

**The relevance of Prophet Muhammad's life and teachings in an insecure, fragile world.** By A. R. Momin. New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 2010, pp. 140. ISBN 978-81-89965-08-2 (Paperback)

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The book under review is an extended version of an essay published in *The IOS Minaret* magazine with the same title. Written by a University Grants Commission (UGC) Emeritus Fellow at the University of Mumbai, India, *The relevance of Prophet Muhammad's life and teachings* is a scholarly, but not an academic, book. Instead, it is directed at the general reading public, particularly toward non-Muslims. It seeks to address western prejudices about Islam by presenting a clear and concise picture of Islam, "the fastest-growing religion in the world" (p. i). The book, however, departs from standard presentation of Islam and Muslim. It describes the consequences of globalization, and presents, in a nutshell, historical evolution of Islam and the Prophet (SAW), and explains the relevance of Islam to the contemporary world. The emphasis of the book is not on the historical sketch of Islam or on *sirah*, the detailed life history of the Prophet of Islam (SAW). Instead, its focus is on the relevance of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) life and teachings in the contemporary context. It underscores those aspects of the Prophet (SAW) which would counter the miseries caused by that "paradoxical, Janus-faced phenomenon" called globalization (p. iii).

The book is divided into three chapters titled respectively as "The global scenario," "A beacon for mankind" and "The enduring legacy." It also contains a two-page "Epilogue," excerpts from *Histoire de la Turquie* (1854) by Alphonse Marie Lamartine who has paid a glowing tribute to the Prophet (SAW). It is not clear why Muslims need to rely upon non-Muslims to prove the greatness of their Prophet (SAW). It would have been better to expose the readers to selected authentic biographies of the Prophet (SAW) written by eminent jurists and scholars of Islam.

A rather lengthy but well executed introductory chapter provides the contemporary global scenario by focusing on such ailments as rising “inequality, deprivation and exclusion” in large parts of the world, an atmosphere of “insecurity and vulnerability,” the challenge of climate change and “American imperialism” that have undermined the sovereignty of many countries, “defied international conventions and violated human rights” (p. 27). The author is to be commended for the painstaking care with which he has documented the atrocities caused by globalization and neo-imperialism.

The second chapter accomplishes two things. First, the author tries to prove that unlike other religions, the Islamic sources of the Prophet’s (SAW) biography are authentic and reliable. The sources he treats, albeit briefly, are three. First is the Quran, “the last testament in a long series of divine revelations is a compact text of about 500 pages” (p. 62). The author should be careful in describing the Qur’an which certainly is not a “book” like all other books and it is not about 500 pages. The Qur’an is not a book of narrative records with a chronological order or a logical beginning, middle and end. It indeed is a composite whole with every word and every verse connected to each other. Its size depends upon the font used and the size of the paper. The Qur’an is better described in terms of chapters, parts and verses. The second source is the *hadith* which were “memorized, written and transmitted through an unbroken chain of narrators and transmitters...” (p. 67), and the third is what the author calls the ‘epigraphic evidence’, i.e., official documents including the letters sent by Prophet (SAW) which have been preserved. The second part of the chapter describes how the above three sources portray the Prophet (SAW)’s personality and character including kindness and compassion, generosity and magnanimity, perseverance and steadfastness, simplicity and humility, justice and fairness, and decency and courtesy. In discussing these qualities, the author refers to the negative aspects of these qualities prevalent in the contemporary world. The discussion in this part is too brief and uneven. Some of the qualities are dealt with at length while others are dealt with in a summary fashion.

The final chapter of the book discusses the Prophet (SAW)’s profound and enduring influence on his followers and on successive generations of Muslims” (p. 97). The Prophet (SAW) is a perennial source of guidance, enlightenment and inspiration for Muslims all

over the world. The legacies recounted include ideals of equality, human brotherhood and social justice, human rights and responsibilities, humane vision of tolerance and peaceful coexistence and emphasis on the golden path of moderation. These are the qualities which made Prophet Muhammad (SAW) the most influential person in history and the greatest benefactor of mankind. These are exactly the qualities which are in short supply in the Muslim world. If the influence is profound and enduring then why are Muslims not guided by the enumerated ideals? Thus, the opening sentence of this chapter is not substantiated by the discussion. Recounting the virtues is not the same as showing the enduring influence of a person on the followers.

*The relevance of Prophet Muhammad's life and teachings*, in many ways, is a highly personal work. It does not present any significant research or proffer original material to experts in Islamic studies. However, it is a good piece of work that presents the qualities of the Prophet (SAW) in a lucid and accessible manner. It is based upon the erudition and knowledge of Islam as well as of other faiths. The book, however, is flawed. It is a book without an introduction and a conclusion. There is a preface which laments the divide between Muslims and the rest of the world. This, however, is not an introduction. An introductory chapter would have outlined the focus of the book, the issues it contains and provide a map that outlines what follows in the subsequent chapters. Devoid of a thesis statement, it is not clear whether the book aims at healing the wounds or at ameliorating the problems created by globalization or sheer ignorance about Muslims and Islam. No attempt has been made in the entire book to analyze the causes and consequences of misunderstanding and the way to promote mutual respect among the great religions of the world. An entire chapter on the menaces of globalization has been catalogued but it is not shown how these individual problems could be resolved by resorting to the Prophet (SAW)'s life and teachings identified in the subsequent two chapters. Even though there is no correspondence between the first and the last two chapters, these could have been tied together in a concluding chapter which is lacking. Finally, the book contains references but there is no index which makes it difficult to use.