ABSTRACT

Since east is east and west is west, for better understanding, interaction between the two is must. Orientalism means the western attempt to know the East especially Muslims and their faith. The west has produced a large number of scholars who have worked on Islam and Islamic studies by making contribution in not only preserving, editing and publishing classical Islamic materials but by making them available for the scholars of Islamic studies.

W.M. Watt is one of those scholars who have produced quality material on this subject. Though in the earlier centuries the western scholars' critical attitude created an atmosphere due to which the relationship between Islam and west could not flourish. During the past many decades a change of attitude has occurred. In this context the names of Dr. T.W. Arnold, Professor A.J. Arberry, Professor H.A.R. Gibb and Professor W.M. Watt can be included but these authors adopted a little impartial and sympathetic attitude toward Islam. From time immemorial many seers and seekers have tried to unlock the mystery of man in the universe. William Montgomery Watt has probably possessed the key to this mystery.
The present study "A critical study of William Montgomery Watt's contribution to Islamic studies" proposes to critically examine Watt's works on various fields of Islamic studies. It includes 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. Watt has actually tried to reinterpret some of the things which were stated by earlier scholars by adding his own observations.

The thesis is divided into six chapters including introduction and conclusion. A detailed Bibliography and appendix have also been attached for convenient study purpose. The very first chapter deals with the definitions, evolution, origins and development of orientalism. It also takes into account the objectivity of the orientalists by analyzing their works thoroughly.

Chapter I focuses on the meaning and definition of orientalism, its evolution, origins, development, objectivity and some prominent orientalists and their works.

The term orientalism is derived from the Latin word oriens (east rising sun) and from the Greek word ("horos, the direction of the rising sun") orient is the opposite of occident. The term occident means the west and orient means the east.
Orientalism had a positive or agreeable meaning referring to “the study of languages, literature, religions, thought, arts and social life of east in order to make them available to the west”.

Mr. Edward W. Said, a renowned English scholar writes about orientalism as follows:

“By orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion are interdependent. The most readily accepted designation for orientalism is an academic are and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic are and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the orient and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist either in its specific or its general aspects, is an orientalist, and what he or she does is orientalism”.

There can be no two opinions about the need and importance of better understanding between Islam and the west. Islam, the religion of more than 500 million people, is the most misunderstood religion in the west. In the first half of the twentieth century, various Middle Eastern and European scholars taught Islamic studies at American universities, but remained very slight until the 1940s.
The origin of orientalism can be traced back from the 7th century A.D. and continues till date. Orientalism originated as a reaction to the basic concept of Islam regarding the origins of man and his religion right from the time of Adam down to Prophet Muhammad.

The journey to success by orientalists includes written material on or related to Islam, all these orientalists mainly concentrated on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and Quran from their own perspective.

There are various reasons for which western scholars took interest in orientalism. The increasing economic interaction which was the result of close political relations, played a significant role. 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 studied Muslim values with much more objectivity.

There are countless orientalists in different countries i.e. France, Germany, England and other European countries who have particularly worked on Islam. It is almost impossible to discuss all of their work in detail. At the end of the chapter some orientalists and their works have been selected for the purpose of chronological analysis.
The biography of W.M. Watt has been included in chapter II, highlighting his place in Islamic studies, his interest in Islam and Christianity along with various scholar's and teacher's views on him.

He was born on 14th March 1909, in Ceres, Fife, Scotland, the son of the Rev Andrew Watt (d. 1910) and Mary Burns (d. 1937). After schooling in Lanarkshire and Edinburgh he studied at the University of Edinburgh (1927-30), and Balliol College, Oxford (1930-33), obtaining degrees in classics (Latin and Greek) and philosophy. He also studied philosophy for the summer semester 1934 at the University of Jena, Germany and theology (1938-39) at Cuddesdon College, Oxford. He was assistant lecturer in moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh from 1934 to 1938; but, he, then became interested in the Christian approach to Islam, and after studies at the University of Edinburgh (1940-43) served as an Islamic specialist on the staff of the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem from 1943 to 1946, having been ordained priest in 1940, and obtaining his Ph.D. from Edinburgh in 1944 for a thesis on 'Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam' (published 1949). From 1947 to 1979, he was head of the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh, from 1964 with the title of Professor and later as Professor Emeritus. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Toronto (1963, 1978) and at George Town
University, Washington (1978-79), and also delivered lectures at Makerere University, Uganda (1967), at Kuwait University (1970) and at the College de France Paris (1970). In 1981 he received the Levi della Vida Medal from the University of California, Los Angeles.

In chapter III a detailed account of Watt’s works, for example, his books, his articles and his reviews have been included.

It is said that his interest in Islam started in 1937, from his conversation with a Muslim student, Khwaja Abdul Mannan, who enabled him to realize Islam as a ‘centuries old system of thought and life’. This interest later developed further and led to his authoring over thirty books and over a hundred and fifty articles. One of his main interests was the career of Muhammad, represented by his famous trilogy, Muhammad at Mecca, Muhammad at Medina and Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman (1953, 1956, 1961), slightly different is Muhammad’s Mecca: History form the Qur’an (1988). Study of the early history of the Islamic sects also attracted him, and from this came his Ph.D. thesis, many articles, and the Formative Period of Islamic Thought (1973). Among his other books are: The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali (translations, 1953); Islam and the Integration of Society (1961); Islamic Philosophy and Theology (1962; enlarged edition 1986); Muslim Intellectual : a study of al-Ghazali (1963); Truth in the Religions (1963);
Islamic Political Thought (1968); What is Islam? (1968); Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an (revision) (1970); Islamic Revelation in the Modern World (1970); The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe (1972); The Majesty that was Islam (1974); Islam and Christianity Today (1984); Islamic fundamentalism at Modernity (1988); Early Islam: Collected Articles (1991); Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions (1991). There have been translations of some of his books into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Japanese and Indonesian.

Watt's thoughts on Quran have been taken up in chapter IV. It mainly deals with the understanding of revelation not only among Christians but also among Muslims. Here he seems to differ from the traditional Muslim understandings of revelation. The emphasis is made on his Islamic revelation in the modern world.

Watt has contributed to the understanding of the revelation not only among Christians but also among Muslims. His view differs from the traditional Muslim understanding of revelation. He produced two significant works directly related to the Quran. The first was 'Islamic Revelation in the modern world (1969)'. The second was the revised edition of his teacher Richard Bell’s Introduction to the Quran (1970). Watt has also dealt with the issue of Islamic revelation in a number of
places in his other publications. In the analysis of his views on revelation, I will focus my attention mainly on his “Islamic Revelation in the Modern World”, since an examination of the related passages of his other works has shown that there are no major changes, in his views on this issue.

William Montgomery Watt points out the possibility to believe that Muhammad had received some knowledge of the Quranic stories or events which were not earlier known to him. Through some informant who had acquired his knowledge from the books and this connection he misinterprets Quranic verses.

Watt elaborated the novelty in the content of the Quran by pointing out that Prophet Muhammad was sent as a warner to bring the message of Islam from God to his fellows. The remaining messages have been derived from Judaism and Christianity because these messages are God’s power and essential good character.

Chapter V, *Views on Prophet* provides a detailed analysis of the works of a number of leading orientalists who have made special studies of the Quran and have also translated it into many other European languages. The unsympathetic and sometimes hostile attitude of these orientalists has been frankly and fairly projected because this attitude is solely responsible for the distorted image of the prophet. At the same
time, the change of attitude into objective and positive one has also been incorporated.

Montgomery Watt is prominent among such well known orientalists. The west’s new analytical approaches were now targeted on the Prophet. Watt studied him in the context of his social background and environment relying heavily on Muhammad’s approach and stressing statesmanship. Maxime Rodinson applied a materialistic and Marx its approach, resorting furthermore to techniques of psychoanalysis to explain the Prophet’s revelation.

The orientalist says that the Holy Prophet used to suffer from epileptic fits. Watt refutes this allegation of the Prophet suffering from epileptic fits in his book “Muhammad Prophet and Statesman”.

Chapter VI, Modernist Writings on W.M. Watt uncovers the ignorance and prejudice practised by some Western writers on Islam. At the same time it also focuses on the contemporary thoughts and opinions on Watt in general and my own view on the author, in particular.

Khurram Murad was of the opinion that Watt was kind enough to lend a sympathetic ear and pen to Islam.
A.S. Basmee admires his openness and honesty in pointing out the problems non-Muslim western scholars face in the field of Islamic studies.

A modern writer, Andreas D'souza, critically analyzed the writing of Watt and said that Watt attempted to move beyond a mere description of Islamic date to the more challenging task of helping Muslim to deepen and strengthen their faith, making it more directly relevant to the questions and issues we faced today.

Josef Ven Ess points out that since Watt has been Anglican Clergyman throughout this life, therefore, sometimes his writings could be described as didactic or possibly propagandistic.

Muhammad Hamidullah, though praises Watt for his efforts in translating the works, yet he clearly spots the fact that Watt has offered an incorrect rendering of Al-Ghazali’s original.

The innermost desire of W.M. Watt is to bring the two religious together in friendly dialogue in order to avoid the impact of the rising tide of secularism and materialism. He adopted the technique of multi-methodology to reach out to a larger public.