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Author (s): **Bharat Jhunjunwala**
Ex-Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore, India



Zainab Asif Husain
Dual Master's Scholar, Faculty of Management and Business Administration, Integral Business School and Széchenyi István University, Hungary, Europe



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Concordance of Islamic Concepts of Allah and Malaa'ykaas and Hindu Concepts of Brahman and Devtas

Bharat Jhunjunwala

Ex-Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore, India

Email: bharatjj@gmail.com

Zainab Asif Husain

Dual Master's Scholar, Faculty of Management and Business Administration
Integral Business School and Széchenyi István University, Hungary, Europe

Email: zainabhusain46@gmail.com

Abstract

The article provides a comparative study of the Holy Quran and Hindu texts to highlight both their concordances and differences. Notable similarities include: the portrayal of the universe as initially unified before becoming separated; the omnipresence of Allah or Brahman in all existence; the concepts of rewards and punishments in the afterlife; the notion of a timeless beginning; and the view of the material world as a purposeful journey towards Allah/Brahman. The numerous angels in Islam can be compared to the 33 types of Devtas in Hinduism, with both traditions affirming that these celestial beings do not consume food or drink. Both traditions acknowledge the existence of malevolent entities that challenge divine authority and disrupt human life. Both traditions also attribute specific functions to certain angels or devtas. However, Hinduism describes the separation of cosmic entities Purusha and Viraj as an inherent, self-initiated process rather than the action of an external force.

The Islamic concept tells of permanence of Jannat (Heaven) versus the Hindu concept telling of temporariness of Swarga (Heaven). However, if we consider the term "unless your Lord may will otherwise" in Al-Qur'an (11:106-108), then the common understanding becomes that the souls go to heaven (or hell) until their time is exhausted as decided by Allah. Additionally, unlike Islam, where Satan i.e. Iblees is a singular figure, Hinduism encompasses Rakshasas as a broader category of malevolent spirits.

The study concludes that a deeper exploration of the similarities between these religious traditions is crucial.

Keywords: Creation of Time, Purpose of Humanity, Heaven and Hell, Merging of Souls, Angels, Sequence of Creation.

1. Introduction

Our paper aims to outline both the points of convergence and the points of divergence between Islamic and Hindu theological concepts.

The structure of this paper is as follows: First, we present Ayats, Hadiths, Tafsirs, and Riwayat from the Islamic perspective. Second, we give the concordant Hindu concepts. Third, we make a comparative assessment.

The first author is Hindu, while the second author is a Shia Muslim. We have predominantly relied on Shia interpretations of the Quran.

2. Concept of ‘God’

“He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him” (Al-Qur’an: 112:1-4).¹

The above verse declares the absolute oneness of Allah, emphasizing that He is unique and Singular.

“Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?” (Al-Qur’an: 21:30).²

Ayat 21:30 delves into the profound concept of tawheed, emphasizing the omnipotence of Allah and His creative prowess. It illuminates the celestial and terrestrial division as a manifestation of Allah’s boundless power, underlining His ultimate sovereignty over all creation.

In Tafsir Al-Mizaan³ (Volume 28, Chapter 21), Allama Tabatabai states regarding this verse: “Given the context, those who disbelieve are the idolaters. They made a separation between the creation and direction of affairs by attributing the former to God and the latter to other gods. Their error in this separation is made clear by drawing their attention to something that is beyond doubt: the opening up of the heavens and the earth after being closed up. Creation and direction are jointly present in this phenomenon, so how could it be that their creation is by one being and their direction by another?” The Islamic perspective thus holds that there is only One Creator who both creates and imparts direction.

The Atharva Veda (8:10:1)⁴ proclaims: “Viraj verily was this [universe] in the beginning”. Viraj is the word for the material universe. The Atharva Veda (8:9:7) further says: “They call Viraj the father of Brahman”. Again, the Rig Veda

¹ The Quran, Sahih International Translation, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://quran.com>.

² Ibid

³ Allama Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Tafsir Al-Mizaan*, vol. 28, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://almizan.org/vol/28/35-72>.

⁴ Sripad Damodar Satwalekar, *Atharva Veda* (Pardi: Swadhyay Mandal, 2024).

(10:90:1, 5)⁵ states: “From him Viraj was born; again, Purusha [Brahman] from Viraj was born.”

The narrative implies that at one point, Viraj alone existed. Brahman was inseparable, existing in a state of unity with Viraj where distinctions between them were not delineated. This unified state was called Viraj. As the cosmic process unfolded, a separation occurred leading to the distinct manifestation of Viraj and Brahman as separate entities. This separation is analogous to the Quranic portrayal of the heavens and the earth being initially joined before being separated.

If Purusha and Viraj appeared simultaneously, as suggested by the Vedas, this aligns with the Quranic portrayal of the simultaneous separation of the heavens and the earth by Allah.

In the Hindu view the separation of cosmic entities Purusha and Viraj is not credited to an external deity but is depicted as a self-initiated process inherent within the cosmos itself. This is a point of distinction. The difference is that the Islamic view attributes creation to the external agency of Allah against Hindu concept of self-creation.

3. Omnipresence of Allah/Brahman

“Whithersoever Ye turn there is the Presence of Allah. For Allah is All-Pervading, All-Knowing” (Al-Qur’an: 2:115).⁶

This verse articulates the pervasive nature of Allah’s presence. It conveys the profound idea that Allah’s guidance permeates every corner of the universe while guiding the material world.

“All this is Brahman. (This) is born from, dissolves in, and exists in That” (Chhandogya Upanishad: 3.14.1).⁷

“All this—whatsoever moveth on the earth—should he covered by the Lord. That renounced, enjoy. Covet not anybody’s wealth” (Isavasya Upanishad: 1).⁸

The term “exists in That” means that existence itself is within Brahman. In other words, Brahman does not merely guide the universe but is the universe itself just as the Prime Minister may make laws that he himself is subjected to.

⁵ Sripad Damodar Satwalekar, *Rig Veda* (Pardi: Swadhyay Mandal, 1985).

⁶ The Quran, Sahih International Translation, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://quran.com>.

⁷ Swami Lokeshwaranand, *Chhandogya Upanishad*, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/chandogya-upanishad-english/d/doc239262.html>.

⁸ Stephanie Simoes, *Isavasya Upanishad*, accessed August 18, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/17430464/Isha_Upanishad_Word_for_Word_Translation_with_Transliteration_and_Grammatical_Notes?auto=download.

The Quranic understanding and the Upanishads share agreement regarding the presence of Allah/Brahman in all existence.

4. The Importance of Inquiry and Reason

The Quran explicitly encourages reflection and understanding, urging believers to use reason and engage in thoughtful contemplation. For instance, it states:

“Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and dumb who do not use reason” (Al-Quran, 8:22).⁹

This verse makes it clear that failing to use reason is seen as a deficiency in the eyes of Allah. The Quran also mentions:

“And they will say, ‘If only we had been listening or reasoning, we would not be among the companions of the Blaze’ (Al-Quran, 67:10).¹⁰

These verses illustrate that using one’s intellect and faculties to understand divine truths is a vital aspect of faith. Imam Ali echoes this encouragement when he advises:

“Learn your religion; do not merely inherit it” (*Ali, Imam, 10 Hadiths*).¹¹

This reflects the importance of gaining knowledge rather than blindly following the tradition. Additionally, Prophet Muhammad, emphasized the obligation of seeking knowledge, stating: “Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every believer” (Ibn Majah, 224).¹²

This principle of seeking knowledge resonates with the Hindu tradition. The Katha Upanishad¹³ advises seekers with the words: “Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn. Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path--so the wise say--hard to tread and difficult to cross” (1.3.14).

Similarly, the Nyaya Sutras state:

“Perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony are the means of right knowledge” (Nyaya Sutras, 1.1.3).¹⁴

These teachings, from both Islamic and Hindu texts, underscore the view that the pursuit of knowledge and the use of reason are essential to understanding the divine.

⁹ ¹⁰ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Imam Ali, “10 Hadith,” article by Amit Bharakda, *The Muslim Vibe*, 2015, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://themuslimvibe.com/faith-islam/in-history/10-hadith-by-ali-ibn-abi-talib>.

¹² Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, vol. 1, book 1, hadith 224.

¹³ Shankara and Madhvacharya, *Katha Upanishad*, trans. Sastri S. (1928), accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/katha-upanishad-shankara-bhashya/d/doc145217.html>.

¹⁴ 18.Akṣapāda Gautama, *Nyāya Sutras*, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-philosophy/The-Nyaya-sutras>.

5. Concept of Heaven and Hell

In Islam, heaven (Jannah) and hell (Jahannam) are the ultimate destinations after Resurrection. Heaven is depicted as a place of bliss and reward for the righteous, while hell is the abode of punishment for the sinful.

Heaven: “But those who believe and do righteous deeds – for them are the Gardens of Pleasure (Jannah) as lodging.” (Al-Qur’an: 18:107).¹⁵

Hell: “And fear the Fire, which has been prepared for the disbelievers.” (Al-Qur’an: 3:131).¹⁶

It may be noted that these Ayahs do not explicitly tell of heaven or hell being eternal places of abode. There are two perspectives on this matter. One interpretation suggests that there will be a single Judgement Day on which all living beings will be gathered. On this day, everyone will be judged, and based on their deeds, they will be assigned either to eternal heaven or to eternal hell. In this view, there will be no subsequent recreation or evaluation. The judgment will be final.

An alternative interpretation is that the Judgement Day is a recurring event. According to this view, different persons will be judged at different times, with each individual being assigned to heaven or hell for varying periods. Thus, Surah Al-Hud:

“As for those who were [destined to be] wretched, they will be in the Fire. For them therein is [violent] exhaling and inhaling. They shall abide in it as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless your Lord may will otherwise. Surely your Lord does whatsoever He wills... And as for those who are blessed, they shall abide in the Garden as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless your Lord may will otherwise” (Al-Qur’an: 11:106-108).¹⁷

These verses imply that the dwellers of Paradise and Hell will remain there for an indefinite time but the exception “unless your Lord may will otherwise” suggests that ultimate decisions are within Allah’s power and that the duration may be subject to His will. This could include the concept of recreation at the end of the current world.

In Hinduism, the concept of Svarga (heaven) bears resemblance to Jannat (paradise) in Islam though there are few differences. Swarga is regarded as a temporary celestial realm where virtuous souls experience pleasure and reward for

¹⁵ ¹⁷ ¹⁸ ²⁰ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

their good deeds until their allotted time expires. Then, the souls are reincarnated into the material world to continue with their journey towards attainment of Brahman.

Swarga is inhabited by Apsaras, i.e. celestial nymphs who serve and entertain the residents, which can be loosely compared to the virgins (hoor) mentioned in Islamic descriptions of Jannat (Shrimali, *Apsara Sadhna*¹⁸; Al-Qur'an: 44:54).

In Islamic theology, the wicked jinns and humans who reject faith and live sinful lives face punishment in Jahannam (Hell), a realm of relentless suffering and fire. Similarly, in Hinduism, evil spirits such as rakshasas and wicked humans who cause chaos and suffering face consequences for their actions. The Hindu concept of Narka represents a temporary hell where the wicked souls endure suffering for their sins before being reincarnated.

Both the Islamic and Hindu concepts involve a state of reward in heaven and punishment in hell. The difference lies in the permanence of Jannat versus the temporariness of Swarga. However, if we consider the term “unless your Lord may will otherwise” in Surah Hud as quoted above, then the common understanding becomes that the souls go to heaven (or hell) until their time is exhausted, that is, till the Lord wills.

To illustrate this concept, consider the analogy of life imprisonment. Imagine a person who has committed a crime and is sentenced to jail for life. While in prison, the individual might face various hardships as a consequence of his actions. However, the time in jail is also a period for reflection and potential rehabilitation. If the person behaves well and the authorities are satisfied, the prisoner can be released before his death.

6. Merging of Souls

To explore the Islamic perspective on the concept of merging of souls and compare it with Hindu concepts, it is important to examine the event of Miraj. The term “Miraj” refers to the Night Journey and Ascension of Prophet Muhammad to the heavens, during which he experienced spiritual revelations and encounters with divine entities.

“Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.” (Al-Quran: 17:1).¹⁹

¹⁸ Narayan Datt Shrimali, *Apsara Sadhna*, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/apsara-sadhana-pdf>.

¹⁹ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024.

Angel Gabriel transported Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem on the winged steed known as Buraq. From Jerusalem, Prophet Muhammad ascended through the heavens, passing through various celestial realms, and ultimately reached the presence of Allah. During this miraculous journey, Prophet Muhammad conversed with previous prophets.

Shaykh Qulayni in his book narrates in the words of Imam Al-Sadiq that, “..during the ascension, Angel Gabriel accompanied Prophet Muhammad but, at a certain point, urged him to advance further while acknowledging that he himself could not proceed. When the Prophet questioned whether Gabriel would leave him in such an exalted realm, Gabriel revealed that no being, not even an angel, had ever ventured beyond that point.” (Al-Kaafi, 3:11).²⁰

Further the narration says that “Gabriel then conveyed to the Prophet, ‘O Muhammad, recognize the magnitude of your position. You are in a realm that no angel or previous prophet has ever reached.’” The Prophet continued further but was halted at a certain juncture by a radiant curtain, with an opening as minuscule as a needle’s eye, through which he beheld the divine light of Allah.”

However, according to the Hindu tradition, individual souls (Atman) undergo repeated births and deaths until they get purified completely and then they merge into Brahman completely:

“From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains to My abode, O son of Kuntī, never takes birth again” (Bhagavat Gita: 8:16).²¹

7. Creation of Time

In the words of Imam Al-Sadiq, grandson of Prophet Mohammad:

“And how can I describe Allah in terms of ‘when,’ when it was He who created Time? (Sudooq, Kitab Al-Tawhid).²²

“Allah’s existence precedes non-existence and His eternity precedes beginning. Times do not keep company with Him, and implements do not help Him. His Being precedes times. It cannot be said that He has a limit or extremity, or end or termination; nor do things control Him so as to raise

²⁰ Shaykh Qulayni, *Al-Kaafi*, vol. 3, p. 11 (Lucknow: Nizami Press, January 1, 2024).

²¹ Swami Mukundananda, *Bhagavad Gita*, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/8/verse/16>.

²² Shaikh Sudooq, *Al-Tawhid*, trans. Syed Ali Raza Rizvi, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.al-islam.org/ask/is-time-created-by-allah-or-not#:~:text=Allah%20is%20not%20affected%20by,fact%20that%20He%20created%20time%20and%20http://jaffaribooks.com/books/Tawhid%20sadooq%20english%20final.pdf>.

Him or lower Him. He created the whole of creation without any example made by someone else, and He did not secure the assistance of any one out of His creation for creating it” (Ali, Imam., *Nahjul Balagha*, Sermon 186).²³

This excerpt from Imam Ali emphasizes the timeless and eternal nature of Allah, stating that His eternity precedes any beginning. It underscores the transcendence of Allah beyond the constraints of time and space, highlighting that He is not bound by limitations of time. He created the entire universe without any prior model or assistance.

Similarly, in Hinduism:

“[The Being] who is the source of the intellect, emotions and will; who is one without a second; who presides over all the causes enumerated above, beginning with time and ending with the individual soul” (Shwetashwetar Upanishad: 3).²⁴

This verse clearly states that the Being (Brahman) presides over everything, starting with time. This concept is echoed in other texts, which mention that at one point He was alone—indicating that there was no differentiation and no separation between two points in time:

“In the beginning, dear boy, this was Being alone, one only, without a second... That Being willed, ‘May I become many, may I grow forth.’ It created fire. That fire willed, ‘May I become many, may I grow forth.’ It created water” (Chhandogya Upanishad 6:2:1-3).²⁵

“[The Brahman desired] I may become many. He undertook penance. He created all this by undertaking penance. Then He entered the creation” (Taittiriya Upanishad: 6:1)²⁶

The concept of time is necessarily rooted in the notion of change. Without change, there can be no discernible measurement of time. Therefore, the creation of time signifies the onset of change within the fabric of existence. Both Hindu and Islamic perspectives converge on the idea that there was no time or change in the

²³ Imam Ali, *Nahjul Balagha*, trans. by Sharif Razi, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons/sermon-186-he-who-assigns-him-different-conditions-does-not-believe>.

²⁴ Swami Tyagisananda, *Svetashwetatara Upanishad* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math), accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.celextel.org/upanishads-krishna-yajur-veda/svetasvatara-upanishad/>.

²⁵ Swami Lokeshwaranand, *Chhandogya Upanishad*, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/chandogya-upanishad-english/d/doc239262.html>.

²⁶ Sastry, Alladi Mahadeva. *The Taittirīya Upanishad with the Commentaries of Sri Sankaracharya, Sri Suresvaracharya, Sri Vidvaranya: Including Introduction to the Study of Upanishads*. Translated from the Original Sanskrit into English by Alladi Mahadeva Sastry, published by Samata Books.

beginning. Then Allah/Brahman willed change hence time arose. It is clarified that here the term Brahman is used here for the merged Brahman-Viraj or the merged material-psychic universes here.

8. Purpose of Humanity and Creation

“We have not created the heavens and the earth and everything in between in vain—as the disbelievers assume. Woe to the disbelievers because of the Fire! That is the recompense for those who disbelieve” (Al-Qur’an: 38:27).²⁷

“I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me” (Al-Qur’an 51:56).²⁸

The first verse tells of a purpose of creation without specifying the purpose. The second verse mentions that the purpose is to worship Allah.

“Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned?” (Al-Qur’an: 23:115).²⁹

“Then He turned towards the heaven when it was ‘still like’ smoke, saying to it and to the earth, ‘Come to me, willingly or unwillingly.’ They both responded, ‘We submit willingly’” (Al-Qur’an: 41:11).³⁰

These Ayats say that it is necessary for every soul—even inanimate objects like the earth—to come to Allah.

The Hindu texts attribute pure desires to Brahman.

“He, who is permeating the mind, who has Prāna (breath) for his body, whose nature is consciousness, whose resolve is infallible, whose own form is like Ākāsha (sky), whose creation is all that exists, whose are all the pure desires, who possesses all the agreeable odors and all the pleasant tastes, who exists pervading all this...” (Chhandogya Upanishad: 3:14:2).³¹

This verse tells of the Brahman being having pure desires. These desires of a pure order serve as the purpose of uplifting humanity to Brahman. This then becomes parallel to the Quran.

In contrast to the above-mentioned Hindu perspective, the teachings of Adi Shankaracharya present a philosophical viewpoint wherein God alone represents truth, while the world is deemed illusory or false (Chinmayananda, Verse 20).³²

²⁷ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Chinmayananda, Swami, Talks on Sankara’s Vivekhoodamani, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Bombay, 1976.

While the earlier verse indicated that Brahman itself possesses pleasant odors and tastes—meaning Brahman was the material world—Shankaracharya says that the world is false. It is beyond the scope of this paper to dwell into these different perspectives in the Hindu scriptures. It suffices to say that the perspective of the Chhandogya Upanishad quoted above is parallel to the Quran, namely, that the material world has a purpose of coming unto Allah or merging into Brahman.

9. Satan

In Islamic tradition, Iblees is the primary figure representing Satan, who opposed Allah’s command. The Quran describes Iblees’s rebellion and role in misleading humanity: “And [mention] when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate to Adam,’ and they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers” (Al-Qur’an: 2:34).³³

Iblees is characterized by his refusal to obey God’s command, his subsequent fall from grace, and his ongoing mission to corrupt and lead humans away from righteousness.

In Hinduism, Rakshasas are a class of malevolent beings known for their antagonistic roles in the divine narrative (Vishnu Purana 6.5.1-6).³⁴ Unlike Iblees, who is a singular entity, Rakshasas represent a broader category of demons or evil spirits. They are depicted as disruptive and harmful forces opposing the divine order.

The comparison between Iblees and Rakshasas highlights a common theme in both traditions: the presence of evil entities that challenge divine authority and disrupt human life. Both Iblees and Rakshasas illustrate the struggle between good and evil, with Iblees representing a singular figure of opposition in Islam, while Rakshasas represent a broader category of malevolent spirits in Hinduism.

10. Angels and Devtas

We read in a Hadith that Imam Al-Sadiq, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, was asked: “Are the angels more in number or the humans?” Whereupon Imam Al-Sadiq replied:

“By Allah, in Whose grasp is my soul! The angels of Allah that are present in the heavens are more than the particles of sand present on the earth; in the heavens there does not exist a place to put one’s foot except that there is an

³³ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024.

³⁴ Horace Hayman Wilson, *Vishnu Purana* (London: Read Books, 2006).

angel there, engaged in glorifying and sanctifying Allah” (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 59: 176).³⁵

Similar to the Islamic concept of innumerable angels, certain the Hindu scholars mention 3.3 million devtas while others mention 33 types of unspecified numbers of devtas.

“With God’s influence, thirty-three types of devtas sustain the world” (Atharva Veda 10.7.13).³⁶

The innumerable numbers of angels in Islam are parallel to unspecified numbers of 33 types of Devtas in Hinduism.

11. Sequence of Creation

The Islamic viewpoint does not explicitly state whether the earth or the angels were created first.

“Praise be to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made the angels messengers with wings – two, or three, or four (pairs)” (Al-Qur’an: 35: 1).³⁷

According to the Hindu perspective outlined in Chapter 8 of the Vayu Purana³⁸ Brahman initially created the Devta Brahma, who subsequently formed the physical world.

Both religions share the concept of Allah’s creation of angels and the earth. However, Islam does not specify the sequence, whereas the Hindu tradition distinctly asserts that angels (devtas) were created first.

12. Characteristics of Angels and Devtas

In a hadith by Imam Al-Sadiq, he narrates, “The angels do not eat food, do not drink water and do not marry, rather, they stay alive by means of the zephyr (wind) of Allah’s ‘Arsh (Throne)!” (Al-Majlisi, Bihar Al-Anwar, 59: 174.4).³⁹

Imam Ali narrates: “In them there is no lassitude, heedlessness and disobedience. Sleep never prevails over them, their intellects are never overcome by inadvertence and forgetfulness, their bodies never experience lethargy, and they

³⁵ Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 59, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.al-islam.org/180-questions-enquiries-about-islam-volume-2-various-issues/9-what-reality-angels>.

³⁶ Atharva Veda. Trans. Satwalekar, Sripad Damodar. Swadhyay Mandal, Pardi., September 11, 2024.

³⁷ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024.

³⁸ Sudarshan Kumar Sharma, *Vayu Purana* (New Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2020).

³⁹ Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 59, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.al-islam.org/180-questions-enquiries-about-islam-volume-2-various-issues/9-what-reality-angels>.

are never enscorbed in the loins of fathers and the wombs of mothers”. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 59: 175).⁴⁰

The Chhandogya Upanishad suggests devtas are psychic entities without physical form who do not eat or drink: “Verily, the Devas neither eat nor drink, they [only] gratify themselves by its sight” (3: 6).⁴¹

Both traditions affirm angels and devtas do not consume food or drink.

13. Forms of Angels and Devtas

Islamic theology underscores the diverse manifestations of angelic beings: “Praise be to Allah, who created the heavens and the earth, who made the angels messengers with wings – two, or three, or four (pairs)” (Al-Qur’an: 35:1).⁴²

The Quran, also, mentions the descent of angels to support the believers, indicating their presence and intervention in human affairs. Thus the Quran says, “Remember when you asked the believers, ‘Is it not enough for you that your Lord will reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down? Yes, if you remain patient and conscious of Allah and the enemy comes upon you [attacking] in rage, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand angels having marks [of distinction]’” (Al-Qur’an: 8:9-10).⁴³

Angels, as depicted in Islamic scripture, have the capacity to manifest with wings or in forms resembling humans. During the Battle of Badr, angels manifested in human form to assist the Muslim army led by Prophet Muhammad: “As Jibrael (as) and the angels arrived on the battlefield, they donned the turban of Al-Zubair to honor his bravery.” (Soleiman, 2022).⁴⁴

According to Islamic tradition, these angels took on the appearance of ordinary soldiers, blending seamlessly into the ranks of the Muslims. They fought alongside the believers, aiding them in combat and providing strategic guidance: “The Battle of Badr brought down angels from the heavens in great numbers to stand alongside those who experienced persecution for their faith. Described as “men as large as mountains,” the angels fought in battle, captured enemies, and even lined up rows of soldiers for prayer. And just as the Companions who

⁴¹ Swami Lokeshwaranand, *Chhandogya Upanishad*, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/chandogya-upanishad-english/d/doc239262.html>.

⁴² Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ ⁴⁷ Omer Soleiman, “The Honored Turbans,” *Yaqeen Institute*, season 2, episodes 17–18 (2022), accessed September 10, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/amp/watch/series/ep-17-the-honored-turbans-angels-in-their-presence-season-2>.

participated in Badr “were seen as the best of Companions, the angels who fought on that day gained the status of the best of angels” (Soleiman, 2022).⁴⁵

Similarly, Devtas in Hinduism manifest in various forms. Sometimes it is said that in Hindu tradition, Rama is revered as the embodiment of Brahman, a Devta, and a human simultaneously. In parallel, Islamic tradition presents Prophet Muhammad’s experience during the Incident of Miraj as a divine interplay: he communed directly with Allah, engaged with Jibrael, and remained in his human form.

14. Power and Roles of Angels and Devtas

In Islam, angels are viewed as beings created by Allah to carry out specific functions. Some key angels include Jibrael (Gabriel), who is the messenger between Allah and Prophets, Mikail (Michael), who is responsible for providing sustenance, and Israfil, who will blow the trumpet signaling the Day of Judgment. Each angel serves a distinct purpose assisting in the divine plan of Allah.

Devtas play diverse and crucial roles in Hindu cosmology. For instance, Indra governs rain and storms, Yama oversees the realm of the dead and justice, while various other deities manage different aspects of the cosmos, from natural elements to cosmic balance. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad mentions the Vasus—another name for the Devtas, including elements like fire, air, sky, and stars, highlighting their significance in sustaining the universe: “Which are the eight Vasus? Fire, the earth, the air, the sky, the sun, heaven, the moon, and the stars these are the Vasus; for in them all this [universe] is placed” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3:9).⁴⁶

This parallels the concept of angels responsible for various aspects such as bringing water to earth in the form of rain (responsibility performed by Angel Mikail) in Islam, suggesting a shared understanding of divine involvement in cosmic affairs across religious traditions.

Jibraeel (Gabriel) is a key angel in Islam, often depicted as the leader of the angels. As stated in the Quran: “Say, ‘Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel—it is he who has brought the Qur’an down upon your heart, by permission of Allah, confirming that which was before it and as guidance and good tidings for the believers’” (2:97).⁴⁷

Similar to Indra, the king of the devtas in Hindu mythology, Jibraeel carries out divine commands and leads the angelic forces. For instance, in the Battle of Badr, he commands the celestial army.

⁴⁶ Swami Madhavananda, *Brihadaranayaka Upanishad* (Champawat: Advaita Ashram, 1950).

⁴⁷ Al-Quran, Sahih International Translation, Retrieved from Quran.com, September 17, 2024

In Rig Veda (1.32.1-2), it is stated that Indra led the devtas against the army of demons: “Now I shall proclaim the heroic deeds of Indra, those foremost deeds that the mace-wielder performed. He smashed the serpent, bored out the waters, split the bellies of the mountains, and crushed the serpent resting on the mountain—with a mace fashioned by Tvaṣṭar. The waters streamed down like bellowing milk-cows into the sea.”⁴⁸

Mikail (Michael) is another important angel in Islam (Al-Quran 2:98). Mikail’s role primarily involves overseeing the natural elements, such as rain and sustenance. He is responsible for distributing sustenance and blessings as decreed by Allah.

Mikail’s responsibilities are akin to those of Varuna in Hinduism, the devtas of the sky, sea, water, and rain. Varuna is responsible for controlling natural forces like rain and upholding moral order. In the Rigveda, Varuna is portrayed as both a guardian of righteousness and a forgiver of sins committed with remorse, featuring prominently in hymns such as Rigveda 1.25, 2.27-30, 7.86-88, 8.8, and 9.73.⁴⁹

Malak-ul-Maut: The Angel of Death i.e. Malak-ul-Maut, mentioned in Al-Qur’an (32:11)⁵⁰, is similar to Yamaraja and Yama’s messengers, known as the Yamadutas, who are tasked with escorting souls to the afterlife and enforcing divine justice, in Hinduism.

“In the Mahabharata, Anushasana Parva⁵¹, it is written: ‘Yama is the devta of the departed souls. He rules the netherworld and decides the destinies of the dead. His emissaries, the Yamadutas, carry out his orders and bring the souls of the departed for judgement’ (Wikipedia).⁵²

Additionally, Yama says: “My dear servants, you have accepted me as the Supreme, but factually I am not. Above me, and above all the other deities, including Indra and Chandra, is the one supreme master and controller. The partial manifestations of His personality are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who are in charge of the creation, maintenance, and annihilation of this universe. He is like the two threads that form the length and breadth of a woven cloth. The entire

⁴⁸ ⁵¹Rig Veda, Trans. Sripad Damodar Satwalekar. Swadhyay Mandal, Pardi. 1985.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Sripad Damodar Satwalekar, *Mahabharat, Anushasan Parva* (Pardi: Swadhyay Mandal, 1978).

⁵² Wikipedia, s.v. “Anushasana Parva,” accessed September 25, 2024,

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anushasana_Parva.

world is controlled by Him just as a bull is controlled by a rope in its nose” (Srimad Bhagavatam: 6.3.12).⁵³

Kiraman Katibin: Popularly known as the Honorable Recorders, are two angels in Islam tasked with meticulously recording the deeds of every person throughout their lives. These detailed records are kept to be presented on the Day of Judgment, when each individual will be held accountable for their actions. The Quran mentions these angels, stating, “But verily, over you (are appointed angels) to protect you, —Kind and honorable, —writing down (your deeds): They know (and understand) all that ye do.” (Al Qur’an: 82:10-12).

This role of Kiraman Katibin is comparable to Chitragupta in Hinduism, who serves as the divine accountant. According to the Garuda Purana⁵⁴, “Chitragupta records the good and evil of men. His imperial throne is in Yamaloka, holding his court and dispensing justice according to the deeds of men, maintaining their records” (14: 16-23).

Thus, both Islamic and Hindu traditions include beings who are specifically tasked with recording human actions and delivering justice based on these records.

15. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper’s exploration of Islamic and Hindu cosmologies reveals both similarities and differences, offering valuable insights into the nature of these traditions. The parallels provide the foundations on which to build mutual understandings. The differences indicate that more work is required to understand whether they could be reconciled.

These findings emphasize the importance of interfaith dialogue, demonstrating how understanding shared themes and distinct beliefs can foster mutual respect and deeper empathy. Such comparative analysis not only enhances our appreciation of diverse religious traditions but also contributes to more inclusive discussions on religious pluralism, promoting a more harmonious global discourse on spirituality.

⁵³ A.C.B. Swami Prabhupada, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, accessed February 9, 1971, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/classes/sb/6/3/12-15/gorakhpur/february/09/1971>.

⁵⁴ Garuda Purana. Trans. Ernest Wood and S.V. Subrahmanyam, Retrieved from <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/sacredscripts/puranas/gp/gpu16.asp#gsc.tab=0> and <https://adichitragupta.com/garuda-puran/>, September 10, 2024.