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Historiographical Analysis of Orientalist Refutation in Pakistani *Sirah* Literature: A Case Study of *Ziā al-Nabī* by Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah al-Azhari

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ABSTRACT

Colonial-era Orientalist literature on *Sirah al-Nabī* ﷺ offered historical and methodological analyses that challenged the traditional Muslim explanation of the Prophet's biography and significantly influenced contemporary literature on early Islam. In response, Pakistani *Sirah* writers in post partition era established a distinct tradition of *Sirah* literature that sought to revisit these interpretations over critical engagement with both the classical Islamic scholarly tradition and modern historical methods. Situated within a historiographical framework informed by postcolonial critiques of Orientalism, this paper deals with how *Ziā al-Nabī* by Pīr Karam Shah Al-Azhari refutes to colonial-era Orientalist literature and contributes to modern Islamic historiography. Participating comparative textual investigation and systematic source criticism, the study examines the author's engagement with major Orientalist arguments regarding the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and assesses the methodological principles underlying his historical reconstruction. The analysis determines that *Ziā al-Nabī* integrates the narrative conventions of the classical *Sirah*–*Maghāzī* tradition with critical assessment of historical sources, comparative analysis, and continued engagement with both Muslim and Orientalist scholarship. Rather than merely refuting individual Orientalist claims, the work critically observes the historiographical norms and methodological premises that formed colonial representations of the Prophet's life while advancing an alternative historical methodology grounded in the Islamic intellectual tradition. The study argues that Pakistani *Sirah* literature, with *Ziā al-Nabī* as a representative example, establishes an important contribution to modern Islamic historiography. By highlighting its innovative methods and historiographical interventions, this article deals with that Pakistani *Sirah* scholarship deserves fuller integration into contemporary academic debates on the historiography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the wider intellectual response to colonial-era Orientalist literature.

Keywords: *Sirah Literature; Comparative Historical Analysis Ziā Al-Nabī; Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari; Islamic Historiography; Orientalism; Postcolonial Historiography; Source Criticism.*

Introduction

Sirah al-Nabī ﷺ, usually focused in the Islamic scholarly tradition, has engaged a dominant place in Muslim intellectual and devotional life since the earliest centuries of Islam. From the classical *Maghāzī* and *Sirah* compiling of Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, and al-Ṭabarī onward, this genre advanced its own internal methods of source transmission, verification, and narrative construction, closely tied to the broader disciplines of *Ḥadīth* criticism and Islamic historiography. However, the encounter between this tradition and European colonial

scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented a primarily different set of historiographical assumptions. Orientalist scholars such as William Muir, Aloys Sprenger, David Samuel Margoliouth, and later W. Montgomery Watt advanced the *Sirah al-Nabī* ﷺ through the lens of historical-critical method, source skepticism, and philological analysis developed within the European scholarship, often placing these approaches within wider colonial and missionary projects. Their conclusions regularly interrogated the authenticity and reliability of classical Muslim sources, presented alternative chronologies of revelation and prophetic career, and innovative interpretations of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ's motives and behavior that stood in sharp contrast to the normative Muslim understanding of prophethood. This literature entered colonial India directly, where it interacted with, and incited responses from, an emerging class of Muslim writers and reformers confronting the political and intellectual pressures of colonial rule. It is within this contested historiographical space that Pakistani *Sirah* writing, particularly in the decades following Partition, developed as a distinct and increasingly sophisticated tradition of response. Unlike former scholarly responses, which responded toward direct polemical refutation, post-Partition Pakistani writers gradually sought to involve Orientalist scholarship on its own methodological approach while drawing upon the resources of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. This development deserves continuous scholarly attention because it characterizes an important but underexplored chapter in the history of Muslim refutations to Orientalism. It also creates how a non-Western scholarly tradition critically involved with Western historical criticism by selectively accepting and challenging its methods. In spite of the outstanding growth of the literature, it remains largely absent from contemporary academic discussions of the historiography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which remain to be dominated by Western and, to a lesser extent, Arab and South Asian reformist voices. This study addresses that gap through an intensive assessment of *Ziā al-Nabī*, the multi-volume *Sirah* work authored by Pir Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari al-Azhari, widely regarded as one of the most substantial and methodologically self-conscious contributions to Pakistani *Sirah* literature. It discusses how *Ziā al-Nabī* involves with the main historical and methodological debates advanced by colonial-era Orientalist scholarship, what historiographical principles underlie the author's revisit of the prophetic biography, and what this engagement talks about the character of Pakistani *Sirah* writing as a contribution to contemporary Islamic historiography. In following these questions, the study aims not only to enlist instances of refutation within the text, but to recognize the fundamental historiographical logic through which *Ziā al-Nabī* restructures the terms of the debate itself.

The importance of this study comprises the juncture of numerous disciplines of investigation. Within Islamic studies, it encircles contemporary scholarship on Muslim responses to Orientalism beyond the more frequently examined South Asian reformist contexts. Within the historiography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it offers a detailed case study of how a modern Muslim scholar engaged with contemporary historical-critical method, complicating any simple binary between "traditional" and "critical" approaches to the prophetic biography. In addition, within postcolonial studies, it offers an empirical instance through which to test and improve Saidian and post-Saidian contexts for understanding intellectual responses to Orientalism, particularly where that response takes the form not of outright rejection but of critical, selective, and constructive engagement.

Furthermore, the article traces the advent of Orientalist scholarship on the Prophet's biography and earlier Muslim responses to it, situates the rise of Pakistani *Sirah* literature

within the post-Partition context, and outlines the postcolonial framework guiding the analysis. It then examines *Ziā al-Nabī*'s engagement with major Orientalist arguments and its methodological innovations, before comparing the work with other Muslim responses and discussing its broader implications for the historiography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The article concludes with directions for future research.

British Colonial India and the Orientalist Challenge to the *Sirah*

***Sirah* as a genre: scope, sources, and relationship to the Maghāzī and Shamā'il traditions**

Sirah institutes the complete scholarly account of the Prophetic biography, encircling the military campaigns (*Ghazwāt*) undertaken during his ﷺ lifetime, his personal conduct and the achievements attained through his mission, the practices he authorized as well as those he objected of, and the corpus of sayings, actions, and utterances attributed to him. As a field of study, *Sirah* is not limited strictly to the temporal boundaries of his life; rather, it also includes antecedent events preceding his birth and subsequent developments following his passing, provided these bear a demonstrable relation to his person, mission, or legacy.

The Art of *Sirah* -Writing and the Islamic Sciences

Sirah -writing is a distinct art and an eminent, unique branch of knowledge and literature that is neither *Ḥadīth* nor history. In what follows, we shall try to determine, with reference to *Ḥadīth*, history, and Seerah, what separates these disciplines from one another, and in what way *Sirah* constitutes a distinct and independent genre.

In Arabic language, the word *Sirah* or *Seerat* derives from the verb *Sara*, which means to travel or to be on a journey. An individual's *Sirah* is that person's journey through life, or biography, encompassing the birth, events in life, manners and characteristics, and death. In modern usage it may also denote to a person's biography. It is sometimes written as "Seera", " *Sirah* " or "Seerat", all meaning "life" or "journey". In Islamic literature, the plural form, *Siyar*, could also refer to the rules of war and dealing with non-Muslims. The phrase *Sirah Rasool Allah*, or *as-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, refers to the study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.¹

Hakeem Abdul Rauf Danapuri states in his renowned work *Assahusyar*, "The scholars of *Ḥadīth* confine their arguments to three matters: what was said, what was done, and what took place in the Prophet's presence. The writers of *Sirah*, too, debate these similar matters, so that if one looks only at the subject matter, the two appear to be one and the same discipline. Though, the difference lies in the treatment of detail. The first distinction concerns in purpose because the *Ḥadīth* scholar's primary concern is to determine the rulings established by a given tradition. The *Sirah* writer's concern is different. It is the noble personality of the Prophet ﷺ himself, and legal rulings enter *Sirah* literature only incidentally, where relevant to the narrative. This variance in purpose also forms their respective methods. For the *Ḥadīth* scholar, the whole effort is one of authentication, i.e. whether this saying or act genuinely traces back to the Prophet ﷺ or not. When that chain of transmission is proved, the task is basically complete. On this view, it does not matter whether one recognizes the date or occasion on which the Prophet ﷺ said or did a given thing. The *Sirah* writer, while equally concerned with authenticity, is not satisfied there. Two further questions matter: when and on what occasion did the Prophet ﷺ say or do this, and why, that is, what context driven it? The *Sirah* writer's task, in other words, is to interlace the Prophet's ﷺ words and actions into an associated, chronological narrative, drawing their causes and contexts, a task the *Ḥadīth*

¹ Syed Muhammad Abdullah, *Urdu Dā'irah Ma'ārif-e-Islāmiyyah*, vol. 12 (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 2005), 219.

scholar, strictly speaking, considers unnecessary.² The earliest *Sirah* compilations, most notably the work of Ibn Ishāq as preserved through the recension of Ibn Hishām, drew upon oral transmission, eyewitness reports, and the emerging conventions of *Ḥadīth* transmission to construct a chronological and thematic account of the Prophet's life. Subsequent historians, including al-Ṭabarī, incorporated *Sirah* material into broader universal histories, situating the Prophet's biography within a wider historiographical framework of pre-Islamic and early Islamic history. Systematically, classical *Sirah* writing depend on heavily on the *Isnād* system of source verification developed within the sciences of *Ḥadīth*, even as its narrative conventions permitted a greater degree of literary and homiletic elaboration than strict *Ḥadīth* criticism would typically allow. This dual character, part historical record and part devotional narrative, would later develop an essential point of argument in its encounter with European historical-critical scholarship.³ The methodical study of the Prophet's ﷺ life within European Orientalist scholarship established over the nineteenth century, alongside the consolidation of British colonial rule in India. William Muir's *Life of Mahomet* (1861) was amongst the earliest and most dominant attempts to reconstruct the Prophet's biography through historical criticism, drawing on classical Arabic sources while subjecting them to the source-critical methods of contemporary European historiography.⁴ Aloys Sprenger's *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad* pursued a similar critical reconstruction, with particular emphasis on philological analysis of early Arabic texts.⁵ Later, David Samuel Margoliouth's *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* extended this tradition, interpreting the Prophet's career in largely political and pragmatic terms.⁶ In the twentieth century, W. Montgomery Watt's two-volume study, *Muhammad ﷺ at Mecca*⁷ and *Muhammad ﷺ at Medina*, refined this approach further, combining sociological analysis with historical-critical method, even as it retained many of the interpretive assumptions of earlier scholars.⁸

Core methodological premises: source skepticism, historical-critical method, *Ḥadīth* criticism

The Orientalist tradition of *Sirah* scholarship was united less by shared conclusions than by a shared method, a stance of source skepticism, in which the trustworthiness of classical Muslim sources, particularly *Ḥadīth* and early *Sirah* narratives, could not be expected but had to be verified, and was often found wanting, through independent historical-critical evaluation. This skepticism owed much to Ignác Goldziher, whose work treated the *Ḥadīth* corpus not as a reliable record of the Prophet's ﷺ words and deeds, but as evidence of the theological and political concerns of later generations.⁹

This skepticism drew on the wider historical-critical scheme established in nineteenth-century European biblical and classical scholarship, which treated religious texts as historical artifacts

² Hakeem Abdul Rauf Danapuri, *Assahusyar* (Karachi: Noor Muhammad Karkhana Tijarat Kutub, Aram Bagh, 1957), 8.

³ Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56.

⁴ William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 4 vols. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861).

⁵ Aloys Sprenger, *The Life of Mohammad, from Original Sources* (Calcutta: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1851).

⁶ D.S. Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905).

⁷ Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

⁸ Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

⁹ Ignác Goldziher, *Muhammadan Studies*, trans. by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971).

subject to the same evidentiary values as any other historical foundation.¹⁰ *Ḥadīth* criticism took on particular importance within this context. Ignác Goldziher, for instance, argued that much of the *Ḥadīth* corpus reflected the theological and political concerns of later generations rather than authentic records of the Prophet's words and actions. Joseph Schacht later extended and systematized this position, proposing criteria for dating *Ḥadīth* based on the historical evolution of *Isnād*, or chains of transmission.¹¹

Colonial administrative and missionary contexts shaping Orientalist output

The production of Orientalist scholarship on the Prophet's biography cannot be fully understood in isolation from the colonial and missionary contexts within which much of it was produced. Numerous prominent Orientalist scholars, including Muir, held administrative positions within the British colonial government in India, and their scholarly work on Islam was frequently informed by, and in turn informed, colonial policy toward Muslim subjects. Missionary concerns similarly shaped the tenor and objectives of much Orientalist writing, as critical historical reconstruction of the Prophet's life was often explicitly or implicitly framed as part of a broader Christian apologetic project aimed at demonstrating the superiority of Christian revelation over Islamic prophethood.¹² This entanglement of scholarship with colonial administration and missionary objectives has led postcolonial critics to question the presumed objectivity of Orientalist historical method, arguing that its critical apparatus was deployed selectively in the service of broader civilizational and religious hierarchies.

Key theses challenged by Orientalists

Orientalist scholarship converged on frequent ideas that later driven constant Muslim intellectual refutation. Scholars objected the authenticity of classical sources, arguing that *Ḥadīth* and early *Sirah* literature bore the imprint of later theological and political interests, and proposed revised chronologies of revelation departing from the classical sequencing. They also presented alternate literature of the Prophet's conduct, especially his political and military aspects, supporting pragmatic or psychological accounts, or alongside, the theological framework of divine revelation. Revelation itself came under critical scrutiny, as scholars advanced naturalistic or psychological accounts of the prophetic experience. Together, these ideas shaped a constant historiographical challenge to the traditional Muslim account of the Prophet's biography, one that later Muslim scholarship, as well as the Pakistani *Sirah* tradition studied here, would raise in a straight line.

Muslim Intellectual Responses Before Partition

Orientalist accounts of the Prophet's biography moved a new stage of Muslim scholarship in colonial India. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Khutbat-i Ahmadiyya* was among the initial systematic Critiques to William Muir, engaging historical perceptive along with traditional arguments to challenge Orientalist explanations.¹³ This approach was further distinguished by Shibli Nomani in *Sīrat al-Nabī*, finalized by Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi, whose extensive use of classical Arabic sources established a more critical and historically grounded model of *Sirah*

¹⁰ Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of Qur'ān, Tafsīr, and Sīra: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 151–63.

¹¹ Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

¹² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

¹³ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Khutubāt-i Ahmadiyya 'alā al-'Arab wa al-Sirah al-Muḥammadiyyah* (Aligarh: Institute Press, 1870).

literature.¹⁴ Scholars such as Chiragh Ali and Syed Ameer Ali also played a significance role in broader reformist efforts to refute the opponents over historical and rational analysis. It was this developing historiographical awareness that would form the intellectual foundation upon which post-Partition Pakistani *Sirah* writing subsequently built.

Post-Partition Pakistan and the Emergence of a Distinct *Sirah* Tradition

Establishment of Pakistan in 1947 as an obviously Muslim nation-state provided *Sirah* literature new historical significance. *Madrasas*, universities, and bodies like the *Idāra-i Taḥqīqāt-i Islāmī* built the institutional base for continued scholarship on the Prophet's biography, whereas Urdu's rise as a scholarly language let this literature reach far outside the traditional 'ālim readership. Colonial-era institutions and enduring Orientalist scholarship meant the challenge of Western historical-critical method continued active rather than settled. The 1949 Objectives Resolution, which stated sovereignty to rest with Allah and committed the state to an Islamic constitutional framework, gave this scholarship added institutional backing by formally tying national identity to religious foundations.

Motivations: Nation-Building, Identity, and Response to the West

Three motivations shaped this literature. Nation-building gave the *Sirah* a civilizational role, securing Pakistan's historical identity in his holy life. *Sirah* thus functioned as collective memory as much as devotion. In the meantime, the continued dominance of Western historiography enforced scholars to involve Orientalist claims on terms that could encourage beyond a confessional readership. Together, these pressures gave post-Partition *Sirah* a more systematic, Historiographically conscious character than former apologetics.

Overview of major Pakistani *Sirah* writers and works

The post-Partition era shaped a significant body of *Sirah* literature by Pakistani scholars working across differing intellectual orientations. Among the most eminent contributions was Muhammad Hamidullah's *Sirah* scholarship, though Indian-born and based in France rather than Pakistani, his widely translated *Muḥammad Rasūlullāh* and documentary studies of early Islamic diplomatic history remained deeply significant in Pakistan, combining rigorous source criticism with direct engagement with Orientalist scholarship¹⁵. Shibli Nomani's earlier *Sīrat al-Nabī*, though begun before Partition, continued shaping Pakistani scholars as a model of historiographically informed writing, a project later completed by Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi. Within Pakistan itself, Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari al-Azhari's multi-volume *Ẓiā al-Nabī* stood out for its systematic engagement with both classical sources and modern Orientalist scholarship. Further prominent efforts came from Muhammad Sulaiman Mansurpuri, Na'im Siddiqui, and Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī, whose literature further prove to the breadth and vitality of Pakistan's post-Partition *Sirah* tradition.

Positioning *Ẓiā al-Nabī* within this tradition

Within this tradition, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* stands out for its scope and methodological self-awareness. Instead of aiming largely at a devotional literature, the author combines the classical devotional tradition with a critical engagement with Orientalist literature, drawing on the *Sirah-Maghāzī* corpus and *Ḥadīth* criticism. This approach makes the work a mainly instructive case for assessing how post-Partition Pakistan's broader motivations and

¹⁴ Shibli Nomani, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, 2 vols. (Azamgarh: Dār al-Muṣannifīn, 1918).

¹⁵ Hamidullah, M. (1969). *Muḥammad Rasūlullāh: A concise survey of the life and work of the founder of Islam*. Ashraf Press.

institutional conditions translated into constant historiographical practice. Consequently, this text serves as the principal focus of the present analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Critique of Orientalism

Edward Said's Orientalism and its applicability to religious/historical scholarship

Any examination of Muslim refutations to colonial literature on the Prophet's *Sirah* starts with the theoretical context of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said argued that Western depictions of the Islamic world were not neutral accounts but methods of knowledge shaped by and serving colonial power. According to him, Orientalism created its own object of study while strengthening the political and intellectual authority of colonial institutions.¹⁶ Though his account engrossed largely on literary and philological traditions, its perceptions cover to Western historical scholarship on the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. From this perception, the historical critical approaches of scholars such as Muir, Sprenger, and Margoliouth should be understood within their colonial context. Their claims of objectivity and source criticism echoed broader conventions of European epistemic authority, allowing them to assess the historical authenticity of an Islamic tradition from a position formed by colonial power.

Historiography and *Sirah*: conceptual definitions and disciplinary boundaries

Central to the argument advanced in this study is the claim that Pakistani *Sirah* writing, exemplified by *Ziā al-Nabī*, constitutes a form of historiography rather than merely devotional or apologetic literature, and this claim requires that the term be defined with some precision. According to Carr, "*Historiography is a progressive science in the sense that it seeks to provide constantly expanding and deepening insights into a course of events which is itself progressive. This is what I should mean by saying that we need 'a constructive outlook over the past'*".¹⁷ Understood in this sense, historiography deals with not merely with what occurred in the past, but with how claims about the past are raised, justified, and contested. The classification of *Sirah* within this context has long been a matter of scholarly disagreement. The classification of *Sirah* has long remained a subject of scholarly debate, with differing views on whether it should be regarded primarily as a devotional literary tradition or as a form of historiography rooted in the methodological conventions of classical Islamic scholarship. This study adopts the latter perspective while acknowledging that the distinction between devotional narrative and historical inquiry within the *Sirah* tradition remains fluid and contested. Accordingly, *Ziā al-Nabī* is best assessed according to its methodological context rather than classified exclusively as either devotional or historiographical literature.

Trends and approaches in historiography: positivist/historical-critical method, interpretive approaches, and the Islamic historiographical tradition

A further conceptual task facing this study is the situating of Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's methodology within the broader landscape of historiographical approaches, both Western and Islamic. Within the Western tradition, the historical-critical method that shaped nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship on the Prophet's biography proceeded from the assumption that historical truth could be approximated through the rigorous, source-critical examination of documentary evidence, with the historian's task conceived as the disciplined reconstruction of "what actually happened," largely independent of the interpretive

¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 3.

¹⁷ E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (Cambridge, UK: Penguin Random House, 1990), 131.

standpoint of the researcher.¹⁸ This historical-critical orientation was later challenged by interpretive and hermeneutical approaches to historiography, which highlighted the inescapably perspectival character of historical knowledge and drew attention to the ways in which historical narratives are formed by the conceptual categories, values, and interpretive frameworks that historians bring to their sources.¹⁹ Parallel to, and in important respects predating, these Western historiographical developments, the Islamic scholarly tradition developed its own sophisticated framework for historical inquiry, generally designated *ʿIlm al-Tārīkh*, which encompassed both the chronicling of events and a highly developed apparatus of source evaluation.²⁰ Central to this historiographical tradition was the practice of *Isnād* criticism, through which the authenticity and reliability of reported statements and historical events were evaluated by means of rigorous examination of both the chain of transmission (*Isnād*) and the integrity, credibility, and precision of each transmitter. Though this methodological context was established primarily within the sciences of *Ḥadīth*, it exercised a philosophical influence on the wider conventions of Islamic historiography, including the composition and transmission of classical *Sirah* literature. An examination of Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's methodology in sight of the three main historiographical orientations, namely Western positivist historiography, Western interpretive historiography, and classical Islamic historiography, offers an essential analytical foundation for the subsequent analysis of the methodological innovations articulated in *Ẓiā al-Nabī*.

Framework for analyzing historiographical "response literature

Extending the preceding theoretical discussion, this study approaches *Ẓiā al-Nabī* as a work of historiographical response literature that critically engages an established historical tradition by contesting and reconstructing its assumptions. The study emphasizes on three interconnected dimensions: the Orientalist claims addressed by Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari, the methodological principles underlying his historical reconstruction, and the wider historiographical position that arises from this engagement. This background grants the revealing basis for the documented analysis that follows.

Author and Text: Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari and *Ẓiā al-Nabī*

Biographical and intellectual background of the author

Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari al-Azhari (1918–1998) was a prominent Pakistani scholar who combined the traditional authority of the Barelvi Sufi tradition with formal training at al-Azhar University in Cairo. Educated initially in the *Dars-i Niẓāmī* curriculum and later at al-Azhar, he was exposed to both classical Islamic scholarship and modern historical debates, including Orientalist critiques of early Islam. After returning to Pakistan, he led *Dār al-ʿUlūm Muḥammadiyah Ghawthiyyah* in Bhera and contributed to religious and public affairs. This intellectual formation shaped his scholarship, most notably *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, his most significant and historiographically ambitious work, through which he engaged extensively with Orientalist interpretations of the Prophet's life.²¹

Structure, scope, and sources of *Ẓiā al-Nabī*

¹⁸ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 6th ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2010), 92.

¹⁹ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 205.

²⁰ A. A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 45.

²¹ Gul Muhammad Faizi, *Abr-e Karam* (Lahore: Zia-ul-Quran Publications, 2002), 14.

Ẓiā al-Nabī is a seven-volume biography of the Prophet organized according to the conventional chronological structure of the classical *Sirah* tradition, from pre-Islamic Arabia to the Prophet's final years. Elsewhere its narrative context, though, the work integrates extensive analytical discussions of historical and interpretive arguments, mainly those arising from Orientalist scholarship. Drawing on classical *Sirah*, *Maghāzī*, *Ḥadīth*, and Qur'ānic foundations along with the works of Orientalist scholars such as William Muir, D. S. Margoliouth, and W. Montgomery Watt, Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari methodically observes and critiques their interpretations. This incorporation of classical Islamic sources with modern Orientalist scholarship differentiates *Ẓiā al-Nabī* within the Pakistani *Sirah* tradition and makes it particularly appropriate for the comparative source-critical analysis commenced in this study.

Position within classical *Sirah*–*Maghāzī* genre conventions

Though, its continuous engagement with contemporary Orientalist scholarship, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* continues firmly deep-rooted in the narrative contracts of the classical *Sirah*–*Maghāzī* tradition. The corpus recollects the chronological and episodic structure characteristic of the genre, proceeds over the standard sequence of proceedings established by Ibn Ishāq and his successors, and conserves the genre's characteristic interweaving of historical narrative with devotional and homiletic commentary. At the same time, Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's treatment of individual episodes frequently exceeds the expository conventions of the classical genre, incorporating source-critical discussion, comparative analysis of conflicting reports, and direct rebuttal of alternative historical interpretations in a manner more characteristic of modern historiographical writing than of classical *Sirah* composition. This positioning of *Ẓiā al-Nabī* at the juncture of classical genre convention and contemporary historiographical method is not incidental but institutes.²²

Methodology

Comparative textual analysis procedure

This study employs comparative textual analysis as its principal method of investigation; a procedure well suited to examining how *Ẓiā al-Nabī* positions itself in relation to both the classical *Sirah*–*Maghāzī* tradition and colonial-era Orientalist scholarship. The process proceeds in three stages. First, respective texts from *Ẓiā al-Nabī* highlighting specific historical or interpretive controversies are identified and extracted, together with the corresponding classical Arabic sources upon which the author draws and the Orientalist texts to which he explicitly or implicitly responds. Second, the paper observes the classical source, the Orientalist argument, and Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's treatment in parallel, paying close attention to points of convergence, divergence, and transformation in their argumentative structures, evidentiary bases, and interpretive conclusions. Third, the following patterns are formed across cases in order to recognize frequent methodological strategies characteristic of Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's historiographical approach as a whole, instead of treating each example of engagement as an isolated rebuttal. This layered procedure allows the analysis to move beyond a simple classification of arguments and counter-arguments toward an assessment of the underlying historiographical logic that structures the text.

Source criticism criteria

²² Pīr Muhammad Karam Shāh, M. (1991). *Ẓiā al-Nabī* (Vols. 1–7). *Ẓiā al-Qur'ān* Publications.

In assessing the sources involved by *Ziā al-Nabī*, this research applies a set of source criticism criteria informed jointly by the classical Islamic tradition of *Isnād* and *maṭn* analysis and by conventional standards of contemporary historical-critical method. Attention is given, first, to the provenance and authenticity of the classical Arabic sources quoted by the author, as well as the transmission history of the reports in question and the extent to which the author involves with current debates over their validity within the classical Islamic tradition itself. Second, the paper observes Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's treatment of Orientalist sources with respect to accuracy of representation, assessing whether his summaries and citations of Muir, Margoliouth, Watt, and others loyally reproduce the substance and nuance of their original arguments, or whether they simplify or recontextualize these arguments in the course of rebuttal. Third, the study assesses the internal constancy and sufficiency of Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's arguments by tentative whether his conclusions are adequately supported by the sources he cites and whether he applies consistent methodological standards when evaluating classical sources, including those that support his own interpretive position. These criteria together provide a basis for assessing not merely what Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari argues, but how rigorously and consistently he argues it.

Selection of case studies/passages for analysis

Given the overall scope of *Ziā al-Nabī* across seven volumes, this paper implements a purposive sampling approach rather than an exhaustive one. The selected texts are drawn from different volumes to confirm suitable representation of Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's engagement with Orientalist scholarship. This approach highlights analytical depth and methodological importance, empowering a focused comparative analysis of his refutations.

Justification of method relative to research questions

The methodological approach applied here is directly responsive to the research questions guiding this study. Because the paper pursues to recognize not only what specific Orientalist claims *Ziā al-Nabī* addresses but also the methodological principles underlying the author's historical reform, an only descriptive or thematic summary of the text's content would be insufficient; the comparative procedure outlined above is required in order to situate the author's arguments obviously against both the classical sources and the Orientalist scholarship with which he involves. Likewise, because the study's wider claim concerns the historiographical character of Pakistani *Sirah* writing as a genre, the source criticism criteria applied here are deliberately drawn from both the classical Islamic and modern historical-critical traditions, allowing the analysis to evaluate author's method on terms internal to both traditions rather than privileging one framework over the other from the outset. The purposive selection of case studies, finally, ensures that the analysis remains grounded in close textual engagement while retaining sufficient scope to support the broader historiographical claims advanced in the study's discussion and conclusion.

Engagement with Major Orientalist Arguments

Case-by-case analysis

Ḥadīth authenticity. In *Ziā al-Nabī*, Justice Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari al-Azhari refutes to Orientalist critiques of *Ḥadīth* preservation by integrating theological and historiographical arguments. Against the claims of Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht that the *Ḥadīth* corpus largely reflects later theological and political developments, he argues that the authority of *Ḥadīth* derives from the Qur'ānic obligation to obey the Prophet ﷺ and from

the Prophet's own instruction to transmit his teachings. The author further deals with that the systematic efforts of the Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) and Successors (*Tābiʿīn*) in conserving and proving Prophetic traditions, together with the classical disciplines of *Isnād* criticism, *maṭn* analysis, and *kutub al-Rijāl*, established a sophisticated critical methodology for recognizing unreliable reports. Rather than rejecting the existence of fabrication, he continues that the Islamic tradition established effective mechanisms to distinguish and reject it. By presenting the preservation of Ḥadīth as both a religious obligation and a historically verifiable process, Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari challenges the Orientalist assumption that the Prophetic tradition lacks methodological reliability as a source for reconstructing the Prophet's life.²³

Military expeditions: The debate of the Prophet's warfare (*qitaāl*) in *Ẓiā al-Nabī* establishes one of the text's most developed polemical engagements with Orientalist literature. It reports straight the interpretive practice that declaims the expeditions against the Meccan Quraysh and the Jewish tribes of Madinah as instances of political pragmatism or personal determination, rather than religious and legal requirement. The author places his refutation against a genealogy of Orientalist writing. This genealogy covers from George Sale's early interpretation of the Qur'ān and its accompanying "Preliminary Discourse", through William Muir's *Life of Mahomet* and its companion volume *Mahomet and Islam*, to the more polemically charged assessments of David Samuel Margoliouth. It culminates in the twentieth-century reassessments of W. Montgomery Watt, namely *Muhammad at Makkah* and *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, and in Tor Andrae's *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*. He does not confine his refutations to Islamic sources alone. He adopts a comparative apologetic strategy, drawing first upon examples of authorized warfare in the Old Testament and instances of conflict and coercion covert within the New Testament tradition.²⁴ This comparison serves to relativize the charge of militarism flattened exactly against the Prophet's career. He then reexamines each expedition, including *Badr*, *Uḥud*, the expeditions against *Banū Qaynuqā'*, *Banū al-Nadīr*, and *Banū Qurayzah*, and the conquest of Makkah, through classical *Maghāzī* historiography.²⁵ He likens the order of provocation, treaty violation (*Naqd al-'ahd*), and defensive necessity with supportive Qur'ānic *Āyat*, as well as *Sūrat al-'Ankabūt* (29:46) and *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3:64), along with authentic *Aḥādīth* that explain the ethical principles governing *qitaāl* (armed combat) in Islam. Through this process, he claims that the campaigns followed to recognizable Islamic legal norms governing just cause, proportionality, and the defense of covenant. The expeditions are thus reorganized not as expressions of ambition but as replies limited by revelation and prophetic ethics.

The Question of Polygamy: The question of polygamy attains extensive theological and historical dealing in *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, protected mainly in the exegesis of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, verses 50 to 52, and prearranged obviously as a refutation of William Muir's objections on the subject. The author counts the determinations underlying the Prophet's plural marriages, labelling them according to distinct bases: educational (*Ta'limī*), propagative (*Tablīghī*), explanatory (*Tashrīḥī*), social, and political. Each marriage is thus carried not as an act of personal understanding but as serving an explicit pedagogical or communal function within the nascent Muslim society. Subsequent this thematic discussion, the author proceeds to a sequential

²³ Pīr Muhammad Karam Shāh, *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, 7 vols. (Lahore: Ziyā' al-Qur'ān Publications, 1991), 2:82.

²⁴ Karam Shāh, *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, 7:565.

²⁵ Karam Shāh, *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, 7:611–615.

account of the *Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn*, describing separately the biography and contribution of each *Ummu-al-Mu'minīn* and focus processing their respective services to the transmission of prophetic knowledge and the association of the early community. Specific attention is given to William Muir's most important objection, namely the episode of Zayd ibn Hārithah's divorce and the Prophet's consequent marriage to Zainab bint Jahsh, an objection also advanced by Fidenzio and repeated by R. F. Bodley among other Orientalist writers. The author discusses this charge directly and without option to apologetic evasion or unnecessary qualification, contribution instead a textually grounded response deep-rooted in the Qur'ānic account and the surrounding *Sirah* background. The author further includes the positions of Montgomery Watt and John Bagot Glubb, both of whom, in his reading, present interpretations that inadvertently affirm the wisdom (*hikmah*) underlying the Prophet's plural marriages, thus lending indirect support to the author's own apologetic framework even from within the Orientalist tradition itself.²⁶

Political and personal motives. *Ẓiā al-Nabī* offers prominent attention to Orientalist characterizations of the Prophet's wider motives, including Margoliouth's suggestion of pragmatic political calculation underlying key decisions of the *Medinan* era. The author refutes by contextualizing these decisions within the context of prophetic mission and revelation as understood in the classical tradition, while also subjecting the Orientalist arguments to internal critique, questioning the sufficiency of the evidence marshaled in support of purely secular motivational explanations.²⁷

Ẓiā al-Nabī's Response: Between Refutation, Reframing, and Methodological Analysis

Across these cases, the author's involvement with Orientalist literature is neither uniform nor indiscriminate but varies according to the nature of the historical claim under attention. In addressing factual and chronological matters, he reassesses Orientalist conclusions through the evidence of classical Islamic sources. Where the disagreement concerns historical interpretation, mainly the motives behind the Prophet's political decisions in Madīnah, he challenges the interpretive assumptions underlying Orientalist readings rather than the historical facts themselves. His discussion of *Ḥadīth* authenticity and the chronology of Qur'ānic revelation extend this engagement to the level of historical methodology by questioning the evidentiary standards and epistemological premises employed in Orientalist scholarship. The level of engagement also differs across the text. At times, he critiques "Western scholars" or "Orientalists" collectively, while in other instances he undertakes detailed examinations of specific Orientalist authors and their arguments. Through, his analysis is presented with methodological confidence rather than in a defensive or apologetic tone, relying on historical evidence and the interpretive principles of the Islamic scholarly tradition. From a historiographical perspective, this differentiated pattern of engagement reflects a deliberate historical method in which factual criticism, interpretive reassessment, and methodological critique are applied according to the character of the historical enquiry under consideration.²⁸

Integration of classical Islamic sources with critical evaluation

A prominent characteristic of these various response strategies, and the features that distinguishes *Ẓiā al-Nabī* from earlier is its combination of classical Islamic sources with an

²⁶ Karam Shāh, *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, 7:469–485.

²⁷ Karam Shāh, *Ẓiā al-Nabī*, 7:217–238.

honestly critical and assessing approach. Rather than treating classical sources as possessing unquestioned authority simply by virtue of their derivation, the author regularly subjects competing classical reports to comparative assessment, evaluating their relative reliability according to the very *Isnād*-critical values he invokes against Orientalist skepticism, and on occasion recognizing genuine points of ambiguity or disagreement within the classical tradition itself. This willingness to apply critical standards constantly, both to Orientalist arguments and to the classical Islamic sources upon which his own reform depends, establishes one of the more historiographically important features of the text, and one that supports this study's broader debate that *Ziā al-Nabī* characterizes a genuine instance of critical historiography rather than apologetic literature narrowly conceived.

Methodological Innovations in *Ziā al-Nabī*

Source criticism grounded in Islamic scholarly tradition combined with modern historical method

Perhaps the most significant methodological achievement of *Ziā al-Nabī* lies in author's synthesis of classical *Isnād* and *maṭn* analysis with the evidentiary sensibilities of modern historical method. Rather than presenting these as competing or incompatible systems of source evaluation, Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari treats the classical apparatus of *Ḥadīth* criticism as itself a form of rigorous historical method, one that anticipates, in its concern for chain-of-transmission verification and internal textual coherence, many of the evidentiary standards later formalized within Western historiography. At the same time, his application of this classical apparatus is neither mechanical nor uncritical: in assessing contested reports, he regularly supplements traditional *Isnād* grading with attention to external validation, internal consistency across multiple accounts, and the credibility of reported events within their broader historical context, considerations more closely associated with modern historical-critical practice than with classical *Ḥadīth* science narrowly construed.²⁹ This dual movement, reclaiming the classical tradition as historiographically rigorous while incorporating modern evidentiary standards, establishes a genuine methodological innovation, one that resists the assumption, implicit in much Orientalist scholarship, that rigorous historical criticism is a distinctly Western achievement to which classical Islamic scholarship stands merely as an object of study rather than a comparable methodological tradition.

Comparative analysis across Muslim and Orientalist sources

A further methodological mark of *Ziā al-Nabī* is the author's constant practice of comparative source analysis, in which classical Muslim accounts and Orientalist reconstructions are placed in direct and explicit dialogue rather than treated in isolation from one another. This comparative procedure covers beyond simple juxtaposition: the author regularly traces the specific classical sources upon which a given Orientalist argument depends, analyzing whether the Orientalist scholar in question has characterized those sources accurately, selectively, or in a manner that elides important countervailing evidence within the same classical corpus. This approach qualifies the author to engage Orientalist literature not as a monolithic external challenge but as a body of arguments deep-rooted in the classical Arabic source tradition. As a result, his critique is directed mainly within a shared evidentiary framework. In this regard, the comparative method of *Ziā al-Nabī* varies from earlier

²⁹ Karam Shāh, *Ziā al-Nabī*, 7: 97-108

apologetic responses, which typically challenged Orientalist conclusions without systematically examining the source-critical foundations on which they were based.

Situating the proposed model against classical, historical-critical, and hybrid historiographical approaches

The author's method avoids classification within the classical Islamic, positivist, or hermeneutical historiographical traditions, drawing on each without belonging to any. It is not simply classical, to that extent as it involves directly and essentially with contemporary historical-critical logical argument rather than proceeding solely within the interpretive horizon of the traditional *Sirah-Maghāzī* genre. Nor is it simply an adoption of Western historical-critical method, in so far as it recollects the classical apparatus of *Isnād* and *maṭn* evaluation as its main evidentiary average, and obviously defends the epistemic authority of that apparatus against the skeptical beliefs of Orientalist source criticism. Rather, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* occupies a openly hybrid position, one in which the classical tradition supplies the primary evidentiary background while selectively incorporating comparative and contextual considerations associated with modern historiographical practice. This hybridity distinguishes the author's approach from both uncritical traditionalism and uncritical accommodation to Western method, resting the text at a productive methodological connection rather than at either extreme.

Alternative historiographical model proposed

Taken together, these methodological features propose that *Ẓiā al-Nabī* grants an alternative approach to *Sirah* literature. It is deep-rooted in the classical Islamic tradition of source criticism while lasting open to useful insights from contemporary historical scholarship. Rather than rejecting historical-critical methods outright or accepting Orientalist assumptions without question, it adopts a balanced and selective approach. Instead, it offers that rigorous historical reconstruction of the Prophet's life is best achieved through a critical dialogue between traditions, in which the classical apparatus of *Isnād* and *maṭn* criticism functions as the primary, though not exclusive, standard of evidentiary evaluation. It is this alternative model, more than any single instance of refutation examined in the preceding section, that constitutes the most substantial and generalizable methodological contribution of *Ẓiā al-Nabī* to modern Islamic historiography.

10. Ẓiā al-Nabī in Comparative Perspective

Comparison with other Muslim responses

Situating *Ẓiā al-Nabī* along with other important twentieth-century Muslim refutations to Orientalist *Sirah* literature clarifies both the shared concerns and the distinctive features of Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's contribution. Muhammad Hamidullah's work, most notably his *Muḥammad Rasūlullāh* and his documentary studies of early Islamic diplomatic and administrative history, shares with *Ẓiā al-Nabī* a commitment to rigorous source criticism and direct engagement with Orientalist argumentation, yet Hamidullah's work is characterized by a more documentary and archival orientation, emphasizing treaties, letters, and administrative records as primary evidentiary categories, and adopting a relatively restrained, scholarly register addressed as much to an academic as to a devotional readership.³⁰ Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*,³¹ composed within the distinct

³⁰ Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muḥammad Rasūlullāh: A Concise Survey of the Life and Work of the Founder of Islam* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1969).

³¹ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿat Miṣr, 1936).

intellectual context of Egyptian modernism, likewise sought to revisit the Prophet's biography in terms defensible before a rationalist and Western-educated audience, but did so by accepting many of the interpretive premises of Western historical and psychological method, at times granting interpretive ground on questions of motive and causation that Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari treats as non-negotiable matters of prophetic mission as the matters of *Ghazwāt*, expeditions, polygamy, *etc.* Martin Lings's *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*,³² by contrast, signifies a rather different mode of response altogether, one produced from within a Western convert and traditionalist perspective, oriented mainly toward accessible narrative reconstruction for an English-speaking audience, and engaging Orientalist scholarship far less directly or systematically than either Hamidullah or Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari. In comparison, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* is characteristic in combining constant engagement with Orientalist literature, methodological reflection on Islamic and Western historical approaches, and the narrative and devotional features of the classical *Sirah-Maghāzī* tradition. This combination contrasts from Hamidullah's documentary method, Haykal's modernist approach, and Lings's traditionalist narrative approach.

Distinctiveness of the Pakistani contribution

This comparison emphasizes the distinctive character of Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari's contribution to modern *Sirah* historiography in Pakistan. Unlike approaches that highlights either accommodation with Western historiography or a primarily documentary treatment of the sources, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* combines the narrative and devotional character of classical *Sirah* literature with the source-critical methods of the *Ḥadīth* tradition and sustained engagement with Orientalist literature. This combination reflects the intellectual framework of contemporary Pakistan, where *Sirah* literature served religious, national, and apologetic purposes while drawing on both traditional and modern forms of scholarship. In this regard, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* characterizes a significant contribution to modern *Sirah* literature by bringing together classical tradition, critical source analysis, and engagement with Western historiographical debates within a single work.

Discussion: Implications for Islamic Historiography

Contribution to postcolonial historiographical theory

The preceding analysis of *Ẓiā al-Nabī* carries implications extending beyond the specific case of Pakistani *Sirah* literature to the wider theoretical discussion of postcolonial responses to Orientalist literature. Saidian theory offers a valuable context for analyzing the relationship between Western knowledge production and colonial power; but, the case of *Ẓiā al-Nabī* suggests a response that extends beyond the conventional binary of acceptance and rejection. Pīr Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari neither rejects Orientalist historical-critical methods wholesale nor accepts their premises uncritically. In its place, he repossesses historical-critical consistency as a methodological achievement embedded within, and in important respects preceding, the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. This challenges the assumption that severe historical review is mainly a Western intellectual development to which Muslim scholarship could only respond defensively. In this respect, *Ẓiā al-Nabī* demonstrates a method of intellectual confirmation in which a religious scholarly tradition appropriates, repositions, and grounds critical historical methodology within its own epistemological heritage. The work consequently proposes a useful case for covering postcolonial historiography beyond

³² Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006).

confrontation and accommodation toward the study of competing and parallel claims to methodological authority, particularly within the fields of sacred biography and Islamic historical scholarship.

Case for integrating Pakistani *Sirah* scholarship into global academic discourse

These conclusions support a larger case for the fuller incorporation of Pakistani *Sirah* scholarship into modern academic discussions of the historiography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Present scholarly discourse on this subject, as noted throughout this study, remains disproportionately weighted toward Western Orientalist scholarship and, to a lesser degree, Arab modernist responses such as those of Haykal, while the substantial and methodologically sophisticated body of Pakistani *Sirah* literature has received moderately little constant scholarly attention within international academic literature. This oversight has important consequences for understanding the historiography of the *Sirah*. By overlooking works such as *Ziā al-Nabī*, contemporary literature risks emphasizing the mistaken view that critical historiographical approaches established mainly within Western literature, while non-Western traditions are seen merely as apologetic responses rather than as independent contributors to historiographical method. Integrating Pakistani *Sirah* literature more fully into global academic discourse would, accordingly, contribute not only to a more complete historical account of modern *Sirah* writing, but to a more balanced and empirically grounded understanding of how historical-critical method itself has developed across, and been contested between, multiple intellectual traditions in the modern period. Such integration would involve, at a minimum, greater attention within comparative religious historiography to the institutional, linguistic, and intellectual contexts within which such scholarship was produced, as well as sustained translation and critical engagement with major Pakistani *Sirah* texts presently accessible primarily to Urdu- and Arabic-reading audiences.

Conclusion

Ziā al-Nabī has a distinguished place in contemporary Islamic historiography over its constant engagement with colonial-era Orientalist scholarship on the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Comparative textual and source-critical analysis proves that the author calibrates his responses according to the nature of individual Orientalist claims, combining factual correction, interpretive reassessment, and methodological critique. In doing so, he synthesizes the *Isnād*- and *maṭn*-based principles of the classical *Ḥadīth* tradition with a consistently critical evaluation of both Islamic and Orientalist sources, proceeding a historiographical model that traces rigorous source criticism within the Islamic intellectual tradition while engaging constructively with modern historical inquiry. These findings produce Pakistani *Sirah* literature as a methodologically significant yet understudied element of modern Islamic thought. They also challenge the supposed opposition between devotional *Sirah* and critical historiography, signifying that confessional commitment and historical criticism need not be reciprocally exclusive. More generally, the results direct that *Ziā al-Nabī* symbolizes a postcolonial mode of engagement with Orientalist scholarship deep-rooted in the confirmation of a native historiographical tradition, beginning it as an important contribution to modern Islamic historiography. Covering comparative analysis to a broader corpus, strengthened by critical editions, translations, and corpus-based approaches, would authorize a more comprehensive evaluation of the historiographical patterns recognized here.

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