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**Quranic Perspectives on the Creation of the Universe: A Textual and Theological Analysis**
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**Abstract**

The Quran, as the foundational scripture of Islam, offers multifaceted insights into the origin and creation of the universe. This article systematically examines the key Quranic verses related to cosmogenesis, exploring their linguistic, theological, and philosophical dimensions. Central to this study is the concept of Badi' (Originator), the debate surrounding creatio ex nihilo versus creation from pre-existing matter, and the Quranic model of a universe created through divine command (Kun Fayakun). Drawing on classical Quranic exegesis and the works of scholars such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Jane Mcaullife, this paper argues that the Quranic text does not unequivocally support the doctrine of creation from absolute nothingness. Rather, it consistently depicts creation as a transformative divine act upon pre-existing metaphysical realities. The article further explores the cosmological significance of Quranic verses referring to primordial water, smoke, and divine throne, situating them within a broader Islamic cosmological framework. The implications of these findings for Islamic theology and the science-religion dialogue are discussed.

**Keywords:** Quran; cosmogenesis; creation; Badi'; creatio ex nihilo; Kun Fayakun; Islamic cosmology; divine command; metaphysical universe

**1. Introduction**

The question of cosmic origins is one of the most profound inquiries shared by science, philosophy, and religion. Among the world's major scriptural traditions, the Quran occupies a distinctive position in its engagement with questions of creation. As the primary sacred text of Islam, the Quran does not merely function as a spiritual guide but also provides rich cosmological narratives that have engaged scholars, theologians, and scientists across centuries.

The Quranic account of creation is neither mythological in the Greek sense nor purely allegorical; rather, it presents a theologically purposeful narrative rich in linguistic precision and interpretive depth. The Arabic root words employed in verses related to creation—such as Badi', Khalaqa, and Fatarah—carry distinct connotations that are central to understanding the Quranic cosmological worldview.

This article undertakes a structured textual and theological analysis of the Quranic verses pertaining to the creation of the universe. It investigates the concept of divine origination (Badi'), the debate between creation from nothing (creatio ex nihilo) and creation from pre-existing matter, and the transformative nature of divine command encapsulated in the phrase Kun Fayakun (Be—and it is). By synthesizing classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary theological reflection, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Quranic cosmology.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the Quranic vocabulary of creation. Section 3 examines the concept of Badi' as divine origination. Section 4 critically evaluates the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo in the Quranic context. Section 5 explores Quranic references to primordial elements. Section 6 analyses the command Kun Fayakun. Section 7 presents the metaphysical framework underlying Quranic cosmology. Section 8 offers a concluding synthesis.

## 2. The Quranic Vocabulary of Creation: An Overview

The Quran employs a range of Arabic terms to describe the act of creation, each carrying specific theological implications. Among the most significant are: Khalafa (to create, to bring into being), Bada'a (to originate without precedent), Fatah (to split, cleave, or initiate), and Ja'ala (to make or designate). This diversity of vocabulary reflects a sophisticated Quranic ontology in which different modes of divine creative activity are linguistically distinguished.

The term Badi' (بَدِيعٌ), derived from the trilateral root b-d-a', is particularly significant. Unlike Khalafa, which broadly denotes creation, Badi' specifically connotes the origination of something without prior example or precedent. As Raghīb Isfahani explains, it means 'to bring something into existence from nothingness, without any pre-existing matter or model.'

Elsaid M. Badawi further elaborates that Badi' implies novelty, to produce something new, to originate, to fashion in a new way. He notes that three forms of this root occur four times in the Quran, namely: *ibtada'a*, *bid'ah*, and *Badi'*.<sup>1</sup>

Understanding this vocabulary is foundational to any rigorous analysis of Quranic cosmology, as the nuances of the original Arabic directly shape the theological claims that can be drawn from the text.

## 3. Allah as Badi': The Originator of the Heavens and the Earth

بَدِيعُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ ۗ وَاِذَا قَضٰى اَمْرًا فَاِنَّمَّا يُقَوْلُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُوْنُ<sup>2</sup>

*(God) is the Originator (Badi') of the heavens and the earth. And when He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be'—and it is. (Al-Baqara 2:117)*

This verse from Surah Al-Baqara constitutes one of the foundational cosmological statements in the Quran. The divine epithet Badi' al-Samawat wal-Ard—'the Originator of the heavens and the earth'—establishes Allah as the absolute source of cosmic existence. The compound phrase Samawat wal-Ard (heavens and earth) functions as a Quranic merism signifying the totality of the created order: the entire universe.

Raghīb Isfahani, in his canonical lexicographical work *Mufridat al-Qur'an*, explicates that Allah as al-Badi' denotes that He is the originator of the universe with no prior model, pattern, or material analogue.<sup>3</sup> This name of God thus carries a dual implication: (1) the universe is not eternal but has a temporal beginning; and (2) the act of creation was unprecedented, without any prior form or model.

The verse also implies that the universe is finite in its origin. The affirmation of divine origination necessarily precludes the eternity of the cosmos, a position consistent with the Quranic emphasis on divine transcendence and the contingency of created being. The concept of Badi' thus underpins the Quranic argument for the temporal beginning of the universe—an insight that has striking parallels with contemporary cosmological models positing a finite cosmic origin.

## 4. Creatio Ex Nihilo: A Critical Evaluation in the Quranic Context

<sup>1</sup>Badawi, Elsaid M., *Arabic-English Dictionary of Quranic Usage*, Boston, Brill, Netherlands, 2008, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Al Baqara 2:117

<sup>3</sup>Raghīb Isfahani, *Mufridat al-Qur'an* (Urdu trans.), vol. II, Sheikh Shams al-Haq, Lahore, 1987, p. 96.

One of the most debated questions in Islamic theology and philosophy is whether the Quran supports the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—creation from absolute nothingness. This doctrine, influential in medieval Islamic kalam (theology), holds that God created the universe without any pre-existing matter, time, or substrate. However, a close reading of the Quranic text challenges this interpretation.

Several contemporary scholars have questioned the assumption of *creatio ex nihilo* as the Quranic position. Dr. Dildar Ahmed, in his article 'Chaos and Order,' asserts that God created the universe from nothing.<sup>4</sup> However, as the following analysis demonstrates, this position is not straightforwardly supported by the Quranic evidence.

#### 4.1 Quranic Evidence Against *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

Multiple Quranic verses indicate that creation involved pre-existing matter or states. The following examples are illustrative:

First, in the story of the creation of Adam, Allah states:

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ<sup>5</sup>

*"The likeness of Jesus in God's sight is that of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, 'Be,' and he was."* (Ale Imran 3:59)<sup>6</sup>

Here, the command *Kun* (Be) is issued after Adam was already formed from clay (*turab*), clearly indicating that creation involved a pre-existing material substrate. The divine command does not produce from nothing but rather transforms existing matter into a new form of being.

Second, the following verse establishes the primacy of water as a pre-existing cosmological substrate:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ<sup>7</sup>

*"It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days—and His Throne was upon the waters."* (Hud 11:7)<sup>8</sup>

The verse indicates that at the time of the creation of the heavens and the earth, Allah's Throne was already situated upon water. The apparent meaning implies that water, as a pre-existing entity, preceded the present cosmic order. This significantly complicates any reading that posits absolute creation from nothingness.

Third, the Quran refers to a primordial state of smoke preceding the formation of the heavens:

ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ<sup>9</sup>

*"Then He turned to the sky, and it was smoke."* (Fussilat 41:11)<sup>10</sup>

This verse clearly states that the sky existed in a gaseous or vaporous state before being fashioned into its present form. The pre-existing smoke serves as the material substrate from which the heavens were formed—another powerful textual argument against *creatio ex nihilo*.

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Dildar Ahmed, 'Chaos and Order,' (Article), *passim*.

<sup>5</sup>Ale Imran 3:59

<sup>6</sup>Al-Quran, Ale Imran 3:59.

<sup>7</sup>Hud 11:7

<sup>8</sup>Al-Quran, Hud 11:7.

<sup>9</sup>Fussilat 41:11

<sup>10</sup>Al-Quran, Fussilat 41:11.

#### 4.2 The Apparent Exceptions in Surah Maryam

Two verses in Surah Maryam are frequently cited as potential support for creatio ex nihilo:

قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّنٌ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتُكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكُ شَيْئًا<sup>11</sup>

"He said: 'It will be so, your Lord says, it is easy for Me, and I created you before, when you were nothing.'" (Maryam 19:9)<sup>12</sup>

أَوَلَا يَذْكُرُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْئًا<sup>13</sup>

"Does the human being not remember that We created him before, when he was nothing?" (Maryam 19:67)<sup>14</sup>

However, these two verses appear to describe the prior non-existence of individual human beings—not the universe as a whole. Moreover, the fact that these are the only two verses in the entire Quran that could be interpreted as gesturing toward creatio ex nihilo strongly suggests that this is not the Quranic cosmological position. The weight of textual evidence points in the opposite direction.

#### 5. Primordial Elements in Quranic Cosmology: Water, Smoke, and the Throne

The Quranic references to water (ma'), smoke (dukhan), and the divine Throne ('arsh) as pre-cosmological realities constitute a coherent cosmological framework. These elements function as primordial substrates or conditions that preceded the formation of the present cosmic order. Water (ma'), as referenced in Hud 11:7, represents a primordial fluid medium upon which the divine Throne rested before the creation of the heavens and the earth. In Islamic cosmological tradition, water is often regarded as the primordial substance from which the created order emerged. This resonates with modern scientific findings regarding the fundamental role of hydrogen—the primary constituent of water—in early cosmic nucleosynthesis.

Smoke (dukhan), mentioned in Fussilat 41:11, has attracted significant interest from scholars seeking to relate Quranic cosmology to contemporary cosmological models. Some interpreters have drawn parallels between this Quranic 'smoke' and the hot, dense gaseous state of the early universe as described by modern astrophysics. While caution is warranted in mapping contemporary scientific concepts onto ancient scriptural language, the verse clearly posits a gaseous pre-stellar state as the raw material of cosmic formation.

The divine Throne ('arsh), as mentioned in Hud 11:7, represents a transcendent cosmological reality. The Throne functions in Quranic cosmology as a symbol of divine sovereignty and the boundary between the uncreated and the created realms. Its existence upon primordial water suggests a pre-cosmic metaphysical order that both precedes and sustains the physical universe.

#### 6. Kun Fayakun: The Divine Command and Its Cosmological Implications

The phrase Kun Fayakun (كُنْ فَيَكُونُ), meaning 'Be—and it is,' is one of the most theologically potent locutions in the Quran. It occurs in multiple verses and serves as the paradigmatic expression of divine creative omnipotence. However, a careful analysis reveals that the command Kun does not necessarily presuppose creation from absolute nothingness.

The grammatical and semantic analysis of Kun Fayakun reveals two critical dimensions:

<sup>11</sup> Maryam 19:9

<sup>12</sup> Al-Quran, Maryam 19:9.

<sup>13</sup> Maryam 19:67

<sup>14</sup> Al-Quran, Maryam 19:67.

First, the divine command is always directed at something: 'He only says to it, Be.' The use of the third-person pronoun (lahu—'to it') implies the prior existence of an entity to which the command is addressed. If the command were addressed to absolute nothingness, there would be no referent for the pronoun.

Second, as the example of Adam illustrates (Ale Imran 3:59), Kun is issued after the formation of Adam from clay. The command, therefore, operates not as a *creatio ex nihilo* but as a transformative directive that brings a pre-existing entity into a new state or form of existence. This interpretation is consistent with the view of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the renowned Andalusian philosopher and commentator on Aristotle, who argued that the apparent meaning of scripture implies the existence of a prior being and time before God created the present being and time, and that theological interpretations to the contrary are allegorical and do not command unanimous agreement.

Ibn Rushd's position underscores the longstanding interpretive diversity within Islamic scholarship on this question and lends weight to the argument that *Kun Fayakun* operates within a framework of transformative rather than *ex nihilo* creation.<sup>15</sup>

### **7. The Metaphysical Universe (Alam al-Amr) as the Pre-Cosmological Reality**

A comprehensive account of Quranic cosmology must engage with the concept of *Alam al-Amr*—the 'World of Command' or the metaphysical universe. This Quranic concept refers to a realm of existence that is spiritual in nature, beyond the perception of human faculties, and ontologically prior to the physical universe. The evidence examined in the preceding sections suggests that the Quran posits a pre-cosmological metaphysical reality from which the physical universe was created. The primordial water, the divine Throne, and the 'smoke' may be understood as symbolic or analogical descriptions of this metaphysical domain as perceived through the limited aperture of human conceptual categories.

This framework aligns with the classical Islamic philosophical distinction between the '*alam al-khalq* (the world of creation, i.e., the physical universe) and the '*alam al-amr* (the world of divine command, i.e., the metaphysical domain). The Quran itself alludes to this distinction in Surah Al-A'raf (7:54): 'His is the creation and the command.'

The metaphysical universe, in this reading, is not a second god or an independent co-eternal reality, but rather the domain of divine creative potentiality and command—the ontological horizon from which physical existence emerges by divine will. This interpretation preserves both the absolute unity of God (*tawhid*) and the intelligibility of creation from a pre-existing, divinely ordained substrate.

The temporal dimension of creation is also affirmed by the Quranic reference to a 'six-day' creation (Hud 11:7), which, while not necessarily indicating a literal six 24-hour periods, signals the sequential and purposive character of the cosmic ordering process. The universe, in the Quranic account, does not emerge instantaneously as an undifferentiated whole but is formed through a divinely structured sequence of transformative events.

### **8. Discussion: Theological and Scientific Resonances**

The analysis presented in this article has several significant implications for Islamic theology, Quranic hermeneutics, and the science-religion dialogue.

From a theological perspective, the Quranic evidence challenges the uncritical adoption of *creatio ex nihilo* as a universal Islamic position. While the doctrine has been influential in classical *kalam*, the textual evidence suggests that it represents a theological inference rather than a direct Quranic teaching. A more texturally faithful account of Quranic cosmology accommodates

<sup>15</sup>Averroes (Ibn Rushd), trans. George F. Hourani, Massrs Luzac and Co., London, 1961, p. 56.

the existence of pre-cosmological realities, including primordial water, smoke, and metaphysical substrates.

The concept of Badi' as divine origination without precedent does not require the absolute nothingness of pre-cosmic existence; rather, it emphasizes the unprecedented and incomparable character of the divine creative act. Allah originates the cosmos without any external model, constraint, or coequal agent—not necessarily without any substrate whatsoever.

From the perspective of science-religion dialogue, the Quranic cosmological framework exhibits striking thematic convergences with contemporary cosmological models. The reference to a primordial gaseous state preceding the formation of the heavens resonates with the nebular hypothesis and the inflationary Big Bang model. The notion of a metaphysical reality preceding the physical universe finds conceptual analogs in discussions of quantum vacuum fluctuations and the pre-Big Bang state in theoretical physics. These parallels, while not constituting scientific proof of Quranic cosmological claims, suggest a productive area for ongoing interdisciplinary inquiry.

### 9. Conclusion

This article has systematically examined the Quranic perspective on the creation of the universe through a textual, linguistic, and theological lens. The analysis has demonstrated that the Quran presents a coherent and sophisticated cosmological narrative that does not straightforwardly support the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Instead, the Quranic text consistently points to the existence of pre-cosmological realities—primordial water, smoke, the divine Throne, and the metaphysical realm of *Alam al-Amr*—from which the physical universe was brought into being through divine command.

The divine epithet Badi' affirms that the universe is not eternal and that its origination was unprecedented—without prior model or coequal creator—while the repeated invocation of *Kun Fayakun* underscores the absolute sovereignty of divine will in the creative process. The transformative rather than *ex nihilo* character of Quranic creation is further supported by the testimony of classical scholars, including Ibn Rushd, who explicitly acknowledged the apparent meaning of scripture as implying a prior cosmic order.

These findings invite a reconsideration of certain entrenched theological assumptions within Islamic scholarship and open productive avenues for dialogue between Quranic cosmology and contemporary scientific cosmology. Future research might profitably explore the relationship between *Alam al-Amr* and modern theoretical physics, the Quranic concept of cosmic time, and the implications of a transformative cosmogenesis for Islamic environmental ethics and the theology of nature.

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