

A CRITICAL STUDY OF CLINTON BENNETT'S THOUGHTS TOWARDS SIRAH OF THE HOLY PROPHET ﷺ

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Sirah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is the topic on which a lot of work has been done both in the Muslim and non-Muslim world. For Muslims it was the source of aspiration and adaptation for the practical purposes of social life while for the non-Muslims it was the source of inquisitiveness and understanding Islam as a successful religion in the past and present time. Therefore, Muslim enthusiastic interest in the biography of the Holy Prophet ﷺ developed and evolved into a regular science while the west has modified the knowledge of biography according to their own order of preference but within the same biographic precedents. Both have tried to reconstruct the biography of the Holy Prophet ﷺ historically, chronologically and logically. Clinton Bennett is one of the western scholars who has contributed not only in the Islamic literature but also the biographic field. His work consists of numerous issues in Islam. Whatever he has learned from Islam and the Sirah of Holy Prophet and thus concluded in the form of his own thoughts, he has expressed most of them in his famous five books for example 'In Search of Muhammad', 'Muslims and Modernity', 'Studying Islam', 'Interpreting the Qur'an', and 'Victorian Images of Islam' (doctoral thesis).

This study focuses on Clinton Bennett's work on Sirah specifically with his broader view of the subject. This research is descriptive and analytical in nature and presents a detailed analysis of the work it is based upon.

Key words: Clinton Bennett, Prophet's biography, Divergent traditions, Miracles, Salman Rushdie, Genuine Prophet.

Introduction

As far as the art of Sirah is concerned, it is the same in the East and the Western World. It is the general practice that every reference regarding to the respective biography is accepted without serious criticism while such references are not accepted in the fields of *hadith* and exegesis, because the later have their own logical systems which sensor the information. Historical and religious records tell us that various religious scholars have over done in praising the respective founders of their religions

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while their attitude towards the biographies of the founders of other religions has been vice versa. The same has happened, in the earlier times to the biography of Holy Prophet ﷺ as taken by the orientalist; although a positive change has been seen in this respect because of the Muslim Scholars' reaction to their earlier biographic writings and their deep and extensive study of the subject due to vast availability of the classical material of biography. Moreover, modern sources and methods have brought a general positive change in the west regarding the Sirah of Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Clinton Bennett¹ is one of the contemporary scholars whose approach is not that extremists like that of Ignaz Goldzeiher (1921), Joseph Schacht (1969), William Muir (1905), Michael Cook (1977), Patricia Crone (1983) and Carl Pfandr (1865). He is one of the pioneers of moderation in orientalism who has tried to reconstruct the biography of the Noble Prophet ﷺ afresh. He has written a separate book on the topic of *Sirah, 'In search of Muhammad' (ﷺ)*; while writing on this topic Bennett has benefited from the works of nineteenth and twentieth century's Christian scholars. Yet he has also made use of apostate's writings in order to understand Islam. After consolidating the variety of scholar's views on the biography of the holy Prophet ﷺ, he has contributed himself to the subject that include the birth date of holy Prophet, childhood, youth, and proclamation of the Prophet Hood, migration to Medina, the wars, and finally the death of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. In addition to this, Clinton Bennett has made a comparative study of Jesus and the holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and had frankly said what he believed. He has highlighted the novelistic similes of Salman Rushdie (b 1947) time and again. He has also mentioned the novelist as a proof and sample to criticize the Islamic values accordingly; the same has been rated as a blasphemer by the Muslims of the world in a great number. Bennett has discussed in detail the classical sources of sirah and has also examined the principles of tradition pertaining to such texts.

1. A Faith sensitive account of the Noble Prophet ﷺ and His book

Clinton Bennett has mentioned two different approaches of teaching *Sirah* in the western academy, critical approach and faith-sensitive approach. He himself agrees with the medieval method because according to him both approaches have extremist touch. He thinks that the western academy instructor will have to and should avoid certain parts of the *Sirah* while teaching in the Western academy; so that the objections of the students might be avoided because he is aware of the fact that most of the

¹ Clinton Bennett (born in 1955 in England) a well known orientalist is a specialist in Christian-Muslim Relations, an author, ordained Baptist Minister and a University teacher. He currently teaches Religious Studies part-time at the State University of New York and writes for various publications. His special interest focused on how ideological presuppositions influenced scholars' assessments of Islam.

orientalists have adopted negative approach regarding *Sirah* and same is the adopted curriculum.

Usually, the instructor gives a summary of the most significant events. The instructor may choose to allude to some aspects of the life of Muhammad (ﷺ) because if he or she does not do so, students are likely to raise questions about them. For example, Muhammad's (ﷺ) marriages and engagement in war are widely known and the instructor may be asked to explain these. They may reply that evaluation or apology has no place in the classroom, or they may repeat the type of standard Muslim explanations to which Esposito (b.1940) refers.²

The topics which are considered to be problematic by Bennett are multiple marriages of Holy Prophet ﷺ comes at the top, including murder of the Poets, Satanic Verses affair, Prophetic revelatory event, the miracles of Night journey and Ascension and splitting asunder of the moon. One of the reasons of avoiding these topics can be the taking of these issues as negative by Bennett himself because he has created an expression in his writings that *Sirah* is only acceptable if these miracles are excluded. He has benefited from the number of non-Muslim scholars which include positive and negative critics of the *Sirah*. Especially he has quoted William Muir (1905), Tor Andréa (1947), Patricia Crone (2015), Michal Cook (b 1940), Montgomery Watt (2006), William St. Clair Tisdall (1928), John Drew Bate (1923), William Cantwell Smith (2000), Esposito (b.1940), Charles Forster (1871), and Sir Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb (1971).

2. Chronology of Prophet's Biography & Difficulty of Comprehension

While beginning the reconstruction of the biography of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, Clinton Bennett takes up the issue of very birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He doubts the validity of the sources regarding Holy Prophet's date of birth as there is no consensus on the issue. Therefore, he is trying to apply an impression of conflict on the whole biography of Holy Messenger ﷺ saying that:

We should note at this point that 570 CE is by no means considered 'safe' as the date of Muhammad's (ﷺ) birth. As Andrea (1936) commented, 'we do not know definitely when Muhammad (ﷺ) was born' since 'the statement that [he] was

²Clinton Bennett, *Studying Islam: The Critical Issues* (London: The tower building 11 York road continuum, 2010),34.

born in the “Year of the Elephant” does not agree with other chronological facts in the Prophet's life'.³

Bennett has followed his predecessors in this matter who wanted to create doubt everywhere in the history of Islam while he has forgotten that the consensus in the history and biography has nowhere been found in its perfection. There is a diversity of chronology, ideas, events and places even in the history of only hundred years ago. When we are talking about a biography of fourteen hundred years ago, we could and should follow the principle of the majority and there is no need to investigate the diverse individuals and to create doubt.

The main reason of diversity of dates and years is the imperfection of Arab calendar and the wrong customs of the dark ages. The Arabs of dark ages used to add and minimize the months of the lunar year according to their own goodwill which has been condemned by the Qur'an.

إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرُمٌ
ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا فِيهِنَّ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ
اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ⁴

Indeed, the number of months with Allah is twelve [lunar] months in the register of Allah [from] the day He created the heavens and the earth; of these, four are sacred. That is the correct religion, so do not wrong yourselves during them. And fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively.

And know that Allah is with the righteous [who fear Him].

While trying to reconstruct the biography of the Prophet of Islam, Bennett raises another objection for non availability of date of birth of Holy Prophet in the Qur'an and he says:

Thus the Qur'an does not, as it were, tell Muhammad's (ﷺ) story – we cannot deduce from it when he was born or when he began to preach.⁵

Bennett is frustrated for not having the date of birth of Holy Prophet ﷺ in the Qur'an, actually he is unaware of the fact that the Divine books contain the account of the qualities, principles and ordains to be followed, and the books do not deal with the birth dates and other ordinary chronology.

The second part of his objection relates to the date of beginning of preaching of the Holy Prophet. It is very astonishing that Bennett has not consulted surah Al-Muddassir (المدثر) of Qur'an, from where the era of beginning of preaching. The time of

³ Clinton Bennett, In Search of Muhammad (London: Cassell Wellington House 125 Strand, 1998), 18.

⁴ Al-Toubah, 9:36.

⁵ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 19.

revelation of this declares the beginning of preaching and the verses of surah themselves tell the preaching story. So, the Qur'an as the source of biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ does provides little assistance in the task of biographical reconstruction.

3. The Problem of divergent material facing by Bennett for reconstructing Sirah

It is learned that Bennett is facing difficulty to compile the biography of the Holy Prophet ﷺ because he is receiving conflicting information from the divergent sources of *hadith* and *sirah*. As Bennett has described his difficulty by citing the following statement:

Turning to a critical investigation of the sources for reconstructing Muhammad's (ﷺ) biography, I begin by noting some divergent material within the *sirah* and *hadith*. There is, for example, dispute about the number of campaigns which Muhammad (ﷺ) personally led, after *hijrah*. There is dispute about the identity of his first male convert.....There is dispute about which Companions were with Muhammad (ﷺ) at various stages, which obviously effects the reliability of *hadith* traced to them at such times..... Alluding to dispute about the exact date of Badr itself, Rodinson comments that 'such disputes about can only take place because everyone agrees that battle did take place'.⁶

The question arises that whether the said difficulty is the real one and such difficulties have some solutions or not? Answer to this question is that divergence in biography is the contingent of this knowledge. The Compilers of the biography or history have to take every report into their account and they have to fix and evaluate the level too. A biographer cannot exclude any report; he can only categorize the dependability and integrity of the report, while to filter and censor the information up to the standard of only truth and fact is the job of muhadith therefore, the two opinions can survive in democracy. While Muhadithin have to examine, analyze and sensor every report to be taken into account. Therefore both accounts would never tally each other.

Since the Arab calendar before or after the Hijrah remains to be the lunar one, therefore the reports of certain historic dates differ with each other because of the local disturbance of the local lunar calculation. Moreover, the Arabs of that age disturbed and hampered the lunar calendar invoke. As *hadith* has said

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الزَّمَانَ قَدْ اسْتَدَارَ كَهَيْئَتِهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ⁷

⁶ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 40.

⁷ Ahmad bin Hanbel, Musnad (Bairut: Moasisa tur Risala, 2001), Hadith No: 20695.

The time has returned to its original form as the God had made it to be after a long tempering and human handling

The exegesis of the same has been mentioned by a companion that:

The passage cited above with reference to the holy Prophet's words means that the time after a long disturbance, addition and deduction, ascending and descending has presently synthesized to its original form therefore, the present known month and year are the same what they originally are.⁸

➤ Status of divergent material quoted by Bennett

As a student of history and biography, it is well known that a historic event or a biographic fact is reported by different chains and trains which at times are overlapping, conflicting and diverging with each other. It is the earnest duty of the historian, a biographer or a research scholar to create a possible consensus and to draw logical consequence out of the divergence and conflict. It is hereby observed that the weight of the solidarity of the reporter and the level of the reported incident must be kept in mind to create a preference of opinion. Whereas Clinton Bennett is not trying to create a possible consensus of preferable opinions instead he is highlighting the conflicting opinions intentionally to devalue the *hadith* and *Sirah* as he says that

Turning to a critical investigation of the sources for reconstructing

Muhammad's (ﷺ) biographyreliability

of *hadith* traced to them at such times.⁹

The divergent information is not an independent and complete agent of finalization of the status of information. As Bennett has reported that there is divergence and conflict in the reports of number of campaigns lead by the Prophet ﷺ, first male convert and which companion was accompanying the Prophet ﷺ at a certain occasion. Clinton Bennett is himself reversed his stand afterwards firstly by the report of Rodinson: Alluding to dispute about the exact date of Badr itself, Rodinson comments that 'such disputes about can only take place because everyone agrees that battle did take place'.

Such various reports undoubtedly have a variety of information and disputed reporting of the happening but the same reports are confirmation of firstly of the happening of Badr and secondly of the conversion of the male person, yet it is the final evidence of above mentioned facts.

6. Credibility of *Hadith* Narrators/ Sanad

When the objectionists cannot discredit the text of the tradition then they focus on the chain of narrators and try to discredit or create suspicions regarding the narrators for example age of narrators, non accessibility and the character of Narrators. The main object is to discredit the tradition itself. The same treatment has been applied to the

⁸ Ahmad bin Hanbel, Musnad, Hadith No: 20695.

⁹ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 40.

narrators of prophetic ﷺ miracles. Clinton Bennett has raised objection on Ibn e Abbas and Anas bin Malik for their lesser ages and on Hazrat Abu Hurayrah for his credibility. Ibn 'Abbas Prophet's ﷺ cousin who was 13 years old at Prophet's death and Anas Ibn Malik who was 19 years old only. Orientalists consider these two sources doubtful because of the age of these two persons.

Bennett has agreed with them by saying that;

Others point out that many of the miracle *hadith* are traced to two transmitters, Ibn 'Abbas (a cousin of the Prophet) and Anas Ibn Malik, whose youth at Muhammad's death (they were 13 and 19 respectively) may cast doubt on their testimony, and to Abu Hurayrah, to whom reference was made above. As it happens, of the four *hadith* in Bukhari, one is attributed to Anas Ibn Malik (58:35 *hadith* no. 208) and one to Ibn 'Abbas (58:35 *hadith* no. 210) and thus Asad (1981) comments on the weakness of both *hadith*. 'Anas', he says, 'was not present at Mecca at the time in question' whilst Ibn 'Abbas 'was not yet born!' 'Abbas indeed appears to have narrated not a few incidents which he could not possibly have witnessed. Commenting on another *hadith* attributed to 'Abbas, Asad writes, 'as to Abbas having heard these words from his father ... this is impossible, for Ibn Abbas was born ten years after the beginning of the Prophet's mission.

If Abbas was a source of false *hadith*^ he may have coined the warning about false transmission (cited above) to protect himself; Anas narrates a similar tradition: 'the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever tells a lie against me intentionally, surely let him occupy his seat in hell fire"' (B 3:39). People would hardly suspect these sources of fraud! On the other hand, 'Abbas was renowned, amongst his contemporaries, both for his Qur'anic *tafsir* (exegesis; see his *Majimu'ah min al-Tafasir*) and for knowledge of the *hadithy* and is said to have kept written records.¹⁰

Generally speaking the traditions of miracles are mainly the focus material of orientalists. They do not accept such contentions pertaining to the biography of the holy Prophet ﷺ while they would accept such narrations relating to the holy Christ amicably.

Secondly speaking the narrations from Anas bin Malik and Abdullah bin Abbas are of very high importance because the both were very close to the Prophet ﷺ and the most dependable companions in Arab world.

Thirdly had they been reporting a false tradition, other companions of higher ages must have rejected them.

¹⁰ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 46.

Fourthly the *hadith* related to the miracle of split of moon is not only narrated from these two companions but also from Jubayr b. Mutim¹¹, Abd Allah b. Umar¹² and Abd Allah b. Masud¹³, God be pleased with them too.

Fifthly the companions' narration with missing one narrator is called *Mursal* that is acceptable according to *hadith* system. Therefore the said narrations are acceptable by any standard of the science of narration.

Lastly in the presence of deterrence of Hell fire for the false Prophetic narration is so fearful and proverbial that any Muslim and especially a companion can never dare to forge a false narration pertaining to the holy Prophet ﷺ.¹⁴

Historically speaking the split of Moon and the traditions of Anas bin Malik and Abdullah bin Abbas have been accepted by the primary generations of Muslims and the classical writers of the collections of *hadith*. For example Bukhari and Muslim have preferred such narration from the said persons (Anas bin Malik and Abdullah bin Abbas) over other companions because of the highest degree of integrity and authenticity of the chain of narrators following them.

It has been learned from the writings of Bennett that he has shown his own concerns regarding the nature and happening of miracles of Noble Prophet ﷺ. Keeping in view the importance of miracles in the biography of holy Prophet ﷺ, Bennett like his predecessors has critically examine the events with the intentions clearly evident in his writings the disapproving attitude of the very happening of the same. Precisely speaking Bennett has tried to reconstruct the biography of holy Prophet ﷺ according to his own chronography.

7. Bennett's Efforts to Exclude Miracles from Sirah of the Noble Prophet

Clinton Bennett has been trying to exclude miracles from *hadith* and biography of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. He over criticizes the happening of miracles by discrediting the narration itself and using the historic disagreements of the time of happening miracles so on and so forth. When he succeeds in the exclusion of miracles from *hadith* and *sirah* then, Qur'anic declarations and disclosures relating to the miracles would mean nothing. Thus the Qur'an (God Forbid) in this way is discredited as Bennett has manifested his opinion by saying:

“Surah 2: 23¹⁵ implies that the Qur'an was the only miracle to which Muhammad (ﷺ) could point as conformation of his mission.”¹⁶

¹¹ Muhammad b. Isa'a, Al- Sunan, 477/4, Hadith No: 2182.

¹² Muslim b. Al-Hajaj, Al-Jame Al-Sahih, 2159/4, Hadith No: 2801.

¹³ Muhammad b. Ismail, Al-Jame Al-Sahih, 206/4, Hadith No: 3636.

¹⁴ عَنْ الْمُغِيرَةِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: «إِنَّ كَذِبًا عَلَيَّ لَيْسَ كَكَذِبِ عَلَى أَحَدٍ، مَنْ كَذَبَ عَنِ الْمَغِيرَةِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ» Bukhari, Al Sahih, 80/2, Hadith No:1291.

Another example and effort of Bennett, in order to promote his internal intentions and to offer a sugar coated tablet to the Muslim community, he has suggested:

In my view, if we extract miracles from Muhammad's (ﷺ) biography, including the Night Journey and Ascension, or interpret them metaphorically, and resist attributing to his lips *hadith* which seem to contradict his message (including those who extol or condemn people and places", we are left with a very credible account of a charismatic personality who, as a religious and social reformer, overcame great odds to achieve success and power without ever losing his personal humility and humaneness.¹⁷

Bennett is focusing on the point that no miracle has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

Hadith 208¹⁸ says that Muhammad (ﷺ) pointed to the moon splitting when the skeptics demanded a miracle. Surah 2:23¹⁹ implies that the Qur'an was the only miracle to which Muhammad (ﷺ) could point as conformation of his mission.²⁰

On the other hand Bennett himself has declared that:

Later, Christians would often deny that Muhammad (ﷺ) was a genuine Prophet because he did not perform miracles, although the *hadith* and *sira* describe some.²¹

As he thinks that the miracles performed by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) are fewer as compared with Jesus Peace Be upon Him, therefore it is indicated by him that Muhammad (ﷺ) is not the **Genuine Prophet**.

Bennett would not be disproving the Prophet Hood of Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) this way since Christians themselves believe that John the Baptist was a Prophet who performed no miracles.

¹⁵ -وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

¹⁶ Clinton Bennett, Interpreting the Qur'an: A Guide for the Uninitiated, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 42.

¹⁷ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad ﷺ, 64.

¹⁸ حَدَّثَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْوَهَّابِ، حَدَّثَنَا بِشْرُ بْنُ الْمُفَضَّلِ، حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ أَبِي عَرُوبَةَ، عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، «أَنَّ أَهْلَ مَكَّةَ سَأَلُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنْ يُرِيَهُمْ آيَةً، فَأَرَاهُمُ الْقَمَرَ شَقَّتَيْنِ، حَتَّى رَأَوْا جِزَاءً بَيْنَهُمَا»

¹⁹ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

²⁰ Bennett, Interpreting the Qur'an, 42.

²¹ Bennett, Interpreting the Qur'an, 94.

And many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true."²²

As far as the genuineness of the Prophet Hood is concerned, the Bible itself has declared that the performance of miracles is not a prime requisite of a Prophet-hood, therefore it is evident that if John the Baptist is the Prophet, why Muhammad ﷺ is not a Genuine Prophet? The most reliable chains that have most authentically related the miracles of the Prophet ﷺ or bothering Bennett, because he could not be able to challenge the genuineness of Prophet-hood of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The quoted verse of the Qur'an by Bennett does not tally with his individual analogical deduction. He has not studied the diverse explanations and the multiple exegesis of said verse. The same verse implies and proves that Qur'an itself is the biggest miracle given to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, while if one penetrates into the meanings of the Qur'an, it will be proven that its verses indicated that the Noble Prophet ﷺ has performed various miracles, although Qur'an is not a record book of miracles, neither it just the biography of Holy Prophet, it is mainly the Book of guidance, while *hadith* has recorded and preserved the miracles of Prophet ﷺ.

So, this argument put forth by Bennett, that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ performed no miracles is without any reference. So it has no importance.

8. Humiliation of Miracles

We see that Bennett has tried to deny the miracles mentioned in *Hadith* and Sirah and has taken the Qur'an as the only miracle of the prophet ﷺ. But as observed in the above lines, he has denied the miracles mentioned in the text of Holy Qur'an because previously it was understood that since Bennett accepts the Qur'an as a miracle therefore he must accept those miracles mentioned in the Qur'an. It is time and again the habit of all orientalists that they try to convince the reader by their reasoning and let their intentions go un-noticed. They start from denying *Hadith* while they end on defying Qur'an by their arguments that they previously have highlighted and accepted as a whole truth. They use the status of Qur'an in discrediting *hadith* while they argue out of *hadith* to defy the Qur'anic parts. After accepting Qur'an a Prophetic miracle, he treats the parts of text of the Qur'an non-seriously and rather humiliating the acts of God like sending 3,000 angels in the battle of Badr which in his point of view was needless miracle. As he says that:

In the battle of Badr "However, if the Muslim army was also God's instrument, were the 3,000 angels necessary?"²³

The answer to this question is a question too. Was Gabriel necessary to take messages of God to the Prophets? Was Taboot-e-Sakina indispensable for the victory of Bani Israel in the presence of the army of Bani Israel as an instrument of God?

²² John, 10:41.

²³ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 49.

Allah has created this universe as an organism of materialize reasoning. So Allah maintains its system through some media He likes.

Bennett has failed to recall that even 313 Muslim soldiers were no needed in Badr non believers could have been ruined by wind or sound. He has tried his level best to discredit or exclude miracles from the biography of the Prophet of Islam ﷺ and also from Islamic traditions. He has any how tried to relate the miracles to the thousand and one night's era and he has suggested that in the perspective of 'Thousand and One Nights' stories, the Muslims must have expected such miracles from the Prophet ﷺ and thus have manufactured themselves such allusions. While the Bennett has forgotten the alleged miracles of Jesus Peace be upon Him mentioned in Gospels, and he has not tried to question even one of the Gospel miracle. As he supposed:

In considering the question of miracles, it is worth reminding ourselves that the seventh century is far removed from our own. People loved fairytales, and tales of the extraordinary. That an extraordinary man was surrounded by extraordinary happenings would hardly have stretched their imagination. Indeed, the possibility that Muhammad (ﷺ) had not performed miracles was probably harder for people to grasp than that he had. At about the same time, too, the wonderful *thousand and One Nights* (with its magic lamp and wish-fulfilling genii) was gaining popularity and, although pre-Islamic in origin, its contents and settings were being adapted to the Islamic context; it begins, 'In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate ... and grace and blessings be upon our Lord Muhammad (ﷺ), Prince of the Apostles'. Many miracles recorded in the *sira-hadith* may perhaps best be explained as the product of zealous but misplaced adoration of the Prophet.²⁴

Bennett's supposition is an effort to jeopardize the biography, the system of *hadith* and the integrity of the companions of Holy Prophet by mere suppositions, probabilities and far stretched possibilities without comparing Muhammadan biography with that of Jesus Peace be upon Him where he used another standard for Christian Gospels. Historically speaking, Jesus era is closer to *thousand and one nights'* era as compared with Islam. Bennett never dared to similarize the John's Gospel or Mathew's Gospel with thousand and one night's stories. He has not noticed and realized the fool proof sensor of Ilm-ul-Hadith and the highest standard of traditional methodology adopted by the companions and developed till contemporary times, having unbroken chains and trains of transmissions up till the time of Prophet Himself.

The Qur'an needs to be read as a whole, in context and perspective of *hadith* and the contexts of the verses need to be known as well. By connecting all the dots together and reading the verses all together and with understanding we see that the Qur'an does

²⁴ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 50.

indeed confirm that the glorious Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did perform miracles, however in the eyes of the disbelievers this was nothing more than magic and they still kept on demanding specific signs. Just because they did not receive the specific signs that they asked for does not mean that no signs were showed to them at all.

9. Novelistic Sponsorship of a Novelist: Salman Rushdie

It is very strange for a research scholar to read a book of a biographer Clinton Bennett which mainly contains the ideas and biography of a novelist or an ordinary person as far as the field of research is concerned. When a biographer is dealing with the galaxy of scholars who are in a way or other related to the standardize research methods and belong to the highest class of contemporary scholars of the world. Herein, if a man like Rushdie satirist, novelist and symbolic comedian is included into the former class it seems to be and implies the mockery of the knowledge, research and the scholars themselves and Bennett has done the same. He has attributed a large part of his book *'In Search of Muhammad'* to the biography of the said novelist and the professional add writer Salman Rushdie (b 1947), which has turned the book into *'In Search of Rushdie'* rather than *'In Search of Muhammad'*.

Dr. Ahamad Shafa'at comments on that in these words:

Bennett does not properly assess the weight of every voice that he has heard is provided by the central place he gives to Salman Rushdie's voice. The conclusion of any book is one of its most important parts. Bennett devotes 20 of 40 pages of the conclusion of his book on Muhammad to Salman Rushdie's fiction, not to talk of other references to him throughout the book.²⁵

Dr. Ahamad Shafa'at concludes that how we can understand and be closer to the Sirah of Holy Prophet by finding Him with the eyes of an apostate and a novelist.

It is hard to understand how he can bring us closer to finding Muhammad by giving an extensive place to Rushdie's voice in the conclusion of the book.²⁶

Dr. Qamr-ul-huda (b 1968) has opined that Bennett has unnecessarily and for the reasons yet unexplored selected Salman Rushdie. He has consumed and donated a considerable portion of his works to Salman Rushdie which apparently is unnecessarily, ill concerned and objectionable because the said portion was best left unsaid. As Dr. Qamr ul Huda has said in his own words:

He unnecessarily spends about fifteen pages to rehash the Salman Rushdie controversy as an example of contemporary problems of perceived insider and outsider account of the tradition. His point is

25 Ahmad Shafa'at, A review of: Clinton Bennett, In Search of Muhammad and In Search of Jesus (<http://islamicperspectives.com/>),8.

26 Ahmad Shafa'at, A review of: Clinton Bennett, In Search of Muhammad and In Search of Jesus,8.

well taken that Rushdie's understanding of the Islamic tradition is more along the lines of early Christian polemical writers and it was his assumed place in the tradition and his access to texts by Muslims that added to global tensions.²⁷

Comprehensively speaking, it has been learned from the works of Bennett that he has attached the negligible, undue and improper contribution of a declared apostate from Muslim world, while dealing with the highly sacred, delegate and fragile literature of the biography of holy Prophet, containing the widely accepted facts regarding the same. Bennett, using his Christianity glasses has tried to gospelized the biography and Islamic contention unsuccessfully because hard historic facts cannot be camouflaged.

10. Bennett's Efforts to Gospelize *Hadith* and *Sirah*

Hadith and *sirah* being the prime source of information have an unimpaired effect on biography and the exegesis of Qur'an. It cannot be denied that traditions were fabricated and wrongly attributed to Holy prophet ﷺ. Therefore a system was evolved and established which was not developed by an individual but a group of specialists whose integrity was beyond doubt. The principles were developed in order to test the *Isnad* along with the very *Matn* of *hadith*. Bennett has shown his interest to contribute towards the Islamic system of *Usool-e-Hadith*. He has suggested that:

My personal view is that it is comparatively easy to subtract from collections *hadith* which extol or condemn certain groups or individuals, without compromising the value of much of the legal and historical material, just as the subtraction of many miracle *hadith* leaves the outline of Muhammad's (ﷺ) life similarly unimpaired.²⁸

But he does not know that such principles have already been established and put into the system and it is almost unacceptable that an individual may develop a criterion without going in deep and without knowing the pros and cons of the principle for the system. The same issue has been taken up by Dr. Ahmad Shafa'at who has rightly responded to Bennett in these words:

The criterion given here for separating the reliable from the unreliable is simplistic. If certain types of *ahadith* are declared as flawed then we cannot be confident that other types of *ahadith* were immune to the influence of those factors that produced those flawed *ahadith*. In view of this, there is no short cut to looking at *ahadith* individually and carefully and then assessing their authenticity on a case-by-case basis. One cannot simply classify *ahadith* on the basis of contents and declare some classes as

²⁷ Dr. Qamr-ul-Huda, "A review of In Search of Muhammad" Islamic Studies 39:1, (2000): 141.

²⁸ Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 63.

reliable and others as unreliable. Incidentally, Bennett's conservative position on *sirah* and *hadith* is consistent with his conservative position on the Gospels, which he regards as substantially historical.²⁹

Perhaps Bennett has taken *hadith* as a counter part of the Gospel, therefore he had suggested and tried to treat with the *hadith* and *sirah* as the Christian leaders or scholars have been treating with the Gospel in order to accommodate their own intentions and comfortabilities. But he does not know that this cannot be done in the presence of a fool proof *Science of hadith* system thus the *hadith* can never be Gospelized.

Conclusion

If one has a bird's eye view of the biographic work of Clinton Bennett it seems to be highly appreciable that he remains neutral and manifest positivity while he quotes at times the negativity too. He has discussed the methodology of teaching Sirah with its variety practiced in the western academy and mentioned various orientalist's views having critical and faith sensitive approaches. He has concluded that the critical scholarship should be maintained without compromising on faith sensitivity.

But even then Clinton Bennett is no exception to the general behavior of all orientalists. He is justified in doing so because of being outsider, like all other western scholars in dealing with Islamic history and literature, in a way which has not been liked by the Muslims and the Muslim scholars in the east. Because the Muslim scholars being as insiders take the Islamic teachings as they are and not as they ought to be, with the firm and serious commitment to the basics and classics of Islam.

At times he has tried to create suspects in the historic facts of the biography of the holy Prophet ﷺ by quoting the split of narrations regarding the subject. Especially he has intentionally tried to create and highlight the suspicions regarding the miracles and thereafter he had tried to exclude the miracles altogether from the Islamic literature and to give an impression that Qur'an does not mention any miracle. According to him the miracles where as mentioned in *hadith* and Sirah enjoy the status of not more than the stories of *thousand and one nights*.

While discussing and reconstructing the biography of Holy Prophet ﷺ, Clinton Bennett has been gradually diverting his favors towards the radical critics of Islam and he has continuously adopted the negative version of apostates and the prejudiced findings of the orientalists.

It is very strange to know that Bennett has used and selected Rushdie and his works in order to understand Islam and the Prophet of Islam ﷺ. Rushdie known as a novelist declare as an apostate and banned in the Muslim countries, how come he becomes a role model of Muslims and a symbol for modernity? It seems to be an intentional act of defamation for the Muslim world and Islam itself committed by the orientalists and at

²⁹ Dr. Ahmad Shafaat, A review of: Clinton Bennett, In Search of Muhammad and In Search of Jesus (<http://islamicperspectives.com>, May 2002).

present time Bennett is on the top of them. Rushdie has been taken as a source of information for the biography of the Holy Prophet and the classical information about Islam. It is general practice of orientalist to select, highlight and encourage the rebels of Islamic society.

Bennett has made use of techniques generally discrediting the evidences and sources of biographic material intentionally; therefore it is observed that he has intentionally tried to create suspicions in the narration of Sirah. Conclusively speaking he has selected the weak narrators from the Sirah in order to discredit the whole literature of biography of the holy Prophet ﷺ. While narrating the biography of the holy Christ, Bennett has manifested and made use of another standard.