

Methodology of Orientalists A Critical Study of Sira-e-Tayyiba and Review the Books of Occidentalists

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Abstract

This research paper is intended to be a critical study of Sira-e-Taiba by Orientalists and to illustrate the various aspects arising out of the research style. The style of this essay will be a research statement. A review of the literature has shown that Orientalism is a study of the Eastern world. The term has a variety of meanings as the movement discusses Eastern languages, literature, civilizations and religions. It is usually a difficult task to determine the basic theme, aims and history of Orientalists because of the different colors of Eastern culture, religion, art and politics. Here we may be able to present a thematic study on the methods of the Orientalists in the study of Sira. Historically, Orientalists have played a perpetual and constant role in distorting the image of Islam. From the beginning of Islam till now they have never tried to cover up the facts and various aspects of the life of the Holy Prophet and in general about Islam, therefore they could not imagine the central message of the religion. - The main reason for this persistence is that they set their goals before researching Islam and the biography of the Prophet. This is a fundamental flaw in the Orientalist approach to the study of Islam.

Keywords: *Methodology, Orientalists, Critical Study, Sira-e-Tayyiba, Occidentalists*

Orientalist's methodology:

Allama Muhammad Asad (a well-known scholar) comments about Orientalists methodology in the study of Islam and Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).” Their investigations prove that Islam could not be treated as only a scientific research object but an accused standing before his Judges. Some of the Orientalists play the part of public prosecutor and others as defence. Overall, the procedure of the deductions and conclusion adopted by most of the European Orientalists reminds of the proceedings of those legendary courts of investigation set up by the Catholic Church against its opponents in the Middle Ages; to be precise, they scarcely even look into historical facts independently, but start, almost in every case form a predetermined conclusion dictated by prejudice.”¹

Orientalist Study Critical Review of Sira-e-Taiba:

This is a historical fact that prejudice is a hallmark of Orientalists methodology. They always had shown hostility and biasness in the study of Sirah. First of all, this hostile methodology introduced by John of Damascus, who was a Christian Scholar?

Ziauddin Sardar comments about the behaviour of John of Damascus,

“He declared Islam to be a pagan cult, the Ka’aba an idol and the Prophet Muhammad irreligious and licentious man. He claimed Muhammad cobbled together his doctrine from the old

and New Testament through the instruction of an Arabian monk. The writing and accusation of John of Damascus became the classical source of all Christian writing on Islam.”²

Another important feature of Orientalists hostile methodology is that so many Orientalists like John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, Andrew Rippon and Uri Rubin have adopted reductionist methodology in their research. Through the way of this reductionist methodology they have tried to create misconceptions about the realities of Islam and created many objections about the life of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

A well-known contemporary Muslim scholar Jabal Muhammad Buaben comments that, present-day Patricia Crone and Michael Cook comes in for particular criticism by rejecting almost all Muslims sources.³

This is fact that a large of Orientalists have neglected the basic rules of evaluation and research and adopted self-created principles for achieving their targets. Jabal Muhammad Buaben remarks about Michael Cook's methodology that "His interpretations about the status of women in Islam, the Prophets marriages, and the encounters with the Quraysh, the so called stannic verses and others have acutely been flamed. Moreover he exhibits great antagonism and prejudice for the man Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) and the doctrine of Islam.

Another reason of crooked aspect of Orientalists methodology in the study of Islam and Sirah, is that their research principles differ from the Muslim methodologies. The Orientalists does not

care any type of moral values in the reporting of historical realities.

The most important aspect of Orientalists methodology is that they always Judge Islamic teachings on the basis of their own principles. Their studies have based on exaggeration and fragile transmissions. Allama Shibli Numani has pointed out that the draw backs of Orientalists methodology is "The European does not care whether the reporter is a man of truth it is given to lies; he care little for his neither possible nor necessary; he merely sees whether the incidents reported by a narrators are in accord with the circumstances and trends of events."⁴

Distrust over Islamic History, is another basic theme of Orientalists methodology. The reason behind this is that most of them belong to Christianity and Judaism or Institutions organized by Christians and Jewish communities. The example of that type of mind set is obvious in the study of Watt, where he writes, "First of all we have to consider the form in which Judao Christian influences may have affected Muhammad. The possibility of his having read the Bible or other Jewish or Christian books may be ruled out. Orthodox Islam holds that Muhammad was unable to read or write; but this assertion is suspect to the modern scholar because it is made in order to support the belief that his production of the Quran is miracles something no illiterate persons could ever have done by himself."⁵

Some Muslim scholars have discussed that conspiracy is also a part of Orientalists methodology. A large number of Orientalists have done their research work on Islam with negative motives.

A well-known Muslim scholar Maryam Jameelah, has written a book with the title of “Islam and Orientalism.” In this book she has overviewed the research of six Orientalists like S.D. Goitein, Hitti, Kenneth Cragg, Nadav Safran, Welfred Cantwell Smith and Freeland Abott. After the review Maryam has concluded Orientalists methodologies in the study of Islam. She says, “Orientalism is not a dispassionate objective of study of Islam and its culture by the erudite faithful to the best traditions of scholarship to create profound original research but noting an organized conspiracy of incite our youth to revolt against their faith, and scorn the entire legacy of Islamic History and culture as obsolete. The objective is to create as much mischief as possible among the immature and gullible by sowing the seeds of doubt, cynicism and skepticism.”⁶

The general feature of Orientalists methodology for the interpretation of Islamic history is totally different from those principles which are mentioned in the Islamic resources.

Akram Diya al Umari has pointed out about the deficiency of Orientalists methodology in the interpretation of Islamic History. He comments,

“The studies of the Orientalists are numerous and differ in their levels, quality and freedom from religious and racial prejudice. However, these studies are usually carried out by scholars who live in environments which are remote from Islam, and which have their own philosophies and cultures. It is difficult for them to understand the truth reasons for a Muslim's conduct, both individually and socially. When they seek to interpret the history of Islam, they draw analogies with European history, despite very different natures of the two histories.”⁷

The Orientalists judgment is mostly based on materialistic approaches in the study of Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). They have not proper believe on revelation, prophet hood and Day of Judgment. This is the most glaring drawback of Orientalists approaches and methodology in the study of Sirah. Through the way of materialistic methodologies they have denied some important events of the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The materialistic interpretation of history is not justified in the field of Islamic research. The amazing thing is that some well-known Orientalists like William Muir, Montgomery watt, D. S. Margoliouth, Bosworth smith and Washington Irving have adopted materialistic approaches in the study of Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). All these Orientalists have neglected some realities of Islamic history and raised many questions without any solid arguments and logic on the teaching of Islam and Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

Some Orientalists like Clinton Bennett has adopted anthropologist methodology in the study of Sirah. He has written many books as “In search of the sacred anthropology” “Victorian images of Islam” and “In search of Muhammad.” He says about his methodology in the study of Sirah that, “he adopts a multi-disciplinary approach throughout this book and use historiography, theology, anthropology. During his career as a scholar describes various stages as he began as a theologian, more into Islamic studies and, more recently into anthropology and the use of anthropology in educational research.”⁸

Some Orientalists have adopted descriptive methodology in the study of Islam. The basic objective for adopting the descriptive methodology is to achieve some specific targets. Due to that

reasons Bosworth Smith has adopted descriptive and repeated methodology in his book “Muhammad and Mohammadanism.” Basically Riv. Bosworth Smith is a devoted Christian and consider his religion superior than Islam and his sacred books over the sacred book of Muslim.”⁹ An important feature of his work is that like other Orientalists he has repeated the questions. He was enthused by Sir William Muir, Springer, Weils and Carlyle.

Maxime Rodinson has adopted socialist methodology in the study of Sirah. Basically he was a French social scientist. He was inspired from Marxism. He has written a book on Sirah with the title of “Mohammad.” He has done his work with sociological aspects, and his evaluations are totally based on the approaches of Orientalists because he was much inspired from Tor Andrae, W. Montgomery Watt and Goldziher. Due to that dependency Rodinson failed to give an independent and fair analysis in the study of Sirah.

Another scholar of Islamic and Christian studies is Kenneth Cragg. He has written so many books on different topics but his book "Muhammad and the Christian: a question of response" is an important value for those scholars who are concerned in interfaith talk. In the study of Sirah he has used “Equational methodology”and done his work on the basis of some particular purposes, as he himself narrates in the preface of his book, “it is the aim of this study to offer at least one Christian's view of a resolution of the problem a resolution which no more than tentative, remain loyal to Christian criteria while outlining a positive response to Muhammad.”¹⁰

This is fact that equational methodology is not sufficient for evaluating the teaching of Islam. Due to that methodology Kenneth Cragg neglected some realities of Islam especially, the status of Prophethood.

Some Orientalists have also adopted different methodologies in the study of Islam and Sirah. They adopted classificatory methodology, reservative methodology, psychological methodology, cultural methodology, secular methodology, institutional methodology, regional methodology and contemptuous methodology. All these methodologies have very close association with scientific methodology. And this is historical fact that scientific methodology is not sufficient for the evaluation of Islamic teachings and Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). The foremost requirement for the evaluation of Islamic teachings is to believe on Oneness of God, prophet hood and Day of Judgment. But unfortunately the majority of Orientalists are unbelievers and this is the glaring deficiency of Orientalists methodology in the study of Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

This is historical fact that Orientalists has always represent, rather supported western powers to ensure imperialism in the eastern world. Basically Orientalism is an integral part of European pursuits to promote western culture through different ways.

Historically, Orientalists have played a key role in distorting the image of Islam. Unfortunately Orientalists have persistently tried to create doubts about the divine mission of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). They have presented unauthentic and groundless stories with an urge to give and then highlights

misconceptions about the life and role of the holy Prophet of Islam.

In modern era the approaches of contemporary Orientalists remain the same in the study of Sirah. Most of them have repeated the questions made by their predecessors. But they have changed their research methodology with the passage of time. In their research they are not fair and neutral instead they are totally prejudice and biased and are doing research under the shadow of modernism and western epistemology.

Today's Orientalists work about seerah:

1. Michael Cook was serving as a professor of Eastern studies at Princeton University. He has written many books. One of his books is on the Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) with a title "Muhammad." Michael Cook has a negative approach towards Sirah and mostly he perceives wrongly the Quranic theories of Hijra and Jihad.

2. Orientalist Patricia Crone was a student of John Wansbrough. She has written many books but her important work is "Hagarism: The making of the Islamic World (Cambridge press 1977). In collaboration with Michael Cook she has done this work.

3. Another professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies Uri Rubin from Tel Aviv University Israel has written a book on Sirah with title of "The life of Muhammad." He has adopted hostile methodology in his research.

Books of Occidentalists about Sirah:

There has been a chronic tendency among the various religious researchers to highlight pros of their own religious founders and neglect the veracity of others. Particularly, this approach and phenomenon has been perpetually observed during the last fourteen history of Judo-Christian antagonism against Islam and Prophet of Islam. In this background the Sira of Prophet of Islam has obtained extraordinary attraction and became a spotlight not only in Muslim intellectuals but in Western literary circles as well. However, Muslim scholars have always been vigilant and attentive in responding and evaluating the absurdities propagated by Orientalists. In this chapter an exclusive study has been focused in reference to highlight the paramount contribution of Muslim researchers and historiographer's in the field of research in Sira Studies.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, after Wiliam Muir's work¹¹, Muslim historiographers have paid attention towards orientalists' approaches about the Sirah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Thus, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan has refuted the questions raised by William Muir on the life of the Holy Prophet. Sir Syed expressed his views in the preface reading public was only equalled by their impatience to peruse it, but no sooner was it found that simplest and plainest facts connected with Islam and Muhammad (PBUH) had been strained and twisted and distorted in short, subjected to the vigorous process in order to make them the indices or exponents of the author's prepossessions and prejudices, then the interest created by the announcement of the work fell to zero. As the young Mohammadans who were pursuing their study of the English literature, and were perfectly ignorant of their own theology the perusal of the work under consideration raised in their youthful

mind the question, if what Sir William Muir has written is a misrepresentation of plain and simple facts, what are the those facts in reality?”¹²

- **Sir Syed Ahmad Khan:**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan has refuted the questions raised by William Muir in the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at Mecca. He has briefly discussed about the ‘Historical Geography of Arabia, Various religions of customs and manners of Pre-Islamic Arabians, History of Holy Mecca, Pedigree of Muhammad, manners and customs of Pre-Islamic Arabians, Birth and Childhood of Muhammad, the Holy Quran , Muhammadan theological literature, Muhammadan Tradition, Shaqq-al-Sadr ad Miraj, Prophecies respecting Mohammad and whether Islam has been beneficial. ¹³

Syed Ahmad Khan has given new dimension of research to Muslim writers through this work. In this work logically and thoroughly he was refuted the questions raised by Muir on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He has also presented careful and exhaustive analysis of various aspects and pointed out the serious errors of Muir’s judgment and interpretation. In this work he has rejected the tradition upon which Muir and other orientalist have built their stories about the life of the Prophet. His work is a good addition for understanding the approaches of Muir and other orientalists.

- **Shibli Nu’mani**

Shibli Nu’mani in his famous work “Sirat al-Nabi” which is a well-known source comprehensively describing the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), critically analyzed

the views of European scholars on the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He emphasizes to examine Western general trend, common mistakes, sources of information and the reason for the common errors which they commit while delving into the prejudice consequently.¹⁴Shibli has also discussed the approaches of Muhammad (PBUH), while giving a list of books written by orientalists on the life of Prophet and divided European scholars into three different groups.¹⁵

Pointing out the faults of orientalists' methodology in studying Islam, Shibli has discussed the common views expressed by orientalists about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In short, he has refuted Western objections applying logical and historical arguments and presented comprehensively an appropriate and immaculate image of Prophet's life.

- **Qazi Muhammad Salman Mansur Puri**

Another eminent Muslim scholar, Qazi Muhammad Salman Mansur Puri has written a valuable book on the biography of Prophet titled "Muhammad, Mercy for the World" focusing different topics like Tafsir, History and Sirah of Prophet. In his book, he has critically evaluated the negative approach of the Western scholars towards Sirah while refuting the queries made by orientalists on Prophet's Life, applying logical reasoning and statistics related to Polygamy¹⁶. Mansur Puri has also presented the concept and status of polygamy in Hinduism, and at the end of this discussion gives a detailed chart about prophet wives that elaborates the purpose behind polygamous aspect of Prophet's life. In the second part of the book, he has presented a brief introduction of Holy wars analyzing the aspects statistically, rebuffing thus, their objectives. Mansur Puri has given a

comparison chart of Holy war with other World wars understanding the case of orientalist's objections on the subject this book has been considered as an excellent work

- **Syed Ameer Ali**

Another Muslim thinker Syed Amir Ali is the author of internationally applauded book "The Life and Teachings of Muhammad" which has been praised for his critical rethinking the Western mind about Sirah scholarship. In his book, he has discussed in detail, the approaches of orientalist like Maurice, Stanley, Carlyle, Emerson, Parker, Channing, Draper, Weil, Springer, Noldeke, Caussinde Perceval, William Muir, Dozy and some other western scholars.¹⁷ Syed Amir Ali has also described the names of French orientalist like Oelsner, Deutch, Higgins, Davenport, Barthelemy St. Hilair, and Carlyle.¹⁸

- Most popular subjects of Prophetic biography like
- Ascension (miraj),
- Tradition,
- Jihad,
- Prophet's response towards Jews and Christians.
- Polygamy

And some other aspects of Sirah of Prophet's life have been the central focusing themes. Hence, this volume got a huge recognition in understanding the case of orientalist, especially towards Sirah. However, one must keep one thing in mind that the author (Syed Amir Ali) has taken up a view which differ the majority of Ummah on the same issues.

- **Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi**

Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi is one the eminent scholars who presented eight lectures on Sira in November 1992 at Madras

(India) on the invitation of “Muslim Educational Association of Southern India” to counter the efforts of Christian scholars in order to avert Muslim social circles to take up eccentric ideology or to get mixed up with their creeds. These lectures have widely been appreciated among all the Muslim communities throughout the world. The focus of these lectures remained the life of Prophet Muhammad ¹⁹ while taking an evaluation of Western scholars’ methodology and historical fallacies in addition. In the third lecture he discussed the approach of German orientalist Dr. Springer history and evaluated the views of some other orientalist like Sir William Muir, Goldziher, and attitude of Bosworth Smith and John Davenport about the biography of the Prophet of Islam.²⁰

- **Justice Pir Karam Shah al-Azhari**

Justice Pir Karam Shah al-Azhari work titled “Zia’ al-Nabi” is a very famous piece of work among Muslim literary circles. An important feature of this book is that justice Karam Shah has specifically focused the case of orientalist I volume VI and VII. In volume VI, he has introduced the orientalist’ ²¹ historical backgrounds of this movement, its objectives and orientalist methodology, ^{and} their baseless approach towards the Quran by rebutting the objections raised in this regard.

He has also refuted the questions raised on the Hadith and Sunnah literature in a very sophisticated way. At the same time, all other objections related to the Prophethood, polygamy, Holy wars and epilepsy have been counter-argued very logically. In fact the contribution of Justice Karam Shah is of immense importance that helps in understanding the place of Western scholarship on Islam and Sira. He has presented a critical

evaluation of the works of Sir William Muir, Tor Andre, Watt, and Arthur Jeffery etc.

- **Dr. Hamid Ullah**

Dr. Hamid Ullah a famous researcher of Sira and Islamic sciences, exceptionally, writes meticulously on original themes in relevance with biography of Prophet. A volume titled “The battle field of the Prophet Muhammad” is the most important work which presents various aspects of Prophetic life and refutes misleading question of orientalists in a logical way. Firstly he presented the system of Islamic State of Madina in the period of Holy Prophet in establishing peace among pluralist society.²² Whereas, in the second part of the book he has given a detail about Holy wars separately one by one and their status and justification, applying maps for better understanding about the wars. His book “Muhammad Rasulullah” is also a useful addition in the study of Sirah. It is a matter of fact; late Dr. Hamid Ullah received an esteem appreciation by his contemporaries like Dr. Mahmud Ahmad Ghazi who declared him ‘Imam of Sira’ in the modern’s era and Mujaddud of ‘Ulum-e-Sirah.

- **Syed Abul’A’ala Maududi**

Syed Abul’A’alMaududi’s work on Islam has not been obscured in both Muslim and non-Muslim circles, on biography of Prophet, “Sirat-e-Sarwar-e-Alam” is a work which has been attributed to him where he flatly refutes all allegations propagated by western scholars on the authenticity of revelation of Quran,²³the status of Sunnah of Prophet.In critically analyses the negative approach of orientalist about three different Qasas (Stories) of Quran like journey made by Musa, Pharaoh’s plans

of killing Prophet Musa and the story of the men of cave.²⁴ Authentic maps for illustration. Hence, the book is of extreme importance in understanding the true picture of Prophet's life.

- **Allama Muhammad Asad**

Muhammad Asad (formerly Leopold Weiss, d. 1992) was a famous Muslim writer, who wrote many books as "Islam at the crossroads"²⁵ "My discovery of Islam"²⁶ and "The road to Mecca"²⁷. In these books he has critically analyzed the approach of western scholars towards Islam and Sirah. He has presented his views in a succinct and logical manner. He has aptly countered anti-Islam propaganda. It has been witnessed that his book "Islam at the Crossroads" is a valuable work in understanding the case of orientalism. This book has seven chapters. Chapter one portrays the real theme of Islam and also the importance of religion in social structure. Here, the ethical values have also been discussed.²⁸ The second chapter focuses on the basic theme of western civilization, and comments on the modern phase of western civilization." The third chapter explains the basic causes behind the orientalist's biasness. The western attitude is not one of indifferent dislike as in the case of deep-rooted and almost fanatical aversion, not only intellectual, but bears an intensely emotional tint." Chapter four discusses the approach of Muslims towards western education. Muhammad Asad has also pointed out in chapter five that "the imitation - individually and socially of the western mode of life by Muslims is undoubtedly the greatest danger for the existence or rather the revival of Islamic civilization".Chapter six and seven deal with Hadith and Sunnah. In these last two chapters he has flatly refuted all the objections raised by the western scholars about Sunnah of the Holy Prophet.

- **Maryam Jamilah**

Maryam Jamilah is well known contemporary Muslim scholar. She has done her work on the theme of orientalists' works. In this regard her book "Islam and Orientalism" is a very valuable work in understanding the basic concepts of Orientalism. Her book covers different dimensions of Orientalism like,

- "Islamic history through the lens of Orientalism,"
- "The Christian view",
- "The Jewish view"
- "The secular view"
- "The humanist view"
- "The conspiracy of orientalists"²⁹

In these discussions, Maryam Jamilah has critically evaluated the approach of Dr. Kenneth Cragg, Dr. Philip K. Hitti, S.D. Goitein, Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, NadavSafran and Freeland Abbott. She has also presented the criteria by which the orientalists judge our faith, that are: Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and the bases of modern scientific knowledge (etheism). The work of Maryam Jamilah, "Islam and Orientalism," is an authentic source in this context

Conclusion:

Above review of Muslim historiographers throws the light on twofold facts, first the vigilance Muslim eye on the literature of Western academicians extended in view of deteriorating the sacred face of the biography of the Prophet of Islam, while on the other hand Muslim historiographers specially, Arab and sub-continental scholars have dedicatedly delved themselves into the matter seriously and they evaluated Orientalists' work regarding

Sirah of Prophet (PBUH) in such a meticulous way that all the absurdities have been vigorously detected and eradicated.

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