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Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri's The Sealed Nectar: An Analytical Review

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Abstract

Safi-ur-Rahman Mubarakpuri (1943–2006) was a prominent Islamic scholar, historian, and author known for his significant contributions to Islamic literature, particularly in Sirah literature. His most celebrated work, Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar), is a comprehensive biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Sealed Nectar is widely regarded as one of the most accessible and authoritative accounts of the Prophet's life and has been translated into numerous languages. This research paper provides an in-depth evaluation of Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri's The Sealed Nectar, emphasising its significance in contemporary Sirah literature. The Sealed Nectar chronicles the major events of the Prophet's life, including his birth, early years, prophethood, struggles, battles, expeditions, and the establishment of Islam. The paper also explores the book's scholarly and educational influence, highlighting how Mubarakpuri's storytelling techniques and language resonate with contemporary readers. The research compares The Sealed Nectar with classical Sirah texts, such as those by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham, analysing how closely Mubarakpuri adheres to traditional sources and how he verifies historical facts. This study aims to deepen the understanding of The Sealed Nectar's contribution to contemporary Sirah scholarship and its enduring relevance for modern readers.

Keywords : *The Sealed Nectar, Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri, Sirah literature, Islamic historiography, historical accuracy, narrative style, classical Sirah texts.*

Introduction:

Sirah literature, which contains the biographical accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), holds a pivotal place in Islamic scholarship and culture. The word 'Sirah' is derived from the Arabic word "سيرة" (sirah), meaning "life" or "biography." This genre not only provides insight into the life and character of the Prophet but also reflects the social, political, and cultural landscape of early Islam. The significance of Sirah literature extends beyond religious texts; it serves as a historical resource, providing a valuable lens through which both scholars and believers can better understand the early development of Islam and the values it espouses. After the Prophet's death, the study of Sirah has been a central focus for scholars and writers. Over the

centuries, different approaches to the Prophet's biography have emerged in both the Muslim and non-Muslim contexts, significantly influencing perceptions of the Prophet and Islam as a whole. Muslim scholars have traditionally focused on the Prophet's life, examining the context and significance of key incidents. They highlight his leadership, moral character, teachings, and exemplary conduct, offering lessons that can be applied in everyday situations. In contrast, non-Muslim authors often take different stances. Some adopt a critical perspective, while others engage with the subject more respectfully and sincerely.¹

¹ Suleyman Sertkaya, A Critical and Historical Overview of the Sirah Genre from the Classical to the Modern Period, Journal: Religions, Vol.13, no.196, 2022, pp. 01.

Allamah Ibn Qayyim writes in his book “Zaad al-Ma’dh” that every Muslim must acquire knowledge of Sirah, as it contains the guidance and leadership of the Prophet (PBUH), which leads to success in this world and the hereafter. Learning about the life of the Prophet (pbuh) helps to understand Islam better. The life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the foundation for understanding the history of Islam and the origins of Islamic civilisation.² Sirah texts also contribute to the theological understanding of Islam by highlighting the Prophet’s role as the final messenger of God. They elucidate the significance of his teachings, the revelation of the Qur’an, and the historical context of his prophethood. This reinforces the belief in Muhammad’s (PBUH) unique position in Islam and his role as a guide for Muslims. The documentation of the Prophet Muhammad's Sirah is regarded as second in importance only to the preservation of his Sunnah, which includes the Hadith. The collection of Hadith began during the Prophet's lifetime, with his approval in certain circumstances. This effort was undertaken after the companions were able to distinguish between the Qur’anic revelation and the wording of the Hadith, ensuring no confusion or bias.

The seventh century marked a watershed in Islamic history, as it witnessed the life and mission of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The origins of Sirah literature can be traced back to the early Islamic period, shortly after the Prophet's passing in 632 CE, although elements of its preservation began during his lifetime. During this period, oral traditions played a crucial role in preserving the accounts of the Prophet’s (PBUH) life. His companions, who were witnesses to many events, shared their experiences, which were later compiled into written form.³

Among the most prominent figures in Sirah literature are Muhammad bin Ishaq bin Yasar bin Khiyar al-Madani, commonly known as Ibn Ishaq, and Muhammad Abu Muhammad Abdul Malik Ibn Hisham ibn Ayyub Al-Hamiri Al-Mu’atari, known as Ibn Hisham. Both are regarded as pioneering scholars for Sirah literature. Their works primarily

document the life events of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Makkah and Madinah.⁴

The biography of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) written by Ibn Ishaq was entitled Sirat Rasul Allah (pbuh). While the original text by Ibn Ishaq has not survived, his work has been preserved primarily through the recension of later scholars, particularly Ibn Hisham, who edited and abridged it. Ibn Hisham's Al-Sirah Nabawiyah is essentially an edited and abridged recension of Ibn Ishaq's original work. Ibn Hisham compiled his recension approximately fifty years after Ibn Ishaq's death. In his editing process, Ibn Hisham omitted reports that he considered weak or unreliable and added linguistic and genealogical information. This made Ibn Hisham's Sirah more accessible and authoritative for later scholars.⁵

Fred Donner's “Muhammad and the Believers” provides an academic exploration of early Islam, focusing on its social, political, and religious dimensions of early Islam in 7th-century Arabia. Donner argues that Islam’s initial development was not solely a religious movement but also a broader societal transformation. He emphasises the importance of tribal solidarity, economic factors, and social ties in shaping the early Muslim community. Although the book offers a well-researched historical perspective, its approach is primarily academic and may appeal more to those interested in historical analysis rather than the spiritual aspects of the Prophet’s mission.⁶ Historians such as al-Tabari (d. 923) and al-Baladhuri (d. 892) played a crucial role in preserving and documenting early Islamic history. Their works helped contextualise the Prophet Muhammad’s life within the larger historical framework of the Arabian Peninsula.

In the fourteenth century, several significant works on the life of the Prophet Muhammad emerged, placing his biography within the broader context of Islamic history. Among them, Ibn Kathir's Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya presents a chronological narrative that helps readers understand the development of Islam and the socio-political landscape of the period. Another important work is al-Suyuti's Al-Khasa'is al-Kubra, which highlights the unique characteristics and virtues of the Prophet

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² Imran Khan, International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM), Volume 3, Issue 1, Jan.-Feb. 2023, pp. 126
www.ijhssm.org

³ Sertkaya Suleyman, A Critical and Historical Overview of the Sirah Genre from the Classical to the Modern Period, Journal: Religions, Vol.13, no.196, 2022, pp. 5-6
<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions>

⁴ Prayogi Arditya, Alamul Yaqin, M. Zulvi Romzul Huda Fuadi, Descriptive Study of the Nabawiyah Sirah by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham, International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities Vol. 1 No. 2 (2022), Pp. 108
<https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v1i2.28>

⁵ Ibid, 108-109.
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<https://en.islamonweb.net/exploring-the-prophet-muhammad-%EF%B7%BA-five-essential-books-for-non-muslim-readers-by-non-muslim-authors>

and their significance in Islamic thought and Muslim devotion. Collectively, these works deepen our understanding of the Prophet Muhammad's life, teachings, and enduring impact on Islamic civilisation. Overall, these works collectively enhance the understanding of Prophet Muhammad's life, his teachings, and their profound impact on Islamic civilisation.

Maulana Safi-ur-Rahman Mubarakpuri:

Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri was a prominent Islamic scholar and educator whose life and works have had a significant impact on the Muslim community in India and beyond. He was born in 1943 in the village of Husainabad, near Mubarakpur in Uttar Pradesh, India. He grew up during a period of profound socio-political change, as India was moving toward independence from British colonial rule.

Safi-ur-Rahman grew up in a family renowned for its religious devotion rather than material wealth. His father, Abdullah bin Akbar, though not formally educated, was widely respected for his deep faith, moral integrity, and piety. This nurturing environment instilled in Safi-ur-Rahman a profound sense of ethical responsibility and spiritual devotion. He received his early education in his native village, where his uncle, Yunus bin Akbar, served as his first teacher and introduced him to the Qur'an. This early foundation played a pivotal role in shaping his scholarly pursuits and lifelong commitment to Islamic learning.⁷

After completing his initial Qur'anic education at home, he enrolled at Madrasa Arabia Darul Taleem, where he received a foundational education in Arabic and Persian. In 1954, he was admitted to Madrasa Ihy-ul-Uloom, Mubarakpur. After two years, he went to Madrasa Faiz-e-Aam, Maunath Bhanjan, District Azamgarh, which is now located in Mau District. Maulana studied there for seven years and earned the degrees of Fadilat, Maulvi, and Alim by 1961.⁸ In 1963, Maulana began his teaching career at Madrasa Faiz-e-Aam, and in 1966, he was transferred to Madrasa Darul Hadees, Mau. In 1969, he joined Madrasa Faiz-ul-Uloom at Seoni (Madhya Pradesh) as a principal. Subsequently, as a principal, he joined Madrasa Arabia Darul Taleem, Mubarakpur in 1972, and in 1974, he was appointed as a professor in Jamiah Salafiyah Banaras and worked there until 1988. He also worked as the chief editor of the Magazine Section of that institute.⁹ During 1963-1988, Maulana authored about seventeen books in Arabic and Urdu. Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri writes that, "A Research Institute was established in 1408

⁷ Salafi, Abdul Maeed, Aah! Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman, Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 136

⁸ Mubarakpuri, Safi-ur-Rehman, *The Sealed Nectar*, Second Edition 2008, Darussalam Publication, Riyadh. Pp. 8-9

⁹ Ibid, Pp. 9-10

Hijrah at the Islamic University of Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah as 'The Centre for the Services of the Prophet's Biography. I was selected to work there.'¹⁰ During his tenure there, he wrote Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (*The Sealed Nectar*), which won first prize in a worldwide Sirah competition organised by the Muslim World League in Makkah in 1979.¹¹

His passing on 1 December 2006 marked the end of a life devoted to faith, scholarship, and service to the community. His life exemplified unwavering commitment to Islamic principles, compassion for others, and dedication to education, inspiring generations of students and scholars. His legacy endures through his writings, teachings, and the institutions he established, reflecting the enduring values of integrity, compassion, and service to humanity.¹²

Literary Analysis of The Sealed Nectar:

The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum) presents a chronological account of the Prophet's life, starting from pre-Islamic Arabia, moving through his prophethood, struggles, battles, and ultimately his passing. The book draws upon authentic sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and early historical records. Unlike some biographies that contain weak or fabricated reports, *The Sealed Nectar* adheres to reliable historical evidence. Mubarakpuri provides a structured account of the Prophet's (pbuh) life, providing readers with a clear understanding. The book covers everything from his birth and early years to the first revelations, the opposition in Makkah, the migration to Madinah, the battles, and the expansion of Islam. The book also highlights the experiences of the Prophet's Companions and the valuable lessons that can be drawn from them. The work presents Muhammad (pbuh) as a great messenger of Allah, an exemplary educator, a statesman, and an outstanding leader. The book also illustrates the gradual establishment of monotheism and provides a compassionate portrayal of the Prophet's role as a husband, father, and leader.¹³

One of the book's major strengths is its introductory discussion of the political, social, and religious conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia. This background helps readers understand the challenges faced by the Prophet (PBUH) and the transformative impact of his message. The book also provides a detailed analysis of the Prophet's military strategies and

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Salafi, Abdul Maeed, Aah! Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman, Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 153-154.

¹² Ibid, 154-156.

¹³ Salafi, Maulana Abdul Razzaq Abdul Ghaffar, , Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 355-359.

leadership during various expeditions, making it a valuable resource for students of Islamic history. Furthermore, it highlights the Prophet's just and ethical conduct in warfare, demonstrating that he always preferred peace and resorted to armed conflict only when necessary.

While *The Sealed Nectar* covers a wide range of topics, some critics argue that it may lack depth in certain areas, particularly in discussing the complexities of specific historical events. Readers seeking a more detailed academic analysis may find this aspect lacking in the book. Some readers may feel that the cultural and historical contexts surrounding certain events could be explored more thoroughly. Greater exploration of the socio-political environment of 7th-century Arabia could enhance the reader's understanding of the challenges faced by the Prophet.

Overall, *The Sealed Nectar* is an essential read for anyone interested in the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is a well-researched and structured biography that provides valuable insights into Islamic history. However, its heavy focus on battles and political events, along with translation issues, makes it less suitable for beginners or those looking for a more personal and character-driven account of the Prophet's (pbuh) life.¹⁴

Impact of The Sealed Nectar:

The Sealed Nectar has had a profound impact on the understanding of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Islamic history. The book has significantly contributed to increasing awareness of the Prophet's life among Muslims, particularly those who may not have previously studied the Sirah in depth. By presenting historical events in an accessible way, it has enabled readers to connect with the struggles, sacrifices, and leadership of the Prophet. Many Muslims have found their faith strengthened after reading it, as it provides an intimate look at the Prophet's resilience, wisdom, and character, inspiring them to incorporate these qualities into their own lives. Additionally, the book has set a high standard for Islamic literature, influencing many subsequent biographies of the Prophet by emphasising factual accuracy and a chronological approach to storytelling. The book's influence is further amplified by its global reach. It has been translated into multiple languages, including English, Urdu, Bengali, Turkish, and French, making it accessible to a diverse audience. This widespread availability has contributed to its status as one of the most widely read biographies of the Prophet.

Dr Abdullah Umar Naseef says, "*The Sealed Nectar* represents a notable effort by Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri, created in response to a writing competition on the life of the

Prophet organised by the Muslim World League, where he was awarded first prize. The book has been extremely well-received, resulting in the complete sale of the initial print run of ten thousand copies, followed by an additional five thousand copies printed thanks to the generous initiative of Mr Hassan Hamoudi."¹⁵ Overall, *The Sealed Nectar* remains a pivotal work in Islamic literature. It has educated millions, strengthened religious devotion, and provided a historical framework for understanding the spread of Islam.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri's contributions to Islamic scholarship and education have had a lasting impact on the Muslim community, both in India and globally. His life exemplified a deep commitment to faith, integrity, and the pursuit of knowledge, traits that are vividly reflected in his monumental work, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtoom (The Sealed Nectar)*. Through this biography of the Prophet Muhammad, Mubarakpuri not only chronicles the significant events of the Prophet's life but also provides invaluable insights into the socio-political landscape of early Islam. *The Sealed Nectar* has significantly influenced the study of Sirah literature in the English-speaking world. Its popularity has led to numerous translations and adaptations, making it a staple in many educational institutions and mosques. The book has played a crucial role in introducing the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad to a broader audience, contributing to a greater understanding of Islam.

Mubarakpuri's work also extends beyond mere biographical account; it serves as a moral compass for Muslims. By emphasising the ethical teachings of the Prophet, he encourages readers to reflect on their own lives, aspire to embody the Prophet's virtues, and engage with contemporary issues through an Islamic lens. Despite some critiques regarding the depth of historical analysis, particularly concerning specific events, the overarching message of *The Sealed Nectar* remains potent and transformative. It invites readers to appreciate the profound significance of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings and their relevance in today's world. Ultimately, Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman Mubarakpuri's legacy is one of inspiration, encouraging future generations to pursue knowledge, uphold moral integrity, and actively engage in the betterment of society through education and faith.

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² Suleyman Sertkaya, A Critical and Historical Overview of the Sirah Genre from the Classical to the Modern Period, *Journal: Religions*, Vol.13, no.196, 2022, pp. 01.

¹⁵ Riyazi Rizwanullah, Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: *Yadon Ke Safar Mein*, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 403

¹⁴ Ibid, 283.

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⁶ Ibid, 108-109.

⁷<https://en.islamonweb.net/exploring-the-prophet-muhammad-%EF%B7%BA-five-essential-books-for-non-muslim-readers-by-non-muslim-authors>

⁸ Sertkaya Suleyman, A Critical and Historical Overview of the Sirah Genre from the Classical to the Modern Period, Journal: Religions, Vol.13, no.196, 2022, pp. 6-8

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⁹ Salafi, Abdul Maeed, Aah! Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman, Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 136

⁰ Mubarakpuri, Safi-ur-Rehman, *The Sealed Nectar*, Second Edition 2008, Darussalam Publication, Riyadh. Pp. 8-9

¹ Ibid, Pp. 9-10

²Ibid

³ Salafi, Abdul Maeed, Aah! Maulana Safi-ur-Rehman, Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 153-154.

⁴Ibid, 154-156.

⁵ Salafi, Maulana Abdul Razzaq Abdul Ghaffar, , Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 355-359.

⁶Ibid, 283

⁷Riyazi Rizwanullah, Sheikh Safi-ur-Rehman: Yadon Ke Safar Mein, 2007, Imam Al-Bukhari Al-Islami Publication, Lahore, Pp. 403