**The Prophet Muhammad – A Role Model for Muslim Minorities**

Muhammad Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui, (trans.) Abdur Raheem Kidwai
(Markfield, Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2006)

Tauseef Ahmad Parray*

Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), India.
*Corresponding author, Email: tahiertauseefamu@gmail.com

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ABSTRACT**

This book discusses the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions from the minority perspective when they were in Makkah, before the migration (hijra) to al-Medina. In this book, the Makkan period of Prophet's life has been studied and presented as a role model for Muslim minorities. The book is based on original Arabic sources and guides the Muslims extensively how to co-exist peacefully with non-Muslims. It also argues that the basis of jurisprudence for Muslim minorities (fiqh al-'Aqliyyat) must lie in this Makkan phase of Prophet's life, when Muslims were in minority and had no political sovereignty.

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**The Prophet Muhammad – A Role Model for Muslim Minorities** discusses, in detail, the aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions in the Makkah, before his migration (hijra) to al-Medina. Though the title suggests that the author deals with the entire life of the Prophet (pbuh), but he only treats the Makkan period – the initial period of Islam when the Muslims were few and had no political sovereignty. That is, the Makkan phase of the Prophet's (pbuh) life has been studied from the 'vantage-point' of a minority, bringing into sharp relief the character of Islam in a minority context. It also seeks to draw lessons from these experiences for the Muslims minorities of the world. On studying the Prophet's (pbuh) life in this perspective, a role model can be gained for the Muslim minorities scattered in all parts of the world. It might serve as a mirror for them and for deriving guidance from the Prophet's (pbuh) example.

Prof. Siddiqui argues that the Makkan period, a period of around thirteen years of the life of Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions, should be the basis of fiqh for the Muslim minorities (fiqh al-'Aqliyyat) and Muslim minorities must see the role of the Prophet (pbuh) and the early Muslims in that period as a model for them to emulate.
Previously no study has been carried out regarding the divine commands issued to the Prophet (pbuh) in the Makkan Suras (chapters of the holy Qur’an) in the first thirteen years of Islam. How historical events had their bearings on the Prophet’s (pbuh) way has not been explored at all in any book before. Nor any attempt has been made so far to study in the light of above mentioned facts the history of Muslims as a minority, the philosophy of history, and the way of life and patterns of thought. In this sense, this work is unique. It is a fact that in Makkan period Islam had a ‘distinctive message’, which is adequate for Muslims minorities all over the world, providing them a comprehensive code of life.

This book has been written from a refreshing new angle and with different perspective – the Minority perspective. This is claimed by the author in the Preface of the book where he writes that no biographer of his (pbuh) has ever “given thought to this obvious fact” (p. ix).

The book comprises of 7 chapters and conclusion of 24 pages. It also contains a Transliteration Table (p. iv), Preface (pp. vii-xiii), Bibliography (pp. 198-204), Notes (pp. 205-224), and Index (pp. 223-230). These chapters are as follows:

I. ‘Pluralist Society of Makkah’ (pp. 1-23), examines the Makkan pluralist society at the time of Prophet’s (pbuh) birth till his migration to al-Medina. The themes discussed in the chapter are: Makkan Quraysh and other tribes; non-Arab elements in Makkah; multiplicity of faith: Idolatry, Polytheism, Christianity, Judaism, etc. arguing that by the time of Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) advent Makkah was a truly “pluralist and multi-faith society” (p. 2). In its final section, ‘Judaism, Christianity and Islam as perceived by the Quraysh’ (pp. 22-23), it discusses the effect of these faiths especially the Islam on social-life, arguing that the Islam posed a “serious threat” to their faith, as the major articles of the Islamic faith – monotheism, life hereafter and messenger ship – had “changed their religious outlook” which had its deep bearings on their society (pp. 22-23).

II. ‘Evolution of the Muslim Minority in Makkah’ (pp. 24-54), discusses the evolution of Muslim minority or “Makkan Islam” that provides the Prophetic role model for growth of the Islam in a non-Muslim society. It throws ample light on the evolution and development of the Muslim Ummah in the Makkan phase and its consolidation and perfection in Madinan phase. Prof. Sidiqui argues that for thirteen years, Muslims were trained “how to live as a minority and how to develop their society” for achieving progress and success; enabled them to do well in the Madinan phase and helped to produce a “blue print for Muslim minorities”, providing them with a way of life and of constructing their society (p. 26). This chapter has been divided into various sections and the important themes discussed are: Prophet’s (pbuh) career; secret and public modes of da’wah in Makkah; education and training of Muslims; the Islamic centre of Dar al-Arqam and other centers in Makkah and Arabia.

III. ‘The Muslim Community of Abyssinia’ (pp.55-86), examines various aspects of Muslim community of Abyssinia; discussing at length the presence, evolution, and performance of Muslims in Abyssinia. After the emigration to the Abyssinia, the construction of Muslim community in a non-Muslim dominated country was the next inevitable phase (see, p.55), argues author, in the opening of this chapter.

The chapter discusses, in its first part the relations, trade and religious links between Makkah and Abyssinia. The emigration [hijra] to Abyssinia – the main theme of the chapter – and Muslim stance in Negus’s court, mainly based on the reports of Umm Salamah al-Makhzumiyyah – herself an immigrant and a witness to the incident; and it especially “analyzes and delves into the issues faced by Muslim minority of Abyssinia” (pp.62-63). That is, it discusses historical, jurisprudential and other issues on this subject. It also examines ‘Negus’s acceptance of Islam’ (pp.77-78); Spread of Islam in Abyssinia (pp.78-80), the link between the Headquarters and Muslim minority in Abyssinia (pp.80-83).
IV. ‘Formation of the Muslim Community in the Makkah Period’ (pp.87-111), discusses social, economic and political life of Makkah Muslims. It examines social system, Makkah fraternity/brotherhood as a permanent feature of the Islamic social system, collective life: Makkah Muslim community’s utmost love, unity and solidarity; economic life of Makkah Muslim Ummah, the trade of Prophet’s (pbuh) and Muslims; social relations among Muslims and polytheists: trade and matrimonial links, etc. In its final section it discusses political alliances, concluding with the argument that in Makkah period “Muslims had friendly and cordial relations with their non-Muslim relatives” (p.111).

IV. ‘The Defence System and the Right to Defend’ (pp.112-132). In this chapter, Sidiqui argues that it is evident from Sirah literature that Makkah Muslims had the right to “protect their life and honor and to promote their faith and identity”; and there are no evidences in Sirah literature or historical work that point to the “contrary” that Muslims had no such right in Quraysh society (see pp.112-13). The main themes examined in this chapter are: Tribal Code of Security and Support (pp.113-14); Right to Defend (pp. 116-19); The Prophet’s [pbuh] Defensive Measures (pp.119-21); and Quraysh Propaganda: The Three-pronged Makkah Propaganda: (a) Propaganda against the divine origin of the Qur’an; (b) Propaganda against the Prophet’s [pbuh] Character; and (c) Objection against the acceptance of Islam by the poorer sections of the society (see pp.128-30, 130-31, 131-32 respectively).

VI. ‘Defence Agreement’ (pp. 133-153), discusses the political and military agreements/alliances – an organizing principle of Jahiliyya followed in Islamic era – that ensured the safety of the life and property of weaker sections and tribes; war agreements with Madinans; emigration(s) [hijra] to Abyssinia and al-Medina, arguing that in contrast to emigration to Abyssinia, emigration of al-Medina is much more important and has “far-reaching social, cultural and religious implications” (p.149).

VII. ‘Muslim Minority after Formation of Islamic State’ (pp. 154-172), Makkah Muslim Minority after Prophet’s (pbuh) emigration (hijra) to Medina in 622 CE is examined in its first section (pp.155-56); Muslim prisoners and persecuted Muslims; Prophet (pbuh) and Makkah Minority and Muslim minorities among Arabian tribes in next sections; and in final section discusses ‘The Muslim Minority in Abyssinia and the post-Emigration Medina’ (p.172). In this chapter, what the author emphasizes is the fact that ‘there flourished Muslim minorities in various regions, villages, towns, tribes, families and nooks and corners of Arabia’. For him, Sirah writers have paid little attention about the Muslim minority groups of Makkah and other Arabian towns and the same holds true for the Muslim minority in Abyssinia (see pp.154-55).

The Conclusion (pp.173-197) of the book consists of 12 points in which Prof. Sidiqui illustrates that “Prophet’s [pbuh] illustrious life provides the role model for Muslim minority” (p.173). These points besides summarizing all the previous chapters, seeks to get lessons from these experiences for Muslims living as minorities today.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions had close personal ties with several non-Muslims in Makkah so Muslim minorities of modern world must emulate him in this regard and have “excellent social relations with non-Muslims” (p.194) - Prof. Siddiqui advises. Muslims should also devote themselves to communicating Islam to others, not only through da’wah (preaching), but also through practical works such as helping the needy of other faiths, through various forms of social action and welfare provision, which would make others see their faith in action. In other words, it is only by showing themselves to be a blessing for others, a source of comfort and benefit for them, that Muslims, including Muslim minorities, can live up to the demands that Islam places on them. Prof. Siddiqui briefly and comprehensively puts it as

“Muslims all over the world, especially Muslim minorities, have to prove that they are the best community, devoted to the cause of protecting mankind against suffering and blessing everyone with happiness, regardless of caste, colour or creed. Their position is of the best
community and their duty is to serve mankind. … Their presence must guarantee help for everyone, especially of their non-Muslim country. However, this cannot be affirmed merely verbally or by recounting old stories. They have to prove it by their conduct”. (p. 194)

Though the title of the book, ‘The Prophet Muhammad – A Role Model for Muslim Minorities’ reflects as if the author deals with the entire life of Prophet (pbuh) but it merely deals with the Makkan phase, a period of first 13 years. In the Preface, Prof. Sidiqui regards Makkan period as “markedly inadequate” and this phase of the Islamic history as “the phase of subjugation”. Therefore, Siddiqui considers the conventional treatment of Makkan and Madinan periods of Islamic history as downright pernicious. In his words:

“The critical study of Makkan period is markedly inadequate. No biographer of his (pbuh) has ever given thought to this obvious fact that the Makkan period of his life (pbuh) and of Islamic history represents the phase of subjugation” (p. ix, italics added).

Furthermore, in this book the author’s use of such terms as “Makkan Islam”, “Medinan Islam” and “Makkan Muslims” resembles (more or less) with the so called modern terminology – used both by Muslim as well as Islamicists writers – for describing Islam and Muslims: ‘political Islam’, ‘European Islam’, ‘Indonesian Islam’, and ‘Indian Muslims’, ‘American Muslims’, ‘African Muslims’ respectively, to mention only a few. These terms also resemble with the terminology used for the division of Islamic history into three main periods, viz. Classical Islam, Medieval Islam, and Modern Islam.

Regarding the sources consulted, as its references and bibliography indicate, it seems that the author has not referred to some of the most popular and authoritative biographies of the Prophet (pbuh) of modern era – including the works (to mention a few only) by Muhammad Hamidullah (Sira Muhammad Rasulullah: A concise survey of the life and work of the founder of Islam; The prophet of Islam: Prophet of migration); and Abu Bakr Siraj Ad-Din a.k.a Martin Lings (Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources).

Besides these shortcomings, this work – based on original Arabic sources – guides Muslims extensively how to co-exist peacefully with non-Muslims. It examines insightfully how Islam was practiced in Makkah, how Muslims led their lives as migrants in the Abyssinia and how Muslim minorities were treated by Islamic State of al-Medin. In a nutshell, the work is a valuable contribution to the literature of the Prophetic biography (Sirah) in the 21st century.