

Research Article

Understanding Shirk in The Qur'an and Sunnah

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Abstract

This study aims to comprehensively understand the concept of shirk in the Quran and Sunnah, exploring its implications for Muslims' beliefs and practices. Through a qualitative approach, this research collects data from various books and journals, analyzing and interpreting them to gain a deeper understanding of shirk. Shirk, as a major sin in Islam, has significant implications for Muslims' faith. The findings of this study reveal that shirk encompasses not only idol worship but also subtle forms of polytheism, such as seeking help from other than Allah and attributing divine attributes to other beings. This research highlights the importance of understanding shirk to maintain the purity of Islamic monotheism and avoid actions that could lead to polytheism. The study provides practical guidance for Muslims to identify and avoid shirk in their daily lives. The novelty of this research lies in its thorough analysis of shirk in the context of the Quran and Sunnah, providing new insights for Muslims to strengthen their faith. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of Islamic monotheism.

Keywords: Shirk, Quranic Guidance, Islamic Monotheism.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Shirk in the Quran and Sunnah is a crucial topic in Islamic theology, as shirk, or the association of partners with Allah, is considered one of the gravest sins in Islam. The concept of shirk has its roots in the Quran and Sunnah, emphasizing the importance of monotheism (Tawhid). Despite its significance, shirk remains a complex issue, with modern challenges and societal influences leading to various forms of shirk that are often subtle and unrecognized. A review of existing literature reveals that while previous studies have explored the concept of shirk, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis that integrates the perspectives of the Quran and Sunnah. This research aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth examination of shirk, drawing from authentic Islamic sources, and offering practical guidance for Muslims to identify and avoid shirk in their daily lives, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of Islamic monotheism and differing from previous research in its nuanced approach to categorizing and analyzing the various forms of shirk.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a library research method, which involves a comprehensive review of existing literature to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of shirk. The study is conducted through a thorough examination of library materials, including books and relevant journals, to gather information on the definition, types, and dangers of shirk. The data collection process involves gathering and analyzing literature that discusses the concept of shirk in Islam, with a focus on its definition, classifications, and potential consequences. By examining various sources, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of shirk and its implications, contributing to a better grasp of this important Islamic concept.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Shirk

Shirk has become an increasingly complex phenomenon in the modern world and has permeated various aspects of individual and societal life. Shirk still exists and has an impact on various contexts of human life today, even though it is sometimes considered an ancient problem related to a particular religion. In Islam, shirk refers to the act of associating Allah with objects, humans, or other forces. However, in the contemporary era, the type of shirk has undergone significant changes, particularly as a result of technological advancements, globalization, and rapid social change (Saujani dkk., 2024).

Shirk, or the act of associating partners with Allah, is a hidden danger that threatens human foundations. Although it is considered the greatest sin in Islam, shirk remains a widespread and perilous threat to the community, often manifesting in subtle forms and nuances. In the Quran, shirk is mentioned as a sin that is not forgiven by Allah, except for those who repent and return to the right path (Quran 4:48) (Pramesty dkk., 2025).

Shirk in Linguistic Terms: The opposite of oneness (الانفراد), and it is used to mean a share or portion. Major Shirk: Equating others with Allah in something of His unique attributes. The evidence for this is the word of Allah Ta'ala: "They will say, 'By Allah, we were indeed in manifest error when we equated you with the Lord of the universe.'" (Quran 26:97-98). And If the equating is in words or phrases, and not in belief, then it is considered Minor Shirk (Khalid bin Ali al-Musyaiqih, 2010).

The term shirk with its various forms is mentioned 227 times in the Qur'an, four of which are mentioned in the singular form, such as in QS. Luqman (31): 13, and in the plural form it is mentioned 58 times, such as in QS. Al-Nisa' (4): 12. It is also mentioned in the past tense (fi'il madli) 17 times, such as in QS. Al-A'raf (7): 173, and twice in the imperative form, such as in Al-Isra' (17): 64. In the present tense (fi'il mudhari'), it is mentioned 51 times, such as in QS. Al-An'am (6): 19, and in the active participle form (isim fa'il) 95 times, such as in QS. Al-An'am (6): 163 (Maslahah, 2021).

Allah commands all creatures to worship Him alone without associating any partners (shirk). As stated in His words in the Qur'an, Surah Adz-Dzariyat verse 56:

"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me."

However, in reality, humans often forget the One who provides sustenance, blessings, and goodness. Not only that, but some humans even do not believe in the existence of Allah SWT as their Lord, and instead believe in other creatures as their saviors. This phenomenon is not only happening in the present era, but it has also occurred in the past during the time of the prophets (Yurisprudencia, 2017).

The evidence that indicates that shirk (polytheism) is a major sin is that Allah forbids Muslims from marrying polytheists. This is explained in Al-Baqarah, verse 221:

"And do not marry polytheistic women until they believe; and a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry [your women] to polytheistic men until they believe; and a believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you. Those invite [you] to the Fire, but Allah invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that perhaps they may remember."

It is mentioned in the Qur'an, in one of the Medinan verses, that polytheists are referred to as impure (najas), which is:

"O you who have believed, indeed the polytheists are unclean (najas), so let them not approach al-Masjid al-Haram after this [current] year of theirs. And if you fear poverty, then Allah will enrich you by His bounty, if He wills. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Wise." (Saputra & Zaipuri, 2020, 44).

Regarding the hadith related to the theme of shirk (polytheism), it is as follows:

Narrated from Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: 'Avoid the seven destructive sins: associating partners with Allah (shirk billah) and

sorcery (magic).' (Reported by Imam Bukhari No. 5431).

Narrated from Anas, concerning the major sins (*al-kabā'ir*), the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: 'Associating partners with Allah (*al-shirk billah*), being undutiful to one's parents, killing a soul, and false speech (or: false testimony).' (Reported by Imam Muslim No. 88) (Ahmad Hidhir Adib & Vina Wardatus Sakinah, 2022).

The primary and most important obligation of a servant towards Allah is to worship Allah with absolute sincerity, making Him one and unique (*tauhid*). If making Allah one is the right of Allah, then it is an absolute obligation for every servant to fulfill it throughout their entire life. On the other hand, associating partners with Allah (*shirk*) is a highly forbidden act (Karlina dkk., 2024).

Humans must seek refuge in Allah from various forms of polytheism (*shirk*). However, if they seek refuge in other than Him, they will fall into *shirk*. As has been explained in His words in QS. Al-Jinn, verse 6:

And indeed, there were men among mankind who sought refuge in men among the jinn, so they [the jinn] increased them in burden [i.e., sin and disbelief] (or: increased them in fear and deviation).

The verse above explains that the ancient custom of the Arabs, when passing through a lonely place, was to always seek protection from the inhabitants of that lonely place. A Muslim should not believe in assumptions and conjectures, because the law of Allah is already clear (Karlina dkk., 2024).

Types of Shirk

Shirk (polytheism) is the gravest sin and the most hated by Allah. This is because *shirk* is a form of betrayal against Allah, who is the sole Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of the universe. *Shirk* is divided into *shirk akbar* (major polytheism) and *shirk asghar* (minor polytheism). Deliberate acts of *shirk* are often caused by factors such as ignorance, misunderstanding, and fear (Muis dkk., 2023). *Shirk* (polytheism) is divided into several categories, which consist of the following types:

a. *Shirk Akbar* (Major *Shirk*)

This is the type of *shirk* that causes a person to leave the faith (apostate from the religion). *Shirk akbar* is a very serious act, where a person associates partners with Allah with something else in fundamental aspects of religious life. When a person falls into *shirk akbar*, they not only ruin their creed (*aqidah*) but also lose the right to obtain Allah's forgiveness in the hereafter. In the view of Islam, *shirk akbar* causes the perpetrator not to enter Paradise, as Allah will not forgive the sin of *shirk* if a person does not repent before death.

b. *Shirk Asghar* (Minor *Shirk*)

This is the *shirk* that does not expel a person from the religion, but it still falls under the category of major sins, and can even be considered the greatest sin after *shirk akbar*. *Shirk asghar* occurs when a person commits an act that should only be attributed to Allah, but is done by associating partners with Him. Although a person who commits *shirk asghar* is still considered a

Muslim, their action can still incur the threat of punishment from Allah. If this act is committed continuously without repentance, there is a great risk for the perpetrator to die in a state of disbelief (*kufr*), that is, to die without faith (Intan Permata Sari dkk., 2025).

Based on a narration from two great scholars, Bukhari and Muslim, from Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: "I found Umar bin Al-Khattab in a group swearing by his father's name. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) called them and said: 'Know that Allah forbids you from swearing by your fathers. Whoever wants to swear, let him swear by Allah or remain silent.'" (Narrated by Muslim).

The reasoning behind this is that if swearing by other than Allah's name was considered Major Shirk, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would not have allowed Umar to teach this to the Companions (as minor shirk), and it is not possible for someone like Umar bin Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) to do such a thing.

In this context, the Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited swearing by other than Allah's name, not because it is an act of Major Shirk but because it is a form of Minor Shirk that can lead to greater forms of shirk or undermine the uniqueness of Allah's name (Khalid bin Ali al-Musyaiqih, 2010).

Dangers of Shirk

Shirk is the act of associating partners with Allah (God) in worship or attributes. In Islam, shirk is considered the greatest sin and an unforgivable injustice if the perpetrator dies without repenting, as it fundamentally destroys the main pillar of faith (Tawhid - the Oneness of God).

Here are the main dangers:

a. The Unforgivable Sin by Allah

The primary danger of *Shirk* is that Allah will not forgive the sin of Shirk if the perpetrator dies without having repented from it. *Shirk* is the only sin that is excluded from Allah forgiveness. (QS. An-Nisa'[4]: 48).

Since shirk (associating partners with Allah) is a sin that cannot be forgiven, and such an act can erase or invalidate a person's good deeds, tawhid acknowledging Allah as the One and Only God is essentially the natural disposition (*fitrah*) of every human being. As explained in the Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf verses 172-173, this declaration existed long before humans were created. In these verses, it is explained that when Allah brought forth the descendants of Adam from his loins, they bore witness to themselves that He is their Lord and Sovereign, and that there is no deity besides Him, Allah SWT. Therefore, there is no excuse for humans to reject or oppose the teachings of **tawhid** (Saujani dkk., 2024).

b. Nullification of All Good Deeds

Shirk, especially *Shirk Akbar* (major *Shirk* which expels one from Islam), will nullify all the good deeds one has performed. The deeds that were supposed to be a provision for the Hereafter become worthless. (QS. Al-An'am [6]: 88). Deeds and

wealth that are wasted in vain the wealth spent by those who commit shirk (polytheism) is futile, as it will not be rewarded by Allah. What they possess will not be able to redeem them from punishment in the Hereafter. As Allah the Almighty says: "The wealth they spend in the life of this world is like a freezing wind that strikes the crops of a people who wronged themselves and destroys them. Allah did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves." (*Surah Ali 'Imran, verse 117*).

In the end, every person who commits shirk will develop a corrupt mentality, bad character, evil morals, arrogance, and will be difficult to advise. They will ultimately be far removed from Allah's mercy and guidance (Nabila dkk., 2025).

c. Eternity in Hellfire and Forbidden Paradise

For the perpetrator of *Shirk Akbar* who dies without repenting, the recompense in the Hereafter is eternity in Hellfire and Allah will forbid Paradise for him. Hadith Evidence: Narrated by Jabir radhiyallahu 'anhu, the Messenger of Allah shallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam said: "Whoever dies without having associated anything with Allah will enter Paradise, and whoever dies having associated something with Allah will enter Hellfire." (Reported by Muslim no. 93). Allah the Almighty says: "Indeed, those who disbelieve – among the People of the Book and the polytheists – will be in the fire of Hell, abiding therein forever. They are the worst of creatures." (*Surah Al-Bayyinah, verse 6*) (Pramesty dkk., 2025, hlm. 05).

d. Loss of Security and Guidance

Shirk removes security (peace) in this world and the Hereafter, and removes guidance from Allah for its practitioner, as *Shirk* is a great injustice. (QS. Luqman [31]: 13). The warning about the dangers of **shirk** (associating partners with Allah) does not stop there; it is further emphasized through the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in his hadith:

"Shall I not tell you about the greatest of all major sins?" The Prophet repeated this three times. The Companions replied, "Of course, O Messenger of Allah." One of the greatest sins he mentioned was shirk.

Shirk has negative effects on daily life, such as constantly being haunted by feelings of anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty. Those who commit shirk will live in a state of unease and restlessness as a consequence of their actions (Dewi dkk., 2024, hlm. 07).

e. The Danger of Minor *Shirk* (*Shirk Asghar - Riya'*)

Shirk also includes *Shirk Asghar* (minor *Shirk*), such as *Riya'* (showing off in acts of worship) or swearing by other than Allah. Although it does not expel one from Islam, minor *Shirk* diminishes *Tawhid* (monotheism) and can nullify the reward of the deed.

Hadith Evidence (About *Riya'*): Narrated by Mahmud bin Labid radhiyallahu 'anhu, the Messenger of Allah shallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam said:

"The thing I fear most for you is minor *Shirk*." They said: 'O Messenger of Allah, what is minor *Shirk*?' He said: '*Riya'* (*showing off*). Allah will say to them on the Day of Resurrection when people are rewarded for their deeds: 'Go to those whom you used to show off to in the world and see if you can find any reward

from them!" (Reported by Ahmad, authenticated as *Hasan* by Al-Albani). Minor shirk (*shirk asghar*), or the lesser form of associating partners with Allah, refers to acts of shirk that do not cause a person to leave the fold of Islam. In a social context, *shirk asghar* can be understood as actions performed in the pursuit of security, peace, wealth, health, or happiness, but not based on the teachings of Islam. Such behaviors are often carried out by people seeking to fulfill their spiritual needs through means that deviate from true Islamic guidance (Muis dkk., 2023, hlm. 03).

The danger of shirk (major polytheism) is fundamentally grave, as it critically undermines the pillars of faith and constitutes the most egregious sin, violating the exclusive right of Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala to be worshipped. Shaykh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab emphasizes this severity by citing the Qur'anic verse (An-Nisa' [4]: 48), which explicitly states that Allah does not forgive the sin of Shirk for those who die without repentance. This carries absolute eschatological consequences: the polytheist is permanently barred from Paradise and threatened with eternal confinement in Hellfire (Al-Ma'idah [5]: 72). Furthermore, shirk has a devastating earthly effect, as it mandates the total nullification of all previous good deeds. Consequently, acts of worship, charity, and obedience are rendered fruitless, leading the perpetrator to ultimate loss on the Day of Judgment. These warnings are consistently highlighted throughout the text to foster a profound sense of vigilance, ensuring the protection of *Tauhid* from all forms of defilement and danger (Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab, Shaykh, 2011).

Syakh Abdul Aziz bin Baz and Shaykh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al-Albani collectively assert that Shirk (polytheism) constitutes the gravest theological danger (*azhamu adz-dzunūb*), as it fundamentally violates Allah's exclusive right to worship (*Tauhid al-Uluhiyyah*). Shaykh Ibn Baz, particularly in his Syarh Kitab At-Tauhid, highlights the absolutely fatal consequences of major *Shirk* (*Shirk Akbar*), specifying it as the unforgivable sin (based on Qur'an 4:48) and resulting in the eternal condemnation of the perpetrator to Hellfire, alongside the total annulment of all previous good deeds. Concurrently, Shaykh Al-Albani addresses the insidious dangers of *Shirk* through the lens of *Sunnah* preservation, as evidenced in his work At-Tawassul, where he cautions against excessive forms of intercession that risk falling into the category of polytheistic deviation. Both scholars are unified in their stance: the peril of *Shirk* is not limited to its overt manifestations but also encompasses subtle forms (*Shirk Asghar*), such as *riya'* (performing acts of worship for ostentation), which Muslims must absolutely guard against (Redaksi, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Shirk, or associating partners with Allah, represents the gravest violation of Islamic monotheism (*tauhid*) and remains one of the most perilous spiritual and theological dangers for humanity. It is not merely a historical or theological concept but a living moral and social threat that persists across time, evolving in form alongside technological and cultural transformations. Despite the modern

perception that shirk is an archaic issue, it continues to manifest in contemporary life through various subtle forms of dependency, idolatry of materialism, and misplaced reverence toward worldly powers. Theologically, shirk is classified into two major types: *shirk akbar* (major polytheism) and *shirk asghar* (minor polytheism). *Shirk akbar* expels a person from the fold of Islam, nullifies all good deeds, and results in eternal damnation in Hell if not repented from before death. On the other hand, *shirk asghar*, such as *riya'* (showing off) or swearing by other than Allah, does not expel one from Islam but still threatens the sincerity of worship and the acceptance of good deeds. Both forms undermine the purity of *tauhid*, which is the essence of a Muslim's faith. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that shirk is an unforgivable sin if committed without repentance (QS. An-Nisa' [4]: 48) and the root of all injustice, as it denies Allah's exclusive right to be worshipped. The hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reinforce this by identifying shirk as one of the greatest sins (*al-kaba'ir*) that leads to destruction. Classical scholars such as Shaykh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, Ibn Baz, and Al-Albani have consistently warned that shirk both major and minor destroys the foundation of faith and must be guarded against in all forms.

The danger of shirk lies not only in its theological implications but also in its moral and existential effects. It erases divine guidance, corrupts the soul, removes peace from human life, and ultimately leads to eternal loss. Therefore, Muslims are urged to purify their worship, seek refuge in Allah alone, and uphold the oneness of God (*tauhid*) in every dimension of life. Maintaining *tauhid* is both an act of faith and a safeguard against the subtle and manifest forms of shirk that continue to threaten human belief and devotion in the modern era.

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