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Overview of Prominent Sīrah Writings of Modern Period

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Abstract: The tradition of Sīrah writing goes back to the very generation of companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). The very first Sīrah works that appeared distinct from the hadith works, however, did not deal with complete biography of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), rather they addresses aspects of his socio-political life and organisation of the government during the Medinan period. This aspect of Sīrah writing came to be known in history as Maghazi. Though a bit later when comprehensive biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) were compiled al-Maghazi were also incorporated in the Sīrah works, socio-political aspect of the Prophet’s life especially his conduct was entities of his time remained focus of various Sīrah works. A large number Sīrah works have been written by scholars from different perspectives highlighting different dimensions of it both in the past and in the contemporary times. This review article attempts to examine and review the prominent Sīrah works of modern period.

Keywords: Prophet, Sirah, Prominent, Modern

Introduction: The word 'Sīrah ' is derived from Sara, which means, ‘conduct’ ‘behaviour’ ‘way of life’ or 'to travel' or 'to be on a journey' and the last but not the least ‘biography’. It is the story of the person’s birth, the events surrounding it, his life and his death, and his manners and characteristics.1 In the Qur’an the word Sīrah occurs in Surah Taha: Allah said:

"...Seize it, and fear not: We shall return it at once to its former condition,”2

This is used in the same meaning as ‘conduct’ or ‘condition.’ 'To argue, an individual's Sīrah which includes each and everything related to his life. Sīrat Rasul Allah or al- Sīrah al-Nabawiyah has been the most widely used names for the traditional account of the Prophet Muhammad’s life conduct.3 The Qur’an has best illustrated the personality of the Prophet (SAAS) in these words:

“You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes.”4

The moral and physical features of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), his birth and the events that took place before and after his birth, his genealogy, his lineage, his tribe, his family, his friends and companions, his opponents and enemies, his expeditions, military enlistments and political treaties, and official assignments are a part of Sīrah literature.
Most Sīrah books wrote even on the events after the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and do go a little further in time. A large number of biographies of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) exist in all Islamic languages in prose, poetry, and more recently even on films.

**Modern Sīrah Writings:** As an aftermath of colonization of most of the Muslim world which accompanied an onslaught of Christian missionaries, there seems to have been a wave of interest in Sīrah writing. The stimulus seems to be either defense of the personality of the Prophet (SAAS) or to seek the guidance from his Sīrah in the changed world scenario. This trend continued rather was strengthened after the decolonization of the Muslim world. We notice a number of Muslim scholars thus ventured to write the Sīrah in the changed world scenario. This trend continued rather was strengthened after the decolonization of the Muslim world. In the modern era there have been numerous well known works other than Mawlud Namas written in this field. Prior to mutiny i.e., before 1857, two works in urdu prose appeared, one was written by Qazi Badr al-Dawlah namely “Fawa’id-i-Badariyyah”. Which is regarding as the early book on Sīrah in urdu prose and second one was compiled by Mufti ‘Inayatullah Kjakori namely, “Tawarikh Habib-i-Ilah”. The last quarter of the 19th century C.E and the 20th century is regarding as the golden era of the Urdu Sīrah writing. The golden period started with the answers to few books written by orientalises such as the book written by Chirag Ali namely, Talikat, published in 1882 in Lucknow and Book written by Altab Husain Hali namely, Tarikh Muhamadiya par Munsifanma Rai, was published in the same year. These two books was answer to Padri Amar u Din’s book Tarikh Muhammad. Many books have been written during these years few among them are:

**Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Life of Mohammad, New Delhi: Cosmos Books, 2009:** The book is introduced by Syed Hamid (former V.C of AMU and Chancellor of Hamdard University New Delhi). The book was first published in 1870 by London: Trubner and co. paternoster Row. This book is rated as the best argued refutation anywhere of the attack made over the centuries against the life and mission of Prophet (SAAS). The book is so well documented and the arguments so logical and convincing that it eclipsed Sir William Muir’s book “The Life of Mohomet” that had provoked it.

**Allama Shubli Noman, Allama Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, Sirat un-Nabi, Lahore: Idarah Islamiyat Publishers, 2002, vol’s 7:** The book comprising seven volumes is the reliable and authentic Urdu Sīrah book which no other composition had equaled in acclaim and authority. The author felt the need to open with D S Margoliouth on certain points on Sīrah like Sir Syed was worried about Sir William Muir. Mawlana Shibli (d. 1914 C.E) had only managed to complete the first two volumes of the book when he died in 1914. His disciple Syed Sulayman Nadwi (d. 1953 C.E.), who was working with him as his literary assistant on the project, collected his research papers and manuscripts and had published them and saved the lifelong learning of his teacher.

The forward of this work was extra ordinary written in scholarly style in which need, importance and methodology of Sīrah writing along with the history and facts of orientlists has been discussed. The book written by two great scholars bears eminent position not only
in Urdu Sīrah writing but in the entire Sīrah literature written in all languages. But every human endeavor has its limitations Shiblī too contains many short comings which have been notified by many scholars. At some place Shiblī has adopted apologetic attitude. Christians have written that prophet’s initial campaigns were carried out for the purpose of booty only. Perhaps shibli got influenced by these sorts of allegations. Now shibli tried to interpret these campaigns in such a way. That at many places his pen has defected from the unanimous viewpoint of Muslims (which is supported by Qur’an). No one has agreed with the interpretation of Shiblī in respect of Ghazwah-i-Badar. Even his student (who completed his work) has disagreed with him in this matter.  

Qazi Muhamad Sulayman Mansurpurī, Rehmata lil ‘Alameen, New Delhi: Atiqad Publishing House, 2001, vol’s 3.\textsuperscript{9}: The book is comprised of three volumes. The first volume was published in 1912, the second one was published in 1921, and the last one was published in 1983. Before third volume was published Syed Sulayman had published seven vol’s book co-authored with Shiblī, and the another book Khutbat-i-Madras. This book was also translated into Arabic and the Arabic translation of this book has been published by Dr. Maktadi Hassan Azhari.\textsuperscript{10}

This is one of the authentic book in Urdu on the biography of Prophet (SAAS), is based on the authentic sources and is leading among the Sīrah works as per the authenticity. Presently is a syllabus book of many universities of this country as well as of many foreign countries.\textsuperscript{11} But his writing style was not too much scientific. The author was not used to discuss things in a chronological order, but he used to discuss a single matter at many places in his book. In the book only first volume of the book is related to Sīrah rest two volumes are just like Syed Sulayman Nadwi’s volume third to seven of Sīrat un Nabi, where author discusses few things related to Sīrah who are fruitful but not directly related to Sīrah.\textsuperscript{12}

Therefore, this book is a source of knowledge for both the scholars as well as for the common people. There is no deficiency of potential in inculcating belief and emotions but it is devoid of eloquence and rhetoric, that is why it could not become popular especially in the modern times.

Mawlana Idris Kandhalwi, Sirat i-Mustafa, Karachi Pakistan: Kutub Khana Mazhari, n.d, Vol’s 3.\textsuperscript{9}: The book comprises of three volumes. The book is written in a classical style like primary Arab basic sources and contains innovative message of Qur’anic verses and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). The book is like the gist of all Arabic Sīrah literature is embodied in one single book.

Due to its valuable content occupies an important and shining place in the world of knowledge. The book is written in a scholar language, it is lucid clear in style. The author gave importance to Gazwat-i-Nabawi and have discussed ‘Aam al-Wafud (year of deputation) in detail. He had shown enthusiasm in jurisprudential issues and have based their work on traditions of Prophet (SAAS). He profess that he had followed the stage of the predecessors. He had made criticism on Shiblī Numani and has no interest in the confusing
western minds and his command and approach to the basic sources is more evident than the other.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, this book is a treasure of knowledge for those who want to acquire vast knowledge of Arabic sources in Urdu. However, readers with modern taste may not find much interest in its debates, language and way of argumentation.

\textbf{Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), trans. Syed Riaz-Ul-Hassan, New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2014.}: The book is originally based on the eight lectures delivered by author under the patronage of the Muslim Education Society of Madrasah, India in October 1925. These lectures were first published in 1926, later Syed Riaz-Ul-Hassan translated this into English entitles ‘Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him’. The present book is considered to be the best to introduce the Prophet (SAAS) of Islam to the western world. When author was preparing the material for this book he had in mind basically a non-Arab, non-Muslim audience. He was in unique position to introduce the Prophet (SAAS), because he had already co-authored seven volume biography of Prophet (SAAS) which is highly regarded in the Muslim world for its scholarly merits. Compared to the biography the present book seems like a bottle of perfume extracted from tons of flowers.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Dr Anwar Mehmud Khalid, Urdu Nasr Ma Sirat-e-Rasool, Lahore: Iqbal Academy, n.d.}: The book comprised of seven chapters, in first chapter the author has discussed the definition of Sīrah by the predecessors along with its literal and technical meaning. Chapter two comprises of sources of Sīrah writing like Qur’an, Hadith, Tafsir, ‘IIm al-Maghazi, ‘IIm al-Asar, ‘IIm al-Ansab (ancestry) and ‘IIm al-Lughat (lexicography). Chapter third and forth describes inceptions of Sīrah writings in Urdu (poetry and prose) and detailed account of evolution of official Urdu Sīrah writings up to the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Chapter fifth is entitled as ‘Golden Era of Urdu Sīrah Writing part I) which thoroughly describes the works written prior to 1947 along with description of book written by non-Muslim writers. Chapter sixth entitled as Golder Era of Urdu Sīrah Writing Part II), discusses Ashraf Ali Thanwi’s ‘Nashr al-Tib, Abdul Rauf Danapurie’s ‘Asal al-Siyar’ and Syed Sulayman’s ‘Khutbat-E-Madrs’ and also discussed the book of Idris Kandhlawi. In the seventh chapter author describes the Sīrah literature written by different scholars belongs to different schools of thought from 1948 to 1985.

\textbf{Dr. Mahmud Ahmad Ghazi, Mahazirat-i-Sīrah, New Delhi: Areeb Publications, 2016.}: The book is actually based on 12 recorded lectures given by Dr Ghazi (d. 211 C.E.) a well-known modern scholar and a product of both Madrasa and University. Each lecture has been divided into chapters of the book. In the first chapter author has put amply light on the meaning, definition, need and significance of the science of Sīrah, second chapter describes the sources of Sīrah, also describes the different dimensions and aspects of Sīrah. Chapter third is comprising on the inception, development and compilation of Sīrah literature and has divided it into eight phases, forth chapter describes the various styles and approaches of Sīrah writing. In the fifth chapter author provides primary accounts of primary Sīrah writers, like of Ibn Ishaq, Al-Waqqadi, Muhammad bin Sa’id and Ibn Hisham.
Chapter sixth, seventh and eighth are comprised on the constitution, establishment, and governance, social and economical setup of the state of Medina. In the ninth chapter author had explained jurisprudential approach of Sīrah writers and had discussed many works in this perspective.

In chapter tenth, eleventh and twelfth, the author has provided considerable overview on the Sīrah literature in the Indian sub-continent. He also discussed the methods and styles adopted by Urdu Sīrah writers like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Qazi Sulayman Masurpuri, Allama Shibli Nomi, Syed Sulayman Nadvi, Mawlama Idris Kandhalwi and Dr Hamidullah.


The author had written a foreword on the beginning and development of Sīrah writing then in the entire first volume, the author has discussed in detail along with the account of their life sketches twenty five classical scholars, who have contributed to Sīrah literature. The author has also given details of works of the scholars along with the methodology adopted by them. At the end of every chapter, the author has given the list of the sources related to the subject. Similarly in the second volume the author had mentioned in detail further twenty four Scholars who have added their contribution to Sīrah literature.

*Prof. Jozaf Harootus, Sirat-i Nabawi Ki Awaleen Kitaba Aur Un Kae Mulifeen, trans. Nisar Ahmad Farooqui, New Delhi: Islamic Book Foundation, 1998.* The book comprises of four chapters, undoutly a praiseworthy work on the early sources of Sīrah of Prophet (SAAS). In the first chapter author discussed the beginning of Maghazi Writings and in the same chapter author discussed in brief the life sketch of four Maghazi writers and their works and methodology adopted by them among them are, Aban bin Uthman, ‘Urwa bin Zubair, Sharjeel bin said and Wahab bin Munabah. In the second chapter author discussed the works of Abdullah bin Abi Bakr, Asif bin ‘Umar bin qataelah and Ibn Shihab Zahari and their brief life sketch. In the third chapter author discussed the life and works of three students of Al-Zahari. In the last chapter author discussed the works and life of Abu Mushare al-Sindi, Al-Waqdi, and Muhammad bin Sa’id.

analysis in depth the message conveyed to us by his life. The book deals with the significant issues associated with the life of the Prophet (SAAS), including Jihad, Terrorism, Ijtihad, the concept of war and the relationship with other religious communities. The author lays emphasis on the fact that the Prophet (SAAS) went out of his way to follow a policy of peace throughout his life, contrary to the misconception that a significant part of his life was spend in warfare.

The author is of the view that Prophet was supremely successful at both the religious and secular levels. In this book author tries to show that peace is the basic ideology of Islam, but unfortunately this vital truth has been hidden by religion which has deteriorated into stagnant ritualism.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, Al RahiQ al-Makhtum, New Delhi: Islami Kitab Ghar Publishers and Distributors, 2015.\textsuperscript{18}}: This is a complete authoritative book on the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) which was honoured by the world Muslim league as the first prize winner held at Makkah. In this book author highlight the exalted states of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in the propagation of the divine message, the religious truth and the hardships he endured in the preaching of this message, especially at that time which was perhaps most unsuitable socially and intellectually for the message of truth. This book explains the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in the light of Qur'an and authentic Ahadith. This biography of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) truly opens man’s mind about the challenges that he faced in his efforts to spread the message of Islam.

\textit{John Andrew Morrow, Prophet’s Covenant with the Christian’s of the world, Arabia: Sophia Perennis, 2013.}: This recently published and widely received work tries to see how Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) was engaging with different communities in the “shadow of war” as some orientalists would often define the life of the Prophet—“the Prophet of sword”. This book deconstructs this biased Eurocentric biased approach of orientalists with the help of the manuscripts, how Prophet (SAAS) signed different covenants with many Christian communities of the time include the Monk’s of Mount Sinai, Christians of Persia, Christians of Nijran etc. The purpose of these agreements was to remove suspicion and strengthen trust and mutual understanding and co-existence between Christians and Muslims considering that the continued conflict between Christians and Muslims across the world has been artificially ignited by the forces of imperialism. The content of those priceless historical documents can shed light on the early history of Islam. These covenants can serve as a source of inspiration for the establishment of insuperable harmony between the three Abrahamic Religions.

\textit{Abu Bakr Siraj u Din Martin Lings, Hayat-e-Sarwar-e-Kainat, New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islamiya Publishers, 2012}: The book is the Urdu translation of the book Muhammad, His Life Based on Early Sources. Academy, This book is an internationally acclaimed, comprehensive and authoritative account of the life of Prophet (SAAS) based on earlier classical sources. This book is presented in a narrative style that is easily comprehensible, yet authentic and inspiring in its use of language, reflecting both the simplicity and the grandeur of the story it tells. The author tries to engage in a meaningful
interpretation of Prophetic life and how the idea of peace and establishment of social justice was the basic fundamental prerogative of Prophetic life.

_Tariq Ramadan, In the Footsteps of the Prophet (SAAS), New York: Oxford University Press, 2007._19: This book is a moving and intimate account of the Prophet’s life not just a chronological narration of events, but an attempt to bring to life his inner inquiry, challenges and his character. How the divine intentions is manifested in the Prophetic approach to His creation. He also argues the need for a reform of approach in engaging with a linear legalistic interpretation of Islam which altogether signals out the diversity inherent in the life of the Prophet and his intentions behind the Ghazwat of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS).

This profound and stimulating biography shows how Prophet Muhammad’s message can be used to address some of the today’s most controversial issues—from the treatment of poor and the role of women to the interpretation of jihad and relations with other religions. It offers Muslims a new understanding of Muhammad’s life and introduced non-Muslims to the story of the Prophet (SAAS) and to the riches of Islam._20

_Prof. Muhammad Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui, Makki Uswa-i Nabawiya, Muslim Aqliyatoo Ka Masayil Ka Hal, New Delhi: Islamic Book Foundation, 2005._21: In the book the author examines insightfully how Islam was practiced in Makah, however Muslim led their migration to Abyssinia and how the Muslim minorities living amongst various Arab tribes. The book is based on original Arabic sources, guides Muslims how to co-exist peacefully with non-Muslims.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part treating the Makkan period of life of the Prophet (SAAS), from a new perspective, the minority perspective, discusses in detail, various aspects of the life of Prophet (SAAS) and his companions in Makah, before their hijrah to Medina and establishment of polity there controlled by Prophet (SAAS). That is to say that the Makkan phase of the life of the Prophet (SAAS) has been studied from the ‘vantage-point’ of a minority, bringing into sharp relief the character of Islam in a minority context.

The second part seeks to draw out lessons from these experiences for Muslims living as minorities today. On studying life of the Prophet (SAAS) in this perspective, a role model is drawn for the Muslim minorities scattered in all parts of the World. It might serve as a mirror for them and for deriving guidance from the example of the Prophet (SAAS). What Prof. Siddiqui Muslim minorities need to see the role of the Prophet (SAAS) and the early Muslims in that period as a model for them to emulate.

_Muhammed Huseyin Heykel, The Life of Muhammad, trans. Ismail Ragi A. Al faruqi, Delhi: New Crescent Publishing Company, 2015._: The book has been translated by a well-known scholar Ismail Ragi A. Al-Faruqi. This book is well known to the Arabic readers as this book has been originally written in Arabic titled as ‘Hayat Muhammad’. The book is of twofold: first, to put in the hands of the contemporary Muslim, a biography which reveals
the carrier of the Prophet (SAAS) in the full light of historical reality. Second, to bring out
the essence of Islam as exemplified in the life of the greatest Muslim, to show the relevance
of Islam to modern life, and to contrast the Islamic message with the claims of modern
ideology.

Among modern biographies of the Prophet (SAAS) in English it is the only fully researched
one available. It includes the most responsible modern presentation of the message of
Islam. It includes complete coverage of the Prophet (SAAS) life, a detailed analysis of pre-
Islamic Arabia, the situation context of revelation, and a comparative study of the Islamic
and Western civilization.21

Muhammad Hamidullah, The Life And Work Of The Prophet Of Islam, trans.
Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2007: The book was originally
written in French language in 1959, and the work is now available in many languages like
Turkish22, Urdu, and Arabic as well as in English. The English translation has been done by
Mahmud Ahmad Ghazi. This work has received well acceptance among the scholars of Sīrah. Ilhami Orucoglu writes that “Author distances himself from classical classifications;
the author gives a very intricate example of research. Even if he mostly chooses not to deal
with disputed issues, it can be seen that he adopts modern ideas in issues like Monk Bahira
and the Ascension.”23

There are many other books among them few are; Syed Amir Ali (d. 1928) wrote The life
and Teaching of Muhammad, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthal (d.1936) Al-Amin: A Life
Sketch Of The Prophet Muhammad, Mufti Muhammad Shafi (d. 1976) Sirat Khatm al-
Ambiya, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui (d. 1978) Life of Muhammad, Mawlana Syed Abul ‘Ala
Mawdoodi (d.1979), wrote two books, Sirat Khatm Rasul and Sirat Sarwar i-‘Alam, Afzal U-
Rehman (1998), wrote three books namely Muhammad The Educator of Mankind,
Nadwi (d.1999), Sirat Nabwi (SAAS) Aur Asr-i-Hazir Mein Uski Ma’nawiyyat Wa Ifadiyyat.
Na’im Siddiqui (d. 2002), Muhsan Insaniyat, Ahmad Deedat wrote two books, Muhammad:
The Greatest and Muhammad: The Natural Successor To Christ, Sarwat Saulat, the Life of
Prophet (SAAS), Innayat Allah Subhani wrote Muhammad: The Biblical Prophet, Zahir
Ahmad Muhammad wrote Glimpses of The Prophet’s Life and Times, Ziauddin Sardar,
Muhammad Aspects of His Biography, Wahidudin Khan, Muhammad: The Prophet Of
Revolution, Muhammad: A Prophet For The Humanity and The Prophet Muhammad: A
Simple Guide To His Life, Talib Hussain wrote Siar i-Nabvi (SAAS) in eleven volumes,
Muhammad Shamsul Haque wrote Life of Prophet Muhammad; The Final Messanger,
Sayed Hussain Nasr wrote Muhammad: Man of Allah, Dr M.Asad Subhani wrote,
Muhammad The Guide of Mankind, Muhammad Abdul Hai wrote, The Noble Life Of
Muhammad (SAAS), B.Salem Foad wrote, Life Of The Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), Khalid
Latif Gauba wrote The Prophet Of The Desert, SSU Tabrez wrote Muhammad The
Messanger of Humanity, Masoodul Hasan wrote English Poems on Prophet Muhammad,
Prof. Abdul Ahad Dawud wrote Muhammad In The Bible, Ziauddin Sardar and Zafar Malik
wrote Introducing Muhammad, Khawaja Shams al-Din ‘Azimi wrote Muhammad al-Rasul
Allah in four volumes, Abdul Rahman Kidwai wrote the Images of Prophet Muhammad in
English literature, Prof. Farida Khanam wrote Life And Teaching Of Prophet Muhammad: Its relevance In A Global Context. etc. etc.

Conclusion: As an aftermath of colonization of most of the Muslim world which accompanied an onslaught of Christian missionaries, there seems to have been a wave of interest in Sīra writing. The stimulus seems to be either defense of the personality of the Prophet (SAAS) or to seek the guidance from his Sīrah in the changed world scenario. This trend continued rather was strengthened after the decolonization of the Muslim world. We notice a number of Muslim scholars thus ventured to write the Sīrah in the changed world scenario. This trend continued rather was strengthened after the decolonization of the Muslim world. In the modern era there have been numerous well known works on different perspectives.

References:

5. Ibn Ishaq’s magnum Opus consisted of three parts: i) al-Mubtada (the beginning), it dealt with the creation of the world, the early Prophets from Adam to Jesus (peace be on them) and the Arabs before advent of the Prophet (peace be on him); ii) al-Ba’th (the advent), it depicted the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) until his migration to Medina; iii) al-Maghazi (expeditions), it described the Prophet’s activities after his migration to Medina.
8. Ibid, 73-74.
9. Before this book author has published a short book on the biography of Prophet (SAAS) entitles Mehr-i-Nabuwat which was published in 1899 C.E. only of 48 pages and is best book for the childs.
10. Translater is the Advocate and Alim of Jamia Salfiya Banaras.
12. Ibid. 589-590.
15. Manzoor ‘Alam is chairman of Institution of Objective Studies, New Delhi.
16. The three students are, Musa bin Uqaba, Muamer bin Rashid, and Muhammad bin Ishaq.
18. This book has also been translated into English as; The Sealed Nector, (Riyad: Darussalam, 2008).
19. The another book of the same author under the title of “The Messenger the Meaning of the Life of Muhammad” (London: Penguin Books, 2007). These two books are of same contents, i.e., two books with the same text.
22. In Turkish this work has gone through many editions.