

Refuting The Argument That The Hadith Have Been Collected 200 Years After The Death Of The Prophet And Therefore Are Unreliable

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Shaykh Shahidullah Faridi says...

The first of the criticisms which are now commonly being directed against the Hadith is that they were not collected in the time of the Prophet ﷺ or of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, and that during the period between the utterance or occurrence of their contents and their being recorded in writing there was every chance of their being materially altered. Some have even gone so far as to say that they were not recorded because they were unreliable.

That in the earlier stages they were not fully recorded in writing, is true, though it is not true that they were not recorded at all even as regards the Prophet's lifetime, for there is good evidence to show that Abdullah b. Amr b. al-As for one, used to write down what he heard from his Master.

Other Companions too put their collections of Hadith into writing later in life, particularly Abu Hurayrah and Abdullah b. `Abbas, two very important sources of Hadith. But in general it can be said that Hadiths were only partially and privately recorded in writing in the early stages.

The reasons for this are quite clear and there is nothing mysterious about them. The Arabs' antipathy to writing in this period is well-known, very few of them were literate. Huge stores of knowledge of genealogy and poetry preserved in their prodigious memories; some people being able to recite a hundred thousand verses.

There were no books in currency among them; even during the Prophet's lifetime the Qur'an did not circulate in book form. The fact that the Prophet's sayings, legal decisions and deeds, were not generally written down is therefore not surprising in the least.

There is also evidence that the Prophet disapproved of the general writing of Hadith in his lifetime for fear that they would become mixed up with the Qur'an, which had not yet been fully revealed, and with which the Muslims had yet to become completely familiar. But this is not to say that he disapproved of memorising of, or acting upon Hadith; on the contrary, he insisted on it.

The more learned of the Companions, including the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, spent their time in absorbing thoroughly the explanations, applications, and developments of the Qur'an by the Prophet in addition to their study of the Qur'an itself. When the Prophet had passed away from this world and the age of the Caliphs came, after some deliberation they also came to the conclusion that the written recording of Hadiths and publishing them in a book form was inexpedient at this stage, for the same reasons as in the Prophet's lifetime, that the Word of Allah must be learnt and studied and thoroughly absorbed first, while its practical application by the Prophet can be handed down by word of mouth and by personal example.

But if we look at the life and the decisions of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, we find that in every case where any matter had not been dealt with explicitly by the Qur'an, they considered it obligatory to discover what was the practice of the Prophet in this situation and made their decisions according to their findings. To contravene the practice of the Prophet on any vital matter was in their eyes equivalent to contravening Islam itself.

The whole of the history of this period shows this valuation of the Prophet's practice, and on this point there is complete unanimity. It is a grave mis-statement to say that Umar al-Khattab was against the relating of Traditions; he was only against collecting them into book form, not that they should not be learnt and known.

He was certainly strict as regards accuracy of reporting and always demanded a supporting witness if any Companion recounted something of the Messenger of Allah; when that witness was forthcoming he accepted the Tradition with no further hesitation.

In those cases which came up before him he continually had recourse to his own knowledge of the Prophet's rulings, and if he himself did not have this knowledge he appealed to the other Companions; on receiving the required information and after satisfying himself regarding its accuracy, he immediately acted upon it.

Indeed, the fact that Hadiths were completely recorded in writing during the lifetime of the Companions was no drawback; they themselves were living models of his practice and treasure-houses of his sayings. They spread over the huge areas which now constituted the Islamic empire, to Kufah and Basrah in Iraq, to Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Khurasan.

Here they were surrounded by eager pupils both Arab and non-Arab, thirsting to hear about their revered Prophet from those who had seen and lived with him. Some of these pupils, who are known as the Followers of the Companions (Tabiun), became renowned all over the Islamic world for their learning in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, for their correct reporting and understanding of Hadith, and for their piety and purity of life.

Such were Hasan Basri, the associate of the companions Imran b. Husayn and Anas b. Malik in Basrah; Alqama and Aswad, the repositories of the vast learning of Abdullah b. Mas'jid in Kufah, who were also the pupils of Umar and A'ishah; Said b. Musaiyib, the pupil of Abu Hurayrah and Taus, Mujahid, Ata' b. AM Rabah and others; Nafi, the pupil of A'ishah, and many others whose honesty and trustworthiness are unquestioned.

Here it is important to note that A'ishah and Abu Hurayrah lived up to between 50 and 60 A.H., Abdullah b. Abbas and Abdullah b. Umar to around 70 A.H., Abu Said Khudri to between 70 and 80 A.H. and Anas b. Malik to 90 A.H. This is to say that in the second half of the first century of the Hijrah it was still possible to hear a great store of Hadith from those who had seen or heard them directly from the Messenger of Allah himself.

Nearly all the famous Tabiun we have mentioned just now, lived up to dates between 90 and 120 A.H., which means up to this time the collections of Hadith related by these perfectly reliable reporters were available to all who wished to take them. Before the first quarter of the second century (100-125 A.H.) collections in book form were still not current, and although many Tabiun had their private written collections, the main basis of teaching was verbal, as was the fashion during this era when knowledge even if written was always committed to memory.

It was at this time that the first large-scale collections in book form began to be made, those by Ibn Jurayj, Malik, Sufyan Thawri, Ma'mar b. Rashid and others, all pupils of the Tabiun. The idea that much time elapsed between the original hearing and final recording in book form of Hadith as would make them unreliable is found to be completely unfounded when their history as given above is attentively considered, particularly with regard to these early collections, almost all the contents of which found their way into the later collection of al-Bukhari etc., a century later.

But the principle is also established that those Hadiths recounted by the well-known and reliable Tabiun whether collected into book form or not were available from the recounters themselves up to the first quarter of the second century of the Hijrah, and it only requires two or three successive trustworthy scholars of Hadith to convey them to al-Bukhari and his contemporaries.

It is also necessary to mention that between the earliest published compilations and al-Bukhari's time there were other large classified collections of great importance such as that of `Abdur Razaq (died shortly after 200 A.H.), the pupil of Ibn Jurayj, Sufyan Thawri, Ma'mar b. Rashid and Malik, the earlier collectors.

The question arises as to what were these unreliable, wrong or concocted Hadith of which so much fuss is being made by ill-informed critics today?

It is not true to state that untrustworthy traditions regarding the Messenger of Allah existed to any noteworthy extent during the main portion of the era of the Khulafa' al-Rashidun. It was only when the Schismatics began to appear such as the Kharijis, and the dynastic clashes of the Banu Umayyah, Banu Abbas and Band Hashim convulsed the Ummah, and particularly after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his family at Karbala', that some partisans had recourse to distorting or inventing Hadith to justify their claims.

But it was never the real scholars of traditions who related these incorrect reports, nor had they any purpose in doing so; unreliable Traditions were purveyed by unreliable people, the partisans, popular preachers, story-tellers and so on, and have not escaped the eagle eyes of the very critical Muhaddithun. The solid body of recognised Hadith which forms the basis of Muslim Law can be found in Malik as well as in the decisions of Abu Hanifah and the later Imams.

If there are differences of opinion on any important point it is almost always where that difference already existed among the companions. What is remarkable about Muslim law based on the Qur'an, and Sunnah as presented by Abu Hanifah and Malik, for instance, is not the differences in detail but the extraordinary agreement in its main structure, which proves that there was an agreed corpus of Sunnah which was common to both schools of thought.

It is a common fallacy to speak of the accepted books of traditions such as al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, etc., as if they themselves constitute the source of Islamic Fiqh. They are certainly adduced as authorities in later judicial controversy, but it is often forgotten that the whole fabric of Fiqh was erected before these traditionists were even born. Abu Hanifah himself was born in 80 A.H. when some of the other Companions of the Prophet were still alive, and he was the pupil of some of the famous Tabiun we have mentioned above, particularly Ata' b. Abi Rabah in Makkah.

The body of traditions used by Abu Hanifah and Malik were fresh from the Tabiun and unsullied by partisan politics and imaginative interpolations, which in any case affected traditions treating with law very little. These traditions are present in the later collections, but were used by Abu Hanifah one hundred years earlier.

The statement reported by the biographers of Imam al-Bukhari that he selected 7,000 Hadiths out of 600,000 is being put to much use by the detractors of Hadith to attempt to show that the majority are unreliable. This statement was made to extol his industry and discrimination, but from the point of view of the history of Hadith it is necessary to go more deeply into the matter and avoid rash conclusions which do not conform to reality.

In citing this bare statement, the impression is given that in al-Bukhari's time there was a vast, unclassified mass of every kind of tradition, true and

false, floating all over the then Islamic empire, and that he suddenly appeared on the scene, separated the true from the false, and was only able to find 7,000 out of 600,000.

The real facts are nothing resembling this at all. Criticism and scrutiny of Hadith was being done from the very beginning, even in the time of the Companions and their Followers, and there had always been a central core of unquestionable true Hadith with the earnest, sincere and pious scholars.

For instance, the comments of Muhammad b. Hasan, the renowned pupil of Abu Hanifah, on Malik's book of Hadith, the Muwatta', show that out of more than a thousand traditions of the Messenger of Allah and the Companions quoted by Malik, Abu Hanifah only differed with about eighty and even then not regarding their authenticity, but preferring a different ruling.

The mischief of fabricating or distorting Hadith was begun, during the time of the political dissension between the Banu Hashim and the Umayyads, and particularly after the massacre of Karbala', when unprecedented passions were roused. But these unreliable traditions circulated among the leading partisans of these two parties and were used to prospective supporters; the really learned were well aware of this and such dishonest tampering with the true Sunnah was clearly denounced by them, and the relaters of such traditions singled out and condemned.

A study of the comments of traditionists on such fabricators and the rejection of their claims to credibility show this plainly, for instance, al-Sha'bi, one of the leading Tabiun in knowledge of tradition and law, roundly condemns various people who related much partisan reports attributing them wrongly to Ali. This kind of fabrication had currency among the ignorant and those who had special interest, not among the scholars.

A second breeding-ground for incorrect and exaggerated traditions were the public preachers and story-tellers, who are prone to this weakness to the present day. The books of the biographies of the reporters of traditions are full of condemnations of people of this type, and their effusions, though gaining currency among the unlettered, were never accepted by the learned. Apart from these two main sources of falsification, there were other unreliable Hadiths which were due to mere human weakness, such as forgetting, mixing-up, exaggeration, ascribing statements of the Companions to the Prophet himself and so on.

The whole science of the traditionists was brought to bear on the elimination of such weak reports, and by an amazingly thorough system of analysis and comparison and minute checking, these defects have been brought to light and carefully classified.

The immense research which has gone into the study of Hadith cannot be imagined by simply reading the bare translation of one of the well-known compilations. To know something of what the Muslim traditionists have achieved, one has to go through such comparative studies of Hadith such as Asqalani's commentary on al Bukhari, where all the ramifications of the variants of a particular Hadith are traced meticulously.

After making such a study the only honest conclusion one can reach is that it is difficult if not impossible to arrive at anything but the same conclusions as these great Muslim religious scholars. With regard to the statement regarding al Bukhari's selection of Hadith, it is also necessary to understand that in the language of traditionists, all the variants of a single Hadith are counted as a separate Hadith, or an identical Hadith related by two or more different persons.

For instance, the famous Hadith reported by Umar, "actions are judged by intentions," is related from 700 different authorities. In the terminology of the traditionists, these are counted as 700 Hadiths. Thus the large number of Hadith mentioned are not actually all different, but contain many slight variations of a single Hadith.

In sum, this statement regarding al-Bukhari's discrimination only amounts to say that he took the trouble to study the whole of the Hadiths, both reliable and unreliable, which existed written or unwritten in his day. But it should not be imagined that he was the first to determine the true from the false; a generally agreed body of good and fair traditions was already in existence with the earlier traditionists. Al-Bukhari added his own unparalleled acumen to make a final examination and compiled a definitive selection of those Hadiths which possessed the very best authority.

Those who lightly challenge the authority of such compilations should be well aware of what they are doing; it requires a person of exceptional industry and intelligence even to reach to the level of a pupil of these great Muhaddithun. To surpass them would require something more than the superficial and biased minds of today, which have not shown themselves capable of any constructive work in the religious field up to the present. (Shaykh Shahidullah Faridi, Fallacies of Anti Hadith Argument, [Source](#))

Sheikh Salih Al Munajjid says...

Question:

Some people reject the Sunnah on the basis that there are many weak and fabricated ahaadeeth and that the fabrications of many liars weaken the Sunnah and make it such that it cannot be trusted. What is your opinion about this claim?

Answer:

Praise be to Allaah.

This is the view of some heretics and misguided people, both in the past and nowadays. In modern times, those who expressed this view include Saalih Abu Bakr in his book al-Adwaa' al-Qur'aaniyyah; Husayn Ahmad Ameen in Daleel al-Muslim al-Hazeen; Ahmad Ameen in Fajr al-Islam; 'Abd-Allaah al-Na'eem in Nahwa Tatweer al-Tashree' al-Islaami; Sa'eed al-'Ashmaawi in Haqqeeqat al-Hijaab; Saalih al-Wardaani in his misleading book Rihlati min al-Sunnah ila al-Shee'ah; 'Abd al-Jawaad Yaaseen in al-Sultah fi'l-Islam; Nasr Abu Zayd in Imaam al-Shaafa'i; Zakariya 'Abbaas Dawood in Ta'ammulaat fi'l-Hadeeth; Hawlat Nahr in Diraasaat Muhammadiyyah; Maurice Bucaille in Diraasat al-Kutub al-Muqaddisah; Murtada al-'Askar in Khamsoon wa Mi'ah Sahaabi Mukhtalaq; Dr. Mustafa Mahmood in Maqaalaat 'an al-Shafaa'ah.

We say: it is true that there were fabricators and liars who made up words and attributed them to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), but the matter is not quite so simple as imagined by those doubters who also spread doubts among others. They are unaware of the facts about how the Muslims took care of the Sunnah. Alongside the fabricators, there were great numbers of narrators who were trustworthy and highly skilled,

and a large number of scholars who surrounded the hadeeths of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) with a strong barrier which was difficult for the liars to penetrate. By means of their vast knowledge and deep insight, these muhaddithoon (scholars of hadeeth) were able to spot the liars and understand their intentions and motives, and they were able to detect everything that was falsely attributed to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

These fabricators were not given free rein to do as they wished with the ahaadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and they were given no room to penetrate the ranks of trustworthy narrators of ahaadeeth without being detected.

Who else exposed the lies of these kaafirs, heretics and extreme innovators?

Who were the ones who gave us the definition of what is fabricated, the reasons for fabrication, different types of fabrications and the signs by which a fabricated report may be recognized? Who wrote so many books on this issue?

They are the guardians of Islam, the vicegerents and troops of Allaah on His earth. They are the brilliant scholars of whom Haaron al-Rasheed spoke when he arrested a heretic and ordered that he be executed. The heretic said, “Why are you executing me?” Haaron al-Rasheed said, “To shield the people of you.”

The heretic said: “O Ameer al-Mu’mineen, what will you do about the thousand ahaadeeth – according to one report, four thousand ahaadeeth – which I have fabricated and spread among you, in which I made what is halaal haraam and what is haraam halaal, of which the Prophet uttered not one letter?”

Haaron al-Rasheed said to him: “What will you do, O enemy of Allaah, about Abu Ishaq al-Fazaari and ‘Abd-Allaah ibn al-Mubaarak? They will go through them and sift them letter by letter.” (Tadhkirat al-Huffaaz by al-Dhahabi, 1/273; Taareekh al-Khulafaa’ by al-Suyooti, p. 174).

Professor Muhammad Asad said: “The existence of fabricated ahaadeeth cannot be taken to prove that the entire system of hadeeth is not to be trusted, because these fabricated ahaadeeth never deceived the muhadditheen as some European critics claimed, oversimplifying the matter, and as was echoed by some who claim to be Muslims.” (al-Islam ‘ala Muftaraq al-Tareeq, p. 96)

We will end this discussion by quoting what was said by Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: Imaam Abu’l-Muzaffar al-Sam’aani said: “If they say: there are too many reports in the hands of the people and they have become confused, we say: no one is confused except those who are ignorant. Those who have knowledge of them (the reports) check them as stringently as those who deal with money check dirhams and dinars. So they single out (and discarded) the false reports and keep the good reports.

If there happens to be a narrator who made a mistake, this will not go unnoticed by the brilliant scholars of hadeeth. These scholars listed the mistakes made in both the isnaad (chain of narrators) and matn (texts) of reports; so you can see that for each narrator they made a list of the mistakes that he had made and the letters that he had mispronounced. If the mistakes of the narrators – in both the isnaad and the matn – did not go unchecked, then how could the fabricated ahaadeeth manufactured by the heretics have slipped past those brilliant scholars?

How could people have narrated ahaadeeth from heretics without the scholars noticing? That is the view of some heretics, but no one would say such a thing except one who is ignorant, misguided, an innovator and a liar who wants to undermine the saheeh ahaadeeth and true reports of the

Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and confuse ignorant people by means of this lie.

There is no evidence for rejecting the reports of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) that is weaker or more impossible than this. The one who voices this view deserves to be silenced and expelled from the Muslim lands. (Mukhtasar al-Sawaa'iq al-Mursalah, 2/561, Al-Bayaan magazine, issue #153, p. 26)

Dr. Ahmad Shafaat says...

An assumption that has misled both the Qur'an-only people and the traditionalists is that if the Hadith is revelatory, it must have been preserved just as the Qur'an with complete reliability. From very early times some Qur'an-only people have argued on the basis of this assumption, saying that since the Hadith is not preserved with complete reliability, it could not be revelatory.

And from equally early times some traditionalists have argued on the basis of the same assumption that since the Hadith is revelatory it must have been preserved with complete reliability. The assumption prevents both parties to combine a respect for the Hadith, which is due to a sacred and revelatory tradition, with a critical approach to the question of its authenticity.

If it looks strange to anyone that God should have sent a revelation without guaranteeing its completely faithful preservation for all times, then let them think of the hundreds, if not tens of thousands, of prophets sent before Islam. These earlier prophets all received revelations but alteration (tahrif) of a serious nature in the revelations during the process of transmission is a fact which is supported by the Qur'an (2:75,79, 4:46, 5:13, 41) and is also established beyond doubt by critical historical research..

Indeed the revelations given to some prophets have completely vanished from history while those given to such prophets as Moses, Jesus and several other Israelite prophets exist in the form of traditions whose reliability is no greater than that of the Hadith.

One may say that if for the earlier prophets the revelations were not fully preserved it is because they were not meant to guide humankind till the end of times whereas since the Prophet Muhammad was the last of the prophets sent to guide all humankind till the day of judgment the revelation given to him should be preserved with complete integrity.

The flaw in this argument is that even if the earlier revelations were meant for a limited period, they should have been preserved, according to the

assumption in question, at least for the period for which they were meant to guide. But this is far from being the case. The prophethood of Jesus lasted for about six centuries until the advent of the Prophet of Islam.

Yet the message of the prophet Jesus was not preserved with complete integrity even for one century. Indeed, many of the books of the New Testament were written within fifty years of Jesus' departure and already they have much more fabricated material than the historically reliable material. It is thus clear that God has a different way of working than we have rather naively assumed. What is this way of God?

In view of the fact that revelations given to earlier prophets were not preserved with complete historical accuracy, we must of necessity conclude that that is not what God considers absolutely essential. The way he seems to lead human beings to development and growth is that through a prophet certain concerns are raised and some tantalizing answers to certain basic questions are given. Then people are left to try to understand the concerns that are raised and answers that are provided. In the process they develop spiritually and find the way to salvation.

Of course, as human beings, they can corrupt the message given by the prophets to an extent that it more or less becomes ineffective, after which there is need for fresh revelation. Thus in the case of Jesus, even though the New Testament has considerably changed the message of Jesus it is to some extent still effective for guiding people and leading them to salvation (2:62, 5:69).

But the Christians continued to change the revelation even after the New Testament was completed so much so that by the fourth century their mainstream tradition departed even from the central principle of tawhid preached by all the prophets, thus finally making the revelation brought by Jesus not only ineffective for salvation but a means of eternal damnation, except for a small fraction of Unitarian Christians (5:69-73).

We can understand this by an analogy. Almost every glass of water has some impurities. Up to a certain level of impurities it is a life-giving drink while beyond that level it can become a source of sickness or even death.

Before Jesus the case with the revelation brought by Moses was similar. It was preserved for a little while but soon it began to be changed. However, even as it was changed by men it continued to be a source of guidance for the Israelites and to some degree it is still effective for salvation (2:62, 5:69).

The above examples show that revelation can serve its purpose to a reasonable degree even when it is altered by men. This is a point that is not

understood, not only by some Muslims, but also by some Christian missionaries who often say how could the Muslims say that the Torah and Injil have suffered tahrif while at the same time say that the Torah and Injil contain light and can save people.

In like manner the Hadith is based on divine revelation and even though it has been changed and corrupted by men, as we shall see in some detail in Part III of this book, yet it still contains light and is effective for human salvation. (Dr. Ahmad Shafaat, The Sacred Hadith Project, Chapter 2: The Message and the Messenger, [Source](#))

One point that Dr. Ahmad Shafaat forgets to point out is that today we have the ability to distinguish the false hadith from the true ones. All hadith that are related to issues on creed are guaranteed and there is no argument on those. There are hadith that are disputed but have no affect on the fundamentals of Islam.

Taqi Usmani says...

Chapter 3

The Authority of the Sunnah: Its Historical Aspect

Faced with the overwhelming arguments in favour of the authority of sunnah, some people resort to another way of suspecting its credibility, that is, to suspect its historical authenticity.

According to them, the sunnah of the Holy Prophet though having a binding authority for all times to come, has not been preserved in a trustworthy manner. Unlike the Holy Qur'ân, they say, there is no single book containing reliable reports about the sunnah.

There are too many works having a large number of traditions sometimes conflicting each other. And these books, too, were compiled in the third century of Hijrah. So, we cannot place our trust in the reports which have not even been reduced to writing during the first three centuries.

This argument is based on a number of misstatements and misconceptions. As we shall see in this chapter, insha'Allah, it is totally wrong to claim that the traditions of the sunnah have been compiled in the third century. But, before approaching this historical aspect of the sunnah, let us examine the argument in its logical perspective.

This argument accepts that the Holy Prophet has a prophetic authority for all times to come, and that his obedience is mandatory for all Muslims of whatever age, but in the same breath it claims that the reports of the sunnah being unreliable, we cannot carry out this obedience.

Does it not logically conclude that Allaḥ has enjoined upon us to obey the Messenger, but did not make this obedience practicable. The question is whether Allaḥ Almighty may give us a positive command to do something which is beyond our ability and means. The answer is certainly “no.”

The Holy Qur’ān itself says,

Allaḥ does not task anybody except to his ability.

It cannot be envisaged that Allaḥ will bind all the people with something which does not exist or cannot be ascertained. Accepting that Allaḥ has enjoined upon us to follow the sunnah of the Holy Prophet, it certainly implies that the sunnah is not undiscoverable. If Allaḥ has made it obligatory to follow the sunnah, He has certainly preserved it for us, in a reliable form.

The following aspect also merits consideration. Allaḥ Almighty has given us a promise in the Holy Qur’ān:

Indeed We have revealed the Zikr (ie. the Qur’ān) and surely We will preserve it. (15:9)

In this verse, Allaḥ Almighty has assured the preservation of the Holy Qur’ān. This implies that the Qur’ān will remain uninterpolated and that it shall always be transferred from one generation to the other in its real and original form, undistorted by any foreign element. The question now is whether this divine protection is restricted only to the words of the Holy Qur’ān or does it extend to its real meanings as well.

If the prophetic explanation is necessary to understand the Holy Qur’ān correctly, as proved in the first chapter, then the preservation of the Qur’ānic words alone cannot serve the purpose unless the prophetic explanations are also preserved. As quoted earlier, the Holy Book says,

We have revealed to you the Zikr (Qur’ān) so that you may explain to the people what has been sent down for them.

The word “Zikr” has been used here for the Holy Qur’ān as has been used in the verse 15:9 and it has been made clear that the people can only benefit from its guidance when they are led by the explanations of the Holy Prophet.

Again, the words “for the people” indicate (especially in the original Arabic context), that the Holy Prophet’s explanation is always needed by “everyone.”

Now, if everyone, in every age is in need of the prophetic explanation, without which they cannot fully benefit from the Holy Book, how would it be useful for them to preserve the Qur'anic text and leave its prophetic explanation at the mercy of distorters, extending to it no type of protection whatsoever.

Therefore, once the necessity of the prophetic explanations of the Holy Qur'an is accepted, it will be self-contradictory to claim that these explanations are unavailable today. It will amount to negating the divine wisdom, because it is in no way a wise policy to establish the necessity of the sunnah on the one hand and to make its discovery impossible on the other. Such a policy cannot be attributed to Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

This deductive argument is, in my view, sufficient to establish that comprehending the sunnah of the Holy Prophet, which is necessary for the correct understanding of the divine guidance, shall as a whole remain available in a reliable manner forever. All objections raised against the authenticity of the sunnah as a whole can be repudiated on this score alone. But in order to study the actual facts, we are giving here a brief account of the measures taken by the ummah to preserve the sunnah of the Holy Prophet.

It is a brief and introductory study of the subject, for which the comprehensive and voluminous books are available in Arabic and other languages. The brief account we intend to give here is not comprehensive. The only purpose is to highlight some basic facts which, if studied objectively, are well enough to support the deductive inference about the authenticity of the sunnah.

The Preservation of Sunnah

It is totally wrong to say that the sunnah of the Holy Prophet was compiled for the first time in the third century. In fact, the compilation had begun in the very days of the Holy Prophet as we shall see later, though the compilations in a written form were not the sole measures adopted for the preservation of the sunnah. There were many other reliable sources of preservation also. In order to understand the point correctly we will have to know the different kinds of the sunnah of the Holy Prophet.

Three Kinds of Ahādīth

An individual tradition which narrates a “sunnah” of the Holy Prophet is

termed in the relevant sciences as “hadīth” (pl. ahādīth). The ahādīth, with regard to the frequency of their sources, are divided into three major kinds:

(1) **Mutawātir**: It is a hadīth narrated in each era, from the days of the Holy Prophet up to this day by such a large number of narrators that it is impossible to reasonably accept that all of them have colluded to tell a lie.

This kind is further classified into two sub-divisions:

(a) **Mutawātir in words**: It is a hadīth whose words are narrated by such a large number as is required for a mutawātir, in a manner that all the narrators are unanimous in reporting it with the same words without any substantial discrepancy.

(b) **Mutawātir in meaning**: It is a mutawātir hadīth which is not reported by the narrators in the same words. The words of the narrators are different. Sometimes even the reported events are not the same. But all the narrators are unanimous in reporting a basic concept which is common in all the reports. This common concept is also ranked as a mutawātir concept.

For example, there is a saying of the Holy Prophet,

Whoever intentionally attributes a lie against me, should prepare his seat in the Fire.

This is a mutawātir hadīth of the first kind, because it has a minimum of seventy-four narrators. In other words, seventy-four companions of the Holy Prophet have reported this hadīth at different occasions, all with the same words.

The number of those who received this hadīth from these companions is many times greater, because each of the seventy-four companions has conveyed it to a number of his pupils. Thus, the total number of the narrators of this hadīth has been increasing in each successive generation, and has never been less than seventy-four. All these narrators, who are now hundreds in number, report it in the same words without even a minor change. This hadīth is, therefore, mutawātir by words, because it cannot be imagined reasonably that such a large number of people have colluded to coin a fallacious sentence in order to attribute it to the Holy Prophet.

On the other hand, it is also reported by such a large number of narrators that the Holy Prophet has enjoined us to perform two rak’at in Fajr, four rak’at in Zuhr, ‘Asr and ‘Isha, and three rak’at in the Maghrib prayer, yet the narrations of all the reporters who reported the number of rak’at are not in the same words.

Their words are different. Even the events reported by them are different. But the common feature of all the reports is the same. This common feature, namely, the exact number of rak'at, is said to be mutawātir in meaning.

(2) The second kind of hadīth is Mashhoor. This term is defined by the scholars of hadīth as follows:

“A hadīth which is not mutawātir, but its narrators are not less than three in any generation.” [Tadreeb-ur-Rāwi by Suyuti]

The same term is also used by the scholars of fiqh, but their definition is slightly different. They say,

“A mashhoor hadīth is one which was not mutawātir in the generation of the Holy Companions, but became mutawātir immediately after them.” [Usool of Sarkhasi]

The mashhoor hadīth according to each definition falls in the second category following the mutawātir.

(3) Khabar-ul-Wahid. It is a hadīth whose narrators are less than three in any given generation.

Let us now examine each kind separately.

The Authenticity of the First Two Kinds

As for the mutawātir, nobody can question its authenticity. The fact narrated by a mutawātir chain is always accepted as an absolute truth even if pertaining to our daily life. Any statement based on a mutawātir narration must be accepted by everyone without any hesitation. I have never seen the city of Moscow, but the fact that Moscow is a large city and is the capital of U.S.S.R. is an absolute truth which cannot be denied. This fact is proved, to me, by a large number of narrators who have seen the city. This is a continuously narrated, or a mutawātir, fact which cannot be denied or questioned.

I have not seen the events of the First and the Second World War. But the fact that these two wars occurred stands proved without a shadow of doubt on the basis of the mutawātir reports about them. Nobody with a sound sense can claim that all those who reported the occurrence of these two wars have colluded to coin a fallacious report and that no war took place at all. This strong belief in the factum of war is based on the mutawātir reports of the event.

In the same way the mutawātir reports about the sunnah of the Holy Prophet are to be held as absolutely true without any iota of doubt in their authenticity. The authenticity of the Holy Qur'ān being the same Book as that revealed to the Holy Prophet is of the same nature. Thus, the mutawātir ahādīth, whether they be mutawātir in words or in meaning, are as authentic as the Holy Qur'ān, and there is no difference between the two in as far as the reliability of their source of narration is concerned.

Although the ahādīth falling under the first category of the mutawātir, i.e. the mutawātir in words, are very few in number, yet the ahādīth relating to the second kind, namely the mutawātir in meaning, are available in large numbers. Thus, a very sizeable portion of the sunnah of the Holy Prophet falls in this kind of mutawātir, the authenticity of which cannot be doubted in any manner.

As for the second kind, i.e. the mashhoor, its standard of authenticity is lower than that of the mutawātir; yet, it is sufficient to provide satisfaction about the correctness of the narration because its narrators have been more than three trustworthy persons in every generation.

The third kind is khabar-ul-wahid. The authenticity of this kind depends on the veracity of its narrators. If the narrator is trustworthy in all respects, the report given by him can be accepted, but if the single reporter is believed to be doubtful, the entire report subsequently remains doubtful. This principle is followed in every sphere of life.

Why should it not be applied to the reports about the sunnah of the Holy Prophet? Rather, in the case of ahādīth, this principle is most applicable, because the reporters of ahādīth were fully cognizant of the delicate nature of what they narrate.

It was not simple news of an ordinary event having no legal or religious effect. It was the narration of a fact which has a far-reaching effect on the lives of millions of people. The reporters of ahādīth knew well that it is not a play to ascribe a word or act to the Holy Prophet. Any deliberate error in this narration, or any negligence in this respect would lead them to the wrath of Allāh and render them liable to be punished in hell. Every reporter of hadīth was aware of the following well-known mutawātir hadīth:

Whoever intentionally attributes a lie against me, should prepare his seat in the Fire.

This hadīth had created such a strong sense of responsibility in the hearts of the narrators of ahādīth that while reporting anything about the Holy

Prophet they often turned pale out of fear, lest some error should creep into their narration.

This was the basic reason for which the responsible narrator of ahādīth showed the maximum precaution in preserving and reporting a hadīth. This standard of precaution cannot be found in any other reports of historical events. So, the principle that the veracity of a report depends on the nature of its reporter is far more validly applicable to the reports of ahādīth than it is applicable to the general reports of ordinary nature.

Let us now examine the various ways adopted by the ummah to preserve the ahādīth in their original form.

Different Ways of Ahādīth Preservation

As we shall later see, the companions of the Holy Prophet reduced a large number of ahādīth in writing. Yet, writing was not the sole means of their preservation. There were many other ways.

1. Memorization

First of all, the companions of the Holy Prophet used to learn ahādīth by heart. The Holy Prophet has said:

May Allah bestow vigor to a person who hears my saying and learns it by heart and then conveys it to others exactly as he hears it.

The companions of the Holy Prophet were eager to follow this hadīth and used to devote considerable time for committing ahādīth to their memories. A large number of them left their homes and began to live in the Mosque of the Holy Prophet so that they may hear the ahādīth directly from the mouth of the Holy Prophet. They spent all their time exclusively in securing the ahādīth in their hearts. They are called Ashāb as-Suffah.

The Arabs had such strong memories that they would easily memorize hundreds of verses of their poetry. Nearly all of them knew by heart detailed pedigrees of not only themselves, but also of their horses and camels. Even their children had enough knowledge of the pedigrees of different tribes. Hammād is a famous narrator of Arab poetry. It is reported that he knew by heart one hundred long poems for each letter of the alphabet, meaning thereby that he knew three thousand and thirty-eight long poems [al-A'lam by Zrikli 2:131].

The Arabs were so proud of their memory power that they placed more of their confidence on it than on writing. Some poets deemed it a blemish to

preserve their poetry in writing. They believed that writings on papers can be tampered with, while the memory cannot be distorted by anyone. If any poets have written some of their poems, they did not like to disclose this fact, because it would be indicative of a defect in their memory [See al-Aghani 61:611].

The companions of the Holy Prophet utilized this memory for preserving ahādīth which they deemed to be the only source of guidance after the Holy Qurʾān. It is obvious that their enthusiasm towards the preservation of ahādīth far exceeded their zeal for preserving their poetry and literature. They therefore used their memory in respect of ahādīth with more vigor and more precaution.

SayyidunaʿAbuʿ Hurairah, the famous companion of the Holy Prophet, who has reported 5,374 ahādīth, says:

I have divided my night into three parts: In one third of the night I perform prayer, in one third I sleep and in one third I memorize the ahādīth of the Holy Prophet. [Sunan ad-Dārimi]

SayyidunaʿAbuʿ Hurairah, after embracing Islaḡm, devoted his life exclusively for learning the ahādīth. He has reported more ahādīth than any other companion of the Holy Prophet.

Once, Marwaḡn, the governor of Madīnah, tried to test his memory. He invited him to his house where he asked him to narrate some ahādīth. Marwaḡn simultaneously ordered his scribe, Abu Zuʿaiziʿah, to sit behind a curtain and write the ahādīth reported by Abuʿ Hurairah. The scribe noted the ahādīth. After a year, he invited Abuʿ Hurairah again and requested him to repeat what he had narrated last year, and likewise ordered Abu Zuʿaiziʿah to sit behind a curtain and compare the present words of Abuʿ Hurairah with the ahādīth he had already written previously. SayyidunaʿAbuʿ Hurairah began to repeat the ahādīth while Abu Zuʿaiziʿah compared them. He found that Abuʿ Hurairah did not leave a single word, nor did he change any word from his earlier narrations [al-Bidaʿyah wan-Nihāyah and Siyar al-Aʿlāḡm of Dhahabi].

Numerous other examples of this type are available in the history of the science of hadīth which clearly show that the ahādīth reporters have used their extraordinary memory power given to them by Allaḡh Almighty for preserving the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, as promised by Him in the Holy Qurʾān.

As we shall later see, scholars of the science of hadīth developed the science of Asmaʿur-Rijaḡl by which they have deduced reliable means to test the memory power of each narrator of ahādīth. They never accepted any

hadīth as reliable unless all of its narrators were proved to have high memory standards.

Thus, “memory power” in the science of hadīth is not a vague term of general nature. It is a technical term having specified criteria to test the veracity of narrators. A great number of scholars of the sciences of *Asmā'ur-Rijāl* and *Jarh wa Ta'dīl* have devoted their lives to examine the reporters of hadīth on that criteria. Their task was to judge the memory power of each narrator and to record objective opinions about them.

Memories of the ahādīth reporters cannot be compared with the memory of a layman today who witnesses an event or hears some news and conveys it to others in a careless manner seldom paying attention to the correctness of his narration.

The following points in this respect are worth mentioning:

1. The reporters of ahādīth were fully cognizant of the great importance and the delicate nature of what they intended to report. They wholeheartedly believed that any misstatement or negligent reporting in this field would cause them to be condemned both in this world and in the Hereafter. This belief equipped them with a very strong sense of responsibility. It is evident that such a strong sense of responsibility makes a reporter more accurate in his reports.

A newsman reporting an accident of a common nature in which common people are involved, can report its details with less accuracy. But if the accident involves the President or the Prime Minister of his country, he will certainly show more diligence, precaution and shall employ his best ability to report the incident as accurately as possible.

The reporter is the same, but in the second case he is more accurate in his report than he was in the first case, because the nature of the incident has made him more responsible, hence more cautious.

It cannot be denied that the companions of the Holy Prophet, their pupils, and other reliable narrators of ahādīth believed with their heart and soul that the importance of a hadīth attributed to the Holy Prophet exceeds the importance of any other report whatsoever. They believed that it is a source of Islāmic law which will govern the Umāh for all times to come.

They believed that any negligence in this respect will lead them to the severe punishment of hell. So, their sense of responsibility while reporting ahādīth was far higher than that of a newsman reporting an important incident about the head of his country.

2. The interest of the reporter in the reported events and his ability to understand them correctly is another important factor which affects the accuracy of his report. If the reporter is indifferent or negligent about what he reports, little reliability can be placed on his memory or on any subsequent report based on it. But if the reporter is not only honest, serious, and intelligent but also interested and involved in the event, his report can easily be relied upon.

If some proceedings are going on in a court of law, the reports of these proceedings can be of different kinds. One report was given by a layman from the audience who was incidentally present at the court. He had neither any interest in the proceedings nor had due knowledge and understanding of the legal issues involved.

He gathered a sketchy picture of the proceedings and reported it to a third person. Such a report can neither be relied upon nor taken as an authentic version of the proceedings. This report may be full of errors because the reporter lacks the ability to understand the matter correctly and the responsible attitude to report it accurately. Such a reporter may not only err in his reporting, but may after some time also forget the proceedings altogether.

Suppose there are some newsmen also who have witnessed the proceedings for the purpose of reporting them in their newspapers. They have more knowledge and understanding than a layman of the first kind. Their report shall be more correct than that of the former. But despite their interest and intelligence, they are not fully aware of the technical and legal questions involved in the proceedings.

Their report shall thus remain deficient in the legal aspect of the proceedings and cannot be relied upon to that extent because despite their good memory, they cannot grasp the legal issues completely.

There were also lawyers who were directly involved in the proceedings. They participated in the debate at the bar. They have argued the case. They were fully aware of the delicate legal issues involved. They understood each and every sentence expressed by other lawyers and the judge.

It is obvious that the report of the proceedings given by these lawyers shall be the most authentic one. Having full knowledge and understanding of the case they can neither forget nor err while reporting the substantial and material parts of the proceedings.

Suppose all the three categories had the same standard of memory power. Yet, the facts narrated by them have different levels of correctness. It shows that the interest of the reporter in the reported event and his

understanding of the facts involved plays an important role in making his memory more effective and accurate.

The deep interest of the companions of the Holy Prophet in his sayings and acts, rather even in his gestures, is beyond any doubt. Their understanding of what he said, and their close knowledge and observation of the background and the environment under which he spoke or acted cannot be questioned. Thus, all the basic factors which help mobilize one's memory were present in them.

3. The standard of memory power required for the authenticity of a report is not, as mentioned earlier, a vague concept for which no specific criteria exist. The scholars of the Science of hadīth have laid down hard and fast rules to ascertain the memory standard of each reporter. Unless a reporter of a hadīth has specific standards of memory, his reports are not accepted as reliable.

4. There is a big difference between memorizing a fact which incidentally came to the knowledge of someone who never cared to remember it any more, and the memorizing of a fact which is learnt by someone with eagerness, with an objective purpose to remember it and with a constant effort to keep it in memory.

While I studied Arabic, my teacher told me many things which I do not remember today. But the vocabulary I learnt from my teacher is secured in my mind. The reason is obvious. I never cared to keep the former remembered, while I was very much eager to learn the latter by heart and to store it in my memory.

The companions of the Holy Prophet did not listen to him incidentally nor were they careless in remembering what they heard. Instead, they daily spared specific times for learning the ahādīth by heart. The example of Abū Hurairah has already been cited. He used to spare one third of every night in repeating the ahādīth he learnt from the Holy Prophet.

Thus, memorization was not a weaker source of preservation of ahādīth, as is sometimes presumed by those who have no proper knowledge of the science of hadīth. Looked at in its true perspective, the memories of the reliable reporters of ahādīth were no less reliable a source of preservation than compiling the ahādīth in book form.

2. Discussions

The second source of preservation of ahādīth was by mutual discussions held by the companions of the Holy Prophet. Whenever they came to know of a new sunnah, they used to narrate it to others. Thus, all the companions

would tell each other what they **learned** from the Holy Prophet. This was to comply with the specific directions given by the Holy Prophet in this respect. Here are some ahādīth to this effect:

Those present should convey (my sunnah) to those absent [Bukhari].

Convey to others on my behalf, even though it be a single verse [Bukhari].

May Allah grant vigor to a person who listens to my saying and learns it by heart until he conveys it to others [Tirmidhi, Abu Dāwūd].

You hear (my sayings) and others will hear from you, then others will hear from them [Abu Dāwūd].

A Muslim cannot offer his brother a better benefit than transmitting to him a good hadīth which has reached him [Jāmi'-ul-Bayān of Ibn 'Abdul Barr].

These directions given by the Holy Prophet were more than sufficient to induce his companions towards acquiring the knowledge of ahādīth and to convey them to others.

The Holy Prophet also motivated his companions to study the ahādīth in their meetings. The word used for this study is Tadarus which means “to teach each other.” One person would narrate a particular hadīth to the other who, in turn, would repeat it to the first, and so on. The purpose was to learn it correctly.

Each one would listen to the other's version and correct his mistake, if any. The result of this tadarus (discussion) was to remember the ahādīth as firmly as possible. The Holy Prophet has held this described process of tadarus to be more meritorious with Allah than the individual worship throughout the night. He has said:

Tadarus of knowledge (the word “knowledge” in the era of Nabī was used to connote knowledge relative to the Holy Qur'ān and the hadīth) for any period of time in the night is better than spending the entire night in worship [Jāmi'-ul-Bayān].

Moreover, the Holy Prophet has also warned, that it is a major sin to hide a word of “knowledge” whenever it is asked for:

Whoever is questioned pertaining to such knowledge that he has and thereafter conceals it, will be bridled by a rein of fire [Tirmidhi].

At another occasion, the Holy Prophet disclosed that concealment of “knowledge” is in itself a major sin, even though the person having that knowledge is not asked about it. He said:

Whoever conceals knowledge which can be benefited from, will come on Doom-day bridled with a bridle of fire [Jāmi’-ul-Bayān].

The hadīth makes it clear that the disclosure of knowledge is an inherent obligation on each knowledgeable person, no matter whether he is asked about it or not.

As the knowledge of the sunnah of the Holy Prophet was the highest branch of knowledge in the eyes of his companions, they deemed it an indispensable obligation on their shoulders to convey to others what they knew of the sunnah.

Thus, it was the most favorite hobby of the companions of the Holy Prophet whenever they sat together, instead of being involved in useless talks, to discuss his sayings and acts. Each of them would mention what he knew while the others would listen and try to learn it by heart.

These frequent discussions have played an important role in the preservation of the Sunnah. It was by the virtue of these discussions that the ahādīth known only by some individuals were conveyed to others, and the circle of narrators was gradually enlarged. Since these discussions were carried out at a time when the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) was himself present among them, they had the full opportunity to confirm the veracity of what has been conveyed to them in this process, and some of them actually did so.

The result was that the knowledge of ahādīth acquired a wide range among the companions, which not only helped in spreading the knowledge of Sunnah but also provided a check on the mistakes of narrations, because if someone forgets some part of a hadīth, the others were present to fill in the gap and to correct the error.

3. Practice

The third way of preservation of the Sunnah was to bring it into practice.

The knowledge of Sunnah was not merely a theoretical knowledge, nor were the teachings of the Holy Prophet merely philosophical. They related to practical life. The Holy Prophet did not confine himself to giving lessons and sermons only, he also trained his companions practically.

Whatever they learnt from the Holy Prophet they spared no effort to bring it into actual practice. Each companion was so enthusiastic in practicing the

Sunnah of the Holy Prophet that he tried his best to imitate even his personal habits.

Thus the whole atmosphere was one of following the Sunnah. The Sunnah was not a verbal report only, it was a living practice, a widespread behavior and a current fashion demonstrating itself everywhere in the society, in all the affairs of their daily life.

If a student of mathematics confines himself with remembering the formulas orally, he is likely to forget them after a lapse of time, but if he brings them in practice, ten times a day, he shall never forget them.

Likewise, the Sunnah was not an oral service carried out by the companions. They brought it into their daily practice. The Sunnah was the center of gravity for all their activities. How could they forget the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet around which they built the structure of their whole lives?

Thus, constant practice in accordance with the dictates of the Sunnah was another major factor which advanced the process of preserving the Sunnah and protected it from the foreign elements aiming at its distortion.

4. Writing

The fourth way of preserving of ahādīth was writing. Quite a large number of the companions of the Holy Prophet reduced the ahādīth to writing after hearing them from the Holy Prophet.

It is true that in the beginning the Holy Prophet had forbidden some of his companions from writing anything other than the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. However, this prohibition was not because the ahādīth had no authoritative value, but because the Holy Prophet had in the same breath ordered them to narrate his ahādīth orally.

The full text of the relevant hadīth is as follows:

Do not write (what you hear) from me, and whoever has written something (he heard) from me, he should erase it. Narrate to others (what you hear) from me; and whoever deliberately attributes a lie to me, he should prepare his seat in the Fire.” [Sahih Muslim]

The underlined phrase of the hadīth clarifies that prohibition for writing hadīth was not on account of negating its authority. The actual reason was that in the beginning of the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān, the companions

of the Holy Prophet were not fully familiar with the Qur'ānic style, nor was the Holy Qur'ān compiled in a separate book form.

In those days some companions began to write the ahādīth along with the Qur'ānic text. Some explanations of the Holy Qur'ān given by the Holy Prophet were written by some of them mixed with the Qur'ānic verses without any distinction between the two. It was therefore feared that it would lead to confuse the Qur'ānic text with the ahādīth.

It was in this background that the Holy Prophet stopped this practice and ordered that anything written other than the Holy Qur'ān should be rubbed or omitted. It should be kept in mind that in those days there was a great shortage of writing paper. Even the verses of the Holy Qur'ān used to be written on pieces of leather, on planks of wood, on animal bones and sometimes on stones.

It was much difficult to compile all those things in a book form, and if the ahādīth were also written in the like manner it would be more difficult to distinguish between the writings of the Holy Qur'ān and those of the ahādīth. The lack of familiarity with the Qur'ānic style would also help creating confusion.

For these reasons the Holy Prophet directed his companions to abstain from writing the ahādīth and to confine their preservation to the first three ways which were equally reliable as discussed earlier.

But all this was in the earlier period of his prophethood. When the companions became fully conversant of the style of the Holy Qur'ān and writing paper became available, this transitory measure of precaution was taken back, because the danger of confusion between the Qur'ān and the hadīth no longer existed.

At this stage, the Holy Prophet himself directed his companions to write down the ahādīth. Some of his instructions in this respect are quoted below:

1. One companion from the Ansār complained to the Holy Prophet that he hears from him some ahādīth, but he sometimes forgets them. The Holy Prophet said:

“Seek help from your right hand,” and pointed out to a writing. [Jāmi' Tirmidhi]

2. Rāfi' ibn Khadij, the famous companion of the Holy Prophet says, “I said to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) [that] we hear from you many things, should we write them down?” He replied:

You may write. There is no harm. [Tadrīb-ur-Rāwi]

3. Sayyiduna Anas reports that the Holy Prophet has said:

Preserve knowledge by writing. [Jāmi'-ul-Bayān]

4. Sayyiduna Abu Rāfi' sought permission from the Holy Prophet to write ahādīth. The Holy Prophet permitted him to do so. [Jāmi' Tirmidhi]

It is reported that the ahādīth written by Abu Rāfi' were copied by other companions too. Salma, a pupil of Ibn 'Abbās says:

I saw some small wooden boards with 'Abūullāh Ibn 'Abbās. He was writing on them some reports of the acts of the Holy Prophet which he acquired from Abu Rāfi'. [Tabaqāt Ibn Sa'd]

5. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas reports that the Holy Prophet said to him:

Preserve knowledge.

He asked, "and how should it be preserved?" The Holy Prophet replied, "by writing it." [Mustadrik Hākim; Jāmi'-ul-Bayān]

In another report he says, "I came to the Holy Prophet and told him, 'I want to narrate your ahādīth. So, I want to take assistance of my handwriting besides my heart. Do you deem it fit for me?' The Holy Prophet replied, 'If it is my hadīth you may seek help from your hand besides your heart.'" [Sunan Dārimi]

6. It was for this reason that he used to write ahādīth frequently. He himself says,

I used to write whatever I heard from the Holy Prophet and wanted to learn it by heart. Some people of the Quraysh dissuaded me and said, "Do you write everything you hear from the Holy Prophet, while he is a human being and sometimes he may be in anger as any other human beings may be?" [Sunan Abu Dāwūd]

They meant that the Holy Prophet might say something in a state of anger which he did not seriously intend. So, one should be selective in writing his ahādīth. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr conveyed their opinion to the Holy Prophet. In reply, the Holy Prophet pointed to his lips and said,

I swear by the One in whose hands is the soul of Muhammad: nothing comes out from these two (lips) except truth. So, do write. [Sunan Abu Dāwud; Tabaqāt ibn Sa’d; Mustadrik-ul-Hakim]

It was a clear and absolute order given by the Holy Prophet to write each and every saying of his without any hesitation or doubt about its authoritative nature.

In compliance to this order, ‘Abduḷlah ibn ‘Amr wrote a large number of ahādīth and compiled them in a book form which he named, “al-Sahīfah al-Sadiqah.” Some details about this book shall be discussed later on, inshā-Allāh.

7. During the conquest of Makkah (8 A.H.), the Holy Prophet delivered a detailed sermon containing a number of Sharīah imperatives, including human rights. One Yemenite person from the gathering, namely, Abu Shah, requested the Holy Prophet to provide him the sermon in a written form. The Holy Prophet thereafter ordered his companions as follows:

Write it down for Abu Shaḥ. [Sahīh-ul-Bukhārī]

These seven examples are more than sufficient to prove that the writing of ahādīth was not only permitted but also ordered by the Holy Prophet and that the earlier bar against writing was only for a transitory period to avoid any possible confusion between the verses of the Holy Qur’ān and the ahādīth. After this transitory period the fear of confusion ended, the bar was lifted and the companions were persuaded to preserve ahādīth in a written form.

The Compilation of Hadīth in the Days of the Holy Prophet

We have discussed the different methods undertaken by the companions of the Holy Prophet to preserve the ahādīth. An objective study of these methods would prove that although ‘writing’ was not the sole method of their preservation, yet it was never neglected in this process. Inspired by the Holy Prophet himself, a large number of his companions used to secure the ahādīth in written form.

When we study individual efforts of the companions for compiling ahādīth, we find that thousands of ahādīth were written in the very days of the Holy Prophet and his four Caliphs. It is not possible to give an exhaustive survey of these efforts, for it will require a separate voluminous book on the subject which is not intended here. Nevertheless, we propose to give a brief account of some outstanding compilations of ahādīth in that early period. It

will, at least, refute the misconception that the ahādīth were not compiled during the first three centuries.

The Dictations of the Holy Prophet

To be in with, we would refer to the fact that a considerable number of ahādīth were dictated and directed to be secured in written form by the Holy Prophet himself. Here are some examples:

The Book of Sadaqah

The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) has dictated detailed documents containing rules of Sharī'ah about the levy of Zakāh, and specifying the quantum and the rate of Zakāh in respect of different Zakāt-able assets. This document was named "Kitāb as-Sadaqah" (The Book of Sadaqah). 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar says,

The Holy Prophet dictated the Book of Sadaqah and was yet to send it to his governors when he passed away. He had attached it to his sword. When he passed away, Abu Bakr acted according to it till he passed away, then 'Umar acted according to it till he passed away. It was mentioned in his book that one goat is leviable on five camels. [Jāmi' Tirmidhi]

The text of this document is available in several books of ahādīth like the Sunan of Abu Dāwūd. Imām Zuhri, the renowned scholar of hadīth, used to teach this document to his pupils. He used to say:

This is the text of the document dictated by the Holy Prophet about the rules of Sadaqah (Zakāh). Its original manuscript is with the children of Sayyiduna 'Umar. Salim, the grandson of 'Umar had taught it to me. I had learnt it by heart. 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-Azīz had procured a copy of this text from Salim and 'Abdullah, the grandsons of 'Umar. I have the same copy with me. [Sunan Abu Dāwūd]

The Script of 'Amr ibn Hazm

In 10 A.H., when Najran was conquered by the Muslims, the Holy Prophet appointed his companion, 'Amr ibn Hazm as governor of the province of Yemen. At this time the Holy Prophet dictated a detailed book to Ubayy ibn Ka'b and handed it over to 'Amr ibn Hazm.

This book, besides some general advices, contained the rules of Sharī'ah about purification, salah, zakāh, 'ushr, hajj, 'umrah, jihād (battle), spoils, taxes, diyah (blood money), administration, education, etc.

Sayyiduna ‘Amr ibn Hazm performed his functions as governor of Yemen in the light of this book. After his demise this document remained with his grandson, Abu Bakr. Ima‘n Zuhri learnt and copied it from him. He used to teach it to his pupils. [Certain extracts of this book are found in the works of hadith. For the full text see, al-Watha‘iq as-Saya‘siyyah fil-Islam by Dr. Hamidullah.]

Written Directives to Other Governors

Similarly, when the Holy Prophet appointed some of his companions as governors of different provinces he used to dictate to them similar documents as his directives which they could follow in performing their duties as rulers or as judges. When he appointed Abu Hurairah and Ala ibn al-Hazrami as his envoy to the Zoroastrians of Hajar, he dictated to them a directive containing certain rules of Shari‘ah about Zakah and ‘Ushr. [Tabaqat Ibn Sa‘d]

Likewise, when he sent Mu‘adh ibn Jabal and Malik ibn Murarah to Yemen, he gave them a document dictated by him which contained certain rules of Shari‘ah. [ibid]

Written Directives for Certain Delegations

Certain Arab tribes who lived in remote areas far from Madinah, after embracing Islam used to send their delegations to the Holy Prophet. These delegations used to stay at Madinah for a considerable period during which they would learn the teachings of Islam, read the Holy Qur‘an and listen to the sayings of the Holy Prophet. When they returned to their homes, some of them requested the Holy Prophet to dictate some instructions for them and for their tribes.

The Holy Prophet used to accept this request and would dictate some directives containing such rules of Shari‘ah as they most needed.

1. Sayyiduna Wa‘il ibn Hujr came from Yemen and before leaving for home, requested the Holy Prophet :

Write me a book addressed to my tribe.

The Holy Prophet dictated three documents to Sayyiduna Mu‘awiyah. One of these documents pertained to personal problems of Wa‘il ibn Hujr, while the other two consisted of certain general precepts of Shari‘ah concerning Salah, Zakah, prohibition of liquor, usury, and certain other matters. [ibid]

2. Munqiz ibn Hayyan, a member of the tribe of Abdul-Qais, came to the Holy Prophet and embraced Islām. While returning home he was given a written document by the Holy Prophet which he carried to his tribe but initially he did not disclose it to anyone. When, due to his efforts, his father-in-law embraced Islām, he handed over the document to him who in turn read it before his tribe which subsequently embraced Islām. It was after this that the famous delegation of Abdul-Qais came to the Holy Prophet. The detailed narration is found in the books of Bukhāri and Muslim. [Mirqat Sharh Mishkaṭ; Sharh an-Nawawi]

3. The delegation of the tribe of Ghamid came to the Holy Prophet and embraced Islām. The Holy Prophet sent them to Sayyiduna Ubayy ibn Ka'b who taught them the Holy Qur'ān and:

the Holy Prophet dictated for them a book containing injunctions of Islām. [Tabaqāt Ibn Sa'd]

4. The delegation of the tribe of Khath'am came to the Holy Prophet. While discussing their arrival Ibn Sa'd reports on the authority of different reliable narrators:

They said, "We believe in Allāh, His messenger and in whatever has come from Allāh. So, write for us a document that we may follow." The Holy Prophet wrote for them a document. Jarir ibn 'Abdullāh and those present stood as witnesses to that document. [ibid]

5. The delegation of the tribes of Sumalah and Huddan came after the conquest of Makkah. They embraced Islām. The Holy Prophet dictated for them a document containing Islāmic injunctions about Zakāh. Sayyiduna Thābit ibn Qais had written the document and Sa'd ibn Ubādah and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah stood as witnesses. [ibid]

6. The same Thābit ibn Qais also wrote a document dictated by the Holy Prophet for the delegation of the tribe of Aslam. The witnesses were Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah and 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb.

These are only a few examples which are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. Many other instances of the same nature are found in only one book, namely the Tabaqāt of Ibn Sa'd. A thorough research in all the relevant books would certainly expose a large number of like events for which a more detailed book is required.

All these examples refer to those events only where the Holy Prophet dictated documents containing general Islāmic injunctions. He has also dictated numerous official documents in individual cases. The large

number of such documents prevents us from providing even a short reference to all of them in this brief study.

All these documents also form part of the Sunnah and a large number of Islāmic injunctions are inferred from them. In brevity, we instead would only refer to a work of Dr. Muhammad Hamīdullah, namely, *al-Wathā'iq as-Siyāsiyyah*, in which he has compiled a considerable number of such documents. Those who desire further study may peruse the same.

The Compilations of Hadīth by the Companions of the Holy Prophet

As discussed earlier, the Holy Prophet has not only permitted but also persuaded his companions to write down his ahādīth. In pursuance of this direction, the blessed companions of the Holy Prophet used to write ahādīth, and a considerable number of them have compiled these writings in book forms. Some examples are given below.

The Scripts of Abu Hurairah

It is well-known that Abu Hurairah has narrated more ahādīth than any other companion of the Holy Prophet. The number of ahādīth reported by him is said to be 5374. The reason was that he, after embracing Islām, devoted his full life for the sole purpose of bearing and preserving the ahādīth of the Holy Prophet. Unlike the other famous companions, he did not employ himself in any economic activity. He used to remain in the mosque of the Holy Prophet to hear what he said and to witness each event around him. He remained hungry, faced starvations and hardships. Yet, he did not leave the function he had undertaken.

There are concrete evidences that he had preserved the ahādīth in written form. One of his pupils, namely, Hasan ibn 'Amr reports that once:

Abu Hurairah took him to his home and showed him “many books” containing the ahādīth of the Holy Prophet. [Jāmi' Bayān-ul-'Ilm; Fath-ul-Bāri]

It shows that Abu Hurairah had many scripts of ahādīth with him. It is also established that a number of his pupils had prepared several scripts of his narrations.

The Script of 'Abdullahi ibn 'Amr

It has been stated earlier that 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr was specifically instructed by the Holy Prophet to write ahādīth. He therefore compiled a big script and named it “*As-Sahīfah as-Sādiqah*” (The script of truth).

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr was very precautionary in preserving this script. Mujahid, one of his favorite pupils says, “I went to ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr and took in hand a script placed beneath his cushion. He stopped me. I said, ‘You never save anything from me.’ He replied:

This is the Saḍiqah (the Script of Truth). It is what I heard from the Holy Prophet. No other narrator intervenes between him and myself. If this script, the Book of Allāh, and wahaz (his agricultural land) are secured for me, I would never care about the rest of the world. [Jāmi’ Bayaḥ-ul-‘Ilm]

This script remained with his children. His grandson, ‘Amr ibn Shu’aib used to teach the ahādīth contained in it. Yahyā ibn Ma’in and ‘Ali ibn al-Madini have said that every tradition reported by ‘Amr ibn Shu’aib in any book of hadīth has been taken from this script [Tahdhīb at-Tahdhīb]. Ibn al-Aḥir says that this script contained one thousand ahādīth. [Asad-ul-Ghabah]

The Script of Anas

Sayyiduna Anas ibn Mālik was one of those companions of the Holy Prophet who knew writing. His mother had brought him to the Holy Prophet when he was ten years old. He remained in the service of the Holy Prophet for ten years during which he heard a large number of ahādīth and wrote them down. Sa’īd ibn Hilal, one of his pupils, says,

When we insisted upon Anas, may Allāh be pleased with him, he would bring to us some notebooks and say, “These are what I have heard and written from the Holy Prophet, after which I have presented them to the Holy Prophet for confirmation. [Mustadrik Hākim]

It shows that Sayyiduna Anas had not only written a large number of ahādīth in several notebooks, but had also showed them to the Holy Prophet who had confirmed them.

The Script of ‘Ali

It is well known that Sayyiduna ‘Ali had a script of ahādīth with him. He says,

I have not written anything from the Holy Prophet except the Holy Qur’ān and what is contained in this script. [Sahīh Bukhāri- Book of Jihad]

Imām Bukhāri has mentioned this script at six different places of his Sahīh. A combined study of all those places reveals that this script was substantially large and it consisted of ahādīth about qisās (retaliation), diyah (blood money), fidyah (ransom), rights of the non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state, some specific kinds of inheritance, zakāh rules pertaining

to camels of different ages, and some rules about the sanctity of the city of Madīnah.

The script was written by Sayyiduna ‘Ali in the days of the Holy Prophet. Then, in the days of his khilāfah (rule), he felt that the ahādīth of the Holy Prophet should be spread among the people to widen the range of Islamic knowledge and to refute certain misguided ideas prevalent in those days.

It is reported by the famous historian Ibn Sa’d that he stood in the mosque and delivered a lecture. Then he asked the people,

“Who will purchase ‘knowledge’ for one dirham only?”

He meant that whoever wanted to learn ahādīth, should buy writing paper for one dirham and come to him, for dictation of the ahādīth of the Holy Prophet.

It is reported that Hārith al-A’war bought some paper and came to him:

So, (‘Ali) wrote for him a lot of knowledge. [Tabaqāt Ibn Sa’d]

It should be kept in mind that the word “knowledge” in the early centuries of Islamic history was used for the knowledge of ahādīth only. [ibid]

Scripts of Jābir

Jābir ibn ‘Abdullah is one of the famous companions of the Holy Prophet who has narrated a large number of ahādīth. It is established that he had compiled the ahādīth in two scripts. One of them contained a detailed account of the last Hajj performed by the Holy Prophet. The full text of this script is found in the Sahīh of Muslim wherein he has described even the minute details of the last Hajj. [Sahīh Muslim- Book of Hajj. Dhahabi says that this is a replica of Jābir’s script.]

His second script contained other ahādīth relating to different subjects.

Qatādah, the famous pupil of Jābir, says,

I remember the script of Jābir more than I remember Surah al-Baqarah (of the Holy Qur’ān). [Tahdhīb at-Tahdhīb]

Reference to this script is also found in the Musanīf of ‘Abdurrazzaq where some ahādīth of this script are reported.

Scripts of Ibn ‘Abbās

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abba’s was the cousin of the Holy Prophet. When the Holy Prophet passed away, he was yet very young. In order to preserve ahādīth, he began to compile what he himself heard from the Holy Prophet as well as those narrated by other companions. Whenever he came to know of any companion having some ahādīth, he would travel to him to hear them.

All such ahādīth were compiled by him in several scripts. These scripts numbered so many that they could be loaded on a camel. These scripts remained with his pupil Kuraib. Musa ibn ‘Uqbah, the famous historian, says:

Kuraib left with us a camel load of Ibn ‘Abba’s’s books. When ‘Ali ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abba’s would need any book from them, he wrote to Kuraib, ‘Send to me such and such books.’ He would then transcribe the book and send to him one of the two copies. [Tabaqat Ibn Sa’d]

The pupils of Ibn ‘Abba’s would copy these scripts and read them over to him to confirm the correctness of the copies. [Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi]

Sometimes Ibn ‘Abba’s would narrate the ahādīth to his pupils while they would record them. [Sunan Dārimi]

These are only a few examples of efforts made by the companions of the Holy Prophet for the compilation of ahādīth. We do not intend here to present an exhaustive survey of such efforts. Detailed books can be consulted for this purpose. Our purpose here was to give only some examples. These concrete examples are more than sufficient to refute the fallacious assumption that the ahādīth were never written in the days of the Holy Prophet and his companions.

The Compilation of Ahādīth in the Era After the Companions

The history of the compilation of ahādīth after the companions is even more vast and detailed. Each companion who narrated the ahādīth had a large number of pupils who compiled what they heard from him. The pupils of the companions are called “Tabi’īn.”

The compilations of the Tabi’īn were generally not arranged subject wise, though some of them have arranged the ahādīth under subjective headings. The first known book of hadīth which is so arranged is Al-Abwab of Imām Sha’bi (19-103 A.H.). This book was divided into various chapters. Each chapter contained the ahādīth relating to the same subject like salah, zakah, etc.

This proves that the first book of ahādīth arranged in a regular manner appeared in the very first century. Another book was written by Hasan al-Basri (d.110) in which he compiled ahādīth containing any explanations or

commentaries of the Holy Qur'ân [Tadrīb ar-Râwi]. This was also a regular book written on a particular subject which appeared in the first century.

In the era of the Tabi'în the compilation of ahâdîth was undertaken officially by the famous khalīfah, 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-Azīz (99-101 A.H.). He issued an official order to all governors under his domain that they should gather the knowledgeable persons from among the companions of the Holy Prophet and their pupils and write down the ahâdîth found with them [Fath al-Bâri].

The result of this official decree was that several books of ahâdîth were prepared and spread all over the country. Ibn Shihâb az-Zuhri was one of the pioneers of the compilation of hadîth in this period. He has written a number of books.

All these books and scripts written in this period were afterwards included in the larger books of hadîth written later on, as is usual in the evolution of every science. The separate entity of these books and scripts, being uncalled for, was not much attended to. Thus, the larger books written in the second and third centuries gradually took their place, and being more comprehensive, detailed, and sufficient, they were so widely spread and studied that the books of the Tabi'în no longer remained on the scene.

However, some manuscripts of these books were preserved. Later books were compared and confirmed by such preserved manuscripts.

One of the books written in the days of the Tabi'în was the script of Hammam ibn Munabbih, a pupil of Abu Hurairah, who prepared a book containing ahâdîth he heard from Abu Hurairah. This book is also known as "As-Sahifah as-Sahihah." All the ahâdîth of this book were included in later compilations. The full text of it is also found in the Musnad of Imâm Ahmad. The original script of this book was thus not attended to and was lost for a considerable time.

In 1373 A.H. (1954 C.E.), two manuscripts of this book were discovered in the libraries of Berlin and Damascus, and were published by Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah with a detailed introduction.

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah edited these manuscripts which were written centuries ago. He has also compared their text with the one narrated in the Musnad of Imâm Ahmad. He could not find any material difference between the two texts. There are a few very minor differences of negligible words which always exist between two manuscripts of the same book.

It proves that the books of the Tabi'īn were included and were thus made part of the later books of hadīth, with all necessary precautions by which they can safely be relied upon.

The Compilations of the First Century

We present here a list of hadīth works written by the Tabi'īn in the first and second centuries. In the first century the following books of hadīth were compiled by the Tabi'īn:

- 1. Book of Khālid ibn Ma'dan (d. 104)**
- 2. Books of Abu Qilabah (d. 104). He bequeathed his books to his pupil, Ayyub Saktiyan (68-131 A.H.), who paid more than ten dirhams as a fare for them being loaded on a camel.**
- 3. The script of Hammam ibn Munabbih, already referred to.**
- 4. Books of Hasan aq-Basri (21-110 A.H.)**
- 5. Books of Muhammad al-Baqir (56-114 A.H.)**
- 6. Books of Makhul from Syria**
- 7. Book of Hakam ibn 'Utaibah**
- 8. Book of Bukair ibn 'Abdullah ibn al-Ashajj (d. 117)**
- 9. Book of Qais ibn Sa'd (d. 117). This book later belonged to Hammad ibn Salamah.**
- 10. Book of Sulaiman al-Yashkuri**
- 11. Al-Abwab of Sha'bi, already referred to.**
- 12. Books of Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri**
- 13. Book of Abul-'Aliyah**
- 14. Book of Sa'id ibn Jubair (d. 95)**
- 15. Books of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul Aziz (61-101 A.H.)**
- 16. Books of Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. 103)**

17. Book of Raja ibn Hywah (d. 112)

18. Book of Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Haq

19. Book of Bashir ibn Nahik.

The Books of Hadīth Written in the Second Century

The basic characteristic of the books written in the second century is that a large number of them were arranged subject-wise, while the books of the first century were not. However, compilations without due arrangement continued in this century too. The list of books compiled in this period is very long. A few prominent books are referred to here:

1. Book of ‘Abdul Malik ibn Juraij (d. 150)

2. Muwatta of Malik ibn Anas (93-179)

3. Muwatta of Ibn Abi Zi’b (80-158)

4. Maghaẓi of Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 151)

5. Musnad of Rabi’ ibn Sabih (d. 160)

6. Book of Sa’id ibn Abi ‘Arubah (d. 156)

7. Book of Hammad ibn Salmah (d. 167)

8. Jaḡi’ Sufyan ath-Thauri (97-161)

9. Jami’ Ma’mar ibn Rashid (95-153)

10. Book of ‘Abdur-Rahman al-Awza’i (88-157)

11. Kitaḡ az-Zuhd by ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mubārak (118-181)

12. Book of Hushaim ibn Bashir (104-183)

13. Book of Jarir ibn ‘Abdul-Hamid (110-188)

14. Book of ‘Abdullah ibn Wahb (125-197)

15. Book of Yahya ibn Abi Kathīr (d. 129)

16. Book of Muhammad ibn Suqah (d. 135)

17. Tafsīr of Zaid ibn Aslam (d. 136)

18. Book of Musa ibn 'Uqbah (d. 141)
19. Book of Ash'ath ibn 'Abdul-Malik (d. 142)
20. Book of Aqil ibn Khalid (d. 142)
21. Book of Yahya ibn Sa'd Ansari (d. 143)
22. Book of Awf ibn Abi Jamilah (d. 146)
23. Books of Jafar ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq (d. 148)
24. Books of Yunus ibn Yazid (d. 152)
25. Book of 'Abdur-Rahman al-Mas'udi (d. 160)
26. Books of Zaidah ibn Qudamah (d. 161)
27. Books of Ibrahim al-Tahman (d. 163)
28. Books of Abu Hamzah al-'ukri (d. 167)
29. Al-Gharāib by Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 160)
30. Books of 'Abdul-Aziz ibn 'Abdullah al-Majishun (d. 164)
31. Books of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn Abi Uwais (d. 169)
32. Books of Sulaiman ibn Bilal (d. 172)
33. Books of 'Abdullah ibn Lahi'ah (d. 147)
34. Jami' Sufyan ibn 'Uyainah (d. 198)
35. Kitāb-ul-Athār by Imām Abu Hanīfah (d. 150)
36. Maghāzi of Mu'tamir ibn Sulaiman (d. 187)
37. Musannaf of Waki' ibn Jarrah (d. 196)
38. Musannaf of 'Abdur-Razzaq ibn Hammam (136-221)
39. Musnad of Zaid ibn 'Ali (76-122)
40. Books of Imām Shāfi'i (150-204)

The following books written in this age are still available in printed form:

- 1. Al-Muwatta by Imām Malik.**
- 2. Kitāb-ul-Athār by Imām Abu Hanīfah.**
- 3. Musannaf by ‘Abdur-Razzāq. This book has been published in eleven big volumes.**
- 4. As-Sīrah by Muhammad ibn Ishaq.**
- 5. Kitāb az-Zuhd by ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak.**
- 6. Kitāb az-Zuhd by Waki’ ibn Jarrah (3 volumes).**
- 7. Al-Musnad by Zaid ibn ‘Ali (76-122).**
- 8. Sunan of Imām Shāfi’i.**
- 9. Musnad of Shāfi’i.**
- 10. Siyar of Awza’i (88-157).**
- 11. Musnad of ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak.**
- 12. Musnad of Abu Dāwūd Tayalisi (d. 204).**
- 13. Ar-Radd ‘ala Siqaril-Awza’i by Imām Abu Yu’suf.**
- 14. Al-Hujjah ‘ala Ahlil-Madīnah by Imām Muhammad ibn Hasan Shaibāni.**
- 15. Kitābul-Umm by Imām Shāfi’i.**
- 16. Al-Maghāzi by Waqidi (130-206) (4 volumes).**

This list is by no means exhaustive. But a careful study of these books only which are available today in printed forms would clearly reveal that their style is much developed and they definitely do not seem to be the first books on their subject. Some of them are in more than ten volumes, and their arrangement shows that the compilation of hadīth in those days reached a developed stage.

All these valuable efforts of compiling the ahādīth belong to the first and second centuries. Hence, one can easily see how false is the assumption that the compilation of ahādīth did not take place before the third century.

What we have cited above is more than sufficient to prove that the compilation of ahādīth had begun in the very days of the Holy Prophet and has continued in each point of time thereafter. This process has, no doubt, passed through certain stages as is usual in every new science or branch of knowledge. But the assumption that the process did not begin before the third century cannot be substantiated on any ground whatsoever.

The Criticism of Ahādīth

Although the task of preserving the ahādīth through all the four ways mentioned earlier, including compilations in written form has been performed with due diligence throughout the first four centuries of Islamic history, yet it does not mean that all the traditions narrated or compiled in this period have been held as true and reliable.

In fact, in the same period in which the work of the compilation of ahādīth was going on, a very systematic science of criticism was developed by the scholars of hadīth in which numerous tests were suggested to verify the correctness of a narration. All these tests were applied to each and every tradition or report before holding it reliable.

The different branches of knowledge which have been introduced by the scholars of the science of hadīth has no parallel in the art of historical criticism throughout world history. It is not possible for us to herein present even a brief introduction of these different branches and the valuable works produced in this respect. It may be said without any fear of exaggeration that thousands of books have been written on these different branches of knowledge regarding the science of hadīth.

It will be pertinent, however, to give a brief example of the nature of the criticism of ahādīth carried on by scholars and the different tests applied by them to ascertain the veracity of a hadīth.

The traditions viewed from different angles have been classified into hundreds of kinds. Relative to their standards of authenticity, the traditions are ultimately classified into four major categories:

- (a) Sahīh (sound)
- (b) Hasan (good)
- (c) Da'īf (weak)
- (d) Maudu' (fabricated)

Only the first two kinds are held to be reliable. Precepts of the Shari'ah can be based on and inferred from only these two kinds. Hence, only the ahādīth of these two categories are held to be the source of Islamic law. The other two kinds have little or no value especially in legal or doctrinal matters.

Before declaring a hadīth as saḥīḥ or hasan, the following tests are applied:

- (a) Scrutiny of its narrators.**
- (b) Scrutiny of the constancy of the chain of narrators.**
- (c) Comparison of its chain and text with other available paths of narration in the same manner.**
- (d) Examination of the chain and the text of the hadīth in the light of other material available on the subject, and to ensure that there is no defect in the chain or in the text.**

We will try to give a brief explanation of these four tests as they are applied by the scholars of hadīth to scrutinize the veracity of a tradition.

1. Scrutiny of the narrators

The first and foremost test of the correctness of a hadīth relates to the credibility of its narrators. This scrutiny is carried out on two scores: firstly, examination of the integrity and honesty of a narrator, and secondly, examination of his memory power.

To carry out this scrutiny, a separate complete Science has been introduced which is called 'Ilm-ur-Rijāl (the knowledge of men). The scholars of this science devoted their lives for the thorough enquiry about each person who has reported a hadīth. For this, they used to go to his place and enquire about him from his neighbors, pupils, and friends so that no scholar would be impressed by his personal relations with a narrator. 'Ali ibn al-Madini, the famous scholar of Rijāl, when asked about his father, first tried to avoid the question and replied, "Ask some other scholar about him." But when the question was repeated with a request for his own opinion, he said:

It is the matter of Faith, (I, therefore, reply) he is a weak narrator.

Waki' ibn Jarrah, the well-known Imām of hadīth, held his father as "weak" in hadīth, and did not rely on his reports unless they are confirmed by some reliable narrator.

Imâm Abu Dâwûd, the author of one of the Six Books, has opined about his son ‘Abdullah (this is the same ‘Abdullah whose work, Kitâb-ul-Masalif, has been published by some orientalist), that he was “a great liar.”

Zaid ibn Abi Unaisah has said about his brother Yahya, “Do not accept the traditions of my brother Yahya, because he is reputed in lying.”

Similar opinions are recorded in the books of the ‘Ilm-ur-Rijâl. Hundreds of books have been written on this subject. Here are only a few examples:

Tahdhīb at-Tahdhīb by Hâfiz Ibn Hajar: Printed in twelve volumes, this book has been designed to give a brief account of all the narrators whose narration is found in the famous Six Books of hadīth only. It contains the life accounts of 12,455 narrators, arranged in alphabetical order. (This is the total of the members given in each volume separately. Sometimes, the same narrator has been mentioned in different places with different names. So, the actual number of the narrators may be less, but not less than 10,000.)

You can pick up any name from any chain of any hadīth in any book from the Six Books. This name will certainly be found in the Tahdhīb at-Tahdhīb recorded in its place in alphabetical scheme. There you can find his dates of birth and death, the list of his teachers, the list of his pupils, important events of his life, and the opinions of the scholars about his credibility.

There are several other books meant for the narrators of the Six Books exclusively, and after consulting them one can easily reach a definite conclusion about the veracity of a narrator.

Lisân al-Mīzân by Hâfiz Ibn Hajar: This book is meant exclusively for those narrators whose names do not appear in any chain contained in any of the Six Books. It means that the traditions reported by them are found only in some books other than the Six Books.

This book consists of seven volumes and embodies the introduction of 5,991 narrators.

Ta’jīl al-Manfa’ah by Hâfiz Ibn Hajar: This book is confined to the introductions of the narrators whose traditions are found in the books of the four Imâms: Malik, Abu Hanīfah, Shâfi’i, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and are not among the narrators of the Six Books. Thus, it contains the introduction of 1,732 narrators.

All these three books are written and compiled by the same person, namely, Hâfiz Ibn Hajar. It means that he has compiled the introduction of more than seventeen thousand narrators of hadīth.

This is the effort of only a single scholar. Many other books are available on the same subject. The following table will show the large number of narrators introduced in a few famous books of Rijal which are frequently referred to:

The last book of this table has introduced only those narrators who have been held as “weak” narrators. Similar books are written by Ibn Abi Hatim, Dâraqutni, etc. On the contrary, there are books which deal with the reliable narrators only, like Thiqat of Ibn Hibban in eleven volumes.

Anyhow, if a narrator is found to be dishonest, has very weak memory or he is unknown, no trust is placed on his narrations. A large number of traditions has been repudiated on this score alone.

2. Constancy of the chain of narrators

It is well-known that no report, in the science of hadith, is accepted unless it gives the full chain of narrators upto the Holy Prophet. Each narrator from this chain is first scrutinized on the touch-stone of his credibility as discussed above. But even if all the narrators of a chain are found to be reliable, it is not enough to hold the tradition as authentic. It must be proved that the chain is constant and no narrator has been missed in between.

If it is found that some narrator has been missed at any stage, the tradition is held to be unreliable. To ensure the constancy of the chain, it is necessary to know about each narrator whether it is possible for him historically to meet the person from whom he claims to hear the tradition.

This scrutiny is indeed very difficult and delicate. But the scholars of the science of hadīth have undertaken this task in such an accurate manner that one cannot but wonder.

While holding an enquiry about each narrator, the scholars, besides ascertaining his integrity and memory, would also survey his teachers and pupils. Thus, a detailed list of both his teachers and pupils is available in each detailed book of Rijāl. So, when deciding about the constancy of a hadīth the scholars do not only make themselves sure about the dates of birth and death of each narrator, but also examine the list of his teachers and pupils.

Not only this, they often try to fix the time-span in which a narrator had opportunities to meet a particular teacher and that in which he did actually hear ahādīth from him. On the basis of this information they derive certain important conclusions about the credibility of a narrator.

For example, ‘Abdullah ibn Lahi’ah is a well-known Egyptian narrator of hadīth. It is established that his memory was weak and he used to narrate those traditions which he wrote. At a particular time, his house was burnt by fire and all his books were also burnt. After this occurrence he sometimes used to report ahādīth from his memory.

Therefore, some scholars have decided that his narrations before the accident are reliable while those narrated after it are not worthy of trust. Now, the pupils who have heard ahādīth from him in the early period, their narrations may be accepted, while the reports of those who have heard from him in the later period cannot be relied upon.

The scholars have scrutinized the list of his pupils and have specified the names of his early pupils, like ‘Abdullah ibn Wahb, etc. and have declared that all the rest should be treated as his later pupils, and no trust might be placed on their narrations.

In short, the second type of scrutiny, which is very essential in the criticism of traditions, relates to the constancy and perpetuity of the chain of narrators. If it is found that a narrator has not heard the hadīth directly from the one to whom he is ascribing it, the tradition is said to be Munqa‘i’ (broken) which cannot be treated as reliable.

3. Comparison with other narrations: The third test applied to a tradition relates to its comparison with what is narrated by other pupils of the same teacher.

Sometimes a tradition is reported by several narrators. All these reports about the same saying or event are said to be the turuq (different paths) of

that tradition. While scrutinizing a tradition, the scholars undertake a combined study of all its “paths.” If it is found that the majority of the reliable reporters narrate the hadīth in a particular way, but one of them reports it in a version substantially different from that of the others, his report is held to be a shādh (rare) version.

In such case, despite the reliability of the reporter, his version is not accepted as a saḥīh (sound) one, and no trust is placed on it unless it is confirmed and supported by any internal or external evidence.

4. General analysis of the tradition: The last, and very important, scrutiny is accompanied by the general analysis of a tradition. In this scrutiny the tradition is analyzed in the light of other relevant material available on the subject. The tradition is examined from different angles: whether the reported saying or event is at all possible; whether the reported event conforms to the established historical events; whether its text can be held as truly attributed to the Holy Prophet; whether the chain of narrators is genuine, etc.

This is a very difficult and delicate scrutiny which cannot be undertaken successfully unless the scholar has full command over all the relevant subjects, occupies complete knowledge of hadīth, and has a great skill in the science of criticism of hadīth.

If, after this scrutiny, a strong doubt appears to a scholar about the authenticity of a hadīth, he points out that there is a “defect” (‘ilal) in the chain or in the text of the hadīth, and a tradition having this kind of ‘illah or defect is not held as saḥīh.

Thus, a saḥīh (sound) hadīth has been defined by the scholars as follows:

“What is reported, by a reporter who is honest and of good memory power, without any break in the chain of narrators, without any shudhūdh (rareness) and without any ‘illah (defect).” (Taqi Usmani, The Authority of Sunnah, Chapter 3: The Authority of the Sunnah: Its Historical Aspect, Source)

To read more about the reliability of hadith please visit the following links...

[God’s Preservation of the Sunnah](#)

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/hadith.html> (early hadith manuscripts)

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/muwatta.html> (people argue that the early Muwatta manuscripts are not reliable, but this link refutes it)

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/bukhari.html> (defending the collection of hadith by Bukhari and Muslim)

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/exisnad.html> (shows the strengths of isnad for supporting hadith)

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/narraulum.html> (this link deals with people who argue that hadith have been inserted into Saheeh Bukhari after his death)

http://www.whyislam.org/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=3772&PN=1 (very good article, read his section on 'The Proliferation of Chains')

Allah Knows Best.