

Fitrat Psychology and Its Paradigm: An Analytical Overview

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Abstract

Introduction and Objectives: This paper proposes a preliminary foundational framework for a theocentric paradigm of psychology grounded in the Quran and Hadith, focusing on the concept of fitrat. It explores some of the basic features of fitrat in the hope that researchers in Islamic psychology may base their work on an alternative framework. In fact, this work emerges from a long standing personal desire for a psychology based on Islamic principles. It is true that Western psychology apparently targets the stability, well being, and happiness of individuals. It is also true that these are worthy goals that Islamic researchers share. However, it is not easy for Islamic researchers to integrate their work with Western psychology—a discipline whose foundations are determinism, an overemphasis on individualism, and secular materialism. As for the method of this research, a logical method based on intuition forms the basis of this work. The linguistic concept of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD)—an innate and established notion—is used to shed light on the Quranic concept of fitrat. Two tables are generated to clearly display the features of fitrat and its relationship with language. Consequently, the ultimate goal of fitrat psychology is the alignment and harmonization of fitrat within and the ḥanīf religion without. Exploring the features of fitrat is the first step toward aligning fitrat with





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the ḥanīf religion. The ground is now ready for future researchers to experiment with and explore the possibility of this alignment.

Keywords: Fitrat, Western Psychology, Ḥanīf, Language Acquisition, Martyrdom.

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1. Introduction: Reclaiming the Spiritual Roots of Psychology

When a researcher finds supportive evidence in the Quran that is consistent with findings in the human sciences, they may confidently develop further research. This is fine. The present paper, however, stems from a longstanding aspiration to explore Islamic foundations for the human sciences—particularly psychology—through the concept of *fitrat*: the inborn human disposition toward truth, morality, and divine connection. Rather than functioning as a supplemental idea, *fitrat* is proposed here as the core of a new psychological paradigm: *fitrat* psychology. The central aim is to propose new foundational assumptions for the study of human behavior, rooted in the Quranic innate concept of *fitrat*.

2. Methodology: An IntuitiveAnalytical Approach

This research adopts a hybrid methodology that integrates three distinct approaches.

1. Intuitional discovery: A selfintuitional reflection on language and *fitrat* gave way to the comparison of these two innate human potentials. As language and *fitrat* are mental faculties specific to human beings, both concepts are discussed in this paper. However, the core insight posits *fitrat* as the building block of a new paradigm that diverges from Western psychology.

2. Analytical comparison: In recent decades, a great deal of linguistic research has resulted in some fundamental generalizations about the nature of language. To prepare a conceptual framework, this paper systematically compares *fitrat* and language. Two tables are used. Table 1 displays the contrastive features of established facts about the LAD as opposed to the unexplored features of *fitrat*. Table 2 takes a further step in clarifying *fitrat* psychology by comparing the basic tenets and assumptions of Western psychology and *fitrat* psychology.

3. Selective literature review: The discussion is presented within linguistic, cognitive, and Islamic psychology scholarship. It is therefore essential to have a brief but selected review of linguistic and psychological research that provides context for the theoretical arguments presented. Some field work and theoretical research in current psychology are touched upon to give the reader a sense of the current situation.

3. Fitrat and Language: A Foundational Analogy

3.1 The Nature of Language Acquisition in Infants

To begin this exploration, let us examine some key characteristics of *fitrat* by drawing a conceptual comparison with another universally recognized innate human faculty, namely language. It is a widely accepted notion that humans are inherently linguistic beings. As Noam Chomsky puts it, “language is species-specific” (Chomsky, 2011; Murphy, 2025), emphasizing that the capacity for language is uniquely human. Chomsky has long posited the existence of an innate faculty known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a theoretical mechanism by which infants, when exposed to any language, rapidly acquire it, ultimately becoming fluent native speakers (Sobecks, 2020; Hussain et al., 2024).

While the LAD is universally acknowledged as a remarkable endowment with both material and neurological correlates, it raises a pertinent question that may help us reflect on the nature of *fitrat*: Is this innate linguistic capacity (LAD) temporary, or does it function throughout one’s life? To respond to this question and lay the groundwork for a discussion of *fitrat*, consider the following hypothetical scenario:

An Iranian couple travels to India for a two-year intensive language program in Hindi. The couple takes their two-year-old toddler to India as well. By the time the infant turns four, he has acquired Hindi with native-like fluency. Remarkably, despite the parents’ continuous effort, they fall far behind their child in terms of language proficiency.

This common experience illustrates a fundamental truth about the LAD. We notice that the LAD’s effectiveness is inversely proportional to physical growth. As children age, the brain’s capacity for language acquisition diminishes dramatically and continues to do so until the end of puberty. This suggests that language is deeply embedded in our biological structure (Love, 1990). While adults can still learn new languages, the process differs fundamentally from language acquisition during childhood. Learning a language shifts from an innate, unconscious mechanism to one reliant on conscious memory and deliberate effort—much like learning subjects such as chemistry or history.

Let us further clarify the difference: the LAD enables children to acquire their native language in a way that is (a) subconscious, (b) involuntary (Krashen, 1983), unforgettable, and if errors occur, they are normative errors. In contrast, learning a second language

in adulthood is (a) conscious, (b) voluntary, forgettable, and errorprone—a process requiring memorization, repetition, and explicit instruction.

3.2 Psychological Perspectives on the LAD

Beyond linguists, let us consider what psychologists have said about the LAD. Researchers in cognitive psychology such as Gómez and Gerken (2000) use a slightly modified phrase: they speak of a “languagespecific learning device,” a label that points to some empirical findings of their research. While cognitive researchers accept the nativist theory of language acquisition—that infants originally possess an innate faculty for language acquisition—they also recognize a learning mechanism in infants that goes back even to the prenatal period. Further research using artificial languages is needed to determine what proportion of infants’ fast acquisition of their mother tongue is due to the LAD and how much is due to the nature of the special data transmitted to the infant prenatally and postnatally.

3.3 Contrasting Paradigms: Secular vs. Fitrat Psychology

It is worth mentioning that for years Western psychologists have conducted research to determine whether the process of language acquisition could be explained in the same way that psychologists explain other human skills. This seems unlikely. Children do not produce grammatically wellformed sentences because they are given cookies.

Notably, leading cognitive empirical psychologists such as Pinker continue to affirm the nativist view: language emerges from an innate grammar embedded in the human brain (Sihombing, 2022). Pinker further engages with Chomsky’s claim that human language shows evidence of universal grammar. He refers to Chomsky’s concept of universal grammar—a metagrammar into which all human languages fit. Chomsky explains that universal grammar represents specific structures in the human brain that recognize the general rules of others’ speech (e.g., whether the local language places adjectives before or after nouns) and then begin a specialized and very rapid learning process not explainable as reasoning from first principles or pure logic.

3.4 Other Innate Human Capacities

Other similar innate human capacities, such as music, may also be innate in nature. For

example, infants at a very early age can detect fundamental elements of music such as beat and rhythm. Researchers, however, have so far been unable to attribute this ability definitively to nature or to nurture. The reality is that “theorists are divided on the issue whether this ability is innate or learned” (Winkler et al., 2009).

Music, however, does not seem to be as indispensable as language, nor is it as intricate. In fact, it is hard to imagine how humans might survive without language, whereas survival without music is conceivable. It may be for this reason that while the Quran frequently refers to language and *fitrat* (two innate human capabilities), there is no direct reference in the Holy Book to music.

3.5 The Quran and the Features of *Fitrat*

The above discussion of language acquisition in infants sets the stage for a comparison between two fundamental human faculties: language and *fitrat*. The concept of *fitrat* and the term *ḥanīf* religion—the religion that conforms to *fitrat* (Table 1)—are mentioned in the Quran (30:30). The *ḥanīf* religion, an uncorrupted monotheistic path aligned with *fitrat*, offers the external revelation that corresponds to the internal compass. Psychological healing, under this model, is achieved by harmonizing one’s *fitrat* with the divine path of the *ḥanīf* religion, as explained in Table 2.

The abovementioned verse emphasizes that salvation is attainable when these two divine gifts—*fitrat* within and the *ḥanīf* religion without—are in harmony. It is through these two means that a person can release their surprising potential abilities. Hence, the mission of *fitrat* psychology is to help individuals recognize, activate, and live according to their *fitrat* by embracing the *ḥanīf* path. Admittedly, this spiritual premise marks a clear departure from the secular foundations of Western psychology. Yet there is a growing need and growing openness to reintroduce religious and spiritual frameworks into the heart of psychological inquiry.

(Tables 1 and 2 may be positioned here.)

3.6 Language Revisited: A Tool for Worship

One of the features mentioned in Table 1 challenges the general assumption that language functions basically as a tool whose role is limited to helping us communicate our mate-

rial needs for survival. In *fitrat* psychology, however, the primary function of language transcends communication; it is the medium through which revelation is received, prayer is expressed, and repentance is performed. This reframes language as a divine gift, not merely a survival tool.

3.7 The Function of Fitrat

Is there a connection between the full acquisition of language and the probable activation of *fitrat*? As mentioned in Table 1, the answer is affirmative. Just as language helps articulate material needs, *fitrat* is a compass for spiritual awakening. It remains dormant until consciously activated, often after puberty—precisely when Islamic law assigns moral accountability.

3.8 The Position of Western Psychologists

What position have Western psychologists taken regarding the relationship between language and *fitrat*? Western psychologists consider this issue irrelevant because, in recent history, the human sciences emerged from an a priori secular framework, deliberately excluding religion. In his narrative review “Integrating Cognitive Behavioral and Islamic Principles in Psychology and Psychotherapy,” Cucchi (2022) mentions the globalization approach, or rather an approach based on hegemonic colonialism of the Western perspective of cognitive behavioral therapy that would exclude indigenous cultures. In the following excerpt, Cucchi mentions the efforts of various researchers who challenge the validity of current secular psychology, at least for the world’s Muslim population:

Feasibility of applying secular, westernbased models to cultures whose foundations are intrinsically shaped and connected to Islam has been questioned (AlAbdulJabbar & Allssa, 2000; Bentall, 2003; Fernando, 2014). In fact, Islam can pervade nearly all aspects of life, from food choice to daily routines, social interactions, education, architecture and health care (Haque, 2004a; Hickey et al., 2016). Failing to consider this would arguably alienate a segment of the population that might fear not having their belief system represented or even understood. Indeed, many of the fundamental principles of the dominant discourse within contemporary secular psychology and psychotherapy are intrinsically opposite to those in the Islamic narrative (Badri, 2008) and for some people, engaging

with secular, westernbased approaches might even be perceived as a threat to parts of Islam itself (Asamari, 2018, p. 58).

3.9 The Contribution of Muslim Psychologists

Although Muslim psychologists do not seem to have directly challenged the basic theories of Western psychologists, they have conducted a great deal of interesting research in areas that Western psychologists have not shown much interest in. Family units, whose foundations are being weakened in the West, are more seriously studied by Muslim psychologists. The practical results have been quite helpful, mostly in individual and family consultation practices. There is also good literature in which religious and spiritual approaches are gaining momentum in research. One example is the field research conducted by Ahmadpour (2025/1403 sh.). She studied the spiritual effects of religious mothers on family members in the city of Khorramabad in western Iran. The results indicate that children raised in such families may experience less social harm and may enjoy a better quality of life compared with children from other types of families.

On the theoretical level, a great deal of research has been conducted by Islamic researchers. Prominent Islamic psychology researcher Haque (2016), in his article “Integrating Islamic Traditions in Modern Psychology: Research Trends in Last Ten Years,” provides a considerable survey of Islamic research in recent years. Haque discusses the efforts of Islamic researchers to unify Islamic beliefs and psychology. He reviews a variety of studies in which researchers have tried to incorporate spirituality and religion into mainstream psychology. However, he rightly argues that such researchers are prone to ignore the incompatibility of the Eurocentric perspective on human nature with the Islamic religion. Haque duly recommends that “theoretical models that are grounded in the philosophy of Islamic thought and within the Islamic tradition need to be expanded.”

3.10 The Secular Container vs. the Infinite Sea of Fitrat

Western psychology treats human potential as a finite container, limited by biological and social constraints. *Fitrat* psychology, by contrast, sees this container as resting upon the infinite sea of divine potential. The divine “cutaway” at the bottom opens access to creativity, resilience, and transcendental power.

3.11 Martyrdom as an Example of the Limits of Secular Interpretation

Conventional psychology may explain suicide through neurological or behavioral models. However, it struggles with ideologically or spiritually motivated acts—such as martyrdom. *Fitrat* psychology frames martyrdom as the highest expression of moral and spiritual intentionality, characterized by:

- **Personal:** Selfpurification and integrity
- **Social:** Justice and compassion
- **Divine:** Submission to God

This framework understands martyrdom as a deliberate, elevated act, not a pathological one—a view entirely lost in secular interpretations.

4. Conclusions

This paper is a step toward a theocentric psychology. When Western psychology aligns with revelation, the overlap is often coincidental. The two approaches emerge from vastly different epistemologies: one rooted in secular rationalism, the other in divine guidance.

In revelation, life is a moral trial. The techniques of Western psychology are fine assets, but Western psychology lacks the divine purpose and the lifestyle that *fitrat* psychology offers.

The goal of *fitrat* psychology is the alignment and harmonization of *fitrat* within and the *ḥanīf* religion without.

For those interested in *fitrat* psychology, it is imperative to develop spiritualpsychological tools through experimentation and Quranic insight.

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Tables

Table 1: Comparison of Features of Language and Fitrat

Feature	Language (LAD)	Fitrat (Innate Spiritual Disposition)
Ontological Basis	Biological, neurological, material faculty	Spiritual, Godgiven essence
Universality	Universal to all humans	Universal to all humans
Activation Period	Maximal in early childhood; declines after puberty	Lifelong; fully active after puberty
Mode of Operation	Subconscious, automatic acquisition	Conscious, reflective moralspiritual awakening
Input Requirements	Requires linguistic exposure	Requires spiritual/moral reminders and revelation
Availability	Gradually declines and stops from adulthood onward	Permanent, never declines; dormant unless used
Errors and Consequences	Errorfree; mistakes are developmental and normative	Deviation from <i>fitrah</i> : declining growth, spiritual loss, depression, and other problems
Goals	Facilitating communication for survival, material, and social needs	Facilitating harmony with <i>hanif</i> religion and communication for survival, material, and social needs
Relation to Revelation	Medium through which revelation is communicated	Inner compass that resonates with revelation
Outcome of Activation	Automatic activation for fluent language competence	Moral growth, transcendence, material and spiritual fulfillment
Consequences of Neglect	Language acquisition happens anyway	Spiritual disconnection; loss of guarantee for moral responsibility
Role of Western Psychologists and Linguists	Extensively studied by psycholinguists and cognitive psychologists	Ignored and unexplored in Western psychology

Table 2: Comparison of the Features of Western Psychology and Fitrat Psychology

Western Psychology	Fitrat Psychology
Foundational Assumptions: Materialism, secularism, individualism, Western values	Foundational Assumptions: Divine spiritualism and harmony between <i>fitrat</i> and the <i>hanīf</i> religion
View of Human Being: A biological-social organism shaped by environment, learning, and experience	View of Human Being: A spiritualmoral being created by God, endowed with an innate <i>fitrat</i> and a divinely ordained purpose
Objective: To help individuals adapt to societal expectations, regulate emotions, and attain wellbeing	Objective: To guide individuals toward alignment with their <i>fitrat</i> , fostering moral growth, humility, generosity, and peaceful coexistence with others
Research Participants: General populations or culturally relevant groups from any society	Research Participants: Practicing Muslims (particularly Shī'a communities) within social and family contexts
Resources: Empirical data, scientific literature, observable behavior	Resources: Quran, Hadith, spiritual texts, and empirically acceptable research aligned with Islamic ethics
Moral Framework: Moral maxims based on temporal and material concerns	Moral Framework: Godcenteredness, otherworldliness, selfcontrol, and following the example of the Ahl alBayt
Goal for Human Optimization: Facilitating social adjustment, symptom management, emotional regulation, and behavioral conformity	Goal for Human Optimization: Encouraging inner purification (<i>tazkiyah</i>), spiritual transformation, and return to the divine path as the foundation for selfesteem and wellbeing
Research Methodologies: Experimental designs, observational studies, surveys, correlational analyses, case studies	Research Methodologies: Hermeneutical and interpretive methods (e.g., Quranic exegesis) integrated with empirically compatible approaches
Worldview: Claims universal applicability of theories and findings across all cultures, including Islamic cultures	Worldview: Rooted in the Islamic worldview, naturally universal in scope and applicable to all cultures, including Western cultures
Mechanism for Change: Cognitive restructuring, mindfulness, behavioral conditioning, and other psychological techniques	Mechanism for Change: Repentance (<i>tawbah</i>), prayer (<i>ṣalāt</i>), remembrance of God (<i>dhikr</i>), fasting (<i>ṣawm</i>), charity (<i>zakāt</i>), and other religious practices, plus useful techniques from Western psychology that are in harmony with religion

Western Psychology	Fitrat Psychology
Ideal Person: A selfguided individual capable of nurturing personal aspirations	Ideal Person: A social individual with spiritual elevation, moral integrity, Godconsciousness (<i>taqwā</i>), and purposeful submission to God, ready to sacrifice for the good of others
Role of Religion: Occasionally considered a cultural or coping variable	Role of Religion: Central source of meaning and guidance, offering a comprehensive framework for a successful lifestyle in harmony with the <i>ḥanīf</i> religion
Emphasis: Adaptation to social environment and management of psychological symptoms	Emphasis: Internal alignment with <i>fiṭrat</i> , striving toward prophetic character, achieving moral and spiritual transcendence, and managing wellbeing

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