

# DR. MOHAMMAD NATSIR

Personality and Contribution as a National and International  
Thought Leader in 20th Century

EDITOR

**PROF. M AFZAL WANI**

The present book is one of the most important treatises on understanding the social, economic and political transformation of the world in 20th Century, with the emergence, as well as, fall of many ideologies and movements—nationalist, fascist, colonial and democratic, featured by vehement polemics and pontifications. Many personalities in the world, then born, got influenced and did influence that radical transformation of the world, of whom the Indonesia born scholar and politician, Dr. Mohammad Natsir is quite prominent and visible on the academic and political horizon of the South-East-Asia, impacting effectively the whole of the global scenario. He could muster a movement against colonialism, poverty and discrimination. Exploring the various aspects of the political and social discourses in their practical context with ground realities in the previous century, through a study on the life and deeds of Dr. Mohammad Natsir, is a much-needed scientific pursuit of knowing the realities and finding rational answers to much tangled questions. His life is a primary source for a real understanding of the dynamics then and now. The book, with this precept, throws enough light on the life, personality, thought, achievements and contribution of this erudite thinker and performer as a national and international thought leader in 20th Century, in comparison and contrast to the notable parallel personalities and thoughts of that century in all parts of the world. The book gives an objective account of the ideas on human sufferings and struggle of an individual and a nation for alleviation with faith and determination in promoting a welfare state for survival of all equally, quite opposite to the misadventure for the benefit of one select discriminatory cluster of tyrants.



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**Personality and Contribution as a**  
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**Leader in 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Editor**

**Prof. M. Afzal Wani**



**Institute of Objective Studies**  
**New Delhi**

**DR. MOHAMMAD NATSIR**

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## PREFACE

Indonesia, a geopolitically important nation of South-East Asia, was in a shambles during the days of European and Japanese colonial stranglehold on its political and economic institutions and resources from last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century to nearly the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1930s, a severe depression caused an exponential growth in urban poverty. There was no system in place to cope with the massive problems being faced by the unemployed, the homeless and the destitute people. Politically aware sections of Indonesia were convinced that the colonial rulers were concerned only about their own people, whom they had brought from outside but did not care for the poverty-stricken natives.

Dr. Mohammad Natsir, born in 1908, during this troubled period, was an Indonesian scholar who achieved notable political prominence for his understanding of the issues and contribution through his writings in finding solutions to the problems which had cropped up. He is well known as he also became the fifth Prime Minister of Indonesia. He is celebrated as a prolific writer having extensively written on contemporary issues and Islam. His schooling, higher education and further studies at Solok, West Sumatra (his birth place) and Bandung, the capital of West Java province in Indonesia had been quite interesting.

In the course of his scholarly journey, Dr. Natsir contributed to subjects like interpretation of the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, dialectics, etc. It is quite fascinating to note that he had got involved in journalism also. In 1929, he penned two articles printed in the *Algemeen Indische Dagblad*, entitled *Quran en Evangelie* (The Quran and the Evangelicals) and *Muhammad als Profet* (Muhammad as the Prophet). He also teamed up with other thinkers to publish the newspaper *Pembela Islam* (Defenders of Islam) from 1929 to 1935, and wrote extensively about his views on the religion for *Pandji Islam* (Banner of Islam), *Pedoman Masyarakat* (Guide for the People), and *Al-Manar* (The Torch). Natsir founded Pendidikan Islam (Islamic Education), a private school in 1930, which was shut down after the Japanese occupation of Indonesia.

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Dr. Natsir is especially remembered for his discourses with his contemporaries and noted for compelling arguments on the relationship between Islam and the state with the then leader and future-President Soekarno in 1930, as a member of Partai Islam Indonesia (The Indonesian Islamic Party), Chairman of the Bandung branch from 1940 until 1942 and Bandung Bureau Head of Education until 1945. During the Japanese occupation, he joined Majelis Islam A'la Indonesia (changed to Majelis Syura Muslimim Indonesia later), and became one of its chairmen from 1945.

With the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence, he became a member of Central Indonesian National Committee. Natsir, in a highly appreciated move, on 3 April, 1950, proposed a motion called 'Mosi Integral Natsir', to unite Indonesia through an agreement making Indonesia a nation of seventeen states. Shortly, he became prime minister, thanks to his role as the head of Masyumi Party and served in that capacity until 1951. But in Guided Democracy Era, he joined the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia and faced arrest as well. Later, he was increasingly associated with organisations related to Islam, including the Majelis Ta'sisi Rabitah Alam Islami and Majelis Ala al-Alami lil Masjid in Makkah, the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in England, and the World Muslim Congress in Karachi, Pakistan. After working for some more organisations like Yayasan Dewan Dawah Islamiyah Indonesia, he passed away on 6 February 1993 in Jakarta.

Natsir is said to have published 45 books/monographs and hundreds of articles expressing his views on contemporary issues and his faith. In early days, his focus, while writing in Dutch and Indonesian, was Islamic policy/guidelines, culture and correlation between Islam and politics. He then dealt with the role of women in Islam also. His later contributions were in English as well. He wrote about politics, exposition of Islamic principles and relationship between Muslims and Christians. His works are a source for understanding history as well as a guide to the future prospect. Natsir could speak many languages, including English, Dutch, French, German, and Arabic, and he had a smattering of Esperanto also.

Awards and Honors of Dr. Natsir include:

- a) King Faisal Foundation Award in 1980
- b) Honorary Doctoral Degree for Literature from Islamic University of Lebanon in 1967
- c) Honorary Doctoral Degree for Islamic Ideas from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1991
- d) Honoured as a National Hero of Indonesia in 2008
- e) An Indonesian stamp issued in his memory in 2011

According to expert references of Bruce Bennett Lawrence, Nancy and Jeffrey Marcus, Humanities Professor of Religion at Duke University, Natsir was "the most prominent politician favouring Islamic reform."

In its furtherance of the programmes on International Personalities, the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) headquartered at New Delhi, India organised an International Conference on "*Personality and Contribution of Dr. Mohammad Natsir as a National and International Thought-Leader in 20th Century*" on February 6-7, 2021 via ZOOM, in collaboration with Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor, Indonesia, International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA and Dewan Dawah Islamiyah Indonesia.

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

While it is worthwhile to comprehensively shed light on the life and times of Dr. Mohammad Natsir from national and international perspectives, certain aspects of the broader theme chosen for deliberations in the conference included:

- i. Dr. Natsir's Personal Life, Qualities, Educational Pursuits and Literary Works

- ii. Socio-Political Environment in Indonesia during the formative days of Dr. Natsir and his Emergence as a National Leader
- iii. Dr. Natsir's Contribution to Nation-Building in Indonesia
- iv. Dr. Natsir's Understanding of International Political Scenario and its Influences on Indonesia as a Nation
- v. Thought of Dr. Natsir and his Responses to Contemporary National and International Influences as an Islamic Scholar
- vi. Dr. Natsir's Contribution to Promotion of Islamic Thinking World Over as Author and Politician
- vii. Relevance of Dr. Natsir's Methodology and Thought to Modern Globalising World

Academics, scholars, administrators, social workers, policy-makers and promoters of international cooperation from various countries participated. This volume carries the papers which were presented during the conference submitted by their authors for publication after review. Wherever necessary the language had to be suitably edited for the sake of clarity and style.

This volume was edited in consultation with an Editorial Board comprised of the following:

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
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| 6. Dr. Nirwan Syafrin (Indonesia)       | <i>Member</i>                |

The publishers place on record gratefulness to them for their efforts.

**Prof. M. Afzal Wani**  
*Editor & Convener*

## FOREWORD

The book, *Dr. Mohammad Natsir-Personality and Contribution as a National and International Thought Leader in 20<sup>th</sup> CE*, is a timely addition to the literature on objective understanding of faiths, cultures, nations and personalities in the world with a positive sentiment for venturing to attain real peace and order in human society, and make possible for all to live in prosperity with dignity. The Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi (IOS) India is publishing this book, as is evident from its contents, based on the proceedings of an international conference, organized by it in collaboration with the Ibn Khaldun University, Bogor, Indonesia, International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), USA, and Dewan Dawah Islamiyah Indonesia, with a high hope to stimulate a culture of mutual respect among people of all faiths, hues and regions in the world.

The book in your hand gives a notable insight into the infancy and making days of an extraordinary child in errands, the future Prime Minister of a nation in snag, to be liberated from pressing clutches. The factual situation, he passed through, remind of a valorous jack up of the improbable to astute credible. That gives a feel of the people who have lived in thorny circumstances and suffered for no fault of their own. They possessed the patience, hope, determination and hard work that could change the world as we have it now. The story of Dr. Natsir, from cradle to 'crown', speaks volumes for the guidance of anyone and anywhere, passing through adverse state of affairs, opposite winds, suffocation, persecution and incursion. It is not necessary to not disagree with him on any opinions and actions, *albeit*, it is, however, a forceful persuasion to accept his pursuits as efforts of a great man of passion with a will to stand for some principles which continue to be relevant to humanity beyond his own tenure of life, neck and neck.

The authors of this work find in Dr. Natsir, a person who was no doubt "an exceptionally intelligent, knowledgeable, wise and compassionate Muslim leader not only in politics and international relations, but also in Islamic thought, Islamic education, inter-religious dialogue, national and community development, and Islamic

## DR. MOHAMMAD NATSIR: A SUMMATION OF HIS LIFETIME EFFORTS AND REALIZATIONS

*Dr. Kamal Ashraf Qasmi\**

Mohammad Natsir (17 July 1908–6 February, 1993) was an Islamic scholar and politician. He was Indonesia's fifth prime minister. After moving to Bandung from his home town Solok, West Sumatra for higher education, Natsir studied Islamic doctrine extensively. His first article was published in 1929, and during the 1930s he wrote for several Islamic-themed papers. He entered politics in the mid-1930s, rising through the ranks of Islamic parties. On 5 September, 1950, he was chosen as prime minister, a term which he served until 26 April, 1951. After his tenure as prime minister, he became increasingly vocal about Islam's role in Indonesia, and was eventually arrested for doing so. He was released in 1966 after the New Order government took power. Natsir continued to be critical of the government, which eventually led to a ban on him from travelling abroad.

Natsir wrote extensively on Islam, totaling 45 books and hundreds of articles. He viewed Islam as an intrinsic part of Indonesian culture and was disappointed by the Soekarno and Suharto governments' handling of the religion. He was given three honorary doctorates during his lifetime, one from Lebanon and two from Malaysia. On 10 November, 2008, Natsir was honoured as a 'national hero of Indonesia'.

### Life

Natsir was born in Solok, West Sumatra on 17 July 1908. His parents were Mohammad Idris Sutan Saripado, a government employee, and Khadijah. In 1916, he studied at Hollandsch-Inlandsche School, Adabiyah, Padang. After a few months, he moved to HIS Solok, studying there by day, and at the Madrasa Diniyah by night. Three years later, he moved to HIS Padang together with his older sister. In 1923, he continued his studies at MULO (Meer Uitgebreid Lager

\* Assistant Professor & Former HoD, Aliah University, Kolkata.

Onderwijs) and joined Pandu Nationale Islamietische Pavinderij and Jong Islamieten Bond. He also learned to play violin.

After graduating, he moved to Bandung, where he studied at an Algemeene Middelbare School, or senior high school. Natsir later said that he had chosen the school for its Western classics class. From 1928 until 1932, he became the chairman of Jong Islamieten Bond, Bandung. He then received a teaching permit after studying for two years at a native teacher's training college. Although he had previously studied Islam in West Sumatra, while in Bandung he took a deeper interest in the religion, including subjects such as the interpretation of the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, and dialectics. He later studied under Ahmad Hassan, the leader of Persatuan Islam.

### Career

While still in high school, Natsir became involved in journalism. In 1929 he wrote two articles, published in the Algemeene Indische Dagblad, entitled *Quran en Evangelie* (The Quran and the Evangelicals) and *Muhammad als Profet* (Muhammad as the Prophet). He also collaborated with other thinkers to publish the newspaper *Pembela Islam* (Defenders of Islam) from 1929 to 1935, and wrote extensively about his views on the religion for *Pandji Islam* (Banner of Islam), *Pedoman Masyarakat* (Guide for the People), and *Al-Manar* (The Torch). Besides writing, Natsir founded Pendidikan Islam (Islamic Education), a private school, in 1930; the school was shut down after the Japanese occupation of Indonesia.

Natsir began to associate with well-known scholars of Islam like Agus Salim, and in the mid-1930s he took Salim's place in discussing the relationship between Islam and the state with future-president Soekarno. In 1938, he enrolled as a member of Partai Islam Indonesia (The Indonesian Islamic Party), and became the chairman of the Bandung branch from 1940 until 1942. He was also employed as the Bandung Bureau Head of Education until 1945. During the Japanese occupation, he joined Majelis Islam A'la Indonesia (changed to Majelis Syura Muslimim Indonesia later), and became one of its chairmen from 1945 until the party was banned.

After the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence, he became a Central Indonesian National Committee member. On 3 April 1950, he proposed a motion called 'Mosi Integral Natsir' that united Indonesia after an agreement which divided Indonesia into seventeen states. Soon afterwards, he became prime minister, influenced by his role as the head of Masyumi. He served until 1951.

In the Guided Democracy era, he opposed the government and joined the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia. As a result, he was arrested and imprisoned in Malang from 1962 until 1964. He was released by the New Order government in July, 1966.

After his release from prison, Natsir became increasingly involved with organisations related to Islam, including the Majelis Ta'sisi Rabitah Alam Islami and Majelis Ala al-Alami lil Masjid, both in Mecca, the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in England, and the World Muslim Congress in Karachi, Pakistan.

In New Order era, he formed Yayasan Dewan Dawah Islamiyah Indonesia. He also criticised government policy, like when he signed the Petisi 50 on 5 May, 1980, which caused him to be banned from going overseas. He died on 14 March, 1993 in Jakarta.

### Politics and Views

According to Natsir, his politics were religiously motivated, with *verse 56 of Surah Al-Dharyyat*, of the holy Quran as justification. His goal as a politician was to ensure that the Muslim community lived in a state where Islamic teachings "applied in the life of individual, society and the state of the Republic of Indonesia". He also fought for human rights and the modernisation of Islam.

Unlike the secular, anti-communist Soekarno, who viewed religion as an entity separated from the nation, Natsir believed that the separation of church and state was not applicable to Indonesia, as he saw it was an intrinsic part of their culture and one of the main reasons they fought for independence.

To support his position, he often quoted William Montgomery Watt, saying that Islam is not just a religion, but an entire culture. After independence, Natsir became increasingly disheartened by how Soekarno, and later Suharto, dealt with religion, writing in the early 1970s that Indonesia was treating Islam as one would treat "a cat with ring-worms". He later began trying to bring Pancasila, the state philosophy of Indonesia, completely in accordance with Islam.

### Writings

Natsir published 45 books and monographs and several hundred articles dealing with his views of Islam. His early works, published in Dutch and Indonesian, dealt with Islamic doctrine, culture, the relationship between Islam and politics, and the role of women in Islam. His later works included some writings in English and focused more on politics, as well as the preaching of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations. Ajjip Rosidi and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah have noted that Natsir's writings serve both as historical records and also as guides for future Muslims.

### Legacy

In 1980, he received an award from King Faisal Foundation. In academic, he received doctorate honorary degree from Islamic University of Lebanon in 1967 for literature. In 1991, he also received an honorary doctorate from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia for Islamic ideas. On 10 November, 2008 he was honoured as a national hero of Indonesia. According to Bruce Lawrence, Natsir was "the most prominent politician favouring Islamic reform.

### Personal Life

He married Nur Nahar in Bandung on 20 October, 1934. From their marriage, they had six children. Natsir could reportedly speak numerous languages, including English, Dutch, French, German, and Arabic; he was also capable of understanding Esperanto.

## DR. MOHAMMAD NATSIR: ENGAGEMENTS WITH THOUGHT AND ACTION ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Umair Azmi\*

*It is not my intention to be apologetic about Islam. For Islam does not need any apology.*<sup>1</sup>

— Mohammad Natsir

The life of Mohammad Natsir can be divided into two phases. The first phase was marked by his participation in the PRRI rebellion. The latter phase began when his political freedom was restricted by the Indonesian state, which led him to plunge into *dawah* activities and engage with trans-national Islamic organisations.

During the former phase, Natsir had dedicated himself to the task of nation-building—resisting the Dutch colonial power and formulating the ideological framework for his young nation. Having a Western educational background, Natsir was no stranger to Western ideas and philosophies.

Despite the prevailing political turbulence those days, his intellectual work was not confined to the pressing issues of Indonesia and nationalism. Rather he wrote on diverse topics. How did he engage with the West and the world at large through his writings? The present article seeks to explore this question with respect to those writings that are available in English, mainly his writings in the short-lived journal *Progressive Islam*, which was published from Holland.

Apart from giving a brief overview of Natsir's writings, two themes will be explored—the first is his engagement with Muslims in different parts of the world as exemplified by his discourse on

\* Staff Engineer, R&D, Tatas Network Ltd., Garogaon, Haryana.

<sup>1</sup> Address to the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (9 April 1952). Published as "The Future of Muslim Nations", *Pakistan Horizon* 5:2 (1952), p. 59.