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Misconceptions and Misrepresentations: A Scholarly Response to Orientalist Criticism of the Seerah

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Abstract

The life and character of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) have been the subject of intense scrutiny by Western Orientalists, many of whom have approached the Seerah with deep-seated biases and preconceived notions. This article explores the recurring themes in Orientalist critiques, particularly their objections to the Prophet's (ﷺ) marital life, his role as a statesman, and the expansion of Islam. The study highlights the historical roots of these critiques, tracing them from early Christian polemics to modern academic discourse. Additionally, it examines the impact of Crusades, colonialism, and contemporary Islamophobia in shaping these perspectives. By analyzing primary Orientalist sources and their rebuttals by Muslim scholars, this paper aims to present a balanced and scholarly response to these criticisms. The research underscores the importance of addressing such misconceptions through authentic Islamic scholarship, interfaith dialogue, and media engagement. Ultimately, it advocates for a more nuanced and objective study of the Seerah, free from ideological distortions and historical prejudices.

Keywords: seerah, Orientalist, Criticism, Islamophobia, Islamic teachings.

The Orientalists systematically and deliberately portrayed the cultural values, traditions, civilization, and religious beliefs of the East before the European audience in a fragmented, ambiguous, objectionable, and often repulsive manner. As a consequence of sustained Orientalist intellectual efforts, a significant number of Europeans developed doubts and suspicions regarding the authenticity and veracity of the Finality of Prophethood (ﷺ) and the divine truth of Islam. This orchestrated skepticism gradually evolved into outright hostility towards the Islamic faith, the Last Prophet (ﷺ), Islamic moral values, and religious doctrines. Over time, Islamic teachings came to be perceived by many as unnatural, regressive, and inherently incompatible with human nature. At the heart of this growing aversion lay the calculated schemes, distortions, and intellectual manipulations of the Orientalists, who persistently misrepresented Islamic teachings, history, and key religious figures. To further

institutionalize this agenda, formal academies and research institutions were established across several European countries with the explicit objective of systematically promoting anti-Islamic narratives. These institutions actively engaged in both overt and covert campaigns to disseminate negative propaganda about Islam and the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ), with the ultimate goal of alienating the global community from the religion of peace and its Messenger of Mercy (ﷺ).

According to an estimate, a book on Islam has been published in some language or another almost every day in Europe over the past century. This estimation is substantiated by historical records, which indicate that between 1800 and 1900, approximately 90,000 books on Islam were published across Europe. Furthermore, within the United States alone, nearly fifty research centers are dedicated to the study of Islam. Additionally, Orientalists publish approximately three hundred academic journals in various languages, contributing extensively to the discourse on Islamic studies. Beyond publishing, they have also organized dozens of international seminars aimed at furthering their intellectual and ideological engagement with Islamic scholarship.¹

Review of Previous Research

The Seerah of Khatam al-Nabiyyin and Imam al-Mursaleen (ﷺ) has been the subject of such extensive and multidimensional scholarly work that no parallel can be found in human history. In addition to Muslims, followers of Judaism, Christianity, and other religions have also written books on various aspects of his (ﷺ) blessed life. However, the primary objective of most Orientalist works has been to criticize and find faults in his (ﷺ) noble personality and actions. Consequently, certain aspects of Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) sacred life and character have been deliberately highlighted in a way that could leave negative and misleading impressions on the general public.

In this regard, numerous books authored by Orientalists have critically analyzed and debated Islamic teachings, particularly targeting the pure Seerah and exemplary conduct of the Prophet (ﷺ). Some of the most prominent among these works include Sir William Muir's *Muhammad and Islam*², Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*³, Will Durant's *The Age of Faith*, Gustave Weil's *History of the Islamic Peoples*, Erich Bethman's *Bridge to Islam*⁴, Adam's *Mohammad and Muhammadism*⁵, Ahron's *Mohammad als Religionsstifter*, Washington Irving's *Life of Mohomet*, Smith's *Muhammad and Muhammadism*, Brooks' *Islam*, Carl Brockelmann's *History of the Islamic People*⁶, Arthur Jeffery's *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, W. Montgomery Watt's two books *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*, J.L. Menezes' *The Life and the Religion of Mohammad and the Prophet of Arabia*, and Ignaz Goldziher's *Muhammad and Islam*.

These and similar Orientalist works have systematically distorted Islamic teachings, focusing particularly on misrepresenting the flawless Seerah of the Prophet (ﷺ). Many of these books were written with the intent to spread misconceptions about Islam and its Prophet (ﷺ), thus shaping a biased and misleading narrative against the religion and its divine message⁷.

¹ Akram Ziya al-'Umari, *Mawqif al-Istishraq min al-Sunnah wa al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah* (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 56.

² William Muir, *Muhammad and Islam* (New Delhi: Cosno Publications, 2010), 17, 148.

³ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Every man's edition, 2013), 2:694.

⁴ Will Durant, *The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 172, 173.

⁵ Gustav Weil, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, (India: Sagwan Press, 2018), 18-19.

⁶ Erich Bethman, *Bridge to Islam*, (United States: Whitefish MT, Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011), 33.

⁷ Ziyā al-'Umri, *Mawqif al-Istishraq min al-Sunnah wa al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*

It is also a fact that over time, the strategies of Orientalists evolved. Gradually, they moved away from sheer prejudice and emotional bias and began employing scholarly, rational, and argumentative approaches in their critique. However, wherever the Orientalists attempted to criticize aspects of the Prophet's (ﷺ) life, Muslim scholars have provided well-reasoned, evidence-based, and compelling responses. This intellectual engagement began in the late 19th century, marking a shift toward a more analytical and scholarly rebuttal. Even Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, known for his modernist approach⁸, engaged in a critical evaluation of his contemporary Orientalist Sir William Muir's book *The Life of Muhammad*. He presented his counterarguments in his work *Khutbat-e-Ahmadiya*, offering a detailed critique and analysis of Muir's claims. Apart from Sir Syed, several prominent Muslim scholars have also played a significant role in responding to Orientalist narratives. Noteworthy among them are Justice Ameer Ali, Qazi Sulaiman Mansoorpuri, and Professor Syed Nawab Ali, whose works contributed immensely to defending and clarifying the true essence of Islamic teachings and the flawless Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

Similarly, several scholarly works have been dedicated to analyzing and refuting Orientalist objections regarding the Seerah of the Prophet (ﷺ). Among them are Akram Zia al-Umari's *Mawqif al-Istishraq min al-Sunnah wa al-Seerah al-Nabawiyyah*, Zakariya Hashim's *Al-Mustashriqun wal-Islam*⁹, Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's *Ahad-e-Nabawi mein Nizam-e-Hukmrani*, Abdul Shakoor Lakhnawi's *Ghazwat al-Nabi*, Thanauallah Amritsari's *Muqaddas Rasool, Mazhar al-Islam's Dafi' al-Awham fi Khayr al-Anam*, Hafeez ur-Rahman's *Sarwar-e-Do Alam*, Muhammad Idris Kandhlawi's *Seerat-e-Mustafa*, and Syed Sabahuddin Abdul Rahman's *Islam aur Mustashriqeen*¹⁰. These books offer detailed insights into various aspects of the Seerah, particularly addressing Orientalist misconceptions and objections with strong scholarly evidence¹¹.

Among the significant contributions, Professor Muhammad Akram Rana's *Muhammad Rasul Allah ﷺ: Mustashriqeen ke Khayalat ka Tajziya* critically examines the political, military, economic, and social aspects of the life of the Prophet (ﷺ), offering well-reasoned responses to Orientalist allegations. The most distinguished and reliable scholarly work in defense of the Seerah against Orientalist critiques is Shibli Nomani's *Seerat-un-Nabi*. In this monumental work, Shibli meticulously discusses thirty-seven (37) Orientalists, documenting their names, origins, writings, and the eras in which they authored their works concerning the Prophet's (ﷺ) life and Islamic principles¹². Similarly, Karam Shah al-Azhari, in the seventh volume of his renowned work *Zia al-Nabi*, provides comprehensive and well-reasoned refutations of Orientalist objections regarding Hadith and the Seerah. He thoroughly examines the critiques related to polygamy, military campaigns, and various actions of the Prophet (ﷺ), providing a scholarly counter-narrative based on historical and theological evidence.¹³

⁸ Sayyid Ahmad Khān, *Khuṭbāt-e-Aḥmadiyah* (Lāhaur: Dost Associates, s.n.).

⁹ Muḥammad Shakīl Siddīqī, *Bar-e-Ṣaghīr Pāk-o-Hind mein Sīrat Nigārī ke Rujhānāt* (Maqālah-e-Dāktarīṭ, Jāmi'ah Karāchī, 2015), 135, 136

¹⁰ This book, published in seven volumes by Dār al-Muṣannifīn, Azamgarh, India, contains various scholarly articles. It presents well-reasoned and academic responses to the doubts and objections raised by Orientalists regarding different aspects of Islam.

¹¹ Muḥammad Shamīm Akhtar Qāsmī, *Sīrat-e-Nabawī ﷺ par I'tirādāt kā Jā'izah* (Lāhor: Maktabah Qāsim al-'Ulūm, s.n.).

¹² Karam Shāh al-Azhari, *Ḍiyā' al-Nabī* (Lāhor: Ḍiyā' al-Qur'ān Publishers, 1420H), 7.

¹³ Shibli Nu'mānī, *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Lāhor: Maktabah Madaniyah, 1408H), 1:67, 69

Furthermore, Dr. Muhammad Shameem Akhtar Qasmi, in his book *Seerat-e-Nabawi ﷺ par A'tirazat ka Jaiza*, critically analyzes and responds to the objections raised against the noble personality and teachings of the Prophet (ﷺ)¹⁴. However, as per the author's research, no exclusive book or academic article has been published that comprehensively explores the root causes and underlying motives behind Orientalist objections against the Seerah. Therefore, this study aims to present a historical and analytical review of the evolution and motives behind such Orientalist criticisms, thereby unveiling the realities behind their writings and narratives.

Fundamental Causes of Orientalist Objections Against the Seerah of the Prophet (ﷺ)

The hostility towards Islam and the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ), expressions of hatred, accusations, and fabricated allegations, particularly targeting the noble character of the Prophet (ﷺ) such as polygamy and false claims regarding his moral conduct stem from various underlying reasons. These Orientalist objections are driven by several key factors, among which some are:

1. *The Armed and Intellectual Confrontation Between Muslims and Christians*

The personality of the Leader of all Prophets and Messengers, Prophet Muhammad Mustafa (ﷺ), stands at the center of an irreconcilable ideological divide between the Christian world and the Muslim Ummah. For Muslims, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is the perfect and most exalted Prophet—a preacher of pure monotheism and a paragon of honesty, purity, righteousness, integrity, and sublime character. However, in the Christian world, the noble personality of the Prophet of Mercy (ﷺ) has been subjected to relentless, venomous, and intensely hostile attacks from multiple angles.

To comprehend this stark contrast in perspectives regarding the Prophet's (ﷺ) life and character, it is essential to examine the historical background and context. Doing so will clearly reveal the extent to which the Christian world's prejudiced approach toward the personality of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is justified or whether their entire narrative is nothing more than an expression of animosity, contempt, and deliberate opposition.

One crucial point worth noting is that it was, in fact, the Christians who initiated hostilities and warfare against Muslims. From the very beginning, they have pursued conflict with a Crusader mentality, continuing this war to this day with the same bitterness, intensity, and malevolent objectives. Their entire approach, driven by ulterior motives and deep-rooted enmity, has remained grossly detached from historical accuracy and objective reality.

Islam is a religion of humanity, offering a universal, eternal, and complete code of life. The Seal of the Prophets, the Leader of all Messengers, and the Final Prophet (ﷺ) was sent as a mercy to the entire world. To manifest Islam's universality and global mission, the Prophet of Guidance, the Master of Prophets (ﷺ) dispatched messages of Islamic invitation to the rulers and monarchs of the world upon returning from the Treaty of Hudaibiyya¹⁵ in Dhul-Hijjah, 6 AH. This treaty had established a temporary truce and a period of peaceful coexistence, which opened new avenues for the propagation of Islam and the communication of its divine commandments to

¹⁴ Muḥammad Akram Ṭāhir, Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh ﷺ Mustashriqīn ke Khayālāt kā Tajziyah (Lāhor: Idārah Ma'ārif-e-Islāmī, 2014).

¹⁵ Ṣafī al-Raḥmān Mubārakpūrī, al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm (Lāhawr: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, s.n), 459–474.

humanity.¹⁶ Consequently, letters inviting various world leaders to Islam were dispatched to different kingdoms.

According to the historian Al-Waqidi, these letters were sent toward the end of 6 AH, following the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah in the month of Dhul-Hijjah. However, some biographers of the Prophet (ﷺ) hold the opinion that these letters were sent in 7 AH. It is possible that the Prophet (ﷺ) made the decision to invite the rulers in late 6 AH, and the letters were dispatched in early 7 AH.¹⁷

2. *Second Cause: The Conquests and Pervasive Influence of the Islamic State*

A careful examination of historical events and evidence reveals that one of the key reasons behind Orientalist doubts and criticisms regarding the blessed personality, teachings, and noble character of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the continuous expansion of the Islamic state. This expansion led to several Christian territories falling under Muslim rule, which, in turn, ignited resentment and opposition among European scholars and theologians. It is a natural phenomenon that people defend their nations, traditions, and power structures, often considering their adversaries as existential threats. Islam, being the final, complete, and universal religion revealed by Allah, was destined to spread across the world. Consequently, various regions inevitably came under the just and divinely guided rule of Islam, enabling people to witness firsthand the practical implementation of its laws and principles.

This rapid spread and profound influence of Islam challenged the existing socio-political and religious order of many regions, particularly the Christian world, leading to deep-seated resentment. The conquest of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt which were strongholds of the Eastern Church by Muslim armies, followed by the Arab expansion into North Africa, Spain, and Sicily, and their advances toward Rome, further alarmed the Christian world. The rise of the Ottoman Turks and their spectacular victories in Eastern and Central Europe, bringing them to the very heart of Christendom, heightened these tensions. The launch of the Crusades by the West in an attempt to reclaim lost territories, only to face humiliating defeats, exacerbated this hostility.

Additionally, the failures of Christian missionary efforts to convert Muslims, particularly in the East, led to frustration among European theologians and scholars. Over time, this compounded resentment and antagonism toward Islam and the Seal of the Prophets (ﷺ), leading to the deliberate misrepresentation, vilification, and distortion of his noble personality and teachings¹⁸The animosity spread against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was not limited to mere political or military confrontations. Instead, a deliberate campaign of misinformation and character assassination was orchestrated, with his noble life and personality becoming the primary target. The central focus of these attacks revolved around his personal and private life, particularly his multiple marriages and his domestic affairs. The apex of this hostility was reached during the Crusades, where anti-Islamic propaganda was systematically fueled.

¹⁶ Muḥammad bin Jarīr bin Yazīd Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk* (Qāhirah: Dār al-Ma'ārif, s.n.) 3:84; Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad bin Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, s.n.) 1:475; Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Bāqī Zarqānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib al-Ladunniyyah* (Qāhirah: Maṭba'at al-Azharīyyah, s.n.) 3:334.

¹⁷ 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubuwwah* (Sukkur: Maktabah Nūriyyah, 1977), 2:294; Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī, *Sīrat al-Muṣṭafā* (Lāhor: Maktabah 'Uthmāniyyah, 1992), 2:2. *Salāṭin-e 'Ālam ke nām Rasūl Allāh* ﷺ ke khuṭūṭ ke matn further : Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh, *al-Wathā'iq al-Siyāsiyyah fi al-'Ahd al-Nabawī* ﷺ (Qāhirah: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1941).

¹⁸ Zafar Ali Qureshi, *Shan-e-Risalat* ﷺ Mein Gustakhi Ki Bahas Ka Tanqeedi Jaeza (Sargodha: Aalmi Majlis Tahaffuz Khatm-e-Nabuwwat, n.d.), 8.

The Christian world, unable to challenge the strength of Islamic civilization on intellectual and military fronts, resorted to distorting the Prophet's image in an attempt to weaken the faith of Muslims and tarnish the reputation of their beloved Messenger (ﷺ). These attacks, filled with bias, ignorance, and deep-rooted hatred, not only reflected the prejudices of the time but also laid the foundation for many of the misconceptions that persist in Western discourse about Islam to this day.

The Role of the Crusades in the Evolution of Orientalist Thought

The Crusades against Islam and Muslims continued for nearly five centuries. During this period, Europe's united military forces intermittently loomed over the Muslim Middle East like a specter of death and destruction. The first brutal Crusade took place in 1099, followed by the second in 1147. The third, a well-known Crusade, was fought between the famous Muslim conqueror Salahuddin Ayyubi (Saladin) and the King of England, Richard the Lionheart, spanning from 1189 to 1193. The fourth Crusade occurred between 1203 and 1204, while the fifth took place in 1217. The sixth Crusade was launched in 1228.¹⁹

When all these efforts and endeavors failed, the Crusaders formed a military alliance with the Mongol forces to destroy the Muslims. As a result, the fall of Baghdad occurred in 1258. The eighth Crusade took place in 1271, the ninth in 1365, and the final, the tenth Crusade, was launched in 1464. These Crusades and bloodshed are deeply connected to Orientalist thought. For five centuries, European thinkers, authors, and poets fueled Christian sentiments against Islam and the Prophet of Mercy (ﷺ), inciting hostility towards Muslims, urging their destruction, and instilling a spirit of warfare and martyrdom among Christians. During the five-hundred-year history of the Crusades (1099–1464), from the 11th to the 15th century, Orientalists produced hostile literature against Islam and the Seal of the Prophets (ﷺ). Despite the combined military strength of Europe, the Crusaders ultimately faced a humiliating defeat. This crushing loss led to a wave of hatred against Islam and the Prophet (ﷺ) throughout Christendom. It was, in truth, a rising storm of prejudice and malice against the Messenger of Mercy (ﷺ), where all manner of vile accusations and immoral allegations were attributed to his noble person.²⁰

3. Third Cause: The Universality and Completeness of Islam

One of the key reasons for the difference in perspective between Christians and Muslims regarding Islam and the noble personality of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the fundamental Islamic belief that he was sent as the Leader of the Prophets, the Chief of the Messengers, and the Seal of Prophethood. With his arrival, all previous religions, laws, and traditions were abrogated. Islam is considered a perfect and eternal way of life, and the Prophet (ﷺ) is the final messenger. This religious standpoint is a major point of contention.

Christians claim that Christianity is the final and complete form of religion. As Christian author George Fisher states:

¹⁹ <https://ur.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

²⁰ Ḥabīb al-Ḥaqq Nadwī, *Islām aur Mustashriqīn*, murattib: Sayyid Ṣabāḥ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (A'zamgarh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 1986), 3:19.

"We assert that Christianity is the ultimate and complete expression of religion. In other words, it is the absolute religion. It is the final outcome of a long evolutionary process, and rather, it is the culmination of the divine message that had been revealed previously"²¹.

Similarly, W. Montgomery Watt strongly proclaims:

"Christians believe that in the person of Jesus Christ, everything that was wrong and erroneous in the world was corrected."²²

When Christianity could not withstand the rational and theological challenge posed by Islam, certain Orientalists began raising objections and doubts about the noble personality of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Their aim was to divert attention from the real issue and to defame the truth of Islam and its last messenger ﷺ (God forbid) so that people would be kept away from it. They sought to hinder the spread and progress of Islam. However, due to its inherent nature and divine truth, Islam continued to grow exponentially. The more it was opposed, the more people sought refuge in its teachings, embracing it wholeheartedly and setting forth on the path of spiritual and moral elevation. Despite all the adversities, Islam only became stronger and more established.

Some Notable Orientalists Who Criticized the Noble Seerah

The noble life, sacred character, and pure traditions of the Prophet ﷺ, the embodiment of chastity and virtue, the benefactor of humanity, the rightly guided, and the Seal of the Prophets, have been the target of objections and accusations by the prejudiced Christian world of the West. Many Orientalists have participated in this campaign, particularly by criticizing the Prophet's practice of multiple marriages (polygamy).

Several Orientalists have specifically attempted to cast doubt on the purity and sanctity of the Prophet's ﷺ life by targeting his marriages. Among the notable critics are ²³Sir William Muir, Edward Gibbon²⁴, Renald Alleyne Nicholson, Philip Schaff²⁵, Erich Bethman²⁶, Gustave Weil²⁷, Will Durant²⁸, and James Kritizeck.

In addition to them, names such as Hilde Bert, André Dandolo, Francis Bacon, the monk Eulogius, and John Lydgate have also played a significant role in spreading hostility, resentment, and false accusations against the Prophet ﷺ. In modern times, Salman Rushdie is among those who have continued this tradition of animosity. These individuals have persistently targeted the noble personality of the Prophet ﷺ, particularly in the context of his multiple marriages, using distorted arguments to misrepresent the truth. Meanwhile, in British-ruled India, Christian missionaries under the Crown also adopted a similar approach, using misleading narratives to attack the sacred character of the Prophet ﷺ and Islam.

Among those who played a negative role in the blasphemous movement that emerged as a result of the doubts and suspicions spread by prejudiced minds, the following individuals are particularly noteworthy: Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Lala Munshi Ram (also known as Swami

²¹ George Fisher, *The Beginning of Christianity* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & co. 1886.), 25.

²² William Montgomery Watt, *The Cure for Human Ills* (London: S.P.C.K. 1959), 37 further: Zafar 'Alī Quraishī, *Shān-e-Risālat ﷺ mein gustākhī kī bahs kā tanqīdī jā'iza*.

²³ Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Literary History of the Arabs* (New York: Silver Scroll Publishing. 1914), 167.

²⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of The Christian Church* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers. 2006). 4:169.

²⁵ Erich, *Bridge to Islam*, 33.

²⁶ Gustav Weil, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, 18, 19.

²⁷ Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, 172, 173.

²⁸ James Kritizeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (City: Princeton University Press, 1964), 137.

Shraddhanand), Mahasha Rajpal, Charan Das, Nathu Ram, Lala Pala Mal, Lala Hans Raj, Pandit Guru Dutt, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dr. Ram Gopal, Chalchal Singh, Lekh Ram, Master Atma Ram, Pandit Kripa Lal, Lala Wazir Chand, Swami Darshanand Sraswati Badauni, Ram Chandra, Parmanand, Golwalkar, Jan Sangh, Kishor Aapye, Lala Hardayal, Pandit Sita Ram, Dr. Munje, Pandit Kali Charan, Pandit Ram Chandra, Dharm Bhikshu Lakhvi, Bhola Nath Sen, Pandurang Vynanath, Pandit Shyam Lal, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sita Dev, Aurobindo Ghosh, Khem Chand, and others²⁹.

These malicious blasphemers specifically targeted the sacred personality of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ by raising baseless objections regarding his marital life, thereby committing acts of disrespect and sacrilege against the honor of the Prophet ﷺ.

In the history of the Indian subcontinent, Rajpal targeted the private life of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in his book, making it the subject of criticism. Similarly, Salman Rushdie wrote an English novel titled *Satanic Verses*, which was published in 1988 by the international publishing house Penguin Books. In this controversial book, objections were raised regarding the marital life of the Prophet ﷺ. It is not possible to comprehensively address the objections and doubts of all the aforementioned individuals in a single article. However, some of the well-known criticisms put forth by prominent Orientalists are referenced here for consideration.

Abd al-Masih bin Ishaq al-Kindi

Among those consumed by hatred and hostility toward Islamic teachings and the Prophet of Islam ﷺ, one notorious name stands out Abd al-Masih bin Ishaq al-Kindi. He played a significant role in spreading antagonistic views against the noble character of the Prophet ﷺ and the religion of Islam. A particular treatise, attributed to al-Kindi, holds importance in the corpus of anti-Islamic literature. Since its influence persists among orientalist even today, Western scholars have shown great interest in its publication. It was first published in 1880 in London for use in Protestant missionary schools. During the Middle Ages, this treatise served as a guiding principle for those hostile to Islam. Over time, it has been translated into multiple languages across the world. The central themes of this treatise revolve around distorting the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, falsely associating his life with polygamy and warfare, and fabricating various other baseless accusations³⁰.

Montgomery Watt

Among those in the Christian world who have made the Holy Prophet ﷺ the target of their criticism, Montgomery Watt is also a notable figure. The sacred personality of the Mercy to the Worlds ﷺ has been subjected to accusations of an immoral nature, and such objections and doubts have become a standard component of orientalist literature, a trend that continues to this day. The renowned Western orientalist Montgomery Watt (W. Montgomery Watt), in an attempt to distort historical truth, writes:

We conclude, then, that virilocal polygamy, or the multiple virilocal family, which for long was the distinctive feature of Islamic society in the eyes of Christendom, was an innovation of Muhammad's. There may have been some instances of it before his time, but it was not widespread, and it was particularly foreign to the outlook of the Medinans.³¹

A household consisting of one husband and multiple wives, which for centuries remained a distinctive feature of Islamic society in the eyes of Christians, was an invention of Muhammad

²⁹ Rāye Muḥammad Kamāl, Ghāzī 'Ilm al-Dīn Shāhīd (Lāhaur: Jahāngīr Book Depot, s.n.), 37.

³⁰ Nadwī, Islām aur Mustashriqīn, 3:17

³¹ William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Madina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 277.

ﷺ's mind. It is possible that a few examples of this existed before him, but it was not a common practice especially for the people of Medina, for whom this concept was entirely new.

Will Durant

Among those in the Western world who misrepresented the pure and noble character of the Seal of the Prophets ﷺ, using their pen as a weapon to propagate prejudiced views, Will Durant stands out. He authored a book titled "The Age of Faith," in which he critically examined various aspects of the sacred life of the Prophet ﷺ, attempting to distort its pristine and exemplary nature before the world. In this book, Will Durant portrays the Holy Prophet ﷺ in an extremely inappropriate manner. As part of his biased narrative, he writes in "The Age of Faith":
Women and power were his only indulgences³²

Women and power were your only occupations." From approximately the 8th century CE, Christian Europe began to perceive Islam as its greatest enemy, one that posed a threat both militarily and spiritually. Under the influence of this deadly fear, the Christian world, in an effort to reinforce its beliefs, deliberately shaped its perception of Islam in the most negative and disparaging manner possible. The image of Islam, which was crafted during the 12th and 13th centuries CE, became deeply ingrained in European thought and ideology, shaping their perspective for centuries to come.

Geoffrey Parrinder

Geoffrey Parrinder is among those Christian writers who have produced biased and misleading literature against the Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ, supplying Orientalists and European scholars with prejudiced material that has sown seeds of doubt in many minds. Parrinder particularly targeted the Prophet's ﷺ practice of polygamy, portraying it in a negative light. In his book *Sex in the World's Religions*, the Christian author Geoffrey Parrinder deems polygamy (multiple marriages) as inconsistent with the prophetic stature and even condemns it as inappropriate for the role of a prophet³³. Under the guise of scholarship and research, he has armed himself with intellectual weaponry against Islam and the Messenger of Mercy ﷺ, fabricating sensationalized myths, baseless accusations, and misleading narratives. His efforts have planted doubt and confusion, creating a jungle of misconceptions that is not easily cleared.³⁴

Recognition of Truth by Some Orientalists

Contrary to the aforementioned facts, some orientalist have acknowledged that the literature produced in the Christian world regarding the Prophet of Mercy ﷺ is biased and does not reflect reality. They have admitted that orientalist scholars have been prejudiced in their depiction of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Acknowledging this undeniable historical fact, the Western scholar J.J. Saunders, author of a *History of Medieval Islam*, writes:

" It cannot be denied that the Prophet of Arabia ﷺ has never been viewed with sympathy or understanding by Christians, for whom the compassionate figure of Jesus (peace be upon him) has always been the ideal. From the time of the Crusades to the present day, Muhammad ﷺ has

³² Durant, *The Age of Faith*, 172-173.

³³ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Sex in the World's Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1996), 151.

³⁴ Nişār Aḥmad, *Muṭāla'a-yi Sīrat aur Mustashriqīn*, mashmūlah Islām aur Mustashriqīn, murattab: Sayyid Şabāḥ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Hindustān, A'zamgarh, Dār al-Mušannifin, 1986), 3:60.

been portrayed in controversial literature in a distorted manner. Fabricated stories were spread about him and were widely believed for a long time.³⁵

Even the outspoken Western orientalist W. Montgomery Watt has acknowledged this undeniable reality. In his book *What is Islam?*, he states: "The problem is that we have inherited a deep-seated prejudice, rooted in the war propaganda of the Middle Ages. This should now be widely recognized."³⁶ Furthermore, in his book *Muhammad at Mecca*, Dr. Watt writes: "Among the greatest figures in history, Muhammad ﷺ has received the least recognition in the West. Western writers have always been willing to believe the worst about him, and whenever they found an objectionable explanation for any of his actions, they were quick to accept it as truth."³⁷

Few great men have been so maligned as Muhammad. Christian scholars of medieval Europe painted him as an impostor, a lecher, and a man of blood. A corruption of his name, 'Mahound, even came to signify the devil. This picture of Muhammad and his religion still Thomas Carlyle in 1840 was the first notable European to insist publicly that Muhammad must have been sincere, because it was ridiculous to suppose an impostor would have been the founder of a great religion³⁸

The renowned American historian S.P. Scott openly acknowledges this undeniable reality in the following unequivocal words:

"Due to inherent prejudices, no divine belief system has ever been subjected to such ignorance and injustice as the principles of Islam. For thirteen centuries, the founder of this religion was labeled an impostor; his intentions were questioned, and every conceivable vice that could degrade humanity and bring calamity upon it was attributed to his character³⁹r.

An immeasurable amount of absurdities and the worst forms of barbarity were falsely ascribed to his teachings. Ecclesiastical hostility and malicious intent expended every possible resource in an attempt to tarnish the character of their rival. In conclusion, some Orientalists have shown the courage to openly admit that Western writers have approached the noble biography of the Leader of Both Worlds ﷺ with deep-seated prejudice. As a result of this biased attitude, they have adopted an unjust approach in a failed attempt to discredit the immaculate life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Research

The discussion above presents a general overview and direction of Orientalist thought regarding the noble life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. The key aspects are as follows:

1. **Distortion of the Prophet's Life and Teachings** Orientalists have attempted to portray the life, character, and eternal teachings of the Leader of Both Worlds ﷺ in a distorted manner.
2. **Reasons behind the Growth of Orientalist Thought several** factors contributed to the development of Orientalist perspectives, including armed conflicts between Muslims and Christians, Islam's comprehensiveness and universality, the expansion of the Islamic state, and the finality of Prophethood, which abrogated previous scriptures and laws.
3. **Impact of the Crusades** The Crusades played a major role in fostering Orientalist thought. When

³⁵ John Joseph Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (Canada: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1965), 34, 35.

³⁶ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islām Kyā Hai*, Mutarjim: Abdul Khāliq (Hindustān, Al-Furqān Publishers, 1968), 1-2

³⁷ Qureshi, *Shan-e-Risalat ﷺ mein Gustakhi ki Bahas ka Tanqeedi Jaiza*, 39

³⁸ Robert P. Gwinn, "History of Arabs", in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press, 1947, 9th Edition) 16:656.

³⁹ Samuel Parsons Scott, *History of Moorish Empire in Europe* (London: Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott Company, 1904), 58, 59

these five-century-long wars failed to inflict significant damage upon the Muslims and did not fully achieve Christian objectives, they resorted to a Cold War strategy, spreading negative propaganda against Islam and the Mercy to the Worlds ﷺ.

4. **Christian Authors' Bias** Many Christian writers appear to be influenced by prejudice and extremism. Due to this bias they particularly targeted the Prophet's teachings and personal life especially his marital life presenting it in an exaggeratedly negative manner.
5. **Orientalist Trends in Islamic Studies**-The dominant approach in Orientalist studies includes spreading misconceptions about Islam and the Prophet ﷺ, misrepresenting Islamic history, and belittling Islamic civilization.
6. **Subcontinental Non-Muslim Writers** Some non-Muslim authors from the Indian subcontinent have also raised unjustified and prejudiced objections against the Prophet's noble character
7. **Acknowledgment of Bias by Some Orientalists** -A few fair-minded Orientalists have shown intellectual honesty by admitting the prejudiced approach of European scholars and Orientalists towards the blessed life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

1. Humanity can attain success and salvation by emulating the noble life of the Leader of Both Worlds ﷺ. Therefore, it is essential to adopt his Seerah and Sunnah as a guiding light in every aspect of life and at every stage of human existence.

2. Highlighting the blessed life of the Prophet ﷺ in a positive and constructive manner is a necessity of our time. It is crucial to respond to the misconceptions raised against his character and teachings, offering logical, well-reasoned clarifications that enable humanity to understand the Prophet ﷺ with intellectual and scholarly integrity.

3. The correct and meaningful portrayal of the Prophet ﷺ should be ensured across various media platforms. His teachings, actions, and contributions must be explained accurately and comprehensively.

4. Just as some Western circles and non-Muslim groups exploit modern media to spread negative propaganda against Islam and Muslims, it is imperative for Muslims to utilize these platforms for positive and purposeful initiatives. Additionally, they must remain prepared to engage in intellectual and ideological discourse to counter this Cold War strategy effectively.

5. There is a pressing need to critically analyze and evaluate the ideologies and arguments put forth by Western intellectuals and Orientalists. This should be done with wisdom and insight, ensuring a well-reasoned, scholarly response to their criticisms and doubts.