

## **Karen Armstrong's works on the Life and Mission of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.): A Critique of Her Distortion of Historical Truths**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Karen Armstrong is a well-known prolific writer on Christianity, Islam, and Prophet Muhammad. She appears in her writings very much objective. In her books on the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) "Muhammad: A Biography of The Prophet" and "Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Times" she generally appears to be attempting, unlike many Orientalists, to create soft image of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). Methodologically her works may be considered highly appreciable but from historical angle she seems to have distorted certain evidence related to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). The basic reason for such lapse in her books is that she did not consult the original and basic authentic sources of Islamic history. This article analyses where she faltered in her presentation of historical truths concerning the Last Prophet (s.a.w.).*

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Karen Armstrong belongs to an Irish family migrated to Birmingham. She served as Roman Catholic Nun for seven years. She graduated in literature from Oxford University in London University. Then she joined a public girl school for girls.

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In 1982 she became a freelance writer and broadcaster. She also worked as Commentator for religious matters in UK and USA for a long time. She has done a lot of work on different religions, like Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. She is known to the world due to her liberal religious thinking, while writing about SÊrat-ul-NabÊ (S.A.W). She defends the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) and compared him and Islam with other two most closely related religions like Judaism and Christianity. She also tries to remove misconception and misgivings of western society about Islam and HaÐrat Muhammad (S.A.W). She also tries to prove that Muhammad (S.A.W) is the Prophet for our times and forever because he is a timeless prophet. She demonstrates that Muhammad's life a pivot point in History and he has genuine relevance to the global crisis we face today. While writing about the biography of the Holy Prophet, She as a western writer tries to create a soft image of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) and Islam in the eyes of western society through her sincere efforts. In spite of her great sincere efforts there are many objectionable points found in her books of SÊra'h like:

Firstly, she has given wrong information about the year of elephant.

She says:

“Then in 547 he led an army to Mecca to prove that the city was not after all immune from war fare but it was said his war Elephant fell upon its knees when it reached the outskirts of the Mecca and refused to attack the Haram Impressed by this miracle the Abyssinians returned home.”<sup>[1]</sup>

While in fact the year of elephants was 570 in spite of 547.

Ibn e Sa'ad says:

ولد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، يوم الاثنين لعشر ليالخلون من شهر ربيع الأول وكان قدم أصحاب الفيل قبل ذلك للنصف من الحرم فبين الفيل وبين مولد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، خمس وخمسون ليلة.<sup>(2)</sup>

Ibn e AbbÉs says:

ولد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، يوم الفيل، يعنى عام الفيل.<sup>(3)</sup>

Ibn e Isláque says:

ولد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يوم الاثنين، لاثني عشرة ليلة خلت من شهر ربيع الأول، عام الفيل.<sup>(4)</sup>

Abu Zur'a also mentions:

"ولد النبى: يوم الفيل".<sup>(5)</sup>

These facts show that the year of the birth of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) was 571 AD in the year of elephant.

Secondly, she says in her book '*Muhammad A Prophet for Our Times*':

"We know practically nothing about Muhammad's early life before he began to receive what he believed were revelations from God at the age of forty". [6]

Again this point is objectionable because the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) is the only personality in human history who's every moment of life is present in the books of Hadith and Seera'h because he is a model for mankind till the Day of Judgment.

As Allah says in Qura'n:

لقد كان لكم فى رسول الله أسوة حسنة<sup>(7)</sup>

Thirdly, she says:

“Muhammad (S.A.W) Ibn e Abdullah retired with his wife and family to a cave Mount  $\times ir\acute{E}$  in the Mccann’s Valley to make a spiritual retirement.”[8]

While Hadiths-e-Nabvi $\acute{E}$  tells that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) retired alone to cave Mount  $\times ir\acute{E}$ .

Hazrat Ayesh $\acute{E}$  (R.A) says:

أول ما بدى به رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم من الوحي لرويا الصالحة فى النوم فكان لا يرى رؤيا الا جاءت مثل فلق الصبح ثم حب إليه الخلاى وكان يخلو بغار حرا اى فتحنت فيه فوات العدد قل ان ينزع إلى أهله ينزو لذلك ثم يرجع إلى خديجة فيتزود لمثلها حت جاء الحق.<sup>(9)</sup>

In this Hadith the word **يخلو**, indicates a complete loneliness. Basic sources tell that Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) went to mount  $\times ir\acute{E}$  alone for meditation while his (S.A.W) wife H $\acute{E}$ zrat Khadija’h (R.A) and children stayed in the valley.

Fourthly, Karen says:

“We would surely consider him to be one of the greatest geniuses the world ever known to create a master piece to found a major religion and a new power are not ordinary achievements.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Here Karen creates a misconception that the Holy Qura’n is a manmade book when she mentions that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) has created a master piece while in reality the Holy Qura’n is not a creation of man. It is purely the word of Allah. As Allah says in the Holy Qura’n at different places in different Surah’s like:

وإنه لتنزل رب العالمينه. نزل به الروح الامين.<sup>(11)</sup>

In another surah Allah says:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ (12)

Again in surah Al-Hajar Allah says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ. (13)

Fifthly in the same book she writes:

“When the first official compilation of the Qura’n was made in about 650AD some twenty years after Muhammad’s death the editors put the longer suras at the beginning and the shortest which include those revealed earliest to the prophet at the end. [14]

Here Karen shows misconception regarding the arrangement of Suras in the holy Qura’n in 650 AD by the editors. Here are some points. Firstly the compilation of the Holy Qura’n was not completed in 650 AD rather it was completed before the death of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W).

Secondly she mentions that the arrangements of the SurÉs are done by the editors, while it is quite obvious that the compilation and arrangements of SurÉs in the Holy Qura’n is done by Allah himself rather than any human being. Even before the death of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) there were many preservers (Hafiz e Qura’n) who learnt Qura’n in the same sequence as is present now.

Thirdly we have come to know through Hadiths that before the death Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) revised the Holy Qura’n twice with Hazrat Jibrael (AS) in the same sequence. So, there is no doubt about the compilation of the Holy Qura’n as to having longer SurÉs in the beginning and smaller in the end by the editors.

In her book “Muhammad, A Prophet for our times”, she says:

“One of the Pagan Arab noticed a crowd of Muslims which included members of both Aws and Khazraj chatting together.”<sup>[15]</sup>

In fact he was not a “Pagan Arab”. Ibn-e-HashĒm says that he was a Jew named ShĒs bin QĒis. Allah revealed these verses for him.

قل يا اهل الكتاب لما تفكرون بآيات الله.<sup>(3)</sup>

The word **يا اهل الكتاب** indicates that in fact he was a Jew.

Sixthly, she writes about Hazrat Muhammad (SAW):

“They could all remember Muhammad as a little boy, living on the charity of his relatives.”<sup>(17)</sup>

The last Prophet of God Hazrat Muhammad never fed on charity of his relatives rather we see that after the death of his mother his grandfather Abdul MuĒalib (who was the chief of clan “QurĒish”) brought him (SAW) up in a very loving and affectionate way. After his death his uncle Abu Talib took his responsibility and supported him with love. Narrations tell:

لما توفي عبد المطلب قبض أبو طالب رسول الله إليه فكان يكون معه، وكان ابو طالب لا مال له، وكان يحبه حباً شديداً لا يحبه ولده، وكان لا ينام الا إلى حبه، يخرج فيخرج معه، وصبا به ابو طالب صابة لم صباية لم يصب مثلها بشيء، قط، وقد كان يخصه بالطعام.<sup>(18)</sup>

Al though Karen has written about Seera’h of our holy Prophet (SWA) in great details but she has missed, on the other hand some events like: During Hijrat-e-MadĒnĒ she has not mentioned about Siraqa bin Malik, BarĒda’h Aslami and Tent of Um-e-Ma’abad.

Some events which she mentions in her books are not found in basic books of Seera’h like:

After the treaty of ḤudabiyÉ'h "Tradition has it that just as they started to leave ḤudabiyÉ'h a sudden wind lifted the mound of black hair and carried it into Mecca as a sign that God had accepted their sacrifice."<sup>(19)</sup>

In short we can say that the misrepresentation of some of historical evidences is because she has not consulted the primary sources of Islamic history and Seera'h. Overall she has tried to portray the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) as the true messenger of Allah and Islam as a peaceful religion before the West. As she says:

"Muhammad: a complex man, who resists facile, ideologically – driven categorization, which sometimes did things that were difficult or impossible for us to accept, but who had profound genius and founded a religion and cultural tradition that was not based on the sword but whose name – "Islam" signified peace and reconciliation."<sup>(20)</sup>

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