



**CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PATHOLOGICAL PORTRAYAL OF
HOLY PROPHET (PBUH) WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO D. B.
MACDONALD**

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ABSTRACT

In the western theological literary academia, Nineteenth century has been proved to be the age of shifting over the academic paradigms from theological debates to introducing Muslim studies. In this perspective, the prolific and legendary orientalist Duncan Black MacDonald (1943 A.D.) played a pivotal role in transmitting and establishing chairs for Arabic and Islamic learnings at Hartford Seminary. He himself portrayed the image of Islam through his writings and lectures. He authored several books on different matters belonging from the Western thought, ideology, culture and perspective to the Muslim rituals and creeds. His major writings regarding Islam and its fundamental belief focusing Muslim cultural, social, religious and historical foundations got widespread recognition in the western academia. While delivering his famous series of lectures "Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory"; "Religious Attitude and Life in Islam" and "Aspects of Islam" have a remarkable impression of presenting the image of Islam in an absurd way. In particular, he proclaimed Prophet of Islam as a pathological case. In the first phase of the article, D.B. MacDonald's life sketch has been penned down, while in the second part of the article, his negative portrayal of Prophet of Islam (PBUH) has been described while in the last part of the article, this assertion has been critically reviewed.

Keywords: Duncan Black MacDonald; Holy Prophet; Pathological Case; Orientalism; Sirah; Criticism on Islam; Hartford Seminary.



Prelude:

Duncan Black MacDonald (1943) was a prominent and legendary Orientalist. A high esteemed gratitude is still being venerated to him on his scholarly work and the endeavors in theological aspects and comparative religious studies by the Western research scholars and his successors. He was born on April 9, 1863 at Glasgow, Scotland.¹ His early education is from Glasgow, Scotland and later on he got his "Art Degree" from Glasgow University in 1885. Along with this, he won a prize in English literature.²

During his educational period, he showed his keen interest in educational activities and consequently got several prizes. Later on, he got the degree of B.D. in 1888 and he received the license for missionary activities. He spent a lot of time in Berlin, Germany. He got his degree of D. D. from Trinity College, Hartford in 1909 and later on from his own University of Glasgow in 1920.³

Duncan Black Macdonald started his long career at the Hartford Theological Seminary as an instructor of Semitic languages in the Department of Exegetical Theology at the age of 29 in 1892.

*"In 1892 Macdonald accepted an invitation from President Hartford to become instructor in Semitic languages at Hartford Theological Seminary, and became one of the enthusiastic band of young scholars who were brought to Hartford in the early nineties"*⁴

He was primarily known as a scholar in the fields of Islamic theology and religious experience. According to the Westerns, D. B. MacDonald have highly esteemed status in promoting and proving best to Christian-Muslim relations and is considered as a reliable bound in this direction. He was the first man who introduced special courses for preparing the priests and missionaries who were thrilled and excited to work in Muslim soil. Initially these courses were presented

¹"*The Macdonald Presentation Volume*" is an anthology of different articles which were produced for giving a tribute, honor and pride to Duncan Black MacDonald and admiring his efforts in establishing Islamic chairs and centers for the Western Scholars to make them acquainted with Islamic and Arabic literature. It was presented by his former students at his seventeenth birthday in 9 April 1933 on threshold of the Hartford Theological Seminary. See:

William G. Shellabear, Edwin E. Calverley, Elbert C. Lane and Ruth S. Mackensen (eds.), *The Macdonald Presentation Volume*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1933).

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

in two languages; Arabic and Syrian languages. Besides this, he sent several missionaries to Muslim soils;

“On the academic side of his life Macdonald has had a distinguished career. Early in his years at Hartford he became interested in providing special courses for men who were looking forward to missionary work in Muhammadan lands. In fact the courses he offered in Arabic and Syriac in his very first year, 1892, had this service in prospect. His annual reports to the President of the Seminary, throughout the years of his professorship, showed that MacDonald was, in addition to his work as teacher of Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis, giving an ever increasing amount of time to instruction in the Arabic and Muslim field with a special emphasis on the missionary enterprise. This must in part account for the fact that so many of the most powerful missionaries in Turkey for nearly a generation were graduates of Hartford Theological Seminary”¹

MacDonald also has keen interest in Muslim history and theology. In order to observe the Muslim culture and rituals and fulfill his lust to visit the Muslim soil, he established a foreign tour of Muslim places like Cairo, Palestine, Syria and Beirut. After returning back from this tour, he delivered ten lectures at Hartford theological seminary in 1909 and later on, these lectures were published under the title of “Aspects of Islam”. In these lectures, he gave his observation about what he saw and experienced in the Muslim soil;

“In 1907-1908 Macdonald was granted leave of absence. He spent his sabbatic year abroad, seven months at Cairo, several months in a journey through Palestine and Syria and visits to Beirut and Constantinople. An important fruit of this year was the delivery of the Hartford-Lamson Lectures in 1909 on "Aspects of Islam”²

In 1910, He organized a special school for the missionary activities at Hartford theological seminary that was renamed after some time as “Kennedy School of Missions”. He was appointed as a head of the *Muḥammadan* studies.³

After a period, his health did not remain in good condition so “his state of health compelled Macdonald to drop his work for the Kennedy School though he was ever willing to give informal advice and assistance when requested to do so. And that was at times not inconsiderable.⁴

D. B. MacDonald was a prominent personality of the West. He attained the membership of different theological societies like: the Royal Asiatic Society (Great

¹William G. Shellabear, *The Macdonald Presentation Volume*, 3-4.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

Britain), the American Oriental Society, and honorary member of the Arab Academy of Damascus.¹ Besides this, he delivered special lectures at different places as “He has had the following appointments: American Lecturer on Mohammedanism at the Congress of Arts and Science, St. Louis Exposition, 1904; Haskell Lecturer at the University of Chicago, 1906; Special Lecturer at Wellesley College, 1907, 1909, 1912; at Cambridge Episcopal Divinity School, 1912; Hartford-Lamson Lecturer, 1909; Haskell Lecturer at Oberlin, 1914; Lecturer at Berkeley Divinity School, 1917, 1918.”²

D. B. MacDonald has been considered an epic of Orientalists in the Europe and a true mentor for his key contribution in establishment of Arabic Chairs and series of continues recognition of Muslim academic debates through propagating missionary motivated essence in the Christian literary circles. His prolific scholarship on different Islamic aspects while proliferating a biased conception of Muslim sacred revelation and consequently portraying a disguised deviant image of Prophet of Islam (PBUH) by declaring him a case of the pathology. It is a historical fact that these kind of assertions have not been received newly in the Western academia rather it reaches back to the inception of Islam.

Survey of Literature:

In nineteenth century and first half of twenty century, major portion of Muslim world was occupied by the Western Christian empires. Under influence of these Christian dominants, the evangelists applied various approaches and methodologies to study the life of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The rudimentary methodologies are:

- i. Comparative approach
- ii. Contextual approach
- iii. Evangelical approach
- iv. Pessimist approach
- v. Subjective approach

The foundational avenue behind these exercises was to trivialize Islamic norms, values, religious records and traditions. For example, in subcontinent, Austrian orientalist Aloys Sprenger³ (1813-1897) produced the first ever full length biography of the prophet (PBUH) titled “*Life of Muhammad*” in the westernized

¹ William G. Shellabear, *The Macdonald Presentation Volume*, 5.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ Rauf Parekh, “Literary Notes: Aloys Sprenger and Delhi College: a Part of History Recreated”, *Daily Dawn*, 24 March 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1171434>.

pattern which was published in India in 1851.¹ His biography attracted the attention from his contemporary evangelical orientalist. Sprenger also confirmed classical Christian theme of epilepsy and suggests that like all “*Hysterical people had a tendency to lying and deceit*” and it is epilepsy that causes his nymphomania.² William Muir³ (1905) authored a book titled “*The Life of Mahomet*” in four volumes as a study of life of Muhammad (PBUH) only in the light of information drawn from Islamic and original sources so that Muslims can recognize it. He combined scholarly and missionary objective in this biography.⁴ G. L. Thākūr Dās (1910), authored a full length biography of Prophet (PBUH) titled “*Sīrat-ul-Masīh wa al-Muhammad* (i.e. The Character of Christ and Muhammad).⁵ His second book was entitled “*Zunūb-e-Muhammadiyah*” (Muhammad a Sinner?).⁶ An indigenous author Imād-ud-Dīn Lāhiz’s (1899) wrote a bibliographical sketch of Prophet of Islam “*Tawārīkh-e-Muhammadi*” which was translated in English as “*Life of Muhammad*”.⁷ Pfander’s *Mizan ul-Haqq* (scale of truth) was also another book which deals various aspects of biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Against these biblical biographies of Prophet of Islam (PBUH), a strong reaction from Muslim scholars was presented at that time. Some of them is presented in preceding lines. *Rahmatu-Allah-Kiranvi* (1991) worked against the missionary activities and authored *Azalat ul-Auhām*⁸ (Destroyer of Imaginations) published in 1852-1853 to condemn the objections elevated in the *Mizan ul-Haqq*. al-Ḥasan Mohani (1877) wrote “*Kitāb al-Istifsār*” (Book of Questions). Syed Amir ‘Ali wrote “*Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad*”⁹ published in 1873 to

¹ Aloys Sprenger, *Life of Muhammad from Original Sources* (Allahabad: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1851). For internet edition of the book visit: <https://ia800306.us.archive.org/35/items/lifemohammadfro00aloygoog/lifemohammadfro00aloygoog.pdf>

² *Ibid.*, 210.

³ William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet* (London: Smith, Elder and co., 1931), iii.

⁴ Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 279.

⁵ G. L. Thākūr Dās, *Sīrat-ul-Masīh wa al-Muhammad* (Amritsar: Mission Press, 1897).

⁶ Dās, G. L. Thākūr Dās, *Zunūb-e-Muhammadiyah*, (Lahore: Punjab Religious Book Society, 1905).

⁷ Imād-ud-Dīn Lāhiz, *Tawārīkh-e-Muhammadi* (Lahore: Punjab Religious Book Society, 1904).

⁸ Āl-e-Hasan Muhānī, *Kitāb al-Istifsār* (Lahore: Dār-ul-Ma‘ārif, n.d), 35-50.

⁹ Syed Amir ‘Ali, *Critical Examination of the life and Teachings of Muhammad* (London: William & Norgate, 1873). Available on: <https://archive.org/details/criticalexaminat00alis>.

prove the balanced approach to Islam and the prophet of Islam.¹ The reformer of the time; Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan (1898) condemned in his book *al-Khutbat-ul-Ahmadiyah fi al-Arab wa al-Sirah al-Muhammadiyah*, in the same time which is after that, frequently being published.²

Christian institutions and seminaries of Pakistan have also been utilizing the above mentioned approaches for training their students about Islam. The mainstay of their efforts is to engage them in religious debates, playing a significant role in reviving these methods of study in both Christian as well as the Muslim institutions like the Gujranwala Theological Seminary (founded in 1877). The polemical writings of Barkat-ul-Allah and G. L. Thākūr Dās were used as seminaries & textbooks for a long period of time.³ *Faith Theological Seminary* founded by Kundan Lāl Nāsir (1918-1996) in 1968 is another institute in Gujranwala that provides special training to its students for responding to the Muslims' objections against Christian's faith.⁴ *New Life Institute* established by Poster Navīd Malik⁵ (Multan) provides training on Christian-Muslim polemics. Christian Theological Research Center (Lahore), founded by Rev. Jamīl Nāsir⁶ have organized courses on the study of Islam that are purely apologetic in nature.⁷

MacDonald's Contribution and Literary Works:

D.B. MacDonald like his contemporaries, introduced several books on different matters belonging from the Western thought, ideology, culture and perspective to the Muslim rituals and creeds but introduced three books specially according the Muslim cultural, social, religious and historical basis. These three books are considered as mark entry for him among the Western scholars;

¹ Sayyed Ahmad Khan, *Al-Khutbat-ul-Ahmadiyah fi al-Arab wa al-Sira al-Muhammadiyah*, preface (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy Aligarh Muslim University, 2003), xxi.

² Sayyed Ahmad Khan, *Al-Khutbat-ul-Ahmadiyah fi al-Arab wa al-Sira al-Muhammadiyah* (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy Aligarh Muslim University, 2003).

³ Farmān 'Alī, "Christian-Muslim Religious Education and Society: A Comparison of Gujranwala Theological Seminary and Nusrat-ul-Uloom," M. Phil Diss. (Islamabad: International Islamic University, 2012), 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵ <https://www.newlifeinstitute.org/Home/NaveedMalik> (Accessed 24 July, 2020).

⁶ <http://khudakiawaz.com/guests/guests-we-had/71-rev-dr-jamil-nasir.html>. (Accessed 24 July, 2020).

⁷ Kang San Tan, *Jonathan Ingleby and Simon Cozens, Understanding Asian Mission Movements* (UK: Wide Margins, 2011), 156.

“Those are: Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory¹; Religious Attitude and Life in Islam (1909)²; and Aspects of Islam (1911)”³

D.B. MacDonald also wrote many articles in different famous Encyclopedias like Encyclopedia of Islam, Encyclopedia of Britannica, Jewish Encyclopedia and Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.⁴

Besides these articles, different series of articles were written by D.B. MacDonald as well. These articles had deep influence among the scholars and were published in various learned journals. Among these journals, the most famous are the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, the American Historical Review; the Proceedings of the American Oriental Society, the Yale Review, The Nation, the Moslem World and the Hartford Seminary Record.⁵ Special interest attaches to Dr. Macdonald's connection with the journal called *ISIS: International Review* devoted to the History of Science and Civilization. After 1915, D. B. MacDonald became the associate editor of *ISIS*.⁶ Hence, D. B. MacDonald have keen interest in the Muslim contribution to science, he devoted long period of his life on this matter.

Macdonald conceded that the education of missionaries could not be ignored, and he used it as a vehicle for advancing scholarship in Arabic studies. He wrote to a friend:

“It is my greatest merit as an Orientalist that I discovered that you could smuggle Muslim studies into a theological seminary under the guise of training missionaries”⁷

It is important to note that MacDonald considered himself to have been an objective scholar when he studied the *Sīrah*. We should relate MacDonald's attitude to his time and to the general attitudes toward Islam that have prevailed

¹Duncan Black MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner, 1903). This book consists of three parts, respectively first is “constitutional development”, the second one is “development of jurisprudence” and third is “Muslim theology”.

²Duncan Black MacDonald, *The religious attitude and life in Islam: being the Haskell lectures on comparative religion delivered before the University of Chicago in 1906* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, Illinois, 1909). Subjects: This book consists of following subjects: Addresses, essays, lectures on Islamic history and culture, General Description of Islam Religion and various aspects of Religious life in Islamic world.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duncan_Black_MacDonald (Accessed 01 Aug, 2010).

in Western circles. For example, the deep influence of earlier Orientalists on him and his close association with contemporary Orientalist circles is implicit in his statement.¹

Portraying Prophet Muhammad as a Pathological Case:

The question of the status and prophet hood of the Prophet Muḥammad has been one of the most crucial and controversial issues, in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. It has been observed that D.B. MacDonald has the same ideas and approach about the personality of Holy Prophet Muhammad as his predecessors adopted. To explain the Prophet's personality, MacDonald echoes previous European attacks on the Prophet's personality in a more lurid and sophisticated manner, using a psychological approach. First he raises a question about the personality and physical condition of Muḥammad (PBUH) in his book "Aspects of Islam" as under:

"What of Muhammad himself? Is it possible to express him in his essential personality and character with certainty in a word?"²

Like many other Orientalists who specialized in the prophet's *Sīrah* and the subject of revelation, the writer also proceeds to tell that the prophet's revelation was the product of his sub-conscience. He considers that Muhammad was not a normal human being; rather he was a pathological case as he describes:

"I think that it is. If there is one thing that is certain about him, his character, his personality, it is that he was essentially a pathological case. But for that fate, he, too, might have been one of the great poets of the Arabian renaissance. As it is, you might describe him as a poet manqué. He was spoiled for poetry by his prophet-ship..."³

Duncan Black MacDonald presents his hypothesis concerning the psychological and pathological character of the Prophet's condition as follows:

"It is evident that, from comparatively early days, he had trances; fell into fits in which he saw and heard strange things. There came to him voices, either, apparently, in a trance condition or when he was awake. Driven by fear for his soul, he had got into the habit of retiring into desert recesses

¹ Muhammad Benaboud, "Orientalism on the Revelation of the prophet: The Case W. Montgomery Watt, Maxime Rodinson, and Duncan Black MacDonald", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 3, no.2 (1986), 320.

²MacDonald, Duncan Black, *Aspects of Islam* (New York: The Macmillan Company, L.T.D., 1911), 60.

³ *Ibid.*, 60.

and there spending days in solitary prayer. So there the voices came to him; there he even saw figures – vague, dim – “¹

According to Duncan MacDonald, he was in trances and was detained in grasp of an odd appearance in fear for a period and he was compelled to ponder in the question that what was the nature of that fear? What was with him, is whether the voice of God or some spiritual entity? He says that the nature of the fear was psychological;

“... the fear fell upon him, "What are they? What is the matter with me? Is this of God? Or am I possessed by some spirit?"²

He is of opinion that it seems that some spirit possessed him and possibility of this thought is quite certain as he says that “now, the conception of possession by a spirit was a high possibility.”³ In order to giving the evidence about his so-called hypothesis that the Prophet was possessed by some spirit, he narrates a fabulous story explaining the spirit identity as under:

“Indeed, Muhammad was thus explained, at first, by the people around him as possessed by one of the jinn, the genii of the Arabian Nights of our childhood. When a soothsayer was called upon to tell where some stolen or lost thing was; where some stray beast had wandered; or what was going to be the outcome of some enterprise, it was one of the jinn that entered into the soothsayer, possessed him and spoke through him. The idea lay very near Muhammad, then, that he might be possessed in the same way by some spirit or other, probably evil”⁴

Contrary to it, he (the Prophet) considered that he is not possessed by a spirit or an evil, rather he considered himself the successor of the old prophets and is in the chain of prophets. As MacDonald says:

“But we find that he gradually reached the belief that what was in him was not an evil spirit. Instead of being possessed by one of the jinn, he is – and this is the great fact – in the line of the inheritance of the Old Testament prophets”⁵

He also says:

“At any rate, to him there comes at last a certainty that it is not one of the jinn that has spoken to him; but that he is a successor of the long line of prophets”⁶

¹ MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, 64.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

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Finally he says that Muhammad was pathological case and the status of the revelation came to him, is like the thought and feelings of a trance medium person, along with he accepts that he was not an impostor as he states in his book:

“But what are we to think of him as he was in himself... this is to be said: – Emphatically, Muhammad was not in his beginnings a self-seeking insincere impostor – of that we can be assured as a fundamental fact. He was a pathological case. His revelations came to him in trance and, like all trance-mediums, he had strangely perverted ideas; but an impostor he certainly was not”¹

Like other Orientalists, MacDonald does not ready to admit that Muhammad was an apostle of God rather he again narrates that Muhammad was a pathological case and his mind creates absurd notions as in preceding lines he is of view:

“If we look at him, further, on the side of philosophy, his case is equally strange, equally contradictory. Again we must go back to our clue, to the essentially pathological state of his mind.... His mind, on one side, was of the crassest concreteness”²

MacDonald has tried to prove emphatically that (God forbids) the Prophet Muhammad was a pathological case and suffering mental disorders.

If the views of Duncan Black MacDonald which have been discussed under this subject, are analyzed, then it would be summarized as under:

- Muhammad was a pathological case and suffering from some mental disease.
- His appearance was most likely as that of soothsayers.
- He was a trance-medium person and his so-called revelation came to him in his trance conditions.

Idealization of Revelation and Its Judeo-Christian Bases:

He (PBUH) have knowledge of that the sacred books have been revealed to the prophets. After acquiring a bit knowledge from those sacred stories concerning to the old scriptures, he made the history of revelation. As MacDonald says under:

“He knew that the Jews and Christians had their sacred books and that they looked back upon an ordered series of prophets, one following another. What his mind then did was this. These scattered fragments that he had picked up of the history of the Old Testament, he proceeded to weave together into a whole. To these, too, he made additions. It is evident that in his time there were traditions of prophets who had come to the Arabs themselves. These he wove together with the stories of the Old Testament

¹ MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, 72.

² *Ibid.*, 75.

in strange, broken fragments and confused, anachronistic order, and made them into what has since become to the Muslim Church its canonical history of revelation”¹

D.B. MacDonald thinks that *Muḥammad* (PBUH) derived information which exists in older scriptures from different places as have been described above.

Imitation from Previous Scriptures:

D.B. MacDonald describes an example which throws light on the similarity of conditions between the older scriptures and Islam as under:

“What is supposed to be, what traditionally, at least, is said to be the first revelation to him runs in almost the same words as the words of Isaiah: “The voice said, ‘Cry!’ and I said, ‘What shall I cry?’” So there came to Muḥammad the angel messenger telling him “Cry!” and he said, “I cannot cry!”²

D.B. MacDonald declared that he (PBUH) made the story deriving from what he (PBUH) heard from these places. In this story, he gave himself central position as he says:

“He carried that away, and then with that as a center and with his broad idea of the story – generally a very inaccurate idea – as material, he built up for himself again what he had heard”³

In this story, what is his place? He narrated in another place which has been passed in preceding lines above.⁴ He proclaims that he (PBUH) have not any intelligible thought about what has been in older scriptures. As he says:

“Yet I do not mean by that that he had any very clear conception of what being an Old Testament prophet meant”⁵

According to MacDonald, this situation remained still as long as *Muḥammad* remained alive, whatever the difficulties the Muslims found, consulted these with *Muḥammad* and they gained guidance from him but after the death of him, this situation did not remained as it were before his demise. After his death, they were bound to gain guidance from *Qur’ān* and from what *Muḥammad* said and did. Along with at that time, they started looking towards the older scriptures of Jewish and Christian. MacDonald says as under:

¹ MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 65.

³ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴ He described as “and what of his part in it? He was simply the last of the prophets; the renewer of the one primeval faith in this age of darkness; the restorer of the truth to mankind.” MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, 219.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

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“But when he died, they had no longer that absolutely infallible guide. When they wanted to hear what had been the story about this or that person in past generations; when they wanted to know what was the exact bearing and force of this or that theological truth; they could not go to him any longer. They were driven back to the Qur’ān; they were driven back to the memory of what he had said; but they began also to fall back upon those same despised Jewish and Christian Scriptures”¹

Examining the possibility of whether Muḥammad was one of the “soothsayers”, a poet or an impostor, MacDonald concludes that he was a mystic who was unable to present his “wavering thought” as he says:

“He dealt in the most bizarre details of the heavens and the earth and the abyss and all the creatures therein.... Muhammad was a mystic; he was adrift on the mystic sea; he could not have compared, defined nor explained his wavering thoughts”²

In this way, MacDonald describes that Islam has not its own fundamentals. It stands on the conception, rituals, basis and ideological approach of the older religions and their textual treasure. Hence the Islam is a dreadful and horrible religion and their followers are in grave darkness, so it is the responsibility of Western scholars to provide guidance to Muslim World as he says:

“There lies before the Muslim peoples a terrible religious collapse. Islam as a religion is not holding its own against the unbelief that is flooding it from the European civilization....And as education spreads and deepens, as history vindicates for itself its place, as the moral feeling becomes more watchful and sensitive, so the legend of Muḥammad will crumble and his character be seen in its true light. And with Muḥammad the entire fabric must go. It is then for the Christian schools and preachers to save these peoples, not only for Christianity but for any religion at all”

According to D.B. MacDonald’s views and assumptions, the result of all this discussion is that:

- Islam is a horrible, awful and dreadful religion.
- Islam as a religion has not its own basis rather it is derived from older scriptures.
- The concept of the revelation is not an Islamic concept rather it is derived from older scriptures. He (the Prophet Muḥammad) constituted this concept to give himself the sole character in the texture of the history of the prophets.

¹ MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, 222.

² *Ibid.*, 75-76.

- After the demise of Muḥammad, Islam has lost his marvelous peculiarities. So it is the ethical and moral responsibility of followers of older scriptures to accumulate and prevent the Muslim world.

Critical Review of D.B. MacDonald's Assumptions:

The biography (*Sīrah*) of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) has attracted the interest of scholars in both the Islamic world and the non-Islamic world for centuries. Vast literature exists on the subject in Arabic and in numerous European and Asian languages. The reason for this interest are numerous and complex, ranging from religious motivations to ideological and political motivations. The Qur'ān and the sayings and actions (*Hadith*) of the Prophet (PBUH) are the two most important sources of acquaintance for the studying of his *Sīrah*.

The Prophet's biography has also attracted great interest also in the West. During the nineteenth century, the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) was the object of attack by Christian priests and propagandists, whom we might call the original Orientalists. He was denigrated, his figure was deformed and he was given insolent names like Mahoun.¹ He was accused of being an imposter, a Christian heretic and a pathological case. It was during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, however, that he attracted the greatest interest among the Orientalists. A vast literature developed "to discover" Muḥammad (PBUH).²

Duncan Black MacDonald considers the Prophet (PBUH) as a pathological case but he doesn't explain his ideas in detail. Anyhow, if we proceed to investigate this matter, we find other Western scholars' concept about the personality of the Prophet that he was epileptic patient as A. T. Welch is of opinion that the graphic descriptions of Muḥammad's condition at these moments may be regarded as genuine since they are unlikely to have been invented by later Muslims. According to Welch, these seizures should have been the most convincing evidence for the superhuman origin of Muḥammad's inspirations for people around him. Others adopted alternative explanations for these seizures and claimed that he was possessed, trance-medium, a soothsayer, or a magician. Welch states it remains uncertain whether Muḥammad had such experiences before he began to see himself as a prophet.³ Edward Sell (d. 1932 A.D.) says:

¹ William Montgomery Watt, "Muhammad in the Eyes of the West", *Boston University Journal* 22, no.3 (Fall 1974), 61-69.

²As a result, the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) was denigrated and ridiculed but also admired and venerated. European scholars of different nationalities gave him much attention. The German scholars were pioneers in studying the Prophet's (PBUH) *Sīrah* and the scholars of various nationalities followed them, including British, French and Italian.

³ A. T. Welch, *Encyclopedia of Islam, article: Muhammad* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1986), 4:400.

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“Muhammad was not in his beginning a self-seeking, insincere imposter of that we be assured as a fundamental fact. He was a pathological case, his revelations came to him in trance and like all trance mediums, and he had strangely perverted ideas”¹

The first attribution of epileptic seizures to Muḥammad (PBUH) comes from the 8th century Byzantine historian Theophanes who wrote that Muhammad’s wife "was very much grieved that she, being of noble descent, was tied to such a man, who was not only poor but epileptic as well."²

The Orientalists have presented their non-scientific claims in the name of science. They did so in order to delude the ignorant who is ignorant of the symptoms of the epileptic disease and ignorant from the state of revelation of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). A consultation of medical literature about epilepsy will quickly expose the blunders of the Orientalists and make the clear differences between the epileptic conditions and the conditions of the revelation on the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH).

What is Epilepsy?

We, at first, investigate the disease of epilepsy and its symptoms. Jerome Engel Jr. the Director of the Epilepsy Telemetry Unit Seizure Disorder Center, United States, says:

“The word epilepsy is derived from the Greek verb “ἐπιληψία” (epilamvanein) (“to be seized,” “to be taken hold of,” or “to be attacked”)...Epilepsy is, of course, not a specific disease, or even a single syndrome but rather a broad category of symptom complexes arising from any number of disordered brain functions that themselves may be secondary to a variety of pathologic processes”³

He (Jerome Engel Jr.) further says about the symptoms of epilepsy:

“The terms convulsive disorder, seizure disorder and cerebral seizures are used synonymously with epilepsy: they all refer to recurrent paroxysmal episodes of brain dysfunction manifested by stereotyped alterations in behavior”⁴

¹ Edward Sell, *The life of Muhammad* (Chennai: The Christian literature society, 1913) 38.

² Frank R. Freemon, “A Differential Diagnosis of the Inspirational Spells of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam”, *Journal of Epilepsia* 17, no. 4 (1976), 423-427.

³ Engel Jr. Jerome and Timothy A. Pedley, *Epilepsy: a comprehensive Text book* (New York: The Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, 2008), 1:11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:1.

Epilepsy is a brain disorder in which clusters of nerve cells, or neurons, in the brain sometimes become signal abnormally. Neurons normally generate electrochemical impulses that act on other neurons, glands and muscles to produce human thoughts, feelings and actions. In epilepsy, the normal pattern of neuronal activity becomes disturbed, causing strange sensations, emotions, and behavior, or sometimes convulsions, muscle spasms and loss of consciousness. Such are the symptoms of epilepsy as science has established them.

During the nineteenth century, as Islam was no longer a political or military threat to Western society and perceptions of epilepsy changed, the theological and moral associations with epilepsy were removed; epilepsy was now viewed as a medical disorder.¹

Contrary to it, European scholars could not succeed to have themselves apart from their prejudice about the personality of the Prophet Muḥammad. They still ascribe to the Prophet Muḥammad the strange fits especially at the time of his revelations. D.S. Margoliouth (d. 1940 A.D.) says:

“The notion...that he was subject to epilepsy finds curious confirmation in the notices recorded of his experiences during the poem of revelation - the importance of which is not lessened by the probability that the symptoms were often artificially produced. That process was attended by a fit of unconsciousness, accompanied (or preceded) at times by the sound of bells in the ears or the belief that someone was present: by a sense of fright, such as to make the patient burst out into perspiration: by the turning of the head to one side: by foaming at the mouth: by the reddening or whitening of the face: by a sense of headache”²

State of the Revelation and the Epileptic Fits:

The graphic difference between the condition of the revelation and epileptic fits are as described under:

1. In revelation, an intense and penetrating consciousness establishes with full knowledge, conviction and contact with the supernal authority that enables the prophet to report and convey his revelation. While epilepsy, on the other hand, stops cognition. It reduces its patient to a mechanical state devoid of either feeling or sensation.
2. The fit of epilepsy leaves the patient utterly without memory of what has taken place. In fact, the patient completely forgets that period of his life and can recollect nothing that has happened to him in the meantime because the processes of sensing and thinking come to a complete stop during the fit. That

¹ Jerome, *Epilepsy: a comprehensive Text book.*, 1:1.

² David Samuel Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons Press 2003), 46.

was not the case at all with the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) at the moment of revelation, for his cognitive faculties used to be strengthened, rather than weakened and do so to a superlative degree till now unknown by the people who knew him most. Muḥammad (PBUH) used to remember with utmost precision what he received by way of revelation and recited it to his companions without a flaw.

Moreover, revelation was not always accompanied by paroxysms of the body. Much of it took place while the Prophet was perfectly conscious, during his usual wakefulness. The several verses of the Qurʾān revealed in wakefulness of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) i.e. one example of these verses is the surah “al-Fath” that was revealed upon the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) while he returned with sincere companions (R.A) from Makkah to Madina after signing the Pact of *Hudaybiyah*.

Epilepsy in the Prophet’s (PBUH) Time:

The historical fact is that the disease epilepsy along with its symptoms was already well-known among the contemporaries of the Prophet (PBUH). In fact, the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) himself was already aware of epilepsy, as it is demonstrated in this Ḥadith as narrated by Bukhārī as ‘Atā bin abī Rabāḥ says:

”قَالَ لِي ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ أَلَا أُرِيكَ امْرَأَةً مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ فُلْتُ بَلَى قَالَ هَذِهِ الْمَرْأَةُ السُّودَاءُ أَتَتْ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَتْ إِنِّي أُصْرَعُ وَإِنِّي أَتَكَشَّفُ فَأَدْعُ اللَّهَ لِي قَالَ إِنْ شِئْتِ صَبِرْتِ وَلَكِ الْجَنَّةُ وَإِنْ شِئْتِ دَعَوْتِ اللَّهَ أَنْ يُعَافِيكَ فَقَالَتْ أَصْبِرُ فَقَالَتْ إِنِّي أَتَكَشَّفُ فَأَدْعُ اللَّهَ لِي أَنْ لَا أَتَكَشَّفَ فَدَعَا لَهَا“¹

“Ibn ‘Abbās said to me, “Shall I show you a woman of the people of Paradise?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “This black lady came to the Prophet and said, ‘I get attacks of epilepsy and my body becomes uncovered; please invoke Allah for me.’ The Prophet said (to her), ‘If you wish, be patient and you will have (enter) Paradise; and if you wish, I will invoke Allah to cure you.’ She said, ‘I will remain patient,’ and added, ‘but I become uncovered, so please invoke Allah for me that I may not become uncovered.’ So he invoked Allah for her”

If he was the patient of epilepsy, then his contemporaries well aware of this disease, they must have charged this disease to him but they did not raise this charge against him. It is vital evidence that he was not an epileptic patient.

Perplexities Regarding the Prophet’s (PBUH) Personality:

Duncan black Macdonald has not any clear idea about the personality of the

¹ Bukhārī, Muḥammad bin Ismāʿil, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Al-Riyāḍh: Darussalam, 1999), ḥ: 5652.

Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). Whenever he speaks on his personality, he dangles, utters the confused and controversial statements and loses himself in the labyrinth of hypothesis by distorting the facts. At several places, he also follows the footsteps of the heathen Arabian contemporaries of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) and says that "Muhammad was thus explained, at first, by the people around him as possessed by one of the jinn".¹ He sheds doubts on the personality of Muḥammad by saying that "Now, the conception of possession by a spirit was a high possibility."² Again he repeats his this notion as "The idea lay very near Muhammad, then, that he might be possessed in the same way by some spirit or other, probably evil."³ Another time, he says that "He spoke the language of the soothsayers; in every respect his external appearance was that of the soothsayers."⁴ At one place, he says "Muhammad was a mystic; he was adrift on the mystic sea; he could not have compared, defined nor explained his wavering thoughts."⁵ Again another place, he passes the similar statement as "Muhammad was a true mystic, was afloat upon that shoreless sea, without guide, without ballest."⁶ Sometimes, he sheds doubts on the personality of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) considering him a poet as he says that "Muhammad was simply a God-intoxicated poet."⁷ In his third lecture under the title "The Qur'ān; the present Muslim attitude towards Muhammad", he very aggressively advances on the behavior of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) by casting suspicion that "Emphatically, Muhammad was not in his beginnings a self-seeking insincere impostor."⁸ As a brief detail of D.B. MacDonald's views on the personality of the Prophet has been given, they are all contradict and controversial according to one another. These views show that the vision of D.B. MacDonald is not clear about the Prophet (PBUH), his personality, his ideology and his aim.

Concluding Remarks:

Duncan Black MacDonald was a prolific writer who left behind him a number of books on different theological aspects. He, as renowned personality of the West, tried to explain the nature of revelation, the prophet's condition during the revelation and the nature of Qur'ān. Under the influence by his historical

¹ MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, 64.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

³ *Ibid.*, 64

⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 185

⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 72

Critical Reflection on Pathological Portrayal of Prophet

background, environment, training, ideological tendencies, political views and religious believes, he reflected the Prophet as the pathological tolerant and considered the condition of the Prophets Muḥammad as a sick person whose claim of receiving the revelation is the result of his prolonged meditation in cave Ḥira. His discourse with Allāh almighty, conducted during this meditation, was basically the result of his pathological fits. Secondly, he further proceeds that at Muḥammad's time, the superstitions and art of soothsaying was common, so he took a vivid effect of these different kinds of superstitions on his mind. Similarly, Muḥammad's claim of angle communication is based on the same phenomenon. If we critically analysis the views of MacDonald, we may draw the conclusion out of his absurd allusions that he had only been imitating the same false attributions which were already presented in the life time of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). Subsequently, we can maintain an Islamic point of view regarding his fictitious portrayal of Prophet of Islam (PBUH) insisting to proclaim as if he was a pathological case is absolutely nullified and an erroneous stand point.



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