

# The Concept of Revelation and the Ideology of Islamic Thought Renewal: An Analysis of the I'jāz 'ilmī Narrative

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## ABSTRACT

Often, efforts to modernize Islamic thought stumble into the trap of reductionism, especially within the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative that attempts to reconcile revelation with contemporary scientific discoveries. This action, though pure in its intention, often unconsciously undermines the authority of revelation itself, transforming it into merely a catalog of verifiable scientific predictions. Existing research tends to praise or merely describe this phenomenon, yet rarely critically explores its deeper epistemological and theological implications for the ideology of Islamic thought renewal. This study employs a conceptual analysis approach and a critical literature review of classical and modern texts. Findings indicate that the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative ironically dismantles the integrity of revelation rather than strengthening it, if the exegetical methodologies applied are selective and hasty. This can subtly give rise to a form of distrust toward the truth of revelation without external validation. Therefore, this study calls for a reconstruction of the epistemological framework of contemporary Islamic thought, so that it can safeguard the authenticity of revelation and scientific progress without succumbing to the confusion of reductionist thinking.

**Keywords:** I'jāz 'ilmī, Revelation, Thought Renewal, Islamic Epistemology, Reductionism

## INTRODUCTION

Ironically, in an era that glorifies rationality and scientific evidence, we observe growing apprehension within the Islamic world — a profound urge to 'prove' revelation. The phenomenon of *i'jāz 'ilmī*, or the scientific inimitability of the Qur'an, is a tangible manifestation of this apprehension; it is a persistent effort to align sacred verses with the latest scientific theories. However, we must ask: is this truly a renewal, or merely a risk intellectual compromise? Many perceive it as a bridge between religion and science, a progressive step that strengthens the faith of the community in the face of modern advancements. Yet, the reality is far more complex, even unsettling. What happens when scientific theories change? Some *i'jāz 'ilmī* interpretations are built upon shifting sands, relying on discoveries considered facts today, but which tomorrow might be obsolete hypotheses. The scope of discussion is often narrow, focusing only on the congruence or incongruence of specific verses with particular theories, rather than the broader implications for the concept of revelation itself—a significant weakness in existing academic discourse. This study attempts to fill that void, delving into how this *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative, which purportedly modernizes thought, might actually shackle revelation to a transient scientific framework, thereby damaging the intellectual integrity of the rich Islamic tradition. This is not merely an issue of exegesis, but a fundamental question concerning authority, truth, and the future of Islamic thought itself.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on the relationship between revelation and science in the context of modern Islamic thought has become an intense intellectual battleground, particularly surrounding the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative. Some scholars, especially those influenced by the work of Maurice Bucaille (1976), view *i'jāz 'ilmī* as conclusive proof of the

Qur'an's divinity. They argue that modern scientific discoveries contained within the sacred text, thousands of years before these discoveries were made, are undeniable signs of its miraculous nature. This approach emphasizes the supremacy of the Qur'an as an absolute source of knowledge that transcends the limitations of human science. They see it as an effective *da'wah* strategy to attract modern intellectuals and counter atheism.

However, this view, though popular among the general public, is often contested by other scholars. For instance, Abdolkarim Soroush (2000), in his critique of religious fundamentalism, implicitly questions the effort to 'prove' religion through mutable science, highlighting the danger when religious truth is made dependent on an ever-shifting epistemological framework. He argues that revelation should stand on its own, as an experience and truth that transcends empirical verification. Soroush's opinion reflects a deeper concern about theological reductionism. Furthermore, some critics, such as Adnan Ibrahim (2014) and Mohammad Arkoun (1994), view *i'jāz 'ilmī* as a form of weak apologetics. Arkoun, for example, condemns the exegetical approach that tends to be literalistic and ahistorical, often used to support *i'jāz 'ilmī* claims. For him, this endeavor disregards the richness of Qur'anic hermeneutics and shackles it to narrow interpretations, far from its original purpose. He seems to argue that the Qur'an needs to be approached with a more critical and contextual framework, transcending simplistic attempts to find scientific miracles. This is not merely a question of methodology, but also one of respect for the integrity of the sacred text.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1995) offers an Islamic epistemological framework that opposes any form of reductionism. His concept of the 'Islamization of knowledge' asserts that scientific knowledge must be absorbed and filtered through the Islamic worldview, not the other way around. Al-Attas seems to suggest, if translated into this context, that revelation does not need to be 'proven' by science; rather, science itself needs to be 'Islamized' to align with the truth of revelation. This is a subtle critique of any effort that places science as the ultimate authority in determining the meaning or validity of revelation.

Moreover, scholars like M. Iqbal (1930) and Fazlur Rahman (1982) have long argued for the necessity of *ijtihad* and a dynamic renewal of Islamic thought, one not trapped in static or apologetic interpretations. Rahman, in particular, emphasizes a holistic hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an, which considers the historical context and the moral purpose of revelation. He would certainly oppose any attempt to diminish the meaning of the Qur'an to mere changeable scientific facts, as this would betray the essence of the greater divine message.

In short, while some parties strenuously defend *i'jāz 'ilmī* as a sign of absolute truth, there are critical voices more concerned about its long-term implications. They see the risk where revelation, which ought to be an eternal guide for life, is reduced to a tool for validating ever-changing science, thereby undermining the integrity and majesty of the sacred text itself. Unfortunately, these criticisms are often drowned out by the popularity of the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative, which is more readily accepted by the general public, leading to a critical void that studies like this need to fill.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is entirely conceptual research, relying exclusively on document analysis and critical literature review. We did not conduct any surveys, interviews, or empirical data collection; instead, we focused on constructing a comprehensive framework of thought through intensive examination of existing texts. This methodology is a deliberate choice and, arguably, the only appropriate way to approach the epistemological questions of revelation and the ideological nature of the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative. To understand the complexity of the interaction between sacred texts, science, and thought renewal, we cannot rely on numbers or external observations. We need to delve deep into the intellectual debates that have transpired over centuries, analyze arguments, and uncover hidden assumptions.

The research process began with the selection of relevant primary texts, encompassing classical Qur'anic exegetical works discussing cosmological and scientific verses, as well as modern works that explicitly or implicitly support or oppose the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative. These sources were not randomly sought but chosen based on their influence in shaping contemporary discourse and the depth of their analysis on this topic. We meticulously filtered academic journal articles, books, and intellectual writings published by leading scholars in the fields of Islamic studies, philosophy of science, and theology. Each text was read not merely to

understand its content, but also to identify underlying premises, methodologies, and unstated implications. We tended to look for ‘flaws’ in arguments, or ‘gaps’ in dominant narratives, as critique is central to conceptual reconstruction. This approach was iterative. Initial texts provided a framework, which was then tested against other texts, leading to an initial synthesis that was subsequently revised as new perspectives emerged. We deliberately disregarded outdated theories or those proven irrelevant to focus on debates that are still active and have significant impact on Islamic thought today. The emphasis was on analyzing how the concept of revelation is conceptualized within the *i’jāz ‘ilmī* context, how it differs from traditional understandings, and what impact these changes have on the ideology of Islamic thought renewal.

The main objective of this methodology is to construct a new, more robust and coherent conceptual framework capable of critically evaluating the *i’jāz ‘ilmī* narrative. It is an intellectual defense of the integrity of revelation, opposing any attempt to reduce it to a tool for ever-changing scientific validation. The researcher, in this case, acts as a critical analyst, not merely a data collector, who deconstructs complex arguments and reassembles them into a clear and authoritative narrative.

## FINDINGS

Often, the *i’jāz ‘ilmī* narrative, purportedly designed to strengthen faith, actually implies a reductionism towards the concept of revelation. Qur’anic verses—rich with layers of meaning, poetic rhetoric, and profound moral objectives—are fragmented and then forced to fit into a narrow framework of scientific facts. This is an act that shackles the freedom of the sacred text. Revelation, which ought to be a comprehensive source of guidance for human life, is reduced to merely an ancient science textbook awaiting validation by modern laboratories. The most significant implication of this narrative is a subtle yet threatening shift in epistemological authority. Traditionally, the authority of truth in Islam originates from revelation itself, recognized through scholarly consensus (*ijmā’*) and established exegesis (*tafsīr*). However, with *i’jāz ‘ilmī*, this authority is indirectly transferred to empirical science. The truth of a Qur’anic verse seemingly becomes ‘valid’ or ‘complete’ only when confirmed by scientific discoveries. This creates an inverted hierarchy, where revelation—which should be the primary source—becomes subject to secondary validation by an ever-changing field of knowledge. This process inevitably leads to serious confusion in exegetical methodology. The *i’jāz ‘ilmī* approach should not employ a ‘cherry-picking’ method of interpretation—that is, taking specific verses in isolation, disregarding their historical, linguistic, and thematic context within the Qur’an as a whole. These verses are then arbitrarily reinterpreted to ‘match’ popular scientific theories of the time. When scientific theories change, Qur’anic interpretations are also forced to change, resulting in instability and subjectivity in the understanding of the sacred text. This is not exegesis, but merely dishonest linguistic acrobatics. More profoundly, the *i’jāz ‘ilmī* narrative implicitly projects a form of distrust towards revelation itself. If revelation is truly the perfect word of God, why does it require scientific ‘proof’ to convince humanity of its truth? This insistence on seeking scientific proof seems to imply that the truth of revelation is not strong enough to stand on its own, unless it is supported by a field of knowledge recognized by the West. This is a dangerous form of inferiority complex, which damages the dignity of revelation and diminishes the confidence of the community. Finally, this narrative is not value-free; rather, it is a strong ideological construct. It aims to gain legitimacy in a post-Enlightenment world dominated by science, attempting to prove that Islam is neither outdated nor irrational. While its intentions may be good, it produces an ideology that distorts the understanding of revelation, forcing Islam to adapt to an alien framework, rather than asserting the originality and supremacy of its own worldview. This might be a form of ‘renewal’ that cripples, rather than liberates.

## DISCUSSION

So, what exactly are the implications of this *i’jāz ‘ilmī* for the world of Islamic thought as we know it? This narrative, ironically, has transformed the concept of revelation from a source of intact transcendent authority into a ‘science textbook’ that needs to be validated by empirical discoveries. This leaves deep scars on the epistemological structure of Islam. When the Qur’an, which is eternal and absolute, is read through the lens of transient and ever-changing science, we unconsciously subject divine truth to a framework of relative truth. It is a dangerous attempt, as if we are trying to fit a mountain into a birdcage—something that cannot happen without destroying both. This raises serious questions about the long-term sustainability and integrity of Islamic thought. It is entirely possible that, when current scientific theories are replaced by new paradigms

then existing *i'jāz 'ilmī* interpretations will collapse, leaving an intellectual void and, worse, a crisis of faith for those who base the truth of revelation on scientific discoveries. This indicates that the *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative does not provide a solid foundation for renewal; instead, it may form a fragile bridge leading to uncertainty. This is not the way to build a civilization of knowledge. Concerns also arise regarding how this narrative affects Islamic education and the intellectual formation of the younger generation. If they are taught that the truth of the Qur'an depends on its congruence with science, then we are creating minds that are less critical and dependent on external validation. They might fail to grasp the depth of hermeneutics, the rich exegetical tradition, and the broader moral-ethical purpose of revelation. Instead, they will seek 'quick answers' in verses quoted out of context, merely to prove the 'superiority' of Islam—an apologetic stance that can lead to intellectual decline. Shouldn't we be teaching them to think critically, not just to hunt for validation? Unfortunately, this understanding is far from ideal. Instead of fostering deep thought, this narrative encourages simplification and reductionism. This also highlights the persistent conflict between modern rationalistic thought and the preservation of Islamic scholarly tradition. There is a strong urge to demonstrate Islam's relevance in the modern world, but the methods used often sacrifice intellectual integrity. It is as if one is trying to win a debate by sacrificing fundamental principles. Modern hermeneutical theories, emphasized by scholars like Fazlur Rahman (1982), urge us to understand revelation holistically, taking into account the overall context, primary objectives, and the eternity of its message. The *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative seems to turn its back on this principle, instead fragmenting revelation into pieces that can be easily 'proven' scientifically. This is not renewal, but a betrayal of the intellectual richness of Islam itself. Therefore, this discussion reinforces that the ideology of Islamic thought renewal should not be trapped in the *i'jāz 'ilmī* that fails to apply proper exegetical methodologies. Instead, it must seek ways to integrate revelation and knowledge within a broader and more coherent framework, where each field stands on its own epistemological authority, and mutually enriches without needing to demean one another.

## CONCLUSION

The *i'jāz 'ilmī* narrative, ostensibly viewed as a sincere effort to strengthen the faith of the community and prove the supremacy of the Qur'an in the face of modern scientific advancements, has in fact created an epistemological dilemma. This study finds that it may weaken the authority and integrity of revelation, if it forces revelation to submit to ever-changing scientific verification. It is a reductionism that may diminish the rich meaning of the Qur'an to mere scientific predictions that can be confirmed or denied. This shift of authority from revelation to science, coupled with selective and often hasty exegetical methodologies, leads to intellectual instability and reflects a distrust towards the truth of revelation itself. It creates a framework where belief is contingent upon scientific discoveries that are never permanent, leading to a fragility of faith when science itself evolves or changes direction. This situation demands a bolder critique and the reconstruction of a more sustainable framework of thought. Thus, what is of utmost importance in this regard is that the fundamental principles of *tafsir* must be properly understood and applied so that the verses of the Qur'an can be accurately comprehended.

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