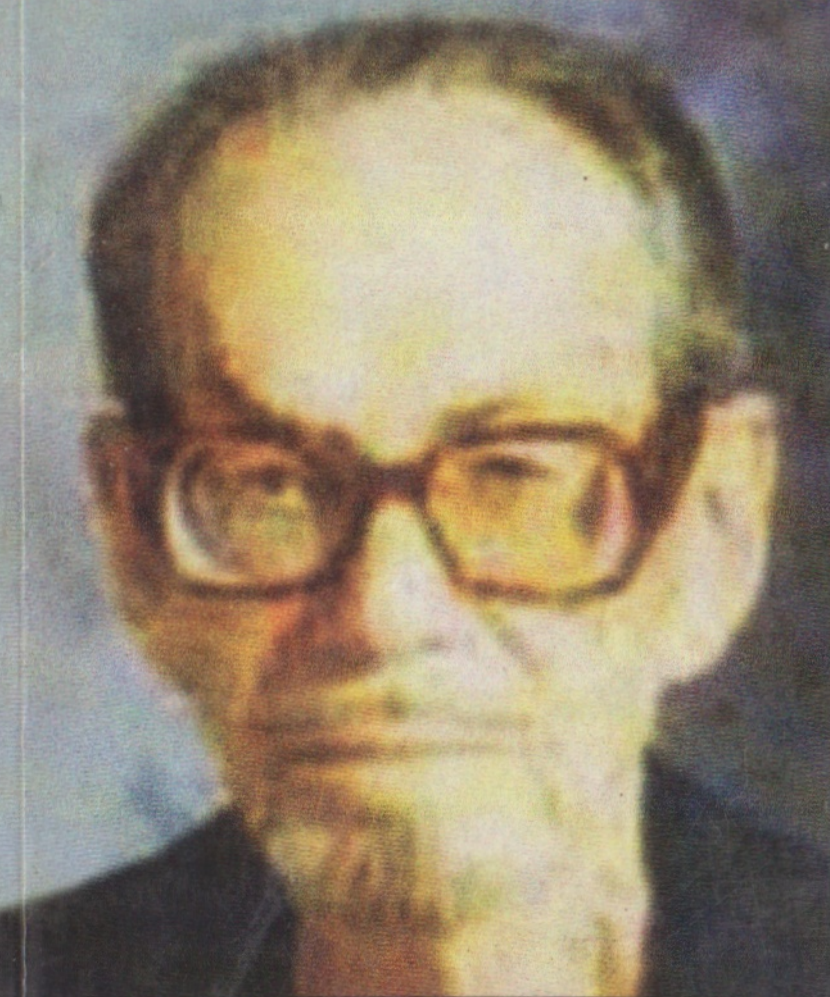


# MUHAMMAD ASAD

HIS CONTRIBUTION  
TO ISLAMIC LEARNING



ABROO AMAN ANDRABI

# **MUHAMMAD ASAD**

**His Contribution to Islamic Learning**

**Dr. Abroo Aman Andrabi**



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*Dedicated to my parents  
who inspired me to accomplish  
this academic pursuit*

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>An Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1 Life Sketch of Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss):</b>	<b>13</b>
(a) Life Before Conversion	13
(b) His Transition From Judaism to Islam	19
(c) His Discovery of Islam	23
<b>2 A Survey of His Writings.</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3 His Contribution to the English Translation and Commentary of the Quran.</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>4 Muhammad Asad's Concept of the State:</b>	<b>117</b>
(a) Background	117
(b) His Concept of State in Islam	121
(c) His Concept of Government in Islam	129
<b>5 The Views of Some Scholars about Muhammad Asad.</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>6 Conclusion.</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>165</b>

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I hope that the lovers of Muhammad Asad will appreciate the ideas put forward by me in the context of Muhammad Asad's ideology.

**January 2007  
New Delhi**

**Dr. Abroo Aman Andrabi**

# An Introduction

*“Surely this Qur’an guides to that which is most upright. It promises the believers who do good work a rich reward.”<sup>1</sup>*

Great scholars appear in every age. Leopold Weiss, a gifted young writer, traveller and linguist with a thorough knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud and with deep roots in European culture, took the road eastward to Mecca. He travelled the road as Muhammad Asad and his name now figures prominently on the roll of 20<sup>th</sup> century English – language Muslim scholars and thinkers.

The story of how Asad walked out of Berlin, away from the west and into a new spiritual life is best told in his own words.

“After all, it was a matter of love; and love is composed of many things; of our desires and our loneliness, of our high aims and our shortcomings; of our strength and weakness. So it was in my case, Islam came over me like a robber who enters a house by night; but unlike a robber, it entered to remain for good.”<sup>2</sup>

Islam provides a complete code of conduct for man in all spheres of life. It does not stand as a barrier between man and his legitimate desires. Islam fulfils all the diverse requirements of a civilized society i.e. religion, politics, social dynamism, development of scientific attitude, creating peaceful and stable social order etc.

He found in Islam a social order and an outlook on life fundamentally different from that of the European mode of living. This sympathy gradually led him to an investigation of the reasons for such a difference, and he

became interested in the religious teachings of the Muslims. He became a Muslim and it was not any particular teaching that attracted him, but the entire wonderful, inexplicably coherent structure of moral teaching and a practical life programme.

He says; "Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure."<sup>3</sup>

So the feeling that everything in the teaching and postulates of Islam is in its proper place created the strongest impression on him.

The present research work aims at studying "Muhammad Asad's contribution to Islamic learning". The work will be divided into five chapters and a brief conclusion.

To discuss the role of Muhammad Asad in Islamic learning, it is necessary to answer the basic questions like, what was his origin, why did he leave his religion and why did he convert to Islam specifically. In the first chapter, the biographical sketch of Muhammad Asad will be discussed. The first portion deals with the study of his life before conversion, the second portion deals with the study of his transition from Judaism to Islam and the last portion of this chapter deals with the study of his discovery of Islam.

It is imperative that the work Muhammad Asad had done must be understood and carried forward. First place to start would be to try to promote his works all over the world.

A survey of Muhammad Asad's writings will be discussed in the second chapter. His main sources of inspiration are the Holy Qur'an and *Sirah* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). The summary of Muhammad Asad's life and his writing is based on the following sources: Muhammad Asad, *Unromantisches Morgenland (The Unromantic Orient)*,

Frankfurter Zeitung, Palestine, 1924; *Islam At The Cross Roads*, New York, 1934; *The Road To Mecca*, New York, 1954; *The Principles of State and Government In Islam*, California Press, 1961; *Sahih al -Bukhari: The Early Years Of Islam*, Arafat Publication, Srinagar, Kashmir, 1935; Translation of the Qur'an into the English language with explanatory notes. *The Message of the Qur'an*, Dublin, 1980 and *This Law of Ours*, Dacca, 1980.

The Qur'an inspired many scholars to develop a scientific field of study known as 'Tafseer'. It aims at deriving the correct meaning of the Qur'anic verses by way of analyzing and interpreting the various factors of revelations including need, purpose, objective, authenticity and the circumstances of revelations, so that the spirit of the Qur'anic verses should be understood in the right perspective. Accordingly, a plethora of literature on this subject has been produced in different languages at different intervals in different parts of the world.

Arabic is not at all easy to translate into a language so widely and radically different from it in structure and genius as English, unless it be with the aid of loose periphrasis and lax paraphrase. Muhammad Asad dedicated a great deal of his time to reading classical and modern books and studies on Islam. He studied many of the classical commentaries which had a great impact upon his understanding of the Qur'an. Muhammad Asad was eminently qualified for this task. He spent his entire life studying the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (tradition) and other allied Islamic disciplines. The Qur'an brought him closer to the mystical nature of humankind. He lived in Arabia for several years. Through daily contact with the people, he gained greater familiarity with Arabic than any other western translator of the Qur'an. In the third chapter his way of translating the Qur'an into the English language will be discussed. It will be shown how this translation in English is different from that of certain other scholars, I.e. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (*The Meaning of the*

*Glorious Koran, A Bi-Lingual Edition with English Translation, Introduction and Notes*, London, 1930.), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (*The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary*, Amana Corporation, America 1989), Abdul Majid Daryabadi (*Tafsir -ul -Qur'an, Translation and Commentary*: all volumes, Lucknow, 1983).

What is the concept of the state in Islam? This is the subject matter of a number of both modern Muslim thinkers and Orientalists. They hold two kinds of opinions about it. One group holds that Islam envisages its specific nature as having the character of a state, while others contend that statehood is not supported in Islam. In the fourth chapter the effectiveness of Muhammad Asad's employment of the comparative method to approach the concept of the state in Islam will be discussed. A brief introduction about the concept of the state will be discussed in the first portion of this chapter. Muhammad Asad's concept of the state will be discussed in the second portion and his concept of government will be discussed in the last portion of this chapter.

Muhammad Asad is one of the leading thinkers of the world of Islam and his ideas have influenced an entire generation. There are different opinions about him. The opinions of different people about him and the influence of his writings on them will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

In the proposed work historical methodology will be employed. Data of the primary sources will be collected and analyzed in the light of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* and the contemporary situation of the Muslim world. On the basis of this descriptive analysis, the findings of Muhammad Asad about the subject will be deduced in the proposed work.

## NOTES

1. Holy Qur'an, 17: 9.
2. El Ashi Arafat: *Why We Embraced Islam*, Book I, Scientific Research House, Kuwait, 1977, p. 107.
3. El Ashi Arafat: *ibid.* p. 106.

# **Life Sketch of Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss)**

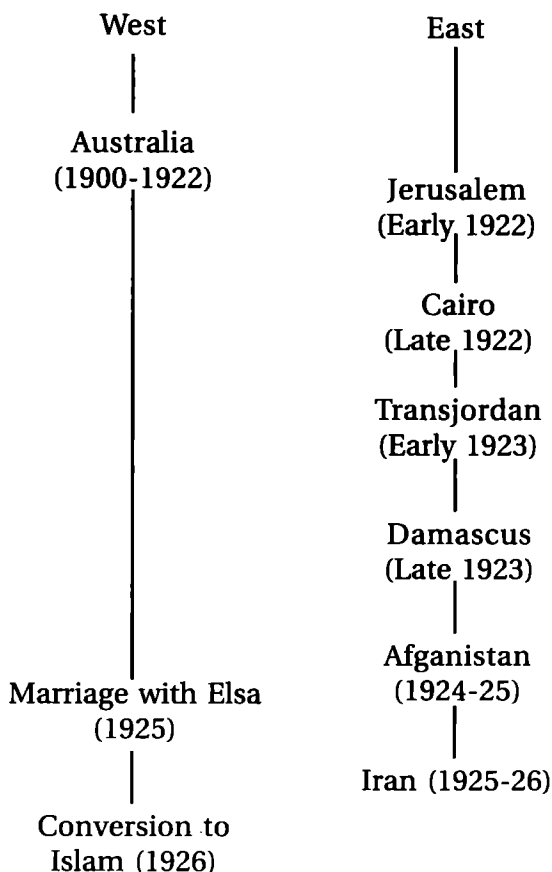
## ***A. Life Before Conversion***

Muhammad Asad was one of the great intellectuals of his time and a great scholar of Islam. A Jew by birth, his birth name was Leopold Weiss.

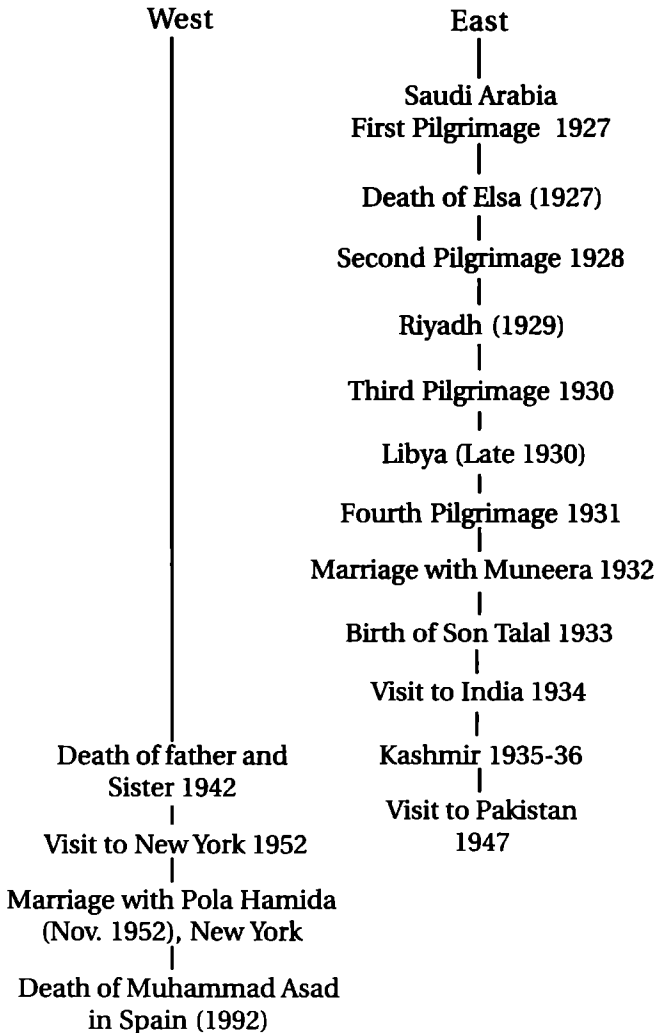
He was well versed in religious knowledge, his family having descended from a line of rabbis. His grandfather, Benjamin Weiss, was an orthodox rabbi in Czernowitz, the capital of the Austrian province of Bukovina. He was interested in mathematics and astronomy and was one of the best chess players of the district. The eldest of his three sons was Leopold Weiss's father, Akiva Weiss, who, he thought, would uphold the rabbinical tradition, which had continued in the family for several generations. But he became a barrister and instead, settled in the city of Lwow in eastern Galicia where he married Malika, the daughter of a rich local banker, Menahem Mendal Feigenbaum. His second son, Leopold Weiss's uncle, at a very young age had become a full-fledged rabbi, after being a businessman for some time. At the age of twenty-five he went to England, studied astronomy and mathematics and after a few years emerged as a promising scholar and a convert to Christianity.

## ***Lepold Weiss (Muhammad Asad)*** **(1900-1992)**

### ***Before Conversion*** **(1900-1926)**



## *After Conversion (1926-1992)*





Muhammad Asad was born in July (1318 A.H) 1900 A.D in Lwow, a city of Austria (in present-day Ukraine), a town inhabited mostly by Poles and Ukrainians. (1) He received his early education at a local school. Unlike his uncle, he was not interested in mathematics and natural sciences. He says in his book:

“I was a very different student. Mathematics and natural sciences were particularly boring to me; I found infinitely more pleasure in reading the stirring historical romances of Sienkiewicz, the fantasies of Jules Verne, Red Indian stories by James Fennimore Cooper and Karl May and latter, the verses of Rilke and the sonorous cadences and also thus spoke Zarathustra.”<sup>2</sup>

He learnt Hebrew from private tutors at home and at the age of thirteen could speak with great fluency. He also studied the Old Testament in its original; and the Mishna and Gemara –that is, the text and the commentaries of the Talmud. At the age of fourteen he escaped from school and joined the Austrian army under a false name. But his father succeeded in tracing him with the help of the police. Then his family settled in Vienna. He studied the history of art and philosophy at the University of Vienna. His heart was not in those studies. He says:

“My interests lay more in the direction of things seen and felt: people, activities and relationships.”<sup>3</sup>

At last he decided to give up his university studies and went to Prague. His mother died in 1919. Then he proceeded to Berlin, where he became acquainted with hunger. He experienced ups and downs in his life from 1920 to 1926. He worked with a film director, F.W. Murnau, as his assistant for two months. In 1921 he joined the United Telegraph (news agency) and worked there as a telephonist for about a month, then worked as a reporter. Later on he became a journalist. In 1922 he went to Jerusalem to meet his uncle Dorian, his mother's younger brother who was a psychiatrist. While travelling in the train Leopold Weiss met a Bedouin who broke his bread

and offered half of it him. About the incident he says: "When I now think of this little occurrence, it seems to me that all my latter love for the Arab character must have been influenced by it. For in the gesture of this Bedouin, who, over all barriers of strangeness, sensed a friend in an accidental traveling companion and broke bread with him, I must already have felt the breath and the step of humanity free of burden."<sup>4</sup>

While living in his uncle Dorian's house, Leopold Weiss saw a hajji in the neighborhood, who assembled Muslims for prayer several times a day. He was impressed by how the Muslims prayed, and felt that they resembled soldiers in the precision of their movements –when they bowed together in the direction of Mecca, etc. He says:

"It somehow disturbed me to see so real a prayer combined with almost mechanical body movements."<sup>5</sup>

This indicates that he used to watch with great interest, the joint prayers said in a regular fashion and in an original manner, which strengthened his belief that there was something special about these people, something special about their faith. This attracted Leopold Weiss in the first instance, towards the study of Islam. Then he met the Hajji and discussed with him the worship of God, the Messenger of God and the meaning of Islam. The Hajji gave him explanations which opened the first door of Islam for him. At that time the Muslim religion did not attract him because his knowledge of it was minimal. But he recognized in Muslims an organic coherence of the mind and the senses which was absent in Europeans.

He spent many years in the Middle East, and then went to Cairo where by coincidence he lived in the neighbourhood of a great mosque, where again he found Muslims praying to Allah with the same words, such as "God is greatest! (*Allah -u -akbar*) And I bear witness that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His Messenger", as he had heard in the old city of Jerusalem. It was at this time that he realized the inner

unity of all Muslims. In 1923 Amir Abdullah of Transjordan invited him where, for the first time, he saw a true Bedouin land and its capital, Amman. He was very impressed to see the simplicity of the Amir who lived in those days in a tent camp on a hill overlooking Amman.

He crossed the frontier thus, without bothering about his passport and visa; he had lost them on the journey from Jerusalem to Haifa. On his way to Damascus, the policemen and the gendarmes created difficulties for him. But, somehow, he managed to obtain a false certificate, which he bought from a man in Metulla who had it issued by the French authorities. Then he entered Syria and finally reached Damascus where he lived for several days with his Damascene friend who was a teacher there.

One Friday, he went with his friend to the Umayyad Mosque. This was first moment that he became aware of how near Allah was to these people, and the people's faith in Him. When Leopold Weiss came out the mosque, he said to his friend,

"You people feel God to be so close to you. I wish I could feel so myself." <sup>6</sup>

He spent much of his time at Damascus and read a number of books on Islam. He also read the Holy Qur'an in French and German translations. He spent 18 months in different Arab countries, some of which time was spent in Turkey and then went back to Europe. He stayed for a few weeks in Vienna with his father. He was appointed as a reporter for the Middle East by a news agency called the Frankfurter Zeitung. This gave him another opportunity to interact with the common man. The Frankfurter Zeitung was not a large newspaper but almost had the status of a research institute. This institute gave a strong impetus to his conscious thinking. He had become disappointed with the religion of his ancestors and now gave some thought to Christianity. As he says in his book,

"In my eyes, the Christian concept of God was infinitely superior to that of the Old Testament in that it

did not restrict God's concern to any one group of people but postulated His fatherhood of all mankind.”<sup>7</sup>

As a journalist, he travelled extensively, mingled with ordinary people, held discussions with Muslim intellectuals, and met heads of state in Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. He paid many visits to Berlin, where he met a widow by the name of Elsa. She was a painter and had a six-year-old son. She was forty years old when she married Leopold Weiss in 1925 as compared to his being only 25 years of age.

In his late twenties Leopold Weiss used to study the Arabic language and he now had access to the original Qur'an in Arabic. He also read other Islamic literature, which strengthened his belief that the way of Islam should not be taken for granted. So he systematically started studying Islam, especially the Qur'an and this marks the beginning of his journey to Islam.

Leopold Weiss fell ill with malaria in Palestine. He did not consult a doctor for help, but was looked after by his landlady, Signora Vitelli. It was her ministrations that helped him to recover from this disease.

## *B. His Transition from Judaism to Islam*

Islam is a religion which specifically aims at human progress, and shows the proper way of it in a number of commands and prohibitions covering every avocation of man's daily life, his social life and politics as well as every prompting of his mind and spirits, says Marmaduke Pickthall that “these commands and prohibitions have been codified onto a complete social and political system. It is a practicable system, for it has been practiced with a success which is the great astonishment of history.”<sup>8</sup>

After the marriage, Leopold Weiss and his wife Elsa often used to read the Qur'an together and discussed its ideas; they became more and more impressed by the inner

cohesion between its moral teachings and its practical guidance. Now Leopold Weiss's view about Islam had changed: he was deeply impressed, and Europe seemed to him a different country, a different environment now, as he saw Islamic culture to be more deep-rooted in human values: love, sympathy, well wishing, equality, etc. He says:

"Every day new impressions broke over me; every day new questions arose from within and new answers came from without. They awakened an echo of something that had been hidden somewhere in the background of my mind; and as I progressed in my knowledge of Islam I felt, time and time again, that a truth I had always known, without being aware of it, was gradually being uncovered and, as it were, confirmed." <sup>9</sup>

During his travels and through his readings, Leopold Weiss's interest in Islam increased as well as his understanding of its scripture, history and peoples. He was greatly impressed by the simplicity of Muslims and the organized way of their life. He spent eighteen months in Iran and six months in Afghanistan. He lived for some-time with Amanullah Khan in his capital Kabul. He discussed Islam, the teachings of the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) with the Governor of Afghanistan. Leopold Weiss says that the Governor in the end told him:

"You have already become a Muslim without noticing it. Only a true Muslim would defend Islam as earnestly as you are doing now."<sup>10</sup>

These words started penetrating his mind. He said:

"When I was back home I plunged into deep thoughts, finally saying to myself, yes I am a Muslim now."<sup>11</sup>

In September 1926 he was traveling with his wife Elsa to Berlin on a train. He found that all his fellow passengers looked unhappy. One had a gloomy expression on his face, though he appeared to be rich and prosperous; next to him was a lady who also had a strangely unhappy

expression on her face. He writes in his book:

“The impression was so strong that I mentioned it to Elsa; and she too began to look around her with the careful eyes of a painter accustomed to study human features. Then she turned to me, astonished and said: “You are right. They all look as though they were suffering torments of hell ..... I wonder, do they know themselves what is going on in them?”<sup>12</sup>

Leopold Weiss had a copy of the Qur'an with him, which he used to study every day. He said:

“On our return to our house, just by coincidence I opened the Qur'an and while focusing on a small chapter of the Qur'an, I read <sup>13</sup> the following verses;

‘You are obsessed by greed for more and more;

Until you go down to your graves;

Nay, but you will come to know!

Nay, but you will come to know!

Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of certainty;

Your would indeed see the hell you are in;

In time, indeed, you shall see it with the eye of certainty.

And on that Day you will be asked what you have done with the boon of life.’ (Chapter 102: verse 1-8).

Leopold Weiss said: “What I found opened my eyes. This chapter illustrates man’s unbounded greed in general, and, in particular, the tendencies which have come to dominate all human societies in our technological age.”<sup>14</sup>

When he looked at this verse (“You are obsessed by greed for more and more; until you go down to your graves”) he called his wife and said, “Is this not the answer to our previous day’s question when I asked you, why the people on the train did not seem very happy?” His wife replied, “Yes the Qur'an gives the answer to everything.”<sup>15</sup> It means that people are so deeply involved in this world that they forget things of real value. They want one luxurious thing after another. Their greed is never satiated.

They are so engrossed in the world that this goes on till they reach their graves.

The next day, that is, at the end of September 1926, he went to the Berlin mosque and told the head of the small Muslim community there that he wanted to embrace Islam. Then in the presence of two witnesses, he declared:

"I bear witness that there is no god but God <sup>16</sup> and Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His Messenger." <sup>17</sup>

So he embraced Islam in the year 1926 in Berlin at the age of 26. He says: "What attached me to the Islamic religion was the love I had for it ..... so I embraced Islam with all my heart and love, and it settled in my heart so as to never leave there again."<sup>18</sup>

The Qur'an is really a book-which guides a man in every sphere of life. He learnt the Qur'an by heart and understood Islam in the best possible manner. After a few weeks, his wife also converted to Islam. Then her seven-year-old son also converted to Islam and was named Ahmad. Muhammad Asad then informed his parents about his conversion but he received no response from them. He also informed his sister, but she considered him as dead. It is very difficult to renounce one's ancestral religion in order to embrace Islam. It is not easy to rebel against one's parents, family and one's entire surroundings in search of truth.

Thus, Muhammad Asad and his wife left Europe because the European culture appeared to them as a strange environment.

The coming of Islam in Asad's life proved to be a turning point for him. He was attracted by the moral teachings of Islam and the practical life-style of the Muslims. He himself was not aware of how Islam had come into his life. He says: "Islam came over me like a robber who enters a house by night; but, unlike a robber, it entered to remain for good."<sup>19</sup>

## C. His Discovery of Islam

His discovery of Islam starts with his conversion to Islam or what he calls, "*The Road to Mecca*" <sup>20</sup>

The great thing about Muhammad Asad was that he only not read, but understood the Qur'an and Islamic Literature. He wanted to observe Islam in practice also. So just after his conversion to Islam, he traveled to the Middle East again and spent six years in Arabia at Hijaz where the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) had lived. He wanted to have first hand information about the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) –and the circumstances of his prophethood. Although belonging to a rich and prosperous European culture, he led a simple life and underwent great hardship, travelling in the deserts of Arabia just for the sake of his faith and his emotional attachment to this great religion. He lived in the neighborhood of Madina, simply to understand the place where the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and



MUHAMMAD ASAD  
IN SAUDI ARABIA

blessings be upon him) had lived 1400 years ago. This was owing to his strong attachment to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him).

In 1927 his wife Elsa died after a week's illness. She was buried in the sandy graveyard of Mecca. Elsa's little son, Ahmad remained with him for over a year, but was then sent to his mother's family in Europe.

Muhammad Asad says: "...His mother's



family finally persuaded me that he must be sent to school in Europe .....”<sup>21</sup>

Muhammad Asad married a girl named Ruqayya but after only one day he sent the girl back to her family because she was only 11 years old. Muhammad Asad said:

“Ruqayya is still a child ..... I could feel no more than pity for the girl who had been made a victim of her uncle’s mean stratagem. I treated her as one would treat a child, assuring her that she had nothing to fear from me.”<sup>22</sup>

Then he married another Arab girl in Medina in 1932. Her name was Munira and she belonged to the Shammar tribe. They established a household in Medina, and in 1933 she bore him a son whom they called Talal. Arabia was his home now as he said:

“Arabia has become my home .... I have an Arab wife and an infant son and a library full of books on early Islamic history.”<sup>23</sup>

He spent a lot of time in Saudi Arabia, and visited Mecca five times as a pilgrim. His first pilgrimage on which his wife Elsa accompanied him took place early in 1927. He went on a pilgrimage again without Elsa in 1928. He says:

“The recent sudden death of my wife, who had accompanied me on this, my first pilgrimage to Mecca, had made me bitter and unsocial.”<sup>24</sup>

When he went on another pilgrimage to



MUHAMMAD ASAD  
IN 1929

Mecca in 1930, he was alone, but the memories of Elsa were with him. Reminiscing, he describes his attachment to her:

“....To the beginning of my Arabian years, to my first pilgrimage to Mecca and the darkness that overshadowed those early days; to the death of the woman who I loved as I have loved no woman since and who now lies buried under the soil of Mecca, under a simple stone without inscription that marks the end of her road and the beginning of a new one for me ....” <sup>25</sup>

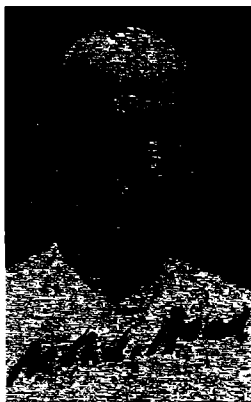
He went on yet another pilgrimage to Mecca in 1931. His last journey to Mecca took place in 1932 on which his Arab wife Munira accompanied him.

During his stay in Arabia, he developed a friendship with the king of Arabia, Ibn Saud, who accorded him great respect and held discussions on Islamic subjects with him. He says,

“In all my years in Arabia, Ibn Saud’s friendship has lain like a warm shimmer over my life. He calls me his friend, although he is a king and I, a mere journalist.” <sup>26</sup>

From this account, it is clear that Asad did have exceptional access to the court of Ibn Saud. It is also clear that his status was not that of an advisor, but of a privileged observer, admitted to the court as a part of the earliest Saudi efforts at public relations. Ibn Saud kept Asad close to him because this useful convert wrote flattering articles about him for various newspapers in continental Europe.

According to Asad, he did finally become a secret agent of sorts: Ibn Saud employed him on a clandestine



ASAD, IN 1932

mission to Kuwait in 1929, to trace the funds and guns that were flowing to Faysal al-Dawish, a rebel against Ibn Saud's rule. Asad determined that Britain was behind the rebellion, and wrote so for the foreign papers, much to Ibn Saud's satisfaction.<sup>27</sup>

Ibn Saud, although a great king, was also a simple man and he looked after his people's welfare. He used to spend half the year in the capital of Hijaz, Mecca and half in the Najdi capital, Riyadh.

Muhammad Asad also met Abdul Aziz and Amir Fayas, the two sons of King Ibn Saud. In late 1928, Muhammad Asad met the famous leader of the Syrian independence movement, Amir Sakib Arsalan, when he paid a visit to King Ibn Saud in Mecca. He was very impressed by this person.

After living for some time in Saudi Arabia, he travelled to Northern Libya in 1930. Despite many hardships, he traveled through deserts, crossed rivers and seas, and going on foot till he reached that part of the world where Umar Mukhtar was fighting with the Italian forces. In the darkness of the night he met Umar al – Mukhtar to have first- hand information about his ideology, and why he was fighting an army which was bigger and stronger than his own. Then this great man travelled to India (Indo-Pak), the home of more than 200 million Muslims. Asad began with a lecture tour to India. According to British intelligence sources, Asad had linked up with an Amritsar activist, one Ismail Ghaznavi, and intended to tour India with a view to get into touch with all important workers. Asad arrived in Karachi by ship in June 1932, and left promptly for Amritsar. This showed that he had a special interest in India. He lived in Punjab, Lahore, for sometime where he met the greatest Muslim poet philosopher of the twentieth century, Allama Iqbal (1876-1938), himself of kashmiri descent who persuaded Muhammad Asad to remain in India and work to elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic State.



**Asad (front center) with staff of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction, West Punjab (Pakistan), 1948-49.**

Muhammad Asad was deeply impressed by his philosophy and, at the insistence of Muhammad Iqbal, stayed on in India for several years. He also spent a few years of his life with Sayyid Abdul ala Madudi at Darus –Salam in Pathankot. In neighboring Lahore, he involved himself with the local community of Kashmiri Muslims.

There is something special about Muhammad Asad in that, he came to Kashmir also. This was in the mid-thirties, around 1935. He stayed there in a houseboat on the river Jhelum, near Lal Maundy. In due course, he met some Muslim scholars of Kashmir and the *Mirwaiz* (head of the Muslim community in Kashmir) Molvi Muhammad Yusuf Shah. He was introduced to the *Mirwaiz* by one Abdul Aziz.

According to Kalim-ullah Khan, (The founder of the Adult Qur'anic Education Programme in Kashmir and the author of a book, *'Islam: The Source of Universal Peace'* (Goodward Delhi, 2001) when Muhammad Asad and Molvi Muhammad Yusuf Shah were talking to each other, this man (Abdul Aziz) who was also present there, said:

“Muhammad Asad talked to *Mirwaiz* Kashmir in fluent Arabic. It was surprising to see this great man from Europe talking in fluent Arabic, as the *Mirwaiz* himself could not talk so fluently. So they had to take the assistance of an Arabic Scholar, one Hussain Shah Wafayee, who acted as some sort of an interpreter between Muhammad Asad and *Mirwaiz* Molvi Muhammad Yusuf Shah.

Muhammad Asad was so greatly attracted to Islam and the Islamic faith, that he travelled all the way from Europe to the Middle East, to Iran, to Afghanistan, to India and finally to Kashmir. Muhammad Asad stayed in Kashmir for some time, as we are told, and this was a great privilege for the Kashmiris. While he was there, he delivered some lectures in the Islamia High School in Srinagar. For Muhammad Asad, the real attraction of Kashmir would have resided in its predicament as contested ground, where a British-backed maharaja ruled a discontented Muslim population. Beginning in 1931, Kashmiri Muslims in Punjab organized an extensive agitation in support of the Muslims in Kashmir. Hundreds of bands of Muslim volunteers crossed illegally from Punjab into Kashmir, and thousands were arrested. By early 1932, the disturbances had subsided, but the Kashmir government remained ever wary.<sup>28</sup> Just what Asad did in Kashmir is uncertain. But on learning of his presence, the Kashmir government immediately wanted him “externed”, although the police had no evidence to substantiate the intelligence report, and there appeared to be legal obstacles to “externing” a European national. The intelligence report had him spreading Bolshevik ideas.<sup>29</sup>

In 1936, Muhammad Asad assumed the editorship of a journal “*Islamic Culture*” in Hyderabad. In October 1938, he resigned the editorship of *Islamic Culture* and then left India. In April 1939, his Austrian passport was visaed in Vienna for entry to Britain and British India.<sup>30</sup> Afterwards he arrived in London, where he asked that this visa be extended: “I beg you to give me a prolongation of

this visa till the end of this year as my parents will come in about four to five months. I have to settle many things for them.<sup>31</sup> This evidence hints that Muhammad Asad made an eleventh-hour attempt at rescuing his Jewish family before returning to India in the summer of 1939. But the scope of these efforts, ended abruptly with the German invasion of Poland and the British declaration of war against Germany in September 1939.

By the late thirties his father understood and appreciated the reasons for Muhammad Asad's conversion to Islam. He never met his father again, but corresponded with him. His father and sister died in 1942 in a concentration camp in Vienna.

In 1948 he was the Director of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction. It was during this time that he wrote an essay, "Islamic Constitution-Making," which was published in English and Urdu under the auspices of the government of the Punjab. He travelled extensively, observed and watched the conditions of other peoples critically and learned their languages.

Muhammad Asad went to Pakistan after its creation in 1947 and in 1949 he was appointed by the Pakistan government as the Head of the Middle East Division in the Foreign Ministry. He contributed a lot to Pakistan through his numerous lectures and articles. He resigned from this post in 1952 to write his biography, "*The Road to Mecca*". So began Muhammad Asad's road back to the West—a choice that would bring him fame and sever his links to living Islam. He came to New York alone, without his wife and son, and lived in a penthouse in Manhattan. He soon found a



**Asad in his last year**

new love, a striking contrast to his Arabian wife of over twenty years: Pola Hamida, an American woman of Polish Catholic descent who had converted to Islam. Asad's marriage to Munira now came undone, and he married Pola Hamida before a civil judge in New York in November 1952. He remained with her for the forty years, and this marriage to a Western convert presaged his evolving preference for an ideal Islam, distinct from the born Muslims who practiced it. She gave Muhammad Asad a great deal of help and he gives her name honorable mention in his books, especially at the first page of his book *"My Discovery of Islam"*, where he writes:

"To my wife whose thorough criticism and advice gave so much of her wise heart to this book that her name ought to have been inscribed on the title page of book together with mine."

This showed the tremendous help he received from his wife in his emotional and sentimental attachment to Islam, and to the Islamic way of life.

After writing this book, he left New York in 1955 and he relocated to Geneva with Pola Hamida. There he began to contemplate a new project, ambitious in scope and significance, a new English translation of the Qur'an. Asad had not been satisfied with Marmeduke Pickthall's widely used translation, since Pickthall's knowledge of Arabic had been limited. As Asad later wrote:

Familiarity with the Bedouin speech of central and Eastern Arabia-in addition, of course, to academic knowledge of classical Arabic- is only way for a non-Arab of our time to achieve an intimate understanding of the diction of the Qur'an. And because none of the scholars who have previously translated the Qur'an into European languages has ever fulfilled this prerequisite, their translations have remained but distant, and faulty, echoes of its meaning and spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Asad began work on the translation in 1960. Such a large-scale project required the support of a patron, and

he eventually appeared in the form of Saudi Arab's king Faysal (r.1964-75). Asad had known Faysal since 1927. He reestablished a link in 1951, when he paid his first visit to Saudi Arabia in eighteen years, and he nurtured the tie as Faysal began his ascent to the throne. Muhammad Asad became one of Faysal's most fervent enthusiasts, seeing in him a vast improvement over Ibn Saud. He says:

"I reflect on the manner in which King Faysal rules over his realm, it appears to me as the fulfillment of every promise which the life of his father had held out and left open."<sup>33</sup> Still Faysal was a dutiful son, and this praise could not cancel out Asad's stinging indictment Ibn Saud, made in *The Road to Mecca*. As it happened, however, this obstacle was not insurmountable. In later editions of the book, Asad completely excised his enumeration of Ibn Saud's failings, replacing them with a few pages of banal ruminations on the desert.<sup>34</sup>

Faysal renewed Asad's Saudi patronage. In 1936, Faysal had the Muslim World League in Mecca subscribe in advance to Asad's planned translation, which he began to compile in Switzerland.

He continued to serve Islam till his death in Spain on February 23, 1992 at the age of 92. He was buried in Granada, Andalusia.

With his death passed a journalist, social critic, reformer, translator, political theorist, traveller and linguist, a devotee to the service of God and humankind, and a man who led a righteous life. He gained popularity not only in Saudi Arabia but in almost all the Muslim countries.

Few in the Muslim world took notice of Asad's passing. He had argued for a rational Islam; he had sought to reconcile Islamic teachings and democracy. He had tried to make Qur'an speak to modern minds. His project in fact, encapsulated ideals that drove the reform of Judaism, which by his parents' generation had largely served to ease Jews out of their faith altogether. Islam provides the



last chance to achieve that ideal—the reform of a religion of law so that it could be made to live in a modern age, as a liberal force of continuing faith.

Unlike so many other Western converts to Islam, Asad chose also to live in Muslim societies, and worked to give Islam direction. But by advocating this reform, Asad remained a foreign body in contemporary Islam, a transplant rejected time and again by his hosts. Saudi Arabia declined to keep him as a journalist. Pakistan, which he served as an official and diplomat, also broke with him and the self-appointed guardians of Muslim orthodoxy shunned him as a Qur'an translator and commentator. Paradoxically, Asad won genuine acclaim in the West. There he found minds open to his ideas, and opportunities to publish and lecture. And there he ultimately found refuge from the late twentieth-century reality of Islam.

## NOTES

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16. Muhammad Asad did not translate the word "God" as Allah.

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## A Survey of Muhammad Asad's Writings

The writings of Muhammad Asad on Islam and the Muslims span almost a century, from the 1920's to the 1980's. These writings include: *Unromantisches Morgenland* (*The Unromantic Orient*), Frankfurter Zeitung, Palestine, 1924; *Islam At the Cross Roads*, New York, 1934; *The Road To Mecca*, New York, 1954; *The Principles of State and Government In Islam*, California Press, 1961; *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam*, Arafat Publication, Srinagar, Kashmir, 1935; Translation of the Qur'an into the English language with explanatory notes. *The Message of the Qur'an*, Dublin, 1980 and *This Law of Ours*, Dacca, 1980. He also brought out a journal, *Arafat*. This journal, was published from Lahore before partition in the late forties, was a monthly critique of Muslim thought –a kind of Journalistic monologue meant to clarify the great confusion prevailing in the Muslim *ummah* as to the scope and practical implications of Islamic Law.

After several months of travel in the Middle East, Muhammad Asad returned to Germany and published his Journal entries as *Unromantisches Morgenland*, *The Unromantic Orient* translated from the German by Elma Ruth Harder. The book consists of 192 pages include 32 pages of original photos taken in 1923. This first English translation of a long forgotten work recaptures his initial

experiences in an unknown and intriguing land where he found a new home and a new sense of belonging.

Muhammad Asad's first book as a committed Muslim was *Islam at the Cross Roads*, published first in New York in 1934 and dedicated to the young Muslims. The text went through repeated printings and editions both in India and Pakistan. Sh. Muhammad Asaf translated it into Urdu in 1991 under the title *Islam Do –Rahe Par*. More importantly, however, it appeared in an Arabic translation in Beirut in 1946 under the title of *al –Islam 'ala muftaqir al –turuq*. It went through numerous editions in the 40's and 50's. Then in 2001 it was published in India by Goodword Books under the original title, '*Islam at the Cross Roads*'. The book consisting of 141 pages, and is divided into 9 chapters, and has a preface. The chapters are as follows:

1. The Open Road of Islam;
2. The Sprit of the West;
3. The Shadow of the Crusades;
4. About Education;
5. About Imitation;
6. Hadith and Sunnah;
7. The Spirit of Sunnah; and
8. Conclusion.

This work can be described as a diatribe against the materialism of the west or, as Muhammad Asad put it, a case of "Islam Versus Western Civilization". He says in the foreword of the book:

"This little book is a humble contribution towards the great goal. It does not pretend to be a dispassionate survey of affairs; it is the statement of a case, as I see it: the case of Islam versus western civilization." <sup>1</sup>

Here Muhammad Asad developed themes which would later become widespread in Islamic fundamentalist thought.

He defined the general role of religion in human life in the first chapter, '*The Open Road of Islam*' in which he says:

**“Man is unable to explain to himself the mystery of infinity and eternity. His reasoning stops before impregnable walls. He can, therefore, do two things only. The first is to give up all attempts to understand life as a totality; the other possibility which may well exist side by side with the scientific one, is the way of religion.”<sup>2</sup>**

**Muhammad Asad distinguishes the religious man from the irreligious. He explains the fundamental position of a common man. He says, that the “...fundamental position is common to all great religions, whatever their denominations may be; and equally common to all of them is the moral appeal to man to surrender himself to the manifest will of God. But Islam, and Islam alone, goes beyond this theoretical explanation and exhortation, it teaches man not only that all life is essentially a unity, because it proceeds out of Divine Oneness, but it shows us also the practical way how every one of us can reproduce, within the limits of his individual, earthly life, the unity of idea and action both in his existence and in his consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>**

**He goes on further to discuss differences between the religions and presents the concept of Islamic worship in the context of other religions. He says:**

**“The conception of ‘worship’ in Islam is different from that in any other religion. Here worship is not restricted to the purely devotional practices, as for example prayers or fasting, but it extends over the whole of man’s practical life as well. Of all religious systems Islam alone declares that individual perfection is possible in our earthly existence. Islam does not postpone this fulfillment till after a suppression of the so –called ‘bodily’ desires, as the Christian teachings do, nor does Islam promise a continuous chain of re –births on a progressively higher plane, as is the case with Hinduism or with Buddhism, according to which perfection and salvation may be attained through the annihilation of the individual self and its emotional links with the world.”<sup>4</sup>**

In the second chapter of *Islam at the Cross Roads*, 'The Spirit of the West', the author suggests ways and means of countering the onslaught of the western civilization on Islamic civilization and values without sacrificing the acquisition of modern western scientific and technological knowledge. He criticizes the utilitarian ethics of the west. He says that:

"In Islam, the first and foremost goal is the inner, moral progress of man, and therefore ethical considerations overrule the purely utilitarian. In the modern western civilization the situation is just reversed. The consideration of material utility dominates all manifestations of human activity, and ethics are being relegated to an obscure background of life. .... Such an evasive attitude towards ethics is certainly incompatible with a religious orientation; and therefore, the very foundations of the modern western civilization are incompatible with Islam."<sup>5</sup>

He is of the opinion that the Muslim should not receive certain western "impulses in the domain of exact and applied sciences, but their cultural relations should begin and end at that point. To go further and to imitate the western civilization in its spirit, its mode of life and its social organization is impossible without dealing a fatal blow to the very existence of Islam as a theocratic polity and a practical religion."<sup>6</sup>

In the third chapter '*The Shadow Of The Crusades*', Muhammad Asad draws a straight connecting line between the crusaders and modern imperialism, and holds western orientalists to blame for the distortion of Islam. He says:

"The evil which the crusades caused was not restricted to the clang of weapons; it was, first and foremost, an intellectual evil. It consisted in poisoning the European mind against Islam, in the misrepresentation of its teachings and ideals to the ignorant masses of the west. It was then that the ridiculous notion of Islam as a religion of sensualism and brutal violence, of an

observance of formalities instead of a purification of heart, entered the mind of Europe and remained there; and it was then, for the first time, that the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) was called in Europe “Mahound”. The seed of hatred was sown.”<sup>7</sup>

In the next chapter, ‘*About Education*’, Muhammad Asad criticizes the subjectivity of western knowledge. He says:

“Knowledge itself is neither western nor eastern; it is universal in the same sense as natural facts are universal. But the angle of vision from which facts are regarded and presented varies with the cultural temperament of the nations. Biology as such, or physics, or botany, are neither materialistic nor spiritual in their purpose; they are concerned with the observation, collection and definition of facts and the derivation of conceivable rules. But the inductive conclusions we derive from these sciences regarding the general aspects of life that is, the philosophy of sciences-are not based on facts and observations alone, but are influenced, to a very large extent, by our pre-existing temperamental or intuitive attitude towards life and its problems.”<sup>8</sup>

In the great days of Islam, there was no distinction between the secular education and religious education. Lectures on Chemistry, Astronomy, Medicine, Physics, and Botany were given in the mosque equally with the lectures on the study of Qur’an, *Hadith* and *Fiqh*. The mosque was the school of Islam; it welcomed to its precincts all the knowledge of the age from every quarter. In Islam there are no such terms as secular and religious, for true religion includes the whole sphere of man’s activities. Thus sciences, which are neither materialistic nor spiritual in them, may be turned into the one or the other aspect according to man’s own mental predisposition.

The fifth chapter ‘*About Imitation*’, does not claim to give a comprehensive answer to the many ailments that had weakened and destabilized the Muslim world, but it

does warns the Muslims against blindly imitating western values and mores, which Muhammad Asad considers to pose a moral danger to Islam. He says:

"The imitation – individually and socially – of the western mode of life by Muslims is undoubtedly the greatest danger for the existence of the Islamic Civilization."<sup>9</sup>

He goes on to point out that, "there is no narrow mindedness in Islam. It concedes to man a very wide range of possibilities, so long as he does not act in contradiction to religious commands."<sup>10</sup>

Further, he says that if a Muslim imitates the dress, the manners and the European mode of life, he betrays his preference for the European civilization, whatever else his avowed pretensions be, and practice, it is impossible to follow the examples of a foreign civilization in its intellectual and aesthetic design, without appreciating its spirit. Equally, it is impossible to have a western religious orientation and yet to remain a good Muslim.<sup>11</sup>

In the next chapter, *Hadith and Sunnah*, Muhammad Asad presents in depth the meaning of the *Sunnah*. He espouses adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. He defines the latter broadly as 'the example the Prophet before us in his attitudes, actions and sayings' and the only binding explanation of Qur'anic teachings. He says that we must regard the *Sunnah* as the only valid explanation of Qur'anic teachings, the only means of avoiding dissension concerning their interpretation and adaptation for practical use. He explains this view by saying that many verses of the Holy Qur'an have an allegorical meaning and could be understood in different ways, unless we possess some sure system of interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter he also attacks the critics of *Hadith* on the ground of their western influenced superficial rationalism. He says that the "... motive lies in the impossibility of bringing our present, degenerate ways of living and thinking into line with the true spirit of Islam as



reflected in the *Sunnah* of our Prophet. In order to justify their own shortcomings and the shortcomings of their surroundings, those pseudo –critics of *Hadith* try to remove the necessity of following the *Sunnah*; because if this is done, they would be able to interpret the Qur’anic teachings just as they like, on the lines of superficial rationalism.”<sup>13</sup>

The next chapter of this book is ‘The Spirit of *Sunnah*’ and here the author draws a sharp distinction between reason and rationalism. In his opinion, the role of reason in religious matters is to passively control a registration apparatus saying yes or no, as the case may be. But this is not the case with so –called rationalism and it does not content itself with registration and control, but jumps into the field of negative speculation; it is not receptive and detached like pure reason, but extremely subjective and temperamental. Reason knows its claim to encompass the world and all mysteries within its little individual circle. <sup>14</sup>

In the conclusion of this work, Muhammad Asad vividly portrays the true picture of Islam and clearly describes the causes for the rise and decline of Islamic culture. This work is resplendent with quotations from the Holy Qur’an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). It radiates the real spirit of Islam, appealing both to the soul and the intellect.

Muhammad Asad’s disillusionment with the attitude of Muslims towards Islam is evident from the latter part of his work. Muslims did not come up to his expectation. In this book, he writes that Muslims have left the way of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) and they have started adopting the European culture, regarding Islam as “out-dated”<sup>15</sup> and out of form. This hurt Muhammad Asad.

After the completion of this work, Muhammad Asad turned his attention towards the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessing be upon him) which

complement and amplify the Holy Qur'an. Encouraged by Iqbal, Muhammad Asad attempted a task that had never formerly been undertaken in English that is, the translation and commentary of the authentic traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessing be upon him). There had been carefully and critically compiled in the ninth century by a traditionist, Imam Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Ismail Ibn Al-Mughirah al-Bukhari. Muhammad Asad was very much impressed by the work of al-Bukhari, says in the preface of the work on him;

"It is impossible in the limited space of this preface to render full justice to the greatness of Al-Bukhari's service to the cause of Islam. The introduction will show that, but for "*Sahih al Bukhari*", Islam would today be difficult to understand and still more difficult to practice."<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad Asad decided to publish in the year 1935 –1939 the first five of forty projected installments of Bukhari's work's under the title *Sahih al -Bukhari: The Early Years Of Islam*. But he was unable to complete the publication of this work because of the loss of his manuscript in the chaos of partition of the India into India and Pakistan. So the first part of this work was published by the Arafat publication, Srinagar, Kashmir in 1935 under the title *Sahih al -Bukhari*, volume 1. This translation faithfully reproduced the spirit and vigour of the Prophet's sayings. There are about eighty pages in the book and it comprises of two sections '*How the Revelation Began I*' and '*The Book of Faith II*' The work depicts the beginning of the Prophet's revelation, the merits of his companions and the early Islam up to and including the decisive turning point of Islamic history, The Battle of Badar. The chain of the narrators of each tradition (*Isnad*) has been fully reproduced, so that every Muslim may find in it the necessary date. The Explanatory Notes, full of erudition and original thought, elucidate the cultural and historical background of the Tradition. This helps the reader to understand the philosophy of Islam in all its ramifications.

In 1936, Asad found a new benefactor. The Nizam of Hyderabad had established a journal under his patronage entitled *Islamic Culture*, first edited by Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall (1875-1936), a British convert to Islam, best known for his English translation of Qur'an. He died in 1936, at which point Muhammad Asad assumed the editorship of the journal. This placed Asad in touch with a wide range of orientalist and Indian Muslim scholarship, and he himself began to write scholarly pieces and translate texts. The best piece of this work is his article '*Towards a Reconstruction of Thought*', *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, 1937.

In October 1938, Muhammad Asad resigned the editorship of *Islamic Culture* and then left India.

Towards the end of 1952, Muhammad Asad resigned from the Pakistan Foreign Service and started to write. He wrote extensively and in August 1954, there appeared in America a remarkable book of his entitled *The Road to Mecca*. The book immediately won critical acclaim. This third book of Muhammad Asad was also published in London in 1954 under the same title *The Road to Mecca* and was reprinted by the Islamic Book Trust, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, in 1996. The book comprises 380 pages. It was translated into Urdu in 1980 by Muhammad -al -Hasini and published under the title *Tufan Se Sahil Tak*. It was then published by Majlis-e- Tahqeeqat Wa Nashriyat Islam, Lucknow. Later, the book was published in India by GoodWord Books, 2001 under the title *My Discovery of Islam*. This edition comprises 375 pages and is divided into twelve chapters;

1. Thirst
2. Beginning of the Road
3. Winds
4. Voices
5. Spirit and Flesh
6. Dreams
7. Midway

8. Jinns
9. Persian letter
10. Dajjal
11. Jihad
12. End of the Road.

This book is not biographical in nature, though in the opinion of some people *The Road to Mecca* is an autobiography of Muhammad Asad. There are a few paragraphs of this book which are concerned with his life and seem to be autobiographical.

On the very first page Muhammad Asad says; "The story I am going to tell in this book is not the autobiography of a man conspicuous for his role in public affairs... My story is simply the story of a European's discovery of Islam and of his integration within the Muslim community."<sup>17</sup>

Later he says; "It is not the story of all my life, but only of the years before I left Arabia for India –those exciting years spent in travels through almost all the countries between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea."<sup>18</sup>

He explains at length as his initial fascination with Islam, in spite of the abysmal fall and disintegration of the Muslim community after World War I, and how he ultimately became a Muslim in 1926, both "intellectually and spiritually".

The first chapter of the book *My Discovery of Islam* is called '*The Story of A Story*' tells us about his travel in India, where he met the legendary poet-philosopher and spiritual father of Pakistan, Muhammad Iqbal. It was a fateful meeting and one that convinced Muhammad Asad that he should forsake his plans to travel to Eastern Turkistan, China and Indonesia, and concentrate instead on realizing the vision of that 'first Islamic State'. He says that he was called upon by Pakistan's Government to organize and direct a Department of Islamic Reconstruction, which was to elaborate the Islamic Ideological concepts of statehood and community, a

concept upon which the newly born political organization might draw.<sup>19</sup>

The second chapter '*Thirst*' is about those years, which Muhammad Asad spent in Saudi Arabia. He gained the confidence and friendship of king Abd al -Aziz Ibn Saud and his heir Prince Faisal.

He says: "In all my years in Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud's friendship has lain like a warm shimmer over my life. He calls me his friend, although he is a king and I a mere journalist. And I call him my friend –not only merely because throughout the years that I have lived in the realm he shows to many men. I call him my friend because on occasion he opens his innermost thoughts to me as he opens his purse to so many others."<sup>20</sup>

The third chapter '*Beginning of the Road*', deals with the life of the author. He describes his childhood, his parents, his education and his religion before conversion. He never wrote about his religious origins. He never stated explicitly that he was a Jew.

The chapter '*Winds*' concerns those years which Muhammad Asad spent with his uncle Dorian (who did not consider himself a Zionist) in his house in Jerusalem and came close to Islam. He explained how he used to watch Muslims praying. He told the story of a Hajji, who was an Imam and how he used to assemble the people for prayer. He had several discussions with him about Islam:

"Years later I realized that with his simple explanation the Hajji had opened to me the first door to Islam."<sup>21</sup>

Also in this chapter Muhammad Asad latter omitted all mention of his uncle Aryeh Feigenbaun (1885 -1981) who was very much an ardent Zionist.

He says; "I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism... I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a foreign Super Power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of attaining to majority in the country and thus to dispose the people whose country it had been, since time immemorial."<sup>22</sup>

Another chapter of this book, 'Voices', is about those years which Muhammad Asad spent in the Middle East from 1922 -1926 as a sympathetic outsider. In this chapter he mentions the difference between the Arabs and the people of the west. He says;

"It is a mere noble tradition which enables the Arabs to be hospitable in so effusive a way. It is their inner freedom. They are so free of distrust of themselves that they can easily open their lives to another man. They need none of the specious security of the walls which in the west each person builds between himself and his neighbours.<sup>23</sup>

He also mentions how he became close with Muslims. He was greatly influenced by the Muslim prayer, by the Muslims' attitude towards their religion, by their regard for the Holy Book of Allah as their constitution and Islam as their way of life.

Once he went to the Umayyad mosque in Damascus to observe a ritual of prayer. Of this he said:

"It was at this moment that I became aware how near their God and their faith were to these people. Their prayer did not seem to be divorced from their working day; it was part of it – not meant to help them forget life, but to remember it better by remembering God."<sup>24</sup>

The next three chapters of the book are '*Spirit and Flesh, Dreams; Midway*' which are about his life in Arabia, where he spent twenty years. It was an age dominated by turbulence and much political confusion. The First World War had wrought unimaginable destruction upon Europe, determining new political boundaries and affiliations.

Muhammad Asad's *Road to Mecca* began at the time of the birth of the nations of Arabia. His early years were dominated by extensive travels to the remotest regions of the Arabian Desert, intense study of the Arabic language and a gradual but profound attraction to the Islamic faith.

He loved to travel among the Bedouins of Mecca. He once asked an old Bedouin about why he moved from

one place to another. The Bedouin replied: "If water stands motionless in a pool it grows stable and muddy, but when it moves and flows it becomes clear. So, too, man in his wanderings."<sup>25</sup>

The chapters combine the fine lines of a writer with the weight and authority of the philosopher. And in his empathy and ability to embrace the peoples and traditions of this "wild land", he succeeds –where others have failed –in providing an authentic and original experience of the lands of the Arabian Desert and an intimate look at the adventure and beauty of a spiritual journey. He observes:

"Have I lived so long in Arabia only to become an Arab? –or was it perhaps a preparation for something that is yet to come?"<sup>26</sup>

After embracing Islam in 1926 he told the story of his conversion:

"My way to Islam had been in many respects unique: I had not become a Muslim because I had lived for a long time among Muslims. On the contrary, I decided to live among them because I had embraced Islam. Might I not, by communicating my very personal experiences to western readers, contribute more to a mutual understanding between the Islamic and western world than I could by continuing in a diplomatic position which might be filled equally well by other countrymen of mine?"<sup>27</sup>

In Palestine, Muhammad Asad became a stringer for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, where he wrote against Zionism and in support of the Muslim cause and Arab nationalism, with a strong anti-British bias. He published a small book on the subject in 1924 under the title *Unromantisches Morgenland*, and this so inspired the confidence of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* that it commissioned him to travel more widely still, to collect information for a full-scale book. Muhammad Asad mentions this book in the chapter 'Midway' of *The Road to Mecca*. He entitled it *Unromantisches Morgenland* –by which I meant to convey

that, it was not a book but rather an endeavour to penetrate its day -by -day realities. Although its anti -Zionist attitude and unusual predilection for the Arabs caused something of a flutter in the German Press, I am afraid it did sell very well."<sup>28</sup>

In the next chapter, Muhammad Asad tells the story of Faysal al -Dawish, a rebel opposing Ibn Saud's rule. (Faysal al -Dawish was a Najdi and had a strong following among the Ikhwan). Muhammad Asad was employed by Ibn Saud on a clandestine mission to Kuwait in 1929, to trace the funds and guns that were flowing to Faysal al -Dawish. Asad determined that Britain was behind the rebellion and said as much in his dispatches to foreign papers, much to Ibn Saud's satisfaction.

He says that, "the series of articles which I subsequently wrote made it clear for the first time that the rebels were being supported by a great European power. They pointed out that the basic aim of these intrigues was to push Ibn Saud's frontiers southward and, ultimately, to convert his most northerly province into an 'independent' principality between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which would allow the British to build a railway line across its territory."<sup>29</sup>

In yet another chapter of this book, '*Dajjal*' the author explains how Islam and the teachings of the Qur'an fascinated him. He says that:

"The message of Islam envisaged and brought to life a civilization in which there was no room for nationalism, no vested interests, no class divisions, no church, no priesthood, no hereditary nobility; in-fact, no hereditary functions at all. The aim was to establish a theocracy with regard to God and a democracy between man and man."<sup>30</sup>

In the same chapter Muhammad Asad says:

"Often we would read the Qur'an together and discuss its ideas; and Elsa, like me, became more and more impressed by the inner cohesion between its moral teachings and its practical guidance. According to the



**Qur'an, God did not call for blind subservience on the part of man but rather appealed to his intellect; He did not stand apart from man's destiny but was nearer to him than the vein in his neck."**<sup>31</sup>

In this chapter, Muhammad Asad wrote that his relationship with his father was resumed in 1935, after his father had come to "understand and appreciate the reasons for my conversion to Islam." Although they never met again in person, they "remained in continuous correspondence until 1942."<sup>32</sup>

He left Saudi Arabia in 1932, with the declared aim of travelling to India, Turkistan, China, and Indonesia. He gave no explanation in this book for his break with Ibn Saud, except his personal disappointment with the monarch. He says in the chapter '*Jihad*':

"I had for years pinned my hopes on Ibn Saud as the potential leader of an Islamic revival; and now that these hopes had proved futile, I could see in the entire Muslim world only one movement that genuinely strove for the fulfillment of the ideal of an Islamic society: the Sansui movement, now fighting a last-ditch battle for survival."<sup>33</sup>

The last chapter of the book, "*End of the Road*" describes his circumambulation of the Holy *Kaba*. Muhammad Asad made his first pilgrimage with his wife Elsa. She died nine days later.

So the book, '*The Road to Mecca*' cannot be read as a document of historical truth about Arabia, Ibn Saud, or even the author's life. It is an impressionistic self-portrait that suggests more than it tells. The book is a combination of memoirs and travelogues, telling the story of a convert to Islam who had crossed the spiritual deserts of Europe and the sandy deserts of Arabia, on a trek that brought him ultimately to the oasis of Islamic belief.

When the state of Pakistan was founded in 1947, Muhammad Asad was invited to serve as its first director of the Department of Islamic Concept of Statehood and the Community. He has contributed to Islamic thought

enormously and falls into the group of scholars substantiating the concept of the state in Islam. He work a treatise exclusively devoted to the subject of the state in Islam – *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, which was published by the University of California Press, Los-Angeles in 1961. This book, built upon his essays, 'Islamic Constitution-Making', which was published in English and Urdu under the auspices of the Government of the Punjab in March 1948, was published again in Gibraltar in 1980. The book comprises 107 pages and is divided into six chapters. These are:

1. The Issue before Us
2. Terminology and Historical Precedent
3. Government by Consent and Council
4. Relationship between Executive and Legislature
5. The Citizen and the Government
6. Conclusion

The book is a collection of thoughts, essays and broadcasts made by the author over a forty-year period.

This work, written from the modern perspective, is a rational critique of basic western philosophy and aims to remove any misconceptions about the Islamic state. This is clear in his treatment of issues such as 'Why an Islamic State, Religion and Morality?', "The Scope of Islamic Law", and 'Misapplications of Western Terms', etc.

Muhammad Asad points out in the chapter, *Government by Consent and Council*, that, an "Islamic State is not a goal or an end in itself but only a means: this being the growth of a community of people who stand up for equity and justice, for right and against wrong-or, to put it more precisely, a community of people who work for the creation and maintenance of such social conditions as would enable the greatest possible number of human beings to live, morally as well as physically, in accordance with the natural law of God, Islam." <sup>34</sup>

The other dimension of his approach is to deal with the issue of the principles of state. Here he breaks new

ground by exploring the various political forms of state and the wisdom behind the unwritten nature of the Islamic Constitution. The scope of Islamic law and the nature of council and assembly in the state are considerably highlighted in the book. Here he seems to be addressing the crucial demand of the Muslim world to formulate the guiding principles of state –craft in Islam.

In this book the author argues clearly for a change in attitude of Muslims, whether they be scholars or laymen, emphasizing that a true Islamic revival is possible only by going back to the original sources, i.e. the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and rejecting the schools of *Fiqh*, which by the very nature of their approach are no longer relevant to the need of our times. Moreover, he says that only the *nusus* (clear text) are eternally binding. By their nature they are not subject to conflicting interpretations; they are in no need of interpretations, being absolutely self-contained and unambiguous in their wording. All such nass ordinances are so formulated that they can be applied to every stage of man's social and intellectual development. On the other hand, many of the subjective conclusions of the jurists are reflections of a particular time and mentality and cannot, therefore, lay claim to eternal validity. Thus it is the *nusus* of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and only these, that collectively constitute the real, eternal shariah of Islam.<sup>35</sup> He argues that the state of affairs will never change until Muslims reconcile themselves to the true tenets of the shariah.

It was Pola Hamida, the wife of Muhammad Asad, who gathered together his, various writings and radio talks of and persuaded him to publish them as '*This Law of Ours*' which was first published by Masud Ali, Resident Director of the Islamic Cultural Centre, Rajshahi, in the Asiatic Press of Dacca in June 1980. The book comprises 44 pages. Later the book was published by Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, in 1987 under the title '*This Law of Ours And Other Essays*'. The book runs to 195 pages. It contains

essays, written as far back as the 1940's, which aimed to contribute some sort of a clarification regarding the confusion prevailing in the Muslim *Ummah* as to the scope and practical implications of Islamic law.

The essays which are highlighted in this book are:

1. An Imaginary Conversation.
2. Codification of Islamic Law.
3. And Our Future.
4. Islamic Law and Muslim Law.
5. A Voice of Nine Hundred Years Ago.
6. Is There Another Way?

Pola Hamida points out in the preface that the reader will be struck "not only by the extraordinary timeliness and timelessness of these thoughts and predictions, but also by their great consistency." (36) This book represents Muhammad Asad's work and thought from the mid-1940 to 1987.

In this same Book he points out what is incumbent on a Muslim. Belief in the Oneness of God – indivisible in His Existence, unattainable by human thought, all – embracing in His Wisdom and Power – and, then in the Apostleship of Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him), Last of the Prophets, Mercy to all the Worlds.<sup>37</sup>

In this book he also explains how he was detained in India as a national enemy in September 1939, and spent the next six years in internment camps with Germans, Austrians, and Italians who had been arrested from all over British-ruled Asia. On this, he said: "My camp was peopled by both Nazis and anti –Nazis as well as Fascists and anti –Fascists"<sup>38</sup>

During his internment, he established contact with his uncle in Jerusalem, Aryeh Feigenbaum, who sent him food, clothes and money. After six years in August 1945, Muhammad Asad was released, and subsequently went to Pakistan after partition, which he saw not simply as a refuge, but as the framework for an ideal Islamic Polity. In 1947, he gave himself over to formulating proposals for

its constitution. Asad's purpose in these proposals is clear: it is to establish an Islamic state as a liberal, multiparty parliamentary democracy. In the 1930s and 1940s, the idea of the Islamic State, in the hands of many ideologies, had been presented as antithetical to democracy, and similar to the totalitarian states of central Europe. Muhammad Asad's work challenged that trend, finding evidence in the Islamic sources for elections, parliamentary legislation, and political parties.

A large portion of this book elaborates Islamic and western civilization and Muslim law. In particular, it deals with the role of *ijtihad* and the creative outlook of the Prophets companions and the great jurists of the past, on the necessity for independent thinking grounded in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. It also contains the author's perspective on the ideological basis of Pakistan as well as on Islam's encounter with the west.

The Qur'an is a miracle. For Muslims, the authenticity of the Qur'an as the word of Allah is beyond any doubt. It urges man to look around him, into Allah's creation and into himself; there he will perceive how creation is perfected in a total harmony.

Later Muhammad Asad subsequently translated the Qur'an into English and wrote a *Tafsir* (commentary) of the Qur'an under the title, '*The Message of the Qur'an*'. It was published in Gibraltar in 1980.

No translation can perhaps ever be satisfactory, nor is an authorized or standard version possible. However Muhammad Asad's translation has some unique qualities. He spent more than 20 years of his life in contemplating the meaning of the Qur'an in English and the commentary in the tradition of the great commentators whose scholarship has enriched studies over the centuries. He began work on the translation in 1960 and began to compile it in Switzerland. A limited edition of the first nine chapters of *The Message of the Qur'an* was published in 1964 and then the complete edition, in one single volume,

comprising 1000 pages, was published in 1980. The Message of the Qur'an presents a valuable discussion of all the moral and social concepts of the Qur'an. The Qur'an not only lays down principles of morality and ethics, but also gives guidance in the political, social and economic fields. This is one of the best translations of the Qur'an. It has made understanding Islam easier for many Europeans and Americans and is responsible for the conversion to the faith of Islam of not hundreds but of thousands of people in Europe and America.

It is a fact that no good commentary of the full Qur'an, which can be unhesitatingly recommended to a beginner, is available in English. The first interpretation of the Qur'an by a European convert appeared as late as 1930. It was *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. But Muhammad Asad had not been satisfied with this widely used translation, since Pickthall's knowledge of Arabic had been limited. As Asad later wrote. "Familiarity with the Bedouin speech of central and Eastern Arabia –in addition, of course, to academic knowledge of classical Arabic –is the only way for a non – Arab of our time to achieve an intimate understanding of the diction of the Qur'an. And because none of the scholars who have previously translated the Qur'an into European languages have ever fulfilled this prerequisite, their translations have remained but distant, and spirit."<sup>39</sup>

The Qur'an can only be properly understood if one is familiar with the historical context of individual revelations and with the coherent inner thread of the text. Equally important is the knowledge of what the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him), a man of the highest integrity, authority, spirituality, and charisma said, did, or consciously did not do (*Hadith*); for as the receiver of the message he was its born interpreter in case of doubt. In addition the Qur'an specifically demands that Muslims follow Muhammad's (Peace and blessings be upon him) example in matters of faith and ethics.<sup>40</sup>

The great thinkers of our past understood this problem fully well. In their commentaries, they appeared the Qur'an with their superb knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Prophets teachings forthcoming from his *Sunnah* as well as by the store of general knowledge available to them and by the historical and cultural experiences which had shaped human society until their time. Hence, it was only natural that the way in which one commentator understood a particular Qur'anic statement or expression differed occasionally and sometimes very incisively from the meaning attributed to it by this or that of his predecessors. In other words says Muhammad Asad, "they often contradicted one another in their interpretations but they did this without any animosity, being fully aware of the element of relativity inherent in all human reasoning, and of each other's integrity. And they were fully aware, too, of the Prophet's profound saying, 'the difference of opinion (*ikhtilaf*) among the learned men of my community are [an outcome of] divine grace (*rahmah*).'" Which clearly implies that such differences of opinion are the basis of all progress in human thinking and, therefore, a most potent factor in man's acquisition of knowledge."<sup>41</sup>

Muhammad Asad was eminently qualified for his task. He spent his whole life studying the Qur'an, the *Hadith* and other allied Islamic disciplines. He had lived in Arabia, leading a Bedouin life-style, which made him a unique personality capable of understanding the Qur'an. Through daily contact with the people he had gained greater familiarity with Arabic than any other western translator of the Qur'an. As an earnest convert, he treated the Qur'an with both the veneration of a believer and the passion of an intellectual on a mission. His translation of the Qur'an and his commentary are considered the best in the English language. They are renowned for their intellectual insight and frequent references to classical commentaries such as *Zamakhshari* and *Al-Tabari*. He says

in the foreword to the Message of the Qur'an that, "As regards the style of my translation, I have consciously avoided using unnecessary archaisms, which would only tend to obscure the meaning of the Qur'an to the commentary reader. I did not see any necessity of rendering the Qur'anic phrases into a deliberately 'modern' idiom, which would conflict with the spirit of the Arabic original and jar upon any ear attuned to the solemnity inherent in the concept of revelation. With all this, however, I make no claim to having reproduced anything of the indescribable rhythm and rhetoric of the Qur'an. No one who has truly experienced its majestic beauty could ever be presumptuous enough to make such a claim or ever to embark upon such an attempt. And I am fully aware that my rendering does not and could not really 'do justice to the Qur'an and the layers upon layers of its meaning: for,

If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words, the sea would indeed be exhausted are my Sustainer's words are exhausted. (Holy Qur'an: 18: 109).<sup>42</sup>

He has made a seminal contribution to our understanding of the Holy Writ of Islam and offered his own evaluation of the remarkable example that the life of the Prophet of Islam has presented to the world at large and the high watermark of excellence it provides of how best our earthly life can be lived, here below.

## NOTES

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9. Asad, Muhammad: *ibid*, p. 91.
10. Asad, Muhammad: *ibid*, p. 93.
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# Muhammad Asad's Contribution to the English Translation and Commentary of the Quran

Praise to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds, Who has said in His Holy Book:

"There has come unto you from God a Light, and a clear divine writ."<sup>1</sup>

And may Peace and Blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad, who has said that:

*"The best among you is he who learned the Qur'an and then taught it."*<sup>2</sup> May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, his family and all his Companions.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of Allah revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) through the medium of a language called Arabic. It was the language of the Arabian Peninsula, the language of a people endowed with that peculiar quick-wittedness which the desert and its feel of wide, timeless expanses bestows upon its children, the language of people whose mental images, flowing without effort from association to association, succeed one another in rapid progression and often vault elliptically over intermediate as it were 'self understood'<sup>3</sup> sequences of thought towards the idea which they aim to conceive or express. They (Muslims) also believe that the Qur'anic language is untranslatable into any other language. But Allah has promised to safeguard it from any violations in its purity.

Allah says in Qur'an;

"Behold, it is we ourselves who has bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder: and behold, it is we who shall truly guard it (from all corruption)."<sup>4</sup>

This prophecy has been strikingly confirmed by the fact that the text of the Qur'an has remained free from all alternations, additions or deletions ever since it was enunciated by the Prophet in the seventh century of the Christian ere.<sup>5</sup>

It becomes incumbent upon each and every person who seeks the dignity of this world and the bliss of the hereafter to regulate his life according to it, to implement its commandments and to pay homage to the magnificence of Allah, Who revealed it. This can be an easy task for those, who understand Arabic, so the language of the Qur'an. But for those not acquainted with Arabic, the translation of the word of Allah is not a task to be undertaken lightly or performed superficially. Muhammad Asad not only rendered the Qur'an into English, he also wrote a commentary on it. He says in the foreword to *The Message of the Qur'an*;

"....although it is impossible to 'reproduce' the Qur'an as such in any other language, it is none the less possible to render its message comprehensible to people who, like most westerners, do not know Arabic....well enough to find their way through it unaided."<sup>6</sup>

More than twenty years of Muhammad Asad's life were spent in contemplating the meaning of the Qur'an in English with the commentary in the tradition of the great commentators whose scholarship has enriched studies through the centuries. The first edition of the first nine chapters of the Qur'an was published in 1946, and then the complete edition, a volume of 1000 pages, was published in 1980 under the title "*The Message of the Qur'an*."

He says that, the translator must be guided throughout by the linguistic usage prevalent at the time of

the revelation of Qur'an and must always bear in mind that some of its expressions-especially such as relate to abstract concepts- have in the course of time undergone a subtle change in the popular mind and should not, therefore, be translated in accordance with the sense given to them by postal-classical usage"<sup>7</sup>

No translation can perhaps ever be satisfactory, nor is an authorized or standard version possible. But Muhammad Asad had a special system of translating Qur'an into English, which made Islam easier for many Europeans and Americans in the Islamic world.

The first verse of the Qur'an is:

*"Bismillah-irahmani-rahim."* (1:1)

It was perhaps the first time that an English translator presented the translation of this verse as, "In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace." This appears to be very close to the words '*Rehman* and *Rahim*', while the other English translators of the Qur'an translate the same verse as:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." (Al-Tabari)

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful." (Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall)

"In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Abdul Majid Daryabadi's Urdu translation "*Tafsir-i-Majidi*" is closer to the view of Muhammad Asad's translation, as he translates the word '*Rahim*' in Urdu as '*baar baar raham karney walla*' which is closer to the meaning 'The Dispenser of Grace.'

Similarly, Muhammad Asad translated certain verses of the Qur'an into English in a manner different from other translations of the Qur'an.

He translates the verse "*inna llazzina kafaru .....*" (2:6) as:

“Those who are bent on denying the truth.....”

While the other English translators of the Qur'an translate this verse as:

“As for the unbelievers.....” (Al-Tabari, Marmaduke Pickthall)

“As to those who reject faith.....” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“Surely those who have disbelieved.....” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

In the explanation of this verse, Muhammad Asad says:

“In contrast with the frequently occurring term *al-kafirun* (those who deny the truth), the use of the past tense in *allazzina kafaru* indicates conscious intent, and is, therefore, appropriately rendered as ‘those who are bent on denying the truth.’” This interpretation is supported by many commentators, especially *Zamakhshari*, (who in his commentary on this verse uses the expression, ‘those who have deliberately resolved upon their *kufur*’).”<sup>8</sup>

This concept appears in Qur'anic revelation at other places: “....men who have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear....” (7:179)

Many misconceptions about the Qur'an which have been attributed to the verse “*wa-idh qala Mush..... Fa'-qtulu anfusakum.....*” (2:53) are automatically explained when we consider that English translators of the Qur'an have translated “*Fa'-qtulu anfusakum*” as:

“Slay one another” (Al-Tabari, Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

“Kill (the guilty) yourselves.” (Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall)

“Slay yourselves” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

But Muhammad Asad translates this as “Mortify yourselves.”

In the explanatory notes to this verse he says:

“The literal interpretation of ‘kill yourselves’

(probably based on the Biblical account in Exodus xxxii, 26-28) is not, however convincing in view of the immediately preceding call to repentance. I incline, therefore, to the interpretation given by Abd al-Jabbar (quoted by Razi in his commentary on this verse) to the effect that the expression 'kill yourselves' is used here in a metaphorical sense (*majazan*), i.e. 'mortify your selves.'" <sup>9</sup>

The other verse "*Wa izz qatal -tum nafsan faddaar -taktumuun. Faqul -naz-ribuuhu bi-ba'zihaa kazaalika yuh-yil -laahul -mautta, wa yuriikum aayaatihii la-'allakum ta'-qiluun*" (2: 72-73) has been translated by almost all English translators of the Qur'an as:

"Remember ye slew a man and fell into a dispute among yourselves as to the crime: But Allah was to bring forth what ye did hide. So we said: 'Strike the (body) with a piece of the (heifer)'. Thus Allah bringeth the dead to life and showeth you His Signs: Perchance ye may understand." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, M.M. Pickthall and Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

But Muhammad Asad translated the same verses as, "For, O children of Israel, because you had slain a human being and then cast the blame for this [crime] upon one another- although God will bring to light what you would conceal- We said: 'Apply this [principle] to some of those [cases of unresolved murder]: in this way God saves lives from death and shows you His Will, so that you might [learn to] use your reason."

The phrase *idribuhu bi -badiha* can be literally translated as: 'Strike him [or 'it'] with something of her [or 'it']' -and this possibility has given rise to notion of the children of Israel being commanded to strike the corpse of the murdered man with some of the flesh of the sacrificed cow, whereupon he was miraculously restored to life. Muhammad Asad says in his explanatory note that neither the Qur'an, nor any saying of the Prophet, nor even the Bible offers the slightest warrant for this highly imaginative explanation, which must, therefore, be rejected

—quite apart from the fact that the pronoun *hu* in *idribuhu* has a masculine gender, while the noun *nafs* (here translated as ‘human beings’) is feminine in gender: from which it follows that the imperative *idribuhu* cannot possibly refer to *nafs*. On the other hand, the verb *daraba* is often used in a figurative or metonymic sense, for instance, in the expression *daraba fi’l-ard* (“he journeyed on earth”), or *daraba ‘sh-shay’ bi’sh-shay’* (“he mixed one thing with another thing”), or *daraba mathal* (“he coined a similitude” or “propounded a parable” or “gave an illustration”), or *‘ala darb wahid* (“similarly applied” or “in the same manner”), or *duribat ‘alayhim adh -dhillah* (“humiliation was imposed on them” or “applied to them”), and so forth. Muhammad Asad took all this into account and came to the conclusion that the imperative *idribuhub* occurring in the above Qur’anic passage must be translated as “apply it” or “this” (referring, in this context, to the principle of communal responsibility). As for the feminine noun *ha* in *badiha* (“some of it”), it must necessarily relate to the nearest preceding feminine noun—that is, to the *nafs* that has been murdered, or the act of murder itself about which (*fiha*) the community disagreed. Thus, the phrase *idribuhu bi – badiha* may be suitably rendered as “apply this [principle] to some of those [cases of unresolved murder]”: for it is obvious that the principle of communal responsibility for murder by a person or persons unknown can be applied only to some and not all such cases. Further, he says, that the figurative expression “he gives life to the dead” denotes the saving of lives as laid down in 5:32. In this context it refers to the prevention of bloodshed and the killing of innocent persons, which can come about as a result of instigating an erroneous judicial process based on no more than vague suspicion and possibly misleading circumstantial evidence.<sup>10</sup>

The verse “*Ma Nansukh min ayahtin aw nunsuha naat-i-bikahir-n-minha aw misliha*” was translated by

**Muhammad Asad as:**

**"Any message which We annul or consign to oblivion We replace *ith* a better or a similar one" (2:106)**

**And the same verse translated by other scholars are:**

**"None of our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but we substitute something better or similar." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)**

**"Such of our revelations as we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof." (M. M. Pickthall)**

**"Whatsoever verse we abrogate or cause to be forgotten we bring a better one or the like of it ..." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)**

**Muhammad Asad says in his explanatory notes that; "taking this restricted meaning of the term *ayah*, some scholars conclude from the above passage that certain verses of the Qur'an have been abrogated by God's command, before the revelation of the Qur'an was completed. Apart from the fancifulness of this assertion, which calls to mind the image of a human author correcting, on second thought, the proofs of his manuscript, deleting one passage and replacing it with another, there does not exist a single reliable tradition to the effect that the Prophet ever declared a verse of the Qur'an to have been 'abrogated' ..... The 'doctrine of abrogation' has no basis whatever in historical fact, and must be rejected." <sup>11</sup>**

**Later he says that "on the other hand, the apparent difficulty in interpreting the above Qur'anic passage disappears immediately if the term *ayah* is understood, correctly, as "message" and if we read this verse in conjunction with the preceding one, which states that the Jews and the Christians refuse to accept any revelation which might supersede that of the Bible: for, if read in this way, the abrogation relates to the earlier message and not to any part of the Qur'an itself."<sup>12</sup>**

**Here Muhammad Asad appears to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of the verse and appears to**



express unconventional views on the abrogation (*Naskh*) theory. Translating the Holy Qur'an has its own challenges because it is a divine scripture, hence capable of meaning differently in different ages.

The verse "...*faman 'u-fiya lahhu min akhihi shay – un fattibaa-'um bil-ma-'ruffi wa addaa-un ilayhi bi-ih-saan...*" (2:178) has been translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Arberry as:

"...But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grants any reasonable demand...."

"....And for him who is forgiven somewhat by his (injured) brother, prosecution according to usage and payment unto him in kindness..." (Muhammad M. Pickthall)

"...yet whose is pardoned ought by his brother, let the service be honorable and payment with kindness....."(Ab. Majid Daryabadi).

But Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

"And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness, and restitution to his fellow –man shall be made in a goodly manner."

In his explanatory notes he says; "and he to whom [something] is remitted by his brother". There is no linguistic justification what ever for attributing –as some of the commentators have done –the pronoun "his" to the victim and, thus for assuming that the expression "brother" stands for the victim's "family" or "blood relation". The pronoun "his" refers, unquestionably, to the guilty person; and since there is no reason for assuming that by "his brother" a real brother is meant, it denotes here "his brother in faith" or "his fellow man" –in either of which terms the whole community is included. Thus the expression 'if something is remitted to a guilty person by his brother' (by the community or its legal organs) may refer either to the establishment of mitigating circumstances in a case of murder, or to the finding that

the case under trial falls within the categories of culpable homicide or manslaughter in which cases there would be no capital punishment. Restitution is to be made by the payment of an indemnity called *diyyah* to the relative of the victim. In consonance with the oft-recurring Qur'anic exhortation to forgiveness and forbearance, the 'remission' mentioned above may also relate to a partial or even total waiving of any claim to indemnification.<sup>13</sup>

The word *ada'* (here translated as "restitution") denotes an act of acquitting oneself of a duty or a debt, and stands here for the act of legal-reparation imposed on the guilty person. This reparation is to be made "in a goodly manner" –by taking into account the situation of the accused and, on the latter's part, by acquitting himself of his obligation willingly and sincerely.<sup>14</sup>

Verse 189 of the second chapter "*.....walaysal –birru bi an taatulbuyuuta min Zuhuurihha walaakinnal –birra manittaqaa.waatul –buyuuta min abwaabihaa; wattaquillaaha la –'allakum tuflihun*" (2:189) has been translated by certain English translators of the holy Qur'an as:

".... It is no virtue if ye enter your houses from the back: It is virtue if ye fear Allah. Enter houses through the proper doors: And fear Allah that ye may prosper." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

".... And it is no virtue that you enter your houses by their backs but the virtue is his who fears God; so enter the houses by their doors, and fear Allah, in order that you may thrive." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"...It is not righteousness that ye go to houses by the backs thereof (as do the idolaters at certain seasons), but the righteous man is he who wardeth off (evil). So go to houses by the gates thereof, and observe your duty to Allah, that ye may be successful." (M.M. Pickthall)

But Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

".....However, piety does not consist in your entering houses from the rear, [as it were] but truly pious is he who

is conscious of God. Hence, enter houses through their doors, and remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state.”

He says in his explanatory notes that “true piety does not consist in approaching questions of faith through a ‘back door’, as it were –that is, through mere observance of the forms and periods set for the performance of various religious duties. However important these forms and time –limits may be in themselves, they do not fulfill their real purpose unless every act is approached through its spiritual ‘front door’, that is, through God-consciousness.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Razi, metonymically, the word *bab* (door) signifies “a means of access to, or of attainment of, a thing”, the metaphor of “entering a house through its door” is often used in classical Arabic to denote a proper approach to a problem.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, another verse of this chapter “.....*wallaahu yahdii man yashaaa-u illaa siraatim –musta-qim.*”(2:213) has been translated by many English translators as;

“....Allah guides whom He will to a path that is straight.” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“.... Allah guideth whom He will unto a straight path.” (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

“.... Allah guides whom He will to path straight.” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

But Muhammad Asad translates this verse as:

“...God guides on to a straight way him that wills [to be guided].”

He explains the verse as: “(God guides whomever He wills on to a straight way). As is made clear in the second part of verse 253 of this chapter, man’s proneness to intellectual dissension is not an accident of history but an integral , part of human nature as such: and it is this natural circumstance to which the words ‘by His leave’ allude.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet another verse “*Innallaziina aamanuu wallaziina hajaruu...*” (2:218) has been translated as:

“Those who believed and those who suffered exile....” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

“Lo! Those who believe and those who emigrate....” (M. Pickthall)

“Surely those who have believed and those who have emigrated....” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates this verse as:

“Verily, they who have attained to faith, and they who have forsaken the domain of evil.....”

He says, that the expression *allaziina hajarū* (lit; ‘those who have forsaken their homelands’) denotes, primarily, the early Meccan Muslims who migrated at the Prophet’s bidding to Medina in order to be able to live in freedom and in accordance with the dictates of Islam. After the conquest of Mecca by the Muslims in the year 8H., this exodus (*hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina ceased to be a religious obligation. Even in the earliest days there was a spiritual connotation as well –namely, a “forsaking of the domain of evil” and turning towards God: and since that time this spiritual connotation has applied both to the historical emigrants (*muhajirun*) of early Islam and to all believers of later times who forsake all that is sinful and “migrate unto God”.<sup>18</sup>

So Muhammad Asad’s translation is closer to the original text.

Verse 241 of the same chapter, “*walilmulalaqati mataun bil –ma ‘roof*” has been translated by other English translators of the Qur’an as:

“For divorced women is a suitable gift” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“For divorced women a provision in kindness” (M. Pickthall)

“And for the divorced women an honorable present” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

However Muhammad Asad translates this verse as:

“And the divorced women, too, shall have [a right to] maintenance in a goodly manner.”

He says that, this obviously relates to women who are divorced without any legal fault on their part. The amount of alimony –payable unless and until they remarry –has been left unspecified since it must depend on the husband’s financial circumstances and on the social conditions of the time.<sup>19</sup>

Yet another verse “....*Innallaziina aamanuu wallaziina hajaruu....*” has been translated by English translators of the Qur’an as:

“....A sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark of the Covenant...” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“.... Lo! The token of his kingdom is that there shall come unto you the ark....” (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

“....Surely the sign of his kingship is that there shall come to you the ark....” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

“....behold, it shall be a sign of his [rightful] dominion that you will be granted a heart....”

In his commentary on this verse he says that, the word *tabut* here rendered as ‘heart’, has been conventionally interpreted as denoting the Ark of the covenant mentioned in the old Testament, which is said to have been a highly-ornamented chest or box. The explanations offered by most of the commentators who adopt the latter meaning are very contradictory, and seem to be based on Talmudic legends woven around that “ark”. However, several authorities of the highest standing attribute to *tabut* the meaning of “bosom” or heart as well: viz Baydawi, in one of the alternatives offered in his commentary on this verse, as well as Zamakhshari in his *Asas* (though not in the *Kashaf*), ibn Athir in the *al-Nihayah*, *Raghib*, and *Taj al -Arus* (the latter four in the article *tabata*). If we take this to be the meaning of *tabut* in the above context, it would read as an allusion to the Israelites’ coming change of heart. In view of the subsequent mention of the “inner peace” in the *tabut*, its rendering as

“heart” is definitely more appropriate than “*ark*”.<sup>20</sup>

So the only befitting translation is that of Muhammad Asad, which conveys the real sense of the verse.

There are some other verses of this chapter which shows us the difference in the translation of certain words such as:

“....*Innallaaha ‘alaa kulli shay –in qadiir*” (2: 20)

“....*La- ‘allakum tattaquun.*” (2:21)

“*Yaaa-ayyu-hallaziina .....*” (2:178)

“..... *Muttaqiin.*” (2:2)

These verses have been translated almost by all English translators of the Qur’an as:

“...For Allah hath power over all things.”

“....That ye may become righteous.”

“O ye who believe ....”

“....To those who fear.”

But Muhammad Asad translates the same verses as,

“...God has the power to will anything.”

“.... So that you might remain conscious of Him.”

“O you who have attained to faith!.....”

“.....the God –conscious.”

Muhammad Asad say of the last verse that: “The conventional translation of *muttaqi* as ‘God –fearing’ sdoes not adequately render the positive content of this expression –namely, the awareness; while the interpretation adopted by some translators, ‘one who guards himself against evil’ or ‘one who is careful of his duty’, does not give more than one particular aspect of the concept of God–consciousness.”<sup>21</sup>

Now see the differences in the English translation and commentary in the verses of the chapter *Al –Imran*.

The verse “.... *Musadiq lima bayna yadahi....*” (3:3) has been translated by almost all other English-knowing translators as: “....confirming what went before it: And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel....” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall and Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

“....confirms whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations]...”

Most of the commentators are of the opinion that *ma bayna yadyhi* –denotes here “the revelations which came before it”, i.e. before the Qur’an but, according to the opinion of Muhammad Asad, this interpretation is not, however, entirely convincing.

He says although there is not the least doubt that in this context the pronominal *ma* refers to earlier revelations and particularly the Bible, (as is evident from the parallel use of the above expression in other Qur’anic passages) the idiomatic phrase *ma bayna yadyhi*’ does not, in itself, mean “that which came before it”. i. e., in time –but rather as pointed out by him in chapter 2:247, “that which lies open before it”. Since, however, the pronoun ‘it’ relates here to the Qur’an, the metaphysical expression ‘between its hands’ or ‘before it, cannot possibly refer to ‘knowledge’ as it does in 2:255 ,but most obviously refers to an objective reality ,with which the Qur’an is ‘confronted’ that is ,something that was coexistent in time with the revelation of the Qur’an. Now this, taken together,

- (a) with the fact – frequently stressed in the Qur’an and since established by objective scholarship – that in the course of the millennia the Bible has been subjected to considerable and often arbitrary alteration, and
- (b) with the fact that many of the laws enunciated in the Qur’an differ from the laws of the Bible , brings him perforce to the conclusion that the “confirmation” of the latter by the Qur’an can refer only to the basic truths still discernible in the Bible, and not to its time-bound legislation or to its present text.

In other words it is a confirmation of whatever was extant of its basic teachings at the time of the revelation of the Qur’an: and it is this that the phrase *ma bayana yadahi*

expressed in this context as well as in 5:46 and 48 and 61:6, where it refers to Jesus' confirming the truth of 'whatever there still remained [i.e., in his lifetime] of the Torah.' <sup>22</sup>

The verse "*Tuulijul –layla finnaaari....*" (3:27) has been translated by Muhammad Asad as: "Though makest the night grow longer by shortening the day" and other translators of the Qur'an translate the same verse in English as:

"Thou causest the night to gain on the day ...."(Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"Thou causest the night to pass into the day...." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"Thou plungest night into day ..." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

So in this verse Muhammad Asad's translation seems to be closer to the Arabic context.

The verse "*....wa lay-saz zakaaru kal-unsaaa....*" (3:36) has been translated by Muhammad Asad as:

"....and [fully aware] that no male child [she might have hoped for] could ever have been like this female."

And the same verse has been translated by other English knowing translators as:

"....And is not the male like the female ....."(Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"....The male is not as the female; ...." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall and Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains in his commentary on this verse that:

"The female child could not be devoted to Temple service under the Mosaic Law, as she intended. But she was marked out for a special destiny as a miracle-child, to be the mother of the miracle-child Jesus. She was content to seek Allah's protection for her against all evil. There is a certain sense of pride in the girl on the part of the mother".<sup>23</sup>

Muhammad Asad says in his commentary:

".... 'And the male is not [or "could not be"] like the female.' Zamakhshari reads these words as forming part



of the parenthetic sentence relating to God's knowledge, and explains them thus: 'The male [child] which she had prayed for could not have been like the female which she was granted' –which implies that Mary's excellence would go far beyond any hopes which her mother had ever entertained".<sup>24</sup>

Another verse of same chapter "*....Inniii akhluqu lakum –mina-tiini ka- hayatit –tayri fa –anfukhu fiihi fayakuunu tayram bi –iznillaah:...*" (3:49) is thus translated by Muhammad Asad:

"...I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breath into it, so that it might become [your] destiny by God's leave..."

Other translators have translated the same verse as:

"....In that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breath into it and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave". (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

".... Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's leave ...." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

" .... Surely I form for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and then I breath in it, and a bird it becomes by Allah's leave ....". (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes in a short comment on this verse in his translation of the Qur'an that:

"This miracle of the clay birds is found in some of the apocryphal Gospels; those of curing the blind and the lepers and raising the dead are in the canonical Gospels. The original Gospel (iii.48) was not the various stories written afterwards by disciples, but the real Message taught direct by Jesus".<sup>25</sup>

And Muhammad Asad's commentary on the same verse in his translation and commentary to the Qur'an is as follows:

"The noun *tayr* is a plural of *tair* ("flying creature" or "bird"), or an infinitive noun ("flying") derived from the verb *tara* ("he flew"). In pre-Islamic usage, as well as in

the Qur'an, the words *ta'ir* and *tayr* often denote "fortune" or "destiny", whether good or evil (as, for instance, in 7:131, 27:47 or 36:19, and still more clearly in 17:13) ..... Thus, in the parabolic manner so beloved by him, Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny, and that this vision, brought to life by his God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny by God's leave and by the strength of their faith."<sup>26</sup>

The English translators of the Holy Qur'an translated the verse "*Izz qaa-lallaahu yaa- 'Iisaaa innii muta-waffika wa raffi -uka I -layya...*" (3:55) as:

"O Jesus! I will take Thee and raise Thee to myself...."  
(Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"(And remember) when Allah Said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me ....."  
(Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"Recall when Allah said, "O Isa! Surely I shall make thee die and am lifting thee to me...." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

And Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

"Lo! God Said: O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto Me ....."

He says in the explanation of this verse that "the verb *rafa'ahu* (He raised him or elevated him) has always, whenever the act of *raf* '(elevating) of a human being is attributed to God, the meaning of 'honouring' or 'exalting'. Nowhere in the Qur'an is there any warrant for the popular belief that God had 'taken up' Jesus bodily, in his life time, into heaven. The expression 'God exalted him unto Himself' in the above verse denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God's special grace – a blessing in which all Prophets partake as is evident from 19:57, where the verb *rafa'-nahu* ("We exalted him") is used with regard to the Prophet Idris."<sup>27</sup>

The verse "*Wa inn khiftum allaa tuqsituu filyataa – maa fankihuu maa taaba lakumminan –nisaaa –I*

*masnaa.....*" (4:3) has been translated by almost all the English translators of the Qur'an as: "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall, Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

While the same verse translated by Muhammad Asad reads "And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among [other] women such as are lawful to you ....."

He says on this verse in his commentary:

"According to an interpretation suggested by A'ishah, the Prophet's widow, this refers to the (hypothetical) case of orphan girls whom their guardians might wish to marry without, however, being prepared or able to give them an appropriate marriage -portion; the implication being that they should avoid the temptation of committing such an injustice and should marry other women instead. <sup>28</sup>..... However, not all of A'ishah's, contemporaries subscribed to her explanation of this verse.

Thus, according to Said ibn Jubayr, Qatadah and other successors of the companions, the purport of the above passage is this: Just as you are, rightly, fearful of offending against the interests of orphans, you must apply the same careful consideration to the interest and rights of women whom you intend to marry." <sup>29</sup>

Another verse from the same chapter "*.....Laa taakuluuu amwaalakum bay -nakum bilbaatili illaaa an takuuna tijjaa -ratan ....*" (4: 29) has been rendered by other scholars in English as:

"....Squander not your wealth among yourselves in vanity, except it be a trade by mutual consent ....." (Muhammad M. Pickthall)

"....Devour not your property among yourselves unlawfully, but let there be a trading among you by mutual agreement..." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"....Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: But let there be amongst you Traffic and Trade by

**Mutual good –will ....”(Abdullah Yusuf Ali)**

And Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:  
 “....Do not devour one another’s possessions wrongfully –not even by way of trade based on mutual agreement ....”

He says in his commentary on the Qur’an:

“If the particle *illa* preceding the above clause is given its usual meaning of ‘except’ or ‘unless it be’, the phrase ought to be rendered thus: ‘Unless it be [an act of] trade based on mutual agreement.’ This formulation however, has baffled many commentators: for, if taken literally, it would imply that wrongful profits from trading based on mutual agreement are exempted from the general prohibition, ‘Devour not one another’s possessions wrongfully’ –a supposition impossible to maintain in view of the ethics postulated by the Qur’an.”<sup>30</sup>

Most of the commentators express the opinion that the particle *illa* has in this context the meaning of ‘but’ and that the clause ought to be understood as follows: “But it is lawful for you to profit from one another’s passions by way of legitimate trade based on mutual agreement”, as Muhammad Asad points out. However quite apart from the fact that this interpretation is highly laboured and artificial, it does not explain why “legitimate trade” should have been singled out here as the sole means of lawfully deriving economic benefits from one another –for, as Razi rightly says in his commentary on this verse, “it is no less lawful to benefit economically through a gift, a bequest, a legal inheritance, alms, a devour, or an indemnity for injuries received: for there are, aside from trade, many ways of acquiring possessions [lawfully].” Muhammad Asad asks, why then, should trade alone have been stressed? –and moreover, stressed in a context not particularly devoted to matters of trade? In his opinion, a really satisfactory answer to this puzzle can be obtained only through a linguistic consideration of the particle *illa*. Apart from its usual connotation of ‘except’ or ‘unless it

be' it has sometimes the meaning of the simple conjunction 'and' (*wa*); similarly, if it is preceded by a negative clause, it can be synonymous with 'nor' or 'and neither' (*wa -la*).<sup>31</sup>

Later he observes, "Now if we apply this particular use of *illa* to the passage under consideration, we arrive at the reading, 'nor [shall you do it] by means of trade based on mutual agreement', or simply 'not even by way of trade based on mutual agreement'. Whereupon the meaning immediately becomes obvious: the believers are prohibited from devouring another person's possessions wrongfully even if that other person –being the weaker party agrees to such a deprivation or exploitation under the stress of circumstances."<sup>32</sup>

Therefore the reading adopted by Muhammad Asad logically connects with the meaning of the verse.

Similarly, another verse of this chapter "*Ar -rijaalu Qawwaamuuna 'alan -nisaaa-I ....*" (4:34) has been translated by English translators as:

"Men are the protectors ....." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"Men are in charge of women....." (Muhammad M. Pickthall)

"Men are overseers over women ...." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

And Muhammad Asad translates this verse as:

"Man shall take full care of women ....."

His explanation is that "The expression *Qawwam* is an intensive form of *Qa'im* ('one who is responsible for' or 'takes care of a thing or a person). Thus, *Qama'ala l-mar'ah* signifies 'he undertook the maintenance of the women' or 'he maintained her'. The grammatical form *Qawwam* is more comprehensive than *Qa'im*, and combines the concepts of physical maintenance and protection as well as of moral responsibility: and it is because of the last –named factor that I have rendered this phrase as 'men shall take full care of women.'<sup>33</sup>

The verse "*....An -natmisaa wajuuhan fanaruddahaa*

*'alaaa adbaarihaaa....'* (4: 47) has been translated by other translators of the Qur'an as: ".....before we change faces, and turn them upon their backs...." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"....Before we change the face and fame of some (of you) beyond all recognition, and turn them hind wards...." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

And Muhammad Asad translates this verse as:

"..... Lest we efface your hopes and bring them to an end ...."

He says in his commentary that, "the term *dubur* does not always signify the 'back' of a thing as most of the translators assume –but often stands for its 'last part' or 'end'"<sup>34</sup>

There are differences in the translation of the chapter *al -Anam* as well.

Other scholars translated the verse ".....*Ma'-sharal -jinni qadis -taksartum -minal ins....*" (6:128) as:

".... O ye assembly of Jinns. Much (toll) did ye take of men....." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

".... O ye assembly of the Jinn! Many of humankind did ye seduce ....." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"..... O company of jinn! You have made much of mankind...." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

And Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

".... O you who have lived in close communion with [evil] invisible beings! A great many [other] human beings have you ensnared ...."

According to most commentators, "the invisible beings" (*al -jinn*) referred to here are the "evil forces" (*Shayatin*) among them, such as are spoken of in verse 112 of this chapter i-e. ("Thus it is that against every Prophet we have set up as enemies the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings that whisper unto one another glittering half -truths meant to delude the mind ....."(6:112).

It is generally assumed that these very beings or forces are addressed here; but the primary meaning of the

term *ma'shar* appearing in this context warrants, in Muhammad Asad's opinion, a different conclusion.

He says: "It is true that this term is often used to denote a group or community or genus of sentient beings which have certain characteristics in common: a conventional –and undoubtedly justifiable –use based on the verb '*asharahu*, It is precisely this verbal origin of the term *ma'shar* which gives us a clue as to what is really meant here. Since, in its primary significance, a person's *ma'shar* denotes those who are on intimate terms or in close communication with him (cf. *Lisan al -Arab*: "A mans *ma'shar* is his family"), we may well assume that it has a similar significance in the above Qur'anic phrase. Thus, to my mind, the allocution *ya ma 'shar al -jinn* does not denote, "O you community of [evil] invisible beings" but rather, "O you who are [or "have lived"] in close communication with [evil] invisible beings."<sup>35</sup>

This indicates that the translation of this verse by Muhammad Asad gives the real meaning of the Arabic context.

In other words Muhammad Asad says that "it is addressed to the misguided human beings who have been seduced by 'glittering half -truths meant to delude the mind'." (verse112). This interpretation is reinforced by the words, 'have there not come unto you apostles from among yourselves.....? (verse130): the Qur'an speaks only of apostles who belonged to the human race and never of apostles from among the *jinn*".<sup>36</sup>

The verse "*.....Muhajirin wal ansar ....*" (9:100) has been translated by almost all English translators of the Qur'an as:

"....who foresake (their homes) and of those who gave them aid ....." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad M. Pickthall)

"...And the emigrants and the helpers...." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“... Who have forsaken the domain of evil and of those who have sheltered and succoured the faith...”

The term *muhajirun*, literally meaning ‘emigrants’, rendered by Muhammad Asad as “those who have forsaken the domain of evil” –applies primarily to the Meccan followers of the Prophet who migrated from Mecca to Medina –at a time when Mecca was still in the possession of the enemies of Islam; the “first and foremost” among them were the earliest emigrants, i.e., those who left Mecca in or before the year 622 B.C and in the course of the next few years, when the Muslim community at Medina was still in danger of being overrun by the *Quraysh* of Mecca. Similarly, the term *ansar* literally meaning ‘helpers’ applies here to the early converts from among the people of Medina who sheltered and succoured their brethren in faith. The ‘first and foremost’ among them were those who embraced Islam before and shortly after the Prophet and his Companions’ exodus from Mecca, and particularly those who did so on the occasion of the two meetings at Al-‘Aqabah near Mecca, between the Prophet and deputations of the Medinan tribes of Al-Aws and Khazraj. Muhammad Asad says, however, that, apart from their purely historical connotations, both terms, *muhajirun* and *ansar* bear in the Qur’an a spiritual meaning as well, and are often used to describe those who morally “forsake the domain of evil” and those who “shelter and succor the Faith.”<sup>37</sup>

The verse “.... *Fama tuzeedu wannanii gayera takhseeri.*” has been translated as:

“... Ye would add to me naught save perdition” (M.M. Pickthall)

“... What then would ye add to my (portion) but perdition” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“...You then increase me not save in loss” (Ab.Majid Daryabadi)

“... Hence what you are offering me is no more than perdition!” (Muhammad Asad)



Muhammad Asad gives the literal meaning as: “You do not add [anything] to me but perdition” and he explains that; although this dialogue is related in the context of the story of the prophet Salih and the leaders of the people of Thamud, its implications have –as is always the case with Qur’anic stories and parables –a universal, timeless import. The stress here is on the intrinsic impossibility of reconciling belief in the one God, whose omniscience and omnipotence embrace-all that exists, with an attribution of divine or semi-divine qualities and functions to anyone or anything else. The subtly-veiled suggestions of the Thamud and their rejection by Salih has a bearing on all religious attitudes based on a desire to ‘bring God closer to man’ through the interposition of alleged ‘mediators’ between Him and man. In primitive religion, this interpretation led to the deification of various forces of nature and, subsequently, to the invention of imaginary deities which were thought to act against the background of an undefined, dimly –perceived Supreme Power (for instance, the Moira of the ancient Greeks). In higher religious concepts, this need for mediation assumes the form of a personified manifestation of God through subordinate deities (as is the case, in Hinduism, with the personifications of the Absolute Brahma of the Upanishads and the Vedanta in the forms of Vishnu or Shiva), or in His supposed incarnation in human form (as represented in the Christian idea of Jesus as ‘God’s Son’ and the second person of the *Trinity*). And lastly, God is supposedly ‘brought closer to man’ by the interposition of a hierarchy of saints, living or dead, whose intercession is sought even by people who consider themselves to be ‘monotheists’ –and this includes many misguided Muslims who do not realize that their belief in saints as ‘mediators’ between men and God conflicts with the very essence of Islam.

Here Muhammad Asad gives a very good account of *Tawheed* (Oneness of God): “The ever recurring Qur’anic

stress on the Oneness and Uniqueness of God, and the categorical denial of the idea that anyone or anything, whether it be a concrete being or an abstract force, could have the least influence on the manner in which He governs the universe aims at freeing man from the self-imposed servitude to an imaginary hierarchy of 'mediating powers', and at making him realize that 'wherever you turn, there is God's countenance' (2:115) and that God is '[always] near, responding [to the call of whoever calls unto Him]' (2:186)." <sup>38</sup>

The verse from another chapter "*Falama jahaaza – hum bi- jihaaziihim .....*" (12:70) has been translated by almost all translators of the Qur'an as:

"And when he provided them with their provisions, he placed the [king's] drinking cup in his brother's camel –pack. And [as they were leaving the city] a herald called out: 'O you people of the caravan! Verily, you are thieves!'"

All the English translations gives the same meaning, but there is a difference in the interpretation of the verse, as Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains in his commentary of Qur'an: "Joseph's plan was to play a practical joke on them, which would achieve two objects. Immediately it would put them into some consternation, but nothing comparable to what he had suffered at their hands. When the plan was unraveled, it would make them thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and dramatically bring home their guilt to them. Secondly, it would give him an excuse to detain Benjamin and bring their aged father into Egypt. He contrived that a valuable drinking cup should be concealed in Benjamin's saddlebag. When it was found after an ostentatious search, he would detain the supposed culprit, and attain his object, as the story relates further on." <sup>39</sup>

Now see the explanation given by Muhammad Asad. Here he quotes Razi, who says in his commentary of Qur'an on this verse: "Nowhere in the Qur'an is it stated that they made this accusation on Joseph's orders; the

circumstantial evidences shows rather (*al –aqrab ila Zahir al –hal*) that they did this of their own accord: for, when they had missed the drinking cup, these servants of Josef remembered that nobody had been near it [except the sons of Jacob], and so it occurred them that it was they who had taken it.” (Razi, *At –Tafsir al Kabirss*) Analogous views are also advanced by Tabari and Zamakhshari in their comments on this verse. Muhammad Asad says that, “this extremely plausible explanation contrasts sharply with the Biblical account of this incident, according to which the false accusation was part of an inexplicable stratagem devised by Joseph. If we discord as we must, this part of the Biblical version, it is far more logical to assume that Joseph, who had been granted by the king full authority over all that belonged to the latter, had placed the royal cup as a present in the bag of his favorite brother; and that he did this secretly, without informing his servants, because he did not want anyone, least of all his ten half brothers, to know his predilection for Benjamin.”<sup>40</sup>

Muhammad Asad further explains that: “the meaning of this story is now clear. It is a further illustration of the basic doctrine that ‘judgment [as to what is to happen] rests with none but God.’ (verse 67 of this chapter). Joseph had wanted to keep Benjamin with himself, but under the law of Egypt he could not do this without the consent of his half brothers, who were the legal guardians of their minor brother; and they –bound as they were by the solemn promise given to their father, would certainly not have agreed to Benjamin’s remaining behind. The only other alternative open to Joseph was to disclose his identity to them, but he was obliged to allow Benjamin to depart with his brothers. The accidental discovery of his gift, entirely unexpected by Joseph, changed everything, for now Benjamin appeared to be guilty of theft, and under the law of the land Joseph was entitled to claim him as his slave, and thus to keep him in his house. The words, ‘in this way did we contrive (*kidna*) for Joseph [the attainment

of his hearts desire]', referring to the incident of the cup, indicate that its final outcome was neither planned nor even foreseen by Joseph."<sup>41</sup>

Another verse from chapter *R'ad* "...*Qul innal – allahaa yudhillu ma'n yashhau'*....." (13: 27) has been thus translated:

"..... Say: Lo! Allah sendeth whom He will astray...." (M. Pickthall).

".... Say: Truly Allah leaveth to stray, whom He will ...." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

".... Say thou: verily Allah sends astray whom He will...." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

".... Say: Behold, God lets go astray him who wills [to go astray]....."

He says that all Qur'anic verses refer to God's "letting man go astray" must be understood against the background of verse 2:26 -27: "None does He cause to go astray save the iniquitous, who break their bond with God."<sup>42</sup>

The "bond with God" apparently refers here to man's moral obligation to use his inborn gifts –intellectual as well as physical –in the way intended for them by God. The establishment of this bond arises from the faculty of reason which, if properly used, must lead man to a realization of his own weakness and dependence on a causative power and, thus, to a gradual cognition of God's will with reference to his own behaviour. Muhammad Asad observes that this interpretation of the "bond of God" seems to be indicated by the fact that there is no mention of any specific "covenant" in either the preceding or the subsequent verses under consideration. The deliberate omission of any explanatory reference in this connection suggests that the expression "bond with God" stands for something that is rooted in the human situation as such, and can therefore, be perceived instinctively as well as through conscious experience: namely, that innate

relationship with God which makes Him “closer to man than his neck –vein”(50: 16).<sup>43</sup>

This is true also of the forth verse of the fourteenth Chapter, (Abraham) “.... *Fayudhillu –aldah ma’n yashau’....*” which has been translated as:

“..... So Allah leads astray those whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases .....” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“..... Then Allah sendeth whom He will astray, and guideth whom He will.....” (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

“..... Then Allah sends astray whom He will and guides whom He will .....” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

“..... but God lets go astray him that wills [to go astray], and guides him that wills [to be guided] .....” In his explanation on this verse Muhammad Asad quotes Zamakhshari, who in his commentary on this verse, stresses this aspect of free choice on the part of man and points out that “God does not cause anyone to go astray except one who, as He knows, will never attain to faith; and He does not guide anyone aright except one who, as He knows, will attain to faith. Hence, the [expression] ‘causing to go astray’ denotes [God’s] leaving [one] alone (*takhliyah*) and depriving [him] of all favour, whereas [the expression] guidance denotes [His] grant of fulfillment (*tawfiq*) and favour .....” Thus, He does not forsake anyone except those who deserve to be forsaken, and does not bestow His favour upon anyone except those who deserve to be favoured.” Commenting on the identical phrase occurring in 16: 93, Zamakhshari states: “[God] forsakes him who, as He knows, will [consciously] choose to deny the truth and will persevere in this [denial]; and .....” He bestows His favour upon him who, as He knows, will choose faith: which means that He makes the issue dependent on [man’s] free choice (*al –ikhtiyar*), and thus on his deserving either [God’s] favour or the withdrawal of [His] aid... and does not make it dependent on

compulsion [i.e. predestination], which would rule out [man's] deserving anything of the above."<sup>44</sup>

Another verse, "*wa izz baadallna aayataa makana aayattin wa-allahuu a'lamu'....*" (16: 101) has been translated as:

"When we substitute one revelation for another, and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages)..." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"And we put a revelation in place of (another) revelation, and Allah knoweth best what He reveals ....." (Muhammad M. Pickthall)

"Whenever we change a verse in place of another verse –and Allah is the Best Knower of what He sends down ....." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"And now that we replace one message by another – Since God is fully aware of what He bestows from on high, step by step ....." (Muhammad Asad)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali commented on this verse as: "The doctrine of progressive revelation from age to age and time to time does not mean that Allah's fundamental law changes. It is not fair to charge a Prophet of Allah with forgery because the Message as revealed to him is in a different form from that revealed before, when the core of the Truth is the same, for it comes from Allah."<sup>45</sup>

Muhammad Asad commented on the same verse in his commentary to the Qur'an as "substituting the message of the Qur'an for the earlier dispensations –and not, as some Muslim scholars maintain, 'abrogating' one Qur'anic verse and replacing it by another."<sup>46</sup> The doctrine of abrogation in the latter sense has been already explained.

Muhammad Asad further explains in his commentary on this verse that "the gradualness of revelation (implied in the verbal form *yanazzil*) corresponds to God's plan, according to which He has gradually unfolded His will to man, substituting one dispensation for another in the measure of mankind's intellectual and social development, bringing to its culmination in the message of the Qur'an."<sup>47</sup>

The verse from the chapter '*Kahf*' "*Wa izz qalla Musa li-fattahuu laa abbraahhu hatta ablugga ....*" (18: 60) has been translated as:

"Behold, Moses said to his attendant, 'I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas or (until) I spend years in travel.'" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"And when Moses said unto his servant, 'I will not give up until I reach the point where the two rivers meet, though I march on for ages.'" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"And recall when Musa said to his page, 'I shall not cease journeying until I reach the confluence of the two seas, or I shall go on for ages.'" (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"And Lo! [In the course of his wandering,] Moses said to his servant: 'I shall not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas, even if I [have to] spend untold years [in my quest]!' " (Muhammad Asad)

The particle *idh* which usually signifies "when" is properly rendered here as "Lo" by Muhammad Asad. He says in the explanatory note: "Lo, often serves in the Qur'an to draw attention to a sudden turn in the discourse, without, however, involving a break in the continuity of thought."<sup>48</sup>

In this verse, as far as "junction of the two seas" is concerned, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Ab. Majid Daryabadi, Muhammad Marmeduek Pickthall and many early commentators explain in their commentaries that "the most probable geographical location is where the two arms of the Red sea join together, viz, the Gulf of Aqabah and the Gulf of Suez. They enclose the Sinai Peninsula, in which Moses and the Israelites spent many years in their wanderings."<sup>49</sup>

And Muhammad Asad explains in his commentary on this verse (here he quotes Baydawi who offers in his commentary, a purely allegorical explanation) that "the 'two seas' represent the two sources or streams of knowledge – the one obtainable through the observation and intellectual coordination of outward phenomena (*'ilm*

*az -batin*) –the meeting of which is the real goal of Moses' quest." <sup>50</sup>

There are noteworthy differences in the English rendering of one the verses of the chapter *Al-Anbiya*,

*"qullna yaa naaru kunii bardan wa saalamman aallaa Ibrahim."* (21: 69) which has been translated by almost all of the famous English translators of the Qur'an as:

"We said: O fire, be thou coolness and safety for Abraham" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, M.M. Pickthall, Ab. Majid Daryabadi and some others)

But Muhammad Asad interpreted this same verse to mean:

"[But] We said fire! Be thou cool, and a source of inner peace for Abraham!"

Muhammad Asad rejects the story of throwing Abraham into the fire. He says in his commentary that "nowhere does the Qur'an state that Abraham was actually, bodily thrown into the fire and miraculously kept alive in it: on the contrary, the phrase 'God saved him from the fire', occurring in 29: 24, points rather, to the fact of his not having been thrown into it. On the other hand, the many elaborate (and conflicting) stories with which the classical commentators have embroidered their interpretation of the above verse can invariably be traced back to Talmudic legends and may, therefore, be disregarded. What the Qur'an gives us here, as well as in 29: 24 and 37: 97, is apparently an allegorical allusion to the fire of persecution which Abraham had to suffer and which, by dint of its intensity, was to become in his later life a source of spiritual strength and inner peace."<sup>51</sup>

Another verse from the same chapter, *"wa aalamna - huu san-aatta laabussin -lakuum li -tuhhsinakumm ....."* (21: 80) has been translated as:

"It was we who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence: will ye then be grateful?" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"And we taught him the art of making garments (of



mail) to protect you in your daring. Are ye then thankful? (Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall)

“And we taught him the art of making the coats of mail for you that it may protect you in your violence; are you then thankful?” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

But Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“And we taught him how to make garments [of God – consciousness] for you, [O men] so that they might fortify you against all that may cause you fear; but are you grateful [for His boon]?”

The term *labus* has occasionally been used by pre – Islamic Arabs in the sense of mail or coat of mail. So the commentators assume that it has this meaning in the above context as well; and in this they rely on the statement that ‘David was the first to make chain mail’. So they understand the term *ba’s* which occurs at the end of the sentence in its secondary sense of war or warlike violence, and interpret the relevant part of the verse, ‘we taught him how to make coats of mail for you, so that they might fortify you against your [mutual acts of] violence’.

According to Ab. Majid Daryabadi, the Holy Qur’an does not assert anywhere or even imply that David was the inventor of the coat of mail. It only affirms, by implication, that he made great and beneficent use of it.<sup>52</sup>

Muhammad Asad says that the noun *labus* is synonymous with *libas* or *libs*, signifying ‘a garment or garments’ (*qumus, Lisan al –Arab*). One should bear in mind that *ba’s* also signifies ‘harm’, ‘misfortune’, ‘distress’ or ‘fear’. So if we adopt this last meaning, the term *labus* may be understood in its primary significance of ‘garment’ – in this case, the metaphorical ‘garment of God – consciousness’ (*Libas at –Taqlwa*) of which the Qur’an speaks in 7: 26. Rendered in this sense, the above verse expresses the idea that the Almighty taught David how to imbue his followers with that deep God-consciousness which frees men from all spiritual distress and all fears, whether it be the fear of one another or the subconscious

fear of the unknown. The concluding rhetorical question, “but are you grateful [for this boon]?” implies that, as a rule, man does not fully realize –and, hence, is not really grateful for the spiritual bounty thus offered him by God.<sup>53</sup>

Another verse from the same chapter “*wa min –ashshayaateen man yaagusuunaa lahu .....*” (21: 82) has been translated by almost all translators of the Qur'an as:

“And of Satans were some who dived for him ....” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Ab. Majid Daryabadi and Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

But Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“And among the rebellious forces [which we made subservient to him] there were some that dived for him [into the sea]....”

He has translated the word *Shayateen* (*Satans*) as ‘rebellious forces’. He says: “My rendering, in this particular context, of *Shayateen* as ‘rebellious forces’ is based on the topical use of the term *Shaytan* in the sense of anything ‘rebellious’, ‘inordinately proud’ or insolent –in this case, possibly a reference to subdued and enslaved enemies or, more probably, to ‘rebellious’ forces of nature which Solomon was able to tame and utilize.”<sup>54</sup>

The other verse “*wa Ismael wa Idris wa Zul –kifl kulluun minna as –saabireenaa*” (21: 85) has been translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall, Ab. Majid Daryabadi and some other scholars as:

“And (remember) Isma‘il, Idris, and Zul –kifl, all (Men) of constancy and patience.

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“And [remember] Ismael and Idris and every one who [like them] has pledged himself [unto God]: They all were among those who are patient in adversity.”

Except Muhammad Asad, all the other commentators in their commentaries on this verse consider the word *dhu'l-kifl* to be the epithet or the proper name of a particular prophet. They mention some names, i.e. Ezekiel, Joshua, Elisha, Elijah and Zachariah. But Muhammad Asad

points out in his commentary on this verse: "The expression *dhu'l-kifl* is derived from the verb *kafala* –and especially the form *takaffala* –which signifies 'he became responsible [for something or someone]' or 'pledged himself [to do something]'.... Since we do not have a single authentic Hadith which would mention, or even distantly allude to a prophet by this name I am, therefore, of the opinion that we have here (as in the Identical expression in 38: 48) a generic term applying to every-one of the prophets, inasmuch as each of them pledged himself unreservedly to God and accepted the responsibility for delivering His message to man."<sup>55</sup>

The verse "*.....Aw ma malakat aymanukum fainnahum gairu' malluumiin*" (23: 6) has been translated as:

"Except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess, for (in their case) they are free from blame." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"Save in regard to their wives and those whom their right hands own –so they are not blameworthy." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"Save from their wives or the (slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse in English as:

"[Not giving way to their desires] with any but their spouses –that is those whom they rightfully possess [through wedlock] –for then, behold, they are free of all blame."

Most of the commentators assume that *awma malakat aymanuhum* relates to female slaves, and that the particle '*aw*' denotes a permissible alternative. This conventional interpretation is, in Muhammad Asad's opinion, inadmissible inasmuch as it is based on the assumption that sexual intercourse with one's female slave is permitted without marriage: an assumption which is

contradicted by the Qur'an itself, as is evident from the verses 4: 3, 24, 25 and 24: 32, to which he gives explanatory notes. This is not the only objection to the above mentioned interpretation. The Qur'an applies the term 'believers' to men and women alike, and since the term '*azwaja*' also denotes both the male and the female partners in marriage, there is no reason for attributing to the phrase *mamalakat aymanuhum* the meaning of "their female slaves" and since, on the hand, it is out of the question that female and male slaves could have been referred to here, it is obvious that this phrase does not relate to slaves at all, but has the same meaning as in 4: 24 –namely, "those whom they rightly possess through wedlock" with the significant difference that in the present context this expression relates to both husbands and wives, who "rightfully possess" one another by virtue of marriage.

On the basis of this interpretation Muhammad Asad says that:

"the particle *aw* which precedes this clause does not denote an alternative ('or') but is rather, in the nature of an explanatory amplification, more or less analogous to the phrase 'in other words' or 'that is', thus giving to the whole sentence the meaning ..... Save with their spouses –that is, those whom they rightfully possess [through wedlock]...etc." <sup>56</sup>

The verse "*Alzzani la yankihuuu illaa zanniyaattan aw mushriikattan wa zanniyattu la yankihuu-haaa illaa zaaniin aw mushrikun....*" (24:3) has been translated as:

"The adulterer shall not marry save an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress none shall marry save an adulterer or an idolater. All that is forbidden unto believers" (Muhammad M. Pickthall)

"The adulterer weds not but an adulterer or an associator; and that is forbidden to the believers." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"The adulterer cannot have sexual relations with any

but an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress, none can have sexual relations with her but an adulterer or an idolater. To the believers such a thing is forbidden.” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“[Both are equally guilty:] the adulterer couples with none other than an adulteress –that is, a woman who accords [to her own lust] a place side by side with God; and with the adulterer –that is man who accords [to his own lust] a place side by side with God: and this is forbidden unto the believers.”

The term *mushrik* normally signifies a person who associates in his or her mind all manner of imaginary deities or forces with God, or who believes that any created being has a share in His qualities or powers. Here Muhammad Asad used the term *mushrik* in the widest metaphorical sense as he says, this term denotes one who accords to his or her desires a supremacy which is due to God alone and thus blasphemes against the principles of ethics and morality enjoyed by Him. The particle “*aw*” which connects the word *mushrikah* with the preceding word *zaniyah* (adulteress) has in this context –as well as in the next clause, where both these terms appear in their masculine form –an amplifying, explanatory value equivalent to the expression.<sup>57</sup>

The other English translators and some commentators understood this verse in the sense of an injunction, that is, “The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or a *mushrikah*; and as for the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or a *mushrik*.” But according to Muhammad Asad, this interpretation is objectionable on several counts: firstly, the Qur’an does not ever countenance the marriage of a believer, however great a sin he or she may have committed, with an unbeliever (in the most pejorative sense of this term); secondly, it is a fundamental principle of Islamic law that once a crime has been expiated by the transgressor’s

undergoing the ordained legal punishment (in this case, a hundred lashes), it must be regarded, as far as society is concerned, as atoned for and done with; and lastly, the construction of the above passage is clearly that of a statement of fact and, cannot be interpreted as an injunction.<sup>58</sup>

A verse from another chapter "*wa lazzina jaahaduu fiinna lanaah-diiyannahuum suubuulaanaa .....*" (29: 69) has been translated as:

"And those who strive in Our (cause), -we will certainly guide them to Our paths....." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall, and Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

"But as for those who strive hard in our cause we shall most certainly guide them on to paths that lead on to Us....."

He says that the plural "Our paths" used here is obviously meant to stress the fact –alluded to often in the Qur'an-that there are many paths which lead to a cognizance (*ma'rifah*) of God.

A verse from chapter 'Rum' "*wa maaa aatayiittum min r-raaba l-liyaar'buu wa-fii amwalii -nassi falla yarbuu inddal-allah ....*" (30: 39) has been translated by many scholars as:

"That which you give in usury for increase through the property of (other) people, will have no increase with Allah ....." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as:

"And [remember:] whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through other people's possessions will bring [you] no increase in the sight of God ...."

According to his concept, the term *riba* denotes an 'addition' to or an 'increase' of a thing over and above its original size or amount; in the terminology of the Qur'an;

it signifies any unlawful addition, by way of interest, to a sum of money or goods lent by one person or body of persons to another. In his footnote, Muhammad Asad mentioned that most of the early Muslim jurists identified this 'unlawful addition' with profits obtained through any kind of interest –bearing loans, irrespective of the rate of interest and the economic motivation involved. With all this –as is evidenced by the voluminous scholars have not yet been able to reach an absolute agreement on the definition of *riba*; a definition, that is which, would cover all conceivable legal situations and positively respond to all the exigencies of a variable economic environment. Here Muhammad Asad quotes Ibn Kathir, who says that the subject of *riba* is one of the most difficult subjects for many of the scholars (*ahl al -ilm*). It should be borne in mind that the passage condemning and prohibiting *riba* in legal terms (2: 275 -281) was the last revelation received by the Prophet, who died few days later (cf. note 268 on 2: 281); hence, the companions had no opportunity to ask him about the *Shar'i* implications of the relevant injunction –so much so that even 'Umar ibn al -Khatib is reliably reported to have said: "The last (of the Qur'an) that was revealed was the passage on *riba*; and behold, the Apostle of God passed away without having explained its meaning to us." (Ibn Hanbal, on the authority of Sa'id ibn al -Musayyab).

The opprobrium of *riba* (in the sense in which this term is used in the Qur'an and in many sayings of the Prophet) attaches to profits obtained through interest –bearing loans involving an exploitation of the economically weak by the strong and resourceful: an exploitation characterized by the fact that the lender, while retaining full ownership of the capital loaned and having no legal concern with the purpose for which it is to be used or with the manner of its use, remains contractually assured of gain, irrespective of any losses which the borrower may suffer in consequence of this transaction.<sup>59</sup>

With this definition in mind, Muhammad Asad says: "We realize that the question as to what kind of financial transactions fall within the category of *riba* is, in the last resort, a moral one, closely connected with the socio-economic motivation underlying the mutual relationship of borrower and lender; and, stated in purely economic terms, it is a question as to how profits and risks may be equitably shared by both partners to a loan transaction. It is, of course, impossible to answer this question in a rigid, one-for-all manner: our answers must necessarily vary in accordance with the changes to which man's social and technological development –and, thus his economic environment –is subject. Hence, while the Qur'anic condemnation of the concept and practice of *riba* is unequivocal and final, every successive Muslim generation is faced with the challenge of giving new dimensions and a fresh economic meaning to this term which for want of a better word, may be rendered as "*usury*" In the present instance, no clear-cut prohibition is as yet laid down; but the prohibition appearing in 2: 275 ff. is already foreshadowed by the reference to the immoral hope of increasing one's own substance 'through [other] people's possessions', i-e, through the exploitation of others."<sup>60</sup>

The verse from the chapter 'Yasin', "*Wazzrib lahum masal –an –asshab –al – qaryah...*" (36: 13) has been translated as:

"Coin for them a similitude: the people of the city when those sent (from Allah) came unto them." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"Set forth to them, by way of a parable, the (story of) the companions of the city. Behold, there came messengers to it." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"And recount thou to them similitude of the residents of a town, when there came thereto the sent ones." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

But Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:



“And set forth unto them a parable – [the story of how] the people of a township [behaved] when [our] message – bearers came unto them.”

He says in his explanatory notes that “the story is clearly described as a parable; it must be understood as such and not as an historical narrative. It seems to me that we have here an allegory of the three great monotheistic religions, successively propounded by Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon them), and embodying, essentially, the same spiritual truths. The “township” (*Qariyah*) mentioned in the parable represents, I think, the common cultural environment within which these three religions appeared. The Apostles of the first two are said to have been sent ‘together’, implying that the teachings of both were –and are –anchored in one and the same scripture, the Old Testament of the Bible. When in the course of time, their impact proved insufficient to mould the ethical attitude of the people or peoples concerned, God ‘strengthened’ them by means of His final message, conveyed to the world by the third and last of the apostles, Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him).” <sup>61</sup>

The other verse from the chapter ‘Qaf’, “*Izz yatalaqqā al –mutalaqqiyan annil yameen –i- wa –an –ish shimali .....*” (50: 17) has been translated as:

“Behold, two (guardian angels) appointed to learn (his doings), learn and note them, one sitting on the right and one on the left.” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“Behold! When the two receivers receive, one on the right hand and the other on the left, a sitter” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“[And so] whenever the two demands [of his nature] come face to face, contending from the right and from the left.”

The first part of the above sentence –*Yatalaqqā al mutalaqqiyan* –may be understood in either of two senses:

‘the two that are meant to receive do receive’, or ‘the two that aim at meeting each other do meet’. The classical commentators adopt, as a rule, the first sense and, consequently, interpret the passage thus; ‘....the two angels that are charged with recording man’s doings do record them, sitting on his right and on his left.’<sup>62</sup>

Muhammad Asad says in his commentary on this verse: “In my opinion, however, the second of the two possible meanings (‘the two that aim at meeting each other’) corresponds better with the preceding verse, which speaks of what man’s innermost self (*nafs*) ‘whispers within him’ i-e., voices his subconscious desires. Thus, ‘the two that aim at meeting’ are, I believe, the two demands of, or, more properly, the two fundamental motive forces within man’s nature: his primal, instinctive urges and desires, both sensual and non –sensual (all of them comprised in the modern psychological term ‘libido’), on the one side, and his reason, both intuitive and reflective, on the other. The sitting (*qa’id*) on the right and on the left is, to my mind, a metaphor for the conflicting nature of these dual forces which strive for predominance within every human being: hence my rendering of *qa’id* as ‘contending’.”<sup>63</sup>

Other verses from the same chapter, “*ma yal-fiizuu min Qauulinn illa ladaihi raqiibuun aattiiduuun. Wa jaa’tt saqraattu ul-mautti bil-haqqi zalikaa ma kuntta minhuu taheedu. Wa nufikha fii-surri zaalikaa yaumul waeid*” (50: 18 -20) have been thus translated as:

“Not a word does he utter but there is a vigilant guardian. And the stupor of death comes in truth. This was the thing which thou was trying to escape! And the trumpet shall be blown: that will be the day whereof warning (had been given).” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“Not even a word can be uttered, but there is a watcher with him, ever –present. And [then,] the twilight of death brings with it the [full] truth –that [very thing, o man,] from which thou wouldst always look away! And

[in the end] the trumpet [of resurrection] will be blown: that will be the day of a warning fulfilled.”

Another verse from the same chapter: “*wa jaat kullu naafsiin ma’ahaa sabikun wa shaheed*” (50: 21) has been translated as:

“And there will come forth every soul: with each will be an (angel) to bear witness.” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

“And every soul cometh, along with it a driver and a witness” (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall, Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as: “And every human being will come forward with [his erstwhile] inner urges and [his] conscious mind.”

The literal meaning is “with that which derives (*Sa’iq*)” and “that which bears witness (*shahid*)”. While the former term evidently circumscribes man’s primal urges –and particularly those which drive him into unrestrained self –indulgence and, thus, into sin –the term *shahid*, rendered by Muhammad Asad as “conscious mind” alludes here to the awakening of the deeper layers of man’s consciousness, leading to a sudden perception of his own moral reality –the “lifting of the veil” referred to in the next verse –which forces him to “bear witness” against himself. <sup>64</sup>

Another verse from the same chapter, “*laqaad kunnta fii gaflihatinn min hazza fakashaf-na annka gitaaa-aka fabasaruuka al-yaumal hadeedu’. Wa qalla qarinhuu hazzaa ma-ladaiyaa aateedun.*” (50: 22 -23) has been translated as: “(It will be said:) ‘Thou wast heedless of this; now have we removed thy veil, and sharp is thy sight this day! And his companion will say: ‘Here is (his Record) ready with me!’” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

“Assuredly thou hast been heedless thereof, now we have lifted off from thee thy veil, so thy sight today is piercing. And his companion will say: this is what with me is ready” (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as: "And will be told:] 'Indeed, unmindful hast thou been of this [Day of Judgment]: but now we have lifted from thee thy veil, and sharp is thy sight today!' And one part of him will say: 'This it is that has been ever –present with me!'"

He says that "the term *qarin* denotes something that is 'connected', 'linked' or 'intimately associated' with another thing. In the present instance –read together with verse 21–the term apparently denotes 'one part' of man, namely, his awakened moral consciousness." Later he says that "the sinner's reason will plead that he had always been more or less conscious, and perhaps even critical, of the urges and appetites that drove him into evil-doing: but, as is shown in the sequence, this belated and, therefore, morally ineffective rational cognition does not diminish but, rather, enhances the burden of man guilt." <sup>65</sup>

The first verse from the fifty first chapter, *adh –dhariyat* "*wa –dhariyat –i-zarwaan*" has been translated as:

"By the (winds) that scatter broadcast" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"By the dispersing winds that disperse" (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"By those that winnow with a winnowing" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall) Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

"Consider the winds that scatter the dust far and wide."

Another verse from the same chapter: "*wa bil issharrihum yastag –firuuna.*" (51: 18) has been translated as:

"And in the hours of dawn, they (were found) praying for forgiveness." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"And ere the dawning of each day would seek forgiveness" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"And in the dawns they used to pray for forgiveness." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translates the same verse as: “And would pray for forgiveness, from their innermost hearts”

The verse “*wa tur*” (52: 1) has been translated by almost all English scholars as: “By the Mount (of Revelation)”

And Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as: “Consider Mount Sinai!”

He renders the adjurative particle *wa* as “consider”. The expression *at-tur*, literally meaning ‘the mountain’, is used in the Qur’an exclusively to denote Mount Sinai, on which Moses received his decisive revelation. In the present context it signifies, metonymically, revelation as such, to which the next verse refers. Muhammad Asad points out; that this is the earliest Qur’anic instance of the adjurative particle *wa* used in the sense of a solemn, oath-like assertion –a calling to witness, as it were –meant (as in the expression ‘by God!’) to give weight to a subsequently stated truth or evidence of the truth: hence, Muhammad Asad rendered it here and elsewhere as ‘consider’. <sup>66</sup>

Another verse “*wa najm izza haw-waa.*” (53: 1) has been translated as:

“By the star when it goes down” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

“By the star when it setteth” (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

“Consider this unfolding [of God’s message] as it comes down from on high”

He says in his explanatory notes that “-consider the star when it sets” is an interpretation which for some reason is preferred by the majority of the commentators. However, almost all of them use the term *najm* –derived from the verb *najama*, ‘it appeared’, began’, ‘ensued’ or ‘proceeded’ to denote also the ‘unfolding’ of something that comes or appears gradually, as if by installments. Hence, this term has from the very beginning been applied

to each of the gradually –revealed parts (*nujum*) of the Qur'an and, thus, to the process of its gradual revelation, or its 'unfolding', as such."<sup>67</sup>

The verse "*Iqtarabati s-saa –atuwa wan shaqqa al-qamaru*." (54: 1) has been translated as:

"The hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the moon was cleft asunder." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"The hour has drawn nigh, and the moon has been rent in sunder." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"The hour drew nigh and the moon was rent in twain." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

"The last hour draws near, and the moon is split asunder!"

Most of the commentators see in this verse a reference to a phenomenon said to have been witnessed by several of the Prophet's contemporaries. As described in a number of reports going back to some companions, the moon appeared one night as if slit into two distinct parts. Muhammad Asad says there is no reason to doubt the subjective veracity of these reports. It is possible that what actually happened was an unusual kind of partial lunar eclipse, which produced an equally unusual optical illusion. But whatever the nature of that phenomenon, it is practically certain that the above Qur'anic verse does not refer to it but, rather to a future event: namely, to what will happen when the 'last hour' approaches. (The Qur'an frequently employs the past tense to denote the future, and particularly so in passages which speak of the coming of the last hour and of Resurrection Day; this use of the past tense is meant to stress the certainty of the happening to which the verb relates). Here Muhammad Asad quotes Raghīb, who regards it as fully justifiable to interpret the phrase *inshaqqa –l –qamar* ("The moon is split asunder") as bearing on the cosmic cataclysm –the end of the world as we know it –that will occur before the coming of Resurrection Day. This interpretation has the support of

some of the earlier commentators as mentioned by Zamakhshari; and it is to Muhammad Asad's mind, particularly convincing in view of the juxtaposition, in the above verse of the Qur'an, of the moon's "splitting asunder" and the approach of the Last Hour. (In this connection we must bear in mind the fact that none of the Qur'anic allusions to the "nearness" of the Last Hour and the Day of Resurrection is based on the human concept of "time").<sup>68</sup>

The verse "*.... Nafarru' m-min-al tinnii faqallu' innaa samii-anna Qur'anan ajjabba*" (72: 1) has been translated as:

"..... That a company of *Jinns* listened (to the Qur'an). They said we really heard a wonderful recital." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"..... That a company of *jinn* gave ear, and they said: Lo! It is a marvelous Qur'an." (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

"..... That some of the unseen beings gave ear [to this divine Writ], and thereupon said [unto their fellow beings]: verily, we have heard a wondrous discourse."

Muhammad Asad says in his explanatory note that the *jinn* were possibly strangers who had never before been seen by the people among and to whom the Qur'an was then being revealed. From 46: 30 (which evidently relate to the same occurrence as the present one), it transpires that the *jinn* in question were followers of the Mosaic faith, inasmuch as they refer to the Qur'an as 'a revelation bestowed from on high after [that] of Moses', thus pointedly stressing their rejection of the Christian concept of the Trinity. All this leads one to the assumption that may have been Jews from distant parts of what is now the Arab world, perhaps from Syria or even Mesopotamia.....I should, however, like to stress that my explanation of this occurrence is purely tentative."<sup>69</sup>

Another verse from the same chapter, "*wa Anna*

*larnasna as-samaaa-aa fawajad-naahaa muliat harasan shadeedan w-wa shuhuuban*" (72: 8) has been translated as:

"And we pried into the [secrets of] heaven; but we found it filled with stern guards and flaming fires." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"And we sought to reach the heaven, then we found it filled with a strong guard and darting meteors." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

"And the *jinn* (who had listened to the Qur'an) said: 'We had sought the heaven but had found it filled with strong warders and meteors.'" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

"And [so it happened] that we reached out towards heaven: but we found it filled with mighty guards and flames."

He says in his commentary that "the above may be understood in alluding not only, metaphorically, to the arrogant Jewish belief in their being "God's chosen people", but also more factually, to their old inclination to, and practice of, astrology as a means to a more general sense—their "reaching out towards heaven" may be a metaphorical description of a state of mind which causes man to regard himself as "self-sufficient" and to delude himself into his own fate." <sup>70</sup>

The verses, "*kalla wal Qamari wa l-layli izz adbara*." (74: 32-33) have been translated as:

"Nay, by the Moon. And by the Night ...." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Ab. Majid Daryabadi and M.M. Pickthall)

Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:

"Nay, but consider the Moon. Consider the Night....."

It has already been explained why Muhammad Asad used 'consider' as the meaning 'consider' of the particle *wa* instead of 'by God'. He says in his commentary on this verse: "In the present case, the truth thus to be stressed is the implied statement that just as the changing phases of



the moon and the alternation of night and day are the outcome of God-given, natural laws, so, too, a sinner's suffering in the hereafter is but a natural outcome of his deliberate wrongdoing in this world."<sup>71</sup>

The verse "*Allazzi annqadhaa zahraka*" (94: 3) has been translated as:

"They which did gall thy back? -" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"Which weighed down thy back?" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall, Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

But Muhammad Asad translated the same verse as:  
"That had weighed so heavily on thy back?"

Muhammad Asad, referring to the burden of thy past sins which are now forgiven', (quoted by Tabari, on the authority of Mujahid, Qatadah, Ad -Dahhak and Ibn Zayd) says that "In the case of Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him), this relates apparently to mistakes committed before his call to prophethood, and is obviously an echo of 93: 7 -'Has he found thee lost on thy way, and guided thee?'"<sup>72</sup>

The first five verses from the chapter *Al -Adiya*, *t "wal aadiyaatti dhab-han. Fa-al mu'riyaatii qadhan. Fa-al mugeerati subhan. Fa aasar -na bihee naq-ann. Fawasat-na bihee jam-ann."* have been translated as:

"By the (steeds) that run, with panting (breath). And strike sparks of fire. And push home the charge in the morning. And raise the dust in clouds the while. And penetrate forthwith into the midst (of the foe) en masse." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

"By the snorting coursers; Striking sparks of fire; And scouring to the raid at dawn. Then, therewith, with their trail of dust; Cleaving, as one, the centre (of the foe)" (Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall)

"By the chargers panting. And the striking sparks of fire by dashing their hoofs. And raiding at dawn. And their in raising dust. And cleaving therein their way unto the host." (Ab. Majid Daryabadi)

Muhammad Asad translated these verses as:

“Oh, the chargers that run panting. Sparks of fire striking. Rushing to assault at morn. Thereby raising clouds of dust. There by storming [blindly] into any host.”

In the first verse Muhammad Asad used the adjurative particle ‘*wa*’ as ‘oh’ instead of ‘consider’ as he had done before. He says in his explanatory note: “Since the subsequent clauses refer to a parabolic, imaginary situation, the adjurative particle *wa* is more suitably rendered here as ‘oh’ instead of the rendering ‘consider’ usually adopted by me or the adjuration ‘by’ appearing in most other translations.”<sup>73</sup>

The term *al-adiyat* as mentioned by Muhammad Asad, “Undoubtedly denotes the war –horses, or chargers, employed by the Arabs from time immemorial down to the Middle-Ages. But whereas the conventional explanation is based on the assumption that ‘the chargers’ symbolize here the believers fight in God’s cause and, therefore, represent something highly commendable, it takes no account whatever of the discrepancy between so positive an imagery and the condemnation expressed in verses 6, not to speak of the fact that such a conventional interpretation does not provide any logical link between the two parts of the chapter..... Beyond any doubt, ‘the chargers’ symbolize the erring human soul or self –a soul devoid of all spiritual direction, obsessed and ridden by all manner of wrong, selfish desires, madly, unseeingly rushing onwards, unchecked by conscience or reason, blinded by the dust –clouds of confused and confusing appetites, storming into insoluble situations and, thus into its own spiritual destruction.”<sup>74</sup>

The verses

“*Qullna ihbitu minhaa jamee-ann.....*” (2: 38)

“*Qallaa ihbitu ba'idakum....*” (7: 24) and

“*Qallaa ihbitaa minha jamee-ann....*” (20: 123) have

been translated by almost all translators (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthall and Ab. Majid

Daryabadi) of the Holy Qur'an as:

"We said: 'Get ye down all from here ....."

"(Allah) said: 'Get ye down ....."

"He said: 'Get ye down both of you, all together....."

Muhammad Asad translated these verses as:

"[for although] We did say, 'Down with you all from this [state] ....."

"Said He: 'Down with you..."

"Saying: 'Down with you all from this [state of innocence, and be henceforth] ..."

In the translation of all these verses Muhammad Asad used the word 'state' to mean the 'state of blessedness and innocence'. According to his opinion the story of Adam and Eve is, in reality, an allegory of human destiny. "In his earlier state of innocence, man was unaware of the existence of evil and, therefore, of the ever-present necessity of making a choice between the many possibilities of action and behaviour. This innocence was only a condition of his existence and not a virtue; it gave to his life a static quality and thus precluded him from moral and intellectual development. The growth of his consciousness; symbolized by the willful act of disobedience to God's command changed all this. It transformed him from a purely instinctive being into a full-fledged human entity as we know it—a human being capable of discerning between right and wrong and thus of choosing his way of life. In this deeper sense, the allegory of the *Fall* does not describe a retrogressive happening but, rather, a new stage of human development; an opening of doors to moral considerations. By forbidding him to 'approach this tree', God made it possible for man to act wrongly—and, therefore, to act rightly as well: and so man became endowed with that moral free will which distinguishes him from all other sentient beings." <sup>75</sup>

In Muhammad Asad's translation "*The Message of the Qur'an*" the translation in English seems incomplete

in some verses. These verse are: 3:32 (*Al -Imran*), 25: 16 (*Al -Fur'qan*) and 46: 9 (*Al -Ahqaf*).

At the end of "*The Message of the Qur'an*" Muhammad Asad describes the symbolism and allegory in the Qur'an, which gives a very good understanding of the *Muqatta'at*. He explains the concept of jinn in many senses as used in the Qur'an. The Prophets 'Night Journey' (*Isra*) from Mecca to Jerusalem and his subsequent 'Ascension' (*Mi'raj*) to heaven are in reality", says Muhammad Asad, "two stages of one mystic experience, dating back almost exactly to one year before the exodus to Medina." <sup>76</sup>

According to various well-documented Traditions - extensively quoted and discussed by *Ibn Kathir* in his commentary on 17:1, as well as by *Ibn Hajar* in *Fath al-Bari* VII, 155 ff. - the Apostle of God, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel, found himself transported by night to the site of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem, where he led a congregation of many of the earlier, long since deceased prophets in prayer; some of them he afterwards encountered again in heaven. The Ascension, in particular, is important from the viewpoint of Muslim theology inasmuch as it was in the course of this experience that the five daily prayers were explicitly instituted, by God's ordinance, as an integral part of the Islamic Faith.

Since the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) himself did not leave any clear-cut explanation of this experience, Muslim thinkers - including the Prophet's Companions - have always widely differed as to its true nature.

The great majority of the Companions believed that both the Night Journey and the Ascension were physical occurrences - in other words, that the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) was borne bodily to Jerusalem and then to heaven - while a minority were convinced that the experience was purely spiritual. Among the latter we find, in particular, the name of Ayesha (May God be Pleased with her), the Prophet's widow and most intimate

companion of his later years, who declared emphatically that “he was transported only in his spirit (*bi-ruhihi*), while his body did not leave its place” (cf. *Tabari*, *Zamakhshari* and *Ibn Kathir* in their commentaries on 17:1); the great *Al-Hasan al-Basri*, who belonged to the next generation, held uncompromisingly to the same view.

As against this, the theologians who maintain that the Night Journey and the Ascension were physical experiences refer to the corresponding belief of most of the Companions - without, however, being able to point to a single Tradition to the effect that the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) himself described it as such. Some Muslim scholars lay stress on the words *asra bi-abdihi* (“He transported His servant by night”) occurring in 17:1, and contend that the term *‘abd* (“servant”) denotes a living being in its entirety, i.e., a combination of body and soul. This interpretation, however, does not take into account the probability that the expression *asra bi-‘abdihi* simply refers to the human quality of the Prophet, in consonance with the many Qur’anic statements to the effect that he, like all other apostles, was but a mortal servant of God, and was not endowed with any supernatural qualities. This, to my mind, is fully brought out in the concluding words of the above verse - “*verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing*” — following upon the statement that the Prophet was shown some of God’s symbols (*min ayatina*), i.e., given insight into some, but by no means all, of the ultimate truths underlying God’s creation.

The most convincing argument in favour of a spiritual interpretation of both the Night Journey and the Ascension is forthcoming from the highly allegorical descriptions found in the authentic Traditions relating to this double experience: descriptions, that is, which are so obviously symbolic that they preclude any possibility of interpreting them literally, in “physical” terms. Thus, for instance, the Apostle of God speaks of his encountering at Jerusalem, and subsequently in heaven, a number of the

earlier prophets, all of whom had undoubtedly passed away a long time before. According to one Tradition (quoted by *Ibn Kathir* on the authority of *Anas*), he visited Moses (Peace be upon him) in his grave, and found him praying. In another Tradition, also on the authority of *Anas* (cf. *Fath al-Biri* VII, 158), the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) describes how, on his Night Journey, he encountered an old woman, and was thereupon told by Gabriel, "This old woman is the mortal world (*ad-dunya*)". In the words of yet another Tradition, on the authority of *Abu Hurayrah*, the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) "passed by people who were sowing and harvesting; and every time they completed their harvest, [the grain] grew up again. Gabriel said, 'These are the fighters in God's cause (*al-mujjahidun*).' Then they passed by people whose heads were being shattered by rocks; and every time they were shattered, they became whole again. [Gabriel] said, 'These are they whose heads were oblivious of prayer.' Then they passed by people who were eating raw, rotten meat and throwing away cooked, wholesome meat. [Gabriel] said, "These are the adulterers."

In the best-known Tradition on the Ascension (quoted by *Bukhari*), the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) introduces his narrative with the words: "While I lay on the ground next to the Ka'abah [lit., "in the *hijr*"], lo! There came unto me an angel and cut open my breast and took out my heart. And then a golden basin full of faith was brought unto me, and my heart was washed [therein] and was filled [with it]; then it was restored to its place..." Since "faith" is an abstract concept, it is obvious that the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) himself regarded this prelude to the Ascension - and therefore the Ascension itself and, *ipso facto*, the Night Journey to Jerusalem - as purely spiritual experiences.

But whereas there is no cogent reason to believe in a "bodily" Night Journey and Ascension, there is, on the

other hand, no reason to doubt the objective reality of this event. The early Muslim theologians, who could not be expected to possess adequate psychological knowledge, could visualize only two alternatives: either a physical happening or a dream.

Since it appeared to them - and rightly so - that these wonderful occurrences would greatly lose in significance if they were relegated to the domain of mere dream, they instinctively adopted an interpretation in physical terms and passionately defended it against all contrary views, like those of Ayesha, Mu'awiyah or Al-Hasan al-Basri. In the meantime, however, we have come to know that a dream-experience is not the only alternative to a physical occurrence. Modern Psychical research, though still in its infancy, has demonstrably proved that not every spiritual experience (that is, an experience in which none of the known organs of man's body has a part) must necessarily be a mere subjective manifestation of the "mind" — whatever this term may connote — but that it may, in special circumstances, be no less real or "factual" in the objective sense of this word than anything that man can experience by means of his physiological organism. We know as yet very little about the quality of such exceptional psychic activities, and so it is well-nigh impossible to reach definite conclusions as to their nature. Nevertheless, certain observations of modern psychologists have confirmed the possibility - claimed from time immemorial by mystics of all persuasions - of a temporary "independence" of man's spirit from his living body. In the event of such a temporary independence, the spirit or soul appears to be able freely to traverse time and space, to embrace within its insight occurrences and phenomena belonging to otherwise widely separated categories of reality, and to condense them within symbolical perceptions of great intensity, clarity and comprehensiveness. But when it comes to communicating such "visionary" experiences (as we are constrained to

call them for lack of a better term) to people who have never experienced anything of the kind, the person concerned - in this case, the Prophet - is obliged to resort to figurative expressions: and this would account for the allegorical style of all the Traditions relating to the mystic vision of the Night Journey and the Ascension.

At this point I should like to draw the reader's attention to the discussion of "spiritual ascension" by one of the truly great Islamic thinkers, Ibn al-Qayyim (*Zad al-Ma'ad* II, 48 f.):

Ayesha and Mu'awiyah (May God be Pleased with them) maintained that the [Prophet's] Night Journey was performed by his soul (*bi-ruhihi*), while his body did not leave its place. The same is reported to have been the view of Al-Hasan al-Basri. But it is necessary to know the difference between the saying, 'the Night Journey took place in dream (*manaman*)', and the saying, 'it was [performed] by his soul without his body'. The difference between these two [views] is tremendous....What the dreamer sees are mere reproductions (*amthal*) of forms already existing in his mind; and so he dreams [for example] that he ascends to heaven or is transported to Mecca or to [other] regions of the world, while [in reality] his spirit neither ascends nor is transported....

Those who have reported to us the Ascension of the Apostle of God can be divided into two groups — one group maintaining that the Ascension was in spirit and in body, and the other group maintaining that it was performed by his spirit, while his body did not leave its place. But these latter [also] do not mean to say that the Ascension took place in a dream: they merely mean that it was his soul itself which actually went on the Night Journey and ascended to heaven, and that the soul witnessed things which it [otherwise] witnesses after death (lit., *mufaraqah*, "separation").

Its condition on that occasion was similar to the condition [of the soul] after death....But that which the



Apostle of God experienced on his Night Journey was superior to the [ordinary] experiences of the soul after death, and, of course, was far above the dreams which one sees in sleep...As to the prophets [whom the Apostle of God met in heaven], it was but their souls which had come to dwell there after the separation from their bodies, while the soul of the Apostle of God ascended there in his lifetime."

It is obvious that this kind of spiritual experience is not only not inferior, but, on the contrary, vastly superior to anything that bodily organs could ever perform or record; and it goes without saying, as already mentioned by Ibn al-Qayyim, that it is equally superior to what we term "dream-experiences", inasmuch as the latter have no objective existence outside the subject's mind, whereas spiritual experiences of the kind referred to above are not less "real" (that is, objective) than anything which could be experienced "in body". By assuming that the Night Journey and the Ascension were spiritual and not bodily, we do not diminish the extraordinary value attaching to this experience of the Prophet. On the contrary, it appears that the fact of his having had such an experience by far transcends any miracle of bodily ascension, for it presupposes a personality of tremendous spiritual perfection — the very thing which we expect from a true Prophet of God. However, it is improbable that we ordinary human beings will ever be in a position fully to comprehend spiritual experiences of this kind. Our minds can only operate with elements provided by our consciousness of time and space; and everything that extends beyond this particular set of conceptions will always defy our attempts at a clear-cut definition

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Prophet's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, immediately preceding his Ascension, was apparently meant to show that Islam is not a new doctrine but a continuation of the same divine message which was preached by the prophets

of old, who had Jerusalem as their spiritual home. This view is supported by Traditions (quoted in *Fath at-Bari* VII, 158), according to which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), during his Night Journey, also offered prayers at Medina, Sinai, Bethlehem, etc. His encounters with other prophets, mentioned in this connection, symbolize the same idea. The well-known Traditions to the effect that on the occasion of his Night Journey the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) led a prayer in the Temple of Jerusalem, in which all other prophets ranged themselves behind him, expresses in a figurative manner the doctrine that Islam, as preached by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him), is the fulfillment and perfection of mankind's religious development, and that Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) was the last and the greatest of God's message-bearers.

The Qur'an was sent as a constitution of divine guidance. It contains principles and guidelines essential for social, political and spiritual guidance of humanity. It is an essence of divine values, a collection of revealed principles the understanding and following of which will lead us along the straight path. The derivation of a manual from the divine principles is one of the most important responsibilities that come from being a Muslim. This responsibility is like a *fard-e kifaya* (communal obligation). It is enough that some one take up this task in a given place and time.

This translation *The Message of the Qur'an* is valuable for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and also for pioneers in the Islamic culture who speak English but have no knowledge of Arabic. The commentary provided in the footnotes of this translation is intended to make it easier for the reader to understand the true meaning of the text, and is a reference to the difference between the Islamic laws and the pre-Islamic norms and patterns of social behavior.

The main aims of Muhammad Asad's translation was to penetrate the veil that over the years has enveloped the meanings of some Arabic words due to semantic change and to reveal them in their original connotations at the time of revelation of the Qur'an. He documented these semantic changes by careful reference to the work of classical lexicographers and philologists and earlier commentators and thus brought a rare freshness and accuracy to his rendering.

Muhammad Asad dedicated a great deal of time to reading classical and modern books on Islam. He studied many of the classical commentaries which have had a great impact upon his understanding of Qur'an. Among these are Ibn Kathir, al Tabari, al Zamakhshari, al Fakhur al Razi, al Baidawi, as Suyuti, ibn Taymiyyah. The other works on Qur'anic studies which were consulted by him are: *Tafsir al -Manar (Qur'an)* by Muhammad Rasid Rida, *Kitab at -Tabakat al -Kabir* by Ibn Sa'd, *Tafsir Sitt Suwar* by Ibn Taymiyyah al -Harrani, *Al -Itqan fi 'ulum al Qur'an* by Abd ar -Rahman Jalal ad -Din as Sayuti, *Jami al Bayan 'an Ta'wil al -Qur'an* by Ibn Jarir at -Tabari, *Tafsir al -Qur'an* by Isma'il ibn Kathir and some others.

## NOTES

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# Muhammad Asad's Concept of the State

## A. Background

Islam is indeed a religion of collective morals, but it contains little that is specifically political – that is, the original Islamic sources rarely convey much on how to form a state, run government, and manage organizations.<sup>1</sup>

The events which took place after the *Hijrah* of Muslims from Mecca to Madina were of historic nature. They included the later agreements between the Quraish, Aws and Khazraj, pairing them together as brothers in Islam, and guaranteeing the Jews living in Madina equal civil rights, freedom of religion and mutual protection against external aggression in return for their recognition of the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) as the paramount executive, military and judicial authority. Subsequently these agreements were formalized into a charter which meticulously recorded. The terms and conditions of the contracting parties, this resulted in the framing of the Madina charter.

The first Islamic State was set up by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) himself in the city of *Yathrib*, later named *Madinat – un Nabi*. This is the ideal model for all Muslims to follow because it is their belief that, whatever the Prophet Muhammad (Peace

and blessings be upon him) did, was perfect, as he was not only a living embodiment of the Holy Qur'an but also acted under Divine guidance through revelations.

The Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) succeeded in establishing an Islamic social order in Madina. The Islamic social order that the Prophet has established was an irrefutable evidence of the inherent soundness of faith and doctrines upon which it was founded. As the head of a free Islamic State he began to introduce and implement the entire Islamic scheme of reconstruction and reform and thus provided a concrete and striking manifestation of moral, social and political ideals of the new faith.

Thanks to this great revolution says Abul A'la Maududi, the Prophet of Islam succeeded in creating the new community with a new code of public morality and a new pattern of individual character. Their collective life was governed entirely by the principles and precepts of Islam. Their beliefs and thoughts were purely Islamic. Their religion was not vitiated by the worship of any deity other than Allah. Their individual character and collective morality had been purged of the evils of the days of ignorance and cast in mould of Islamic ethics.<sup>2</sup>

The 'State' in the western sense is considered as a group of people inhabiting a specific territory and living under a common legal political authority. The term came into vogue during the renaissance and gained further popularity when many social and political thinkers of Europe like Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1629), John Locke (1632 – 1704), John Austin (1790 – 1559), J. S. Mill (1806 – 1873), and Laski (1893 – 1930) dealt with it extensively and formulated theories of the state in a ratio – historical perspective. Gradually a variety of states – nation state, democratic state, totalitarian state, etc. were founded. Each type of state represents its special objectives and characteristics. The history of modern world is a living example of such states. Notwithstanding this the general

interpretation of state focuses on the political organization of people living in a particular space and time frame.

The concept of the state in Islam is the subject matter of a number of both modern Muslim thinkers and orientalist. They hold two kinds of opinions about it. One group holds that Islam envisages its specific nature of character of state as being specifically Islamic in character while others contend that statehood is not supported in Islam. Among the latter are Qammar-ud-din (*The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiah*), William Cantwell Smith (vide I. R. Faruqi's '*Viability of the Islamic State*' in the *Shariah, Ummah and Khilafah*, ed. Yusuf Abbas Hashimi) are worth to mention. The former group forms a long list of thinkers and scholars and includes specifically Abul A'la Maududi, Muhammad Iqbal, Maulana Azad, Dr. Hamidullah, Yousuf Al- Qarzawi and John Esposito. This group finds proof (*hujjah*) of and support for the information of the state in Islam. They contend that although the Qur'an and *Hadith* do not directly mention word 'state' there are nevertheless ample words and terms which suggest what it stands for – political authority, power, system, institution, etc. Qur'anic words like *Khilafah*, *Imarah*, *Ulil amr*, *Ummah*, *Iqamate-din*, according to these scholars, connote and imbibe much what is meant by state.

Moreover, the relevant *Hadith* and the precedence of *khilafat -t - Rashidah* which was basically the political institution of early Muslims set up to ensure the power interpretation and application of *Shariah* for the welfare of mankind, are elaborated in a good deal in their writings. Although to some of them whether Islam supports a state or not is hardly a debatable issue. What they are more concerned with is to look into the basic principles and structure of the state. Only a few scholars have seriously taken up the issue that Islam does not advocate state. This is probably because of their reaction to the western theories of state and the present situation of the Muslim world.



The other scholars, who find its legacy in traditional historical writings, rely on it, not with rigidity, but with the openness to move forward in socio – historical situations. Earlier some of the scholars were more concerned with the state as a historical truth, realized under the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) and his pious *kulafa* and the precedence, they held is to be continued. They were simple and direct in their approach. Some of these political writings were meant to serve as counsel to the kings, popular or unpopular, in their rule of the people. *Kitab –al –Kharaj* of Abu Yusuf, *al –Ahkam al Sultaniyah* of al –Mawardi, *Zakhir-at al –Muluke* of Sayyid Ali Hamadani and *al Siyasat –al –Shariyah* of Ibn Taymiyah can be placed in this category.

However, in the wake of the dominance of the west over Muslim nations, new challenges were posed to the later. Religion became marginalized and the domain of socio – economic activities was considered far removed from it. This opinion owes much to the western ratio-secular philosophy. It is against this background that scholars like, Muhammad Iqbal, Abul A'la Maududi, Maulana Azad and Fazlur Rehman propounded the political theory of Islam. They took a serious note of the western challenge of secularism and socialism and developed their approach in the comparatively perspective. That is why their philosophical writings make a special critique of the western nations in the realms of secularism, communism, socialism, democracy, theocracy and nationalism. In Islam, according to them, the principles of equality, freedom, mutual co-operation and welfare are supreme and cannot be identified with the spirit of western ideologies.

Muhammad Asad too is found following this comparative method of treating the subject of the state in Islam. He however, makes a good break through which is exemplified by his monumental works on the subject – *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* and *This*

*Law of Ours.* These works, as conceived in the modern perspective, make a rational critique of its (the west's) basic philosophy in order to clear the doubts created about the Islamic State. This is clear in his treatment of issues such as 'Why an Islamic State, religion and morality', 'the scope of Islamic Law', and 'misapplication of western terms', etc. The other dimension of his approach is to deal with the issue of the principles of state. Here he breaks the new ground by exploring the various political forms of the state and the wisdom behind the unwritten nature of the Islamic constitution. 'The scope of Islamic Law' and the 'nature of the council and assembly in the state' are highlighted in his book. Here he addresses the crucial demand of the Muslim world to formulate the guiding principles of state –craft in Islam.

## B. His Concept of the State in Islam

Muhammad Asad who has made an enormous contribution to Islamic thought, fall into the group of scholars who subscribe to the concept of state in Islam.

He says; "I decided to draw the theoretical outline of an Islamic Constitution on the strength of the clear-cut political injunctions forthcoming from the Qur'an and from the authentic *ahadith*." <sup>3</sup>

Although he converts to Islam, he thought fit discuss the nature of an Islamic state. He says that the outward forms and functions of an Islamic state need not necessarily correspond to any historical precedent. All that is required of a state in order that it might deservedly be described as Islamic is the embodiment in its constitution and practice of those clear-cut, unambiguous ordinances and economic life. <sup>4</sup>

Muhammad Asad argues against those educated Muslims who have been influenced by the western concept of "secularism". The term, secularism signifies that

which is not religious. It derives from the Latin word *Saeculum*, which initially meant “age” or “generations” in the temporal sense. It later became associated with matters of this world, as distinct from those of the spirit which are directed towards the attainment of paradise. The French word *Laicite* also signifies secularism but originally designated “lay people”, those who were not of the clergy.<sup>5</sup>

Muhammad Asad says “there is no doubt that countless Muslims passionately desire a sociopolitical development on Islamic lines; but there is also no doubt that in the mental climate of the modern world, it has become almost axiomatic among many educated people that religion ought not to interfere with political life.”<sup>6</sup> It is true that religion must not interfere in practical politics, as this policy will give people the opportunity to work in different fields such as the study, architecture and religious progress.

Muhammad Asad raises his voice against secularism by saying that in a modern ‘secular’ state there is no stable norm by which to judge between right and wrong. The only possible criterion is the nation’s interest. But in the absence of an objective scale of moral values, different groups of people, even within one nation may have and usually do have divergent views as to what constitutes the nation’s best interests. No nation or community, he adds, can attain to happiness unless and until it is truly united from within and no nation or community can be truly united from within, unless it achieves a large degree of unanimity as to what is right and what is wrong in the affairs of men. No such unanimity is possible unless the nation or community agrees on a moral obligation arising from a permanent, absolute moral law.<sup>7</sup>

So, he rejects the idea of a secular state, since such a state does not submit to a universal morality but to the interest of a nation, race or class or some other divisive category. Only religion can provide a universal code of morality: Islam fulfills this function admirably, as it is a

religion meant for the good of all mankind. According to his opinion, Islam does require the realization of the supreme purpose of all creation – to establish divine will on earth – dependent in an essential sense on the existence of an Islamic state. Only when eternal immutable standards of right and wrong exist can mankind fulfill its duty of worshipping God truly by submitting to His will. The Islamic state is intrinsic to the will of God. <sup>8</sup>

Further more, he says: “However, our moral obligation to try to emulate the great companions relates precisely to their character and behaviour—to their spiritual and social integrity, their selflessness, their idealism, and their unquestioning surrender to the will of God. It cannot and does not relate to an imitation, by people of later times, of the companions produce in matters of state administration – for the simple reason, pointed out above, that this procedure was in many respects an outcome of time – conditioned requirements and individual *ijtihad*, and did not in each and every instance depend on *Shar'i* ordinances alone.” <sup>9</sup>

Muhammad Asad depicts his Islamic state as a welfare state whose inspiring principles originated more than thirteen hundred years ago. The period of Hazrat Umar (May God be Pleased with him) which presages the modern welfare state by many centuries, he says “It follows that a state, in order to be truly Islamic must arrange the affairs of the community in such a way that every individual man and woman, shall enjoy that minimum of material well – being without which there can be no human dignity, no real freedom and, in the last resort no spiritual progress. This, of course, does not mean that the state should, or ever could, ensure easy and carefree living to its citizens. It only means that in an Islamic state there shall be no soul – grinding poverty side by side with affluence; secondly, that all the resources of the state must be harnessed to the task of providing adequate means of livelihood for all its citizens, and thirdly that all the

opportunities in this respect should be open to all citizens equally, and that no person should enjoy a high standard of living at the expense of others.”<sup>10</sup>

Muhammad Asad compares Islamic democracy with the democracy of the west: “Islam maintains that all human beings are socially equal and must, therefore, be given the same opportunities for development and self-expression. Islam makes it incumbent upon Muslims to subordinate their decisions to the guidance of the Divine Law revealed in the Qur’an and exemplified by the Prophet: an obligation which imposes definite limits on the community’s right to legislate and denies to the ‘will of the people’ that attribute of sovereignty which forms so integral a part of the western concept of democracy.”<sup>11</sup>

Democracy, term originated in ancient Greece to designate a government where the people share in directing the activities of the state, as distinct from governments controlled by a single class, select group, or auto craft. The definition of democracy has been expanded, however, to describe a philosophy that insists on the right and the capacity of a people, acting either directly or through representative, to control their institutions for their own purpose. Such a philosophy places a high value on the equality of individuals and would free people as far as possible from restraints not self-imposed. It insists that necessary restraints be imposed only by the consent of the majority and that they confirm to the principles of equality.

Doctrines of natural law evolved into the idea of natural rights, i.e., that all people have certain rights, such as self-preservation, that cannot be taken from them. The idea of contract followed that rulers and people were bound each other by reciprocal obligations. If the sovereign failed in his or transgressed on natural rights, the people could take back their sovereignty.

This idea as postulated by John Locke, strongly influenced the development of British Parliamentary

Democracy and, as defined in the social contract theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau, helped from the philosophical justification for the American and French Revolutions. Socialists and others, who insist that Economic Democracy through Economic Equality and Public Ownership of the major means of production is the only foundation upon which a true political democracy can be erected, have long challenged the idea that equality of opportunity can be maintained through political democracy alone.<sup>12</sup>

The proponents of democracy, insist that the concept of *shura* (consultation) is mandated in the Qur'an, and that the modern application of this Qur'anic mandate is a form of democracy very similar to that seen in the Western world, based on "one person-one vote," as the expression of the mutual consultation of the people.

This approach finds support from at least two lines of reasoning. First, there are an appreciable number, who claim absolute sovereignty for the united will of the people that is consensus (*ijma*) on the basis of the Prophet's saying:

"Never will God make my community agree on a wrong course." (*At – Tirmidhi*, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar). As Muhammad Asad states in his book, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, "Many Muslims conclude from this tradition that whatever the community – or at least the majority within it – agrees upon must, under all circumstances, be the right course."<sup>13</sup> While Muhammad Asad does not precisely agree with this statement, he is of the definite opinion that the concept of *shura* (consultation) implies that the people must directly participate in the government.

According to Islam, the source of law is divine revelation, while western democracy regards law as a purely man - made product.

Muhammad Asad found in the *ahadith* (traditions) a new series of laws. Some of them are explanations of the Qur'anic laws; others are evidently meant to amplify the later and to show their application to concrete cases.

Finally, there are in the Prophet's *Sunnah* Laws concerning problems not specifically mentioned in the Qur'an. He took together, the ordinances of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* and presented them as the Law of Islam, called the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law). He says, "The *Shari'ah* cannot be changed, because it is a Divine Law and need not be changed, because all its ordinances are so formulated that none of them ever conflicts with the real nature of man and the genuine requirements of human society at any time. This is because it legislates only with regard to those aspects of human life which by their very nature are not subject to change."<sup>14</sup>

If Muslims codify the *Shari'ah* on the lines suggested above, says Muhammad Asad, it will for ever remain splendid in its clearness, self – contained and self – evident. Every one of its statutes will convey a precise meaning, which admits of no 'interpretation': and every Muslim will know that, being a Muslim, he is bound to accept the unchangeable quality of the *Shar'i* laws. Consequently, *ijtihad* will have to apply only to matters, which are not fixed by regulations of the Divine Law – i-e, to Muslim Law. It is, however, important to remember that the field thus left to the exercise of our reasoning is immense for the *Shari'ah* was never intended to cover every possible constellation of life. It served only a framework within which Muslims are expected to unfold their creative powers, and in the light of which they have to regulate their daily affairs. Thus *ijtihad* will become fully legitimate for a great number of intelligent people as soon as they have acquainted themselves with the small, concise – and therefore easily understandable – code of the *Shari'ah* and have submitted to its guidance.<sup>15</sup>

No truly Islamic government can be established until a complete revision of the *Shari'ah* takes place. While repeating typical conventional beliefs about the *Shari'ah* being a complete code of life, Muhammad Asad argues forcefully for greater scope for free legislation. He asserts

that the actual *Shari'ah* includes a small number of laws based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The rest are laws resulting from the *ijtihad* of every age. Such laws based on the independent reasoning of earlier Muslim scholars are not considered of much value and can therefore be changed and replaced. Every generation has the right to exercise *ijtihad* in the temporal areas.<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad Asad quotes a Qur'anic verse to substantiate his assertion:

"For every one of you we have ordained a Divine Law and an open road"<sup>17</sup>

He says that a rediscovery of the 'open road' of Islam is urgently required at a time like this, when the Muslim world finds itself in the throes of a cultural crises, for we may affirm or deny, for centuries to come, the validity of Islam as a practical proposition. Set as we are in the midst of a rapidly changing world, our society, too, is subject to the same inexorable law of change ..... From the Islamic point of view, there must be an endeavor to return to the realities of Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and to find on their basis new channels for our political thought and our social actions. This was a movement of the first – kind. The present drift of Muslim society toward western concept and institutions is a movement of the second kind.<sup>18</sup>

Muhammad Asad realized that the Law Giver can only be one who possesses infinite wisdom and knowledge. Only such a Being can constitute the Law so that it can be understood and followed by every human being blessed with normal intelligence. That is to say, the clauses of the Law – whether contained in the Qur'an or in the Prophet's *Sunnah* – are so devised as to require no specialized erudition for their understanding.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "God does not impose upon any soul a duty beyond its ability".<sup>19</sup>

It means erudition is not within everybody's ability. But, on the other hand, every sane Muslim is obliged to know the Law of Islam.



Muhammad Asad says that “on no account must we obliterate the demarcation between *Shar’i* (that is, *nass*) laws on the one hand and *ijtihadi* conclusions – whether individual or communal – on the other hand. As to the *Shari’ah* it self, it cannot and need not be submitted to *ijtihad*, for it consists exclusively of ordinances which, being absolutely unambiguous by virtue of their wording, can be taken at their face value only, and at no other value.”<sup>20</sup>

Muhammad Asad further believed that modern and future Muslims had considerable flexibility to deal creatively through *ijtihad*, -independent thinking-with an ever-changing world and its attendant challenges. But he believed that they must, when carrying out *ijtihad*, be bound by the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*. This means that in all matters which were clearly enjoined by the *Shari’ah*, sovereignty belonged to God alone, but in most other areas, such as the form of the political system to be adopted, God in His wisdom had given the believers the right, and imposed on them the duty, to exercise their reason and to arrive at the appropriate decision for their time by mutual consultation.

When viewed in this light, the question then becomes not, “What does Islam say about democracy?” but rather something more like, “What should Islam say about democracy?” This point is well-stated by Professor Khaled Abou el Fadl, Professor of Islamic Law at the UCLA School of Law: “If Muslims are going to reclaim their right to develop their own political tradition, they must state political ideas not as historical or legal conclusions, but as theoretical propositions to be developed and systematized. In a sense, theory must gain an independent existence apart from history or law... One must move beyond aesthetic interpretations and authentication to the development of systematic political theory. The aim is not to develop a theory of Islamic government, but to develop theories of Islamic government.”<sup>21</sup>

## C. His Concept of Government in Islam

Muhammad Asad is a noted Muslim writer, translator and commentator of the Qur'an. He identifies two main parts of an Islamic government:

An *Amir* (king) who heads the executive branch, and a (*majlish ash – shura*) that legislates laws.

He says that both must be elected by the people: "It follows that, in order to satisfy the requirements of Islamic law, the leadership of the state must be of an elective nature; consequently, an assumption of governmental power through non – elective means of any description whatsoever becomes automatically, even through the person or persons concerned be Muslims, as illegal as an imposition of power by conquest from outside the Muslim community." <sup>22</sup>

Hence, as a principle, we may state that the government, both in its legislative arm, as well as in its executive arm, and the function of choosing a leader, must be based on the consent, and the will of the people, and that this is the expression of the principles of *shura* and *bayat*. The Qur'anic ordinance, "*amrahum shura bayanahum*." (The believers' affairs are to be run by mutual consultation among themselves) (42: 38) must be regarded as the fundamental operative clause of all Islamic thought relating to statecraft. It is so comprehensive that it reaches out into almost every department of political life, and it is so self – expressive and unequivocal that no attempt at arbitrary interpretation can change its purpose. The word *amr* in this connection refers to all affairs of a communal nature and therefore also to the manner in which the government of an Islamic state is to be established; that is, to the elective principle underlying all governmental authority. Beyond that, the phrase *amrahum shura bayanahum* –literally, "their communal business is consultation among themselves" makes the translation of all political business not only consequent upon, but

synonymous with, consultation: which means that the legislative powers of the state must be vested in an assembly chosen by the community specifically for this purpose.

It is evident from the context that the expression “among themselves” in the Qur’anic ordinances under consideration refers to the whole community. Hence the legislative assembly – or, to use the nomenclature well-known throughout Muslim history, the *majlish ash – shura* – must be truly representative of the entire community, both men and women. Such a representative character can be achieved only through free and general elections. The members of the *majlish* must therefore be elected by means of the widest possible suffrage, including both men and women.<sup>23</sup>

He opposes the nomination of the *majlish ash – shura* by the head of the state, as it refers to the whole community both men and women. In addition to participation in the electoral process, women have also been invited to join in political activities. These activities appear to be sanctioned by Islamic Law. In Islam, community decisions must be made through a process of consultation (*shura*).

The Qur’an, in describing the qualifications of true believers, states:

“..... And whose rule in all matters of common concern is consultation among themselves.”<sup>24</sup>

Muhammad Asad argues that this verse reaches into all aspects of political life and that, to fulfill the requirements of this verse, a legislative assembly should be formed. He further argues that the verse refers to the entire community; therefore, the legislative assembly must be representative of the entire community, and that to achieve true representation, the members of the legislative assembly must be elected through free elections with wide suffrage, including both women and men.<sup>25</sup>

He quotes many Hadith for the prohibition of self – canvassing in any administrative appointment. He says

when the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) was approached by one of his companions with the request for a government post, he answered emphatically:

"By God, we do not appoint to such work anyone who asks for it, nor anyone who covets it." (*Al – Bukhari and Muslim*, on the authority of 'Abd ar – Rehman ibn Samurah.)

He also quotes many traditions from the Prophet such as:

"Follow the largest group" (*Ibn Majah*, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar.) and

"It is your duty to stand by the united community and the majority." (*al – 'ammah*) (*Ahmad ibn Hambal*, on the authority of Mu'adh ibn Jabal.)

In these traditions Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have advised the Muslims to follow the largest group and stand by the united community and the majority.

Muhammad Asad says; "Human ingenuity has not evolved a better method for corporate decisions than the majority principle. No doubt, a majority can err; but so can a minority."<sup>26</sup>

He concluded that an Islamic state must be governed by means of consultation: that is to say, by means of an intimate collaboration between the legislature and the executive (the leadership of both being vested in one and the same person, namely, the *Amir*). Further he suggested the establishment of a Tribunal to decide any disputes arising between the *Amir* and the legislative Assembly. The tribunal should have the right and the duty (i) arbitrate in all cases of disagreement between the *Amir* and the *Majlis –ash – Shura* referred to the Tribunal by either of the two sides and (ii) to veto, on its own accord, any legislative act passed by the Assembly or any administrative act on the part of the *Amir* which, in the Tribunal's considered opinion, offends against a *nass* ordinance of the Qur'an or *Sunnah*. The composition of

the Tribunal should be the result of consultation in the *Shar'i* sense; its members might be selected by the *Majlis* (Assembly) from a panel of names submitted by the *Amir*, or vice versa.<sup>27</sup>

Muhammad Asad quotes many traditions from the Prophet to elucidate the duty of allegiance. He says;

“When the *Amir* has been duly elected, he may be considered to have received a pledge of allegiance from the whole community.”<sup>28</sup>

Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“The hand of God is upon the community [*al-jama'ah*]; and he who sets himself apart from it will be set apart in Hellfire.” (*Tirmidhi*, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn Umar.)

Consequently, when the government fulfills the requirements imposed by the *Shari'ah*, its claim to the allegiance of the citizens is absolute; they must stand united behind the government and must be prepared to sacrifice for this unity all their private comforts, interests, possessions and even their lives for. Therefore, says Muhammad Asad a government ruling in the name of God and His Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) and in obedience to the law of Islam has the right to call upon all resources of the citizens-including their personal possessions and even their lives – whenever the interests of the community and the security of the state demand such an effort.<sup>29</sup>

Muhammad Asad argues in favour of an elective form of government, based on the pious Caliphate Model. He says that the Islamic community allegiance to “those in authority among you” is conditional upon those in authority acting in obedience to God His Apostle. From this principle, it follows that the community is duty-bound to supervise the activities of the government. Thus a government subject to the people's consent is a pre-requisite for an Islamic state. It follows that, in order to

satisfy the requirements of Islamic law, the leadership of the state must be of an elective nature and that, consequently, any assumption of government power through non-elective means becomes automatically illegal, as an imposition of power from outside the community.<sup>30</sup>

He believed that the presidential form of government was best suited to an Islamic state as it corresponded to the Islamic concepts of caliph. A strong head of state, possessing the necessary qualifications to lead the community, should be entrusted with the job. His ministers should hold office during his pleasure.

In almost all Muslim states, even those not governed by Islamic Law, the constitution requires that the leader be a Muslim. He says; "It is obvious that only a person who believes in the Divine origin of that Law, in a word, a Muslim – may be entrusted with the office of head of the state. Just as there can be no fully Islamic life without an Islamic state, no state can be termed truly Islamic unless it is administered by people who can be supposed to submit willingly to the Divine Law of Islam."<sup>31</sup>

He observed that without a certain amount of differentiation between Muslim and non – Muslim is required in the Islamic state or there would be no possibility of establishing an Islamic state or states in the sense envisaged by the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. This does not and can not mean that we should discriminate against non – Muslim citizens in the ordinary sphere of life. Muhammad Asad says that, on the contrary, they must be accorded all the freedom and protection which a Muslim citizen can legitimately claim: only they may not be entrusted with the key position of leadership. One cannot escape the fact that no non – Muslim citizen - however great his personal integrity and his loyalty to the state – could, on psychological grounds, ever be, supposedly able to work wholeheartedly for the ideological objectives of Islam; nor, in fairness, could such a demand be made of

him.”<sup>32</sup> In Islamic states the non- Muslim communities enjoyed complete – autonomy, for the government placed in their hands the independent management of their internal affairs, and their religious leaders exercised judicial function in cases that concerned their coreligionists.

Muhammad Asad laid stress on free and compulsory education for all citizens. He said that men and women, Muslims and non – Muslims, should have the right to free and compulsory education.

A state which owes its justification to the call of Islam and aims at establishing the law of Islam as the law of the land, says Muhammad Asad, must make education not only accessible but also compulsory for every Muslim man and woman. This is because one of the basic tenets of such a state is to make all the facilities of life available to its non – Muslim citizens as well. Education must be free and compulsory for all citizens, regardless of religion.<sup>33</sup>

From the Islamic point of view the question of the equality of men and women is meaningless. It is like discussing the equality of a rose and jasmine. Each has its own perfume, colour, shape and beauty. Seyyed Hosain Nasr, a contemporary writer on Islam, says in his book *“Ideals and Realities of Islam”* that “Man and woman are not the same; each has particular features and characteristics. Women are not equal to men. But then neither are men equal to women. Islam envisages their roles in society not as competing but as complementary. Each has certain duties and functions in accordance with his or her- nature and constitution.”<sup>34</sup>

He does not touch on the matter of women separately, but he favors their right to receive an education.

The crucial feature of Muhammad Asad’s scheme of the Islamic state is that in identifying its principles, he relies solely on the ‘clear texture ordinances’ (*nusus*) of the Qur’an and such traditions as constitutes the real, eternal *Shari’ah* of Islam. He excludes *fiqh* or

jurisprudence, holding that "the far larger area of things and activities which the Law-Giver has left unspecified – neither enjoining nor forbidding them in *nass* terms - must be regarded as allowable (*mubah*) from the *Shar'i* point of view."<sup>35</sup>

Muhammad Asad seems to support the rational – legal basis of the legitimacy of authority based on the democratic process. For him, there should be elected government based on presidential system. He also talks of broad Muslim suffrage. He lays stress on basing the state on the eternal message of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him), which implies 'maintaining ideological purity'.

He says that, "it would, of course, still be possible for an influential but otherwise worthless candidate to avoid the outward appearance of self – canvassing by making use of a party organization or of individual middlemen who would make propaganda for him among the public. However, the fact that the candidate himself would be debarred from delivering electioneering speeches or from otherwise addressing the electorate on his own behalf would make the task extremely different. With the result that, as a rule, only a person enjoying well – deserved and unsolicited esteem among the electorate would have a genuine chance of success."<sup>36</sup>

Muhammad Asad is not quite clear on this point. In fact the western electoral system is unsuited to the genius of Islam. Islam would have a political system where consultancy and not electioneering leads to the election of the *Majlis ash – shura* and no person becomes a candidate, not to speak of his canvassing for himself.

The Qur'an does not refer to a state in the contemporary sense at all. Rather, it assumes a moral community, the Islamic '*Ummah*, which guarantees the right physical and spiritual environment for the successful development of Islam. The concept of '*Ummah* is very crucial to the understanding of the Muslim minority



situation, contextually as well as typically. Muhammad Asad, in his well known translation and commentary on the Qur'an, explains, "The word '*Ummah* primarily denotes a group of living beings having certain characteristics or circumstances in common."<sup>37</sup>

Thus he points out, the term '*Ummah* is often used as Synonymous with community, people, nation, genus, generation.

The Qur'an defines the Muslim '*Ummah* as those who surrender to Allah and follow his guidance as sent through the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) who was chosen to be a messenger to all humanity. Muslims, therefore, are a group of people committed to a set of beliefs and entertaining a sense of mission and a special role in history.

Allah says in Qur'an "And thus we have willed you to be a community of the middle way [*'Ummatan Wasatan*] so that you may be a witness to the truth before all mankind"<sup>38</sup>.

The Muslim '*Ummah*, has no variants, for it is based on one set of beliefs, focusing on the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) and one code of practice guided by *Shari'ah* (the divine law) and shared experiences through common history of Islam and Muslims – the early persecutions, the trials and triumphs, the flowering and dénouement, all have come to characterized the common Muslim experience leading to the emergence of an "*Ummah* consciousness"<sup>39</sup>.

According to Qur'an:

- The presidal principle, according to which a state president (Amir), and not a committee or politburo, must be head of state. He functions as a successor to the Prophet but not as a 'representative of God' in the papal sense (40).
- The consultative principle, according to which executive and legislative functions must be exercised on the basis of consultation (*Shura*)<sup>41</sup>.

- The Islamic principle, according to which Islam is the state religion. This requires the head of state to be a Muslim and the entire legislation to be kept in accordance with Qur'an, *Sunnah* as the basic and highest constitutional law of the land, assuring of course the rights and privileges if non-Muslim minorities, too.

Indirectly it may derive a forth, decorative principle from these three.

That is, from the rights of the '*Ummah* as such (2: 30) and the Qur'an's insistence on the administration of justice, that the obligatory consultations mentioned above should not only be advisory but binding. This interpretation espoused by Muhammad Asad in his commentary of the Qur'an on this verse

"..... And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in God: for, verily, God loves those who place their trust in Him." (3: 159) as; he says, this injection, implying government by consent and counsel, must be regarded as one of the fundamental clauses of all Qur'anic legislation relating to state craft. The pronoun 'then' relates to the believers, that is, to the who community; while the word *al-amr* accruing in this context- as well as in the much earlier – revealed phrase *amruhum shura bayanahum* in 42: 38 – denotes all affairs of public concern, including state administration. All authorities agree in that the above ordinance, although addressed in the first instance to the Prophet, is binding on all Muslims and for all times.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, Murad Wilfered Hoffman says that Islamic democracy is not to be understood as unlimited sovereignty of the people, even while it is always people who have to translate God's sovereignty on earth into concrete action. Just like any other parliament, a Muslim parliament must take into account the constitution, in this case the Qur'anic norms, the *Shari'ah* in the narrow

sense of divine, i.e., Qur'anic norms. Within this broad framework an Islamic parliament is free to construct State Organizations, an economic system, a system of criminal law, etc., since the Qur'an and (normative) *Sunnah* as well allow maximum flexibility in these matters. <sup>43</sup>

Muhammad Asad has shown in his pioneering book *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, fruit of lifelong studies, that the ideal Islamic common wealth is a state under the rule of law, a parliamentary republic with a constitution, which could correspond to Western constitutions on all essential points (separation of power, bill of rights, party pluralism, protection of minorities) as long as it ensures that the head of state is a Muslim, that Islam is the state religion, and that the Qur'an is the supreme constitutional norm. <sup>44</sup>

Muhammad Asad presents his concept of the Islamic State and attempts to formulate a workable constitution in considerable detail, basing his views on the authoritative sources of Islamic reasoning: the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. He clearly argues for a change in attitude of the Muslims, whether scholars or laymen, saying that a true Islamic revival is possible only by going back to the original sources, that is, the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. He has rejected the schools of *fiqh*, which by the nature of their approach are no longer relevant to the need of our times. He holds that this state of affairs will never change until Muslims reconcile themselves to the true tenets of the *Shari'ah*. The fields of Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*) and Islamic political theory were of great importance to him, as he felt that the spiritual and temporal success of the Muslim community depended largely on a correct understanding and application of Islamic law and on a sound political system. He laid great emphasis on the Qur'anic principle of consultation, and he gave no quarter to totalitarian systems of government, which he thought were pernicious and anti-Islamic.

There are a number of examples in the book of *Seerah*

(the Prophet's biography) which begin with these words:

*"O People, give me advice"* which indicates that the affairs of the State were not only required to be regulated in accordance with the laws of the Holy Qur'an but also to be decided by mutual consent. The Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) Himself was advised by Allah to consult them (the believers) in all matters of administration.<sup>45</sup>

This verse and the verse 38 of Chapter As - '*Shoora*' lay down the basic principles that should guide the Muslims in the transaction of their national affairs. This method was followed by the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) regarding all the matters and he never sought to impose his will upon anyone. And he followed the decision of the majority. Authority or power to rule, according to Islam is a trust- '*Amanat*'- of the people and not the birthright of anyone.

The Qur'an Says

"Verily Allah commands you to give over the trust to those entitled to them and that when you Judge between men, you judge with justice." <sup>46</sup>

After the death of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) in Madina in 632, Abu Bakr Siddiqi (may Allah be pleased with him) was appointed as a leader of the believers, and first successor of the Prophet. Events tell us that the Prophet was of the opinion that this task of leadership should go to Abu Bakr (may God be pleased with him), but he never nominated the latter nor did he prepare a will.

There were, however, certain indications during his lifetime of his wishes. For instance, only the head of the State performs the task of congregational prayer. That is why the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) used to lead the prayer himself. For, according to Islam, the Imam of the mosque should be one who is the leader of the political institution, or he could be one appointed by the head of the State as his deputy. It is

significant that the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him) made Abu Bakr (may God be pleased with him) lead the prayer several times. This stand of the Prophet was to make it clear to the people that the appointment of the leader of the believers should be in accordance with the opinion of the people and not by appointment. That is why after his death, when the companions gathered together at Saqifa Bani Saeda, an assembly hall in Madina, Abu Bakr (may God be pleased with him) was appointed the successor of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him), after a long consultation. Although the Islamic system is democratic in its nature, it would be more appropriate to say that democracy in Islam is indirect democracy rather than direct. That is to say, the entire public is not consulted in the Islamic democratic system. Instead, we find different methods in that golden period of Islam known as the appointed after consulting the public. Only the senior people available in Madina were consulted.

This pattern was adopted concerning the appointment of all the four caliphs.

The modern concept of State in the modern world is that it is an organized institution run by the people through their elected representatives for the collective welfare of the people, residing in a specified territory and the constitution is patterned according to the history, beliefs, customs and ideology of its people. All the Socialist and the democratic states are governed by man made laws and institutions and are based on the theory of material advancement and utilitarianism.

The concept of State in Islam wholly differs from the present day concept. In the modern times when the territorial nationalism is the order of the day and people's politics and outlook are molded by material and economic consideration. To study the concept of the Islamic State it is important to determine the character of the Islamic State and the, as to how the Islamic State can be realized in a

democracy in the modern society. Islam should not only be considered as merely a religion. It is not a set of mythological beliefs and rituals but its structure is religio-political. There is no dictomy to Islam between spiritual and temporal. The State forms an integral part of Islam. According to Muhammad Iqbal, "it is only an effort to realize the spiritual in the human organization." <sup>47</sup> It is a social, economic and political system, hence it is statecraft. Islamic State is a state patterned on the Socio-moral, religio-political ideals of Islam. The criterion of an Islamic State is not union of ruler and the government, but the principles of justice and religion combined with Social action.

A State is constituted by four elements: territory, population, organization and sovereignty. Islam differs on the element of sovereignty. No State is independent if it lacks the sovereign power or the power to make laws for its people. In the ancient times the Monarch till this idea was enunciated for the first time by Rousseau, the French Philosopher and after the French Revolution attempts were made to found states on this basis in Europe.

The Islamic State (Madina) founded in the Christian era, by Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). The constitution of Madina establishes the importance of consent and cooperation for governance. According to this pact, Muslims and non-Muslims are equal citizens of the Islamic State, with identical rights and duties. Communities with different religious orientations enjoy religions autonomy which essentially is wider in scope than the modern idea of religious freedom. The constitution of Madina established a pluralistic state - a community of communities. It promised equal security to all and all were equal in the eyes of the law. The principles of equality, consensual governance and pluralism are beautifully enmeshed in the past of Madina. The ideals of Islam were till the reign of the four caliphs. But at the end of the rule of the rightly guided

caliphs the Prophet's dream of an equal and just society remained unfulfilled and this changed the concept of the Islamic polity. This change was the result of the variations in ideals. Though basic ideals like equality, liberty, justice and toleration prevailed to some extent.

As was rightly observed by Dr. S.A.Q. Hussaini, "the attempt at leveling and equalizing failed; the brotherhood of all believers was jeopardized; racial differences and tribal distinction and even discrimination between the old and new converts entered the scheme of things"<sup>48</sup> In an Islamic State Sovereignty belongs to God. It should not be understood that all the law are made by God or all possible laws are provided in Qur'an. But the Qur'an principles should be the fundamental for the laws made in an Islamic State, by the people. Thus people enjoy only a restricted right of making laws they cannot go against the Qura'nic Principles. They are only executors of law and are at par with the ordinary citizens. Qur'an is the original source that provides principles and ordinances. It is a divine book and the laws given therein are superior to the man made laws. It is regarded as the foundation over with the super structure of Islam rests.

The Qur'an informs us that true religion is practical.

"It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the east and the West, but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the Angles and the Scripture and the Prophets, and giveth his wealth for love of Him to Kindred and to Orphans and to the needy and the homeless and to beggars and to set salaves free; and those who are regular in prayer and pay the poor their legal portion. And those who keep their promise when they make one, and the persevering in adversity and tribulation. These are they who are sincere. These are they who keep from evil."<sup>49</sup>

Muhammad Asad has very successfully developed the concept of the Islamic State in theory. He portrayed the true picture of Islam and clearly described the causes

for the rise and decline of Islamic culture. But his disillusionment with the attitude of Muslims towards Islam is evident from the latter part of his work. Muslims did not come up to his expectation. He did not receive an encouraging response from the Muslims. That is the reason why his sound theory could not be practically implemented.

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# The Views of Some Scholars about Muhammad Asad

Muhammad Asad almost always worked on his own and never belonged to any organized movement. Because he was, and remained an intellectual and never became an activist or the founder of a party. Neither did he leave any disciples who could carry on and develop his thought. But posterity will continue to benefit from the radiance of his thought through the written legacy he left in many fields: travel and autobiography, *Sunnah* and *Shari'ah*, Jurisprudence and Qur'anic exegesis, secularism and westernization, political theory and constitutional ideas.

He is one of the leading thinkers of the world of Islam and his ideas have influenced an entire generation. People have different opinions about him, but the majority recognizes his firmness, sincerity and his deep knowledge. An example of the influence of his writing may be found in the testimony of a twenty one year old American Jewish woman named Margaret Marcus (born in 1934, who later converted to Islam, took the name Maryam Jameelah, becoming one of the best – known ideologues of Islamic Fundamentalism. She was famous for her methodical indictments of the west). Muhammad Asad's book, *"The Road to Mecca"* found a place on the shelves of the public library in Mamaroneck, New York, near her home. Her parents would not let her take out the book, so she read it in the library over and over again.

She says “what he (Muhammad Asad) could do, I thought I could also do, only how much harder for a single woman than for a man! But I vowed to Allah that at the first opportunity, I would follow his example.”<sup>1</sup>

The book *‘Islam at the Crossroads’* is a masterpiece on the subject. She says, “Although I completely agree with Muhammad Asad when he wrote in his book, *‘Islam at the Crossroads’* that the imitation of western ways of life based on their materialistic, pragmatic and secular philosophies can only lead to the abandonment of Islam, yet I must take issue with him when he asserts that all that is of any use to Muslims from the west is confined to the physical sciences.”<sup>2</sup>

Maryam Jameelah cites Muhammad Asad’s *“Road to Mecca”* and *“Islam at the Crossroads”* as critical influences on her decision to become a Muslim.”<sup>3</sup>

Another prominent scholar of Islam, Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) (a British convert to Islam and a famous English scholar, and Commentator of Holy the Holy Qur’an who translated it into English, entitling it *‘The Meaning of the Glorious Koran’ A Bi-lingual Edition with English Translation, Introduction and Notes*, London, 1930) said that “Mr. Muhammad Asad has written a book which is a notable contribution to what we may call the literature of Muslim regeneration, and the fact that he is a European by birth and education, a widely travelled and observant man, makes his achievement that much more remarkable .....It is the most thoughtful and thought – stimulating work on the means of Islamic revival that has appeared since Prince Sa’id Haleem Pasha’s famous *‘Islamlashmaq’*.”<sup>4</sup>

The omission and elisions of his book did not detract from its commercial success. *The Road to Mecca* was translated from English into the major languages of Europe, and the royalties must have represented a windfall. The book also created a demand for Asad’s services as a lecturer, and his reputation in the west reached its pinnacle. But in Muslim lands, especially

among Muslim activists, his choices raised troubling questions. Maulana Maududi (1903 – 79), in a letter (to Margaret Marcus [Maryam Jameelah] written on 25 February 1961) – expressed misgivings:

“I have great respect for (Asad’s) exposition of Islamic ideas and especially his criticism of western culture and its materialistic philosophies. I am sorry to say, however, that although in the early days of his conversion, he was a staunch, practicing Muslim, gradually he drifted close to the ways of the so –called ‘progressive’ Muslims like the ‘reformed’ Jews. Recently his divorce from his Arab wife and marriage to a modern American girl hastened this process of deviation more definitely... Once a man begins to live the life of a true Muslim, all his capabilities lose their ‘market value’. It is the same sad story with Muhammad Asad, who had always been accustomed to a high and modern standard of living and after embracing Islam, had to face the severest financial difficulties. As a result, he was forced to make one compromise after another.”<sup>5</sup>

Another prominent scholar and diplomat Wilfried Hofmann (1931) (now Dr. Murad Hofmann) from the west, a German social scientist, and a German Ambassador in Algeria (1987-90), and Ambassador to Morocco (90-94) reverted to Islam in 1980. At present, he is world-famous as a great intellectual. He says of Muhammad Asad that he met him in 1985 when he was 85 years old. He says in his book *“Journey To Makkah”*, Every born Muslim must be reconverted to Islam sometimes during his life; Islam cannot be inherited. In view of this, it was alarming when a levelheaded and a realistic man like Muhammad Asad towards the end of his long life revealed to me serious doubts as to whether as in 1926, he would again find his way to Islam, if he were again a young man in today’s Muslim world. With some bitterness he shared the frequently heard opinion that one could find lots of Muslims in the orient, but precious little Islam these days

whereas the occident (i.e. west) had very few Muslims but knew much about Islam.<sup>6</sup>

Murad Hofmann in his other book '*Islam the Alternative*' says that "Muhammad Asad has shown in his pioneering book '*The Principles of State and Government in Islam*' (1961) the fruits of a lifelong study, that the ideal Islamic commonwealth is a state under the rule of law, a parliamentary republic with a constitution, which could correspond to a Western Constitution on all essential points (separation of power, bill of rights, party pluralism, protection of minorities), as long as it ensures that the head of state is a Muslim, that Islam is the state religion, and that the Qur'an is the supreme constitutional norm."<sup>7</sup>

Muhammad Asad had done more for the creation of the image of Islam than uneasy travelers between the two Worlds such as Mohammed Arkoun (*Rethinking Islam*, Boulder, Colorado, 1994) and Bassam Tibi who have come to sit between two stools.<sup>8</sup>

Another prominent scholar, Hamid Enayat, the author of a famous book, "*Modern Islamic Political Thought*", says that;

"The crucial feature of Asad's scheme of the Islamic State is that in identifying its principles, he relies solely on the 'clear textual ordinances' (*nusus*) of the Qur'an and tradition as constituting 'the real, eternal *Shari'ah* of Islam'. He excludes *fiqh* or jurisprudence, holding that 'the far larger area of things and activities which the Law – Giver has left unspecified – neither enjoining nor forbidding them in *nass* (textually defined) terms – must be regarded as allowable (*mubah*) from the *Shar'i* point of view.' This obviously allows considerable scope for a libertarian interpretation of Islam."<sup>9</sup>

Another scholar Hasan Zillur Rehman (editor of the quarterly magazine *Iqra*) says that Muhammad Asad, in fact, represents an outstanding example of a phenomenon of modern times: the conversion, on both sides of the Atlantic, of a number of western writers and intellectuals



**MUHAMMAD ASAD, HAMIDA ASAD AND  
MURAD HOFMANN IN 1985**

to Islam, and their passionate commitment to its vision and way of life. The circumstances and particulars of their entering the fold vary, but there are usually three overarching reasons common to them: belief in the divine origin of the Qur'an, in the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) and in Islam's Message to lead a righteous life. Their acts of faith have shown a wider western public that Islam is not a quaint, fanatical religion followed by wild natives in remote regions, that, on the contrary, Islam's message and teachings are relevant to, and appropriate for, reasonable and thoughtful people in the most advanced areas of the world. To mention just a few names: From Great Britain have come, among others, Lord Stanley of Alderley, an uncle of Bertrand Russell; the 11th Baron Headley (Umar al-Farooq), a member of the House of Lords and an activist believer; Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, a superb novelist and, later, a translator of the Qur'an; Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din), a perceptive scholar of mysticism; and Charles Le Gai Eaton, a talented expositor of Islam. French converts have included René Guénon ('Abd al-Wahid Yahya), an

expert in metaphysics, comparative religion and esotericism; Vincent Mansour Monteil, an orientalist; and Maurice Bucaille, an author. From Germany Murad Wilfried Hofmann, a diplomat and writer; from Austria, Baron Umar von Ehrenfels, an anthropologist; from Hungary, Abdul Karim Germanus, an orientalist; and from Switzerland, Frithjof Schuon, described by T. S. Eliot as the most impressive writer in the field of comparative religion he had ever encountered. From North America, there are Thomas Irving (al-Hajj Ta'lim 'Ali), an Islamic scholar and translator of the Qur'an; Margaret Marcus (Maryam Jameelah), a writer; Cyril Glassé, author of *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* and other Islamic works; Jeffrey Lang, a mathematician and writer on Islam; and Michael Wolfe, a poet, novelist and writer of travel books. It would seem that these western Muslims have been just as earnest in their devotion to Islam as Muhammad Asad. So why does Asad stand head and shoulders above all other western converts who wrote in English? Because none of them—not even Pickthall—has contributed more than he to elucidating Islam as an ideology and conveying its quintessential spirit in contemporary terms to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Muhammad Asad's contributions resist easy summary.

Muslim renaissance became Asad's goal in life: In his study of the Qur'an, Asad found that Islam gave 'yes to action, no to passivity. Yes to life and no to asceticism.' In its pages, he found an intense God – consciousness that made no division between body and soul or faith and reason, but consisted of a harmonious interplay of spiritual need and social demand. Here he quotes Muhammad Asad who says: 'It was obvious to me that the decline of the Muslims was not due to any shortcomings in Islam but rather to their own failure to live up to it... It was not Muslims that had made Islam great: it was Islam that made the Muslims great. But as soon as their faith became habit and ceased to be a program of life, to be consciously

pursued, the creative impulse that underlay their civilization waned and gradually gave way to indolence, sterility and cultural decay.' From that point on, Muslim renaissance became Asad's goal in life. He travelled far and wide, conferred with kings, leaders and the common man 'between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea', and began putting his ideas on paper. "*Islam at the Crossroads*", first published in 1934, still stuns the contemporary reader with its analysis of Muslim regression and its bold prescription for instilling self – assurance in an Islamic world suffering from lack of confidence under the onslaught of western technology.<sup>10</sup>

Further he says that "Asad was the conscience of the thinking Muslim. 'The door of *ijtihad* will always remain open', he used to say, 'because no one has the authority to close it.' As Islam enters the most critical phase of its development in the west, Muhammad Asad's legacy assumes an urgency no thinking Muslim can afford to ignore."<sup>11</sup>

To understand how Muslims could regenerate themselves, Asad took a characteristic approach: he immersed himself in understanding the source of Islam, the Qur'an. Embarking on an intensive study of classical Arabic, he began at the same time living among the Bedouin of central and eastern Arabia whose speech and linguistic associations had essentially remained unchanged since the time of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) when the Qur'an was revealed. It gave him insight into the semantics of the Qur'anic language unknown to any Westerner and enabled him latter to translate the Qur'an into English as *The Massage of the Qur'an*. Along with his commentary, the message is without parallel in conveying the holy book's meaning and spirit to non-Arab readers.<sup>12</sup>

According to Martin Kramer, "Asads "*Road to Mecca*" was the shorter journey, made headlong in the enthusiasm of youth. His road from Mecca was the longer journey,



made painstakingly in an awareness of the contradiction between the promise of Islam and its contemporary practice –and his own equivocal position in it. For all Asad's fervor and belief, his Muslim answer satisfied his Jewish question, put most poignantly by Asad to Asad: why is it that, even after finding my place among the people who believe in the things I myself have come to believe, I struck no root." <sup>13</sup>

In the last years of his life, Muhammad Asad reportedly began work on a sequel to *The Road to Mecca*, tentatively entitled *Homecoming of the Heart*. According to Mushtak Parker, the title is said to have alluded to his contemplated return to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of Prince Salman (b. 1936), governor of Riyadh and one of Ibn Saud's sons. It is not clear whether such a return was realistic prospect, or whether the title hinted at a more spiritual homecoming. As Asad had neither completed this work nor returned to Arabia when he died on 20 February 1992. <sup>14</sup>

G.E. Von Grunebaum (Director, Near Eastern Center University of California, Los Angeles) says that "Mr. Asad's statement on '*The Principles of State and Government in Islam*' has a double significance. Unlike Mawardi's '*Institution of Rulership*' (*al – Ahkam as – Sultaniyya*), it is frankly presented as a program... The double significance that his book thus acquires for us is enhanced by the fact that the views Mr. Asad expounds are those of a large and influential section of the Muslim public.

His ideas are offered as an objectively and universally valid interpretation of the Muslim message; but the public Mr. Asad wishes to influence is an Islamic one – more specifically, the politically self- conscious Muslim circle of Pakistan. His purpose imposes on him a certain methodological procedure and a manner of presentation that has been developed in this milieu which may be somewhat out of the ordinary to the western reader."<sup>15</sup>

G.E. Von Grunebaum further says about Muhammad Asad's work that it is first and foremost a declarative document. It expounds a view of a state, which the author conceives of as an absolute – as the fulfillment of demands on man and society, which are implicit in the immutable core of Revelation and tradition. To western readers, however, it may present an attempt to harmonize modern western – inspired political ideas with the heritage of the Muslim tradition. It is, in this sense, not only an expository but also a confessional document and, in due proportion, to be classified with Calvin's Institute or the Communist Manifesto. But it is equally valuable as a document of the present Muslim.<sup>16</sup>

A contemporary writer on Islam, Seyyed Hossein Nasr from Tehran, was the first holder of Aga Khan chair of Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut in 1964-65, visiting lecturer at Harvard University 1962, Professor of the History of Science and Philosophy Tehran University says about Muhammad Asad's book, *The Road to Mecca* that "An account of the experience of becoming a Muslim and living the religious life of Islam by a convert to Islam who has had wide experience of the Muslim world."<sup>17</sup>

And about *Islam at the Crossroads*, he says, "An excellent study of the significance of the *Shari'ah* in the light of the problems that the Muslim world faces in the modern world."<sup>18</sup>

Another contemporary writer on Islam, from Pakistan is Sahibzada Anwar Ali who says about Muhammad Asad that "It is no less significant that scholars like Muhammad Asad and Muhammad Marmeduke Pickthal, who having been brought up in the westered tradition, took to Islam, have expressed themselves strongly against secularization and western acculturation."<sup>19</sup>

Harry Zinder (1909–91) (The husband of Muhammad Asad's cousin Hemdah (1916 –87) who was the daughter of his uncle Aryeh Feigenbaum) says there

could be no doubt from Asad's writing that Asad remained a fervent anti – Zionist. However he left the systematic indictment of the modern – day state of Israel to others. In 1947, he was fully preoccupied with the partition of India, and offered no published comment on the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel. In the years that followed the 1967 war, he spoke out more frequently, especially on Jerusalem. Harry Zinder, here quotes Muhammad Asad who says in his writing that: “we cannot ever reconcile ourselves to the view, so complacently accepted in the west, that Jerusalem is to be the capital of the State of Israel. In a conceivably free Palestine – a state in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could live side by side in full political and cultural equality – the Muslim community should be specially entrusted with the custody of Jerusalem as a city open to all three communities.”<sup>20</sup> But given the fever of anti – Israel passion in the Arab world after 1967, Asad's criticism could only be described as restrained. As Pakistan was far removed from the conflict, more would not have been expected of him.<sup>21</sup>

H. St. John (Abdullah) Philby (1885 – 1960) however, took a much less enthusiastic view of Asad's book. According to Philby, Asad was no more than a journalist in search of a story, a man without any flair for geographical work or political analysis. Philby, too had converted to Islam in 1930, assuming Asad's place as the convert in the court of Ibn Saud.<sup>22</sup>

From India Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, founder of Center for Peace and Spirituality, a prominent scholar and the author of more than 200 hundred books and at present, world famous as a great intellectual. He says of Muhammad Asad that he met him in an International Conference held from Christian Dialogue in Tripoly in 1976.

Maulana says, “In this meeting, during my conversation I felt that he holds progressive views as regards certain teachings of the Qur'an. These views find

reflection in his commentary of the Qur'an. This Commentary is very valuable in many respects for he has attempted to give rational interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an to cater the needs of modern times. However this valuable *Tafsir* could not become popular on account of his *Ijtihadi* views (rational interpretations)."<sup>23</sup>

The death of such great personality as Muhammad Asad was a personal loss to certain people, e.g. Kalimullah Khan (Founder of Adult Qur'anic Education Program in Kashmir, a prominent scholar and the author of a famous book, '*Islam the Source of Universal Peace*', which was based on the lectures delivered in the USA in 2001) says:

"... I recalled those days about ten years back, when I came to know through a B. B. C News item that Muhammad Asad, a great scholar of Islam has passed away. It was a shock to me. I took it as a personal loss. So I wanted to assemble my friends for a joint prayer to Almighty Allah for the peaceful life hereafter for Muhammad Asad and pray for eternal prosperity for this great soul. When I called my friends, I happened to see one of my old friends, who was almost double my age. He was in his eighties. I told him, would you please join me tomorrow because my all friends are getting assembled at my place. He asked why? I replied because one of the greatest scholars of Islam Muhammad Asad has died. He said this is a big shock you are giving to me. Because I knew this personality and I have talked to this person. I asked how come. He told, this man had come to Kashmir also. This was the first time when I heard about Muhammad Asad's death in Kashmir. Then this old friend (Abdul Aziz) of mine told me something in detail about Muhammad Asad. So to be frank enough, I could not bear it. Tears started rolling down my cheeks, I simply cried and said how unfortunate I am that I was not born just twenty thirty years earlier that I could see such a great soul in this part of the world. So I simply got hold of the hands of this person and kissed them and I said, these are

the hands, which have touched the hands of Muhammad Asad. So by holding the hands of this old friend, I felt as if I am holding the hands of this great man Muhammad Asad, who admired my Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him), and who had such great adulation with Islam and Islamic faith which made him to travel all the way from Europe to Middle East to Afghanistan, to India and finally to Kashmir.”<sup>24</sup>

Muhammad Asad stayed in Kashmir for some time as we are told this is a great privilege for Kashmiri people and he translated the first part of *Sahih al – Bukhari* into English from this soil, which is also a great privilege for Kashmir.

Further Kalimullah Khan said that the *Sahih al -- Bukhari* was printed in the Brocoz Press in Srinagar in 1935 by Arafat Publication and priced at rupees 2 and 8 anas that meant 2 and 1/2 rupee was its cost. I don't know how many people are going to admire it but to me, this is a great asset. It is a great privilege for Kashmir and to Kashmiri people that Muhammad Asad was in Srinagar and released the translation of *Sahih al – Bukhari* in English Language in Srinagar. <sup>25</sup>

Another famous scholar, Professor Ziauddin Ahmad in his book '*Al Qur'an – Divine Book of Eternal Value*' says that:

“Muhammad Asad rightly comments: to make the law of Islam the law of the land, in order that equity may prevail; to arrange social and economic relations in such a way that every individual shall live in freedom and dignity, and shall find as few obstacles as possible and as much encouragement as possible in the development of his personality; to enable all Muslim men and women to realize the ethical goals of Islam not only in the beliefs but also in the practical sphere of their lives; to ensure to all non – Muslim citizens complete physical security as well as complete freedom of religion, of culture, and of social development; to defend the country against attack

from without and disruption from within; and to propagate the teachings of Islam to the world at large; it is in these principles, and in these alone, that the concept of an Islamic State finds its meaning and justification. If it realizes them, the state can rightly be described as 'God's vicegerent on earth' – at last in that part of the earth, which falls under its factional jurisdiction."<sup>26</sup>

Waqf Ikhlas, a prominent scholar and the author of the famous book, *'Why Did They Became Muslims'* in which he wrote about Muhammad Asad that "Recently he (Muhammad Asad) has rendered the *Qur'an al – Karim* into English. His attempt to write a *tafsir* (translation of *Qur'an al – Karim*) without the indispensably required background in the basic Islamic sciences indicates that he is not in the *Madh-hab of Ahl as – Sunna* and that consequently, his *tafsirs* and other (religious) writings may be harmful. Wahhabis and other groups outside (the right way guided by the four) *Madh-habs* present this ignorant heretic as an Islamic scholar."<sup>27</sup>

At another place in the same book, Waqf Ikhlas quotes Muhammad Asad who says in his book *Islam at the Crossroads*: "you ask me what aspect of Islam attracted you most? I cannot answer this question, for Islam has penetrated and invaded my entire heart.... what attracted me to Islamic religion was the love I had for it. You know, love is composed of various things: Desire, loneliness, ambition, elevation, zeal for progress and improvement, our weaknesses mixed with our strength and power, the need for someone to help and protect us, and the like. So I embraced Islam with all my heart and love, and it settled in my heart so as to never leave there again."<sup>28</sup>

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## Conclusion

Muslims of European or American origin have played and are playing an important role in the development of Islamic Studies. This is the case of an intelligent non-Muslim European of 20<sup>th</sup> century who, for some reason or other, studied the Arabic Language and became fully proficient therein. One day he took up a copy of Qur'an and impressed by the beauty of its diction and the spiritual depth of its ideas. He read Qur'an on and on and gradually the immortal truth of this holy Book unfolded itself before him and at last convinced that it is the truth, he embraced Islam.

Muhammad Asad is a source of inspiration for all of us. An embodiment of dedication and one of the greatest scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who continued to serve Islam till he breathed his last in Spain on February 23, 1992. With his death passed a journalist, traveler, social critic, linguist, thinker, reformer, diplomat, political theorist and translator, a scholar dedicated to the service of Almighty Allah and humankind, and to leading a righteous life. But death will not be the final chapter in Muhammad Asad's close relationship with the Muslims. His luminous works remain a living testimony to his great enduing love affair with Islam. He had argued for a rational Islam; he had sought to reconcile Islamic teachings and democracy, he had tried to make the Qur'an speak to modern minds. His

project, in fact, encapsulated ideals that drove the reform of Judaism, which by his parents generation had largely served to ease Jews out of their faith altogether. Islam provided the last chance to achieve that ideal – the reform of a religion of law so that it could be made to live in a modern age, as a liberal force of continuing faith.

The extraordinary contribution to Islamic research made by Muhammad Asad is remarkable. The dedication in his annotated translation of the Qur'an reads:

*(Liquamin Yatafakarun)*

**“For the people who think”**

The spirit of the translation is resolutely modernist.

Unlike so many other Western converts to Islam, Muhammad Asad chose also to live in Muslim societies, and worked to give Islam direction. But by advocating this reform, Muhammad Asad remained a foreign body in contemporary Islam, a transplant rejected time and again by his hosts. Saudi Arabia declined to keep him as a journalist; Pakistan, which he served as an official and diplomat, also broke with him; and the self – appointed guardians of Muslim orthodoxy shunned him as a Qur'an translator and commentator.

Think for a moment about Muhammad Asad: his hopes, determination, sacrifices, family, disappointments, accomplishments, and the new challenges he must have faced as he converted from his religion (Judaism to Islam), lived alone, and formed new, interdependent relations with his parents. Think of living 100 years with so many changes, so much to learn, so many losses and so many victories.

He stood alone among contemporary Muslims by virtue of extraordinary perception of and contribution to Islam. He critically examined the causes of the decline of the Muslims as well as the forces and the problems pressing them and awoke them from their slumber. Driven by a reformer's zeal, he tried to reconcile religion and modernization and to produce a wide-ranging synthesis

of Islam, modernity and the needs of the society of the day. To this effort he brought depth of knowledge, clarity of reasoning and a gift for the meticulous exposition and dissection of arguments, even when he accepted their conclusions. It is a great achievement that, with high virtuosity and great passion, he contrived to make a coherent whole of his concerns, which were as diverse as the western challenges that gave rise to them.

Allah has endowed him with rare qualities of mind and heart, and history has seldom witnessed a personality of this stature, who combined in him such a wide range aptitude.

With his command of the English language, his knowledge of the Bible and biblical sources, as well as Jewish history and civilization, Muhammad Asad was more successful than most in communicating to Muslim and non-Muslim readers the essence of Islam in both its historical and timeless context. But beyond words and books, Muhammad Asad wanted to see the living body of Islam flourish in the modern world. Although distressed by the sad state of the Muslim world and its reactive agenda, he remained optimistic to the end that a new generation of Muslims would eventually arise to make his dream a reality. According to him, the foundation of an Islamic state on the basis of Qur'anic injunctions and the Prophet's sayings. Briefly, the two defining limits are that in an Islamic state true sovereignty lies with God and that believers must conduct all businesses pertaining to the state and community through mutual consultation. Within this framework, Asad showed that an Islamic state had the flexibility to contain features of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, including the American institutions of presidency and the Supreme Court.

The primary sources of Muhammad Asad's inspiration were the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam (Peace and blessings be upon him). But he could not fail to be impressed by Muhammad Abduh

and Dr. Muhammad Iqbal and other thinkers who had earlier diagnosed the ills of Muslim society. Muhammad Asad instilled in his public new confidence in the power and future of Islam. To do all this he used a powerful weapon: his pen.

His writings on Islam and the Muslim extend over half a century, from the 1920's to the 1980's. The impact of his writings has been tremendous. It has changed the very course of the people's thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. Their thinking, their view of life, their aspiration, the very purpose of their existence, their goal and ideal have undergone complete transformation. His literature has performed wonders which could be described without end. They are filled with the unconquerable will to change surroundings and build a new world, the like of which was seen during the glorious era of the *Khilafat-e Rashida*. This is the greatness of Mohammad Asad that he presented such a dynamic, excellent and thoughtful work for Muslims.

His thoughts emanated from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). So, if Muslims follow these writings they will never go astray in this worldly life *Dar-ul-Amal* (place of action), even their life hereafter *Dar-ul- Jaza* (place of reward and retribution ) too will be secure.

This is really so sad part of the story that a great person who wanted to serve Islam so much and served also, got disillusioned by the character of the Muslims by their half hearted attachment to Islam and Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). His disillusionment with the attitude of Muslims towards Islam is evident from one of his works. Muslims did not come up to his expectations. They have left the way of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) and they have started adopting the European Culture.

He again reminds us that O: Muslims common know your Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon

him), know Qur'an and transmit the message of Qur'an to the people of the world because this is a duty of every Muslim. So propagate Islam, the way Muhammad Asad propagated it to his fellow human beings.

“Whoso goes away in search of learning,  
God makes thereby easy for him the way to paradise”  
(*Sahih Muslim*)

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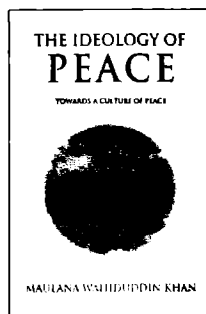
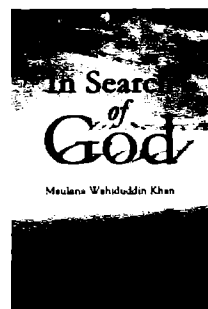
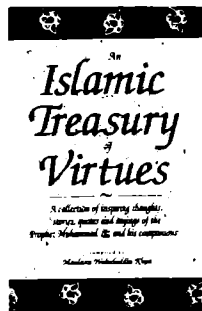
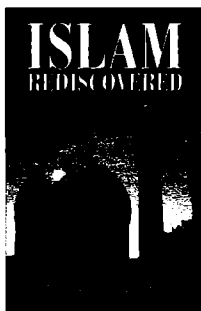
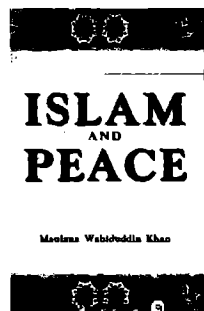
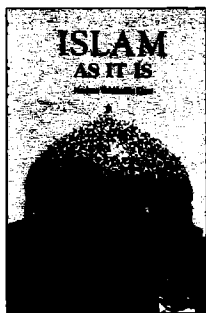
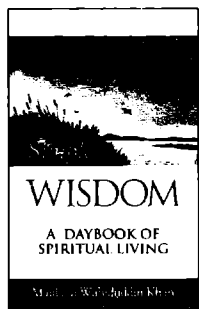
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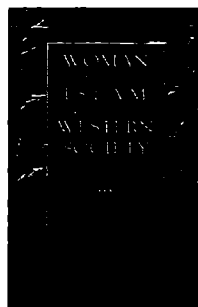
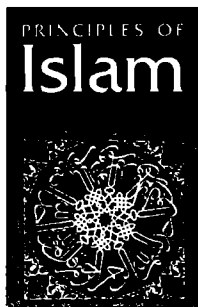
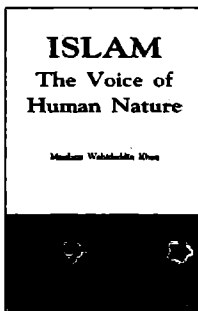
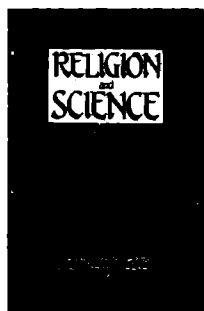
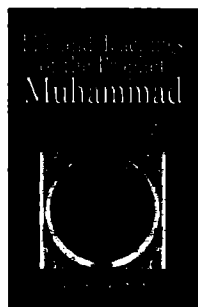
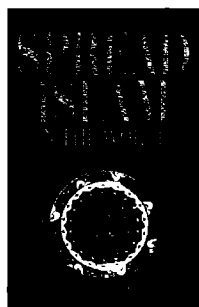
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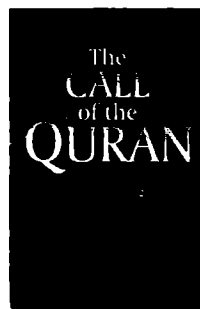
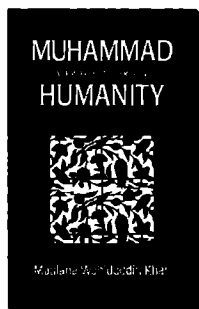
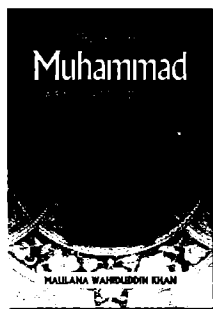
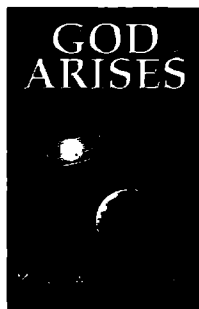
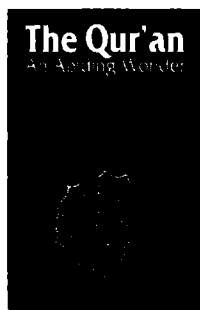
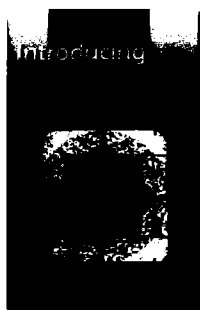
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# MUHAMMAD ASAD

## HIS CONTRIBUTION TO ISLAMIC LEARNING

The reasons for Westerners converting to Islam are varied; but there are usually three overarching reasons common to them: belief in the divine origin of the Qur'an, in the prophethood of Muhammad and in Islam's message to lead a righteous life.

This book presents the case of a European of the 20th century, one Leopold Weiss, who took it upon himself to study the Arabic language and the Quran and was so impressed with the beauty of its diction and the spiritual depth of its ideas that he ended up embracing Islam who later became known as Muhammad Asad.

Muhammad Asad was a gifted young writer, traveller and linguist with a thorough knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud and with deep roots in European culture, who took the road eastward to Makkah, and his name now figures prominently on the rolls of 20th century English-language Muslim scholars and thinkers.

Abroo Aman Andrabi discusses the life and writings of Muhammad Asad, especially his definitive translation of the Quran, in the manner befitting a scholar. Muhammad Asad's contribution to Islamic learning was the subject of Dr. Andrabi's doctoral thesis at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.



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