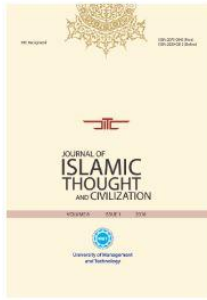


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## Early Christian Sīrah Writings of Subcontinent: A Comparative Study of their Methods, Impact and Cogitating on New Contemporizing Methodology

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### Abstract

This article is an attempt to study the methods adopted in the Christian missionary biographies of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in subcontinent from early nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. These missionaries came into this region with their strong missionary convictions and they set up a new literary apologetic trend in the religious history of subcontinent in order to prove the superiority of Christianity over Islam and to trivialize its norms, values, religious figures and traditions. Though this trend was not novel in the history of Christian-Muslim relation however, a distinguished feature of it, in India, was that it took the shape of direct confrontation and animosity e.g. the great debate between Pfander and Rahmatu-Allah-Kīrānvī held in 1854. This early confrontational contact between Islam and Christianity played a pivotal role in the development of an academic environment and had an impact on the Christian-Muslim relations in the subcontinent in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This study is an attempt to explore this early intellectual confrontational landscape and its impact upon each other's communities. Furthermore, it also attempts to investigate how modern Christians and Muslims can develop new ways for mutual understanding in the light of contemporary intellectual traditions. Last but not the least, after highlighting major shortcomings in their methods, this study cogitates on new contextual approach for the study of Christianity and Islam.

**Keywords:** Christian-Muslim Relation, Christianity, Subcontinent, contextualization, apologetic, Great Debate, Sīrah

### Introduction

The history of Christian-Muslim apologetic literary movement goes back to the very early beginning of Islam. Qur'ān, the basic source of Islamic knowledge, raised serious and critical objections upon standard Christian doctrines like, trinity, incarnation, atonement, crucifixion, divinity of Jesus and Marry — the mother of Jesus, Jesus as the son of God, and last but not least their weak concept of monotheism.<sup>1</sup> In response, Syriac

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<sup>1</sup>For full detail to see Qur'ānic views about these Christian doctrines see: Abul A'lā Mowdūdī, *Nasrāniyyat Qur'ān kī Rowshnī main* [Christianity in the Light of Qur'ān, Urdu] (Lahore: Tarjumān al-Qur'ān, 2008).

and Arabic Christians who had the first hand interaction with Muslims gave initial response of these objections and rejected the authority of Qur'ān and Muḥammad over Christian doctrines. A Jacobite Patriarch John I (d.648) wrote a report to answer the questions a Muslim official named 'Amr posed.<sup>2</sup> Another author Theodore Abu Qurra (750-820) also wrote a treatise in which the author answers the Muslim objections in a dialogical way. One of his students raised different objections against Muslims and Theodore answered these questions in the light of the Christian teachings.<sup>3</sup>

However, two early Syrian-Arabic writings are important, as these had an impact upon the development of literary apologies not only in the Muslim world but also in the west just like, Abu Rā'ita (755-835),<sup>4</sup> 'Abdul Masīh al-Kindī and the John of Damascus.<sup>5</sup> These writers wrote their work in the Muslim context. Later in Byzantine, more ironic work was developed by Nicetas of Byzantium (d.850) and Theophanes the Confessor (758-817) as a result of the military confrontation between Abbasid rulers and Byzantine during that era. Their writings were more harsh and critical while making comments towards the Qur'ān, Muhammad (SAW) and the Muslim traditions.<sup>6</sup> This apologetic legacy had an impact upon the subsequent Christian authors as Goddard states that "Later Byzantine accounts of Islam in the main reproduce much of Nicetas's argument and also much of his tone".<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Muir frequently quoted al-Kindī in his *Life of Mohem*<sup>8</sup> and the themes presented in the apology of John of Damascus became classical Christian themes in their apologies.<sup>9</sup>

In all of the above-mentioned Syrian-Arabic, Byzantine and later European writings two things were common firstly, the Christian apologetic writings under the Muslim Rule, and secondly, the Christian apologetic under the Church. However, under the European colonization movement in the eighteenth century most of the Middle Eastern, Asian and African countries became colonies of the Europe and the Britain. This situation not only changed the political landscape but also the religious milieu. For example, countries that were ruled by Muslims like India came under the direct control of the British colonial power. They patronized Christianity and invited Christian

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<sup>2</sup>Uri Rubin, edit. *The Life of Muhammad* (Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998) 345.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 346.

<sup>4</sup>For full detail see: Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Century* (Great Britain: Paternoster, 2005), 44-63.

<sup>5</sup>Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian Muslim Relations* (London: Edinburg University Press, 200), 53-55.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 55-60.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>8</sup>Muir, 49-50.

<sup>9</sup>Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad* (Continuum, 1998), 77.

Missionaries to convert people into Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> Christian missionaries started preaching their Christian faith to the Indian people and they publically started denouncing Islam and Prophet Muhammad (SAW).<sup>11</sup> This confrontation not only played an important role in developing relationship between Christians and Muslims in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in India, but also built a negative imagery of the Prophet (SAW) for all those who converted to Christianity in that era and today constitute the second largest minority in Pakistan known as Ahmadīs—the followers of Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani (1835-1908). Keeping in view this background, this article explores these basic questions; what are the early biographies of Christians in the subcontinent and how these present the life of the prophet (SAW). What was the influence of these writings upon the adherents of each religion? Which methods Christian biographers adopted in these early *sīrah* writings? What are the shortcomings in their methods? How we can develop a suitable method for contemporary Christian *sīrah* writers in Pakistan? Here, I have only selected those writers which have written full length biographies of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and deliberately excluded those scholars who have written about Islam in general and devoted a chapter on the life of the Prophet (SAW).

## 2. Aloys Sprenger (1813-1897)

Aloys Sprenger (1813-1897) produced the first ever full length biography of the prophet (SAW) titled *Life of Muhammad from Original Sources* which was published in India in the year 1851.<sup>12</sup> He was a renowned Austrian orientalist who joined the East India Company in 1843, as a medical doctor. In 1850, he became the principal of Delhi College,<sup>13</sup> where he wrote *Life of Muhammad*, and many other books.<sup>14</sup> Following is a short critical analysis of the major themes he discussed and the methodology he used.

His biography received a lot of attention from his contemporary evangelical orientalis. He made an unproductive effort and tried to convince his readers to reject the conceptions related to the illiteracy of the Prophet (SAW) and how *Ka'bah* was built after the advent of Islam.<sup>15</sup> In addition, he also mitigated the role of the Prophet (SAW) in spreading Islam to all the parts of the world. As he states; “the successful prophet of the Arabs, in founding a new religion, did nothing more than gather the floating elements,

<sup>10</sup>For full detail of this religious and political change see: Arvin A. Powell, *Muslim and Missionaries in Pre Mutiny India* (NewYork: Rutledge Press, 2003), 295.

<sup>11</sup>M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1999), 293.

<sup>12</sup>Aloys Sprenger, *Life of Muhammad from Original Sources* (Allahabad: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1851). For internet edition of the book visit; <https://ia800306.us.archive.org/35/items/lifemohammadfro00aloygoog/lifemohammadfro00aloygoog.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup>Ikram Chaghatai, “Dr. Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893): His Life and Contribution to Urdu Language and Literature,” *Iqbal Review* 36 (1), (1995)

<sup>14</sup>Rauf Parekh, “Literary Notes: Aloys Sprenger and Delhi College: a Part of History Recreated,” *Daily Dawn*, 24 March 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1171434>.

<sup>15</sup>*Life of Mohammad from Original Sources*, op. cit., 13-38.

which had been imparted or originated by others, in obedience to their resistible force of the spirit of the time.”<sup>16</sup>

Sprengrer, firstly denied the historicity of the event of surah al-Feel<sup>17</sup> and then questioned the Muslim historical method employed in it. Moreover, he also suggests an alternative method in relation to Muslim *Muhaddisīn*. He questions the authenticity of *Hadīth* literature declaring it as a fraud and fictitious writing, which was later carried by Muir in his books; revolving around the life of Muhammad. He states, “To supply what seemed to be wanting, pious fraud assisted imagination, by furnishing arguments for its creations. Well calculated fictions were believed in the age of faith; and many of them became dogmas for succeeding centuries.”<sup>18</sup> While talking about the source of *sīrah*, he considered the Qur’ān, Ibn Ishāq (704-768), Ibn Hishām (d.833) and Wāqidi (747-823) as the prominent sources. Later, he expresses his ideas about these sources in a way which would make them seem unreliable and appreciated the work of Wāqadī alone. He states “There is no trace of a sacrifice of truth to design, or of pious fraud, in his work. It contains few miracles; and even those which are recorded in it admit of an easy explanation.”<sup>19</sup>

Sprengrer also confirmed classical Christian theme of epilepsy and suggests that like all “hysterical people had a tendency to lying and deceit” and it is epilepsy that causes his phomomania.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. William Muir (1819-1905)

Sir William Muir (1819-1905) was a Scottish orientalist who joined East India Company in 1837. During his service he performed three different roles in India, including the educational role, the governmental role and the missionary role.<sup>21</sup> He was a close friend of C.G. Pfander (1803-1865), a German missionary who was recruited by CMS to work in northern India, and it was upon the latter’s encouragement that he proceeded to research and publish his biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*).<sup>22</sup>

To accomplish Pfander’s request he authored a book titled *The Life of Mahomet*: in four volumes. It aims to study Muhammad’s life only in the light of information drawn from Islamic and original sources so that Muslims can recognize it. He combined scholarly and missionary objective in this biography, but failed in achieving his goal as Avril A. Powell, states that the work of Muir’s is purely evangelical in nature; and writes that, “William’s purpose was more overtly evangelical, for he mentioned in his preface

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>17</sup>Al-Qur’ān: Feel 105:1-5.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>21</sup>Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 279.

<sup>22</sup>William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1861 (London: Smith, Elder and co., 1931), iii.

that he had been urged by a local missionary to write, in the *Hindoostanee* language a scholarly history of Muhammad, based on Arabic sources, and suitable for the perusal of his followers in order to satisfy the local ‘*ulāmā* that the missionary criticisms of Islamic belief and practice were justified.’<sup>23</sup>

After a very brief preface, the author has written a very long introduction of almost two hundred and seventy pages. This introduction is divided into four chapters of which the third is further divided into six sections. In these chapters, he expresses his views about the primary sources of *sīrah*, biblical accounts of Arabia, Islamic sources about the history of Arabia, and the historical account of the ancestors of the Holy Prophet (SAW). In first and second volume of the book, the author discusses the life, time, teachings and work of the Holy Prophet (SAW) during his *Makkan* life. In the last chapter of the second volume, he throws light upon different aspects in relation to the association between the two religions. In the third volume, which starts with chapter eight, he analyzes the battles fought by the Holy Prophet (SAW) and the Muslims in their defense. In the last volume, he includes the historical events of the *Madīnan* period, which starts from the sixth year of *Hijra*. Like, pilgrimage to *Makkah*, embassies from *Tā’if* and other surrounding regions, the Farewell Pilgrimage, sickness of the Holy Prophet (SAW), his demise and burial, and campaign of Osama Ibn Zayd (d. 674) to Syrian border. Finally, he reviews the personality and character of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

Muir, in his attempt to write about the life of the prophet (SAW), rejected the standard version of Sīrah available within the Muslim literature and gave his own interpretations. For example, he called the Muslim account of Night Journey and Ascension as a pious fraud from the Muslims who came after<sup>24</sup> and raised objections on this miracle, as provided in the Hadith literature, calling it a pious fabrication.<sup>25</sup> He also denigrated Prophet’s personality labeling him a polygamist and stated that he suffered from epilepsy etc. He also rejected links between Muhammad (SAW) and Ismail (AS).<sup>26</sup> His depiction about the wives of the Prophet (SAW) is vulgar, particularly when he describes the account of his marriage with Zaynab bint Jahsh (d.641) who was married to Zayd ibn Hārith (d.629). All in all, Muir’s biography presented Prophet’s life contrary to the standard Islamic version.

#### 4. The Legacy of Muir and Sprenger

The legacy of Muir and Sprenger had a two-way impact upon both the Christian and Muslim intellectuals. Their work was highly appreciated by subsequent indigenous

<sup>23</sup>Avril A. Powell, “Reciprocities and Divergences Concerning Religious Traditions in two Families of Scholars in North India,” in Jamal Malik, (edit.,) *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860* (Leiden. Boston. Koln: Brill, 2000), 193.

<sup>24</sup>Muir, 117.

<sup>25</sup>Muir, III.

<sup>26</sup>William Muir, *The Muhammedan Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1897), 42.



Christian and missionary writers who reiterated the themes and findings of Muir and Sprenger in their biographies. Three examples are included here, two of indigenous writers and one from a missionary writer. First and foremost, is G. L. Thākūr Dās (1852-1910),<sup>27</sup> who wrote a full length biography of Prophet (SAW) titled “*Sīrat-ul-Masīh wa al-Muhammad* (i.e., The Character of Christ and Muhammad).”<sup>28</sup> Here, the author judges Muslim tenants in the light of Christian theology to prove the superiority of Jesus over Muhammad. He provides numerous statements to justify his claim, and here three examples have been quoted to show writer’s bias and prejudice in the study of sīrah. (a) In introduction, he describes Muir objective, as he states ‘to release Muslim brothers with the hope that they will listen to him and, consequently, will repent.’<sup>29</sup> And then turns to present a Christian view of the life of Prophet (SAW). (b) In the first section of the book, he says, “Worshipping *Ka’bah*, polygamy, divorce, slavery, denying the sacrifice of Christ, rejecting godhead of Christ, worshipping *Kalimah* and grave, Hajj, killing the followers of other religions are all the acts of goodness and the matters of faith from Muslim perspective which will lead them to Paradise. However, all these things are wrong, bad and sin from Christian perspective because they keep man away from God’s nearness and presence.”<sup>30</sup> (c) In the second section of the booklet, the writer states that Christ was steadfast in his theory and practice. He was resolute in what he said and what he did. He was not dominated by vain desires of his self and he fulfilled the Law of God perfectly. However, the author asserts that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) “was not steadfast in sayings and actions. He was dominated by mean desires. He broke many ethical laws.”<sup>31</sup> To support his blames and charges, the author presents examples from the battles and fights of the Holy Prophet (SAW) with polytheists and disbelievers; his marriages with a number of wives, which he calls prostitution; his marriage to the widow of his adopted son; abrogation in the Qur’ān and other laws of Islam, etc.<sup>32</sup>

In his second book entitled “*Zunūb-e-Muhammadiyah* (Was Muḥammad a Sinner?).”<sup>33</sup> The author questions the infallibility of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and asserts that Muhammad (SAW) and his believers are equally sinners and sinners are criminals; hence they will enter hell.<sup>34</sup> He justifies his claim arguing that “If Muhammad was asking for forgiveness constantly, and God had declared him *Daal* also, he would certainly have

<sup>27</sup>G. L. Thākūr Dās, ‘*Adam-e-Zarūrat-e-Qur’ān* (Ludhyana: Punjab Religious Book Society, 1886). The book can be accessed through: <http://www.study-islam.org/urdu/urdu-books/absence-any-need-quran>. Accessed at 28-06-2018.

<sup>28</sup>G. L. Thākūr Dās, *Sīrat-ul-Masīh wa al-Muhammad* (Amritsar: Mission Press, 1897; Lahore: Punjab Religious Book Society, 4<sup>th</sup> n.d.).

<sup>29</sup>*Sīrat-ul-Masīh wa al-Muhammad*, op. cit., 4-5.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 17-32.

<sup>33</sup>G. L. Thākūr Dās, *Zunūb-e-Muhammadiyah*, (1905).

<sup>34</sup>*Zunūb-e-Muhammadiyah*, preface.

committed a number of greater sins.”<sup>35</sup> At the end, in his concluding remarks, he asserts, “According to the nature of his prophet-hood which we have shown in the above discussion, Muhammad (SAW) cannot be included in the class of forgiven saints.”<sup>36</sup>

Another important book from an indigenous author was ‘Imād-ud-Dīn Lāhiz’s (1856-1899) *Tawārīkh-e-Muhammadi* (Life of Muḥammad).<sup>37</sup> The author was born in a reputed Muslim family of India and Robert Clark (b. 1825) of the Church Missionary Society baptized him at Amritsar in 1866.<sup>38</sup> Lāhiz divided his books into three chronological eras. Firstly, account of the years six to thirteen, seventeen, twenty to twenty-five, and thirty-five to forty-one since the birth of the Holy Prophet (SAW); secondly, account of the years five to ten, twelve and thirteen since the proclamation of his prophethood; and thirdly, account of the eleven years of his life after *Hijrah*.

He also presents the life of prophet (SAW) in the light of the early medieval Christian thinking. He questions the views of Muslims in relation to the pious nature of Holy Prophet’s parents and then states “The belief that all the persons in the lineage were pure and holy is never right. There is no need search about all. Just see ‘Abdullah (d. 570) and Aminah (d. 577). They were worshippers of idols.”<sup>39</sup> He like Muir, rejects the unanimous Muslim view of Muhammad’s genealogy to Ismail and states that Muslim believes “Muhammad is one of the descendants of Ishmael but they have no evidence for that. Only for the sake of fame he is called the son of Ishmael.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover like Springer and Muir he rejected the miracle of prophet SAW e.g. *shaqq al-Sadr*.<sup>41</sup> He concludes his book in seven points. They are: (a) “the Prophet (SAW) had a bad temperament who very frequently became angry; (b) he was not a tolerant man; (c) he was very fond of his praise; (d) he was aggressive towards his enemies; (e) he was a selfish man; (f) he was so sex-addicted that it seems he was born in the world only for this; (g) he was totally ignorant of the knowledge of God and heavenly ideas.”<sup>42</sup>

After this brief analysis and evaluation of the thoughts and views presented by the author in this book, we note that he was similar to Sprenger. Although he claimed that his book is grounded on the writings by Muslims, all charges pressed by him against the Prophet (SAW) are false. This was a brief impact of Christian missionary sīrah writings

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 8-11.

<sup>37</sup>‘Imād-ud-Dīn Lāhiz, *Tawārīkh-e-Muhammadi* (Lahore: Punjab Religious Book Society, 1904).

<sup>38</sup>For more detail see: Wherry E. M., *The Muslim Controversy* (London: Christian Literature Society, 1905), 15-66; Aslam Barkat, *Tārīkh Kalīsiya-e-Pakistan 52-1992 CE* (Clārkabād, Punjab: St. Peters Publication Society, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1993), 266; G. L. Thākūr Dās, *Khudāwand Masīh kay Nao Rattan* (Lahore: MIK, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1995), 9-18.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 186-187.



upon the development of subsequent indigenous Christian biographies of Prophet (SAW). It is evident that these indigenous biographies were enormously influenced from the writings of Muir and Springer. However, these biographies created a reactionary movement among Indian Muslims and following is an attempt to juxtapose indigenous Christian and Muslim attitudes towards these early Christian biographies of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

### 5. The Impact upon Indian Muslims

The above-mentioned Christian sīrah writings elevated Muslim grief, which was already touching heights due to similar anti-Islamic writings by other Christian missionaries like Pfander's Mizan-ul-Haq (scale of truth). Rahmatu-Allah-Kiranvi (1818-1991) stood against him and he wrote *Azalat al-auhām* (destroyer of Imaginations) published in 1852-3 to answer the objections raised in Mizān. Earlier, it produced a first Muslim apology in Urdu language<sup>43</sup> entitled "*Kitāb al-Istifāsār* (Book of Questions)" by Āl Ḥasan Mohani (1788-1877).<sup>44</sup> He also wrote another book *al-Istibshār* (Good News) in response of Pfander's *Hal-ul-Ashkāl* (Solution of Problems).<sup>45</sup> This tract war against each other finally led them to open debates. The great debate of Agra held in 1954 between Kiranvi and Pfander is the most important one.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, to answer missionary objections on the life of Prophet (SAW) Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) was the first to give a scholarly response to Muir's life of Mohamet. He considered these writings detrimental to Islam. As Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914) states that Syed Ahmad used to say "Islam is under attack and the Muslims even did not know about it."<sup>47</sup> Abul A'la Maudūdī (d.1979) declared his book as the first major scholarly work on the life of Prophet (SAW).<sup>48</sup>

Another response came from Molvi Chiragh 'Ali (1844-1895) who wrote "Muhammad the True Prophet" in English and in Urdu language "*Tā'liqāt*" in response to the writings of Imad al-Din Lahiz. Altaf Hussain Hali wrote "*Taryaq-e-Masmum*" in response to Imad al-Din's *Tahqiq al-Imān*. He also wrote *Tārikh-e-Muhammadi par aik*

<sup>43</sup>I think it is not true; the publisher may make a mistake calling it a first apology in Urdu Language. In my point of view the first ever book written in Urdu language in Christian apology was Nasir Ali bin Fazal's *Khulasa Sawlat al-Zaygham*, published from Matba' Sangeen Hulya Taba'a Powsheeda in 1842.

<sup>44</sup>He belonged to Lucknow. He also served as Judge in Hyderabad Deccan. Along with *Kitab al-Istifāsār* he also wrote *Kitab al-Istibshār* which was the response of Pfander's book *Hal-ul-Ishkāl*. Both books are considered as the basic source upon Christianity. For complete detail see: Āl-e-Hasan Muhānī, *Kitāb al-Istifāsār* (Lahore: Dār-ul-Ma'ārif, n.d) 35-50.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>46</sup>For full detail of this great debate see: Arvin A. Powell, *Muslim and Missionaries in Pre Mutiny India* (Rutledge, 1995).

<sup>47</sup>Sayyed Ahmad Khan, *al-Khutbat-ul-Ahmadiyah fi al-Arab wa al-Sira al-Muhammadiyah* (Preface), (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy Aligarh Muslim University, 2003).

<sup>48</sup>For detail see: <http://www.sirsyedtoday.org/books/?cid=64>. Accessed at 30-06-2018.

*Munsifana Ra'i* in response to Imad al-Din's *Tārīkh-e-Muhammadi*. Last but not the least, Syed Amir 'Ali, who was named Molvi Syed Amir 'Ali by Syed Ahmed wrote *Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad*<sup>49</sup> published in 1873 to prove the superiority of Islam over all religions of the world.<sup>50</sup>

From the above mentioned examples it is evident how biographies of Muir and Sprenger caused a Muslim backlash, just to fulfill their missionary and evangelical objectives of reiterating the classical image of Prophet (SAW). However, they claimed that these writings were intended to present an original version of Prophet's life. However, it is evident from the content and the findings that they failed in their efforts and evangelical motives were dominating in their thought-process. As Buaben emphasized that Muir failed in his attempt to construct a biography of the Prophet (SAW) which Muslims would accept as an accurate and reliable account.<sup>51</sup> And this aspect is also evident from the following discussion in relation to the themes and method that were adopted to study the life of Prophet (SAW).

## 6. Themes and Methods in their Studies

Even a cursory glance at the above-mentioned discussion makes it evident that the basic theme of Christian Missionaries is to study the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), apologetically and polemically. To accomplish their target, they created doubt, denied the historicity of numerous Islamic events and disregarded the life events of the messenger of Islam. There are numerous sub-themes that are prevalent in their writings like, the denial of the historicity of the *Ka'aba* and structuring the *Ka'aba* by Ibrāhīm and his son Ismail (A.S), the holiness of the black stone, denial of the Prophet's miracles and labeling them as inventions of his companions. They criticized the Muslim practice of *Jizya* (tribute), arguing that Islam does not give equal rights to its citizens. They tried to convince people that Jihad has always been the basic weapon for spreading Islam, leading people to believe in the barbaric nature of the Prophet (SAW) who only wanted bloodshed by referring to the incident of banu Quraiza in 6 AH.

Other sub-themes include the critique upon the marriages of Prophet (SAW), attempts to disapprove the illiteracy of the Prophet in order to prove that the Qur'ān is Prophet's (SAW) own creation, denying that the Prophet (SAW) was sinless by misinterpreting some verses of the Qur'ān, dishonoring the character of the wives of the Prophet (SAW), denial of the Qur'ān as a revealed text and to prove it Muhammad's own creation with the help of previous revealed texts of Torah and Psalm, denial of the

<sup>49</sup>Syed Amir 'Ali, *Critical Examination of the life and Teachings of Muhammad* (London: William & Norgate, 1873) available on: <https://archive.org/details/criticalexaminat00alis>.

<sup>50</sup>Sayyed Ahmad Khan, *al-Khutbat-ul-Ahmadiyah fi al-Arab wa al-Sira al-Muhammadiyah, preface* (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy Aligarh Muslim University, 2003).

<sup>51</sup>Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad*, 116.

Prophet's early childhood miraculous events and last but not the least, denial of Muhammad (SAW) as the messenger of Allah.

In retrospect, we can safely surmise that these early Christian writers of the Subcontinent used each and every aspect related to the life of the Prophet (SAW) in a negative way and left no stone unturned to malign and misinterpret the righteous nature of the Prophet and the historicity of his life and works. Moreover, these sub-themes highlight that their heinous objectives were not novel, innovative or new. These are the same allegations that were made by early Christian writers, like in the apology of Kindī and other apologists during the medieval era.

They largely relied upon secondary western sources to write their biographies on the life of Prophet (SAW) and that is why they failed to bring any new objection. The sources are: Bush's *'Life of Mohammed'* (1837), Washington Irving's *'Life of Mahomet'* (1850), Religious Tract Society's *'Life of Mohammed,'* Sale's *Koran and Preliminary Treatise,* and Gibbon's *History.* They merely reiterated centuries old objections which have already been answered by Islamic scholars and hence failed in producing something new.

### **7. A Critical Analysis of their Methods, Approaches and Cogitating on New Contemporizing Approach**

The missionaries applied numerous methods and approaches to study the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The basic methods are: (a) Comparative method; (b) Contextual method (c) Evangelical method (d) Pessimist approach (e) and Subjective method. Their detail is as following:

In terms of the comparative method, all of the above mentioned authors used it in their studies. However, the authors of *Zunūb-e-Muhammadiyah, Masīhya Muhammad Sīrat-ul-Masīh wa al-Muhammad* paid the most amount of attention to it. A common element in the comparative methods is that all of these writers approved the superiority of Jesus over Muhammad (SAW). But any conclusion drawn upon pre-conceived notions and suppositions would always be questionable and have almost no use in academic circles. Such writings only adorn book shelves and have no relevance or intellectual merit. The Christians of Pakistan also see no use of such works in the modern context of Pakistan.

The contextual method is also another important avenue for the study of religions. But it can be useful only when the sensitivities of specific context have been taken care of. As the author of *Life of Muhammad* states, "Several Lives of Mohammad already exist in English language... But upon examination it was not found that any of them possessed the particular merit of being adapted to the people of India."<sup>52</sup> However, in reality the contents of the book do not fulfill the author's claim, as it hurts the feelings of

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<sup>52</sup>*Life of Muhammad* (Bombay: American Mission Press, 1851), iii.

millions of Indian Muslims for writing derogatory comments about the character of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Another important method that was used by these Christian writers was evangelical method which is a method used by writers to convert the people of other faiths to their faiths or religions. Here the writer creates doubts in the religious beliefs of their subjects in order to win them into their religion. William Muir's purpose was purely evangelical, for he mentioned in his preface that he had been urged by a local missionary to write a scholarly history of Muhammad in *Hindoostanee* language, based on Arabic sources, suitable for the perusal of his followers and for satisfying the local 'ulāmā in relation to the criticisms made by missionaries against Islamic beliefs and practices.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, 'Imād al-Dīn Lāhiz states in the preface of his book that there were three main objectives for writing this book; (a) the need of a book to assist them in their religious debates with Muslims; (b) such a book was needed for Muslims who were unable to read the history of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in Arabic or Persian languages. People, who had no knowledge about the history of the Holy Prophets Isa Masīh and Muhammad, were considered untrue to the religion; (c) a book was needed to train the Muslim converts to Christianity because some of them rejected Christianity after embracing it. These statements clearly express evangelical purpose of these writings.

These early writers adopted a pessimist approach regarding Muslim sources to study the life of Prophet (SAW). They categorically rejected them and only relied upon secondary sources.

Lastly subjective methods are also visible in their writings. These writers used Christian theological concepts to criticize the life and works of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The author of '*Adm-e-Ma'sūmiyyat-e-Muhammad*' was inclined towards proving the sinful nature of Muhammad (SAW) on the basis of the Christian concept of sin. He discusses the issue from the Christian theological perspective and emphasizes upon the Christian meaning of sin. The verses and Hadiths that he quoted to prove the sinful nature of Muhammad (SAW) also mentions Jesus, but the author failed in reaching to similar results regarding him.

Some Christian institutions and seminaries of Pakistan have been using the above mentioned approaches to teach their students about Islam. Furthermore, there are some religious groups among Christians and Muslims who are engaging themselves in religious debates, playing a significant role in reviving these methods of study in both Christian as well as the Muslim institutions like the Gujranwala Theological Seminary (founded in 1877). The polemical writings of Barkat-ul-Allah and G. L. Thākūr Dās were

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<sup>53</sup>Avril A. Powell, "Reciprocities and Divergences Concerning Religious Traditions in two Families of Scholars in North India" in Jamal Malik, (edit.,) *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860*, 193.

used as textbooks for a long period of time.<sup>54</sup> Faith Theological Seminary founded by Kundan Lāl Nāsir (1918-1996) in 1968 is another institute in Gujranwala that provides special training to its students for responding to the Muslims' objections against their faith.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, New Life Institute established by Navīd Malik<sup>56</sup> (Multan) provides training on Christian-Muslim polemics. Christian Theological Research Center (Lahore), founded by Rev. Jamīl Nāsir<sup>57</sup> have organized courses on the study of Islam that are purely apologetic in nature.<sup>58</sup> However, this confrontational approach will not lead the Christian and Muslims of Pakistan anywhere; there is a pressing need to develop more dialogical and contextual approach in the study of Islam and Christianity.

### 8. Conclusion

All of the above-mentioned Christian writers ranging from Sprenger to Thākūr Dās have attempted to describe the life of the Prophet (SAW) using their religious perspectives. Some of them attempted to find out the similarities and differences from the lives of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Jesus (AS) to prove the superiority of Jesus over Muhammad. Some went further and tried to assassinate the character of the Prophet (SAW) to prove him sinful, warmonger and immoral person and did not hesitate in making faulty and misleading interpretations of Islamic texts, the Qur'ān and Hadith; attempting to relate the Muslim scripture to Christianity. There were also some authors who tried to apply psychological tactics, disregarding the mental health of the Prophet (SAW). It can be rightfully concluded here in the light of above-mentioned writings that the intellectual landscape of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was confrontational and constituted of attacks and counter attacks. Consequently, this intellectual landscape gave birth to polemical writings by Muslim theologians in large numbers; if not equal in proportion. However, these writings are important as the native Christian authors used these missionary writings as their reference books for not only writing about Islam but also making apologetic or polemical talk with the Muslims.

The major shortcoming in their approach towards Islam, especially to the life of the Prophet (SAW) is that they paid no heed towards acculturating and translating the message of Christianity in the theology of Islam. No attempt was made to investigate the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) without giving proper attention to the Islamic sources and its theology, which is indeed a valid and fruitful approach. It was not the

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<sup>54</sup>Farmān 'Alī, "Christian-Muslim Religious Education and Society: A Comparison of Gujranwala Theological Seminary and Nusrat-ul-Uloom," M. Phil Diss. (Islamabad: International Islamic University, 2012), 59.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>56</sup>For further information visit: <http://www.newlifeinstitute.org/Home/About/naveed.php>. (Accessed at: 10-05-2018).

<sup>57</sup>For full detail of founder's introduction please visit; <http://khudakiawaz.com/guests/guests-we-had/71-rev-dr-jamil-nasir.html>. (Accessed at: 10-05-2018).

<sup>58</sup>Kang San Tan, Jonathan Ingleby and Simon Cozens, *Understanding Asian Mission Movements* (UK: Wide Margins, 2011), 156.



scope of this article to investigate them and hence they have been intentionally exempted from it. It was not until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that some thoughtful missionaries argued for adopting a sympathetic and positive treatment for studying different religions within India. One of those missionaries was Daniel Fleming<sup>59</sup> (1877-1969) who worked at Forman Christian College; for a short period of time, and emphasized that the similarities between Christianity and Islam should not be overlooked. As he stated, “there are many valuable resemblances between Muhammedanism and Christianity. We have many things in common with the Muhammedans which we cannot afford to overlook.”<sup>60</sup> So, here the responsibility falls upon the contemporary Christian theologians of Pakistan. They should take into account the similarities existing between both religions seriously and contextualize Christianity in the context of Pakistan. An important development is that the command of theology is in the hands of native theologians these days. The intellectual landscape which existed for the first native Christian generation has thoroughly changed; the theology of inclusivism is replacing exclusivism; theology of dialogue is taking place instead of confrontational theology; those who were each others’ enemies in olden times have signed peace treaties and last but not the least; theology of white-man burden has faded away and indigenous theologies are taking place in each and every country across the globe.

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<sup>59</sup>For further detail visit: <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/e-f/fleming-daniel-johnson-1877-1969/>. (retrieved at 11-20-2017)

<sup>60</sup>For full detail see: Stanley E. Brush, “Presbyterians and Islam in India,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985), Vol. 62, No. 3, American Presbyterians in India/Pakistan 150 Years (Fall 1984): 215-222.



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