Research Article

Exploring the Legitimate Authority of Prophetic Sīrah (Biography) in Deriving Deductions and Rulings

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Abstract. This paper investigates the legitimate authority of the Prophetic Sīrah (biography) as a source of legal and ethical deductions within Islamic jurisprudence. While classical scholarship unanimously considers the Sīrah an essential component of the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition), its independent capacity to serve as a foundational basis for deriving rulings has been a subject of nuanced analysis. By distinguishing Sīrah from Sunnah, this study critically examines the extent to which the Sīrah can function as a source of normative guidance. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in library research, the paper utilizes descriptive, analytical, and comparative approaches to scrutinize classical and contemporary scholarship. The findings demonstrate that Prophetic Sīrah, beyond its

narrative value, possesses significant legislative weight in contextualizing and applying Islamic principles to the evolving realities of Muslim life. In the context of modern complexities, the Sīrah not only reinforces Muslim identity but also provides actionable frameworks for ethical and legal reasoning. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic legal theory by reaffirming the integrative role of Sīrah alongside the Sunnah in shaping jurisprudential thought and moral conduct.

Keywords: Prophetic Sīrah, Sunnah, Legal Authority, Islamic Jurisprudence, Normative Deduction, Islamic Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The Messenger (p.b.u.h) of Allah (S.W.T.) is an exemplary role model for every human being, and his *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* both have an important position in Islam and the life of every Muslim. In this way, studies related to *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* should be considered paramount from where multiple scholarly works on the Prophet (p.b.u.h) as an exemplary personality and visionary leader are used as the main reference for people to benefit from. Nonetheless, those who study *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* must grasp and identify them clearly in terms of legitimacy and substance, as some individual scholars in the modern period have made a few mistakes that initiated misinterpretations of the terminological meaning of *Sīrah* compared with *Sunnah* (Bilal Muhammad Shalish, 2016, 369-395). For instance, some consider the Prophetic *Sīrah* as the sole legislative source; others extract principles and generalities and attempt to apply them to the mandatory aspects of daily life; and yet some others regard the Messenger (p.b.u.h)'s practical act as an obligation for imitation with what he did not do being haram (Saʿīd Ḥawwá, 1995, Vol. 1, p128-131).

As a result, on the one side, Muslims are confused with the concept of biography and follow it in all dimensions, and on the other side, non-Muslims view the Message of Islam as a forest law or barbarism. Thus, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) is widely misinterpreted and his Biography and Message, particularly in contemporary times, are notorious for causing misconceptions among people for two reasons. *Firstly*, the cause of misunderstanding and the misbehaviors of Muslims on the one hand; and, *secondly*, the cause of worldwide Islamophobia on the other. As a result, there have been drawings, cartoons, and caricatures insulting the Prophet (p.b.u.h) in the Western printing media, i.e., newspapers and magazines, distorting the image and character of the Messenger (p.b.u.h). As a result, the researchers believe it is essential to understand the breadth of the *Sunnah* and Prophetic *Sīrah* and their respective validity and authority.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous books and journal articles discuss the subject of Prophetic *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* in Islamic scholarship. Among them, some academic works related to this research, especially to the exploration of terminologies, *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* in Islamic tradition, are presented in this section. Muṣṭafá al-Sibāʿī's work, entitled *the Sunna and Its Role in Islamic Legislation* (Muṣṭafá al-Sibāʿī, 2008) is a revolutionary endeavour, as the author examines every subject linked to the *Sunnah* such as its

status, legislative power, and the stages that led to its recording, etc. Also, he gives the perspectives of individuals who have criticised the *Sunnah* throughout history, explaining and then refuting their arguments. Even though the information provided by this writing helps to define the terminology of *Sunnah* and to understand how it has been misunderstood in history, it fails to discuss the issues related to the Prophetic *Sīrah*.

In another notable work entitled *'The Basis in the Sunnah and Jurisprudence of the Prophet's Biography'* (Saʿīd Ḥawwá, 1995), the author Saʿīd Ḥawwá, explains the Prophetic *Sīrah* in detail. In its preface, he discusses the *Sunna* and its writers, exploring the *Sīrah* and how it has been misunderstood. finally, he emphasises the need of how important to understanding the difference between *Sīrah* and *Sunnah*, which is the core argument discussed in this article in detail. He fails to argue the legitimacy of Prophetic *Sīrah* and its status in Islamic tradition.

In terms of methodological aspects between Islamic scholars of *Sunnah, Sīrah,* and Islamic History, there is an important article under the topic of *'Features of the Methodological Difference between Scholars of Hadith, Biography, and History'* which was written by Nama Muhammad al-Banna (al-Banna, 2018) and explains the significant intersections and differences between these genres in terms of objective, nature, time of origin, the classified works, and the method of classification. This research benefits from the general idea. Apart from that, as a critique, it is possible to note that the work is another preliminary study. Hence it does not explore the *Sīrah*'s legalistic status in Islamic scholarship.

Another fine work was written by ʾAbd al-Hādī al-Khamlīshī (al-Khamlīshī, 2014) on the topic of *'The Relationship of Sīrah with Prophetic Sunnah* tries to analyze the terms of *Sīrah* and *Sunnah*, their significance, the stages that led to their recordings, and the methodology of criticism between narratives of *Sīrah* and *Sunnah.* However, it has not focused on the legitimacy of *Sīrah* and the differences between *Sīrah* and *Sunnah*, which have been fully focused on in this research.

Regarding the legitimacy of Prophetic *Sīrah* and its application in the modern world, Bilal Muhammad Shalish in his article entitled *Historical Experience of Prophetic and Rashidun Time as the Source of Legislation for Nabhani State* (Shalish, 2016) has highlighted for instance the approach of the leader Nabhani (1909-1977) of *Hizb al-Tahrīr* and his faultiness with examples, raised due to the misunderstanding of *Sīrah*. Despite this articulated the modern issues related to the understanding of *Sīrah* in a broader aspect, it is neither focused on the legitimacy status of Prophetic *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* and their differences which this paper concentrates on.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has adopted qualitative methodology which involves textual analysis and library research where descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods are used. The descriptive method is employed to deal with information gathered from authentic sources written by different Muslim scholars concerning the subject of this research. The analytical method is used to explain the definitions and legitimacy of the Prophetic *Sīrah* as mentioned in the writings of selected scholars. *Finally,* the comparative method is utilized to find the differences and limitations of *Sīrah* and

Sunnah and explore the legitimate authority of Prophetic *Sīrah*. Toward its objective, this paper attempts to investigate works of literature on *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* and academic articles in Arabic and English.

The content of the discussion in this paper includes an introduction, a review of previous literature on Prophetic *Sīrah* and *Sunnah*, and the methodology employed in this study. Besides, it strives to define what is understood by Prophetic *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* which could be a pathway to getting a clear idea of this research. The limitations of *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* in legitimacy with differences between them are analyzed and debated.

Sīrah: Its Literal and Technical Definition

The Prophetic *Sīrah* in Islam refers to the teachings, practices, and exemplary way of life of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). The term "*Sīrah*" in Arabic derives from the verb *Sāra*, denoting route, behaviour, approach, state, conduct, tradition, morals, character, biography, and journey. When attributed to a person, it means his life journey. (Ibnu Manzūr, 1990, vol.4, p. 389-390; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1986, p. 136) Therefore, a person's *Sīrah* includes not only his life sketch but a detailed account of it from his birth to death, the events related to it, and his conduct, behaviour, personal character, etc. The *Qur'ān* also mentions the format of the word *Sīrah* in the same meaning as 'condition' or 'form' (al-Jawzī, n.d, vol.5, p. 280) in only one sentence in the *Surāh Tāhā*.[1] "[Allah] said, seize it, and fear not: We shall return it at once to its former condition..." [Quran *Tāhā* 20: 21].

In Islam, *Sīrah* specifically refers to the whole life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) from his birth to death including the chronological description of all his personal experiences. The Prophetic *Sīrah* encompasses various aspects of life, including religion, ethics, economics, politics, education, family, social relationships, and more. It serves as a comprehensive guide for Muslims on how to lead a fulfilling and righteous life. It is worth mentioning that *Sīrah, Sīrat Rasul Allah, and al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* have been the most widely used names for traditional accounts of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)'s life conduct. (W. Raven, 1997, Vol. 9, p. 660-663)

The *Sīrah* of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) has been one of the most prominent genres in the Islamic literary tradition from the early period of Islam to the present. The foremost factors leading to the birth and development of *Sīrah* as a discipline were the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. As a result, Muslims have made great efforts to know the Prophet and introduce him to others. Prophetic *Sīrah* provides spiritual, socio-political, and legal role models for believers. It includes individual and public spheres of life. The multi-dimensional personality of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) is a lode star guiding and lighting the ways leading to human freedom, peace, love, progress, and salvation. In the early Islamic period until the end of the first half of the second century of *hijra* the term word '*maghāzi*' was used as a synonym for Prophetic life, especially related to the battles he participated in. Some historians assert that the term *Sīrah* was first used by Ibn Hisham (Martin Hinds, 1998, p. 1-10; Muhammad

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[1] The reference for all translated Qur'anic verses mentioned in the entire paper is: A. Yusuf Ali, The Holy *Qur'an:* Text, Translation, and Commentary, (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989).

Ibrāhīm and Muhammad Waqas, 2020, p. 25) and others claim Zuhri had applied to the whole biography of the Prophet (p.b.u.h). (Uri Rubin, 1995, p. 1112) As a general notion, *'Magāzi'* is the history of the armed forces of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and the books written on this topic. (Ibnu Manzūr, 1990, vol. 15, p. 124; Martin Hinds, 1998, p. 1162)

Sunnah: Its Literal and Technical Definition

The term *'Sunnah'* in Islamic scholarship indicates the Prophet (p.b.u.h)'s way of life in general. Its literal meaning is habitual or customary practice, whether this practice is good or bad. Regarding Prophetic *Sunnah,* many definitions are provided by various Scholars *of Hadīth, Fiqh, and 'Usūl al-Fiqh.* Their definitions differ because each scholar looks into it from his discipline, where he has a specific and unique goal towards which his studies progress. Therefore, they have been divided into three groups, which are as follows: (Muṣṭafá al-Sibā'ī, 2008, p. 73- 74)

The first group includes the scholars of *Hadīth,* who view the Prophetic *Sunnah* as what has been related to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) from his speech, actions, approvals, physical or moral attributes, or biography, regardless of whether any of the above is from the period before the first revelation or after it. As such, *'Sunnah'* is a synonym of *Hadith.* For them, the life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) is a guide and model for humanity, by relating it to all that has to do with his biography, manners, sayings, attributes, and actions, regardless of whether any of the above establishes an Islamic ruling or not. *The second group* involves the scholars of *Fiqh,* who believe that the Prophetic Sunah was established by the Prophet (p.b.u.h), but it is not obligatory. They study the life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) knowing that all his actions point to Islamic rulings concerning human actions, whether a specific action is forbidden, permissible, and compulsory. The last group comprises the scholars of *'Usūl al-Fiqh,* who relate the Prophetic *Sunnah* to the Prophet (p.b.u.h)'s speeches, actions, and approvals. They consider *Sunnah* the opposite of *Bid'ah* (innovation) and see the Prophet (p.b.u.h) as a legislator who laid down the legal rulings for *Mujtahid.*

Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī defines *Sunnah* technically as what the Prophet (p.b.u.h) commanded, emphasized, or recommended of his sayings, deeds, or approvals (Muṣṭafá al-Sibā'ī, 2008, p. 76). It is remarked by the abovementioned information that the terminologies of *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* are directly related to the Prophet (p.b.u.h). So, after understanding their definitions, it is crucial to discuss their differences in the following section.

DISCUSSION
Differences Between *Sīrah* and *Sunnah*

The Prophetic *Sīrah* embodies and applies the Islamic beliefs and concepts presented in *al-Qur'ān.* It serves as a real-world example of how Islam should be used by people, especially Muslims in all their affairs related to the earthly and the Hereafter aspects of life. The Messenger (p.b.u.h) believed in the revealed Divine Constitution and applied it into practice by becoming a living example to be followed by other human fellows (Muslims and non-Muslims). Allah (S.W.T.) says: "And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character" (*al-Qalam* 68: 4), and Aisha said, "His

character was the *Qur'ān*" (Bukhārī, *al- 'Adab al-Mufrad*, 308). So, because both *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* are related to one person and directed from one source, it is important to understand the differences between them in terms.

Muslim scholars believe that *Sīrah* and *Sunnah* have different perspectives regarding the relationships between them ('Abd al-Hādī al-Khamlīshī, 2014). While some use both terms interchangeably; (Ibrāhīm 'Abd Allāh Jābir Muhammad, 2021) some others emphasize their differences, especially in terms of content and legitimacy. This is explained as follows:

Firstly, Sīrah provides the historical context chronologically and narrative of the Prophet (p.b.u.h)'s life including his birth, family, Prophethood, struggles, and various events throughout his life, while the *Sunnah* encompasses his sayings, practices, approvals, characters, and physical description. (Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-'Umarī, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 50) In terms of content and definition, the *Sunnah* is widely accepted as the second source of Islamic legislation, supported by the Prophetic biography of explanation and deduction.

Secondly, Sīrah provides a comprehensive narrative of the Prophet (p.b.u.h)'s life covering historical, social, and political aspects. It includes his interactions with individuals, tribes, nations, and people of other faiths. Hence, *Sīrah* serves as a historical account, while *Sunnah* serves as a source of religious and legal guidance (Sa'īd Ḥawwá, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 95). This shows that the Prophetic *Sīrah* cannot be valued as a separate source without its support from *Sunnah*.

Thirdly, in Islamic Jurisprudence – *Fiqh* – the *Sunnah* is often considered a more direct source for legal rulings, while the *Sīrah* contributes to the contextual understanding (Ibrāhīm Bin Sālih al- Ḥumaydayn, 1423Hijri). In the Islamic legacy, mere history does not have the authority to legislate, but Prophetic biography, if it is the kind of practical *Sunnah*, does not encompass all Prophetic activities to the same extent as legislation.

Fourthly, in confirmation of events, the scholars were more lenient in narrating the Prophetic biography and more stringent in narrating the *Sunnah*. Perhaps they were motivated by their understanding of *Aqa'id* (Creeds) and *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Law) as the cardinal foundations of worship and obedience. As for the Prophet (p.b.u.h)'s biography, its purpose is admonition and drawing lessons (Mūsá Shahīn and Salāh Shalabī, n.d, p. 5). From this standpoint, the texts with the authority to legislate must be definite, hence, the Prophetic *Sīrah* cannot be regarded as an independent source of legislation.

Lastly, Sīrāh's books are produced based on historical occurrences that commonly disregard *Isnad*, even though certain works from the late eras show how *Sunnah* texts are organized by *Isnad* or subject (Nama Muhammad Al-Banna, 2018). In modern times, *Sīrah* incidents based on *Isnād* reinforced the *Sunnah*, and, hence, are considered part of the *Sunnah*. So, scholars should use the right way to deal with the Prophetic *Sīrah*.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the difference between the scholar of *Sunnah* and *Sīrah*, like the difference between an archaeologist and a historian (Sa'īd Ḥawwá, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 96). The task of the archaeologist is to discover and provide a study on the relic. In contrast, the historian's task is to benefit himself and others from this

relic, present a comprehensive picture of an event or era, and offer a comprehensive theory of the flow of events. Such a distinction exists between a scholar of *Sunnah* and a biographer of *Sīrah*, as the biographer is also a scholar of *Hadīth* and more. His task includes narrating, collecting, scrutinizing, and critiquing and comparing narrations. However, as a biographer, he has an additional task, to examine these narrations considering texts of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. He must search for details, fill any gaps in the cycle of events, and may do so through interpretation, analysis, or by relying on weak narrations. Sometimes, he fills these gaps based on connected narrations without an explicit chain - *Isnād*. It is remarked from this discussion that a biographer serves two purposes of being both a verifier and a historian, which qualify him to become a diligent researcher.

Legislative Aspects of Prophetic *Sīrah*

The biography of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) introduces him as a Messenger, a Prophet, and a human, which are realities combined in the Prophetic *Sīrah*. Because the Messenger (p.b.u.h) was human, his acts reflected his humanity and life experience (Ahmad al-Raysūī, 2014, p. 217). Therefore, among the Companions, the scholars, and those who followed them used to distinguish between the life of the Messenger (p.b.u.h) that was given in the context of the legislation and those that were not, as well as between his orders that were given to convey the message and those that were not. Imam Ibn 'Aāshur (Tāhir Ibnu 'Aāshūr, 2007, p. 27-36) also lists the Messenger's commands in twelve categories with examples, including legislation, fatwa, judiciary, leadership, guidance, reconciliation, referring to the advisor, advice, perfecting souls, teaching high truths, discipline, and other human customs that are limited in nature, time, and place.

Contemporary *Sīrah-Sunnah*-related debates are seriously involved in defining what is legislation in *Sunnah* and *Sīrah*. while delving into legislative aspects of Prophetic biography, it is evident that the scholars committed to this area strived to differentiate legislative parts from others. As Qarafi (Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfī, 1424 hijri, Vol. 1, p. 221-223) and Shāh Walī Allah (Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 271-272) stated whatever is regarded as legislative in *Sunnah*, those things alone could also be considered legislative in Sīrah. In this regard, *Sīrah* alone will not bring new legislation. As stated above, *Sīrah* is a practical prophetic life to the revelation, that encompasses all walks of life. Contemporary scholars who are committed to *Sīrah* studies strive to differentiate the parts that are not considered legislation in *Sīrah*. In this way, Qaradawi argues that some instances that occurred in prophetic life come into the specific context of *Makkah* or *Madinah* where the Prophet (p.b.u.h) lived. Some other instances such as fasting without breaking, which are considered a unique part of Prophethood, are irrelevant to others. What he concludes is that whatever comes to legislation in line with *Sunnah*, can only be part of legislation in *Sīrah*. Seemingly, Qaradawi did focus on types of *Sunnah* and brought it into different categories. Although he didn't concentrate on *Sīrah* he tried to include a prophetic biography along with *Sunnah*. It is explicit that clear definitions and criteria were not provided to categorize legislative aspects of *Sīrah* in Qaradawi's argument. (Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, 1997, p. 65-66) Muhammed Gazaly also has approached the thing in the

same pattern, he emphasizes that all that includes Prophetic biography cannot be suitable to all human beings. Moreover, legislative aspects are limited to what is in the *Sunnah.* (Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, 2012, p. 82-84)

It is imperative to highlight the contemporary efforts made by the scholars to demonstrate the legislative aspects of *Sīrah*. Raisuny categorized the *Sunnah* into seven parts which do not come into the purview of legislative perspectives. Since *Sunnah* and *Sīrah* are interrelated disciplines, *Sunnah*-related studies can profoundly contribute to determining the legislative aspects of *Sīrah*. In this sense, it can be summarized seven criteria as Raisuny viewed as follows: 1) As a human, the Prophet's involvement such as food, drink, etc. 2) Day-to-day life experience of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) like a business. 3) Means and ways that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) employed to achieve the goal. 4) the reason that made the Prophet (p.b.u.h) execute the things, that might change according to the context. 5) As an administrator, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) accomplished matters like war and peace agreements. 6) As a state leader, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) tackled the issues that were peculiar to the government matters. 7) Things that are unique to Prophetic life (Ahmad al-Raysūī, 2014, p. 237-238).

Based on these seven criteria, the Prophetic tradition and Prophetic biography had limited legislative aspects. In this way, it can be stated that legislative aspects of *Sīrah* are confined to some aspects of life in the Prophet (p.b.u.h). It also shows that the legislative part still needs some more scholarly investigations to define and deduce the lessons to apply in the contemporary context. Simultaneously, it should be recognized that there is enough room to deduce multiple lessons and rules from the *Sirah* despite the legislative part being limited to some scope.

Finally, it is obvious from the discussion mentioned above, that the Prophetic *Sīrah* is the practical application of Islam based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah* throughout prophecy, whether before or after it. Following the Qur'an, the Prophetic *Sunnah* serves as the second source of Islamic legislation. The Prophetic biography is part of the *Sunnah* since it is a practical version, but not all Prophetic actions are legislative; There are some actions as a human being. Some actions are related to the Arabian culture and others to political and administrative legitimacy. Thus, they are not all in the same grade too. The Prophetic *Sīrah*, which is founded on the authority of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*, has the authority to legislate in so far as it is of the practical *Sunnah*. Therefore, only those who have advanced to the degree of knowledge (*Mujtahid*) may use any case of *Sīrah* to sentence it to *Sunnah*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Prophetic Sīrah serves as a comprehensive and dynamic guide that encapsulates the multifaceted dimensions of human life, offering Muslims a practical model for living under Islamic values. Rooted in the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and authentic historical accounts, the Sīrah affirms that Islam is not confined to ritual obligations but represents a holistic way of life that encompasses personal, familial, social, and spiritual domains. While the primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence remain the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, the Sīrah plays an indispensable interpretive role in understanding the Prophetic Sunnah and, by extension, the Qur'ān itself. This study concludes that although the Prophetic Sīrah is not an independent legislative

source, it holds significant legal and ethical weight when corroborated by the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Its evidentiary value emerges when it aligns with or elucidates these primary sources, often returning to the category of Practical Sunnah. Thus, the Prophetic Sīrah functions as an essential instrument in applying Islamic teachings to real-life contexts, reinforcing its authoritative role in guiding both individual behaviour and societal development within an Islamic framework.

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