Chapter – 3

The Message of the Qur’ān – Description, Sources and Exegetical Methodology
Asad’s fondness for the Qur’ān

The Message of the Qur’ān, represents Asad’s magnum opus. And it was God’s last message to mankind, the Qur’ān, which seized Asad both for a moment and for a lifetime – ever since that fateful Berlin subway ride on an autumnal day in 1926.¹

Many years of Asad’s young and mature life were spent in contemplating the Qur’ān’s meaning and dreaming of producing a new rendering of the Holy Book with a commentary in the tradition of the great commentators whose scholarship enriched Qur’ānic studies. Even the ten years he had spent labouring on a translation of the entire Sahih al-Bukhārī that was to be irretrievably lost in the waters of Ravi were a necessary part of his attempt to comprehend the divine message: full familiarity with the Prophet’s tradition was a pre requisite for understanding the Qur’ān.²

Asad’s fondness for the Qur’ān is made explicit by his own writings. “The Qur’ān” asserts Asad, “represents the Ultimate manifestation of God’s grace to man, the ultimate wisdom, and the ultimate beauty of expression: in short, the true Word of God.”³

Qur’ān – A Unique Phenomenon

Asad is rightfully amazed at the beginning and closing revelations. He quotes them thus:

Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created – created man out of a germ-cell!

Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Beautiful One who has taught [man] the use of the pen-taught man what he did not know.
With these opening verses of the ninety-sixth surah – with an allusion to man’s humble biological origin as well as to his consciousness and intellect-began, early in the seventh century of the Christian era, the revelation of the Qur’ān to the Prophet Muhammad, destined to continue during the twenty-three years of his ministry and to end, shortly before his death, with verse 281 of the second Surah:

And be conscious of the day on which you shall be brought back unto God, where upon every human being be repaid in full for what he has earned, and none shall be wronged.

Between these first and the last verses (the first and the last in the chronological revelation) unfold a book which, more than any other single phenomenon known to us, has fundamentally affected the religious, social and political history of the World.

Asad compares the multifaceted and depth of the impact of Qur’ān on human lives and history with the other sacred scriptures:

No other sacred scripture has ever had a similarly immediate impact upon the lives of the people who first heard its message and, through them and the generations that followed them, on the entire course of civilization. What type of society was created under the influence of the Qur’ān? Asad answers: It shook Arabia, and made a nation out of its perennially warring tribes; within a few decades, it spread its world view far beyond the confines of Arabia and produced the first ideological society known to man; through its insistence on consciousness and knowledge, it engendered among its followers a spirit of intellectual curiosity and independent inquiry, ultimately resulting in the splendid era of learning and scientific research which distinguished the world of
Islam at the height of its cultural vigour... How the present age, the age of science is an outcome of Qur'anic teachings Asad opines: ...And the culture thus fostered by the Qur'an penetrated in countless ways and by-ways into the mind of medieval Europe and gave rise to that revival of Western culture which we call the Renaissance, and thus became in the course of time largely responsible for the birth of what is described as the "age of science": the age in which we are now living.

While the impact of the Qur'anic teachings on medieval Europe and the subsequent positive developments over there in now an established fact, Yet the fact remains Renaissance of Europe as such and the "age of science", may not be presented in the idiom and terms which convey the impression that "Renaissance" and "age of science" and Islam are one in spirit and goals. Asad has himself been critical of western materialistic philosophies as such.

Asad sees all such great historical changes – in the final analysis, being brought by the message of the Qur'ân and elaborates: ... And it was brought about through the medium of the people whom it inspired and to whom it supplied the basis for all their ethical valuations and a direction for all their worldly endeavours: for, never has any book – not excluding Bible – been read by so many with a comparable intensity and veneration; and never has any other book supplied to so many, and over so long a span of time, a similarly comprehensive answer to the question, "How shall I believe in order to achieve the good life in this world and happiness in the life to come?"

About the possibility of misreading the answer from the book Asad clarifies: However, often individual Muslims may have misread
this answer, and however for many of them may have departed from the spirit of its message, the fact remains that to all who believed and believe in it, the Qur’ān represents the ultimate manifestation of God’s grace to man, the ultimate wisdom, and the ultimate beauty of expression: in short, the true Word of God.

Qur’ān – Asad’s Lifetime Study

In order to understand the book of God correctly, Asad spent a lifetime of study on its contemplation and studied its allied sciences along with traditions of Prophet (S). He stayed in Saudi Arabia, learnt the Qur’ān, Hadīth and Islamic history. He got a good command of Arabic language. He lived among the Bedouins to understand the nuances of the language, the God’s book is in. He states: I studied the Qur’ān and the Traditions of the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him); I studied the language of Islam and its history, and a good deal of what has been written about it and against it. I spent over five years in the Hijaz and Najd, mostly in al-Madīnah, so that I might experience something of the original surroundings in which this religion was preached by the Arabian Prophet. As the Hijaz is the meeting centre of Muslims from many countries, I was able to compare most of the different religious and social views prevalent in the Islamic world in our days. Those studies and comparisons created in me the firm conviction that Islam, as a spiritual and social phenomenon, is still in spite of all drawbacks caused by the deficiencies of the Muslims, by for the greatest driving force mankind has ever experienced, and all my interest became, since then, centered around the problem of its regeneration. He further says: The work which I am now placing before the public is based on a lifetime of study and of many years spent in Arabia. It is an attempt – perhaps the first attempt – at a really idiomatic,
explanatory rendition of the Qur'anic message into a European language.\[12\]

**Why the Need of New Translation and Exegesis of the Qur'ān?**

Asad highlights the perplexing situation the Westerners feel when they observe Muslim attitude to the Qur'ān and looks for reasons behind it: The attitude of the Muslims towards the Qur'ān perplexes, as a rule, the Westerner who approaches it through one or another of many existing translations. Where the believers, reading the Qur'ān in Arabic, sees beauty, the non-Muslim reader often claims to discern “crudeness”; the coherence of the Qur'ānic world-view and its relevance to the human condition escape him altogether and assume the guise of what, in Europe’s and America’s Orientalist literature, is frequently described are “incoherent rumbling;\[13\] and passages which, to a Muslim, are expressive of sublime wisdom, often sound “flat” and “uninspiring” to the Western ear. And yet, not even the most unfriendly critics of the Qur'ān have ever denied that it did, in fact, provide the supreme source of inspiration – in both the religious and cultural senses of this word – to innumerable millions of people who, in their aggregate, have made an outstanding contribution to man’s knowledge, civilization and social achievement. How can this paradox be explained?\[14\]

Asad is not convinced by the explanations generally offered in this regard, he says: It cannot be explained by the too-facile argument, so readily accepted by many modern Muslims, that the Qur'ān has been “deliberately misrepresented” by its Western translators. For, although it cannot be denied that among the existing translations in almost all the major European languages there is many a one...
that has been inspired by malicious prejudice and especially in early times – by misguided missionary zeal, these is hardly any doubt that some of the more recent translations are the work of earnest scholars who, without being actuated by any conscious bias, have honestly endeavored to render the meaning of the Arabic original into this or that European language, and in addition, there exist a number of modern translations by Muslims too who, by virtue of their being Muslims, cannot by stretch of imagination be supposed to have ‘misrepresented’ what to them, was a sacred revelation. \(^{15}\) “Still”, Asad asserts: translations – whether done by Muslims or non-Muslims – has so far brought the Qur’ān – nearer to the hearts or minds of people raised in a different religious and psychological climate and revealed something, however little, of its real depth and wisdom. \(^{16}\) Looking for the plausible explanations, Asad admits: To some extent this may be due to the conscious and unconscious prejudice against Islam which has pervaded western cultural notions ever since the time of the Crusades – an intangible heritage of thought and feeling on the part not only of the Western “man in the street” but also, in a more subtle manner, on the part of scholars bent on objective research. But even this psychological factor does not sufficiently explain the complete lack of appreciation of the Qur’ān in the Western world, and this in spite of its undeniable and ever increasing interest in all that concerns the world of Islam. \(^{17}\) Looking further for more solid reasons for Westerners remaining generally unimpressed by Qur’ān, Asad says; It is more than probable that one of the main reasons for this lack of appreciation is to be found in that aspect of the Qur’ān which differentiates it fundamentally from all other sacred scriptures: it stresses on
reason as valid way to faith as well as its insistence on the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical (and, therefore, also social) spheres of human existence: The inseparability of man’s daily actions and behaviour, however “mundane”, from his spiritual life and destiny.18

Putting the partial blame on the Westerners, Asad complains of their problems: This absence of any division of reality into “physical” and “spiritual” compartments makes it difficult for people brought up in the orbit of other religions, with their accent on the “supernatural” element allegedly inherent in every true religious experience, to appreciate the predominantly rational approach of the Qur’ān to all religious questions. Consequently, its constant interweaving of spiritual teachings with practical legislation perplexes the Western reader, who has become accustomed to identifying ‘religious experience’ with a thrill of numinous awe before things hidden and beyond all intellectual comprehension, and is suddenly confronted with the claim of the Qur’ān of being a guidance not only towards the spiritual good of the hereafter but also towards the good life – spiritual, physical and social – attainable in this world. In short, the Westerner cannot readily accept the Qur’ānic thesis that all life, being God-given, is a unity and that problem of the flesh and of the mind, of sex and economics, of individual righteousness and social equity are intimately connected with the hopes which man may readily entertain with regard to his life after death. This, in my opinion, is one of the negative, uncomprehending attitude of most Westerners towards the Qur’ān and its teachings. But still another – and perhaps even more decisive – reason may be found in the fact that the Qur’ān itself has never yet been presented in any European language in a manner which would make it truly comprehensible.19
Making an analysis of translation of the Qur’ân in European languages, Asad traces a common weakness or inadequacy on the part of all translators, he elaborates; When we look at the long list of translations – beginning with the Latin words of the high Middle Ages and continuing up to the present in almost every European tongue – we find one common denominator between their authors, whether Muslims or non-Muslims: all of them were – or are – people who acquired their knowledge of Arabic through academic study alone: that is, from books. None of them, however great his scholarship, has ever been familiar with the Arabic language as a person is familiar with his own, having absorbed the nuances of its idiom and its phraseology with an active, associative response within himself, and hearing it with an ear spontaneously attuned to the intent underlying the acoustic symbolism of its words and sentences. For, the words and sentences of a language – any language – are but symbols for meanings conventionally, and subconsciously, agreed upon by those who express their perception of reality by means of that particular tongue.20

Delineating the point further Asad says: Unless the translator is able to reproduce within himself the conceptual symbolism of the language in question – that is, unless he hears it “sing” in his ear in all its naturalness and immediacy – his translation will convey no more than the outer shell of the literary matter to which his work is devoted, and will miss, to a higher or lesser degree, the inner meaning of the original: and the greater the depth of the original, the farther must such a translation deviate from its spirit.21

Accepting the scholarship of some of the translators, Asad makes a qualified statement regarding their outstanding status, thus: No
daubs, some of the translators of the Qur’ān whose works are accessible to the Western public can be described as outstanding scholars in the sense of having mastered the Arabic grammar and achieved a considerable knowledge of Arabic literature; but this mastery of grammar and this acquaintance with literature cannot by itself, in the case of translation from Arabic (and especially the Arabic of the Qur’ān), render the translator independent of that intangible communion with the spirit of the language which can be achieved only by living with it and in it.\(^{22}\)

**Peculiarities of Arabic Language which the Westerners are Unaccustomed to**

Asad seems to be eager to highlight some of the peculiarities of the Arabic language, which Westerners are unaccustomed to. He explains: Arabic is a Semitic tongue: in fact, it is the only Semitic tongue which has remained uninterruptedly alive for thousands of years; and it is the only living language which has remained entirely unchanged for the last fourteen centuries. These two factors are extremely relevant to the problem, which we are considering. Since every language is a framework of symbols expressing its people’s particular sense of life-values and their particular way of reality, it is obvious that the language of the Arabic – a Semitic language, which has remained unchanged for so many centuries – must differ widely from anything to which the Western mind is accustomed. The difference of the Arabic idiom from any European idiom is not merely a matter of its syntactic cast and the mode in which it conveys its ideas; nor is it exclusively due to the well-known, extreme flexibility of the Arabic grammar arising from its peculiar system of verbal “roots” and the numerous stem-forms which can be derived from these roots; nor even to the extraordinary richness of the Arabic
vocabulary: it is a difference of spirit and life-sense. And since the Arabic of the Qur’ān is a language which attained to its full maturity in the Arabic of fourteen centuries ago, it follows that in order to grasp its spirit correctly, one must be able to feel and hear this language as the Arabs felt and heard it at the time when the Qur’ān was being revealed, and to understand the meaning which they gave to the linguistic symbols in which it is expressed.

Delving further into the peculiarities of the Arabic language, Asad goes on: We Muslims believe that Qur’ān is the Word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the medium of a human language. It was the language of the Arabian Peninsula: the language of the 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” – sequences of thought towards the idea which they aim to conceive or express. The ellipticism (called ījāz by the Arab philologists) is an integral characteristic of the Arabic idiom and, therefore, of the language of the Qur’ān – so much so that it is impossible to understand its method and inner purport without being able to reproduce within oneself, instinctively, something of the same quality of elliptical, associative thought. Now this ability comes to the educated Arabs almost automatically, by a process of mental osmosis, from his early childhood: for, when he learns to speak his tongue properly, he subconsciously acquires the mould of thought within which it has evolved and, thus, imperceptibly grows into the conceptual environment from which the Arabic language derives its peculiar form and mode of expression. Not so, however,
the non-Arab who becomes acquainted with Arabic only at a mature age, in result of a conscious effort, that is, through study: for, what he acquires is but a readymade, outward structure devoid of that intangible quality of ellipticism which gives to the Arabic idiom its inner life and reality. 24

Asad does not rule out the possibility of non-Arab mastering the Arabic language but puts certain conditions. He explains: This does not, however, mean that a non-Arab can never understand Arabic in its true spirit: it means no more and no less than that he cannot really master it through academic study alone, but needs, in addition to philological learning, an instinctive “feel” of the language. Now it so happens that such a “feel” cannot be achieved by merely living among the modern Arabs of the cities. Although many of them, especially the educated ones, may have subconsciously absorbed the spirit of their language, they can rarely communicate it to an outsider – for the simple reason that however high their linguistic education, their daily speech has become, in the course of centuries, largely corrupted and estranged from pristine Arabic. Thus, in order to obtain the requisite “feel” of the Arabic language, a non-Arab must have lived in long and intimate association with people whose daily speech mirrors the genuine spirit of their language, and whose mental processes are similar to those of the Arabs who lived at the time when the Arabic tongue received its final colouring and inner form. In our day, such people are only the Bedouin of the Arabian Peninsula, and particularly those of Central and Eastern Arabia. For, notwithstanding the many dialectical peculiarities in which their speech may differ from the classical Arabic of the Qur’ān, it has remained – so far – very close to the idiom of the Prophet’s time and has preserved all its intrinsic characteristics. 25 In other words,
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’ān. And because none of the scholars who have previously translated the Qur’ān into European languages has ever fulfilled this prerequisite, their translations have remained but distant, and faulty, echoes of its meaning and spirit.  

Asad takes up the Challenge

Not being satisfied with the existing translations of the Word of God into European languages, Asad being convinced of his capabilities, that he could produce a better rendering of the Qur’ān, focused on translation and exegesis. It took him seventeen years of hard work to complete the work. A preliminary, limited edition of part of this work, comprising the first nine sūrahs of the Qur’ān, was published in 1964. The first (Madīnah) edition was destroyed as Asad’s Saudi hosts raised serious objections to some of his formulations. Among them being: Isrā’ and Mi’raj not as physical occurrences but as purely spiritual (Appendix- IV); the view that the jinn in some cases should be understood as ‘elemental forces of nature’, like Bergson’s élán vital (Appendix- III), also his interpretation of 24:31 and 33:59 to the effect the question as to whither women had to wear the hijāb or not was culturally conditioned and also denial of Asad that the Qur’ānic verses could abrogate each other. So Asad published The Message of The Qur’ān himself in 1980 in Gibraltar and it was reproduced in 1984, 1993, 1997, 2003 and 2004.
Chapter-3

Financers of the Project

Asad began work on the translation and exegesis in 1960. Such a large-scale project required the support of a patron, and he eventually appeared in the form of Saudi Arabia's King Faysal (r. 1964-75). Asad had known Faysal since 1927. He reestablished a link in 1951, when paid his first visit to Saudi Arabia in eighteen years, and he nurtured the tie as Faysal began his ascent to the throne. Asad became one of Faysal's most fervent enthusiasts, seeing in him a vast improvement over Ibn Saud. "Whenever I reflect on the manner in which King Faysal rules over his realm", wrote Asad, "it appears to me as the fulfillment of every promise which the life of his father had held out and left open."29 Still Faysal was a dutiful son, and this praise could not cancel out Asad's stinging indictment of 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.30

Faysal renewed Asad's Saudi patronage. In 1963, Faysal had the Muslim World League in Mecca subscribe in advance to Asad's planned translation, which he began to compile in Switzerland. Asad published a limited edition of first nine sūrahs in 1964. At about that time, he moved to Tangier, settling in a comfortable villa surrounded by cypress trees and bougainvillaeas, where he worked to complete the translation. In 1980, he published the full translation and commentary in Gibraltar, under the title The Message of the Qur'ān. In 1974, even before the translation was published in full, it was banned in Saudi Arabia. Asad was left to finish the work on his own, supported financially by his friends. Fortunately Asad had many including Shaykh Ahmad Zaki al-
Yamâni (b. 1930), the Saudi minister of oil and natural resources and "my brother-in-spirit", to whom Asad devoted a collection of his essays a few years later.  

The Message of the Qur’ân Translated into Other Languages

Asad’s English translation and Exegesis is perhaps the only one which has been further translated *en toto* into several languages such as Turkish and Swedish. Even his original work has seen many reproductions. However, its latest edition (2003), licensed by Asad’s widow Pola Hamida, and elegantly, even luxuriously, printed by the Oriental Press in Dubai, is more than a reproduction. While faithfully reproducing Asad’s translation and footnotes, the new version comes with a prologue by Hasan Gai Eaton, transliteration of the Qur’ânic text (on the right side column), explaining Notes on the transliteration, a general index, multicolored calligraphic illustrations, and a book marker with key elements of the book only grow from 999 to 1164 pages because its format was slightly increased in size from original to 28½ x 23 cms.

Asad’s text was only marginally ‘tempered’ with: by adapting it to the new transliteration system used (e.g. Al-Hâqqah becoming Al-Haaqqah or Al-Isrā’, becoming Al-‘Israa’); by moving the verse numbers to the end within the translation as found in the Arabic; by replacing the Arabic numerals by the occidental ones within the Qur’ânic text; and by indicating the number of verses of each Sūrah in the table of contents.

Gai Eaton’s prologue, which includes a short biography of Asad, is extra ordinarily perceptive. He concludes that ‘no one has
succeeded (better) – or come closer to succeeding – in conveying the meaning of the Qur’ān (p. iii). Eaton manages to convey beautifully the awe this unique divine revelation commands, clearly spelling out why the Qur’ān is a scripture without equal; *sui generis, an aliud*. I warn only against the reveling in a supposed symmetry between Jesus as incarnation and the Qur’ān as inlibration of God (p. iii). This is not only doubtful but theologically dangerous importation of a thoroughly Christian concept. Eaton strongly mistakes the book’s title ‘The Message of the Qur’ān’ for ‘The meaning of the Qur’ān’ (p. iv). His remark that the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was edited by a relative when Asad worked there is incorrect.\textsuperscript{34}

The General Index (pp. 1141-1164) is particularly useful because it uses keywords which, like ‘Homosexuality’, ‘Polygamy’, or ‘Freedom of Choice’ do not appear as such in the Qur’ānic text. In view of this one wonders why other terms are missing like Atheism, Begging, Diplomacy, Drugs, Ecology, Eschatology, Eternity, Etiquette, Illegitimate Children, Immigration, Incarnation, *Khalīfah*, Menstruation, Military Service, Monotheism, Music, Mysticism, Necklace, Original Sin, Perjury, Pluralism, Polytheism, Poverty, Predestination, Reason, Saints, Sufis, Theft, Treason, *Ummah*, or Wastefulness. There is no end to it once you enter into this path.\textsuperscript{35}

**Features of The Message of The Qur’ān**

1980 edition of the book which was produced in a full form – complete translation and Exegesis during the life time of Muḥammad Asad shall be the reference book for our discussions in this work.\textsuperscript{36} The book has beautiful glazed cover with golden inscriptions, carrying the title...
The Message of
THE QUR’ĀN

In the middle is a beautiful Islamic motif crescent and five cornered star. The star is made of first verse of the Qur’ān.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.2\textwidth]{star.png}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.2\textwidth]{crescent.png}
\end{center}

A aesthetically a soothing scene.

At the bottom appears:

TRANSLATED AND EXPLAINED
by

Muhammad Asad
The page inside the cover carries the title of the book and a large Islamic art and calligraphic illustration of the Qur’ānic verse.\textsuperscript{39}

Next page too carries the title of the book along with the name – Muḥammad Asad. It also carries the inscription:

DAR AL-ANDALUS GIBRALTAR

It is followed by an Islamic art illustration. Facing the page, are written Qur’ānic words\textsuperscript{40}

لذت، إن نعكرون

For the people who think, the work is that way dedicated to those who think; At the top, is inscribed Qur’ānic verse \textsuperscript{41}

embellished in beautiful art form. At the bottom appears:
The significance of the verse at the top of this page cannot be lost on those who believe, the Qur’ān, the Word of God and are convinced of God's assurance that it is He who guarantees its safety. Dedicating the book for those who think is not only significant from the angle that Qur’ān exhorts it, rather its, selection by Asad highlights his approach to the book and clearly his invoking peoples' mental capabilities for the appreciation of the contents of the book. The publication of the book at the advent of the new Islamic century it seems, is hoped to herald a regeneration of Islamic culture and civilization in the following century.

The following page gives the publishing details: Complete edition published in 1980 by Dar al-Andalus Limited, 3 Library Ramp, Gibraltar. Copyright is reserved for Pola Hamida Asad, wife of Muḥammad Asad. E.J. Brill – London – Publishers and Booksellers, 41, Museum Street, London WCIA ILX, are shown as distributors. The page gives information about ‘A preliminary, limited edition of part of this work, comprising the first nine Sūrahs of the Qur’ān, was published in 1964, at the top.

Contents are spread over four pages. There is an eight page ‘Forward’ by Asad, followed by two pages of ‘works of Reference.’ Next are names of the Qur’ānic Sūrahs 1-114 in the traditional order. At the end are four appendices:

1) Symbolism and Allegory in the Qur’ān;
2) Al-Muqatta‘āt;
3) On the Term and Concept of *Jinn*;
4) The Night Journey.

At the end appears the Arabic inscription:

\[
\text{وفي تفسير كتاب ربي الحالة}
\]

\[
\text{وأتمنى لله أن لا أظلم الله}
\]

\[
\text{والصلاة والسلام على النبي محمد الجزى}
\]

It is indicative of the humility and humbleness of Asad and his gratefulness to God, whose grace helped him to complete the work. Salutation and prayers are offered in honour of the Prophet Muhammad, who brought the last Message of God and is the seal of the Prophets.

In the "Forward", Asad terms Qur’ān as a unique phenomenon, unparallel by anything like it, which has fundamentally affected the religious, social and political history of the world. Asad considers the renaissance of Europe and the 'age of science' being possible only when the Europeans during the middle ages got inspiration from Muslim civilization - which had been the outcome of the Qur’ānic phenomenon.

As the book has continued to be venerated by the million and millions of the Muslims round the globe, down the history, who
see beauty in the ultimate forms in it, who find its passages expressive of sublime wisdom, the question perplexes Asad why the western non-Muslim reader of its translations does not share this experience.

Asad blames the hitherto translators of the Qur’ān into European languages for not being adequately competent to understand the nuances of the Arabic language as their language learning had been only academic. They did not live among the Bedouins of Central and Eastern Arabia – who are vital link for understanding and having the “feel” of the language of the Qur’ān. Though he blames the Westerners concept of religion as well, who are accustomed to the division of reality into “physical” and “spiritual” compartments and also who do not consider reason as a valid way leading to the path of truth or religion, yet he declares that “the Qur’ān itself has never been presented in any European language in a manner which would make it truly comprehensible.”

Asad highlights some of the peculiarities of the Arabic language which make doubly important for any translator of the Qur’ān to “feel” the language before he undertakes to translate it.

Asad pinpoints some of the important steps which a Qur’ān translator must take and gives us some features of his attempt at translating the Qur’ān.43

**Works of References**

About the copy of the Qur’ān used by Asad for translation and Exegesis, he explains: This work is based on the recension of Ḥajar Ibn Sulaymān al-Asadī, as it appears in the so-called “Royal Egyptian’ edition of the Qur’ān, first published in Cairo in 1337H.
and regarded by Arab scholars as the most exact of all existing editions.  

When referring in the explanatory notes to a particular Qur'anic passage, the number of the sūrah is followed by a colon and the verse number: e.g., 3:28 signifies sūrah 3, verse 28; similarly, 6:138-140 and 142 stands for sūrah 6, verses 138-140 and verse 142. (It should be noted that in the translation and the verse-numbers-corresponding to those of the Cairo edition – have been placed within parenthesis at the beginning of each verse, and not, as in the Arabic text, at the end.)

Asad has provided a long list of works, covering mostly books on the Qur'anic Exegesis, Hadith, Hadith Interpretation, Islamic history, Sūrah philology and encyclopaedia of Islam, in a chronological order. The list of the works and authors, as presented by him, is reproduced below. About the publication details of these works, Asad makes it clear: Inasmuch as many of the works mentioned below – and referred to in the explanatory notes – have been published in several editions, no useful purpose would have been served by indicating the edition utilized by the translator. As for works which exist in single or easily identifiable editions, the place and date of publication have been stated below.

The explanations of the classical Qur'ān – commentators referred to in the notes will be found, unless otherwise indicated, in the context of a particular author’s commentary on the Qur'ānic verse under consideration. References to dictionaries relate – unless otherwise indicated – to the article dealing with the root-from of the work concerned.
All references to the Bible relate to the Authorized King James Version.\textsuperscript{48}

Abū Dā'ūd Abū Dā'ūd Sulaymān al Ash'ath (d. 275H.) \textit{Kitab as-Sunnan}.

One of the most important of the \textit{Sunnan} works. The compiler, Abū Dā'ūd, examined 500,000 traditions, and picked up 4,800 of them for his work on which he laboured for twenty years.\textsuperscript{49} The \textit{Sunnan} works constitute the richest branch of Ḥadīth literature. Since the earliest period in the history of Islam, the traditionalists attached more importance to the legal traditions (\textit{Ahadith al-Ahkām}) and the dogmatical traditions than to the historical (\textit{maghāzī}).\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Asās} Maḥmūd Ibn ‘Umar az-Zamakhsharī (d. 538H.), \textit{Asās al-Balāghah}
\item \textit{Baghawī} Al-Husayn Ibn Mas‘ūd al-Farrā’
\hspace{1cm} \textit{Al-Baghawī} (d. 516H.), \textit{Ma‘ālim at-Tanzīl}
\item \textit{Baydāwī} Abd Allah Ibn ‘Umar al-Baydawi (d. 685 or 691H.)
\hspace{1cm} \textit{Al-Husayn Ibn Mas‘ūd al-Farrā’}
\hspace{1cm} \textit{Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Aṣrār al-Ta‘wil}
\item \textit{Bayhaqī} Abū Bakr Ahmad Ibn Husayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458H.), \textit{Kitāb as-Sunan al-Kubrā}
\item \textit{Bidāyat}
\item \textit{Al-Mujtahid} Muhammad Ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd (d. 595H.), \textit{Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihāyat Al-Muqtasid}, Cairo, n.d.
\item \textit{Bukhārī} Muhammad Ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256H.), \textit{Al-Jāmi‘as-Ṣahīh}
\end{itemize}
The most important of not only all the Musannafs but of all the works in Ḥadīth literature is the al-Jāmi‘as-Ṣahih of al-Bukhārī who interrogated more than 1000 masters of Ḥadīth who lived in places so distant from one another as Balkh, Merv, Nishapur, the Ḥijaz, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Al-Bukhārī sought aid of prayers before recording tradition and weighed every word that he wrote with scrupulous exactitude. He devoted more than one-fourth of his life to the actual compilation of his work, and at the end produced his epoch-making book which is accepted by most of the tradition as the most authentic work in Ḥadīth literature, and which is considered by the Muslims in general as an authority next only to the Qur’ān.\(^{51}\)

Dārimī Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Dārimī (d. 255H.), Kitab as-Sunan.

Dārquṭnī ʿAlī Ibn ʿUmar ad-Dārquṭnī (d. 385H.), Kitab as-Sunnan.

Encyclopaedia of Islam (1st ed.) Leyden 1913-38:

Fāʾiq Maḥmūd Ibn ʿUmar az-Zamakhsharī (d. 538H.), Kitāb al-Fāʾiq fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth, Hyderabad 1324

Fatḥ al-Bārī Ahmad Ibn ʿAli Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852H.) Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Cairo, 1348H.
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<th>Author</th>
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<td>Ibn Kathīr</td>
<td>Abn‘l-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr (d. 774H.), Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān, Cairo, 1343-47H.</td>
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<td>Ibn Mājah</td>
<td>Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd Ibn Mājah al-Qazwīnī (d. 273 or 275 H.) Kitāb as-Sunnan.</td>
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<td>Ibn Qayyīm</td>
<td>Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751 H.) Zād al-Ma‘ād fī Ḥajj Khayr al-‘Ībād, Cairo, 1347 H.</td>
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<td>Ibn Taymiyyah</td>
<td>Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrāmī (d. 911 H), Tafsīr Sitt Suwar, Bombay 1954.</td>
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Jawhārī Abu Nasr Ismā‘īl ibn Ḥammad al-Jawhārī (d. about 400 H.), Tāj al-Lughah wa-Ṣihāḥ al-‘Arabiyyah, Būlāq 1292 H.

Kashāf See Zamakhshārī

Lane William Edward Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, London 1863-93.

Līsān al-‘Arab Abu’l-Fadl Muḥammad ibn Mukarram al-Ifrīqī (d.711 H.), Līsān al-‘Arab.

Mānār Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān (Known as Tafsīr al-Manār), Cairo 1367-72 H.

Mufradāt See Rāghib


Muḥallā Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 H), Al-Mūhalla, Cairo 1347-52 H.

Muslim Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj an-Nisābūrī (d.261 H.) Kitāb as-Ṣahīḥ.

The position of the Sahīh al-Bukhārī in Hadīth literature is not unrivalled. Another Sahīh was compiled almost simultaneously with it, and it was considered almost superior to the Sahīh al-Bukhārī by some, equal to it by many, and next to it most of the tradionists. It is the Sahīh of Muslim b. Ḥajjāj.\textsuperscript{52}
Mustadrak  
Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim (d. 405 H.)  
*Al-Mustadrak*  
‘ala’ṣ-Ṣaḥīḥayn  
fi ’l-Ḥadīth.  
Hyderabad 1334-41 H.

Muwatṭa’  
Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 H.),  
*Al-Muwatṭa’*

Nasā’i  
Aḥmad ibn Shu‘ayb an-Nasā’i (d. 303 H.),  
*Kitāb as-Sunan.*

Nayl al-Awṭār  
Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Ash-Shawkānī (d. 1255 H.),  
*Nayl al-Awtār Sharḥ Muntaqā al-Akhbār,* Cairo 1344 H.

Nihāyah  
‘Ali ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Aḥtīr (d. 630 H.),  
*An Nihāyah fi Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*

Qāmūs  
Abu’t-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Fīrozābādī (d. 817 H.),  
*Al Qāmūs.*

Rāghib  
Abu’l Qāsim Ḥusayn ar-Rāghib (d. 503 H.),  
*Al-Mufradāt fi Gharīb al- Qur’ān.*

Rāzī  
Abu’l-Faḍl Muḥammad Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 606 H.),  
*At-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*

Shawkānī  
see  
*Nayl al-Awtār*

State and  
Government  
Muḥammad Asad,  
*The Principles of State and Government in Islam,*  

Suyūtī  
See  
*Iṭqān*

Ṭabaqāt  
See  
*Ibn Sa’d*
Tabarî | Abû Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Jarîr at- Tabarî (d.310 H.), Ḫaṣaṣṣ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wil al-Qur’ān.

Tāj al-‘Arūs | Muṭaṣṣal al-Zabīdī (d.1205 H.), Tāj al-‘Arūs.

Tirmidhī | Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Tirmidhī (d. 275 or 279H.), Al-Jāmi‘ aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ.

Wāqīdī | Muḥammad ibn Ṭaimī al-Wāqīdī (d.207 H.) Kitāb al-Maghāzī.

Zamakhsharī | Maḥmūd ibn Ṭāhir al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 H.), Al-Kashahf ‘an Ḥaqā‘iq Ghawāmid at-Tanzīl.

(for the same author’s lexicographic works, see Asās and Fā‘iql.)

Sūrah Names

After ‘Foreword’ and ‘Works of Reference’, in the ‘Contents’ pages appear the list of Sūrahs in the traditional order. Arabic names have been retained along with their English renderings, put in the brackets. Page numbers are indicated against every Sūrah.53 e.g.

Sūrah

1. Al-Fāṭihah (The Opening) ......1
2. Al-Baqarah (The Cow) ......3
3. Āl-‘Imrān (The House of ‘Imrān) ......65
4. An-Nisā’ (Women) ......100

Qur’ānic Sūrah names, which have their biblical equivalents have been adopted in the brackets- obviously to ease the Western reader to relate his religious knowledge to the Qur’ānic facts. e.g.;
**Sūrah**

10. ْيُنُس (Jonah)

12. ْيُسَعف (Joseph)

14. ْيَرَاحِم (Abraham)

15. ْمَارِيام (Mary)

71. ْنُه (Noah)

Some **Sūrah** names have been left without any English renderings, such as

11. ْهُد.

15. ْعَـلِـيـهـر

31. ْلَعْـمَان

38. ْسَد

47. ْمُحَـمَّمَد

50. ْقَـاف

106 ْقُرَيْش

**Sūrah Introductions**

Asad introduces the **Sūrah**s before undertaking their translation and exegesis. He retains the word **Sūrah** in his English renderings. Every **Sūrah** is begun with its number like: 'The First **Sūrah**, 'The Fourth **Sūrah**' etc. Then there are names in Arabic and English like 'Al-Fatiḥah (The Opening). Also period of revelation is
indicated like ‘Mecca Period’, Medīna Period’. Usually the reason of Sūrah name is discussed, e.g. about the first Sūrah, Asad writes: “This SŪRAH is called Fatihat al-Kitāb (“The Opening of the Divine Writ”), Umm al-Kitāb (“The Essence of the Divine Writ”),... Usually he makes a discussion of the chronological order of the Sūrah in the beginning of introductions. Introductions carry a summary of the contents of the Sūrah along with the central theme, e.g., In the introduction of the second Sūrah, Al-Baqarah, the following lines conclude the introduction: Throughout this Sūrah runs the five-fold Qur’ānic doctrine that God is the self-sufficient fount of all being (al-qayyūm); that the fact of His existence, reiterated by prophet after prophet, is accessible to man’s intellect; the righteous living – and not merely believing- is a necessary corollary of this intellectual perception; that bodily death will be followed by resurrection and judgment, and that all who are truly conscious of their responsibility to God “need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve.”

Translation

English translations of the Qur’ānic verses and the Qur’ān (in Arabic) are put in parallel columns; usually more space is provided for translation columns, as the translation is mostly comprised of more word, than the words in Qur’ān e.g. The verse two of the first Sūrah is comprised of five words in Arabic, its English translation has run into thirteen words, occupying more space as well.

*Al-ḥamd li-‘allaah rabb al-‘aalmīn.*

All Praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the Worlds.
Exegetic Notes

Exegetic notes have been arranged as footnotes. Exegetic notes of every Sūrah start from number one and end with the last note of that Sūrah. Generally the number of exegetic notes are almost equal to those of the verses of the Qur'ān. e.g. First Sūrah has four notes, whereas it has seven verses; the second Sūrah has 278 notes, whereas it has 286 verses; the fourteenth Sūrah has 65 notes, whereas it has 57 verses; the sixtieth Sūrah has 24 notes, whereas it has 13 verses only. The lengths of the exegetical notes too vary from just one line upto almost 51 lines (for 51 lines exegetical note see, note 90 in the third Sūrah, pp. 85-86).

Appendices

Four appendices which have been put in the end of the book, speak a lot about the approach of Asad on some important aspects of the Qur'ān.

Appendix I: ‘Symbolism and Allegory’

Asad, in this appendix, explains what he calls “key phrases” of the Qur'ān: When studying the Qur'ān, one frequently encounters what may be described as “key-phrases”- that is to say, statements which provide a clear, concise indication of the idea underlying a particular passage or passages: for instances, the many references to the creation of man “out of dust” and “out of a drop of sperm”, pointing to the lowly biological origin of the human species; or the statement in the ninety-ninth Sūrah (Az-Zalzalah) that on Resurrection Day “he who shall have done an atom’s weight of good, shall behold it, and he who shall have done an atom’s weight of evil, shall behold it”- indicating the ineluctable afterlife consequences of, and the responsibility for, all that man
consciously does in this world; or divine declaration (in 38:27), "We have not created heaven and earth and all that is between them without meaning and purpose (bātilan), as is the surmise of those who are bent on denying the truth."  

Instances of such Qur'ānic key-phrases can be quoted *ad infinitum*, and in many varying formulations. But there is one fundamental statement in the Qur'ān which occurs only once, and which may be qualified as "the key-phrase of all its key-phrases": the statement in verse 7 of *Al 'Imrān* to the effect that the Qur'ān "contains messages that are clear in and by themselves (āyāt muḥkamāl) as well as others that are allegorical (mutashabihāt)". It is this verse which represents, in an absolute sense, a key to the understanding of the Qur'ānic message and makes the whole of it accessible to "people who think" (*li-qawmin yatafakkarūn*).  

Asad is of the firm opinion that without understanding what is implied by the term *mutashabih*, much of the Qur'ān is liable to be-and, in fact, has often been – grossly misunderstood both by believers and by such as refuse to believe in its divinely-inspired origin. However, Asad hastens to add, an appreciation of what is mean by "allegory "symbolism" in the context to the Qur'ān is, by itself, not enough to make one fully understand its world-view: in order to achieve this we must relate the Qur'ānic use of these terms to a concept touched upon almost at the beginning of the divine writ-namely, the existence of "a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception" (al-ghayb). It is this concept that constitutes the basic premise for an understanding of the call of the Qur'ān, and, indeed, of the principle of religious – every religion – as such: for all truly religion cognition arises from and is based on the fact that only a small segment of reality is open to
man’s perception and imagination, and that by far the larger part of it escapes his comprehension altogether.\textsuperscript{60}

Asad makes an analysis psychological nature of man and establishes a way for comprehending “beyond perception” part of the reality, as envisaged by the Qur’ān. He explains: However, side by side with the clear-cut metaphysical concept we have a not-less clear-cut finding of a psychological nature: namely, the finding that the human mind (in which term we comprise conscious thinking, imagination, dream-life, intuition, memory, etc.) can operate only on the basis of perceptions previously experienced by that very mind either in their entirety or in some of their constituent elements: that is to say, it cannot visualize, or form an idea of, something that lies entirely outside the realm of previously realized experiences. Hence, whenever we arrive at a seemingly “new” mental image or idea, we find, on closer examination, that even if it is new as a composite entity, it is not really new as regards its component elements, for these are invariably derived from previous – and sometimes quite disparate – mental experiences which are now but brought together in a new combination or series of new combinations.\textsuperscript{61}

Now as soon as we realize that the human mind cannot operate otherwise than on the basis of previous experiences – that is to say, on the basis of apperceptions and cognition already recorded in that mind – we are faced by a weighty question: Since the metaphysical ideas of religion relate, by virtue of their nature, to a realm beyond the reach of human perception or experience – how can they be successfully conveyed to us? How can we be expected to grasp ideas which have no counterpart, not even a fractional one, in any of the apperception which we have arrived at empirically?\textsuperscript{62}
The answer is self-evident: By means of *loan-images* derived from our actual-physical or mental-experiences; or, as Zamakhshari phrases it in his commentary on 13:35, “through a parabolic illustration, by means of something which we know from our experience, of something that is beyond the reach of our perception” (*tamthilan li-ma ghaba anna bi-ma nushahid*). And this is the innermost purport of the term and concept of *al-mutashabihat* as is used in the Qur’ān.⁶³

Thus, the Qur’ān tells us clearly that many of its passages and expressions *must* be understood in an allegorical sense for the simple reason that, being intended for the human understanding, they could not have been conveyed to us in any other way. It follows, therefore, that if we were to take *every* Qur’ānic passage, statement or expression in its outward, literal sense and disregard the possibility of its being an allegory, a metaphor or a parable, we would be offending against the very spirit of the divine writ.⁶⁴

Asad, to illustrate his thesis, provides many examples related to God’s being, life hereafter, etc. At one place he explains: Consider, for instance, some of the Qur’ānic references to God’s being—a Being indefinable, infinite in time and space, and utterly beyond any creature’s comprehension. Far from being able to imagine Him, we can only realize that He is *not*: namely, not limited in either time or space, not definable in terms of any Comparison and not to be comprised within any category of human thought. Hence, only very generalized metaphors can convey to us, though most inadequately, the idea of His existence and activity.⁶⁵
Appendix II: *Al-Muqatta‘ât*

Asad introduces the subject: About one-quarter of the Qur’anic *Sūrahs* are preceded by mysterious letter-symbols called *musqatla‘ât* ("disjointed letters") or, occasionally, *fawā'îh* ("openings") because they appear at the beginning of relevant *Sūrahs*. Out of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, exactly one-half that is, fourteen-occur in this position, either singly or in varying combinations of two, three, four or five letters. They are always pronounced singly, by their designations and not as mere sounds—thus: *alif lām mim*, or *ḥā mim*, etc.\(^{66}\)

Rebutting the Western Orientalists, Asad explains: the significance of these letter symbols has perplexed the commentators from the earliest times. There is no evidence of the Prophet’s having ever referred to them in any of his recorded utterances, nor any of his companions having ever asked him for an explanation. Nonetheless, it is established beyond any possibility of doubt that all the companions—obviously following the example of the Prophet—regarded the *muqatla‘ât* as integral parts of the *Sūrahs* to which they are prefixed, and used to recite them accordingly: a fact which disposes effectively of the suggestion advanced by some Western orientalists that these letters may be no more than the initials of the scribes who wrote down the individual revelations at the Prophet’s dictation, or of the companions who recorded them at the time of the final codification of the Qur’ân during the reigns of the first three Caliphs.\(^{67}\)

Outlining the varied attempts by scholars to comprehend the significance of these letters, Asad elaborates: Some of the companions as well as some of their immediate successors and
later Qur'ān commentators were convinced that these letters are abbreviations of certain words or even phrases relating to God and His attributes, and tried to “reconstruct” them with much ingenuity: but since the possible combinations are practically unlimited, all such interpretations are highly arbitrary and, therefore, devoid of any real usefulness. Others have tried to link the muqattā‘āt to the numerological values of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, and have “derived” by this means all manner of esoteric indications and prophecies.

Detailing another, perhaps more plausible interpretation, Asad expresses his dissatisfaction with that on the bases of its being ‘based on more than conjecture: and, so, in the last resort, we must content ourselves with the finding that a solution of this problem still remains beyond our grasp.’ This was apparently the view of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, summarized in these words of Abū Bakr: “In every divine Writ (Kitāb) there is [an element] of mystery – and the mystery of the Qur’ān is [indicated] in the opening of [some of] the Sūrah.”

Appendix- III: On the Term and Concept of Jinn

At the very outset Asad insists: in order to grasp the purport of the term jinn as used in the Qur’ān, we must dissociate our minds from the meaning given to it in Arabian folklore, where it early came to denote all manner of “demons” in the most popular sense of this word. Asad explains Qur’ānic usage of the term: In the usage of the Qur’ān, which is certainly different from the usage of primitive folklore, the term jinn has several distinct meanings. The most commonly encountered is that of spiritual forces or beings which, precisely because they have no corporeal existence, are beyond the perception of our corporeal senses: a connotation
which includes "satans" and "satanic force" (Shayātīn—see note 16 on 15:17) as well as "angels" and "angelic forces", since all of them are "concealed from our senses" (Jawaharī, Raghib). In order to make it quite evident that these invisible manifestations are not of a corporeal nature, the Qur'ān states parabolically that the jinn were created out of "the fire of scorching winds" (nar as-samūm, in 15:27), or out of a "a confusing flame of fire" (mārij min nār, in 55:15), or simply "out of fire" (7:12 and 38:76, in these last two instances referring to the Fallen Angel, Iblīs). Parallel with this, we have authentic ʿahdīth to the effect that the Prophet spoke of the angels as having been "created out of light" (Khulīqat min nūr: Muslim, on the authority of ‘Ā’ishah) – light and fire being akin, and likely to manifest themselves within and through one another (c.f. note 7 on verse 8 of Sūrah 27).

Extending the use of the term jinn, Asad elaborates: the term jinn is also applied to a wide range of phenomena which, according to most of the classical commentators, indicate certain sentient organisms of so fine a nature and of a physiological composition so different from our own that they are not normally accessible to our sense-perception.

Asad alludes to what he calls occasional use of the term jinn in the Qur'ān is to devote those elemental forces of nature-including human nature – which are "concealed from our senses" inasmuch as they manifest themselves to us only in their effects but not in their intrinsic reality. Instances of this connotation are found, e.g., in 37:158 ff (and possibly also in 6:100), as well as in the earliest occurrences of this concept, namely, in 114:6.

Apart from this, it is quite probable that in many instances where the Qur'ān refers to jinn in terms usually applied to organisms and
endowed with reason, this expression either implies a symbolic “personification” of man’s relationship with “satanic forces” (Shayātīn)- an implication evident, e.g., in 6:112, 7:38, 11:119, 32:13 – or, alternatively, is a metonym for a person’s preoccupation with what is loosely described as “occult powers”, whether real or illusory, as well as for the resulting practices as such, like sorcery, necromancy, astrology, soothsaying, etc. endeavors to which the Qur’an invariably refers in condemnatory terms (c.f. 2:102 and the corresponding note 84; also 6:128 and 130, or 72:5-6).\footnote{75}

In a few instances (e.g., 46:29-32 and 72; 1-15) the term jīnn may conceivably denote beings not invisible in and by themselves but, rather “hitherto unseen beings” (see note 1 on 72:1).\footnote{76}

Finally, references to jīnn are sometimes meant to recall certain legends deeply embedded in the consciousness of the people to whom the Qur’an was addressed in the first instance (e.g., in 34: 12-14, which should be read in conjunction with note 77 on 21:82) – the purpose being, in every instance, not the legend as such but the illustration of a moral or spiritual truth.\footnote{77}

Appendix IV: The Night Journey

The Prophet’s “Night Journey” (isrā’) from Mecca to Jerusalem and his subsequent “Ascension” (mi’raj) to heaven are, in reality, two stages of one mystic experience, dating almost exactly one year before the exodus to Madīna (cf. ibn Sa’d 1/1, 143), asserts Asad in beginning of his discussion on the issue.\footnote{78} After discussing the happenings during the Night Journey of the Prophet, Asad explains that since the Prophet 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 was borne bodily to Jerusalem and then to heaven—while a minority were convinced that the experience was purely spiritual.\textsuperscript{79}

The most convincing argument in favour of a spiritual interpretation of both the Night Journey and the Ascension is, Asad claims, 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.\textsuperscript{80}

Bringing his knowledge of Psychology to his aid Asad tries to explain the phenomenon thus: 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 of 'Ā'ishah, Mu'āwiyyah or Al-Ḥasan al-ʿāṣrā. 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
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 the 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 to 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 Traditions relating to the mystic vision of the Night Journey and Ascension.\(^{81}\)

Muhammad Asad dwells at length on the subject and quotes Ibn Qayyim (\textit{Zād al-Ma′ād II, 48 f.}) upholding his assertion that it was Prophet's soul which went for Night Journey and Ascension, and this is in no way inferior experience.\(^{82}\)

In conclusion, Asad says: 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 Fa'īl al-Bārī VII 158), according to which the Prophet, during his Night Journey, also offered prayers at yathrib, Sinai, Bethlehem, etc. the well-known traditions to the effect that on the occasion of his Night Journey the Prophets led a prayer in the Temple of Jerusalem, in which all other prophet ranged themselves behind him, expresses in a figurative manner the doctrine, that Islam, as preached by the Prophet Muḥammad, is the fulfillment and perfection of mankind's religious development, and that Muhammad was the last and the greatest of God's message-bearers.83

Sources of Asad's Exegesis

Muḥammad Asad is unique in having access to a very wide range of sources.84 He benefited from the great classical and modern Qur'ān commentators who represent a broad range of exegetical approaches. He acknowledges his debt to the commentaries of: Abu Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), whose encyclopaedia tafsīr is unparalleled in its scope, depth and primary importance;85 Jār Allāh Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), the Mu'tazili rationalist whose work represents the culmination of rhetorical and syntactic analysis; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), the doyen of philosophical exegetes; the popular 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Umar al-Baydāwī (d. ca. 685/1286), who condensed and amended al-Zamaksharī's rationalist interpretations; the comprehensive abu'l Fida' ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who represents the traditional approach to tafsīr; and Muḥammad 'Abduh, one of the outstanding scholars of modern Egypt whose
exegesis was continued by his disciple Muḥammad Rāshid Rīdā (d. 1345/1935).

Asad also supported his interpretations by the use of the most authoritative lexicographical and philological resources, such as: Muhammad ibn Manzūr’s (d. 711/1311-12) Līsān al-ʿArab, Abū al-Qāsim al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī’s (d. 502/1108) al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān and Murtadā al-Zabīdī’s (1205/1790) Tāj al-ʿArūs fī Sharḥ al-Qamūs. The wealth of material that Asad quotes from classical authorities—starting with the companions and cousin of the Prophet and the father of Qur’ānic exegesis ʿAbd Allah ibnAbbās (d. ca. 68/ ca 686) — is one of the fortes of his rendering: in no other translation of the Holy Qur’ān in English there is as much commenotation and interpretation from the giants of exegesis whose original work is normally accessible only to scholars of Arabic.

Being well versed in Hebrew, Asad’s knowledge of Talmud and its commentaries make him capable enough to present comparative studies of common issues in the two books: Qur’ān ad Bible. He makes references to the Bible, wherever he finds it proper.

Asad had his education in Western philosophies and sciences. He had interacted with the great thinkers of West and had listened to their discussions. He had a particular interest in the study of modern psychology. He makes use of this knowledge in the interpretation of some Qur’ānic verses.

Though Asad’s resources base was much wide, but his use of these resources depended on his approach to the study of the Qur’ān. He shows clear bias in favour of modern Qur’ān interpreter, Muhammad ‘Abduh. Above all, Asad is forthright in his claim that by living among the Bedouins of Arabia he had developed that
"feel" of the Arabic language, which he sees indispensable for understanding the Qur'ān.

**Exegetical Methodology**

Muhammad Asad, ever since his first encounter with the Qur'ān, when he was in his twenties only, up to the last days of his life engaged himself intensely with it. So he rightly said at the completion of his Qur'ānic exegesis. The work which I am now placing before the public is based on a lifetime of study and of many years spent in Arabia. It is an attempt – perhaps the first attempt – at a really idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Qur'ānic message into a European language.⁹¹

**Target Group**

Asad fully believed in the untranslability of the Qur'ān, but was convinced that its messages, if proper and adequate efforts are made, can be made comprehensible to those who do not know Arabic well. He explains: Nonetheless, I do not claim to have "translated" the Qur'ān in the sense in which, say, Plato or Shakespeare can be translated. Unlike any other book, its meaning and its linguistic presentation form one unbreakable whole. The position of individual words in a sentence, the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Qur'ān, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable – a fact that has been pointed out by many earlier translators and by all Arab scholars. But although it is impossible to "reproduce" the Qur'ān 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 at all or – as is the case with most of the educated non-Arab Muslims – not well enough to find their way through it unaided.  

**Preference for Classical Linguistic Usage**

In order to render the book in a language which is comprehensible, Asad stresses: To this end, the translator must be guided throughout by the linguistic usage prevalent at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān, 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 post-classical usage. As has been pointed out by that great Islamic scholar, Muhammad ‘Abduh even some of the renowned, otherwise linguistically reliable Qur'ān commentators have occasionally erred, magnified by the inadequacy of modern translators, have led to many a distortion, and sometimes to a total incomprehensibility, of individual Qur'ānic passages in their European renditions.

**Qur'ānic Ījāz (inimitable ellipticism) Taken fully into Account**

Another (and no less important) point which, Asad stresses, the translator must take fully into account is the ījāz of the Qur'ān: that inimitable ellipticism which often deliberately omits intermediate thought-clauses in order to express the final stage of an idea as pithily and concisely as is possible within the limitations of a human language. This method of ījāz is, as I have explained, a peculiar, integral aspect of the Arabic language, and
has reached its utmost perfection in the Qurʾān. In order to render its meaning into a language which does not function in a similarly elliptical manner, the thought-links which are missing – that is, deliberately omitted – in the original must be supplied by the translator in the form of frequent interpolations between brackets; for, unless this is done, the Arabic phrase concerned loses all its life in the translation and often becomes a meaningless jumble.  

**Communicating Conceptual Images of Early Islam**

Asad seems to be serious enough in his attempt at communicating religious terms in a way, which is not coloured by later Islamic developments. He enters into a long discussion and explains the early Islamic connotation of terms like *Muslim, Islam, Kufr, Kitab, ahl al-kitab* etc. and their later transformation. In order to capture the minds of the fresh seekers after truth, unburdened by historical developments, Asad stresses the use of conceptual images of early Islam only. He elaborates: furthermore one must beware of rendering, in each and every case, the religious terms used in the Qurʾān in the sense which they have acquired after Islam had become “institutionalized” into a definite set of laws, tenets and practices. However, legitimate this “institutionalization” may be in the context of Islam’s religious history, it is obvious that the Qurʾān cannot be correctly understood if we read it merely in the light of later ideological developments, losing sight of its original purport and the meaning which it had – and was intended to have – for the people who first heard it from the lips of the Prophet himself.  

Coming up with the examples, Asad adds: For instance, when his contemporaries heard the word *Islam* and *Muslim*, they understood them as denoting man’s “self-surrender to God” and “one who
surrenders himself to God”, without limiting these terms to any specific community or denomination – e.g., in 3:67, where Abraham is spoken of as having “surrendered himself unto God” (Kana musliman), or in 3:52, where the disciples of Jesus say, “Bear the witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto God” (bi-annā muslimūn). In Arabic, this original meaning has remained unimpaired, and no Arab scholar has ever become oblivious of the wide connotation of these terms. Not so, however, the non-Arab of our day, believer and non-believer alike; to him, Islam and Muslim usually bear a restricted, historically circumscribed significances, and apply exclusively to the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad. Similarly, the terms kufr (“denial of the truth”) and kāfir (one who denies the truth”) have become, in the conventional translations of the Qurʾān, unwarrantably simplified into “unbelief” and “unbeliever” or “infidel” respectively, and have thus been deprived of the wide spiritual meaning which the Qurʾān gives to these terms. Another example is to be found in the conventional rendering of the word kitāb, when applied to the Qurʾān, as “book”: for, when the Qurʾān was being revealed (and we must not forget that this process took twenty-three years), those who listened to its recitation did not conceive of it as a “book” since it was compiled into one only some decades after the Prophet’s death, but rather, in view of the derivation of the noun kitāb from the verb kataba (he wrote or, tropically, “he ordained”), as a “divine writ” or a “revelation”. The same holds true with regard to the Qurʾānic use of this term in its connotation of earlier revealed scriptures: for the Qurʾān often stresses the fact that those earlier instances of divine writ have largely been corrupted in the course of time, and that the extant holy “books” do not really represent the original revelations. Consequently, the translation of ahl al-kitāb as “people of the book” is not very meaningful; in my
opinion, the term should be rendered as “followers of earlier revelation”. ⁹⁷

Asad concludes: in short, if it is to be truly comprehensible in another language, the message of the Qur’ān must be rendered in such a way as to reproduce, as closely as possible, the sense which it had for the people who were as yet unburdened by the conceptual images of later Islamic developments and this has been the overriding principle which has guided me throughout my work. ⁹⁸

Asad makes the exception: with the exception of two terms, I have endeavored to circumscribe every Qur’ānic concept in appropriate English expressions – an endeavor which has sometimes necessitated the use of whole sentences to convey the meaning of a single Arabic word. The two exceptions from this rule are the terms al-Qur’ān and Sūrah, since neither of the two has ever been used in Arabic to denote anything but the title of this particular divine write and each of its sections or “chapters”, respectively: with the result that it would have been of no benefit whatsoever to the reader to be presented with “translations” of these two terms. ⁹⁹

Qur’ān Viewed as One Integral Whole: Tafsir of Qur’ān by Qur’ān

Apart from these linguistic considerations, Asad asserts, he has tried to observe two fundamental rules of interpretation.

Firstly, the Qur’ān must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as one integral whole: that is, as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another.
Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its pages, and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. Whenever this rule is faithfully followed, we realize that the Qur’ān is in the words of Muhammad ‘Abduh — “its own best commentary.”

Preference to Ahistorical Approach

Secondly, adds Asad: no part of the Qur’ān should be viewed from a purely historical point of view: that is to say, all its references to historical circumstances and events—both at the time of the Prophet and in earlier times—must be regarded as illustrations of human condition and not as ends in themselves. Hence, the consideration of the historical occasion on which a particular verse was revealed—a pursuit so dear, and legitimately so, to the hearts of the classical commentators—must never be allowed to obscure the underlying purport of that verse and its inner relevance to the ethical teaching which the Qur’ān, taken as a whole, propound.

Reason as a Guiding Principle

Asad reminds the reader that very uniqueness of the Qur’ān consists in the fact that the more our worldly knowledge and historical experience increases, the more meanings, hitherto unsuspected, reveal themselves in its pages.

Stressing on reason as guiding principle employed by the past great thinkers of Islam who had understood the problem fully, well Asad explains: In their commentaries, they approached the Qur’ān with their reason: that is to say, they tried to explain the purport
of each Qur’anic statement in the light of their superb knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Prophet’s 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 him by this or that of his predecessors. In other words, they often contradicted one another in their interpretations: but they did this without any animosity, being fully aware of the element of relativity in all human reasoning, and of each other’s integrity. And they were fully aware, too, of the Prophet’s profound saying, “The Differences of Opinion (ikhtilāf) 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. 

Works of Arab Philologists and Classical Commentators Consulted and Cited but not Necessarily Followed

Asad clarifies: In order to bring out, to the best of my ability, the many facets of the Qur’anic message, I have found it necessary to add to my translation a considerable number of explanatory notes. Certain observations relating to the symbolism of the Qur’ān as well as to its eschatology are separately dealt with in Appendix 1 at the end of this work. In both the notes and the appendices I have tried no more than to elucidate the message of the Qur’ān and have, to this end, drawn amply on the works of great Arab philologists and of the classical commentators. If on occasion, I have found myself constrained to differ from the interpretations
offered by the later, let the reader remember that the very uniqueness of the Qur’an consists in the fact that the more our worldly knowledge and historical experience increase, the more meaning, hitherto unsuspected, reveal themselves in its pages.\textsuperscript{104}

Asad, while showing his indebtedness to early commentators, he admits, impliedly, non finality of his final work: but, although none of the truly original, classical Qur’an—commentators ever made any claim to “finality” concerning his own interpretations, it cannot be often enough stressed that without the work of those incomparably great scholars of past centuries, no modern translation of the Qur’an—my own included—could ever be undertaken with my hope of success; and so, even where I differ from their interpretations, I am immeasurably indebted to their learning for the impetus it has given to my own search after truth.\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{Avoidance of Unnecessary Archaisms in Translation}

As regards the style of his translation, Asad states: I have consciously avoided using unnecessary archaisms, which would only tend to obscure the meaning of the Qur’an to the contemporary reader. On the other hand, I did not see any necessity of rendering the Qur’anic phrases into a deliberately “modern” idiom, which would conflict with the spirit of 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 experienced its majestic beauty could ever be presumptuous enough to make such a claim or even to embark upon such an attempt.\textsuperscript{106}
Asad, while showing his humbleness and humanity, characteristic of genuine commentators and translators of the meaning of Qur’ān, thus: And I am fully aware that my rendering does not and could not “do justice” to the Qur’ān and the layers upon layers of its meanings: for,

If all sea were ink for my sustainer’s words, the sea would indeed by exhausted ere my sustainer’s words are exhausted.

(Qur’ān 18:109)

Non Literal and Explanatory Translation

Asad often attempts at offering explanatory translations of the Qur’ānic verses; he prefers to present literal translations in exegetical notes. In the explanatory translation he tries to present the preferred nuance of the word meaning and the sentence.

Some Examples

(a) Part of the verse 24 of the Sūrah Yūnus (Tenth Sūrah) is translated in explanatory way:

“... as if there had been no yesterday.”

Exegetical note (39) by Asad, carrying the literal translation as well:

Lit., “as if it had not been in existence yesterday”: a phrase used in classical Arabic to describe something that has entirely disappeared or perished (Tāj al-‘Arūs).

(b) Part of the verse 32 of the Sūrah Yūnus (Tenth Sūrah) is translated by Asad in explanatory way:
"... How, then, can you lose sight of the truth?"

Exegetical note (5) by Asad, carry the literal translation:

Lit., “How, then, are you turned away?” i.e. from truth.\(^\text{109}\)

**Biblical Knowledge Utilized**

Asad makes full use of his Biblical knowledge in the explanation of various Qur’ānic verses.

Example: Verses 33 and 34 the *Sūrah Al-‘Imrān* (Third *Sūrah*) has been translated by Asad as:

> "Behold, God raised Adam and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of ‘Imran above all mankind, in one line of descent."

Exegetical note (22) of the above quoted verses state: Lit., “offspring of one another”- an allusion not merely to the physical descent of those prophets but also to the fact that all of them were spiritually linked with one another and believed in one and the same fundamental truth (Ṭabarī). Thus, the above passage is a logical sequence to verses 31-32, which make God’s approval contingent upon obedience to His chosen message-bearers. The names which appear in this sentence circumscribe, by implication, all the prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān inasmuch as most of them were descendants of two or more of these patriarchs. The house of ‘Imrān comprises Moses and Aaron, whose father was ‘Imrān (the Amrān of the Bible), and Aaron’s descendants, the priestly caste among the Israelites – thus including John the Baptist, both of whose parents were of the same descent (c.f. the references, in *Luke* 1., 5, to John’s mother Elisabeth as one “of the daughters of
Aaron”), as well as Jesus, whose mother Mary – a close relation of John – is spoken of elsewhere in the Qur’ān (19:8) as a “sister of Aaron”: in both cases embodying the ancient Semitic custom of linking- a person’s or people’s name with that of an illustrious forebear. The reference to the House of ‘Imrān serves as an introduction to the stories of Zachariah, John, Mary, and Jesus.\(^{110}\)

**Defensive Approach Albeit Modern Mans Anxieties Addressed**

One of the distinguishing features of Asad’s translation and exegesis is that he takes full cognizance of the fact that his reader, a Western non-Muslim man or a Westernized man- Muslim or non-Muslim alike have great mental reservations about things which the Western mode of thought make ‘clumsy’, ‘odd’, ‘cruel’ etc. At times Asad seems to go too far to ‘satisfy’ his Western reader. His explanations regarding *Isrā* (Night Journey) and *Mi`rāj* (Ascension).\(^{111}\) On the term and concept of *Jinn*, symbolism and allegory in the Qur’ān are only some of the cases where he seems to be too accommodative to the confines of the modern man’s mode of thinking. However, at times he clarifies Qur’ānic positions in very impressive and convincing manner. Whenever an opportunity comes, Asad uses modern knowledge to explain some Qur’ānic phenomena, which helps the reader appreciate the purport of the Qur’ānic message. Asad sometimes writes very long exegetical note, where he feels, the urgent need for it. An illustrative example is as follows:

Verse 38 of *Sūrah al-Ma‘idah* (Fifth *Sūrah*) has been translated by Asad as:
Now as for the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off the hand of either of them in requital for what they have wrought, as a deterrent ordained by God: for God is almighty, wise. Exegetical note (48) explains Asad’s treatment of the subject related to the above quoted verse:

The extreme severity of this Qur’anic punishment can be understood only if one bears in mind the fundamental principle of Islamic Law that no duty (taklif) is ever imposed on man without his being granted a corresponding right (haqq); and the term ‘duty’ also comprises, in this context, liability to punishment. Now, among the inalienable rights of every member of the Islamic society-Muslim and non-Muslim alike — is the right to protection (in every sense of the word) by the community as a whole. As is evident from innumerable Qur’anic ordinances as well as the Prophet’s injunctions forthcoming from authentic Traditions, every citizen is entitled to a share in the community’s economic resources and, thus, to the enjoyment of social security in other words, he or she must be assured of an equitable standard of living commensurate with the resources at the disposal of the community. For, although the Qur’ān makes it clear that human life cannot be expressed in terms of physical existence alone — the ultimate values of life being spiritual in nature—the believers are not entitled to look upon spiritual truths and values as something that could be divorced from the physical and social factors of human existence. In short, Islam envisages and demands a society that provides not only for the spiritual need of man, but for his bodily and intellectual needs as well. It follows, therefore, that — in order to be truly Islamic — a society (or state) must be so constituted that every individual, man and woman, may enjoy that minimum of material well-being and security without which there can be no
human dignity, no real freedom and, in the last resort, no spiritual progress; for, there can be no real happiness and strength in a society that permits some of its members to suffer undeserved want while others have more than they need. If the whole society suffers from privations owing to circumstances beyond its control (as happened, for instance, to the Muslim community in the early days of Islam), such shared privations may become a source of spiritual strength and, through it, of future greatness. But if the available resources of a community are so unevenly distributed that certain groups within it live in affluence while the majority of the people are forced to use up all their energies in search of their daily bread, poverty becomes the most dangerous enemy of spiritual progress, and occasionally drives whole communities away from God-consciousness and into the arms of soul-destroying materialism. It was undoubtedly this that the Prophet had in mind when he uttered the warning words (quoted by As-Suyūṭī in Al-Jām‘aṣ-Ṣaghīr), “Poverty may well turn into a denial of truth (kufr)”. Consequently, the social legislation of Islam aims at a state of affairs in which every man, woman and child has (a) enough to eat and wear, (b) an adequate home, (c) equal opportunities and facilities for education, and (d) free medical care in health and in sickness. A corollary of these rights is the right to productive and remunerative work while of working age and in good health, and a provision (by the community or the state) of adequate nourishment, shelter, etc. in cases of disability resulting from illness, widowhood, enforced unemployment, old age, or under-age. As already mentioned, the communal obligation to create such a comprehensive social security scheme has been laid down in many Qur’ānic verses, and has been amplified and explained by a great number of Prophet’s commandments. It was the second caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb, who began to translate
these ordinances into a concrete administrative scheme (see Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt III/I, 213-217);

It is against the background of this social security scheme envisaged by Islam that the Qur'ān imposes the severe sentence of hand-cutting as a deterrent punishment for robbery. Since, under the circumstances outlined above, “temptation” cannot be admitted as a justifiable excuse, and since, in the last resort, the entire socio-economic system of Islam is based on the faith of its adherents, its balance is extremely delicate and in need of constant, strictly-enforced protection. In a community in which every one is assured of full security and social justice, any attempt on the part of an individual to achieve an easy, unjustified gain at the expense of other members of the community must be considered an attack against the system as a whole, and must be punished as such: and, therefore, the above ordinance which lays down that the hands of the thief shall be cut off. One must, however, always bear in mind the principle mentioned at the beginning of this note: namely, the absolute interdependence between man's rights and corresponding duties (including liability to punishment). In a community or state which neglects or is unable to provide complete social security for all its members, the temptation to enrich oneself by illegal means often becomes irresistible – and, consequently, theft cannot and should not be punished as severely as it should be punished in a state in which social security is a reality in the full sense of the word. If the society is unable to fulfill its duties with regard to every one of its members, it has no right to involve the full sanction of criminal law (ḥadd) against the individual transgressor, but must confine itself to milder forms of administrative punishment. (It was in correct appreciation of this principle that the great caliph 'Umar
waived the *hadd* of hand-cutting in a period of famine which afflicted Arabia during his reign.) To sum up, one may safely conclude that the cutting off of a hand in punishment for theft is applicable only within the context of an already-existing, fully functional social security scheme, and in no other circumstances.\textsuperscript{112}

*Though Asad seems to present the philosophy of Islamic laws, rights and duties of Islamic society and state and their interrelationship in a very logical and impressive way, yet he seems to be defensive in the face of the Western accusations against Islamic laws. In this case Asad's explanations are tantamount to an apologia.*

Asad in his enthusiastic pursuit to demonstrate that the Qur'ān along with its contents and message, is fully relevant rather indispensable for the modern man, seems to diminish or undervalue the significance of 'incidence of revelation' or *Asbāb-i-Nazūl* or *Shānī Nuzūl*.

Likewise, despite his knowledge and command over *Hadīth* literature, he sparingly makes use of it in crucial areas, notwithstanding questions from classical books on *Hadīth* here and there, rather prefers his preferred tool, reason for investigation and explanation of the concerned issue.
Endnotes

2 Ibid.
4 Asad explains the difference between the chronological order of the Qurʾān and its present form in fn 1: It is to be borne in mind that, in its final compilation, the Qurʾān is arranged in accordance with the inner requirements of its message as a whole, and not in the chronological order in which the individual Sūrahs or passages were revealed.
5 Asad, "Foreword" *op. cit.*, p. i.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 See for example, *Islam at the Crossroads*; though in the later years Asad had mellowed down his hard comments on the West.
10 Asad, *op. cit.*, p. i.
11 Asad, "Islam, Our Choice."
12 Asad, "Foreword", *op. cit.*, p. v.
13 Asad explains it in fn 2 of ‘Foreword’, *op. cit.*, p. ii: Thus, for instance, Western critics of the Qurʾān frequently point to the allegedly "incoherent" references to God – often in one and the same phrase – as “He”, “God”, “We” or “I” with the corresponding changes of the pronouns from “His” to “Ours” or “My", or from “Him” to “Us” or “Me.” They seem to be unaware of the fact that these changes are not accidental, and not even what one might describe as “poetic license”, but are obviously deliberate: a linguistic device...
meant to stress the idea that God is not a "person" and cannot, therefore, be really circumscribed by the pronouns applicable to finite beings.

14 Asad, Foreword, *op. cit*, p. ii.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., pp. ii-iii.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. iii-iv.
24 Ibid.
25 Asad expresses the genuine anguish over the current threat to this important link to have a "feel" of Arabic language. He writes: It is to be noted that the impact of modern economic circumstances, which have radically changed the time-honored way of life of the Bedouin and brought them, by means of school education and the radio, into direct contact with the Levantine culture of the cities, the purity of their language is rapidly disappearing and may soon cease to be a living guide to students of the Arabic tongue. Asad, Forward, *op. cit*, fn 3, p. iv.
26 Asad, *op. cit*, pp. iv-v.
28 Ibid.
29 From the 1973 postscript to the 4th rev. ed. Of The Road to Mecca (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus), 378. Quoted by Martin Kremer, op. cit, fn. 49.

30 Cf. 177-81 of the original 1954 ed. with 177-81 of the 4th rev. ed. of 1980. Quoted by Martin Kramer, op. cit, fn. 50.


33 All the details and comments pertaining to 2003 edition of The Message of the Qurʾān, have been provided by Murad Hofmann, in his review article, n. 27.

34 Murad Hofmann, n. 27.


36 This has been made available to me, courtesy Prof. Yazin Mazhar Siddiqui, former Chairman, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University. Now it has been with me for some years. His graciousness is gratefully acknowledged for sparing his personal copy for me.

37 Pickthall – a renowned English translator of the Qurʾān, renders this verse: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

38 “There is not god but God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.”

39 56:76

40 Al-Qurʾān, 16:67.

41 Al-Qurʾān, 15:9

42 Asad, in very impressive formulation, has expressed his humbleness and humility in interpreting ‘Word of Eternal God’, and has offered his gratefulness, in helping him to
complete this work to God; there is no god but God; and has offered his salutations to the unlettered Arab Prophet; ‘after him there is no Prophet.’

43 A detailed discussion on Asad’s methodology shall be presented in the following pages of this work, Insha’Allah.

44 Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, p. ix.

45 The verse numbers have been moved to the end as found in the Arabic in the 2003 edition of The Message of the Qur’an. See Murad Hofmann, n. 27.

46 Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, ix.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Siddiqi, Dr. Muhammad Zubayr, Hadith Literature Its origin, Development, Special Features and Criticism, Calcutta University, 1961, pp. 102-103.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., pp. 88-89.

52 Ibid., p. 97.

53 2003 edition of The Message of the Qur’an, has number of verses in each Sūrah indicated in the table of contents; see Murad Hofmann, n. 27.

54 Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, p. 1

55 Ibid. p.3

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., pp. 989-991.

58 Ibid., p. 989.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., pp. 989-990.
63 Ibid., p. 990
64 Asad, The Message of the Qur’ān, Appendix I, p. 990.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., p. 993.
71 Ibid., p. 994.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p. 995.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., p. 996.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p. 997.
82 Ibid., pp. 997-998.
83 Ibid., p. 998.
84 ‘Works of Reference’ in the preceding pages attest to the rich sources base of Asad
85 Notes on some of the significant Exegetics works of the Qur’ān have been included in the first chapter of this work.
86 Nawwab, op. cit, pp. 182-183.
87 See for examples, The Message of the Qur’ān, note 70 in 6: 84, p. 184; Also notes 48 & 49 in 37:123.
88 See relevant portion of chapter two, dealing with Asad’s educational background.
89 See e.g., his discussion of Isrā', Night Journey of the Prophet and Mi'raj (Ascension) to heavens where he makes use of his knowledge of modern psychology: Appendix IV, p. 997, para III.

90 See his numerous references to Abduh's interpretation of the Qur'ān, as also his admission in "Foreword" and fn. 4, p.v. of profusely borrowing from Imām Abdul's Qur'ānic Exegesis.

91 See "Foreword", The Message of the Qur'ān, p.v.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., pp. v-vi.

95 Ibid., p. vi.

96 It is an established fact that the Qur'ān was compiled as we see it today, during the period of first Khalīfah, Hazrat Abū Bakr (r. 632-634). Here Asad seems to have made a mistake.

97 Asad, op. cit, p. vi

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid., pp. vi-vii; In the corresponding foot note Asad explains: Etymologically, the word al-qur'ān is derived from the verb qara'a ("he read" or "recited"), and is to be understood as "the reading [par excellence]", while the noun Sūrah might be rendered as "a step [leading to another step]" and tropically - as "eminence in degree" (c.f. Lane iv, 1465). It should be noted, however, that when the noun qur'ān appears without the definite article al, it usually has its primary meaning of "recitation" or "discourse", and may be rendered accordingly.

100 Ibid., p. vii

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., pp. vii-viii.
104 Ibid., p. vii.
105 Ibid., p. viii
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, p. 294
109 Ibid. p. 52.
110 Ibid., P. 71
111 Some excerpts from Asad’s appendices relating to these points have been presented in the preceding pages of this chapter.
112 Ibid., p. 149-150.