

A Comparative Study of the Indication of Divine “Establishment (Istiwa’) upon the Throne” toward Transcendence (Tanzih) or Corporealism (Tajsīm) in Both Schools' Sources (Farīqayn), Emphasizing Hadiths in *Al-Kāfi* and *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*

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ABSTRACT

Literalism, in its literal interpretation of certain Qur'ānic expressions—including "establishment (istiwa') upon the Throne"—leads to a form of corporealism (tajsīm) concerning God, which, in a rational and hermeneutical analysis, is incompatible with divine monotheism (tawḥīd) in its various dimensions. Islamic schools typically cite hadith sources to justify their doctrinal foundations. Thus, the question becomes whether these documentary evidences sufficiently support their claims or not. In this regard, a comparative study of the sources of the two major schools (al-farīqayn—Shī'ī and Sunnī), which constitute the primary fronts of the transcendence (tanzih) and anthropomorphic (tashbīh) positions, yields better results in determining the prevailing orientation of Islamic sources and provides a suitable verification of the extent to which hadiths support the theological claim: Do the hadith sources provide sufficient support for the corporealist (tajsīmī) perspective? Employing library-based research and a comparative-analytical method, this article seeks to verify, through a comparative examination of the indication of the hadiths from these authoritative books concerning "establishment upon the Throne," whether they support transcendence (tanzih) or corporealism (tajsīm) perspectives. The findings indicate that these hadiths, either directly or indirectly, indicate transcendence (tanzih) rather than corporealism (tajsīm), and corporealist interpretations in both sources have been subject to opposition.

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1. Introduction

The discussion of divine attributes and the manner of attributing qualities to the Divine Essence has always constituted one of the most central and sensitive topics in Islamic theology (*kalām*). Within this discourse, the question of "anthropomorphism" (*tashbīh*)—or corporealism (*tajsīm*)—and "transcendence" (*tanzīh*)—the purification of God from creaturely attributes—has shaped two major intellectual fronts among theologians and exegetes. One of the most challenging cases invoked by proponents of both perspectives is the Qur'ānic expression "establishment (*istiwā*) upon the Throne" (*al-ʿarsh*), which appears in several places in the Noble Qur'ān.

Literalists (*zāhirarāyān*) and proponents of the corporealist (*tajsīmī*) and anthropomorphic (*tashbīhī*) school, by adhering to the lexical and apparent meaning of this expression, have interpreted it as indicating a kind of physical settlement, sitting, or material positioning of God upon the Throne, thereby attributing a form of corporeality (*jismānīyat*) to God. In contrast, transcendence-oriented (*tanzīhī*) theologians, on the basis of rational and transmitted proofs, have deemed such interpretations incompatible with the principle of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and God's absolute transcendence from any creaturely attributes, and have insisted on the hermeneutical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of such verses and traditions.

Given that each Islamic school typically cites authoritative hadith sources to justify its theological and exegetical foundations, a fundamental question arises: Do these documentary evidences sufficiently support the corporealist claims, or is the transcendence-oriented reading of these texts more robust and more widely accepted? In this regard, a comparative study of the hadith sources of the two major schools (*al-farīqayn*—*Shīʿī* and *Sunnī*), which encompass the two primary transcendence-oriented and anthropomorphic fronts, can yield valuable results in determining the prevailing orientation of these sources. Such a study will lead to a precise verification of the extent to which hadiths support the theological claims of corporealist groups.

The central research question of this article is: Do the hadiths transmitted in authoritative Islamic hadith sources provide sufficient support for the corporealist perspective, indicating the physical and material establishment of God upon the Throne, or do they affirm the transcendence-oriented approach and the purification of God from material attributes? To this end, this article has been composed with the aim of comparatively verifying the indication of the hadiths of two authoritative books (as representatives of the two major schools) concerning transcendence or corporealism, in order to clearly elucidate the extent to which transmitted sources support each of these two theological approaches.

2. Methodology

The present research, in terms of its nature and objective, is considered fundamental-theoretical (*bunyādī-nazarī*) and has been organized using a

comparative-analytical method. The comparative approach means that data collected from the two primary hadith fronts of the Islamic world (Shī'ī and Sunnī) have been extracted and placed alongside one another to reveal points of convergence and divergence in approaching the question of "establishment upon the Throne." The method of data analysis is based on qualitative content analysis of hadith texts. Accordingly, hadiths relevant to the topic of "establishment" were first extracted from the authoritative sources of the two major schools and then subjected to a detailed semantic analysis using the principles of the science of hadith jurisprudence (*fiqh al-ḥadīth*), including attention to verbal contextual indicators (*qarā'in-i lafẓī*), context (*siyāq*), the early understanding of the text, and the rational foundations accepted in theology.

The statistical population of this research comprises all traditions transmitted concerning the attributive (*khabarī*) attributes, particularly those pertaining to the verse "al-Raḥmānu 'alā al-'arshi istawā" (The Most Merciful established Himself upon the Throne) in two representative and authoritative hadith sources from the Shī'ī and Sunnī schools. The data collection method was library-based, involving consultation of primary hadith texts, narrative exegeses (*tafāsīr-i rawā'ī*), and commentaries (*shurūḥ*) on hadiths. In the next stage, the collected data were thematically classified based on their primary content and then evaluated and compared with respect to their indication of corporealism (*tajsīm*) or transcendence (*tanzīh*). In this process, efforts were made, by placing alongside one another the interpretations of exegetes and commentators from both schools, to determine whether corporealist inferences represent an accepted and dominant reading in these sources, or whether transcendence is the prevailing and accepted approach. More precisely, the researchers have sought, through a perspective that transcends any single absolute interpretation and by taking into account both opposing and supporting views in both sources, to arrive at a final judgment concerning the ultimate indication of the hadiths.

3. Findings

The findings of this comparative-analytical study, conducted on the hadith sources of the two major schools, clearly demonstrate that the hadiths pertaining to "establishment upon the Throne" indicate transcendence (*tanzīh*) either directly or indirectly, rather than corporealism (*tajsīm*) and materiality. This means that from the totality of the traditions examined in both sources, no strong indicative correspondence (*muṭābaqa*) or implication (*iltizām*) can be inferred concerning settlement, movement, dwelling, or any material or corporeal attribute that would necessitate likening God to creation. Rather, these traditions, in their context, are designed and transmitted in such a way as to guide the listener and audience beyond sensible and material concepts, emphasizing God's incomparability and uniqueness.

On the other hand, the research findings indicate that corporealist and anthropomorphic inferences, advanced by some literalists and traditionalists who interpret these expressions literally, have been strongly opposed and criticized in both hadith sources under examination. Thus, the corporealist reading is not only not a dominant and accepted reading among the scholars of these two schools, but has always been met with negative reactions and rational hermeneutical interpretations (*ta'wīl*). In other words, the mainstream currents of Shī'ī and Sunnī scholars throughout the history of Islamic theology, by appealing to these very hadith texts, have reinforced the transcendence-oriented tendency and negated any corporeality from the divine realm. Therefore, the findings of this research clearly demonstrate that the hadith evidence concerning establishment, contrary to the claims of corporealist groups, does not serve as a strong support for proving anthropomorphism and corporealism, and may even constitute a primary confirmation of the transcendence-oriented and hermeneutical perspective.

It was also determined that the traditions concerning the Throne and establishment emphasize more the station of Lordship (*rubūbīyat*) and God's absolute and unconditional sovereignty over existence than the quality of place or a corporeal state. Hence, interpreting these expressions through the lens of monotheism of action and attributes (*tawḥīd-i af'ālī wa ṣifātī*) is more productive than their literal interpretation and is more fully consistent with the rational and transmitted foundations of other dimensions of religion.

4. Conclusion

This article, employing a comparative-analytical method in two authoritative hadith sources of the two major schools, has investigated the indication of the hadiths on "establishment upon the Throne" concerning corporealist and transcendence perspectives. The final conclusion of this research indicates that the article's hypothesis—that the hadith sources do not provide sufficient support for the corporealist perspective—is fully confirmed. The hadiths examined do not by any means provide conclusive indication of corporeality or anthropomorphism, and the available internal and external contextual indicators all indicate transcendence and the purification of God from creaturely attributes. Moreover, any corporealist interpretation in the history of the interpretation of these hadiths, in both Islamic traditions, has been met with serious opposition and declared invalid.

These results demonstrate that not only is it incorrect to argue from these traditions to prove God's corporeality, but these same texts can be employed in defense of pure monotheism and divine transcendence. Thus, the prevailing and certain orientation of Islamic sources on this topic is the tendency toward transcendence and the negation of any similarity between the Creator and creation. To put it more clearly, sound reason (*'aql-i salīm*), the unequivocal verses of the Qur'ān, and the prophetic and Alawid traditions are all aligned on

this matter and all affirm a single truth of monotheism—namely, the uniqueness and unconditionedness of the Divine Essence. Ultimately, this study has demonstrated that the comparative approach in the examination of religious texts possesses high efficacy and can resolve many theological disputes, preventing one from falling into the trap of literalist and unprincipled understandings.

Declarations

Authors' Contributions: Data Collection and Compilation: Mohammad Shokri, Mohammad Dargah-Zadeh, Safar Nasiriyani; Research Report and Drafting: Mohammad Dargah-Zadeh; Data Analysis and Final Inference: Safar Nasiriyani. All authors have read the final version and affirm its content.

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