PREFACE

Humanity is currently in a serious crisis. The dominant Western civilizational model has lost its glamour and is increasingly seen by an appreciable section of the intellectuals across the continents to be irrelevant for providing solutions to the crisis.

‘Back to the tradition’ seems to be the new slogan. Islam’s universal appeal is demonstrated by its winning unprecedented number of reverts every day from the most industrialized nations of the World. A paradox exists: Islam, Muslims, their institutions, their sacred places, their leaders, their material and other assets are subjected to a global onslaught in the name of ‘fighting global terrorism’ by the most powerful nations of the World; yet in the post 11 September World, the seriousness and attention to Islam among the people has tremendously increased globally. Reports from America say that more and more people are buying copies of the Qur’an to the extent that book stores there have run out of stock. Even the Western educated Muslims, and the Muslim communities in the West – for whom English is either a native language or the language of intellectual discourse, there has been appreciable increase in their interest to understand Islam from the authentic sources.

The need for a critical study of existing Qur’anic translations and exegesis is self evident. Muhammad Asad represents a unique phenomenon, being from the West, a Jewish revert to Islam; lived for decades among the Muslims in the East, mastered Arabic and other Muslim languages and devoted almost two decades for the preparation of his magnum opus The Message of the Qur’ān – translation and explanation.
In the present work, Asad’s contribution has been posited in the background of the rich legacy of *tafsîr* literature – hence the first chapter deals with the history and principles of the Qur’ânic exegesis. A modest attempt has been made to understand the personality of Asad, particularly the formative influences which could have bearing on his intellectual dispositions and Qur’ânic commentary.

Hence the second chapter elucidates his life and thought. The third chapter discusses his *tafsîr’s* features, sources and exegetical methodology. In the fourth chapter, Asad is compared with two outstanding contemporary Qur’ânic Scholars – ‘Abdullah Yusuf Alî and Mawlânâ Mawdûdî in particular reference to *Surah An-Nûr*. This study helps us to appropriately posit Asad among the 20th century Qur’ânic Exegetes. Asad has attracted comments from a large number of contemporary scholars and intellectuals – some appreciative of him and others critical. Fifth chapter documents contemporary opinion on Asad. Sixth chapter, in a way, forms the core of the work – comprised of a critique of his exegetical work. And at the end remains the conclusion, which not only gives conclusion on Asad’s exegetical methodology and influences but offers suggestions for the future exploration in the field.

I am humbled by Allah’s infinite mercy which enabled me to complete my work – All praises are due to Him.

I am grateful to Mr. Naseem Aḥmad, Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, who sanctioned one year leave for academic pursuit which helped me to bring the work in the present form. I have had the opportunity to interact with a galaxy of scholars and intellectuals here at Aligarh and abroad. I gratefully
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*Abdul Majīd Khan*