



**TENSIONS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT AND MATERIAL AMBITIONS
IN SURAT AZ-ZUKRUF**

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Abstract

The current research looks at the major themes of Surah Az-Zukhruf, the 43rd surah of the Quran. This surah, revealed during the Meccan period, addresses the challenges faced by early Muslims, including polytheism and material temptations. It highlights the core of Tawhid (the oneness of God), criticises idolatry, and warns against prioritising worldly wealth over religious virtues. Notably, verses 81-85 set out fundamental Islamic principles, demonstrating God's authority and affirming prophethood, while countering doubters' claims about divine authority and companionship.

The research uses a qualitative method to analyze these verses, aiming to fill gaps in current scholarship and deepen understanding of their significance. It emphasizes Surah Az-Zukhruf's relevance to modern discussions on materialism versus spirituality, portraying the surah as a moral guide for believers.

Key findings show that this surah not only critiques materialistic pursuits but also reassures believers of divine protection and accountability. By situating these teachings within Mecca's socio-religious context, this research fosters a balanced view of spirituality and materialism, encouraging contemporary Muslims to reflect on their values and choices. Ultimately, this article offers valuable insights into the lasting significance of the Quran, emphasising the importance of following divine guidance in an ever-changing world.

Keywords: Surah Az-Zukhruf, linguistic analysis, monotheism, divine guidance, Tawhid.

Introduction

Overview

The Holy Quran stands as an unparalleled text in Islamic tradition, revered by believers as the direct word of God revealed over a period of approximately 23 years to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) through the angel Jibrael. Comprising 114 chapters, or Surahs, the Quran reflects the complexities and profound teachings of Islam. Notably, Surah Az-Zukhruf, the 43rd chapter, dates to the Meccan period, when Prophet Muhammad and his followers faced significant challenges from the Quraysh and other polytheistic entities (Khanghah 2022). This

surah addresses critical themes surrounding faith, the inviolability of Tawhid (the oneness of God), and the consequences of disbelief.

Surah Az-Zukhruf, referring to “The Gold Adornments,” contrasts spiritual values with materialistic pursuits, shedding light on the pitfalls of prioritizing worldly wealth over spiritual convictions. The significance of this surah is underscored by its reflections on the accountability of individuals before God and the futile practice of idol worship, emphasizing the importance of adhering to divine guidance (Amir, Saeed, and Kang 2020).

Themes of Idolatry and Divine Authority

The critique of idolatry is an essential component of Surah Az-Zukhruf. It commences by asserting the Quran's divine legitimacy, refuting claims that reduce its significance to mere poetic devices or magicians' tricks. Throughout the surah, Allah asserts His position as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, reminding humanity to recognize the signs of His existence and the absurdity of associating partners with Him (Khanghah 2022).

Moreover, Surah Az-Zukhruf articulates the theological and societal difficulties faced by the early Muslim community, highlighting the necessity of unwavering faith amid adversity (Fauziyah, Alfa, and Maksum 2020). A pivotal aspect of this surah is its portrayal of prophetic missions and the divine wisdom underpinning their selection. Critics often question why angels were not sent down to accompany the prophets as a testament to their truthfulness. The response provides a poignant reminder that God's choice to send human messengers serves practical and ethical purposes appreciated by humanity.

Key Verses and Contemporary Relevance

Verses 81-85 of Surah Az-Zukhruf present core tenets of Islamic belief, specifically the authority of the Almighty and the authenticity of prophethood. A thorough analysis of these verses can illuminate their enduring relevance in modern contexts, wherein the challenges of materialism and spiritual fulfillment often clash. This exploration aims not only to enhance understanding of the Quran's teachings but also to promote interfaith dialogue that acknowledges shared values (Poshtei, Ganjali, and Keyzoghani 2022).

These verses resolutely refute claims made by skeptics regarding the divinity of God or the notion of Him having companions, showcasing His singular power and sovereignty. In doing so, believers are encouraged to prioritize their faith and devotion above transient worldly distractions.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the central themes found in verses 81 to 85 of Surah Az-Zukhruf.
2. To explore the role of these verses in enriching the broader philosophical discourse within the Quran.
3. To extract valuable insights derived from scholarly interpretations of these verses.

Research Questions

1. What are the predominant themes highlighted in verses 81 to 85 of Surah Az-Zukhruf?
2. How do these verses contribute to broader philosophical discussions within the Quran?
3. What insights can be gained from scholarly interpretations of these specific verses?

Problem Statement

Even though there are deep religious and divine messages summarised in Surah AzZukhruf, specifically in verses 81 to 85, there is still a lack of comprehensive, focused analytical literature that profoundly examines the verbal, conceptual, and illustrative aspects of these certain verses of the Surah. These verses particularly address critical concerns such as the rejection of the belief that God has children, the assertion of monotheism, the Prophet's perspective on misconceptions, and God's knowledge and dominion regarding the day of judgement.

Nevertheless, many present-day scholars and readers might not fully acknowledge the inferences and profundity of these verses in their historical context or in contemporary understanding. Therefore, this study seeks to fulfil this knowledge gap by conducting a thorough, analytical research that explains the inferences, spiritual relevance, and practical implications of these verses (81-85) of Surah Az-Zukhruf.

Research Significance

This research presents meaningful contributions to the existing body of literature, specifically targeting a deeper comprehension of the Quran's response to the rampant idolatry and polytheism that characterized Mecca. By situating these verses within the intricate socio-religious landscape of the Quraysh tribe, the study offers a nuanced interpretation that emphasizes the philological and linguistic elements essential for grasping the verses' core messages. This approach seeks to bridge traditional and modern exegeses of the Quran, bringing together classical interpretations with contemporary perspectives.

Moreover, the pivotal discoveries articulated in this research will significantly enrich the field of Quranic studies by addressing a notable gap in the verse-to-verse analyses. By delving into Surah Az-Zukhruf and correlated surahs that delineate fundamental Islamic tenets, this work promises to propel further inquiries into these texts. Consequently, the study aspires to broaden the understanding of these vital verses, forging connections between historical interpretations and present-day applications, thereby reaffirming their relevance in modern Islamic thought and practice.

Literature Review

The Chiastic Structure of Surah Az-Zukhruf

Surah Az-Zukhruf is structured with a remarkable chiasmic framework that intricately weaves together five essential themes, each adding depth to the overall message. The first theme, **Divine Acknowledgment**, emphasizes the recognition of a higher power, illustrated by the assertion that "If you inquire them, they will accept God" (Section A, Verse 9), which finds a counterpart in the reflective Verse 87. The second theme explores the **Cosmos and Existence**, focusing on the relationship between "the world and the sky" (Section B, Verses 10-11), a concept echoed in Verse 84. The notion of **Divine**

Kinship surfaces as the third theme, where the term "God's children" (Section C, Verse 16) reappears in a mirrored form in Verse 81. The fourth theme, **Resisting Evil**, addresses the importance of safeguarding oneself from malevolent forces, articulated in "Barring the Devil" (Section D, Verses 36-37) and paralleled in Verse 62. Finally, the fifth theme highlights the presence of **Celestial Beings**, with a focus on "Angels" (Section E, Verse 53), which again parallels in Verse 60. This chiasmic arrangement not only enriches the text but also solidifies the interconnectedness of these pivotal concepts.

From the outset, the Surah emphasizes the Quran's authenticity, reliability, and the profound nature of divine revelation in verses 2-4. Within this section, the term 'Quran'—indicative of 'to recite'—is introduced, appearing 70 times throughout the text, with notable instances in Verses 3 and 31. This underscores the Quran's role as a verbal revelation from ALLAH to the final Prophetic figure, Hazrat Muhammad (Ahammad, 2024). The concluding verses celebrate and extol the greatness of ALLAH, declaring Him as the sovereign of the universe and the possessor of infinite wisdom (43:84). This framing creates a symmetrical correspondence between the introduction and conclusion of this section, asserting that God's words epitomize ultimate truth.

A significant theme within the Quran is the ongoing strife between believers and non-believers regarding various doctrines. In Verses 5-19, there emerges a confrontation with the disbelief exhibited by those who mock divine revelations (Surah Az-Zukhruf, 64-89). This group is criticized for their incredulity towards the prophets, labeled as 'ungrateful' and 'mockers' (43:5). Central to the discourse is the doctrine of the afterlife, which posits the resurrection of the deceased and the ensuing Judgment Day to reward the faithful and punish the disobedient (Surah Az-Zukhruf, 64-89). This theme is vital to Quranic philosophy, particularly in chapters revealed during the nascent phases of Prophethood in Mecca.

Verses 57-89 in Chapter 43 predict the impending Judgment Day, elaborating on the post-mortals existence and the rewards reserved for the believers—symbolized by "full dishes and goblets of gold" (43:71), "pleasure," and "gardens bearing abundant fruits" (43:73). While believers and their companions are thus invited to enter Paradise (43:70), the non-believers are warned of the daunting nature of this day and the accompanying tribulations (43:65). The overarching narrative serves as a guiding force for humanity, illustrating how to shape a world conducive to the aspirations for rewards in the afterlife (Momen, Hanieh, and Ghasemnezhad, 2023).

Significance of Surah Az-Zukhruf

The significance of Surah Az-Zukhruf to the early Islamic community and its rich thematic content have elicited extensive scholarly interest. Research highlights its robust affirmation of Tawhid alongside a critique of materialism. Momen and Ghasemnezhad's study elucidates how the Surah addresses the socioeconomic realities of Mecca, cautioning against the distractions posed by material wealth that can lead individuals away from spirituality (Momen, Hanieh, and Ghasemnezhad, 2023). Additionally, an investigation by Khanghah analyzes the rhetorical strategies employed to convey spirituality's precedence over material possessions, indicating its resonance in today's consumerist landscape (Khanghah, 2022).

Moreover, Surah Az-Zukhruf fortifies the identity of early Muslims amidst societal adversities, presenting Prophetic messages as a source of strength for believers confronting external challenges (Amir, Saeed, and Kang, 2020). In another study, Alfa Fauziyah and Maksu accentuate the insistence within Surah Az-Zukhruf on reflecting upon divine nature and the futility of idol worship, highlighting its relevance in navigating contemporary existential concerns (Khanghah, 2022).

Additionally, a comprehensive examination by El Khayat et al. posits that Surah AzZukhruf functions as a moral compass, advocating for ethical principles concerning material wealth (Khayat, Yusoff, and Latif, 2022). This exploration of social responsibility promotes a

collective ethos, enabling believers to emphasize community welfare over personal gain (Kader, 2021), thus aligning with Islamic values of charity and social justice.

Analyses have further illuminated the juxtaposition of fleeting materialism against the eternal essence of faith, asserting that this dichotomy forms a central theme within Islamic thought. Scholars have linked the Surah's teachings to contemporary materialistic struggles, indicating its vital message for modern Muslims facing similar crises.

Despite existing literature on Surah Az-Zukhruf—including explorations of its chiasmic structure, traditional commentaries, and contemporary reflections on the spiritual themes of monotheism and divine supremacy—there exists a noticeable gap in detailed analysis. This void especially pertains to thematic, verbal, and interpretative examinations of Verses 81-85, yearning for a more profound understanding that meticulously integrates classical and modern interpretations, thereby augmenting both religious insight and practical applicability.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study utilized a qualitative research framework centered on thematic and linguistic evaluation of Surah Az-Zukhruf's Verses 81-85. The justification for this qualitative approach lies in its capacity to provide a nuanced comprehension of intricate texts, producing rich insights into their meanings and implications (Lim, 2024). This methodology incorporated both conventional and digital archival resources, thereby allowing for comprehensive thematic exploration.

Qualitative research remains significant in spiritual studies, as it delves into the complexities of sacred texts that affect understanding of human experiences, offering spiritual guidance (Rackley, 2020). As such, this approach is deemed apt for conducting an in-depth exploration of the chosen verses focusing on content, themes, and contextual significances.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The criteria for inclusion were strictly defined, encompassing sources that directly engage with the interpretation of Surah Az-Zukhruf, particularly Verses 81-85. Selected materials included credible contemporary and traditional Quranic exegesis, chosen for their scholarly reliability and potential to elucidate the linguistic nuances and rhetorical implications of the verses.

Included were peer-reviewed studies, scholarly articles, and respected platforms focused on religious studies and Quranic texts relevant to the targeted verses, all presented in English. Conversely, studies that did not specifically cover Surah Az-Zukhruf or those lacking in scholarly integrity were excluded. Non-English sources were omitted to preserve the rigor of the research.

Data Collection and Synthesis

Primary data was obtained from verified sources, including the original Arabic text and English translations of Verses 81-85 from the Quranic Arabic Corpus and the Tanzil Project, which are esteemed resources for Quranic inquiry due to their authenticated content. Secondary sources consisted of established commentaries and scholarly articles sourced from reputable digital platforms like Quran.com, AllIslam.org, and others, providing additional insights into the verses' meanings.

Data synthesis adopted a systematic approach, integrating relevant perspectives from diverse qualitative sources—academic articles and reputable Islamic platforms to cultivate a well-rounded understanding of the selected verses. The synthesis process commenced by identifying

prevailing themes across various exegetical interpretations of Verses 81-85, allowing for comparative analysis that advances interpretive clarity.

Result and Findings

Key Findings

Divine Authority and Monotheism

In verse 81, the proclamation “If the Most Compassionate had offspring, I would be the first worshipper” lays the groundwork for the concept of Tawhid (Oneness of God). This affirmation is not merely an assertion of faith; it serves as a rebuttal to the polytheistic beliefs prevalent in Meccan society. The declaration stresses that ultimate authority and power reside solely with the Almighty, urging believers towards a steadfast monotheistic understanding. El Khayat et al. (2022) describe how this notion is echoed throughout the Quran, forming a coherent theological framework that advocates for the rejection of idolatry.

Prophethood as a Moral Compass

Verse 82 elaborates on the role of Prophets as divine messengers tasked with delivering God's guidance. This verse encapsulates the profound responsibilities resting on the shoulders of the Prophets, emphasizing their role in conveying moral integrity as dictated by divine will. The significance of Prophethood during a period of fierce opposition serves as a beacon of hope for believers, enhancing their resilience as they navigate adversities fostered by Meccan opposition.

Accountability and Divine Justice

In verse 83, a stark warning emerges concerning the fate of disbelievers. This message highlights the concept of moral accountability—a central theme of Islamic teachings. The divine patience, as noted in this verse, allows the unworthy to indulge in their falsehood until the appointed Day of Judgment arrives. This fosters a reflective space for believers, encouraging them to contemplate their moral choices in light of divine expectations.

Divine Protection and Assurance

Verse 84 underscores the certainty of God's protection for believers amid trials and tribulations. The verse serves as an assurance of divine oversight, reinforcing the notion that steadfast faith is rewarded with spiritual resilience. For early Muslims confronting societal exclusion and hostility, this affirmation became a critical source of strength.

Critique of Materialism and Idolatry

The concluding verse, 85, critiques the futility of idol worship, establishing a clear distinction between material aspirations and divine supremacy. This admonition extends beyond historical contexts, calling to attention the perils of contemporary idolatries—be they in material wealth or misplaced priorities. Gengil (2020) articulates that understanding this critique can guide modern Muslims to cultivate a robust identity that prioritizes spiritual values over ephemeral desires.

Comparative Analysis with Other Surahs

Surah Az-Zukhruf shares numerous themes with other chapters in the Quran, such as **Surah Al-Dhariyat** and **Surah Al-Hijr**, which similarly address divine revelation and the consequences of disbelief. This interplay highlights a consistent narrative across the Quran concerning the accountability of past nations and the enduring message of Prophethood. Furthermore, insights drawn from the narrative styles and thematic content of Surah Az-

Zukhruf and **Surah Al-Najm** demonstrate the Quran's artistic coherence while emphasizing essential spiritual principles.

Significance in Hadith and Sunnah

Numerous Hadith articles emphasize the value of Surah Az-Zukhruf within Islamic pedagogy. For instance, the declaration from **Sahih Al-Bukhari** delineates the necessity of learning the Quran as a means to convey knowledge accurately. Drawing on this mastery aids believers in applying the teachings of Surah Az-Zukhruf to their lives, specifically regarding the rejection of polytheism—a hallmark of the Holy Prophet's mission.

Balancing Spirituality and Materialism

Surah Az-Zukhruf's discourse on the tension between spirituality and materialism remains exceptionally pertinent in contemporary society. The verses warn against excessive material pursuits that distract individuals from their spiritual obligations. Pellegrino, Abe, and Shannon (2022) highlight this ongoing challenge in an era where societal values emphasize consumerism over ethical considerations.

Moral Responsibility and Accountability in Islam

The verses of Surah Az-Zukhruf emphasize the concept of moral responsibility and accountability, which serves as the central theme in Islamic teachings. The Holy Quran asserts that all individuals, both believers and non-believers, will encounter the consequences of their actions on the Day of Judgment, thereby reinforcing the ethical framework that guides Muslims.

Accountability (Hisaab) extends beyond individual actions to encompass the responsibilities of the community as a whole. The Holy Quran encourages believers to strive toward equity, collective well-being, and social justice. This perspective is essential in addressing contemporary issues such as corruption, inequality, and poverty within Muslim communities (Aziz et al. 2021).

Understanding the significance of accountability can enhance moral education among Muslims. Incorporating these teachings into educational systems can foster a sense of ethical responsibility among the youth, thereby equipping them with the guidance needed to navigate the moral challenges present in society.

Relevance of Verses 81-85 in the Modern Muslim Society

The significance of Surah Az-Zukhruf cannot be ignored in contemporary society. These verses provide definitive guidance for Muslims navigating the pressures of modern life, where material possessions often compete with individuals' spiritual obligations and values.

Verses 81-85 of Surah Az-Zukhruf urge believers to uphold their faith while addressing pressing contemporary issues, including social justice, ethical values, and environmental sustainability. The warnings and reminders conveyed in these verses empower individuals to make discerning decisions that reinforce their spiritual beliefs, irrespective of the challenges presented by modern society. In a time when numerous individuals experience a profound sense of disconnection resulting from rapid technological advancements and persistent societal transformations, these teachings advocate for the synthesis of one's spiritual values.

The verses encourage Muslims to prioritize their spiritual principles and the moral implications of their actions over the transient appeal of material wealth (Pellegrino, Abe, and Shannon 2022). Moreover, the significance of these verses is further demonstrated by the dynamic movements within Muslim communities that foster social activism, community service, and

moral leadership. By engaging with Islamic teachings, individuals can derive collective motivation to initiate positive change, underscoring the interconnection between social responsibility and spirituality.

Conclusion

The analysis of Surah Az-Zukhruf has yielded several critical findings, indicating that the study concentrates on the tension between spirituality and material possessions, while emphasizing the significance of accountability in relation to the repudiation of polytheism. Surah Az-Zukhruf underpins the importance of trust on God. In a world full of temptations and disruptions, the surah empowers human beings to pursue strength and direction only from ALLAH.

It informs wisdom on the ineffectiveness of keeping faith in worldly powers that can result in misdirection, rather than prompting believers to establish their belief and actions in genuine commitment to ALLAH. These verses critique the dependence on material wealth and underscore the transient nature of materialism. Numerous scholars have interpreted Surah Az-Zukhruf as a reminder for humanity that genuine fulfilment is sourced from spiritual values rather than from worldly acquisitions. Furthermore, verses 81-85 of Surah Az-Zukhruf accentuate the role of prophethood and divine guidance in steering believers towards moral and ethical conduct, thereby reinforcing the necessity of adhering to the commands of the Almighty. This thematic analysis offers a comprehensive understanding of how the teachings of Surah Az-Zukhruf pertain to both individuals and the broader communities within

Islamic society. In the historical context, the verses of Surah Az-Zukhruf have served as a guiding influence for early Muslim communities in tackling the challenges posed by a materialistic society. The emphasis on ethical behaviour and accountability has created a framework for moral integrity and social cohesion. In contemporary society, the teachings derived from Surah Az-Zukhruf resonate deeply amid the ethical dilemmas presented by a globally materialistic environment.

The enduring significance of these verses from Surah Az-Zukhruf encourages modern Muslims to reflect on their choices and the consequences of their actions, thereby promoting a balance between material and spiritual pursuits. This relevance underscores the limitless nature of Quranic revelation and its ability to address society's ever-evolving challenges. To conclude, Surah Az-Zukhruf summarizes insights and knowledge that are vital for fields of Islam. From condemning idolatry to the harsh representation of the ephemeral nature of worldly possessions, the surah offers a framework for comprehending the relevance of monotheism, the certainties of afterlife, and the significance of pursuing God's direction.

Recommendations

The insights derived from the examination of the verses of Surah Az-Zukhruf hold considerable significance for future research, particularly in exploring how the teachings of the Holy Quran engage with the dialogues among diverse religions.

Subsequent research may investigate the correlation between Islamic teachings on ethics and spirituality and those of other faiths, thereby fostering enhanced mutual respect and understanding.

Furthermore, an inquiry into the contemporary applications of these teachings to address global challenges, such as social justice and environmental sustainability, can augment the relevance

of Islamic scholarship in modern contexts. Engaging with the viewpoints of various scholars will enrich academic discourse and promote collaborative efforts among diverse communities in the pursuit of shared moral and ethical objectives.

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