

# ***Ghulam Jilani Barq's Views on the Relationship of Science and Rationality with Islam: An Appraisal***

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## **Abstract**

*Ghulam Jilani Barq was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century South Asian Muslim scholar. He envisaged a vast spectrum of social and moral issues faced by the Muslims of South Asia by incorporating the scientific and rationalistic perspectives of Islamic injunctions, particularly the Qur'an. His authorship targeted the educated middle class audience. Barq challenged the misconception that Islam is an outdated religion and cannot keep up the pace with modern society. In response to that misconception, he presents Islam as the only religion which inspires to explore and rule the world by acquiring knowledge. In short, he undertook the task of developing compatibility between the teachings of Islam and the modern scientific knowledge. The article aims at unearthing the scientific and rational approach with which Barq highlighted the significance of Islam as a living religion and a code of life.*

## **Introduction**

Enlightenment was called the age of reason as it eradicated superstitious outlook of the world and envisaged to rationalize everything related to the human life. Every sphere of life and every idea known to humankind was

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revolutionized in the light of rationality; religion was no exception. Modernity in the East and the West was different with reference to its historical context, the ideas it challenged and the implications it had in respective societies. The response it yielded in Europe was different than that of its colonies in general and South Asia in particular. In the West, modernity was directed against Church; it challenged the latter's authority in terms of ideas and beliefs and was successful to a great extent in undermining the authority of the Church and ultimately the religion.

In the East also, modernity posed a great challenge to the validity of religion as it attempted to challenge the religious doctrines, particularly Islam, by evaluating them on the touchstone of scientific knowledge. However, the response of Muslim intelligentsia towards the threat of modernity was not the same as in the West. Instead of distancing themselves from religion, they tried to reconcile it with science. Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) was the foremost advocate of the reconciliation between Islam and science and became one of the first Muslim thinkers of South Asia to incorporate a scientific approach towards religion. He assayed to reconcile Islam and scientific knowledge. Syed Ahmad was followed by many scholars in reconciling Islam and modernity. Ghulam Jilani Barq was one of the many Muslim scholars who adopted Syed Ahmad's approach to establish the compatibility and coherence of Islam with modern times and ideas.

The present article deals with Barq's scientific and rational interpretation of Islamic injunctions, with particular reference to the Qur'an and their summoning to explore the universe which ultimately would guide its followers to the glory. The study is divided into five sections: starting with a brief biological sketch of Ghulam Jilani Barq, the second section deals with Barq's major works on religious thought, the third section addresses Barq's logical and rational interpretation of Islam, the fourth one accounts for Barq's interpretation of the Qur'an from a naturalistic frame of

reference, and the last section analyses Barq's rationalistic and scientific arguments.

### **Ghulam Jilani Barq: A Brief Biographical Sketch**

Ghulam Jilani Barq was born in a village Bisal, in District Attock, Punjab, on October 26, 1901 in the family with an ever-lasting affiliation with the religious seminaries. His father, Qasim Shah, a *patwari* by profession, was a pious man and had five sons: Anwar-ul-Haq<sup>1</sup>, Tajammul Hussain, Ghulam Rabbani Aziz<sup>2</sup>, Ghulam Jilani and Ghulam Yahya.<sup>3</sup> Barq's family was affiliated with religious seminaries and atmosphere. Barq was enrolled in a religious seminary.<sup>4</sup> He took lessons on *mantaq* [Persian: logic] in *Darul Ulum*, Chakwal. Later on, he got enrolled first in *Madrassa Naumaniyya* and afterwards in *Madrassa Hamidiyya* to acquire the education of *Maulvi Fazi*<sup>5</sup> or *Munshi Fazil* to become a teacher in government school. Later on, Barq graduated in the degree of *Munshi Fazil* from Oriental College, Lahore.<sup>6</sup>

In 1920, Barq joined the Islamia High School, Nowshera as a teacher of Arabic.<sup>7</sup> He was posted to different districts i.e. Jalandhar, Lalamusa, Hoshiarpur and Chakwal. Meanwhile, he completed his education of *Maulvi Fazil*, *Munshi Fazil* and matriculation. In 1924, Barq acquired Oriental Training at the Central Training College, Lahore. In

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- 1 Anwar-ul-Haq was a graduate of Deoband School and had an insight into the political and cultural history of Islam. He taught at Oriental College, Punjab University and after retirement, served at Islamia College, Lahore.
  - 2 Ghulam Rabbani Aziz completed his Masters in Management and Organizational Leadership (MOL) in Arabic and Persian. He taught at various religious seminaries and, later on, in Government College, Gujrat, and Islamia College, Kasur. He had many works to his credit regarding Islamic literature along with the translations of various academic writings.
  - 3 Ghulam Yahya administered a religious seminary for many decades.
  - 4 Ghulam Jilani Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat* [Urdu: Story of my Life] (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1982), 34.
  - 5 The degree/certificate of *Munshi/Maulvi Fazil* qualified a person to hold a relatively high level of clerkship.
  - 6 Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat*, 46.
  - 7 Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat*, 47.

those years, Barq was deeply inspired by *Islamic Civilization*; a book authored by a member of *Arya Samaj*,<sup>8</sup> which converted him into an atheist.<sup>9</sup> Some time later, he was presented with Allama Inayat Ullah Mashriqi's<sup>10</sup> (d. 1963) *Tazkirah* which convinced Barq to embrace Islam with full conviction.<sup>11</sup> In 1930, he resigned from his job and attended Islamia College, Lahore, for Masters in Arabic.<sup>12</sup> After completion of his Masters, he got enrolled in Ph.D. and undertook research on the life and thought of a renowned 14<sup>th</sup> Century jurist, Imam Taqi-uddin Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328). He submitted his dissertation to the University of Punjab, Lahore, and was awarded Ph.D. in 1940.<sup>13</sup> The next fourteen years (1963-1977) constituted the most productive phase of Barq's life, as he authored most of his books during that period. He wrote his autobiography in October 1981 which was his last work. On March 12, 1985, Barq died at the age of eighty-four.

### Major Works of Barq

Barq wrote thirty-six books elaborating various aspects of Islam. He attempted to address the contemporary issues and the changing trends of thinking and lifestyle in South Asia, particularly Pakistan, inspired by the West in the

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8 *Arya Samaj* [Hindi: Noble Society] was a Hindu Reform Movement established during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) who laid great emphasis on the pristine teachings of the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. For details, see Gulshan Swarup Saxena, *Arya Samaj Movement in India, 1875-1947* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1990).

9 Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat*, 81.

10 Inayat Ullah Mashriqi better known as Allama Mashriqi (1888-1963) was one of the most prominent freedom fighters who rebelled against the British Raj in India. He belonged to a middle-class family. He was a very learned man. In 1930, he laid the foundation of the Khaksar Movement which was an anti-British movement. For a detailed study, see Muhammad Aslam Malik, *Allama Inayat Ullah Mashraqi: A Political Biography* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

11 Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat*, 83.

12 Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat*, 89.

13 Barq, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat*, 182.

framework of Islamic commandments. His major works dealing with his religious thought are:

(i) *Duo Qur'an* [Urdu: Two Qurans], published in 1943, was the primary work of Barq which ultimately opened the avenues of further understanding of Islam in prevalent circumstances. Barq was probably the first writer to give such a direction to the study of Qur'an. He laid emphasis on the study of universe for the one who wants to understand the meanings of Qur'an in a better way. He quoted many verses from the Qur'an which command the observation of nature. The central argument of the book is that besides the written Qur'an, the universe is the second Qur'an and is full of *Ayahs* [Arabic: Evidences] of the presence of some higher authority. Where the former is in written form, the other is in material form (nature) and is the manifestation of the former.<sup>14</sup> He asserts that it is nearly impossible to understand the theory of Qur'an without getting acquainted with the practical knowledge about its practical manifestation. Those who want to understand and approach God cannot achieve their objective unless or until they glance at the practical creation of God. If a person wants to learn about modern philosophers, he needs to read their works first. The works will supplement one's effort to understand that philosopher. In *Duo Qur'an*, Barq incorporated the same argument.

(ii) *'Azeem Kainat ka 'Azeem Khuda* [Urdu: The Mighty God of the Magnificent Universe], published in 1975, is primarily a compilation and translation of various articles written by the European scientists. Barq not only translated the articles but also quoted various verses of the Qur'an to inspire his readers to study science. It is an effort to look into the miraculous system of this universe. God has created this universe in the best possible manner and everything creates a mixed feeling of surprise and awe in the human mind. It carries a debate about the plant and animal kingdoms as well as the compatibility in the universe and its various

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14 Ghulam Jilani Barq, *Duo Qur'an* (Lahore: Al-Faisal Publishers, 2011), 13.

components. The basic theme or objective of the book is to know God by knowing His creation.<sup>15</sup>

(iii) *Allah ki 'Adat* [Urdu: God's Wont], published in 1962, tried to generalize the tradition or practice of God under particular situations. Barq is of the view that God created this world and everything in it for the benefit of humankind. They are facilitated with every delight of life and they can develop themselves as much as they can. However, the universe is self-regulatory and it regulates itself by some rules and principles established by God.<sup>16</sup> It responds to the actions and deeds of humankind. If the people inhabiting a piece of land are good and honest and do not commit extravagance, they will prosper and lead a healthy life; however, if they cross their limits, they will face diseases, natural calamities and famines which will ultimately scourge them.

Barq gave forty arguments to assert his idea about the compatibility of Islam with the modern scientific knowledge. Those forty points include scientific evidences, logical arguments, divine anticipations and historical facts. The objective was to contain the effects of unbridled modernism which has shaken people's belief in Islam. Due to the spread of Western thought, people in 1960s started to undermine the validity of Islam, ultimately taking it for granted. In order to contain this trend, Barq made a last attempt to prove the compatibility of the Qur'an with all the times to come.

(iv) *Islam aur 'Asr-i-Rawan* [Urdu: Islam and Contemporary Times], published in 1965, discusses the greatness of Islamic way of life, universality of Quranic teachings and their comparison with the devastating trends and culture of Europe. Barq emphasized that the development which Europe is proud of has contributed nothing for the evolution of mankind; rather it has precipitated the mankind into a pitfall of ignorance and blind

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15 Ghulam Jilani Barq, *'Azeem Kainat ka 'Azeem Khuda* (Lahore: Al-Faisal Publishers, 2011), 9.

16 Barq, *'Azeem Kainat ka 'Azeem Khuda*, 21.

pursuit of animal desires.<sup>17</sup> He explained the political, social, legal and economic system of Islam as an alternate of the European culture. He highlighted the vices prevalent in the European society like usage of alcohol and other drugs, adultery, absence of family life, inequality in social and economic terms, absence of moral values and the absence of spirituality. Europe can make an excellent advancement in technology and the weapons of mass destruction but it can never establish a society of human beings living in a peaceful atmosphere. All these factors are the precursors of the decline of the West which is not much far. He further stated that the world has tested all the systems but Islam and in present chaotic situation it is only Islam which can enlighten the blind vision of mankind. He urged upon his audience to give Islam a chance to prove its worth as the best system for the prosperity and survival of the human species.

(v) *Ramz-i-Iman* [Urdu: The Mystery of Belief], published in 1969, entails a comprehensive discussion over Islamic commandments. The author put up an effort to explain the reasons behind the Islamic commandments and their impacts on the state and society if followed and practiced in true spirit. The prayers, *zakat* (obligatory alms), fasting and pilgrimage all are the commandments of Islam; in addition, there is sacrificial ceremony once a year which is undertaken by every Muslim capable of it. In addition to these rituals, there is a moral code which is to be followed by every Muslim. The fulfilment of these precepts may lead to a better and a peaceful society which indoctrinates the principle of human amelioration in the long run.

(vi) *Meri Akhri Kitab* [Urdu: My Last Book], published in 1977, was Barq's last work that he produced, though later he wrote his autobiography at the behest of friends. *Meri Akhri Kitab* helps understand his religious views and their gradual development in a historical perspective. For him, this book

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17 Ghulam Jilani Barq, *Islam Aur 'Asr-i-Rawan* (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1965), 56.

was the last effort to prove the consonance of Islam and Qur'an, with the modern scientific knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Barq produced several works on history and philosophy besides translations of various literary and research works, with most of them addressing the contemporary social issues. He could never escape his theological outlook and interests. His works include *Farmarawayan-i-Islam* [Urdu: The Muslim Rulers]<sup>19</sup>, *Imam Ibn Taymiyyah*<sup>20</sup>, *Danish-i-Rumi wa Sa'adi*<sup>21</sup> [Urdu: Wisdom of Rumi and Sa'adi], *Hayat-i-Sikander*<sup>22</sup> [Urdu: Life of Sikander] and *Jahan-i-Nau*<sup>23</sup> [Urdu: The New World], *Hukama-i-'Alam*<sup>24</sup> [Urdu: The Philosophers of the World] and *Moarrikhin-i-Islam* [Urdu: The Historians of Islam] (1969) and his autobiography, *Meri Dastan-i-Hayat* [Urdu: My Life History].<sup>25</sup>

The above mentioned prominent works of Ghulam Jilani Barq reveal that the subjects and themes on which he wrote were not only diverse but novel in their nature as well. The titles of his books were usually provocative and grabbed the

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- 18 Ghulam Jilani Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab* (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1977), 7.
- 19 *Farmarawayan-i-Islam* shows his insight into the evolution of Muslim polity after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
- 20 *Imam Ibn Taymiyyah*, was Barq's Ph.D. dissertation and was published in Urdu language in 1941.
- 21 Published in 1963, *Danish-i-Rumi wa Sa'adi* was primarily a biographical work covering the life histories of the renowned Persian poets, Shaykh Sa'adi of Shiraz (d. 1291) and Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273) along with a comprehensive analysis of different traditions from *Bostan* of Sa'adi and *Mathnawi* of Rumi.
- 22 *Hayat-i-Sikander*, published in 1942, was authored in response to the allegations raised by the Hindu press against Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan (d. 1942), the renowned Unionist leader in the Punjab. Barq cleared Hayat's position regarding Hindu accusations and countered all the allegations.
- 23 *Jahan-i-Nau* was published in 1949 and was written with an objective to educate the middle class and broaden their vision about life. It is a collection of various historical, reformatory and scholarly essays.
- 24 *Hukama-i-'Alam* was published in 1945 and was a translation of *Al-Qifti's Tarikh al-Hukama* [History of Scholars].
- 25 It was authored in 1981 and gives an account of Barq's life history, his career as a teacher, his friends and various other people who inspired Barq at one or the other point of his life.

attention of the public. He highlighted the most pressing issues of the Muslim society. However, the most interesting feature of Barq's works is their targeted readership, as his emphasis is on the development and understanding of the middle educated class. He presented Islam as an attractive doctrine for those whose eyes were dazzled by the glitter of modernity. He strove to prove Islam as an ever up-to-date religion and absolutely compatible with changing times.

### **Logical/Rational Interpretation of Islam by Barq**

Historically, most of the traditional Muslim theologians and religious scholars have interpreted the Quranic injunctions in accordance with their times. The logic behind various commandments of the Qur'an was described differently in every age. However, the institution of *ijtihad* was undermined after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 and it remained in that state for several centuries. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Century South Asia, Shah Waliullah was the foremost exponent of revival of *ijtihad* and felt the need to revive the practice of exploring logic behind the Quranic injunctions. "Waliullah aimed at presenting the Islamic thought in as coherent and logical form as any theological-philosophical system could be".<sup>26</sup> He was of the view that every commandment of God had an ameliorating impact on the daily lives of human beings; he envisaged to find out the logic behind the do's and don'ts as prescribed by the Qur'an and called it *Ilm-i-Israr-i-Din* [Urdu: Knowledge of the Mysteries of Religion].<sup>27</sup> Waliullah not only attached great significance to the task, but also undertook the delicate task himself. In his masterpiece *Hujjat Ullah al-Balighah*, he highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of certain Quranic do's and don'ts and their effects on human life, thus opening a gate to the logical and rational interpretation of the Qur'an. After Waliullah opened the gates of logic and reasoning, he was followed by most of the religious scholars

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26 N. Hanif, *Islam and Modernity* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1997), 184.

27 Ubaid Ullah Sindhi, *Sharah Hujjat Ullah ul Baligha* [Urdu: Secrets and Realities of Shariah and Mysticism] (Karachi: Hikmat Qur'an Institute, 2010), 29.

of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century South Asia; Barq being one of them.

Barq, also, felt it necessary to highlight the logic behind the Quranic injunctions to respond to the challenges of his times; modernity being the primary challenge. It shall not be an exaggeration to say that Barq's thought regarding rationalizing the injunctions was purely inspired by Waliullah's thought. He discussed various issues and the way they have been addressed in the Holy Qur'an, explaining the reason behind the divine verdicts and tried to assert their validity in modern age. The following discussion reveals how he tried to rationalize the divine injunctions of the Holy Qur'an:

### **Critique on Unbridled Freedom of Women in the West**

Islam is a religion for all times to come and the Qur'an provides guidance on every issue related to human life. This was the underlying idea of Barq's oeuvre. As mentioned earlier, modernity was the greatest challenge to Islam in the times of Barq. He tried to address various issues related to it, in the light of Qur'an; unbridled freedom of women as propagated by the West, was one of the core issues discussed by him.

With the Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a large number of women started working outside, along with the male members of the society.<sup>28</sup> It was not long when women started resenting the discrimination in wages which was very low compared to the male sex. As a result, feminism and feminist movement came into being. The National Women Liberation Movement, Oxford (1968)<sup>29</sup> emerged as the practical manifestation of the feminist movement. Initially, it demanded equal wages, equal educational and job opportunities for women. However, its demands culminated into absolute freedom in

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28 Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Frank Cass and Company, 1977), 4.

29 Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 224.

terms of sexual, legal and financial independence and the right to self-defined sexuality.<sup>30</sup> All these demands awfully disturbed family structure and morals in the West. It led to unbridled freedom of the women which ultimately resulted in social chaos, frustration and dissatisfaction.

Barq animadverted that there was a strong reason why Allah restricted the free mingling of genders in the society so that the society may escape the reckoning effects of moral degradation. The Qur'an does not confine the women to their homes, and it commands them to practice a particular *modus operandi* when they go out of homes.<sup>31</sup> Barq considered the unbridled freedom of women in the West as a cause of social decline and dissatisfaction in the Western society. He made Europe and North America a case study and opined that women have suffered a lot because of their limitless intermingling with men.<sup>32</sup> It stunted, he opined, their social, intellectual and economic growth on the one hand and adversely affected their social standing on the other hand.

Barq added that, in Europe, most of the girls of high schools do not complete their education by indulging in premarital affairs leading them to underage pregnancies.<sup>33</sup> These underage pregnancies cease the educational process of the girls and make them absolutely dependent on the male members of the society. The women in that case are more prone to exploitation and male chauvinism. Consequently, it leads to frustration and despair in women, which constitute the greater part of society, and thus social destruction ensues.<sup>34</sup> All these arguments imply that Barq was not against the participation of the women in social, political and economic affairs of the state and society;

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30 Line Nyhagen Predelli and Beatrice Halsaa, *Majority-Minority Relations in Contemporary Women's Movements: Strategic Sisterhood* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 54.

31 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 52.

32 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 54.

33 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 67.

34 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 67.

however, he wanted them to take part by retaining their dignity and chastity.

### **Critique on Intermingling of Men and Women in the West**

Barq resented the ungoverned intermingling of men and women in the West, arguing that it has long-lasting impact on the society. He cited the case of the West as an example highlighting various vices resulting from the free intermingling of men and women in Europe and America. It is the society, Barq stated, which pays the price of such irresponsible and casual behaviour; spreading brazen shamelessness and immodesty in the society. It severely disturbs the family life<sup>35</sup>, and sows the seeds of social dissatisfaction and decline. For Barq, the practice of free sex, which is prevalent in the West, is against human nature.<sup>36</sup> No matter how liberal one becomes, it is next to impossible to tolerate the sharing of one's partner; even in animals this thing is very much taken care of, not to talk about human beings.

It not only impairs the social fabric but critically affects the state's business as well which suffers due to the psychological wavering of the workers.<sup>37</sup> On the other end, it escalates the number of divorces which creates problems for both the state and the society in the long run.<sup>38</sup> The number of orphans and single-parent children also increases, i.e. thirteen million in 1960 in the United States of America.<sup>39</sup> They are unlikely to contribute to their surroundings and become a liability for the society. Besides, the number of suicides also increases as it had happened in the West, i.e. in 1962, half a million people committed suicide in California alone, and seventy-two thousand people ended their lives.<sup>40</sup>

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35 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 202.

36 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 145.

37 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 145.

38 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 146.

39 *Times*, November 25, 1962, cited in Barq's *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 67.

40 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 68.

### **The Logic Behind the Unlawfulness, Drinking and Adultery**

Frustration and dissatisfaction in the society are the foremost causes of drinking and alcoholism.<sup>41</sup> Along with drinking, ungoverned freedom of women and their mingling with men add fuel to the fire, and a lot of young people go astray.<sup>42</sup> The most harmful effect of drinking is that it intensifies sexual urge to an extent where it drives man's actions accordingly and he attempts to exploit and harass females without thinking about the consequences.<sup>43</sup> Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) declared alcohol the "mother of all vices".<sup>44</sup> It is because it masks the brain, adversely affects one's cognitive functions, and does not let the drunkard to think clearly.

Besides intensification of sexual urge, drinking causes other issues as well. It escalates the crime rate in the society.<sup>45</sup> A person whose thinking ability is impaired can break into someone's house and steal. He may commit heinous crimes like murder or rape, etc.<sup>46</sup> Health of an alcoholic is adversely affected and he becomes a liability for the people around. Unfortunately, most of the victims of this curse are young boys and girls who ruin their lives even before getting off the ground. Adultery and alcoholism complicate the family life and ultimately lead to divorce. Divorces lead to other issues pertaining to child custody and their brought up. It also affects the efficiency of the divorcee individuals at workplace.

According to Barq, alcoholism spoils the elite class of the society which becomes stagnant and weak. It weakens the morale of the forces which are very significant for the

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41 Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (London: University of California Press, 1988), 45.

42 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 147.

43 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 143.

44 Ebrahim Kazim, *Scientific Commentary of Suratul Faateḥah* (New Delhi: Pharos Publishing, 2011), 386.

45 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 147.

46 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 147.

territorial defence of any state. Ultimately, the stagnant elite are overthrown and are replaced by an alien ruler, which exterminates all the remnants of the old system. Barq incorporated the examples from historic battles and wars that changed the course of history. He exemplified the Battle of Waterloo, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Nadir Shah's attack on Delhi and takes alcoholism in account for the defeat of the French, Americans and Mughals respectively.<sup>47</sup>

### **Rational Explanation for Punishments in Islam**

Penalization is a part of the system of check and balance in any society. It is very necessary for the prosperity of state and society that justice be imparted to the weak sections of the society. Injustice sows the seeds of hatred in the society, spreads discontent in it and ultimately leads to annihilation. Caliph Ali (R.A.) is reported to have said that an infidel state can prevail but not the unjust one. According to political and social analysts, the absence of justice causes anarchy.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, to contain injustice and anarchy, it becomes mandatory to penalize the wrongdoers. Utilitarians think that a punishment should serve three purposes: it should deter the crime, rehabilitate the offender and protect the society at large.<sup>49</sup> Enforcement of law remains incomplete unless or until the state does not devise a proper system of punishment.

Islam has a proper system of punishments and it commands its followers to penalize the culprits. There are five punishments which have been established by the Qur'an: death sentence for murder, head or limbs amputation for revolt, eighty lashes for false allegation of adultery on any woman, hand amputation for theft, and

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47 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 139.

48 Norman E. Bowie and Robert L. Simon, *The Individual and the Political Order: An Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1998), 195.

49 Wojciech Sadurski, *Giving Desert Its Due: Social Justice and Legal Theory* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 251.

hundred lashes for adultery.<sup>50</sup> Flogging and death sentence are considered brutal in the West. However, if analyzed properly, the punishments in Islam have been established to deter the anarchy and to contain social crimes. Barq argued that though Islamic punishments are severe, the crimes they are supposed to penalize are also heinous.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the flogging is meant to make the offender an example for the people more than to cripple the man receiving it. By doing so, crimes such as adultery and murders can be deterred. The government should make a committee to decide all the matters pertaining to the punishments.<sup>52</sup> In the West, the violent criminals are kept in the lock up so that the crime may be deterred;<sup>53</sup> even then, there is a sharp increase in the crime rate.

Regarding hand amputation, Barq argued that it was not the only punishment for theft. Instead, there are levels of theft depending on the things which are stolen and the social condition of the thief. If a child steals a sweet-meat, his hands would not be amputated; rather he would be left after minor punishment.<sup>54</sup> Hand amputation is applied only in extreme cases.

### **Revisionist Perspective on Polygamy in Islam**

Along with various other allegations on Islam, one is polygamy which is considered an instrument of male domination. Islam's permission to Muslim men to have several wives at a time while those wives cannot have more than one husband is often referred as inequality. It is further argued that where there is an inequality, there is power and dominance.<sup>55</sup> That is the reason why Islam is considered to serve the interests of men only and therefore is portrayed as

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50 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 182.

51 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*.

52 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*.

53 Deborah Drake, *Prisons, Punishment and the Pursuit of Security* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 175

54 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 183.

55 Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, *Polygamy: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2008), 131.

an anti-feminist religion; without understanding the context of the issue and thorough study of the Qur'an. Resultantly, Islam has been accused of being a male chauvinistic religion.

Barq was of the view that polygamy was permitted by Islam only in special cases. For example, if the number of male members of the society falls abruptly owing to some epidemic or war casualties, polygamy is allowed.<sup>56</sup> It is to lend support to the widows and orphans of the society which otherwise would perish in the absence of any earning hand. Moreover, partial and out-of-context study of the Quranic commandments also caused confusion. Barq tried to prove that the Qur'an allows only one marriage at a time.<sup>57</sup> The Qur'an insists on equitable treatment with all the wives, and if a person is not able enough to treat his wives justly and equally, he is not allowed to have more than one wife.<sup>58</sup>

### **Islamic Economic System: The Last Resort**

In times of Barq, there were two dominant economic systems prevalent in the world, i.e. Capitalism and Communism. These two are not only ideologies but complete worldviews. Historically, they divided the world into two blocs. Capitalist bloc was led by the United States and the Communist bloc was led by Soviet Russia (former USSR).<sup>59</sup> Both claim to facilitate the optimum development of the society and the state trying to win over the third world countries by giving them incentives and to outrun the other bloc. Meanwhile, the Islamic economic system, which had been stagnant for many centuries, became a story of the past. Under these circumstances, Barq felt it necessary to highlight the inherent flaws present in both the dominant economic systems of the world. He argued that neither of the two, i.e. Capitalism and Communism, served the interests of

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56 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 198.

57 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 199.

58 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 201.

59 Mack H. Jones, *Knowledge, Power, and Black Politics: Collected Essays* (New York: State University of New York, 2014), 252.

humankind in an efficient manner; rather these systems had become nuisance for human beings.<sup>60</sup> To Barq, economy has two extremes: inflation or deflation, and both are baleful.<sup>61</sup>

Barq disapproved the capitalism for the same reason for which it had been despised by the communists. He opined that labour increases the value of raw material by working on it but the profit goes into the pocket of the capitalist/investor or the businessman. This mode of development serves only the upper classes of the society, and leaves the masses deprived and unsatisfied. It induces hatred amongst the poor against the rich, and the latter becomes victim of robbery, murder and ransom at the hands of the former.<sup>62</sup> Eventually, the gap between the two classes increases to such an extent that they turn into each other's enemy, which is dangerous for both—the state and the society.

Communism, Barq argued, also has many deficiencies. Foremost among them is its incompatibility with human nature.<sup>63</sup> Individual/personal property was snatched from the Russians in Soviet Russia which spread hopelessness in the farmers and the people having other vocations. As there was no incentive for the masses to work hard, agricultural and industrial production of USSR was severely affected. As soon as the Soviet regime endowed the farmers with two percent share in the assets of the land, the production enhanced, and Russia became self-sufficient in the agricultural production. Besides that, the masses were socially and intellectually crippled as they had no freedom under Communism to make important decisions affecting their lives and professions.<sup>64</sup>

Barq pointed out that revival of Islamic economy is the only solution that can address the problems of modern

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60 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 80.

61 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 205.

62 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 80.

63 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 80.

64 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 81-82.

economy. He stated that Islam's economic system is based on equity, kindness, brotherhood and fear of God.<sup>65</sup> He established that Islam discourages poverty and wealth,<sup>66</sup> as both are extremes and make the people go astray. Barq stated that Islam gives right to personal property, but it discourages extravagance, and commands its followers to share the burden of the poor sections of the society.<sup>67</sup>

Barq criticized the institution of interest in modern banking system, and asserts that it is in conflict with Islam. It is because it is exacted from a needy person in lieu of helping him. It is against the very spirit of Islam, which revolves around compassion, empathy and brotherhood.<sup>68</sup> In addition, it spreads other social vices like extravagance, lack of resolve, and accumulation of wealth in a few hands.<sup>69</sup> Barq bluntly stated that interest is a tool in the hands of the European nations to cripple the economy of weaker states, and to subjugate them forever.<sup>70</sup> He proposed that banks can be Islamized by taking three basic steps, which are:<sup>71</sup>

- Money of people entrusted to the banks should be invested in business.
- 2.5 percent should be deduced annually from the bank accounts of people, and the profits from business should be given to all the account-holders.
- Interest should be prohibited on account-holders' balance and loans.

Barq's knowledge of either the modern or Islamic economy is neither deep nor does he propose a sound model to establish an economy on Islamic lines. Nonetheless, he highlights the ideals on which Islamic

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65 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 84.

66 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 206.

67 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 85.

68 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 212.

69 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 216.

70 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 213.

71 Barq, *Islam aur Asr-i-Rawan*, 217.

economy should be based upon i.e. compassion and brotherhood.

### **Scientific Knowledge and the Qur'an**

Syed Ahmad Khan was the most dominant 19<sup>th</sup> Century South Asian Muslim who tried to reconcile Islam with the modernity in Indian subcontinent. In his times, science emerged as a worldview, and it was a standard or criterion to verify the validity and credibility of any field of knowledge, religion being no exception. Science was the spirit of the age. Any idea or ideology which did not conform to the scientific knowledge was discarded. In Europe, Christianity suffered a lot in the wake of Scientific Revolution, and Syed Ahmad feared that the same was about to happen with Islam in India. He foresaw the storm of science coming and the destruction of ideas it would bring. Therefore, he tried to reconcile the Qur'an with science and by doing so he assayed to establish the validity of the Qur'an itself on one hand and on the other hand inspiring the Muslims to be acquainted with the scientific knowledge. His attempt to harmonize the Qur'an and science created a huge controversy, and he was eventually denounced as an infidel or at least something near to infidelity. After Syed Ahmad, there were other scholars who tried to bring the Qur'an in harmony with science and nature, Barq was one of them.

Barq was one of those very few scholars who attached great significance to the acquisition of scientific knowledge. He shared the idea of Syed Ahmed that the Qur'an is the word of God and nature is also the work of God,<sup>72</sup> and there can be no difference between the two. However, there is a basic difference between the approaches of Syed and Barq: the former attempted to make the Qur'an (along with the miracles in it) compatible with science, whereas the latter appears to highlight the significance of scientific knowledge in the light of the Qur'an. Barq's primary objective was to accentuate the need of scientific development in Muslim countries. He emphasized the role of conquering the nature

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72 Hussain, *Syed Ahmed Khan: The Pioneer of Muslim Resurgence*, 180.

assigned to man by God. For that purpose, it becomes mandatory for every Muslim to acquire knowledge about nature.

His work *Do Qur'an* deals with the questions why and how the Qur'an encourages study of this universe. As the name of the book implies, there are two Qurans according to Barq: one is in the form of written book or the theory and the other one is nature or the practical manifestation of the first. He supported his argument by stating the fact that the number of verses in the Qur'an regarding universe and its knowledge is much higher than the number of verses related to theological matters. There are seven hundred and fifty-six verses which invite the Muslims to ponder over the creation of universe and its phenomena; whereas there are only hundred and fifty verses regarding religious matters.<sup>73</sup> The idea was first propounded in *al-Jawāhir fi Tahsīr al-Qur'ān al-Kārim* by Tantāwī Jawahīrī [Arabic: Pearls in the exegesis of Quraan] (d. 1940).<sup>74</sup> He opined that the thinking over nature is as important as reading the Holy Qur'an.<sup>75</sup>

To Barq, the evolution of humankind is possible only through the acquisition of knowledge of this universe and without that knowledge, progress is not possible. Barq resents that the West had made great progress owing to their knowledge about this universe,<sup>76</sup> while the Muslims were lagging far behind. He urges the Muslims to study science. He not only developed congruence between the Qur'an and science but asserted that the former commands its followers to think over the universe and nature. To substantiate his argument, he penned down a large number of scientific topics discussed by the Qur'an; some are given below:

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73 Barq, *Do Qur'an*, 13-15.

74 Zafar Ishaq Ansari, "Scientific Exegesis of the Qur'an", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* III, no. 1, (2001): 93.

75 Ansari, "Scientific Exegesis of the Qur'an", 14.

76 Ansari, "Scientific Exegesis of the Qur'an", 15.

### **The Qur'an on the Formation of Solar System**

The formation and nature of this solar system has been a mystery for the human beings since the time immemorial. Greeks and Romans devised their theories to understand and explain the formation of this universe. Since Renaissance, the West has been leading the world in the fields of science and knowledge. It questioned many established beliefs of the human beings regarding this universe, particularly about the nature and characteristics of earth.<sup>77</sup> Barq cited a number of the Quranic verses to assert the similarity between the "Word of God" and the "Work of God." He strived to validate the authenticity and significance of the Qur'an in modern times when most of the religious scriptures were declared unscientific and archaic. By interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, he concludes that the universe was created from a gaseous cloud.<sup>78</sup> The Qur'an states, "Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart..." (The Prophets: 30). In another verse it states, "Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke..." (Verses Made Distinct: 11). By quoting these verses from the Qur'an, Barq substantiated his argument that Islam does not overlook the significance of pondering over the natural phenomena rather it encourages the study and observation of nature.

### **The Qur'an on the Commencement of Life on Earth**

Advocates of "Theory of Evolution" believe that all living things commenced from the simplest life form, i.e. amoeba.<sup>79</sup>

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77 Various theories were propounded by different scientists include Nebular hypothesis, Planetesimal hypothesis, Gaseous Tidal hypothesis, Binary Star hypothesis, Gas Dust Cloud hypothesis. Nebular theory of formation of the solar system states that the sun and the planets originated from the Nebula, which was a gaseous cloud. A part of that cloud separated from it and cooled down to form earth and the planets. Planetesimal theory holds that all the planets are the parts of the sun which cooled down after getting separated from the sun.

78 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 40.

79 Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Great Chain of Life* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 4.

The singular cell organism multiplied thousands of times to evolve into multi-cellular organisms. Barq advocated Darwinism holding that all life started from the sea, and evolved into various forms.<sup>80</sup> He substantiated his argument by quoting the verse “We made every living thing from water” (The Prophets: 30), and highlighted the fact that the amoeba is born in the muddy water. He referred to another verse which states, “People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a [*nafs*] single soul, and from it created its mate...” (Women: 1) The Qur’an uses the word *nafs* which Barq interpreted as *Wahid-ul Khuliya Janwar* [Arabic: single cellular animal] instead of translating it as ‘single soul’ to substantiate his argument that single cellular amoeba is the source of all life.<sup>81</sup>

Most of the Muslim scholars and masses dissent the theory of evolution<sup>82</sup>; however, Barq accepts its validity to a great extent. Starting from amoeba, he devised seven stages of evolution which concluded at the emergence of Adam. Growth of fetus in the womb of a mother, Barq opined, goes through exactly the same stages from which amoeba went at the first place to evolve into human form.<sup>83</sup> The fetus is a unicellular organism like amoeba in the first phase, like a leech in the second, like a frog in the third phase and like a beaked bird, a quadruped, an ape and finally human in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh phases respectively.<sup>84</sup>

### Contraction of Universe

‘Contraction of the Universe’ was one of the theories propounded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century which tried to explain

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80 Barq, *Do Qur’an*, 181

81 Barq, *Do Qur’an*.

82 Joseph Seckbach and Richard Gordon, eds. *Divine Action and Natural Selection: Science, Faith and Evolution* (London: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2009), 521.

83 Barq, *Do Qur’an*, 183.

84 Barq, *Do Qur’an*.

the changes in Earth's geology.<sup>85</sup> "The theory was based on the concept of a hot, nascent and incandescent earth shrinking as it cooled over time."<sup>86</sup> The idea opened new avenues for the geologists to think over Earth's geology and the future of the universe. Although it was criticized and ultimately refuted in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Barq believed it to be true as it appeared congruent with the Qur'an. Barq cited the verse "Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?" (Thunder: 41) to corroborate the authenticity of the scientific facts presented by the Qur'an.<sup>87</sup> It is worth mentioning that most of the scholars or exegetes of the Qur'an do not interpret the above quoted verse in the same manner. For example, Mohammad Asad in *The Message of the Qur'an* interpreted it for the loss of the worldly power of the pagans of Makkah.<sup>88</sup>

#### **Pollinating/Fertilizing Airs**

Reproduction is the source of sustenance of life. Plants and animals reproduce to ensure the survival of their species, though in a different way. Animals reproduce by mating, while plants reproduce by pollen grains which are transported either through insects or air. Barq proved the very fact from the Qur'an by quoting the verse "We send the winds to fertilize" (al-Hijr: 22). He stated that air plays exactly the same role which the insects or the rodents play in fertilization in plants i.e. it takes pollen grains from the male parts to the female parts of the flowers, or in some cases from the male to female plants of the same species.<sup>89</sup>

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85 Mark Amsler, ed. *Creativity and the Imagination: Case Studies from the Classical Age to the Twentieth Century* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1987), 121.

86 Robert E. Krebs, *The Basics of Earth Science* (West Port: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 36-37.

87 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 43.

88 Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar-ul Andalus, 1980), 506.

89 Barq, *Meri Akhri Kitab*, 46-47.

### **Survival of the Fittest and Evolution in the Light of the Qur'an**

Although Darwinism failed to retain its validity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,<sup>90</sup> the everlasting impact it left on the human mind and understanding is undeniable. It provided alternate discourse to study human past, present and future. Barq, being a staunch advocate of Darwinism, believed that being stronger is the only way to survive. Knowledge is power, and power is survival; it is the bottom line of most of his scholarship. For him, modern life demands a lot of hard work and achievement.<sup>91</sup> That is why he urged for the intellectual development of the Muslims and its manifestation in all walks of life. He appeared disgusted with the intellectual weakness of the Muslims in his writings.<sup>92</sup> He criticized the *madrassa* culture and the inappropriate sexual activities brooding in it,<sup>93</sup> and also for the reason that traditional Muslim education does not equip its graduates with knowledge which he regarded necessary for the global battle of survival.<sup>94</sup> For Barq, success was a perpendicular rock to climb, for which one has to strain every nerve.<sup>95</sup>

### **Barq's Rational and 'Naturalist' Interpretation of the Qur'an: An Analysis**

The ideas and thought of Barq were not novel or radical. He presented the same ideas and ideals which his predecessors had presented long ago. However, his addressees and audience was general public and educated

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90 Peter J. Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900* (London: John Hopkins Press, 1992), 42.

91 Markus Daechsel, *The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu Middle Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.

92 Markus Daechsel, "The Civilizational Obsessions of Ghulam Jilani Barq" in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, eds. Harald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004), 281.

93 Daechsel, *The Politics of Self-Expression*, 146.

94 Daechsel, "The Civilizational Obsessions of Ghulam Jilani Barq," 281.

95 Daechsel, "The Civilizational Obsessions of Ghulam Jilani Barq," 280.

middle class, rather than theologians and intellectuals. The logic in the Qur'an which he presented in his writings is simple and easy to understand. Barq discussed the do's and don'ts given by Islam in the light of scientific developments of his age. He believed that Islam was the religion of reason.<sup>96</sup> He assayed to present logic behind the injunctions of *Shariah* in a manner which is comprehensible to the average mind.

The rationale Barq gave for the abstinence from adultery, alcoholism, and gambling is not religious but secular and moral. By exemplifying the Western society and its moral decay due to the above-mentioned vices, he validates the veracity of the Qur'an, and warned the followers of Islam of the consequences if those teachings are ignored. He took an account of the European and American societies, so that the Muslim masses may get to know about the consequences of deviation from the path prescribed by Islam. He opined that the moral decline manifests itself in societal degeneration. Moreover, everything forbidden by God is deleterious to human life and prosperity. He attempted to prove Islam as a religion congruent with nature. While going through Barq's works, the reader may reach the conclusion that by following Islam, one may achieve harmony with the nature and be successful in life.

"There is no difference between God's law and the natural law" is the bottom-line of Barq's ideas pertaining to universe and nature. He employed a naturalist frame of reference in his arguments. Like Syed Ahmad Khan, he tried to prove the oneness of science and the Qur'an. Nonetheless, both did it with reference to the scientific developments of their respective time. Barq, like Syed Ahmad Khan, wanted the Muslims to get acquainted with the scientific knowledge by highlighting the fact that there were more verses pertaining to scientific knowledge than the issues of *shariah* in the Holy Qur'an. However, Barq's

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96 Daechsel, "The Civilizational Obsessions of Ghulam Jilani Barq," 275.

attempt was not as comprehensive as that of Syed Ahmad Khan's. In addition, Syed Ahmad had to prove the veracity of the Qur'an to the non-Muslim/Christian British rulers which was not the same in case of Barq. The latter was horrified with the burgeoning effects of modernity which would have swept even the traces of religion from South Asia, and had to prove the validity of divine religion by showing its compatibility with science. Barq, unlike Syed Ahmed, did not try to interpret the Qur'an (including the miracles mentioned in it) to answer the criticism of the West, rather he highlighted the parts dealing with nature and tried to inspire the Muslims to study science to excel in this world and hereafter.

### **Conclusion**

Barq lived at the time when the Muslims were subjected to the British colonialism. Like every revolutionary, he wanted the Muslims to get rid of the clutches of the European slavery, and restore their lost dignity. That was possible only if the Muslims focused on two fronts: moral and educational. He highlighted the teachings of the Qur'an to suffice his argument, and presented them in a very simple and intelligible manner. Barq, by incorporating the various verses of the glorious Qur'an regarding universe and nature, asserted that not only does Islam resonate with science, but it also calls for its study. He anticipated that his expected readers would be inspired from his works and might develop in the field of scientific knowledge for the Qur'an commands the same. For not only the Islam's but its followers' survival is associated with the development and advancement in modern knowledge and that is possible only if the latter get in a position to compete the West in the fields of science and technology. That is the reason, he picked out those verses of the Qur'an which invite the readers to observe and discover the mysteries of nature and the universe. Barq also strove to curtail the influence of the straying philosophy of modernity by giving a rational interpretation of the Islamic injunctions in an easy to understand manner.