



Deđerlendirme Yazısı / Review Essay

Reviewing the Historicity of Buhāra's Meeting Incident with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the Orientalist and Muslim Scholarship

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Introduction

The meeting incident of Buhāra with the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has been a point of contestation both within the Orientalists and the Muslim scholarship. Muslim *sīrah* writers leave no stone unturned to respond to Orientalists' claims. However, there are some figures within the Muslim scholarship, who besides refuting the erroneous claims of Western scholars, look with suspicion at the very authenticity of this incident. Keeping this entire scholarly provocative and engaging incident at fore, the present paper attempts to inquire the incident with reference to the primary sources, highlighting the Orientalists' standpoint and equally the modern Muslim scholars' approach. A critical explanation will be attempted to situate the incident within the parameters of science of *sīrah* and *magāzi* to drive its authenticity home. The study will base on a thorough and comparative analysis of both the Orientalist and Muslim scholarship to draw an argumentative and all-inclusive conclusion.

The Muslim and the Christian intellectual debate on Buhāra's meeting with the Quraysh caravan led by Abu Tālib (d. 620 CE), the Prophet's uncle, has always been a reference point in the Islamic history. The incident is narrated to have occurred in 581 CE turned an astonishing enterprise for Christian monks fervid recognition of Muhammad's (pbuh) prophethood. Based on his in-depth theological understanding, he could unhesitatingly point out the miraculous

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personality of the Prophet (pbuh), acknowledge his forthcoming mission, and identify him as the stamp of the prophethood as it is told of Judaism and Christianity. The medieval Judo-Christian scholarship on this incident has been very much antagonistical as depicted in Dante Alighieri's (d. 1321CE) *Divine Comedy*. The modern Orientalists, in order to overemphasize Buhira's Biblical experiences hold the view that during Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) stay at Buhira's station in *Busrā* (a province of Syria nowadays), the Christian monk inspired him and made him familiar with the Biblical Tradition, prophetic legacies, foundations of the new faith, and cosmological wisdom. Henceforth, many European scholars have debated on this incident for narrowing down Prophet's position to a plagiarist of the revealed knowledge. They maintained that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) achieved much of the knowledge on the revealed scripture through his interactions and consultations with Jewish scholars in and around *Medina*. This, according to them, was the sole purpose of his interest in the Judo-Christian narratives. Besides, the Qur'anic revelation, starting around 610 CE, cemented his position as the last prophet; thus, deflating the aforementioned claims, the narrative of this incident has been delineated at length in various seminal biographies of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Such biographies wrest a decent space in the authoritative and canonical Muslim scholarship. The *sīrah* literature sums up the same incident to unveil the truth regarding prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) and his mission. To examine this incident and the nuances aligned to it, let us begin with the account given in the following primary sources.

The meeting incident with Buhira monk took place at around 581 CE, when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) accompanied the Quraysh caravan to Syria. The caravan was led by eminent Qurayshites including Abu Tālib, the Prophet's uncle. The biographies of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) situate this incident when the Prophet (pbuh) was twelve years of age and some *sīrah* writers said he was nine.¹ Abu Tālib, who succeeded Abd al-Muttalib as the sole guardian of the Prophet (pbuh), did not want to take the Prophet (pbuh) with him, thinking that he was too young to bear the hardships of dry desert travel; but, when he prepared to set out, the Prophet (pbuh) flew to his arms, his uncle could not control his emotions and said, "I swear by God! I will never separate you from myself and will take you all along."² Thus, he permitted his nephew to accompany him for a/the journey to Syria.

Eventually, the caravan reached *Busrā*, where the Christian monk Buhira (some say his name was Jarjis) lived. As mentioned before, Buhira was well

1 Suhayli has narrated that Prophet's (pbuh) age at that time was nine. See Ibn Kathir, *Sīrah al-Nabī* (Urdu translation) Hidāyatullah Nadwi (Deoband: Hafzi Book Depot), 1: 171.

2 Ibn Kathir, *Sīrah al-Nabī*, 1: 168.

versed in the earlier biblical manuscripts, containing the prophecy of the forthcoming prophet, and like Waraqah bin Nawfal, and the other 'Unitarians' of the time, he too could infer that Muhammad (pbuh) would be the final Prophet (pbuh) as mentioned in their scriptures. Buḥīra came out from his church to meet the caravan and readily recognized the Prophet (pbuh) from some attributes and signs. While holding his hand he said, "This is the leader of the universe, the messenger of the Lord of the universe and Allah will send him as mercy to the universe."³

The Quraysh asked Buḥīra, "How do you know that?" He replied, "When you appeared from the 'Aqabah (gorge), all trees and stones prostrated and this can happen only for a Prophet." He also identified him by the seal of the Prophethood below his shoulder, resembling an apple. Buḥīra invited all of them for a banquet in honour of the future Prophet (pbuh) he recognized. All of them came to his cell except the Prophet (pbuh), who was left to take care of the camels, much to the chagrin of the monk. Soon, he was also called at Buḥīra's wish to join the feast. When the Prophet (pbuh) came, surprisingly, a small, low-hanging cloud above his head covered and protected him from the scorching heat of the desert sun. People had taken the shelter beneath the shadow of a tree outside the cell and when the boy could not find any place, he sat aside. The moment he sat, the shade of the tree⁴ leaned over him as he was the Prophet (pbuh). Buḥīra drew people's attention on it and advised Abu Tālib (when he came to know that he is the guardian of this boy) to send his nephew back to Mecca and to not move

3 Muhammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhi, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, abwāb al-manāqib, mā jā'a fī bad'i nubuwwati al-Nabī*, 2: 302.

4 Government of Jordan has established an institute named *Mu'assasah Āl al-Bayt lil fikr al-Islāmī* (موسسة آل البيت للفكر الاسلامي). It has been assigned to search and preserve those historical monuments and remnants, which belong to the Prophet (pbuh) and his Companions. Fortunately, after going through strict and scrupulous investigation with the help of narratives of ḥadīth and sīra, historical documents preserved by the Ottomans, and witnesses of the regional public, the institute got succeed in finding out that tree which casted its shade on the Prophet (pbuh) outside the church of Buḥīra.

Few years ago, while making a survey of an oil pipeline, the road was discovered, which was used in the ancient times for journeys between Hejaz and Syria. At this occasion this wonderful tree was discovered, which stands-alone like a pearl in the middle of the desert expanding hundreds of square miles and is still alive up to this day in that dreary scorched desert.

The local government, after enclosing the premises of this tree, has arranged irrigation facility that has made it more fresh and verdant. The existence of this tree, around which there is neither a single tree standing up to hundreds of miles nor any way for water to feed it, is a sheer miracle of the final Prophet (pbuh). Its discovery and arrangement for its preservation is the real honour and virtue for the government of Jordan. Muftī Abu Lubāba Shāh Manūr, *Āsār-e-Nabawi Khatrey mei* (Al-Sa'id Publishers, 2011), 34.

towards Syria with him, speculating the Roman Jewish threat for his life. He was convicted that they might recognize him by the signs and supposedly would not spare his life. Realising the situation, Abu Tālib abided by Buhīra's suggestion and sent Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) back to Mecca with Bilāl and Abū Bakr.⁵ When the Prophet (pbuh) returned to Mecca, as *Ibn Kathīr* (d. 1373 CE) narrates, the supplication of Buhīra was, "Oh my Lord! I entrust Muhammad to your protection and security."⁶

Imam Suhaylī (d. 1185 CE) has narrated from Zuhri (d. 741 CE) that Buhīra was a Jewish. However, *Ibn Kathīr* says that the entire incident of Buhīra reveals that he was a Christian monk. Famous historian Mas'ūdī (d. 956 CE) reports that he belonged to the tribe 'Abd al-Qays and his name was Jarjīs (Georges). *Ibn Kathīr* narrates from Ibn Qutayba (d. 889 CE) that in the jāhiliyyah period, a mysterious voice from the heavens was heard that Buhīra was one of the best men lived on this earth.⁷

Orientalist Approach

The Orientalists like John William Draper (d. 1882) held that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was deeply impressed not only by the religious but also by the philosophical ideas of Buhīra. He argued this in the light of his assertion that later in his career, the Prophet (pbuh) was glared by the Nestorian (a Christian sect) doctrines to a great extent. While commenting upon the incident, he says:

He (Buhīra) found the boy not only precociously intelligent, but eagerly desirous of information, especially on matters relating to religion. By the monk Buhīra, in the convent at Bozrah (Busrā), Muhammad was taught the tenets of the Nestorians; from them, the young Arab learned the story of their persecutions. It was these interviews that engendered in him a hatred of the idolatrous practices of the Eastern Church, and indeed of all idolatry. His untutored but active mind could not fail to be profoundly impressed not only with the religious but also with the philosophical ideas of his instructors, who gloried in being the living representatives of the Aristotelian Science. His subsequent career shows how their religious thoughts completely had taken possession of him and repeated acts manifest his affectionate regard for them.⁸

In the same fashion, Sir William Muir (d. 1905) and D.S. Margoliouth (d. 1937) jointly have made questionable assertions based on this incident and

5 Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, 2: 302. See also. Mawlānā Idris Kandahlawī, *Sīrah al-Mustafā* (Deoband: Kutub Khana A'zāziyah), 1: 112.

6 *Ibn Kathīr, Sīrah al-Nabī*, 1: 172.

7 *Ibn Kathīr, Sīrah al-Nabī*, 1: 170-172.

8 John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*, e-book no.1185, last updated January 25, 2013, www.gutenberg.org.

surprisingly, regarded it as the greatest triumph of Christianity. They said that the Prophet of Islam learnt the secrets and fundamentals of the faith of Islam from Buhira. The cores of the wisdom he later propagated, as they argue, served as the foundations of Islamic doctrines. They believe that all the good principles of Islam are but an elaboration of the basic ideas imparted by Buhira.⁹ Similarly, a French Orientalist Carra De Veaux (d.1953) wrote a book entitled *The Author of Qur'an* on this subject, making an outrageous claim that Buhira dictated the whole Qur'an to the Prophet of Islam.¹⁰ Sir William Muir, (as quoted by *Shibli Nu'māni* [d.1914]) has also done a window-dressing to force the conclusion that the disgust the Prophet (pbuh) developed for idol worshipping and the outlines of the new faith that he chalked out were the fruits of the observations and experiences during this journey.¹¹

The Muslim Response

The biased and unacceptable approach put forth by the Western scholars was critically examined, evaluated and rigorously researched by the Muslim scholars from time to time, opening a fresh debate on the study of Prophet's meeting with Buhira. In response to the claim of Orientalists, Allāma Shibli Nu'māni (d. 1914) writes:

If the Christian writers insist on accepting the report under discussion, we have a right to demand that it ought to be accepted just as it stands. In the original story there is no mention of any teaching by the monk. Moreover, it is inconceivable that a mere boy of twelve could be initiated into the subtleties of religion, unless it were a sheer miracle. But then, why is Buhira, put to trouble?¹²

Similarly, after mentioning the assertions of people like Sir William Muir on this incident, Shibli Nu'māni further answers briefly as:

Granting that the Prophet (the law-giver) of Islam had received his lessons from Christian teacher, it should have been impossible to find in him that vehemence of feeling for the unalloyed Unity of God (Tawhīd-i-Khālis) and against the Trinity to which every page of the Qur'an bears testimony.¹³

Likewise, in rejoinder to their assertion, Mawlāna Abu al-Hasan 'Ali Nadwī (d. 1999) writes:

9 Allāma Shibli Nu'māni, *Sirah al-Nabi* (S.A.W), English translation. M. Tayyib Bakhsh Badayūni (New-Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributers, 2010), 1: 145.

10 Mawlāna Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwī, *Nabi-i-Rahmat*, English translation. *The Apostle of Mercy*, Mohiud Din Ahmad (Lakhnow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1982), 96.

11 Nu'māni, *Sirah al-Nabi*, I: 146.

12 Nu'māni, *Sirah al-Nabi*, I: 145-146.

13 Nu'māni, *Sirah al-Nabi*, I: 146.

Who, in his senses, would be prepared to accept that a boy whose age was nine at that time, was able to learn, in a meeting so brief as a single repast, all about those intricate problems, inexplicable intricacies, differences and corollaries of the abstruse creeds of the 6th century Christian heretical sects. Such a supposition would be blatantly absurd, for, we know, the language spoken by the monk was different, and, most probably, incomprehensible to the boy. What is more, how could the monk have told about the events that were to happen after 30 or 40 years of his death (and the boy could have compiled that in the form of Qur'an?). All this goes to show that only he catches at straws whose prejudice against anything makes him blind to the truth.¹⁴

Consequently, Western researchers in the modern era came to the adjoining point that whatever the Prophet of Islam preached to the people, was purely the revelation of God; and what claims have been made concerning it (Buhira's event), were the inculcation of tales of the monks and religious heads of Christians, which are proved and verified as baseless and unreal. This was only a fictitious idea without any evidence or historical proof.¹⁵

One can argue that the Western scholars, raising queries over the credibility of the sources of *sīra*, seemingly constructed a factory of doubts and confusions for the people with regard to such prophetic incidents, which can be alarming for all the established prophetic traditions. A counter argument can be that the Prophet's (pbuh) rejection of Trinity, refutation of the redemption, and falsification of Crucifixion may have also been injected by Buhira. Then, why the Christians, up to this time, follow a parallel scriptural discourse alien to the original teachings of Christianity?

This Incident in Light of the Muslim *Sīra* Writers

The Modern *sīra* writers, including Sulaymān Mansūrpūrī (d. 1930) and Allāma Shiblī Nu'mānī, besides refuting the claims of Western scholars, have questioned the very authenticity of this incident and have categorically regarded it as unreliable and inauthentic. However, their unique observation and approach to this incident itself needs to be critically analysed. The account below, based on primary sources, highlights their claim. While narrating this incident, Sulaymān Mansūrpūrī writes:

Most of the books describe that when the Prophet (pbuh) was twelve years old, his uncle Abu Tālib took a trade journey to Syria and Prophet (pbuh) accompanied him. At Busrā, Buhaira Rāhib (a Christian monk) recognized him as the final Prophet (pbuh). The monk told Abu Tālib: Don't take him to the

14 Mawlānā Abū al-Hasan Ali Nadwī, *Nabi-i-Rahmat*, 96-97.

15 Nadwī, *Nabi-i-Rahmat*, 96-97.

land of Jews. They might harm him if they recognize him. Kind-hearted uncle returned him back from Busrā.¹⁶

Furthermore, the same author raises some questions such as:

In this respect, the tradition which is narrated by Tirmidhī also describes that Abu Tālib returned the Prophet (pbuh) with Bilāl and (Abū Bakr). Ibn al-Qayyim says that it is an obvious error. Firstly, Bilāl was neither with Abu Tālib and nor with Abu Bakr. Secondly, probably Bilāl might have not been there in those days.¹⁷

The same author, quoting the following part of the Qur'anic verse in support of his argument, argues:

... Even though before this they (Jews) used to pray for victory over *kuffār* (by saying, Oh Allah! Assist us against our enemies through the avenue and grace of your final Prophet [pbuh]). However, when they recognize what comes to them (the Prophethood of the final Prophet [pbuh]) they denied it (They reject it, fearing that they will lose their leadership).¹⁸

Sulaymān Mansūrpūri adds:

The said verse witnesses that Jews were looking for the promised prophet and reckoned on his arrival would bring victory for Jews over *kuffār* (infidels). This belief remained with them till the advent of the (final) Prophet. So this verse proved that the statement of the Christian monk (Buhira) is not genuine because if Jews would have recognized the Prophet, they would have accepted him as the deity of triumph and victory according to their belief and would have remained submissive to him. In conclusion, the tale of the monk is unreliable.¹⁹

Accordingly, Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350 CE), after narrating the entire event along with Buhira's suggestion to Abu Tālib of not taking the Prophet to Syria, he writes:

So, Abu Tālib returned the Prophet with his slave. Tirmidhī records that Bilāl accompanied the Prophet. But this report is absolutely wrong, because Bilāl was not there at that time (suppose). If he was there but still neither with the uncle of the Prophet and nor with Abu Bakr. Bazzār has also mentioned this tradition in his *Musnad*, but has mentioned "a man" (رجل) instead of Bilāl (بلا).²⁰

16 Sulaymān Mansūrpūri, *Rahmah lil 'Ālamīn* (New-Delhi: Ateqad Publishing House, 2007), 1: 65.

17 Mansūrpūri, *Rahmah lil 'Ālamīn*, 25.

18 Baqara, 2/89.

19 Mansūrpūri, *Rahmah lil 'Ālamīn*, 25.

20 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-ma'ād*, Urdu translation, Ra'īs Ahmad Ja'farī Nadwī (Deoband: Maktabah Fārān, 2012), 1: 69.

Ibn al-Qayyim has not termed this entire event wrong or non-genuinely as some people have misunderstood, rather he has only made criticism of the last sentence of the tradition narrated by Imam Tirmidhī regarding this event.

One of the modern *sīra* writers, Mawlānā Sāfī al-Rahmān Mubarakpūrī (d. 2006), in his *al-Rahīq al-makhtūm*, narrates the part of Buḥīra's recognition of the Prophet (pbuh) as follows: "He (Buḥaira) asked Abu Tālib to send the boy back to Mecca and not to take him to Syria for fear of the Romans and Jews. Abu Tālib obeyed and sent him back to Mecca with some of his men servants.²¹ However, in the footnotes, Mubarakpūrī has also talked about the tradition narrated by Tirmidhī, pertaining to the same event, and also quoted Ibn al-Qayyim's criticism of it. But, at the same time, the author has narrated this event from other sources and has given preference to Tirmidhī. Similarly, Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 CE), whose *Tabaqāt* is regarded as one of the most authentic sources of *sīra* narrates the event of Buḥīra, in which there is no mention of Bilāl and Abu Bakr. He avers:

Dawūd bin Husayn (narrator of *Tabaqāt*) narrates that when the Prophet (S.A.W) was twelve years old, a trade Caravan was preceding to Syria. Abu Tālib went with it and took the Prophet with him. All of the members of the Caravan made halt at the (Church of) Buḥīra monk. What he had to ask Abu Tālib about the Prophet, he asked and told them to protect him. This was the reason that Abu Tālib returned back to *Mecca* along with the Prophet.²²

A Comparative Analysis

Despite the verse, quoted in defence of his argument, Sulaymān Mansūrpūrī describes that the Jews were looking for the final Prophet (pbuh) and they used to tell at the time of any encounter that when the final Prophet (pbuh) arrives, they will join hands with him in order to gain triumph over them. However, needless to say, when the Prophet (pbuh) arrived, they did not go by their intention to join, rather refused to believe him as the final Prophet (pbuh) on a collective scale. Verily, they knew the arrival of the final Prophet (pbuh) and they recognized him, but *imān* (faith) is not only to recognize but also to believe with firm conviction.

When Qur'an says, "They recognized him," we find many witnesses and proofs regarding this in those days. The most authentic testimony belongs to Safiyya (wife of the Prophet [pbuh]), whose father and uncle were eminent Jewish scholars. She said that when the Prophet (pbuh) immigrated to *Medina*,

21 Sāfī al-Rahmān Mubarakpūrī, *Al-Rahīq al-Makhtūm*, English translation, *The Sealed Nectar*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Salaam, 2008), 76. The author has narrated the entire incident on the authority of *al-Musannaḥ ibn Abī Shayba* 11: 489, Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il*, 2: 24 and al-Tabarī, 2: 278-278.

22 Muhammad b. Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, Urdu translation, Abdullah Imādī and Muhammad Asghar Mughal (Deoband: Hafzi book depot, 1998), 1: 144.

her father and his brother went to meet him and they argued with him for a long time. When they came back home, Safiyya heard their conversation:

Uncle: Is this the same Prophet whose reports are written in our books?

Father: Yes, I swear by God.

Uncle: Do you believe in him?

Father: Yes, of course.

Uncle: Then what is your intention?

Father: I will oppose him and until my last breath and will not allow his message to get propagated among the people.²³

Therefore, there is no contradiction between the apprehension of Buḥīra about the enmity of Jews and the Qur'anic verse above. It substantiates the account that the Jews knew about the arrival of the final Prophet (pbuh) and would aspire his assistance in their future against the infidels (*kuḥffār*). However, when the final Prophet (pbuh) proclaimed his prophethood, they denied and refused to accept it, though they recognised him like they do recognise their own children. This view is succinctly expatiated in Qur'an like:

“Those who have been given book (the Jews and the Christians) recognise him (Prophet [pbuh] together with his lineage, tribe, place of birth, place of residence, appearances, qualities, and attributes) just as they recognise their own sons. Undoubtedly there (still) exists among them a group who knowingly hide the truth.”²⁴

Likewise, *Allāma Shiblī Nu 'mānī* has raised some questions over the tradition of *Tirmidhī*, and thereby termed this tradition unreliable. He writes:

The fact is that the story of Buḥīra is unreliable. The different chains of narrators that report this incident are all what the traditionalists have termed as *mursal*, i.e., neither was the original narrator an eye-witness himself nor does he name the eye-witness from whom he quotes...the last narrator of this story at the top-end is Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī who himself was not present nor does he tell the name of the man who narrated it to him.²⁵

Ibn Kathīr says that this tradition is among the *mursalāt* of the Companions because Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī came to *Medina* in 7 AH. Possibly, he had heard it

23 Mawlānī Abu al-A'lā Mawḍūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'an* (New-Delhi: Markazi Maktabah Islāmī, 2014), 1: 94.

24 Baqara, 2: 146.

25 Nu'mānī, *Sīrah al-Nabī*, 146-147.

from the Prophet (pbuh) himself or from any senior Companion or had narrated it due to its fame since this incident had remained well-known and widespread among the people.²⁶ An established principle of the ḥadīth methodology is that if a Companion narrates the incidents like the event of Buḥīra without witnessing it first hand, in the terminology of *muḥaddithīn* (traditionalists), it is called *mursal* of the Companion, which is accepted and reliable from them. Otherwise, the traditions of ‘Ā’isha Siddīqa and other junior Companions (pertaining to different events), in which they were not present, get unreliable and lose validity. It is ample for a tradition to be authentic and sound, that all the narrators (in the chain) up to the Companion are reliable (*thiqa*).²⁷ Jalāl al-Din Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE) says that these types of traditions could also be found in Bukhārī and Muslim.²⁸

Some Reputed Reflections

In response to Allāma Shiblī Nu‘mānī’s assertion, after describing the credibility and validity of *mursal* tradition (the gist of which is written above), Mawlāna Idrīs Kandahlawī (d. 1974) says:

The astonishing thing is that Allāma (Shibli) has acknowledged this principle in the event of *bi’tḥat* (advent of the revelation on the Prophet). Allāma writes, “This tradition is narrated by Ā’isha”. Although Hazrat Ā’isha was not even born at that time. In the terminology of *muḥaddithīn*, this type of tradition is called as *mursal* and the *mursal* of the Companion is trustworthy and accepted. Because the missing narrator must be a Companion. But don’t know, why Allāma forgot this principle here (in the incident of Buḥīra)?²⁹

Allāma Shibli has also raised a question on Abd al-Rahmān b. Ghazwān (the narrator of this incident) and has given a reference to Dhahabī who in his *Mīzān al-i’tidāl* has stated that *‘Abd al-Rahmān* narrates *munkar* (unfamiliar) traditions and the tradition pertaining to the incident of Buḥīra is also among them.³⁰ The eminent traditionalists have discussed the authenticity of Abd al-Rahmān b. Ghazwān and called reports narrated by him as reliable. Ibn Kathīr writes:

Many people have narrated this tradition from the authority of ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Ghazwān, who is regarded among those dependable and sound (*thiqa*) narrators from whom Bukhārī has narrated traditions and other experts of the science have validated him. In my knowledge, no one has impugned him, although this tradition of his contains oddity and weirdness.³¹

26 Ibn Kathīr, *Sīrah al-Nabī*, 171.

27 Kandahlawī, *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 113-114.

28 Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, on the authority of *Sīrah al-Mustafā (S.A.W)*, 114.

29 Kandahlawī, *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 114.

30 Nu‘mānī, *Sīrah al-Nabī*, 146.

31 Ibn Kathīr, *Sīrah al-Nabī*, 170.

Ibn Ḥajar (d. 1449) says that all the narrators of this tradition are reliable and narrators of Bukhārī. Abd al-Rahmān b. Ghazwān is also among the narrators of Bukhārī. *Muḥaddithīn* entrust him with authenticity.³² Sakhāwī (d. 1497 CE) says that he has not seen anyone who has made criticism on Abd al-Rahmān b. Ghazwān. Further, he says it is the mistake of some narrators, who have mentioned the name of Abu Bakr and Bilāl in this tradition. Therefore, it can be said that the mention of Abu Bakr and Bilāl is *mudraj* (interpolated) in this narration and due to the *mudraj* of two words we cannot declare this tradition as weak because all the narrators of it are reliable and dependable.³³ Jazarī (d. 1429 CE) says that the chain of this narration is authentic (*saḥīḥ*) and all of its narrators are the narrators of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. So, the mention of Abu Bakr and Bilāl is only an–inadvertent–mistake of the narrator.³⁴ Ibn Ḥajar says that the chain of this tradition reported by Tirmidhī is strong and sound and the mistake may have happened due to another narration. For instance, Ibn ‘Abbās narrates that the Prophet (pbuh) travelled to Syria at the age of twenty and Abu Bakr accompanied him in this journey and both met the same Buḥīra at that time. Ibn Ḥajar in his *al-Isāba* says that if this narration is sound, then this journey is a separate journey from the previous one, which has been mentioned before. So, the narrator has been in doubt due to similarity and closeness of both events and thus, mentioned Abu Bakr by mistake.³⁵

Moreover, *muḥaddithīn*, like ‘Alā al-Dīn Mughulṭāy (d. 1361 CE) narrates a principle that when both *jarh* and *ta’dīl* are found about a narrator, preference will be given to the group that have made *ta’dīl* of the narrator. Unless *fiṣq* (involvement in major sins) of the narrator is not proven and certified, his narration cannot be rejected. *Fuqahā* also hold the same principle that in this case, preference will be given to the *ta’dīl* over vague and ambiguous *jarh* although critics numbers more than the admirers and verily accepting this principle is the path of prudence and meticulousness.³⁶ Mawlānā Idrīs Kandahlawī states that Badr al-Dīn ‘Aynī (d.1451 CE) and Ibn Humām (d. 1457 CE) have followed the same path in ‘*Umdah al-Qārī* (Interpretation of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*) and *Fath al-Qadīr* (commentary of *al-Hidāya*) respectively.³⁷ Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855 CE) also rely on the same conduct; unless everyone from the people of knowledge are not unanimous on the abandonment of any narrator, he doesn’t abandon his narration.³⁸

32 Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *al-Isāba*, on the authority of *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 112-113.

33 Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, ‘*Uyūn al-athār*, 1: 43; on the authority of *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 113.

34 ‘Alī al-Qārī, *Mirqāt sharh Mishkāt*, 5: 472; on the authority of *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 113.

35 Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Isāba*, on the authority of *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 113.

36 Mawlānā Idrīs Kandahlawī, *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 127.

37 Kandahlawī, *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 128.

38 Kandahlawī, *Sīrah al-Mustafā*, 128.

Conclusion

The historicity and occurrence of Buḥīra's meeting incident with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has been discussed both in Western and Muslim writings on *sīra* literature. Therefore, one can sum up the Orientalists' approach towards Buḥīra's meeting incident with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in two different stances:

1) Buḥīra was an inspiration to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to stage a divine-ordained faith in Arabia.

2) The prophetic legacies mentioned in Qur'an were the exposition of the Biblical tradition explained to Muhammad (pbuh) by Buḥīra during the stay at *Busrā*.

Though, apparently Orientalists have applied thorough analytical but biased approach towards the event, both the classical and Modern Muslim scholars have, at large, rebutted their claims on equally analytical grounds providing elucidated references and details to unveil the incident. Besides the Orientalists' bias, it is exemplified that some modern Muslim *sīra* writers have taken the various narrations of the incident far-granted to put forth their reservations. The lacuna in the narrations by the name of *mudraj*, *Bilāl's* companionship in the incident, reliability of the narrator of *Tirmidhī* namely Abd al-Rahman b. Ghazwān, Ibn al-Qayyim's criticism are cases in point. The study evaluated the overall debate on this incident, exhibiting the authenticity of the story.