

The Greatness of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

Zafar Ali Qureshi

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the most-talked of person in the whole range of human history. Throughout the ages his followers and others have vied the one another in writing from their different angles and viewpoints on the various facets of the life and teachings of the Prophet. And it is but meet that it should be so. Arthur N. Wollaston writes in his book *Half-Hours with Muhammad*: “The Prophet of Islam has had a more potent influence on the destinies of mankind than has been vouchsafed to any son of Adam who has left footprints on the sands of time.”¹ John William Draper observes in his classic *The Intellectual Development of Europe* about the Holy Prophet (SAW): “Four years after the death of Justinian was born the man who, of all men, has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race.”²

For a correct appraisal and appreciation of the work and worth of the Holy Prophet some idea of the condition of the world before his advent needs to be given.

Syed Ameer Ali says in his *The Spirit of Islam*:

The holy flames kindled by Zoroaster, Moses and Jesus had been quenched in the blood of men. A corrupt Zoroastrianism battling for centuries with a still more corrupt Christianity had stifled the voice of humanity, and converted some of the happiest portions of the globe into a veritable Aceldama. Incessant war for supremacy, perpetual internecine strife, combined with a ceaseless wrangling of creeds and sects, had sucked the life-blood out of the hearts of nations, and peoples of the earth trodden under the iron heels of a lifeless sacerdotalism, were crying to God from the misdeeds of their masters. Never in the history of the world was the need so great, the time so ripe, for the appearance of a Deliverer.³

In that benighted era in a corner of the globe called Arabia darkness reigned more supreme. The law of the jungle was the code of behavior of the Arabs, “Might is Right,” their guiding principle of life. Their manners were rude, vulgar and uncouth. Their morals were at the lowest ebb. They led a gay life of gambling and adultery. Loot and plunder was their motto, murder and rapine their very habits.

The German scholar, Von Kremer, writing in his *History of Islamic Civilization*, says, “Wine, women and war were the only three objects which claimed the love and devotion of the Arabs.”⁴

Sir William Muir states in his *Life of Mahomet*:

“The prospects of Arabia before the rise of Mahomet were as unfavorable to religious reform as they were to political union or natural regeneration. The foundation of Arab faith was a deeprooted idolatry, which, for centuries had stood proof, with no palpable sign of decay, against every attempt at evangelisation from Egypt and Syria.”⁵

Surveying the condition of the world at large, Denison states in his book *Emotion as the Basis of Civilization*:

In the fifth and sixth centuries the civilized world stood on the verge of chaos. The old emotional culture that had made civilization possible... had broken down and nothing had been found adequate to take its place. It seemed then that the great civilization that it had taken four thousand years to construct was on the verge of disintegration and that mankind was likely to return to the condition of barbarism where every tribe and sect was against the next and law and order unknown. The new sanctions created by Christianity were working division and destruction instead of unity and order. Civilization like a gigantic tree whose foliage had overreached the world.. stood tottering rotten to the core. It was among these people that the man was born who was to unite the whole known world of east and south.⁶

This man was the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) — “the Praised One.”

The author is former Asst. Professor (Islamic Studies) Islamia College, Civil Lines, Lahore. He is the author of *Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his Western Critics*.

From the very beginning he was unique in his person and behavior. His whole nation testified to his truthfulness and sincerity of purpose. They called him *Al-Sadiq* — the Truthful, and *Al-Ameen* — the Trustworthy. In all his multifarious dealings with all sorts of people he was gentle and kind, straightforward and upright. He had a sweetness and charm of his own in his talk and deportment. Though born among lewd folks he never indulged in any kind of indecency. He stood aloof from the feuds and wrangling of his people. On the other hand, he shared the weal and woes of everyone and was always ready to give a helping hand to the needy and the downtrodden, the helpless and the indigent, widows and orphans, slaves and way farers. In such a topsy-turvy world he towered above all. He was a sort of beacon light in the vast ocean of darkness spreading all around. Sir William Muir says, “All authorities agree in ascribing to the youth of Mahomet a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the people of Mecca.”⁷

When the Holy Prophet (SAW) reached the age of forty he was called upon by the Almighty to proclaim the message of Islam, the message of hope and cheer to the downtrodden humanity, the message of liberty, equality and fraternity, the message of peace and goodwill on earth.

He chided them for all sorts of injustice and iniquity perpetrated by them and admonished them to come back to paths of justice and fair play and to give every man his due — particularly the downtrodden and the weak, women, children and slaves.

He deplored their puerile notions of superstitions and soothsaying and exhorted them to acquire knowledge and learning, and to take their rightful place in the scheme of creation.

He upbraided them for their evil habits and evil ways and asked them to inculcate notions of gentleness and kindness, and to lead lives of righteousness and piety.

Above all he told them that one day they shall have to account for all their deeds, good or bad, and no pedigree, no wealth, no distinctions of birth or position would avail them aught on the Day of Reckoning. True faith and good deeds alone will stand them in good stead on that Day.

His people, who were steeped in idolatry and other abominable vices, turned against him. He was laughed at, scoffed at, jeered upon, reviled, upbraided, pelted with stones and threatened with all sorts of dire consequences. His very life was at times in jeopardy and danger. But he stood like a rock, dauntless and fearless, against heavy odds, against the very furies of hell let loose upon him. He had illimitable faith in the Lord God, in the justice of his cause and the truthfulness of his mission. He thus triumphed over all opposition, all obstacles and all impediments.

A hostile critic like Sir William Muir has admitted:

We search in vain through the pages of profane history for a parallel to the struggle in which for thirteen years the Prophet of Arabia, in the face of discouragement and threat, retained thus his faith unwavering, preached repentance and denounced God’s wrath against his godless fellow citizens. Surrounded by a little band of faithful men and women, he met insults, menaces and dangers with a lofty and patient trust in the future. Not less marked was the firm front and unchanging faith in eventual victory which at Medina bore him through seven years of mortal conflict with his native city.⁸

At another place speaking about the Holy Prophet’s trust in Allah (SWT), Sir William Muir writes:

”..the first point which strikes the biographer is his (Muhammad’s) constant and vivid sense of a special and all-pervading Providence. This conviction moulded his thoughts and designs from the minutest actions in private and social life to the grand conception that he was destined to be the Reformer of his people. In trouble and affliction, as well as in prosperity and joy, he ever saw and humbly acknowledged the hand of God.”⁹

Faith in Allah and kindness to-words fellow beings and steadfastness of character are the essence

of the religion preached by the Holy Prophet. It is laid down in the Holy Quran:

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives wealth out of love for Him, to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and to keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate; and who keep up their promise when they make a promise and are patient in distress and affliction and in times of conflict. These are they who are truthful; these are they who are God fearing (Surah ii. 177).”

Over and over again stress is laid in the Holy Qur’an on the observance of two cardinal principles of human conduct: “Keep up prayer and pay the por-tax” (Zakat) — in short, emphasizing man’s obligation to his Creator on the one hand and to His creatures on the other.

Speaking about the purpose of the Holy Qur’an `Allama Iqbal says in his `Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam’:

“The main purpose of the Qur’an is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and the universe. It is in view of this essential aspect of the Quranic teaching that Goethe, while making a general review of Islam as an educational force said to Eckerman: `Your see this teaching never fails. With all our systems, we cannot go; and generally speaking no man can go further than that.’”¹⁰

In regard to the personality of the Prophet, it needs perhaps be stressed that he towers above all whom history calls by the name of “great.” Of all the so-called “makers of history” none has made any deep impression on more than one or two aspects of variegated life with the hallmark of his personality. If someone is the exponent of theories he is deficient in “practical politics.” If someone is renowned as a statesman, he is not a man of action in the real sense of the word. If someone is adept in ethics and spirituality he is a miserable failure in handling the mandane affairs of the word. One can go on multiplying examples of this sort. To cut it short, one comes across heroes who are proficient and adepts in one walk of life only. Prophet Muhammad is the only example in history where all the fine traits of a grand personality are blended together in a most perfect manner.

He is a seer and a servant and a living embodiment of his noble teachings. He is a wonderful reformer as well as a remarkable law-giver. He is a judge of the highest eminence as well as a noted man of action. He is an illustrious statesman as well as an incomparable General. He is a great ruler as well as a superb spiritual guide. In short there is a perfect amalgam of spiritual as well as mundane traits in him.

Apart from this, all the noted figures of history were more or less products of their surroundings. His case is a unique one in that his surroundings did not exert the least influence upon his personality or mission.

Of all the so-called “makers of history” or revolutionary figures the Holy Prophet is the only person who had to find ways and means of starting a revolution where none existed before, who had to bring together the wherewithal of revolution, who had to mold and produce the kind of men he wanted for his purpose because the very spirit of reform and revolution and its attendant paraphernalia were non-existent in those people among whom his lot was cast.

In his *History of the Muslims of Spain*, The Dutch historian, Reinhardt Dozy writes about the difficulties of the Holy Prophet: “He had to mould, to metamorphose a sensual and sceptical people — a nation of scoffers.”¹¹

Rom Landau says in his book *Islam and the Arabs*: “He (i.e. the Prophet) had to impose discipline upon a society that thrived on tribal violence and blood vengeance.... His problem was to replace humanity for cruelty, order for anarchy, and justice for sheer might.”¹²

By sheer dint of his personality the Holy Prophet changed the thoughts, habits and morals of the Arabs. He turned the uncouth into cultured, the barbarous into the civilized, the evildoers into pious and

righteous persons. Under his spell and guidance, “sterile Arabia seems to have become converted as if by magic,” as Professor Philip K. Hitti has put it, “into a nursery of heroes the like of whom in number and quality is hard to match anywhere.”¹³

He accomplished this fact through his captivating manners, his endearing courtesy and his noble teachings, By his gentle behaviour he befriended even his enemies. He captivated the hearts of the people with his unbounded sympathy and the milk of human kindness. He ruled justly. He did not swerve from the path of justice and righteousness. He did not deceive or break any promise even with his worst enemies who had driven him out of his native place, who were after his very life, who had pitted the whole of Arabia against him. In fact he forgave them all when he triumphed over them. He did not avenge anyone for his personal grievance.

In spite of the fact that he became the ruler of his country he lived poorly as before in his thatched cottage. He did not seek any reward or profit for his own person, nor did he leave any property for his heirs. Till his last moments there was not the slightest tinge of the royal pomp or show, nor of princely glory or hauteur of the high and the mighty in him. He moved among the people and was always at their beck and call. He ruled over the hearts of the people. In a sublime manner, he fulfilled all his obligations to his Creator and His creation.

It is not humanly possible to bring out in the compass of a short article all the salient points of the life and teachings of the Prophet with any semblance of justice. Volumes are needed for the purpose. We shall confine ourselves to quoting some of the rich tributes which have been paid by the scholars of the East and West to the Character and Achievements of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

Muhammad Ali writes in his book, *Muhammad the Holy Prophet (SAW)*:

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW), all by himself, combines in his person in a much higher degree the collective virtues of all the Israelite prophets — the manliness of Moses, the tender-heartedness of Aaron, the general ship of Joshua, the patience of Job, the daring of David, the grandeur of Solomon, the simplicity of John and the humility of Jesus.¹⁴

European Scholars

Stanley Lane-Poole says in his *Studies in Mosque*:

He was an enthusiast when enthusiasm was the one thing needed to set the world aflame, and his enthusiasm was noble for a noble cause. He was one of those happy few who have attained the supreme joy of making one great truth their very life-spring.¹⁵

In his another book, *The Speeches and Table-Talk of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)* the same author writes:

He was gifted with mighty powers of imagination, elevation of mind, delicacy and refinement of feeling... He was most indulgent to his inferiors, and would never allow his little servant to be scolded. He was the sweetest and most agreeable in conversation.¹⁶

Edward Gibbon writes in his famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

“His (Prophet’s) memory was capacious and retentive; his wit ready and social, his imagination sublime, his judgment clear rapid and decisive. He possessed the courage of both thought and action.”¹⁷

Stobart writes in his book *Islam and its Founder*:

The chief characteristic of his character was a quiet patient determination of will and fixedness of purpose which neither years of opposition nor personal danger nor exile could subdue, and ‘which was destined to achieve the marvellous work of bowing towards him the heart of Arabia as the heart of one man!’¹⁸

Major A.G. Leonard writes in his book *Islam: Her Moral and Spiritual Value*:

“A man not only great, but one of the greatest, i.e. truest man that humanity has ever produced. Great not simply as a Prophet, but as a patriot and a statesman: a material as well as spiritual leader who constructed a great nation, a great empire, and even more than all these, a still greater Faith. True, moreover, because he was true to himself, to his people, and above all to his God.”¹⁹

Various Roles of the Holy Prophet (SAW)

As a Prophet: Professor Nathaniel Schmidt writes in *The New International Encyclopedia*:

...an historical criticism that blinks no fact, yields nothing to credulity, weighs every testimony, has no partisan interest and seeks only the truth, must acknowledge his (Muhammad's) claim to belong to that order of prophets who... in diverse times and diverse manners, have admonished, taught, uttered austere and sublime truths, laid down principles of conduct nobler than those they found, and devoted themselves fearlessly to their high calling, being impelled to their ministry by a power within.²⁰

As a Social Reformer and Lawgiver: The German scholar Dr. Gustav Weil writes in his *History of the Islamic Peoples*:

It was he who purified Arabia of idolatry and released it from foreign bondage. It was he who substituted an inviolable and inviolate system of law in place of blood-revenge, law of might and caprice. It was he who laid down the law for all times. It was he who softened the hard lot of slaves, and showed a paternal care for the poor, the orphan and the widow. It was he who assigned a share to them in the poor-tax.²¹

As a Master-Mind or Great Revolutionary: C.W.C. Oman writes in his book *The Byzantine Empire*:

For the first and last time in history there had arisen among the Arabs one of those world-compelling minds that are destined to turn aside the current of events into new channels and change the face of whole continents.²²

As a General: G.M. Draycott says in his *Life of Mohammad*:

...continually the master of his circumstances, whom no emergency could find unprepared, whose confidence in himself nothing could shake, and who by virtue of his enthusiasm and ceaseless activity wrested his triumphs from the hands of his enemies.²³

As a Statesman: S.P. Scott writes in his monumental *History of the Moorish Empire in Europe*, Vol. I:

Rather may these results be designated the operations of a master-mind actuated by lofty ambition; a mind capable of solving the most perplexing questions of statecraft, and endowed with a degree of political wisdom not often exhibited by even those whom the voice of history has invested with the proud title of “artificers of nations.”²⁴

As an Administrator: W. Montgomery Watt writes in his book, *Muhammad, the Prophet and Statesman*:

...there is his skill and tact as an administrator and his wisdom in the choice of men to whom to delegate administrative details. Sound institutions and a sound policy will not go far if the execution of affairs is faulty and fumbling. When Muhammad died, the state he founded was a “going concern,” able to withstand the shock of his removal and, once it had recovered from the shock, to expand at prodigious speed.²⁵

As a Just Ruler: Sir William Murir writes in his *Life of Mohomet*:

In the exercise of a power absolutely dictatorial, Mahomet was just and temperate. Nor was he wanting in moderation towards his enemies.²⁶

As a Genius: Charless Mills writes in his *History of Mohammedanism*:

Deeply read in the volume of nature though extremely ignorant of letters, his (Prophet's) mind could expand into controversy with the wisest of his enemies, or contract itself to the apprehension of the meanest of his disciples. His simple eloquence was rendered impressive by a manner of mixed dignity and elegance, by the expression of a countenance wherein the awfulness of majesty was so well-tempered by an amiable sweetness, that it excited emotions of veneration and love; and he was gifted with that authoritative air of genius which alike influences the learned and commands the illiterate.²⁷

As a Born Leader of Men: Arthur N. Wollaston writes in *Hal-Hours with Muhammad:*

He had command over the hearts of men such as has never been surpassed, rarely indeed equaled in the history of mankind.²⁸

Carlyle writes in the same strain:

No emperor with his tiara was obeyed more as this man in the cloak of his own clouting.²⁹

No Change in the Prophet's Behaviour or Conduct. R. Bosworth Smith writes in his book *Mohammad and Mohammadanism:*

On the whole the wonder is to me not how much, but how little under different circumstances, Mohammad differed from himself. In the shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary recluse of Mount Hira, in the reformer in the minority of one, in the ruler of Medina, in the acknowledged conqueror, in the equal of the Persian Khusraw and the Greek Heraclius, we can still trace a substantial unity. I doubt whether any other man, whose external conditions changed so much, ever himself changed less to meet them: the accidents are changed, the essence seems to me to be the same in all.³⁰

At another place Bosworth Smith says:

Head of the State was well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretensions and Caesar without the legions of Caesar, without a standing army, without a body-guard, without a fixed revenue. If ever a man had the right to rule by a right Divine, it was Mohammed for he had all the power without its instruments and without its support.³¹

Washington Irving writes in his *Life of Mahomet:*

His military triumphs awakened no pride nor vainglory as they would have done had they been affected for selfish purposes. In the time of his greatest power he maintained the same simplicity of manners and appearance as in the days of his adversity. So far from affecting regal state, he was displeased if, on entering a room, any unusual testimonial of respect was shown him. If he aimed at universal dominion, it was the dominion of faith, as to the temporal rule which grew up in hands he used it without ostentation, and he took no steps to perpetuate it in his family.³²

Edward Gibbon writes in the same strain in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire:*

Even at the zenith of his worldly power the good sense of Mohammad despised the pomp of royalty; the apostle of God submitted to the menial offices of the family; he kindled the fire, swept the floor, milked the ewes and mended with his own hands his woolen garments.³³

Best Exemplar as a Perfect Man. D.G. Hogarth says in his *A History of Arabia:*

Serious or trivial, his daily behaviour has instituted a canon which millions observe as this day with conscious mimicry. No one regarded by any section of the human race as Perfect Man has been initiated so minutely.³⁴

Achievements of the Prophet

Syed Ameer Ali writes in his work *The Spirit of Islam:*

His life is the noblest record of a work nobly and faithfully performed. He infused vitality into a dormant people; he consolidated a congeries of warring tribes into a nation, inspired into action with the hope of everlasting life; he concentrated into a focus all the fragmentary and broken lights which had fallen on the heart of man. Such was his work, and he performed it with an enthusiasm and favor which admitted no compromise, conceived no halting; with indomitable courage which brooked no resistance, and allowed no fear of consequences; with a singleness of purpose which thought of no self.... The Recluse of Hira, the unlettered philosopher—born among a nation of unyielding idolaters—impressed ineffaceably the unity of God and the equality of man upon the minds of the nations who once heard his voice. His “democratic thunder” was the signal for the upraise of the human intellect against tyranny of priests and rulers. In that “world of wrangling creeds and oppressive institutions when the human soul was crushed under the weight of unintelligible dogmas, and the human body trampled under the tyranny of vested interests, he broke down the barriers of caste and exclusive privileges. He swept away with his breath the cobwebs which self-interest had woven in the path of man to God. He abolished all exclusiveness in man’s relations to his Creator. This unlettered Prophet, whose message was for the masses, proclaimed the value of knowledge and learning. His persistent and unvarying appeal to reason and to the ethical faculty of mankind “his thoroughly democratic conception of divine government, the universality of his religious ideal, his simple humanity” — all serve to differentiate him from his predecessors, “all affiliate him,” all serve to differentiate him from his predecessors, “all affiliate him,” says the author of *Oriental Religions*, “with the modern world.”³⁵

Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din writes in his book *The Ideal Prophet*:

He ennobled and enlarged the laws of Moses, and brought down upon earth the Kingdom of heaven prayed for by Jesus. By raising the morals of his people to a saintly and angelic heights, he realized the democratic dreams of Aristotle and Plato. He produced a state populated and worked by men who needed no police force to keep them in order, who had no prejudice of class, race or color left in them against one another — men amongst whom was no distinction between rulers and the ruled.³⁶

European Scholars

Philip K. Hitti writes in his *History of Arabs*.

Within a brief span of mortal life, Muhammad called forth out of unpromising material a nation never united before in a country that was hitherto but a geographical expression, he established a religion which in vast areas superseded Christianity and Judaism and still claims the adherence of a goodly portion of the human race.³⁷

Horace Ship writes in his book *Faiths that Moved the World*:

He found Arabia a land of primitive idolatry, tribal strife, and in fear of the powerful neighboring peoples. He left it united, vital and in possession of a great faith. He brought into the world the most powerful monotheistic religion.³⁸

Carlyle says in his classic *Hero and Hero-worship*:

To the Arab nation it was a birth from darkness into light:

Arabia first became alive by means of it.

A poor shepherd people, roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world, a Hero-Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe; see the unnoticed becomes world notable, the small has grown world-great; within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Granada on this, at Delhi on that, glancing in valor and splendor and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world.³⁹

Professor Oliver J. Thatcher writes in his *A General History of Europe*:

Mohammad made the Arabs into a nation and brought them into history. His influence on them intellectually may be seen from the fact that for nearly three hundred years the Arabs led the world

in civilization.⁴⁰

Encyclopaedia Britannica records:

Of all the Prophets and religious personalities of the world, Muhammad was the most successful.⁴¹

French historian, Lamartine, says in his *Historie de la Turquie*:

Never has man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman, to subvert superstitions which had been interposed between man and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry then existing. Never has a man undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he (Muhammad) had in the conception as well as in the execution of such a great design no other instrument than himself, and no other aid, except a handful of men living in a corner of the desert.

If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in history with Muhammad?

The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and every race. He has left us as the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality the hatred of false gods, and the passion for the one and Immaterial God. His life, his meditations, his heroic reviling against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying the furies of idolatry, his firmness in enduring them for thirteen years at Mecca, his acceptance of the role of public scorn and almost of being a victim of his fellow country-men: all these and, finally, his flight, his incessant preaching, his wars against odds, his faith in his success and his superhuman security in misfortune, his forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire; his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death: all these attest... to a firm conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma. This dogma was twofold, the unity of God and the immateriality of God; the former telling what God is, the latter telling what God is not;...

Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than him?⁴²

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