



COSMIC CREATION THEORY ACCORDING
TO THE QUR'ĀN AND *SUNNAH*

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates and analyzes critically the Islamic creation narrative according to the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. It then compares and contrasts that narrative with current discoveries and contemporary theories in the field of cosmology, physics, geology and planetology. The Islamic creation narrative consists of four major threads: the time taken for creation to take place, the order of creation, the nature of seven heavens and the nature of seven earths. The Qur'an clearly mentions that the creation of the heavens and Earth took place in six days. This dissertation argues that the denotation of the word *day* to the days of the week is erroneous since it is based on *ḥadīths* with problematic chains of narration. The meaning of the word *day* can be understood as long and regular periods of time that are in agreement with the latest discoveries in planetology and cosmology. This work supports the notion that multiple heavens were created before Earth. After two days of cosmic creation, the heavens were reduced to seven. It argues that the notion of cosmic breakup and the collapse of several regions of the primordial universe are in agreement with the Multiverse theory. Hence, the seven heavens share many similar traits. The study proposes that a fresh perspective pertaining to cosmic creation in the Islamic narrative must be considered. Findings also prove that the Islamic narrative does not contradict contemporary science.

خلاصة البحث

تقوم هذه الدراسة بالبحث والتحليل النقدي لقصة بداية الخلق في الإسلام وفقاً للقرآن والحديث ثم مقارنتها مع الاكتشافات الحديثة والنظريات المعاصرة في مجال علم الكونيات والفيزياء وعلوم الأرض وعلم الكواكب. تتكون قصة بداية الخلق في الإسلام من أربعة بحوث رئيسية هي: الوقت الذي يستغرقه الخلق، وترتيب الخلق، وطبيعة السماوات السبع، وطبيعة الأرضين السبع. يذكر القرآن بوضوح أن خلق السماوات والأرض وقع في ستة أيام. ويذكر هذا البحث أن فهم معنى اليوم بأيام الأسبوع ليس بصحيح لأنها مبنية على الأحاديث المشككة الأسانيد. ويمكن فهم معنى اليوم على فترة زمنية طويلة ومنتظمة متفقة مع أحدث الاكتشافات في علم الكواكب وعلم الكونيات. يدعم هذا البحث الفكرة القائلة بخلق العديد من السماوات. فبعد يومين من خلق الكون انخفضت إلى سبع سماوات. تذكر هذه الدراسة أن مفهوم انفكاك الكون وانهيار العديد من المناطق فيه يتوافق مع نظرية الأكوان المتعددة. وبالتالي، فإن السماوات السبع تشترك في كثير من الصفات. ويؤكد هذا البحث ضرورة مراعاة المنظور الجديد المتعلق بخلق الكون في السرد الإسلامي. وأخيراً تستنتج هذه الدراسة أن قصة بداية الخلق في الإسلام لا تتعارض مع العلم الحديث.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION PAGE

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Firdaus bin Yahya

Signature.....

Date.....

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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DEDICATION PAGE

To Islam, the most precious gift from Allah s.w.t.

To my father and mother who are instrumental in shaping what I am today.

To my wife and son who gave their loving support to me in this endeavor.

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Thomas Edison famously said that an invention is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. It is the perspiration of not only the inventor but those who assisted and supported him. Likewise, this thesis is the product of many who graciously extended physical and moral support to the researcher. My gratitude to Emeritus Professor Dr. Osman Bakar who suggested the thesis' topic in one his class. He encouraged me to develop it into a full thesis. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Professor Dr. Cemil Akdogan who patiently supervised me in the arduous journey of writing this thesis. My heartfelt gratitude to Professor Dr. Torla Hj Hassan who supervised by post viva work and gave many beneficial insights and suggestions. To my loving wife, Nurrul Huda bte Abdul Rashid, who showed great patience and understanding during my long hours of solitude, my sincerest appreciation. Last but by no means the least, my deepest gratitude and thanks to my parents, Yahya bin Synen and Habsah bte Senin, for without their support and prayers, this thesis will never materialize.

TRANSLITERATION

ب	=	b	ط	=	t{
ت	=	t	ظ	=	z{
ث	=	th	ع	=	'
ج	=	j	غ	=	gh
ح	=	h{	ف	=	f
خ	=	kh	ق	=	q
د	=	d	ك	=	k
ذ	=	dh	ل	=	l
ر	=	r	م	=	m
ز	=	z	ن	=	n
س	=	s	ه	=	h
ش	=	sh	و	=	w
ص	=	s{	ء	=	'
ض	=	d{	y	=	ي

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Approval Page	iv
Declaration Page	v
Copyright Page	vi
Dedication Page	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Transliteration	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Objective of the Study	4
Literature Review	4
Significance of the Study	9
Methodology of the Study	10
Organization of the Study	13
CHAPTER 1: COSMIC CREATION THEORIES.....	14
Introduction	14
Cosmology and Cosmogony.....	15
Classification of Creation Myths.....	16
Egyptian Creation Myth.....	18
Babylonian Creation Myth.....	19
Greek Creation Myth.....	21
Persian Creation Myth.....	25
Islamic Creation Narrative.....	25
Contemporary Theories.....	29
Conclusion	32
CHAPTER 2: SOURCES OF ISLAMIC SYARIAH	34
Introduction	34
The Qur’ān	35
Types of <i>Qirā’at</i>	37
Types of <i>Tafsīr</i>	38
<i>Tafsīr</i> Methodologies	40
Different Types of <i>Tafsīr</i>	43
The Ḥadīth	44
The <i>Sanad</i> and <i>Matn</i>	46
The Science of Criticism of Ḥadīth Narrators	47
Classes of Ḥadīth	50

Categories of <i>Āḥād</i> Ḥadīth	51
Legal Significance of <i>Hadīth</i>	56
Compilers of Ḥadīth	61
Conclusion	63
CHAPTER 3: CREATION OF METAPHYSICAL COSMOS	64
Introduction	64
First Creation	65
The Ḥadīth on Prophetic Light	69
The Water	74
The Throne	78
Time Scale	80
Creation Motive	82
Conclusion	84
CHAPTER 4: CREATION TIME	86
Introduction	86
The Qur'ānic Verses	87
The Traditional Views	90
The Contemporary Views	104
Earth's Story	106
The Big Bang	116
Conclusion	133
CHAPTER 5: CREATION ORDER	136
Introduction	136
Conflicting Verses	137
The Solutions to the Contradiction	140
First Interpretation	140
Second Interpretation	141
Third Interpretation	142
Fourth Interpretation	144
Fifth Interpretation	145
The Analysis	146
Heavens of Heaven	149
The Creation Sequence	150
The Lower Heaven	155
Conclusion	157
CHAPTER 6 SEVEN HEAVENS	158
Introduction	158
The Sources	160
Critical Analysis of the Ḥadīths	164
Aristotelian System of World Structure	171

Contemporary Views	173
The Ḥadīth of <i>al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'rāj</i>	169
Characteristics of the Seven Heavens	179
The Origin of the Seven Heavens	184
Multiverse Theory	189
Seven Layers of Heavens	195
Conclusion	197
CHAPTER 7: SEVEN EARTHS	199
Introduction	199
The Source	200
The Analysis	201
Contemporary Views	206
In Search of Earth-like Planets	210
Seven Earths Existing in Seven Heavens.....	219
Conclusion	222
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS	224
An Overview	224
Disputed Information of the Creation Narrative	228
Suggestions	230
BIBLIOGRAPHY	232

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In every civilization and religion, there lurks the attempt to explain how the world began. Almost all attributed it to an act of a deity or a set of deities. The common thread that goes through all creation myths spun by humankind includes the fractionation of the cosmos from a primordial chaos into separate and distinct entities that may include the emergence of myriad of deities; land emerging from an infinite and timeless ocean; and creation out of nothing. The differences lie not in the fact that the cosmos has a beginning, but in how the story is being told by each civilization and the local “flavour” infused into the creation myths.

A creation myth is considered a reality and truth to those who sincerely believe in it. The unbelievers, on the other hand, may have a different view. It is a false story, laced with illogical sub-plots in a tapestry of incredible narration, concocted by some people in the past, added, edited and handed down through the generations. Sometimes the echoes of the original creation myth reverberated across the corridor of time. But most often than not, any resemblance to the original story has long gone, replaced by a completely new one.

There is however no rights and wrongs in each of the creation myth since they cannot be put to falsification test. Each religion and civilisation therefore is entitled to accept its creation myth as absolute truth and regard other creation myths as what they are in the first place – myths.

Likewise, Islam has its own story on how the world, indeed the cosmos itself, came into being. Muslims regard it as sacred truth because it is enshrined in the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* of Prophet Muḥammad P.B.U.H.

However, unlike the other two monotheistic religions: Judaism and Christianity which share similar Biblical creation myth narrated in the first few verses of Genesis in the Old Testament, the story of cosmic creation in Islam is not as easy to derive at.

The difficulties arise not because the Qur'ān is a vague and inconsistent book, but more to the fact that it is book of guidance. Thus, its main purpose is not to tell a full and complete story, be it the beginning of creation, nor the prophets or civilizations, except perhaps the story of Prophet Yūsūf as told in a sūrah with his name. The Qur'ān's main purpose is to guide humans.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The cosmic creation story is riddled with stories and narrations that border on myth and wishful thinking. This arises precisely because those narrations cannot be corroborated with empirical studies, perhaps because the moment of creation happened such a long time ago that almost all traces of that moment have been obliterated.

The Islamic narrative on creation story faces similar problem. The only credible sources for Muslim scholars to scour for information pertaining to cosmic creation are the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. Often, the understanding of the Qur'ānic verses and the narrations of the *ḥadīth* are conspicuously and sometimes audaciously coloured with popular perceptions and ideas.

The Qur'ān does not relate the cosmic creation story in one cogent narration. Scholars who wish to have the complete picture has to search for verses that has anything to do with creation and the cosmos and piece them together like a jigsaw puzzle, all without having the aid of the whole picture to assist with.

This process is made complicated with different understanding of those verses in relation to their position in the overall narration. Crucial factors such as grammatical positions of words, their literal and intended meanings, metaphorical or otherwise, all these can easily be overlooked in the eagerness to complete the puzzle. Patience and meticulousness are quite often in short-supply.

Compounding the problem further is the *ḥadīth* literature on cosmic creation. They are replete with stories that seem to verge on the impossible. Unfortunately, most of these *ḥadīth* were accepted at face value, for some reason or another, without checking their authenticity.

Quite easily, the Islamic cosmic creation narrative can descend to myth level if the necessary checks and balances are not put in place and a fresh perspective breath into the narrative.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the main Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* that relate to the creation of the cosmos.
2. Identify the process of cosmic creation, its order and general characteristics as stated in the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* literature.
3. To understand and derive the most plausible theory of cosmic creation according to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, taking into account the current theories in cosmology and physics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Islamic cosmic creation narrative can be found in books across several genres, particularly relating to Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), commentaries (*shurūḥ*) on *ḥadīth*, the encyclopedias of Islamic history and general books on Islam and modern science.

The most fertile ground for cosmic creation story is the encyclopedias of Islamic history. These encyclopedias are of two types. The first starts the story from the beginning of creation. The second starts from a specific period of time. A famous example of the later is the book *Tārīkh al-Baghdādī*, written by Aḥmad bin 'Āli popularly known as al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī. It is a voluminous work specifically on the history of Baghdad. This type of historical encyclopedia is not relevant to this research. It is the former that this thesis will turn to because it contains narrations on cosmic creations.

There are only two books of this type of historical encyclopedia. The older of the two is *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* written by Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. The second is *al-Bīdāyah wa al-Nihāyah* written by Ismā‘īl bin Kathīr in 7th century AH. Both books share many similar *ḥadīth* and Qur’ānic verses pertaining to cosmic creation. However, Ismā‘īl’s *al-Bīdāyah* is more comprehensive in depth and length. Ibn Jarīr’s *Tārīkh* is more concise and quite skimpy in details. Perhaps the reason for it, as alluded to several times by Ibn Jarīr himself in his *Tārīkh*, is that he had written down almost all the relevant *ḥadīth* in his another encyclopedic work: his *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Thus he saw no need to repeat them again in his *Tārīkh*.

The second important resource on Islamic cosmic creation narrative is the books of *tafsīr*. There are two methodologies of *tafsīr*. The first is called *tafsīr bi al-ma’tḥūr* in which the Qur’ān is explained through *ḥadīth* and the opinions of the Companions and *tabi’īn* (followers of the Companions). The most important *tafsīr* book in this category is the *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* mentioned above. It is the oldest complete book of *tafsīr* and the first to be written. It contains narrations that came from the Prophet P.B.U.H., his Companions and the *tabi’īn*, complete with their chains of narrations. This voluminous book has the most comprehensive story on cosmic narration. Since it is primarily a book of *tafsīr*, one has to collate the necessary info from the narrations found in various parts of the book.

Second in degree of importance and comprehensiveness in the same category is *al-Durr al-Manthūr fi al-Tafsīr al-Ma’tḥūr* written by the 9th century AH polymath, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī. Some scholars even regarded it as purer than *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* due to al-Suyūfī’s diligence in sticking to pure narrations from the first three

generations of Muslims and avoiding his personal views. In contrast, Ibn Jarīr's usually started interpretation of the verse with his personal view before supporting it with narrations.

The second methodology of *tafsīr* is called *tafsīr bi al-ra'yi*. It is where the main focus is the opinion of the *tafsīr* scholar. The *ḥadīth* and the opinions of the Companions and *tabi'īn* take a backstage and only recalled when it is necessary to compare, contrast or support the scholar's opinion. The most celebrated work in this category is the book *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* written by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the celebrated scholar of 5th century AH. It is perhaps the most detailed book on *tafsīr* ever written, challenged in depth only by *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. If the later contains the writer's interpretations sparingly, the former in contrast is generous with the writer's opinions and ideas. He enlightened it with what he thought to be the hidden meanings and messages of Qur'ānic words and verses. It is therefore not surprising that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī called his *tafsīr* *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (The Keys to the Unknown) and *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*.

Naturally, al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* expounded on ideas, opinions and views of his time but they may not reflect the reality as discovered in recent times. However, al-Rāzī's knowledge in mathematics, physics and astronomy assisted greatly in infusing an intellectual and academic flavour in his interpretation. A clear example will be his exposition on Aristotelian system of cosmic spheres. There is no other book of *tafsīr* that go to such depth.

Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī was written in the 2nd century AH, while al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr was written in the 5th century AH. Both are like the two pillars of *tafsīr* written in two different opposite end of Islamic civilization. Shortly after al-Rāzī's death, the Mongols sacked Baghdad. Both works of *tafsīr* are also the most prominent in the their category: al-Ṭabarī in the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* category and al-Rāzī in the *tafsīr bi al-ra'yi* category. Together, they are relatively sufficient in drawing up a cogent theory of Islamic cosmic creation derived from the Qur'ān. Other book of *tafsīr* do not contain as much information on cosmic creation as these two books. Contemporary books on *tafsīr* are even briefer in information. They seem intend to just plug in the gaps or updating the facts missed out by early scholars.

The other source of Islamic cosmic creation narrative is the *ḥadīth*. Not all compilers of *ḥadīth* recorded those narrations pertaining to cosmic creation. Only a handful did so and among them is the famous *ḥadīth* scholar Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhārī out. His compilation of authentic *ḥadīth*, the Ṣaḥīḥ, includes a chapter on the beginning of creation. However, not all *ḥadīth* in that chapter talks about it. In fact, only two *ḥadīth* in that chapter narrate an event in which the Prophet P.B.U.H. explained about the beginning of creation. The rest of *ḥadīths* in it touch on other issues that have some connection, even tenuous, to creation.

It is in the books of commentaries of *ḥadīth* (*shurūḥ*) that one can find more information on cosmic creation. Due to al-Bukhārī's unassailable stature in the world of *ḥadīth*, he has the highest number of commentaries for his Ṣaḥīḥ. But the most comprehensive and in-depth commentary belongs to Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. His encyclopedic Faṭḥ al-Bārī surpasses all other commentaries, either for al-Bukhārī's or

other *ḥadīth* scholars, in depth and coverage. On the *ḥadīth* concerning cosmic creation, his comments opened up the door to further *ḥadīth* that ultimately lead to deeper understanding on the subject matter.

These three sources, the encyclopedias of Islamic history, the books of *tafsīr* and commentaries on *ḥadīth*, are the main contributors in drawing up the picture of Islamic cosmic creation. Other books, chiefly those concerning Islam and Science, while plentiful, contribute only a fraction of what is needed to build up that picture. Their main purpose is limited to give a different perspective to what was espoused in those three major contributors. There are occasions when these different perspectives swerved significantly from those found in the three contributors.

Perhaps the most popular book of this genre is Maurice Bucaille's *The Bible, The Qur'ān and Science*. Other less popular yet sometimes excellent books are written in Arabic. Some of their authors became household name. Dr Zaghlūl al-Najjār, the celebrated Egyptian geologist, is a famous example. There are also some articles and a book written by Malaysian academicians and intellectuals on the subject matter. Foremost among them is the book *Konsep Kosmologi* by Aminudin Ruskan Al Dawamy.

The picture on cosmic creation can be complemented with popular science books on cosmology, physics and astronomy. Most of these books are targeted for the laymen. Yet they contain scientific ideas that are very advance and require background information on physics and astronomy. This is especially so for those books that explain the latest research and findings on the early events of the Big Bang.

It is interesting to note that when it comes to those early moments of the Big Bang, some books contradicted each other, or present a different picture than the ones in other books. Perhaps it is because events in those early moments are not agreed upon by all cosmologists. It is thus important not to confine oneself to just one book. The reading should cover a number of books to get a broader picture of the differences and agreements among cosmologists.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is important to dispel some of the misconceptions and errors in understanding the theory of cosmic creation according to Islam. Often than not, these misconceptions and errors are magnified due to the following factors:

- 1) Failure to understand the intricacies of Arabic language employed by the Qur'ān. The *'irab* (grammatical positions) of the relevant Qur'ānic words and their intended and extended meanings must be fully comprehended.
- 2) Delegating or even ignoring the dual role of the *ḥadīth* as the explainer of Qur'ānic verses as well as its complementary pair.
- 3) Utilising the *ḥadīth* without any recourse in verifying its authenticity and categorization.
- 4) Fully appreciative of the roles of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* but falls short in understanding the basic principles of the sciences of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.

This research aims to avoid making similar mistakes. It will be careful on the usage of Qur'ānic verses and the *ḥadīth* but at the same time be constantly aware of the prevalent scientific theories. It is hopeful that this balance and careful research methodology will pave the way to a better understanding of *al-āyāt al-kawn* in the Qur'ān by future researches, utilizing the development of cosmic creation theory of the Qur'ān as an example.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study will collate and analyze all relevant Qur'ānic verses. Interpretation of those verses will be sought from books of *tafsīr*. Those interpretations will be scrutinized on their validity and authenticity. A check will also be made for different types of recitations as that will have an impact on the meaning of the verses. Recourse will also be made into books concerning *waqf wa ibtida'* (ending and beginning) of Qur'ānic verses. This will assist further on having a clearer picture of the intended meaning.

The *ḥadīth* literature will be used to throw light on those verses whenever such explanations can be found. If a relevant *ḥadīth* is found, a full critical treatment of that *ḥadīth* will be implemented. Its different chains of narration as collated by compilers of *ḥadīth* will be critically analyzed. Every single narrator on those chains will be reviewed. The soundness of the chains themselves will be tested. The only exception will be the *ḥadīth* compiled by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Scrutiny of his narrations is unnecessary. Scholars are in full agreement of their authenticity.

If a *ḥadīth* is narrated by the nine compilers¹ and those beyond that circle, only the chains of narration belonging to those nine compilers will be considered. The others need not be analyzed since their chains of narration often than not will pass through one or more of those nine compilers. If a *ḥadīth* is not narrated by those nine compilers, then it will be considered and given proper analysis as per the rigour of the sciences of *ḥadīth*.

For each relevant Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth*, the researcher shall quote them first in their original Arabic format. The researcher will then give their translations. For Qur'ānic verses, the researcher shall use the accepted Yusuf Ali's translation. For *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the researcher shall use those translated by Muḥammad Muhsin Khan. Otherwise, the researcher shall translate the *ḥadīth* myself. Quoting the *ḥadīth* in its original Arabic will assist the informed reader in verifying the accuracy of the translations. It will also facilitate cross referencing of the *ḥadīth*.

Quoting the Qur'ānic verses in their original Arabic is necessary although the *sūrah* and verse number is mentioned. The original Arabic format gives an advantage for a deeper understanding of its meaning with which no amount of translation can match.

Beyond the scope of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, the study will look into the current theories in cosmology and physics. It is hope that this will assist in building a more accurate picture on cosmic creation. But theories and trends in cosmology and physics

¹ They are al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, al-Nasā'ī, Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, Mālik bin Anas and al-Dārimī.

are as relevant as their mathematical equations and observations. They are not cast in stones. On the other hand, the words of God are immutable. As such, whenever there is a conflict between current scientific theories and Qur'ānic verses or *ḥadīth*, it is the latter that will be upheld, in so much as the correct and proper meaning of those verses are sought first and the *ḥadīth* have been certified authentic.

The research will also make references to philosophical discussions among past scholars if it is deemed to be helpful or contribute to the development of cosmic creation theory as propounded by the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. If such discussions dip into the ontological without any support from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, those discussions will be discarded.

The research will also use the oldest and most extensive Arabic dictionary available, the *Lisān al-‘Arab* written by Muḥammad bin Mukarram popularly known as Ibn Mandhur, the 13th century grammarian. In addition, the research will also employ other dictionaries especially the excellent Hans Wehr Arabic-English Dictionary.

Both calendar system, Civil and Hijric, will be employed. To differentiate between the two, the researcher shall use the abbreviation “AH” which stands for “After Hijrah” for Hijric dates. If the date is without any abbreviation, it refers to the Civil calendar.