

INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES, NEW DELHI (INDIA)

In collaboration with

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT (IIIT), USA

Two-day Online International Conference on

**Personality and Contribution of Muhammad Asad as an
International Journalist, Linguist, Political Theorist, Mufassir and
Scholar of Religions in 20th Century”**

May 28-29, 2022 at New Delhi (India)

CONCEPT NOTE

Human history possesses a vast treasure of experiences reflecting the emergence of multiple wants, desires, urges and aspirations among people at different periods of time and places of dwelling and travelling. Ordinary thoughts, values, incentives, motivations and opportunities have offered human solutions to their problems with a choice to opt for the most suitable. The uncertainty and hope have, however been the manifest characteristics of all situations, leaving a big gate always open to march ahead with thoughts, urges, aspirations, understanding, discoveries, progress, culminating every time into another band of uncertainties, thoughts, opinions and solutions. The nineteenth century Europe, carrying humanity to the technologically advanced twentieth century, was full to its brim with knowledge-creation through theorists as economists, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, military strategists, geographers, religious preachers, revolutionaries, scientists, technologists and plotters. People anywhere in the world had no option but to look towards the most materially advanced Europe, having the best of the educational institutions for learning and training. The world till then had shaped itself with interventions by human hand from anywhere in it, but, here is the time of juncture in the history of human understanding, thought and action when world was not significantly anything more than what it was made by the interventions of European mind and hand. Today's world continues to be still what it could be with the knowledge and action of the men of thought, advancement and feat in Europe. Materially to find a parallel to that in human history, to and fore, will be for long a sweet day dream.

Be that as it may, in the satisfaction of spiritual aspects of life, the tremendous developments in Europe are a wanton misery, though religious preachers have been issuing certificates of deliverance from the possible painful consequences of ignoring the soul in quite contradiction to the wish of the Creator of universe, which is still and really so, very much a part of human understanding and faith. By its nature, human being is overwhelmed by inner voice calling for return to Him, being materially so well, however, not responding to that natural course of human development. Europe gave the world a history of wars without any substantial reason of advancing human good crushing rather the values which could have better guided the world to the true glory after a wonderful scientific and technological progress.

At the end of the nineteenth century, on 2nd July 1900, Muhammad Asad was born in Austria, in the home of a Jew Lawyer, Akiva Weiss. By choice he had opted to be a lawyer, though he was coming from a well-established lineage of Jewish Rabbis. Asad was named Leopold Weiss. He received traditional primary education and education in religion, studying textual versions of the religious scripts of *Talmud* and the related commentaries. As a gifted child of the family, Asad could master eloquence in Hebrew and Aramaic languages besides his own native German and

Polish languages just at the age of 13, at the time when the First World War was to get in, in 1914, with senseless death knell to 6 millions of people and leaving many more millions in distress and devastation. At that human juncture of colossal loss of senses by misguided people in power pushing humanity into crisis, Asad left the school and joined Austrian Army without the knowledge of his family. He adopted a false name to cover the information of his joining army from his father, though he got back to join his family when the fact was disclosed.

Asad could stir up as the one of the most cogent youths with journalistic skills responding logically to unconvincing and demotivating social and political environment of Europe. He travelled and tread into the quest for his life which he himself was not knowing as to which shape that could take. While in Mandatory Palestine, which was a territorial arrangement made by occupiers between 1920 and 1948 in Palestine as per the resolutions of the League of Nations, he had his own reservations about the Zionist Movement and used to vehemently question its leaders, including Chaim Weizmann. He accepted Sunni Islam in 1926 (in Berlin); adopted the name "Muhammad Asad, retaining the roots of his earlier name as regards its meaning. He had observed:

"Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking; and the result is a structure of absolute balance and solid composure."

Asad in his travels got to visit Arab, moving across that land, which had been cradling for long a faith whose most prominent features are clarity and certainty, that is, Islam.

When in Saudi Arabia, he spent enough time with tribal people. He was, however, acquainted with the royals, as with Ibn Saud, who was the founder of the kingdom. The King had a good knowledge of the talent and skillfulness of Asad. He gave him the confidential assignments also to work for the sustenance of his kingdom mainly to protect it from the revolts, posing a threat to the establishment. Asad's prominence was then obvious from his reference in the newspapers across nations of the region.

Asad visited India also, which was then united and under British occupation. He met Dr. Muhammad Iqbal. In his meeting in India with Dr. Iqbal he developed the idea of not proceeding further to east of the world but rather work giving his intellectual contribution for building an edifice for a future possible Islamic establishment.

In British India, Asad had an opportunity to meet Chaudhry Niaz Ali Khan, a philanthropist and agriculturalist, the founder of the Dar-ul-Islam Trust Institutes at Pathankot and Jauharabad. On Iqbal's suggestion, Asad initiated translation of *Sahih al Bukhari* and completed its two chapters in Kashmir which he visited during that period.

When the Second World War broke out, Asad worked with British Government for five years, but became citizen of Pakistan at its birth on 14 August 1947. He served in Pakistan as a bureaucrat and diplomat holding the key positions of the Director of Department of Islamic Reconstruction, Deputy Secretary (Middle East Division) in the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan, and Pakistan's Envoy to the United Nations. He made recommendations for drafting the First Constitution for Pakistan and tried to create good relations between Pakistan and Middle East States.

In 1949, Asad joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the head of the Middle East Division. He is said to have made efforts to strengthen Pakistan's ties with the Muslim states of the Middle East. In 1952, he was given by Pakistan its diplomatic assignment to the United Nations in New York,

which he relinquished in the same year to write the most mentioned book, *The Road to Mecca*. He enjoys eminence as a writer for his books, *The Road to Mecca* and translation of the Holy Qur'an in English, *The Message of The Qur'an*. Himself Asad says:

The Message of the Qur'an is "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."

Some Significant Memories

Significantly, it is notable that during his career, Asad worked for some time with the expressionist film director Fritz Lang F. W. Murnau; and also as a telephone operator in Berlin, that made him obtain a popular interview with Russian author, Maxim Gorky's wife, after simply ringing up her hotel room. In 1922, Asad in British Mandate of Palestine, stayed in Jerusalem at the house of his maternal uncle Dorian Feigenbaum, who was a psychoanalyst, a disciple of Freud, and later established the Psychoanalytic Quarterly. Worked as a columnist for the German newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a prestigious newspaper of Germany and Europe and sold articles on a freelance basis, notably for understanding of Arab fears and grievances against the Zionist project. He published a book on the subject in 1924, which earned him support from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to travel more to collect more information, which lasted for two years.

As regards his family, Asad had a son, Talal Asad, from his second Saudi Arabian wife, Munira. Talal Asad became an anthropologist specialising in religious studies and post colonialism. Asad also had a step-son named Heinrich (converted name Ahmad) with his first wife Else (converted name Aziza).

Towards the end of his life, Asad moved to Spain and lived there with his third wife, Pola Hamida Asad, an American national of Polish Catholic descent who had also converted to Islam, until his death on 20 February 1992 at the age of 91. He was buried in the Muslim cemetery of Granada in the former Moorish province of Andalusia, Spain.

Distinction and Appreciation

Distinguished, as he is considered, he advocated *Ijtihad* and rationality in interpreting religious texts. With due concern he dedicated his works 'to people who think' so being best described as "Europe's gift to Islam" and "a mediator between Islam and the West". In 2008, the entrance square to the UN Office in Vienna was named *Muhammad Asad Platz* in commemoration of his work as a "religious bridge-builder". Vienna's cultural adviser, Andreas Mailath-Pokorny were present at the unveiling of the square. Mailath Pokorny, while talking to the media said:

"There is probably no more appropriate place to honor Muhammad Asad than that in front of the UN-City. Muhammad Asad was a citizen of the world, who was at home, and left his mark, everywhere in the world, especially in the Orient."

IOS conference on Muhammad Asad

In its furtherance of the programmes on International Personalities, the Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi (India) in collaboration with the International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA, will be organising a two-day online International Conference on the **"Personality and Contribution of Muhammad Asad as an International Journalist, Linguist, Political Theorist, Mufassir and Scholar of Religions in 20th Century"** on May 28-29, 2022 at New Delhi (India).

Objective of the Conference

The objective of the conference is to promote academic endeavours of understanding personalities, opinions and cultures across the globe for fostering a critical healthy international understanding in accordance with Article 51 of the Constitution of India and International Instruments like UN Charter.

Themes for Deliberations

While it is worthwhile to highlight the life and times of Muhammad Asad in International Perspectives comprehensively, certain suggestive aspects of the broader theme are noted below for deliberations at the two-day online International Conference on “**Personality and Contribution of Muhammad Asad as an International Journalist, Linguist, Political Theorist, Mufassir and Scholar of Religions in 20th Century**”:

- Muhammad Asad’s personal life, qualities, educational pursuits and literary works.
- Socio-Political environment in Europe (especially Nazi Jurisdictions), Arab and other parts of the world during making days of Muhammad Asad and his emergence as a linguist, theorist and journalist with performance much beyond his home terrain.
- Influences on religious thought of Muhammad Asad and his conversion to Islam and his contribution to Islamic literature and understanding.
- Muhammad Asad’s understanding of nuances of the geo-political scenario in his times across the globe with reference to transformation and resurrection of Muslim countries through World Wars.
- Muhammad Asad’s responses to Western political thought and encounters to it from East.
- Relevance of Muhammad Asad as thinker, bureaucrat and diplomat to present day Globalising world.
- Any other aspect of the theme as may be found relevant.

Participation

Academicians, scholars, administrators, social workers, policy makers, promoters of international cooperation etc. from anywhere in the world can participate.

Language

The language of presentation will be English.

Important Dates

Last date for submission of abstracts (in pdf & doc. file)	April 30, 2022
Notification of acceptance/rejection of abstracts	May 5, 2022
Last date for submission of full paper (in pdf & doc. file)	May 25, 2022

Submit abstracts at: <https://forms.gle/nBhYhQFVAMmWnoP67>

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