Introduction
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Orientalism, when defined in simple words, implies the Western attempt to know the East, particularly the Muslims and their faith, Islamic sciences and literature. For a limited period, especially in its early stages, it reflected missionary sentiments and zeal but soon it donned the mantle of so called “objectivity” and empiricism with which the West approached the East. In due course of time it became a movement, an approach and a way of life. All sorts of topics and subjects came under discussion. Organized efforts were made in Egypt, North Africa, and other regions to revive ancient languages and cultures. Arabic language was though to be incapable of fulfilling the need of the modern time. Emphasis was laid on local dialects and vernaculars. Arabic script was sought to be changed and replaced with the Roman one. The role of alien elements in the development of Islamic culture and civilization was highlighted.

For a proper understanding of Orientalism a brief account of Crusades will be in order here. In a sense the foundation of Orientalism was laid down much before the crusades. However, Orientalism acquired a great deal of significance only after the failure of Crusades in achieving the politico-military, even religious, goals of the West.
Muslim interaction with Christianity dates back to the times of the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him); the Christians of Najran had met him in Madinah. After the early Muslim conquests which brought many Christians or Christian-dominated territories under the Islamic fold the two religions and their followers came in close contact with each other. The wave of early Islamic conquests swayed over a long part of the Christendom defeating it particularly in West Asia and North Africa. The Christian world suffered a setback on religious fronts as well. For a great number of Christians, attracted to, and impressed by the simple and rationale Islamic faith, embraced the religion of their conquerors. It is apparent that the Church was declining fast in the East. In Europe, however, it was spreading in a big way. Between 500 to 1100 AD almost the whole of Western Europe was forcibly brought under the Christian fold.

The Christianized or religiously united Europe gave a new life to the ailing Christendom, which expressed itself in the form of violent mediaeval Crusades. At that time Crusades were viewed as wars with a 'holy' cause, namely, deliverance of Jerusalem from the Muslim "occupation". The Crusaders almost achieved their goal when they successfully established the so-called kingdom of Jerusalem. At that time the Muslim world was badly divided. The central authority of the
Abbasids was weakened and a number of "dynasties" had come up which were often at loggerheads with each other. The politically divided world of Islam, thus, fell an easy prey to the first crusaders.

The crusades, probably, had a missionary character as well. It is well known that the first crusade was preached and launched by Pope Urban II, which suggests its missionary nature and orientation. In his sermon at Clermont the Pope had said that the Eastern Christians were in peril, their Churches were being desecrated and pilgrims visiting Jerusalem were being harassed. After highlighting the plight of Eastern Christianity the Pope urged people to rise up and fight for the deliverance of Jerusalem. In his speech one may even trace indications about the conversion of the Muslims. The Pope's statement does show that he had some hope that a successful Crusade might create opportunities for conversion of Muslims to Christianity.

The Crusades (starting towards the end of eleventh century and continuing to the fifteenth), on the other hand, provided a unique opportunity for elaborate interaction between Muslims and Christians. There took place a kind of cultural interpenetration, which paved the way for direct contact between the Arabs and the Europeans. Over a period of time many crusaders realized that they could learn a lot from the culturally superior Muslims.
A positive outcome of the Crusades was that they awakened Muslims from deep slumber. As a result they became united to a great extent and launched a counter-offensive under the leadership of Salahuddhi Ayyubi. Later Jerusalem was liberated after almost 90 years of Christian occupation. The Ottoman caliphs, too, earned on Ayyubi’s mission. The counter-offensive lunched by the Ottomans swept over Eastern Europe and sent a shock wave right across the European continent. It is for this reason that many Christian writers have described the crusades as a misadventure.

After the failure of the crusading movement the Christendom, particularly some far-sighted leaders and intellectuals, began to deliberate on why the crusades had failed. The idea behind this soul-searching was not to merely find out the causes of failure but also devise a new strategy to counter and check the advance of the Ottomans and their faith in Europe. They discovered that ignorance was the main cause of their decline. As a result they decided to acquire knowledge from all sources. So during the Renaissance i.e. between 13th to 14th centuries, European scholars and intellectuals concentrated on reviving their literature, art and other academic disciplines. This intellectual awakening also made them rethink about the Muslims and their faith. Consequently, many people, scholars as well as laymen, embarked upon acquiring knowledge from
Muslim institutions and individuals in Spain and the Fertile Crescent. Travellers wrote travelogues and scholars produced academic works and thus began the tradition of studying the East, which is known as Orientalism.

Orientalism is derived from Orient, which implies East; the countries lying east of Mediterranean are usually described as the Orient. Occident, on the other hand, means the West; the countries of Europe, particularly Western Europe, and the US are called the Occident. Orientalism, with all its connotations, came to be used towards the end of the eighteenth century. Now Orientalism signifies eastern characteristics, life style, values, knowledge, literature, art and culture. It further denotes learning or knowledge of the languages, religions and culture of the east. The person well versed in all these is regarded as “Orientalist”. There is no denying the fact that the West has for long thought of the “Orient” as one of her many inventions. In their imagination the Orient was a place of romance. It was taken to be a thing, a ‘subject’ to be discussed and analyzed. In his inimitable style Edward W Said wrote of Orientalism “as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient — dealing with it by making statements about it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it, in short Orientalism as a Western
style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (E W Said 1978, Orientalism, Introduction).

Undoubtedly Orientalism has been a kind of intellectual invasion through which Europe has sought to capture the heart and mind of the Muslim world in such a way that it becomes indifferent towards and averse to its glorious past and seeks a future which would have no connection with the great Islamic civilization. Efforts were made to overawe Muslims, intellectually so as to make them look towards the West for inspiration and leadership. Today it can be said that a remarkable attitudinal change is discernible in the altered circumstances especially since the industrial revolution in Europe. Today’s Orientalism is no longer focussed on early Islam. Instead, the religious movements, social trends and analysis of contemporary Muslim societies, both externally and internally, are the new themes that fascinate the Western scholars. The attitudinal difference is also marked by a substantial amount of rationality in their approach to various problems and issues.

Twentieth century dawned with a host of new trends. Great changes took place on all levels, political, economic and social. The colonized nations awoke after a long slumber. The movements of self-determination, scientific developments and coming together of a variety
of cultures find civilizations have radically transformed the nature of problems and issues. Under the influence of these changes Western scholars have conducted some positive researches also in which a good deal of objectivity has been observed. They are no longer concerned with deciphering codes and performing secret missions behind the enemy lines. Islamic Studies, in fact, has established new outposts such as in Mexico, Australia, Canada and the US. Muslims and Christians are mixing with one another as never before. To put it simply, the self-understanding of the 'Orientalist' has not remained unaffected. It has changed to a great extent.

The west has produced a large number of scholars who worked on Islam and Islamic Studies. Their contribution in preserving, editing and publishing classical Islamic materials and making them available for scholars of Islamic studies as immense treasure. William Montgomery Watt is one of those scholars who produced quality material and deep researches and works on Islam. His work especially in the field of early history of Islam as well as his works on intellectual history of Islam is highly valuable.

The present study proposes to critically examine his works on various fields of Islamic history. It will take into account his methods, his sources, his treatment of subject and his point of view regarding the
biography of the Prophet in general and in Islam in particular. It is perhaps not out of place to mention that a critical assessment of William Montgomery Watt has to be found in the whole work.

Some of the various reasons for which western scholars took interest in orientalism are the following.

The increasing interaction which was the result of close political relations, played a significant role in this context. Moreover geographical proximity made it convenient for the growing number of travelers and missionaries from the West to travel to the East. As a result they could study Muslim values with more objectivity.

Medieval Christendom has studied Islam for two purposes. First of all they wanted to protect Christians from the Muslims' onslaught and secondly they also had a keen desire to convert Muslims to Christianity.

The western scholars in the beginning refused to acknowledge the real contribution Islam made to science and culture. But with the passage of time this view changed. Now most of the leading scholars and orientalists admit and acknowledge their contribution.

It is difficult to say that orientalism is totally wrong and evil because many outstanding western scholars have devoted their lives to Islamic studies with sincere interests in it.
In the earlier centuries the western scholars' critical attitude on Islam had been responsible for creating an atmosphere in which the relationship between Islam and west could have been healthy. During the past many decades a change of attitude has occurred in some quarters. Dr. T.W. Arnold, Professor A.J. Arberry, Professor H.A.R. Gibb, Professor W.M. Watt, adopted a somewhat impartial and sympathetic attitude towards Islam.

The first institution *Ecole des Langues orientales vivantes* of the same mission was established in Paris in 1795.

Meanwhile Arabic studies in England became a major concern for all those who wished to study Muslim culture and a new chair of Arabic was setup at the University of London.

From time immemorial many seers and seekers have tried to unlock the mystery of man in the universe. William Montgomery Watt was one of the very few who probably possessed the key to this mystery.

The present study of this author is confined to the aspect of Prophet's life and mission. He has also tried to reinterpret some of the things which were stated by the earlier scholars in this field and he has added his own observations.
The purpose of this study is to present a comprehensive, understanding and analysis of W.M. Watt's contribution to Islamic studies.

Watt's main area of interest is, apart from the life and epoch of the Prophet, the early history of Islamic sects. He has written a number of articles on various aspects of this subject. His interest in Islam began in 1937 when a veterinary student from Lahore shared his flat with him for about eight months. Their conversations on the supper table aroused his interest in Islam. His contact with Islam, in fact, began with a dialogue. He got particularly fascinated with the problems of the relationship between Christianity and Islam. It was a turning point in his career. Watt has written some thirty books and over a hundred and fifty articles solely for a large reading public. And this was not the result of mere chance or persuasion but it was consciously planned by him. It appears that he wrote for the sake of writing or for eternity, and not only for his colleagues but also for educated people outside his discipline as well.