

The Holy Prophet Muhammad in the Eyes of Non-Muslims

To give an unbiased yet positive account of his character to the readers, in this section, I intend to quote some of the writings of Non-Muslim writers to illustrate how he appeared in the eyes of some of the Non-Muslim writers.

PRINGLE KENNEDY

Pringle Kennedy has observed (*Arabian Society at the Time of Muhammad*, pp.8, 10, 18, 21):

Muhammad was, to use a striking expression, the man of the hour. In order to understand his wonderful success, one must study the conditions of his times. Five and half centuries and more had elapsed when he was born since Jesus had come into the world. At that time, the old religions of Greece and Rome, and of the hundred and one states along the Mediterranean, had lost their vitality. In their place, Caesarism had come as a living cult. The worship of the state as personified by the reigning Caesar, such was the religion of the Roman Empire. Other religions might exist, it was true; but they had to permit this new cult by the side of them and predominant over them. But Caesarism failed to satisfy. The Eastern religions and superstitions (Egyptian, Syrian, Persian) appealed to many in the Roman world and found numerous votaries. The fatal fault of many of these creeds was that in many respects they were so ignoble ...

When Christianity conquered Caesarism at the commencement of the fourth century, it, in its turn, became Caesarised. No longer was it the pure creed which had been taught some three centuries before. It had become largely de spiritualised, ritualised, materialised

How, in a few years, all this was changed, how, by 650 AD a great part of this world became a different world from what it had been before, is one of the most remarkable chapters in human history This wonderful change followed, if it was not mainly caused by, the life of one man, the Prophet of Mecca

Whatever the opinion one may have of this extraordinary man, whether it be that of the devout Muslim who considers him the last

and greatest herald of God's word, or of the fanatical Christian of former days, who considered him an emissary of the Evil One, or of certain modern Orientalists, who look on him rather as a politician than a saint, as an organiser of Asia in general and Arabia in particular, against Europe, rather than as a religious reformer; there can be no difference as to the immensity of the effect which his life has had on the history of the world.

To those of us, to whom the man is everything, the milieu but little, he is the supreme instance of what can be done by one man. Even others, who hold that the conditions of time and place, the surroundings of every sort, the capacity of receptivity of the human mind, have, more than an individual effort, brought about the great steps in the world's history, cannot well deny, that even if this step were to come, without Muhammad, it would have been indefinitely delayed.

MICHAEL H HART

He in his book *The 100* has ranked the great men in history with respect to their influence on human history. He ranked the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw) as the most influential man in the human history. He wrote the following about the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw). The text has been quoted in its entirety, however in the few places where I differed strongly with his opinion, I have taken the liberty to insert my humble opinion within parenthesis to caution the reader.

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

Of humble origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and pervasive.

The majority of the persons in this book had the advantage of being born and raised in centers of civilization, highly cultured or politically pivotal nations. Muhammad, however, was born in the year 570, in

the city of Makkah, in southern Arabia, at that time a backward area of the world, far from the centers of trade, art, and learning. Orphaned at age six, he was reared in modest surroundings. Islamic tradition tells us that he was illiterate. His economic position improved when, at age twenty five, he married a wealthy widow. Nevertheless, as he approached forty, there was little outward indication that he was a remarkable person.

Most Arabs at that time were pagans, who believed in many gods. There were, however, in Makkah, a small number of Jews and Christians; it was from them no doubt that Muhammad first learned of a single, omnipotent God who ruled the entire universe. When he was forty years old, Muhammad became convinced that this one true God (Allah) was speaking to him, and had chosen him to spread the true faith.

For three years, Muhammad preached only to close friends and associates. Then, about 613, he began preaching in public. As he slowly gained converts, the Makkahn authorities came to consider him a dangerous nuisance. In 622, fearing for his safety, Muhammad fled to Madinah (a city some 200 miles north of Makkah), where he had been offered a position of considerable political power. This flight, called the Hagra, was the turning point of the Prophet's life. In Makkah, he had had few followers. In Madinah, he had many more, and he soon acquired an influence that made him a virtual dictator. During the next few years, while Muhammad's following grew rapidly, a series of battles were fought between Madinah and Makkah. This war ended in 630 with Muhammad's triumphant return to Makkah as conqueror. The remaining two and one half years of his life witnessed the rapid conversion of the Arab tribes to the new religion. When Muhammad died, in 632, he was the effective ruler of all of southern Arabia.

The Bedouin tribesmen of Arabia had a reputation as fierce warriors. But their number was small; and plagued by disunity and internecine warfare, they had been no match for the larger armies of the kingdoms in the settled agricultural areas to the north. However, unified by Muhammad for the first time in history, and inspired by their fervent belief in the one true God, these small Arab armies now embarked

upon one of the most astonishing series of conquests in human history. (However, one should note that these were not offensive wars, limitation of time and space will not allow us to dwell onto a detailed analysis of these wars and conquests). To the northeast of Arabia lay the large Neo Persian Empire of the Sassanids; to the northwest lay the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman Empire, centered in Constantinople. Numerically, the Arabs were no match for their opponents. On the field of battle, though, the inspired Arabs rapidly conquered all of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. By 642, Egypt had been wrested from the Byzantine Empire, while the Persian armies had been crushed at the key battles of Qadisiya in 637, and Nehavend in 642.

But even these enormous conquests — which were made under the leadership of Muhammad's close friends and immediate successors, Abu Bakr and 'Umar ibn al Khattab did not mark the end of the Arab advance. By 711, the Arab armies had swept completely across North Africa to the Atlantic Ocean. There they turned north and, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, overwhelmed the Visigothic kingdom in Spain. For a while, it must have seemed that the Muslims would overwhelm all of Christian Europe. However, in 732, at the famous Battle of Tours, a Muslim army, which had advanced into the center of France, was at last defeated by the Franks. Nevertheless, in a scant century of fighting, these Bedouin tribesmen, inspired by the word of the Prophet, had carved out an empire stretching from the borders of India to the Atlantic Ocean — the largest empire that the world had yet seen. And everywhere that the armies conquered, large scale conversion to the new faith eventually followed.

Now, not all of these conquests proved permanent. The Persians, though they have remained faithful to the religion of the Prophet, have since regained their independence from the Arabs. And in Spain, more than seven centuries of warfare finally resulted in the Christians reconquering the entire peninsula. However, Mesopotamia and Egypt, the two cradles of ancient civilization, have remained Arab, as has the entire coast of North Africa. The new religion, of course, continued to spread, in the intervening centuries, far beyond the borders of the original Muslim conquests. Currently, it has tens of millions of adherents in Africa and Central Asia, and even more in Pakistan and northern India, and in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the new faith has been

a unifying factor. In the Indian subcontinent, however, the conflict between Muslims and Hindus is still a major obstacle to unity.

How, then, is one to assess the overall impact of Muhammad on human history? Like all religions, Islam exerts an enormous influence upon the lives of its followers. It is for this reason that the founders of the world's great religions all figure prominently in this book. Since there are roughly twice as many Christians as Muslims in the world, it may initially seem strange that Muhammad has been ranked higher than Jesus. There are two principal reasons for that decision. First, Muhammad played a far more important role in the development of Islam than Jesus did in the development of Christianity. Although Jesus was responsible for the main ethical and moral precepts of Christianity (insofar as these differed from Judaism), St. Paul was the main developer of Christian theology, its principal proselytizer, and the author of a large portion of the New Testament.

Muhammad, however, was responsible for both the theology of Islam and its main ethical and moral principles. In addition, he played the key role in proselytizing the new faith, and in establishing the religious practices of Islam. Moreover, he is the author of the Muslim holy scriptures, the Quran, (however, the Muslims believe and try to prove that it is the literal word of God), a collection of certain of Muhammad's insights that he believed had been directly revealed to him by Allah. Most of these utterances were copied more or less faithfully during Muhammad's lifetime and were collected together in authoritative form not long after his death. The Quran, therefore, closely represents Muhammad's ideas and teachings and to a considerable extent his exact words. No such detailed compilation of the teachings of Christ has survived. Since the Quran is at least as important to Muslims as the Bible is to Christians, the influence of Muhammad through the medium of the Quran has been enormous. It is probable that the relative influence of Muhammad on Islam has been larger than the combined influence of Jesus Christ and St. Paul on Christianity. On the purely religious level, then, it seems likely that Muhammad has been as influential in human history as Jesus.

Furthermore, Muhammad (unlike Jesus) was a secular as well as a religious leader. In fact, as the driving force behind the Arab conquests, he may well rank as the most influential political leader of all time.

Of many important historical events, one might say that they were inevitable and would have occurred even without the particular political leader who guided them. For example, the South American colonies would probably have won their independence from Spain even if Simon Bolivar had never lived. But this cannot be said of the Arab conquests. Nothing similar had occurred before Muhammad, and there is no reason to believe that the conquests would have been achieved without him. The only comparable conquests in human history are those of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, which were primarily due to the influence of Genghis Khan. These conquests, however, though more extensive than those of the Arabs, did not prove permanent, and today the only areas occupied by the Mongols are those that they held prior to the time of Genghis Khan.

It is far different with the conquests of the Arabs. From Iraq to Morocco, there extends a whole chain of Arab nations united not merely by their faith in Islam, but also by their Arabic language, history, and culture. The centrality of the Quran in the Muslim religion and the fact that it is written in Arabic have probably prevented the Arab language from breaking up into mutually unintelligible dialects, which might otherwise have occurred in the intervening thirteen centuries. Differences and divisions between these Arab states exist, of course, and they are considerable, but the partial disunity should not blind us to the important elements of unity that have continued to exist. For instance, neither Iran nor Indonesia, both oil producing states and both Islamic in religion, joined in the oil embargo of the winter of 1973 74. It is no coincidence that all of the Arab states, and only the Arab states, participated in the embargo.

We see, then, that the Arab conquests of the seventh century have continued to play an important role in human history, down to the present day. It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.

SIR THOMAS CARLYLE

Talking about the fact that Hazrat Muhammad^(saw) was illiterate he writes:

One other circumstance we must not forget: that he had no school learning; of the thing we call school-learning none at all. The art of writing was but just introduced into Arabia; it seems to be the true opinion that Muhammad never could write! Life in the Desert, with its experiences, was all his education. What of this infinite Universe he, from his dim place, with his own eyes and thoughts, could take in, so much and no more of it was he to know. Curious, if we will reflect on it, this of having no books. Except by what he could see for himself, or hear of by uncertain rumour of speech in the obscure Arabian Desert, he could know nothing. The wisdom that had been before him or at a distance from him in the world, was in a manner as good as not there for him. Of the great brother souls, flame beacons through so many lands and times, no one directly communicates with this great soul. He is alone there, deep down in the bosom of the Wilderness; has to grow up so, — alone with Nature and his own Thoughts.

J. H. DENISON

J. H. Denison writes in his book, *Emotions as the Basis of Civilisation*, pp. 265 9:

In the fifth and sixth centuries, the civilised world stood on the verge of chaos. The old emotional cultures that had made civilisation possible, since they had given to man a sense of unity and of reverence for their rulers, had broken down, and nothing had been found adequate to take their place. It seemed then that the great civilisation which had taken four thousand years to construct was on the verge of disintegration, and that mankind was likely to return to that condition of barbarism where every tribe and sect was against the next, and law and order were unknown The new sanctions created by Christianity were creating divisions and destruction instead of unity and order Civilisation like a gigantic tree whose foliage had overreached the world stood tottering rotted to the core Was there any emotional culture that could be brought in to gather mankind once more to unity and to save civilisation? ... It was among

the Arabs that the man was born who was to unite the whole known world of the east and south.

S.P. SCOTT

S. P. Scott writes in, *History of the Moorish Empire in Europe*, p. 126:

If the object of religion be the inculcation of morals, the diminution of evil, the promotion of human happiness, the expansion of the human intellect, if the performance of good works will avail in the great day when mankind shall be summoned to its final reckoning it is neither irreverent nor unreasonable to admit that Muhammad was indeed an Apostle of God.

LAMARTINE

Lamartine a French historian, writes in his book, *History of Turkey*, p. 276:

Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, 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 ask, is there any man greater than he?

If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and outstanding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, and empires only. They founded, if any at all, no more than material power which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man merged not only armies, legislation, empires, peoples and dynasties but millions of men in one third of the inhabited world, and more than that, 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 of every tongue and of every race. (*Historie de la Turqu*., Vol. 2, page 76-77)

SIR WILLIAM MUIR

The following description of his person and character is taken from Sir

It is strongly corroborative of Muhammad's sincerity that the earliest converts to Islam were not only of upright character, but his own bosom friends and people of his own household who, intimately acquainted with his private life could not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which even more or less exist between the profession of the hypocritical deceiver abroad and his actions at home".

SIR JOHN GLUBB

Talking about the revelations and dreams of Hazrat Muhammad^(saw) he writes:

Whatever opinion the reader may form when he reaches the end of this book, it is difficult to deny that the call of Muhammad seems to bear a striking resemblance to innumerable other accounts of similar visions, both in the Old and New Testaments, and in the experience of Christian saints, possibly also of Hindus and devotees of other religions. Such visions, moreover, have often marked the beginnings of lives of great sanctity and of heroic virtue.

MONTGOMERY WATT

W. Montgomery Watt, the well known Orientalist, has said the following about his personality in general (*Muhammad at Madinah* pp 334-5):

We may distinguish three great gifts Muhammad had, each of which was indispensable to his total achievement. First, there is what may be called his gift as a seer. Through him or on the orthodox Muslim view, through the revelations made through him the Arab world was given an ideological framework within which the resolution of its social tensions became possible. The provision of such a framework involved both insight into the fundamental causes of the social malaise of the time, and the genius to express this insight in a form which would stir the hearer to the depths of his being.

Secondly, there is Muhammad's wisdom as a statesman. The conceptual structure found in the Quran was merely a framework. The framework had to support a building of concrete policies and concrete

institutions. In the course of this book, much has been said of Muhammad's far sighted political strategy and his social reforms. His wisdom in these matters is shown by the rapid expansion of a small state to a world empire, and by the adaption of his social institutions to many different environments and their continuance for thirteen centuries.

Thirdly, 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 had founded was a going concern, able to withstand the shock of his removal and, once it had recovered from this shock, it expanded at prodigious speed.

The more one reflects on the history of Muhammad and of early Islam, the more one is amazed at the vastness of his achievement. Circumstances presented him with an opportunity such as few men have had, but the man was fully matched with the hour. Had it not been for his gifts as a seer, statesman, and administrator and, behind these, his trust in God and firm belief that God had sent him, a notable chapter in the history of mankind would have remained unwritten. It is my hope that this study of his life may contribute to a fresh appraisal and appreciation of one of the greatest of the sons of Adam.

Such is a testimony of a biographer who was not favorably disposed towards the Holy Prophet.

REV. BOSWELL SMITH

Head of the state as 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 palace, without a fixed revenue. If ever a man had the right to rule by a right divine, it was Muhammad for he had all the power without the instruments and without its supports.

(Muhammad and Muhammadanism)

On the whole, the wonder is not how much but how little, under different circumstances, Muhammad differed from himself. In the

shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary of Mount Hira, in the reformer in the minority of one, in the exile of Madinah, in the acknowledged conqueror, in the equal of the Persian Chosroes and the Greek Heraclius, we can still trace substantial unity. I doubt whether any other man whose external conditions changed so much, ever himself changed less to meet them.

KAREN ARMSTRONG

A modern research scholar of Islam Karen Armstrong, wrote in her book:

Muhammad had to start virtually from scratch and work his way towards the radical monotheistic spirituality of his own. When he began his mission, a dispassionate observer would not have given him a chance. The Arabs, he might have objected, were just not ready for monotheism: they were not sufficiently developed for this sophisticated vision. In fact, to attempt to introduce it on a large scale in this violent, terrifying society could be extremely dangerous and Muhammad would be lucky to escape with his life.

Indeed, Muhammad was frequently in deadly peril and his survival was a near-miracle. But he did succeed. By the end of his life he had laid an axe to the root of the chronic cycle tribal violence that afflicted the region and paganism was no longer a going concern. The Arabs were ready to embark on a new phase of their history. (*Muhammad – A Biography of the Prophet* page 53-54)

Finally it was the West, not Islam, which forbade the open discussion of religious matters. At the time of the Crusades, Europe seemed obsessed by a craving for intellectual conformity and punished its deviants with a zeal that has been unique in the history of religion. The witch-hunts of the inquisitors and the persecution of Protestants by the Catholics and vice versa were inspired by abstruse theological opinions which in both Judaism and Islam were seen as private and optional matters. Neither Judaism nor Islam share the Christian conception of heresy, which raises human ideas about the divine to an unacceptably high level and almost makes them a form of idolatry. The period of the Crusades, when the fictional Mahound was established, was also a time of the great strain and denial in Europe. This is graphically

expressed in the phobia about Islam. (*Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, page 27).