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The Rationalistic-Critical Approach of  
Orientalists in Seerah Writings: An Exploratory  
Study of Modern Trends

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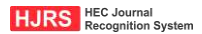
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## The Rationalistic-Critical Approach of Orientalists in Seerah Writings: An Exploratory Study of Modern Trends

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Aqsa Tasgheer \*\*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The practice of Seerah composing has prevailed from the classical period of Islamic history, and it has proceeded through the ages, to the contemporary world. With the passage of time developments and different circumstances occurred in the methodology and way of writing on the Seerah as well. Various insightful works to feature the various aspects of the Prophet's (PBUH) life have shown up in the past numerous decades. The reason for composing such sort of works is, principally, to show the significance of the Prophet's life for all occasions, and in conditions. Modern Seerah texts are profoundly impacted by the impressive historical currents that have formed the post-colonial Muslim world. In the 19th century, the Islamic world confronted the Western understanding of science, as it steadily began to go affected by the last option in economic, political, and military perspectives. The examinations done in this period were currently done even with the contributions of the Western perspective. Even though there were a few works, assuming scant managed without concerning the Western techniques for research, some others were composed as criticism of the orientalist studies, and some were delivered affected by the orientalist thoughts. However, in the contemporary era, there have arisen some recent fads in the composing trends of the Seerah. The current paper analyzes the process of internalization, which permitted some writers to create works that peruse feels that they were living in the hour of prophecy as well as targets to display contemporary search trends followed by West and orientalists such as after decolonization and how they affect our Muslim writers.*

### **KEY WORDS:**

*Seerah, Orientalists, West, Writing Trends, Muslims*

### **Introduction**

Almost, every religion of the world provides a set of teachings that are

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to be followed in order to achieve salvation. Most religions provide a role model for this noble cause. It is man's instinct that he wants a practical expression or incarnation of his religious conviction. Man has been compiling the biographies of great religious leaders for his associates. After referencing the principles of composing biographies, researchers have given a record of this art created in progressive periods. No doubt every religion attempted to have a history of their prophets, religious founders, or religious pioneers, yet it is likewise certain that no religion could fulfill the standard of Seerah writing. Islam is the only religion that professes to have a genuine Prophetic biography named as "Seerah".

There has been an ongoing propensity amid different divine analysts to feature authorities of their devout religious initiators and disregard other's reliability. Especially, this methodology and peculiarity have been ceaselessly seen during the last few decades of the history of Judo-Christian opposition against Islam and the Prophet of Islam. It has been seen that western researchers' works are probably one-sided and myopic. They make an honest effort to deny the completely clear truth "Prophethood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H)". In this association, the level various types of allegations on the Messenger. Many orientalists have attempted to limit the social status of Messenger also. In this background, the Seerah of Prophet (PBUH) has acquired amazing attraction and turned into a focus in Muslim intellects as well as in Western literacy spheres.

The modern scientific thought which arose in the West, spread with the assistance of colonialism in the nineteenth century and started to have a worldwide impact. Supported by the force of innovation, modern science pulled in different social orders and drove them to foster their idea relying upon them, moving toward the physical and metaphysical issues as indicated by the modern perspective. The present circumstance had its impact on the Muslim world. Defeats of the Ottoman Empire, which was around then the greatest power in the Islamic world, against the West caused a sense of profound respect of Muslims towards the tactical and military force of the West and the world saw that delivered that power. In this way, the prevalence of the scientific and the philosophical perspective on the West was acknowledged in advance. This reverence directed the Muslim scholars to learn the western perspective and to decipher the whole Islamic civilization as per this perspective.<sup>1</sup>

### **Importance of Research**

In modern times, orientalism has turned into an exciting paradigm in western countries. This area of interest spreads from exploration to criticism and criticism to insult, it additionally has been managed

present-day procedures to colonize and involved underdeveloped nations. Past is the observer to this claim. Before, numerous orientalists have been attempting to advance the Western plan against Islam and Asian-African nations. This paradigm and modern trends need to be explored from a critical point of view. So, there is a dire need to research such topics to prove the authenticity and validity of standardized Shariah sources, especially Seerah.

### **Research Objective**

Today, the researchers notice the variety of orientalists' inaccessible stock. Some of them are halfway and rivals, some of them are research-orientated and some of them have a delicate corner to Islam and the East. In any case, the point which is normal among them is their analysis on the Seerah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Now, the greater part of them has settled upon disposition, even though, their methodologies are not quite the same as one another. Indeed, even in some cases, they are found to condemn each other in this issue. Most intriguing thing is that some of them have professed to be close to Islam and Muslims or appear in like manner.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to scrutinize the validity of this modern rationalistic approach of western seerah writers that has deluded Muslims a great deal. The article has also attempted to highlight the response of Muslim Seerah in this regard.

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative and descriptive research methods are applied in this study. Basic sources of Sirah as well as various books and articles are referenced.

### **Muslim Style of Seerah Writing**

After the Iranians, it was the Muslims who chipped away at biography. The biography of Muslims has a significant spot in Islamic history. Assuming we talk about the style of biography, history must be the best charisma of Islamic historiography. Most students of history have also given significance to accreditations and references in memoirs. While the account is a significant section in Islamic history. Urwah Bin Zubair, Asim Bin Umar, Wahab Bin Manba, Muhammad ibn Muslim Ibn-e-Shahab Zuhri, Ibn Ishaq, Waqidi, and Muhammad ibn Sa'd worked vigorously on biography. The start of historiography among Muslims occurred through biography. Muslims esteemed respectfulness and completeness in memoir. Numerous significant things acquired from the life of the Prophet (PBUH) kept on being recorded in writing. Muslim history specialists also composed biographies in the light of the evidence. Also, students of history regularly investigated anything ascribed to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in such a manner where to search for proof. Then again,

by citing observers and storytellers, they made these portrayals credible.<sup>2</sup>

Muslim antiquarians composed biographies in the spirit of faith and with the adage of adoration for the Prophet (PBUH) and passed on it to the vanquished region of the world so that people could benefit from the temperance and lessons of the Prophet. Muslims chipped away at the memoir of love for Prophet (PBUH) and, as independent historians, traced the events.

### **Modern Approach in Seerah Writing**

The twentieth century was the time of restoring developments in the Muslim circles. There were numerous Islamic and spiritual moments in the Arab and non-Arab Muslim world in the west and the east. The goal of these developments was the initiation of the Muslim world through Islamic tenets. These drives were intended to reestablish the Islamic social orders and states and to change the lives of Muslims as per the old Islamic vision. The creation of Pakistan in itself is an example.

A defining element of modern Seerah texts-without a doubt of all parts of Islamic investigations is the rise of "lay scholars". There are various social, historical, and political purposes behind this, however one overall component is the Muslim experience with the West. The French control of Egypt and the south of Syria (1798-1801), the long British control of the Indian subcontinent, which formerly went under the British crown in 1857, and colonization of different pieces of the Muslim world all have had a conclusive impact on the field of Seerah study. Without precedent for Muslim history, Europe had direct contact with an extremely enormous number of Muslims, and Western civilization started a direct impact on Muslims' day-to-day life in a way that had not been experienced previously. Seerah texts of the 19th and early 20th centuries reflect different aspects of this effect.<sup>3</sup>

Now, we separate orientalist into two categories. The first one is that who is biased about Islam and following their traditional way of Seerah writing and the subsequent one is that who doesn't utilize any sort of awful language and try to investigate impartially. Some orientalist contributed a lot concerning their study of the Holy Quran, Hadith, and Seerah since the 18th century. Few of them attracted Muslim researchers because of the quality of their work about Islam. These orientalist have had a positive image in regards to their commitments in presenting Islamic writing in the West in their native languages.

### **Trend of Seerah Writing in West**

Orientalists have found the first and old sources, followed and gathered original copies around the world, altered them, and distributed their translations in various languages. They have given such a huge resource of information on Islam that it is presently inescapable for any

individual who composes on Seerah and Islam. Their academic undertakings have commonly been appreciated, yet there has been a discernment in the Islamic circle that they did not utilize scientific meticulousness, fairness, and expansive mindedness in introducing Prophet's (PBUH) Seerah and Islam, however with deception and bias. They have intentionally twisted the occasions and put forth a coordinated attempt to twist the historical backdrop of Islam.

Orientalists have composed endless writings on Islam in multiple languages rather than in English. So every one of the individuals who can't directly be benefited by Arabic versions will peruse their books and comprehend something very similar on the planet. Everything that they need to say and clarify about Islam will not provide them with a genuine image of Islam. Moreover, the people in the future looking Islam as orientalist portrayed will likewise stay incredulous of Islam.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 18th century, the western world designed rationalistic and materialistic methodologies, that was later applied to other social sciences. Western scholars especially orientalist questioned the authenticity of Islamic sciences. Seerah literature is one of the greatest assets of Islam that has been the major focus of many intellectuals (both Muslim and non-Muslim) for centuries. As a result of the western rationalistic approach, traditional principles of Seerah literature were criticized. Numerous anti-Islamic sources and materialistic notions were absorbed into the context of Islamic history and Seerah as they were discovered in conventional records even though Muslims applied the best research methods of that time while compiling Seerah. There appeared certain acquisitive objections or interpretations of Seerah (for example on the issues of revelation and miracles). The materialistic elucidations of the western scholars, though not entirely but partially penetrated Muslim thought. Orientalist interpretations in the study of seerah have greatly influenced the thinking of Muslim intellectuals and modern Seerah writers worldwide.

Modern Seerah texts are profoundly impacted by the formidable historical currents that have formed the postcolonial Muslim world. The scholarly meticulousness of a portion of these texts regardless, of the pattern that rules generally nineteenth and mid-twentieth century Seerah, attempts to legitimize and apologize. Muslim intellectuals of this period were generally responding against two centuries of colonial dominance; with few exceptions, their portrayals of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s life were endeavors to rationalize the miracles referenced in classical works of Seerah, discard occasions which would be thought of "scandalous" in the political environment of their times, and all the more by and large present a —historical-critical method of so-called objectivity

acquired from the intellectual apparatus of Orientalism.<sup>5</sup>

During the last quarter of the 20th century, Seerah texts began to create some distance from these political, social, and intellectual burdens. This alleviation made it feasible for a couple of authors to create strikingly clear records of the whole Prophetic time, recovering the closeness that was the sign of classical Seerah texts.

### **Muslim Scholars' opinion about Western Style of Seerah Writing**

Another contemporary methodology in Seerah composing is the methodology of western-style induction and inference. Numerous Seerah writers studied in the west and were raised in western colleges and some other people who moved on from eastern colleges yet contemplated in western styles, embraced this cutting-edge approach in Seerah writing, particularly the individuals who composed Seerah in English, French, and German. Their compositions are as indicated by western norms and styles of induction.<sup>6</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Syed Amir Ali are very famous names in the circle of Seerah writing in this perspective and the most prominent example of such writers in Seerah is Dr. Muhammad Hammidullah. There are numerous Arab Seerah writers too who studied in western colleges and wrote the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the western way of writing. It is a very important factor to check the impact of the western style of Seerah writing on Muslim writers and their opinion to understand their trends and style. Some Muslim writers failed to answer such critics in a good manner whereas some Muslim writers answered their questions and allegations in a very decent way.

After William Muir's work in the last of the 19th century, Muslim historians and scholars considered western methodologies regarding the Seerah writing. Western methodology of Seerah writing has both positive and negative impacts on Muslim writers. There are some examples which we can discuss regarding this.

Syed Ahmad Khan presented another research aspect to Islamic scholars by his exertion. In his work, he has invalidated brought up the issues by Muir on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) completely and coherently. He has additionally introduced a cautious and thorough ample investigation of different angles and pointed out the genuine blunders of Muir's judgment and interpretation. In his work, he has dismissed the custom whereupon Muir and different orientalists have fabricated their anecdotes about the life of the Prophet. His work is a decent expansion to accepting the methodologies of Muir and different orientalists. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan worked effectively in certain perspectives however when he attempted to demonstrate things logically and scientifically, he denied some miracles.<sup>7</sup>

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan has discredited the inquiries elevated by William Muir on Sirah in this work. Sir Syed communicated his perspectives in the introduction of his book, "When this work showed up, the interest it energized among the perusing public was just risen to by their restlessness to examine it, yet no sooner was it observed that simplest and plainest realities associated with Islam and Muhammad (PBUH) had been stressed and twisted and misshaped in short, exposed to the vigorous process to make them the lists or types of the author's inclinations and prejudices, then, at that point, the interest made by the declaration of the work tumbled to nothing. As the youthful Mohammadans who were seeking after they studied English Literature, and were completely oblivious to their philosophy the examination of the work under thought brought up in their young brain the question, assuming that what Sir William Muir has composed is a deception of plain facts, what are those realities truly"?<sup>8</sup>

Allama Muhammad Asad (a notable scholar) remark about Orientalist's technique in Islamic Sciences and Sirah studies. "In their examinations, it nearly shows up as though Islam couldn't be discussed as a simple entity of scientific investigation, however, a charge remaining under the watchful eye of his Judges. A portion of the Orientalists fills public role investigator set on getting a verdict, different regions like direction for the guard who, being persuaded that his client is liable, can weakly argue for "moderating conditions". With everything taken into account, the procedure of the deduction and conclusion took on by the greater part of the western Orientalists helps to remember the procedures of those popular courts of examination set up by the Catholic Church of Middle age against its adversaries; in other words, the barely even research historical facts freely, however, start, practically for each situation structure an inescapable result directed by prejudice."<sup>9</sup>

Eastern world's study is generally known as orientalism. Containing different implications this term, it examines Eastern languages, writing, evolutions, and faiths. Usually, the essential subject, targets, and history of Orientalism is hard to define perfectly, since it has its different shades in moving toward the Eastern religion, craftsmanship, culture, and legislative issues or politics. Here we will most likely be unable to deliver a substantial discussion on this subject, except the thematic study concerning Orientalist procedure in the study of Seerah. Traditionally, Orientalists have assumed an unending and constant part in misshaping Islam's portrayal. From the beginning of Islam, they have never attempted to divulge the real factors and the different parts of Sirah specifically and those of Islam as a general rule, subsequently couldn't consider the focal message of the religion. The principal purpose for this predictable methodology stayed the targets set afore examination in investigation of



Islam and the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This is the essential downside of Orientalists strategy in the study of Islam. <sup>10</sup>

An eminent modern Islamic scientist Jabal Muhammad Buaben comments "Insinuating some present-day factual, created by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook comes in for specific analysis, for being essentially protester and making a joke of a grant by overlooking all Muslims sources. This is the way that most Orientalists have disregarded the fundamental principles of appraisal and research and accepted independent guidelines for achieving their destinations. Jabal Muhammad Buaben also comments about the methodology of Michael Cook, that "His understandings of the Prophets marriages, the status of ladies in Islam, the purported stannic stanzas, and the experiences with the Quraysh and others have truly been blasted. Michael Cook shows unimaginable threat and predisposition for Muhammad (PBUH) and the instructing of Islam. <sup>11</sup>

Doubt over Islamic History is one more essential topic of the Orientalists system. The purpose for this is that the vast majority of them have a place with Christianity and Judaism or Establishments coordinated by Christians and Jewish people groups. The specimen of this kind of mentality is clear in Watt's study, as expressed by him, "Most importantly we need to consider the structure wherein Juda o Christian impacts might have impacted Muhammad the chance of his having perused the Bible or other Jewish or Christian books might be precluded. Conventional Islam holds that Muhammad couldn't peruse or compose; however, this affirmation is suspect to the modern scholars since it is made to help the belief that his development of the Quran is miracles something no unskilled individual might at any point have done without anyone else." Some Muslim researchers have talked about that conspiracy is additionally a piece of Orientalists' technique. A number of orientalists did anti-Islamic work with anti-Islamic intentions.

Maryam Jameelah, a well-known Islamic researcher, composed the book "Islam and Orientalism." She attempted to assess the workds and ideas of six Orientalists like Philip K. Hitti, Kenneth Cragg, S.D. Goitein, Welfred Cantwell Smith, Nadav Safran also, Freeland Abott in this book. She reached the conclusion after her study. As she remarks, "Orientalism is certainly not an impartial target of Islamic study and its ethos by the intellectual devoted to the leading customs of scholarship to make significant innovative work, but nothing an predetermined scheme of impelling Muslim adolescence to rebel versus their beliefs, and hatred whole tradition of Islamic History and culture as outdated. The goal is to make however much damage as could reasonably be expected among the juvenile and susceptible by planting the seeds of doubt, criticism, as well

as distrust.<sup>12</sup>

It is not that authentic Islamic books were not in their insight or were out of reach. A significant number of orientalists have been so in modern times. Those, who have utilized their psychological and intellectual capacities in the study of Islamic sciences and devoted their lives. An Orientalist A.J. Wensinck has arranged a very detailed list for the induction of hadiths from the books of hadiths and biography. Similarly, he has also administered the arrangement of the Encyclopedia' of the words of the Hadiths. The Orientalist G. L. Strange and his book "Lands of the Eastern Caliphate" (Geography of the Eastern Caliphate) likewise fall under this classification. This large number of works and research endeavors are verification that these journalists and editors have not saved any work/struggle and have given full evidence of their true dedication to their subject in this long life of study and exertion. The well-known German Orientalist, Carl Brockelman, is probably one of the biggest orientalists of our century. He was without a doubt a researcher of Arabic writing. Today, it is unimaginable to expect to envision a library of orientalists without this precious book of Brockelman. He was the same Brockelman when he turns into a steadfast Christian and composes the history of the Muslim world with the sensations of particular honors of the European countries in his heart, keeps on composing such abnormal things that many nations had to restrict his books.

Dr. Abdul Quddus Hashmi says: I read this book. I'm stunned that this extraordinary researcher of Arabic books gives the name of books. It tells the name of the writer and the time of his demise. It also tells in which libraries and where the book is accessible. For what reason doesn't he ever open the books and read them? First of all, he read the books very little, those which he peruses didn't consider their customs, then, at that point, he made the causes and results so that nobody can imagine such odd causes and results in the edges of an individual. For what reason did this occur? The answer is nothing that while composing history, his brain, heart, and mind were involved by the thoughts of the predominance of the European countries.<sup>13</sup>

The reason behind the abnormal part of the Orientalist approach Islamic studies and Seerah is that the standards of their research vary from that of the Muslim approaches. The Orientalists do not attention with regards to a moral value in the reporting of chronicled real factors. The main part of Orientalists' methodology is that they generally assess lessons about Islam based on western standards. Studies by them are found on embellishment as well as delicate diffusions

In this regard Allama Shibli Numani has brought up that the disadvantage of Orientalism procedure is that the European doesn't mind

authenticity of narrator or reporter's character; rather he focuses minimally on his neither conceivable nor fundamental; he just sees whether the occurrences announced by storytellers are as per the conditions and patterns of occasions.

Moulana Shibli Noumani in his popular work "Sirat al-Nabi" which is a notable source completely explaining the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), basically investigated the perspectives of European researchers on the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He accentuates analyzing Western general patterns, common errors, source of information, and the justification for the normal mistakes which they submit while digging into the study of Seerah. Thusly, we will attempt to Judge how much malignance and bias consequently. Shibli has additionally examined the methodologies of orientalists in the 17th to 19th century about Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) while giving a rundown of books composed by orientalists on the life of Prophet and divided European researchers into three distinct groups.

Calling attention to the issues of orientalists' approach in concentrating on Islam, Shibli has examined the normal perspectives communicated by orientalists about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In short, he has refuted Western objections applying legitimate and primordial contentions and introduced exhaustively an proper and faultless picture of Sirah.<sup>14</sup>

A modern American Seerah writer Michael Cook wrote a book named Muhammad (Past Masters). He introduced the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as a successful leader, reformer, and politician<sup>15</sup> This book of Michael Cook shows the outflow of inclination and contemptibility about Seerah and Islam. His endeavors of making religious amicability couldn't be productive because he has counseled one-sided orientalists' work of Seerah in his book. Biased orientalists convey a not insignificant rundown of essayists beginning from William Muir and Montgomery Watt. They mislead their readers about the Seerah and the character of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). They counseled unauthentic translated secondary sources to portray the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). They counsel Seerah ibn Ishaq's translation of A Guillaume. This translation of Guillaume procures inescapable missteps of translation.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The universe has been evolving since its inception, but the last one hundred years or so have seen the fastest dramatic shift. Because the repercussions of these developments transcended time and geography, they had a direct impact on Islamic sciences, especially Seerah writing. This research paper has attempted to provide an overview of the rationalistic and critical approach of western orientalists in Seerah

writing. This approach has stipulated the world with Seerah literature that has done both constructive and destructive effects. Constructive effects, in the sense that it provided more scrutinized narratives of Seerah and increased interfaith harmony. On other hand, destructive effects were much more because traditional sources of Seerah were brought into question and as a result, modernist Muslim Seerah writers adopted an apologetic approach as they were immensely inspired by the Western scholars. Though most of the orientalist tried to criticize Seerah narratives by rationalistic and scientific methods suspecting traditional sources. There are also great works offered by Orientalists which have admitted the authenticity and universality of Seerah accounts. These works may be appreciated but cannot be completely trusted as their sources were secondary rather than primary. They depended on translations that were untrustworthy and undependable. Most importantly, even after admitting the authenticity of Seerah, they still ignored the light of truth (Islam). So, it is not appropriate to blindly trust the orientalist who failed to evaluate the Seerah and its teachings impartially and objectively. Diverse approaches advocated by orientalist presents a variety of Seerah literature and it has greatly affected Muslim Scholars as there appeared marvelous Seerah works of literature such as Sirat-un-Nabi by Shibli in their responses. So, modern trends in Seerah's writing have been greatly influenced by the contemporary rationalistic-critical approach of the western approach. Muslim scholars ought to focus on balancing both traditional and modern sources of Seerah writing and become more exclusive by multifaceted investigations in their fields to avoid apologetic manners and blind chase of the west.

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