
**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF MICHAEL A. COOK'S THOUGHTS
REGARDING SEERAH OF PROPHET (PBUH)**

سیرت رسول ﷺ کے بارے میں مائیکل اے کک کے افکار کا تجزیاتی مطالعہ

Hafiz Muhammad Nawaz

MPhil Islamic Studies, Lahore Garrison University Lahore

hafizmnawaz786@gmail.com

Hafiz Ahmad Saeed Awan

PhD Scholar, Islamic Studies Department, GC University, Faisalabad

hafizahmadsaeed@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Waris Ali

Assistant Professor, Islamic Studies, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore

mwarisali@lgu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine and critically analyze the views of Michael A. Cook concerning the Seerah (biography) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The research explores his interpretations of early Islamic history, the initial challenges faced by the Prophet, and the Prophet's role as both a religious and political leader. Additionally, the study offers a critical assessment of Cook's arguments related to the compilation of the Quran, the biography of the Prophet, and the historical, political, economic, and social aspects of Islam. This approach is employed to understand the underlying reasons, viewpoints, and motivations behind Cook's interpretations. A comparative and critical analysis of Cook's views on the Seerah of the Prophet is conducted in light of the Holy Quran and the portrayals presented by other writers. The primary objective of this comparative, analytical, and critical study is to engage in logical and scholarly evaluation rather than to disprove any individual, initiate interreligious controversy, or assert the superiority of any particular source. Rather, the purpose is to seek guidance from this sacred subject matter.

Keywords:

Michael A. Cook, Seerah (biography) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), early Islamic history

Introduction to the Topic:

The Seerah, or biography, of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is a profound and inspiring narrative that has shaped the course of human history. It chronicles the life, teachings, and mission of the final Prophet of Islam, whose message continues to guide billions of people worldwide. The Seerah provides invaluable insights into the origins and development of Islam, offering guidance and inspiration for Muslims worldwide. Muhammad's life and legacy continue to inspire millions of Muslims worldwide, serving as a model of moral and spiritual excellence. His teachings have had a profound impact on various aspects of human civilization, including law, ethics, and social justice. Through military expeditions and

conquests, he successfully spread the message of Islam and established it as the dominant religion in Arabia. In his final years, Muhammad continued to guide the Muslim community, undertaking the Farewell Pilgrimage (Hajj) in 632 CE, where he delivered his final sermon. He passed away peacefully in Medina in 632 CE.

The Seerah provides crucial understanding of Islam's beginnings and growth, guiding and inspiring Muslims globally. It serves as a model for living a righteous and virtuous life, sheds light on the historical and social context of Islam's emergence, and inspires Muslims to strive for spiritual excellence and emulate the Prophet's character.

Michael A. Cook is a renowned British historian and scholar of Islamic history. Born in 1940, Cook has dedicated his academic career to understanding the complexities of Islamic civilization. He is particularly recognized for his work on the early Islamic period, the history of the Ottoman Empire, and the study of Islamic law and theology. Cook's scholarly contributions have significantly shaped the field of Islamic studies, offering fresh perspectives and challenging conventional interpretations. His rigorous research methods, combined with a deep understanding of primary sources, have earned him respect among both academic and popular audiences. Cook's work often delves into the historical, social, and political contexts of Islamic thought, providing valuable insights into the evolution of Islamic ideas and practices. He is a renowned historian and scholar of Islamic studies, has made significant contributions to the field of Islamic history. His book, "Muhammad," offers a critical analysis of the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This analysis delves into Cook's interpretation of the Seerah, examining his historical methodology, his perspective on key events and figures, and the controversies surrounding his work.

This analysis will critically assess Cook's approach, highlighting both its strengths and weaknesses. It will explore how his work has been received by both Islamic scholars and Western academics, and discuss the broader implications of his interpretations for understanding the historical and religious significance of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

By critically analyzing Cook's work, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of his perspective on the Seerah and its influence on contemporary Islamic scholarship.

Importance of the Topic:

The Seerah, the biography of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is a cornerstone of Islamic faith and history. It chronicles the life, teachings, and mission of the final prophet sent by God to humanity. Understanding the Seerah provides invaluable insights into the origins and development of Islam, offering guidance and inspiration for Muslims worldwide.

Michael A. Cook's "Muhammad" offers a unique perspective on the Seerah, challenging traditional interpretations and raising important questions about the historical context and authenticity of certain events. By analyzing Michael A. Cook's work, we can gain a deeper understanding of the Seerah and its significance. It allows us to critically examine traditional interpretations, engage with diverse perspectives, and strengthen our understanding of Islamic faith.

Literature Review

Several scholars have critiqued Michael A. Cook's interpretations of Islamic history and the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad.

Hallaq critiques the tendency to label Michael A. Cook as a "neo-Orientalist" solely based on

his early work, "Hagarism." While "Hagarism" was indeed a radical departure from mainstream Islamic studies, Cook's subsequent work has shown a more nuanced and balanced approach.

Fred Donner criticizes Michael A. Cook's book "The Koran". According to him it is very short introduction is a comprehensive and informative work, despite its compact size. While it offers valuable insights.

Karl Ernest critically scrutinizes methods that scholars of the Qur'an apply to their research, with a specific emphasis on the major contributions of Michael Cook. The first part of this study starts with a survey of the historiography of Qur'an Studies particularly with the methodological approaches that have significantly contributed to the study of the Qur'an. The narration of prominent works in Qur'anic Studies covers the development of methodologies through the ages by analyzing the crucial contributions of various scholars in the field.

Moreover, the study investigates the intellectual achievements of Michael Cook, looking into his conceptual framework and landmark discoveries. Through the application of highly evolved techniques such as text-linguistic analysis, textual exegesis, and comparative religious studies, it evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Cook's method. It contrasts these with the strengths and weaknesses of alternative methodologies. With this inquiry, we advance the field of Qur'anic Studies by examining Cook's method and also pave the path for further research.

His study seeks to launch discourses on the methodology within the field. This study will encourage researchers to engage in profound and multidisciplinary studies exploring the Qur'an from varied approaches.

Cook's View about Muhammad

In Michael Allen Cook's writing there are different comments about the Prophet Muhammad's life and religion. In his book, "Muhammad" he writes in chapter number seven in these words: "If the external sources are in any significant degree right on such points, it would follow that tradition is seriously misleading on important aspects of the life of Muhammad, and that even the integrity of the Koran as his message is in some doubt. In view of what was said above about the nature of the Muslim sources, such a conclusion would seem to me legitimate; but it is only fair to add that it is not usually drawn."¹

Here is the point which is so much clear for readers how orientalist think about Prophet Muhammad, Quran and other basic sources of Muslims. Michael Allen Cook gave his conclusion that if a person relays on traditional sources for the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad definitively he will be misled by it. According to author his life span and information related to his character is not real. Generally, a person reads biography of him as Prophet and his introduction to the whole world according to his personality but Michael writes this is misled information. In the same way author objected the integrity of Quran as well.

Cook considers the Quran as oldest Islamic source but criticizes that it does not give a continuous biographical narrative about Muhammad's life. He admits Ibne Ishaq and other sources of Seerah are biographical collections but were compiled after his death. Author considers reliable sources other than the Muslims like Christians and Jews writers and their scriptures as he writes them external sources. He does not bother how Muslims collected their basic sources like Quran and Hadith but he only focuses on one thing which has been mentioned.

Michael Allen Cook did not consider the personality of Muhammad as successful Prophet

because he writes about his character not real as people read about him in books. In other words, his personality is not that as Quran, Hadith and books of Seerah describe him. He should have to give him personality sketch according to his understanding but he only denied information related to him in books.

Interpolation in Quran:

According to Muslim belief Prophet Muhammad received The Holy Quran from Allah through revelation but Michael Allen Cook raised questions its authenticity as he put allegations about the personality of Muslim's Prophet.

"Yet alongside this conservative editing we also find evidence of a much freer handling of the raw materials of the Koran. This presumably reflects an earlier stage in their history. There are, for example, clear cases of interpolation. Thus, in the fifty-third sura, the basic text consists of uniformly short verses in an inspired style, but in two places this is interrupted by a prosaic and prolix amplification which is stylistically quite out of place."²

Author writes Quran, a holy book of Muslims is not authentic but fabricated. Upon his claim he gives argument from its text, in surah number fifty-three named Surah Al-Najam verses are very short but in whole surah there are two places where are long verses. Author made his argument on the base of this hypothesis that every surah of Quran has same length of verses, that is why, he objected on surah number fifty-three. He considered it interpolation in verses of Quran which actually made the personality of Prophet controversial and object able.

Islamic View

According to true teachings of Islam there is not any rule for length of Quranic Surahs and verses. Neither any Muslim Scholar nor any order of Islam support to that claim which has been written by Cook. Evidence of this mentioned thing is the whole Quranic arrangement. There is not pat rule about the length for surahs as well as the verses of it. There are so many long and short surahs in the Holy Quran to prove the claim of author wrong.

Political Leader:

Cook in his book admits Prophet Muhammad as a successful political leader. He divides his life into two portions; first half of his life is before migration in Makkah which was his homeland and second was the era of his life after migration in Madina where he spent last decade of his life. His successful story as political leader he describes in his book named Muhammad in these words:

"It was no accident that Muhammad achieved this in Arabia, with its predominantly pastoral and stateless tribal society. He had the good luck to be born into an environment which offered scope for political creativity such as is not usually open to the religious reformer. But it was clearly more than good luck that he found in this society the key to a hitherto virtually untapped reserve of power."³

Many leaders of world came in politics accidentally and became famous but author considers Muhammad as successful not by accident but by his luck. According to Cook it was his luck to be born in that situation where was space for politics and he got that chance properly and became successful in it. Author considers that condition suitable for politics but not favorable for religious reformer. In other words, he considers him in his writing successful only in politics but unsuccessful as Prophet.

William Montgomery Watt

In orientalism there is a big name of William Montgomery Watt and he is another

scholar in this field who presented the same result in his book, which has been mentioned earlier by Michal Cook. He wrote a book, “Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman” in which he concluded that Muhammad was a person with creative imagination, worked at deep levels of society. He did not consider Muhammad’s all proclaims are true, but he accepted that Muhammad gave a better religion to millions of people in this world. On the other hand, he writes that the turning point of his career was the foundation of the Islamic state at Medina and he became a successful statesman.⁴

Michael H. Hart

Michael H. Hart is an American writer, astrophysicist and he wrote a very famous book, “The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History”. In this book he put at number one Prophet Muhammad in list of hundred persons. He focused in this book on two things, first he collected the one hundred names from the five thousand years of human history who influenced world widely then he made list of those names who was the most influential among them. He gave answer why did he rank the name of Muhammad at first.

“My Choice of Muhammad to lead the list of 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 on 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.”⁵

Michael Hart admits the personality of Prophet Muhammad as successful on both levels, religious and secular. Hart is Christian by his religion but he analyzed the human history on real basis, he did not only get result but admitted it. According to Hart, Prophet Muhammad was not only successful in his own life but still he is powerful and influential. Michael Hart’s conclusion is answer to all orientalist who did not admit this reality in his writings and books. Prophet Muhammad was not only most successful person in human history but he gave the complete code of life for the people of whole world. Michael Hart rightly accepted the reality that Prophet Muhammad was successful at secular level along with religious circle. According to Muhammad’s religion, Islam, there is complete system for politics as for other areas of life because this is basic requirement of society. To establish the true Islamic welfare society is the only solution to all the problems which humanity is facing today. In it no legislation can be done at any level whatsoever, which is incompatible with the Quran and the Way of the Prophet (PBUH). Even hundred percent democratic opinion and votes on any issue cannot make something lawful which has been forbidden by The Quran and the way of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). In the same way hundred percent democratic opinions on an issue cannot make something forbidden which has been permitted by God and His Prophet (PBUH).

A person does not know exactly what is good or bad by result for him as it can be seen that many constitutions have been made by men but after some time, they required change. On the other hand, God knows better what is good for his creature. As The Holy Quran says, “Allah knows and you do not know”.⁶ We can't dare to challenge the above-mentioned statement. We cannot implement a system other than the one sent down by ALLAH and implemented and proven as perfect already by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

We accept that ALLAH knows and we don't know and of course our limited knowledge is nothing as compared to the Infinite knowledge of ALLAH, so how dare we try to implement a

non-Islamic system instead of implementing the Islamic welfare system. It is necessary to give protection even to other than the humans in Islamic state. If a dog dies hungry, head of the state will be responsible for negligence of duty. The detail of Islamic Welfare State is described in detail in upcoming paragraphs.

Islamic Political System

The base of Islamic Political System is on three principles, without understanding of them it cannot be identified. First of all, Monotheism, which means there is only one God, who is creator and owner of this world and its creatures. Sovereignty belongs to Him and has authority to give order to do or avoid any act. Only He deserves to be worshiped and obeyed. Our personalities with the help of these we exist, our parts of bodies which help us to do something, our authorities which are practiced by us on materials, even these materials which we possess were not produced by us, only God gives us without any other's help.

Therefore, to set our purpose, to select activities to consume our energies, to make boundaries to practice our authorities are not our or any other's responsibilities. It is right of God, who created us having these powers and authorities and gave many things of this world in our possession. This principle of Monotheism strongly negates the sovereignty of man. Any person, family, group, nation or the whole people of earth do not have right to rule. It only belongs to God and only He has right to legislate rules of life.

The second most important thing of Islamic political system is prophethood, which means God sent his messages for his people through his Rasool (Prophet). We get two things from him. One of them is book in which directly God describes his orders and other is his authentic explanations (Hadees) which Prophet (PBUH) gives through his quotations and actions. All those rules which are base for the system of human life have been described in His book; according to it Prophet (PBUH) made, ruled and established that system as example. These are two things upon which an Islamic state is based.

The third most important principal of Islamic political system is Khilafat (assistance), which means man is an assistant of God in this earth and uses his authorities which have been given by Him in His land. When a person makes anyone his assistant in his property, four things remain important between their relations.

- Landlord, not his assistant, is actual owner of property.
- Assistant works in it according to instructions of his owner.
- Owner gives limited authorities to his assistant and he cannot cross them.
- Assistant cannot change in it according to his desire but is bound to follow his orders.

These four conditions are necessary for assistance; these four things come in mind whenever this word is spoken. If any assistant crosses his limits, he will not be eligible for this post. In the same way Islam announces man as assistant of God with these conditions. According to Islam, State is Khilafat (assistance) of man under the sovereignty of God, which is bound to work in its limits in the light of His instructions.

This explanation is enough to understand that there is not any particular person, family or group to claim for its eligibility but every person, who has firm belief on Islamic fundamentals, is eligible, if he is ready to perform it. This is the point from where the concept of Islamic Democracy comes. Every person of Islamic society has right and authority of it

equally. Anybody is neither superior in it nor has authority to deprive any other person from it. The parliament will be elected to run the affairs of a state by the conformity and suggestions of these persons. Anybody who will get confidence of the people of Islamic society will be able to become the head of state.

In the same way if leader loses the confidence of people, he will have to quit that post. That is why, Islamic democracy is complete democracy as it should be but there is a difference between it and western system. Their political system is based on “Democratic Sovereignty” but its base is “Democratic Khilafat (assistance).” In western system people make their rules by their majority but in Islamic political system Muslims are bound to obey the rules which have been described by God and His Prophet (PBUH). In short, western democracy is free to do legislate with the help of their majority but Islamic democracy is bound to follow the rules of God.

Islamic View about Purpose of the State

The purpose of Islamic state has been described in the book of God. The purpose is to establish those good deeds to those God wants to see in it and in the same way to eliminate those things which are not liked by Him. Its purpose is to run administration of country not to fulfill the desire of any group of people. Islam gives them a big goal to be achieved in shape of prosperity of citizen and eliminate the things which will be caused the anarchy in society. In this way, Islam gives principles about things to be adopted or left so that it can be established in any time period and environment. It is necessary to give protection to other than the humans. If a dog dies hungry, head of the state will be responsible for negligence of duty.⁷

Ethical values should be adopted in every profession of life according to Islam. That is why it makes policy to state that its political system should be based on justice, truth and purely honesty. It does not bear lie, fraud and injustice even for country and national interests. Dignity, truth, and justice are base in the relationship between head and population of state. In the same way link of other countries will also rely on these qualities. Islam orders to its followers and state as well to fulfill their promises, to make equal standers to give and take anything, to do what you say, to say what you do, to fulfill your duties with your rights, to use power to establish justice not injustice, to consider your power as guardianship and keep this thing in your mind that you will be asked about it in the life of hereafter.

Rights of Citizens

Islam has rights for every man who lives within the Islamic state or not, is friend or enemy, and makes necessary its respect in every condition because there is respect of human blood which cannot be flooded without reason. It is not allowed to harm women, children, old citizens and wounded in any condition. The respect of woman is also necessary and cannot be ignored. Hungry needs food, naked wants cloth, wounded and patient persons deserve treatment even though from an enemy nation. These and some other rights are given to every person by God and are basic rules of Islamic state.

In the same way the rights of citizens are not limited only for those people who live in the premises of Islamic state but any Muslim who lives in any corner of the world will be considered its citizen as he will enter in it. All Islamic countries of the world will have same citizenship and any Muslim will be eligible for any higher post within these countries in spite of any difference of race.

Minorities in Islamic State

There are also some rights which are essential part of Islamic constitution for non-

Muslims who live in Islamic country. According to Islamic terminology Non-Muslim in Islamic territory is called “Zimmi” (protected). It means his all things including his personality, home, business, honor are as respected as any Muslim citizen’s belongings. In the eyes of law all will be treated in the same way, there will not be any distinction in it but judiciary will not interfere in the personal laws of non-Muslims. They will have freedom in their beliefs and religious activities as well.

There will not be any restriction for non-Muslims to preach their religious teachings and will also be allowed in their limits to give their views about Islam. These rights are the essential part of Islamic constitution with some others which will be applicable till non-Muslims remain in the boundary of law. If they involve in illegal activities, they will not be considered in the protection of Islamic country. If any non-Muslim country mistreats its Muslim community, in response any Muslim country will not have any authority on this base to misbehave against its constitution with its non-Muslim community. Even if all Muslims out of the Islamic country are killed, it will not have right to kill any innocent non-Muslim within its boundary.

Head of State

According to Islam, there will be head of state for the administration of the whole territory. All those men and women who will believe the all articles of Islamic constitution will be able to give their point of view in the selection of head. The criteria for him will be the maximum grip of Islamic knowledge, practices upon it and having ability to control the issues of the country. There will be parliament selected by people to support him to solving problems and he will be bound to get their views in issues. He will remain on his seat with his complete authorities as till he will have confidence of his people. In the same way he will have to quit, if he loses their assurance.

Every citizen is allowed to give his views about head of state and his policies. No legislation will be done repugnant to the Quran and Sunnah in any Islamic country. The laws made by God and his Prophet (PBUH) are to be followed; any parliament does not have authority to change them even after approval of majority. The committee of scholars remains active in parliament to make laws about things which come on surface with the changing of environment and scientific activities.

Judiciary

The judiciary is selected by government in Islamic state but remains free to announce its orders according to its constitution. Every citizen having high or low post, belonging to any religion, race or group of community is equal for it. Even if, it calls the head of state, he is bound to come like any other person in front of court to defend himself.

The all arguments can be concluded that Islam is complete code of life in which political system is very much important. It has all those aspects which are necessary for the whole society. The concept of Islamic political system competes the current perception of national welfare state. That is why, different scholars including orientalist praise this system and consider Prophet Muhammad as successful political leader, who gave the concept of Islamic political system.

Summary:

Michael Allen Cook, in his book, “Muhammad, critically examines the Prophet's life, questioning the authenticity of Islamic sources and suggesting interpolations in the Quran. He views Muhammad as a successful political leader due to the favorable conditions of tribal

Arabia but not as a true religious prophet. He relies on external non-Muslim sources and downplays Islamic traditions. In contrast, scholars like William Montgomery Watt acknowledge Muhammad's political success while questioning his religious claims. However, Michael H. Hart, in *The 100*, ranks Muhammad as the most influential person in history for his unmatched success on both religious and secular fronts.

It presents the Islamic political system based on monotheism, prophethood, and Khilafat, emphasizing divine sovereignty over legislation. It details citizen rights, protection of minorities, and ethical governance, contrasting it with Western democracy. Islam is shown as a complete code of life, independent of external influences and focused on justice, welfare, and divine guidance.

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