

*A Study on the Methodology of Hadith
Criticism and Its Impact on Hadith Exposition
Between Abu Hanifah and Al-Shafi'i*

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Introduction

Muslim scholars in the past and present unanimously agree that the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is the second primary source of Islam after the Glorious *Qur'ān*. *Sunnah* is considered as the practical manifestation of the *Qur'ān*. It is associated with the *Qur'ān* strongly, to the extent that without *ḥadīth*, the *Qur'ānic* message would not properly be understood. *Ḥadīth* elaborates the ambivalent, details the concise, interprets the obscure and ambiguous, limits the absolute and specifies the general statements of the *Qur'ān*.² However, following the death of the Prophet (s.a.w), people started to recall his words, actions, instructions and even his life style characteristics, for both social and religious usages. However, several prominent Companions have realised the predicament of accepting every available report without critical evaluation and assessment of such reports. This alarmed the early Muslim scholars of the necessity of having an acceptable method of hadith validation. Thus, these Companions, such as 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, Abu Bakr and 'Ali, were critical of some of the reports and even rejected many parts of such

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² We have sent unto you (Mohamed) the reminder (*Qur'ān*), that you may explain clearly to the mankind what is sent down through you for them and they may give thought. (Surah al-Nahl, verse: 44.)

reports.¹ By doing so, the early generations of Muslims had laid down certain critical techniques of ḥadīth criticism and authentication procedures. For instance, “Ammar b. Yasir once reported a ḥadīth of the Prophet with regards to the *tayammum* ablution, in a gathering of the Companions, and ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb spoke up and said: “Fear God”, thereby indicating his disagreement with what Ammar had reported. In another instance, when Maḥmūd b. Rabi’ reported in an assembly of the Companions that the Prophet had said that no one who professed that there was no god but God would be sent to hellfire, Abu Ayub al-Ansari remarked that he did not think that the Prophet had ever said such a thing.”² Such precautions and thoughtful attention towards the narrations of the Prophetic teachings constituted the early genesis of what is later known in subsequent generations as the ‘methods of *ḥadīth* criticism’.

In addition, Muslim scholars developed the science of *ḥadīth* to a very sophisticated level. During the first four centuries of *hijrah*, some commonly shared principles among *Muḥadithūn* at the level of *ḥadīth* criticism of both *matn* and *sanad* were in place. Within the Islamic intellectual spheres the ‘methods of *ḥadīth* criticism’ are known to be the techniques and procedures of *ḥadīth* validation and authentication. These procedures contain various substantive subjects proposed by the scholars of *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence, to verify the authenticity of the reported narrations of the Prophet (s.a.w).³ Through these methods, scholars are able to comprehend the judicial, ethical and the theological ramifications of the Prophetic teachings, his actions, its narrations, regulations and proliferation of its literal expression.

¹ Seemingly, the aim of ‘the methods of hadith criticism’ is to identify, accept as well as reject *ḥadīth*, and to distinguish the authentic and agreeable to the weak and forged *ḥadīth*. Also, to know the essence, conditions, types and judgments of the narration; the narrators, their conditions, the categories of the narrated materials and other related matters. It is also to transmit and ascribe Prophetic tradition, to which it is attributed by speaking or any other way. The main objective of this science is to protect the *aḥādīth* from any possible corruptions and lies, and subsequently, to protect the Islamic *shari’ah* and preserve it from distortion and forgery. (see: Al-Qāsim, Moḥamed Jamāl ad-Din, *Qawā’id at-Taḥdīth min Funūn Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dar al-Nafā’is, 1st edition, 1987). p.78.

² Muhammad Zubayr Sidiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*. Cambridge: the Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p.107.

³ *Ibid*, p.108

Moreover, scholars of *ḥadīth* (in the procedure of *ḥadīth* exposition) often investigate about the meaning and concepts of *ḥadīth* terms and their meanings based on Arabic literal maxims and *shari'ah* principles, to extract the relevant judicial principles (*aḥkām*) and necessary social teachings in such narrations. However, because of their cultural milieus and educational backgrounds, scholars have laid down several contrasting and divergent methods of authentication, throughout the generations, which subsequently affect the exposition of the *ḥadīth*.

Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi'ī: Life and Work

1. Abu Ḥanīfah

Abu Ḥanīfah was born in al-Kūfa during the reign of the powerful Umayyad caliphates. His father was a trader from Persia. Abu Ḥanīfa's early education was achieved through Muslim traditional *madrasah* schools and it was here that he learned the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and he did remarkably well in the early years. Born into a family of tradesmen, Abu Ḥanīfah joined his father's business, where he showed scrupulous honesty and fairness. Upon gaining more knowledge and in a progressive way, Abu Ḥanīfah's interest in Islamic jurisprudence and Fiqh was remarkable. He embarked on a prolific quest for knowledge that would in due course have a profound impact on the history of Islam. During the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate, the powerful Caliphate Mansūr, Abu Ḥanīfah was offered the post of Chief Judge of the State, but Abu Ḥanīfah declined the offer, choosing instead to remain independent. In the year 146 A.H, Abu Ḥanīfah was sent to prison by Mansūr, where he was finally poisoned. Abu Ḥanīfah, feeling the effects of the poison, bent down in prayer and died in the year 150 A.H.¹

2. Al-Shāfi'ī

Abu 'Abdullah Muḥammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī was born in Gaza, Palestine and was raised in Makkah, his parents' home town. He was a descendent of the Hāshimi family of the Quraysh tribe (the Prophet's

¹M. Hadi Hussain, **Imam Abu Hanifah: Life and Work**, New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1998, pp.3-10

family). He memorised the Holy Qur'ān while he was still a young child. Al-Shafi'ī traveled extensively for the sake of spreading knowledge. He went to Madinah, met Imam Mālik, memorised many *aḥādīth*, and learned the Muwatta of Imam Maliki. He also visited Iraq several times as well as Egypt. Imam al-Shafi'ī did not confine himself to the knowledge of *ḥadīth* or *fiqh*, but he was also well versed in Arabic linguistics, poetry and genealogy. During his life Imam Shafi'ī also suffered from political maneuverings. He was once taken prisoner by the Abbasid caliphate, Hārūn al-Rashīd, though upon arrival the Caliphate found him innocent and released him. He died in the year 204 A.H. in Egypt. Among his major works are *al-Risālah Fi-Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, commonly known as *al-Risālah*- a Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence, and *Kitāb al-Umm*.¹

The Method of Ḥadīth Criticism between Abu Ḥanifah and al-Shāfi'ī

These two are among the most influential and renowned personalities in the Muslim academic world, particularly in field of *fiqh* and jurisprudence. They are considered by many to be the founders of the Islamic jurisprudence in the Islamic law. Their profound use of scholastic analysis of the textual scripture and rational principles is admired by many. Since the early ages of their lives, both scholars' main concern was how to comprehend the message of the Qur'ān accurately. They were aware that comprehension of the Qur'ānic legal, dogmatic and ethical expressions cannot be achieved without appropriate apprehension of two essential elements, namely, the Arabic language and the Prophetic teachings. Both of these tools have a binding interpretive role in the understanding of the Qur'an. This is because, without proper understanding of the Arabic language's grammatical principles and etymological foundations, the Qur'anic statements will be far from being comprehended. Similarly, without the Sunnah (the practical aspect of the Qur'ān), the Qur'anic instructions will be ambiguous. Both of these scholars mastered the Arabic language and endeavoured to grasp the teachings of the Prophet (s.a.w).

¹ Al-Shāfi'ī, Moḥamad b. Idrīs, *Al-Risālah*, Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turath, 1979, pp.5-11.

Since our aim in this paper is to see their method on ḥadīth authentication and its impact on ḥadīth interpretation, we will highlight such a method as follows. Like other early Muslim scholars, both of these scholars laid down a method of ḥadīth authentication. However, since the ḥadīth consists of two parts: the *isnad* and the *matn*, the method of these two scholars encompassed the principles of the criticism of textual and narrative chains of the ḥadīth as the traditionists later began to write and develop their commentaries of the ḥadīth literature in a detailed form. Since the early years of the Muslim history, *hadith* literature consisted of the principles of authentication relating to the *isnad* and those relating to the *matn*. Both scholars, though in different approaches, had applied such method. Both agreed, yet in somewhat different ways, that for a tradition to be authentic, it should fulfill two necessary conditions, namely, *dirāyatan* (science of understanding the ḥadīth)¹ and *riwāyatan* (science of ḥadīth transmission),² In terms of narration or transmission it should be authentic without discontinuity or indictment of its transmitters. Secondly, in terms of *dirāyah* it should be consistent with the Qur'anic message and should be free from any defects which clearly contradict with the general principles of the *Sharī'ah*.³ The two levels of criticism are discussed below.

1. Transmission must be continuous and uninterrupted

Both imams agreed that an authentic ḥadīth is a narration which has continuous transmission besides its clear textual meaning. Any prophetic narration with broken chain does not qualify as a *ṣaḥīḥ* and

¹ It is the science which comprehends the words of the Prophet (s.a.w) and his actions, its narrations, regulations and proliferation of its literal expression. Or it is the science that investigates the meaning and concepts of ḥadīth terms and their meanings, based on Arabic literal maxims and *sharī'ah* principles, as it is necessary to be consistent with the Prophet's way of life. (See: Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl ad-Dīn Abd ar- Rahmān B. Abi Bakar, *Tadrīb al-Rāwiyi, Fī Sharḥ Taqrīb ar-Rāwiyi*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 3rd edition, 1989).

² It is the knowledge through which we know the truth of the narration, its conditional rules, conditions of transmitters and categories of various reports. Or it is the science of ḥadīth transmission is the science that concerns with reporting, narrating, validating, and writing of the Prophet's words and deeds.

³ Al-Shafī'ī, Abi 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Idris *Kitab al-Umm*, Bulaq: Matba'ah al-Kubra al-Amiriyah, p.59. M. Hadi Hussain, *Imam Abu Hanifah: Life and Work*, New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1998. pp.129-130.

transmitters of the *ḥadīth* should be upright persons. To confirm the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* in the level of *riwāyah* (transmission), both agreed on certain verified circumstances as pre-requisite steps to validate the reliability of the narration, namely, the way of the *ḥadīth* transmission through generations and whether it was transmitted through direct hearing, reading to the teacher or permission, its values and authority, acceptance and rejection.¹ Besides this, both scholars were very concerned about the conditions of transmitters (impugnment and validation), ways of transmission and reception, and finally, the classification of reports and understanding of their meanings.² In terms of transmission, both imams agreed that all the traditions must be traced back to its original reporter through a chain of transmitters. These transmitters must be of excellent character, trustful and must have a good retentive memory and high qualities of the head and heart. For instance, according to Imam al-Shafi'ī:

“A true Sunnah is (the) one that has been reported by a person who was known to be staunch in his or her faith, straightforward in speech, perspicacious as to the substance of the narration and mindful of Allah.”³

Secondly, every tradition which reported an event or happening that occurred frequently in the presence of a large number of people, must have been originally reported by several narrators.⁴ Such conditions are:

1. The narration must be accompanied by an *isnād* in which the transmitter has given the name of the authority from whom he learned the *ḥadīth*; and that authority must give the name of his source or teacher from whom he received the same *ḥadīth*, and so on until it

¹ Majid Khadduri, *al-Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shāfi'ī's al-Risālah fī uṣūl al-fiqh*: treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003, p.30. Khalil I. Semaan, *Al-Shāfi'ī's Risālah: Basic ideas, with English translation of the chapters on an-Nasikh Wa al-Mansukh*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1961, pp.43-44.

² Ibid, p.39, and M. Hadi Hussain, *Imam Abu Hanifah: Life and Work*, p.40.

³ Khalil I. Semaan, *Al-shāfi'ī's Risālah: Basic Ideas*, p.44.

⁴ Doi, Abdur Raḥmān, *Introduction to the Ḥadīth*, A.S. Noordeen, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1991. p.14.

reaches the Prophet (s.a.w). This plays an essential role in the *ḥadīth* validation because the authenticity of the *ḥadīth*, rests on it, hence it must be continuous and uninterrupted throughout the chain.

2. Every level of the chain must be known to be an upright person (*‘adl*) at the time of reporting the *ḥadīth*. *‘Adālah* is related to the transmitter’s personal piety and virtue, though *‘Adālah* is said to be more extensive than a simple exhibition of piety, and can only be known by consistent information concerning the conduct and activities of a person.¹ Within the field of *ḥadīth* criticism, *‘adālah* is said to be the state or quality of being pious, mainly in religious devotion and reverence to God or commitment and respect to parents and family, as well as to practice only pious act, thought and statement. For the report to be accepted, the uprightness of the reporter must be established.

3. The narrators of the *ḥadīth* should be straightforward and possess retentive memory. If he is known to frequently commit errors and inconsistencies, his report would be unacceptable.²

2. In the level of *dirāyah* (understanding)

In the level of *dirāyah* (understanding), where the *matn* is concerned, the *ḥadīth* should not be contrary to the text or the teachings of the *Qur’ān*, or the accepted basic principles of Islam. Both Abu Ḥanīfah and Imam al-Shāfi‘ī relied on both the literal meaning of the *Qur’ān* and on the authentic *Sunnah*. Nonetheless, they considered practicing and applying the *Sunnah* as equally important as that of the *Qur’ān*. In addition, they strongly maintained the use of consensus and discouraged the use of one’s personal judgment without relying on the *Qur’ānic* verses and Prophetic teachings as well the consensus or the juristic reasoning (*Qiyās*).

¹ *‘Adl* is known for his performance of obligatory religious duties, observance of what is prohibited, diligence in pursuit of righteousness in his conduct and in dealings with others, discipline in speech and truthfulness. (See: al-Katib al-Baghdadi, *al-Kifayah fi ‘Ilm al-Riwāyah*, pp.100-106. See also: Kamali, Mohamad Hashim, *Ḥadīth Methodology*, p.264.)

² Majid Khadduri, *al-Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi‘i’s al-Risālah fi uṣūl al-fiqh: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p.41.

However, the *ḥadīth* should not be against the dictates of reason or laws of nature and common experience, as it should not be contrary to the traditions which have already been accepted by the authorities as reliable and authentic by the majority of Muslim scholars. The *ḥadīth*, which praises the excellence of any tribe, place or persons, should be generally rejected. The *ḥadīth* that contains the dates and minute details of future events should also be rejected.¹

1. The text and the message of the *ḥadīth* must be consistent with the *Qur'ān* (*‘arḍ al-sunnah ‘alā zāhir al-Qur’ān*). Since the role of the Prophet (s.a.w) was to convey and interpret the message of the *Qur'ān* to mankind, Abu Ḥanīfah says it is impossible that the Prophet (s.a.w) will teach something contradictory to revelational guidance of the *Qur'ān*.² In addition, while the authenticity of all *Qur'ānic* verses are validated through recurrent way (*tawātur*), it should always be put before anything else. According to Abu Ḥanīfah's view on this ground, any traditional narrations that clearly contradict the *Qur'ānic* rulings are taken as forgery *ḥadīth*.³ Both the authentic *ḥadīth* and the *Qur'ānic* verses form the basic revelational source of the shari'ah, therefore, their contradiction is rationally inconceivable. Hence:

“Should there be a clear case of conflict in such a way that no reasonable compromise and interpretation can remove it, the *ḥadīth* is rejected”.⁴

¹ Khalil I. Semaan, Al-Shāfi'ī's Risālah: basic ideas, p.45

² Kamali, Mohamad Hashim, Ḥadīth Methodology: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification, and Criticism of Ḥadīth, Kuala Lumpur: Ilmiyah Publishers, 2002. p.277

³ In fact Abu Ḥanīfah only applied the method of the companions in this regard. It was Ā'ishah (r.a) who indicted and rejected various narrations on this ground. For instance, the narration: “The offspring of adultery (*zinā*) shall not enter paradise down to seven generations” was indicted and rejected. This is because such narration has clearly violated and contradicted the *Qur'ānic* message addressing the personal responsibility of man in terms of rewards and punishments. The *Qur'ān* says: (وَلَا تَحْمِلُ وَاثَرَهُمْ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ) “no soul shall carry the burden of another soul.” (Fatir: 18.)

⁴ Kamali, Mohamad Hashim, Ḥadīth Methodology: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification, and Criticism of Ḥadīth, p.278.

In this regard Abu Ḥanīfah differentiated between the *ḥadīth* refusal and *ḥadīth* validation. *Ḥadīth* refusal means to deny the authority and the binding role of the prophetic teaching. On the other hand, *ḥadīth* validation means to confirm the authenticity of the narrative chain and apprehension of the *ḥadīth* textual meaning.¹

He stated:

"فأما إذا قال الرجل: أنا مؤمن بكل شيء تكلم به النبي، غير أن النبي لا يتكلم بالجور، ولم يخالف القرآن، فإن هذا القول منه: هو التصديق بالنبي وبالقرآن، وتزويه له من الخلاف على القرآن، ولو خالف النبي القرآن، وتقول على الله غير الحق، لم يدعه الله حتى يأخذ باليمين، ويقطع منه الوتين... فرد كل رجل يحدث عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، بخلاف القرآن ليس رداً على النبي عليه السلام، ولا تكذيباً له، ولكن رد على من يحدث عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بالباطل، والتهمة دخلت عليه، ليس على نبي الله عليه السلام، وكل شيء تكلم به النبي به النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم سمعنا به أو لم نسمع به فعلى الرأس والعينين، قد آمننا به... ونشهد على النبي أنه لم يأمر بشيء نهى الله عنه، ولم يقطع شيئاً وصله الله، ولا وصف أمراً وصف الله ذلك الأمر بغير ما وصف به النبي... ولذلك قال الله تعالى: "من يطع الرسول فقد أطاع الله"² (النساء: ٨٠).

Abu Ḥanīfah applied this technique widely throughout his method of *ḥadīth* verification and authentication as the main ground of *ḥadīth* validity. This is because, since Abu Ḥanīfah lived in the era where most of the narrations were not documented well enough, and most of the narrations at that time contained many erroneous, invented and weak portions, this method seemed to Abu Ḥanīfah to be the most effective standard of proof of the authenticity of the Prophetic narrations. He applied this method strictly, to the extent only a small number of *aḥādīth* were sound or sufficiently well genuine in his *ḥadīth* collection.

¹ Abu Ḥanīfah, al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘alim, pp.21-22.

² Ibid., (Quoted from: al-Damini, Musfir Aza Allah, Maqayis Naqd Mutun al-Sunnah, Riyadh: s.n., 1984, pp.287-288.)

Al-Shāfi'ī principally agreed with Abu Ḥanīfah that a narration must be consistent with the *Qur'ān* and it will be rejected only when it clearly conflicts with the *Qur'ānic* teachings. He stated in the book of al-Umm:

"... فعليك من الحديث بما تعرف العامة، وإياك والشاذ منه، فإنه حدثنا ابن أبي كريمة عن أبي جعفر عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، أنه دعا اليهود فسألهم فحدثوه حتى كذبوا على عيسى، فصعد صلى الله عليه وسلم، فخطب الناس فقال: إن الحديث سيفشوا عني، فما أتاكم عني يوافق القرآن فهو عني، وما أتاكم عني يخالف القرآن فليس عني."¹

However, al-Shāfi'ī's method in this regard seemed to be more flexible and accommodative than Abu Ḥanīfah's. Thus, while affirming this, on the other hand, he also denounced the possibility of such contradiction between the authentic narration and the *Qur'ān* to have taken place in the actual sense. For him it is impossible that the Prophet (s.a.w) had thought of something contradictory to the *Qur'ānic* principles.²

2. Though both Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi'ī considered practicing and applying the *Sunnah* as equally important as that of the *Qur'ān*, both imams also agreed on the complementary status of the fundamental principles of the *Sharī'ah* (the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah*, the consensus and the juristic reasoning or *Qiyās*). In addition, while strongly maintaining the use of consensus, they had, on the other hand, discouraged the use of one's personal judgment without relying on the *Qur'ānic* message and Prophetic teachings as well the consensus or the juristic reasoning (*Qiyās*). The *ḥadīth* must not contradict with syllogism and the *Sharī'ah* principles. To be authentic the narration should be in agreement with syllogism and approved general principles of the *Sharī'ah*. It should not be contradictory to the general purpose and aims of the Islamic teachings. If the *ḥadīth* contains a contradictory teaching to those of the *Sharī'ah*, that is enough evidence to prove its forgery and weakness. This is because since Islam disapprove of any kind of illusive or superstitious

¹ Imam al-Shāfi'ī *Kitāb al-Umm*, v.7, pp.307-308.

² *Ibid*, v.7. p.45.

teachings, any narration which contains irrational knowledge is therefore rejected.

“Anything that is totally suppositious, or in clear conflict with accepted norms, or contradictory on itself or totally incredible vis-à-vis the clear principles of the *nuṣūṣ* would come under suspicious.”¹

Seemingly, their methods of criticism have shared the main features and traits, particularly, steps related to the level of transmission and transmitters. Both of them agreed that the reporter has to be reliable, trustworthy and upright, while agreeing on report to have clear and continuous chain of narration. However, in the level of *dirāyah* (understanding), especially in *‘arḍ al-sunnah ‘alā zāhir al-Qur’ān*, their methods seemed to be somewhat different. This is because while Abu Ḥanīfah strictly demanded the *ḥadīth* to be exactly consistent with *zāhir* (external expression) of the *Qur’ānic* verses, Imam al-Shāfi‘ī was more flexible and accommodative. For al-Shāfi‘ī, the *ḥadīth* must be consistent with the *Qur’ān*, however, if there is apparent contradiction between the *Qur’ānic* text and the authentic *ḥadīth*, the *ḥadīth* should be accommodated through harmonizing the two texts. These methodological dissimilarities had reflected the way of *ḥadīth* exposition of both Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi‘ī. Certain examples of implication are as follows.

Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi‘ī’s method of *ḥadīth* criticism and its impact on their *ḥadīth* exposition

Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi‘ī’s method of *ḥadīth* criticism had reflected their treatment of the *aḥādīth* and how the *ḥadīth* should correspond to the *Qur’ān* in both explanation and evaluation of its message. For instance, the main stream of Muslim scholars agreed on the role of the *Sunnah* to be elaboration of the ambivalent expressions of the *Qur’ān*, interpretation of the obscure and ambiguous terms of the *Qur’ān*, and specification of the general statements of the *Qur’ān*. However, the question is whether or not every *sunnah* can play such a role? For instance, do the solitary *ḥadīth* have sufficient authority to play such a role or only the recurrent *sunnah* have enough authority for such a

¹ Kamali, Mohamad Hashim, *Ḥadīth Methodology*, p.280.

role? Because of the dissimilarity of their method in the level of *‘ard al-sunnah ‘alā zāhir al-Qur’ān*, Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shafī‘ī had responded differently to such questions, and this, in turn, was reflected on their treatment of the *sunnah* throughout their scholastic jurisprudence and legal expositions and treatments of the *sunnah*. However, this paper will limit itself to mention only three examples of such dissimilarities between their treatment of the *sunnah*, namely; solitary *ḥadīth*,¹ additional segment² and the marriage guardianship.

1. Solitary *ḥadīth* between Abu Ḥanīfah and al-Shafī‘ī’s Method of interpretation.

Normally, solitary *ḥadīth* could be authentic, agreeable, weak or a forgery, however, a number of Muslim scholars, including Imam Abu Ḥanīfah, have held that *Āḥād* engenders speculative knowledge acting upon which is preferable only. For them, solitary *ḥadīth* indicates probability and possibility rather than accuracy (opposite of *mutawātir*). Imam al-Shafī‘ī agreed with him, nonetheless, according to al-Shafī‘ī’s method of *ḥadīth* assessment, when Solitary *ḥadīth* met all its requirement and when there is nothing to oppose its contents, then action upon it becomes obligatory.³

¹ Literally, *Āḥād* means solitary or one. Technically, *Āḥād* is the *ḥadīth* which is reported by one, two or more, which has not yet fulfilled the requirements and conditions of the *mutawātir* or is well-known, however, no consideration will be given to the number of its narrators after being solitary. Solitary *ḥadīth* has less value compared to *mutawātir* or recurrent *ḥadīth* and the well-known or *mashhūr*. *Āḥād* is the *ḥadīth*, which is narrated by people whose number does not reach that of the *mutawātir*. A *ḥadīth* is called solitary when only a single reporter is found relating it at some stage of the *isnād*. (Ibn Manzūr, *Lissān al-Arab*, 3/71. and, Al-Khatīb, Ajāj, *Uṣūl al-ḥadīth, ulūmihi, Wa Muṣṭalaḥihi*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981, p.302.

² Technically, additional segment is where two or more reliable narrators narrated the *ḥadīth*, but one of their narrations contains an additional segment, or the same reliable narrator narrated the same *ḥadīth* twice, and one of the narrations has an additional segment which is not in the other.

³ However, according to the majority of Muslim scholars, *Āḥād* may not be relied upon as the basis of belief (*‘aqīdah*). Matters of belief must be found in certainty even if a conjecture (*ẓann*) may at times seem preferable. Thus, according to the majority of the scholars, acting upon *Āḥād* is obligatory even if *Āḥād* fails to engender positive knowledge. In practical legal matters, a preferable *ẓann* is sufficient as a basis of obligation. It is only matters of belief where conjecture ‘avails nothing against the truth’. (See: Kamali, Mohammad Hashim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991.p.72.

Each of them treated and interpreted the solitary *ḥadīth* differently. For Abu Ḥanīfah, for the solitary *ḥadīth* to be acceptable and also to play a role of elaboration, interpretation and specification of the *Qur'ānic* ambiguous and concise terms and statements, it should have the following conditions:

A. The subject matter of a solitary *ḥadīth* should not be that which necessitates the knowledge of a vast number of people (*ma ta'ummu bihi al-albalwa*).¹ "If, for example, we are informed, by means of a solitary report, of an act or saying of the Prophet which was supposed to be known by hundreds or thousands of people and yet only one or two have reported it, such a *ḥadīth* would not be reliable".² On this ground Abu Ḥanīfah rejected this *ḥadīth*:

"Any one who touches his sexual organ must take a fresh ablution".

"إذا مس أحدكم ذكره فليتوضأ"

B. The narrator's action must not contradict his narration.³ For this condition, Abu Ḥanīfah rejected the authority of a narration narrated by Abu Hurayrah:

"When a dog licks a dish, wash it seven times, one of which must be with clean sand."⁴

"إذا ولغ الكلب في إناء أحدكم فليغسله سبعا، إحداهن بالتراب الطاهر".

Abu Ḥanīfah explained this by saying that Abu Hurayrah did not act upon it himself. And since the normal requirement of washing is three times, the report is considered weak, including its attribution to Abu Hurayrah.⁵

¹ Al-Hafnāwi, Moḥamad Ibrāhīm, *Darāsāt Usūliyah Fī al-Sunnah an-Nabawiyah*, Iskandariyah: Maktabat wa-Matba'at al-Ish'a' al-Faniyah, 1999, p.297.

² Kamali, Mohammad Hashim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p.75.

³ Al-Hafnāwi, Moḥamad Ibrāhīm, *Darāsāt Usūliyah Fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah*, p.297.

⁴ Reported by al-Bukhāri, in the book of Ablution, 1/274 no:172. And by Muslim: In the book of aṭ-Ṭahārah, 1/234.

⁵ Kamali, Mohammad Hashim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p.75

C. *Āḥād* should be in agreement with syllogism and approved general principles of the *Sharī'ah*. It should not be contradictory to the general purpose and aims of the Islamic teachings. If the *ḥadīth* contains a contradictory teaching to those of the *Sharī'ah*, that is enough evidence to prove its forgery and weakness.¹

However, while Abu Ḥanīfah imposed these restrictions for accepting the authority of the Solitary *ḥadīth*,² Imam al-Shāfi'ī's explanation and exposition was more accommodative and yielding. He only required the *Āḥād* to have authentic chain and continuous transmission. Thus, al-Shāfi'ī did not refuse aforementioned narrations which Abu Ḥanīfah rejected. For al-Shāfi'ī, the discrepancies between the action and the report of a narrator may be due to forgetfulness or some other unknown factors. Discrepancies of such kind do not, by themselves, provide conclusive evidence to render the report unreliable. On the other hand, Imam al-Shāfi'ī did not insist on the requirement on the analysis that people who witnessed or observed an incident did not necessarily report it. We know for example that countless numbers of people saw the Prophet (s.a.w) performing the pilgrimage of hajj, and yet few reported their observations.³

2. The manifest (*ẓāhir*) of al-Qur'ān

For Abu Ḥanīfah strictly demanded the narration to always be consistent with the *Qur'ānic* explicit or manifest expressions (*ẓāhir*). However, when a conflict arises between, say, the *ẓāhir* of the *Qur'ān* and the text (*naṣṣ*) of the Prophetic narrations, the former would prevail despite it being one degree weaker in the order of priority.⁴ This may be clearly illustrated in the *Qur'ānic* verse concerning

¹ Al-Hafnāwi, Moḥamad Ibrāhīm, *Darāsāt Usūliyah Fī al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah*, p.297.

² All four Imams of jurisprudence considered *Āḥād* to be authoritative in principle, and none rejected it unless there is evidence to suggest a weakness in its attribution to the Prophet, or which may contradict some other evidence that is more authoritative in their view. (Kamali, Mohammad Hāshim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p.76.)

³ Al-Shāfi'ī, Moḥammad b. Idris, *al-Risālah*, Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1979, pp.374-378.

⁴ Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p.98

guardianship in marriage, which is in the nature of *zāhir*. The *āyah* says:

“So if a husband divorces his wife (irrevocably), he cannot, after that, re-marry her (*ḥatā tankiḥa*) until after she has married another husband and he has divorced her”.¹

"فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدُ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ"

This text is *zāhir* in respect of guardianship as its principal theme is divorce, not guardianship. From the Arabic form of the word '*tankiḥa*' in this text, the Ḥanafīs have drawn the additional conclusion that an adult woman can contract her own marriage, without the presence of a guardian.² However, there is a *ḥadīth* on the subject of guardianship which is in the nature of *naṣṣ* which provides that:

“There shall be no marriage without a guardian.”

"لا نكاح إلا بولي"

While the *ḥadīth* is clearly demanding woman must have a guardian for her marriage contract, Ḥanafīs give the priority to the *zāhir* al-Qur'ān over this *ḥadīth*.³

3. Additional segment.

Scholars of *ḥadīth* hold different views about the value of *ḥadīth* which contains additional segment, in terms of acceptance and refusal. Some of them say that the reliable narrator's addition is acceptable, whether it is from the narrator himself or from other reliable narrators, or whether it is a literal addition or textual addition, or both. This is the opinion of the majority of jurists and traditionists or scholars of *ḥadīth*. Meanwhile some others hold that the reliable narrator's addition is not acceptable at all. On the other hand, some others are of the opinion that the reliable narrator's addition is acceptable if it is

¹ Surah al-Baqarah, verse: 229.

² Ibid, pp.98-99.

³ Ibid, p.99.

from another reliable narrator other than the narrator of the *ḥadīth*. However, this opinion holds that the additional segment is not accountable if it is from the same narrator who narrates the *ḥadīth* once in both the complete and incomplete forms.

However, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ,¹ provided deep analysis in the matter and divided the addition into three parts:

1. An addition which is not different from the original part of the *ḥadīth*; where the reliable narrator may report an additional segment which is not contradictory to the original part of the *ḥadīth*. This kind of addition is acceptable, whether or not it gives a new judgment.

2. An addition which is different from what was previously reported by the reliable reporter. This part, according to Ibn Ṣalāḥ, is rejected. This kind of addition is given the value of *shāz* or stray *ḥadīth*, which we had previously discussed, hence it takes the judgment of *shāz*.

3. An addition which falls between these two types and it has some similarities with the first as well as the second type. For instance, an additional term in a *ḥadīth* which was not mentioned by other narrators of the *ḥadīth*. Ibn Ṣalāḥ did not characterise this type of addition as acceptable or not, leaving its matter to the opinion of the *Mujtahid*. If this type of addition is seen as acceptable and in concord with the original *ḥadīth*, it will be accepted. But if it is seen as different from the original *ḥadīth* it will be rejected. Such an addition is one of the reasons why scholars normally disagree with each other. For example, Imam Muslim, Ahmad b. Ḥanbal and others narrated from Mālik al-‘Ashja’i from Rab’i, from Ḥuzayfah, who said: The Messenger of Islam said:

“... The earth has all of it been made into a mosque for me, and its soil has been purified for me.”²

¹ Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ, *al-Muqadimah*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabi, p.185.

² Reported by Muslim, In the book of the Mosques, 1/371, no, 522. Also it was narrated by al-Bayhaqi: Ma’rifat al-Sunan Wa al-Athar, 1/213. See: al-Suyūṭi, *Tadrīb ar-Rāwi*, 1/247.

However, Mālik alone had narrated the additional term: “its soil” ترابه as said by al-Suyūṭi. In this *ḥadīth*, the additional segment appears to be acceptable because there is no contradiction between it and the original part of the *ḥadīth*. However, some argue that the additional segment seems to be the rejected segment because it contains different values and different judgments, hence it is an unacceptable addition.

This is why Imam al-Shāfi‘ī and Mālik accepted it because for them, the additional version does not oppose the shorter version of the *ḥadīth*. The additional version elucidates the obscurity of the original narration. The *Muṭlaq* or general is always understood through its *Muqayad*; therefore they held that “*tayamum* or dry ablution” is not permitted except with the soil of the earth. Nevertheless, Imām Abu Ḥanīfah and those who were with him, disagreed with Imām al-Shāfi‘ī and Imam Mālik, and rejected “the additional segment”. Because for them “the additional segment” contains new rules and judgments; therefore it becomes a contradictory and unacceptable addition. For this reason, for them “dry ablution” is permitted with all clean objects on the surface of the earth, such as stones. To answer Imam Mālik and ash-Shafi’s claim that this addition plays the role of “limiting the general interpretation of the *ḥadīth*,” this group also said that some of the general expressions are not limitable.¹

Conclusion

The preceding expositions clearly manifest both Ḥanafī’s and Shāfi‘ī’s concern on the necessity to possess thorough comprehension of the *Qur’ānic* legal, dogmatic and ethical expressions, which eventually drove them to draw the theoretical and practical method to be employed for *ḥadīth* criticism. Since the *ḥadīth* consists of two parts; i.e., the *isnād* and the *matn*, these two scholars employed methodologies encompassing the principles of the criticism of textual and narrative chains of the *ḥadīth*. Later, the traditionalists began to write and develop their commentaries of the *ḥadīth* literature in a detailed form. It is indispensable to note that majority of traditionalists agree on the necessity of having a clear method of both exposition and

¹ Ibid.

authentication through which they will be able to understand the message of the *sunnah*, and also to distinguish the true *sunnah* which can play such an essential role from the false *sunnah*. In turn, this method of elucidation and authentication is reflected upon every scholar's exposition and interpretation of the *sunnah*, which lead to the judicial differences of the various Islamic *fiqh* schools in the past and present.

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