

Hafiz Ibn-e-Kaseer and the Art of Seerat-writing

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Abstract

Seerat of the Holy prophet (PBUH) holds a very significant position in the teachings of Islam. Seerat, in fact, is deemed as the commentary (in words and in deeds) of the holy prophet on the teachings of Quran. Since Seerat grew under the shadow of the Glorious Quran, it helps immensely in understanding the spirit of Islam. In fact, some Seerat writers aptly insist that the best way of understanding Islam is to read Seerat in the light of Quran and read the Holy Quran in the light of Seerat. This integral conjunction, they contend, can help us to have a real grasp of the spirit of Islam. In view of the importance of Seerat, no wonder, there are innumerable books on the Seerat of the Holy Prophet in almost all the leading languages of the world. These books on Seerat cover the life of Prophet from cradle to grave. Of course, one can not dismiss that some of these books are written with meticulous care and extra-ordinary respect for the prophet, while others are not of equal standard. Our contention is that two of ibn-e-kaseer's books, that is, Tafseer Ibn-e-kaseer and Al-bidaya wan Nahyan are considered the most respectable books on the Seerat of the holy prophet. It is obvious that in a small article of this nature, only an overview of these editions can be presented. We sincerely pray that this overview may urge the readers to get hold of these works and examine them with utmost care.

Keywords: Ibn-e-Kaseer, Seerat, Seerat writing

The Art of Seerat-Writing

More than 1900 pages of Al-Bidaya comprise the biography of the Holy Prophet (SAW).¹ His narrations and descriptions regarding the events related to the life and prophetic mission of the Holy Prophet (SAW) are quite comprehensive and enable the readers to follow and obey the teachings of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in every walk of life.

Besides the accuracy and authenticity of the events and occurrences regarding the biography of the Holy Prophet (SAW), the book very distinctly reveals the author's love and affection

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towards the Holy Prophet (SAW). In the beginning of the book, he writes: Now I am going to describe the life-history of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in such a manner that it will become a source of satisfaction and consolation for the readers and will also cure the spiritual maladies of the people.²

Ibn-e-Kaseer was basically an eminent scholar of hadith and had learnt quite a few books and collections of Ahadith by heart. Al-Bidaya seems to be a collection of the sayings of the Holy Prophet rather than a book of Islamic History.

Though the predecessors of Ibn-e-Kaseer had done their utmost in connection with the compilation as well as authentication of the traditions, they had not probed into the events and narratives so much as to make them more and more reliable and authentic and that is why numerous absurd and fabricated traditions were amalgamated with the actual ones in the biography of the holy Prophet (SAW) and the same were reproduced and copied by the successors in their books. But Ibn-e-Kaseer had based his writings on the proper probity and scrutiny of the traditions and their narrators.

He is deemed to be the pioneer and founder of this Art. In his book, he always describes various traditions relating to a particular event and then indicates the most preferential one at the end in view of its authenticity and accuracy under the 'principles of Hadith'. Thus he contributed a lot to the 'Art of Seerat-writing' and introduced a new mode of scrutiny and probity for the authentication of the narrators and their traditions.

'Hafiz Ibn-e-Kaseer' has divided the entire portion pertaining to the biography of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in seven parts and each part has been named as a 'Kitab' (book) according to the following details:

- Kitab-ul-Mab'ath
- Kitab-ul-Maghazi
- Kitab-ul-Bu'oth
- Kitab-ul-Wafood
- Kitab Hajja-tul-Wida'a
- Kitab-ush-Shamayel
- Kitab Dalayel-un-Nubu-wat.

He has further divided each book in various minor topics and chapters.

At first, no special attention has been paid to write down the events on yearly basis, however the author has kept in view the chronological order while narrating different occurrences. Nevertheless, the events occurred after ‘Hegira’ have been described absolutely on yearly basis.

‘Ibn-e-Kaseer’ has started the biography of the Prophet from the noble and exalted family lineage of the Holy Prophet (SAW). After discussing the lineage in the light of multifarious traditions, he has recorded the names of the ancestors of the Holy Prophet (SAW) up to ‘Adnan’, the grandfather of the ‘Arabs’. Beyond ‘Adnan’, the details of the remaining genealogical chain up to ‘Hazrat Adam (A.S)’ have been recorded in the light of a well-known book of History: ‘Tareekh-e-Tabari’ as well as certain other reliable sources of history.³ Then he has illuminated the felicitous birth of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in the light of a narrative from the renowned book of ‘Hadith’, ‘Saheeh-ul-Muslim’. In this connection, he has revealed a few marvellous and amazing events during the birth-night of the Holy Prophet (SAW).⁴ Furthermore, he has discussed in detail about the auspicious name of the Holy Prophet (SAW), fostering and nursing by ‘Haleem Sa-adia’ as well as certain unusual occurrences during his stay with the foster-mother.⁵ This primary and introductory chapter also comprises the details of the Holy Prophet’s journey to ‘Madina’ in the company of his mother, ‘Amina’ when he was only 6 years of age: the sad demise of his mother:⁶ Looking after by the grandfather, ‘Abd-ul-Mut-taleb’ and the latter’s demise: looking after by the uncle, ‘Abu Talib’: Journey to Syria and the incident of meeting with a Christian Monk, ‘Buhaira’: participation of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in the battle of ‘Fujjar’ as well as ‘Half-ul-Fazool’: the reconstruction of the Holy ‘Ka-aba’: engagement in trading-activities, marriage with ‘Hazrat Khadeeja (RA)’: avoidance from all types of polytheistic customs and rituals and so on.⁷

After recording the aforesaid information, the first of the 7 parts, ‘Kitab-ul-Mab-ath’⁸ begins which comprises the following details:

The signs of annunciation: prophecies of the Jewish and Christian scholars regarding the Holy Prophet (SAW): signs and symptoms of the Prophethood: isolation and worship in the cave of ‘Hira’: discussions regarding the annunciation as a prophet, etc.⁹ similarly, the events occurring after claiming to be a prophet, like ridicules and derisions by the polytheists and their constant persecution and oppression, etc., have also been described in the

light of the books of ‘Ahadith’, ‘Seerat-e-Tayyeba’ and history.¹⁰ Then there is a detailed account regarding the migration of the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to ‘Habshah’: boycott of ‘Banu Hasham’ by the ‘Quraish’: the Holy Prophet’s night-journey to ‘Bait-ul-Maqdis’ and then ascension to the heavens: journey to ‘Taif’: preaching activities during ‘Haj-days’: meetings with the people coming from ‘Madina’: oaths of allegiance’: ‘Uqba-e-Uula’ and ‘Uqba-e-Sania’ and finally migration to ‘Madina’. All these events have been illuminated in the light of most authentic and trustworthy traditions and narratives.¹¹

‘Hafiz Ibn-e-Kaseer’ has described the occurrences and incidents after the migration of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to ‘Madina’ on yearly basis and in a proper chronological order. As compared to all other events, the circumstances and happenings of the battles have been discussed in rather much more detail. He has started describing the occurrences of the ‘Hegira-era’ since the beginning of Islamic calendar. The year-wise analysis of some of the momentous happenings is as under:

- 1 Hegira: (a) Foundation and construction of the mosque of ‘Quba’.¹² (b) First ‘Juma-prayer’. (c) Meeting of Jewish scholars with the Holy Prophet (SAW). (d) Construction of ‘Masjid-e-Nabvi’. (e) Construction of dwellings for the exalted wives of the Holy Prophet (SAW). (f) The brotherhood-treaty (Mua:khaat). (g) The well-known Madina-pact (etc.).¹³
- 2 Hegira: The 2nd year after ‘Hegira’ begins with ‘Kitab-ul-Maghazi’, i.e, the details of the Holy Wars. At first, ‘Ibn-e-Kaseer’ has discussed the conspiracies and intrigues of the Jews as well as the Hypocrites. Then he has illuminated the revelation of the Quranic verses regarding the Holy Battles. Similarly, the circumstances and happenings of all the wars fought against the polytheists as well as the expeditions of the patrol-troops have also been narrated. Being the most important and momentous of all other events, the battle of ‘Badr’ has been elaborated with rather much more detail. Discussion over some other important occurrences includes fasting in the holy month of ‘Ramazan’, change of ‘Qibla’, Eid-Prayer, Zakat, the laws of retaliation and blood-money and so on.¹⁴
- 3 Hegira: Besides all other happenings of this year, occurrences during the battle of ‘Uhud’ have widely been discussed and elaborated.¹⁵

- 4 Hegira: Out of the happenings and events of this year, special attention has been paid to the description of the wars of ‘Banu Nazeer’¹⁶ and ‘Zaat-ur-Reqa-a’: introduction of prayer-in-terror: ¹⁷ prohibition of wine: marriage of the Holy Prophet (SAW) with ‘Umm-e-Salma’ (RA), etc. ¹⁸
- 5 (Hegira):- Apart from all other events of this year, the happenings of the battle of ‘Ahzaab’¹⁹ have been elaborated with rather much more detail.
- 6 Hegira: In this year, the most detailed account is in connection with the ‘Hudaybia-Agreement’. ²⁰ Moreover, the battles of ‘Banu Mustaliq’ and the sad event of ‘IFK’ have also been illuminated. ²¹
- 7 Hegira: Details of the occurrences during the 7th year after ‘Hegira’ include somewhat a detailed description of the battle of ‘Khyber’²² as well as ‘Umra-tul-Qaza’, etc. ²³
- 8 Hegira: Out of the battles fought in this year, the war of ‘Muta’, the conquest of ‘Makkah’ and the battles of ‘Hunain’ and ‘Taif’ have specially been elaborated. ²⁴ Before the conquest of ‘Makkah’, ‘Kitab-ul-Bu-ous’ begins with the details of the letters as well as delegations sent by the Holy Prophet (SAW) to the Emperors of various foreign states. ²⁵
- 9 Hegira: This era begins with a detailed account regarding the war of ‘Tabuk’, during which a good few miracles were displayed by the Holy Prophet (SAW). ²⁶ Besides, the arrival of the messenger of the Emperor of ‘Rome’ to realize about the presence of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in ‘Tabuk’: agreements of reconciliation with various tribes: the intrigues of the hypocrites: establishment of ‘Masjid-e-Zirar’: making pilgrimage obligatory’’: nomination of ‘Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA)’ as a chief of the pilgrim-congregation: agreements with various tribes in ‘Mina’ and ‘Arafat’ during ‘Haj-days’: some remarkable announcements:, etc., are some of the most important events which have been described in much detail. ²⁷ Then ‘Kitab-ul-Wafood’ begins with the details of the various Arab tribes coming in multitude to ‘Madina’ for embracing Islam. ²⁸
- 10 Hegira: Discussions of this year begin with the nomination of ‘Ma-az ben Jabal (RA)’ and ‘Abu Musa Ash-ari (RA)’ for ‘Yaman’ and ‘Khalid Ben Waleed (RA)’ for ‘Najran’. Then comes the book of ‘Hajja-tul-Wid-a’

which discusses in detail the circumstances of the last pilgrimage of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Most of these informations have been taken from the books of ‘Ahadith’ and somewhat from other books of prophetic biographies as well as the books of History.²⁹

- 11 Hegira: Out of the occurrences and happenings of this year, ‘Ibn-e-Kaseer’ has recorded a very detailed account of the sad demise and obsequies of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Thereafter, he has provided sound informations regarding the exalted wives of the Holy Prophet (SAW), his children, slaves, slave-girls, servants, writers of the revelation, garments, weapons, horses, etc.³⁰ Then ‘Kitab-ush-Shamayel’ begins which consists of the details in respect of the Holy Prophet’s figure and features, beauty and grace, stature and physique, manners and habits, qualities and perfections and so on.³¹ As against the other biographers, he has added an invaluable collection of ‘Shamayel’ to his book. No speaking of the books of history, even the prophetic biographies compiled before him are lacking for such informations.

At the end of this valuable portion regarding the prophetic biography, ‘Hafiz Ibn-e-Kaseer’ has written the book of ‘Dalayel-un-Nub-uwat’ which comprises a too much detailed account of the miracles of the Holy Prophet (Peace And Mercy Be Upon Him).³²

Al-Bidaya was not available since long. In the preface of his book, ‘Seerat-ul-Nabi, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi writes about Maulana Shibli Naumani that the latter used to express deep sorrow and regret for the unavailability of Al-Bidaya. Shibli said: “If the same book were available, all the confusions and complications would have been resolved”.³³

For the first time, Al-Bidaya was published in 1358 H from Egypt and, since then, the biographers have been frequently copying and reproducing its extracts and contents. The biographies written before its publication are lacking for such informations and references. However, the ‘Seerat-writers before the 10th and 11th century (H) have benefited from this valuable book, because its scripts were available at that time.

Nafees Academy Karachi, Pakistan has published the Urdu version of Al-Bidaya in 14 Volumes.³⁴ The first 4 Volumes have been translated by Prof. Kaukab Shadani, the next 9 Volumes by Maulana Akhtar Gatehpuri, while the last Volume has been translated by Maulana Anwar-ul-Haq Qasmi. The Urdu translation

of the book is up to the mark, however some of its parts are much deficient, because many chapters have been summarized in a few sentences. The Portions of the book pertaining to ‘Seerat-e-Nabvi (SAW) have separately been translated into Urdu by ‘Maulana Hidayat-ul Lah Nadvi and published by Maktaba Quddosiyya, Lahore.³⁵ The same translation is also up to the mark.

Conclusion

Although the book, Al-Bidaya is holding a secondary position as a source for the Seerat-writers, yet it has its own peculiarity and distinction among the biographies of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Thus it has become quite a comprehensive source for the ‘Seerat-writers.

- Since it has been composed in the light of the preliminary and fundamental sources of ‘Seerat-e-Nabvi” (SAW), It contains quite a few extracts of those rare books of which only some parts are available now.
- The most positive and distinctive feature of this books is that the author has been much more careful in discussing the differences and disagreements among the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW). He has done his utmost to shun from accusing them of any incident and improper deed or saying. In this connection, he has tried his best to exterminate the accusations and doubts raised about Amir Muawia (RA).³⁶
- Though the book has been compiled in accordance with the thoughts of ‘Ahl-e-Sunnat wa Al-Jama’at, the author, being a moderate figure, has never concealed the actual historical facts.

Notes & References

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- ² Ibid, Vol:1, pp. 29.
- ³ Ibid., Vol:2, pp. 206-216.
- ⁴ Ibid., 224-229.
- ⁵ Ibid., 229-237.
- ⁶ Ibid., 238-240.
- ⁷ Ibid., 240-270.
- ⁸ Ibid., 272.
- ⁹ Ibid., 271-377.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp 379-409.
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp 416-560.
- ¹² Ibid., 598.
- ¹³ Ibid., 600-625.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 634.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., vol:3, pp. 134-200.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 217.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 225.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 237.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 239-328.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 330- 347.
- ²¹ Ibid., 323-330.
- ²² Ibid., 325-393.
- ²³ Ibid., 409-419.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 425-242.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 451-464.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 593-609.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 610-641.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 643-716.
- ²⁹ Ibid., vol:4, pp. 3-167.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 175-371.
- ³¹ Ibid., 375-439.
- ³² Ibid., 445-716.
- ³³ Shibli Nau'amani, & Syed Suleman Nadvi, *Seerat-ul-Nabi*, "Preface", Vol:1, pp. 13.
- ³⁴ Kokab Shadafi, Maulana Akhtar Qasmi, *Al-Bidaya*, op.cit., 88.
- ³⁵ Maulana Hidayat-Ullah Nadvi, *Seerat-ul-Nabi*, Urdu Trans. (Lahore: Maktaba Qudusiyya, 1996)
- ³⁶ Kokab Shadafi, Maulana Akhtar Qasmi, *Al-Bidaya*, Vol.5, op.cit., 9-10.