The Marriage between Science and Religion

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Zulfiquar Zahoor's exhibition on graphically designed calligraphy on Quranic cosmology opened at Drik on August 20 and ended on August 26. Zahoor's images presented neat, minimal, decorative borders and centres as calligraphy to larger, innovative, geometric designs. The shapes, designs and motives co-related to vital verses from the Quran. With depth and imagination, Zahoor has brought in a cosmic dimension to the spiritual aspect of the Quranic verses.

Reputedly an architect and landscape designer, Zahoor has done his Masters in Theology from the Indian seat of Muslim culture at Aligarh, Zahoor is also known to be a successful astrologer and also serves as the "khateeb" at one of the Dhanmondi mosques. Thus one appreciates his preoccupation with astronomical delineations of interpretations from the Holy Quran. His flamboyant creations include English letterings too that reaches out to a global audience. Zahoor has made the Quranic verses appear as part and parcel of modern life. The Islamic instructions and forecasts, transferred on to the fine art work, brought to mind the illustrated diaries and books -- of geniuses of the past --- like Archimedes, Galileo or even Leonardo da Vinci.



Dressed in flowing white, and sporting a flowing beard and moustache, Zahoor, soft-spoken but with a confident note in his lilting voice, spoke of his passion for astronomy and its presence in the holy Quran.

He elaborated that, as Dante put it, astronomy is the "meeting place of science and religion". "Al-Quran has given the accurate information of the infinite space 1,400 years back" said Zahoor. "Recently NASA has seen the infinite epical Hubble Telescope. This calligraphy exhibit should open new doors to men of science and religious minded persons."

"Astronomy was central to Islamic science just as it has been in ancient Greece. The majesty of the heavens and their eternal, unchanging nature were seen as powerful evidence that the universe was ruled by a divine intelligence. The movements of the heavenly bodies should be analysed mathematically. They formed the subject matter of the science of astrology. Technically, Islamic astronomy was based on that of Ptolemy. The aim of analysing celestial movements into regular geometrical patterns became the fundamental aim of all astronomers."

Zahoor added that sometimes astronomers disagreed with the details of Ptolemy's theories, but their aim and approach were always to refine and improve his system, never to replace it. The model of the cosmos accepted by Islamic scientists was that of Aristotle and Ptolemy, in which the star and planets encircled the earth in a system of concentric spheres, he explained.

Quoting from "The Universe by Leo Marriott, Zahoor said, " The Islamic astronomers also developed a strong emphasis on the observation of the skies, motivated by the desire to improve the exactness for their cosmic model. Practical observation had long been traditional among the Arab peoples. The nomadic tribes of the desert regions had built up a detailed knowledge of the stars, which were vital to them in gauging direction and time, in the same way that the stars were vital to mariners at sea."

Zahoor stressed on special Quranic verses that have relevance for those in Bangladesh in times of natural and man-made disasters with only hopes and prayers to rush to one's rescues. Zahoor had expanded with remarkable finesse on the message of peace and salvation in the Holy Quran. ■