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REASON AND REVELATION:

Sir Syed's Response to the Intellectual Challenge

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Article History Published Online:	For Sir Syed interpretation of the Quranic propositional gestalt entails profundity of understanding as well as mythological, hermeneutical and exegetical skills of highest sophistication. One must be well-versed in Islamic and Quranic sciences and subtleties of Arabic lexicography, grammar, morphology, syntactic, semantics, stylistics and other features of language and literature. Besides, one must be aware of the history of exegetical literature and fully cognizant of the dynamics of exegetical disagreement. Additionally, one must be aware of the source of misinterpretation of the injunctions and propositions of the Quran.
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Hermeneutical Challenge of the West:

The misinterpretation of the Quranic verses can emanate or originate from several sources. The interpreters can misunderstand the function and purpose of the revelations of the Quran if they try to historicize, cultureless or Scientifics the essentially



transcendental character of the Quranic discourse. Any historical or cultural or scientific analysis of the transcendental character of the Quranic verses can serve some of our immediate situational purposes or cater to some contemporary intellectual or methodological concerns. However, we must be cognizant of the fact that all situational reduction are amenable to revocation at any point of time and space. Nevertheless, any situational reduction of an essentially transcendental verse of the Quran resort to such a reductive fallacy from several vantage points, we shall be ending up into an irresolvable theological disagreement and all of us can be simply parading our respective misinterpretations.

The interpreter of the Quran has to be well-versed into the stylistics of the Quran. He must understand the multifunctional character of the Quranic verses. The Quranic language is comprised of diverse types of statements. For example, the entire Quranic propositional gestalt cannot be deemed to be descriptive in function or meaning. One of the commonest and most widely prevalent sources of misinterpretation can be our natural propensity for literal translation of the Quranic verses. If we go in for wholesale literal translation of the Quran and deem every verse of the Quran to be descriptive of some empirical or trans-empirical state of affairs, we shall be knotting ourselves into irresolvable difficulties. As it happens, the Quran is comprised of thousands of verses of multifunctional character. Its' verses are: descriptive, assertive, informative, declarative; expressive, interpretative, symbolic, allegorical, metaphorical, analogical; metaphysical, transcendental, ontological, cosmological, axiological, epistemological; ontogenetic, axiogenetic, epistemogenetic, methodogenetic, semiogenetic, hermeneugenic etc. A mature, judicious and methodologically balanced interpretation of the Quran requires that the exegete be well-versed in understanding the complex logic of the Quranic discourse.



The classical exegeses of the Quran need to be revisited in the light of contemporary historical research and methodological advancement. Most of these time-honoured and sanctified multi-voluminous contributions have been worked out on faulty grounds. The conceptual frameworks within which the classical exegetes were operating have turned out to be bristling with grave methodological fault lines.

The classical exegetes based their exegetical contributions either on the reported sayings of the Prophet or on bibliogical/Israelogical stories or on Greek philosophical speculations. All the three grounds are too shaky to be acceptable as sound and authentic bases for working out the exegetical formulation of the Quran vision and mission.

Firstly, the reported traditions of the Prophet, even when authenticated through a grueling process of methodological analysis, historical scholarship and hermeneutical deductions, cannot be accepted as unimpeachable and incorruptible reported sayings of the Prophet.⁵ These reported sayings were collected and compiled two hundred years after his demise. For two hundred years most of the reported traditions of the Prophet were oral transmissions and therefore amenable to all additive, subtractive, multiplicative and divisive manipulations which all oral transmissions have suffered across the multiple periodisations of the historical continuum. Furthermore, these manipulations were powerfully accelerated on account of sectarian motivations, denominational ambitions, personal predilections and professional considerations. The post-Muhammad(s) times were politically and socially unstable and therefore fertile enough to lead to endless proliferations of the so-called traditions of the prophet. Such proliferations might even have been inspired by the best of intentions. Nevertheless, proliferations these were and repeated



transmissions subjected their truth increasingly to the law of diminishing returns.

Secondly, the bibliological or Israeological stories too cannot be deemed to be an authentic or reliable source on which to anchor the interpretation of the Quranic verse pertaining to ancient prophets. The Quran has advanced the narratives of shorter or longer length profiling the life and times of numerous Israelite prophets. The narratives of the ancient prophets have been outlined in ancient Books as well. The Israelite scholars had written detailed narratives with regard to the life and times of ancient prophets. Those were the times when miracle-mongering was at its highest. Therefore, these narratives are full of mythological accounts violating both rational justification and natural laws. These mythological accounts were part of the Semitic Historical Collective Unconscious, so to say. They were part of the conceptual milieu within which the classical doctors of Islam were operating. So, when Quran outlined these narratives, their interpretations were worked out by the doctors of Islam, in keeping with their conceptual milieu in which mythological accounts and miraculous elements predominate. In view of the fact that the mythological and miraculous accounts pertaining to ancient prophets were fully known to our classical interpreters and the Quranic outlines with regard to these verses ancient prophets were partially similar, the classical interpreters felt genuinely fully free to interpret these Quranic outlines in consonance with their Bibliologically oriented and directed mindsets.

The Quranic outlines of the ancient prophets were no doubt similar to their historically evolved and crystallized bibliological versions or renderings. However, the Quranic accounts, according to Sir Syed, are so worded or phrased that irrational, unnatural and mythological elements explicitly preponderant in bibliological narratives are rendered without any justification. The classical



Islamic scholars could not appreciate this fine distinction and construed the meanings of the Quranic words *Mutatis Mutandis* on bibliological narratives. They did so because the bibliological narratives since pre-Quranic times were so popular and so famous that they just could not liberate themselves from their preconceptions or just could not summon sufficient critical acumen to question the bibliologically oriented accounts violative both of human rationality and natural law. Furthermore, all mythological and miraculous components of bibliological cosmogony were easily interpreted by classical Islamic scholars as indicative of the supreme and absolute power of Allah. Accordingly, they did not feel called upon to ponder over the real import of the words and phrases employed in the Quranic outlines pertaining to ancient prophet. Besides, there was no standardized progress of experimental science which could serve as a criterion of distinction between fact and fiction and attract their attention towards understanding natural laws.¹

The miraculous components and mythological dimensions appended to or inserted into the exegetical literature of the Quran emanated not from the verses of the Quran but from the collective conceptual milieu within which our classical doctors of Islam were inspired. For example, it was not proved those days that the spread of a storm or tornado across the entire globe and the rise of water above the highest mountaintops was simply impossible occurrence. Therefore, the exegetes felt free to imaginatively widen the scope of the storm of Noah referred to in the Quran as hyperbolically as possible.

Thirdly, long before the emergency of post-Copernican experimental scientific revolution, the Islamic beliefs and values negotiated a major challenge posed by Greek philosophy. The methodological assumptions and onto-cosmological tenets of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus impacted powerfully



Muslim intellectuals during Abbasid Caliphate. The foremost Muslim philosophers who responded to this challenge with remarkable intellectual daring were al-Kindi (80-873), al-Farabi (870-950), Ibn Sina (980-1037) and Ibn Rush (1126-1198). They tried to reconcile the theo-centric or creationistic onto-cosmological account of the Quran with the supposedly rationalist metaphysical interpretations worked out by Greek philosophers. These philosophers were essentially field-integrationists and grand reconciliationists. To them the rationalist interpretations worked out by Greek and the revelatory tenets of Islam were perfectly compatible. They did not see any contradiction between Islam and Greek philosophical rationalism. However, the quest for compatibility did not remain confined to working out a reconciliation between Islamic beliefs and Greek doctrines. Muslim interpreters, exegetes and scholars, in course of time, tried to reconcile the Quranic cosmological tenets with the then established principles of Greek Cosmology, Physics and Astronomy. They appreciatively highlighted the verses of the Quran apparently in accord with Greek science. They also interpretatively managed to adjust the verses apparently inconsistent with Greek scientific assumptions.

Sir Syed gives certain broad hermeneutical principles with a view to providing the prospective interpreters or exegetes a guidelines as to how to carry out a methodologically informed analysis of the Quranic propositions and injunctions:

1. The interpreter will have to grasp and appreciate the nuances, the mood and the style of the Quranic use of words.
2. The interpreter will have to seek help from one verse to simplify or explain the meaning of another verse.



3. The interpreter must understand that the stipulation of a word and its designated meaning are mutually strictly correlative.
4. The interpreter must understand as to whether a word, under consideration, in a particular context, is not used in a meaning other than the designated one.
5. The interpreter must ensure as to in what sense an equivocal word is used.
6. The interpreter must ensure as to whether a word has been used literally or figuratively.
7. The interpreter must ensure as to whether a particular discourse is amenable to allegorical interpretation or not.
8. The interpreter must determine as to whether the designated meaning of word is or is not context-specific.²

The interpreter must be cognizant as to whether the designated meaning of a word does or does not carry a rational or what may be stipulated an interpretative rider. This stipulation or consideration has been practiced by almost all classical and medieval doctors of Islam or interpreters of the Quran. For example, the Quranic phrase of God' sitting on the throne has not been taken literally by the interpreters or exegetes of the Quran. The literal or originally designated meaning of such Quranic phrases as 'face of God', 'hand of God', etc. has not been espoused by interpreters of the Quran in view of several considerations. According to Sir Syed, such phrases cannot be taken literally because they are either impossible of rational consideration or violative of divinely promulgated natural laws or contrary to what is ordinarily experienced by man. In view of the same, whether we are interpreting divinely revealed discourse or human speech or writing, we cannot fix the meanings of words literally or referentially or designatively unless we abide by the interpretative rider with a view to ascertaining as to whether words



under consideration are univocal, monosemic and monoreferential or polysemic, polyvocal and polyreferential or whether they are used literally or figuratively.

With regard to the exegesis of the Quranic discourse, Sir Syed propounds a crucial distinction between what he calls intended speech (*Kalam-i-Maqsood*) and unintended speech (*Kalam-i-Maqsud*). This distinction brings out the role of idiomatic, figurative, metaphorical, allegorical and symbolic expressions both in the context of human speech and divinely ordained or revealed discourse. According to Sir Syed, the Quranic discourse is repeatedly employing, what can be said to be unintended speech (*Kalām-i-Maqsūd*) in the form of idiomatic, figurative, metaphorical, allegorical and symbolic expressions. He cites the following Quranic verse with a view to illustrating the distinction between intended speech and unintended speech:

To those who reflect
Our signs and treat them With arrogance, no opening
With there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they
Enter the Garden, until The camel can, enter
through the eye of the needle.
Such is our reward For those who sin.³

Sir Syed writes:

From this we cannot conclude that at some time the camel will pass through the eye of the needle, for it is unintended speech (*Kalam-i-Ghair Maqsood*). Its' function is to stress on the impossibility of admission to paradise of those people who rejected the signs of God. Similarly on the basis of this verse, we cannot argue on the possibility of gates of heaven out there, as it is unintended speech; its purpose being to stress on the inadmissibility of the rejecter to the mercy of God. Various similar instances of unintended speech can be



cited from the Quran and we cannot argue on the basis of their literal meanings.⁴

The supreme wonder of the Quran is the style in which it has been revealed. The greatest of the scholars and philosophers as well as the illiterate and ignorant masses can equally benefit from its revelations. Whether we try to understand it from the viewpoint of commoners or from the perspective of philosophers and scholars, we all arrive at the same conclusions. It is specifically a special feature of the Quranic discourse that an ignorant and illiterate person can arrive at the same inductions of derive same deductions from it which a scholar or philosopher can bring out after extensive investigations and intensive interpretations. In fact each one of us can be benefited by the Quran according to one's knowledge and potential for understanding.

Sir Syed carried out his intellectual endeavours in a fully-fledged east-west civilisational crossfire of nineteenth century India. As a sincere and enlightened intellectual leader and social reformer of his times he negotiated this dilemma with exceptional hermeneutical skills and methodological sophistication. His culture and upbringing pulled him to the majesty of Islamic beliefs and values. However, the long-term communitarian interests pushed him to the irresistible attractions of western science. Sir Syed realized the inevitability of a religious world-view and value-system and unavoidability of scientific research. The civilisational march requires both the blessings or religion and investigations of science. Therefore, religion and science cannot be mutually contradictory. If we think them to be so there must be something fundamentally wrong with our understanding of both religion and science. In view of the same, Sir Syed tried to work out reconciliation between Islam and science, the insuperable methodological limitations of such a project notwithstanding. It became the life-long intellectual mission of Sir Syed to rationally



demonstrate the truth both of the Quranic revelations and scientific propositions. He became convinced that scientific cosmology is perfectly compatible with scriptural discourse. There can be no real contradiction between the injunctions of the Quran and laws of nature. However, apparent contradictions, if any, must be ironed out by recourse to interpretation.

Sir Syed also qualifies the finalistic account of Islam, Quran and Sunnah. He sincerely believes in perfection of Din (religion) and finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (s). However, he does not accept the finality of Shariah as it is nowhere referred to in the Quran. The perfection of Din needs to be categorically distinguished from the alleged finality of Shariah, which in fact, is an ongoing and evolving legal mechanism of socio-political, economic and inter-personal crisis management and changes in keeping with the shifting conditions of human culture. The vertical claim of perfection of Din should not be horizontally applied to mean complete guidance in the spheres of culture, science, politics, economy etc.

For Sir Syed religion is essentially cultivation of personal relationship of man with God. He does not accept the totalist version of religion. He does not deem religion to be a complete code of conduct. Religion has been unwarrantedly stipulated to be capable of guiding in all worldly matters. Muslims have lost their imitative because of this totalist interpretation of Islam. They have wrongly come to believe that they can do nothing to resolve their social, political and economic problems without seeking permission from theologians and jurisconsults who obviously are supposed to be in possession of a complete list of prescriptions and proscriptions for all times to come.

As Sir Syed saw it, the totalist version of religion arises out of methodological confusion. When we are not clear about different segments of a cultural gestalt and jumble them up, our



confusion are worse confounded. In view of the same Sir Syed emphasizes on clearly demarcating the jurisdiction of religion from other spheres of analysis as well as operation. For example, the nuclear core of Islam needs to be separated from the historical, geographical and cultural conditions of the Islamic world. It also needs to be separated from social, political and economic imperatives of Muslim struggle for survival or expansion. It Also needs to be categorically delineated from scientific or experimental field of investigation.

Sir Syed maintains that theological systematization of any religion like other intellectual responses is not over and above the operation of cultural conditioning or situational determination. The nuclear core of Islam or the Quran in the process of expansion and propagation gets culturally or situationally concretized. Any interpretation of the Quranic discourse is the function of concrete cultural and situational dynamics of a particular society at a particular point of history. Sir Syed underscores that while the nuclear core of Islam i.e. its moral and spiritual perspective on human-life, is perennially and universally valid, no concrete interpretation of Islam can lay any claim to finality. All interpretation of Islam are situationally evoked and culturally directed.

The final authority of various schools of Islamic jurisprudence in also radically contested by Sir Syed. The juristic inductions and deductions o various doctors of Islam cannot be identified with the mandatory beliefs, values and principles enshrined in the fundamental propositions of the Quran. At best these juristic derivations can have recommendatory significance or relevance in our times and climes. In fact, they were individual opinions expressed within the context of their space and time and were never meant to be eternally applicable. In view of the fact that Shariah can never be conclusively or definitively formulated,



it is obligatory upon Muslims of every age to resolve their social, political, economic, administrative, cultural and educational problems within the framework of the moral and spiritual tenets of Islam. Every age demands a new framework of interpretation. The doors of '*ijtihad*' or reinterpretation, so to say, can never be closed. The interpretation of the Quranic discourse is to be accomplished by every age in the light of its specific historical and situational requirements.

In his quest for harmonization of reason and revelation, Sir Syed's hermeneutical and exegetical endeavours invited severest possible criticism from votaries of religious orthodoxy and theological establishment. They accused him of being a naturalist. He was not a naturalist masquerading as a Muslim. He was a philosophical theologian or an enlightened apologist for Islam. However, the underlying assumption of Sir Syed was to adjust the Quranic doctrines to the norms and criteria of western scientific rationality.

Sir Syed carried out his intellectual endeavours in a fully-fledged East-West civilisational crossfire of nineteenth century India. As a sincere and enlightened intellectual leader and social reformer of his times he negotiated this dilemma with exceptional hermeneutical skills and beliefs and values. However, the long-term communitarian interests pushed him to the irresistible attractions of Western science.

Sir Syed's was a monumental effort to resolve a universal and profound dilemma-the conflict between science and religion. The conflict is too deep, too profound and too powerful to allow any easy reconciliation between these competing paradigms of interpretation or perspectives upon the cosmos. Whether Sir Syed succeeded in this endeavour or not is beside the point. Plato, Aristotle, Shankar, Ramanuja, Ibn Arabi, Sirhindi, Descarts, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel and many more after him, and Dilthey,



Husserl, Arobindo, Iqbal, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and many more after him too did not. What is crucial is that Sir Syed amongst all modern Muslim thinkers attempted to resolve the central dilemma of 'religion or science' facing human civilization.

Sir Syed's views deserve to be thoroughly debated. His methodological framework lacks some essential elements of perennial value and significance. For example, Sir Syed almost ignores the mystical dimension of human consciousness and its moral and spiritual role in the ongoing march of human civilization. He is also blissfully unaware of an existentialist perspective on religion. It is this respect that philosophically far more brilliant and creatively profounder Sir Syed of Lahore scores over the methodologically far more advanced and analytically sharper Sir Syed of Aligarh.

Sir Syed was an outstanding Muslim modernist and reformer of nineteenth century India. He was the first modern Muslim mind. He was captivated by the amazing progress registered in multiple fields by European people. He wanted similar scientific and technological sophistication and material progress for Muslims as well. Galvanized by a vision and inspired by a dream, a determined Sir Syed, establishes M.A.O College, presently Aligarh Muslim University, for the modernization of India Muslims by recourse to English education and scientific research. Whether he succeeded in this endeavour or not is beside the point. What needs to be underscored is that armed with the courage of his convictions; he tried to weave his dream into the fabric of reality. India Muslims missed the Sir Syed of twentieth century. Let us pray and hope they do not miss the Sir Syed of twenty first century.

Sir Syed was a multidimensional personality of nineteenth century south-Asian sub-continent. He was a creative thinker, a philosophical theologian, a community leader, an educationist and



a liberal modernist. He had an unflinching faith in the eternal truth of Islam. However, the scientific progress and consequent optimism in nineteenth century Europe deeply impacted Sir Syed's thinking and approach to Islamic Weltanschauung. The stimulating role of the events of 1857 in shifting the very paradigm of his thought can never be overemphasized. Consequently, Sir Syed adopted a two-pronged strategy with a view to working out or bringing about Muslim Renaissance both at sub continental and international levels:

1. He became convinced that the only way to rehabilitation of sub-continental Muslims post-1957 Devastation, was through their cultivation of natural sciences in English language. Accordingly, he established M.A.O . College with a view to introducing Muslims to latest scientific research.
2. The impact of Western science not only stimulated Sir Syed to practically impart modern scientific education to Muslims, it also inspired him to undertake the far more arduous task of reinterpreting Islam in the light of latest historical scholarship and scientific research. It gave him a new perspective on religion. He not only reignited the need for 'ijtihad' already underlined by Shah Waliullah but tried to work out a new '*Ilm-al-Kalam*', in fact, conceptual framework with a view to restoring the relevance, significance and meaningfulness of Islam in post-Enlightenment times and climes. He reconceptualised a new role and function of Islam in our age. It is this re-conceptualisation or exegetical vision which should constitute the contemporary relevance of Sir Syed as his nineteenth century interpretation of Islam, is essentially



unacceptable to large sections of twenty-first century Muslim across the globe.⁵

Sir Syed's Response:

Sir Syed realizes that religion is inevitable and science is unavoidable. Civilisational march requires both the blessings of religion and investigations of science. Therefore, religion and science cannot be mutually contradictory. If we think them to be so there must be something fundamentally wrong with our understanding for both religion and science. In view of the same, Sir Syed tries to work out a reconciliation between religion and science.

Working out reconciliation between modern scientific cosmology and Semitic creationistic world-view is not the easiest of intellectual projects. The insuperable methodological limitations of such a project notwithstanding, it become the life-long intellectual mission of Sir Syed to rationally demonstrate the truth both of scriptural revelations and scientific propositions. He becomes convinced that scientific cosmology is perfectly compatible with scriptural discourse. There can be no real contradiction between the injunctions of the Quran and laws of nature. However, apparent contradictions if any, must be ironed out by recourse to interpretation. Accordingly, Sir Syed proceeds to work out an exegesis of the Quran which is in accord with the naturalistic cosmology. Sir Syed starts with the assumption that the divinely revealed Quranic discourse or the 'word of God' and scientific discourse objectively describing the physical world or 'work of God' cannot be incompatible. The assumption of the essential harmony between the 'word of God' and he 'work of God' leads Sir Syed to a radical reinterpretation of classical formulations of Islamic beliefs.⁶



In view of the same, Sir Syed denies all the miracles attributed to all the prophets throughout the history of Semitic religion. He denies the literal truth of the Quranic verses pertaining to ‘jin’, ‘Satan’, angels, creation of Adam, antichrist, immaculate birth of Jesus, ascension of the prophet of Islam to the divine Sanctum Sanctorum, paradise, hell, hand of God, seat of God etc. Thus Sir Syed tries to project a version of Islam which is in accord with the Western Scientific rationality or criteria of justification.

Sir Syed even offers a naturalistic explanation of the prophetic revelation, the bedrock of the Semitic *Weltanschauung*. He does not accept the classical view that scriptural revelations were delivered to the prophets through the archangel Gabriel. For Sir Syed Gabriel signifies the natural potential for prophethood or what Christian Troll calls ‘Habitus of Prophethood’.⁷ The prophet’s inner potential when fully realized delivers messages which are perfectly divinely ordained. The prophet in his revelatory experience is in perfect attunement with God who divine injunctions and promulgates divinely ordained Shariah through the depths of his revelatory experience.

Sir Syed’s vociferous advocacy of complete compatibility between religion and science is fraught with serious methodological difficulties. The pos-Enlightenment predominant European attitude towards religion is perfectly understandable. It is perfectly methodologically justifiable to go in for wholesale repudiation of a religion’s perspective on the universe. One can go in for a scientific or scientific approach and offer cogent and coherent arguments against the very possibility of religion. However, to strive for complete or perfect compatibility of religion and science is to be asking for the moon.

Now, how can ongoing, changing and revocable scientific researches be compatible with the perennial beliefs and values of Islam? How can the reconciliation worked out by classical and



medieval theologians and interpreters between Islam and Ptolemaic cosmology be justified in Post-Copernican heliocentric era? Now when we are anchored on prohelio-centric and antigeocentric cosmological predilections what should be our understanding and interpretation of the verse of the Quran with implicit and explicit cosmological, astronomical and scientific import. Should we design our interpretations in accord with the heliocentric account or not? And, what is the guarantee of the perennial truth of the heliocentric cosmology? May be a future paradigmatic breakthrough divests the heliocentric framework of its' meaning and relevance and then we shall appropriating the essentials and principles of the post paradigmatic cosmology whatsoever. And should we then again fashion our interpretation of the relevant Quranic verses in keeping with those post paradigmatic scientific or cosmological assumptions and so on ad finitum. How long can interpreters of religion go on playing to the gallery of scientific opinions masquerading as final and ultimate key to the *mysterium tremendum* of the universe? Should we not stop somewhere and cry 'enough is enough', for scientific opinions may come and scientific opinions may go but the Quranic vision and mission will go on forever.

Sir Syed responds to this dilemma with plausible hermeneutical creativity and ingenuity. He does not maintain that the verses of the Quran are multisemic and the fixing of the signification of these verses is indefinitely vortexed into the realm of undecided ability till all possible meanings evaporate through and endless play of differences and deferrals. He rather positively and optimistically points out that the divinely ordained and inspired Quranic propositional gestalt as 'word fo God' perfectly in accord with the universe as 'work of God' is supremely miraculously invested with multi-layered, multi-dimensional and multipurpose semantic plenitude, which is amenable to interpretation cross-



culturally and cross-historically and every age with its' scientific and cosmological baggage will discern and discover appropriate meanings in this gestalt in the light of its' respective postulates and presuppositions. The Quran provides us exact guidance and enlightenment at every stage of our scientific progress.

The words of the Quran have been so miraculously revealed that whatever the extent of the progress of our science and whatever our considered opinions in the light of these developed sciences, we shall find that it's words are still in accordance with reality. It shall dawn on us that our earlier meanings which have now been proved wrong entailed at fault of our knowledge and not that of the words of the Quran. Thus, if our science so develop in times to come that the then established laws will be disconfirmed, we shall again return to the Quran and again definitely find it according with reality. And we shall find that our earlier meanings emanated from our faulty knowledge and the Quran was innocent of every fault.⁸

Scientific research will unavoidably register progress or negotiate paradigm-shifts and the Quranic exegesis will inevitably respond to such progressive or shifting nature of scientific discourse. The Quranic exegesis will definitely respond to scientific developments as hundreds fo the Quranic verse seem to be referring to cosmological, astronomical, chemical, biological, geological and geographical phenomena or features. These verse may be proto-scientific or quasi-scientific or fully-fledged scientific propositions. Accordingly, the Quranic exegesis will try to interpret such verses in the light of latest scientific discourse. The Quranic verses are immutably anchored unto their textual structure while our understanding and interpretation of these verses will always operate within the given parameters of the



scholarship or research of an Age or Era. While our understanding and interpretation of the Quran will always be susceptible to mistakes and ever revocable and changeable in the light of ongoing scientific research, the Quranic propositional gestalt will perennial remain immune to change or innocent of limitations and faults. For example, in pre-Copernican times our understanding and interpretation of the Quran led us to believe that the Sun moves around the Earth and sets in the evening and rises in the morning. The Quran refers to the movement of the Sun only parenthetically i.e. as believed by the people at large and not as a statement of fact. Now, when in Post-Copernican times we know the Sun is stationary and the Earth moves round the Sun, we realize that our previous understanding and interpretation of the Quran was faulty and not the Quran itself. The perennial revocability of our understanding and the miraculous quality of the Quranic verses to perennially accord with latest scientific findings only establishes or proves the perfection of the Quran.⁹ Thus, while the textual perfection of the Quran, according to Sir Syed, is demonstrable; our faulty understanding of the Quran is also understandable. However, such proneness to faulty interpretation does not absolve us of our perennial interpretative responsibility.

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