

Challenging Verses in the Qur'an in Balance: A Study of *Khāshā'ish al-Qur'ān* by Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz

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Abstract

This article explores the tahaddī (challenge) verses in the Qur'an by emphasizing the principle of tawāzun (balance) as elaborated by Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz in his seminal work, Khāshā'ish al-Qur'ān. In light of the growing rational critique of divine revelation and the increasing need for a Qur'anic approach that is both intellectually and spiritually relevant, this topic warrants critical attention. This study employs thematic analysis and literature review methods, focusing particularly on the content and argumentative structure within Khāshā'ish al-Qur'ān. The findings indicate that the challenge verses not only highlight rhetorical and linguistic excellence but also reflect a profound equilibrium between rationality and spirituality, between linguistic aesthetics and the power of message, and between a universal challenge and the specific context of the Arab society of the time. The concept of tawāzun is clearly manifested in how the Qur'an conveys powerful messages without exaggeration, allowing intellectual freedom while preserving the trajectory of truth. This underscores the Qur'an's distinctiveness in both form and substance. This study affirms that understanding the tahaddī verses must be accompanied by an appreciation of the principle of balance that characterizes divine revelation.

Keywords: *Qur'an, challenge, tawāzun, i'jāz, Khāshā'ish al-Qur'ān*

ملخص البحث

تتناول هذه المقالة آيات التحدي (في القرآن الكريم، مع التركيز على مبدأ التوازن) (كما فصله الدكتور محمد عبد الله دراز في مؤلفه الرائد *خصائص القرآن*). ونظراً لتزايد النقد العقلي للوحي الإلهي، والحاجة المتزايدة إلى منهج قرآني يجمع بين البعد العقلي والروحي، فإن هذا الموضوع يكتسب أهمية بالغة تستحق البحث والنقاش. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على تحليل موضوعي ومنهجي للمصادر، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على مضمون وبنية الحجاج في كتاب *خصائص القرآن*. وتشير النتائج إلى أن آيات التحدي لا تبرز فقط التفوق البلاغي واللغوي، بل تعكس أيضاً توازناً عميقاً بين العقلانية والروحانية، وبين جماليات اللغة وقوة الرسالة، وبين التحدي الكوني والسياق الاجتماعي الخاص بالمجتمع العربي آنذاك. ويتجلى مبدأ التوازن بوضوح في الطريقة التي ينقل بها القرآن رسائل قوية من دون مبالغة، مما يتيح حرية التفكير دون الابتعاد عن مسار الحقيقة. وهذا ما يؤكد فريدة القرآن الكريم في الشكل والمضمون معاً. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن فهم آيات التحدي لا بد أن يقترن بتقدير لمبدأ التوازن الذي يُعد من أبرز سمات الوحي الإلهي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *القرآن، التحدي، التوازن، الإعجاز، خصائص القرآن*

A. Introduction

The Qur'an, as the holy scripture of Islam, serves not only as a source of faith and ethics but also presents itself as a text that offers intellectual challenges to humanity. One prominent form of this challenge is known as *tahaddī*, an open invitation to any individual or collective to produce something comparable to a portion or the entirety of the Qur'an. This challenge is not merely rhetorical; it serves as a declaration of the Qur'an's *i'jāz* (inimitability), affirming its authenticity and uniqueness. Through the *tahaddī* verses, the Qur'an asserts that no created being can rival its linguistic composition, depth of meaning, or the moral truths and justice it conveys.

Amid the rise of modern hermeneutical debates and religious pluralism, the study of *tahaddī* becomes increasingly relevant. It is not only concerned with defending the originality of the sacred text but also pertains to how Muslims situate the Qur'an within contemporary global intellectual discourse. In this regard, it is essential to move beyond the purely linguistic or formal aspects of inimitability and consider how the Qur'an maintains a balance of message, values, and structure making it universally compelling and rationally persuasive.

A significant scholarly work that explores the characteristics of the Qur'an in depth is *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān* by Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz. This book not only elaborates on the linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of the Qur'an but also highlights the principle of *tawāzun* (balance) embedded in the structure of divine revelation. According to Dr. Draz, the uniqueness of the Qur'an lies not solely in its aesthetic expression but in its equilibrium between rationality and spirituality, between eloquence and clarity of meaning, and between universal challenges and the specific social context in which the Qur'an was revealed. Thus, reading the *tahaddī* verses through the lens of this balance provides a deeper and more meaningful understanding.

Based on the above, the research questions addressed in this study are as follows: First, what are the different forms of *tahaddī* verses in the Qur'an? Second, how does the concept of *tawāzun* emerge and function in shaping the nature of these challenge verses, according to Dr. Draz?

The aim of this study is to thematically explore the structure and variation of the Qur'an's challenge verses and to analyze how the principle of balance manifests and becomes a central value within these verses, based on the insights of Dr. Muhammad

Abdullah Draz in *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān*. This research seeks to enrich our understanding of the Qur'an's uniqueness, particularly in relation to its holistic *i'jāz*.

Previous scholarship has paid significant attention to the themes of *i'jāz* and *tahaddī* in both classical and modern Islamic intellectual traditions. Scholars such as al-Bāqillānī, al-Jurjānī, and al-Rāghib have elaborated on the rhetorical and structural dimensions of Qur'anic inimitability. However, much of this literature tends to emphasize the linguistic aspects without delving into the balance of values and messaging. In this context, Dr. Draz's approach, which integrates psychological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, offers a fresh and holistic perspective. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the contemporary discourse on *i'jāz* by proposing a more integrative and balanced approach to the study of *tahaddī* verses.

B. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach using the method of library research. This approach is deemed appropriate given the topic's close relationship with normative texts and conceptual Islamic literature. The primary objective is to describe and analyze in depth the forms of *tahaddī* in the Qur'an and to examine how the concept of *tawāzun* (balance) is manifested in the structure and content of these verses, based on the perspective of Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz.

The analytical framework consists of thematic analysis and content analysis. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to classify and interpret *tahaddī* verses according to their thematic and contextual characteristics. Meanwhile, content analysis is employed to trace the messages and values of balance within these verses both explicitly and implicitly as interpreted by Qur'anic exegetes and expounded upon by Dr. Draz in his principal work.

The primary source of this study is *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān* by Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz, a work that thoroughly addresses the distinctive characteristics of the Qur'an, including discussions on *i'jāz*, *tahaddī*, and the principle of balance within the structure and message of divine revelation. In addition, the Qur'an itself serves as the main textual corpus, supported by classical and modern exegeses such as those by al-Rāghib al-Aṣṣafhānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī, which provide deeper interpretive insight into the relevant verses.

Secondary sources include a range of literature addressing the concept of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, studies on *tahaddī*, and scholarly works discussing the principle of *tawāzun* in Islamic thought; spanning the fields of *tafsīr*, *balāghah* (Arabic rhetoric), and Islamic philosophy. These texts serve as theoretical and analytical frameworks to support the interpretation of primary data.

Through this methodology, the study aims to present a comprehensive portrayal of the structure and meaning of the Qur'an's challenge verses while also highlighting Dr. Draz's intellectual contribution in linking the Qur'an's miraculous nature to the principle of balance in its message delivery.

C. Finding and Discussion

The Concept of Challenge (*Tahaddī*) in the Qur'an

One of the distinctive features of the Qur'an is its boldness in explicitly challenging not only humankind but also the jinn to produce something comparable to its content. This challenge is known in classical Islamic literature as *tahaddī*, derived from the Arabic root *ḥadda–yaḥaddī–taḥaddīn*, meaning “to challenge” or “to provoke in open competition.” In the Qur'anic context, *tahaddī* is not merely an expression of belief in the superiority of divine revelation; rather, it serves as a rational argument for the authenticity and authority of the Qur'an as the unmatched speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), beyond human or supernatural imitation.¹

Generally, the *tahaddī* verses are found across various surahs and appear in different contexts, yet they follow a recurring pattern: the Qur'an challenges its audience to produce a chapter, ten chapters, or even an entire book equivalent to it. Key verses often cited in this discussion include al-Baqarah [2]: 23, Yunus [10]: 38, Hud [11]: 13, and al-Isra [17]: 88.² These verses demonstrate a progressive scale of challenge from quantity (ten surahs to one surah) to quality (absolute equivalence in substance and style).³

According to Islamic scholars, the forms of *tahaddī* in the Qur'an can be classified into three main categories. First, *tahaddī lafẓiyy*, or the linguistic and structural challenge, refers to the Qur'an's unparalleled rhetorical composition, rhythmic

¹ Manna' Khalil al-Qattan, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2001), 283–285.

² Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1998), 55–59.

³ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19–20.

eloquence, and semantic density features considered unattainable by ordinary human capacity.⁴ Second, *tahaddī ma'nawiyy*, the challenge in meaning and conceptual depth, encompasses the Qur'an's moral, spiritual, and existential teachings. Third, *tahaddī shar'iyy* pertains to its legal and ethical content principles that are both practical and just. This form emphasizes that the Qur'an's guidance is not only idealistic but also applicable to real-life contexts.⁵ These three dimensions complement one another in affirming that the Qur'an is unmatched not only in form but also in substance. For instance, al-Baqarah [2]: 23 does not merely pose a linguistic challenge, but also emphasizes spirituality by associating the challenge with *taqwā* (piety), indicating that *tahaddī* encompasses deeper meanings that transcend rhetorical form.

The uniqueness of this *tahaddī* lies in the Qur'an's holistic approach to delivering its message. The challenge is not limited to literary form but extends to the values embedded within the text. Thus, *tahaddī* functions not only as a declaration of superiority but also as an invitation for reflection and deeper engagement with divine revelation. In this regard, understanding *tahaddī* verses requires more than linguistic analysis; it necessitates a comprehensive approach that explores structural meaning, socio historical context, and the ethical messages conveyed.⁶

The Qur'an's Distinctive Features According to Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz

In his seminal work *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān*, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz provides a profound analysis of the unique characteristics of the Qur'an that render it inimitable, particularly within the context of *tahaddī*. According to him, the Qur'an's uniqueness does not rest solely on the beauty of its language but more profoundly on the integration of content, style, structure, and delivery.⁷ He emphasizes that one of the most striking aspects of the Qur'an is the harmony between form and substance, between the arrangement of words and the depth of meaning, resulting in a powerful and enduring impact on its readers.

First, Draz highlights the coherence between the content and rhetorical style of the Qur'an. Each verse is not only a bearer of normative guidance but is articulated in a

⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muhammad Khalaf Allah and Muhammad Zaghlul Sallam (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971), 108–110.

⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 92.

⁶ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 47–48.

⁷ Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1998), 21–22.

manner that aligns with its thematic substance. For instance, verses describing the majesty of God are conveyed in majestic and poetic language, while legal verses adopt a clear, logical, and structured tone.⁸ This illustrates an intrinsic relationship between expression and message something Draz argues is rare, if not absent, in human literary works.

Second, the Qur'an exhibits consistency in its message and structure despite being revealed gradually over more than two decades.⁹ Draz observes that the Qur'an maintains thematic continuity and moral principles throughout its revelation, even as its verses address diverse contexts. There are no contradictions in its core message, and its composition conveys complete meanings even without following a linear narrative structure typical of conventional literature. This feature distinguishes the Qur'an not only from classical Arabic literature but also from other religious scriptures.

Third, Dr. Draz draws attention to the unique systematic arrangement of verses and chapters in the Qur'an. The order in the *muṣḥaf* is not entirely chronological but reflects a distinctive thematic and spiritual architecture.¹⁰ Draz asserts that this arrangement is not a result of historical compromise or editorial compilation, but rather reflects divine wisdom and transcendent purpose. The Qur'an, in this view, exhibits a kind of "spiritual symmetry" that could only be orchestrated by the Omniscient.¹¹

By articulating these three characteristics, Draz affirms that the Qur'an's inimitability does not lie in a single aspect, but rather in the harmonious unity between form and meaning. This comprehensive distinctiveness reinforces the claim that the Qur'an cannot be replicated, and that its challenge remains relevant across all eras.

Balance (*Tawāzun*) in the Challenge Verses (*Tahaddī*) of the Qur'an

One of the key contributions of Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz in understanding the Qur'an's *tahaddī* is his emphasis on the principle of *tawāzun* (balance), which he regards as a hallmark of the Qur'an. According to Draz, the uniqueness of the Qur'an lies not only in its aesthetic and linguistic inimitability but also in the balanced manner

⁸ Ibid., 45-47.

⁹ Ibid., 63-66.

¹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7-9.

¹¹ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), 115-118.

through which it presents an intellectual and spiritual challenge.¹² In other words, the Qur'an challenges not only the intellect but also invites the heart and soul to reflect, contemplate, and consciously submit.

First, there is a balance between reason and revelation in the challenge verses. The Qur'an adopts a rational and logical approach when it asserts that if people doubt its divine origin, they are invited to produce something similar. This challenge is open and objective in nature. However, at the same time, the Qur'an frames this challenge within a spiritual context calling upon humanity to submit to God and recognize their limitations.¹³ For example, al-Baqarah [2]: 23 is not merely argumentative but also carries a tone of devotion and existential reflection.

Second, the Qur'an maintains equilibrium between logical argumentation and spiritual engagement. The *tahaddī* verses are not addressed exclusively to linguists or Arab poets, but to all of humanity. This suggests that the challenge is not only linguistic, but also pertains to one's ability to comprehend the truth and justice conveyed by divine revelation.¹⁴ In Draz's view, this reflects the Qur'an's holistic approach to humanity: treating the human being as both a rational and a believing creature.

Third, Dr. Draz highlights the harmony between rhetorical form and substantive meaning in the challenge verses. According to him, the eloquence of the Qur'an's linguistic structure is not an end in itself, but a means to reinforce the depth of its message.¹⁵ Challenge verses are consistently accompanied by meaningful theological, legal, or ethical content. Qur'anic rhetoric is never hollow or manipulative; rather, it functions as an effective vehicle for truth.

Fourth, in Dr. Draz's analysis, the principle of *tawāzun* is a defining feature of the Qur'an evident in all its dimensions, including the challenge verses. He asserts that this balance includes the relationship between form and content, between beauty and message, between challenge and invitation, and between intellectual freedom and moral guidance.¹⁶ Through this lens, Draz successfully shows that the Qur'anic

¹² Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1998), 85.

¹³ Ibid., 88–90.

¹⁴ Manna' Khalil Al-Qattan, *Mabahits fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2001), 284.

¹⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muhammad Khalaf Allah dan Muhammad Zaghlul Sallam (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971), 112–113.

¹⁶ Draz, *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān*, 91–92.

challenge is not antagonistic but constructive and educational guiding humanity toward recognition of the majesty of revelation and the greatness of God.

Thus, *tahaddī* is not merely a declaration of superiority, but part of a broader system of da'wah built upon the foundation of balance. This is where the true *i'jāz* of the Qur'an lies: not only in its inimitable form but also in the irreplaceable equilibrium of its values.

The Modern Relevance of Balance (*Tawāzun*) in the Challenge Verses (*Tahaddī*)

As rational thought and modern science continue to evolve, intellectual challenges directed at the Qur'an have likewise transformed. Contemporary critiques no longer focus solely on linguistic or aesthetic dimensions, but also engage with questions of rationality, ethics, and the compatibility of religious teachings with modern advancements. In this context, the principle of *tawāzun* found within the *tahaddī* verses proves to be both relevant and timely for reflection and application.

First, the intellectual challenges posed by science and reason call for a Qur'anic interpretation that is not merely textual but also contextual and contemplative. While the original *tahaddī* verses historically challenged the Arab audience to match the Qur'an's linguistic and rhetorical excellence, they may now be read as an open invitation to the scientific and intellectual communities to evaluate the Qur'an's message from the standpoint of rational argument, universal values, and its ethical contributions to science and civilization.¹⁷ The Qur'an's balanced approach does not position revelation in opposition to reason, but rather as a guide that harmonizes with sound intellect.

Second, the Qur'an's engagement with modern critiques reveals its resilience in preserving both its authenticity and relevance. Criticisms raised by Orientalists and secular scholars concerning its structure, chronology, and narrative coherence can be addressed through a methodological equilibrium balancing textual and historical analysis, scientific criticism, and reverence for spirituality.¹⁸ In this regard, Dr. Draz

¹⁷ Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, trans. Alastair D. Pannell and The Author (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978), 125–130.

¹⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), 24–27.

makes a crucial contribution by showing that the Qur'an's seemingly non-linear structure reflects a profound and consistent spiritual logic.¹⁹

Third, the actualization of *tawāzun* in contemporary Islamic preaching (*da'wah*) and Qur'anic studies is increasingly necessary. *Da'wah* strategies that emphasize only emotional appeal or, conversely, only rational discourse, tend to be imbalanced and less effective. The *tahaddī* verses inspire a model of Islamic communication that speaks equally to the intellect and the heart.²⁰ In academic Qur'anic studies, the principle of *tawāzun* is also relevant as a hermeneutical approach capable of bridging text and context, tradition and modernity.

In sum, the concept of balance in the challenge verses is not static or confined to historical settings; it remains a dynamic principle capable of addressing the intellectual and spiritual demands of the present age. This principle represents one of the Qur'an's most enduring epistemological contributions to modern thought and reinforces the argument that its *i'jāz* is proven not only linguistically, but also in its ability to respond to changing times without compromising its core essence.

D. Conclusion

The study of the *tahaddī* verses in the Qur'an, as analyzed through the perspective of Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Draz, reveals that the Qur'an's miraculous nature (*i'jāz*) is not merely external or textual, but encompasses profound meaning and a remarkable harmony between form and substance. The challenges issued by the Qur'an do not simply test linguistic competence; they also call for intellectual reflection and spiritual awareness. This, according to Draz, is the core of the Qur'an's *i'jāz* its strength lies in its *tawāzun* (balance) in conveying truth: between rhetoric and substance, between invitation and challenge, and between reason and revelation.

This principle of balance, as emphasized by Dr. Draz in *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān*, affirms the Qur'an's unmatched expressive power and its continued relevance in navigating the complexities of the modern world. In today's era, such balance is essential to be translated into Islamic educational methods and *da'wah* strategies that are more adaptive to global contexts and public rationality. It is therefore recommended that the

¹⁹ Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *Khashā'ish al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1998), 75–77.

²⁰ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Da'wah* (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2001), 213.

dimension of *tawāzun* be further explored through interdisciplinary approaches whether in Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic pedagogy, or contemporary Islamic thought so that the richness of the Qur'an may be understood not only normatively, but also in practical and transformative ways for the Muslim community.

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