

FABRICATION OF HADITH AND ITS CAUSES: AN APPRAISAL BY DR. MUHAMMAD ARSALAN MUHAMMAD

1.1 Introduction

The Qur'an and Sunnah form the cornerstones of Islam. Both are indispensable sources of Islamic law as one cannot practice Islam without consulting both of them. For this reason, the Sunnah has been studied almost with the same care as the Qur'an. It was recorded and transmitted down the centuries through succeeding generations.

The Prophet (S.A.W) on the other hand, was described by A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her) as the mirror of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an".¹ He was charged by Allah not only to convey the texts and words of the Qur'an as revealed unto him, but also explain the details of rulings contained therein through speeches, actions and silent approvals of the actions or sayings of others.

These actions, words and approvals of the Prophet (S.A.W) were of course witnessed and heard by those with him, the companions (may Allah be pleased with them), who in turn acted upon them, and, also recorded them, whether by committing them to memory or writing them down and passed the message down to the succeeding generations.

Sunnah is the second main source of Islamic Law. Jurists refer to it to discover legal injunctions, in the same way preachers and educators do to draw from its inspiring meanings, worthy instructions and profound wisdom, and ways to encourage people to the good and dissuade them from the evil.²

In order to appreciate the subject matter i.e. fabrication of Hadith and its causes, it is pertinent that we understand the difference between Hadith and Sunnah. Hadith means any report that attached to the Prophet (S.A.W) being his saying or action or silent approval, it may be genuine or otherwise

¹ Tirmidhi in his Sunan, Ibn Kathir, I. (1969) Tafsirul Qur'anil Azeem, Daarul Ihyaa'il-Turathil Arabi, Beirut, vol. 4 p.402-3.

² Al-qaradawi. Y. (2006) : Approaching the Sunnah : Comprehension and Controversy, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, London, p. 21.

while Sunnah means any genuine report that attached to the Prophet (S.A.W) being his saying or action or silent approval. In a nut shell every Sunnah is Hadith and not vice-versa or Hadith is a channel to the Sunnah.

2.6.1 Fabrication of Hadith and its Causes

The Companions of the Prophet (S.A.W) did not have doubt about the authenticity of the Sunnah as the second source of the Shariah reports by any of them. Also, their successors did not hesitate to accept any Hadith that was reported by a Companion of the Prophet (S.A.W).

The scrutiny of both the chain of narration (*Isnaad*), and the content (*Matan*) of the hadith which is a method of identifying authentic Hadiths and distinguishing them from the fabricated and weak ones began in the later days of the Companions after the *Fitna* (civil war) between Aliyu Ibn Abi-Taleeb and Mu'awiyah Ibn Abi-Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with them) which was ignited by Abdullah Bin Saba', a hypocrite who was of a Jewish origin.³ After the civil war the scholars of Hadith did not accept any Hadith unless they ascertained its chain of narrations, including the identification of the uprightness, integrity and fairness of the narrators.

The Shi'ites were the first to fabricate reports that eulogized some of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) especially the members of the Prophet (S.A.W)'s family (Ahl al-Bait).⁴ For example, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, a famous Shi'ites Scholar, in his commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah states: "The origin of fabrication about the eulogizing of Ahlul-Bait came from the Shi'ites".⁵

A part from the Shi'ites, some ignorant among the Sunnis are also known to have fabricated false reports. For example, in the cause of preaching or defending schools of jurisprudence and theology or due to desperation for wealth, or justify their goals and positions.⁶

³ Assuba'i, M.(n.d.) As-Sunnah Wa Makaanatuhah Fit Tashre'ii Islamiy p. 90; Al-Azmi, M.M. (1978): Studies in Early Hadith Literature with a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts, p. 33; Al-Amin, A.S. (1994): Mauqiful Madrasatil-Aqliyyah minas Sunnatin-Nabawiyyah, Muktabatur-Rushd, Riyadh, Vol. 2. pp. 25-27.

⁴ Assuba'i, op. cit. pp. 75-76.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Al-Azmi, op. cit. p. 68; Assuba'i, op. cit. pp. 78-79.

1.2.1 Causes of Fabrication

The scholars of Hadith have identified seven causes of fabrication of Hadiths. These causes are discussed below:

1.2.1.1 Political differences

Fabricated reports were used by political groups to enhance the position of their leaders and to debase their opponents. The Shi'ites were so notorious for this. Thus, Imam Maalik (179 AH) passed a verdict prohibiting scholars from narrating Hadith in any form from the Shi'ites.⁷ Another renowned scholar of Hadith, Sharik Bin Abdullahi al-Qadhi said: "Narrate from any one except the Shi'ites because they consider fabrication as part of their creed."⁸ Hammad Bin Salamah said; "A Shi'ite scholar has confessed to me: 'When we used to gather and find something to be good, we would make it a hadith.'⁹ Imam al-Shafi'i (d. 204 AH) was reported to have said: "I have never come across a more capricious people given to perjury than the Shi'ites."¹⁰

Prominent among the fabricated Hadiths of the Shi'ites is the so called Prophet's will at a place called *Ghadeer-khom*. According to the fabricated report, the Prophet (S.A.W) is alleged to have gathered all the companions (May Allah be pleased with them) that were with him after the Farewell pilgrimage (Hajjatul Wada'). He then held up the hand of Ali Bin Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) before the crowd and declared: "This is my successor, brother and caliph after me. So listen to him and obey"¹¹.

Another fabricated report by the Shi'ites is the one which ascribed the following words to the Prophet (S.A.W): "Whoever wants to see Adam in his knowledge; Noah in his piety; Ibrahim in his forbearance; Moses in his dignity; and Jesus in his worship – then let him look at Ali".¹²

There are several other fabricated reports of similar inclination that tend to eulogize the persons of some members of the Prophet's household such as

⁷ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 79.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid; Assalih, op. cit. p. 267; Assuyuti, J.A. (2000): Tadribur-Rawi Li Sharhit-Taqrabin Nawawi, Darul-fikr, Beirut, p.187.

¹⁰ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 79.

¹¹ Assuba'i, op. cit. pp. 79-80.

¹² Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 80.

the allegation that: Umar bn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) maltreated Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her) and her dear husband, Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) in front of their children, Hassan and Hussain.¹³ Perhaps, the most preposterous report of the Shi'ites is the one that claims the Prophet (S.A.W) said: "Kill Mu'awiyah"¹⁴ whenever you see him on my pulpit".¹⁵

Some Sunnis also fabricated some Hadiths in order to preserve what they regard as orthodox principles of Islam. For example, there is one which states: "There is no tree in the Paradise except that it is written on its leaves 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (S.A.W) is His Prophet, Abubakar is al-Siddiq (trustworthy), Umar is al-Faruoq (possessor of criterion between right and wrong) and Usman Dhi al-Nurain (possessor of two lights).'"¹⁶

The supporters of the caliph Mu'awiyah (may Allah be pleased with him) also came up with a report which purports that the Prophet (S.A.W) said: "The trustworthy are only three: I, Gabriel and Mu'awiyah."¹⁷ Another one in support of the Abbasid dynasty states: "One hundred and thirty five years will be yours and for your sons al-Saffah, al-Ma'mun and al-Mahdiy, etc."¹⁸

1.2.1.2 In Opposition to Islam

With the spread of Islam and its overshadowing of influential empires such as the Persian and Roman at that time, and despite the fact that several people embraced Islam whole-heartedly, there was quite a number of others who converted to Islam only because there was no other way to maintain their prestige except by pretending to follow the new dispensation. From within, they planned to nibble the Islamic fabric and ruin it. Some of these elements were quite formidable under the guise of theological and philosophical thinkers. Shi'ism, Sufism and Ascetism are the prominent among them. Many other heretical groups emerged and used cover and diabolic plans to achieve their devilish objective in the form of introducing false Hadiths into Islam.¹⁹

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mu'awiyah bn Abi Sufyan, the fifth caliph of Islam and one of the scribes of the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 81.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Al-Azmi, op. cit. p. 8; Assuba'i, op. cit. pp. 83-84.

One of the most revolting of these fabricated reports is that: "The Almighty Allah created Himself out of the sweat of fatigue horses."²⁰ They also fabricated a report that "Looking at a beautiful face is an act of worship."²¹

This spate continued for several scores of years. Many of the heretics were executed. Abdulkarim Bin al-Auja confessed, before he was executed, that he had fabricated a large number of *Hadith* that made the lawful unlawful and vice-versa. Al-Mansur had put Muhammad Bin Sa'id al-Maslub to the sword, and al-Mahdiy is known to have executed Bayan Bin Salaman for his atrocities in the name of Islam.²²

1.2.1.3 Differences in Fiqh

To this category, *Hadith* fabrication was a method of uplifting their opinions and refuting the opinion of others. For example, in praise of Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH), it is fabricated that the Prophet (S.A.W) said: "There will emerge a man from my community called Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man; he is the light of this *ummah* (community)."²³

In their attack against al-Shafi'i, others fabricated a report that the Prophet (S.A.W) said of him: "There will emerge amongst my community, a man called Muhammad Bin Idris al-Shafi'i who is more harmful to my nation than *Iblis* (the Devil)."²⁴

On the other hand, the Persians of Zoroastrian faith fabricated *Hadiths* in support of the Persian language. One of the reports states: "Indeed, if Allah is angry, He sends down revelation in the Arabic language, but if He is pleased, He sends down revelation in Persian."²⁵

1.2.1.4 Bad Story Tellers and Spectacular Tales in the Name of Religion

Narration of spectacular events of fictitious nature in order to stir up the interest of listeners, led some people to fabricate *Hadiths*. As a result, many tales and unfounded events during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W) and the Rightly-guided Caliphs were fabricated. Example of such tales is: "The Almighty Allah will create a bird for whoever utters the declaration "La

²⁰ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 84.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid; Assuyuti, op. cit. p. 187.

²³ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 85; Assalihi, op. cit. p. 166.

²⁴ Assuba'i, ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

ilaha illa Allah" whose claws shall be of gold and its feathers of diamond."²⁶

Another example is when Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal and Yahya Bin Ma'in (d. 233 AH), visited a mosque in *Rasafah* where one story teller was performing. To the shock of the two pious jurists, the man said: "Ahmad Bin Hanbal and Yahya Bin Ma'in had narrated to him on the authority of Abdurrazaq and Qatadah that Anas (may Allah be please with him) said, the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever says, *La ilaha illal-Lah* (None has the right to be worshiped but Allah), Allah creates from every word a bird, whose beak is made from gold and whose feather is made from coral." The man narrated many other fabricated reports from the same source. After the sermon, the two jurists confronted him and demanded to know his sources. He repeated that he had heard it from Ahmad Bin Hanbal and Yahya Bin Mai'n. Yahya then said to him: 'I am Yahya and this is Ahmad Bin Hanbal. We are not aware of these contents of the Prophetic Sunnah. So, if you must narrate false *Hadith* ascribe them to others but not us!' To the surprise of everyone, the man retorted: 'It has been narrated to me that Yahya Bin Ma'in is a fool but I did not take it to be true until this moment. Yahya said: "What do you mean"? He replied: 'Are you the only Yahya Bin Ma'in and Ahmad Bin Hanbal in this world? I have studied under seventeen Ahmads Bin Hanbals and Yahyas Bin Ma'in".²⁷

The activities of storytellers certainly created problems for the genuine and sincere scholars. Imam Assuyuti reports in his work, Tahdhirul-Khawas, that one storyteller in Baghdad interpreted the verse: "... It may be that your Lord will rise you to a station of praise and Glory"²⁸ to mean that the Prophet (S.A.W) will sit together with Allah upon the Arsh (throne). When Ibn Jarir al-Tabary heard of this story, he spoke out against it angrily. He then inscribed the following words upon his door: "Praise be to Him Who has no partner and no co-sitter on His Arsh".²⁹ This was enough signal for the good minded people of Baghdad who proceed to the house of the storyteller and pelted it with stones and blocked it entrance.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid; Assalih, op. cit. pp. 268-269.

²⁸ Al-Hilahi, M.T. and Khan, M.M. (n.d.) Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, Madina, K.S.A, P. 380.

²⁹ Assuba'i, op. cit p. 86.

1.2.1.5 Encouragement and Warning

The ascetics, in their attempt to make the rules of Islam with a view to encouraging people do good deeds and desist from evil deeds, fabricated *Hadiths*. Forgetting that Islam is a complete way of life and that it does not require any modification. These reports were easy to detect and point out. Consequently, the scholars of *Hadith* wasted no time in rejecting them as fabrication. The Prophet (S.A.W) himself has declared: "Whoever tells a lie against me, deliberately, let him prepare his seat in the (Hell) Fire."³⁰

The fabricators of *Hadith* argued that they were not lying against the Prophet (S.A.W) but were working for what they thought is in the best interest of Islam. By this argument they fabricated *Hadiths* that showed the good virtue and rewards of some verses of the Qur'an. Others fabricated some *Hadiths* to show the virtue of certain supplications and religious deeds. When Nuh Bin Abi Maryam was confronted over this habit of fabrication, he replied: "We fabricate them in order to soften the hearts of men."³¹ Accordingly, this group was described as the worst of all groups of *Hadith* fabricators.

Currying favour with Kings and Leaders

The example of this is what Giyath Bin Ibrahim did. It was reported that one day he entered the palace of Caliph al-Mahdy and found him playing with a dove. He instantly narrated a famous *Hadith* which reads as follows: "There shall be no playing except with shooting with bows and arrows (i.e. archery), camel or on horseback". He then added to it "and with birds wings". To please al-Mahdy. Al-Mahdy is said to have given Giyath ten thousand dirhams, and after he had left his palace, Al-Mahdy declared that Giyath has certainly uttered a lie against the Prophet (S.A.W). He then ordered that the dove be slaughtered.³² Many scholars have condemned the act of Caliph al-Mahdy.

³⁰ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 87.

³¹ Ibid; Al-Azmi, op. cit. p. 46.

³² Al-Iraqi, Z.A. (1991): *al-Ta'yyeed wal-idhah lima Utliqa wa ughliqa min muqaddamati Ibn Salah*. Mu'assalul-kutubit-thaqafiyyah, Beirut, P.130; At-Tahhan, M. (1987): *Tayseer mustalahil Hadith*, maktabatul-ma'arif, Riyadh. P. 90.

1.2.1.7 Differences in Madhahib (Jurisprudential and theological Schools)

Some ignorant followers of *madhahib*³³ and theological schools have, in their attempt to defend the views of their *madhahib* and various schools and philosophy, fabricated Hadiths. The example of this is the statement: "Whoever raises up his hands in *salat*, his *salat* is void"³⁴ Another is: "There shall appear a people from my community who will be saying that the Qur'an is created and whoever says so, has certainly, denounced his belief in Allah, the Almighty and his wife becomes divorced from him instantly".³⁵ These are the most important causes for fabricating Hadiths.

The scholars of Hadith, on the other hand, used different methods to identify or detect fabricated *Hadith* for the purpose of preserving the Sunnah. A close study of the methods shows that fabricated Hadith can be identified in one of the two ways through: *Isnad* (chain of narration) or *Matan* (Content of the report).

The characteristics to identify fabricated Hadith are many. Some are through the chain of narration (*Isnad*) while others are through the content (*Matan*). The scholars of Hadith consider any chain of narration contains some certain defects as fabricated Hadith. For example, where the narrator appears to be a liar or where a narrator reported from a scholar that he did not actually meet, or where the fabricator confess or through careful observations of the psychology of the narrator such as the case of Sa'ad bn Turaif as reported by Saif bn Umar al- Tamimi that "Once we were in the presence of Sa'ad bn Turaif his son came home from the Kuttab (Local Qur'anic School) crying and Sa'ad asked what the matter was? The boy said: 'My teacher beat me'. Out of anger, Sa'ad said, "I will disgrace them today. Instantly Sa'ad said "Ikramah informed me on the authority of Ibn Abbas from the Prophet (S.A.W) who said, "The teacher of your children are the worst among you the merciful to the orphan and the harshest to poor".³⁶

³³ Madh-hab (singular of madhahib) initially means the position of an outstanding scholar on a particular point. It was also used to refer to the sum total of a scholar's opinions, whether legal or philosophical. Later it was used to denote not only the scholar's opinion, but also that of his students and followers.

³⁴ As-Suba'i, op. cit. p.88; As-Salih, op. cit. p.268; At-Tahhan, op. cit. p. 92.

³⁵ Assuba'i, op. cit. p. 87.

³⁶ Assubai, op cit p 97

- In regard to content of the Hadith (*Matan*), the scholars of Hadith mention many ways to identify the fabricated Hadith such as; stilted and awkward words of the content. An expert who is familiar with the intricacies of Arabic language knows when a given word or phrase is stated and concludes that it is impossible to have emanated from one who is eloquent how then could such word have emanated from the most eloquent person who has ever spoken Arabic, Muhammad (S.A.W). In essence, they are so familiar with words and terms of Hadith that they have a very strong ability by virtue of which they can distinguish between what is possible to have emanated from the Prophet (SAW) and what is not possible. or absurdity and irrationality in Meaning or contradicting the categorical texts of the Holy Qur'an or when the Hadith contradicts the well-known historical facts occurred during the period of the Prophet of Allah (S.A.W) or conformity of the Hadith with narrator's school of thought or sect while he is extremely fanatic to his school or sect or where the Hadith consists of something which is so significant that is supposed to relate to a significant happening or event that must have been witnessed by many people due to the nature of the happening, and it happened that the Hadith was only reported by a single narrator or where Hadith contains an exaggeration on the reward for doing a small good deed or an exaggeration on the punishment for committing a minor sin e.t.c.³⁷

These are the most important criteria evolved by the scholars for Hadith criticism and methods of distinguishing between the sound and fabricated ones.

It is therefore, pertinent to mention that the *sanad* of a Hadith may be criticized without that affecting the *matan*. However, where the *matan* of a Hadith is criticized, it automatically affects the reliability of the *sanad*. The general understanding among Hadith scholars is that the content of a Hadith with defect in its chain of narration may be regular and consistent with other sound and acceptable *Isnad*

1.3 Conclusion

It is necessary for any one giving legal verdict to understand the process of establishing evidence and proof from Hadiths. According to Muslim

³⁷ Ibid

scholars, every issue relating to knowledge must pass through four stages and subjected to a detailed investigation, after which the person can grasp the most correct opinion on issues in which the scholars have differed. The stages are:

- (i) Verifying the proof involved in that issue with a view to establishing its authenticity.
- (ii) Investigating into the validity of using the verified authentic proof for that specific issue.
- (iii) Determining that the verified, valid proof is free from being abrogated.
- (iv) Establishing that the verified, valid and unabrogated proof is not contradicted by other proofs.

It is only after these stages are settled that a Hadith can be used as a proof of and evidence for an Islamic ruling. Lack of implementing these stages when researching an issue of knowledge can cause a person to fall into what is called 'improper verification of the issues'.