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## Integration of Qur'anic Ethics and Environmental Science: Revisiting the Meaning of Sail Al-'Arim for Contemporary Flood Mitigation Strategies

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This study examines the relevance of the Qur'anic narrative of Sail al-'Arim (QS. Saba': 16) in addressing contemporary environmental crises and flood disasters. The research aims to reconstruct the theological meaning of the narrative into an ethical and ecological framework applicable to modern disaster mitigation and environmental governance. The study responds to the limited integration of Qur'anic environmental ethics within contemporary sustainability and disaster-risk discourse. **Design/methods/approach** – The research employs a qualitative library-based method through an interdisciplinary approach. The study combines Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis, Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, and comparative interpretation between Tafsir al-Qurṭubī and Tafsir al-Azhar. Primary data were obtained from Qur'anic verses and classical-contemporary tafsir literature, while secondary sources included environmental ethics and disaster mitigation studies. **Findings** – The findings demonstrate that Sail al-'Arim should not merely be understood as a historical account of divine punishment, but also as a representation of ecological collapse caused by environmental neglect, weak governance, and declining collective responsibility. The study identifies three major ethical principles embedded in the narrative: environmental stewardship, sustainable resource management, and social resilience in disaster preparedness. These principles strengthen non-structural flood mitigation frameworks based on moral awareness and communal responsibility. **Research implications/limitations** – This study is limited to interpretative and conceptual analysis without empirical field validation. Consequently, the applicability of the proposed ethical framework in practical disaster management remains untested and requires further empirical investigation. **Originality/value** – The originality of this research lies in its interdisciplinary synthesis of Qur'anic exegesis and environmental studies, positioning the narrative of the Ma'rib dam collapse as a conceptual model for sustainable ecological resilience and faith-based disaster mitigation.

**Keywords:** Sail al-'Arim; Izutsu Semantics; Contextual Hermeneutics; Comparative Exegesis; Flood Mitigation; Environmental Ethics.

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## Introduction

Floods are one of the most frequent hydrometeorological disasters in various parts of the world, including Indonesia [1]. In recent decades, floods are no longer understood as just a seasonal natural event [2], but have developed into structural problems influenced by human activities, such as land conversion [3], watershed damage [4], uncontrolled urbanization [5], weak spatial planning [6], and low ecological awareness of the community [7]. Thus, flooding is actually a socio-ecological problem that involves the complex relationship between humans, the environment, and development policies [8].

In the midst of increasing disaster threats, a new approach is needed that not only relies on technical solutions, but also touches on ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions [9]. In the context of religious societies, the Qur'an has great potential as a source of value that can strengthen environmental awareness and collective responsibility [10]. One of the relevant narratives of the Qur'an is the story of *Sail al-'Arim* in QS. Saba': 16, which is the great flood that befell the Saba' after they turned away from the favor of Allah [11].

So far, the story has often been understood theologically as a form of punishment for disbelief. However, if read through an interdisciplinary approach, the narrative [12] of *Sail al-'Arim* can also be interpreted as a symbol of the collapse of civilizational systems due to the loss of ecological balance, weak resource governance, and the fading of people's moral responsibility [13]. This perspective is important because it is able to connect the message of the Qur'an with contemporary disaster problems [14].

In addition, the difference in interpretation between classical mufasir such as Imam al-Qurṭubī and modern mufasir such as Buya Hamka is interesting to study comparatively [15]. The Qurṭubī emphasizes the theological-historical dimension, while Hamka presents a socio-historical approach and critique of civilization. This comparison opens up a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning [16] of *Sail al-'Arim* and its relevance for today's flood mitigation. Therefore, this research is important to be carried out as an effort to integrate Qur'anic ethics and environmental science in responding to the modern ecological crisis.

## Previous Studies

Research on environmental ethics and the interpretation of disaster verses has become an important discourse in contemporary Qur'an studies. Broadly speaking, the previous literature can be grouped into three main clusters.

The first cluster focused on the relationship between religion, spiritual values, and environmental awareness. Purnawanto & Munfariqoh (2024) emphasized that the Qur'an has great potential as a source of value to build

environmental awareness to mitigate climate change. In line with that, Al Qurtuby (2022) underlines the urgency of religion and spirituality as instruments in responding to socio-ecological challenges. In the context of education, Mannuhung et al. (2025) offer a model of internalizing ecotheology as spiritual resilience in Islamic educational institutions to create a disaster-responsive society.

The second cluster focuses on semantic analysis and interpretation methodology of key terms in the Qur'an. Fadhilah & Nugroho (2024) have conducted a semantic analysis by Toshihiko Izutsu on the phrase *Al-'Urwatul Wutsqo* to find its relational meaning. Meanwhile, regarding hermeneutic methodology, Nugroho et al. (2023) and Ummah (2019) dissect the effectiveness of Abdullah Saeed's *Double Movement* theory in attracting moral-universal messages from the historical context of verse to modern reality. However, these studies have not specifically applied this methodological tool to the narrative of *the Sail al-'Arim* disaster.

The third cluster is a specific study of the story of the Saba' people. Arifin (2020) conducted a critical study of the historical understanding of the land of Saba' in the Qur'an. Regarding the comparison of interpretations, Rizki Prianka Putri (2023) has studied Hamka's interpretation method in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* which is known to have a socio-social pattern. Similarly, Muhamad Khabib Imdad & Fitri Meliani (2025) conducted a comparative analysis between modern and contemporary interpretations to see the shifts in the meaning of religious texts.

**Research Position and Differentiation** Unlike the studies above, this study occupies a unique position by conducting interdisciplinary integration. If previous research tends to be fragmented on one approach (only semantics, only history, or only comparative interpretations), this study combines Izutsu Semantics, Abdullah Saeed's Hermeneutics, and Comparative Dialectics (Al-Qurtubī vs Hamka) simultaneously. The main differentiation of this study lies in its attempt to reconstruct the meaning of *Sail al-'Arim* from a mere "doomed event of the past" to a "paradigm of environmental ethics" for contemporary flood mitigation strategies. Thus, this research fills a research *gap* regarding the transformation of the Qur'anic narrative into the ethical-practical framework of modern environmental science.

## Method

This research is a type of library research that uses a qualitative-descriptive approach. The main focus of this study is to reconstruct the meaning of the narrative of *the Sail al-'Arim* disaster in QS. Saba': 16 through an interdisciplinary perspective.

To achieve this goal, the study integrates three main analytical frameworks:

Toshihiko Izutsu Semantic Analysis: It is used to dissect the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of the term *sail al-'arim* through three main steps, namely lexical meaning analysis, relational meaning (syntagmatic and paradigmatic), and synchronic-diacronic analysis [17].

Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Hermeneutics: Used to contextualize meaning through a *double movement approach*. This analysis involves the study of micro-contexts (internal texts), macro-contexts (the historical reality of the Saba' people), and contextual connectors to connect historical meaning with contemporary realities [18].

Comparative Study of Tafsir: Conducting a dialectic between classical and modern interpretations by comparing Tafsir al-Qurṭubī (theological-historical pattern) [19] and Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar (socio-ethical pattern) [20].

Research data were collected from primary sources in the form of classical Arabic tafsir and dictionaries, as well as secondary sources in the form of environmental science literature, risk sociology theory, and modern disaster mitigation policies. All data is systematically analyzed to transform the Qur'anic narrative into an ethical-practical framework for contemporary flood mitigation strategies.

## Results

This study finds that the phrase *Sail al-'Arim* in QS. Saba':16 does not merely refer to a historical flood event, but symbolically represents the collapse of a civilization's support system caused by moral neglect, environmental mismanagement, and failure to maintain collective responsibility. Through Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis, the term *sail* denotes a destructive overflowing current, while *al-'arim* is associated with dam structures, barriers, or catastrophic damage. Combined, the phrase signifies not only physical disaster but also systemic breakdown in ecological, social, and moral order. Using Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, the narrative of Saba' is interpreted as a universal ethical lesson: prosperity without gratitude, justice, and responsible governance will eventually produce vulnerability and destruction.

The comparative interpretation shows that Al-Qurṭubī emphasizes the theological-historical dimension, viewing the flood as divine punishment for disbelief, while Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar stresses socio-historical causes such as negligence in maintaining infrastructure and weakening civic ethics. These perspectives complement one another. The study also finds that the transformation of fertile gardens into barren land symbolizes ecological degradation, loss of productivity, and the economic consequences of environmental collapse. In contemporary relevance, the story of *Sail al-'Arim* provides a conceptual basis for non-structural flood mitigation, including sustainable environmental management, public participation, good governance,

disaster education, social resilience, and climate adaptation. Therefore, this research concludes that Qur'anic narratives can be reconstructed into an ethical-practical framework for modern disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.

## Discussion

### 1. Linguistic and Semantic Dimensions (Toshihiko Izutsu Approach)

In Izutsu's semantic approach, the analysis of QS Saba' verse 16 focuses on the key term *sail al-'arim*, by tracing how the word was understood in Arabic at the time of revelation, then examined in the network of conceptual meanings of the Qur'an. This approach is carried out through three main steps, namely lexical meaning analysis, relational meaning, and synchronic and diachronic analysis [21].

The first step is to analyze the lexical meaning (the basic meaning of words in the dictionary and the use of Arabic).

The word سَيْلٌ (sail) comes from the root س ي ل which basically means *to flow, glide, move down, or melt*. In classical Arabic dictionaries such as Lisān al-'Arab and Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ, السيل the word is used to denote rushing water, flood, or flood that descends from a valley and carries away whatever it passes through. In classical Arabic usage, the word is often associated with large, destructive rainwater runoff. Thus, lexically sail [22] does not just mean "water", but a strong current that overflows and has the potential to be destructive [23]. The derivation of سَيْلٌ (sail) is in:

a) QS Ar-Ra'd Verse 17

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِهَا فَاحْتَمَلَ السَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَابِيًا ۗ

The word فَسَالَتْ comes from سال يسيل which means *to flow*. In QS ar-Ra'd:17, this word does not refer to a destructive flood, but a flow of water which is a metaphor for haq and void. Rainwater falls from the sky, enters the valleys, and then flows according to their respective capacities. It shows the meaning of natural motion, order, proportionality, and God's grace. The use فَسَالَتْ of and السَّيْلُ respectively indicates the correctness of the Qur'anic diction; the first word describes the process of water flowing, while the second word carries the flow of water. Thus, the same root shows the dynamics of the process and the result, as well as the metaphor of the relationship between truth and falsehood [24].

b) QS Saba' Verse 12 - أَسْلُنَا

## وَأَسْلَنَّا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقَطْرِ

The word *وَأَسْلَنَّا* in QS Saba' verse 12 in the word of Allah *وَأَسْلَنَّا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقَطْرِ* which means "And We flow/liquefy for him copper springs" comes from the IV form *أسال* which means *to make something flow, liquefy, or flow*. In the context of this verse, Allah gave a miracle to Prophet Solomon in the form of molten copper that flowed like a spring. This word contains nuances of technological convenience, the blessings of civilization, and the power of God over matter [25].

The word *سَيْلٌ* in Qur'an Saba' verse 16 and Qur's ar-Ra'd verse 17 come from the same root (س ي ل), but have different contexts of meaning. In QS Saba':16 on the phrase *سَيْلٌ الْعَرَمِ*, the word *سَيْلٌ* means a great flood or a devastating flood, so it has the nuances of punishment, punishment, and destruction for the Saba'. As for the phrase *فَأَحْتَمَلَ السَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَابِيًا* the word *السَّيْلُ* means a torrent of water due to rain that brings foam, so that it has nuances of natural phenomena, order, and parables about truth and falsehood. Thus, the same word can mean disaster or mercy, according to the context of the verse.

Turning to the word *الْعَرَمِ* (al-'Arim) which comes from the root *ع ر م* has various meanings in the Arabic lexicon. In *Lisān al-'Arab*, this root can mean hard, strong, transcendent, also refers to a major damage or disaster. Some other dictionaries such as *Tāj al-'Arūs* refer to a meaning related to a pile, barrier, or something built to hold water. In the history of classical tafsir, especially *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, it is said that in the Himyar/Yemeni dialect, al-'Arim means *المسناة* or *السد*, i.e. an embankment or dam. While other mufasir interpret it as a major disaster or a very destructive flood [24]. Al arimi exists only in one verse saba' 16.

If these two words are combined into *سَيْلٌ الْعَرَمِ*, then several interpretations arise among scholars. First, according to al-Ṭabarī and a number of classical mufasir, this phrase means a flood that comes from a dam, namely a flood due to the collapse of the Ma'rib dam in the land of Saba'. Secondly, according to *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, this term refers to the great flood that destroyed the gardens and prosperity of the land of Saba'. Third, Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān compiles several opinions: some understand it as the name of a dam, some interpret it as a destructive flood, and some consider it a well-known name of disaster among Arab people [27].

The second step, analysis of the relational meaning of the word *سَيْلٌ الْعَرَمِ*. Relational meaning is a connotative addition that is inserted into an existing meaning, by inserting words in a specific position in a specific domain. This means that the additional meaning attached to a word depends a lot on the sentence in which the word is used. Izutsu classifies this relational meaning into two types of analysis, namely syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis [28].

### a) Syntagmatic analysis

The importance of syntagmatic analysis lies in the attempt to interpret the meaning of a word by considering the words that lie before and after it in a particular context.

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِي أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ

But they turned away, so We brought upon them a great flood and We replaced their two gardens with two overgrown gardens (trees) that bore bitter fruit, the Atsl tree and a little of the Sidr tree.

The phrase سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ in Qur'an Saba' verse 16 cannot be interpreted only as "great flood", but must be seen in the order of the verse in its entirety. This verse begins with the words of Allah فَأَعْرَضُوا which means *they turn away*, that is, turn away from Allah's gratitude, obedience, and favor. After that فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ, which shows the direct action of Allah by sending a terrible flood to the people of Saba'. The word سَيْلٌ means flood or great current, while الْعَرِمِ reinforces the meaning of destructive flooding, related to the damage of dams.

The meaning is made clearer by the word afterward, وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ which means *We replaced two of their gardens with two other gardens*. This indicates that the flood was not a momentary calamity, but a turning point that turned prosperity into misery [29]. Two fertile orchards that used to be a source of prosperity were replaced with gardens containing bitter fruits, atsl trees, and a few sidr trees, which are less valuable and not as productive as before. From this arrangement there appears a strong cause-and-effect relationship: turning away from God causes floods, then floods cause ecological damage and loss of economic favors. Thus, syntagmatically the phrase سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ in this verse not only means a physical flood, but also a symbol of the collapse of civilization due to man's disobedience to God's favor.

### b) Paradigmatic analysis

The term *sail al-'arim* is related to other concepts in the Qur'an such as *'adhāb* (punishment), *fasād* (destruction), and the destruction of civilization. In this relationship, the meaning of *sail* develops from simply a flood to a symbol of destructive power, while *al-'arim* is no longer limited to a physical dam, but expands to become a symbol of the buffer system of life – both ecological, social, and moral. Thus, the construction of *sail al-'arim* represents the collapse of the system due to the failure of humans to maintain a balance of values.

The third step is synchronous and diachronic analysis. Synchronously, in the entire Qur'anic system, events of destruction such as *sail al-'arim* are always associated with a moral pattern: rejection of Allah's favor or commands leads to punishment. This verse is part of a general pattern, where natural disasters are

understood as manifestations of ethical consequences. Meanwhile, diacronic, there is a development of meaning from the initial use in Arabic into the Qur'anic meaning system. The term *sail*, which was originally neutral as a natural phenomenon, in the Qur'an acquires a theological dimension as an instrument of divine punishment. Similarly, *al-'arim* which originally referred to the technical structure of dams, underwent an expansion of meaning to symbolize the collapse of a wider system of life.

Through these three steps, the phrase *sail al-'arim* in QS Saba' verse 16 is not only understood as a historical disaster, but as a semantic concept that reflects the close relationship between the human moral condition and the balance of life. In this perspective, the destruction that occurs is not solely due to natural factors, but is a reflection of the collapse of the ethical foundations that sustain civilization.

## 2. Historical Dimension and Hermeneutics (Abdullah Saeed's Approach)

The double movement approach developed by Abdullah Saeed emphasizes that the understanding of the Qur'an must move from the context of the descent of verses to the relevant meaning in the present day. In this framework, the analysis of the phrase *sail al-'arim* in QS Saba' verse 16 can be understood through three layers: micro-context, macro context, and context connectors that connect the two. 30].

At the micro-level of the context, *sail al-'arim* appears in a whole series of narratives. Verse 15 describes the ideal condition of the Saba' as *balдах tayyibah wa rabbun ghafūr*, which is a fertile land and is under the auspices of God's forgiveness [29].

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ ۖ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ ۚ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا لَهُ ۗ ۖ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ ۚ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٌ

Indeed, for the people of Saba' there was a sign (of God's power) in their dwelling place: two gardens on the right and on the left. (It was said to them), "Eat from the provision of your Lord and be grateful to Him. (Yours is) a good land, and (your Lord is) Most Forgiving."

Indeed, for the Saba's there is a sign (of God's power) in their dwellings, namely two gardens on the right and on the left. (to them it is said): "Eat of the sustenance that your Lord has bestowed upon you, and give thanks to Him. (Your country) is a good land and (your Lord) is the Most Forgiving God".

However, this condition changed when they *a'radū* (turned away). In the structure of the verse, *sail al-'arim* is present as a direct consequence of this attitude. Thus, internally in the text, this phrase does not simply refer to the flood event, but becomes part of a cause-and-effect pattern that affirms that rejection of Divine favor leads to the coming of punishment [31].

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جُنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِي أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ

But they turned away, so We brought upon them a great flood and replaced their two gardens with two overgrown gardens of bitter fruit, the Atsl tree and a little of the Sidr tree

Moving on to the macro context, this verse is related to the historical reality of the Saba' people in the Yemeni region which is known to have an advanced civilization with a sophisticated irrigation system. Their livelihood depends heavily on large dams that regulate water distribution [32].

In this context, *the sail al-'arim* can be understood as a major flood due to the damage to the dam. However, as Abdullah Saeed emphasized, the Qur'an does not merely record historical events, but elevates them as a moral lesson [24]. The destruction is understood not only as a technical failure, but as a result of a crisis of values – that is, a loss of gratitude and moral responsibility. Thus, the event represents the collapse of the balance between man, God, and nature [33].

The next step is the context connector, which is an attempt to connect the historical meaning with contemporary reality. In this perspective, *sail al-'arim* is no longer limited to past events, but can be understood as a universal symbol of the various forms of disasters that occur due to human actions. Phenomena such as floods due to environmental damage, climate crises, or even the collapse of social systems due to injustice and corruption, can be seen as modern manifestations of the same pattern. This means that when humans ignore ethical and spiritual values, and fail to maintain balance with nature, destruction becomes an inevitable consequence [34].

Thus, through the double movement approach, *sail al-'arim* in QS Saba' verse 16 is not only understood as a historical story, but as a universal principle that continues to be relevant. This verse emphasizes that the sustainability of a civilization depends heavily on the moral integrity and spiritual awareness of humans in managing the blessings given by God.

Abdullah Saeed's contextualization approach is used to draw universal ethical values from the early historical context.

- Historical Context: The Saba' are an advanced agrarian civilization in Yemen that has advanced hydraulic technology in the form of the Ma'rib Dam. Their destruction occurs when material prosperity is no longer accompanied by moral responsibility (*i' rād*).
- Ethical Principles: From this narrative, emerges the value of Ecological Trust, where nature is a trust that must be managed with responsibility, as well as Collective Gratitude which is realized through fair resource management.

### 3. Comparative Studies: The Dialectics of Classical and Modern Interpretation

This analysis compares two spectrums of thought to enrich understanding:

- Tafsir al-Qurṭubī (Classical): Emphasizes the theological-historical aspect. The flood is understood as *'iqāb ilāhī* (God's punishment) for disbelief, with historical details about the collapse of dams due to the interference of rodents (rats) [35].
- Tafsir al-Azhar/Hamka (Modern): Emphasizing the socio-ethical aspect. Hamka sees *Sail al-'Arim* as a critique of an arrogant civilization. He relates the narrative to modern experiences (such as the flood on the Makkah-Medina highway) to show that human technological progress is very fragile before the laws of nature [36].

The following is a Comparative Narrative of the Triumph and Collapse of the Saba': A Review of Tafsir Al-Qurtubi and Tafsir Al-Azhar

#### a. Identity and Ontology of the Name Saba'

- Al-Qurtubi: interpreting Saba' through qira'at and etymology; there is a difference between recitation and without. It confirms that Saba' is the name of a man based on the hadith of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the ancestor of the Arab tribes in Yemen and Syria.
- Al-Azhar (Hamka): agreed that Saba' was an ancestral figure of Arabia, but expanded as a great empire in southern Arabia. Associated with King Tubba' and Queen Bilqis.
- Main difference: Al-Qurtubi focuses on genealogy, Al-Azhar focuses on the history-politics of civilization.

#### b. Prosperity Visualization: Miracle vs Human Engineering

- Al-Qurtubi: describes the land of Saba' as very fertile, the fruit falls on its own, free of insects and harmful animals; with the nuance of "paradise on earth".
- Al-Azhar: explains prosperity as a result of human ingenuity building large dams and managing water.
- Key differences: Al-Qurtubi emphasizes the miracle of pleasure, Al-Azhar emphasizes human effort and technology.

#### c. The Concept of Gratitude: Ritual vs Charity

- Al-Qurtubi: gratitude means obeying Allah and acknowledging His favors; human sustenance always needs to be accompanied by a request for forgiveness.
- Al-Azhar: gratitude is manifested in real work, maintaining dams and public facilities. Neglecting maintenance is disbelief of favor.
- Main differences: Al-Qurtubi theological-spiritual, Al-Azhar practical-social.

**d. Moments of Destruction: Destiny vs Oblivion**

- Al-Qurtubi: The great flood occurred because the red rat sent by Allah bore a hole in the dam; destruction is a divine destiny.
- Al-Azhar: the damage starts from a small hole that is left behind, then enlarges during heavy rains; the result of human negligence.
- Main difference: Al-Qurtubi emphasizes the power of Allah, Al-Azhar emphasizes the law of cause and effect (Sunnatullah).

**e. Ecological Change as a Punishment**

- The two agreed that the fertile gardens should be replaced with wild plants such as khamt, atsl, and a little sidr.
- Al-Qurtubi: the mention of "garden" for bad plants as a form of divine innuendo.
- Al-Azhar: emphasizes fertile land covered with sand and rocks so that only wild plants grow.
- Main differences: Al-Qurtubi has linguistic and rhetorical nuances, Al-Azhar has ecological-economic nuances.

**4. Synthesis: The relevance of QS. Saba': 16 for Contemporary Flood Mitigation**

Interdisciplinary, the message QS. Saba': 16 provides an important foundation for non-structural flood mitigation strategies, namely prevention efforts through environmental governance, community education, social strengthening, and sustainable policies. This verse shows that disasters are not just natural phenomena, but are often closely related to human behavior in managing resources and maintaining environmental balance.

The Principle of Balance (Mizān). Flood mitigation requires development that respects the carrying capacity of nature, such as maintaining water catchment areas, forests, rivers, and green open spaces. This is in line with the concept [34] of *sustainable development* from the Brundtland Commission (1987) which emphasizes sustainable development for future generations. Fritjof Capra also asserts that life takes place through the balance of ecological systems; when the balance is disturbed, disasters are more prone to occur [37].

Prohibition of Fasād (Environmental Damage). Damage due to deforestation, land conversion, poor spatial planning, or corrupt policies are forms of *fasād* that trigger floods systematically. Ulrich Beck through the theory of *risk society* explains that modern society often creates threats through its own activities [38]. Anthony Giddens added that modernization without ecological control generates new risks, including floods and environmental crises [39].

Value-Based Environmental Education. Religion can be an effective source of disaster literacy, especially in religious communities. Religious values

encourage a moral responsibility to protect nature collectively. Émile Durkheim explained that religion serves to build social solidarity and mutual awareness. In critical education, [40] Paulo Freire emphasizes the importance of transformative awareness so that people not only understand the dangers of flooding, but also actively prevent it [41].

**Social Resilience.** Flood mitigation requires communities that are able to adapt, survive, and recover after disasters. C.S. Holling (1973) through the *theory of resilience* explained that a resilient system is able to absorb disturbances without losing its main function. Social solidarity, preparedness, and local capacity greatly determine the speed of recovery of flood-affected communities [42].

**Governance and Good Governance.** Many floods are exacerbated by weak regional planning, poor drainage, and lack of development supervision. The World Bank and UNDP affirm that *good governance*—including transparency, accountability, public participation, and law enforcement—is a key requirement for disaster risk reduction. Without good governance, development can actually increase vulnerability [43].

**Community Participation.** Flood management will be more effective if the community is involved as the main subject. Robert Chambers through a participatory approach explained that local residents have practical knowledge about the region, rainfall patterns, and flood-prone points. Therefore, risk mapping, evacuation routes, and environmental monitoring should be community-based [44].

**Ecological and Social Justice.** The poor are often the most vulnerable because they live on the banks of rivers or flood-prone areas. Robert Bullard through *environmental justice theory* emphasized that the impact of environmental damage often disproportionately affects marginalized groups. Therefore, flood mitigation must ensure safe space distribution, equitable assistance, and humane relocation [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) [46]

**Climate Change Adaptation.** Today's floods are closely related to the increase in extreme weather due to climate change. [47] The IPCC explains that global warming increases the frequency of heavy rains and floods [48]. Therefore, mitigation needs to be accompanied by adaptations such as early warning systems, river restoration, and climate-resilient city designs [45].

**Social Capital.** The success of mitigation is greatly influenced by community trust and cooperation [49]. Robert Putnam explained that *social capital* in the form of social networks, mutual cooperation norms, and public trust can strengthen collective capacity to face disaster [50], [51]. In the Indonesian context, the culture of mutual cooperation is an important asset in flood preparedness.

## Conclusion

This research shows that the narrative of *Sail al-'Arim* in QS. Saba': 15–16 has a meaning far beyond the historical account of the flood that befell the Saba'. Through Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach, the term *sail al-'arim* not only refers to a great physical flood, but also represents the collapse of the life-sustaining system due to the moral failure of humans to maintain a balance of ecological values and trusts. Thus, disasters are understood as the consequence of structural damage rooted in human behavior.

Through Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, the story of the Saba' can be transformed into universal principles that remain relevant today, such as the importance of collective gratitude, justice in the distribution of resources, ecological responsibility, and integrity in the management of civilization. The devastation that befell Saba' shows that technological progress without an ethical foundation will give birth to social and ecological vulnerability.

A comparative study of Tafsir al-Qurṭubī and Tafsir al-Azhar shows that there are two complementary patterns of interpretation. The Qurṭubī emphasizes the theological-historical dimension that floods are a form of punishment for disbelief of favor, while Hamka emphasizes the socio-historical dimension that destruction occurs due to human negligence in maintaining infrastructure and loss of work ethic. These two perspectives affirm that disasters can be read as a spiritual consequence as well as a failure of human governance.

In the end, this study confirms that contemporary flood mitigation is not enough to rely solely on technical engineering and physical development, but also requires environmental ethics, fair governance, community participation, and collective moral awareness. The Qur'an, through the *narrative of Sail al-'Arim*, offers an important contribution as a source of public value that can enrich modern approaches in dealing with today's ecological crises and disasters.

## Author's Contributions

**Umi Fadhilah:** Conceptualization, data collection, analysis, writing original draft. **Dadang Darniah:** Supervision, methodology review, editing, and final manuscript validation.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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The authors state that generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used only to assist language improvement, grammar checking, and formatting preparation. All ideas, analysis, interpretations, and final content remain the full responsibility of the authors.

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