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Orientalists' Views on the Prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ: A Critical Study of W. Montgomery Watt's Arguments

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Abstract

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It is a very unfortunate and unrealistic attitude of the West that most Westerners do not recognize and appreciate the great services of Islam and its Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in uplifting humanity. Rather they are spreading hatred and enmity against Islam and its Prophet in the West and European societies even in today's modern era of scientific research and education. One of the Orientalists of English and Christian background, W.Montgomery Watt in his book "Muhammad at Mecca" has established so many arguments against the Prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, to prove that he ﷺ was not Prophet of Allah (SWT). Out of these arguments two namely (a & b) had been analyzed in my previous article published in one of the issues of the same journal (Al-Adwa) and now we are going to analyze the following two other important arguments critically or scientifically in this research paper:

- c) Who told Muhammad ﷺ that "thou art the Messenger of God"?
- d) The Issue of Recitation (i.e Meaning of Ma Ana Biqari).

The conclusion of this research work is that the

declaration about Muhammad (ﷺ) was a Messenger of God declared through Jibril at the very initial stage of revelations or *Wahy* and not directly by God Himself or by the physical appearance of God. Similarly, the conclusion of his argument about the reading and writing ability of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is that he (Watt) is lacking about the basics of Arabic grammar. Consequently, he (Watt) wrongly claimed that the Prophet (ﷺ) knew the reading and writing of the Arabic language and hence reading and writing of the Quran.

Introduction

With reference to the previous writing “Research Methodology of Montgomery Watt: Case study of Muhammad at Mecca”¹, which was obviously the first part of a two-portion article, we have analyzed some views of Watt regarding the Prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) under his two arguments (a & b) out of five (a, b, c, d, e). Watt’s other two arguments (c & d) will be analyzed in this article. Whereas the last argument (e) will be analyzed in a separate research article afterward.

Before analyzing the arguments (c & d) we summarise the previous article here to have the right enough connection and bases for the more detailed critical study of these arguments of Watt regarding the Prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ). Before analyzing these arguments (c & d), also it seems essential to clarify in the beginning that Watt’s approach to dealing with these issues of the Sirah is not just sociological but theological also. In other words, we can say, in the real sense, his approach is theologically-sociological or sociologically-theological. The summary of the previous article is as under:

- The Prophetic experience of Muhammad (ﷺ) began with “true dreams in sleep” (not with “true vision” of God in the wake, as Watt tried to prove with the help of his own version or division of a continuous tradition of Ibn Shahab Zuhri into 12 independent or separate sentences). This division or separation ultimately changed or distorted the facts, as the Arabic language is a very technical and highly delicate language whose sentences can not be cut out in a haphazard manner.
- In support of the above claim about the Prophet’s physical seeing i.e. “true vision” of God, Watt uses mostly the arguments or grounds of his predecessors particularly his teacher Richard Bell. These arguments emphasize that the person who saw the Prophet

(ﷺ) at the beginning of *wahy* was God. In favor of this claim, Watt argues that the mention of Gabriel in the Quran was a later phenomenon or the name of Gabriel has been mentioned in Medinan verses of the Quran, not in Makkan verses.² To prove this claim, Watt wrongly used the tradition of Ibn Shahab Zuhri and wrongly interpreted verses 1-18 (excluding or skipping verses 11 & 12 which do not favor his preconceived views) of Surah Najm. However, it has been proved or clarified that Jibril (عليه السلام) has been mentioned in Quran in more than three verses or places in Makkan Surahs by his names (or by some other names of Jibril e.g. *Al-Rooh, Rasoolun Karim, Muta'n thamma Amin*) or pronouns or adjectives in previous research article of this researcher.³ Similarly, Jibril has been mentioned in the same tradition of Ibn Shahab Zuhri by *Al-Haq*. This tradition was in continuous passages which have been divided by Watt into twelve separate or independent sentences by adding some words or conjunctions by himself in its English translation.

- Again, following his teacher, Watt interpreted verse 10 (فاوحى الى) (ﷺ) as a supportive argument for his same view about the “vision” of God by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). He argues that the subject (فاعل) in the verbs (فاوحى ، ما اوحى) is not Jibril, although he recognizes that in the expression (الى عبده), it surely means “His (God’s) servant”, so Allah or God is definitely pronoun in (عبده), in his view, if we make Jibril as the subject in both the verbs (فاوحى ، ما اوحى) then the construction becomes awkward.⁴ In fact, this is not an awkward construction. Rather, it is an emphatic and rhetorical style of Arabic of the Quranic language which can be found in many places of the Quran. For example:

القارعة ○ ما القارعة ○ وما ادركك ما القارعة ○⁵

واذا بطشتم بطشتم جبارين⁶

و فعلت فعلتك التي فعلت⁷

Above all these linguistic styles of the Quran which are also relevant and significant here, the opinion of a competent and very famous scholar of Islamic Studies (Quranic & Hadith Sciences) is highly concerned in this regard. Abul Fida Ismail in his commentary book of the Quran i.e. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* very authoritatively said that:

(فاوحى إلى عبده ما اوحى) معناه فاوحى جبريل إلى عبدالله محمد ما اوحى، او فاوحى الله الى عبده محمد ما اوحى بواسطة جبريل وكلا المعنيين صحيح)⁸

(So he revealed to His servant whatever He revealed) means Jibril conveyed to Allah's servant Muhammad ﷺ whatever he conveyed. Or, the meaning here could be: Allah revealed to His servant Muhammad ﷺ whatever He revealed through Jibril. Both meanings are correct).

In this clear-cut commentary note, *Ibn Kathir* describes that both meanings are correct. And the results of both meanings are the same, that is, *Wahy* has been sent from God to His servant Muhammad ﷺ through His angel Jibril (جبريل).

After this analysis of Watt's views about the vision of God (which was actually the vision of Jibril) by the Prophet Muhammad's physical eyes, the concluding remarks of an eminent Muslim scholar, Hafiz'Imad Uddin Abul Fida Ibn Kathir, are very significant here. He (Ibn Kathir) in his commentary of the Quran (i.e. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*) explaining the initial verses of Surah Najm in the light of the Companion's traditions, expressed his final remarks saying that the person coming down from the horizon towards the earth, suspended and reached very near to the Prophet was definitely Jibril (جبريل). He further opined that this vision of Jibril in actual condition by Muhammad ﷺ happened at the beginning of *wahy*, and long before the Night Journey of the Prophet to the heavens. In other words, the vision of Jibril in a powerful manner by the Prophet happened two times i.e. one in the early period of Prophetic experience (i.e. in 610 CE) and another during the *Ma'raj* or *Isra* or the Night Journey event (i.e. in 621CE) of Muhammad ﷺ, at *Sidrat-ul-Muntaha*, which is the last year of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Makkan life.⁹

Ibn Qayyim, in his valuable book of Sirah (i.e. *Zaad ul Ma'ad*), also discussed the research work of Ibn Taimiyah regarding whether the Prophet ﷺ saw God with his physical eyes or not. So he (Ibn Qayyim) said that the conclusion of Ibn Taimiyah's research in this regard was that neither there was any evidence about the physical seeing of God by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ nor any senior Companion of the Prophet ﷺ was convinced about this physical seeing. Further discussing two sayings of Ibn Abbas (رضي الله عنه) in this regard, he said that the first saying was not negating the second one. After these concluding remarks of Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Qayyim explained that the meaning of verse 8 of Surah Najm did not imply the event of *Ma'raj* because, in this verse of Surah

Najm, the closeness and coming very closer was meant for the closeness of Jibril not for the closeness of God, as Watt is trying to prove. In fact, the context of the verses also witnessing that this was Jibril's closeness with Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and the Prophet did not perceive this vision or closeness of Jibril as the closeness of God.¹⁰

Now we proceed further to analyze and reply to the presumptions or misunderstandings or wrong perceptions of Watt under the following subtitles or arguments (c & d) in his book "Muhammad at Mecca". As Watt has raised the following issues from rational, religious, and psychological perspectives, so we will try to reply to the same perspectives. These three issues and their factual answers are as under:

- c. Who told Muhammad ﷺ that "Thou are the Messenger of God"?
- d. What is the meaning of "ما أنا بقارى"? Or The Issue of Recitation?
- e. Through which source did Muhammad (ﷺ) receive the *Wahy* (through human consciousness or through metaphysical force)? Or the form of Muhammad's Prophet's consciousness, or the psychological perspective of Watt for conveying *Wahy*.

But, argument (e), that is, the psychological perspective of *Wahy* requires a full-fledged research article, so it will be analyzed in the next research article in the next Issue of Al-ADWA.

Now we analyze (c & d) arguments of Watt in detail.

c) Who told Muhammad (ﷺ) that "Thou art the Messenger of God" ("You are the Messenger of God") Jibril or God?

Watt is of the view that the words "Thou art (i.e. you are) the Messenger of God" occur four times (i.e. in four passages of Al-Zuhri's report as divided by Watt in B, C, D, and I). He says that in the last two passages, that is, D and I the speaker is Gabriel. In the first passage (i.e. B) the speaker is mentioned by 'the Truth' or God (الحق) and in the second passage (i.e. C) the speaker is implicit in verb (أتاني) i.e. "he came to me" and said "You are the Messenger of God".¹¹ Watt is also of the view that the situations are different in these four passages which raise the question whether these are "four versions of one event" which have become, for any specific reason, different features of the same event?¹² Watt repeats his same observation in favor of his view that Jibril "is not mentioned in the Quran until much later"¹³. This is again due to his lack of knowledge of Arabic grammar, as it has been discussed in detail under previous subtitle of "Muhammad's Visions". Here once again he tries to create doubt

on the basis of wrong assumption saying that “the mention of Gabriel is suspicious at this early stage” or “there is no mention of Gabriel in the Quran until the Medinan period”. In fact, Watt’s knowledge of the Quran and Arabic grammar is very limited. As we have discussed or proved in the previous sub-title that the speaker in these four passages (B, C, D, I) is throughout Jibril.¹⁴ Similarly, we have mentioned earlier that in Makkan Surahs, Jibril, if not mentioned by his name, but he (Jibril) is definitely mentioned in the Quran by some different terms or as pronouns or adjectives.¹⁵ Thus the text does not support the assumption made by Watt, and the rules of Arabic grammar do not advocate the assumption. Moreover, if Watt relies on the Quranic evidence only, regarding Jibril, then his own approach will be inconsistent because he himself has considered traditions of Al-Tabari’s version of Al-Zuhri’s report. Thus if traditions support that Jibril is mentioned in the Makkan period or in the initial period of *Wahy*, then it must be sufficient for Watt, but here he is casting doubt even about the tradition of Al-Tabari. It might be noted here again that the passages, which Watt shows as if by Zuhri, are in fact made by Watt out of Zuhri’s continuous narration. Such divisions of the continuous text made by Watt just show that “speakers” in passages B, C, D and I are different. In research methodology, it is called the mutilation of facts.

As far as the question of Watt “whether these passages are four versions of one event, that somehow or other have developed different features?” is concerned, Watt does not answer this question, perhaps to maintain the doubts that which he has been trying to create while analyzing the issue of Prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ). Its answer is very simple the context of the narration is itself witnessing that passages from A to G are all continuous in Al-Zuhri’s report from ‘A’isha (رضي الله عنها), and the narration up to the end of passage E describes the different circumstances or situations including the “call” and the conveying of the ‘Iqra’ passage. In other words, we can say that Imam Ibn Shahab al-Zuhri is reporting from ‘Aisha (رضي الله عنها) a collective event of declaring the Prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) which consists of some different events. But these are not different versions of one event as Watt suggests. This collective event from ‘A’isha’s report is summarized almost in an orderly manner here as under:

- i. Beginning of revelation or Prophetic experience was through al-ru’ya al-sadiqah (true dreams in sleep),
- ii. These dreams used to come like the breaking of dawn.
- iii. Then solitude became dear to him and he would go to a cave on

- Hira for engaging himself in tahannuth, a kind of worshipping Allah (SWT) before the declaration of his (ﷺ) Prophethood.
- iv. Then he (ﷺ) saw angel Jibril in human form in wake at Hira, where Jibril asked Muhammad (ﷺ): Recite.... Then Prophet went to his wife Khadijah (رضي الله عنها) and informed her about this new frightening situation in which he (ﷺ) was afraid of losing his life, as he (ﷺ) expressed to Khadija (رضي الله عنها). After this first revelation of the Qur'an, there was a gap of a few days. During this gap, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was highly worried and thinking of throwing himself from the mountain.
 - v. Then the Messenger of Allah saw the angel (who was used to coming to him at Hira) "on a chair between the sky and the earth." This was the first time to see Jibril in a very powerful manner and in a form other than human in the wake. Thus Jibril appeared and said, "O Muhammad, I am Gabriel, and 'thou art the Messenger of God' (or you are the Messenger of God)."

These are the different circumstances or short events of a single event of the declaration of Muhammad's Prophethood by Jibril not four different versions of a single event (as suggested by Watt), which was narrated by Zuhri in a continuous account, but when it has been divided by Watt into several independent sentences, created complications in understanding its actual account or event. It must be noted here that the *post-tahannuth* experience has not been described in the traditions as well as in the Quran as al-ru'ya al-sadiqah (i.e. true dreams). So this is another contradictory view of Watt that comes out when he tries to achieve his goal of isolating the "original call to be a Messenger" from "vision".¹⁶ We have discussed this "vision" or "appearance" (of Jibril), not God in detail in the previous article. Here it is emphasized further that all the accounts of al-Zuhri's report clearly say that the "call" came in the wake of the solitude or retirement at Hira, and the "vision" or "appearance" (of Jibril) in a very powerful manner was simultaneous, which can not be separated from the call. Why Watt wants to separate the "call" from "vision"? Or why he slips away from his previous view in which he acknowledged the sudden or unexpected appearance of "the Truth" for supporting his assumption of the "Vision of God"? In fact, Watt has been very inconsistent with his own views, especially regarding important matters of the Prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), so he is well determined to cast doubts about Islamic faiths, Quranic teachings, and Sirah authentic traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Now let us

see how Watt is inconsistent in this regard. Following are some of his main statements regarding the “Call” to be a Messenger and “Vision” of God (not the vision of Jibril).

a) “the ‘experiences’ belong to two types... (passage) B, perhaps together with C, describes his ‘original call to be a Messenger’, whereas D and I ‘appear to be a reaffirmation of this to reassure him’ in a time of anxiety.”¹⁷

Contrary to his previous views here Watt has conceived that “the call” and “vision” are separate (without providing any substantial evidence or logical reasoning for this isolation)

b) “If B refers to the original call, what is its relation to the visions?”¹⁸

c) Watt is also of the view that: The traditional accounts suggest that the visions came during the retreat, but in general, the comparative dates of the different features of Muhammad’s call are uncertain. “sometimes the appearance is said to be unexpected”,...¹⁹

Similarly in Watt’s own translation, division, and arrangement of the words of the same quoted report of Al-Zuhri, he said in passage B:

d) “At length “unexpectedly” the Truth (not with small ‘t’ as a proper noun) came to him and said, O, Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God.”²⁰

It is clear from this statement of Watt that the appearance or the vision of “Truth” was sudden and unexpected, and Watt considered this appearance or vision in the sense of God (as he wrote “Truth” instead of truth), as we have discussed earlier.

In his statement, ‘c’ Watt has also acknowledged that “sometimes the appearance is said to be unexpected”. Although it (the appearance or vision of Gabriel) was not “sometimes” unexpected it was always unexpected and sudden, and simultaneous to the call means Jibril always used to appear suddenly and come with the message of God.

Thus, if we compare Watt’s above statements (a) and (b) with (c) and (d), there seems contradiction. On the one side, he accepts the unexpectedness of the vision or appearance (either of God or Gabriel). On the other, he said, ‘what is the relation of the original call (to be a Messenger) to the visions? Certainly, the original call took place at Hira to announce that Muhammad (ﷺ) is a Messenger of God, and this announcement by Gabriel happened when he (Gabriel) appeared suddenly in wake at Hira or when the vision of Gabriel by Muhammad (ﷺ) took place at Hira. If we think over the main purpose of this original call or

vision, the issue becomes clear that the call (to be a Messenger of God) and the vision are inseparable. The purpose of the call and simultaneous vision was the commencement of the *Wahy* or Divine Message in the form of the first five verses of the first passage of *Wahy* conveyed to Muhammad (ﷺ) by Gabriel.²¹

Now a question raises if Watt considers this original call (i.e you are the Messenger of God) separated from the vision of Gabriel, Is there any passage or verses of the Message which have been conveyed to Muhammad at the time of this original call? Watt did not mention any passage of the Quran at the time of this original Call. Otherwise or without the passage of the Message the original call is purposeless.

In fact, the reason behind this separation of the call from the sudden vision of Gabriel by Muhammad (ﷺ) is to sustain the theory of contemplated reform and of ambition and preparation of Muhammad (ﷺ) to become a Prophet {we seek God's refuge about such baseless accusations upon the innocent Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)}.

Thus the separation of the fact of the suddenness from the call was necessary for Watt to prove that Muhammad (ﷺ) was trying to become a prophet for personal ambition and not chosen by Allah (SWT) and hence not a true Prophet of God. Another interrelated target of Watt here is to create doubts in the minds of the believers (either true Christians or Muslims).

d) **Meaning of *Ma Ana Biqari* (ما أنا بقاري) or The Issue of Recitation**

Under the sub-heading of 'Recite' Watt writes that the words '*ma aqra'u* (i.e. ما أقرأ) in al-Zuhri's tradition must be translated as 'I can not read (or recite)'; whose explanation seems to be (in Watt's view) by the words *ma ana biqari* (ما أنا بقاري) i. e. 'I am not a reader or reciter' in another version of the tradition. He further says that Ibn Hisham makes a distinction between *ma aqra'u* (ما أقرأ) i. e. 'I can not read or recite' and *ma dha aqra'u* (ماذا أقرأ) i.e. 'what shall I recite?' Then Watt emphasizes that "this latter (i.e. *ma dha aqra'u*) is also the more natural meaning for *ma aqra'u*. That is, *ma aqra'u* is the same as that of *ma dha aqra'u*? (i. e. what shall I read or recite?).

Here in fact Watt is mixing or confusing the negative *ma* (ما النفي) and interrogative *ma* (ما الاستفهامية). He seems to be contradictory on this issue of recitation. Shortly after, it will be discussed in some more detail. Watt, instead of realizing his scarce knowledge of Arabic language or grammar, makes an allegation against the traditionists that the latter they

(traditionists) avoided the natural meaning of the words (i.e. *ma dha aqra'u?*). So, in the first tradition (i.e. *al-Zuhri's*) he (Watt) considers *ma* (ما) as a negative, however, in the second tradition (*Ibn Hisham's*) he (Watt) emphasizes that the sentence with interrogative *ma* is similar to negative *ma*. Hence he magically maintains or concludes that the natural meaning of *ma aqra'u* (ما أقرأ) is not negative but interrogative (ماذا أقرأ). Although in the first paragraph of the same sub-heading, he presents opposite views about the meaning of the sentence. In the first few lines he said “must be translated ‘I can’t read (or recite)’”.²² i. e. a negative meaning of *ma aqra'u* (ما أقرأ). Whereas in the last few lines of the same paragraph, he concludes “The form of the tradition..., requires that the *ma* be taken as ‘what’...”²³ That is, an interrogative meaning of *ma aqra'u* (ما أقرأ) or (What shall I recite?). Likewise, serious misunderstanding or a gross mistake which he (Watt) expresses with full surety, that Prophet had received some other messages before this *Iqra* passage or the first revelation. Although he accepted that “there are no effective objections to the almost universal view of Muslim scholars that this is the first part of the Quran to be revealed”.²⁴ Even he considers this first revelation “a command to worship” arguing that “(it is) what we should expect to come first in view of the general tenor of the primary message of the Quran”.²⁵ It is very strange that after giving all these statements positively he (Watt) all of a sudden takes a turn in opposite direction and says with full surety that: “The possibility can not be excluded, of course, that Muhammad had already received other messages which he did not regard as part of the Quran”.²⁶

In fact, all such statements by Watt have been wrongly made just to reject or discredit the fact that the Prophet could not read or write. He thinks Prophet knew some reading or writing because he (ﷺ) was a businessman, and business can not be run without reading and writing. Another serious misunderstanding or a serious mistake Watt expresses, with full confidence, when he says that “the latter traditionists avoided the natural meaning of the words”. That is, {(*ma dha aqra'u?* or what shall I recite?) or the correct meaning of the words {*ma aqra'u* (ما أقرأ) is *ma dha aqra'u?* (ماذا أقرأ) or ‘what shall I recite?’}, just to support the “dogma that Muhammad could not write, which was an important part of the proof of the miraculous nature of the Quran”.²⁷

Now we discuss the above four statements of Watt in somewhat detail focusing mainly on his research methodology to analyze the issue

rather than responding to or arguing the issue in detail. The above four statements can briefly be mentioned:

- i. The sentence *ma aqra'u* either is interrogative or negative.
- ii. Did Prophet (ﷺ) receive any passage or revelation before the 'Iqra passage or the first revelation or Wahy?
- iii. The latter traditionists deliberately avoided the natural meaning of *ma aqra'u* which means (in Watt's view) *ma dha aqra'u* (i.e. interrogative, not negative).
- iv. This avoidance was merely to support the dogma that Muhammad (ﷺ) could not write as proof of the miraculous nature of the Quran.

As for as point (i) is concerned, the tradition of Ibn Ishaq or Ibn Hisham clearly mentions that there was something in a written form brought by Jibril (عليه السلام) in a cover of silk cloth (i.e. ديباج) (*Dibaj*).

Following Hadith must be considered in this regard.

وقع عند بن إسحاق في مرسل عبيد بن عمير أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال أتاني جبريل بنمط من ديباج فيه كتاب قال اقرأ قلت ما أنا بقارئ قال السهيلي قال بعض المفسرين إن

قوله الم ذلك الكتاب لا ريب فيه إشارة إلى الكتاب الذي جاء به جبريل حيث قال له اقرأ

{Ibn Ishaq narrated from *Mursal* of Ubaid bin Umar, Prophet (Muhammad (ﷺ) said: "Jibril came to me with the book in a cover of silk cloth and said: Read or Recite it, I (ﷺ) said: I can not read or recite'. Said Suhaili (author of Ruzul Unuf): "Some of the exegesis said: Verily the words of Allah: ذلك الكتاب لا ريب الم ○ indicating or pointing out to the Book (ذلك الكتاب) with which Jibril came and said to him (ﷺ) Read or Recite it. }²⁸

Jibril says to Prophet (ﷺ) that read or recite it (i.e. a Book or pages of the Book were in Jibril's hands). Prophet said: I can not read or recite (i.e. *ma aqra'u*). It definitely shows that there was something in written form in the custody of Jibril (عليه السلام), and he (Jibril) asked Muhammad (ﷺ) to read or recite this written passage. Here '*ma aqra'u*' simply means لا أعرف القراءة) i.e. I do not know how to read or I cannot read or recite (which is a negative sentence). This is a very logical order of the event. Thus Watt not only contradicts his previous statement that it must be considered a negative sentence, but he also picks or quotes only a sentence (*ma dha aqra'u*) from the whole tradition of Ibn Hisham which is in support of his previously conceived view, and did not see the tradition in the whole context of the text or logical order. For this logical order, many later Muslim scholars For example, Imam Ibn Kathir, Imam Nauwawi, etc. also did not consider this *ma* as an interrogative. Ibn Kathir argues that the

sentence *ma ana abeqari* (ما أنا بقارى) in the tradition, clearly shows that this is a negative sentence because *ba* in this grammatical formation can not be added into a positive sentence according to Arabic grammar.

As for as point (ii) is concerned, it is quite sure that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not receive or recite any passage of the Quran before the first revelation or *Wahy* of 'Iqra passage of the *surat al-'alaq*. But Watt's contradictory views regarding this issue are as under:

“There is no effective objections to the almost universal view of Muslim scholars that the 'Iqra passage was the first part of the Quran to be revealed”²⁹.

In the strict sense, this statement of Watt rejects the suggestion that there were any pre-'Iqra' passages revealed to Muhammad ﷺ. However, at the end of the same paragraph, Watt insists that:

“The possibility can not be excluded, of course, that Muhammad ﷺ had already received other messages which he did not regard as part of the Quran; one example would be the words in the traditions “Thou art the Messenger of God” (You are the Messenger of God).³⁰ It is a very mistake or a deliberate attempt to mix two distinctive fields or subjects of the Islamic academic heritage or Islamic sources. That is, first is the revealed knowledge in the form of the Quran, for which Muhammad ﷺ had no discretion to include or exclude even a single dot or letter or word, etc. Each and every word or part of the Quran is definitely from Allah (SWT) and He Himself is the Protector or Preserver of the divine book Qur'an. He Himself made arrangements to remain protected from any tiny change through memorizing of Qur'an by Muslim children male or female, young or old living in any part of the world.³¹ Muhammad ﷺ, like many other messengers or apostles of God, could not add or delete or edit any part of the divine book or scripture revealed in the definite form from Allah (SWT). Its words and meaning are from God. Whereas the second distinctive field or source is Hadith or authentic and decisive traditions described and explained by Muhammad ﷺ and narrated through the chain of authentic narrators or transmitters. The authentic Hadith traditions are basically the words and actions of Muhammad ﷺ and had been reported and collected after the very scientific and logical study of the several competent companions (Sahabah) of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and then the successors (*Tabi'een*) and later on the extremely cautious compilers from the successors (Tab' *Tabi'een*), like Imam Bukhari

Thus Watt has mixed up the Quranic revelation and the Hadith tradition “thou art the Messenger of God” to support his previously

conceived views. In this tricky manner, he tried to prove that there were some other passages that Muhammad (ﷺ) had already received and did not include as part of the Quran.

This is the gross mistake or deliberate effort of most of the Orientalists they have been insisting that Muhammad (ﷺ) had any sort of ambition or discretion or authority to include or exclude any part of the Quran on his own. Muhammad (ﷺ) could not include or exclude any part of the Quran as per his desire.³² He (ﷺ) had to just receive, memorize and preserve it so that it could be saved for the whole of mankind till the last day or spread these revelations as per the commandment of God for promulgation in the whole practical life of the Muslim. Thus Muhammad (ﷺ) was just a receiver, practical model, and conveyer of the Message to society not the creator of any part of the Quran. God, Himself is the whole and sole authority or Creator of the Quran.

Here, therefore, the main issue of pre-*Iqra* passages revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) has been sidetracked by Watt. The issue did Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) receive any pre-*Iqra* passage or message that made part of the Quran. Or is there any part or pre-*Iqra* passage of the Quran that Watt can quote that so and so is part of the Quran? And Watt himself has recognized that “Thou art the Messenger of God” is part of a tradition of al-Zuhri or al-Tabari. Then why he is citing this tradition as an example of a pre-*Iqra* passage as a part of the Quran? It is because he has felt the difficulty of his statement in which he has recognized that “there are no effective objections that the *Iqra* passage was the first part of the Quran to be revealed”. Thus any tradition relating to *Wahy* or Quran or any part of the Quran are quite separate things. The words of the tradition “Thou art the Messenger of God” are not words of any verse of the Quran. If Watt insists that Muhammad (ﷺ) had already received other messages (of the Quran) before the *Iqra* passage of the Quran, then he must have mentioned that pre-*Iqra* passage of the Quran. He has mentioned tradition which is irrelevant in this issue of the pre-*Iqra* passage of the Quran. Thus this is the contradiction of Watt’s views and he tries here to misguide the readers and present the facts in a quite distorted manner for his certain objectives, which is a serious violation of the internationally recognized principles of scientific research. Similarly, Watt’s speculation or contradiction reaches its climax when he says that the “vision” and the address “Thou art the Messenger of God” happened three years after the “original call”. Here one may ask then, what was the purpose of the original call? Or is there any message or part of the Quran that Watt could quote that had been received by Muhammad (ﷺ) before the *Iqra*

passage? Anyhow, we have discussed rather than proved shortly before that the “vision” and the “original call” are not two separate events. The *Iqra* passage was received by Muhammad (ﷺ) at the time of the original call, otherwise, the original call would be purposeless or useless. Regarding pre-*Iqra* passage or any part of the Quran before the first *Wahy* Quran itself categorically rejects and clarifies the position of Muhammad (ﷺ) saying that:

وما كنت تتلوا من قبله من كتاب ولا تخطه بيمينك إذا لارتاب المبطلون

As you were not used to reading or reciting any book before this (i.e. the giving out of the Quran), not to writing it with your right hand. In that case, the prattlers could have entertained doubts.³³

Therefore, it is very clearly stated in this verse that he (ﷺ) had nothing to recite before the Quran or before the first *Wahy* of the Quran. In other words, he (ﷺ) received no part of the Quran or any book to be recited before the *Iqra* passage. It should also be clear here that this answer had been given to the unbelievers (Mushrikeen of Makkah) in the context of their allegation against Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that he himself had composed the book and was giving out this as a revelation from God.

Thus Watt not only presents his contradictory views in this regard, and does not acknowledge his lacking of the knowledge of Quran, Arabic grammar, and the status of authentic Hadith traditions, but also emphasizes his previously conceived ideas or views. This shows that he is unable to make his research regarding the basic faiths of Islam and Muslims according to the basic principles of research recognized internationally. The way of picking or dropping the ideas or views which are in favor of his previously conceived ideas or views is not admissible in scientific research.

Now we come to statement (iii) of Watt's four statements just to analyze his research methodology to treat the *Wahy* upon Muhammad (ﷺ). In the third statement or the third point, Watt emphasizes that the natural meaning of *ma aqra'u* has been avoided by the latter traditionists deliberately, which, in Watt's view, is *ma dha aqra'u* (i.e. an interrogative sentence made by Muhammad (ﷺ) because Muhammad (ﷺ) knew reading or reciting already (in Watt's view), so he (ﷺ) asked Jibril which portion I read (i.e. *ma dha aqra'u*?).

This wrong and false blame was put on the latter traditionists by Watt again for the same reason that he has inadequate knowledge about the Quran and he wants to prove (by any way wrong or false) his previously conceived views regarding Muhammad (ﷺ). It is an

undeniable and quite certain fact that Muhammad (ﷺ) was uneducated and illiterate (i.e. Ummiyy or أمي). All the Orientalists must be clear about the fact that Muhammad's illiteracy was neither a later development nor a so-called "dogma" to prove the miraculous nature of the Quran this miraculous nature of the Quran will be discussed in detail in the next coming fourth statement of Watt. The Prophet's or Muhammad's illiteracy had been declared by Quran itself. Muhammad's reading, writing, or reciting ability before the Quran was not decided or determined by the latter traditionists. Quran itself had said earlier that:

وما كنت تتلوا من قبله من كتاب ولا تخطه بيمينك

And you were not used to reading or reciting any book before this, nor to writing it with your right hand.³⁴

Then, Watt takes another twist, neglecting deliberately the clear-cut opinion of his predecessor Margoliouth that Muhammad was an unlettered person,³⁵ making another wrong presumption that "Muhammad knew at least enough to keep commercial records".³⁶ So here Watt suggests that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was not completely unlettered but he knew some reading and writing. He refers in this support to some passages of the Quran such as 29:48 (the verse mentioned above) and 25:4-6.³⁷ Concluding his views in this regard he further said, "the probability is that Muhammad was able to read and write sufficiently for business purposes, but it seems certain that he had not read any scriptures".³⁸ Before discussing Watt's interpretations of the reading and writing necessity of Muhammad (ﷺ) for commercial purposes, it seems better to discuss briefly the verses of these two different surahs cited by Watt in this regard.

Verse 48 of surah 29 *al-'ankabut* very categorically stated that Muhammad (ﷺ) was not able to read or write any book. If as Watt says, he (ﷺ) had little knowledge of reading and writing for commercial records or business purposes, can he present an example of a commercial record or business deal in written form or any tradition in this regard? In fact, this is again a gross mistake of Watt that he refuses the unlettered status of Muhammad (ﷺ) without any evidence or substantial argument. Unless he had no evidence how could he decide about such a serious issue? Well, he could suspect but he can not decide without any substantial evidence in favor of his claim. Thus in this way, he has mixed up the two different concepts of research i.e. rebuttal of any claim and suspicion about any claim, which is totally wrong in any scientific research. Similarly. if Watt's assumption is that without any education (i.e. reading or writing) no any businessman can succeed, it is not always true. Today, we can find such persons who are uneducated but running very

good businesses depending mainly on their memory power and verbal calculations. Thus a researcher can understand easily that if an assumption is wrong then how the result or conclusion will be correct? And giving a conclusion contrary to the fact, on the basis of a wrong assumption, makes the researcher and research questionable and declares that the researcher himself is going to be deceived.

Likewise, the three verses (4, 5, and 6) of *Surah 25 Al-Furqan* (one of which has been quoted by Watt leaving its immediately preceding and following verses for his certain purposes) are also witnessing that Muhammad was an illiterate or uneducated person on account of which he (ﷺ) had been accused by the *Mushrikeen* to be assisted by a group of people for writing down the Quran in verse 4, an allegation made by the unbelievers against Muhammad (ﷺ), has been responded by Allah (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) which is having an interesting point that must have been considered by Watt who has avoided insight of it, and on the basis of this verse Watt concludes that Prophet did not "himself" write down the Quran but had it written by assistants or secretaries. The interesting point is that Watt would have asked himself before giving his absurd interpretation, why the Prophet's opponents made such an allegation that he (ﷺ) got the assistance of others for composing the text of the Quran. They may have alleged that Prophet himself had written down or composed the Quran (if he (ﷺ) knew reading and writing). But, they said he got the assistance because they knew well that Prophet himself could not write as he was an illiterate or uneducated person like many other Makkan people. They knew very well that Muhammad (ﷺ) himself was not capable of producing such a unique literary piece in the form of the Quran which he was giving out as revelation from God. Watt did not give even a little care to the whole text and context of verse 4 and just picked a part of this whole verse. He just concentrated on the word "assistants or secretaries" but not on the condemnation of the allegation by God Himself about assistance saying that this is a definite injustice and falsehood made against the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). This severe condemnation and rebuttal from God also continued in next verse 5 about the allegation made by the unbelievers that the revelation of Muhammad (ﷺ) was merely old-world stories that the Prophet had got written for him and read unto him morning and evening. This allegation of assistance of others was seriously rebutted by God declaring this allegation as being injustice (i.e. ظلما) and falsehood (i.e. زورا). It is, therefore, questionable why Watt was unable to consider this whole context and sequence of verses 4 and 5. Therefore the interpretation made by Watt is basically wrong. There

could be no more disregard for the context and inappropriate interpretation of it. Similarly, in verse 5 the same allegation of writing down the revelation for himself with the help of others has been denied through a vigorous argument by God Himself pointing out that no one has written down or assisted or composed the text of the revelation except the One Who knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth. This 'One Who Knows...' is the main reference and a just point to be considered for understanding the issue, but Watt does not seem ready to follow the meaning and implication of all these three continuous verses (4-6) as a whole. Verse 6 very categorically and decisively says that "One Who knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth has sent down the revelation i.e. the Quran. It also indicates that revelation is definitely a secret and a very closely related affair between Allah (*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*) and His Messenger, and nobody could be an eyewitness to this special process. Quran emphasizes in many places, therefore, Allah alone is the best witness between the Prophet and those who reduce its actual status. Again the fault on the part of Watt is that he uses the skipping or reducing method and does not consider the whole issue in its due course for his specific purposes.

Now, the point (iv) or fourth statement Watt is to be discussed very briefly in which he insists that the latter traditionists deliberately avoided the natural meaning of *ma aqra'u* just to support the dogma that Muhammad (ﷺ) could not write as proof of the miraculous nature of the Quran. In other words, Watt suggests that the illiteracy of Muhammad (ﷺ) is an essential condition for the miraculous status of the Quran. No, the illiteracy of Muhammad (ﷺ) is not a necessary condition for the miraculous nature of the Quran. It is not an actual reason to become miraculous for Quran. It does not mean that if Muhammad (ﷺ) were not illiterate, the argument for the miraculous status of the Quran would have become faulty, it is not correct. To be illiterate of Muhammad (ﷺ), is a supportive argument for the miraculous nature or status of the Quran, because, otherwise the detractors could have a reason for doubting that it has been written down by Muhammad (ﷺ) himself.³⁹ Secondly, to be illiterate of Muhammad (ﷺ) is also a supportive argument for the miraculous status of the Quran in a way that the greatest and precious book of knowledge and education has been bestowed upon a person who is unlettered, just to show the supreme power of the One and only One God or the Omnipotent who is behind this miracle. But the necessary condition for the miraculous nature or status of the Quran is that it is not self-contradictory because it came down from the Supreme Being who is All-knower even the secrets of heaven and the earth. It would be self-

contradictory or consists of many contradictions if it were from other than Allah (or man-made).

As Quran itself states that:

○ افلا يتدبرون القران ولو كان من عند غير الله لوجدوا فيه اختلافا كثيرا

Do they not then consider the Quran carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In this research article two important matters or arguments of Watt regarding the Prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) have been analyzed in the light of facts described in the Quran, Hadith, and Sirah traditions, and also in view of grammatical principles of the Arabic language. These arguments and their simple rephrases are as under:

- i. Who told Muhammad (ﷺ) that “thou art the Messenger of God”? In other words who told Muhammad (ﷺ) that you are the Messenger of God, i.e. was that told by God directly to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) or through Jibril (عليه السلام)?
- ii. The issue of Recitation (of the first revelation of the Quran). In other words, previously knowing of Muhammad's (ﷺ) reading and writing ability i.e. wrong understanding of Watt about the meaning of Hadith and Sirah tradition regarding the reading and writing capability of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and also Watt's lacking of knowledge of Arabic grammar.

These two (i & ii) arguments or sub-titles of Watt under the main heading of “The call to be a Prophet” have been evaluated critically or scientifically in this research paper. Now we will conclude these above two arguments one by one as both of them are two different but related issues.

As far as the issue of “Who told Muhammad (ﷺ) that you are the messenger of God” is concerned, there was some serious difference of opinions even among the Companions (Sahabah-e-Karam) of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), but keeping in view some important and imperative concepts of basic Islamic teachings, some highly knowledgeable companions had concluded that the declaration about Muhammad (ﷺ) to be a Messenger of God was declared through Jibril (عليه السلام) at the very initial stage of revelations or *Wahy* and not directly by God Himself or by the physical appearance of God Himself. It means, there is no substantial proof that Muhammad (ﷺ) saw God directly or with physical eyes at any stage of life, whether it is earlier life of Prophetic experience in

Makkah or during the night journey or ascension of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to Heaven through *Buraq* (Mi'raj) in the last years of Makkan life.

Ibn-e-Kathir, after a long discussion or debate on this viewpoint, had shown his preferred opinion by putting a question and with several arguments in favor of this viewpoint from the Quran and Hadith. He raised a question that “Did the Prophet (ﷺ) see His Lord during the Night of Isra? Ibn-e-Kathir’s arguments in this regard are as under:

1) First Category of Arguments

As Allah said:

ما كذب الفواد ما رأى⁴¹ افتخرونه على ما يرى-

“The heart lied not in what he (ﷺ) saw. Will you then dispute with him (ﷺ) about what he (ﷺ) saw?”

Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim reported or recorded from Ibn Abbas (رضي الله تعالى عنهما) about the following two relevant verses (11 and 13) of Surah Najm:

ما كذب الفواد ما رأى

The heart lied no in what he (Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) saw, and,

ولقد رآه نزلة اخرى

And indeed he (Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) saw him (saw Jibril in his original shape having six hundred wings, each wing filling the side of the horizon), a second descent (second time) that,

“He (Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) saw Allah twice in his heart”,⁴² (that is, not by his physical eyes). Simak (a Successor) reported a similar view from ‘Ikrimah (another Successor) from Ibn Abbas (a Companion).⁴³ Abu Sahlih, As-Suddi, and several others said similarly that the Prophet (ﷺ) saw Allah twice in his heart.⁴⁴ In the light of the above Quranic verses and Hadith (a similar viewpoint has also been narrated by other narrators), therefore, it can be concluded here that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) never saw God Himself directly or with physical eyes, but he saw Him by his heart, though he saw His greatest signs e.g. one sign in the form of Jibril six hundred wings on the horizon with physical eyes.

2) Second Category of Arguments

Masruq (a Successor) said, “I went to ‘A’ishah and asked her: Did Muhammad (ﷺ) see his Lord? She said, ‘You said something that caused my hair to rise!’ I said, ‘behold!’ and recited this Ayah,

لقد رأى من آيات ربه الكبرى

Indeed, he saw the greatest signs of his Lord.

She said where did your mind wander? It was Jibril. Whoever says to you that Muhammad (ﷺ) saw his Lord, or hid any part of what he

was commanded (i.e. Allah's Message), or knew any of the five things which only Allah knows,

ان الله عنده علم الساعة وينزل الغيث

Verily, Allah, with Him is the knowledge of the Hour, He sends down the rain...⁴⁵

Then he invents a great lie against Allah! The Prophet (ﷺ) only saw Jibril twice, in his original shape once near *Sidrat Al-Muntaha* and another time in *Ajyad* (in Makkah) while Jibril had six hundred wings that covered the horizon. A compiler of Sahih Muslim recorded that Abu Dharr said, "I asked the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), Have you seen your Lord?" He said,

نور انى اراه

How can I see Him since there was light?

In another narration of Sahih Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

رايت نورا

I only saw a light

Imam Ahmad recorded in his *Musnad* that 'Amir (a Successor) said that Masruq (a Successor) asked 'Aishah, "O Mother of the faithful, has Muhammad (ﷺ) seen his the Lord, thee Exalted and most Honored?" She said, "Glorious is Allah! My hair is standing on end because of what you said. Three matters, if one tells you about any of them, will have lied. Whoever tells you that Muhammad (ﷺ) has seen his Lord, will have lied." She then recited the two verses,

لا تدركه الابصار وهو يدرك الابصار

No vision can grasp Him, but He grasps all vision.⁴⁶ and,

وما كان بشرا ان يكلمه الله الا وحيا او من وراء حجاب

It is not given to any human being that Allah should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation. Or from behind a veil.⁴⁷

Imam Ahmad also recorded that Masruq said, I asked 'Aishah, 'Did not Allah Said,

ولقد راه بالافق المبين

And indeed he saw Him in the clear horizon,⁴⁸ and,

ولقد راه نزلة اخرى

And indeed he saw Him at a second descent? She said: I was the first among this Ummah to ask Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) about it. He (ﷺ) said,

انما ذاك جبريل

That was Jibril.

References

- 1 For detailed analysis, see the writer's article published in this research journal: Vol26 Issue37 December 2012, pp.1-18. <https://iri.aiou.edu.pk/?p=21672>
- 2 See Watt: Muhammad At Mecca, Oxford University Press, 1953, p.42.
- 3 See above referred Issue of research journal (i.e. AL-ADWA) ; See Al-Quran: 81 : 19-21; 94 : 04
- 4 See Watt: Loc, cit
- 5 Al-Quran 101:1-3
- 6 Al-Quran 26:130
- 7 Al-Quran 26:19
- 8 Abul Fida Ismail: Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Arabic Version) ,Vol.4,Darul Fikr, Berut, 1980, p.250.
- 9 See Ibn Kathir: Op.cit, pp.251-2
- 10 See Ibn Qayyim: Zaad-ul- Ma'ad, Vol.2, p.47
- 11 Watt: op, cit, p.45
- 12 See Ibid
- 13 See Supra, p.1
- 14 See Ibid
- 15 See Al-Qur'an 53:5-6; 66: 06; 82: 19-21; 97:04.
- 16 See Watt. Op. cit, p.44
- 17 Watt: Op. cit, p.45
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Ibid, p.44
- 20 Ibid, p.40
- 21 Its details are to be discussed in the next coming sub-title (d).
- 22 Watt: Op.cit, p.46
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibn Hajar Asqalani : Fathul Bari, Darul Fikr (without date) vol.8, p.718
- 29 Ibid, p.47
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Al-Quran 15:09
- 32 Al-Quran 10:37
- 33 Al-Quran 29:48
- 34 Al-Quran 29:48
- 35 Margoliouth categorically says that Muhammad (ﷺ) "was not as a child taught to read or write, though these arts were known to many Meccan". See Muhammad and The Rise of Islam, New York and London: G.P. Putnam, The Knickerbocker Press, 1905, p.59.

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- 36 Watt: Muhammad's Mecca p.52.
- 37 Al-Quran 25:4-6 {those who disbelieve say: "This (the Quran) is nothing but a lie that he (Muhammad ﷺ) has invented, and others have helped him at it, so that they have produced an unjust wrong thing and a lie". And they say: "Tales of the ancients, which he has written down, and they are dictated to him morning and afternoon"}.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 See Al-Quran 29:48
- 40 Al-Quran 4:82
- 41 Al-Quran 53:11-12
- 42 Muslim 1:158
- 43 At-Tabari 22:507
- 44 At-Tabari 22:508
- 45 Al-Quran 31:34
- 46 Al-Quran 6:103
- 47 Al-Quran 42:51
- 48 Al-Quran 81:23