

## **“MUHAMMAD” BY MAXIME RODINSON (AN ANALYTICAL STUDY)**

*Muhammad Akram Sajid\**  
*Muhammad Abdullah\*\**

**Abstract:** “MUHAMMAD” by Maxime Rodinson (1915-2004), originally, *Muhamet* in French is a biased view of continually launched blames on the life of Holy Prophet (SWS) by the orientalist. The book has been written in socio-economic perspectives. Maxime Rodinson looks the background, Muhammad (Peace be upon him) instigated the Arabs who were scattered throughout the peninsula, for the lust of wealth that was plundered in the battles. Maxime does not believe in the arrival of revelation, either blames, Prophet (SWS) was a sick man. He criticized the personality of the Prophet (SWS). Infact Rodinson as an agnostic could not understand the miracle of the Prophet (SWS) so he studies Islam in the particular atmosphere of France in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His main objections are on later compilation of Hadith, Jihad, a merely looting and plundering, and polygamy. He, as a Marxist could not understand the everlasting spiritual revolution brought by the Holy Prophet (SWS). This paper is going to analyze the “Muhammad”, of Maxime Rodinson in a very impartial manner.

Orientalists have their own approach writing towards Islam and its belongings. They normally criticize the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) commonly, particularly, his personal life and basic teachings of Islam, as is the case with Maxime Rodinson a French orientalist who wrote the book, “MUHAMMAD” originally in French language, in 1961 by “Muhamet”. Before discussing the book, let us have a brief view of his life.

The writer Maxime Rodinson was born at Marcelice, Paris France in 1915 in a very poor communist family. He got his formal education from the primary stage but continued his studies privately merely serving his teachers who did not demand from him any kind of tuition fee<sup>1</sup>. Very hardworking, Rodinson came into the professional life i.e. he started his carrier as \*Errand Boy. He got admission in 1932 at *Ecole Des orientales\** where he topped the institution and got proficiency more than thirty languages, particularly Arabic and Ethiopian languages. He got admission in 1937 at “National Council of Research” and studied Islam thoroughly. Maxime Rodinson was a co-librarian in 1940 at French institute of Damcus, the coming seven years he led in Sadoon and Berut (Lubnan)

In 1948 Rodinson was appointed as librarian at *Bibliothèque Nationale* of Paris, afterwards incharge of Muslim section at the same instituion. In 1955 he was promoted as Director of Studies at, *Ecole partique des Hautes Ethdes*. In

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\* Lecturer, Islamic Studies, Government College Township, Lahore. Pakistan

\*\* Associate Professor, Sheikh Zayed, Islamic Centre, Punjab University, Lahore. Paksitan

1960 he was appointed as professor of Ethiopian languages he served over there for a long decade retiring from the same post he returned to France, where he passed away on May 23, 2004 and was buried at Paris, France<sup>2</sup>.

Maxime Rodinson was born at Jew family. He joined communist party in 1937 and left it in 1958 as he criticized Stalen Marshal on his post war policies, moreover he gave up Judaism, became secular and finally declared himself as agnostic<sup>3</sup>.

Maxime Rodinson favoured, Palestine and criticized Israel, wrote a book “Less Tamps Modern” (translated in English as, Israel, A colonial Settler State) in 1967 but later on he ate his words and used to favour Israel as it was now a settled fact. He wrote many books, the following are very famous

- I. Muhammad (Muhemet)
- II. Maxime and the Muslim World
- III. Israel and the Arabs
- IV. Israel a colonial settler state
- V. The Arabs
- VI. Islam and capitalism
- VII. Europe and the Mystique of Islam
- VIII. Marxist- Leninist scientific Atheism and the study of Religion and Atheism in USSR
- IX. The persistence of the Jewish Question
- X. Why Palestinians fight Israel?

Rodinson wrote many articles in the contemporary magazines, newspapers and in the encyclopedias but his book “Muhammad” made him famous in the Islam opposite circles they consider it a touchstone in this respect and Muslim corners do not like the blames written in this book. His book is banned in the Middle East not only its publishing but also its sale and purchase. Maxime Rodinson writes in a very difficult language as he was a linguistic and thinks he can deceive the readers by his assonate words. In this rhymed prose he desires to deceive the 1.5 billion Muslims and blame the Prophet (SWS)<sup>4</sup>.

His main objection on Islam and its prophet (SWS) is about compilation of Quran and Hadith, revelation, polygamy, and jihad.

It has seven chapters longest among them is about Jihad. It comprises three hundred and thirteen pages. He provides maps to explain his story he borrowed his forefathers. Writing during “Muhammad”, he refers to footnotes and references. Maxime Rodinson enlists at the end of his book a bibliography also. The under discussion book, “Muhammad” by Maxime Rodinson was written in French language and translated in 1971 by Anne carter so before us the English edition is for analysis.

There are many negative aspects of the writer, an atheist, secular and

agnostic, Rodinson cannot understand the philosophy of Prophethood particularly when he is the last Prophet (SWS).

The assassination of his parents during second world war, his explosion from communist party, his giving up ancestors religion Judaism to declare into an agnostic, his upbringing in a very adverse atmosphere, living as immigrant from Russia to Poland and then as a vagabond in France, his unpleasant family life converted him into a very negative and narrow minded, vindictive, biased and complicated personality. So very strange an unbalanced personality is writing down on a person, i.e. Muhammad (SWS) unanimously declared by the authentic writers, most respectful, successful, kind, true and merciful to his whole life. Even his worst enemies could not blame him in his private life. So a person like Rodinson cannot compile the biography of Muhammad (SWS) in a true sense. His book is full of contradictories and disputed issues along with unreliable sources, anyhow he thinks he is a philosopher (his schooling does not show he might have got some education about philosophy and he can find the facts by his philosophic mind, while the narrations and details of his book do not match his this claim)<sup>6</sup>. As analysing his book minutely it looks appropriate to divide it into some sub-headings to elaborate it in detail.

### **1. Description of the then Peninsula of the Arab**

Maxime Rodinson was a multi dimensional personality i.e. he was jack of all trades and knows so many know hows. He describes the details of the then Arabia in many folds, social, economical, religious, educational and political spheres. He provides the trade links and foreign relations of the Arabs towards the rest of the surroundings and far off areas. He discusses the rites and customs of the Arabs, their good deeds and evil mindedness, all have been in detail vivid and it is well knitted.

### **2. Maximes's sources**

Maxime being an independent secular communist praises Tor Andre who studies the Prophet (SWS) in psychological perspectives, influenced by him, Rodinson declares that Muahmamd (SWS) had some kind of psychological illness (infact he could not understand the sacred importance of revelation and considers it was some kind of psychological attack as revelation was being given to the Prophet (SWS) French writer, Rigis Blackere is also his favourite even Blackere's book on Prophet (SWS) being disputed could not be published. Montgomery watt, Charles J leaded, M. Godferry, Rodey parate, Dr. Hameedullah, Frants Buhl, Darmenghan Annel Dell, Toshihiko Izits Hanna Zaeharias, Richard Bill, A.J. Arbery and Xaviour de Dhanhol are the writers from whom he seeks guidance for preparing the book. From Islamic writers he takes guidance from Ibn-e-Ishaq, Tabri, Waqdi and Ibn-e-Saad.

### **3. “Muhammad” in Social and Merxist Perspectives**

Rodinson remained member of communist party for twenty one years, so he studies the Prophet (SWS) in social and communist views, a person whose ideas get a change day by day, so he looks Muhammad (SWS) in this scene, changing ideas with the chronology of circumstances.

### **4. Purpose of writing “Muhammad”**

Maxime writes that he gets informations compiling his book from his porcedessors but rearranged it in a new way (truly in a new way perfectly a collection of lies!). Rodinson objects on the Seerah of Prophet (SWS) that it has been written one hundred and twenty years after the death of the Prophet (SWS). One can answer it, is it possible that one and a sole companion of Prophet (SWS) can remain in touch with the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) all and sundry and do write the every nick and corner of his life spane’s detials, so it was only possible after the death of the Prophet (SWS) as many people observed different aspects of his life.<sup>7</sup>

Goldzehir and Schacht do not believe this written material (Seerah) authentic while Maxime Rodinson<sup>8</sup> used to refer from Ibn-e-Haasham, Waqdi and Tabri occationally but orientalist mal practise it according to their negative approach and depicit it as they wish writing against Islam and the Prophet of God (Peace be upon him).

### **5. Objections on Hadith**

Maxime Rodinson says the sayings of the Holy Prophet (SWS) were not written in the life of the Prophet (SWS) and if written, it were not cutlviated by the Holy Prophet (SWS) during his life personally. While it was written down in the presence of Prophet (SWS) as “Saheefa-e-Ali (R.A.)” and Saheefa-e-Sadiqa. Moreover “hearing of Hadith without any break from one to another”, “principles of writing Ahadith”, “Asma-u-Rajal” and “criticism” on sayings of the Prophet (SWS) either they are true words of the Prophet (SWS), or merely self storied, all these were result of training of the Prophet (SWS) towards the Muslims, they enabled to safe the Hadith in its true sense. Maxime Rodinson at times he confesses that expansion intrgiues, explotation and superior thinking of Europe and its Allies gathered so many blmaes around Muhammad (SWS) and his teachings. Of and on he admits the fact that as an theist he could not understand properly the Prophet (SWS). He writes;

“On last warning and one last vindication, I am concerned with a religion founder, a man who during most of his life at least was profoundly and sincerely religious with a keen snese of direct presence of the divine. It can be objected that I was an ethiest cannot possibly understand such a man.<sup>9</sup>

The writer elaborates the aim of writing down this book, he basically wrote for the European reader, for Muslims he opinions they should read the book removing respect and esteem about Muhammad (SWS) from their minds.

He writes;

“The reader should be cautioned that our sources on life of Muhammad are abundant and clear but not very reliable”.

### **6. Fictional Style**

Describing the pre-Islamic era Maxime opts a supra-natural style. He mentions Aetherai a lady traveller who travelled the whole world as she arrived at Spain, the writer narrates the imagination of 400A.D and involves him in the beauty of Constantinople, it shows Maxime Rodinson de-railing him from the right track.<sup>11</sup>

### **7. Minute Details of the Desert**

He, as a careful depicter, provides very minute details of the desert life. One of them is about water. Let us have the description.

“The river beds, or wadis, bear witness to an era of greater humidity, but in historical times at least they have been dry for the most part, only dotted with occasional scattered pools. Now and then, without warning, a sudden downpour transforms them briefly into raging torrents. These floods’ as the Arabs call them, wreak appalling havoc. But the water remains sinking deep into the earth. Man dig deep wells in the ground to look for it; one is said to reach up to six hundred feet in depth”.<sup>12</sup> He tells us the importance of camal in this way. During the second millenium before the Christian era, the inhabitants of these regions domesticated the camel, a creature ideally suited to the desert. From then on, small groups of nomads follwoed the camels which were their livelihood. Sprenger has described the Arabs as a parasite on the camel”.<sup>13</sup>

Rodinson writes that the Arabs were living as a centreless life but Dr. Hameedullah rejects the idea and proves that though they had given up the Din-e-Ibraheemi, yet they were not totally vagabonds. As we look into the greatest source of Rodinson, Sirat Ibn-e-Hassham and compare it with Maxime’s, “Muhammad”, it comes into the light that Ibn-e-Hassham tells the details of Arabs, religious conditions, irrespect of social, economical, political, about religious he gives the details of performing Hajj, i.e. they had changed the original Manasik of Dine-e-Ibraheemi.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover his favorite author Montgomery Watt does not agree to the view that Arabs were merely leading a moralless life rather he says they had a tribal humanism in them.<sup>16</sup>

### **8. Denying Divine Inspiration**

Infact the core of Maxime’s thinking is that Muhammad (SWS) was born in a place that was showing a very lawlessness situation, and he benefitted the atmosphere, Arabs need, wealth and it was the high time to hit the iron as it was very hot, Arabs having no economy, found safe horizon accepting the philosphy of Prophethood<sup>17</sup>, that was a gurantee of income for them it means the writer is denying the status of the Prophet (SWS) rather

Allah the Almighty says in this respect;

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ 18

*“He the Prophet (SWS) does not say from his own words but it is everything from the ‘Wahi’ that is sent (from the God) to him”.*

Maxime Rodinson writes so many blames but inspite of all this he does confess saying Holy Prophet (SWS) as “The Prophet of Allah”.<sup>19</sup> Even William Muir, recognizes the fact that the incesstors of the Prophet (SWS) were also very respectable even in the days of “Jahilyyia” (Period before Islam).<sup>20</sup>

Maxime Rodinson as usual narrates the details of the false story vivid by the biased orientalists that Prophet (SWS) before Islam, met the Buheera, the hermit and from him got the guidance for Prophethood, while Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, condemns this and proves this is a manipulated story.<sup>21</sup> The most reliable narration is of Saheeh of Imam Bokhari (R.A.) that describes the details of revelation.<sup>22</sup>

Rodinson desires to show that revelation was the reaction of Muhammad (SWS)’s ideas he borrowed from the local atmosphere. In spite of this not only Muslims but also all the orientalists and everyone agree that Quran has been revealed from the Almighty Allah. Yes, Rodinson may say the Jews and the Christian do not believe in this Divine order. Allah says;

وَمَا كَانَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ أَنْ يُفْتَرَىٰ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ

مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ 23

*And this Quran is not from otherthan who can make it but from Allah, the Quran certifies that is in your hands and details of the book having no doubt but from the Allah the livelihood given to all the worlds.*

Professor Syed Sabah-ud-Din Abdur Rehman wirtes in this context, such a writers do nothing but inflmae the already enmity present in the heart of Jews and Christians. He did nothing but recompile the ingnorant writing of his precedessors already written by the orientalists.<sup>24</sup>

Professor Muhammad Benaboud of Muracco comments the “Muhammad”, “Maxime Rodinson seems very harsh writing on the Prophet (SWS), but he does not write constructive literature, he visualized the material approach towards history. It is very unfortunate being an ignostic he is unable to understand the personality of a Prophet (SWS). He ignored the spiritual aspect of the Prophet (SWS). He basically writing in guse of social perspectives is describing his own social baseless structure of the France of 20<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore he writes, he realives the rejected objections, he examines

Wahi (revelation) on the touch stone of Rationalism and philosophical basis. He desires to depict Wahi before secular creations in a new scientific mode. Though those terms, beautiful but difficult words seems attractive, really are the reflection of Maxime Rodinson Satanic mind. This is not a new blame, Duncum Black Macdonald is also his fellow thinker.<sup>26</sup>

He describes Muhammad (SWS) was a patient of epilepsy, Hysteria or Schizophrenia. He writes; “We find these ecstasies and sensory phenomena in a very similar form among persons suffering from recognized mental conditions such as hysteria, schizophrenia and uncontrolled verbalization”.<sup>27</sup>

### 9. Slang Language

Though Clament, Hert, Theodore Noldeke and Casenavo do not accept Muhammad (SWS) as Prophet but Maxime Rodinson, uses very cheap words, laughing at Prophet (Peace be upon him) feels proud of it, as, “Supposing he was sincere, that he really had what, for the sake of frankness. We can call visual and auditory hallucinations. Does this mean that he was in some way abnormal, sick or mad”.

Alfred Guillaeme does not accept that Prophet (SWS) had some illness.<sup>28</sup> David Noss declares that Quran is the word of Allah and still have no change in any type.<sup>29</sup>

Hafiz Mehmood Akhtar writes, “In those days Torah and Bible were not yet translated into Arabic so how, Prophet (SWS) got these apocryphal books? He, more, conforms by Rodwell’s words, that I admit that our any book may reach to Muhammad.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Muhammad Akram Chaudhry replies Arther Jeffery in these words. “Pearson and Arther Jeffery may compare and criticize Quran they would accept finally that Quran is unchanged”.<sup>31</sup>

Karen Armstrong severely criticizes on Montgomery Watt and Maxime Rodinson that they have no capability of analyzing the incidents of seventh century as they are born in 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup>

Maxcime Rodinson do not accept the verse:

إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا

that He was the Prophet towards all human beings, while Karen says, “So Muhammad message acquired a universal value”.

Sheikh Ahmed Dedat writes that Michael H. Heart declared Prophet (SWS) the best and top most among the hundred successful men, “My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the 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 level.<sup>33</sup> Dedat more writes, once, “TIME” asked the choice of people among generals, rich merchants, historians, writers and other most influential people, Muhammad topped unannouncedly.<sup>34</sup>

Jules Messerman a Professor at Chicago University researched on three

based, for a successful man a man who seeks welfare of his companions, provides social shelter to his followers and enlists them into one group on religious basis, Muhammad (SWS) combined the three qualities up to the best extent. Karen Armstrong rejects the idea that Muhammad (SWS) brought a change in the society in Marxist perspectives rather she concludes that an economical chaos was everywhere visible in the society, they ate the belongings of a widow, looted the penniless, snatched from the poor, indulged in plundering of caravans but Prophet (SWS) moulded them to spend moderately, to help the needy and give alms to the poor, so saying it a socialist revolution would be a blunder.<sup>35</sup>

### 10. Jihad - a Plundering

Maxime wrote the most lengthy chapter in his “Muhammad” and writes that the motives behind this Jihad were looting, the booty, capturing the women, snatching fertile lands and as a vindictive assassinating the enemy in the battle field. As one analyzes, the fact comes out that Jihad does not mean an attack on the enemy or a camisado on the unawared enemy or Muslims bearing bare swords in their hands order everyone to accept Islam or be killed. No this is not the fact. Islam says every noble and sacred deed for the welfare of people or good effort for the noble cause is called Jihad. Anyhow as we look into the matter we find these battles were started from the Meccan side and as were forced Muhammad (SWS) had to come to the battle field but not saged the people, on the otherhand gave very unique principles for fighting with the enemies. He, the Prophet (SWS) spent one fifth of the booty on the needy people.

Dr. Khalid Alvi defends the objection in this way “the Prophet (SWS) of God is superior in the worlods of the world in three stages, he fought for the leberation of mankind, he had high aims, and he formed a new nation in the situation he had no foreign assistance.<sup>36</sup>

Syed Abul Aala Mududi writes in this perspectives, righteous and justified war is what has the noble cause and sacred methodology and both the goals were present in the examples personality of the Prophet (SWS).<sup>37</sup>

The hollow and hypercritical approach have no value when Prophet (SWS) elaborated the principles of Jihad saying:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا شَيْخًا فَائِيًا وَلَا طِفْلًا وَلَا صَغِيرًا وَلَا امْرَأَةً وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا وَكَلْتُمْ غَنَائِمَكُمْ وَأَصْلِحُوا وَأَحْسِنُوا  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (38)

Prophet (SWS) says, do not kill old man, child or a women, no stealing from the booty, put on a place assembling it, behave goodly as Allah loves the good doers.

Before blaming Islam Maxime Rodinson should keep in mind, the crimes done by his co-religists in World War I and II, Vietnan and recently in Iraq, Afghanistan and Goantenabae.



The American orientalist Hough Kennedy writes, the Meccans fought for maintaining their superiority but Muslims loved Din instead of booty. Muhammad desired conquering Mecca without blood-shedding and he achieved the target via Hudaybia Truce a foresighted agreement.<sup>40</sup>

One can ask, do the present chain of blunders being done by US-led coalition is keeping peace after the heavy bombardment or according to Zafir Ali Qureshi “an orphan shephard who did not know the techniques of the war, guaranteed the everlasting after the battles”.<sup>41</sup>

Maxime blames on the Jihad in bogus words as Dr. Haedullah proves aggregately only less than two casualties of the enemies in a month, show how the Prophet (SWS) had very noble example of peace for the enemies.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Israr Ahmed argues, the orientalist favor Meccan period, Prophet (SWS) did not catch sword by the order of Allah, but when obeyed the revelation launching Jihad it was a unique peaceful revolution, upon it ‘critics’ objected a lot.<sup>43</sup>

### **11. Polygamy**

“Muhammad”, a false colourful picture, artificially vivid by Maxime forwards another baseless blame on the private life of the last Prophet of God (SWS) that he married so many women merely to enjoy the physical pleasures. Maxime Rodinson writes;

The Prophet was growing old. At the time of the expedition of Tabuk he must have been in his sixties. Even so, he had not lost his fondness for women. In the year (629-630), the year of the capture of Mecca, he apparently made two new marriages but both broke up almost at once. The two women in question refused to let him touch them, one because of a hysterical condition, the other because her father had been killed in a skirmish with the Muslims. Muhammad had no alternative but to divorce them. By this time he seems to have had ten wives, not counting his concubines. At one time he contemplated getting rid of the oldest, Sawda, who was now well into her forties, a ripe old age for Arab women of the time. He did divorce her, but she came back and said to him: “I am not asking you to sleep with me. I yield my turn to A’isha. But I want to be there, on the day of Resurrection, among your wives”. He agreed to take her back”.

Qazi Salman Mansurpuri writes in this context, people of all kinds differ polygamy if Asia had one cultural routine for all the society it had no harm but Christian and Jew traditions accept polygamy, many a Prophets (A.S) married more than one, can they be (God forbids) cursed, never at all, so why Prophet (SWS) should be discussed in this regard.<sup>44</sup>

Maxime Rodinson says, as Muhammad grew old but wealthy by plundering he sought shelter marrying more and more beautiful women. Qazi Mansurpuri replies in the same coin, “Prophet (SWS) led the early twenty five

years of his life very modestly and next twenty five with a widow or forty years, and marrying between the age of fifty five to fifty nine had so many reasons it was not for sexual enjoyment, like after some marriage there was no tribal enmity, embraced Islam, after the marriage with Umm-e-Habiba (R.A) Abu Sufyan gave up hostile behavior, Juwari (R.A)'s family leaving robbery, accepted Islam, Najid came in the fold of Islam after the marriage with Mamona (R.A) Zainb's marriage crushed the bad custom of adopted son and trinity, Aesa (R.A) did a lot for the service of Quran and Hadith reinstating the polygamy was the sunnah of Holy Prophets (A.S), national necessity and religious benevolence.<sup>45</sup> While Syed Amir Ali, writes marrying more than one justified that Prophet (SWS) maintained justice among them, so objecting it seems very ridiculous from orientalist's side.<sup>46</sup>

Margoliouth, do not agree with the orientalist, rather favors that it concluded many visionary results.<sup>47</sup> S.P. Scott proves that before objecting polygamy, look Muhammad (SWS) led his nights in pious and praying before Allah.<sup>48</sup> John David port writes it was not compulsory or obligatory<sup>49</sup> marrying more than one woman.

Maxime Rodinson, revised his book before seventeen days of his death. He writes, "Muhammad was a remarkable man. I have tried to show how his character and his ideas were formed. I have sought to understand how he got so many successes. I wrote hundreds and thousands of pages against him but I confess from the core of my heart I could not minimize his dignity even not equal to a hair<sup>50</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Collecting the paper, it comes out that Maxime Rodinson did not justified the book and its context. It bears baseless and self framed stories. "His Muhammad" do not match the true principle of research and analysis. It is full of prejudice and bias. Clash of ideas may occur unconsciously but his book is full of it, it seems he desired to get rid of it in a very haste! His objections on, Hadith, revelation, Zakat, Jihad, polygamy and major Islamic teachings are in a very critical and impartial atmosphere. His "Muhammad" inflamed the enmity between Muslims and non-Muslims. Ground reality and eternal truth proved him wrong, he himself confessed the universal reality that he was the last Prophet of God (Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon him).

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