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From Vapour to Vision: Qur'anic Imagery and the Symbolism of Clouds

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Abstract

This study presents a unique interdisciplinary examination of cloud imagery in the Quran, examining the cloud motif as a crucial "nexus" that is the intersection point between divine discourse, natural phenomena, and human perception. Moving beyond traditional interpretive boundaries, this research constructs a new tripartite framework that integrates the scientific-physical, interpretive-metaphorical, and intellectual-philosophical aspects of cloud imagery. Its central thesis is that the Quranic cloud functions as a dynamic, polysemic sign. The study includes the etymological, linguistic, and cultural meanings of the cloud and elucidates the various aspects of cloud imagery in the Quran, including linguistic, symbolic, and scientific aspects that showing how the cloud appears in the Quran not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a symbol of mercy, power, justice, and renewal of life. The paper selects Quranic verses related to clouds whose interpretation is presented in the context of imagery interpretation. This study draws on the interpretations of Maulana Maududi, Syed Qutb, and Majidi to create an intellectual harmony between traditional interpretive understanding and modern scientific observation. Furthermore, the dynamic and spiritual interpretation of the cloud is presented visually through flowcharts and pictorial explanations, so that the reader can access the depth of the scientific and symbolic message of the Quranic text. The results prove that the Quranic cloud is not a static image but a connecting conceptual operator. It holds the key to understanding the Islamic worldview, where nature, text, and meaning are deeply intertwined.

Introduction

There is a fascination in the Quran of artistic depiction that transcends the obvious. This is what the poets could not achieve, and this is why the Arabs accused the Quran of sometimes poetry, sometimes magic, and sometimes superstition. It was only because they were helpless before its magnificent images, and they felt the transcendence of this revealed revelation which is beyond the reach of man (السيد, 2020).

Thus, this study serves as evidence of one aspect of the miraculous nature of the Quran in the field of artistic imagery, and as evidence of its continuous, uninterrupted and timeless gifts. It also shows that it is suitable for all times and places. Inevitably every era will discover something new, and every seeker of truth will find within himself what he seeks.

The Quranic treatment of clouds represents one of the most sophisticated and multidimensional uses of natural imagery in religious literature, transforming meteorological phenomena into profound theological discourse that encompasses divine attributes, cosmic order, and human spiritual development. Unlike static descriptive passages, the Quran's cloud imagery operates through dynamic linguistic structures that create immediate experiential impact while conveying complex theological truths about divine power, mercy, and wisdom manifest in atmospheric phenomena (Rahman ,1980).

The dynamic nature of Quranic cloud imagery emerges through its integration of vivid sensory

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language, temporal progression, and multilayered symbolism that transcends mere weather description to become vehicles for understanding divine governance of natural systems, spiritual purification processes, and eschatological realities. This sophisticated approach transforms ordinary meteorological observations into profound spiritual instruction that remains relevant across cultural and temporal boundaries (Abdel Haleem ,2005)

This living, moving imagery portrays clouds as vessels of blessing and a metaphor for the ever-changing yet purposeful processes within creation. Quranic descriptions convey the dynamic interplay between clouds, rain, earth, and life, inviting reflection on the interdependence of natural phenomena and divine will. This article explores the multifaceted representation of clouds in the Quran, analysing their linguistic expressions, symbolic meanings, and implications for understanding the relationship between the Creator and creation.

Etymology of "Cloud": Origins and Meanings

The English word "cloud" represents a fascinating example of semantic evolution in language development. Understanding its etymological journey provides insight into how metaphorical thinking shapes linguistic change over time.

Old English Origins

The modern English word "cloud" derives from the Old English term "clūd," which originally carried a meaning quite different from its contemporary usage (Oxford English Dictionary ,2023). Rather than referring to atmospheric formations, "clūd" initially meant "rock," "hill," or "mass of stone" (Partridge ,2006). This original meaning connected the word to concepts of solid, substantial masses rather than the ephemeral water vapor formations we associate with clouds today.

Germanic Connections

The Old English "clūd" has clear Germanic linguistic roots, sharing ancestry with related terms across the Germanic language family(Watkins ,2000). The word connects to Old High German "klōz," meaning "a ball or lump," demonstrating the consistent semantic thread of something massed or clustered together. These connections place the word within the broader Indo-European linguistic tradition of terms relating to lumping, clotting, or gathering into consolidated forms.

Semantic Evolution

The transformation from "rock/hill" to "cloud" occurred through metaphorical extension during the transition from Old English to Middle English, roughly between the 12th and 15th centuries (Oxford English Dictionary ,2023). Early speakers recognized visual and conceptual similarities between the solid, looming presence of hills or rock formations and the billowing, massed appearance of atmospheric clouds. This metaphorical leap demonstrates how human cognition processes visual similarities to extend word meanings into new domains.

Displacement of Earlier Terms

Before "cloud" acquired its modern meaning, Old English speakers used "wolcen" to refer to atmospheric clouds(Partridge ,2006). This earlier term, related to modern German "Wolke," was gradually supplanted as "clūd" underwent its semantic shift. The replacement illustrates how competing terms within a language can led to the dominance of one form over another through processes of semantic change.

The Word "Cloud" Across Languages

The concept of clouds as atmospheric formations exists universally across human cultures, yet the linguistic expressions for this phenomenon vary significantly across languages. Examining these variations reveals insights into how different language families and cultures conceptualize and categorize natural phenomena.

a) Indo-European Languages

Germanic Languages

Within the Germanic language family, several distinct roots appear for cloud terminology. Modern German uses "Wolke," which connects to the Old English "wolcen" mentioned earlier (Oxford English Dictionary ,2023). Dutch

employs "wolk," demonstrating the shared Germanic heritage, while Swedish uses "moln" and Danish "sky," showing some divergence within the family(Crystal ,2010). Norwegian presents both "sky" and "skye," illustrating regional variation within a single language.

Romance Languages

Romance languages show remarkable consistency in their cloud terminology, largely deriving from Latin roots. Spanish "nube," Italian "nuvola," French "nuage," and Portuguese "nuvem" all trace back to the Latin "nubes" (Adams ,2007). Romanian "nor" represents an exception, possibly showing influence from non-Romance substrate languages in the region.

Slavic Languages

- Slavic languages demonstrate their common ancestry through similar cloud terms.
- Russian "облако" (oblako), Polish "chmura," Czech "mrak,".
- Serbian "облак" (oblak) show both shared roots and divergent developments within the family (Sussex and Cubberley ,2006).
- The variation between terms like Russian "oblako" and Polish "chmura" illustrates how even closely related languages can develop different primary terms for the same concept.

b) Non-Indo-European Languages

East Asian Languages

- Chinese uses "云" (yún), a character that originally depicted rising vapors(DeFrancis ,1984).
- Japanese borrowed this character as "雲" (kumo) but also developed native terms.
- Korean "구름" (gureum) represents an indigenous development rather than Chinese borrowing, showing independent conceptualization within the East Asian linguistic sphere.

Semitic Languages

Hebrew "ענן" (anan) demonstrate separate developments within the Semitic family (Holes ,2004). These terms show no clear cognate relationship, suggesting independent innovation for cloud terminology within different branches of the Semitic language tree.

African Languages

Swahili uses "wingu," while Yoruba employs "àwọsánmà" (Bamgbose ,2000). The diversity in African languages reflects the continent's linguistic complexity, with terms for clouds developing independently across different language families including Niger-Congo, Afroasiatic, and Nilo-Saharan.

Austronesian Languages

Indonesian and Malay use "awan," while Tagalog uses "ulap" (Adelaar and Himmelmann ,2005). These variations within the Austronesian family show how even related languages across the Pacific developed distinct terminology for atmospheric phenomena.

c) Semantic Patterns

Metaphorical Extensions

Many languages extend cloud terminology into metaphorical domains. English "cloudy" can describe unclear thinking, while similar metaphorical uses appear cross-linguistically (Lakoff and Johnson ,1980). Spanish "nublado" (cloudy) similarly describes mental confusion, suggesting universal cognitive patterns in metaphorical extension.

Cultural Meanings and Symbolism of Clouds Across World Cultures

While clouds are a universal atmospheric phenomenon, their cultural meanings, symbolic interpretations, and roles in religious and mythological systems vary dramatically across human societies. The interpretation of clouds reflects deeper cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and relationships with the natural world (Eliade ,1958).

a) Western Cultural Traditions

Classical Mediterranean Cultures

In ancient Greek and Roman traditions, clouds served as divine messengers and dwelling places of the gods. Homer's Iliad frequently describes Zeus as "the cloud-gatherer," emphasizing his control over weather and fate (Burkert ,1985). Roman augury included cloud interpretation as a method of divine communication, with specific cloud formations indicating favourable or

unfavourable omens for military and political decisions.

Judeo-Christian Symbolism

Biblical traditions establish clouds as vehicles of divine presence and communication. The pillar of cloud that guided the Israelites through the wilderness represents divine guidance and protection (Douglas ,1999). In Christian iconography, clouds often symbolize the boundary between earthly and heavenly realms, with Christ's ascension and second coming associated with cloud imagery. Medieval Christian art consistently portrayed clouds as pathways for angels and divine manifestations.

Modern Western Interpretations

Contemporary Western culture has developed largely secular cloud symbolism, with clouds representing both positive and negative emotional states. The phrase "on cloud nine" indicates euphoria, while "under a cloud" suggests suspicion or gloom(Partridge ,2006). Romantic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries used cloud imagery to represent the sublime and humanity's relationship with untamed nature.

b) East Asian Cultural Perspectives

Chinese Traditional Beliefs

Chinese cosmology assigns clouds significant roles in both Taoist and Confucian thought systems. Taoism views clouds as symbols of transformation and the natural flow of qi (life energy) through the universe(Kohn ,2000). Traditional Chinese painting elevated cloud depiction to an art form, with clouds representing the breath of mountains and the dynamic balance between yin and yang principles.

Japanese Cultural Interpretations

Japanese aesthetics, influenced by both Shintoism and Buddhism, interpret clouds as symbols of impermanence and the transitory nature of existence. The concept of mono no aware (the pathos of things) often uses cloud imagery to represent life's ephemeral beauty (Keene ,1988). Japanese poetry, particularly haiku, frequently employs clouds as seasonal markers and metaphors for human emotional states.

Indian Subcontinental Traditions

Hindu traditions associate clouds with fertility, renewal, and divine blessing. The monsoon clouds carry particular significance, representing life-giving rain and agricultural abundance (Zimmer ,1946). Classical Indian literature, including works like Kalidasa's Meghaduta (The Cloud Messenger), uses clouds as romantic messengers carrying lovers' communications across vast distances.

c) Indigenous and Traditional Cultures

Native American Perspectives

Various Native American cultures attribute spiritual significance to cloud formations, often viewing them as ancestors' spirits or pathways for spiritual communication (Brown ,1991). Plains tribes developed sophisticated cloud-reading skills for weather prediction essential to buffalo hunting and agricultural timing. Pueblo cultures incorporate cloud imagery into pottery and ceremonial art, connecting clouds to rain ceremonies and crop fertility.

African Traditional Interpretations

African cultures across the continent often personify clouds as ancestral spirits or divine messengers. Yoruba cosmology includes cloud deities responsible for bringing life-sustaining rain (Drewal ,1992). San peoples of Southern Africa interpret cloud formations as part of their complex astronomical and navigation systems, integrating meteorological observation with spiritual practice.

Australian Aboriginal Perspectives

Aboriginal Australian cultures embed cloud interpretation within Dreamtime narratives, connecting cloud formations to ancestral beings and creation stories (Bell ,1998). Different tribal groups developed distinct cloud-related ceremonies and artistic representations, often linking cloud movements to seasonal changes and resource availability.

d) Contemporary Global Variations

Secular Scientific Influence

Modern meteorological understanding has created new cultural frameworks for cloud interpretation. Weather forecasting has

transformed clouds from mysterious divine phenomena into predictable atmospheric events, though cultural symbolism persists alongside scientific knowledge (Fleming ,1990).

Environmental and Climate Change Contexts

Contemporary environmental movements have invested clouds with new cultural meaning related to climate change and atmospheric pollution. Clouds now symbolize both natural beauty under threat and the complex atmospheric systems affected by human activity(McKibben ,1989).

e) Psychological and Symbolic Universals

Cross-Cultural Patterns

Despite cultural variations, certain cloud symbolism appears across multiple societies. Clouds frequently represent transitions, boundaries between realms, and communication between earthly and spiritual domains(Jung ,1968). The vertical nature of cloud formation often symbolizes spiritual ascension or divine descent across diverse cultural systems.

Colour and Formation Symbolism

Dark storm clouds universally suggest threat, conflict, or impending change, while white, fluffy clouds typically represent peace, purity, or positive transformation. These associations appear consistently across cultures, suggesting possible universal psychological responses to meteorological phenomena(Arnheim ,1974).

The Meaning of "Cloud" in Arabic Language

The Arabic language possesses a rich and sophisticated vocabulary for describing clouds and atmospheric phenomena, reflecting both the linguistic complexity of Arabic and the cultural importance of weather patterns in Arab societies. Understanding cloud terminology in Arabic reveals insights into meteorological knowledge, poetic traditions, and cultural symbolism within Arab and Islamic contexts.

a) Primary Arabic Terms for Cloud

The General Term

1. سحاب (Sahab)

The most common Arabic word for cloud is "سحاب" (sahab), derived from the trilateral root س-ح-ب (s-h-b) which relates to dragging, pulling, or drawing (Wehr ,1994). This etymology reflects the visual perception of clouds as formations that are "drawn across" the sky. The term appears frequently in the Quran and classical Arabic literature, establishing it as the standard word for atmospheric clouds.

2. غيم (Ghaym) "Dense Cloud Formations"

Arabic uses "غيم" (ghaym) to describe dense, overcast cloud cover that obscures the sky. This term derives from the root غ-ي-م (gh-y-m), related to covering or concealing(Lane ,1863). The word carries connotations of complete sky coverage, distinguishing it from isolated cloud formations described by other terms.

3. غمام (Ghamam) "Light, Scattered Clouds"

The term "غمام" (ghamam) refers to light, scattered clouds or thin cloud cover. Classical Arabic dictionaries distinguish this from "ghaym," noting that "ghamam" describes less dense formations that do not completely obscure sunlight (Ibn Manzur ,1994).

4. مُعْصِرَاتٌ (Muʿṣirāt)

Its origin from ع ص ر (to squeeze), as if something is squeezed to extract its juice. Similarly, clouds squeeze water through rain. (Al-Zubaidi ,1967). This word is used for clouds that are ripe, ready to rain, and full of water.

b) Specialized Cloud Terminology

Meteorological Distinctions

Arabic developed sophisticated terminology for different cloud types and weather phenomena. "سحابة ممطرة" (sahabah mumtirah) specifically denotes rain-bearing clouds, while "سحابة جافة" (sahabah jaffah) describes dry clouds unlikely to produce precipitation (Al-Damiri ,1978). This precision reflects the critical importance of accurate weather prediction in desert and agricultural societies.

Seasonal and Regional Variations

Different Arabic dialects developed specific terms for regionally important cloud phenomena. Gulf Arabic uses "هباب" (hubab) for dust-laden clouds, while Levantine Arabic employs "عجاج" (ajaj) for similar formations Holes (2004, 2016). These regional variations demonstrate how environmental conditions shape linguistic development.

c) Quranic and Religious Contexts

Divine Symbolism

The Quran employs cloud imagery extensively as symbols of divine power and mercy. The phrase "والسحاب المسخر" (wa al-sahab al-musakhkhar) refers to "clouds made subservient," emphasizing divine control over natural phenomena (Quran 2:164). This usage establishes clouds as signs (ayat) of Allah's creative power and beneficence(Abdel Haleem ,2005).

Eschatological Imagery

Islamic eschatology uses cloud symbolism to describe the Day of Judgment and divine intervention. The Quran describes the coming of the Hour with imagery of "يوم تأتي السماء بدخان مبين" (the day when the sky brings forth evident smoke/clouds), connecting atmospheric phenomena to spiritual and temporal transformation (Quran 44:10).

d) Classical Arabic Poetry and Literature

Pre-Islamic Poetry

Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (al-shi'r al-jahili) developed elaborate cloud imagery reflecting Bedouin life and desert experiences. Poets like Imru' al-Qais used cloud metaphors to describe both physical beauty and emotional states, with "كأنها غمامة" (ka-annaha ghamah) becoming a standard simile for feminine beauty(Arberry ,1957).

Abbasid Literary Developments

Abbasid period poetry expanded cloud symbolism into more sophisticated literary devices. Al-Mutanabbi and other classical poets used cloud imagery to represent generosity, temporary shelter, and the transient nature of worldly pleasures(Sperl and Shackle ,1996). The phrase "سحائب الجود" (sahaa'ib al-jud) meaning "clouds of generosity" became a common metaphor for beneficent rulers.

e) Linguistic Structure and Morphology

Root-Based Derivations

Arabic's trilateral root system allows extensive derivation from cloud-related roots. From س-ح-ب (s-h-b), Arabic derives "ساحب" (sahib) meaning "dragging" and "انسحاب" (insihab) meaning "withdrawal," maintaining semantic connections across different word classes(Wright ,1896).

Collective and Singular Forms

Arabic distinguishes between collective cloud formations and individual clouds through morphological patterns. "سحاب" (sahab) represents collective clouds, while "سحابة" (sahabah) denotes a single cloud formation, demonstrating Arabic's grammatical precision in natural phenomenon description.

f) Modern Standard Arabic Usage

Contemporary Meteorology

Modern Standard Arabic meteorological terminology incorporates traditional cloud vocabulary while adding scientific precision. Weather forecasts use "غيوم كثيفة" (ghuyum kathifah) for dense clouds and "غيوم متفرقة" (ghuyum mutafarriqah) for scattered clouds, maintaining linguistic continuity with classical usage(Stetkevych ,1970).

Technological Integration

Arabic weather applications and scientific texts employ traditional terminology alongside borrowed terms. "الأقمار الصناعية" (al-aqmar as-sina'iyyah) for satellite imagery combines with classical "سحب" (suhub) plural of "sahab," demonstrating Arabic's adaptability to modern contexts.

g) Cultural and Symbolic Meanings

Hope and Mercy

Arab cultural tradition associates' clouds with divine mercy and hope, particularly in desert contexts where clouds promise life-giving rain.

The expression "جاءت السحب" (ja'at as-suhub) meaning "the clouds have come" carries connotations of relief and blessing beyond mere weather description.

Transience and Change

Arabic literature uses cloud imagery to represent the temporary nature of worldly affairs. The phrase "كالسحاب العابر" (ka-al-sahab al-abir) meaning "like passing clouds" describes ephemeral experiences, reflecting philosophical perspectives on temporal existence.

h) Dialectical Variations

Regional Differences

Maghrebi Arabic uses "سحابة" (shaba) with different phonetic realization, while Egyptian Arabic employs "غيمة" (ghima) as the primary term (Versteegh ,2001). These variations demonstrate how standard Arabic cloud terminology adapts to regional phonological and cultural patterns.

Bedouin Specialized Vocabulary

Traditional Bedouin dialects preserve extensive cloud-related vocabulary reflecting nomadic weather-reading skills. Terms like "رعد أبيض" (ra'd abyad) for lightning in white clouds and "برق أحمر" (barq ahmar) for lightning in red clouds show sophisticated meteorological observation (Kurpershoek ,1994).

Dynamic Quranic images of clouds

Rain Clouds

اللَّهُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَيَبْسُطُهُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ وَيَجْعَلُهُ كِسَفًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ (Quran 30:48)

(Allah sends the winds that stir up clouds and then He spreads them in the sky as He pleases and splits them into different fragments, whereafter you see drops of rain pouring down from them.)

and

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَامًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ(Quran 24:43)

(Do you not observe that Allah makes the cloud move gently then joins its pieces together: then gathers it into a mass of thick cloud: then you see that raindrops fall down from its midst:)

This verse presents a coherent and dynamic picture of the formation of clouds, their movement, their spread in the sky, the emergence of raindrops and their falling on the earth, which is a clear picture of Allah's power and wisdom in the universe. In this process, Allah's mercy and life-giving blessings for creatures are revealed. As clearly outlined in Figure 1.2.1

a) Winds Lift Clouds

By the power of Allah Almighty, winds rise and lift clouds and carry them to the sky. This process occurs by the command of Allah where the winds move the clouds, which is a living and dynamic system of nature. As shown in Figure 1.2.2

As Majidi said, "Allah gathers the clouds and spreads them far away, which makes the valleys covered. (Daryabadi ,1994)"

The scientific explanation of this process of rain is fully consistent with modern meteorological science. The stages described in the verse present a complete picture of the physical process of rain. In the first stage, the winds collect sea vapor, which according to modern science is the basic principle of evaporation and convection currents(Holton and Hakim ,2013). In the second stage, this vapor reaches the troposphere and turns into clouds through condensation, which is called the Cloud Formation Process in science(Wallace and Hobbs ,2006).

b) Cloud Expansion

In the third stage, the clouds spread over a wide area under the pressure of the winds, which corresponds to the Advection Process in meteorology (Ahrens ,2015). These clouds are expanded in the sky according to the will of Allah Almighty. Sometimes they are wide and like an umbrella, and sometimes they are separated from each other and divided into pieces. This expansion is a coherent and dynamic process that

depicts the development of clouds and the preparation of rain.

The fourth stage refers to the classification of clouds, Clouds are divided into different shapes and types (As shown in Figure 1.2.3), such as Cumulonimbus (rain clouds) and Cirrus (high and thin clouds) which is known in modern science as Cloud Classification (Cumulus, Stratus, Cirrus) (World Meteorological Organization ,2017).

Raindrops come out of the clouds, which is a dynamic and coordinated process. This rain falls on the earth by the command of Allah and paves the way for the life of creatures. Rain fertilizes the earth and restores life, which is a sign of Allah's mercy. This process is called the Precipitation Process in scientific terms, in which cloud droplets fall to the earth in the form of rain through Coalescence and the Bergeron Process (Rogers and Yau ,n.d.).

c) The Joy of Creatures

When Allah Almighty showers this rain on His creatures, they immediately start celebrating, because rain is a blessing of life. This joy is an expression of appreciation for Allah's blessings.

Figure 1.2.1: Surah Ar Room 30:48 and Suran An Noor 24:43

Figure 1.2.2: Winds Lift Clouds

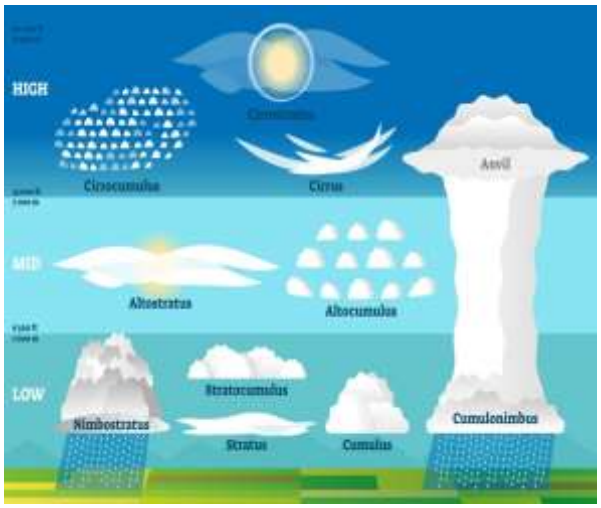

Figure 1.2.3: Classification of clouds

Clouds Full of Water

وَأَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا(Quran 78:14)

(and sent down abundant water from the clouds)

This is a dynamic and coherent depiction of the power of Allah, which describes the process of clouds growing, filling with water, and then pouring down heavy rain. This natural process is a manifestation of Allah's wisdom and mercy that gives life to the earth.

a) Meaning of "الْمُعْصِرَاتِ "

"الْمُعْصِرَاتِ " are clouds that are filled with water but have not yet rained. This word has been likened to the state of a woman whose menstruation is approaching, that is, they are full of water but have not yet started. The same condition also occurs in clouds that are ready to rain. According to modern meteorology, this

refers to Cumulonimbus clouds that are very high in vertical development (up to 20,000 feet) and have intense convective activity (Houze ,2014). Such clouds are formed by the rapid rise (updraft) of warm, humid air and contain an abundance of water droplets and ice particles.

b) The Meaning of "ثَجَّاجًا"

"ثَجَّاجًا" is water flowing continuously with abundance and intensity, that is, heavy, continuous and torrential rain. Which is called a heavy precipitation event in science. According to modern research, such rain occurs when the moisture content in the clouds is extremely high and atmospheric conditions are in a state of instability (Doswell et al. ,1996) . This process is especially seen in tropical and monsoon regions where moisture-rich winds from the ocean continuously feed the clouds (As shown in Figure 1.2.5). This rain falls on the earth as a mercy to the worlds and revives the earth and life.

c) The Dynamic System of Clouds

This verse presents a dynamic scene where Allah Almighty sends the winds and lifts the clouds, then spreads them in the sky and then brings the water down to the earth in a powerful manner. This entire process is continuous, coordinated and dynamic, which gives life to the universe. As explicitly detailed in Figure 1.2.4.

As Syed Qutb said, "The laws of nature squeeze these clouds, and their water falls to the earth. How is this water squeezed? It may be that water is squeezed from the clouds by the winds, or it may also be that water comes out through the process of lightning when clouds collide with each other, but behind all these causes there is a cause of causes who is the creator of all these causes and effects." (Qutb ,1995)

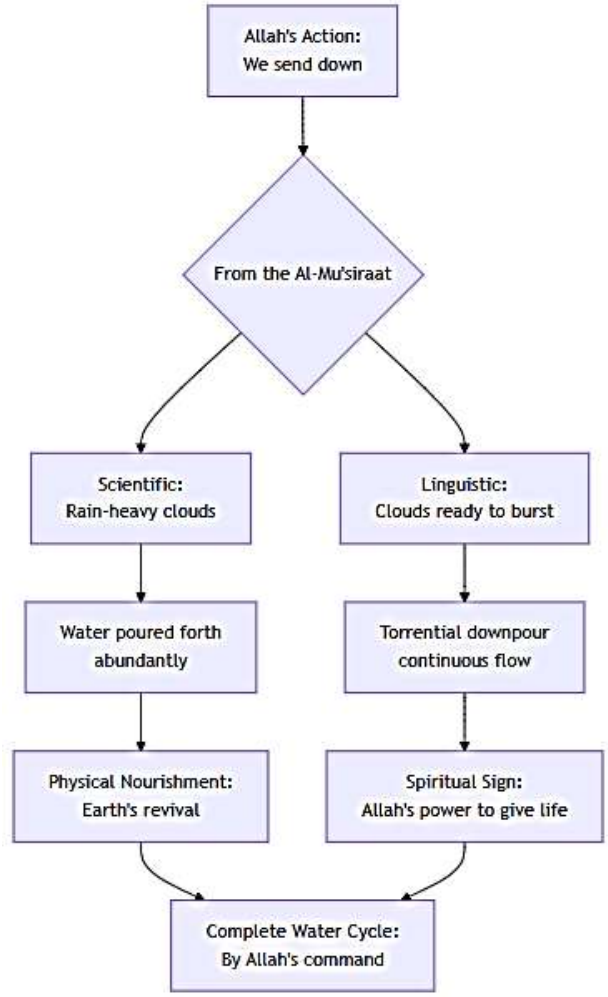

Figure 1.2.4: Surah An Naba 78:14

Figure 1.2.5: High moisture winds feed the clouds

The Punishment of the Shadow of the Clouds

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمِ الظُّلَّةِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ(Quran 26:189)

(Then they branded him a liar, whereupon the chastisement of the Day of Canopy overtook them. It was the chastisement of a very awesome day.)

This verse presents a dynamic picture of a natural punishment that descended in the form of shadowy clouds, and beneath it was intense heat and punishment. This event is a clear sign of Allah's grip, natural phenomena and punishment that teaches a lesson to the people.

a) Historical Event

This punishment was inflicted on the people of the Companions of the Oneness who disobeyed Hazrat Shuaib (AS). For their denial, Allah Almighty inflicted this natural and divine punishment on them, which was to destroy their entire life and existence. As visually summarized in Figure 1.2.6.

b) The Punishment of the Day of Shadows

" يَوْمِ الظُّلَّةِ " means the day of shade or the day of clouds that cast shade. This is the title of a specific punishment that Allah Almighty inflicted on the people of the Companions of the Oneness, who denied and refused the invitation of Hazrat Shuaib (AS).

As Maududi said, "Since these people had asked for heavenly punishment, Allah Almighty sent a cloud over them, and it remained over them like an umbrella until the rain of punishment completely destroyed them." (Maududi ,1984)

This punishment was a severe and terrifying day when clouds covered the sky that were shaded (As shown in Figure 1.2.7) but beneath them was intense heat like fire, which was a sign of radiation and punishment. These clouds are also called "Shadows", but this shade was not comforting but rather punishing.

As Majidi said that "At the time of the punishment, a cloud had appeared first, the heat had already set in, people gathered under it in the desire for cool air, fire started pouring out of it and everyone was burned, that cloud was like a canopy. That is why it was described as the canopy of punishment." (Daryabadi ,1994)

c) Scientific Facts

Although only Allah knows best about the exact nature of this torment, in the light of modern science we can understand it in the following ways:

1. Heat Wave:

A region with extreme temperatures that are unbearable for human survival. According to modern research, temperatures above 50°C can fail the thermoregulatory system of the human body (Mora et al. ,2017). Historical evidence suggests that there is a record of such heat waves in the Middle East region.

As Syed Qutb said, "Some traditions state that it was so hot that people began to suffocate and die." (Qutb ,1995)

2. Volcanic Activity:

The eruption of fire or the release of lava from the earth. The Arabian region is surrounded by several mineral volcanic areas in which evidence of volcanic activity is found (Camp et al. ,1992). In such events, the release of volcanic ash and gases can cause immediate destruction.

3. Meteor Showers:

The impact of celestial bodies on the Earth. The Waber craters near the Red Sea indicate that this region was not immune to the effects of meteorites (Prescott et al. ,2004). The heat and pressure generated by the explosion of meteorites can cause local destruction.

These scientific possibilities explain that the punishment of the "Day of Shadow" was not an unnatural event, but a punishment manifested under the natural laws of Allah, for which various scientific explanations are possible.

d) A Combination of Natural Phenomena and Punishment

This day presents a terrifying scene due to the individual heat or heat of the clouds and the mixed form of the shadows. These clouds

surrounded the earth, but living under them was a source of torment because they contained the heat of fire, which was a sign of severe torment even in the shade.

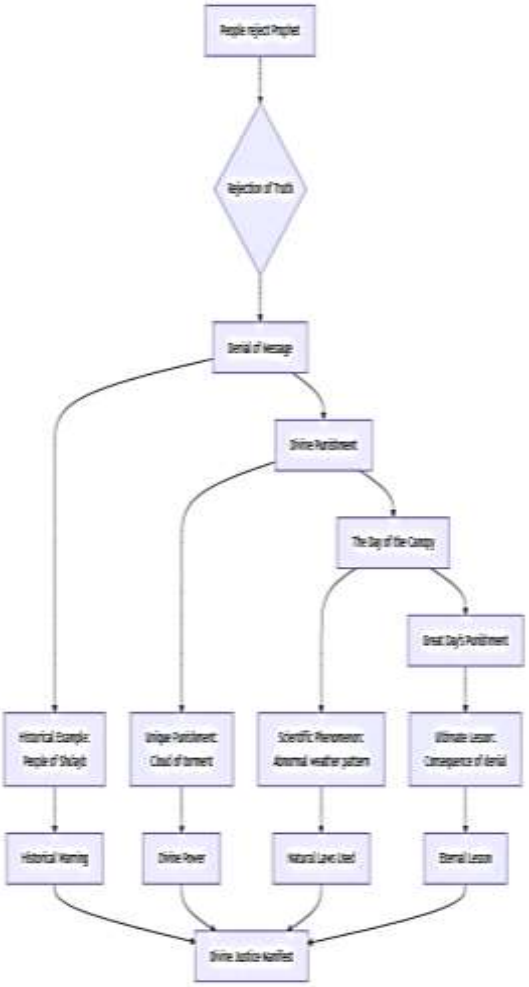

Figure 1.2.6: Surah Ash Shu'araa 26:189

Figure 1.2.7: Day of Shadows

Conclusion

This study makes it clear that the cloud is presented in the Holy Quran not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a symbol of divine wisdom, mercy and renewal of life. Literal, linguistic and cultural analysis shows that the concept of clouds is closely related to human hope, faith and the divine system. The interpretations of Maulana Maududi, Syed Qutb and Majidi reveal that natural phenomena in the Quran are made a source of contemplation and divine knowledge. From a scientific perspective, the phases of clouds in the Quran are also consistent with modern meteorological principles, which are proof of the scientific miracle of the Quran. Thus, the imagery of the cloud draws man to the fact that every phenomenon of the universe is a mirror of the power of the Creator and carries a message of invitation for man to reflect and believe.

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