

**English Rendering of Prof. Sardar M. Latif Beig's
Review of M.Watt's *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*
(With an introduction of the Reveiwer by the Translator)**

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Professor Sardar Muhmmad Latif Beig was born on December 5, 1921 at Balkot in tehsil Uri, district Muzaffarabad of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. He was the son of Mawlana Sardar Muhammad Murtaza Beig. S.M. Latif Beg had his elementary and primary education in Uri town and his secondary education at Sopore, where he passed his Matriculation in 1938 and moved to Srinagar. He had his B.A. degree with Honours in Arabic in 1942 and M.A. Degree in English (Literature) in 1944. He was appointed as Lecturer in English at Sri Pratap (S.P) College, Srinagar in 1945. In 1952 he had his Honours Degree (Mawlawi Fazil) in Arabic and Muslim Theology and in the same year he was transferred to Govt. College Sopore and later got promoted to the position of Professor there. He served also as Principal of the Islamia College of Science and Commerce at Srinagar and later at the Govt. Degree College, Sopore.

Soon after his retiring from the active service in December 1976 as Principal of the Govt. Degree College, Sopore, he moved from Sopore to Khadpora village near Uri town. This last abode of Latif Sahib, as he was popularly called, was named after him as Latifabad in 1982. On Ist June, 2002 (Rabi al-Awwal 19, 1423) he breathed his last and was buried in the same village. (Latifabad, District Baramulah).

In 1940 late Latif Sahib had *bay 'at* at the hands of a famous '*alim* and spiritual leader Hazrat Peer Hafiz Sayyid Jama'at Ali Shah of Alipore, District Sialkot, Punjab. He performed his first Hajj in 1966 which is well remembered by the people around Sopore for he returned with no material presents and gifts except the water of Zamzam and dates. He had his Hajj

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second time in 1988.

At his rented house in Sopore, Professor Mawlawi Latif Sahib taught recitation of the Holy Qur'an and thus thousands of students got benefited from him. It is said that he lectured in tafsir of the Qur'an at Arampora in Sopore. His lectures and lessons in English language and literature at the College, too, were with a difference. His grasp of Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages, literatures and religious knowledge made his lectures highly rich, live, interacting and interesting.

He was a humble and modest 'alim (scholar) of Islamic 'ulum and a pious practising Muslim adhering to the Sunnah. As incharge of English section of *The Wular* (annual magazine of the Govt. College Sopore) for a long time he contributed a lot to the literary developments.

Following is our humble attempt to present an English version of his review, published in the Urdu section of the Govt. Degree College Sopore annual magazine, *The Wular* (January 1963). on William Montgomery Watt's book, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*.

Review of Watt's book, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*

To be a Muslim one has to believe in the Prophethood of 'Isa (Jesus) and Musa (Moses) the way one believes in the Prophethood of Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him). A Muslim cannot utter even a single word that can be slanderous to Jesus (peace be upon him). But when the Christians started writing about Prophet Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him), they used full force of expression to present his innocent character and biography in a distorted form. From Dante to H.G. Wells numberless Western scholars have expressed their views in different ways about Prophet Muhammad (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him). But, unfortunately there are only few such truthful and just scholars among them who have studied the life of this great personality (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) with sincerity and objectivity. Briefly speaking, the writings of the Christian scholars about the life of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) or the inferences and conclusions drawn by them are based generally on prejudice and bigotry and to some extent on

ignorance. In this context Watt's book under review is a good and valuable addition to the *Sirah* writing in the history of Western literature.

The book is written by a renowned scholar and famous author, Mr. W. Montgomery Watt. He has written on *sirah* two exhaustive books, *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina* and in the book under review he has presented the gist of his first two books so that the readers can conveniently study the *Sirah* of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) in one volume. The author has in addition to other things paid special attention to the social and the political background in which Islam had its genesis in a new form and expanded in an astonishing speed. This book is equally useful and fascinating for those who are interested in religion, history and sociology.

Those who have read Washington Irving's *Life of Muhammad* or *Outline of History* by H.G. Wells, know that these renowned authors when overwhelmed by their prejudice or ignorance are far away from approaching the reality. It is no wonder that the author of *Rip Van Winkle*¹ cannot do justice with the biography of this holiest person, Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him). Both in the beginning and at the end of his book, Watt has shed light on the historical background of this prejudice. After the demise of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him), when Islam spread successfully and political domination (*fatha*)² was attained, Christianity turned against it. Egypt and Syria which had been once centres of Christianity, later on millions of Christians embraced³ Islam there in eighth century (AD). Because of exemplary courage Muslims established their authority (rule) on some of the Christian European countries. As a result of all these developments, Christians started spreading various misunderstandings about Islam and particularly about the (final) Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) of Islam. No bad and evil trait remained there that was not attributed to the Muslims. When during the crusades Christians got an opportunity to see the Muslims closely, some of them (Christians) were extraordinarily impressed by honesty, truthfulness, right dealing and conduct of the latter. However, the Christian majority

continued to spread concocted views about Islam and the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greeting be on him). After the 12th century (A.D.) a section emerged that reflected some of their main mistakes in this regard. Watt writes that for the last two hundred years European scholars have been trying to remove the misunderstanding about Islam, rampant since the Medieval Ages in Europe. In spite of all these changes, as Watt confesses, the prejudices that were found against Islam and the Prophet in the Medieval Ages, exist still to a certain level in the Christendom. And all the contemporary wide spread means of information have failed in wiping away these unbecoming prejudices. Hundreds of years back in Italy, when Dante expressed ugly ideas about the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) H.G. Wells in the 20th century too is found as giving vent to similar type of prejudices and ignorance about Islam. This led to the bane on the two books written by Dante and Wells in some Islamic countries.

*Nkli kufr kufr na-bashad*¹. Sir Thomas Browne has considered the Qur'an as a mixture of opposites and myths. Washington Irving, the American author has sarcastically referred to the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) as prophet of sword. Carlyle and Gibb have to some degree praised Islam but also used sarcastic words against it. When Carlyle in his "Hero as a Prophet" selects the Prophet Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) as his main subject it appears as if the audience is not ready to listen to his lecture and therefore he is apologetic for selecting this topic. H.G. Wells has acknowledged the soundness of Islamic principles by citing the Farewell Sermon of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) as an example. The Prophet delivered this sermon to a huge Muslim gathering at the time of his Farewell Hajj. Wells has praised Abu Bakr Siddiq (R.A.) and 'Umar Faruq (R.A.), yet whatever he has written about the *Sirah* of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) is not even worth the reference. The famous scholar who has written an article on the Prophet in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* presents him (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) as a dictator and autocrat.

Comparatively Mr. Watt's style of writing and method of drawing the inferences is civilized and scholarly. He has nowhere given up seriousness and civility. The opponents of Islam have presented the historic events of Islam in a wrong way, and drawn far fetched conclusions. Watt, however, analyses them in the light of the actual facts and thus defend the truth about Islam and the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him). The event of *nikah*, marriage to Zaynab, murder of Ka'ab ibn Ashraf, expulsion of the Jews from Madinah etc. have been distorted by many Christian historians and as they present them with their pre-conceived views. In this context Mr. Watt deserves tribute for having risen above the common level to evaluate the events of Islamic history in an impartial way and thus having responded in an befitting and impressing manner to the biased critics of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him).

The books of Hadith and Sirah of the Prophet mention that at the time of receiving the divine revelation (*nazul of wahy*) the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) would undergo through an extraordinary condition to the extent that even in a cold season he (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) would perspire. The Christian historians have tried to infer from it, *na 'udhu bi'llah*⁵ that he suffered from epilepsy.

This allegation was levied in order to disprove the divine revelation in his (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) case. And also to suggest that a person affected by epilepsy for 23 years could not have his teachings and principles sound to deserve a serious thought for practice. The worthy author (Mr. Watt) has in clear terms denounced this allegation as a laughing stock. He writes that an epileptic has his physical and mental powers affected to the worst extent and it is well known that the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) had his health extraordinarily sound right upto the last moment.

Some Christians have raised an objection against Islam that it presents God as a very dreaded being with more *jalal* (qualities of magnificence / grandeur) and less *jamal* (qualities of beauty / mercy) and in Islam the real motivation for virtue is the emotion of fear, while love has little role to play. The author of the book has evaluated and discussed this criticism well and

refuted to it on the basis of sound arguments. The fear of *akhirah* (the Hereafter) is indeed included in the Islamic teachings, but according to the author, it is the biggest or the first motivation for '*amal*' (deeds and action). In the light of the Quranic '*ayat*' (verses), he discusses that since Allah (SWT) is *Khayr mahad*, God (incarnate) and *Qadir Mutlaq* (Absolute Power), therefore man needs to thank Him and worship (obey) Him. Gratitude requires that in the deepest recesses of his heart man should feel that he depends on Him for his creation (birth) and existence and for all that life is better than death. Worship is the practical manifestation of this gratitude. The conception of Allah's being All-Good and Absolute Power (Omnipotent) does not make (bind) man to worship just in a ritualistic manner but endows him with a new and high conception which is related to every practical aspect of life. And since man gets everything from God, therefore, the gratitude demands that at opportune time he should sacrifice everything that he has in His way. It is in gratitude on his part if he holds back (and saves) his wealth from the needy and ingratitude is against '*ubudiyah*' (worship and servitude).

Similarly some enemies of Islam and the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) are of the view that after *Hijrah*, the prophetic position of Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) comes to an end and his is now the role of a worldly ruler, not bound by any principle or covenant to consolidate his power. Such writers hold that the power corrupts and the absolute power corrupts absolutely (the good character). The author here explains the reality of such views in clear terms, and at the same time refutes the allegations by saying that the life of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) at Madinah was as simple and voluntary poverty continued. The same principles which bounded life at Makkah were carried on in Madinah. Even at the time of *fatha* (liberation) of Makkah when his bigger enemies came under his control, he manifested his peculiar and exemplary character by giving amnesty to all opponents although till then they were bent upon his murder (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him). Jesus (A.S.) had advised to "love thy enemy" and Muhammad, the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) practically demonstrated it before the whole world. Jesus could have never got control over his enemies and as

such his teachings regarding the love for opponents were confined to sermons only but Prophet Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) acted upon and made it a practical reality. The author has rightly stated that it is the biggest successful achievement of Prophet Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) that he won the hearts of big tribal chieftains of Makkah by his good behaviour, though these very people were thirsty of his blood just a couple of months earlier. To behave like this with his enemies speaks that even as the "conqueror"⁶ of Makkah it is actually his prophetic magnanimity that manifests and not a power-thirsty political ruler who never forgives his sworn enemies once they come under his control.

In conclusion the author (Mr. Watt) of the book has proved briefly yet in an adequate way the extraordinary greatness of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) on three counts:

1. As a religious leader he gave thousands of people the religion and the (divine) Book whose teachings appeal deeply to their hearts. The very religion that emerged in Makkah in abject poverty became gradually a global and universal religion.
2. As an intellectual, the Prophet's (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) stature is very high. Most of the things are given in the Holy Qur'an as general outline of life. None can remain without acknowledging and praising the far sightedness and wisdom of the Prophet (SAAS) on seeing that by the brief Qur'anic outline he presented an all embracing legal code (Shari'ah) which led the Muslims to establish great states and governments in different countries and under various conditions.
3. As an administrator too the Prophet's position is very high. In understanding the personalities he (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) is the final and perfect. He would entrust a job to the person best and exactly suited for it. It is well-known that even the best law and the best policy fails in the absence of good administration. Because of the good and capable administration of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) every aspect of life attained its perfection. That is why even after his demise the structure of the Islamic state didn't weaken but got more stability.

In short, the book is very valuable and its full beauty can be understood only by reading it. However, the book in spite of its beauties has some lapses. For instance the author has given much importance to the "Satanic verses". As per the research of Mawlana Shabir Ahmad Ūthmni (Osmani) the *riwayat* (reports and references) of "Satanic verses" are not upto the level of *Sahih* (soundness) according to the general majority of the *muhaddithun* (Refer to notes on Surah *Najm* by the Mawlana).⁷ Rationally too it is impossible to hold that the Satan could put his words into the mouth of any divinely guided Prophet at the time of revelation (*nazul*) of *wahy* or just later. If it could be so then trust in the divine revelation (*wahy ilahi*) would cease for ever. However for this lapse the author (Mr. Watt) can't be blamed because some Muslim Mufassirs (*mufassirun*) too have cited it.

Similarly, the author writes that the five times daily *salat* (prayers) was not offered during the time of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him). This is a clear mistake. Anyone acquainted with *hadith* or history of that period knows well that the *salat khamsah* (five times daily prayers) had been fixed and regulated right from the time of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him). It is proved by *tawatur* (historical continuity) and *ijma'* (consensus) of the Muslims. The author perhaps mistook it because the Qur'an does not name these five prayers individually.

Similarly the author has expressed his doubt in the inclusion of the earliest passages of the Qur'an in its final (present) compilation and in the illiteracy of the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) holding that he had some basic education prevalent then. However, these doubts are far from the reality. Islamic scholars have written in detail on these issues and the Qur'an itself refutes these doubts. Therefore, we need not dilate upon these issues here.

Overlooking these flaws, the book in general is worth reading and commendable. Moreover, we should not forget that a non-Muslim does not consider the Prophet (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) to be *ma'sum* (infallible) the way we Muslims do. Similarly the former unlike we Muslims does not consider the Quran to be *munazzal min'llah* (revealed by God). If he (a non-Muslims) agrees with Muslims in these matters of belief then he is (to be called) a Muslim and not a Christian or anything else.

Notes and References (Added by the Translator)

1. Rip Van Winkle is name of a character and title of a story by W. Irving in *The Sketch of Geoffrey Crayon* (first published, 1819-20). It tells of a man who slept for 20 years.
2. The present translator in league with the great scholars of Islam prefers to translate *Fath* (pl. *futuhah*) as *liberation* rather than *conquest* or *occupation*, for that being against the very concept of emancipation for which Islam stands.
3. The present translator is well aware of the fact that Christians don't convert to Islam but revert to it since Jesus himself was a Prophet of Islam, the religion of all the Prophets from Adam to Muhammad (prayers of Allah and greetings be on him) and none of the prophets stood for a religion other than of submission (Islam) to the Truth revealed through them. (May Allah bless them all).
4. An interesting Persian proverb used, in Urdu and Kashmiri as well, while referring to any blasphemous statement, meaning that 'quoting blasphemy be no blasphemy'.
5. *na 'udhu bi'llah*- we seek refuge in Allah - is an expression used by Muslim writers and speakers while quoting anything that does not befit or is not factually correct.
6. *fatih* (libertor) of Makkah.
7. For details on 'Satanic Verses' and scholarly Islamic response see Majid Ali Khan, *The Holy Verses*, New Delhi, 189 and Mawlana Shabbir Ahmad 'Uthmani *Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Urdu), Surah 53 *An-Najim*.

**Research Conducted at the S.H. Institute of Islamic Studies,
University of Kashmir, Srinagar
(1988-2005)**

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