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THE QUR'ĀN'S OPENING CHAPTER: ITS EPISTEMOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR SCIENTIFIC EXEGESIS

*Osman Bakar*¹

Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to discuss the concept of the Qur'ān as umm al-Kitāb kitāb (mother of the book) and its epistemological significance for scientific exegesis ('ilm al-tafsīr). A fundamental conceptual derivative of this concept is the doctrine of the Opening Chapter (Sūrat al-Fātiḥah) of the Qur'ān as the essence and summary of the sacred Scripture. This article discusses some of the implications of this doctrine for the theory and practice of scientific exegesis. Among the issues raised in the discussion are the question of whether all major themes of the Qur'ān are essentially contained in the Opening Chapter, the question of the possibility of mutashābihah verses carrying scientific meanings, and the possibility of the Opening Chapter serving as the foundation of both muḥkamāt and mutashābihah verses. Also examined is the extent to which the Opening Chapter serves as the foundation for a discourse on the scientific theme. This includes clarifying the relevance of the Opening Chapter to the understanding of the epistemological structure of a true science as so much emphasised in Islamic intellectual tradition. This article establishes a finding that identifies sixteen most fundamental ideas embodied in the Opening Chapter.

Keywords: Umm al-Kitāb, Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, 'Ilm al-Tafsīr, Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihah, Epistemology

¹ Rector, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Holder, Al-Ghazali Chair of Epistemology and Civilizational Studies and Renewal, ISTAC-IIUM. Email: osmanbakar@iium.edu.my.

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to show the special significance of the Opening Chapter of the al-Qur’ān (*Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*) to science and scientific exegesis (*tafsīr ‘ilmī*). Accordingly, we will examine the knowledge content of this Quranic chapter, and then point out its significance for the concept and practice of science as well as its epistemological role in relation to the theory and practice of scientific exegesis. Our commentary on the Opening Chapter will demonstrate that its knowledge content is primarily theological and metaphysical in nature but of great relevance to Islamic philosophy of science and, more particularly, to the theory and practice of scientific exegesis.

The position of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb* (lit: “mother of the book”) is unique and profound among all books, both divine and human. It implies that it is the foundation of all forms of knowledge. We will shortly explain the meaning of this special epistemological position of the Opening Chapter.

By virtue of the epistemological position of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb*, to say that, in principle, the Qur’ān contains all knowledge is to also say that all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is essentially contained in the Opening Chapter. The implications of this statement for science and the theory of scientific exegesis are quite clear. We may claim that the most fundamental foundational principles of science are to be found in the Opening Chapter. These principles that happen to be metaphysical-theological and cosmological in nature would serve as the deepest foundational layers of science. Their solid foundation is instrumental to the construction of Islamic science with its own unique epistemological architecture. The more philosophically minded classical Muslim scientists were very much aware of this foundation for their science. These foundational layers of science are of a permanent nature that ought to be contrasted with their upper and outermost layers, namely the biological and physical that may be subject to change with advancement in scientific knowledge. Further, if we are searching for scientific ideas and scientific meanings in the Qur’ān, then a good understanding of the knowledge content of the Opening Chapter would be a very useful epistemological guide.

We will also discuss in this article the significance and implications of the Opening Chapter's name, *umm al-kitāb* for scientific exegesis. The particular significance and implication to be treated here concerns the possibility of the category of *mutashābihāt* verses carrying scientific meanings. The Qur'ān speaks of its verses as being divided into two categories. The first category comprises "verses basic or fundamental (*muḥkamāt*) [of established meaning]" which it considers as *umm al-kitāb* ("the foundation of the Book"). The second category comprises the *mutashābihāt* verses [not of established meaning] just mentioned.² A question that arises is whether there is a conceptual relationship between *umm al-kitāb* as referring to the Opening Chapter and *umm al-kitāb* as referring to the category of *muḥkamāt* verses. The premise of the question is that, since the Opening Chapter is the foundation of the whole Qur'ān (*umm al-kitāb*), logically speaking, it must also be the foundation of the *mutashābihāt* category of verses. The idea of the Opening Chapter as being the foundation of the *mutashābihāt* verses could only be of profound significance to the perennial Muslim controversy on the meaning of this category of verses in relation to the *muḥkamāt* verses. The epistemological function of the Opening Chapter as the foundation of both scientific knowledge and the *mutashābihāt* verses will help to address the issue of the possibility of these verses also furnishing us with scientific knowledge. We hope to discuss these various issues in different parts of this article.

The Special Epistemological Position and Role of the Opening Chapter as *Umm al-Kitāb*

The special epistemological position of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb* is based on the authoritative testimony of both the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muhammad (May God's salutation and peace be upon him!), who was its original recipient and most authoritative human interpreter. Both authorities speak of the Opening Chapter's pre-eminent position in relation to the rest of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān speaks of its "seven oft-repeated verses" (*sab' min al-mathānī*) as God's special gift to the Prophet and his community of believers (*umma*):

² See: *The Qur'ān*, chapter 3 ("The Family of 'Imran"), verse 7.

And We have bestowed upon thee the seven oft-repeated (verses) (*sab' min al-mathānī*) and the Grand Qur'ān (*al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*).³

In referring to this verse and the Opening Chapter with its seven verses, the Prophet (May God's salutation and peace be upon him!) called the latter "the greatest and finest chapter (*sūrah*) of the Qur'ān."⁴ He also called it "the mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*)" or the "mother of the Qur'ān (*umm al-Qur'ān*)."⁵ In other words, the Prophet (May God's salutation and peace be upon him!) interpreted the above verse to mean that the seven verses of the Qur'ān serve as *umm* ("mother" or "foundation") of the rest of the Qur'ān.

Questions then arise in our mind as to what makes the Opening Chapter so special and so grand that it deserves to be called the Qur'ān's "greatest and finest chapter" when outwardly and quantitatively speaking, the chapter is among the shortest, just comprising seven short verses and not more than forty words. In our view, the profound answer to the above question is to be found in the meaning and significance of the very name *umm al-kitāb*, which the Prophet has given to the chapter. Since the term *umm al-kitāb* is explicitly mentioned in only three verses in the whole Qur'ān, it would be instructive to quote them here to enable us to understand the textual context in which the term occurs in each of these verses.

The first occurrence of the word is in the following verse, which we have previously mentioned, but which we now quote in full:⁶

He (God) it is who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses basic or fundamental (*muḥkamāt*) (of established meaning): they are the foundation of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*); others are not of well-established meaning. But those in whose hearts are perversity, follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning seeking discord and searching for its hidden

³ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 15 ("The Rocky Tract"), verse 87

⁴ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 6/1, no. 1.

⁵ *Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, no. 2498 and no. 3344.

⁶ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 3 ("The Family of 'Imran"), verse 7.

meanings (*ta'wīl*). But no one knows its true meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*)⁷ say: "We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord." None will grasp the Message except men of understanding (*ūlū al-albāb*).

The second occurrence is in this verse:

God blots out or confirms what He pleases. With Him (God) is the mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*).⁸

And finally, the third occurrence of the term *umm al-kitāb* is in the following verse:

And verily, it [i.e. the Arabic Qur'ān]⁹ is in the mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*), in Our Presence, high [in dignity], full of wisdom.¹⁰

Before identifying the meaning of *umm al-kitāb* that is appropriate to each textual context, we will first examine the semantic field of the word *umm*. The word *umm* conveys several closely related meanings and concepts. These meanings include the ideas of mother, source, origin, basis, foundation, original, original version, gist, and essence.¹¹ The meaning of "mother" applies

⁷ The above reading of the sentence with a full stop after "except Allah" (*illa'Llah*) is accepted by most commentators, including Ibn 'Abbas. The minority view, however, prefers to have the following reading: "But no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. They say: We believe in the Book..." Ibn al-'Arabi belongs to this minority view. However, he maintains that irrespective of which reading one adopts, the important reflection to be made is on the implications of the sentence that follows: "We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord." For Ibn al-'Arabi's explanation of the verse, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 200-201.

⁸ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 13 ("The Thunder"), verse 39.

⁹ It is very clear that the pronoun 'it' refers to the Arabic Qur'ān since the immediately preceding verse mentions it as follows: "We have made it a Qur'ān in Arabic that you may be able to understand [and learn wisdom]. See *The Qur'ān*, chapter 43 ("The Golden Adornments"), verse 3.

¹⁰ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 43 ("The Gold Adornments"), verse 4.

¹¹ See E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society

primarily to a human female, who has given birth to her offspring, and secondarily to animals. Edward Lane also quoted the views of some classical Muslim lexicologists supportive of extending the concept of mother to the members of the plant kingdom.¹² Interestingly, some classical Muslim scientists such as the members of the fourth century A.H./tenth century C.E. philosophical-scientific circle known as the “Brothers of Purity” (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*) extended the usage of the word mother even further to the mineral kingdom.¹³ The basic idea common to the application of the word mother to human females and the three natural kingdoms of animals, plants, and minerals is the function of “giving birth” – generation or reproduction as the case may be – to new “beings” or “entities.” By analogy, it is perfectly legitimate to extend the usage of the word mother to other entities, including to the entity ‘book,’ so long as it can be shown that the function of generation, production, or giving birth to something new is attributable to the entity in question.

We may refer to two other meanings of the word *umm* cited by Lane that may be relevant to our discussion of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb*. The first of these two meanings is “anything to which other things are collected together or adjoined.”¹⁴ The second meaning is “that which comprises or comprehends other things.”

In the light of the above references to the usage of the word *umm al-kitāb*, the first observation that we can make is that in the title name given to the Opening Chapter and in the three verses of the Qurʾān that we have earlier quoted (3:7, 13:39, and 43:4), this word refers to three different entities. The first entity is the seven verses constituting the Opening Chapter; the second is the *muḥkamāt* verses; and the third, the metaphysical Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ Mahfūz*). The nature, reality, and function of this “metaphysical” entity needs a little explanation, as it is an issue of contention among the exegetes.

Trust, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 89-90.

¹² In referring to this kingdom, Lane uses the phrase “inanimate things that have growth” and the general example in Arabic of the “mother of the tree” (*umm al-shajarah*) and the specific examples of the palm-tree (*umm al-nakhlah*) and the banana-tree (*umm al-mawzah*). See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 89.

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978), pp. 91-92.

¹⁴ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 89.

It seems that exegetes generally agree on the existence of a metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* that is different from the Arabic Qur'ān, since the Qur'ān has clearly stated that it is in *umm al-kitāb* in the Divine Presence.¹⁵ The contention among them, however, is about the relationship between this metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* and the Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ Mahfūz*) mentioned in another verse. This verse reads: “Nay, this is a Glorious Qur'an [inscribed] in a Tablet Preserved.”¹⁶

It is true that this verse may be interpreted in such a way as to deny the idea of a metaphysical tablet or what Muhammad Asad calls a “heavenly tablet” understood in a literal sense,¹⁷ and thus to deny the identification of the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* with the metaphysical “Preserved Tablet.” According to Asad, classical exegetes such as Tabari, Baghawi, Razi, and Ibn Kathir, with whom he concurs, prefer to understand the above verse in a metaphorical sense rather than in a literal sense.¹⁸ In the metaphorical sense advocated by these exegetes, the phrase *fi Lawḥ Mahfūz* (“upon a well-guarded tablet”) is interpreted as “an allusion to the imperishable quality” of the Qur'ān, which is in conformity with “God’s promise that the Qur'ān will never be corrupted,¹⁹ and would remain free of all arbitrary additions, diminutions, and textual changes.”²⁰

However, if we are insisting on a synthetic exposition of the Qur'ān that will reveal its cohesive and unified outlook on God, man, and the universe – of the kind as insisted by Fazlur Rahman²¹ – then the alternative interpretation that confers a metaphysical status to the

¹⁵ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 43 (“The Gold Adornments”), verse 4 (earlier quoted, see note 9). Those who strongly believe in a metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* could not find better supporting arguments than the two features attributed to it, namely its proximity to God (*ladaina*) and its transcendence (*la'aliyun*), mentioned in the verse.

¹⁶ See *The Qur'an*, chapter 85 (“The Constellations”), verses 21-22.

¹⁷ See Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, p. 1128.

¹⁸ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, p. 1128.

¹⁹ On this very promise of God, see *The Qur'ān*, chapter 15 (“The Rocky Tracts”), verse 9, which reads: “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message (*al-dhikr*); and We shall assuredly guard it [from corruption].

²⁰ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, p. 1128.

²¹ See: Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago University Press, 2009, second edition); 1st edition 1980.

“Preserved Tablet” and identifies it with the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* would be preferable. Classical exegetes such as Ibn ‘Abbas, al-Ghazzali, and Ibn ‘Arabi interpreted the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* as identical to the “Preserved Tablet” (*Lawḥ Mahfūz*)²² understood as a metaphysical entity. ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali is one modern exegete in the English language, who agrees with this interpretation. He understands *Lawḥ Mahfūz* as referring to “the metaphysical source and storage of not only the Qur’an but all the originally revealed books of God.”²³

Interestingly, Asad accepts the idea of a common metaphysical source for all divine revelations,²⁴ but he gives this epistemological function not to the “Preserved Tablet” but to the *umm al-kitāb* in the Divine Presence. Anyway, notwithstanding the disagreement on the ontological status of the “Preserved Tablet,” we may assert that the idea of the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* as the common source of all divine revelations is in perfect conformity with the Islamic belief in all the revealed books of God, which is the third article of faith (*iman*) in Islam. However, we see problematic issues raised by the metaphorical interpretation of *Lawḥ Mahfūz* as adopted by Asad and other exegetes that would deprive it of an objective metaphysical status. Since these exegetes believe in the idea of a metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* in the Divine Presence as the common source of all revelations, which itself needs to be fully explained, their interpretation depriving the *Lawḥ Mahfūz* of such a status does not remove the need for the epistemological explanation in question.

Moreover, belief in the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* as identical to *Lawḥ Mahfūz* does not contradict the doctrine of the incorruptibility of the Qur’ān on the earthly human level, which is also an important truth for the Muslims. We may speak of the preservation of the Qur’ān both at the level of terrestrial human life and at the metaphysical level of the “Preserved Tablet.” The concept of *Lawḥ Mahfūz* as a metaphysical entity that is in conformity with Quranic ontology, cosmology, and epistemology would help to concretize the idea of the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* as the common

²² *Tafsir ibn ‘Abbas* (p. 263) interprets *umm al-kitāb* as meaning *Lawḥ Mahfūz*.

²³ ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān*, p. 492, note 1864.

²⁴ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān*, p. 895.

source of all revelations, of which the Qur'an is the final. We believe that the idea of the eternal Qur'ān inscribed in the Preserved Tablet that serves as the metaphysical source of the Arabic Qur'ān would be of relevance and significance to our quest for a better understanding of the meaning of this Qur'ān as *umm al-kitāb* and to Quranic exegesis that seeks to fathom its meanings. Accordingly, we prefer to adopt the understanding of the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* as identical to the "Preserved Tablet."

We now seek to examine which meaning of *umm* given earlier would be most appropriate to be applied to the name *umm al-kitāb* as it is used in relation to each of the three entities, namely the opening chapter, the *muḥkamāt* verses, and the metaphysical Preserved Tablet. It appears to us that the meaning of *umm* as "foundation, basis, and essence" would be the most appropriate to the name *umm al-kitāb* in all the three cases. The concepts of foundation, basis, and essence are known to be closely interrelated. The words "foundation" and "basis" have the same meaning and translate well the Arabic *asas*. As for the word "essence," it does not convey the same meaning as "foundation" and "basis," but when it comes to their epistemological role and function, there is convergence in meaning. For an idea or meaning to be a foundation or basis of other ideas, it needs to be more essential in nature in the epistemological sense than the ideas that need to be based on it. However, having said that, it is to be noted that the word "essence" also conveys the idea of "core content," "summary," and "gist," which when applied to knowledge would be very relevant to the role of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb*.

Major Themes of the Opening Chapter and Fazlur Rahman's Major Themes of the Qur'ān

We argue that it is most fitting for the Opening Chapter to be called *umm al-kitāb* in the sense of it being the essence, core, and summary of the Qur'ān. Our contention is that the whole teachings of the Qur'ān are summarized by the Opening Chapter. However, the truth of this statement can only be internalized if we have adequate knowledge of the content of the whole Qur'ān and of the epistemological relation between the content of the Opening Chapter

and that of the rest of the Qur'ān. We need to show that all the fundamental ideas and major themes in the Qur'ān are contained in the Opening Chapter and captured in it in such a way that our mind perceives the rest of the Qur'ān as their mere explanations and clarifications. A thematic classification of the content of the Qur'ān into its major components as proposed by Fazlur Rahman would be helpful to the realization of the above task. To start with, we may try to show that all the nine major themes listed by him are covered in principle in the Opening Chapter.

Clearly, his first theme “God,” which is the Qur'ān's most fundamental theme, appears in the very first verse in the Opening Chapter. His second and third themes – man as individual and man in society – are treated under several ideas. First, they are treated under the idea of *al-‘ālamīn* (“the worlds”), which is God's creation. The human world is the most important component of the cosmos. Second, they are treated under the idea of the collective man as indicated by the pronoun “We.” As indicated in the fifth and sixth verses in the Opening Chapter, it is the collective man who expresses commitment to worship God the One and seek help from Him alone.²⁵ It is also the collective man who seeks God's guidance to live in the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*).²⁶ Third, they are treated under the idea of the straight path and its contraries. This time, the idea of the straight path is mentioned again but together with its contraries to capture the most fundamental division of human collectivities and their respective ways of life. Earlier, the straight path was mentioned as the most important objective of man's prayer to God, but there the focus was on the collective man, the subject of the prayer. In the seventh verse of the Opening Chapter, followers of the straight path, meaning followers of God's true religion, are contrasted with those who stray from His path and those who revolt against it.²⁷

²⁵ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 (“The Opening”), verse 5: “You [Lord] do we worship, and Your aid we seek.”

²⁶ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 (“The Opening”), verse 6: “Guide us to and in the straight path.”

²⁷ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 (“The Opening”), verse 7: “[The straight path is] the path of those on whom You bestowed Your Grace, not of those whose [portion] is wrath and who go astray.”

Rahman's fourth theme – nature – is treated under the idea *al-'ālamīn* of (“cosmos”). Nature is part of the cosmos that is explained in the rest of the Qur'ān as partly physical and partly non-physical. His fifth theme – prophethood and revelation – is another one treated under the idea of the straight path. God revealed His guidance to various branches of mankind through His chosen Prophets and Messengers. The rest of the Qur'ān provides detailed explanations of this theme. His sixth theme – eschatology – is covered by the fourth verse of the opening chapter, which mentions God as the “Master of the Day of Judgment” (*Malik yawm al-dīn*). Quite obviously, *yawm al-dīn* (“Day of Judgment”) refers to the eschatological event where and when the collective man will meet God.

His seventh theme – Satan and Evil – is yet another theme that is treated under the subject of the straight path. More precisely, it is treated under the subject of the contraries of the straight path, which the seventh verse has reduced to their essential core, namely the path of deviation and straying and the path of rebellion. In other parts of the Qur'ān, Satan is identified as the real source of man's deviation from the straight path and his rebellion against it.²⁸ Satan is presented as the personification of evil. His eighth theme – the emergence of the Muslim community – is again covered by the idea of the straight path. The emergency of the first Muslim community, which the Prophet (May God's salutation and peace be upon him!) himself and the early Muslims refer to as the *Muhammadan* community (*ummat Muḥammadan*), was meant to provide the final divine illustration of the straight path in its communal (ummatic) setting.

Finally, Rahman's ninth theme – the People of the Book and diversity of religions – is also treated under the subject of the straight path. This theme is touched in various parts of the Qur'ān with the view of reminding them the original guidance which God gave to their Prophets. The above discussion of Rahman's nine major themes

²⁸ [Iblis] said: “O my Lord! Because You have put me in the wrong, I will make [all that is evil] on earth seem goodly to them, and I will put them all in grievous error.” See *The Qur'an*, chapter 15 (“The Rocky Tracts”), verse 39; also chapter 15, verse 31: “[Iblis] refused to be among those who prostrated themselves.”

of the Qur'ān clearly shows that these themes are all included as essential components of the Opening Chapter. I would argue that there are other major themes of the Qur'ān that could be added to Rahman's list. Good examples are angelology and the scientific theme. It is quite clear that these two themes are also covered by the Opening Chapter. The theme of angelology is seen to be treated under the ideas of the cosmos (*al-'ālamīn*), the eschatological event of the Day of Judgment, and the straight path as the divinely guided path. In traditional Islamic thought, angelology is viewed as a branch of metaphysical cosmology meaning that the angels are part of the cosmos. It is concerned with the angelic world with its cosmic functions. The rest of the Qur'ān provides more detailed information about the nature of the angels and their ranks in the sight of God as well as their role and functions in relation to eschatological events, the climax of which is the Day of Judgment, and man's personal growth and development. The straight path is informed by revelation, and assigned to this major task of bringing God's revelation to the Prophets and Messengers is the Archangel Gabriel (peace be upon him!).

As for the scientific theme, we contend it is also embraced by the Opening Chapter. We will discuss the significance of the Opening Chapter for this theme in a later section. No additional theme of the Qur'ān is to be discussed just for the purpose of showing that it is likewise contained in the fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter. It would be perhaps more beneficial to provide a thematic classification of the fundamental ideas that are explicitly presented in the Opening Chapter and then to point out that these fundamental ideas are explained and clarified in detail in the rest of the Qur'ān.

Sixteen Fundamental Ideas in the Opening Chapter

As we go through the order of the seven verses in the Opening Chapter, we can see that the Chapter, and hence the Qur'ān, begins with "the Name of God" followed by two of His Names, the Most Gracious (*al-Raḥmān*) and the Most Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*). The first fundamental idea in the chapter is therefore the Name of God (*Allah*). Since the idea of name (*ism*) is explicitly mentioned in the first verse,

though in relation to God, it needs to be included as part of the ideas that the Chapter treats. Accordingly, we present it as the second fundamental idea in the Chapter. The third fundamental idea in the verse pertains to the two Divine Names and Attributes, *al-Rahman* and *al-Raḥīm*, which may be referred to as “the twin faces of Divine Mercy.” The second verse is about the “the Praise of God (*al-ḥamdu liLlāh*)” in connection with His creation of the cosmos. There are three fundamental ideas contained in this verse, namely the praise of God, which is one of the spiritual acts of glorification of God, the Divine Attribute *Rabb* (“Lord, Creator, Cherisher, and Sustainer”) as the metaphysical principle of the cosmos, and the cosmos as a separate reality from God. We, therefore, have “the Praise of God” as the fourth fundamental idea, *Rabb* as a creative principle as the fifth fundamental idea, and the cosmos as the sixth fundamental idea.

The third verse repeats “the twin faces of Divine Mercy,” and because of this repetition we believe it has a special significance of its own that justifies us to earlier treat the two Divine Attributes together as a separate idea from the first idea of the Name of God in which they are already included. The fourth verse presents us with the seventh fundamental idea, namely the eschatological event of the Day of Judgment, and the eighth fundamental idea of God’s role in the event as indicated by the His Attribute, *al-Malik* (“The Master”). The fifth verse furnishes us with the ninth, tenth, and eleventh ideas. The ninth fundamental idea is “man,” as personified by the pronoun “we,” in the verb *na’budu* (“we worship and serve”). The tenth fundamental idea is man’s worship of God alone as indicated by the statement “You alone we worship” (*iyaka na’budu*). The idea of “the worship of God alone” is extremely important to be noted, because it defines the “straight path” (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) that is mentioned in the following verse. The eleventh fundamental idea is “human need for divine help” as indicated in the statement “Your help alone we seek” (*iyaka nasta’īn*).

The sixth verse contains two ideas, namely the idea of “human need for divine guidance” as indicated in the statement “guide us to and in” (*ihdina*) and the idea of the straight path as conveyed by the phrase *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* as the concrete embodiment of God’s guidance. The idea of human need for divine guidance may then be

presented as the twelfth, and the idea of the straight path as the thirteenth. Finally, the seventh verse characterizes the straight path, describing what it is and what it is not, thereby providing us with three more fundamental ideas. The straight path is described positively or affirmatively as “the path of those on whom You have bestowed your grace (*ni'mah*).” God’s *ni'mah* (“grace and favors”) to His servants in the straight path may be presented as the fourteenth fundamental idea in the Opening Chapter. The verse emphasizes that the straight path is neither the path of those on whom is wrath (*al-maghḍūb ‘alaihim*) nor that of those who go stray (*al-dāllīn*). Human objects of divine wrath would then be the chapter’s fifteenth fundamental idea, and “the go astray people from the path of divine guidance” as the sixteenth.

We may conclude that there are altogether sixteen fundamental ideas that constitute the essence of the Qur’ān. The rest of the Qur’ān may be viewed as detailed explanations and clarifications of these fundamental ideas. It would be sufficient to illustrate this textual fact by simply providing evidence in quantitative terms of the extent to which these ideas are repeated in manifold forms in the rest of the Qur’ān. In the last chapter, we encountered the Qur’ān’s claim concerning itself that it is a Book that is “fully consistent within itself (*mutashābihan*), repeating each statement [of the truth] in manifold forms (*mathānī*).”²⁹ The Qur’ān also speaks of the content of the Opening Chapter as its “seven oft-repeated” (*sab‘ min al-mathānī*) verses. We consider these two verses as of having a significance to our discussion of the content of the Opening Chapter and its epistemological relations with the rest of the Qur’ān. In our understanding, the two occurrences of the word *mathānī* are interconnected.

We maintain that the word *mathānī* (“oft-repeated”) in reference to the seven verses of the Opening Chapter does not just mean that they are the most frequently uttered verses by the human tongue, but more importantly, they are repeated over and over again in the rest of the Qur’ān, albeit in manifold and diverse forms yet consistent with each other, in accordance with the nature of the Qur’ān as a book “fully consistent with itself, and repeating each

²⁹ *The Qur’ān*, chapter 39 (“The Throngs”), verse 23.

statement [of the truth] in manifold forms.” This means that the sixteen fundamental ideas contained in the seven verses are repeated with varying frequencies in proportion to their importance in explaining the Quranic message. Tabulated below is the information that has been gathered about the frequency of repetitions of each of the sixteenth fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter.

The Fundamental Ideas in the Opening Chapter

Chapter	Description of Idea	Noun/Verb Form in which Keyword Occur	Frequency of Repetitions
1	The Name of God (<i>Allah</i>)	<i>Allah</i>	2699
		<i>Ilah</i>	147
2	Idea of name (<i>ism</i>)	<i>ism, asma'</i>	39
3	The twin faces of Divine Mercy	<i>al-Raḥmān</i>	57
		<i>al-Raḥīm</i>	116
		<i>raḥmah</i>	114
		<i>root word ra ha mim</i>	339
4	The praise of God	<i>Ḥamd</i>	43
		<i>al-Ḥamīd</i>	17
5	<i>Rabb</i> as a creative principle	<i>Rabb</i>	975
6	The cosmos	<i>ālamīn</i>	73
		<i>Rabb al- ālamīn</i>	42
7	God's role as the Master of the Day of Judgment	<i>al-Malik</i>	1
		<i>root word: mim lam kaf</i>	206
8	The eschatological event of the Day of Judgment	<i>yawm al-dīn</i>	10
		<i>yawm</i>	405
9	Man as implied by the pronoun “we”	<i>insān</i>	71
10	Man's worship of God	<i>'abd</i>	131
		<i>in verb- forms from 'abada</i>	122

Chapter	Description of Idea	Noun/Verb Form in which Keyword Occur	Frequency of Repetitions
11	Human need for divine help	<i>ista'īn</i>	4
		<i>ta'awun</i>	2
		<i>musta'ān</i>	2
12	Human need for divine guidance	<i>Hudan</i>	85
		<i>Hādī</i>	2
		<i>hadā</i>	144
13	The straight path	<i>ṣirāṭ</i>	45
		<i>ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm</i>	32
14	Divine grace and favors	<i>nī'mah</i>	50
		<i>an'am (form IV verb)</i>	17
15	Human objects of divine wrath	<i>Ghadab</i>	14
		<i>maghdūb</i>	1
16	The go astray people from the path of Divine Guidance	<i>Ḍalāl</i>	38
		<i>ḍalla (verb I form)</i>	53
		<i>ḍall or ḍallīn (plural)</i>	14

The above quantitative illustration of the nature and extent of the repetitions of the sixteen fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter in varied forms in the rest of the Qur'ān helps to explain the *mathānī* (“oft-repeated”) nature and character of the Qur'ān in general and the Opening Chapter in particular. The data are not meant to exhaustively reveal the *mathānī* pattern of the whole, which is not the primary concern of this article. However, they are deemed sufficient to help us understand and appreciate the epistemological position of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb* in the sense of it being the essence of the Qur'ān. Further, this epistemological role of the sixteen fundamental ideas would help us to better understand the meaning of *umm al-kitāb* as applied to the *muḥkamāt* verses and the metaphysical Preserved Tablet as well as to articulate the significance of the Opening Chapter to science and scientific exegesis.

Based on the above position of the sixteen fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter as the essence of the Qur'ān, we can see that these ideas may also be understood as the foundation, basis, and

mother of the Qur'ān. Together with the word “essence,” these words convey equivalent meanings that emphasize different aspects of the relationship between the Opening Chapter and the rest of the Qur'ān. As the essence, gist or summary of the Qur'an, the Opening Chapter is its part into which all its other parts can be “collected together,” contracted, absorbed, squeezed, and integrated. As the mother of the Qur'ān, epistemologically speaking, the sixteen fundamental ideas give birth to, generate, and give rise to less fundamental ideas in the rest of its parts. And as the basis or foundation of the Qur'ān, meaning-wise, the Opening Chapter “comprehends the rest of it.”³⁰ A thing is said to be the basis or foundation of another thing, if the latter's meaning is established on and in terms of the former's meaning. Thus, in the case of the Opening Chapter, it is acknowledged as the basis or foundation of the Qur'ān in the sense that the meanings contained in the rest of the Book function as its more detailed explanations (*tafsīl*) and clarifications (*tibyān*). In other words, the Opening Chapter constitutes the core content of the Qur'ān, and the rest of the Book serves as its *tafsīr* (“exegesis”). In this case, of course, the exegete is none other than God Himself!

The same table of data about the manifold repetitions of the sixteen fundamental ideas may also be used to illustrate the role of the Opening Chapter as the foundation of the Qur'ān that comprehends all its other parts. Just as an illustration, the table shows that the idea of *Rabb al- ālamīn* (“Lord of the worlds”) and the idea of *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (“the straight path”) in the opening chapter are repeated 42 and 32 times respectively in different semantic contexts. These contexts point to the various meanings comprehended by the two fundamental ideas.

Out of the several meanings of *umm* that are applicable to the name *umm al-kitāb* as the title of the Opening Chapter, some of them are certainly appropriate for the same name given to the metaphysical Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ Maḥfūz*) and the *muḥkamāt* verses. In the latter case, the core idea in the term *umm* is that of “source” and “origin,” since it is the metaphysical source of all the originally revealed books of God. Verses 43:3-4 state explicitly that the

³⁰ This is one of the meanings of *umm* cited by Lane. See E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 89.

Arabic Qur'ān is in the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* (*fi umm al-kitāb ladaina la'aliyyun*), meaning that the latter is the source of the Arabic Qur'ān. In Asad's view, only the meaning of "source" is applicable to *umm al-kitāb* in this context. Accordingly, he translates *umm al-kitāb* in 43:4 as "the source of all revelation."³¹ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, however, translates it as "the mother of the Book."³² He justifies the use of the word "mother" on account of the generative function of this metaphysical *umm al-kitāb*. He writes: "From this fountainhead [i.e. the mother of the Book] are derived all streams of knowledge and wisdom..."³³

Apart from describing the "Mother of the Book" as "the Fountainhead of God's Eternal and Universal Law" Yusuf 'Ali also refers to it as "the Foundation of Revelation." Viewed as a whole, the meaning of *umm* emphasized by Yusuf 'Ali in this case pertains to the ideas of foundation, core or essence, original principle or fountainhead, which he thinks are all applicable to the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* and justifiably covered by the English word "mother." His use of the word "Mother" covers the meaning of "source" (*asl*) as adopted by Asad, as indicated by the ideas of original principle and fountainhead. Thus, in terms of epistemological role and function, we see little difference between the metaphysical *umm al-kitāb* as understood by Yusuf 'Ali and the *umm al-kitāb* of the Arabic Qur'ān as we have earlier explained. The close resemblance between the two *umm al-kitāb* is perhaps understandable given their deep epistemological relationship. The Qur'ān describes itself as being both in the transcendent *umm al-kitāb*³⁴ and inscribed in the Preserved Tablet.³⁵ Based on these Quranic data, we may infer that the metaphysical meanings of the sixteen fundamental ideas in the Arabic *umm al-kitāb* are inscribed in the transcendent *umm al-kitāb*.

In the case of the attribution of the name *umm al-kitāb* to the category of *muhkamāt* verses in the Qur'ān (3:7), we will discuss the issue in a separate section below, since it is closely intertwined with

³¹ Muhammad Asad, *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, p. 81.

³² 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 1055.

³³ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, note 4606, p. 1055.

³⁴ *The Qur'an*, chapter 43 ("The Gold Adornments"), verse 4.

³⁵ *The Qur'an*, chapter 85 ("The Constellations"), verses 21-22.

another epistemological issue, namely the distinction between this category of verses and the *mutashābihat* verses. These issues have some implications for scientific exegesis: whether scientific knowledge is substantially contained in the *mutashābihat* verses is of considerable interest to proponents of scientific exegesis. The distinction between the *muhkamāt* and the *mutashābihat* verses also raises the epistemological issue of the legitimacy of *ta'wīl* (“hermeneutics”) as an exegetical method for the understanding of the Qur'ān in general and the scientific verses in particular.

The *Muhkamāt* and the *Mutashābihat* Verses: Epistemological Issues and Their Implications for Scientific Exegesis

In verse 3:7 that we have previously cited, the Qur'ān asserts that all of its verses are divided into two categories. The first category comprises the “*muhkamāt* verses” (*ayat muhkamāt*), while the other category comprises the “*mutashābihat* verses.” Since the identity of each category is an issue of contention among the exegetes, and needs to be more firmly established, we will only offer a tentative English translation of each of them. Yusuf 'Ali translates *muhkamāt* as “basic or fundamental or of established meaning,”³⁶ and *mutashābihat* as “allegorical.” Asad translates *muhkamāt* as “clear in and by themselves”³⁷ and *mutashābihāt* also as “allegorical.” Although these translations are not final and are still open to refinement, they are adequate to be adopted for the purpose of distinguishing the *muhkamāt* (sing: *muhkam*) from the *mutashābihat* (sing: *mutashābih*).

Yusuf 'Ali views his definition of *muhkam* as “a verse of established meaning” as being based on the general view of the classical commentators.³⁸ Asad adopts the translation “clear in and by themselves,” because he considers Tabari's description of *ayat muhkamāt* as too narrow, limiting them as it were to “statements or ordinances (*naṣṣ*) of the Qur'an, which do not admit of more than one interpretation.”³⁹ We agree with his view that this definition by

³⁶ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, p. 107.

³⁷ Muhammad Asad, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, p. 81.

³⁸ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, note 347, p. 107.

³⁹ *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, note 5, p. 81.

Tabari is rather problematic, since it would have to exclude many verses that are not actually belonging to the *mutashābihāāt* category. Asad has thus raised a very pertinent issue pertaining to the definition of both the words *muhkam* and *mutashābih*. The scope and volume of each category of verses would depend on the definition adopted for each. Since the number of verses of the Qur’ān is constant, the narrower the definition adopted for either one of the two categories, the bigger will be the volume of verses for the other. The consequences of such approaches to their definitions for a better understanding of the Qur’ān would not be purely contentions over numerical issues. Our appreciation of both categories of verses, and thus our understanding of the whole Qur’ān, could be adversely affected, what more if in adopting the reading of a part of the same verse 3:7 as followed by the majority – “...but no one knows its hidden meanings (*ta’wīlahu*) except God – we prefer to understand it literally. Some of us then may not want to know the meanings of the *mutashābihāt* verses on the (mis)understanding that “only God knows!”

In our view, especially in this case, it is extremely important to have a satisfactory definition of *muhkam* and *mutashābih* so that we can identify these two categories of verses in a more systematic and precise way. The identification of these categories for the purpose of the general science of exegesis is not unlike in nature the identification of scientific verses for scientific exegesis. Anyway, having a sound definition of any idea or thing we wish to discuss is always a good thing. It is partly to avoid misunderstanding that could lead to further confusion. But it is also to help produce a thought system that would be more organized and systematic. The definition tradition was a well-developed and an important aspect and feature of classical Islamic scholarship.⁴⁰ Interestingly, this tradition that was developed both in the transmitted (*naqlī*) and intellectual-rational (*‘aqlī*) sciences was inspired by the Qur’an itself.

Reflecting on the content of the Qur’ān, we could not help thinking how obsessed this last sacred scripture of humanity is with

⁴⁰ On the meaning and scope of the definition tradition in classical Islamic thought, see Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*, especially chapters 2, 3, and 4 on al-Farabi.

definitions. The first definition, which we are going to discuss shortly, albeit briefly, is to be found in the Opening Chapter itself. The Qur'ān's extensive concern with definitions has something to do with one of its own epistemological missions, namely executing the function of *tafsīl* ("systematic and detailed explanation") of its knowledge-content. The meanings of the word *tafsīl* as given in the classical lexicons, when applied to knowledge, cover such ideas and activities as categorizing, dividing, grouping, and classifying it, and presenting it in a logical order, detailing and particularizing it, and making it plain and clear. All these knowledge-activities are embodied in the Quranic function of *tafsīl*. Quite clearly, producing definitions would be an important part of these activities.

It is the function of definition to help us be clear about the thing defined. Through definitions, we hope to have a better knowledge of the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of each thing defined as well as of its characteristics. Thus, the Islamic logical tradition has distinguished between two types of a definition. The first kind of definition is known as *ḥadd* (literally: limit), which seeks to furnish us with knowledge of the nature of the thing defined. For this reason, it is called the "essential" definition. The second kind is known as *rasm*, which seeks to inform us with the various characteristics and features of the thing defined. These characteristics and features describe the non-essential aspects and components of that thing. Thus, this kind of definition has been called the "descriptive" definition.

Definitions, however, are not attainable through one act of thinking. They imply a thinking process. They are progressively pursued with the intention of arriving at better and better ones till the perfect definition is achieved. If we apply this discussion of definition to the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses, it means that we need to have their better definitions that would help us to achieve a coherent vision and synthetic exposition of the Qur'ān's content and its cohesive outlook on the cosmos and human life. Their definitions, as provided by the classical exegetes, need to be improved upon in our times. It is thus a legitimate and desirable thing, for example, for Asad to re-examine the classical definitions of *muḥkamāt* verses, such as that of Tabari, and point out its limitations

and then come up with his own. The issue of the definition of *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihah* verses will be further discussed later.

As asserted earlier, the first definition in the Qur'ān may be found in the Opening Chapter itself. We are referring to the definition of the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), which constitutes one of the sixteen fundamental ideas in the chapter. The idea of the straight path is central to the meaning of human existence and the meaning of human life and thought. God provides an explanation of its meaning in the Chapter itself by defining it. In the light of our understanding of the two types of definition, we could say that God has given in verse 1:7 the descriptive definition of straight path. That the definition is descriptive and not essential is evident from the verse, regardless of which of two interpretations of it we follow.⁴¹ Let us consider the first interpretation: "The path of those on whom you have bestowed your Grace, those whose [portion] is not wrath, and who do not stray."⁴² If this interpretation is followed, then the verse looks like it is describing three characteristics of the followers of the straight path and not of the straight path itself. According to this interpretation, those on the straight path have three characteristics. First, they are bestowed with Divine Grace; second, they are not objects of wrath; and third, they do not go astray. Since the description refers to the followers of the straight path and not the path itself, the definition provided by the verse could not be of the essential kind.

Let us now consider the second interpretation: "The way of those upon whom you have bestowed your blessings, not of those who have been condemned [by you], nor of those who go astray."⁴³ If this interpretation is followed, then the verse is referring to three different paths – the straight path whose followers are recipients of divine blessing, the path whose followers are objects of divine wrath, and the path whose followers do not go astray." Even this

⁴¹ As emphasized by the exegetes, the last verse may be interpreted in two ways, which is now to be explained.

⁴² This translation is provided by Yusuf 'Ali based on his interpretation of the verse. See his *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 15.

⁴³ This translation is provided by Muhammad Asad. See his *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, p. 2.

interpretation does not offer an essential definition, because the verse is still describing the followers and not the path which they follow, albeit there are now three different paths to be distinguished from each other. However, at least from the point of view of the higher objective of definition, which is to arrive at the knowledge of the nature and reality of the straight path, it is preferable to the first interpretation. The reason for this is that the straight path is now contrasted with two other different paths. In accordance with the science of definition, a description of what the straight path is and what it is not already contributes in a way to an understanding of the nature and reality of the straight path.

A question to ask, in the light of this discussion about the definition of the straight path, is whether the Opening Chapter also provides its essential definition. The seven verses in the Chapter clearly show that an essential definition of it is not explicitly stated. However, there is an allusion or an implicit reference to it, although in realizing this fact we have been helped by verses in other parts of the Qur'ān that make references to the straight path. The allusion is to be found in verse 1:5 immediately preceding the verse about the straight path (1:6): “You alone we worship, and unto you alone do we turn for help.” When we look at this verse closely together with the following verse “Guide us the straight way,” we are inclined to think that there must be some profound connections between them. However, by themselves, the seven verses do not tell us in an explicit manner the sort of relationship that exists between the worship of God and the straight path.

It is a verse in *Surat Ya Sin* (chapter 36) that provides the conclusive answer. The straight path is none other than the worship of the One God. The verse reads: “Did I not enjoin on you, O you children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan – for verily he is your open enemy – and that you worship Me [alone]? This would have been a straight way!”⁴⁴ This verse clearly identifies the straight path with the worship of God alone. It therefore furnishes us with an essential definition of the straight path. The essential meaning of the straight path is the worship of God, the precise content of which is explained by various verses in the Qur'an. This discussion about the

⁴⁴ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 36 (“Chapter *Ya Sin*”), verses 60-61.

descriptive and essential definitions of the straight path may serve as a useful guide to the discussion about the true meanings of the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihat* verses.

Our discussion of the idea of straight path as contained in verse 1:6 is also illustrative in other ways. It confirms the claim that has been made before that the fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter are repeated in the rest of the Qur'ān in manifold forms that will explain each other. The idea of the straight path in the Opening Chapter is, in fact, repeated in 36:60-61 in a different and slightly more detailed way that helps to confirm the worship of God as its core meaning, which was only alluded to in the Opening Chapter. As can be seen from our table of data on the sixteen fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter, the idea of the straight path is found to be repeated 31 times in the rest of the Qur'ān. Each time the idea repeats itself, we see different aspects of it being revealed or the same aspect but understood in a different context, as made clear by its preceding and succeeding verses. For example, the role of verse 36:60-61, cited earlier for the purpose of affirming the essential definition of the straight path, is shared by three other verses.⁴⁵

We shall pursue our inquiry into the meanings of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihat* verses first by examining their linguistic meanings and then the various semantic contexts in which the words occur in the Qur'an. In choosing the appropriate meaning for each of the two words, we will be guided by the relevant revealed data in the Qur'ān and the various principles of science of exegesis. One of these principles is the idea of the inner consistency of all the verses. Accordingly, the importance of the issue of the inner consistency between the *muḥkamāt* and the *mutashābihah* verses could hardly be overemphasized. We shall first address the issue of the linguistic meaning of *muḥkam*. The root meaning of *muḥkam*, as indicated by its root-verb of the fourth verb-form but in the passive form (*uḥkima*), is for something to be made firm, strong, sturdy, solid; for something to be fortified, strengthened, and consolidated; and for something to be expertly, thoroughly, carefully, and masterly executed. These various characteristics or features may be applied to a physical object such as a building, a knowledge-activity such as

⁴⁵ See the verses 3:51, 19:36, 43:64

mastering a language, or ideas such as verses of the Qur'ān. It might be of interest to us to note that the word *muḥkam* also conveys the meaning of “accurate, precise, and exact,” the significance of which to the understanding of the *muḥkamāt* verses would be visible to us when discussing them later.

Lane cited a lexicon in which the idea of *muḥkam* is applied to a building. In this case, the building is described as being made “firm, stable, strong, solid, and compact” and it is “held to be secure from falling to pieces.”⁴⁶ And when the idea of *muḥkam* is applied to a portion of the Qur'ān, there is wide agreement among the philologists that it is meant to convey the meaning that it is “secured from change, alteration, and peculiarization, and interpretation not according to the obvious import, and abrogation.”⁴⁷ The definition of *muḥkam* as “of established meaning” as generally adopted by the classical exegetes is clearly based on this meaning. As always, at the crux of the matter, when we are applying particular linguistic meanings to any idea or concept in the Qur'ān, is the issue of whether the application is, epistemologically speaking, in conformity with the semantic field of the idea as defined and insisted by the Qur'ān. Thus, in the special case of the word *muḥkam*, which exists in the plural in the Qur'ān, the central issue to be addressed concerns the adequacy or appropriateness of meanings from the general semantic field of the word that are to be incorporated into its Quranic concept.

To arrive at a sound definition of the idea of *muḥkam* as applied to specific verses of the Qur'ān, in addition to knowledge of its semantic field, we need to know the contexts in which the word occurs. In this case, the task is made simpler by the fact that the word occurs only once in the Qur'ān. Part of the verse containing the word reads: “...in it [i.e. the Book] are the *muḥkamāt* verses (*āyāt muḥkamāt*): they are the *umm al-kitāb*; others are the *mutashābihat* ...”⁴⁸ However, there are two other verses in which the idea of *muḥkam* occurs in the passive form of its fourth form root-verb (*uḥkimat*). One of the two verses reads:

⁴⁶ Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 618.

⁴⁷ Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 618.

⁴⁸ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 3 (“The Family of ‘Imran”), verse 7. The verse has been cited earlier in full. See note 5.

[This is] a Book, with verses of established meaning (*uḥkimat*), further explained in detail (*fuṣṣilat*) – from One Who is Wise and Well-Acquainted [with all things].⁴⁹

The second verse reads:

Never did We send a messenger or prophet before you, but, when he framed a desire, Satan would throw some [vanity] into his desire: but God will cancel anything [vain] that Satan throws in, and God will confirm [and establish] (*yuhkimu*) His messages (*āyāt*): for God is All-Knowing, Wise.⁵⁰

It appears that we now have all the necessary information about the use of the word *muḥkam* and related verbs as derived from its root word to enable us to have a sound understanding of the idea that is signified by the word. We may summarize this information as follows: [1] the core meaning of *muḥkam* pertains to the quality of “firm, stable, strong, solid, and compact;” [2] *muḥkam* conveys the idea of “well-established and immutable;” [3] *muḥkam* conveys the idea of being “accurate, exact and precise;” [4] *muḥkam* conveys the idea of being produced in a thorough, expertly, and masterly way; [5] *muḥkam* conveys the idea of being “fortified, strengthened, and consolidated;” [6] the *muḥkamāt* verses constitute *umm al-kitab*; [7] these verses are to be contrasted with the *mutashābihat* verses; [8] all verses are well-explained;⁵¹ and [9] *muḥkam* conveys the idea of being free from error.⁵²

If we now apply these nine ideas and meanings to the verses of the Qur’an, we arrive at several important conclusions about the nature, substance, and function of the *muḥkamāt* verses that are sought to be contrasted with the *mutashābihat* verses. The first five ideas and the last two pertain to the nature of the *muḥkamāt* verses, regardless of their content or “substance”. In other words, they are about the characteristics and features of the meanings of the verses,

⁴⁹ *The Qur’ān*, chapter 11 (“Hud”), verse 1.

⁵⁰ *The Qur’ān*, chapter 22 (“The Pilgrimage”), verse 52.

⁵¹ *The Qur’an*, chapter 11 (“Hud”), verse 1.

⁵² *The Qur’an*, chapter 22 (“The Pilgrimage”), verse 52.

as signified by the word *muḥkam*. The sixth idea pertains to the substance and function of the verses. The idea of the *muḥkamāt* verses as constituting *umm al- kitāb* means that the *muḥkam* nature of these verses must also conform to their role and function as *umm al-kitab*. Since the idea of *umm al- kitāb* also pertains to its content of meanings, it further qualifies the meaning of *muḥkam* to be applied to its verses.

If we synthesize all the above collected meanings of *muḥkam*, we will arrive at its core meaning, namely “well-established.” Consequently, there is a need to concretize the nature and scope of the idea of “well-established” meaning so that they conform to the meaning of *umm al- kitāb*. Also needed to be examined in relation to the idea of a verse being well-established (*muḥkam*) is the issue of the nature of the “language” in which the verse is expressed. In the history of human thought, spiritual truths have been expressed in various linguistic forms, such as the language of legends and myths, the language of symbols, parables, and similitude, and the language of logic. It is quite clear to us that the Qur’ān uses both the last two types of language to express its truths or messages. There is thus a need to examine if it is differences in their linguistic expressions that largely distinguish the *muḥkamāt* verses from the *mutashābihat* verses. And the seventh idea pertains to all the three aspects – nature, substance, and function – of the *muḥkamāt* verses. To fully comprehend the category of *muḥkamāt* verses, we need to compare them with the *mutashābihat* verses in the three aspects. An explanation of the meaning of *mutashābih* is, therefore, necessary.

The word *mutashābih* occurs five times in the Qur’ān in the noun form,⁵³ and once in the adjective form (*mutashābihatun*) in verse 3:7, which is the focus of our current discussion. The word *tashābaha*, its root-verb of the sixth form, occurs four times. In all these occurrences, only in two verses (3:7 and 39:23) are these words mentioned in reference to the verses of the Qur’ān. In verse 39:23, the idea of the inner consistency (*mutashābihah*) of the Book is emphasized. In verse 3:7 the words *mutashābihatun* and *tashābaha* occur together, apparently with the main idea of emphasizing their meanings as similitude, parables, and allegories. The meaning of the

⁵³ See verses 2:25; 36:99; 6:141 (twice); 39:23.

root-verb *tashābaha* is “to resemble one another, to be similar to one another, to be identical, to be ambiguous, and to be obscure.”⁵⁴ It is also “to be analogous, to act as a parable and as an allegory, and to have parts that are consistent with each other.”⁵⁵ It was clearly on the basis of these root meanings that the two Jalal al-Dins (al-Jalalayn),⁵⁶ well-known classical exegetes, defined *mutashābihat* in their Quranic exegesis. They defined *mutashābih* as that “of which the meaning is not to be learned from its words,” and it is of two kinds. One is that “of which the meaning is known by referring it to what is termed *muḥkam*,” and the other is that “of which the knowledge of its real meaning is not attainable in any way.”⁵⁷

The idea of a *mutashābihah* as having meanings that cannot be learned directly from its words clearly refers to its root meanings of similitude, parable, and allegory, since linguistic expressions of this kind are not to be understood literally. Such a kind of expression may be described as having an “inner meaning” (*ta’wīl*). However, according to Jalalayn, while in the case of some *mutashābihat* it is possible to know their inner meanings by making references to the *muḥkamāt* (“well-established meanings”), it is not so in the case of other *mutashābihat*. Their view that, for some *mutashābihah* verses, their inner meanings can only be known by referring to some *muḥkamāt* is epistemologically welcome, because it would serve the purpose of realizing the coherence and inner consistency of the Qur’ān in general and the consistency between the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihat* verses in particular. This view also affirms the epistemological function of the *muḥkamāt* as the foundation of the *mutashābihat* verses, thus confirming the status of the former as *umm al-kitāb*. Yet another affirmation is the inference that “meaning-wise,” a *mutashābih* (“similitude”) cannot stand on its own. To be meaningful, it needs to stand on an established meaning (*muḥkam*).

⁵⁴ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, p. 1500

⁵⁵ ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2005), p. 39, note 4276.

⁵⁶ *Tafsir Jalalayn* was written by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 A.H.) and Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 894).

⁵⁷ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, p. 1500

From the point of view of God as the author of the Qur'ān, the function of a similitude is to describe a hidden reality that otherwise, no one knows about except Him. Instructing through similitude is one of the ways in which God provides spiritual education for the believers. What is required from the believers is an understanding of the inner realities of things, particularly human souls, alluded to by the similitude in question. The task of the exegetes is to help explain to the believers the mode of understanding the inner meaning (*ta'wīl*) of a similitude. It is the Qur'ān itself – the same verse 3:7 that contrasts the *muḥkamāt* with the *mutashābihah* – that provides the basis for the concept of *ta'wīl*. A portion of the verse states: "...But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings (*ta'wīl*), but no one knows its hidden meanings (*ta'wīl*) except God." In principle, it is possible to know the inner meaning of a similitude, because God has established the resemblance between them – i.e. between a similitude and its inner meaning – for the very purpose of educating man. However, for the human mind to recognize the resemblance, the similitude in question needs to be based on well-established ideas (*muḥkamāt*) and knowledge most pertinent to it.

Exegetes like Al-Jalalayn are right in acknowledging the appropriateness of this mode of understanding of similitude. However, their view that the inner meanings of some *mutashābihat* cannot be known by virtue of the methodological limitation of *ta'wīl* is not shared by some other exegetes, who consider it epistemologically problematic, not least from the point of view of the human quest for a coherent understanding of the whole Qur'ān. Ibn al-'Arabi, who lived about two centuries before al-Jalalayn, offers a vastly different understanding of *ta'wīl*. He was critical of two understandings of *ta'wīl* prevalent among the interpreters of the Qur'ān. In the first understanding, *ta'wīl* is limited to the rational interpretation of the *mutashābihat* verses based on creative thinking (*ijtihād*) and rational reflection with the view of arriving at their inner meanings that would ensure their consistency with the *muḥkamāt* verses. In the second understanding, *ta'wīl* is pursued rather arbitrarily and subjectively, so much so that, in Ibn 'Arabi's own

words, the interpreters “plunge deeply into *ta’wīl* such that no correspondence (*munasabah*) remains between the revealed words and the meaning,” and they fail “to refer the knowledge of their *ta’wīl* back to God,”⁵⁸ whereas it is precisely the aim of *ta’wīl* to bring back the written, revealed word to what God means by it.

To those claiming that the real meanings of some *mutashābihat* verses are not attainable in any way Ibn al-‘Arabi’s answer is that “they are perfectly right in their opinion if they seek to attain it through rational reflections and efforts.” He argued that by its nature, the rational method of *ta’wīl* is deficient. He admitted the possibility of the interpreters employing this method “drawing near to the truth” and perhaps even “achieving the truth in what they interpret.”⁵⁹ However, knowledge earned (*muktasab*) through rational reflections is inferior to knowledge bestowed (*mawhūb*) by God. At best, the former kind of knowledge could ensure the rational consistency of the verses, but not certitude of the kind made possible by the latter kind of knowledge.

Ibn al-‘Arabi maintained that the rational interpreters could not arrive at certitude in the understanding of *mutashābihah* verses, since “they do not know exactly what God meant in what He sent down.”⁶⁰ As his argument goes, if we want to know the true meaning of these verses, then we must seek to understand the words in them in God’s own terms. Since God knows the real meaning of His revealed words, man should ask Him to bestow upon him this knowledge. To emphasize this point Ibn al-Arabi draws our attention to the pertinent “textual fact” that the *ta’wīl* verse is immediately followed by this verse in which we are taught to make this prayer: “And bestow upon us mercy (*rahmah*) from Your own Presence (*min ladunka*); You are the Bestower (*al-Wahhāb*).”⁶¹ Ibn ‘Arabi interpreted divine mercy in this verse to mean bestowed knowledge from the Divine Presence, which is what is known in Sufi epistemology as *‘ilm ladunī*. He

⁵⁸ See Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (“The Meccan Openings”) (Cairo: Bulaq, 1911), vol. II, p. 594). We cite these translations and references from William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 200-201.

⁵⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, vol. II, p. 594; See William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 200.

⁶⁰ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 200.

⁶¹ *The Qur’an*, chapter 3 (“The Family of ‘Imran”), verse 8.

emphasized, however, that this bestowed knowledge is conditional upon man's godfearing quality (*taqwā*),⁶² his worship of God, and his prayer (*du'āt*). Anyhow, included in this divinely bestowed knowledge is knowledge of the inner meaning of the *mutashābihat* verses as God Himself meant.

Ta'wīl as Ibn al-'Arabi understood it is thus an objective mode of knowing. It is essentially a spiritual method of knowing, since it concerns the deepest aspect of the self's cognitive powers and knowledge capacity. It may be viewed as a higher form of experimental method, since it pertains to man's experimentation on his own self with the view of purifying and polishing it to make it well prepared to receive the light of bestowed knowledge from the Divine Presence. This self-experimentation involves the development of godfearing quality in the experimenter through a steadfast performance of spiritual acts of worship of God, particularly canonical prayers, and supplications.

In the light of this explanation, we may conclude that a *ta'wīl* of the *mutashābihat* verses – and more generally of the whole Qur'ān – demands a corresponding *ta'wīl* of the microcosmic text of which the interpreter's soul is the core dimension. Insofar as the basic meaning of *ta'wīl* conveys the idea of “returning a thing to its origin” or “reducing a thing to its ultimate intent,”⁶³ it may be asserted that the soul of the interpreter cannot return the Quranic text to its true inner meaning unless it too returns to its Divine Origin.⁶⁴ The same methodological principle applies to the understanding of the cosmic text studied by science. Since there is a one-to-one correspondence between the hierarchically structured soul of man the microcosm and the hierarchically structured cosmic text as the macrocosm, it is likewise possible to maintain that the soul of the interpreter of the

⁶² Ibn al-'Arabi quoted several Quranic verses to show the causal relations between godfearing quality and bestowed knowledge. One verse says: “Be godfearing, and God will teach you,” (chapter 2, verse 282). Another verse says: “If you are godfearing, He will give you discrimination (*furqān*),” (chapter 8, verse 29).

⁶³ E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 127.

⁶⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the close relationship between the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'anic text and the *ta'wīl* of interpreter's soul, see Osman Bakar, *Tawhid and Science*, pp. 34-38.

cosmic text cannot penetrate its deepest meaning unless it too undertakes a journey to its transcendent source.

The main purpose of a scientific exegesis of the Qur'ān is to search for a correspondence between the “scientific” meaning of a particular verse and the scientific meaning of the natural phenomenon, which is believed to be described by it. It is, therefore, important for anyone undertaking a scientific exegesis of the Qur'ān to observe this methodological principle.

Having discussed various ideas and concepts pertaining to the relationship between the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihat* verses, it would be most instructive if we take a concrete example of the *mutashābihat* verses from the Qur'ān that can serve the purpose of simultaneously illustrating a good number of these ideas, concepts, and relations. In our view, the first two *mutashābihat* verses of the similitude type (sing: *matalun*) may serve such a purpose. Four specific but interrelated illustrations are mentioned here. First, it is to show the epistemological relationship between each similitude and the *muḥkamāt* (“well-established”) ideas to which it is referred for interpretation. Second, it is to show that the well-established ideas that serve as the basis of interpretation of the similitude may comprise various kinds of objective truth. Third, it is to show that a similitude can be constituted of objects, events and relations either from the natural world or the human cultural world. And fourth, it is to show that it is possible for a similitude to have a scientific meaning.

The first similitude (*matāḥlun*) reads: “Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, God took away their light and left them in utter darkness. Thus, they could not see. Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return [to the path].”⁶⁵ The second similitude reads: “Or [another similitude] is that of a rain-laden cloud (*ṣayyib*) from the sky: in it are zones of darkness (*ẓulumāt*), and thunder (*ra'd*) and lightning (*barq*); they press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunder-clap, the while they are in terror of death. But God is ever round the rejecters of faith. The lightning all but snatches away their sight; every time the light [helps] them, they walk therein, and when the darkness grows

⁶⁵ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 2 (“The Cow”), verses 17-18.

on them, they stand still. And if God willed, He could take away their faculty of hearing and seeing; for God has power over all things.”⁶⁶

These two similitudes pertain to the same group of people as the conjunction “or” (*aw*) at the beginning of the verse 2:19 clearly suggests. By the same group of people, as indicated by the pronoun of possession “their” (*hum*) in the phrase *mathaluhum* (“their similitude”), is meant the combined group of “the rejecters of faith” and “the spiritual hypocrites,” both of whom are mentioned in the preceding verses.⁶⁷ The “rejecters of faith” (*al-kāfirīn*) are mentioned again in the second similitude (2:19), but not the spiritual hypocrites. Although, based on their apparent beliefs and behavior, these two groups of people are described separately, they are treated as one and the same group for the purpose of similitude-composition. The same similitudes are applicable to both groups, since inwardly their spiritual conditions are almost the same, as attested to by verse 2:7 and verse 18.⁶⁸

The first similitude is centered on a specific human activity, namely “a man who kindled a fire,” and is therefore composed from objects and relations in the human cultural world. The second similitude is centered on a specific natural phenomenon, namely “a

⁶⁶ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 2 (“The Cow”), verses 19-20.

⁶⁷ The “rejecters of faith” are signified in the Qur'ān by several equivalent expressions. They are mentioned for the first time in verse 2:6 as signified by the phrase *alladhīna kafarū* (literally: those who reject) and are described only briefly in two verses (2:6-7) preceding the similitude verses. The next mention of them is in our second similitude under discussion (2:19) where they are signified by the word *al-kāfirīn*. The “spiritual hypocrites” are not signified by any precise technical term or formal expression. Their spiritual identity as a group is inferred from the long description (verses 8-16) about their “hypocritical” behavior perhaps best summarized by verse 2:8: “And of the people there are some who say: “We believe in God and the Last Day;” but they do not really believe.” This verse defines their identity in terms of the apparent contradictions between their outer behavior and their inner reality. The fundamental spiritual disease or vice underlying this hypocrisy is insincerity. There is, however, a term popularly used in reference to the spiritual hypocrites, namely *munāfiqūn*. This word occurs 27 times in the Qur'ān, not to mention its occurrence in other verb or noun forms. Its first occurrence in the Qur'ān is in verse 4:61.

⁶⁸ The rejecters of faith are described in 2:7 as spiritually deaf and blind and the hypocrites as spiritually “deaf, dumb and blind.”

rain-laden cloud from the sky,” and is thus crafted from objects and relations in the natural world. However, there are elements common to both similitudes. These elements are light,⁶⁹ darkness (*zulumāt*), and man’s faculty of hearing and sight which can be taken away anytime by God. The relations emphasized between these elements are man’s dependence on light for his vision during darkness that enables him to walk, and the transient nature of this light, because its sources can cease to be functional in emitting light at any moment that God wills. The source of light in the first similitude is a kindling fire and in the second similitude, lightning. When these sources of light cease to be functional, the people concerned again find themselves in darkness. The second similitude has the important additional reference to the rain-laden cloud with its accompanying thunder and lightning as a source of both fear and hope. All the elements and relations composing each similitude are meant to describe the state of the souls of the rejecters of faith and the spiritual hypocrites that result from their rejection of the light of divine guidance.

According to our earlier theory of the epistemological relationship between the *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihat* verses, the inner meaning of the latter may be obtained by interpreting them in the light of the former. In this case, the well-established ideas that serve as the frame of reference for the interpretation of each similitude are those contained in verses 2:2-5 that precede the verses describing the rejecters of faith and the spiritual hypocrites. These verses deal with the group of people referred to as the “God-fearing” (*al-muttaqīn*),⁷⁰ who are described as those on the path of divine guidance. They are described as such on account of their beliefs and practices that are characteristic of them as a distinct spiritual group. They are defined⁷¹ as believers in the Unseen (*al-ghayb*), the Divine Revelations, and the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*), and practitioners of

⁶⁹ Two words are used to signify light. One is *nūr*, which occurs only in the first similitude (2:17) and the other, *ḍaw’* which occurs in both similitudes (2:17 and 2:20) but in its fourth verb-form *adā’a*.

⁷⁰ *The Qur’ān*, chapter 2 (“The Cow”), verse 2:2.

⁷¹ The definition of *al-muttaqīn* (“The God-fearing”), which is not essential but descriptive in nature, is the second definition to be found in the Qur’ān.

steadfast prayer (*ṣalāh*) and regular charity. The verses 2:2-5 thus deal with the first five articles of Islamic faith (*īmān*) and two of the pillars of Islam. The truths embodied in these articles and pillars pertain to metaphysical truths about God and the cosmos and spiritual truths about man's practice of prayer and charity, which are both individual and communal in nature. These truths are well-established and immutable in nature, since they constitute the core of the teachings of all Prophets.

Quite clearly, in this early part of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* ("The Cow"), believers in the Qur'ān are sought to be contrasted with those who reject it and the hypocrites who outwardly accept it but inwardly reject it. While the external characteristics of the rejecters and the hypocrites are described in a clear manner, their inner thoughts and attitudes are left without description. It is the similitude that is going to describe the inner thoughts and feelings of the rejecters and the hypocrites that explain for their rejection of the light of divine guidance and the psychological consequences of this rejection on their inner being. In particular, the similitude, under the guidance of the well-established truths already identified, seeks to lead us to the inner meaning of light and darkness and of hope, fear, and despair at the deeper levels of their consciousness.

At this deeper psychological level, there is darkness in the soul that is non-physical in nature, resulting from the person's rejection of the light of divine guidance and what it stands for in human life and thought. Darkness is absence or lack of light. It is divine light that illuminates the space of the soul. Without it, the space of the soul will largely be in darkness. There are, of course, bright spots of the soul to speak of, since as the Most Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) God has endowed every man with natural intelligence (*'aql*), which is a form of light. The rejecters and the hypocrites turn to this natural intelligence of theirs to illuminate and brighten the dark space of the soul. However, they just fail to realize that this natural lamp, which may be helpful in brightening their worldly life, is hardly effective in illuminating the dark space of the soul, since the natural lamp itself needs to be supplied with spiritual light.

We have thus far illustrated three of the four aspects in which the idea of similitude can help to explain the epistemological relationship between the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihat* verses. The

fourth aspect pertains to the possibility of similitudes serving as one of the sources of scientific knowledge. If we examine the two similitudes carefully, then we must admit that their meanings include the scientific ones. The relationship between light and vision is implicit in each similitude. Vision is not possible in darkness. It is only possible when there is light to illuminate objects. In the first similitude, the light comes from the kindling fire, and in the second similitude, it comes from lightning. We can see objects, because they reflect light to our eyes that generate a vision process. Classical Muslim scientists specializing in optics, such as Ibn al-Haytham, developed a new theory of vision that was later inherited by modern optics.

In the second similitude, we have the allusion to the scientific theory in meteorology concerning phenomena of thunder and lightning in the process of rain formation from clouds. Although some classical Muslim scientists have dealt with these important meteorological phenomena, it is modern scientists that have developed the theory to a far more advanced level. The two similitudes thus clearly show that scientific meanings in the Qur'ān are not to be merely found in the scientific verses as understood by many modern Muslim scientific exegetes. Scientific meanings inherent in a similitude may be viewed as part of its inner meanings, but they are still of the kind of meanings to which Ibn 'Arabi referred to as the product of the exercise of *ta'wīl* at the level of rational interpretation, which is to be distinguished from its inner meanings at the deeper levels. These deeper meanings can only be reached through the exercise of *ta'wīl* that demands the inward journey of the interpreter's soul to the center of his being.

Some Conclusions about the Epistemological Relationship between the *Muḥkamāt* and the *Mutashābihat* verses

Based on the foregoing discussion of the nature, substance, and function of the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihah* verses, especially in their relation to each other, we may draw several conclusions. First, the textual context of the words *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihatun* in verse 3:7 requires an understanding of the former as *umm al-kitāb* in the primary sense of basis and foundation. Most important of all, the *muḥkamāt* verses are to serve as the basis for the correct

understanding of the *mutashābihat* verses. It is, therefore, appropriate for Yusuf 'Ali to translate *umm al-kitāb* in verse 3:7 as the "foundation of the Book." However, we need to be clearer here on the meaning of "foundation." We affirm that their foundational nature is attributable to the fact that they are well-established both in form and meaning.

Meaning-wise, the *muḥkamāt* verses are considered well-established in the sense that they refer to truths that possess the epistemological attributes and qualities of immutability, exactness, and preciseness and of being error-free. Metaphysical truths about God, the cosmos, and man, are clearly of this category. By man, we mean both man as individual and man as an integral part of society. The divinely revealed laws (sing: *sharī'ah*) that are meant to guide man in his individual and collective life are included in this body of truths. Metaphysical truths are exact and precise in nature like mathematical truths. For this reason, some Muslim metaphysicians speak of metaphysics as an exact science. These truths are immutable in the sense that their epistemological values are not subject to change and improvement. And their quality of being absolutely error free is a consequence of their qualities of exactness and immutability. All the sixteen fundamental ideas in the Opening Chapter refer to well-established truths. All the spiritual attributes that define *al-muttaqīn* ("the God-fearing") as earlier discussed are likewise well-established truths. The descriptions of *muḥkamāt* verses that Yusuf 'Ali⁷² and Asad⁷³ have given coincide with the above description of their content.

Form-wise, the *muḥkamāt* verses are considered well-established in the sense that the truths we have identified are clearly expressed in accordance with the normal rules of language understood both as an ethnic attribute and a mode of thinking. In our case, language as an ethnic attribute refers, of course, to Arabic. God

⁷² 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, p. 107: "the Mother of the Book must include the very foundation on which all law rest, the essence of God's Message..."

⁷³ Muhammad Asad, *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, p. 81: The *muḥkamāt* verses as those comprising "the fundamental principles underlying its [i.e. the Qur'ān's] message and, in particular, its ethical and social teachings."

has revealed the Qur'ān in the Arabic language. And normal language as a mode of thinking refers to the logical or rational mode of expressing truths. From the point of view of humanity living in the age of the Qur'ān, this rational mode of expressing truths that is governed by the rules of logic would be viewed as the “well-established” one. However, language of the kind that expresses truths through symbols, similitudes, parables, and allegories is treated by the Qur'ān as legitimate as attested by the fact that a portion of its verses – the *mutashābihat* – employ this kind of language. The wisdom of the Qur'ān in using the linguistic form of expression of truth as indicated by the *mutashābihat* verses needs to be further reflected upon by its readers.

The *muḥkamāt* verses may then be defined as “those dealing with truths that are well-established both in meaning and form and that serve as the epistemological foundation of the rest of the verses in the Qur'ān.” It is in accordance with the above understanding of what “well-established” means that the *muḥkamāt* verses play their foundational epistemological role. It is only appropriate and proper that verses with clear and established meanings, such as those referring to the divine law or the *sharī'ah*, with its prescribed laws and moral code of conduct for the believers as well as for the larger human community, should serve as the foundation of Quranic teachings. Personal religious duties and social obligations and responsibilities and the pursuit of law and order in human society, which are the foundation and the cornerstone of its stability, ought to be based on clear, well-defined, rational, and logical principles, rules and regulations, and ethical-legal prescriptions, and not on ambiguous and obscure ones.

As our second conclusion, we affirm the principle that necessitates the understanding of the *mutashābihat* verses based on the *muḥkamāt* verses. The *mutashābihat* verses are those that express truths in a non-rational or non-logical way such as through symbols, similitudes, allegories, and parables.⁷⁴ The necessity of the

⁷⁴ Asad defines the *mutashābihat* verses as follows: “..those passages of the Qur'ān which are expressed in a figurative manner, with a meaning that is metaphorically implied but not directly, in so many words, stated.” See his *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, p. 81.

mutashābihat verses may be explained from various points of view. We asserted earlier that there must be wisdom in the inclusion of this kind of verses in the Qur'ān as a substantive and integral part of it. Here we present just two explanations. First, for the great multitude of human minds, spiritual instruction proves to be 'more effective when truths and spiritual lessons are conveyed to them in the language of similitudes, parables, and allegories. Second, the existence of the *mutashābihat* verses is dictated by the role of the *muḥkamāt* verses as *umm al-kitāb*. This role is quite analogous to the role of the Opening Chapter as *umm al-kitāb* in relation to the rest of the Qur'ān. The ideas in the Opening Chapter are repeated in the rest of the Qur'ān in manifold and diverse forms. We may say that as dictated by Divine Wisdom, the two fundamental *mathānīan* ("repetitive in varied forms") modes in the Qur'ān in accordance with its self-explanatory nature as a Book are of the *muḥkam* and the *mutashābih* types. In other words, the *mutashābihat* verses constitute one form of God's detailed explanation of the Opening Chapter. However, their function of detailed explanation (*tafsīl*) and clarification (*tibyān*) of other verses of the Qur'ān is to be understood within the framework of the position and role of the *muḥkamāt* verses as *umm al-kitāb*. This specific way of looking at the *mathānīan* mode in the Qur'ān that makes it applicable as well to the *mutashābihat* verses shows how thoroughly, systematically, and masterfully the functions of *tafsīl* and *tibyān* are displayed in the Qur'ān, thereby resulting in its coherence and inner consistency (*mutashābihan*).

Our third conclusion is that some of the *mutashābihat* verses contain scientific meanings. Some similitudes in the Qur'ān are composed from relations between objects and phenomena in the natural world. This textual fact has at least two implications for science and scientific exegesis. First, a comprehensive scientific exegesis needs to examine the scientific content of some of the *mutashābihat* verses. Second, since the *mutashābihat* verses have a pedagogical role to play in Islamic spirituality and ethics, the fact that scientific meanings are part of the inner meanings of some of these verses means that scientific knowledge has a role to play as well in spiritual education.

Our fourth conclusion is that there is a need for a better understanding of the Quranic conception of *ta'wīl* and its significance for Islamic epistemology in general and science of exegesis in particular. We affirm *ta'wīl* as a legitimate mode of knowledge that does not compromise principles of rational thought and the inner consistency between the *mutashābihat* and the *muḥkamāt* verses. However, we maintain that *ta'wīl* understood as a special kind of hermeneutic interpretation of the Quranic text that seeks to fathom the inner meanings of the *mutashābihat* verses, and more generally of all verses in the Qur'ān, demands a corresponding inward journey of the interpreter's soul to the center of his being, which is none other than our spiritual heart that a Prophetic hadith describes as "the throne of God." Consequently, there is also a place for *ta'wīl* in scientific exegesis.

The Opening Chapter's Relevance to Science

As previously explained, by science we mean not just the knowledge of its content derived from its study of the cosmos and its parts, but also the methodological aspects of the study of nature, mathematics and the cognitive world, its foundational elements, and its unique objectives. Seen in this light, it can be said that the Qur'ān's references to science are truly many and varied. We may begin to study them with an overview of the relevance of the Opening Chapter to science.

In viewing its content, the Opening Chapter demonstrates relevance to science in at least five major respects. First, it is relevant to the conceptual tools of science. Second, it is relevant to the subject matter of science. Third, it is relevant to its foundational assumptions. Fourth, it is relevant to the methodological approaches of science in its study of the natural and mathematical worlds. And fifth, it is relevant to the objectives of science. We shall now examine each of the five aspects of the relevance of the Opening Chapter to science and scientific exegesis.

The Opening Chapter and the Conceptual Tools of Science

In the development of science as a branch of knowledge and as an academic discipline, conceptual tools are needed. These conceptual

tools include scientific terminology and vocabulary that concern naming things studied by science, definition, classification, and abstract or summary.

It can be shown that the Opening Chapter is relevant to all these conceptual tools. The idea of names and realities of things is important, especially to science. The relevance of the Opening Chapter to this very idea may be inferred from the explicit mention of the Divine Name (*ism*) in the first verse of the Chapter. The conception of name and naming is important to all fields of study.⁷⁵ Theologically and metaphysically speaking, the Name Allah unites His all other Names which refer to His corresponding Attributes.⁷⁶ The conception of name is important to the understanding of the Quranic verse that tells us God “taught Adam the names of all things.”⁷⁷ Exegetes offer different interpretations of to what these “names” taught to Adam actually refer. The philosophical interpretation of “name” of a thing as meaning the reality of that thing is of particular interest to science, since it is the main objective of science to know the reality of natural things which it studies. Anyhow, “naming” things is important to science. Thus, the word “name” (*ism*) in the Opening Chapter has generated numerous discussions of its meaning and significance in the various sciences, even though there its specific use is in relation to God.

Then, we encounter in verse 1:7 the definition of the straight path (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*) mentioned in verse 1:6. We have already discussed in detail the issue of definition raised by the meanings of these two verses. We also emphasize there the pervasive concern of the Qur'ān with definitions that inspired the “definition tradition” in Islamic intellectual tradition. The importance of definitions to Islamic science could not be overemphasized. Closely related to the issue of definition in the two verses is the idea of classification. Verse 1:7 provides not only the descriptive definition of the straight path but

⁷⁵ For a classical work that deals with the conception of name and the philosophy of naming with the view of applying them to the discussion of the Names of God in Islam, see Al-Ghazzali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (“*al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*”), trans. David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992).

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazzali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p. 51.

⁷⁷ *The Qur’ān*, chapter 2 (“The Cow”), verse 31.

also the classification of religious paths, since the straight path is sought to be contrasted there with two other paths. Classifications of human beings according to different criteria are found in various parts of the Qur'ān. But the idea of classification is first encountered in the Qur'ān in the Opening Chapter itself. This is the classification of religious paths into the straight path [i.e. the path of those on whom is bestowed divine grace], the path of those on whom is divine wrath, and the path of those who are astray. The importance of classification to science is universally acknowledged. There is a traditional saying in philosophical and scientific thought that “classification is the beginning of science.”

The Opening Chapter is also relevant to the conceptions of “abstract, synopsis or summary” in scholarly writings. The provision of abstracts, synopses, and summaries in scholarly writings is perhaps most widely practiced and strictly observed in the field of science. But it is the Opening Chapter itself that provides a unique model of abstract, synopsis or essential summary preparation. Consisting of merely seven verses, it is presented by God and the Prophet Muhammad (May God's salutation and peace be upon him!) as the perfect summary of the whole Qur'ān. As far as the Muslims are concerned, this summary is, of course, divine, but there is no reason why human attempts at writing good abstracts, synopsis, and summaries of such scholarly works as doctoral theses and scientific articles cannot be modeled after the Opening Chapter itself. All these ideas – name and naming, definition, classification, and book or article abstract, synopsis, and essential summary – clearly show the relevance of the Opening Chapter to the idea of the conceptual tools of science.

The Opening Chapter and the Subject-Matter of Science

The subject-matter of science is found to be principally contained in the second verse of the Opening Chapter, “Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds (*rabb al-'alamin*).⁷⁸ The Quranic word *al-'alamin*, meaning “all the worlds,” is generally understood to refer to the whole reality other than God, which in the English language is

⁷⁸ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 (“The Opening”), verse 2.

usually known as the universe or the cosmos.⁷⁹ The term *al-‘ālamīn* therefore provides a definition of the cosmos, the subject-matter of cosmology.⁸⁰ The different worlds or parts of the cosmos form the subject-matters of various particular sciences such as astronomy, physics, geology, biology, and angelology. The Opening Chapter itself does not mention what these different worlds are, but the constituent worlds of the cosmos and their respective “creaturely” contents can be found in certain other parts of the Qur’ān.

Many verses in the rest of the Qur’ān tell us that there are many worlds, the physical as well as the non-physical. There is the physical world of which our planet Earth is a very special part populated as it is by the human species⁸¹ and many other forms of life not found on the other planets of our solar system. Then there is the subtle intermediate world above which stand the many spiritual worlds of the angels, which some Prophetic *aḥādīth* describe as creatures of pure light. Scientifically speaking, classical Muslim philosopher-scientists referred to them as completely “separate substances” (*al-‘uqūl al-mufāriqah*) without bodily forms.⁸² It is interesting to note that they used the same Arabic word ‘*uqūl*’ (sing: ‘*aql*’) as is used for the human intellect-reason, meaning that the two species of creatures – angels and humans – share some fundamental elements together. Man, therefore, contains an angelic substance and

⁷⁹ The term “cosmos” will be used throughout this book as the rendering of the Arabic word *al-‘ālamīn*.

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion of the definition of the cosmos, see Osman Bakar, *Quranic Pictures of the Universe: The Scriptural Foundation of Islamic Cosmology* (Brunei Darussalam: UBD Press and Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2016), Chapter 1.

⁸¹ The uniqueness of the planet Earth will be discussed at length in chapter 5.

⁸² Al-Farabi is a good example of classical Muslim philosopher-scientists who adopted this particular terminology in reference to the angels. His discussion of the nature of the angels as absolutely incorporeal beings and their generation as separate substances with the cosmic role and function of secondary agents (*al-asbāb al-thawānī*) in the causal chain of cosmic phenomena in relation to God, Who is the First Cause, is found in several of his major works. See his *Risālat fī al-‘aql* (“Treatise on the Intellect-Reason”), ed. N. Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938); *Kitāb al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* (“Book on Civilizational Politics”), ed. Fauzi Najjah (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964); and

angelic qualities within his own being by virtue of being given the gift of *'aql* by God.

As for the subtle world, it is identified with the world of psychic substances and of the *jinn*s, which is neither physical nor spiritual. Like the angels, the *jinn*s are invisible to man. The Qur'ān describes them as “creatures of fire,” not physical fire but “fire of a scorching wind.”⁸³ Although angels and *jinn*s together constitute the invisible worlds they have roles and functions to play in relation to the existence and functioning of the physical world. Thus, qualitatively speaking, the Islamic cosmos is far more extensive and a much richer reality than the cosmos of modern science.

Science as a branch of knowledge and as an academic discipline does not study the *al-‘ālamīn* or the cosmos as a whole but only a part of it. Modern science claims to study the whole cosmos but then its cosmos is limited to the physical one, rejecting the non-physical cosmos as unreal. The subject-matter of Islamic science is what is traditionally known as the natural (*al-ṭabī‘īyyah*) and mathematical (*al-riyāḍīyyah*) worlds. The natural world was understood by many Muslim scientists as including the subtle world of the *jinn*s, which they view as having relations with the biological and human worlds. But Islamic science does not study the angelic world, not because it is unreal but because it is completely spiritual and transcendent to the physical world and, therefore, beyond the scope of its methodological competence and its objectives as dictated by Islamic ontological considerations. The traditional Muslim scientific mind is very much aware of the scope of the subject-matter of his science but at the same time he is aware of its relations with the metaphysical angelic and divine realities.

The Opening Chapter and the Foundational Assumptions of Science

The third relevance of the Opening Chapter to science pertains to its foundational assumptions. Every science requires foundational assumptions on which to build its epistemological structures, basic concepts and theories, and its thematic contents. In every society its

⁸³ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 15 (“The Rocky Tract”), verse 27: “And the jinn race, We have created before man, from the fire of a scorching wind.”

worldview and cultural matrix influence the individual sciences that are cultivated in that society as well as their respective philosophical ideas that are to serve as their foundational assumptions. The case of Islamic science is no exception. In the case of this science, as it was cultivated in Islamic civilization for many centuries, we may speak of several layers of principles serving as its foundational assumptions, namely, the metaphysical-theological, the cosmological, the eschatological, and the natural-physical. The Opening Chapter furnishes the first two layers of these principles or assumptions but not the third and the last layer. However, principles pertaining to the natural-physical layer which may serve as the nearest foundational assumptions for the natural and mathematical sciences can be found in other parts of the Qur'an.

The metaphysical-theological foundations of science are contained in the first four verses of the opening chapter and in the sixth verse. These verses refer to the Divine Name Allah⁸⁴ plus four of His other "Beautiful Names," namely the Compassionate (*al-Raḥmān*), the Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*),⁸⁵ the Creator, Owner, Guide and Sustainer (*al-Rabb*),⁸⁶ and the Master of the Day of Judgement (*al-Mālik*).⁸⁷ The sixth verse does not explicitly mention any Divine Name, but it alludes to the Divine Name and Attribute, the Guide (*al-Hādī*) since it speaks of man's prayer to God to guide him upon the straight path.⁸⁸ In other parts of the Qur'ān we find eighteen verses describing God as "guiding whomsoever He wishes"⁸⁹ to a path that is straight.

Similarly, the fifth verse (1:5) may be understood as furnishing

⁸⁴ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 ("The Opening"), verse 1.

⁸⁵ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 ("The Opening"), verses 1 and 3

⁸⁶ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 ("The Opening"), verse 2.

⁸⁷ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 ("The Opening"), verse 4.

⁸⁸ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 1 ("The Opening"), verse 6.

⁸⁹ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 2 ("The Cow"), verses 213 and 272; chapter 7 ("The Heights"), verse 155; chapter 10 ("Yunus"), verse 25; chapter 13 ("The Thunder"), verses 27 and 31; chapter 14 ("Abraham"), verse 4; chapter 16 ("The Bee"), verses 9 and 93; chapter 22 ("The Pilgrimage"), verse 16; chapter 24 ("The Light"), verses 35 and 46; chapter 28 ("The Narrations"), verse 56; chapter 35 ("The Originator"), verse 8; chapter 39 ("The Crowds"), verse 23; chapter 42 ("Consultation"), verses 13 and 52; chapter 74 ("The One Wrapped Up"), verse 31.

another metaphysical-theological foundational principle of science in the form of the Divine Name and Attribute, the One whose help is sought (*al-Musta'ān*).⁹⁰ The verse “You alone do we worship and your aid alone we seek” tells us that God is man’s sole object of worship and the One whose help we should seek. It is to God *al-Musta'ān* that man’s search for help should be solely directed, because it is this Divine Attribute that will feature prominently in the divine response to the human seeker of divine help. The very purpose of man’s prayer as meant by the verse is to seek God’s help to guide him upon the straight path. This is evident from the fact that in the verse the seeking of divine help is mentioned together with the commitment to worship God alone, and that in the following verse man pleads to God to keep him forever in the straight path.

A question that may be naturally asked here is how the Divine Names and Attributes mentioned in this Opening Chapter could be explicitly or otherwise relevant to science. The importance of the Divine Name *al-Rabb* as a metaphysical-theological principle serving as the deepest level of foundational assumptions of science as expressed in the phrase *Rabb al-'ālamīn*⁹¹ seems to be widely understood among the Muslims. It is perhaps because of the frequent usage of this Quranic phrase that whenever the relationship between God and the universe is mentioned, it is always God as *al-Rabb* that comes first to the minds of most Muslims followed by the Name Creator (*al-Khaliq*) and similar Names. Since the key idea in the

⁹⁰ The name and attribute *al-Mu'in* (“The Helper”) does not exist in the Qur'ān. But the word *al-Musta'an*, which refers to God as the One whose help is sought, occurs twice there. See *The Qur'ān*, chapter 12 (“Yusuf”), verse 18 and chapter 21 (“The Prophets”), verse 112.

⁹¹ This term has been rendered in various ways in modern English translations of the Qur'ān. This is not surprising since the Arabic word *rabb* is rich in meanings. For examples, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, in his *The Tarjumān al- Qur'ān: the Opening Chapter of the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1991), translated it as “Lord of all creation” though in his commentary on the verse he discusses the wide range of meanings of the word *rabb*; ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali, in his *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, translated it as “the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds”; Muhammad Asad, in his *The Message of the Qur'an*, translated it as “the Sustainer of all the worlds.” In the English translation of Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi's *Tafhīm al- Qur'ān, Towards Understanding the Qur'ān* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2006) we have the rendering “the Lord of the entire universe.”

Divine Name *al-Rabb* is the attribute of God as the Creator, the relationship between God and the universe in the popular understanding is defined mainly as the relationship between God the Creator and the universe as His creation. The subject matter of Islamic science is, therefore, a world that is created and governed by its Creator and not an independent or autonomous reality.

The relationship between God and the universe, however, may be envisaged in other ways. According to Ibn 'Arabi and his intellectual school of Sufism, the whole universe is God's Self-Disclosure (*tajallī*), meaning that His Names and Attributes display traces and properties in the cosmos and in fact the universe is ultimately nothing but the reflection of the Divine Qualities.⁹² Ibn 'Arabi made this assertion based on the Qur'ān itself.⁹³ This particular perspective on the relationship between the Divine Names and Attributes and the cosmos would mean that all of the former, including those mentioned in the Opening Chapter, are relevant to science and vice versa inasmuch as it is possible to establish relations between the worlds studied by science and the cosmos as God's Self-Disclosure.

This perspective would also mean that it could hardly be possible for us to separate Islamic science from metaphysics and theology. There is always an essential relationship to be seen between the two regardless of whether we view science as the result of an application of metaphysical-theological principles or see it as a form of knowledge attained through the study of nature having a metaphysical-theological significance. Science seeks to study the various qualities and properties of the natural world but, as reminded by Ibn al-'Arabi, every such quality and property exists only as a Divine Self-Disclosure. In other words, a veritable scientific knowledge of the natural world always points to the metaphysical knowledge of the Divine Names and Attributes.

⁹² For a detailed discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's views on the relationship between the Divine Names and Attributes and the cosmos, see William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn 'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

⁹³ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 7 ("The Heights"), verse 143. This verse contains a reference to God's self-disclosure to the mountain (*falammā tajallā rabbuhu li'l-jabal*) following Moses' plea to God that he might be able to see Him.

Although, principally speaking, metaphysical-theological principles constitute the deepest layer of the foundational assumptions of science and therefore the furthest from the kind of scientific knowledge pursued by scientists, the Quranic perspective on the cosmos as God's Self-Disclosure of His Names and Qualities as expounded by Ibn 'Arabi presents an immediate and direct relevance of metaphysics and theology as a source of the foundational assumptions of science. Not all Muslim scientists based themselves on this thesis formulated by Ibn 'Arabi, but the basic principle of this perspective, namely, the intrinsic relation between the cosmos and Divine Qualities, generally shapes the worldview of Islamic science.

As for the cosmological foundational assumptions of science, these premises are implied in the Opening Chapter's verse 2 that mentions the cosmos (*al-'ālamīn*), in verses 5 and 6 that mention man, and in verse 4 that mentions the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-dīn*). It may be emphasized here that the Quranic conception of the cosmos provides the foundation for Islamic cosmology and the natural and mathematical sciences.⁹⁴ The Quranic conception of man serves a similar foundational purpose. It is indeed significant that in the Opening Chapter, man is the only being or creature in the cosmos to be mentioned. But lest some people might deny this observation as man is not explicitly mentioned here as *al-insān* – the very word occurring many times in the rest of the Qur'ān in reference to man – it is important to explain in what way man is mentioned. The text clearly shows that man is mentioned collectively here as God's servants (sing: *'abd*) as indicated by the pronoun "we" in the verse "You do we worship (*na'budu*) and Your aid do we seek (*nasta'īn*)."

As to why of all creatures, man alone is mentioned in the Opening Chapter that summarizes the whole Qur'ān, it seems most reasonable to argue that the human species is the best summary and the most noble of his created cosmos. What amounts to the same thing, man is viewed as central to God's creation. The rest of the Qur'ān indeed supports this thesis that man is God's most noble creature and that he is so by virtue of the fact that God has breathed

⁹⁴ See Osman Bakar, *Quranic Pictures of the Universe*.

His Spirit into him and he has been created a microcosm (*'ālam al-ṣaghīr*), meaning a small universe in which, essentially speaking, all the elements of the cosmos are summarized.⁹⁵

The mention of the Day of Judgment brings up the issue of the end of the cosmos and the return of creatures to God, which is related to the domain of eschatology, the science of the return of all things to God. Eschatological realities therefore also serve as a foundational element of cosmology in that they set a temporal limit to the existence of the present world in which we live and negate the idea that this cosmos is everlasting.

The Opening Chapter and Its Relevance to the Methodological Approaches of Science

During their history Muslims developed various sciences based on the Quranic epistemology that recognizes many avenues to knowledge which is central to the Islamic message. The Qur'ān describes Islam as “the religion of truth”⁹⁶ which also means the “religion of knowledge” since truth is concerned with knowledge. The primacy of knowledge in Islam as affirmed by many other verses of the Qur'ān and Prophetic *aḥādīth* makes clear that Islam is above all a “way of knowledge.” In the Quranic perspective, knowledge is the central path to salvation and spiritual happiness. Given the centrality of knowledge in the Qur'ān, this central idea must be somehow indicated in principle in the Opening Chapter which summarizes the Sacred Text. In our view, this idea is captured in the term worship in verse 5 and the term “the straight path” (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) in verse 6. The two terms are profoundly interrelated since the Qur'ān defines the straight path as the worship of God Who is One.⁹⁷

We may, therefore, turn to the epistemological dimension of the “straight path” and this effort includes the consideration of the Quranic idea of the various ways of knowing or the various paths to

⁹⁵ For comprehensive arguments on why the idea of microcosm is Quranic see Osman Bakar, *Quranic Pictures of the Universe*, Chapter Seven.

⁹⁶ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 61 (“The Battle Array”), verse 7.

⁹⁷ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 36 (“Ya Sin”), verse 61.

the knowledge open to man. As the microcosm, man has been naturally equipped with all the cognitive faculties that are necessary for him to know the macrocosm. Man's cognitive instruments as mentioned in the Qur'ān include his spirit (*rūh*),⁹⁸ heart (sing: *qalb*) that is "open to the Truth,"⁹⁹ his intelligence and power of understanding,¹⁰⁰ and his senses including hearing and sight. The noun '*aql*' ("intellect-reason") which refers to man's noetic faculty and power of thought, which itself possesses grades that are discussed explicitly by commentators, Islamic philosophers, and Gnostics, does not appear as such in the Qur'ān, but its existence is implied in its verb form and through its many attributes mentioned in numerous verses. The term '*aql*' is, however, found in many Prophetic *aḥādīth*. Islamic science employs primarily but not exclusively the empirical method based on observation and experimentation, which are much emphasized in the Qur'ān,¹⁰¹ for its study of the observable cosmos. But the traditional Muslim scientific mind is ever aware of other sources of and avenues to knowledge, particularly Divine revelation (*waḥy*) which would exercise positive influence on methodological approaches to the study of nature. Nor does the Muslim mind see a contradiction between the various methods of attaining knowledge from observation and experimentation to ratiocination and intellection to illumination and revelation.

The Opening Chapter and Its Relevance to the Objectives of Science

Science has objectives that are both immediate and distant. In Islamic science, the generally accepted view regarding the immediate objective of each branch of science is that it seeks to know the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the particular aspect of the physical universe which it studies; and it seeks to know this reality not only in itself, but also in relation to other levels of reality to which it is connected since there

⁹⁸ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 15 ("The Rocky Tract"), verse 29.

⁹⁹ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 22 ("The Pilgrimage"), verse 54.

¹⁰⁰ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 16 ("The Bee"), verse 78.

¹⁰¹ *The Qur'ān*, for example, chapter 67 ("The Dominion"), verses 3-4.

is a unity that pervades the created order and all levels of cosmic existence. Furthermore, this knowledge is related in an ultimate sense to the knowledge of God. Next in immediacy is the application of the knowledge thus acquired to man's practical and intellectual needs. More distant objectives include the realization of man's spiritual and moral perfection. The Qur'ān deals with all these objectives of science. For example, it refers to the creation of the celestial bodies for the purpose of time-calculation;¹⁰² the creation of the heavens and the earth for human reflection with the view of arriving at certainty of the afterlife¹⁰³ and for the purpose of knowing God's Names and Qualities.¹⁰⁴

All these objectives of science are implied by and embodied in the idea of worship mentioned in verse 5 of the Opening Chapter. According to the Qur'ān, worship (*'ibādah*) is the purpose of human existence.¹⁰⁵ Worship must therefore embrace all human activities, including the scientific as Islamically understood. It is an objective of science to help man perform his worship of God in a more perfect manner and not only to know a particular phenomenon in isolation from the whole and independent of knowledge of God. In fact, *ya'budūn* mentioned in the Qur'ān, meaning "they worship", is understood in the Islamic wisdom tradition to mean *ya'rifūn* (they know) so that the Quranic verse that states that God created men so that they would worship Him is understood to mean to know Him which includes knowing His creation not as an independent reality but as His creation.

Conclusion

The preceding pages clearly demonstrate that a thoughtful attempt at an epistemological exegesis of the Qur'ān's Opening Chapter can provide us with rich ideas that are of deep significance to Islamic philosophy of science and scientific exegesis. Central to these ideas

¹⁰² *The Qur'ān e*, chapter 10 ("Yunus"), verse 5; chapter 15 ("The Rocky Tract"), verse 85.

¹⁰³ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 3 ("The Family of 'Imran"), verses 190-191.

¹⁰⁴ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 7 ("The Heights"), verse 54.

¹⁰⁵ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 51 ("The Winds that Scatter"), verse 56.

is the affirmation of the epistemological structure of a true science comprising its subject matter (*mawḍūʿ*), fundamental premises and assumptions (*muqaddimāt*), methods of study (*turuq*), and objectives (*ahdāf*). The exegesis in question may lead us further to a fruitful inquiry into the issue of whether it would be meaningful to speak of a science of scientific or epistemological exegesis.

INVESTIGATING THE UNDISPUTED SCIENTIFIC REALISM IN THE ISLAM-MODERN SCIENCE DISCOURSE

Amana Raquib¹, Talha Moosani² and Marium Ezam Qazi³

Abstract

In the Islam and science discourse, the philosophical discussion on the nature and reality of scientific knowledge is mostly missing. Almost the whole discourse sustains its validity and relevance from a strong scientific realist stance that is the de facto position within this discourse. However, going by the Sunnī epistemological standards, since only conclusive or certain knowledge (Wilm qat'ī or yaqīnī) counts as proof (burhān) in Sunnī theology (kalām), scientific knowledge due to its layers of theoretical presuppositions, is probable and limited; a claim also substantiated by the history and philosophy of science. Scientific propositions cannot be beneficial for theological pursuit such as knowing and appreciating divine attributes or used as a basis for either affirming or questioning and reinterpreting scriptures. In the current Muslim discourse on Islam and modern science, uncritical, unacknowledged, and undefended acceptance of scientific realism has led to the unwarranted use of modern scientific knowledge for such theological and religious purposes.

Keywords: Islamic epistemology, scientific realism, instrumentalism, Sunnī theology, Islam-Science discourse

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, School of Economics and Social Sciences, Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. Email: araquib@iba.edu.pk

² Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. Email: talhamoosani123@gmail.com

³ Research Assistant, School of Economics and Social Sciences, Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. Email: mariumanis@gmail.com

Introduction

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the rationale, objectives and scope of learning and practicing science, as well as the development of appropriate research questions, methodologies, and programs, are to be informed by the fundamental principles of theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*). The epistemological standards, present within the Sunni theological (*kalām*) tradition, which is metascientific, therefore need to be used to establish the nature and status of scientific theories, models, and explanations within the Islamic hierarchy of knowledge. Establishing the status and position of scientific theories based on the theological standards and categories of knowledge is a prerequisite for developing the Islamic justification for the scientific enterprise and the arbitration of the ends and goals toward which modern scientific knowledge should be directed by and for Muslims. Joseph Lumbard discusses the same necessity that:

The reality is that so long as Muslim society does not find the way towards developing its own concepts or reformulating the concepts of others as if they were ab initio its own, there is no hope of escaping this intellectual perplexity that afflicts the minds of those within it.⁴

Since modern science is an essential component of modern education, an average educated Muslim needs to know their theological-epistemological position with regards to the scientific methodology and scientific theories (their relation (or non-relation) to Muslim understanding of Reality (*al-Ḥaqq*), and whether scientific knowledge could inform Islamic theology in any substantive manner in addition to its other pragmatic social functions of tentative explanation, prediction, and problem-solving. Lots of debates within the educated Sunni Muslim polity and attempts to reconcile every new scientific theory with Islamic theology and scriptures emerge due to the non-availability of any such theological-epistemological position regarding the epistemic status of scientific theories

⁴ Joseph E. B. Lumbard, “Islam and the Challenge of Epistemic Sovereignty,” *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024): 406, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040406>, p. 5.

according to the standards of knowledge consolidated within the Sunni theological tradition.

To ascertain the Islamic position regarding scientific theories by assessing them through the Sunni *kalām* standards of knowledge, the limits of those scientific theories in conceptualizing and studying the phenomena need to be determined. It needs to be understood from within the discipline of the philosophy of science whether scientific theories are, by and large, capable of, and developed for the purpose of, revealing reality (partially or wholly) or providing explanations of apparent phenomena or whether their goal is to solve problems within a certain research paradigm. The objective of capturing, conceptualizing, or representing reality that lies beyond appearances is metaphysical, whereas the goal of explaining and predicting phenomena and solving problems that come in the way is pragmatic or instrumental. Islamic understanding of knowledge encompasses both; classifying the scientific theories and, hence, scientific knowledge under the pragmatic objective could still make it a valuable social enterprise. This, however, would not allow scientific knowledge to be used for understanding, explaining, verifying, or refuting theological doctrines or claims, which can only happen on the assumptions of Scientific Realism - henceforth referred to as SR.

In the discourse on Islam and science, in recent years⁵ the discussion on the nature and reality of scientific knowledge, as discussed in the philosophy of science, seems to be mostly missing. Most of the questions asked in such conversations concerning the reconciliation of Islamic theology and modern scientific knowledge sustain their validity and relevance only from a strong Scientific Realist position, which is the unquestioned *de facto* position in these conversations. Mehdi Golshani, editor and task force member of one such project, has mentioned that “the challenge for Muslims has been the philosophical interpretations of modern science, not science *per se*”⁶ In the same project, however, recourse to the philosophy of science is absent. Another pertinent example is a three-part article⁷

⁵ Golshani et al., *Muslim World Science Initiative Report of İhsanoğlu Task Force on Islam and Science*. (London and Islamabad, 2016).

⁶ Golshani et al. *Muslim World Science Initiative Report*, 2016, p. 59.

⁷ Mohammad Daneshgar, “The Quran and Science, Part I: The Premodern Era,”

on the Quran and science, published recently, which does not include any such analysis from the standpoint of contemporary philosophy of science.

The central problem this paper identifies is that “scientific realism” is being adopted by Muslim theologians and academics without much critical analysis. Subsequently various scientific terms and ideas get mapped onto Islamic theology, which means the attribution of scientific entities and theories to God and His ways of interacting with or acting upon the physical world - which ultimately results in asking the questions of the compatibility or incompatibility of the scientific assumptions with the scripture. For instance, Basil Altaie, despite maintaining a distinction between laws of nature and laws of physics, does not look closely at the status of scientific realism itself within the philosophy of science.⁸

The way scientific realism has been conceived and received has changed, so it is necessary first to try to understand the nuances of its meanings and, subsequently, the implications of whether this position enjoys as high an epistemological status that could guarantee the truth and reality of the scientific theories and their associated entities and processes as to make them theologically relevant. This paper takes up the question of scientific realism and whether science as a body of knowledge can raise or answer theological questions, such as about the possibility or impossibility of God creating and running the universe through scientifically conceptualized and theorized entities⁹ and processes such as atoms, quarks, cells, genes,

Zygon 58, no. 4 (2023): 952–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12931>; Mohammad Daneshgar, “The Qur’ān and Science, Part II: Scientific Interpretations from North Africa to China, Bengal, and the Malay-Indonesian World,” *Zygon* 58, no. 4 (2023): 970–1004, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12932>; Mohammad Daneshgar, “The Qur’ān and Science, Part III: Makers of the Scientific Miraculousness,” *Zygon* 58, no. 4 (2023): 1005–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12930>.

⁸ Basil Altaie, *God, Nature and the Cause: Essays on Islam and Science* (N.p.: Kalam Research & Media, 2016); Basil Altaie, *The Divine Word and the Grand Design: Interpreting the Quran in the Light of Modern Science* (N.p.: Beacon Books, 2019).

⁹ The possibility for God to have created the processes on the ontological level in a certain manner, which is unknown to us (part of the *ghaybiyyāt*), while at the same time giving us the observable trends to show us a process and structure, which leads us to an appreciation of God’s power and might, is something that is discussed under *taskhir* in the final part of the paper.

chromosomes, photosynthesis, respiration, evolution, etc. Such an interface of theology with science becomes justified only on the pretext of assuming the certainty or definitiveness (*yaqīn* or *qaṭʿīyat*) of scientific propositions. However, the certitude of scientific (theory-based) propositions is neither supported by the Sunnī epistemological standard for determining the definitive propositions (*qaṭʿīyat*) nor by the history of scientific development and theory change, which has shown that scientific theories are not certain or conclusive in their claims but are somewhat limited in many aspects by the respective scientific methodologies.

Another factor worth highlighting is that the SR espoused by contemporary Muslim theologians undergirds much more certainty than the one championed by the philosophers of science or even practicing scientists. The Muslim discourse conceives some semblance of ontological reality for the theoretical entities of science. The kind of ontological realness (no matter to whatever degree) presumed and granted by the Muslim theologians to the scientifically arrived entities and processes differs greatly from the kind of verisimilitude or approximation to truth that is, in principle, fallible, proposed, and debated within the philosophy of science under the umbrella of scientific realism. This paper asks that, if this is the case, then whether a dialogue between science and Islamic theology is warranted at all. For instance, the same concern (that science should not inform theology) is echoed in this paper,¹⁰ but then the author, in his other works, uses scientific claims of evolution to reinterpret the Quranic creation story¹¹ or develop Islamic theological position on extraterrestrial beings¹²

¹⁰ Shoaib Ahmed Malik and Nazif Muhtaroglu, “How Much Should or Can Science Impact Theological Formulations? An Ashʿarī Perspective on Theology of Nature,” *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2022): (Si8), 5–35, <https://doi.org/10.31820/ejap.18.2.9>.

¹¹ Shoaib Ahmed Malik, “Adam, Eve, and Human Evolution: Is There a Conflict?” in *Islamic Philosophy of Religion: Essays from Analytic Perspectives*, ed. M.S. Zarepour (1st ed.; Routledge, 2023), pp. 261–81, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003327714>.

¹² Jörg M. Determann and Shoaib A. Malik, eds., *Islamic Theology and Extraterrestrial Life: New Frontiers in Science and Religion* (N.p.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), pp. 139–58.

The structure of the paper is as follows: It will first display SR's permeation in the Islam-Science discourse and then briefly elucidate the concept of scientific realism from within the discipline of philosophy of science. This will include its definitions and the main challenges it faces, primarily due to its strong claims regarding the contents and mechanisms constituting reality (metaphysical or ontological) and our scientific understanding of that (epistemological). Then, the paper will discuss how the instrumentalist position, on the one hand, shows the weaknesses of SR yet does not suffer from such weakness primarily due to its limited epistemological claims. Then it will state the standards that exist in the Sunnī *kalām* (theological) tradition with regards to knowledge propositions that are certain (*yaqīnī*), conjectural (*ẓannī*)¹³, self-evident (*badīhī*) as well as discuss the status of scientific unobservables as to why they do not fall under their category of senses (*ḥissiyyāt*) or experience (*mujarrabāt*). Both are required to be intersubjectively and widely shared amongst all human beings instead of being based on the observations and experiences of a select group of experts or scientists whose observations are colored and mediated by both theoretical presuppositions and sophisticated technological instruments.

The Sunnī theological understanding will be used as a standard metric to analyze what constitutes *ilm* in the Sunnī tradition. The framework of this paper is thus conceptual and not school or scholar-based. The criterion of knowledge that is present in the later consolidation of Sunnī position, such as Taftazani's work that serves as a compendium of theological doctrines, would be used as a standard to assign science's epistemic worth. The paper will end by expanding on the Quranic notion of *taskhīr* (subjugation) to explain the instrumental success of scientific theories.

¹³ Within *ẓann*, there is (1) *al-ẓann al-rājih* (when a proposition has a high probability of being true). (2) *al-ẓann* (when a proposition is likely to be true). (3) *al-shakk* (when a proposition can be equally true or false). (4) *al-wahm* (when a proposition is more likely to be false than true) (5) when a proposition is false. What moves a person along this spectrum is the nature and the weight of evidence. These categories are relevant in *fiqh* (Islamic Law) but since the orientation of this paper is theological and only certain knowledge is used in theology, it won't discuss these categories.

Science-God Mapping in the Muslim Imagination

The mapping of scientific theories, entities, and processes onto God (His attributes and forms of acting) assumes the acceptance of these with some degree of scientific realism, which is mainly a metaphysical position regarding the ontological existence of scientific entities, processes, and relations. Using scientific knowledge for any discourse within theology, in a scientific realist spirit, means elevating science to a level that connects directly to God. The paper argues that Muslims cannot hold a scientific realist position regarding the truth or approximate truth of scientific theories within the philosophy of science yet consider them outside the realm of theology since anything considered real in science would acquire theological significance and carry implications for theological beliefs. Likewise, using scientific theories for theological understanding and debate reflects a subscription to strong SR, even if it is unconscious and indeliberate. Scientific concepts, evidence and conclusions being imported into theology without rigorous assessment is thus problematic.

Following are a few examples of the central problem that this paper highlights:

...science has benefited and transformed our lives tremendously. Being in contradiction with such a respected discourse, or more broadly with empirical reality, is not something a genuine religion can afford. After all, religion is here to interpret the world, not to replace or contradict it. The genre of scientific miracles of the Quran has been immensely popular among contemporary Muslims precisely because it aims to disclose such crucial harmony between the Qur'an and science.¹⁴

And

In the absence of any unequivocal textual evidence

¹⁴ Isra Yazicioglu, "Perhaps Their Harmony Is Not That Simple: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi on the Quran and Modern Science," *Theology and Science* 11, no. 4 (2013): 339–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2013.836888>, 352.

describing Adam's earliest descendants in detail, there would be no way to gauge the extent or rate of genetic and phenotypic change that has taken place among Adam's later progeny. Therefore, scriptural evidence cannot be used by theologians to indicate whether Adam's earliest descendants would have been classified biologically as *Homo sapiens* or possibly as some earlier human species.¹⁵

And

This book seeks to explain how scientific confirmation of life elsewhere in the cosmos might impact Islamic theology and thus affect its 2 billion adherents.¹⁶

SR is implicit in these instances, which in turn creates a tension between Islam and science, demanding reconciliation. It gives an impression that scientific theories are equivalent to "empirical reality"; otherwise reconciliation would not have been needed. Linking genetic and phenotypic change to Adam's progeny or referring to science as an empirical reality reveals this position of SR. The use of concepts like "mutations", "DNA", and "homosapiens" is itself indicative of an understanding that has submitted to the truth of these concepts and seeks to situate it within the Muslim theological framework. Determann and Malik assume and then assert that scientific confirmations about extraterrestrial life are epistemologically strong enough to impact theology. This is in direct contradiction with his own earlier position that science should *not* dictate theology at all¹⁷

Scientific Realism and Scientific Instrumentalism propose alternative interpretations of science as a whole, yet critical Islamic analysis of these positions in the recent Islam-Science project remains absent. The uncritical SR makes the interlocutors of

¹⁵ David Solomon Jalajel, *Islam and Biological Evolution: Exploring Classical Sources and Methodologies* (Western Cape: University of the Western Cape, 2009), 164.

¹⁶ Determann and Malik, *Islamic Theology and Extraterrestrial Life*, 5.

¹⁷ Malik and Muhtaroglu, "How Much Should or Can Science Impact Theological Formulations?" (Si8)5.

Islam-Science engagement consider scientific knowledge as “established knowledge”, to the extent that the Quranic verses (and hence theology) can be subjected to reinterpretation in order to be aligned with this “established knowledge”.

Further, he explained that the Quran can be subjected to *ta'wīl* (interpretation away from apparent meaning) when its verses are related to “established knowledge”. Nadim Al-Jisr (1897 –1980), son of Hussein Al-Jisr and Grand Mufti of Tripoli, wrote in *Qissat al-Iman* [The Story of Faith]. When such certain rational evidence establishes the existence of the human being by way of evolution, it is possible to reinterpret these texts and reconcile them with certain evidence. This does not contradict the beliefs of the Muslims in any way, as long as the underlying principle with them remains that God is the Creator of the human being in any event.¹⁸

Such an articulation of “a Quranic paradigm of science” betrays a “hegemonic culture of science and the ideological outlook that accompanied the rise of modern science.”¹⁹ That is why it is not found in the premodern times. This paper problematizes the assignment of truth or realism to scientific knowledge that necessitates attempts (past and current) to reconcile the scientific knowledge with the scripture.

Methodology

This paper argues for the paradigmatic differences between the two epistemological frameworks of science and theology that make way for holding the two separate in their spheres, subscribing to an indifference model. This indifference is different from Barbour’s independence since the independence model only highlights the different roles of religion and science, the former answering the why and the latter how.²⁰ However, the explanation offered by scientific

¹⁸ Golshani et al. *Muslim World Science Initiative Report*, 2016. 74.

¹⁹ Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 133.

²⁰ Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (N.p.: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

theories cannot be equated with the howness or modality of the divine action and therefore cannot be taken as absolute. The theoretical explanations represent how the scientists conceptualize and see the various connections in the phenomena. Establishing the epistemic status of the knowledge of the created world generated by the scientific method becomes imperative. The paper seeks to assign a place to scientific knowledge using the Sunnī *kalām* (theological) epistemological framework. Accordingly, Islamic theology and modern Science, as bodies of knowledge, represent two different standards of what constitutes knowledge. There are no common definitions and sources of knowledge, truth, and certainty shared by both, so they could neither be competitors nor partners striving toward a single body of knowledge.

Scientific Realism: A Brief Introduction

Scientific realism means that the entities or theories that undergird scientific processes and methods are real and that scientific explanations of phenomena represent what actually occurs in the universe. This has layers of approximation, but a scientific realist does believe in the truth value of scientific theories. This issue is hotly debated within the philosophy of science but gains more significant currency for those seeking to situate the scientific enterprise in a theological context. The “realness” of science determines its treatment.

Scientific realists generally adhere to three types of realist commitments: metaphysical, epistemic, and semantic.²¹ The paper addresses the issues within semantic and epistemic realism. Metaphysical realism in the Islamic theological paradigm is not contested since it affirms and asserts the mind-independent universe and the existence of metaphysical reality, including supra-sensible beings mentioned in the revelation. Semantic realism is the notion that “claims about scientific objects, events, processes, properties, and relations, whether they be observable or unobservable, should be construed literally as having truth values, whether true or false.”²²

²¹ Anjan Chakravartty, “Scientific Realism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified 2011, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scientific-realism/>.

²² Chakravartty, “Scientific Realism.”

Tied closely to this is the concept of epistemic realism holding that the knowledge obtained through the scientific enterprise constitutes knowledge about the underlying reality of the world. Epistemic and Semantic Realism claims the quasi-absolute truth of scientific theories and statements involving unobservable entities, objects, events, processes, properties, and relations between them. Their claim needs to find support in the Muslim theological epistemology.

Sunnī *kalām* (theology) has its own understanding of the seen and unseen realms of reality, where the unseen beings, such as God and angels, act behind the apparent phenomena in unknown and unknowable ways. Adopting the SR position inevitably assumes that God interacts with the seen world through the actions of these scientifically known entities and that the scientific processes and laws are God's processes and (natural) laws. For instance, interpreting gravity as God's way of operating in the natural world assumes that humans have understood completely why an object falls to the ground, and how God operates in the cosmos. According to the Sunnī theology, the way phenomena exist for creation, it doesn't for God. There is a difference between saying, "the mind has conceptualized an atom and created a model" versus "Allah Created the atom in this manner". The latter elevates scientific knowledge to a point where it makes a theological claim. At the same time, the paper does not claim that "Allah did not create atoms", all it asserts is that any theological declaration based on science (even in opposition to it) is not justified.

There are places in the Qur'an where Allah (SWT) invites the reader to think and contemplate upon nature, which is deemed to be an *āyah* (sign) of God. The basic thrust of this Quranic argument is phenomenological or experiential – to contemplate nature and how it is suited to and beneficial for humans. In other words, the non-scientifically mediated experience of a tree in its wholeness and existential situatedness within its extended nature is available to scientists and laypersons alike. It inspires a kind of awe about the Creator, unlike the scientifically understood tree in its abstraction, performing abstract, scientifically understood processes of "photosynthesis" or "respiration", understood only by a scientifically trained mind.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of reflection is to establish the limitations of human knowledge and our inability to comprehend creation, not to establish a scientific fact and demonstrate its correspondence with the Qur'an. The contemplation that the Quranic text calls for is outside the text in nature and does not move back to the text, nor does it follow or correspond to any particular Quranic scheme. The commentaries share this understanding of contemplation. Thus, contemplation does not imply a correlation between science—whether natural philosophy, astronomy, or medicine—and the Qur'an.²³

The thinking that occurs within restrictive scientific categories robs an active conscious mind from accessing the world around it as an *āyah* (sign) of Allah (SWT). Instead, the world is reduced to a set of lifeless, empirically tested, and verifiable objects.

Scientific Realism and its Challenges within the Philosophy of Science (POS)

The main tenets of SR consist of the following:

1. The existence of the objects or entities of scientific knowledge is independent of the minds or acts of scientists. This is an ontological claim.
2. Scientific theories assert the truth about that extra-mental or objective world. This is an epistemological claim.²⁴

Despite the agreement on the two postulates above, diverse and multifaceted understandings of SR have existed throughout the history of science on how SR as a concept has evolved and how SR is understood differently by those who use it. One does not find one strong SR position; instead, many weak versions exist. Even amongst

²³ Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, 137.

²⁴ Chakravarty, "Scientific Realism."

the various strands of SR, there is disagreement about what is “real” within the scientific theories.²⁵

Historically, scientific realism has been challenged in a variety of ways. The first is that scientific theories are always subject to revision. Even if a theory has solid evidence, it may be replaced by one with better evidence. Second, scientific theories may be inaccurate or incomplete. Third, the real world may not be the way the theory predicts. Finally, scientific theories may be based on false assumptions. If a theory is based on false assumptions, it is incorrect even if the evidence supports it. These three challenges to scientific realism are known as pessimistic induction, the problem of falsifiability, and the problem of scope.²⁶

An SR position asserts that if an atomic theory sufficiently explains the empirical data obtained through the observational framework (in a given domain), then that is reason enough to believe in the existence of atoms. Otherwise, it is hard to explain how the theory explains the dataset, generates new entities, and accurately predicts experimental results. It is at this juncture that scientific realism and instrumentalism part ways. For an instrumentalist, a theory’s explanatory power does not imply belief in the scientific entities. The data only points to the fact that the theory works; it is silent about the actual “existence” as these theories are used only to make sense of the data. In science, only those theories that are empirically adequate survive, and if they can explain the data, then they are considered sound. The logical error in the above SR argument is that the need for a theory is equated with the existence of theoretical entities. This is an ontological commitment that cannot be justified via empirical adequacy, that is, predicting and explaining empirical data without invoking any entities. Instrumentalism can hence avoid burdening scientists with an ontological commitment to the unobservable entities invoked in such explanations, properly

²⁵ Stathis Psillos, “Realism and Theory Change in Science,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-theory-change/>.

²⁶ K. B. Wray, *Resisting Scientific Realism* (N.p.: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

claiming that such commitments are not licensed, nor required, by the activity of science,

Copernicus' theory of planetary motion and the late Renaissance version of the Ptolemaic theory of planetary motion were both predictively accurate. In fact, the two theories were roughly equally accurate with respect to the predictions they generated, erring by as much as 5 degrees with respect to some predictions but often predicting with far greater accuracy. Rather, its predictive success was a consequence of the fact that it employs eccentric circles, epicycles, and different circles. These were strategically and deliberately built into the planetary models to ensure that the theory was as successful as the contemporary Ptolemaic theory. In short, these were ad hoc adjustments.²⁷

This is an example of how a result-based approach cannot be used to judge the realness or truth value of theories. The question of "what makes a theory work" is still largely unanswered. It is unnecessary to allocate the burden of truth or reality to such theories when they can deliver results as *instruments*.

The instrumentalist is non-realist in being agnostic, emphasizing the impossibility of humanly knowing the reality of such entities. It suits Sunnī theological position in being limited in its claim²⁸. Denying the reality of scientific objects in an absolute manner, like the other versions of antirealism, would mean an absolute knowledge claim about the unobservable or unseen reality, which is not informed by the revealed sources, hence theologically not preferable. Holding an Instrumentalist position also allows for the

²⁷ Wray, *Resisting Scientific Realism*, 2018,p.169.

²⁸ Whether Allah (SWT) can grant human beings the knowledge of His divine actions and how He executes them, according to the Sunnī creed, is beyond the comprehension of human faculties since divine action cannot be subscribed within time and space. All observations that humans make are due to the divine actions beyond the veil of time and space, and the effects of His actions are observed by us in all the observable natural entities and processes, but not His actions or ways of bringing those about which belong to the *ghayb* (unseen or transcendental realm).

metaphysical realism found in Sunnī theology without necessitating a subscription to scientific realism.

To conclude this section, the question remains whether the “realness” lies in the truth (or approximation to truth) of theories, their empirical success, their research output, or their problem-solving capacity. Whether the realness is claimed for the theoretical entities, equations, or relations is uncertain. The weakness of SR within the history and philosophy of science has been apparent as shown in its many recently compromised versions.²⁹ Despite its compromised stance, when assumed and employed within a theological discourse, it makes specific demands on the notion of God and His workings within the seen universe. Its weaknesses and limitations are not fully appreciated when employing it in Islamic theology. Suppose the idea of reality is extremely reduced or negated as in some versions of SR, such as structural realism, then they are incapable of making any demands on theology, whether positive or negative.

The *Kalām* Epistemological Framework

The primary task of any science in the Sunnī *kalām* tradition is to provide unequivocal proofs for all its claims.³⁰ Therefore, scientific propositions need to reach this level of proof to have high epistemic worth within the *kalām* epistemic hierarchy. But how can this definitive proof be provided? In other words, what are the sources of knowledge and how is knowledge classified?

Knowledge propositions in the traditional classification are divided into two types: *badīhī* (self-evident) or *fiṭrī* (innate) or *darūrī* (necessary) statements that are non-inferential and hence *yaqīnī* (certain) and *nazrī* or *muktaṣab* (inferential) statements.³¹ The first

²⁹ Psillos, “Realism and Theory Change in Science.”

³⁰ Sa’ad al-Din Masud Ibn Umar Ibn Abd Allah al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: ‘Aalam al-Kutub, 1998), 1:174.

³¹ Ali Ibn Muhammad Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, 2nd ed., 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2012), 1:98; al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, 1:210–13; Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyyah on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Dar’ Ta’arud al-‘Aql wa-l-Naql* (Netherlands: Brill, 2020), pp. 270–89; Abu Abdullah Qutbuddin, *Al-Qutbi* (Karachi: Maktabat-ul-Bushra, 2021), pp. 57–58.

kind is the one which is direct and requires no further evidence, or better yet, it does not have further evidence. The second kind of knowledge is indirect or inferential knowledge. These statements are not self-evident and, therefore, carry the possibility of uncertainty. The knowledge propositions belonging to the first category are ones based upon logical truths or *al-awwaliyat* (first principles), *al-mahsusat* (observation based on sense perception) - whether *zāhirī* (external sensation) or *bāṭinī* (internal sensation or innate knowledge), *al-majarrabat* (experience), *mutawātir* (mass transmitted) reports, and *al-ḥadsīyyāt* (intuitions).³² In addition to the revealed knowledge (Quran and Sunnah), these *badīhī* (self-evident) propositions are considered irrefutable or certain (*yaqīnī*) beyond doubt. These categories of necessary or axiomatic propositions ward off epistemological skepticism and provide firm foundations for certain knowledge within the Islamic theological tradition. These propositions are known to be true and do not need further proof; hence, ordinary human reason can affirm their certainty.

1. First Principles or Self-Evident Logical Truths (*awwaliyyāt*):

These are *a priori* rational truths that are *ḍarūrī* (necessary), such as a person's knowledge of their own existence, the existence of others, the existence of the external world and the existence of God. These include the logical truths, for example, the whole is greater than its parts, qualities are distinct from the thing which is qualified and mathematical truths such as $2+2 = 4$.

2. *Ḥissīyyāt* or *Maḥṣūṣāt*: These are empirical propositions that are known through the external senses or sense-perception. An example would be: The Sun emanates light, and Zayd is standing near a tree.

It should be understood, though, that when we say that evidence for the existence of *ḥissīyyāt*, or observable entities is our being able to sense them, this does not mean that senses are

³² Jurjani, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 2:36-42; al-Taftazani, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 39-42; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyyah on Reason and Revelation*, pp. 148, 256.

independent means of attaining certain knowledge; this is certainly not the case according to what *al-Ijī* has stated in his *Mawāqif*:

...the intellect doesn't attain certainty [in the domain of *ḥisiyyāt*] through the use of the senses only, [neither in terms of universal statements nor particular statements], due to the fact that the senses can neither experience universals nor are they infallible in terms of particulars, but in fact, the intellect needs something else to attain certainty [although we aren't sure about what those things are or how they arise].³³

3. *Mujarrabāt*: These are also empirical propositions, but these are based on the observed causal connections between experiential objects gained through repeated observations such as fire burns, or water quenches thirst.

4. *Mushāhadāt al-bāṭinah*: These are propositions based on the sensing of one's inward states. Examples are: I feel pain, I am tired, and I feel happy.

5. Intuitions: These are the propositions generated from intuition (*al-ḥadsiyyāt*). As explained in one of the glosses of *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*,

Al-Ḥadsiyyāt (Intuitions), in the terminology of the philosophers and the *mutakallimīn* (theologians), are statements that are granted by the intellect by way of intuition. An intuition is the coming together of ordered premises [leading to a conclusion] in the mind without any will or action. Thus, if the statement emerges from a strong intuition that drives away all doubt and leads to certainty, it is considered certain knowledge (*qaṭ'ī*). For example, knowledge of the encompassing Knowledge of the Creator is because of the perfection of his actions: When we observe that the actions of Allah (SWT) are inexorable and perfect, we intuitively understand He is

³³ Jurjani, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 1:152

All-Knowledgeable. Similarly, when we observe the different phases of the Moon when it is at different positions with respect to the Sun, we intuitively understand that the light of the Moon comes from the Sun. And if the statement does not emerge from a strong intuition, it is considered probable knowledge.³⁴

Intuitive propositions are direct and non-inferential. They are neither observed (*mushāhadāt* or *maḥṣūṣāt*) nor experienced (*mujarrabāt*) by the human subject. These could be metaphysical, as in the case of intuitive knowledge about Allah’s absolute knowledge, or refer to natural phenomena such as the Sun and Moon. There can also be intuitive certainty regarding the application of a universal, such as a human being, to a particular person. One intuitively knows that someone belongs to the category of human beings without inferential reasoning, especially in cases where the person in question does not fall under the standard definition of a human being, such as a dead person. Unlike previous examples of intuitive propositions, which might not be accessible to everyone, this kind of intuition is universal and shared by all people.

6. *Mutawātirāt*: These are mass-transmitted successive reports that cannot be considered a lie, such as Antarctica is the coldest place on Earth.

Scientific propositions can potentially fall under the *maḥṣūṣāt* or *mujarrabāt*, but since the propositions we are concerned with involve unobservable entities, they cannot fall under any of these categories of certain knowledge, including the *maḥṣūṣāt* or *mujarrabāt*. Some academics³⁵ have suggested that the category of intuitions can be applied to scientific (biomedical) propositions, and hence scientific (biomedical) knowledge hardly seems to be the case since intuition in the Islamic epistemology is direct, non-theoretical and non-inferential, totally unlike scientific propositions at hand,

³⁴ al-Taftazani, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, p. 71

³⁵ O. Qureshi and A.I. Padela, “When Must a Patient Seek Healthcare? Bringing the Perspectives of Islamic Jurists and Clinicians Into Dialogue,” *Zygon* 51 (2016): 592–625, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12273>, p. 608.

which involve multiple levels of theoretical presuppositions and formal inferences. This category has been used within Islamic tradition to explain the direct, experiential knowledge of Allah (SWT) and His divine presence. This is a private, direct, and non-rational category, totally in contrast to scientific knowledge, which is public and rationally defensible through theoretical assumptions and inferences drawn from them.

The following quote in Ghazali's *Mi'yār al-'Ilm fī al-Manṭiq* (2013) supports this.

And similar to the experimental (*mujarrabāt*) is intuited knowledge (*ḥadsīyyāt*). This is where things are known, starting with an intuition of the soul (the place where the locus of knowledge is located) that occurs due to the clarity and strength of the mind and its ability to testify to things so that the soul accepts it and believes in it so that it cannot doubt it. But if a disputant disputes it, truly believing the opposite or simply a skeptic, you cannot have the disputant recognize the truth unless his intuition is strengthened. This is like our knowledge that the light of the Moon is derived from the Sun and that the reflection of its ray to the world is similar to the reflection of the mirror's ray to all other objects opposite it, due to its different shapes when its distance from the sun varies. Whoever practices any subject acquires many examples of this kind of knowledge through intuition and deliberation that he cannot prove, nor can he doubt them, nor can he share them with others by teaching them, except by showing the student the path he has taken and followed so that if he takes the path himself, that path will lead him to that same belief if he has the necessary intellectual aptitude. You should not aspire to silence every disputant with this type of claim because some beliefs are so certain that we cannot teach them to others by way of proof unless we participate in practicing them in order to share the knowledge derived from them. In such a case, it is said: "He who has not

tasted does not know, and he who has not arrived does not realize.³⁶

Scientific propositions do not fall under this category, where propositions have experiential certainty and are neither provable nor teachable. Instead, scientific knowledge is public knowledge, and every effort is made to prove its claims to both scientists and non-scientists. A set of theoretical presuppositions and auxiliary assumptions is at work, without which scientific propositions cannot make sense. Scientific knowledge is made public, and then the proofs and counterproofs are given via complex inferential reasoning.

An interesting observation regarding all the above categories, except intuition, is their universal and intersubjective nature. The concepts or entities that fall under these are such that all human beings, regardless of their educational background or training, have access to and clear undisputed understanding of them simply because of the *badīhī* (self-evident) nature of these entities and propositions. Since all human beings share their common and essential human nature (*fiṭrah*), the innate (*fiṭrī*) understanding of such propositions as being certain is shared in virtue of that. Scientific propositions do not possess the same status since they are theoretical and inferential (*naẓrī*) and not innate (*fiṭrī*) or self-evident (*badīhī*). The inferences are primarily drawn from hypothetical theoretical assumptions as seen in the previous sections. Universal and certain propositions are thus ones that have non-inferential self-evident (*badīhī*) referents that require no pondering to be known. Scientific propositions, in contrast, are inferential, and the concepts they employ, such as atoms, quarks, cells, genes, etc., are also inferential (*naẓrī*). This is the case because scientific theory-based inferences refer to abstract and unobservable physical entities. The premises in scientific inferences, whether inductive or deductive, are thus not self-evident (*badīhī*). The referents used by the Qur'an, especially pertaining to the signs of Allah (SWT), are also (*badīhī*) and hence non-inferential; according to Said Nursi, it is in these ordinary events, which everyone can observe, that the Qur'an wants to show us the signs of the Wise

³⁶ Abu Hamid Mohammad bin Mohammad al-Ghazali, *Mi'yār al-'Ilm fī Fann al-Mantiq*, ed. and researched by Dr. Sulaiman Dunya (Egypt: Dar al-Maarif, 1961), 192.

Creator.³⁷ That is why, within the Sunnī *kalām* tradition, the epistemological standards that qualify the truth or veracity of any proposition are not just stringent but also rate collective intersubjective human experience to be certain. Conversely, scientific abstractions are not universally intersubjective but are arrived at by a set of science experts working within the limitations of the scientific methodology.

The Status of Unobservable Scientific Entities

In Sunnī epistemology, the existence (*wujūd*) of *ḥissiyyāt*, those entities belong to the physical world and are experienceable by the senses, is self-evident, which is to say that one does not need theoretical argumentation or inferential reasoning to know that a certain physical entity exists. For example, the statement “the sun exists” require no evidence to ascertain its veracity. This is simply because there is no actual evidence for their existence apart from our sense perception (*maḥṣūṣāt*) of these *ḥissiyyāt* (observable or sensible objects). It is also important to note that the knowledge of the existence of any observable entity is epistemologically prior to forming any judgment about its qualities. Thus, it is not the case that a certain theoretical understanding of the sun or moon is developed first and then verified whether something similar to these “theoretical” entities exists in *al-khārij* (extramental reality) or not. Instead, everyone talks about the sun and the moon after understanding they exist.

In contrast to observable entities like the sun or the mountains, scientific entities like electrons are not directly observable or sensible. Hence they require two (or maybe even three) levels of theoretical inference or interpretation to merely prove their existence. These unobservable entities are first theorized as part of some overarching paradigm, and then, different instruments are built - again relying on the theoretical construction - to detect those entities. What is then detected through these instruments is interpreted (again based on interdependent theories) as either an affirmation or

³⁷ Isra Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Quranic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age* (N.p.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 135–36.

falsification of the initial hypothesis (the theorized entity). Even if, after all the theoretical interpretations, it is affirmed that the said entity does exist, its existence would have been proven by experiments laden with theoretical assumptions and not by virtue of it being self-evident. This is in stark opposition to the *kalām* (theological) criterion that certain knowledge about the existence of physical entities should be self-evident.

Strong SR considers the unobservable entities constituting a scientific theory to be physical entities like the everyday objects that we interact with. Thus, a bacterium is ontologically no different from the table in a room. The level of existence of both lies on the same plane, which is physical existence. The only difference is that a quark is hidden from ordinary human perception, unlike a table. In *Taymiyyah* terms, the table and the quark are ‘*ayn* (self-standing entities), the former being a real ‘*ayn* and the latter a potential ‘*ayn*. Furthermore, for Ibn Taymiyyah the primary question is an ontological one,

.. it is primarily because for him [Ibn Taymiyyah], to know is first and foremost to know of what exists “out there” as independent, self-standing entities in the external world (*a’yān qā’ima bi-anfusihā fī al-khārij*). Only after accounting for the ontological question of what exists can we consider the epistemological question of how precisely we come to know what exists.³⁸

The atom or quark – if it exists – is a physical entity like other physical entities, and this is an ontological claim. But how do we know if it exists (or not) since it does not exist in the external world the way a chair or table does? This is clearly, a question of epistemology. This paper does not question the possibility of the existence of an unobservable entity like the quark. Our question, instead, is whether humans can ever come to know whether these entities ontologically exist or not with absolute certainty, like the other *badīhiyyāt*. Thus, it is an epistemological question. To further explicate, discussing the functions or causal effects of a quark

³⁸ El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyyah on Reason and Revelation*, 235.

implies that one believes in its physical existence. When quantum physics is exported to Islamic theology³⁹ and then used to make claims about God, the strong SR is assumed whereby quarks are assumed to have ontological realness and not only theoretical abstractions. The probability of being real is present, but the certainty is not, and hence, it is improper to use those as established facts to be then used as *badīhiyyāt* in theology. Thus, scientific conclusions are inferential judgments that do not possess the rational necessity of either the first principles or other *badīhī* propositions. These potentially fallible theoretical (*naẓrī*) conclusions are unlike ordinary *mahṣūṣāt* and *mujarrabāt*, and cannot falsify, question or call for reinterpretation of revealed knowledge. Due to their inferential and, therefore, potentially falsifiable nature, they cannot even serve to explain the revealed knowledge.

Instrumentalism: Old and New

There is a well-known passage in al-Jurjani's *Sharḥ* on al-Ijī's *al-Mawāqif* which has been received as a realism vs instrumentalism debate⁴⁰ with al-Ijī taking a strictly anti-realist or instrumentalist position concerning astronomical models, while al-Jurjani taking a more nuanced realist position. According to al-Ijī,

And these [models] are fancied/imagined constructions [of the mind] which have no existence in the extramental world nor is there any prohibition about these [scientific] activities; nor do they have any relation to belief and doctrine; nor can they be affirmed or negated...thus when you see these mere imaginary entities weaker than a spider's net the sounds of these hollow words [from astronomy and its likes] should not frighten you in any way.⁴¹

³⁹ Altaie, *The Divine Word and the Grand Design*, 2019.

⁴⁰ F. Jamil Ragep and Alī al-Qūshjī, "Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy: An Aspect of Islamic Influence on Science," *Osiris* 16 (January 2001): 49–64, 66–71.

⁴¹ Al-Jurjani, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 7:109.

This passage shows that al-Ijī had a clear position about astronomy and its models: they are nothing but supposed entities - a construction of the mind - which may be useful for different tasks but have no correspondence to extramental reality. Al-Ijī also, interestingly, states that the reader should not be frightened by the complications and sophistication of astronomy because these are “hollow words”, which means that they are no representatives of reality. Thus, if at any time the reader feels that astronomical models contradict something in revelation, they should remember that these models do not aim for truth (therefore they are neither affirmed nor negated). Instead, they are mere tools constructed with the aim of empirical accuracy.

Abdul Hakeem Siaalkooti - who has a *ḥāshiyah* (gloss) on the *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* - says about the above passage.

...the correct recording of the movements of heavenly bodies is dependent on the accurate construction of observational instruments and placing them exactly on the meridian, then observing the celestial bodies when they reach the [expected] position with a very keen eye without any negligence and without any mistake in the calculation; [clearly] the unification of all these conditions is improbable; Nay! Impossible.... Yes, the astronomers have made every possible effort to obtain the correct readings, but do they know them (the movements of the celestial bodies) as they truly are in *nafs al-amr*? Absolutely not!⁴²

Al-Jurjani, in his commentary of *Mawāqif*, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, crafted a case for the mathematical part of astronomy as being real and apodictic and not imaginary. He was an astronomer himself and wanted to show that the glory of God’s creation could be revealed through astronomy.

Ragep’s estimation was metaphysically neutral astronomy, which affirms the reality of mathematical astronomy only and not its underlying metaphysics and physics. Astrology came to be categorized as a part of natural philosophy (or physics), whereas

⁴² Al-Jurjani, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 7:109.

astronomy (which became known as *'ilm al-hay'ah*) was categorized as a strictly mathematical discipline".⁴³ Al-Ghazali had also accepted apodictic mathematics as certain knowledge and hence the mathematical part of astronomy without its physics. Al-Qushji, unlike al-Jurjani, pretty much accepted al-Ijji's instrumentalist or conventionalist interpretation. Such a non-realist approach provided more flexibility in terms of experimenting with novel theoretical models such as the rotation of the earth.⁴⁴

When it came to astronomy, al-Ijji, who was well acquainted with the basic picture of Ptolemaic astronomy, held that the orbs were "imaginary things" (*umūr mawhūmā*) and more tenuous than a spider's web (*bayt al-'ankabūt*). However, al-Ijji did not conclude that astronomers' constructions were to be censured or condemned. Instead, he insisted, echoing al-Ghazali, that "[religious] prohibition does not extend to them, being neither an object of belief nor subject to affirmation or negation."⁴⁵

This freedom from realism provided more constructive room for growth in astronomy for astronomers like al-Qūshjī, and al-Khafri. Al-Qūshjī, being a scientist himself like al-Jurjani, according to Ragep, wanted to have a position more sophisticated than al-Ijji, a theologian who was not interested in glorifying God with science. Al-Jurjani and al-Qūshjī, knew that without proving astronomical knowledge to correspond with reality, it could not be used to praise God's subtle wisdom in his wondrous creation since instrumental knowledge or theoretical conventions/constructions could not glorify God. Al-Qūshjī, tried to strike a balance in rejecting the realist position by mentioning that "the correspondence between our human constructions and external reality is itself a source of wonder"⁴⁶ This position of al-Qūshjī, coincides with the position promulgated in this paper, especially the upcoming section where it will be argued that the correspondence between human scientific (and common-sense) constructions and external reality despite being probable, fallible,

⁴³ Ragep and al-Qūshjī, "Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy", 52.

⁴⁴ Ragep and al-Qūshjī, "Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy", 49-64, 66-71.

⁴⁵ Ragep and al-Qūshjī, "Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy", 55.

⁴⁶ Ragep and al-Qūshjī, "Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy," 63.

uncertain, and falsifiable conjectures, is a blessing from God and is part of the *taskhīr* mentioned in the Qur'an. Thus, two incompatible scientific theories informed by the same observational data (underdetermination) and providing similar predictions and pragmatic efficiency reflect God's marvel in allowing this to happen for human convenience.

While stating the premodern Muslim discourse on the realist or instrumentalist nature of scientific theories, it needs to be pointed out how the features of the discourse have shifted. First, the Muslim discourse of the post-classical period only involved astronomy that was highly dependent on mathematics, which was considered apodictic knowledge or part of *awwaliyyāt* (apodictic knowledge), unlike the physical entities of modern science like atoms, cells, quarks, viruses, etc., which are considered sensible entities residing in the external, physical world, hence unplaceable within the category of *awwaliyyāt* (apodictic knowledge). On the other hand, this paper is concerned with scientific constructs and physical or non-mathematical processes such as atoms, quarks, bacteria, etc. Al-Jurjani's realist account was meant only for mathematical knowledge propositions that he considered part of *awwaliyyāt* (apodictic knowledge), residing in the *nafs al-amr* (thing in itself) only. Another significant difference lies in the fact that the history of modern science in the past two centuries has generated a philosophy of science that is much more cognizant of the fallible and instrumental nature of scientific theories and which has been used in this study to understand the nature of scientific theories and scientific propositions. The earlier Muslim astronomers and scientists were not witness to this long history of refutation of working and successful scientific models and concepts, which, if they had been, would have made them more easily side with instrumentalism.

Expanding on the Quranic Notion of *Taskhīr*

One of the SR arguments against instrumentalism is the "No Miracles Argument". It asserts that without claiming ontological reality for scientifically known entities, their pragmatic efficacy, workability and repeated applications can only be considered a miracle. Since it is unscientific to attribute the success of all those theories to miracles

alone, scientific realism is the only way to go. The theories are producing results because the theoretical entities must exist without question. Since Sunnī theology affirms that Allah (SWT) has a direct and active involvement⁴⁷ in the phenomenal world, it makes the situation even more complex at the level of intelligibility since, behind the empirical aspects, there is the divine creative agency. The exact mode of that agency lies beyond human comprehension simply because Allah (SWT) is above the spatio-temporal categories and is not bound by the categories of scientific terms and language. If, according to Sunnī creed (theology), there will always be many unknowable aspects of the phenomena, how can human beings make accurate predictions?⁴⁸

This is answered with the concept of “*taskhīr*”⁴⁹ (subjugation). The purpose of subordinating water under humans and, likewise, surrendering the boats under them, as referenced in the Quran, meant they could exercise control over them and travel distances for their needs. It is Allah (SWT) who makes these natural forces yield to humans. The question arises as to in what ways they come under human control. One is the physical control that human have over domestic animals, which allows them to milk and slaughter those for food. Another way we can understand *taskhīr* (subjugation) is through the various theoretical models that allow us to explain, predict, and control various external phenomena. Allah (SWT) has subsumed the universe to human beings in such a way that they can derive benefits even without comprehending it completely. The fact that these natural occurrences are directly controlled by divine power, and that reality eludes human understanding, yet the various theoretical models apply to the external world allowing a good deal of prediction and control over the external world, is something that requires explanation and theological reconciliation.

⁴⁷ Quran Qur’an, 14:32-33; Quran Qur’an, 31:20; Quran Qura’n, 45:12-13; Quran Qur’an, 22:65.

⁴⁸ We find a similar, though not the same, characterization of theistic intelligibility that does not endorse SR in Robin Collin’s idea of Theistic Non-Reductive Intelligibility (TNRI). Robin Collins, “Contributions from the Philosophy of Science,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 338–42.

⁴⁹ Quran 2:164.

It is proposed that the working of scientific theories as instruments is made possible by God's generosity, wisdom, and power, Who allows those explanatory models to work in the sense of explanation, prediction and application without being the true mirrors or representations of the Ultimate Reality (*al-Haqq*). Our feeble attempts at models, equations, and theories are all granted empirical adequacy and reliability by the *Faḍl* (Grace) of Allah (SWT). This explains why obsolete theories that employed phlogiston and ether could work consistently, as well as the various incompatible and incommensurate theories we find in the history of scientific practice.

Although this is a novel appropriation of the concept of *taskhīr* (subjugation), it doesn't significantly differ from the traditional interpretation that are present in the *tafsīr* (exegesis) literature.⁵⁰ First, it needs to be understood that every single thing that exists in the world is subjected to serve human needs, and thus whatever processes are observed in the world are actually "miracles", in the sense that no one can completely explain why these natural phenomena work the way they do unless they concede to the fact that God's Knowledge, Power, and Mercy are behind all these occurrences.

It is also equally important to state what is not meant by *taskhīr* (subjugation). The paper does not state that "the world has been subjugated (*musakhkhār*) through science by Allah" - this would be a profound misunderstanding. Scientific theories or models of the universe - though not necessarily real or true - have been granted workability and empirical success by Allah (SWT). The limited predictions about the universe work not because of all the science that has gone into them but because Allah (SWT) chooses them to work for human beings. The natural world works as we expect it to, and those expectations are generated using scientific or non-scientific (common sense) explanations.

Conclusion

Regarding theology (*ilm al-kalām*), it is important to understand that the only knowledge that is useful in this domain is certain

⁵⁰ Quran 45:13.

knowledge- the sources of which have been outlined and explained⁵¹. If modern scientific knowledge doesn't reach the level of self-evident (*badīhī*) and certain (*yaqīnī*) knowledge, then it can never contradict the scriptural texts (*nuṣūṣ*), since even an apparent or surface-level contradiction can only arise out of two statements of equal epistemic value - let alone a true contradiction. Nor can scientific knowledge become evidence for or against theological or doctrinal claims and arguments.

According to the Sunnī theologians and logicians, only the revealed knowledge (Qur'an and Sunnah) and the six categories of *badīhiyyāt* (self-evident) propositions that are established beyond doubt or dispute, enjoy the status of being irrefutable. Only these propositions that are certain (*yaqīnī*) or definite (*qat'ī*) are capable of becoming theological evidence where those are based upon revelation (*waḥy*), logical truths or first principles (*awwalīyyāt*), sense perception (*maḥṣūṣāt*), inward states (*mushāhadāt al-bāṭinah*), experience (*mujarrabāt*), widely transmitted (*mutawātir*) reports, and intuitions (*al-ḥadsīyyāt*)

The propositions belonging to these six categories are known to be true, and understanding their meaning does not require further proof. Ordinary human reason knows its truth without making a recourse to further far-removed assumptions and speculations, which is what scientific propositions require and depend upon. This compromises the epistemic worth of scientific propositions that are based on theoretical speculations. Scientific knowledge, therefore, does not meet the requirements of certain, definite (*yaqīnī* and *qat'ī*) knowledge. It falls, at best, under the category of *zannī* (probable knowledge) - a claim that has been substantiated by the history and philosophy of science. Consequently, scientific (theory-laden, hence fallible) knowledge, despite having its benefits as practical art (*fann*), can neither be used in theology as evidence- whether it be fine-tuning arguments or anything else- nor can any of its theories, for instance evolution, purport to challenge or revise any theological pre-understanding. By the standards of Sunnī *kalām* epistemology, scientific knowledge is *'ilm* only in a limited sense; in reality,

⁵¹ al-Taftazani, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 39-42.

modern science is a practical art (*fann*) of explaining, predicting, and problem-solving.

In the ongoing debate of scientific realism and anti-realism, instrumentalism is the position that can be appropriated from within the Sunnī theological epistemic framework to arrive at a theological position about the status of scientific knowledge. Used as instruments, the various probable (*zannī*) conceptual schemes, categories, and explanatory models could in principle be applicable to the horizontal causal explanation of the world and its day-to-day affairs, thus contributing to the *maṣlahā* and *manfaʿa maṣlahāh* and *manfaʿah* i.e., well-being of humanity. This is, however, possible only if the consequences of that scientific knowledge and understanding do not transgress the Islamic ethical boundaries and do not abuse the Islamic vision⁵² of well-being (both human and environmental) at the practical level.

⁵² Principally, the Islamic theistic metaphysical view could have informed contemporary Muslim scientific pursuits. That could have tailored the kind of questions that Muslims would have asked and the type of research programs they would have initiated, using the same scientific method. For instance, the very questions asked within the theistic framework would have been, why the leaves of a certain tree have a certain shape and size and not some other. This is theistic because this is informed by the belief that Allah (SWT) is Wise and there is a purpose (teleology) in the way He has created everything. Out of innumerable contingent possibilities if He has the leaves to be of a certain type it must have been the best for that tree or fruit etc. This question of what would have happened had something been designed differently could have been asked within all scientific disciplines, and the various possibilities explored with the conclusions on how adversely a different design or system would have affected the very purpose of a thing or a system. Such a teleologically informed research paradigm would have interpreted the telos of one thing or system to be interconnected with everything else. The methodology to study alternatives could have been different, not lab isolation but perhaps a study in nature requiring all the affecting variables to be there. Developing such a theistic scientific paradigm from scratch is practically impossible due to the globalized hegemony of one way of doing science worldwide despite its limitations and biases.

TAWHIDIC LEADERSHIP IN THE MODERN WORLD: BRIDGING ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE WITH UNIVERSAL VALUES FOR PEACE AND INTEGRITY

Mohammad Eisa Ruhullah¹ and Thameem Ushama²

Abstract

This research explores the foundational principles of Tawhidic Leadership, an Islamic governance model rooted in the Oneness of Allah (ﷻ) (Tawhīd) and centered on fostering an ethically grounded and inclusive approach to leadership. The study investigates how core principles such as al-shūrā (consultation) and amānah (integrity) operate within this framework to promote governance that aligns with Islamic values of justice (‘adālah), freedom (ḥurriyyah), and moderation (wasaṭiyyah). Using a qualitative, thematic analysis of both classical and contemporary Islamic texts, the research systematically presents findings through tables and charts, providing clarity and depth to the analysis. The results illustrate that shūrā and amānah are crucial in ensuring public trust, inclusivity, and ethical accountability. Shūrā is shown to enhance participative governance by fostering consultation within the ummah (community), while amānah establishes transparency and trustworthiness in leadership actions. This study’s findings extend beyond theoretical insights, highlighting practical strategies for embedding Tawhidic principles into contemporary governance structures, especially within Muslim-majority societies. Comparisons with existing governance models reveal that Tawhidic Leadership offers a distinct approach that is not only ethically sound but also adaptable to modern societal needs. Recognizing limitations, including variability in interpretation across diverse cultural contexts, the study calls for future research into the

¹ Postgraduate student, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur. Email: eisa.iium@gmail.com.

² Professor, Abdulhamid Abusulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

application of Tawhidic principles within multicultural settings and secular governance frameworks. Ultimately, this study advocates for Tawhidic Leadership as a valuable model for addressing the ethical and governance challenges of the modern world, contributing to broader discussions on sustainable, just, and inclusive leadership models rooted in Islamic teachings.

Keyword: Tawhidic Leadership, ethical governance, *shūrā*, *amānah*, *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*.

Introduction

Tawhidic Leadership is an Islamic leadership model grounded in the principle of *Tawhīd* (the Oneness of Allah (ﷻ)), which aligns all aspects of life and governance with divine unity and purpose.³ This approach emphasizes a leader’s duty to uphold justice, integrity, and accountability while guiding the community toward moral and spiritual well-being in accordance with Islamic values. Islamic leadership is rooted in foundational principles that foster peace, harmony, and long-term societal stability.⁴ At the heart of these principles is *shūrā* (consultation), which mandates that leaders seek the counsel of others, ensuring diverse perspectives in decision-making. *Shūrā* is an essential element of Islamic governance as it reflects the collective wisdom of the community (*ummah*) and strengthens accountability.⁵ By embedding consultation into leadership, the potential for balanced and just policies is heightened, enhancing trust between leaders and citizens. This approach fosters a

³ Osman Bakar, “The Qur’anic Identity of the Muslim Ummah: Tawhidic Epistemology as Its Foundation and Sustainer,” *ICR Journal* 3, no. 3 (2012): 438–54, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v3i3.531>.

⁴ Omar Khalid Bhatti, Waqas Farooq, and Ali Osman Öztürk, “Reassessing Leadership Traits: An Islamic Perspective,” *Turkish Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 2 (2020): 177–202, <https://doi.org/10.12711/tjbe.2019.12.2.0146>.

⁵ Zulhasmi Bin Mohamad, “*Shūrā* Implementation Towards Work Commitment: A Study at Northern Region Road Transport Department,” *Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia* (Universiti Utara Malaysia, 2019), https://etd.uum.edu.my/8939/1/s820207_01.pdf.

participatory governance model that values each individual's voice, aligning leadership with the goals of collective well-being.

Alongside consultation, *amānah* (integrity) serves as a core value in Islamic leadership, emphasizing the moral and ethical responsibility of those in power. Leaders are considered stewards of public trust, accountable not only to the *ummah* but also to Allah (ﷻ). The concept of *amānah* enforces honesty, transparency, and a commitment to justice (*‘adl*), which are essential to a stable political and economic structure.⁶ When leaders act with integrity, they prioritize the welfare of their people, resisting corruption and fostering social cohesion. Such ethical governance, deeply embedded in Islamic teachings, strengthens society's moral fabric and economic stability by ensuring that resources are managed responsibly and equitably.

By integrating *shūrā* and *amānah*, Islamic leadership fosters a governance model that transcends material prosperity, aiming instead for a holistic stability that nurtures *salām* (peace) and *ittifāq* (harmony).⁷ This leadership model contributes to sustainable political and economic frameworks by aligning decisions with the higher objectives (*maqāsid al-sharī‘ah*) of Islamic law, including protecting faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. In this way, Islamic leadership upholds the values of justice and compassion, providing a solid foundation for societies to thrive.⁸ When leadership prioritizes consultation and integrity, it not only meets the immediate needs of

⁶ Basirah binti Abu Bakar et al., "Leadership and Accountability Values in the Perspectives of Al-Quran al-Karim," *Jurnal Yadim* 4, no. 1 (2024): 33–51, <https://doi.org/https://10.61465/jurnalyadim.v4.157>.

⁷ Amini Amir Abdullah and Masitah Esa, "The Islamic Concept of Leadership in Sustainable Development: A Preliminary Discussion," *Research Gate*, no. January (2015): 1–23, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Amini-Abdullah/publication/273322754_the_islamic_concept_of_leadership_in_sustainable_development_a_preliminary_discussion/links/54feb960cf2eaf210b3c85f/the-islamic-concept-of-leadership-in-sustainable-development-a-p.

⁸ Fahu Azwa Mohd Zain et al., "Integrating Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Principles with *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah*: A Blueprint for Sustainable Takaful Operations," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 17, no. 3 (2024): 461–84, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-11-2023-0422>.

its citizens but also builds a resilient, inclusive, and morally guided society in which peace and harmony can flourish.

In Islamic governance, leadership is fundamentally a moral and ethical responsibility deeply rooted in principles that prioritize collective welfare, accountability, and justice.⁹ Central to this framework are the concepts of *shūrā* and *amānah*, which serve as the pillars of Islamic leadership. *Shūrā* emphasizes the importance of involving the community in decision-making processes, reflecting the Islamic commitment to inclusivity and shared responsibility.¹⁰ By actively engaging with diverse perspectives and valuing the insights of the community, Islamic leaders are called to make decisions that honor both the spirit of consultation and the collective interest. This approach not only fosters greater unity and cohesion but also ensures that leadership remains transparent and attuned to the needs of those it serves.¹¹

Integrity, or *amānah*, represents another crucial aspect of Islamic leadership, underscoring leaders' ethical obligation to act with honesty, trustworthiness, and moral accountability. In Islam, leadership is seen as a trust (*amānah*) granted by God, for which leaders will ultimately be accountable.¹² This perspective instills a profound sense of responsibility and encourages leaders to act ethically, resist corruption, and prioritize the well-being of the community over personal interests.¹³ Together, *shūrā* and *amānah*

⁹ Ahmad Reza Maulana et al., "Islamic Education and Democracy: Harmonizing Faith and Civic Engagement," *RISOMA: Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan* 2, no. 4 (2024): 185–99, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62383/risoma.v2i4.141>.

¹⁰ Abdul Basit Soomro Raja Bahar Khan Soomro, *Understanding Islam Through the Lens of Glorious Qur'an*, ed. Raja Bahar Khan Soomro & Abdul Basit Soomro, 1st ed., 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373119660_understanding_islam_through_the_lens_of_glorious_qur'an.

¹¹ Sanusi Lafiagi Haruna, "Islamic Civilization's Contributions to Modern Governance," *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Sains Dan Humaniora* 8, no. 1 (2024): 1–7, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23887/jppsh.v8i1.81551>.

¹² Muhdar H.M. and St. Rahma, "The Influence of Spiritual Intelligence, Leadership, and Organizational Culture on Organizational Citizenship Behavior: A Study to Islamic Bank in Makassar City," *Al-Ulum* 15, no. 1 (2017): 135, <https://doi.org/10.30603/au.v15i1.219>.

¹³ S. J. Oswald A. J. Mascarenhas, "The Ethics of Corporate Ethical and Moral

offer a distinctive model of leadership that is both morally grounded and community-centered, emphasizing that true leadership in Islam is a service to others and a fulfillment of a Divine trust.¹⁴

The Scholarly Definition of Islamic Governance Based on Prominent Perspectives

According to Abul A‘la Maududi, Islamic governance is a “Divine Governance System” rooted in Tawhid, where sovereignty belongs solely to Allah (ﷻ), not to any individual or group.¹⁵ According to Maududi, this system requires that all political, social, and economic affairs align with Shari‘ah, ensuring that the state upholds justice, equality, and morality as prescribed by Islamic principles. This governance model strongly emphasizes accountability to God and adherence to a moral code that transcends individual or political interests.¹⁶

Dr. Muhammad Asad asserts Islamic governance as a “moral and ethical framework” where leadership is entrusted to those who are just, honest, and accountable, reflecting the principles of *amānah* (trust) and *‘adl* (justice). Asad emphasizes the role of consultation (*shūrā*) and the community’s (*ummah*) participation in governance, asserting that Islamic governance should foster an environment of mutual respect and compassion, thus leading to a harmonious society that aligns with both spiritual and material well-being.¹⁷

As defined by major scholars, Islamic governance centers on a system rooted in divine authority and moral principles. Maududi

Charismatic Leadership,” *Corporate Ethics for Turbulent Markets*, 2019, 113–49, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78756-191-520191005>.

¹⁴ Saim Kayadibi, “The Theory of Syari‘ah Oriented Public Policy,” *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 15, no. 2 (2015): 171–80, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v15i2.2861>.

¹⁵ Moh. Husnul Affan and Asep Awaludin, “The Concept of ‘Humanity’ in the Perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Shari‘ah*,” *Al-Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syari‘ah Dan Hukum* 8, no. 1 (2023): 53–61, <https://doi.org/10.22515/alahkam.v8i1.5895>.

¹⁶ Jeremiah B. Bautista, “Re-examining Islam and Democracy Through the Wasatiyya Perspective” (University of California, Los Angeles, 2014), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA619662.pdf>.

¹⁷ Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, ed. Muhammad Asad, (University of California Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.5232965>.

envisions it as a “Divine Governance System” based on Tawhid, where sovereignty belongs to Allah (ﷻ) and all state matters align with Shari’ah. Meanwhile, Asad views it as a “moral and ethical framework” led by just and trustworthy leaders, prioritizing consultation and community involvement to promote justice, respect, and harmony.

Universal Values for Peace and Integrity Based on the Views of Scholars

Hans Küng articulates those universal values, especially those promoting peace and integrity, are rooted in a global ethical framework that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. Küng argues that values such as justice, respect for human dignity, and mutual responsibility are essential for global peace as they foster trust and cooperation among diverse societies. According to Küng, these principles form the foundation of a “global ethic” that can guide humanity toward lasting peace and integrity in both personal and collective actions.¹⁸

Amartya Sen emphasizes that universal values for peace and integrity are embedded in the principles of justice, freedom, and equality, which are essential for human development and societal well-being. Sen argues these values promote ethical governance, reduce conflict, and support fair treatment across all societies. By advocating integrity and respect for rights, Sen posits that a commitment to these universal values encourages nations to pursue policies that uphold peace, discourage violence, and foster inclusivity, ultimately supporting a more equitable global order.¹⁹

Scholars like Hans Küng and Amartya Sen emphasize that universal values of peace and integrity are crucial for fostering a

¹⁸ Hans Küng, *Wisdom and a Global Ethic*, ed. Vincent Shen and Willard Oxtoby, *The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy*, XXII, vol. 22 (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1991), https://books.google.com.my/books?id=asPLEAAAQBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁹ Amartya Sen et al., *Civil Paths to Peace*, ed. Amartya Sen et al., *The Publications Section Commonwealth Secretariat Marlborough House* (London: The Publications Section Commonwealth Secretariat Marlborough House, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.14217/9781848590014-en>.

harmonious global society. Küng advocates a “global ethic” based on justice, dignity, and mutual responsibility that transcends religious and cultural divides. At the same time Sen highlights the role of justice, freedom, and equality in promoting ethical governance and reducing conflict. Together, these perspectives underscore the importance of universal values in building a peaceful, inclusive, and equitable world.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of Tawhidic Leadership, an Islamic leadership paradigm rooted in the principle of *Tawḥīd*, and examine its applicability and transformative potential within the modern global landscape.²⁰ This research aims to define and clarify the foundational aspects of Tawhidic Leadership, such as unity, accountability, ethical governance, and service to humanity, in order to present it as a holistic model that fosters moral integrity, social justice, and organizational sustainability. By grounding leadership practices in the principles of *Tawḥīd*, this study seeks to bridge traditional Islamic wisdom with contemporary leadership challenges, highlighting the relevance of spiritual values in addressing governance, ethics, and social cohesion crises in today’s complex societies.

The scope of this study encompasses an analysis of Tawhidic Leadership principles and their practical applications within diverse sectors, including politics, corporate governance, education, and social organizations.²¹ This research will examine case studies and real-world applications to identify how Tawhidic values can enhance ethical decision-making, accountability, and inclusive leadership. It will also explore comparative insights from other spiritual and ethical frameworks to position Tawhidic Leadership as a viable and adaptive model for modern leadership. The study will focus on both Muslim-

²⁰ Kerry L. Neal, “The Path to the Water: Developing Islamic Legal Theories of Transboundary Aquifer Governance,” *University of York* (University of York, 2021), <https://doi.org/oai:etheses.whiterose.ac.uk:30521>.

²¹ Suhaimi Mohd Sarif, “Tawhidic Paradigm and Organizational Policy and Strategy Practices,” *South East Asia Journal of Contemporary Business, Economics and Law* 5, no. 2 (2014): 28–35.

majority and multicultural societies, aiming to demonstrate how Tawhidic principles can contribute to effective leadership practices in a globalized world, promoting unity, justice, and mutual respect across cultural and religious boundaries.²²

Many people believe that the Islamic world is experiencing democratic rule for the first time, influenced by Western ideologies. However, several scholars argue that Islam has its roots in democracy, both philosophically and practically, and the Quranic injunctions support this view.²³ Many classical and contemporary Islamic scholars have interpreted the Quranic principle of *shūrā* as a foundation for what might be termed an ‘Islamic democracy.’²⁴ However, the term here does not denote ‘democracy’ as applied in the Western context; instead, it refers to shared values such as justice, equality, and public accountability, which both systems emphasize.²⁵ Shuracracy—a system rooted in Quranic consultation—predates Western democratic theories, which only emerged as formal systems in recent centuries, shaped by thinkers like Plato, Hobbes, Locke, and Aristotle.

In contrast, the Islamic political model, established over 1,400 years ago, was practically implemented through the Prophet Muhammad’s (ﷺ) leadership. The Madinah Constitution exemplified these values, using consultation as a guiding principle to promote peace, harmony, justice, and equality within a unified community (*ummah*) under a divinely-centered (Tawhidic) framework.²⁶

²² Abdullah Sahin, “Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education,” *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>.

²³ Abdulkadir Mubarak, “Democracy from Islamic Law Perspective,” *Kom : Casopis Za Religijske Nauke* 5, no. 3 (2016): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.5937/kom.1603001m>.

²⁴ Camille Mulcaire, “Can There Be an Islamic Democracy?,” *Oxford University Press* 25, no. September (2014): 1–8, <https://doi.org/https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/52160>.

²⁵ David Beetham et al., *Democracy: Its Principles and Achievement*, ed. David Beetham et al. (Geneva: The Inter-Parliamentary Union P.O.Box 438 1211 Geneva 19 Switzerland, 1998), http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_pr_E.pdf.

²⁶ Fisher Zulkarnain et al., “When the East Meets the West: Analyzing Rached Ghannouci’s Synthesis of Democracy in Islam,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 127–41, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no2.10>.

Therefore, *Shuracracy* is not only foundational to Islamic governance but also an early archetype of ethical governance, highlighting the timeless nature of its values. For example, Allah (ﷻ) forbade Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from deciding without consulting his companions and constantly sought their opinions before making a decision. Therefore, many Islamic political scholars referred to this Quranic verse as the basis of democracy in Islam, where Allah (ﷻ) said:

It was thanks to Allah’s mercy that you were gentle to them. Had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away from you. So, pardon them, and pray for their forgiveness, and take counsel from them in matters of importance. And when you are resolved on a course of action place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).²⁷

Many clerics and modern Islamic scholars interpret the Quranic verse mentioned above as a representation of Islamic democracy. Islamic scholars often view *shūrā* as foundational to an “Islamic democracy,” emphasizing values such as justice, equality, and accountability, which are distinct from Western democratic models.²⁸ According to the previous paragraph, *Shuracracy*, based on Quranic consultation, predates Western democratic thought, emerging during the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) through the Madinah Constitution. This framework promoted peace, justice, and unity within the *ummah* under a Tawhidic approach, establishing *Shuracracy* as an early and enduring model of ethical governance.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was urged to consult his companions and respect their opinions, even in matters of spiritual affairs. This principle of consultation extends beyond the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions, applying to all Muslims. Furthermore, the Qur’an encourages Muslims to engage in mutual consultation in

²⁷ Qur’an, *Surah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3: 159.

²⁸ Jaan Islam, “Contrasting Political Theory in the East and West: Ibn Khaldun versus Hobbes and Locke,” *International Journal of Political Theory* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.22609/1.1.5>.

worldly governance and socioeconomic matters.²⁹ Allah (ﷻ) said in the holy Qur'an:

Who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, and donate from what We have provided for them; and who enforce justice when wronged³⁰

In early Islamic philosophy, democracy was viewed with mixed reactions. While some, like Al-Ghazali, saw it as a deviation from the Islamic leadership system, others, like Al-Mawardi, believed it was necessary without a pious caliph. Ibn Khaldun saw democracy as compatible with Islam as long as it adhered to Islamic law.³¹

This study explores Tawhidic Leadership as an Islamic leadership model, emphasizing unity, accountability, and ethical governance within modern contexts. By integrating spiritual principles into leadership, Tawhidic Leadership offers a framework for addressing global governance challenges, promoting social justice, and fostering sustainable organizational practices across diverse fields. Furthermore, Islamic political scholars highlight the concept of *shūrā* within Islamic teachings as an intrinsic value that parallels democratic ideals, suggesting that Islam has historical roots in participatory governance. By examining these values, this research contributes to the discourse on ethical and inclusive leadership, bridging Islamic wisdom with contemporary leadership needs across multicultural societies.

Research Problem

In an era marked by rapid globalization and complex socio-political challenges, Muslim-majority societies often face difficulties in aligning governance practices with the foundational Islamic concept

²⁹ Ahmad Nabilul Maram, M. Ridlwan Nasir, and Husein Aziz, "The Islamic Values and Democratic Ideals: Navigating the Intersection of Islam and Democracy," *Jurnal Keislaman* 6, no. 2 (2023): 340–59, <https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v6i2.3909>.

³⁰ Qur'an, *Surah al-Shūrā*, 42: 38-39).

³¹ Zulkarnain et al., "When the East Meets the West: Analyzing Rached Ghannouci's Synthesis of Democracy in Islam."

of Tawhid and its associated values, such as *shūrā* and *amānah*.³² Despite the rich legacy of Tawhidic principles in Islamic thought, modern governance structures in these societies are frequently influenced by secular or Western models that may lack ethical coherence with Islamic leadership ideals.³³ This incongruence has led to governance models that often suffer from reduced accountability, inclusivity deficits, and weakened moral foundations—factors that contribute to public distrust and diminishing civic engagement.³⁴

The core research problem is to investigate how the Tawhidic principles of unity, consultation, and integrity can be effectively integrated into contemporary governance frameworks in Muslim-majority societies.³⁵ This study addresses theoretical and practical challenges, exploring how a Tawhidic Leadership model could offer an ethically grounded, inclusive, and sustainable approach to governance. By identifying actionable strategies for incorporating Tawhidic principles,³⁶ this research aims to support the development of governance systems responsive to Muslim communities' ethical needs while navigating the complexities of the modern world.

³² Khalid Arar et al., *Islamic-Based Educational Leadership, Administration and Management: Islamic-Based Educational Leadership, Administration and Management: Challenging Expectations through Global Critical Insights*, ed. Khalid Arar et al., Taylor & Francis (Taylor & Francis, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003360070>.

³³ Mohammad Abdul-Monaem Abdul-Hamid Affan, "Competing Models of the Modern Islamic State: Wahhabi vs. Muslim Brotherhood Ideologies," *AUC Knowledge Fountain* (American University in Cairo, 2014), <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/1068>.

³⁴ Ravza Altuntas-Cakir, "Muslim Democracy: The Return of Political Theory" (Durham University, 2018), <http://theses.dur.ac.uk/12644/>.

³⁵ Fayzul Huq, Arshad Islam, and Kazi Afifa Khatun, "The Strategies and Practices of Sheikh Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi in the Pursuit of Unity in Diversity and Harmony: The Global Viewpoint," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (2021): 520–38, <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.81.9664>.

³⁶ Molina Ibrahim et al., "Addressing Contemporary Ethical and Moral Issues through Islamic Education," *Journal on Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.35335/kbbzar83>.

Literature Review

Integrating Tawhidic Governance into Today's Social Framework

Muhammad Rafiqul Hoque identifies key principles of Islamic governance as outlined in the Quran, such as Tawhid (Islamic monotheism), Shariah (way of life), *'adalah* *'adālah* (Justice), *hurriyah* *hurriyyah* (freedom), *musawah* *musāwah* (equality), *shūrā* (consultation), *wasatīyyah* (moderation), *khilāfāh* (vicegerency), *ummah* (commonwealth), *muhāsabah* (accountability), and *mu'āmalāt* (civil conduct).³⁷ These foundational elements are complemented by historical examples from Prophetic tradition, notably the *Madinah* Charter—recognized as the world's first written constitution³⁸—and the Hudaibiyah Peace Pact, both of which emphasized multiculturalism, religious freedom, and women's participation.³⁹ Furthermore, M. Abdul Aziz's study reveals that the governance approach of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* was characterized by practices such as free and fair elections, decision-making through *shūrā*, respect for public opinion, and a commitment to transparency and accountability. Together, these aspects illustrate an Islamic political system that emphasizes justice, inclusivity, and ethical governance within a cohesive framework.⁴⁰

Islamic leadership principles have long emphasized ethical governance, rooted in the core values of consultation (*shūrā*) and integrity (*amānah*). *Shūrā* is foundational in Islamic governance,

³⁷ Muhammad Rafiqul Hoque, "Identity of an Islamic Ideological State: An Analytical Study," *IUC Studies* 7, no. October 2012 (2012): 147–78, <https://doi.org/10.3329/iucsv7i0.12266>.

³⁸ Badruzzaman Ishak and Shamrahayu Binti Ab Aziz, "The Madinah Charter in Light of a Modern Constitution," *IUM Law Journal* 30, no. 1 (2022): 195–220, <https://doi.org/10.31436/iiumlj.v30i1.713>.

³⁹ Khaled Abdelhay Elsayed, "The Implication of Peace Treaties in Disseminating Da'wah Islamiyah (the Islamic Call) among Non-Muslims: A Special Reference to Hudaibiya Treaty," *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 7 (2012): 204–12.

⁴⁰ Dr. M. Abdul Aziz, "The Principles of Islamic Polity in the Qur'an and Sunnah: Revisiting Modern Political Discourse," *Al-Burhān: Journal of Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 5–28, <https://doi.org/10.31436/alburhn.v7i1.296>.

reflecting the importance of collective decision-making as emphasized in the, Qur'an, *Surah al-Shūrā*, 42: 38, where believers are described as “those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation.” Classical Islamic scholars, such as Al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyyah, have expounded on *shūrā* as a mechanism that upholds justice, encourages diverse perspectives, and fosters a sense of accountability among leaders.⁴¹ More recent studies by scholars like Esposito and Sachedina further highlight *shūrā* as a democratic principle that can be aligned with modern governance structures yet caution against oversimplifying this concept in Western political terms.⁴²

Shūrā, however, can only function effectively with the ethical foundation of *amānah*, which encompasses trust, responsibility, and moral integrity. Islamic leadership is deeply rooted in the leader's moral character, with *amānah* described as a covenant between the leader and the community and between the leader and God. Scholars such as Al-Attas and Kamali have stressed that *amānah* requires leaders to act with sincerity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to justice, as neglecting these values undermines public trust and the legitimacy of governance.^{43, 44}

Despite this rich tradition, much of the literature focuses either on the theoretical underpinnings of *shūrā* and *amānah* or on their

⁴¹ Ahmed Akgunduz, *Islamic Public Law - Islamic Law in Theory and Practice: Documents on Practice from the Ottoman Archives*, ed. Ahmed Akgunduz (Istanbul: IUR Press, 2011), [https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=lang_en&id=fafIAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=John+Esposito+\(2000\)++Al-](https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=lang_en&id=fafIAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=John+Esposito+(2000)++Al-Mawardi+and+Ibn+Taymiyyah,+have+expounded+on+Shura+as+a+mechanism+that+upholds+justice,+encourages+diverse+perspectives,+and+fosters+a+sense+of+ac.)

Mawardi+and+Ibn+Taymiyyah,+have+expounded+on+Shura+as+a+mechanism+that+upholds+justice,+encourages+diverse+perspectives,+and+fosters+a+sense+of+ac.
⁴² Tauseef Ahmad Parry, *Islam and Democracy in the 21st Century*, ed. Tauseef Ahmad Parry, *Oxford University Press* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9789391050337.001.0001>.

⁴³ Ahamad Faosiy Ogunbado, “Concept of Islamic Leadership in Syed Muhammad Naquib Al- Attas’s Philosophy,” *Riphah Journal of Islamic Thought & Civilization Published* 1, no. 2 (2023): 27–43, <https://journals.riphah.edu.pk/index.php/jitc/article/view/1932>.

⁴⁴ Mohamad Hashim Kamali, “*Siyasah Shar’iyah* or the Policies of Islamic Government,” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 6, no. 1 (1989): 59–80, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v6i1.2833>.

application in early Islamic governance. Few studies thoroughly explore how these principles can be applied in contemporary Muslim societies, especially in contexts where governance structures have evolved significantly. Modern governance challenges, including corruption, authoritarianism, and public distrust, pose significant obstacles to the implementation of *shūrā and amānah*. Scholars like El Fadl and Moussalli argue that a lack of moral integrity among leaders erodes the effectiveness of consultation and damages the socio-political fabric of Muslim-majority societies.^{45, 46}

Additionally, while the concepts of *shūrā* and *amānah* are often studied separately, there needs to be more literature addressing the interplay between these principles and how they mutually reinforce each other in practice. Recent studies, such as those by Aboul-Enein and Hashim Kamali, begin to address this relationship but do not delve deeply into its implications for leadership models that balance ethical values with practical governance needs.^{47, 48}

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining *shūrā* and *amānah* as complementary principles essential to Islamic leadership, both in historical contexts and contemporary governance.⁴⁹ By bridging classical interpretations with modern applications, this

⁴⁵ Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Challenge of Democratic Commitment," *Fordham International Law Journal* 27, no. 1 December (2003): 4–71, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400873203>.

⁴⁶ Ahmad S. Moussalli, "Islamic Democracy and Human Rights," *Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino* 87, no. 2 (2007): 437–55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25818137>.

⁴⁷ Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, *Ayman Al-Zawahiri: The Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy*, ed. Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, *USAF Counterproliferation Center, Air University*, 21st ed. (New York: USAF Counterproliferation Center, Air University, 2004), https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=Ik_dAAAIAAJ&pg=GBS.PT4&hl=en_GB.

⁴⁸ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Catholics and Muslims in Dialogue: Working Together to Serve Others," *ICR Journal* 6, no. 1 (2015): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v6i1.344>.

⁴⁹ A A Abdullah and M Esa, "Towards Holistic Concept of Leadership in Islam for Sustainable Development Community," *International Journal of Social Policy and* 11 (2015): 27–49, <https://ijsps.ism.gov.my/IJSPS/article/view/108%0Ahttps://ijsps.ism.gov.my/IJSPS/article/download/108/105>.

research aims to provide a framework for ethical governance that prioritizes consultation and integrity, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and morally sound leadership model for Muslim societies today.

***Shūrā* and Governance in the Perspective of the Quran and Hadith**

The concept of *shūrā* holds significant importance in Islamic governance. It refers to seeking counsel, deliberating, and making decisions collectively.⁵⁰ This concept is firmly embedded within Islamic tradition and is underscored in the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an, in particular, highlights the principle of *shūrā*, as a fundamental process for attaining truth and making well-informed decisions. Several verses emphasize the importance of *shūrā*. For example, Allah (ﷻ) mentions consultation in *Sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:38, highlighting the significance of collective decision-making. Similarly, in *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:159, Allah (ﷻ) further encourages the practice of consultation, stressing its value in fostering unity and wise leadership. These verses reflect the principles central to Islamic governance and ethical decision-making, as interpreted in various translations of the Qur'an.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his companions, *shūrā* was a fundamental aspect of governance. They actively sought advice from one another and made decisions collectively. The Prophet (ﷺ) practiced *shūrā* in various matters, including military strategies, community affairs, and legal rulings. For example, during the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet (ﷺ) consulted his companions on whether to fight within the city of Medina or outside it. His decision to follow the majority opinion, even though it differed from his initial inclination, underscores the significance of consultation in Islamic governance.⁵¹ Additionally, the concept of

⁵⁰ Uriya Shavit, "Is *Shūrā* a Muslim Form of Democracy? Roots and Systemization of a Polemic," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2010): 349–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200902917085>.

⁵¹ Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Modernist and Fundamentalist Debates in Islam-The Political Theory of Islam*, ed. Kamran Talattof Mansoor Moaddel, *Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 1976),

ijmā' (consensus) relates to *shūrā*, as it involves reaching a collective agreement among scholars on specific issues.⁵²

Hadith literature also supports the practice of *shūrā*. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said, "*The one who is consulted is in a position of trust*"⁵³ emphasizing the responsibility and significance of those involved in the consultative process. Another Hadith states, "*Consult with them in the matter. Then, when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah*".⁵⁴

The principles of *shūrā* include justice, equality, and collective will. *Shūrā* ensures that decisions are fair and just, as the Qur'an emphasizes, "*O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate from justice. If you distort the testimony or refuse to give it, then know that Allah is certainly All-Aware of what you do*"⁵⁵ *Shūrā* promotes equality by allowing diverse voices to be heard, preventing the concentration of power in the hands of a few. It reflects the collective wisdom and will of the community, preventing autocracy and fostering inclusivity.

However, some misconceptions exist regarding *shūrā*. It is not merely about majority rule but considers divine and intellectual criteria, not just popular opinion. *Shūrā* does not prioritize satisfying base desires but aims for the true benefit of society. Additionally, a powerful minority can influence public opinion, so *shūrā* should be guided by higher principles.⁵⁶

Shūrā is vital to Islamic governance, ensuring justice, equality, and collective decision-making. The Quranic verses and Hadith reinforce these principles, emphasizing the pursuit of justice and the

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-106-9_5.

⁵² Nazrul Islam and Saidul Islam, *Islam and Democracy in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh, Islam and Democracy in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42909-6>.

⁵³ *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith 2822.

⁵⁴ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith 7208.

⁵⁵ Qur'an, 4:135.

⁵⁶ Abdeslam M. Maghraoui, "American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 05, no. 4 (2006): 26–40, <https://doi.org/10.11610/connections.05.4.02>.

well-being of all.⁵⁷ Many Muslim-majority nations struggle to meet even the most basic standards of *shūrā* and governance. Minimal *shūrā* and governance are essential for ensuring morality, ethics, justice, fairness, freedom, equality, and the rule of law. The historical record of Western liberal democracy during both colonialism and postcolonialism cannot be defended in terms of its support for democracy and human rights abroad or its promotion of peace, morality, and ethics worldwide.⁵⁸

When it comes to the compatibility of Islam and democracy, Muslim conservatives, fundamentalists, and Orientalists argue that Islam is inconsistent with democracy, while Muslim reformists claim the opposite. Some argue that most Islamic laws are specific to the context of early Islam and do not apply to modern times. Ultimately, the challenge lies in finding a balance between maintaining Islamic principles and adapting to contemporary democratic norms. This balance can promote a governance system that upholds justice, equality, and the rule of law, tailored to the unique socio-cultural contexts of Muslim-majority countries.⁵⁹

According to the ethical-based Shari'ah, *shūrā* and governance are the most effective means of serving Islam's moral objectives. It has the potential to promote justice, protect human dignity, and allow for human freedom and liberation. From this perspective, the Shari'ah, consisting of ethical virtues, moral norms, and living standards, is permanent, unchanging, and timeless. It represents universal aspects of Islam that strongly support *shūrā* and governance.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Azzam S Tamimi, "Democracy in Islamic Political Thought," *This Paper Is Based on a Lecture given at the Belfast Mosque*, no. October (1997): 1–26, <https://doi.org/https://d-nb.info/1107773776/34>.

⁵⁸ John O. Voll - John L. Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, ed. John O. Voll - John L. Esposito, *Oxford University Press* (Oxford University Press, 1996), <https://global.oup.com/academic/?lang=en&cc=my>.

⁵⁹ Abdul Rashid Moten, "Social Justice, Islamic State and Muslim Countries," *Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 10, no. 1 (2013): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.5840/cultura20131011>.

⁶⁰ Nor Hazila binti Ismail, Mohamed Eskandar Shah Mohd Rasid, and Maizura Md Isa, "The Relevance of *Shūrā* in Promoting Shared Prosperity in Developed and Developing Countries: ICIS 2021," *Journal of Fatwa Management and Research* 26,

Despite the universal recognition of *shūrā* and governance as a system that embodies the principles of justice, equality, and the collective will of the people⁶¹—as illustrated by the guidance in the Holy Qur’an, *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4: 135 and *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16: 90 advocating for justice, goodness, and righteousness. The Islamic principles of divine sovereignty, the instrumentality of the world for future happiness, and the societal implementation of religious laws present a unique challenge to harmonizing democratic processes with Islamic values as mentioned in the Holy Qur’an:

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition.⁶²

According to Moten, the *khilāfah* embodies trust, responsibility, authority, duty, election, and service. Man’s destiny and ultimate vocation is to serve Allah (ﷻ), as the Qur’an affirms, “*I have not created jinn and mankind except to serve Me*”⁶³ The faithful execution of this sublime responsibility is the essence of ‘*ibādah*. As a *khalīfah*, human activities can be categorized as either *Ḥaqq Allāh* or *Ḥaqq al-‘ibād*, with the Qur’an emphasizing justice, trust, respect for life and property, patience, humility, thankfulness, and forgiveness in all dealings with others. There is no other way to fulfill this responsibility, and true civilization is only possible through a morality upheld by *Tawḥīd* alone among the known ideologies. Moreover, Muslim scholar-activists who followed earlier revivalists had strong anti-colonial rhetoric and activism coupled with Islamic commitments. Sayyid Qutb contrasted Islam against the political and economic development models prevalent in the West. He believed that the Western model was based on secularism, which

no. 2 (2021): 78–88, <https://doi.org/10.33102/jfatwa.vol26no2.402>.

⁶¹ Lailial Muhtifah et al., “The Theology of Islamic Moderation Education in Singkawang, Indonesia: The City of Tolerance,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 6552, <https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V77I4.6552>.

⁶² Qur’an, *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16: 90.

⁶³ Qur’an, 51:56.

is antithetical to Islam. In contrast, Islam is divine, and the Qur'an and the sayings and actions of the Prophet (ﷺ) serve as its foundation. Qutb argued that Islam was the only system with the values required for leadership and a way of life. All that is secular is sacred in the roots of its being.⁶⁴

Strengthening Political Stability through Principles of Islamic Leadership

Islamic leadership principles offer a distinctive approach to governance, one rooted in ethical responsibility, justice, and community welfare. Core principles such as *shūrā*, *amānah*, *hurriyyah*, and *'adl* establish a framework that promotes accountability, inclusivity, and fairness—qualities crucial for fostering political stability.⁶⁵ In Islamic governance, leadership is viewed as *amānah* granted by both the community and divine authority, creating a moral obligation for leaders to prioritize the collective good over personal interests.⁶⁶ This ethical foundation encourages leaders to act with integrity and to make decisions in the best interest of the people they serve. By adhering to these principles, Islamic leadership offers a path to strengthening public trust and unity, which are essential for achieving and maintaining political stability.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ A. R. Moten, *Varieties of Islamisation: Varying Contexts, Changing Strategies*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=LKsEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=%22islamization+of+science%22%7C%22integration+of+knowledge%22%7C%22environment+care%22&ots=YwyT2uSSDh&sig=1pWZ7irG-VG93A2ziGa57YLpzc>.

⁶⁵ Fuad Fachruddin, "Educating for Democracy: Ideas and Practices of Islamic Civil Society Association in Indonesia," *Graduate Faculty of School of Education, University of Pittsburgh* (University of Pittsburgh, 2005), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/12207662.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Muhammad Usman Siddique, Syed Ali Sultan, and Dr. Arfan Arshad, "A Study of Islamic Perspective on Leadership," *Al-NASR*, 2023, 58–72, <https://doi.org/10.53762/alnasr.02.03.e05>.

⁶⁷ Firman Noor, "Institutionalising Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia: A Study of Internal Fragmentation and Cohesion in the Post-Soeharto Era (1998-2008)," *Doctor Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter* (University of Exeter, 2012), <https://doi.org/1512398029>.

One of the most central principles in Islamic leadership, *shūrā*, emphasizes the importance of consultation and community involvement in decision-making processes. *Shūrā* encourages leaders to actively seek and consider the opinions and concerns of those affected by their decisions, fostering an environment of transparency and shared responsibility.⁶⁸ By incorporating diverse perspectives, leaders can better address the needs and aspirations of their communities, which, in turn, reduces the likelihood of dissent and dissatisfaction. Research has shown that inclusive decision-making can increase community engagement and create a stronger sense of belonging and loyalty within the populace. In politically unstable states, where marginalization and disenfranchisement often fuel unrest, the principle of *shūrā* offers a pathway to fostering unity and mitigating conflict by making governance a more participatory process.⁶⁹

The principle of *amānah* further strengthens political stability by instilling ethical standards in leadership. Leaders who are perceived as honest and responsible are more likely to inspire public confidence and support, reducing the potential for social discord. In many Muslim-majority societies, political instability is exacerbated by corruption, lack of transparency, and misuse of power, which erodes public trust in governance. *Amānah*, as a guiding principle, requires leaders to act with integrity, resist corruption, and uphold their commitments to the community.⁷⁰ Studies on political ethics indicate that trust in leadership plays a critical role in achieving stability, as it directly impacts citizens' willingness to follow laws

⁶⁸ Md Golam Mohiuddin and Mohammad Muzahidu Islam, "Decision Making Style in Islam: A Study of Superiority of *Shūrā* (Participative Management) and Examples from Early Era of Islam," *European Journal of Business and Management* 8, no. 4 (2016): 79–88, www.iiste.org.

⁶⁹ Mohammad Selim, "*Shūrā* or Consultative Decision Making and Its Effectiveness in Establishing Unity, Strength and Commitment," *2021 International Conference on Sustainable Islamic Business and Finance, SIBF 2021*, 2021, 90–93, <https://doi.org/10.1109/IEEECONF53626.2021.9686349>.

⁷⁰ Hasnah Haron et al., "Values in an Islamic University in Malaysia: Analysis from Western and Islamic Perspectives," *The Journal of Muamalat and Islamic Finance Research* 19, no. 1 (2022): 86–105, <https://doi.org/10.33102/jmifr.v19i1.415>.

and regulations.⁷¹ By embodying the value of *amānah*, Islamic leadership can address one of the root causes of instability: the public's lack of faith in their leaders' intentions and actions.⁷²

Justice (*'adl*) is another cornerstone of Islamic leadership with profound political stability implications. Islam highly values justice as a moral duty and prerequisite for societal harmony. Leaders are expected to uphold justice in all aspects of governance, ensuring that laws and policies are applied fairly and equitably to all citizens. When justice is perceived as consistent and impartial, it reduces grievances related to discrimination and inequality, often catalysts for social unrest. Political theorists argue that a just system not only deters conflict but also reinforces citizens' trust in governmental institutions.⁷³ In contexts where political instability is prevalent, upholding the principle of *'adl* can contribute to a sense of security and fairness, which are fundamental to stabilizing societies and creating a sustainable governance structure.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Islamic leadership principles also stress the importance of accountability and stewardship, as seen in the concept of *khilāfah* (stewardship or viceregency). Leaders are accountable to the people they serve and to a higher, divine authority, which emphasizes their role as caretakers of the community and environment. This dual accountability encourages leaders to act responsibly and with a long-term vision, considering the well-being

⁷¹ Mohammad Alabed, "Exploring the Islamic Principles on Leadership and Its Implementation between Muslim Leaders in Sweden," *Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering Division of Construction Management Chalmers University of Technology* (Chalmers University of Technology, 2017), <https://odr.chalmers.se/server/api/core/bitstreams/93b1a443-3648-476c-9a12-b36331844e51/content>.

⁷² D.N. Ayoob, M. and Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in Muslim Societies*, ed. M. and Lussier Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, 119th ed. (University of Michigan Press., 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.189346>.

⁷³ Mukhlis Latif, Muhammad Mutawalli, and Zuhlilmi Paidi, "Fiqh Peradaban and the Actualization of Religious and State Life in the Modern Society," *Fikrah* 11, no. 1 (2023): 151, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v11i1.22570>.

⁷⁴ Muhammad Imran Pasha, Sobia Riaz, and Anum Riaz, "Social Harmony and Governance: A Case Study of Muslim States," *Global Sociological Review* VII, no. I (2022): 16–26, [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(vii-i\).03](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(vii-i).03).

of future generations. When leaders exercise such stewardship, they are more likely to implement policies that promote sustainable development, social equity, and economic stability.⁷⁵ This proactive and holistic approach can help prevent the structural issues that often underlie political instability, such as economic disparities, environmental degradation, and social fragmentation.⁷⁶

In conclusion, the principles of Islamic leadership—consultation, integrity, justice, and stewardship—provide a comprehensive framework that aligns with the ethical and practical requirements for achieving political stability. These principles address key factors that contribute to stability, such as public trust, fair governance, and social cohesion, offering a model that is particularly suited to addressing the challenges faced by politically unstable states. By integrating these values into governance structures, Muslim-majority countries have the potential to create leadership models that are both ethically grounded and resilient, promoting stability in a way that resonates with Islamic traditions and meets contemporary needs. In a world where many political systems struggle with legitimacy and accountability, Islamic leadership principles offer an alternative approach that prioritizes the welfare of the people and the ethical integrity of governance.

Research Objectives

This study examines the principles of *shūrā* and *amānah* as central to Tawhidic Leadership in Islamic governance. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, the research will focus on the following objectives:

1. **To analyze the concept of *shūrā* within Tawhidic governance:** This objective involves exploring the origins,

⁷⁵ M Abdul Aziz, “The Principles Studied in Islamic Political Thought: Revisiting Modern Political Discourse,” *IJISH (International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities)* 6, no. 1 (2023): 65–86, <https://doi.org/10.26555/ijish.v6i1.6974>.

⁷⁶ Yuli Andriansyah, “Globalization, Economic Imbalances, and Sustainable Development: What Islam Can Contribute to Solve It?,” *International Conference and Call for Paper on Law and Sustainable Development amongst Developed and Developing Countries 2014*, no. November (2014), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.1532.3049>.

definitions, and applications of *shūrā* as a means of achieving unity and collective decision-making within an Islamic framework. It will investigate classical and modern interpretations to understand how *shūrā* fosters inclusivity, accountability, and ethical decision-making in leadership.

2. **To investigate the role of *amānah* as a core value in Tawhidic Leadership:** The study will delve into *amānah* and its emphasis on trustworthiness, moral responsibility, and accountability under the concept of Tawhid. This objective seeks to highlight how integrity strengthens leadership, builds public trust, and ensures justice within governance structures.
3. **To examine the interplay between *shūrā* and *amānah* in Tawhidic governance:** This objective focuses on understanding how consultation and integrity are interdependent within Islamic leadership. It will explore how leaders can balance *shūrā* and *amānah* to achieve ethical, inclusive, and effective governance. It will examine how *shūrā* without *amānah* may lead to ineffective consultation, while *amānah* without *shūrā* may result in autocracy.
4. **To evaluate the relevance of *shūrā* and *amānah* in contemporary governance models within Muslim societies:** This objective aims to assess how *shūrā* and *amānah* can be applied to modern governance settings, addressing both challenges and opportunities for integrating these principles. Case studies from Muslim-majority societies will be examined to understand how Tawhidic Leadership principles are adapted to current leadership and governance practices.
5. **To propose a Tawhidic Leadership framework grounded in consultation and integrity:** Based on the analysis, this objective will outline a model that integrates *shūrā* and *amānah* as foundational values for leadership. This framework will offer theoretical and practical guidance for ethical governance that aligns with Islamic principles and is intended to serve leaders, policymakers, and scholars as a

basis for fostering morally grounded and sustainable governance.

Through these objectives, the study aims to deepen the understanding of Tawhidic Leadership by illustrating how consultation and integrity can inform a governance model that is both ethically sound and relevant to the complexities of the modern world.

Significance of Study

This study bridges theoretical and practical insights on Tawhidic Leadership within modern governance by highlighting *shūrā* and *amānah* as essential principles that foster transparency, accountability, and ethical responsibility. Grounded in the concept of *Tawhīd*, the framework integrates Islamic values into leadership, responding to the need for governance that reflects the ethical and cultural values of Muslim societies. By incorporating *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* (the objectives of Islamic law) and emphasizing *ummah* (community) and *khalifah* (stewardship), the model supports governance rooted in justice and spiritual values. This approach aligns with Quranic leadership qualities—Godly, ethical, humane, and balanced—ensuring that authority derives from Allah (ﷻ) and is directed towards ethical ends, addressing the demand for moral decision-making in today’s political and organizational contexts.⁷⁷

Practically, this research provides leaders and policymakers in Muslim-majority societies with a governance model that is both value-driven and relevant to contemporary challenges. By illustrating how *shūrā* and *amānah* can be applied today, it offers a blueprint for leadership that strengthens public trust and promotes civic engagement. In contributing to the fields of political science and Islamic studies, this study enriches the discourse on ethical

⁷⁷ Mohamed Sulaiman et al., “The Influence of Spirituality and Responsibility on Business Leadership Effectiveness: An Empirical Analysis,” *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (2015): 310–34, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Naail-Mohammed-Kamil/publication/299487371_the_influence_of_spirituality_and_responsibility_on_business_leadership_effectiveness_an_empirical_analysis/links/56fb5bff08aef6d10d905896/the-influence-of-spirituality-and-re.

governance, offering a grounded model for leadership that emphasizes social justice, accountability, and community welfare within the Tawhidic ethical framework.⁷⁸

Research Methodology

This study adopts a secondary data analysis approach, using qualitative descriptive methods to examine Tawhidic Leadership through *shūrā* (consultation) and *amānah* (integrity),⁷⁹ as well as additional principles like *hurriyah hurriyyah* (freedom),⁸⁰ *‘adālah* (justice), and respect for humanity, animal rights, and environmental stewardship.⁸¹ By analyzing classical Islamic texts, including the Qur’an and Hadith, alongside secondary literature and contemporary scholarship, this research aims to uncover the ethical and governance dimensions of these principles within a modern context.⁸²

The methodology includes a comprehensive review of primary sources and existing literature to build an integrated view of Tawhidic Leadership’s potential role in addressing current governance needs.⁸³ A thematic analysis identifies and categorizes

⁷⁸ N S M Al-Salmi, “Quality Management Guidelines for Islamic Societies,” *VU University Press* (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2017), https://doi.org/978_90_8659_752_9.

⁷⁹ Abbas Ramdani, “Negotiation in Islamic Financial System: Developing a *Shari’ah*-Compliant Negotiation Model,” *College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia* (Universiti Utara Malaysia, 2017).

⁸⁰ Nur Kumala, “Hadis Studies The Contextual Qur’anic Interpretation of Jihad,” *Journal of Qur’an and Hadis Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 186–206, <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/559756-the-contextual-quranic-interpretation-of-364d3568.pdf>.

⁸¹ Irfan Abdurahman, Asep Lukman Daris Salam, and Erfan Shofari Sholahuddin, “Perkembangan Pemikiran Hukum Keluarga Islam Tentang Norma Hukum Waris, Wasiat, Dan Hibah,” *AL-AFKAR: Journal for Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2024): 891–903, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v7i2.1237>.

⁸² Imran H Khan Suddahazai, “Examining the Concept of Educational Leadership from the Classical Islamic Worldview,” *Khazanah Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (2023): 20–38, <https://doi.org/10.15575/kp.v5i1.25283>.

⁸³ Arbaiah Abdul Razak, Suhaimi Mhd. Sarif, and Yusof Ismail, “Islamic Leadership for Sustainability: A Systematic Literature Review Using Prisma,” *Online Journal of Islamic Management and Finance* 2, no. 2 (2022): 59–81, <https://doi.org/10.22452/ojimf.vol2no2.4>.

core themes,⁸⁴ focusing on how values such as consultation, justice, and integrity foster inclusivity and ethical responsibility. Case studies from Muslim-majority nations further demonstrate the real-world application of these principles, illustrating challenges and adaptability in governance structures.⁸⁵ Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a descriptive model for ethically grounded leadership informed by Islamic teachings and relevant to modern governance frameworks.⁸⁶

Research Hypotheses on Tawhidic Leadership in the Modern World

This study hypothesizes that Islamic leadership based on *shūrā* (consultation), *amānah* (integrity), *hurriyyah* (freedom), and *‘adālah* (justice) enhances governance by fostering ethical, accountable, and inclusive practices. Specifically, it proposes:

1. Primary Hypothesis: Leadership grounded in *shūrā*, *amānah*, *hurriyyah*, and *‘adālah* strengthens public trust and civic engagement in Muslim societies.
2. Secondary Hypothesis One: *Shūrā* enhances inclusivity and responsiveness, reinforcing social cohesion.
3. Secondary Hypothesis Two: *amānah* promotes ethical standards, reducing corruption through accountable leadership.
4. Secondary Hypothesis Three: Together, *shūrā*, *amānah*, *hurriyyah*, and *‘adālah* create a sustainable model of

⁸⁴ Ahmad, N. S. et al., “Exploring Al Ghazali’s Theory for Professional Development in Middle Leadership : A Systematic Literature Review,” *Management Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (2024): 98–111, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37134/mrj.vol13.1.8.2024>.

⁸⁵ Siti Fairuz bt Ramlan, “Refining the Theoretical Construct of Islamic Work Ethic: A Qualitative Study,” *Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya* (University of Malaya, 2017), <http://210.48.222.80/proxy.pac/dissertations-theses/refining-theoretical-construct-islamic-work-ethic/docview/2877962749/se-2>.

⁸⁶ Houda Abadi, “International Norms Project Seeking an Islamic Framework towards Peacebuilding and Women’s Inclusion,” *Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa*, 2022, 1–36, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/115252/1/Seeking_an_islamic_framework_published.pdf.

governance that addresses both Islamic ethical values and modern societal needs.

These hypotheses evaluate the impact of consultation, integrity, freedom, and justice on governance and propose that they are core pillars of a relevant and ethical leadership model.

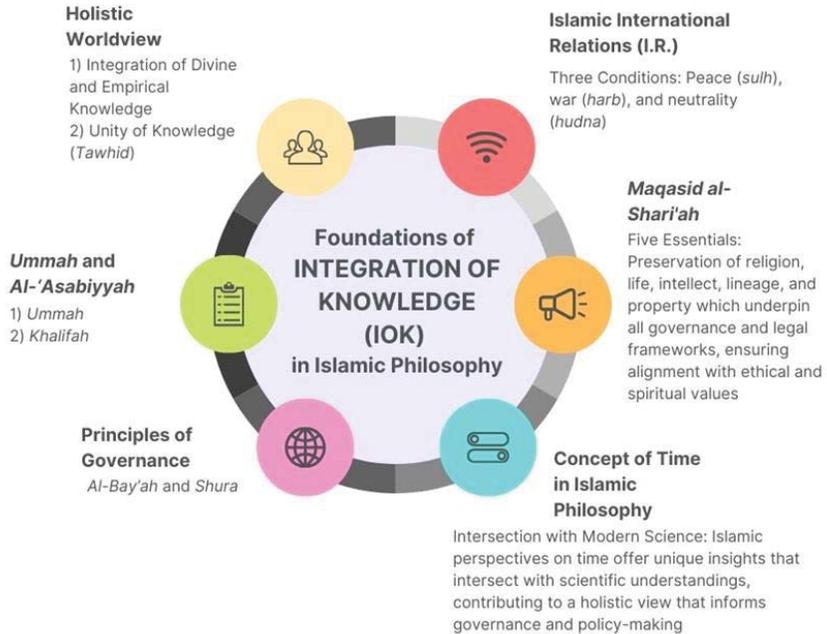


Figure 1.0: Tawhidic Leadership: A Philosophical Integration of Knowledge for Governance and Societal Development

Source: (Author 2024)

The chart presents the foundational elements of the Integration of Knowledge (IOK) within Islamic philosophy, highlighting a holistic approach to understanding and applying knowledge in governance and society.⁸⁷ Central to this model is a holistic

⁸⁷ Jasmin Omercic, “Integration of Knowledge (IoK) Methodological Reasoning of Islamic Economics (IE) as the Wisdom of Humanity: A Heterodox Economic Approach,” *International Journal of Islamic Economics and Finance (IJIEF)* 4, no.

worldview that integrates divine and empirical knowledge, unified under the concept of *Tawhīd*.⁸⁸ In terms of governance, the principles of *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) and *shūrā* provide a framework for decision-making rooted in collective engagement and accountability. The concept of *ummah* and *khalīfah* further emphasize communal responsibility and leadership within the Islamic community.⁸⁹

The model also incorporates *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which defines five key objectives—preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property—as foundational to ethical and spiritual governance.⁹⁰ Additionally, Islamic perspectives on time intersect with scientific understanding, offering a unique lens for policy-making that respects both tradition and modernity. Finally, Islamic International Relations (I.R.) outlines conditions for peace, war, and neutrality, providing guidelines for ethical engagement on a global scale. Together, these elements establish a comprehensive framework for knowledge integration that aligns with Islamic values and principles.⁹¹

Analytical Findings and Discussion

The study's findings indicate that *shūrā* and *amānah* are central to Islamic governance, providing essential foundations for participative and ethically grounded leadership. The results, organized into tables and visual representations, underscore how *shūrā* fosters inclusiveness by involving the community in decision-making processes, which contrasts with unilateral or top-down governance models. *Shūrā* allows leaders to gauge public sentiment and gather

2 (2021): 233–62, <https://doi.org/10.18196/ijief.v4i2.11658>.

⁸⁸ Suddahazai, “Examining the Concept of Educational Leadership from the Classical Islamic Worldview.”

⁸⁹ A Muqtedar Khan, “What Is Islamic Democracy? The Three Cs of Islamic Governance,” *E-International Relations* 7, no. June (2015): 1–4, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/01/07/what-is-islamic-democracy-the-three-cs-of-islamic-governance/>.

⁹⁰ Jaser Auda, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*, (Herndon, VA:International Institute of Islamic Thought Washington 2008).

⁹¹ Bouhedda Ghaliya and Belayet Hossen, “Integration of Knowledge: A Time Befitting Step,” *Abqari Journal* 19 (2019): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.33102/abqari.vol19.1>.

diverse perspectives, enhancing the quality of decisions and fostering trust between leaders and followers.

Meanwhile, *amānah* is presented as the guiding principle for accountability and trustworthiness, ensuring that leaders act in the community's best interest. This analysis utilizes various graphs and tables to illustrate how these principles have historically been employed in Islamic governance and how they could be applied today, making the results accessible and visually compelling for a broad audience.

Interpretation of Data

The interpretation delves deeper into the significance of *shūrā* and *amānah*, linking these principles to the research question of how Tawhidic governance can inform modern governance models. The data suggest that *shūrā*, by promoting community involvement and consensus-building, not only bolsters trust but also strengthens communal ties by ensuring that individuals feel heard and respected. Leaders who prioritize *shūrā* can better maintain social harmony, which is critical for governance in diverse, multicultural societies.

Amānah is similarly shown to be integral to ethical governance, with the data indicating a strong association between leaders' adherence to *amānah* and public trust. This principle encourages leaders to act with transparency, honesty, and a commitment to the common good. The study interprets these findings as evidence that *shūrā* and *amānah* together foster a balanced and ethical governance framework that prioritizes both communal welfare and moral integrity.

Comparison to Existing Studies

When placed alongside existing research, this study's findings offer a fresh perspective on Islamic governance principles by emphasizing the synergy between *shūrā* and *amānah*. Past studies have often examined these principles individually; however, this study highlights how they interact to form a comprehensive approach to ethical leadership. For instance, while prior research has shown *shūrā* to be crucial for inclusivity, this study demonstrates that without the

integrity provided by *amānah*, consultation alone may fail to result in ethical decisions.

Conversely, *amānah*, when practiced without *shūrā*, could lead to overly rigid governance that lacks public engagement. By comparing these findings to prior studies, the research shows that integrating both *shūrā* and *amānah* allows for a governance model that is ethically sound and responsive to public needs, setting a unique benchmark in Islamic governance literature.

Key Insights or Themes

Several themes emerge from the data analysis that are critical to understanding Tawhidic governance. The principles of justice, inclusivity, and accountability are consistent themes that characterize governance frameworks inspired by Islamic teachings. Justice, as outlined in Islamic governance, is not merely procedural but is rooted in a deep moral responsibility to treat individuals equitably and to uphold fairness in all affairs. Inclusivity is a second key theme, reflected in the practice of *shūrā*, where decision-making is seen as a collective responsibility rather than the sole prerogative of the leader.

Accountability, tied closely to *amānah*, emerges as the foundation of a governance model that respects public trust and ethical principles. These themes reinforce the study's main assertion that Islamic governance can contribute significantly to contemporary debates on ethical governance by prioritizing moral values that are universally applicable across diverse societies.

Theoretical Implications

The study offers a nuanced view of existing governance theories by presenting a Tawhidic model of leadership that is both ethically grounded and adaptable to diverse governance contexts. Core elements of *shūrā* (consultation) and *amānah* (integrity), integral to Tawhidic Leadership, provide a fresh lens through which to view participative and ethical governance. This framework emphasizes a leader's accountability to society and a higher moral authority, which is unique compared to secular models that often focus solely on institutional accountability.

Traditional governance theories, especially those rooted in representative democracy and centralized authority, may lack a holistic moral dimension. Tawhidic Leadership, grounded in the Oneness of Allah (ﷻ) (Tawhid), introduces a governance model that embodies the principles of *'adālah* (justice), *ḥurriyyah* (freedom), and *khilāfāh* (stewardship). These principles ensure that governance not only serves the material needs of a society but also upholds ethical obligations and long-term societal welfare. By prioritizing values such as *wasatīyyah* (moderation), the model extends the theoretical discussion on governance to include a balanced and principled approach, positioning Tawhidic Leadership as an alternative capable of addressing complex, contemporary governance challenges.

Practical Applications

The findings suggest a practical blueprint for embedding Tawhidic principles into governance structures, especially for policymakers in Muslim-majority societies. Implementing *shūrā* could take the form of establishing consultative councils or community forums, where public opinion is actively solicited and plays a central role in decision-making. Such structures ensure inclusivity and foster civic engagement, which is essential for enhancing public trust and participation in governance.

Amānah can be institutionalized by adopting transparent accountability mechanisms, such as regular public reporting on government actions and financial transparency initiatives. This approach aligns leaders' actions with community expectations of ethical governance, reducing corruption and enhancing public trust. Furthermore, by integrating *khilāfāh*, policymakers are reminded of their duty to act as caretakers of the community and environment, fostering sustainable development and long-term social equity.

These applications demonstrate that Tawhidic Leadership principles offer more than just theoretical insights; they provide practical tools for establishing governance systems that are culturally resonant and ethically grounded. Such a model is particularly relevant in today's world, where issues of public trust, inclusivity, and ethical accountability are paramount.

To practical applications of Tawhidic (divinely-centered) leadership principles that align with ethical governance, transparency, and societal welfare in today's context. Here are some examples and suggestions:

Ethical Integrity and Public Trust: In Tawhidic Leadership, a leader is accountable to both the community and to divine principles, embodying honesty, integrity, and fairness. In modern governance, this can translate into policies that prioritize ethical standards, resist corruption, and protect public trust. For instance, adopting clear codes of conduct and ethics oversight mechanisms for public officials can mirror this principle by holding leaders accountable and promoting trust within society.

Community-Centric Decision-Making: *Shūrā*, or consultative governance, emphasizes collective decision-making and public consultation. Today, this can be practically applied through inclusive policymaking, where communities are actively engaged in decision-making processes. Examples include participatory budgeting initiatives or policy consultations that allow citizens to have a say in decisions impacting their lives, reflecting the Islamic principle of *shūrā* by valuing diverse perspectives in governance.

Justice and Social Welfare Programs: Islamic governance places a strong emphasis on *‘adl* (justice) and the welfare of the *ummah* (community). In today's world, Tawhidic Leadership can inspire policies that prioritize equitable resource distribution, access to quality education, and healthcare as fundamental rights. Scandinavian countries, for example, have welfare systems that focus on reducing inequality and promoting social cohesion, demonstrating how justice and equity can lead to stable, prosperous societies.

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability: Tawhidic principles include stewardship (*khilāfah*) over the earth. A modern application is seen in sustainable development policies prioritizing the environment, reflecting Islamic ethical responsibility toward creation. The concept of *khilāfah* suggests that leaders and citizens alike are custodians of natural resources, which can be practically implemented through green policies, renewable energy projects, and regulations that protect natural ecosystems.

Transparent and Accountable Institutions: The principle of *amānah* (trust) implies that public offices are a trust and should be

executed responsibly. This could encourage the establishment of transparent governance frameworks, such as independent audit bodies, freedom of information laws, and anti-corruption commissions. New Zealand, for example, is recognized for its low corruption levels and transparent institutions, which align with *amānah* by ensuring that leadership serves the public, not personal interests.

In summary, Tawhidic Leadership principles such as *amānah*, *shūrā*, and *‘adl* can inspire modern governance models that are both ethically grounded and socially responsible. When applied practically, these principles demonstrate the timeless relevance of Islamic governance ideals and their potential to foster an inclusive, fair, and sustainable society in **today’s world**.

Limitations of Findings

This study acknowledges several limitations, such as the reliance on historical data, which may not fully capture the complexities of modern governance challenges. Additionally, the cultural and political diversity of Muslim-majority countries means that a one-size-fits-all application of *shūrā* and *amānah* may be overly simplistic. The interpretation of these principles can vary widely based on socio-political contexts, and future research would benefit from cross-cultural empirical studies that assess the adaptability of these concepts across different environments.

Another limitation is the scarcity of empirical studies on the real-world application of *shūrā* and *amānah* in modern governance, making it challenging to quantify their impact. Addressing these limitations could enhance the applicability of this study’s findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of Tawhidic governance in diverse political landscapes.

Future Research Directions

Building on this study, future research could examine the operationalization of *shūrā* and *amānah* in various governance structures, both in Muslim-majority and secular contexts. For example, comparative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of consultative governance models in different socio-political settings

could provide valuable insights into how Islamic governance principles interact with modern democratic systems. Additionally, research on the role of technology in facilitating *shūrā* could explore how digital platforms enable real-time public consultation, making participative governance more feasible in large, diverse populations.

Further studies might also consider how the principles of *shūrā* and *amānah* can be adapted to address emerging governance challenges, such as climate change or socio-economic inequality, thereby extending the relevance of Islamic governance principles to a broader range of contemporary issues.

Conclusion

Tawhidic Leadership is a model of leadership grounded in the concept of *Tawhīd* (the Oneness of God), which shapes leadership as an ethical,⁹² Divinely-centered responsibility. In this model, leaders recognize that ultimate authority and accountability belong to God, which instills a profound sense of duty to lead with integrity, justice, and compassion. Tawhidic Leadership requires leaders to act as stewards (*khalifah*) who prioritize the well-being of the *ummah*, uphold *amānah*, and consult others or *shūrā* in decision-making.⁹³ This leadership framework fosters a holistic approach, encouraging leaders to serve selflessly and maintain social justice, reflecting a commitment to both spiritual and societal obligations.⁹⁴

A Tawhidic Leadership model offers a compelling framework for modern governance by integrating universal values for peace,

⁹² Ashiqun Nabi and Suhaimi Mhd Sarif, "Tawhidic Paradigm and Ethical Leadership : The Views of Students," *Conference Work*, 2012, 1–8, http://irep.iium.edu.my/22283/1/ICLSC1222_TP_EthicalLeadership.pdf .

⁹³ Imtiyaz Yusuf, *Essential Writings Ismail Al Faruqi*, ed. Imtiyaz Yusuf, *Islamic Book Trust* (Virginia USA: Center for Islam in the Contemporary World (CICW) Shenandoah University 44160 Scholar Plaza Suite 100 Leesburg, Virginia 20176 USA, 2021), https://www.contemporaryislam.org/uploads/1/2/2/1/122197478/pdf_edition_-_ismail_al_faruqi_essential_writings.pdf.

⁹⁴ UROOJ KHAN and Danish Ahmed Siddiqui, "How Belief of Tawhid Leads to Well-Being in Muslims: The Serial Mediation of Tawakul, and Self-Regulation, Complemented by the Belief of Reward in the Afterlife," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 13, no. June (2024): 1–56, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4864011>.

integrity, and accountability within a divinely centered approach.⁹⁵ "Universal values for peace and integrity" refer to principles such as justice, compassion, responsibility, and communal harmony⁹⁶—values foundational to both ethical societies and sound leadership.⁹⁷ These values align with Tawhidic principles, as *Tawhīd* emphasizes unity, accountability to a higher moral authority, and respect for human dignity, transcending individual or self-serving interests. Unlike secular models, Tawhidic Leadership introduces a divine accountability that reinforces ethical decision-making and self-restraint, grounding leaders in a sense of spiritual and social responsibility that shapes just governance.⁹⁸

While modern political systems like democracy and *shuracracy* embrace principles such as consultation (*shūrā*) and public trust (*amānah*), a Tawhidic model synthesizes these values to form a balanced and cohesive leadership approach.⁹⁹ *Shūrā*, or consultative governance, ensures that decision-making reflects the collective will and wisdom of the community, preventing autocratic

⁹⁵ Alizaman D. Gamon and Mariam S. Tagoranao, "Integrating Tawhidic Human Values within a Secular Framework: Implications for Muslim Communities in Southeast Asia," *IUUM Today | Designed by: Theme Freesia | WordPress*, 2024, <https://news.iium.edu.my/?p=180929>.

⁹⁶ Sigit Susilo, Suwito Eko Pramono, and Joko Sutarto, "Integrating Faith and Ethics in Police Education: A Phenomenological Study on Character Cultivation at the Indonesian Police Academy," *Journal of Educational Development* 12, no. 2 (2024): 53–62, <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals//jed>.

⁹⁷ Mariah Darus et al., "Ethical Governance through *Maqāṣid Sharī'ah* Perspective: A Conceptual Framework," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 10 (2024): 920–32, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i10/23148>.

⁹⁸ Esra Aras, "The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism: Perspectives From Mawlana Abu'l-A'La Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini," *Department of International Relations of Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University* (Middle East Technical University, 2008), [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/MT_Globalization_Report_2018.pdf%0Ahttp://eprints.lse.ac.uk/43447/1/India_globalisation_society_and_inequalities\(lsero\).pdf%0A](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/MT_Globalization_Report_2018.pdf%0Ahttp://eprints.lse.ac.uk/43447/1/India_globalisation_society_and_inequalities(lsero).pdf%0A) <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the>.

⁹⁹ Abdul Syatar, "Democracy and Modern State: *Siyasah Shar'īyyah* Analysis," *Jurnal Al Tasyri' Iyyah* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jat.v0i0.20139>.

rule and valuing diverse perspectives. Combined with *amānah*, or the ethical stewardship of resources and power, Tawhidic Leadership fosters trust and transparency, as leaders see themselves as caretakers accountable to both the community and God.¹⁰⁰

The study’s practical implications suggest that policymakers and leaders in Muslim-majority contexts can benefit from adopting a Tawhidic Leadership model, where foundational elements—*shūrā*, *amānah*, *‘adl*, and *hurriyyah*—work in unison to establish a balanced, ethical, inclusive, and principled approach to leadership.¹⁰¹ By grounding governance in the unity of divine principles and human well-being, Tawhidic Leadership offers a sustainable model that cultivates peace and integrity at all levels of society. Practicing Tawhidic Leadership within modern political systems not only reinforces ethical governance but also creates a holistic framework fostering unity, accountability, and social harmony in ways secular models may struggle to achieve alone. Additionally, through *khilāfah* and *ummah*, Tawhidic leaders are reminded of their responsibility to act as caretakers not only of their people but also of the environment, promoting sustainable development and ensuring the long-term welfare of society.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Md Nazrul Islam, “God in Politics : Islamism and Democracy in Bangladesh,” *School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore* (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore., 2017), <https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/69470>.

¹⁰¹ Muliati Usman et al., “The Role of Islamic Leadership in Vitalizing High Morale in the Workplace,” *Journal of International Business, Economics and Entrepreneurship* 8, no. 2 (2023): 32–41, <https://doi.org/10.24191/jibe.v8i2.22950>.

¹⁰² Rusnah Muhamad, Mohd Edil Abd. Sukor, and Mohd Rizal Muwazir@Mukhazir, “Corporate Social Responsibility: An Islamic Perspective,” *Asian Journal of Accounting Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2008): 43–56, <https://doi.org/10.22452/ajap.vol1.no1.4>.

CHARTING ACADEMIC EVOLUTION: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY OF ISTAC-IIUM'S THESIS CATALOG¹

Nurul Ain Norman², Nik Md Saiful Azizi Nik Abdullah³
and Abdelaziz Berghout⁴

Abstract

This paper presents a bibliometric analysis of ISTAC-IIUM's thesis catalog (1993–2024), highlighting thematic trends and epistemological insights. It offers critical reflections on ISTAC's scholarly trajectory, emphasizing its evolution from a foundational institute to a hub for interdisciplinary Islamic scholarship. This study underscores ISTAC's commitment to addressing contemporary global and regional challenges through its academic output while staying rooted in its intellectual foundations. It also identifies thematic gaps, particularly in interdisciplinary research and emerging fields such as sustainability, gender studies, and digital transformation. Recommendations include developing integrated academic pathways, expanding underrepresented specializations, and fostering global collaborations to enhance ISTAC's visibility and impact. The research contributes to understanding ISTAC's academic trajectory, offering actionable insights to guide its future strategic direction in Islamic scholarship and its relevance in global academic discourse. This study demonstrates ISTAC's evolution from a foundational institute of Islamic thought to a dynamic and adaptive

¹ This is part of a project funded under the ISTAC grant research funds (ISTAC24-016-0018), entitled "Charting Academic Evolution: A Comprehensive Trend Analysis of ISTAC Catalogue Theses" and is a continuation of the ISTAC Theses Catalog project, led by Professor Dr. Waleed Fekry Faris.

² Assistant Professor, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), and Head of Research, Innovation and Development, ISTAC-IIUM.

³ Associate Professor, Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, and Deputy Dean of Student Development and Community Engagement, ISTAC-IIUM. Corresponding author: nikazizi@iium.edu.my

⁴ Professor, AbdulHamid Abu Sulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and Dean of ISTAC-IIUM.

institution addressing the complexities of modern society while aligning with IIUM's Tawhidic and Ummatic framework to advance holistic and impactful scholarship.

Keywords: Islamic scholarship, thesis trend analysis, academic evolution, ISTAC-IIUM, interdisciplinary research

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1987 by the visionary scholar Royal Professor Tan Sri Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has emerged as a beacon of excellence in Islamic studies, earning its place among the world's most prestigious academic institutions. With a foundation rooted in al-Attas' groundbreaking philosophy of *adab* and the Islamization of knowledge,⁵ ISTAC is not merely a center for research but a unique intellectual powerhouse shaping the global discourse on Islamic thought, civilization, and human development. Esteemed for its interdisciplinary approach, ISTAC stands alongside other international institutions of renown, such as the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies and Harvard's Program in Islamic Law, positioning itself as a thought leader in bridging Islamic scholarship with contemporary challenges.⁶

⁵ According to Mohd Hilmi Ramli, al-Attas's philosophy, particularly his concept of *Adab*, is central to many of his essential writings, including *The Beacon on the Crest of a Hill*, *The Culture of Knowledge: An Elaboration*, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (1998), and *Development in Malaysia: Towards a Better Understanding* (2001, 2005). See M H. Ramli, *Analysis and Translation of Kitab Al-Mudarabah of Mabsut by Al-Sarakhsi (d. 483/1090)* (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2016). See also: S.M.N. al-Attas, *The Beacon on the Crest of a Hill: A Brief History and Philosophy of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991); *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991, 1995, 2007); *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998; *Development in Malaysia: Towards a Better Understanding*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit UTM Press, 2001, 2005).

⁶ International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM) website. <https://institute.iium.edu.my/istac/>.

At ISTAC's core is its mission to embody and disseminate the principles of *ḥaqq*—truth, wisdom, justice, and reality—concepts that resonate deeply with the universal values of Islamic philosophy.⁷ This alignment with the principles of perfection and justice, inherent in divine governance, reflects ISTAC's aim to cultivate scholars of extraordinary intellectual and moral caliber who can engage with and address the complexities of modern society. al-Attas' vision of an Islamic university, founded on the ideal of the *Insān Kāmil* (the universal man)⁸, is brought to life through ISTAC's scholarly endeavors, making it a global model for integrating classical Islamic knowledge with the intellectual challenges of the modern era.

In its current phase under IIUM, ISTAC has expanded its focus through strategic initiatives that align with its foundational vision while addressing contemporary global challenges. The recent activities organized in ISTAC underscore the institute's growing role as a hub for interdisciplinary and intercultural scholarship. Its identity is deeply rooted in the vision of its founder, whose enduring legacy continues to inspire ISTAC's mission. Building on this foundation, ISTAC's integration into IIUM has broadened its scope, ensuring its relevance in a rapidly changing world while honoring the principles so profoundly articulated by Royal Professor Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

Charting ISTAC's academic evolution through a bibliometric analysis of its thesis catalog is essential for understanding its contributions to knowledge production and its ability to adapt to emerging intellectual trends. With its expansive library and diverse faculty, ISTAC has consistently produced theses that reflect the scholarly rigor of its researchers and address the most pressing global and regional issues, such as sustainable development, interfaith relations, and cultural preservation. A study of this nature sheds light

⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

⁸ Nabila Huringiin, "Ideas and Realization of Islamic University by al-Attas (Case Study: ISTAC-IIU Malaysia)," *HUNafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 18:1, (2021): 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v18i1.623.17-31>.

on ISTAC's capacity to remain at the forefront of Islamic scholarship while staying aligned with the academic trajectories of other prestigious institutions worldwide.

The need for this comprehensive trend analysis is twofold. First, it provides valuable insights into ISTAC's scholarly trajectory, identifying shifts in thematic and methodological priorities that reflect broader societal and intellectual movements. Second, it offers a roadmap for future research directions, ensuring ISTAC's continued relevance and leadership in addressing global challenges.⁹ By examining ISTAC's extensive thesis catalog, this study seeks to uncover key themes, methodologies, and areas of emerging interest. The findings will deepen our understanding of ISTAC's role as a global leader in Islamic scholarship and demonstrate why institutions worldwide look to it as an intellectual partner in shaping the future of knowledge.

Background

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has long been a cornerstone of Islamic intellectual inquiry, embodying the vision of its founder, Royal Professor Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Established on February 27, 1987, and officially launched by Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed on October 4, 1991, ISTAC was conceived as a research and postgraduate institution dedicated to advancing Islamic civilization and science. Its foundational ethos was to revive and expand Islamic intellectual thought, positioning the institute as a

⁹ As highlighted by Hafiz and Suryadi, ISTAC's interdisciplinary approach to exploring the intersections of Islamic and Malay civilizations makes it a model for academic innovation, and its evolution deserves systematic study to fully appreciate its impact and future potential (Hafiz Zakariya and Suryadi, "The Experiences of the International Institute of Islamic Civilization & Malay World (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia in Empowering the Malay World & Islamic civilization." *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 6, 2 (2021): 221–236. <https://doi.org/10.31291/hn.v6i2.444>.)

global leader in scholarship on Islamic philosophy, history, and civilization.¹⁰

Over the years, ISTAC has contributed significantly to academic development, as demonstrated by the work of Mohd. Zain Abd. Rahman who analyzed the trends in master's and doctoral dissertations from 1991 to 2004. The study documented 20 doctoral dissertations and 58 master's theses during this period, covering a wide array of disciplines such as Quranic studies, Hadith, comparative religion, theology, Sufism, and Islamic law. Notably, ISTAC's theses often employed philosophical and interdisciplinary approaches, reflecting its commitment to integrating classical Islamic knowledge with modern intellectual frameworks.¹¹ The work also highlighted the diversity of ISTAC's graduates, hailing from countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina, Uganda, and Gambia, thus emphasizing its global reach. Gender analysis showed that while males predominated in submissions, ISTAC awarded its first doctoral degree to a female scholar, marking an early milestone in fostering inclusivity.¹²

Nuramirahshahrin notes that ISTAC initially operated autonomously under IIUM with a small team but became a Kulliyah of IIUM in 2002. This transition marked a shift in its administrative and academic structure, enabling ISTAC to broaden its interdisciplinary focus while continuing to uphold its foundational values.¹³ Dinobeano's 2018 essay critiques ISTAC's trajectory, suggesting that political interference and shifting goals have sometimes hindered the institute's potential to address the broader socio-economic needs of Malaysia's Bumiputera and Malay communities. Despite these challenges, ISTAC's contributions to Islamic philosophy and intellectual revival remain significant,

¹⁰ Nuramirahshahrin, "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)," *Daripenasiswi*, December 1, 2010, Powered by Blogger. <https://nuramirahshahrin.blogspot.com/2010/12/international-institute-of-islamic.html>.

¹¹ Mohd Zain Abd. Rahman, "Postgraduate Research in Islamic Thought and Civilization at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)," *Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science* 10,1 (2001): 49–64.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Nuramirahshahrin, "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)".

particularly in the study of figures such as Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and its emphasis on addressing global intellectual challenges.¹⁴

The importance of revisiting ISTAC's academic evolution is further underscored by its role in addressing contemporary global challenges. From 1991 to 2002, ISTAC functioned as a leading autonomous academic institution, producing scholarly works of high caliber. However, as it transitioned into IIUM's structure, ISTAC's focus expanded to include interdisciplinary collaborations and modern research objectives. Recent scholarly critiques emphasize the need to adapt ISTAC's intellectual framework to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving world, particularly in areas such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and economic competitiveness.¹⁵ This dynamic evolution of ISTAC underscores the necessity of conducting a comprehensive trend analysis of its academic output, ensuring its legacy and contributions remain aligned with current and future scholarly needs.

This study builds upon the works of previous scholars to chart the evolving trends in ISTAC's academic output. By analyzing its thesis catalog, this research aims to identify thematic, methodological, and geographical patterns in its scholarly works, offering insights into ISTAC's academic trajectory and its alignment with global intellectual currents.

Objectives and Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the trends within ISTAC-IIUM's thesis catalog, focusing on thematic shifts and emerging patterns from 1993 to 2024. This dual approach seeks to understand ISTAC's academic evolution while providing

¹⁴ Dinobeano, "ISTAC and the Closing of the Malay Mind." *Din Merican: The Malaysian DJ Blogger*, September 6, 2018, Blog at WordPress.com. <https://dinmerican.wordpress.com/2018/09/06/istac-and-the-closing-of-the-malay-mind/>.

¹⁵ Dinobeano argues that ISTAC's current structure may need to be revised to drive economic competitiveness among the larger Bumiputera population, emphasizing the need for a broader, more inclusive approach to educational and economic reform (Dinobeano, "ISTAC and the Closing of the Malay Mind.").

actionable recommendations for future research.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To analyze thematic trends in ISTAC's theses catalog over the past decades.
- To recommend future research directions based on the findings.

To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods approach¹⁶ was adopted. The quantitative analysis involved categorizing theses into ISTAC's six research areas, highlighting growth and thematic shifts. The qualitative analysis employed thematic coding of thesis titles and abstracts using NVivo software to identify patterns and research priorities.¹⁷ Secondary data sources included ISTAC's library catalog, administrative records, and scholarly articles.¹⁸

The study also draws on Royal Professor Tan Sri Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' theoretical framework, incorporating his principles of *adab* and the 'Islamization of knowledge' to guide thematic categorization. This integrated methodology ensures ISTAC's research trajectory aligns with its intellectual heritage while addressing contemporary global challenges.

Charting Academic Trends in Islamic Studies

Academic institutions play a critical role in advancing the frontiers of knowledge, and analyzing the trends within their scholarly outputs

¹⁶ Sami Almalki, "Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Mixed Methods Research—Challenges and Benefits," *Journal of Education and Learning* 5, 3 (2016): 288. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v5n3p288>.

¹⁷ Patricia Bazeley and Kristi Jackson, *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* (SAGE Publications, 2013), 30-35; Dwivedi, Y.K., Anuj, S., Nripendra P.R., Mihalis, G., Pooja, G., and Vincent, D., "Evolution of Artificial Intelligence Research in Technological Forecasting and Social Change: Research Topics, Trends, and Future Directions," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 192, (December 2022) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122579>; John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2014), 184; John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2018), 87.

¹⁸ Mohd Zain Abd. Rahman, "Postgraduate Research in Islamic Thought".

provides valuable insights into their intellectual trajectories. Charting academic trends, particularly in thesis and dissertation production, has emerged as a vital method for understanding how institutions like ISTAC-IIUM contribute to the evolving field of Islamic studies. Analyzing theses enables scholars to identify thematic priorities, methodological preferences, and areas of growing interest, offering a roadmap for future academic endeavors.

Thematic analyses of thesis trends are not unique to ISTAC. Similar studies conducted at institutions like Al-Azhar University and the Center for Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford have highlighted a growing interest in areas such as Islam and environmental ethics, Islamic finance, and interfaith dialogue.¹⁹

Charting the trends in ISTAC-IIUM's thesis catalog is critical for understanding how the institution has adapted to the intellectual demands of a rapidly evolving world. By identifying shifts in research focus—from foundational Islamic philosophy to contemporary global challenges, where the analysis provides a framework for aligning ISTAC's academic output with pressing societal needs. Such studies are essential for guiding future research directions.²⁰ As El-Sharnouby observed, institutions that regularly analyze their academic outputs are better positioned to innovate and address emerging global challenges.²¹ ISTAC, with its legacy of scholarly excellence and a commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry, stands to benefit greatly from this reflective approach.

ISTAC's Evolving Academic Contributions

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has consistently positioned itself as a beacon of Islamic scholarship, bridging classical traditions with contemporary academic challenges. Central to this mission is the Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library (SMNAL), named after ISTAC's visionary founder. Housing over 150,000 volumes, including rare manuscripts

¹⁹ Dina El-Sharnouby. "Islamic Studies in the Modern Era: Trends and Challenges." *Journal of Comparative Religion Studies* (2019): 60–70.

²⁰ Dinobeano. "ISTAC".

²¹ Dina El-Sharnouby, "Islamic Studies".

and artifacts, the library stands as a cornerstone of Islamic thought and civilization. Its meticulously organized theses catalog reflects ISTAC's commitment to a multidisciplinary approach, enabling scholars to access diverse intellectual traditions and engage with both historical and contemporary issues effectively.²²

ISTAC's evolving academic priorities are vividly captured in its theses catalogue, which offers a microcosm of the institution's intellectual trajectory. Early works predominantly focused on classical Islamic thought and civilization, while more recent contributions address pressing global issues such as ethics, technology, and intercultural dialogue. Studies within ISTAC have explored the intersection of Islamic thought with advancements in digital technology, showcasing the institution's ability to adapt its academic inquiries to contemporary challenges. For example, ISTAC's commitment to exploring contemporary ethical challenges is evident in events like the *Islam and Biomedicine* forum, officiated by Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah at ISTAC on August 10, 2023. This forum supported global efforts to integrate Islamic perspectives into fields like biomedicine, underscoring ISTAC's relevance in bridging traditional Islamic scholarship with modern technological and ethical inquiries. The forum reflects the institution's broader academic ethos rather than a specific thesis. This work exemplifies ISTAC's capacity to bridge traditional Islamic scholarship with emerging fields of inquiry, reinforcing its relevance in a rapidly changing world.²³

Global collaborations have further underscored ISTAC's interdisciplinary ethos. The workshop *Islam and Science: An Educational Approach*, held from November 29 to December 2, 2013, co-organized with the American University of Sharjah and the

²² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library Catalogue. *Internal ISTAC Resources* (2024).

²³ "Book Launch of Dato' Dr. Afifi al-Akiti's *Islam and Biomedicine*," officiated by Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah at ISTAC on August 10, 2023, <https://sultannazrinshah.com/book-launch-of-dato-dr-afifi-al-akitis-islam-and-biomedicine/>.

Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris, exemplified this focus.²⁴ By addressing themes such as the history and philosophy of Islamic science and modern cosmology, the workshop positioned ISTAC as a global hub for advanced discourse on the interplay between science and religion. These efforts highlight ISTAC's role in fostering meaningful academic exchanges across diverse disciplines.

The Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library also houses unique academic treasures, such as its Ottoman manuscript collection, highlighted by Mehmet Özay.²⁵ This repository serves as a vital resource for researchers in Islamic and Ottoman studies. However, its underutilization presents an opportunity for ISTAC to amplify its academic impact through curated research initiatives and exhibitions, further cementing its status as a leader in Islamic scholarship.

Wan Ali Wan Mamat has significantly advanced the study of Malay manuscripts and civilization at SMNAL Library. His meticulous research encompasses the preservation, cataloging, and analysis of traditional Malay manuscripts, offering critical insights into the intellectual heritage of the Malay world. Wan Ali's co-edited work, *Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters*, explores the profound impact of colonialism on regional civilizations, while his book *An Introduction to Malay Manuscripts* serves as a seminal resource on traditional Malay bookmaking practices.²⁶ These efforts align with ISTAC's broader mission to preserve and advance knowledge of Malay civilization, fostering a deeper understanding of the region's rich intellectual traditions.

In sum, ISTAC's evolving academic contributions reflect its dual commitment to preserving the intellectual heritage of Islamic

²⁴ "Next Islam & Science Workshop in Malaysia," Islam & Science Network, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://islam-science.net/next-islamscience-workshop-in-malaysia-1376/>.

²⁵ Mehmet Özay, "The Ottoman Manuscripts in ISTAC's Collection: A Resource for Islamic Studies," *Journal of Islamic Civilizational Research* 10, no. 2 (2022): 45–55.

²⁶ Wan Ali Wan Mamat, *An Introduction to Malay Manuscripts* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC Press, 2015).

civilization and addressing the complexities of contemporary scholarship. Through its unparalleled library resources, innovative research, and global collaborations, ISTAC continues to shape the discourse on Islamic thought and its relevance in the modern world.

Theses Classification According to ISTAC Six Niche Areas and Specializations

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has consistently positioned itself as a premier institution for Islamic scholarship, focusing on developing a new generation of scholars equipped to engage with the complexities of the modern world. According to Gary Dargan, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas envisioned ISTAC as an institution dedicated to nurturing multilingual and multidisciplinary scholars who possess a profound understanding of Islamic civilization and its universal principles. These scholars are expected to contribute meaningfully to advancing knowledge for the benefit of the Muslim ummah and humanity at large.²⁷

One of ISTAC's foundational objectives is to reframe modern knowledge within an Islamic worldview, offering a counterbalance to the dominance of secular Western perspectives. To achieve this, ISTAC established the Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Civilization in 1992, with al-Attas as its inaugural holder. This position was later held by Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr. Osman Bakar, a prominent Islamic philosopher renowned for his contributions to Islamic science and philosophy. These efforts underscore ISTAC's commitment to advancing scholarship that integrates Islamic values into contemporary academic discourse.²⁸

ISTAC's graduate programs reflect its interdisciplinary and

²⁷ Gary Dargan, "ISTAC: A Unique Islamic Research Center of Excellence," *Amust (Australasian Muslim Times)*, (March 2, 2020). <https://www.amust.com.au/2020/03/istac-a-unique-islamic-research-center-of-excellence/>.

International Education Media. 2024, "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)," *International Education Media*, v. 15, London: Ealing House, (2024). https://www.internationalschoolguide.com/malaysia/iium_istac.htm.

²⁸ Ibid.

international character. The institution offers master's and doctoral degrees in Islamic Thought, Islamic Civilization, and Islamic Science, rooted in an Islamic epistemological framework and centuries of scholarly tradition. The academic structure preserves the master-disciple approach, ensuring deep, personal engagement in knowledge transmission. From 1987 to 2015, its academic program emphasizes three core areas²⁹:

1. Islamic Thought: Encompassing theology, philosophy, and metaphysics.
2. Islamic Civilization: Covering culture, history, and the social sciences.
3. Islamic Science: Exploring its philosophy, methodology, and historical dimensions.

In 2015, ISTAC underwent significant restructuring. The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) established the Ibn Khaldun International Institute of Advanced Research (ISLAH) to continue ISTAC's mission of integrating Islamic perspectives into contemporary scholarship. Following its integration with IIUM, ISTAC expanded its niche areas to include:

1. Islamic Thought
2. Malay-Islamic Civilization
3. Comparative Religion and Intercultural Dialogue
4. Islam and Gender Equity
5. Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization
6. Peace and Security Studies
7. Reform (*Islah*) and Renewal (*Tajdid*) in Islamic History
8. Comparative Civilizational Studies
9. Islam and Futures Studies
10. Ottoman Civilization and the Modern World

These areas reflect ISTAC's commitment to addressing contemporary challenges through an Islamic scholarly framework. The institute also experienced substantial organizational changes in 2017 when it was renamed the Institute of Malay Civilization and Ottoman Studies,

²⁹ "Ibn Khaldun International Institute of Advanced Research," DBpedia, accessed May 29, 2024. https://dbpedia.org/page/Ibn_Khaldun_International_Institute_of_Advanced_Research.

located at the original ISTAC campus in Damansara. This change reflected its emphasis on regional and global historical legacies, particularly Malay and Ottoman civilizations. Later, the institution reverted to its foundational focus on Islamic Thought and Civilization in 2019 while maintaining its multidisciplinary approach. The institute also delves into art, literature, and gender equity within an Islamic framework, supported by an extensive collection of manuscripts and artifacts. Developing areas of interest, such as Ottoman civilization and Malay-Islamic history, offer new opportunities for research connecting Islamic scholarship with global and regional issues, including topics like peace and security, multiculturalism, and interfaith dialogue.³⁰

ISTAC has reinforced its standing as a globally recognized hub for Islamic research and scholarly exchange. In addition to collaborations with the University of Maryland and the *Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris*, ISTAC has engaged with institutions such as the International Institute for Muslim Unity (IIMU), Rabdan Academy in Abu Dhabi, and Universiti Malaya. These partnerships have enabled ISTAC to tackle complex societal issues, blending Islamic principles with contemporary frameworks to address global challenges.

Key initiatives include the *REBUILD Project* in collaboration with Universiti Malaya and the Department of Psychology, IIUM. Funded by the Commonwealth of Australia, this project focuses on preventing radicalization through family empowerment and resilience-building strategies. Another significant undertaking is the curriculum review of Islamic Civilization programs in Malaysian universities, incorporating the Madani Civilizational Approach to address modern educational needs.^{31,32}

³⁰ "International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization," *Wikipedia*, last modified May 30, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Institute_of_Islamic_Thought_and_Civilization.

³¹ *ISTAC Annual Report 2023*, Section on Research and Publications, pp. 51–53.

³² International Islamic University Malaysia. "Professor Datuk Dr. Abdelaziz Berghout, Professor Dato' Dr. Ahmad Murad Merican and Dr. Nurul Ain Norman's Project on Review of the Curriculum and Delivery of Islamic Civilisation Programmes in Universities and Institutions of Higher Education in Malaysia: Civilisational Madani Approach." Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://www.iium.edu>.

ISTAC's engagement with security studies is exemplified by its collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia, and IPSOM on the Malaysian Safety Perception Index, a critical resource for assessing national security concerns. Similarly, research projects on radicalization, terror financing, and cyberterrorism highlight ISTAC's proactive approach to countering violent extremism. Through these efforts, ISTAC not only contributes to policymaking but also develops practical tools for community engagement and public awareness.³³

On the cultural front, ISTAC has bolstered its focus on Malay civilization and Ottoman studies through lecture series, manuscript cataloging, art exhibitions. For instance, the *Malay Manuscripts Lecture Series*, convened by Dr. Wan Ali Wan Mamat and the *Tanah Air: Malay Maritime Civilization Project*, led by Prof. Dato' Dr. Ahmad Murad Merican, underscore ISTAC's dedication to preserving regional heritage while fostering scholarly dialogue. ISTAC have also initiated the ISTAC-World Professorial Lecture Series (IWPL) in January 2023 and the ISTAC-IIUM Distinguished Scholar Lecture Series (IDSL) from 2023, exemplifying ISTAC's dedication to fostering global academic collaboration and enriching scholarly discourse. Under Comparative Religion and Interfaith Dialogue, ISTAC's collaboration with Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) exemplifies its dedication to fostering intercultural harmony. On January 2, 2024, ISTAC hosted a memorial lecture honoring Daisaku Ikeda, highlighting his contributions to cross-cultural dialogue.³⁴ Additionally, the Science and Spirituality niche is exemplified by ISTAC's collaboration with Harvard Law School and the University of St. Andrews on the January 2024 conference *Islamic Theology: Uniting Diverse Voices*. Topics such as *Kalam*, *Tafsir*, and *Falsafah*

[my/directory/show/MUV4NGpEWmhVUGI2YIBoQ3lhd29mQT09](https://www.iium.edu.my/directory/show/MUV4NGpEWmhVUGI2YIBoQ3lhd29mQT09);
<https://www.iium.edu.my/directory/show/VkdsNkhZK1hSZWNDazBiRkJP0Jdz0>
 2.

³³ ISTAC Annual Report 2023, Section on Special Partnership Programs, pp. 68–70.

³⁴ Soka Gakkai Malaysia. "Daisaku Ikeda Memorial Lecture at ISTAC-IIUM, January 2024." Accessed December 29, 2024.
<https://www.sgm.org.my/events/daisaku-ikeda-memorial-lecture>.

were discussed, showcasing ISTAC's ability to integrate classical Islamic scholarship with modern challenges.³⁵

In sum, ISTAC's strategic collaborations and targeted programs underscore its adaptability and relevance in addressing both local and global challenges. By engaging with diverse academic fields and societal issues, ISTAC continues to position itself as a leader in Islamic scholarship and a vital contributor to global discourse and through its theses and research outputs, ISTAC continues to uphold its vision of integrating Islamic values with contemporary academic and societal demands, ensuring its relevance as a leading center of Islamic scholarship in the modern world.

Discussion and Findings

Thematic Trends of ISTAC Catalog Theses

The ISTAC catalog of theses is a testament to the institute's academic prowess and scholarly output. This comprehensive compilation is divided into two parts, covering various research topics and disciplines within Islamic studies. The first part provides essential details such as the year of publication, call number, authorship, level of study, supervisor information, thesis title, and abstract. While adherence to ISTAC's transliteration rules is generally maintained, some variations may occur due to individual author styles. Including abstracts enhances accessibility and understanding of each thesis's scope and objectives. The second part of the collection organizes the theses according to ISTAC's current niche areas.

The data in Table 1.0 reflects ISTAC's initial academic priorities between the years 1993 to 2002 and highlights its focus on areas central to its mission of integrating Islamic scholarship with modern intellectual challenges. It provides an organized breakdown of the distribution of theses across ISTAC's core niche areas.

³⁵ Islamic Theology: Uniting Diverse Voices." *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Accessed December 29, 2024. <https://itc.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>.

Table 1.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 1993 – 2002

Niche Area	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	1 M: 1 P: -	-	2 M: 2 P: -	2 M: 2 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	7 M: 4 P: 3	7 M: 5 P: 2	7 M: 4 P: 3	3 M: 3 P: -	6 M: 3 P: 3	36 M: 24 P: 12	57.14 %
Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: 1 P: -	-	2 M: 2 P: -	3.17 %
Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	-	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: 1 P: -	2 M: 2 P: -	3 M: 3 P: -	6 M: 6 P: -	2 M: 2 P: -	-	2 M: 2 P: -	18 M: 18 P: -	28.57 %
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	1 M: 1 P: -	-	-	1 M: - P: 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 M: 1 P: 1	3.17 %
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 M: 1 P: 1	2 M: 1 P: 1	3.17 %
Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 M: 1 P: 1	-	1 M: - P: 1	3 M: 1 P: 2	4.76 %
Total											63 M: 47 P: 16	

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

The most prominent niche area during this period was “Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development,” with 36 theses (24 MA and 12 PhD), constituting 57.14% of the total. The second most popular area was “Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic civilization,” with 18 theses (all MA) making up 28.57%. Other niche areas included “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” (3.17%), “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” (3.17%), “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” (3.17%), and “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” (4.76%)

Civilizational Perspective” (4.76%). In total, 63 theses were produced, with a majority being MA theses.

Table 2.0 depicts the thematic trends in theses produced by ISTAC graduates from 2003 to 2012, marking a period of expansion and diversification in the institute’s academic output. By analyzing thesis titles, abstracts, and administrative records, the data highlights the shift in focus and the growing engagement with interdisciplinary research.

Table 2.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 2003 – 2012

Niche Area	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	8 M: 6 P: 2	2 M: 1 P: 1	5 M: - P: 5	6 M: 2 P: 4	8 M: 3 P: 5	4 M: 2 P: 2	7 M: 4 P: 3	6 M: 3 P: 3	5 M: 3 P: 2	7 M: 3 P: 4	58 M: 26 P: 31	53.21 %
Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World	-	2 M: 2 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	2 M: - P: 2	3 M: 1 P: 2	2 M: 2 P: -	2 M: 1 P: 1	-	2 M: 1 P: 1	2 M: 2 P: -	16 M: 9 P: 7	14.67 %
Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	2 M: 2 P: -	-	2 M: - P: 2	1 M: - P: 1	-	3 M: 2 P: 1	-	4 M: 2 P: 2	3 M: 3 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	16 M: 9 P: 7	14.67 %
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	-	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: - P: 1	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	2 M: 1 P: 1	-	1 M: 1 P: -	2 M: 1 P: 1	8 M: 4 P: 4	7.33 %
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: - P: 1	3 M: 1 P: 2	2.75 %
Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective	-	-	1 M: 1 P: -	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: - P: 1	1 M: 1 P: -	-	1 M: 1 P: -	-	3 M: 1 P: 2	8 M: 4 P: 4	7.33 %
Total											109 M: 53 P: 55	

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

“Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” continued to be the dominant area with 58 theses (26 MA and 31 PhD), representing 53.21% of the total. There was an increased focus on “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” and “Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization,” each contributing 14.67% with 16 theses each (split between MA and PhD). “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” had eight theses (7.33%), while “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” and “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” had fewer contributions, each accounting for 2.75% and 7.33%, respectively. Overall, 109 theses were completed in this decade, with a nearly even split between MA (53) and PhD (55) theses.

Table 3.0 provides a detailed breakdown of these trends between 2013 and 2022, reflecting the institute’s efforts to align its academic contributions with contemporary global and regional challenges while staying true to its foundational mission.

Table 3.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 2013 – 2022

Niche Area	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	M: 2 P: 1	M: 4 P: 3	M: 6 P: 4	-	-	M: - P: 1	M: - P: 1	M: - P: 2	-	M: 3 P: 1	M: 15 P: 13	32.55 %
Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World	M: 5 P: -	M: 5 P: 3	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 1 P: -	M: 1 P: 2	M: 1 P: 2	-	M: 5 P: -	M: 3 P: 1	M: 22 P: 8	34.88 %
Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	M: 2 P: -	M: 3 P: 2	M: 1 P: 1	M: - P: 1	-	-	M: - P: 1	-	-	-	M: 6 P: 5	12.79 %

CHARTING ACADEMIC EVOLUTION:
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Niche Area	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Frequency	Percentage
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	-	M: 2 P: -	M: 1 P: 1	-	-	M: - P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	M: - P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	-	7 M: 2 P: 5	8.13%
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	-	M: 2 P: -	M: 1 P: -	-	-	M: - P: 1	M: 1 P: -	-	M: 1 P: -	-	6 M: 5 P: 1	6.97 %
Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective	M: 1 P: -		M: - P: 1	-	-	M: - P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	-	-	-	4 M: 1 P: 3	4.65 %
Total											86 M: 51 P: 35	

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

During this period, “Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” remained significant but with a slightly reduced share, comprising 28 theses (15 MA and 13 PhD), making up 32.55% of the total. “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” saw a notable increase, contributing the largest share at 34.88% with 30 theses (22 MA and 8 PhD). “Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization” produced 11 theses (12.79%), and “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” had seven theses (8.13%).

Contributions in “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” and “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” remained modest at 6.97% and 4.65%, respectively. A total of 86 theses were completed during this decade, with a majority being MA theses (51).

Over the past decade, the research focus at ISTAC has evolved significantly. The thematic trends strongly emphasize “Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World”, constituting 34.88% of the theses, reflecting a growing interest in this area. “Islamic

Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” follow closely at 32.55%, highlighting the integration of Islamic principles with contemporary issues. Emerging research interests include increased attention to “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies,” which have grown to 6.97%, reflecting a heightened focus on gender dynamics and family structures.

Additionally, the impact of external socio-political factors is evident in the increased focus on “Peace and Security Studies” and the rise in “Islam, Family and Gender Studies,” indicating a response to contemporary global and societal challenges. Future research directions are recommended to deepen the exploration of these themes, address contemporary issues such as climate change and technological advancements, and encourage cross-disciplinary studies to provide comprehensive insights into Islamic civilization’s role in the modern world.

Table 4.0 offers a comprehensive breakdown of these trends, illustrating ISTAC’s commitment to addressing contemporary challenges while maintaining its intellectual and philosophical foundations between 2023 and 2024.

Table 4.0: Theses Thematic Trends Produced by Graduated ISTAC Students 2023 – 2024

Niche Area	2023	2024	Frequency	Percentage
Islamic Thought, Civilization and Sustainable Development	M: 3 P: 1	M: 2 P: 2	10	25.00%
Malay-Islamic Civilization and The Modern World	M: 4 P: 2	M: 3 P: 3	15	37.50%
Epistemology, Spirituality and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization	M: 2 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	6	15.00%
Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies	M: 1 P: 1	M: 0 P: 1	4	10.00%
Islam, Family, and Gender Studies	M: 0 P: 1	M: 1 P: 1	3	7.50%
Peace and Security Studies from A Civilizational Perspective	M: 1 P: 2	M: 2 P: 3	9	22.50%

Explanation: M: MA Thesis, P: PhD Thesis

“Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World” emerged as the most significant focus area, contributing 15 theses (7 MA and 8 PhD), representing 37.5% of the total. This underscores ISTAC’s sustained emphasis on exploring the nexus between Malay heritage and contemporary global issues.

“Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” maintained a strong presence with ten theses (5 MA and 5 PhD), accounting for 25% of the total. “Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective” demonstrated growing scholarly interest,

with nine theses (3 MA and 6 PhD) representing 22.5%, reflecting ISTAC's alignment with global concerns over conflict resolution and civilizational harmony. "Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization" contributed six theses (3 MA and 3 PhD), reflecting 15% of the total. At the same time, "Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies and Islam," "Family, and Gender Studies" remained niche areas, contributing 4 (10%) and three theses (7.5%), respectively.

In total, 40 theses were produced during this period, with a balance between MA (15) and PhD (25) theses. The distribution demonstrates ISTAC's adaptability to emerging intellectual demands while maintaining its foundational strengths in Islamic thought and civilization. This trend highlights ISTAC's commitment to bridging traditional Islamic scholarship with pressing contemporary issues, ensuring its continued relevance and influence in global academic discourse.

Professional Contextualization of ISTAC's Six Niche Areas and Specializations: An Evaluation of 374 Master's and PhD Dissertations

Evaluating 374 master's and doctoral theses offers a comprehensive perspective on ISTAC's academic priorities and intellectual trajectory. The dominant focus areas—"Peace and Security Studies" (23%) and "Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World" (22.7%)—demonstrate the institution's commitment to addressing contemporary issues within the Islamic world, with particular attention to Southeast Asia. These areas reflect regional and civilizational challenges, underscoring ISTAC's role in contributing to scholarly discourse on governance, security, and preserving Islamic heritage in a rapidly changing modern context.

"Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development" (21.1%) also feature prominently, signifying ISTAC's emphasis on harmonizing Islamic values with the exigencies of modernity and sustainability. Conversely, "Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization" (16%) and "Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies" (13.9%) have received comparatively less focus, though they remain central to ISTAC's academic mission. "Islam, Family, and Gender Studies" (3%),

however, reflects a significant gap, suggesting potential for growth in this critical area. With the global rise in gender discourse, ISTAC has an opportunity to lead discussions on the intersection of Islamic principles with contemporary family and gender issues, thus addressing an emerging global priority.

Between 2000 and 2024, ISTAC's research output reveals a clear trend of institutional growth and academic expansion. A nearly tenfold increase in theses during this period underscores ISTAC's maturity and alignment with global shifts in Islamic studies and civilizational scholarship. Doctoral research accounts for 54.8% of the total theses, highlighting ISTAC's emphasis on producing advanced scholarly contributions. This preference for doctoral studies reflects ISTAC's success in fostering rigorous research, driving innovation in Islamic thought, and generating substantial insights into civilizational studies.

While this focus on doctoral research establishes ISTAC as a hub for advanced scholarship, the lower proportion of master's level theses (45.2%) suggests an area for development. To address this imbalance, ISTAC could invest in interdisciplinary, research-oriented master's programs that serve as a pipeline for doctoral studies. Expanding these programs would also cater to students seeking specialized knowledge without committing to a doctoral track, broadening ISTAC's appeal and academic influence.

Evolution of Academic Focus

The evolution of academic focus at ISTAC from 1993 to 2024 demonstrates significant trends and shifts across its six niche research areas. With the addition of data for the years 2023–2024, ISTAC's thematic priorities reveal increasing diversification and responsiveness to global and regional challenges. The analysis of the academic trends is as follows:

1) Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development

This area consistently remains a cornerstone of ISTAC's research output. Spanning decades, it reflects ISTAC's commitment to exploring the intersection of traditional Islamic

principles with contemporary societal needs. However, its proportional contribution shows slight variability, indicating that while it remains essential, other areas are gaining prominence in ISTAC's scholarly discourse.

2) Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World

This niche has seen a marked increase in recent years, culminating in its highest representation in 2023–2024, accounting for 37.5% of theses. The focus on Malay-Islamic Heritage aligns with ISTAC's mission to address the region's specific intellectual and cultural contexts, as well as its integration into modern global narratives.

3) Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective

This area has experienced a gradual rise, particularly during the latest period, reflecting global concerns around security and civilizational harmony. The increased focus may be attributed to ISTAC's collaborations with international bodies addressing counter-extremism and peacebuilding.

4) Islam, Family, and Gender Studies

While traditionally underrepresented, this field is witnessing slow but steady growth. The rise reflects an increasing awareness of the significance of family and gender issues within the Islamic framework, particularly in the context of global discourse on inclusivity and equality.

5) Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization

This area has maintained a consistent presence, reflecting ISTAC's philosophical underpinnings and its founder's intellectual vision. However, it remains less dominant than other niches, suggesting potential for further exploration, particularly in integrating spirituality with modern intellectual challenges.

6) Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies

This area continues to contribute steadily but modestly. Its growth signals a recognition of the importance of interfaith dialogue and comparative studies in fostering mutual understanding in increasingly pluralistic societies.

These findings underscore ISTAC's evolving priorities, reflecting its ability to adapt to contemporary intellectual challenges while maintaining its foundational focus on Islamic thought and civilization. The steady increase in research output, particularly at the doctoral level, highlights ISTAC's role as a leader in advanced Islamic scholarship. This progression reinforces ISTAC's relevance within the global academic landscape and points to opportunities for further strengthening its interdisciplinary and inclusive approach to Islamic studies.

The observed trends in Islamic scholarship, particularly the move from classical studies of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*'aqīdah*) to interdisciplinary approaches integrating modern sciences and humanities, reflect a dynamic response to societal changes. The emergence of fields like Islamic finance, bioethics, and environmental sustainability signals a paradigm shift. This evolution aligns with the growing need for Islamic frameworks to address global challenges in ethically sound and contextually relevant ways.³⁶

One significant factor influencing this shift is globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of societies. The proliferation of Western academic paradigms in previously insular Muslim-majority societies necessitated a counter-response, driving scholars to frame Islamic epistemologies that are both rooted in tradition and applicable to contemporary realities. For instance, the focus on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a guiding principle showcases a shift from rigid jurisprudential applications to holistic frameworks addressing societal well-being.

³⁶ See: John L. Esposito and Tariq Ramadan. *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Tariq Ramadan*. Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Video interview, March 12, 2003. Accessed May 29, 2024.

Additionally, advancements in technology and digital communication have democratized access to knowledge, allowing scholars to engage with diverse intellectual traditions. This has encouraged the synthesis of ideas, as evidenced by the incorporation of systems thinking and sustainability science into Islamic scholarship. The increasing emphasis on these fields suggests a deliberate move toward relevance in a rapidly changing world. Understanding these trends is crucial for guiding future research and ensuring that Islamic scholarship continues to serve both local and global needs.

Analysis of Post-2020 Thematic Trends

This section explores recent academic directions based on hypothetical data, offering insights into the distribution of thesis topics at ISTAC from 2020 to 2024. The hypothetical data provides insights into the distribution of thesis topics at ISTAC from 2020 to 2024. Here's an analysis based on each thematic area:

- 1) **Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development:**³⁷ This area showed strong engagement in 2020 and 2022 but gradually declined in 2023 and 2024. This trend may indicate a shift from traditional civilizational studies to more contemporary concerns.
- 2) **Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World:** This theme exhibits a steady increase, particularly from 2021 to 2024, suggesting a growing focus on integrating Malay-Islamic heritage with modern societal issues. This rise reflects an interest in understanding Malay identity within the broader scope of globalization and modernity.

³⁷ Sustainable development, while integral to Islamic thought and civilization, was not explicitly a cornerstone of ISTAC's early academic output. Its prominence grew in the early 2000s as global attention on sustainability increased, aligning with ISTAC's interdisciplinary goals. The term became more prevalent in research outputs post-2000, particularly as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and environmental crises highlighted the need for sustainability-focused studies within Islamic frameworks.

- 3) **Epistemology, Spirituality, and Intellectuality in Islamic Civilization:** Research in this area remains stable, showing slight fluctuations. The consistent interest may highlight an ongoing focus on spiritual and intellectual aspects within Islamic scholarship, aligning with ISTAC's philosophical underpinnings.
- 4) **Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies:** This theme shows a gradual increase, particularly in 2023 and 2024, likely driven by the need for dialogue between Islamic and other civilizations amidst contemporary global tensions.
- 5) **Islam, Family, and Gender Studies:** Although traditionally underrepresented, this theme has seen consistent growth each year. The rising interest indicates an awareness of the importance of family and gender issues within Islamic studies, aligning with global discussions on gender equality and family structures.
- 6) **Peace and Security Studies from a Civilizational Perspective:** This theme peaked in 2021 but saw a slight decline in subsequent years, suggesting fluctuating attention. Interest in this area may correlate with specific global events impacting peace and security.

The post-2020 trends at ISTAC reveal a dynamic academic landscape increasingly responsive to contemporary global challenges. While traditional areas such as "Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development" remain foundational, a marked shift toward themes like "Malay-Islamic Civilization and the Modern World" and "Islam, Family, and Gender Studies" reflects a growing alignment with societal transformations and issues of identity, heritage, and inclusivity. The steady rise in "Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies" and "Peace and Security Studies" highlights ISTAC's commitment to fostering inter-civilizational dialogue and addressing the complexities of peace in an interconnected world.

The evolution of these theses trends over time also mirrors broader shifts in academic priorities. Early research outputs may have

focused heavily on traditional disciplines, however, as societal needs have grown more complex, the scope of research has expanded to include interdisciplinary and applied fields. This transition indicates a maturation of Islamic scholarship, as it adapts to remain relevant and impactful in contemporary contexts.

Furthermore, these classifications trends serve as a reflection of the institution's identity and strategic goals. By integrating multiple fields with Islamic thought and civilization, the institution positions itself as a custodian of cultural and intellectual heritage, ensuring that traditional knowledge systems are preserved and reinterpreted for modern audiences. The trends thus act as a barometer of academic evolution, signaling the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation within the scholarly community.³⁸

Granular Analysis of NVivo Coding Results

While NVivo was used to organize and analyze themes, providing a more granular analysis of the coding results would offer readers deeper insight into how specific themes emerged and evolved. NVivo allowed researchers to identify recurring keywords, phrases, and thematic clusters, which were then grouped into ISTAC's six core research areas. This process facilitated the discovery of newer trends and shifts in research focus, particularly in recent years.

For example, themes related to "Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development" showed strong connectivity with sub-themes such as sustainability and climate change, indicating a growing emphasis on modern challenges. Meanwhile, categories like "Islam, Family, and Gender Studies" revealed keywords associated with gender roles, family dynamics, and social justice, reflecting recent global concerns about equality and inclusivity.

To illustrate these insights, the following chart shows the frequency of key themes identified through NVivo across the core areas from 2020 to 2024.

³⁸ See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Harvard University Press, 1968), 50–56., which emphasizes the integration of classical Islamic traditions into modern scientific discourse.

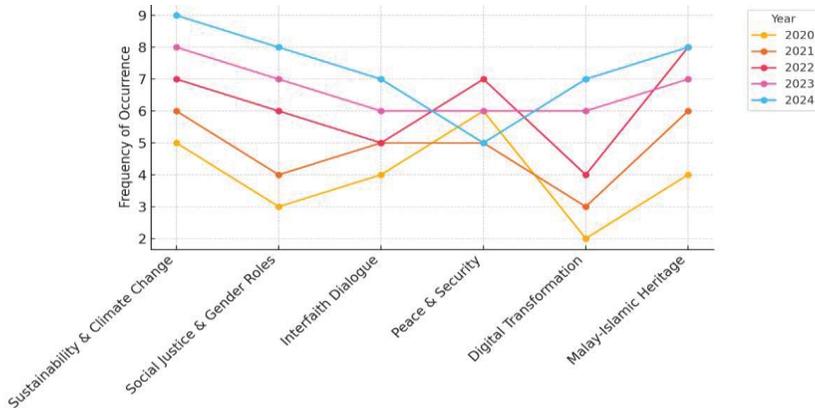


Figure 1: Emerging Themes Identified Between 2020 – 2024

The chart shows key themes that emerged across ISTAC’s theses in recent years, illustrating a progressive increase in themes related to Sustainability and Climate Change and Social Justice & Gender Roles. These trends suggest an increased scholarly interest in addressing environmental and social issues within the Islamic framework. Additionally:

- 1) **Malay-Islamic Heritage** has maintained high relevance, particularly in 2022 and 2024, reflecting a strong cultural emphasis in ISTAC’s research.
- 2) **Digital Transformation and Interfaith Dialogue** have grown steadily, indicating an engagement with technology’s role in Islamic studies and fostering intercultural understanding.
- 3) **Peace and Security** fluctuated, potentially linked to specific global events that impact the focus on security studies.

This detailed analysis, supported by NVivo, demonstrates the evolving thematic focus within ISTAC’s academic community, aligning its research priorities with contemporary societal concerns.

Furthermore, it is crucial to contextualize the reasons behind the thematic shifts observed during 2003–2012 and 2013–2022. The 2003–2012 period marked a significant expansion in ISTAC’s

academic focus, driven by heightened regional collaborations and an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary research. This phase saw the integration of Malay-Islamic civilization with contemporary issues, reflecting Malaysia's socio-political dynamics and ISTAC's strategic efforts to address local and global challenges.

In contrast, the 2013–2022 period was characterized by a rise in global scholarly engagement, particularly in sustainability and peace studies. This shift was fueled by growing global concerns over environmental crises and security issues, emphasizing ISTAC's adaptability and responsiveness to evolving intellectual and societal priorities. These thematic shifts underline ISTAC's alignment with broader academic trends and its commitment to remaining at the forefront of Islamic scholarship.

Recommendations for Future Study and Specializations

To ensure ISTAC remains at the forefront of Islamic scholarship, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance its academic offerings, global appeal, and research impact.

1) Enhancing Academic Pathways and Program

Introducing integrated Master's and PhD pathways at ISTAC could streamline students' academic transitions, fostering continuity and enhancing enrolment at the Master's level. This initiative would create a cohesive academic journey and attract a diverse global student body. ISTAC should also consider marketing its master's programs internationally, targeting students seeking advanced specialization in Islamic studies. Such efforts would enhance ISTAC's global presence and attract a diverse student body, reinforcing its role as a hub for international academic collaboration.

To broaden its reach, ISTAC could develop shorter, coursework-oriented master's programs tailored for professionals and academics from other disciplines. These programs would make ISTAC's offerings more accessible to a broader audience and encourage interdisciplinary engagement, thus strengthening its position as a leading institution for specialized Islamic studies.

2) Balancing and Expanding Specializations

While “Peace and Security Studies” remain a dominant focus, it is critical to ensure balanced growth across other areas, such as “Spirituality, Family, and Gender Studies”. Equal emphasis on these fields will ensure ISTAC’s curriculum remains aligned with contemporary global contexts and offers a comprehensive perspective on Islamic thought and civilization.

Promoting interdisciplinary studies, such as integrating Peace Studies with Islamic Spirituality or Epistemology, could provide students with a more holistic educational experience and encourage innovative research approaches. Integrating interdisciplinary modules and fostering cross-departmental collaboration would encourage innovative research, bridging multiple areas of inquiry and enhancing ISTAC’s academic output.

Given the increasing global discourse on gender issues, expanding “Islam, Family, and Gender Studies” should be a priority. Developing frameworks sensitive to contemporary gender debates within an Islamic context will position ISTAC as a thought leader in addressing these critical and evolving issues. Similarly, enhancing “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” would enable ISTAC to contribute to and learn from global civilizational dialogues, solidifying its relevance in international academic circles.

3) Strategic Research Directions

Future research efforts should integrate Islamic principles with contemporary global challenges, particularly in gender studies and interdisciplinary approaches. Developing programs that address emerging global trends through Islamic values will provide valuable insights and attract scholars seeking innovative contributions to pressing societal issues.

Expanding research into areas like Digital Transformation and Islamic Ethics would position ISTAC as a leader in addressing technological challenges through an Islamic lens, fostering relevance in global academic discourse. Exploring topics like artificial intelligence, bioethics, and sustainability through Islamic scholarship would enhance ISTAC’s appeal to a broader academic audience and increase its impact.

4) Administrative and Strategic Vision

ISTAC must prioritize quality over quantity in its research output to strengthen its global reputation. Encouraging publications in high-impact journals, fostering collaborations with leading universities, and attracting international scholars would significantly enhance ISTAC's global reputation and academic influence.

Preserving and promoting ISTAC's foundational works (1993–1999) is also vital. Developing a digital archive of past theses and research would institutionalize ISTAC's legacy, making its intellectual heritage accessible to future students and scholars worldwide.

Looking ahead, ISTAC should adopt a forward-thinking strategic vision that addresses pressing global challenges through its specialized research areas. This approach will allow ISTAC to contribute meaningfully to societal discourse while solidifying its position as a global thought leader in Islamic studies.

Conclusion

ISTAC has firmly positioned itself as a leading institution for Islamic thought and civilization, with its thesis catalog from 1993 to 2024 reflecting a dynamic and evolving academic focus. Key areas such as “Islamic Thought, Civilization, and Sustainable Development” have consistently dominated ISTAC's research output. At the same time, “Malay-Islamic Civilization” and “Peace and Security Studies” have grown significantly in recent years, underscoring ISTAC's adaptability to contemporary global and regional challenges. However, thematic areas such as “Islamic Family and Gender Studies” and “Religious and Comparative Civilizational Studies” remain underrepresented, presenting opportunities for future expansion.

To ensure continued excellence, ISTAC must adopt a forward-looking strategy focused on several critical areas. First, expanding its program offerings at the Master's degree and PhD levels will address the needs of a diverse global academic community while opening avenues for interdisciplinary and innovative research. Developing

areas like “Islamic Family and Gender Studies” can help ISTAC contribute to global conversations on inclusivity, family structures, and gender dynamics within the Islamic framework. Second, strengthening ISTAC’s global outreach is imperative. By enhancing international recruitment and forming partnerships with leading Islamic universities, ISTAC can broaden its influence and attract a more diverse student body. Offering programs in English or other widely spoken languages will further position ISTAC as a global hub for Islamic scholarship. Third, fostering interdisciplinary research will distinguish ISTAC in the academic world. For instance, integrating artificial intelligence with Islamic ethics or addressing climate change through Islamic sustainable development can place ISTAC at the cutting edge of academic inquiry. These innovative areas will attract researchers seeking to explore emerging fields within an Islamic framework. Lastly, ISTAC should leverage its alumni network to enhance its visibility and influence. By celebrating the accomplishments of alumni in academic and policy-making roles, ISTAC can foster a strong sense of pride and community among its stakeholders, reinforcing its global reputation.

ISTAC’s Commitment to Innovation and Impactful Research

To remain impactful and relevant, ISTAC must emphasize innovations and impactful research that enhance its professional and academic standing. Such efforts will directly feed the objectives of the university, which is currently moving toward a Tawhidic and Ummatic framework. By linking groundbreaking research with practical applications, ISTAC can advance a transformative agenda that aligns with the broader mission of fostering integrated and holistic knowledge for the betterment of humanity.

In conclusion, ISTAC’s commitment to linking classical Islamic scholarship with modern societal issues remains evident in its evolving research themes. By prioritizing the expansion of underrepresented fields, encouraging innovative and interdisciplinary research, and enhancing its global collaborations, ISTAC can solidify its position as a world-class institution for Islamic thought and

civilization. This balance of tradition and innovation will ensure ISTAC's contributions remain impactful and relevant in addressing the multifaceted challenges of the modern world, while furthering the university's mission to embody the Tawhidic vision and foster an Ummatic perspective.

Review Essay

ANWAR IBRAHIM'S *THE ASIAN RENAISSANCE* REVISITED

*Osman Bakar*¹ and *Ayana Jihye Moon*²

Nearly three decades ago (1996), the first edition of this book was published by Times Books International. Its author, Anwar Ibrahim, was then one of the most powerful men in Asia. He was the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia (1993-1998) and its Minister of Finance (1991-1998), a post which he currently holds for the second time (since 3 December 2022). He is Malaysia's tenth and present Prime Minister (since 24 November 2022). The book received critical acclaim. It was reprinted in 1997. A new edition was published in 2008 by Marshall Cavendish.

Although almost three decades have passed since the publication of the first edition, most of the ideas contained in the book are even older. This is because the ideas are “the product of personal reflection on events, writings and encounters with personalities” (p. 15) that dated back to earlier times well before he climbed the political ladder to the corridors of power in Malaysia. However, the ideas in question remain to be still as fresh as when they were first presented in the book. The freshness of these ideas may be explained by the fact that they are big ideas, epistemologically speaking, dealing with issues of a “civilizational nature” confronting human societies and the global human order. By civilizational nature, we mean issues that are inclusive of every societal dimension and that are interconnected across cultures and

¹ Rector, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Holder, Al-Ghazali Chair of Epistemology and Civilizational Studies and Renewal, ISTAC-IIUM. Email: osmanbakar@iium.edu.my.

² Graduate, Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: ayanamoon.work@gmail.com

civilizations. The freshness of the book's content also has to do with the fact that many of the issues discussed demonstrate continuity with the contemporary global political condition. That this book deals precisely with such kinds of big ideas is made clear by the titles of the book's nine chapters.

The title is *The Asian Renaissance*, and the chapters are as follows: 'Symbiosis Between East and West'; 'Democracy and Civil Society'; 'Justice and the Law'; 'Ethics and Economics'; 'The Humane Economy'; 'The Primacy of Culture'; 'Islam in Southeast Asia'; and 'The Asia of the Future'. Quite clearly, the ideas embodied in the chapters, when viewed together, constitute the best collection of major civilizational themes that any author has ever assembled and discussed in a single volume. The main concern of the book is with the contentious issue of the "Asian Renaissance" and the "Asia of the Future", hence the author's choice of the book's title. But he has treated this issue – indeed all issues in the rest of the chapters – in the context of a global discourse without detaching himself from the Islamic intellectual and philosophical tradition from which he hailed. His familiarity with the modern and contemporary world literature on the major civilizational issues he treated is admirable! This is the great merit of the book and its author.

I am glad to note here that I was among the earliest respondents to the book. In 1997, a year after its publication, the University of Malaya Press published my book titled *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization*. Two chapters of the book make many references to Anwar's thoughts and his idea of *The Asian Renaissance*. One chapter (chapter 5) is titled "Asian Values, Or Universal Values Championed by Asia? Implications for East-West Understanding." The other chapter (chapter 6) is titled "The Relevance of Muhammad Iqbal's Idea of Islamic Renaissance to Contemporary Debate on the Asian Renaissance". My response to Anwar's book was not in the ordinary format of a full book review. Rather, the two chapters were meant to show my appreciation of the book as a literary work of rare quality in contemporary thought in terms of the depth of political wisdom it succeeds in displaying and to impress upon readers that Anwar Ibrahim, who is also a close friend of mine, is perhaps Asia's

best living political leader to have articulated a cogent philosophy on Asian Renaissance and the future of Asia.

As Anwar himself made clear in his book, his thoughts on the Asian Renaissance were inspired by many leading Asian and European thinkers whose views he approvingly quoted. But he is a thinker in his own right. He has the admirable ability to synthesize big ideas from diverse sources to help him come up with his own philosophical position. Anwar impressed me as an intellectual and political leader who commands a distinctive position in the Asian Renaissance. In my essay on Iqbal and the Asian Renaissance, I wanted to show that he was one of the major Asian thinkers who had a great influence on Anwar's vision of twenty-first-century Asia. But he goes beyond Iqbal. Iqbal is not known to have made any explicit reference to an Asian Renaissance, whether as a contemporary fact or as a future possibility.³ His primary preoccupation was with the renaissance of Islam and not the Asian Renaissance. Thus, Iqbal spoke of "Muslim Asia", "the younger generation of Islam in Asia", and "the reawakening of Islam". The closest he got to the idea of Asian Renaissance was when he used the term "new spirit in Asia". Anwar embraced, in principle, Iqbal's idea of a renaissance in Muslim Asia but extended it to the whole Asian continent. Anwar knows too well that Asia is a heterogeneous continent that is deeply divided along religious and cultural lines and thus, as well, the problematic nature of the intellectual task to articulate a rational discourse on renaissance for the whole continent. And yet he attempted to undertake the task. To a certain extent, Anwar succeeded in taking the discourse on Asia's future during the last decade of the twentieth century to a new level of clarity and sophistication.

No one before Anwar attempted to define the Asian Renaissance. He did. He defines it as "the revival of the arts and sciences under the influence of classical models based on strong moral and religious foundations; a cultural resurgence dominated by a reflowering of art and literature, architecture and music and advancements in science and technology" (p. 17-18). He tried to

³ Osman Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya Press, 1997), 60.

clarify on the definition by emphasizing that, notwithstanding their many similarities, the Asian Renaissance differs from the European “in that it has its foundations in religion and traditions” (p. 18). He further explains that the renaissance of Asia “entails the growth, developing and flowering of Asian societies...imbued with truth and the love of learning, justice and compassion, mutual respect and forbearance, and freedom with responsibility” (p. 19). When Anwar wrote these words in the 1990s explaining his vision of Asian Renaissance, he did not mean that this was a still far off possibility. He maintained instead that “the fresh blossoms of the Asian Renaissance” have begun to appear. Rather significantly, he was referring to the economic rise of Asia as a dimension of the Asian Renaissance, meaning that its fresh blossoms first appeared in the economic domain. He says, “Nothing is more visible in the rise of Asia than the economic aspect”. Anwar was thus arguing how central the role of economic power was to the materialization of the Asian Renaissance.

Anwar’s *The Asian Renaissance* raises questions about the necessary conditions for civilizational rebirth or renaissance. While acknowledging the importance of the economic dimension and transformation as a condition for a renaissance, as when he was alluding in the book to the rise of Asia three decades ago, Anwar views intellectual progress as a more fundamental determining factor that would result in a more inclusive and comprehensive, and thus a more progressive worldview. His views have not changed since then till now. Implied in the fundamental change in worldview is a major change in the way of thinking. As an example, the European Renaissance emerged following the collapse of the medieval Christian worldview when there was an unprecedented search in the West for new values to replace it. In this context, it is interesting to know which new worldview Anwar has in mind as the preferred one to be embraced by Asia if its Renaissance were to be realized in our times. It seems to us that in the book, Anwar sees in Islam and Confucianism a sharing of common philosophical ideas and intellectual perspectives on humanism, enlightenment, and social cohesion that would be instrumental to the materialization of the Asian Renaissance. Anwar argues for an Asian Renaissance that is

founded on religion and morality. As such, he is sympathetic to Confucian thought that places a strong emphasis on hierarchy, order, and the values of the state and family, even if its pursuit is viewed in the West as being at the expense of personal freedom. Moreover, in these civilizational features he sees similarities to the spirit of Islam and its ummatic characteristics.

When the Enlightenment prevailed in the West, Islam and Confucianism dominated Eastern thought, though they had something in common with ideas that were created and developed in other regions of the Orient. Many Eastern societies could not avoid the global impact of the Western Enlightenment Movement mainly through European colonization. Western Enlightenment principles such as democracy and individual rights were frequently imposed on nations that were under colonial rule in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. However, during and after the Enlightenment, Confucianism continued to exercise a powerful intellectual influence in East Asia, particularly China. Enlightenment concepts were frequently combined with regional customs, resulting in hybrid intellectual movements. Anwar bemoans the decline of Eastern community values in the face of the increasingly wealthy and powerful Western culture and influence. In the process of expressing that regret, he forcefully argues that Asia needs to break away from the Western-centered worldview. In contrast to the West, which had experienced a single, coherent Enlightenment movement, the East had seen fragmentations, with intellectual advancements taking place in different forms and at varying rates.

After World War II in 1945 and the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, most colonized countries ostensibly achieved independence. However, the global security landscape centered on the United States and Europe, and the subsequent polarization of global security with the introduction of the US-China bipolar system made more Asian countries militarily and ideologically subordinate to the great powers in line with their national interests. Anwar seeks to challenge the notion that the West is the epitome of human progress in all spheres, including politics, economics, and culture. In this sense, the Asian Renaissance offers a glimpse of this perspective. Even when he was appointed Prime Minister of Malaysia, his global perspective

remained unchanged. He argues that Asia, with its many cultures and lengthy history, is more than capable of standing on its own two feet in the modern world and criticizes the Western-centric mindset that frequently rules international discourse. However, this critique does not imply that Anwar is a leader who rashly opposes Western ideologies.

Anwar is a great believer in inclusive and responsive leadership that can interact with the public and permit real participation of the citizens, and he supports strong leadership. He frequently criticizes authoritarian governments wherever these may be and highlights the value of accountability, civil society, and pluralism. In criticizing authoritarian post-colonial non-Western governments in his chapter “Justice and the Law,” Anwar quoted George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*: “It would be a tragedy indeed if this hard-earned freedom were to result merely in the substitution of a foreign oppressor with a domestic one” (p. 62). In contrast to both Western liberal democracy and dictatorial models, his conception of democracy in Asia combines political openness with economic progress. Furthermore, Anwar’s worldview includes the notion of solidarity and regional cooperation. In his capacity as Malaysia’s political leader, he advocates for increased cooperation among Asian countries, especially within ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), in furtherance of regional economic integration, peace, and security. With the view of increasing Malaysia’s global influence and creating its new security belt against Western dominance, Anwar’s MADANI government brings Malaysia into the fold of BRICS.

Anwar Ibrahim is a devoted Muslim leader who reminds us of fading Islamic values through *The Asian Renaissance*. He emphasized the solidarity of the Muslim ummah by speaking out without hesitation on behalf of the Muslims and the ummah of Palestine who face unfair treatment and genocide in the lopsided international political landscape. As he wrote in the book, he personally demonstrates his political solidarity with Palestine by fostering unity and exchanges with Asian nations like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and the Gulf states. Anwar’s emphasis on unity stems from his conviction that, rather than being divided by historical

divides and differences, Asia's strength resides in its capacity to cooperate and put up a united front in international affairs.

The big difference between Anwar Ibrahim and other Malaysian leaders is that he is an intellectual, a philosopher, and an activist who loves learning. Anwar presents an Asian renaissance discourse that posits its realization through an emphasis on knowledge and learning and proposes. He believes that it would be possible for Islam to play a central role in shaping the future course of Asian values. To develop a more inventive and globally competitive workforce, he advocates for rejuvenating Asian intellectual traditions by fusing them with modern knowledge. Anwar thinks that Asia needs to invest in its human capital and that educational reform is crucial to its long-term prosperity. The world's political and economic landscape has brought a sense of loss to Asian countries for a long time. Furthermore, while having many positive aspects, Asian nations have been able to absorb Western influence due to the West's supremacy in culture and intellect.

Likewise, Islam in modern times has lost much of its importance in the global world, even though it contains many aspects that make it a distinguished civilization beyond religion in the narrow sense as understood by many people. According to Anwar Ibrahim, civilization is more than just political or economic dominance. His approach strongly emphasizes the value of recovering Asia's cultural legacy while interacting with the outside world in a fair, inclusive, and sustainable manner. In this sense, Anwar's conception of civilization is not merely a criticism of Western models; rather, it is an appeal for a more comprehensive, integrated picture of humanity, one in which many customs and cultures can live and work together to create a common future. Even after taking office as Malaysia's Prime Minister, his long-standing philosophy is clearly in place. As highly noticeable, he uses the word "civilization" often. In addition, in pursuit of civilizational renewal (*tajdīd al-haḍāri*) upon becoming the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar launched his Malaysia MADANI (Civilizational Malaysia) policy, which is presented as a new national vision, social philosophy, and a comprehensive framework for the formation of national policies.

The renaissance that Anwar has long advocated is one in

which Asian nations would enlighten themselves, safeguard their identities, and expand their influence in the world based on their achievements. In so doing, rather than succumbing to a global order based on a unipolar or multipolar world, more Asian countries would act as one solid force to influence the world's political, economic, and social landscapes. This appears to be the reason why as a politician and intellectual activist he has attempted to champion his civilizational ideals especially through his exercise of moral leadership, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and regional cooperation. He seems to be hoping for the day when Asia will change the world order by fully protecting its Asian identity and what is Asian.

The chapters of Anwar's books clearly show that he is keen and energetic in engaging not only fellow Asian political leaders and intellectuals but also the contemporary West in a discourse on the meaning and civilizational significance of renaissance for Asia. The issues he has selected for this intellectual engagement are of central importance to modern Western thought and civilization. Thus, discussing these issues would provide him with the golden opportunity to impress upon his counterparts in the contemporary West that they are not marginal to Asian values as some in the West would like to think. On the contrary, issues such as democracy and civil society, justice and the law, ethics and economics, and the primacy of culture are viewed by him as fundamental to the Asian civilizational consciousness as well. However, to be sure, there are differences in foundation, approach, and emphasis between the modern Western and Asian civilizational consciousness. As he puts it, "while the objectives may coincide with those of others, Asia differs in emphases and approaches". Anwar further argues that "although it is open to learn from others, it is nevertheless justifiably convinced of the efficacy of its ways because Asian cultures have survived largely intact for millenniums" (p. 100).

The words quoted above from the book's chapter "The Primacy of Culture" demonstrate Anwar as the "Asian Man" who speaks on behalf of Asia viewed as a single geo-cultural entity in the context of its encounter with the West. But Anwar is deeply conscious of the multicivilizational character of Asia. He is well-

informed not only about civilizational differences between Asia and the West but also about such differences within Asia itself, which poses a great challenge to the renaissance of Asia as a common quest. He is not shy to talk and even argues about the differences between civilizations. He is a great believer in dialogue as a cultural virtue. The spirit of dialogue permeates the whole of the *Asian Renaissance*. It is as if he is telling readers that dialogue is the key to settling differences. With enlightened dialogue between cultures and civilizations, there are no differences that cannot be addressed. In this sense, Anwar is an optimist advocate of dialogue. His optimism largely stems from his life-long dedication to intercultural dialogue dating back to the days when he was a youth leader in culturally pluralistic Malaysia. He built his reputation as a successful international advocate of intercultural dialogue at various stages of his life. More recently, Anwar speaks of the need for the contemporary world to strive for the cause of the dialogical community. In embracing the idea of dialogical community, he took inspiration from the first Confucian society in China and the first Muslim community in Arabia, respectively founded as exemplary dialogical communities by Confucius and the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). As Malaysia's present Prime Minister, Anwar now has the chance to further develop and advance the idea of dialogical community that would help him renew his quest for an Asian Renaissance after having been deprived of more than two decades of the prime of his life in the pursuit of one of his great dreams due to political trials and tribulations.

Anwar's *The Asian Renaissance* is an inspiring book with precious messages for our times that deserves to be read, especially by Asia's younger generation. It is as relevant today as it was three decades ago. It is even more relevant today when the rise of Asia, especially as an economic power is becoming increasingly visible globally. It is therefore not surprising that China and South Korea are interested in translating Anwar's *The Asian Renaissance* into their respective languages. Xiamen University China is to be congratulated for its laudable initiative in undertaking the translation of the original English edition of this book into Mandarin. Thanks to this translation, millions of Chinese-speaking readers, especially in

China, can now benefit from this cogent discourse by a leading Asian intellectual and political leader on issues pertaining to the future of their respective countries and the common destiny of their continent. A Korean translation of the book is now under discussion. A new second edition of Anwar's *The Asian Renaissance* would also be greatly welcomed by many people around the globe!

Manuscript Studies

Persian Marriage Contract of an Indian Sufi Emperor: Southeast Asian Fate of the Last Mughal

Amir H. Zekrgoo¹

Abstract

Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Emperor of Mughal India, was a Sufi poet and calligrapher. He was dethroned by the British and deported to Burma, where he died in sickness and despair. Zafar married Zeenat Mahah Begum, who accompanied his husband to exile. They left behind a marriage contract, which is historically and artistically remarkable. The language, text structure, layout, and decorative elements of the contracts follow the age-old tradition of Persian marriage documentation.

This article provides an overview of the dramatic life of Bahadur Shah II, along with a detailed study of his marriage contract. A brief account of his life is presented under three headings: 'The Sufi Emperor,' 'Trail and Exile to Burma,' and 'Death, Burial and Legacy.' The Emperor's Marriage Contract has been studied at the textual and artistic levels. The textual analysis is discussed under the 'Original Text,' followed by its 'English Translation.' 'Text Structure,' 'Personalities,' 'Bride's Dower,' and 'Date' complement this section. The aesthetic evaluation of the contract is elaborated under a few headings: 'Layout,' 'Illumination,' 'Calligraphy,' and 'Seals.'

Keywords: Bahadur Shah Zafar, Mughal, India, Persian marriage contract, seals, bride's dower, *nikāh*.

¹ Honorary Fellow, Faculty of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, Australia. Email: ahzekrgoo@gmail.com.

Introduction

Among the various types of historical documents within the Islamic tradition, e.g., royal decrees, endowment deeds, appointment letters, etc., marriage contracts occupy a distinct place. With an attractive appearance and multi-layered content, they function like open windows that allow the reader to peek into aspects of the personal lives of people who lived in a distant past. They help us understand that marriage was regarded as a sacred union and a divine blessing. We learn about the identity of married couples and their genealogy and are exposed to their social status. The items listed in the 'Bride's Dower' section provide an insight into the financial condition of the groom. The presence of respected elders at the ceremony, who endorsed the marriage by their seals, adds a different dimension to the event.

The scattered pieces of information that are recorded in these attractive documents stimulate the imagination to picture that memorable day and wonder if the rest of their lives were fulfilling. Did they actually live a long, happy married life, or did they end up in a bitter separation? How many children did they produce, and what was the offspring's destiny? Our curiosity often remains unfulfilled simply because of the unavailability of data about the expanse and quality of the lives of the newlyweds.

However, there are exceptional cases where the documented history is relatively abundant, and Bahadur Shah's marriage contract is among them. When I first began studying the Emperor's marriage contract, I was planning a detailed examination of the document itself, similar to the numerous marriage contracts that I had studied and introduced over two decades.² However, my long-time association with Indian art and culture and the historical significance of India's last Mughal Emperor encouraged me to make an effort to introduce the royal marriage contract against a backdrop of interesting recorded historical events.

² I have introduced over 70 marriage contracts in a book that was published some 24 years ago. See Amir H. Zekrgoo, *The Sacred Art of Marriage – Persian Marriage Certificates of the Qajar Dynasty* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2000).



Figure 1: Royal Seal of Bahadur Shah Zafar, recording the bloodline of the last Mughal Emperor.

The triangular ornamentation on the top has the following words in stylized *Naskh* script: الله هو الكافي, Below the above words, I can read the word الكافي, penned in an unrecognizable fashion. The central circle has the name of the Emperor in excellent *Nasta'liq* style against ultramarine ground. It reads:

ابو ظفر سراج الدين محمد بهادرشاه
بادشاه غازي سنه احد

The 16 circles surrounding Bahadur Shah II's name provide his lineage, in a clockwise arrangement, ending with Amir Timur on the top. They read:

1. ابن محمد اكبرشاه بادشاه
2. ابن شاه عالم بادشاه
3. ابن عالميگر بادشاه
4. ابن جهاندارشاه
5. ابن شاه عالم بادشاه
6. ابن عالم گير بادشاه
7. ابن شاه جهان بادشاه
8. ابن جهانگير بادشاه
9. ابن اكبر بادشاه
10. ابن همايون بادشاه
11. ابن بابر بادشاه
12. ابن عمر شيخ شاه
13. ابن سلطان ابوسعيد شاه
14. ابن سلطان محمدشاه
15. ابن ميران شاه
16. ابن اميرتيمور صاحب قران

The Sufi Emperor

Born in 1775 in Delhi, Bahadur Shah II, mostly known as Bahadur Shah Zafar, was a Sufi and poet destined to be the twentieth and the last Mughal Emperor of India. His lineage has been recorded in an artistically designed seal that links him, through sixteen intermediaries, to Amir Timur. (Figure 1)

He ascended the throne in 1837 at the age of sixty-two. By then, the Mughal Empire had already been reduced to the city of Delhi and its surrounding territories. The East India Company had spread the British influence throughout India, leaving its devastating mark on the empire.

Bahadur Shah married several times, but his second and most beloved wife was Zeenat Mahal – a queen known for her intelligence, beauty, and devotion to the king. He married Zeenat Mahal in 1840 when he was 64 years old. The age of Zeenat Mahal has not been recorded, but from the paintings that remain from them, we can guess that she was perhaps significantly younger than the king. (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Paintings of Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and his Queen Zeenat Mahal Begum, c. 1840

Zafar was not cut out to be a king. He was a spiritual man with little interest in politics. Before occupying the throne, he lived like a poor scholar. An outstanding Urdu poet, Bahadur Shah's poems are still appreciated. The king was also a fine calligrapher who left behind pieces in various styles in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. (Figures 3 & 4)

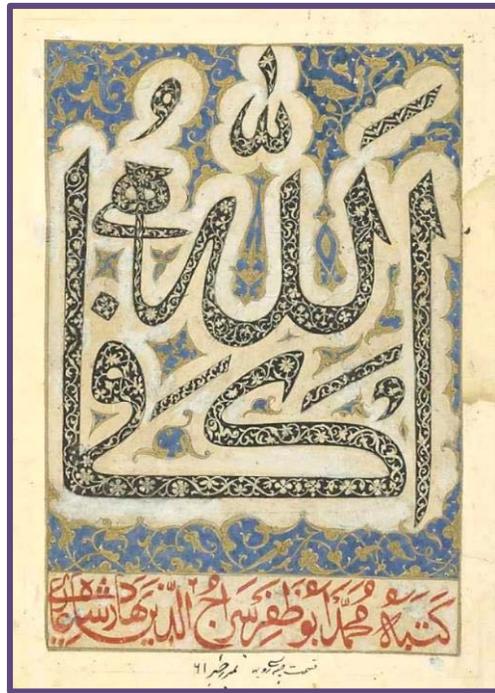


Figure 3: Calligraphic composition by Bahadur Shah Zafar. Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper are part of the mid-19th century private collection.

The expression *الله الكافي* (God is sufficient) appears in bold stylized Thuluth script. The black body of the script is decorated with scrolling arabesques. The top, the bottom, and the open spaces between the letters are decorated with floral designs on blue ground. The red writing on the lower band reads:

كتبه مُحَمَّدُ أَبُو ظَفَرِ سِرَاجِ الدِّينِ بَهَادُرْشَاهِ غَازِي

(Written by Muhammad Abu Zafar Siraj al-Din Bahadur Shah Ghazi).

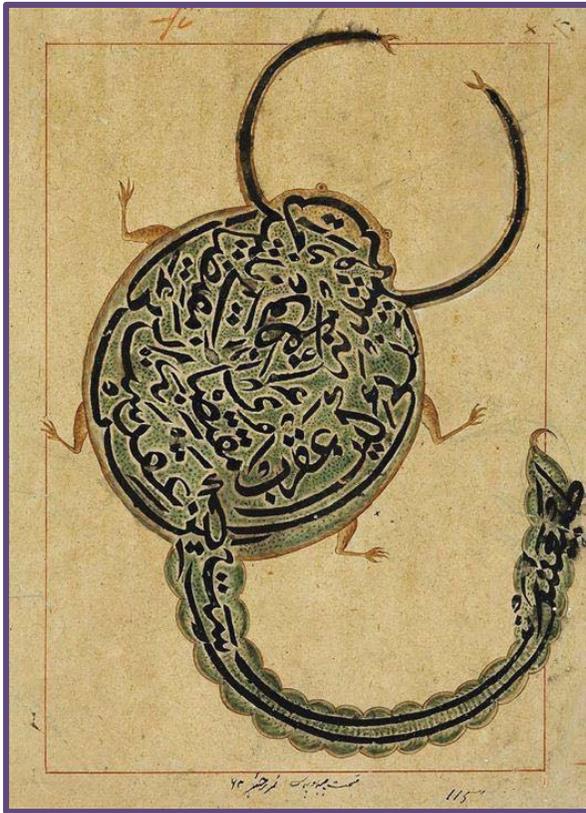


Figure 4: Calligraphic composition in the form of scorpion by Bahadur Shah. Ink and watercolor on paper, 31 x 22.5 cm. mid-19th century, private collection (Christie's).

The imaginary shape of the scorpion is eye-catching: a circular body, a long, curvy tail, a pair of thin, curvy, symmetrical feelers, and four legs that resemble a lizard's. On the scorpion's body, tail, and feelers, there is a writing inscribed in Naskh style. At first glance, the words seem random, but a close inspection reveals the following Persian couplet.

نیش عقرب نه از ره کین است مقتضای طبیعتش این است

A scorpion stings not out of aversion,
It follows nature's innate direction.

The words کتبه ابو ظفر (penned by Abu Zafar) – are creatively composed within the text.

The emperor was inspired by Sufi teachings of spiritual love and brotherhood. He even composed a verse in which he clearly stated that Hinduism and Islam shared the same essence.³ Religious tolerance was among the notable traits of the Mughals.⁴ Zafar genuinely believed in multiculturalism and celebrated many Hindu festivals.

He was also lenient towards certain East India Company officials, who he considered friends. On several occasions, Bahadur Shah presented Sir Thomas Metcalfe (1795-1853) – a civil servant of the Company as well as an agent of the Governor General of India at the Imperial Mughal court – selected poems in Persian and Urdu in his own hand-writing.⁵ (Figure 5)

Zafar was regarded as a Sufi master (*pīr*) with a circle of devout followers (*murīds*). Even after becoming the Emperor, he wore plain attire, unfit to the position. It was reported that “his appearance is that of an indigent *munshī* or a teacher of languages.”⁶ He believed, as did his followers that his spiritual powers as a Sufi master would help him perform better in state matters. But the British troops were too strong, the Mughal Empire was already on the verge of collapse, and Zafar was merely the King of Delhi.

³ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of Delhi, 1857* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 80.

⁴ Emperor Akbar (1548-1605) initiated the movement by ordering the first translation of Hindu epic of *Ramayana* to Persian. It became a trend followed by a number of Mughal dignitaries. Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) authored an important treatise in Persian called *Majma‘al-Bahrain* (Confluence of the Two Seas) in which he explored the fundamental unity of Hinduism and Islam, despite their diverse outlooks.

⁵ These pieces are part of ‘Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi’, an album collected by Metcalfe, comprising a few calligraphic specimens and about 130 paintings.

⁶ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of Delhi, 1857* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 78.

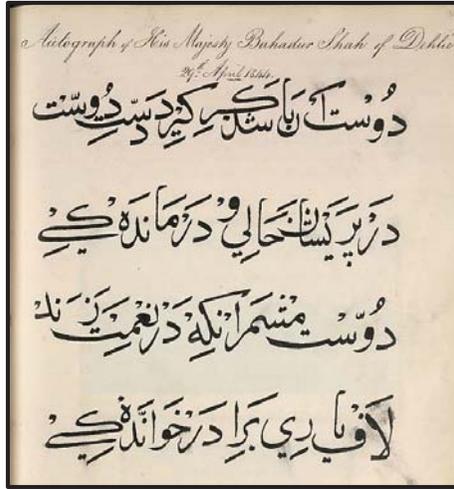


Figure 5: On 29 April 1844, Bahadur Shah presented Metcalfe with his handwritten Persian poem, expounding on the measures of genuine friendship and brotherhood. The couplet is by the renowned Iranian poet Sa'di Shirazi (1210-1291). It reads:

دوست آن باشد که گیرد دست دوست در پریشان حالی و درماندگی
دوست مشمر آنکه در نعمت زند لاف یاری و برادر خواندگی

*A real friend is one who extends a helping hand
At the time of grief, helplessness, and hardship
Consider not a friend who, at the time of plenty –
Boasts about brotherhood and friendship.⁷*

Naturally, there was resistance to British aggression among the public, and some members of the royal family – including two of the King's sons – were actively involved. Bahadur Shah reluctantly supported the rebellion, as they seemed to be the last resort for saving what was left of a once renowned mighty empire with vast territory.⁸ The clash ended in the Siege of Delhi by the British forces. Bahadur Shah took refuge in the Humayun's tomb – the burial ground of two of his great ancestors – Humayun (1508-1566) and Babur (14830-

⁷ Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

⁸ William Dalrymple (2009), 145.

1530). His location was eventually revealed. On 20 September 1857, the king and his sons were captured by the East India Company forces led by Major William Hodson. The event became the theme of a few artworks proudly produced by the British as a memorial to their victorious occupation of India. (Figure 6)



Figure 6: Capture of Bahadur Shah in Humayun's Tomb. Steel engraving.

This picture depicts a historic event that took place on the 20th of September, 1857. Captain Hodson captures Bahadur Shah and his sons during the 'Sepoy Mutiny' (according to the British) and the 'First War of India for Independence' (according to Indians.) The old man with a turban and robe at the picture's focal point is Bahadur Shah. In front of him stands Captain Hodson in British military uniform. Behind the Emperor, his two sons can be seen with their hands tied behind their backs.

Trail and Exile to Burma

Bahadur Shah's life took an even more devastating turn after his capture. Soon, two of his sons, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr Sultan, as well as his grandson Mirza Abu Bakht, were shot to death by Hodson. The princes were mounted on a bullock cart and driven towards Delhi. Near the gate, where a large crowd had gathered, Hodson stopped the bullock cart, took the three princes down, stripped their top garments, and shot them dead in cold blood, using a

carbine from his troopers. He then stripped them of their signet rings, turquoise armbands, and jeweled swords. Their bodies were ordered to be displayed for everyone to see⁹ – a shocking event that immediately became a controversial event both in India and abroad, even then.¹⁰ Upon hearing the news, the Emperor became overwhelmed with grief and went into depression.¹¹ (Figure 7)

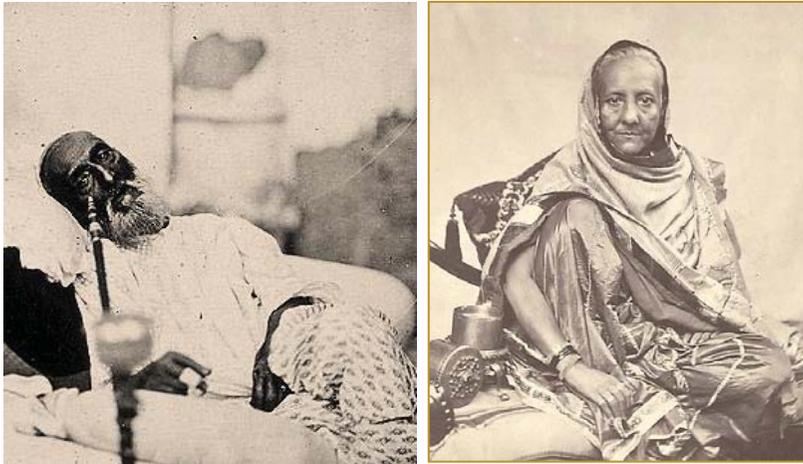


Figure 7: The weak Emperor Bahadur Shah right before being exiled to Burma (left) and Queen Zeenat Mahal Begum (right).

This was followed by a series of hard blows that were going to put an end to the Mughal Empire. The king of Delhi was taken to court in the Red Fort of Delhi. The trial lasted 21 days and had 19 hearings and 21 witnesses. Over 100 documents in Persian and Urdu, along with their English translations, were presented to the court.¹²

The King was charged on the following four counts:

1. Aiding and abetting the mutinies of the troops.

⁹ Michael Edwardes, *Red Year: The Indian Rebellion of 1857* (London: Cardinal Books, 1975), 59.

¹⁰ An elaborate account is available in: T. R. Holmes, *History of Indian Mutiny* (London: Macmillan and Cop, 1898), 591-617.

¹¹ The images are part of 'Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi'.

¹² H. S. Bhatia, *Justice System and Mutinies in British India* (Deep & Deep Publications, 2001), 204.

2. Encouraging and assisting diverse persons in waging war against the British Government.
3. Assuming the sovereignty of Hindustan.
4. Causing and being accessory to the murder of Christians.¹³

After convicting him on several charges, Zafar was officially removed from the throne, and Queen Victoria subsequently assumed the title of Empress of India.

In October 1858, the last Mughal Emperor was exiled to Rangoon in the British-controlled Burma – present Myanmar.¹⁴ His wife, Zeenat Mahal, and two sons, Mirza Jawan Bakht and Mirza Shah Abbas, accompanied him. (Figure 8)



*Figure 8:
A meaningful picture of
the deposed Mughal
Emperor after being
exiled to Burma.
Behind him stand
his sons, Mirza Jawan
Bakht and Mirza Shah
Abbas. They look
displeased and restless.
On the right of the old
seated Zafar, proudly
stands William
Hodson, his captor and
the one who shot the
King's two other sons.*

¹³ An elaborate account of the court hearings is available in “Proceedings of the April 1858 Trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar ‘King of Delhi’”, *Parliamentary Papers*, June 1859. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20161006215545/http://www.csas.edu.ac.uk/mutiny/Trial-BahadurShah.pdf>

¹⁴ H. S. Bhatia, *Justice System and Mutinies in British India*, 204.

Death, Burial, and Legacy

A couple of years after his exile in Rangoon, the old king became critically ill. In October 1862, his condition deteriorated, and on Friday 7th of November, at 5 am, he passed away. He was buried at 4 pm on the same day. Having been buried far from Hindustan, the Sufi Emperor gradually faded away from memories. Some 150 years later, on the 16th of February 1991, his tomb was recovered and a proper shrine known as Bahadur Shah Zafar Dargah was erected which attracted visitors who paid homage to him.¹⁵

Zafar, despite his catastrophic defeat by the mighty British forces, is very much a celebrated figure in contemporary India:

The last Mughal Emperor stands in our memory as a symbol of a lost era of a pluralistic India. Though he was not much of a ruler, the Delhi darbar being confined to only a few miles, he was the chosen leader of Hindus and Muslims alike, unanimous in their anger and rejection of British rule during India's first war of independence in 1857.¹⁶

The Emperor's Marriage Contract

At first glance, the beautiful marriage contract of Bahadur Shah Zafar and Zeenat Mahal Begum appears to be of Iranian origin. This should not be of any surprise, for there has been an uninterrupted relationship between Iran and India since ancient times.¹⁷ Cultural

¹⁵ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal*, 474.

¹⁶ Sami Rafiq, "Zafar's legacy," in *Hindustan Times*, May 12, 2007.

¹⁷ The seals that were produced in Mehengo-Daro have been found in the Persian Gulf -region, testifying to maritime trade between the Indus Valley Civilization and the people of Persia. The similarities between the Hindu *Vedas* and Zoroastrian *Avesta* reveals striking parallels between the religions of ancient Iran and India. This connection is also evident in the areas of art and architecture. A study of Ashokan pillars in India (3rd century BCE), compared with those of the Persepolis (6th century BCE) shows that the Ashokan capitals were most probably carved under the supervision of Achaemenid craftsmen. See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "From Cyrus to Ashoka: A Comparative Study of Ancient Arts and Beliefs of Persia and India," (Persian), *Honar Nameh* 1, no. 1 (1998): 2-19.

connection became most prominent during the Islamic period of India, especially during the Mughal era when Persian was the official language of refined conversation and state correspondence. Even the British officials carried seals upon whom were carved their names and positions in Persian language and *Nasta'liq* script – an Iranian style of Islamic calligraphy.¹⁸

The style of the Indian miniature paintings of this period is often referred to as Indo-Iranian or Indo-Persian. Mughal manuscripts, in terms of their general outlook – layout, decorative elements, and calligraphic style – have a close affinity with their Iranian counterparts.

A study of historical Persian marriage contracts unveils an intricate structure carefully crafted to serve various purposes. This structure comprises the following components:

1. **Praise and thanksgiving:** This section begins with the eloquent and reverent Arabic language, offering heartfelt praise and gratitude to the Lord for bestowing the blessings of marriage upon the people.
2. **Preface:** In this segment a harmonious blend of Persian and Arabic is employed. The languages complement each other, weaving a tapestry of words that sets the stage for the contractual content.
3. **Introduction of the marrying couple:** As the tone gradually shifts from religious and poetic to practical, the document begins the process of formal documentation. Here, meticulous records of the names of the newlyweds and their respective fathers are entered.
4. **Bride's Dower:** This section transitions away from the floral language and poetic elements, focusing solely on the financial aspects. It provides a comprehensive inventory of the items included in the bride's dower, such as silver, gold, cash, land, real estate, houses, carpets, kitchenware,

¹⁸ I have introduced seals belonging to British officials (Alexander Honey and of Edward Charles Ross) in one of my writings. See figures 7 and 8 in Amir H. Zekrgoo, "An Introduction to Persian Seals: Special Reference to Devotional Seals from an Eighteenth-Century Manuscript," *Al-Shajarah* 27, no.1 (2022): 153-170.

furniture, streams, walnut trees, and even male and female servants. Additionally, it meticulously records the payment from the groom's side and the receipt from the bride's side for any portion of the total dowry.

5. **Prayer and date:** The document concludes with a prayer and a date, sealing the agreement with solemnity and reverence. The legitimacy of the contract is affirmed through the seal impression of respected community members who were present as witnesses during the ceremony. 19

A comparison between Bahadur Shah's marriage contract with the ones produced during the Qajar period (1789-1925) reveals a strong resemblance.²⁰ In terms of general appearance, layout design, text arrangement, decorative elements, language, and calligraphic style, Bahadur Shah's marriage contract – produced during the same period (1840) – closely follows the Qajari model. (Figure 9)

What follows is a careful examination of the Emperor's marriage contract, beginning with the main text, which is penned in 17 lines and is composed of a combination of Persian and Arabic. The numbers within square brackets [] indicate the line in the original document.

¹⁹ A detailed account is available in Amir H. Zekrgoo, "The Persian Tradition of Marriage Documentation: Pre-Islamic & Islamic Marriage Contracts," *Al-Shajarah* 12, no. 2 (2007): 143-160.

²⁰ The greatest number of documented historical marriage contracts belong to the Qajar period. I have studied numerous marriage contracts of the period, preserved in museums, archives, and private collections, and have introduced some eighty pieces in my book. See Amir H. Zekrgoo, *The Sacred Art of Marriage – Persian Marriage Certificates of the Qajar Dynasty* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2000).

PERSIAN MARRIAGE CONTRACT OF AN INDIAN SUFI-EMPEROR:
SOUTHEAST ASIAN FATE OF THE LAST MUGHAL

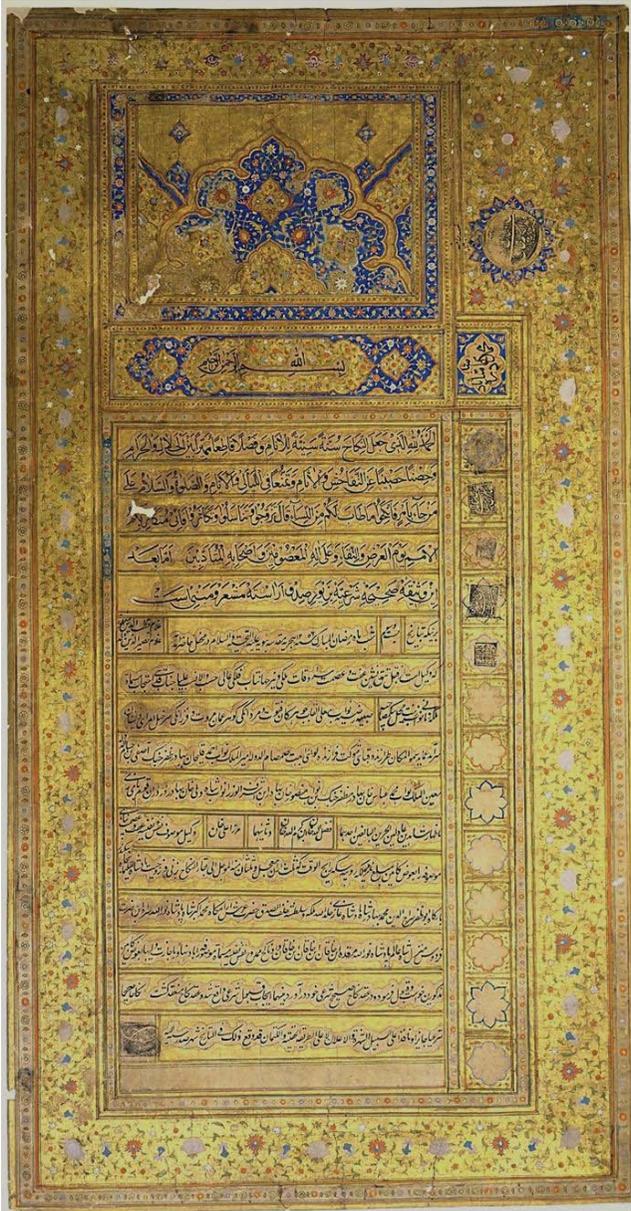


Figure 9: Marriage contract of Bahadur Shah Zafar, from the British Library Collection

Original Text

[1] بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ [2] اَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَ النِّكَاحَ سُنَّةً سَيِّئَةً لِلْاِنَامِ وَ فَصَلًا قَاطِعًا مُمَيَّزًا بَيْنَ الْحَلَالِ وَالْحَرَامِ [3] وَ حِصْنًا حَصِينًا عَنِ النَّفَاحِشِ وَالْاِنَامِ وَ تَمْتَعًا فِي اللَّيَالِي وَ الْاَيَّامِ وَ الصَّلَاةِ وَ السَّلَامِ عَلَيَّ [4] مَنْ جَاءَ بِأَمْرِ فَأَنكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ قَالَ تَزَوَّجُوا وَ تَنَاسَلُوا وَ تَكَاثَرُوا فَإِنِّي مُتَكَثِّرٌ بِكُمْ [5] الْاَمَمِ يَوْمَ الْعَرْضِ وَ اللَّقَاءِ وَ عَلَيَّ اَلِهِ الْمَعْصُومِينَ وَ اَصْحَابِهِ مُتَادِّبِينَ - اَمَّا بَعْدُ [6] اَيْنَ وَثِقَهُ صَحِيحِهِ شَرَعِيهِ بَزِيوَرٍ صِدْقِ اَرَاستِه مَشْعَرٍ وَ مَبْنِي است [7] برينكه بتاريخِ بَست و سوم شب ماه رمضان المبارک سنه 1256 هجريه مقدسه نبويه عليه التحيه والسلام در محفل حاضر آمد - «غلام نصرالدين، ولد غلام قطب الدين مغفور [8] كه وكيل است از قبل تَتَّقُ نشين عفت و عصمت سرادقات ملكي و نير جهانتاب فلكي، عالي حسب، والا نسب عليا جناب، قدسي احتجاب مسماء» [9] «ملكه زمانى نواب زينت محل بيگم صاحبه» صبيه رضيه نواب معلى القاب جوهر كان فتوت و مردانگى، گوهر عمان مروت و فرزنانگى، سرخيل امرای ذیشان [10] سرآمد عمايد سموالمان طرازنده قباى شوكت، فرازنده لواى ابهت، صمصام الدوله اميرالملك نواب احمد قليخان بهادر ظفرجنگ آصفى بن حسام الدوله [11] معين الملك نواب محمد عباس خان بهادر مظفر جنگ بن نواب منصور خان بهادر ابن شرف الوزرا نواب شاه ولى خان بهادر دُرُ دُرَّان قوم نامى زنى [12] به اظهار شاهدين عادلين الحرين البالغين، احدهما فضل الله خان ابن كرم الله خان و ثانيا مرزا على خان، وكيل موصوف نفس نفيسه عفت و عصمت پناهى [13] موصوفه را بعوض كابين مبلغ پانزده لکه روپيه سکه رايج الوقت كه ثلث از آن معجل و ثلثان منه الموجل الى بقاء النكاح بزنى و زوجيت پادشاه سليمانجاه سکندر [14] بارگاه ابوظفر سراج الدين محمد بهادرشاه، بادشاه غازى خلدالله ملكه و سلطنته خلف الصدق حضرت عرش آرامگاه محمد اكبرشاه پادشاه نورالله سرراه ابن حضرت [15] فردوس منزل شاه عالم پادشاه نورالله مرقدہ ابن خاقان ابن خاقان داد ناکح ممدوح نفس نفيسه مسماء موصوفه را باذنها و باجازات وليها بعوض كابين [16] مذکورين خواست و قبول فرمود و در عقد نكاح صحيح شرعى خود در آورد بينهما ايجاب قبول شرعى واقع شد و عقد نكاح منعقد گشت - نكاحا صحيحا [17] نكاحا صحيحا شرعيا جايزا و نافذا

عليالسييل الشهرة والعلان لا على الطريقه الخفيته والكتمان قد وقع ذلك في تاريخ شهر
صدر سنه اليه

English Translation

[1] In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful [2] Praised be Allah (ﷻ), who established marriage as a revered institution for mankind and made it a distinct and decisive exercise that distinguishes between the permissible and that which is forbidden, [3] and a fortified garrison that protects us from vulgarities and sins, and made with it delightful our nights and days. And prayers and peace be upon [4] the Prophet who commanded it. So, marry the women that you are pleased with, as He said, “marry and produce offspring, and multiply, then know that I shall boast your numbers [5] on the day of Presentation and Meeting (Day of Resurrection) – and [prayers and peace] be upon his infallible family and respectful companions. [6] This complete agreement that is sanctioned by Shariah and adorned with honesty, declares [7] that on the evening of the twenty third of the auspicious month of Ramadan of the of the year 1256, from the holy emigration of the Prophet (ﷻ) – upon whom be highest salutations and peace – became present in the gathering: Ghulām Naṣr al-Din, son of the forgiven deceased Ghulām Quṭb al-Din [8] who represents the [lady] who is veiled by modesty and chastity, and dwells within the royal curtains: the luminating sun of the realm, of exalted lineage and dignified family, her exalted highness [9] “Malika Zamānī, Nawwāb Zeenat Maḥal Begum Ṣāhibah” the praiseworthy daughter of the Nawwāb of eminent titles, the jewel of the mine of generosity and courage, the pearl of the sea of humanity and wisdom, the chief of the dignified princes, [10] the grand master of high-ranking chiefs, the embroiderer of the robe of majesty, the elevator of the banner of glory, Ṣamṣām al-Dawlah Nawwāb Aḥmad Qulikhān Bahadur Zafar Jang Āṣifī, son of Ḥisām al-Dawlah [11] Mu‘īn al-Mulk Nawwāb Muḥammad ‘Abbās Khān Bahadur Muzaffar Jang, son of Nawwāb Maṣṣūr Khān Bahadur, son of the glory of the ministers, Nawwāb Shāh Walī Khān Bahadur, who is the most prominent pearl of the renowned Za‘ī tribe; [12] as testified by two just, noble, and mature witnesses: firstly Faḍl-Allah Khān, son of Karam-Allāh Khān; secondly Mirzā ‘Alī Khān – who

represent the aforesaid precious soul of modesty and purity, [13] to bring her into wedlock – in exchange for a dower of fifteen lakh Rupees of the current coin, a third of which is paid and the remaining two third to be settled during the marriage – with the emperor of Solomon ranking [14] and Alexander grandeur “Abu Zafar Sirāj al-Din Muḥammad Bahadur Shāh Bādshāh Ghāzī,” may God extend his dominion and kingdom to eternity – the rightful successor of the one whose resting place is the [divine] throne, Emperor Akbar Shāh – may the Divine light elevate his station – son of [15] the Paradise dweller, Emperor Shāh ‘Ālam, may the Divine light illuminate his grave – son of Khāqān, son of Khāqān, son of Khāqān, son of Khāqān – on behalf of the marrying man) the Emperor) asked for her hand in marriage with her permission and that of her father, in exchange for the dower, and accepted the conditions. Thus, the correct and lawful *nikāḥ* was performed. [16] The statements of *ījāb* (proposal) and *qabūl* (acceptance) were uttered by the two sides according to the Shari’ah, and the tie of *nikāḥ* was bond [17] in a valid, lawful and permissible manner, recognized by the public – not conducted in secret or concealed – on the exalted month of the mentioned year.

Text Structure

A close study of the contract’s content reveals the following five-layered arrangement, which exhibits similarities with the Qajar marriage contracts.

1. **Praise and thanksgiving:** The first five lines that begin with the *BismiLLāh* on the ornamented heading are written eloquently in Arabic. It praises the Lord for blessing the people with the boon of marriage and ends with greeting the holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his family. This section is penned in excellent *Naskh* script.
2. **Transitory statement:** Line 6 is a brief announcement introducing the nature of the document, i.e., ‘an agreement that is sanctioned by the Shari’ah.’ It smoothly moves the reader’s attention from the introductory praise to the main theme. This line visually blends with the previous section, as it is also executed in *Naskh* style. The language, however, is

a mixture of Persian and Arabic words that follow Persian grammar.

3. **Introduction of the marrying couple and date of the Ceremony:** The largest and the most informative section of the document is composed in lines 7 to 12. This part is dedicated to recording the names of the principal personalities involved in the process of the *nikāḥ* ceremony: the marrying couple, their fathers and lineage, the representative (*wakīl*) who pronounced the wordings of the *nikāḥ* on behalf of the newlyweds, and the two prominent witnesses. This part is visually distinct from the previous parts because it is written in Persian and penned in the Nasta'liq style of calligraphy.
4. **Bride's Dower:** In line 13, the amount of the bride's dower and the agreed method of payment is recorded.
5. **Concluding statement:** The concluding lines, 14 to 17, confirm that the *nikāḥ* is valid and lawful, as it has been performed according to the requirements of religious law.

Personalities

Names of thirteen people are mentioned in the contract. Their names, positions, and relations are organized in Table 1:

Table 1: Names of People Listed in the Marriage Contract

	Names and Titles of Honor	Position / Relation
1.	Abu Zafar Sirāj al-Din Muḥammad Bahadur Shāh Bādshāh Ghāzī	Emperor
2.	Emperor Akbar Shāh II	Emperor's Father/Predecessor
3.	Emperor Shāh 'Ālam	Father of Akbar Shāh II, grandfather of the Emperor

	Names and Titles of Honor	Position / Relation
4.	Malika Zamānī Nawwāb Zinat Mahal Begum	Queen
5.	Şamşām al-Dawlah Nawwāb Aḥmad Qulikhān Bahadur Zafar Jang Āşifī	Queen's father
6.	Ḥisām al-Dawlah Mu‘īn al- Mulk Nawwāb Muḥammad ‘Abbās Khān Bahadur Muzaffar Jang	Queen's grandfather (Father of Şamşām al-Dawlah)
7.	Nawwāb Manşūr Khān Bahadur	Queen's great-grandfather (Father of Ḥisām al-Dawlah...)
8.	Nawwāb Shāh Walī Khān Bahadur	Queen's great great grandfather (Father of Nawwāb Manşūr Khān Bahadur)
9.	Ghulām Naşr al-Din	Performer of <i>Nikāḥ</i>
10.	Ghulām Quṭb al-Din	Father of <i>Nikāḥ</i> performer (Ghulām Naşr al-Din)
11.	Faḍl-Allah Khān	Official witness 1
12.	Ghulām Quṭb al-Din	Father of official witness 1 (Faḍl-Allah Khān)
13.	Mirzā ‘Alī Khān	Official witness 2

Bride's Dower

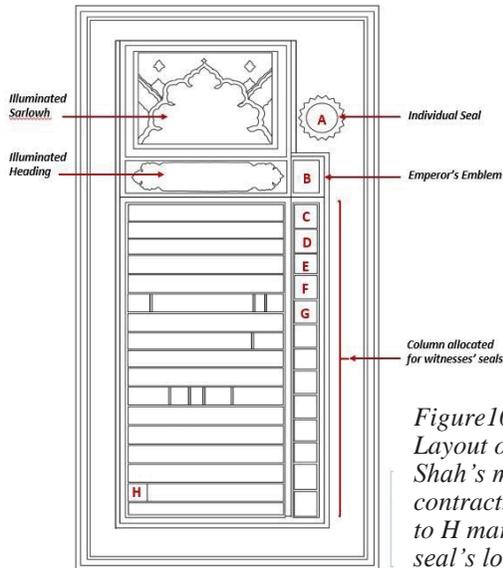
‘Fifteen lakh (1.5 million) Rupees of the current coin’ is the amount stated as the bride's dower. One-third of the total sum has been paid and resolved by the time of marriage, while the remaining two-thirds were intended to be settled throughout the course of marriage.

Date: 23rd of Ramadan of 1256 AH. /17th November 1840

Artistic Dimension

Layout:

Following the typical Qajari marriage contracts, the main structure is asymmetrical. The decorated *sarlowh* and the following text are laid out slightly to the left. (See a detailed account under ‘Seals.’) This addition, along with the large seal on the top right-hand side of the *sarlowh*, has visually balanced the setting. (Figure 10)



*Figure 10:
Layout of Bahadur
Shah's marriage
contract. Letters A
to H mark the
seal's location*

Gold is the dominating color of this scroll-type marriage contract.²¹ The entire surface surrounding the text area is meticulously decorated with floral patterns painted in white, blue,

²¹ Historical marriage contracts were prepared in two formats: scroll-type and booklet-type. The earlier ones were prepared on a sheet of paper that could be rolled and stored, like royal decrees, waqf deeds, etc. From the second half of the 19th century the booklet-type contracts became popular. The oldest scroll-type Persian marriage contract that I have studied and introduced is dated 1792, while the earliest booklet-type dates 1868. See Amir H. Zekrgoo, *The Sacred Art of Marriage*, p. 30 and p. 86.

and red for the flowers and greenish grey for the leaves. Hair-thin lines travel through the decorated area, forming the stems that delicately connect the floral pattern.

Illumination

The highly illuminated top section of the contract, the *sarlowh*, is decorated with fine floral designs painted with lapis lazuli, cinnabar, gold, and white against gold background. It is divided into two parts. The upper part displays an ornamental arch at the center, typical in Mughal architecture. To its right, a large seal can be seen. (Figure 11) The lower part of the *sarlowh* features an attractive elongated escutcheon that frames the most used expression at the beginning of any Islamic manuscript – In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. (Figure 12)



Figure 11: Upper part of the sarlowh, with a large seal on its right



Figure 12: Lower part of the sarlowh with Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim in stylized Naskh script. On the right is Bahadur Shah's emblem.

Calligraphy

Naskh and *Nasta'liq* are the two calligraphic styles used in the scroll. The Arabic text that fills the first six lines, including the *BismiLlāh* heading, is penned in *Naskh*. The remaining eleven lines are in *Nasta'liq*.

Seals

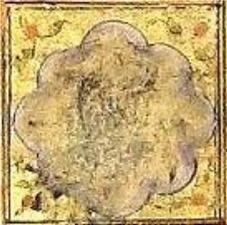
There is a total of seven seals. On the right-hand side of the text, a column is stylishly designed to accommodate the seal impressions of the esteemed witnesses to the ceremony. These witnesses are in addition to the two official witnesses – Faḍl-Allah Khān and Mirzā 'Alī Khān – whose names are stated within the text to fulfill the legal requirement of the *nikāh*.²²

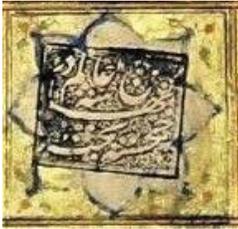
The column is divided into thirteen squares; each square is decorated with a simple eight-petalled rosette to accommodate the seal impression of a witness. However, only the five top boxes have been filled out, and the remaining eight are left blank. A much larger and more eye-catching seal can be seen high up on the right-hand side of the *sarlowh*. It is beautifully framed within a sixteen-petalled rosette. (Figure 11) In the lower-left corner, a peculiar fish-shaped seal impression is noticeable immediately after the last word of the text.

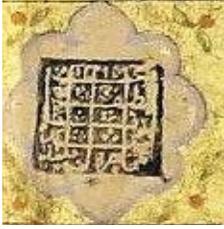
On the top of the witnesses' column, at the same level as the highly illuminated '*BismiLlāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*' – the Emperor's name is composed within an escutcheon. Though this is a handwritten work, not a seal impression, it has similarities with the seals in terms of size and layout composition; as such, I decided to include it here. (Figure 12) A systematic account of the seals and the Emperor's calligraphic emblem is provided in Table 2.

²² Presence of two witnesses has been a mandatory condition for a *nikāh* ceremony to become official. However, there has been a tradition to invite respected members of communities to bless the occasion by their presence, and by leaving their seal impressions on the documents. It is worth noting that the endorsement of marriages by revered elders was not merely a polite gesture or social etiquette. This action somehow engaged the witnesses to share the responsibility of looking after the newlyweds' affairs and provide them with proper guidance at critical times during their married life.

TABLE 2: SEALS

Seal	Location / Inscription
	<p><u>Seals A:</u> This circular seal appears on the right-hand side of the <i>sarlowh</i>. It is written in excellent <i>Nasta'liq</i> style, composed in two levels separated by an extended ya (ے). On the upper part, the word '<i>al-Mannān</i>' (المنان) can be read. The letters on the two sides are faded. The lower part bears the name 'Abd al-Karīm Khān (عبدالکریم خان).</p> <p>The seal is stamped inside a hollow circle enclosed within a 16-petal rosette. The rosette is ornamented with floral motifs against an ultramarine ground.</p>
	<p><u>Seals B:</u> (Emperor's Emblem) Located on the top, above the column of witnesses, on the right-hand side of the highly illuminated '<i>BismiLLāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm,</i>' the Emperor's name (محمد بهادر شاه بادشاه) is creatively composed by connecting strokes of different letters, penned in an average stylized <i>Naskh</i>. The writing is set within an escutcheon against ultramarine blue, decorated with stylized floral motifs.</p>
	<p><u>Seals C:</u> Located on the 2nd top row, on the column dedicated to the seals, right below Bahadur Shah's emblem, this faded and smudged seal is in the form of a vertical oval. The <i>Nasta'liq</i> illegible inscription is stamped inside a stylized 8-petalled rosette, surrounded by fine floral motifs against gold background.</p>

	<p><u>Seals D:</u> Located on the 3rd top row, on the column dedicated to the seals, is a square seal in excellent <i>Nasta'liq</i> style, stamped on an 8-petalled rosette surrounded by fine floral motifs against gold background. It reads: Sāhib Qarān Jamshīd Bakht Ibn Shāh 'Ālam (جمشید بخت ابن شاه عالم صاحبقران) The owner of the seal could be one of Bahadur Shah's uncles, as the inscription introduces him as "son of Shāh 'Ālam."</p>
	<p><u>Seals E:</u> Located on the 4th top row, on the column dedicated to the seals, this illegible square-shaped seal is stamped in an eight-petalled rosette surrounded by fine floral motifs against the gold background.</p>
	<p><u>Seals F:</u> Located on the 5th top row, on the column dedicated to the seals, this square-shaped seal, in excellent <i>Nasta'liq</i> style, is stamped on an 8-petalled rosette surrounded by floral motifs against the gold background. It reads: Sāhib Qarān Jamshīd Bakht Ibn Shāh 'Ālam (خجسته بخت بهادر بن عالم سنه) The seal owner was perhaps one of Zafar's uncles, as the inscription introduces him as "son of Shāh 'Ālam" – a case similar to Seal C. Both seals share the same style of calligraphy and composition.</p>

	<p><u>Seals G:</u> Located on the 6th top row, on the column dedicated to the seals, this square-shaped seal is stamped within an 8-petalled rosette surrounded by floral motifs against the gold background. The writings are in stylized <i>Naskh</i> script, creatively composed to form a lattice. I could not read the text since the available image does not provide a clear visual inspection.</p>
	<p><u>Seals H:</u> Located on the lower left corner of the text, this rectangular seal has a fish design, with a faded inscription in <i>Nast'aliq</i> script.</p>

Conclusion

The life of the last Mughal Emperor had multiple social, political, cultural, and artistic dimensions worthy of revisiting. From the viewpoint of cultural heritage, Bahadur Shah Zafar linked Iran and India to Burma in Southeast Asia. The emperor was a Sufi poet and calligrapher. He had a dramatic life with a sad ending. Arrested by the British army and taken to court, he was charged with assuming sovereignty for India. This was followed by the exile of the dethroned Emperor and his family to Burma, where he died and was buried. He was forgotten for quite some time, but in 1991, 150 years after his demise, his tomb was recovered, and a proper shrine was erected in his commemoration.

Bahadur Shah Zafar may not have been a strong ruler, but Indians remember him as a symbol of a lost era of a pluralistic and integrated India. He was the chosen leader of Hindus and Muslims alike, unanimous in their anger and rejection of British rule during India's first war of independence in 1857.

Revisiting history through artifacts puts the events in a different light. Bahadur Shah's marriage contract is an attractive and informative cross-cultural artifact with religious, linguistic, financial, legal, and artistic edges. It contains detailed data on a wide range of

subjects. In terms of layout, composition, and decoration, the document follows the model of Persian marriage contracts of the Iranian Qajar period. The use of the Persian language and *Nasta'liq* script testifies to the deep cultural, linguistic, and artistic ties between Iran and India. This beautiful illuminated scroll records the names of 13 people, including the Emperor, the Queen, their ancestral lineage, the official performer of the *nikāh*, and two official witnesses. Detailed documentation of the amount of the bride's dowry, as well as a clear statement that a third of the amount was already settled by the time of *nikāh* and that the Emperor had committed to pay the remaining two third during their married life, reveals a strictly financial aspect of the marriage. The contract also bears seal impressions of seven dignitaries, most of whom were members of the royal family. They attended and witnessed the ceremony and, by putting their seals on the contract, gave additional credibility to the marriage.

Book Reviews

Nasr M. Arif and Abbas Panakkal (eds.). *Southeast Asian Islam: Integration and Indigenisation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2024. xi + 305 pp. ISBN 9781032699257.

Reviewer: Alexander Wain. Lecturer, Divinity School, University of St Andrews. Email: adrwl@st-andrews.ac.uk

During the 1940s, as Indonesia's independence struggle gained momentum, several idealistic scholars tied to Sukarno's evolving project of national authentication and cultural rejuvenation began exploring creative new ways of observing and analyzing their shared Islamic heritage. During the decades that followed, within the work of leading intellectuals like Sanusi Pané, Hamka, Sartono Kartodirdjo, and Kuntowijoyo, subsequently followed by Malaysians in the mold of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Syed Hussein Alatas, Kassim Ahmed, and Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, a series of methodologically innovative studies emerged dedicated to the examination of Southeast Asian Islam using an indigenous lens. While colonial-era scholarship had 'othered' Southeast Asian Islam, continually emphasizing its non-conformance to a perceived Middle Eastern Islamic orthodoxy, these new studies stressed its inherent uniqueness and Islamic authenticity. Although initially met with skepticism, both within Western academia and among Islamic reformers committed to essentialized notions of Arabized Islamicity, a broader cohort of Southeast Asianists have begun to embrace this emic mode of inquiry over recent decades. This volume, assembled by editors Nasr M. Arif and Abbas Panakkal, sits firmly within that trend. Characterized by diverse scholarship—both established and insurgent—local and global, it explores issues of integration and indigenization within a series of carefully crafted, sympathetically rendered depictions of Southeast Asia as a repository of a continually evolving understanding of Islam that is of no less significance or legitimacy than iterations of that faith found elsewhere.

In the volume's opening chapter, "Arrival, adoption, and adaptation: integrating Islam in maritime Southeast Asia" (pp.

13-36), Carool Kersten describes Southeast Asian Islam's post-thirteenth-century integration into the wider Muslim world. Taking a suitably expansive (if slightly Indonesia-centric) view of the region, Kersten presents a welcome corrective to previous scholarship. Rather than perpetuate prior assumptions of a profound regional syncretism, he establishes the existence of local Muslim identity "much more firmly rooted in Islamic tradition, through sustained contact with other parts of the Muslim world, than is often recognized" (p. 14). Acknowledging the region's diversity (termed its "non-existent homogeneity," p. 15), the chapter questions received assumptions and broadens subject boundaries, all while emphasizing the diverse ways in which "Muslims from Southeast Asia were not passive recipients of Islamic knowledge but active participants in the formation of [a] distinct Southeast Asian, or *Jāwī*, Muslim culture" (p. 24). Although the significance accorded (Hadhrami) Arab Muslims during Southeast Asia's earliest phases of Islamization is perhaps exaggerated, seemingly due to an overreliance on the work of Naquib al-Attas, the chapter remains a nuanced depiction of Islam's indigenization within Southeast Asia, from the thirteenth century down to the twentieth.

The next chapter, "Living *sunnah*: scholars, community leaders, and the integration of Islam in Java" (pp. 37-60), sees Ismail Fajrie Alatas creatively reconceptualize Javanese Islam as a product of "articulatory labor," or the "social realization of Prophetic teachings" via the careful modulation of Islamic norms through a local lens (p. 39). Stressing Java's Sufi past, a range of pertinent and carefully chosen examples are used to demonstrate how Java's traditional shaykhs, as Sufi masters, were considered spiritual descendants of the Prophet capable of projecting definitive recontextualizations of *sunnah* based on their own lived experiences. Coalescing with the previous chapter's desire to problematize prior scholarly perceptions of Southeast Asia as syncretic and barely Islamized, Alatas emphasizes living *sunnah*'s status as "one of multiple realizations of *sunnah* that have developed historically in different parts of the Muslim world" (p. 41), thereby situating it firmly within the ambit of an 'orthodox' Islamicity. Since the nineteenth century, however, such an inherently flexible notion of

sunnah has come under increasing pressure from more objectified, textually fixed (and often Hadhrami-sponsored) interpretations linked to essentialized images of Shari'ah. R. Michael Feener takes up this complex theme in chapter 3, "Islamic jurisprudence and *adat* in Southeast Asia" (pp. 61-85), which constitutes a well-informed and articulate discussion examining the shifting, historically contingent relationship between Islamic law and local custom within Indonesia. Although sadly neglecting Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, the chapter presents a nuanced portrait of a longstanding regional Islamic legal pluralism in which pre-Islamic customary norms were deemed compatible with Shari'ah. From the nineteenth century onwards, however, and paralleling the developments highlighted by Alatas, "the notion of *adat* as being adversarial...rather than complementary...to the law of Islam" became dominant (p. 70). Post-independence, this conservative turn (notably in Aceh) has seen a "new level of symbolic state engagement with the particulars of Islamic belief and practice," such that "the coercive apparatus of the state [have been used] to steer society toward particular paths of reform and development" (pp. 75-6).

Returning to broader questions of history, chapter 4, "Integration of South Asia within Southeast Asian tradition" (pp. 86-117), sees Abbas Panakkal explore "the specific ways in which South Asia contributed to the integration of Southeast Asian cultures" within the wider Islamic world (p. 86). Cognizant of international trade's inherent potential to drive societal and cultural transformation over the *longue durée*, Panakkal delineates the mechanisms by which Southeast Asia's Islamization (broadly defined), as conducted in conversation with South Asia, developed "a unique Islamic culture that managed to preserve the core principles, values, and higher purposes of Islam while remaining open to the influences of local traditions," thereby reflecting "the remarkable flexibility and adaptability of Islam as a universal faith that encourages integration" (p. 108). In chapter 5, "Integration of Islam into the Malay and Bugis-Makassar kingdoms" (pp. 121-142), Muhamad Ali pushes elements of this argument still further, exploring Islam's integration into the political and legal landscapes of pre-modern Melaka (Malaysia) and Makassar (Indonesia), with

particular reference to Islam's role in the continued justification of pre-Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist inflected notions of kingship.

In chapter 6, "Muslim women's dress in Southeast Asia: Islamic law, fashion, and national identity" (pp. 143-166), Euis Nurlaelawati and Nina Mariani Noor present an interesting, empirically based discussion of female Muslim attire as a contemporary expression of indigenous modernity across both Indonesia and Malaysia. Avoiding 'normative' Western perspectives, which tend to frame veiling (described here using the Indonesian terms *kerudung* and *mukena*) as a reactionary gesture of anti-modernism, the authors utilize the oft-neglected Southeast Asian experience to conceptualize the veil as a symbol of cultural self-confidence and female empowerment. Nuanced enough to avoid naive conclusions – such as equating veiling with greater religiosity or anti-western sentiment – the chapter situates support for traditional clothing within a complex cultural landscape defined by national identity, fashionability, and a plurality of religious opinions. Remaining within the contemporary period, chapter 7, "Muslim cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia: marketplaces as sites of interaction and integration" (pp. 167-186), explores the traditional Southeast Asian marketplace as a locus of "Muslim cosmopolitanism," a term used to signify "a way of living that is rooted in the central tenet of Islam, which is that all men are part of a common humanity" with "a high degree of receptiveness to universal values" (p. 168). Written by Khairudin Aljunied, this innovative treatment describes the survival of Southeast Asian Islam's traditional inclusivity, buoyed by an indebtedness to Sufi forms of spirituality, within the mercantile environments of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, where inherent multiculturalism has resisted conservative pressures associated with Islamic reformism.

Questions of plurality continue within chapter 8, "Cultural adaptation and integration: Islam in Southeast Asia" (pp. 189-207), which sees Anthony Reid craft a characteristically nuanced, complex, and multifaceted image of an Islamic Southeast Asia defined by (amongst other things) inter- and intra-religious plurality. In sympathy with the volume's emic concerns, Reid stresses the indigenous origins of this plurality, attributing its evolution not to

foreign influence but a longstanding regional desire for novelty (conversion) alongside reassurance (vernacularization). This commitment permitted the development of an outward and inward-looking religiosity, allowing Southeast Asian Islam to remain both adaptative and internally coherent. Chapter 9, “*Pondok* education, public discourse, and cultural pluralism in Malaysia and Indonesia” (pp. 208-233), considers some of the same issues within contemporary religious education. Author Azmil Tayeb, drawing upon extensive research conducted across both Malaysia and Indonesia, paints a stark contrast between the two nations: while picturing the first as “centralized and discursively narrow,” the second emerges as “decentralized and discursively open” (p. 209), thereby permitting the maintenance of a tolerant, pluralistic environment that contrasts sharply with Malaysia’s supposed conservative ossification. Although this rigid demarcation may oversimplify and conflict with each nation’s internal complexities, the chapter’s main argument—that discursive spaces must remain open for adaptative change and healthy societal discourse—is both essential and persuasive.

Rounding out the volume are two intriguing studies dedicated to Islamic Southeast Asia’s rich artistic and architectural legacy. The first, “The Islamic art of Southeast Asia” (pp. 234-262), is by Robert Hillenbrand, a scholar known for his erudite explorations of Islamic art history in the Middle East and Africa. Bringing that wealth of knowledge to bear here, Hillenbrand constructs numerous valuable comparative insights situating Malay and Javanese artistic expressions within their broader Islamic contexts, all with an assurance other studies often lack. Although Hillenbrand’s unfamiliarity with Southeast Asia leads to several factual errors regarding the region’s history, his conclusion—that ‘the art of Southeast Asia should be understood, accepted, and valued for what it is: an outstanding example of the capacity of Islamic art to evolve and adapt in response to other ways of seeing’ (p. 252)—is a significant contribution, designed to elevate the region’s disciplinary standing. In the volume’s final chapter, “The mosques of Southeast Asia: a narrative of representation and negotiation” (pp. 263-289), Tutin Aryanti frames traditional, independence-era, and

contemporary forms of Malaysian and Indonesian mosque architecture as “systems of knowledge” designed to reflect each nation’s unique cultural, political, and economic landscapes (p. 264). Situating her approach within the architectural philosophies of vernacularism and modern-regionalism, Aryanti defines Southeast Asian Islamic architecture in terms of its “expressions and intentions” (p. 267), thereby constructing valuable insights into how sacred space may reflect and project national aspirations.

Ultimately, this timely and well-conceived volume presents readers with a wealth of innovative scholarship designed to center Southeast Asia within the wider Islamic world while describing it in its own terms. I am sure it will constitute a valuable addition to any scholar’s library.

Mohammed Rustom (ed.). *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation: Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata*. Leiden: Brill, 2023. 558 pp. ISBN 9789004529021; ISBN 9789004529038 (e-book).

Reviewer: Nevad Kahteran. Professor, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina. Email: nevad.kahteran@hotmail.com.

The book presented with this short review, a profound work on comparative philosophy matching in significance the work of Toshihiko Izutsu, appeared in the edition of our colleague M. Rustom, a member of the International Society for Comparative Philosophy towards World Philosophy (CPWP) and a multi-talented researcher and associate of those to whom this extensive volume is dedicated, i.e., the Chittick couple, William Chittick and his wife, Sachiko Murata. As I have been associated with the Chitticks for almost two decades, it is my great pleasure to present this praiseworthy endeavor of our colleague Rustom to our readership, taking into account the important fact that these are two of the most prominent American and world-widely known researchers in this

field, in fact, those who have provided deep explorations and deeper insights in the field of such comparative studies of the Sino-Islamic philosophical tradition.

In addition to the foreword by Professor S. H. Nasr of George Washington University, a list of Chittick's works (the chronological list mentioned there does not include translations of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata's books, as well as their many abridged and complete translations of Sufi texts that have been published in various journals and anthologies over the past several decades), this volume consists of four parts: Sufism in Persianate Contexts; The Akbarian Tradition; Islamic Philosophy and Cosmology; Hermeneutics and Cross-Cultural Translation; and Index of Names and Technical Terms. Each part seeks to deepen the heart of the research of this famous American couple, who nurtured numerous generations of researchers at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY).

During their doctoral studies in Tehran, Chittick focused on Islamic studies and prominent Sufis and philosophers, while Murata specialized in Buddhism and Far Eastern religions. Since their mentor was the leading Muslim thinker S. H. Nasr, the Chitticks had the opportunity to work closely with other leading authorities in Islamic philosophy at the time, such as Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzīm 'Aṣṣār, 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, Abū l-Qāsim Gurjī, Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī, Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, as well as Toshihiko Izutsu-sensei, who taught there before the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and the common link for all of them was the work of Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, which brought them together and united them in their research. Chittick and Murata met and married during their time in Iran.

Comparative philosophers are indebted to them for introducing the works of Chinese-Muslim thinkers to the international community of scholars the works of Chinese-Muslim thinkers such as two major Chinese-Muslim scholars, Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 (1570-1660) and Liu Zhi 劉智 (ca. 1660-1739), and numerous other authors of the *Han Kitab* (Chinese 漢克塔布 / 汉克塔布, Pinyin Hànn kètǎbù - a corpus of published books by Muslim-Chinese scholars, and philosophers who aim to highlight the synonymity of

Confucianism and Islam), and for highlighting the fruitful Islamic intellectual tradition in China, which fosters cross-tradition engagement . It is certain that they will continue to enrich Islamic and Far Eastern comparative studies with their contributions, just as it is already clear that they have become a landmark or a cornerstone of such global philosophical studies over a half-century. Their writings have been translated into fifteen languages and are taught at every major academic institution worldwide, including the Balkans.

This *Festschrift*, edited by our colleague Rustom, brings together their students and collaborators from the past 25 years, showcasing their significant contributions from Arabic, Persian, and Chinese, especially a corpus of texts such as the *Han Kitab*, which is a newly discovered universe within the international community of scholars. This volume coincided with the eightieth birth year of both its recipients. Sincere congratulations to the Chittick couple on the occasion of their jubilee, and to the editor himself for such a conceived volume, which further illuminates the unique intellectual depth and breadth of horizons of the comparative model of thinking and acting.

Finally, over the past 30 years, China has experienced a revival of interest in Chinese-language writings on Islam, making this an outstanding achievement , which our CPWP and international community of scholars applaud and celebrate as a contribution to the scholarship on the history of Islam in China and intercultural and transcultural studies.

Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 (1584-1660), Ma Zhu 馬注 (1640-1711), Liu Zhi 劉智 (1670-1730), Ma Dexin 馬德新 (1794-1874), and his prominent disciple Ma Lianyuan 馬聯元 (Nūr al-Ḥaqq) (1841-1904) stand as eminent scholars within the Chinese Islamic Han Kitab (Han Qitabu 漢克塔補) tradition. The inception of this intellectual movement can be traced back to Wang Daiyu's seminal work, "True Commentary on the Real Teaching."

It is worth noting the significant contributions of Sachiko Murata, who has diligently advanced a nuanced appreciation of the intricate worldviews propounded by Liu Zhi and Wang Daiyu. Numerous books and studies written or translated by the Chitticks, William and Sachiko Murata, as a result of the valuable intellectual

and intercultural cooperation of these authors, that is, as a great confirmation of the necessity of intercultural and transcultural dialogue, their linguistic and spiritual worlds – is an exemplary paradigm of comparative literary-philosophical research, which, as a counterbalance to the world of violence and conflicts in which we live – offers an intellectually and morally indispensable alternative: instead of a "clash of civilizations" – a dialogue of cultures and civilizations and the ability to hear the Other, the need to explore in the vast world weave of cultures and civilizations and in the richness of their differences, both synchronously and diachronically, the profound human connection in the fundamental and ultimate questions of human existence.

In this respect, the book presented here is part of this global intercultural and transcultural dialogue in the context of globalization. Hence, I personally express great joy to have the opportunity to provide a Bosnian-Herzegovinian contribution in Malaysia to the philosophical acceptance, shaping, or recognition of its universal action in the spirit of multicultural Bosnia and the cultural pluralism of the modern world, which is so universally intertwined and interdependent that a deeper understanding of such literature is no longer just a mere intellectual curiosity, but a question of the survival of the human race as a whole.

Yusmadi Yusoff. *Anwar Ibrahim: A Pursuit for Global Justice and Peace through Dialogue*. Kuala Lumpur: RIGHTS Foundation, 2024. 150 pp. ISBN 9789672574118.

Reviewer: Mohd. Shazani Bin Masri. Lecturer, Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UNIMAS. Email: mmshazani@unimas.my

Yusmadi Yusoff presents a fascinating picture of a visionary leader in his latest book, *Anwar Ibrahim: A A Pursuit for Global Justice and Peace via Dialogue*. Drawing on his lengthy history of political and personal interaction with the present Malaysian Prime Minister

Anwar Ibrahim, Yusmadi tells a story that goes beyond the political and exposes a man fervent in his ability to bridge divisions through dialogue. This book narrates Anwar's story from his student days as an activist, then through the ups and downs of his political career, until his present position as a world-renowned Muslim statesman currently ranked as the 15th most influential Muslim figure in the world according to "The World's Most Influential Muslims (2025)" by RISSC. It showcases Anwar's resoluteness in upholding justice, peace, and harmony despite increasing division nationally and internationally.

The book begins with Professor Osman Bakar's elegant foreword, fondly recalling Anwar's leadership journey from their secondary school days. Since they were friends, Osman has noted Anwar's early involvement in leadership roles and keen debating skills. Osman saw Anwar's consistent commitment to social justice and that his friend could easily connect with the public with his extraordinary communication skills.

Osman then discusses the significance of dialogue in leadership. He emphasized dialogue as a powerful leadership tool because it can persuade and facilitate common ground. He described Anwar as always seeking common ground and understanding, hence showcasing Anwar's leadership, which is predominated by a niche dialogical approach.

Growing together as youth leaders, Osman highlighted Anwar's extensive local and global experience in youth leadership. Anwar's active role in organizations such as the National Union of Muslim Students Association (PKPIM), the Muslim Youth Movement Malaysia (ABIM), and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) proved this.

It was no plain sailing for Anwar. Osman discussed the tremendous challenges Anwar has faced throughout his political career, including imprisonment. But that experience, instead of breaking him, prepared Anwar for mature leadership with a spirit determined to fight for social justice. Anwar rose from the ranks and files in UMNO and rapidly became the Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister many years later. His dialogical leadership qualities played a significant role in his political success.

Professor Osman's insightful recognition of Anwar as a "dialogical leader" illuminates the latter's unwavering commitment to constructive dialogue and collaborative decision-making. "Dialogical leader" signifies Anwar's consistent approach to leadership that prioritizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and the pursuit of common ground. Even in disagreement or conflict, this leadership does not abandon persuasion through understanding and collaboration. It highlights Anwar's ability to bridge divides and unify by resting on shared values and goals.

By calling Anwar a "born dialogical leader," he suggests that this approach is intrinsic to Anwar's leadership style and not merely political tactic. This distinction reflects the authenticity and effectiveness of Anwar's commitment to dialogue to achieve peace and justice. As a concept, "dialogical leader" sets the epistemic tone for the rest of the book. It provides more clarity to the source of Anwar's charismatic strength. Anwar is well known for being a good debater. Now, it seems that between debate and dialogue, dialogue has a better case for political communication based on Anwar's lead.

This book is an inquiry into the contemporary model of leadership and not just a mere biography. According to Yusmadi, Anwar's relentless dedication to communication embodies a transforming model that promotes human rights, interfaith understanding, and peace over national and cultural borders. Emphasizing Anwar's conviction that " Dialogue is the bridge to understanding, and understanding is the path to peace" (p. 1), he highlights how this idea drives Anwar's several projects and relentless dedication creating a more fair and equal society.

It also showcases Anwar's endeavors to create establishments that reflect his dedication to dialogue, notably Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. The Center, founded in 1995, meant to "bridge the gap between Muslim and Christian communities through informed dialogue." (p.64) It seeks to promote mutual understanding and respect between the two 'faith cousins' of the Abrahamic religious tradition. Similarly, Anwar launched a committed campaign for the Rohingyas. He aims to garner global support so that human rights and justice are universally upheld.

Yusmadi relates Anwar's Malaysia MADANI framework to his broader goal for global justice. MADANI frameworks serve as a roadmap for international and intercultural inclusivity and fairness. To this end, Yusmadi depicts Anwar's dedication for a better future for Malaysians within the framework of inclusivist global community.

The book exemplifies dialogue as one of Anwar's primary leadership styles and apparatus. Rooted in empathy, mutual respect, and a sincere desire to understand varying viewpoints, this method presents a welcome substitute for adversarial politics. The text, however, may be improved by a more thorough theoretical investigation. Linking Anwar's writings to accepted theories of political epistemology and the Sacred, as developed in the writings of Seyyed Hossein Nasr *Knowledge and the Sacred* or Osman Bakar's *Tawhid and Science*, will strengthen the intellectual depth of the book and offer a more solid academic basis. Direct reference to a recently published historical treatise about Islam in Malaysia by Khairudin Aljunied can also better contextualize "Anwar's dialogue" in Southeast Asian contemporary Islamic political history of ideas.

Notwithstanding this limit, the book skilfully emphasizes the transformative power of dialogue. Yusmadi demonstrates dialogue as a means of seeking truth, fostering consensus, and harmonizing many points of view rather than only as a means of communication. This is consistent with Tawhidic epistemology, in which many points of view are one under the oneness of knowledge, acknowledging the natural connectivity of all things. Emphasizing the importance of attentive listening and meaningful interaction with others in a spirit of humility and respect, dialogue is presented as an ethical responsibility deeply rooted in Islamic principles, including *shūrā* (consultation) and *adab* (respectful conduct).

The book shows how Anwar's dedication to communication shows up practically during his political career. He addresses problems such as Muslim-Christian relations and encourages interaction between Islam and Confucianism through discussion, therefore promoting interfaith and intercultural knowledge. From supporting the Rohingya to pushing democratic reforms, he also uses conversation as a political instrument to argue for justice on many

other subjects, proving the potential of communication to influence actual change in globally.

Emphasizing compassion, sustainability and respect, Anwar's Malaysia MADANI vision captures his conviction in conversation as the cornerstone of a united society. Policies and projects aiming to promote inclusivity and respect for Malaysia's varied population help to apply this framework, therefore acknowledging the richness and strength that diversity offers to a country.

Moreover, Anwar's dialogical approach covers global concerns, including his support of Palestinian justice and the Rohingya crisis . Through discussion, he promotes worldwide cooperation and solidarity on issues of justice and human rights, therefore transforming divisive problems into shared global concerns and supporting group solutions to urgent global crises.

The book also covers several scholarly gaps in the understanding of dialogue as a transforming instrument in Malaysian politics. It provides ideas on how dialogical leadership can heal divisions in Malaysia's varied sociopolitical scene, fostering peace and understanding in a nation sometimes marked by ethnic and religious conflicts. This book serves as a case study for inclusive governance, showcasing Anwar's approach to dialogue across ethnic and religious lines. This could provide a paradigm for other countries to learn from Malaysia's example in managing multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural relations.

Furthermore, the book presents another viewpoint on Islam and democracy in Malaysia, showing how Islamic values of unity, justice, and communication could support democratic values. It shows how Islamic values could be compatible with and even support democratic ideas, therefore challenging the sometimes-perpetuated conflict between Islam and democracy. Emphasizing the need to obtain knowledge and understanding through honest and courteous interaction with others, it also positions conversation as a sort of political epistemology, stressing a distinctive framework grounded in dialogue rather than hostile discussion.

The book is a testament to how dialogue could be a powerful tool for peaceful cooperation and collective problem-solving. It shows how dialogue bridges different communities by facilitating

mutual understanding and reconciliation. This is particularly true when, for example, there are solid historical grievances and perceived differences, as exemplified by Anwar and his dialogue with the Sarawak government. By leading through example, Anwar demonstrates Malaysia's capacity to navigate complex discourses on justice, human rights, and interfaith relations through dialogic and persuasive politics, rather than relying on adversarial or confrontational approaches.

In conclusion, this book represents a significant contribution to the discourse on "dialogue" in leadership, politics, and epistemology. Although not a strictly academic work, it is likely to attract a wide readership due to its engaging blend of insider insights into Anwar's biography and Yusmadi's incisive analysis.. This book is for those who seek communicative nuances in leadership and have seen various applications in dealing with global justice, interfaith dialogue, and Southeast Asian politics. It is the story of a contemporary world leader from a Southeast Asian country who leverages his unique local insights to address global challenges. Ultimately, the book is politically strategic as it aligns with Anwar's current vision for Malaysia and his approach to leadership. It portrays him as a statesman deeply committed to justice, peace, and inclusivity, thereby reinforcing his image as a leader prioritising the greater good. The book deliberately enhances Anwar's leadership brand by stressing his worldwide activities and leveraging Islamic values, framing him as a bridge-builder and unifier in a world too frequently split by conflict and mistrust. It also subtly reinforces his Malaysia MADANI model, thereby promoting an inclusive, ethical, and aspirational vision for Malaysia's future. . Emphasizing Anwar's dedication to communication, justice, and peace, the book is potent evidence of his ongoing legacy as a leader who has inspired millions with his vision of a more fair and harmonious society.

Syed Serajul Islam and Md. Saidul Islam. *The Jamaat Question in Bangladesh: Islam, Politics and Society in Post-Democratic Nation*. New York: Routledge, 2024. 278 pp. ISBN 9781032316383.

Reviewer: Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: zackyfouz@iiu.edu.my

The student revolution in Bangladesh successfully ousted the authoritarian regime of Sheikh Hasina Wajid. However, the supporters of the old regime and its regional allies are still trying to manipulate the long-held fear of Jamaat-e-Islami to undermine the revolution's credibility and its goals. They argue that the revolution would allow the dominant Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, to come to power and transform the country into a theocratic state, which would be detrimental to minorities in the country (Mojumdar, A., 2024). Even during the revolution's early days, the previous regime claimed that the revolution was a conspiracy orchestrated by Jamaat-e-Islami to overthrow the ruling secular government (Chaudhury, R., 2024). Although this claim gained little support after the revolution, fears surrounding the party/movement persist. In this context, the book *'The Jamaat Question'* published during the previous authoritarian regime, remains relevant as it helps us understand why and how Jamaat became a contentious issue in Bangladeshi intellectual and political circles as we witnessed a glimpse of it during and after the revolution. What makes the book even more intriguing is the central question it aims to address: how has Jamaat remained resilient despite significant repression, discrimination, and scrutiny from the ruling regime over the past 16 years? (p. 2). In addressing this driving question, the editors of the book, Serajul Islam and Md. Saidul Islam, did an impressive job of bringing experts on Bangladeshi politics and society to reflect on the history, evolution, changes, and impact of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. The comprehensive coverage of themes in the book shows that it has succeeded in situating the movement within the broader socio-political and economic landscape of the country. With that note, let's explore the main contributions of the

book.

Everything starts from the point of Jamaat-e-Islami being one of the leading religious parties that opposed the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 due to religious and geopolitical concerns. However, the country was born, putting the movement on ‘the wrong side of history’ (p. 3). Although the movement accepted the new reality and substantially contributed to the nation’s democracy, society, and economy ever since, Saidul Islam, in his introductory chapter, mentions that the secular establishment continues to push the people ‘to view the party from the retrogressive and reductionist lens of 1971’ (p. 8). The Jamaat is ‘expected to carry forward the sin of opposing liberation from generation to generation’ (p. 4). (p. 4). Jamaat is a ‘national problem’ to deal with, a potential enemy to fight against, and a possible adversary to blame for all national owes (p. 3). Examining these narratives through the concept of governmentality by French philosopher Foucault, Saidul Islam argues that the root of the problematization of the Jamaat’s existence in Bangladesh is the construction of a discourse that projects the movement as ‘other’ and ‘internal enemy of the nation’ that needs to be diagnosed, examined, studied, problematized, and surveilled (p. 4). Saidul Islam expands on his theoretical analysis in chapter eight of the book, co-written with Anwarul Wadud, documenting how the problematization of the movement at the level of discourse led to actual violence against its members and leaders during Hasina’s regime (p. 166-179). Although Jamaat is often portrayed as the ‘religious other’ who corrupted the ‘secular’ nature of Bangladesh, Serajul Islam’s chapter shows that religion has always played a significant role in Bangladeshi politics. Interestingly, most political parties have turned to religious sentiments and religious parties to bolster their legitimacy. This trend began with the nation’s founder himself, who resorted to religious discourses when facing socio-economic challenges. It continued under subsequent leaders, including General Zia, Erased and Khalida Zia. Even Sheikh Hasina’s supposedly secular regime sought support from Hefazat Islam, a Deobandi movement, and their network to counter the growing influence of Jamaat-e-Islami since 2018 (p. 52-55).

Besides these dominant secular narratives, Moniruzaman’s

contribution emphasizes that Jamaat's internal political and social policy-making process is partly responsible for the party's marginalization in post-independent Bangladesh. While acknowledging its contribution to the development of democracy in the country, one crucial point he makes is that the party's past activism was overly focused on defending and glorifying personalities such as Ghulam Azam and other Jamaat senior leaders who openly took an anti-liberation stance before 1971. This strategic error negatively impacted the public perception of the party, as it allowed the entire blame for being an 'anti-independence force' to be squarely placed on it. Furthermore, the political, legal, and social stigma that Jamaat has been formally labeled with after 2010 is a direct consequence of such activism (p. 91). This was further exacerbated when the movement failed to make a concerted effort to explain its anti-liberation stance with credible evidence. Moreover, Moniruzaman criticizes the movement for its failure to produce capable Islamic intellectuals who can work beyond party-political lines due to its excessive involvement in electoral and social welfare activities over the last fifty years (p. 93-94). To a certain extent, Nazmus Shakib's chapter can also be seen as an extension of Moniruzaman's analysis about the failure of Jamaat to produce quality Islamic intellectuals. In his chapter, he correctly argues that many of the significant ideational changes within the movement were the direct outcome of an external shock, such as the impact of the war on terror, rather than the consequence of internal intellectual evolution and debates (p. 72). The subsequent chapters go beyond the political and intellectual aspects to analyze the socio-economic contributions and welfare programs of Jamaat as an Islamic movement. These chapters provide a comprehensive understanding of the significant scale and scope of its socio-economic intervention in a nation with a population of over 170 million people. Additionally, they reveal the unique conditions of the country, where reliance on the services of NGOs has significantly increased in the past, shaping the movement's core more than its political and ideological aspects. Moreover, those chapters make clear that any reader of the country's socioeconomic development history cannot overlook the contributions of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh in uplifting

the daily life of the neglected poor and marginalized (p. 100-145).

Finally, Mahruf Billah addresses the war crime allegations against senior Jamaat leaders, often considered the 'elephant in the room'. In this regard, he thoroughly documents the initial efforts to hold accountable those involved in crimes against humanity during the liberation struggle under Mujib Rahman's regime. On this hotly debated issue, the author's main line of argument to question the credibility of the popular accusations against Jamaat leaders is that while there is no doubt that Jamaat-e-Islami supported the united Pakistan and stood against liberation, none of the previous cases filed against the criminals who involved in crimes against humanity during Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's premiership ever included any Jamaat leaders. He further notes that the first prime minister, Mujibur Rahman had all the power and authority to bring Jamaat leadership into the court of justice for their alleged involvement. Still, none of the investigations during his period on war crimes led to such a conclusion in 1970s (p. 186). Furthermore, he shows that those legal terms and laws were twisted during Hasina's regime to allow the government to take revenge on Jamaat-e-Islami for its political affiliation with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party under the slogan of bringing criminals to justice. Thus, for Maruf Billa, the Hasina regime's decision to execute the popular Jamaat leaders for their alleged involvement in war crimes, is clearly driven by political calculations to reinforce the regime's secular authoritarian tendencies in the country (p. 198-199). Although this line of argument is crucial for proving the innocence of the Jamaat leadership on legal grounds and emphasizing the politicization under Sheikh Hasina, one might feel that it falls just a little short of challenging the narratives in the public domain. In this case, if the author had included statements and writings from Jamaat leaders condemning the atrocities of the Pakistan Army during the early days of the liberation struggle or its immediate aftermath despite their support for united Pakistan, the legal approach to the issue might have been strengthened and solidified.

Overall, *'The Jamaat Question in Bangladesh'* offers a timely exploration of the history of Islamism in the country while providing insights into its future in a post-revolutionary context. It is a critical

addition to the growing studies on the Islamist phenomenon in the subcontinent. There has been extensive and exclusive research on Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan and India, but not as much when it comes to Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh.¹ This is surprising considering its significant success in building civil society institutions, contributing to democracy, and holding ministerial positions in the government. *'The Jamaat Question'* fills this scholarly lacuna. The book's primary strength lies in its comprehensiveness, providing an analysis of the socio-religious, political, and economic dynamics of the movement and attempting to theorize the Jamaat question. However, a notable limitation is the absence of a dedicated chapter on Jamaat's contribution to the discourse about gender, Muslim women, and women empowerment, which is essential for understanding the movement's commitment to gender inclusivity in Bangladesh context. Despite this limitation, *'The Jamaat Question'* is a must-read work for scholars interested in the Islamist phenomenon in the subcontinent, especially in Bangladesh.

¹ I. Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); R. Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-Islami of Pakistan* (California: University of California Press, 1994); H. Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists? Jama'at-e-Islami and Jam'at-ud-Da'wa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011); Abdul Rashid Moten, *Revolution to Revolution: Jama'at-e-Islami in the Politics of Pakistan* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002); A. Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan: Vanguard of New Modernity* (Syracuse University Press, 2013); M. Islam, *Limits of Islamism: Jamaat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Osman Bakar, Ahmad Murad Merican and Wan Ali Wan Mamat (Eds.). *Colonialism in The Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC & Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 2020. 360 pp. ISBN 9789839379709.

Reviewer: Arief S. Arman. Research Fellow, University Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD), Kuala Lumpur. Email: 705243@soas.ac.uk

Colonialism, in all its grand riches and assumed bravado, has shaped and continues to mould the thoughts and actions of many across the globe. The impact of coercion and pillaging, and of blatant disregard to those who have been labelled ‘the other’, is very much the *sine qua non* of the colonial enterprise. Physical subjugation might be a template used in the past, but the current imbroglio is one that relates to economic and intellectual suppression. The residue of colonial policies has taken the form of an all-encompassing dictum to which modern nation-states are compelled to follow. This, in turn, has had, and continues to have, an adverse effect on the lives of millions of people the world over. These decisions are often made under duress; a necessary caving in by governments to be ‘relevant’ and ‘competitive’ in the modern world. Closer to home, there is a pressing need to (re)consider our past and to learn from the relationships between civilisations. The intention here is to build a future where honest communication – and perhaps reconciliation – can take place between subjugator and subjugated, as well as communities with diverse lived realities and worldviews.

Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters is a collection of thirteen essays on the topic of colonialism and its impact on the Nusantara region, often referred to as the ‘lands below the wind’. Published by the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM) Publications 2020, these riveting papers were submitted by scholars from across the region, and initially presented at an international conference jointly organised by ISTAC-IIUM and the Malaysian Historical Society on Sept 2-3, 2019. The conference was held on the occasion of the International Council for Historical-Cultural Cooperation in

Southeast Asia (ICHCC-SEA) Sixth International Conference on History and Culture. The editors of the book are Osman Bakar, Ahmad Murad Merican, and former National Library of Malaysia director general, Wan Ali Wan Mamat. Chapter contributors to the book include Jakarta-based academic Farish Noor and Maria Luisa Camagay of the Philippines. There is also a foreword titled ‘Rediscovering History: Malay Culture and Civilisation Today’ by the tenth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim.

The topics of discussion are separated and made clear from the start. The sub-sections in the text include ‘Europeans in the Malay Archipelago’, ‘The Hispanised Malay and Magellan’, ‘Resisting Colonialism’, and ‘The Impact of Colonialism on Public Policy, Culture, and Identity’. Most of the authors deal with the civilisational relationship between colonial powers and their hosts in the Malay Archipelago. The narration of this relationship is often made through the motivation, experience, and trajectory of colonialists themselves. Furthermore, the impact of colonisation on the Nusantara cannot be overstated, as various domains within the life of the locals were altered and transformed in accordance with the civilisational agenda of the 3Gs: Gold, God (Gospel) and Glory. Different variants of the 3Gs came to play in the region, but the expansion of modern European civilisation was very much rooted to the trifecta: monopoly of wealth, religious exclusivism, and political nationalism.

Chapter one by Osman Bakar gives a picture of the real politico-economic objectives of occidental powers in this part of the world. The current rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) provides documented chronological evidence of the Portuguese imperial vision and monopoly over spice trade in the state of Malacca. Chapter two sees Ahmad Murad Merican’s critical assessment on how Penang (Pulau Pinang)² was occupied – taken possession of by a British overlord in the figure of Francis Light. Merican brings forth the strong assertion that “*The colonial*

² Merican is highly critical of the usage of ‘Penang’ (he believes it to be a corruption of the word ‘Pinang’) in (and by) the Malaysian National Archives – seemingly ensnared in a neo-colonial mode. He strongly suggests that the original ‘Pulau Pinang’ be used in all official documents (Merican, 2020:42).

experience has buried the ‘native self’ as well as the colonial self. There is historical amnesia.” (Merican, 2020: 34). Indeed, what was deemed to be fair game at the time constitutes human right abuses today. Chapter three authored by Bondan Kayumonos, examines the intense rivalry between the British, Dutch, and Portuguese imperialists in dominating the nutmeg trade in the Banda Islands. This economic and political milieu resulted in violent warfare, with most casualties being the natives of the aforesaid archipelago. The rivalry resulted in the Treaty of Breda in 1667, which delivered the control of nutmeg trade to the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) – better known as VOC.

Chapter four by Farish Noor highlights the invention of the ‘Bornean pirate’ within the larger schema of a ‘war on piracy’ – a pretext and justification for the involvement of colonialists in the Nusantara seas (primarily the north coast of Borneo and the Sulu Sea). Narratives about ‘anarchy’ and ‘native misrule’ were utilised by the oppressors to legitimise acts of imperial conquest. Moreover, the entire campaign indicates how the concept of ‘piracy’ was a nominal construct that was in reality, instrumental fiction. Chapter five by Fernando Santiago discusses the topic of identity, of historicising ‘Malayness’ and the emergence of the ‘hispanised Malay’. Santiago points out that the heroic figure of José Rizal is thought to be the ‘Great Malayan’ and the ‘Pride of the Malay Race’. The study contextualises the roots of the Filipinos’ notion of ‘Malayness’, while also explaining their affinity with the Malay world at large. Chapter six sees an exploration of the Italian, Antonio Pigafetta’s account of Filipino women. Maria Camagay expertly weaves the intricacies of Filipino history, indicating the role of women in pre-colonial Pinoy society as one of significance, especially relating to religious matters – as observed by Pigafetta. There is also mention of the apparent autonomy and freedom that pre-colonial Filipino women enjoyed, which was curtailed by Spanish rule later on.

Chapter seven by Ian Alfonso discusses the trajectory of Spanish influence in the Philippines. This chapter includes an illustration– an artist’s rendition of a caracoa, from *Le Second Livre de la Navigation*, a 1599 Dutch account, which is used as the book’s cover. Chapter eight would be of interest to those who seek to

comprehend how Islamic leadership was influenced by colonialism. Jajat Burhanudin explores the notion of how European colonisers – as a political behemoth – determined the character of Muslim leaders in the Malay Archipelago, and eventually Islamic dynamics in the region. His study looks at how Dutch (*Belanda*) colonial policies in Indonesia and the British in Malaya impacted the traits and styles of *'ulama* (religious class/scholars) in the two Muslim nations. Burhanudin contends that there are stark dissimilarities between the two. The Dutch attempted to draw native elites into their colonial establishment, but the *'ulamā* – due to their strong anti-colonial activism – were treated as the distinct 'other', who consequently evolved to become a 'distinct religious community'. Such a stance culminated in the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926. On the other hand, the British had a more tolerant (one might say 'peaceful') policy towards Islam, enabling the *'ulama* to be integrated (some might use the word 'duped') into the ruling elites in the protected Malay states.

Chapter nine engages in the theme of colonial resistance in the form of the influential figure, Tuan Guru Abdullah bin Qadi Abdus Salaam (1712-1807) – a Malay hero in Cape Town, South Africa. Achmat Salie highlights the spiritual lessons imparted by Tuan Guru Abdullah on both his followers and the laity alike, since there is nothing that occurs in the world without it having been decreed by the Almighty. Indeed, even colonialism has been decreed. However, Tuan Guru Abdullah is not suggesting that the subjugated be stuck in a defeatist frame of thinking, and of being. He called for resistance in the form of complete reliance (*tawakkul*) on God, and inspired the diaspora Malays (Cape Malays specifically, with their predecessors being scholars and warrior princes) to remain steadfast in the face of adversity. Salie also points out that Tuan Guru Abdullah was related to the circle of the nine saints of Java (*Wali Walī Songo*) and was regarded as the seal of saints in the Cape. Furthermore, Tuan Guru Abdullah was an initiate of two Sufi Orders – the Shādhilī and Qadari Qādirī *ṭarīqas*. A crucial aspect of resistance imparted by the revered teacher is his reliance on the Holy Qur'ān, using its verses as a language of protest rather, and not simple pious platitudes. Salie contends that Tuan Guru Abdullah was among the handful of

scholars who came to a realisation that the Quranic chapters were political commentaries. Thus, he applied the Holy Qur'ān as a living reality, proving to be a catalyst in galvanising the spirit of diaspora Malays in resisting the colonial onslaught. It is interesting to point out that Salie saw the spread of Wahhabism as detrimental to a true appreciation of Islam – stifling an inherent peace and order by plunging into *takfīrī* chaos.

Chapter ten sees the discussion of the spread of the *ribā* (usury) industry in colonial Malaya. Akin to malignant cancer cells that spread in the body of an unsuspecting host, the influence of *ribā* adversely affected the body politic of the Malays. Nazari Ismail argues that the banking industry (in nascent forms) and concomitant *ribā* never existed in the Nusantara. It is only after the coming of colonial powers that such a nefarious industry began, with the first bank established in 1840 in Singapore – the Union Bank of Calcutta. The debt-for-profit industry was slow to take off in the region due to strong Islamic values, and the consideration of charging interest on loans as *kabā'ir* (major sin). However, these values eroded over time as the irresistible influence of the colonialists spread far and wide. Chapter eleven sees Mohammad Abu Bakar connecting the history of colonialism to the way foreign policies are former and enacted today, particularly in Malaysia. Chapter twelve is an exploration of a crisis of identity that the Malays have gone through in both historical Malaya and contemporary Malaysia. Awang Sariyan argues; it is only natural that colonial powers seek to impose their authority in the land of the ruled in all domains of life – including administration, culture, and education. Moreover, the education system implemented caused fissures within Malay society as there was some sort of cognitive dissonance that took hold of the people. As such, language played an important role in the dissemination of ideas. During the period of British rule, the Malay language gradually lost its role in the advancement of civilisation. In administration, education, and law, the use of English became ubiquitous. The British administration introduced two main types of education, namely the English school and the vernacular school. Malay schools fell under the umbrella of vernacular schools, together with Chinese and Tamil-medium schools. The Malay people as the majority population

(including the *Orang Asal*) were denied their dominant status and were treated the same as the Chinese and the Indians, who came or were brought to Malaya by the British from both China and India respectively. One can make the argument that in the long run, the authority of the Malays withered, paving the way for a monolithic culture of capitalism and consumerism to take root in the country (subversion of Islam and its values, creating a bulging consumer class that cuts across racial lines). In the publication's last chapter, Md. Salleh Yaapar discusses rather astutely the colonial myth of indigenous people as being 'backward' and 'lazy'. In making this argument, Salleh Yaapar refers to the Malaysian sociologist of Hadrami origin, Syed Hussein Alatas' magnum opus, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977).

To conclude, this book would appeal to the layperson as it is written in an approachable manner, with academic jargon kept at a minimum. If there is any criticism of the publication, it is that it is rather dense, which perhaps reflects the bold ambition of bringing together diverse chapters addressing difficult and diverse questions. For those interested in history and post-colonial studies, *Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters* can be used as a guide to facilitate research. It helps us to make sense of the civilisational encounters that have shaped our current reality. The younger generation(s) ought to be encouraged to better understand the civilisational consequences of colonialism in this region, which is frustratingly identical with experiences of colonialism in other parts of the world. We would do well to remember that the overwriting of one history by another is a perpetuation of control and domination in so-called 'liberated' lands.

AL-SHAJARA

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