# *Assessing and Evaluating Ḥadith:*
## Its Value, Significance, Authority and Authenticity in Islamic Thought

### *Dr. Farhat Nisar*
Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities,
Comsats Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan

### *Dr. Sayyed Abdul Ghaffar Bukhari*
Head Department of Islamic Studies,
National University Of Modern Language, Islamabad, Pakistan

## Abstract

*Qur'an and Ḥadith as fundamental and primary sources of Shariah stand as hall mark of Islam. Ḥadith called traditions as the second fundamental source of Islam embodies sayings, actions and expressions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) explicit or implicit. Mainly there have been two trends of rejecting the status of Ḥadith. One is rejecting the authority of Ḥadith and other rejects the authenticity of Ḥadith especially "Khabar-al-wahid" or solitary tradition. Other group does not completely reject the authority of Ḥadith rather text of Ḥadith especially in case of weak traditions. This paper discuss the opinion of rejecters of Ḥadith and contribution of Muslim scholars along with their arguments from Qur'an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to highlight the importance and significance of authority and authenticity of Ḥadith in all disciplines of Islamic thought.*

*Key words: Ḥadith, Authority, Authenticity,*

## Introduction:

Islam unlike other theologies and religions is not simply a theological statement about Allah's relationship with His creatures. Besides the system of doctrine of worships and creeds, it deals with social, punitive, marketable, and traditional matters. It enters into everything, even from macro to micro level of social and  privet life of each member of the society no matter from any gender, age class and situation. Islam as complete way of life and religion called "Deen" provides guidance for every individual of every all times.

Qur'an and Ḥadith as fundamental and primary sources of Shariah stand as hall mark of Islam. Qur'an is everything of Prophet Muhammad

(SAW) 's  revelations or Wahy. Ḥadith called traditions as the second fundamental source of Islam embodies   sayings, actions and expressions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) explicit or implicit. Every aspect of his life and conduct has been reported to us in the vast collections of Ḥadith.  Status of Sunnah of the Holy Prophet was an ideal which the early generations of Muslims sought to approximate by interpreting his example in terms of the new materials at their disposal and the new needs and that this continuous and progressive interpretation was also called Sunnah, even if it varied according to different regions.

In addition to al-Qur'an, therefore, every Muslim believes in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a source of  guidance and wisdom. Several verses of  al-Qur'an have established clearly that the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) is inspired and guided by Allah.

*"Nor does he say of his own desire ; it is not but revelation that is revealed."*[1]

*"And Allah has revealed to thee the Book and the Wisdom and taught thee what thou knew not."* [2]

*"Allah did confer a great favour on the Believers when he sent among them a Messenger from among themselves reciting to them His signs and purifying them and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom."*[3]

The commentators of al-Qur'an and other leading jurists like al-Shaffi' have stated in unmistakable terms that the word "hikmah" in the above verses of al-Qur'an refers to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).. Several other verses of al-Qur'an also made it compulsory upon believers to obey the Prophet of Allah and to respect his authority some are given below:

*"O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Prophet (SAW) and those in authority from among you."* [4]

*" O you who believe, obey Allah and His Prophet (SAW)  and turn not away from him when you hear (him speak)."* [5]

*"O you who believe, respond to Allah and His Prophet (SAW) when he calls you to that which gives you life."* [6]

*"Whoever obeys the Prophet (SAW)  , he indeed obeys Allah."* [7]

*" And whatever Prophet (SAW)  gives you, accept it and whatever he forbids you, abstain (from it)."* [8]

*"Certainly you have in the Prophet (SAW)  Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for him who hopes in Allah and in the Last Day and remembers Allah much."* [9]

## History of classification of Ḥadith:

During the life time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) Companions used to refer to him directly, even after the death of Prophet (SAW) when quoting sayings. The Successors of the companions of Prophet (SAW) followed the same pattern, some of them used to quote the Prophet (SAW) through the Companions while others would quote directly Prophet (SAW) without using intermediate authority of companions of Prophet (SAW) .Such kind of Ḥadith was later known as "Mursal". But gradually missing links between companions and the Prophet were found in many traditions. For this reason the need for the verification of each "isnad" arose. Another reason was the premeditated fabrication of Ḥadith by various people which appeared amongst the Muslims as need to verify the chain and narrators of Ḥadith. The rules and regulating established by this discipline are known as "Mustalah al-Ḥadith".

According to the expert's narration and narrators Ḥadith is classified two major kinds in respect of the chain: [10]

Mutawatir traditions transmitted by a large number of people, and Ahäd (solitary) traditions. "Ahad" traditions have again been sub-divided e.g Hanafis have divided it into three kinds, namely "Mashoor", "Aziz" and "Gharib" but constantly transmitted and widely-known as "Aähäd" (solitary).

## Ḥadith-e-Mutawatir:

In Arabic language word tawatir literally means the coming of something in succession, or report conveyed by a body of people which entails by itself the knowledge of its truth [11].

In Islamic terminology Mutawatir is a Ḥadith is one which is conveyed by narrators whose number reaches such an extent of abundance that their agreement on a lie is usually impossible [12].

In other words it can be said that mutawätir Ḥadith is is one which is transmitted through a people whose gathering together and agreement on a lie cannot be conceived is impossible during the first generations, namely during the lifetime of the Companions, Successors their Followers, for collections of traditions came into being due to their large number and the distance between their places, from a people like them, till it thus reaches Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and beginning being just like its end and its middle being just like its both ends, e.g the transmission of the number of "Raka'ät" and number of prayers, rates of zakat, and what is similar to that. The conditions of number of narrators, and variety of places are disputed. There is no condition of any definite number of transmitters in tawâtur, although some jurists have

suggested certain fixed numbers. Sometimes their number may be limited and sometimes unlimited [13].

The experts of doctors of Ḥadith have generally accepted that if at last ten Companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) have narrate a tradition, it is considered "Mutawatir"[14].

Examples of Mutawatir Ḥadith includes instructions about prayers, rites of pilgrimage, rates of zakât, method of performing ablution, and similar other acts received by the Muslims from the Prophet (SAW) through observation or direct hearing from him.

**Mashor Ḥadith:**

Al-Mashor Ḥadith (widely-known tradition) is one which has been transmitted from Prophet (SAW) by a number of persons whose agreement on a lie can be suspected, but the scholars at large have received it as accepted, and have acted upon it. Considering its root (origin) it belongs to solitary traditions [15]. According to experts of Ḥadith and Jurists Mashor Ḥadith is one which belongs to solitary traditions as regards its beginning, then it becomes widespread among the scholars in the second generation, until it is transmitted by a body of people whose unanimous agreement on a lie cannot be imagined. Mashor Ḥadith has also been defined as a tradition which must be widely accepted by the scholars [16].

It is also a Ḥadith or tradition whose transmitters are upright. Another view is that it is one whose narrators are two; and according to a third view, it is one whose narrators are more than one. According to the jurists, it should be transmitted by more than three narrators (i.e. they should be four or more), and according to the experts of Ḥadith it should be narrated by more than two narrators (i.e. they should be three or more), in each link of transmission. Hence it is necessary that its narrators should be two or more [17].

Additionally widely speeded Mashor Ḥadith must be transmitted by the people whose agreement on a lie cannot be imagined. They belong to the second generation the successors and their followers. Mashor tradition starts as a solitary one in the generation of the Companions of Prophet (SAW) and becomes widespread in the generations of the Successors (T'abaen) and their followers (Taba Tabaen). Those are reliable people and masters who cannot be blamed for lying [18].

Examples of Mashor Ḥadith includes punishment of stoning to death (rajm) inflicted on a married person who commits adultery, wiping over the leather socks while performing ablution, prohibition of marrying a women along with her maternal or paternal aunt, prohibition of temporary marriage

after its permission, and fasting for three consecutive days to expiate the break of an oath are Mashor traditions. [19]

**Khabar Al-Ahad (Ḥadith-e-Ahad Or Solitary tradition):**

A solitary tradition is one which is transmitted by a single narrator or two narrators more — therein being no consideration of the number of transmitters — after being something other than Mashor and  Mutawâtir tradition is called a solitary tradition  or khabar al-wâhid [20].

A solitary tradition is one which is transmitted by solitary narrators the Prophet (SAW).  It means narration of one from one, one a body, or a body from one, from the beginning of the chain of narrators its end. The number of its transmitters does not reach the number of the transmitters of a Mutawâtir tradition in the three generations, namely the generation of the Companions of Prophet (SAW), the Successors, and their followers. In other words, it is transmitted by one or two or more narrators whose number is below the number of the narrators of Mashhor and Mutawâtir traditions during the first three generations, although their number might reach the extent of a Mutawâtir tradition later on after the lapse of these generations. The reason is that the Ḥadith  was already compiled after the third generation, i.e. Followers, and all the traditions became well-known by means of compilation of  Hadïth. A solitary tradition thus does not fulfil the conditions of a Mutawâtir and Mashhùr tradition.[21]

In other words it can be said that khabar- al -wahid is Ḥadith or tradition which has only a single narrator should narrate it. What is required narrators in the three early generations should be less in number than Mutawâtir and Mashhor traditions. Mashhür is also khabar al-wàhid according the experts of Ḥadith and   majority jurists.

A solitary tradition or khabar-al-wahid entails certain knowledge {'ilm al-yaqïn) according to  Ibn Hazm, and some scholars of Ahl al-Ḥadith and demand certain knowledge when it is combined with other presumptive evidence (qarä'in, signs) which is the view of  Ibn al-Hâjib, and al-Amidi. Then it can be authoritative if two persons, necessary for witness, narrate the tradition or if four persons, necessary for witness in the case of adultery, narrate the tradition. But solitary tradtion is not at all a proof nor authoritative in matters of religion. [22]

A solitary tradition is recognized as a valid argument in  hudud cases (prescribed punishments) according to the majority of the jurists, Yüsuf and Abu Bakr al-Jassäs from among the HanafI jurists, whereas Abü'l-Hasan al-Basri and the majority of the Hanafï jurists are opposed [23].

Examples of solitary transmission are found during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW) when Companions convey the injunctions of the Shari'ah to the people through and single transmitters and the Prophet (SAW) confirmed it. The Prophet (SAW) himself sent twelve persons to countries with his letters to convey the message of Islam to their Even within the country he used to send his letters to his through individual messengers. During his caliphate 'Umar decided many cases on the basis of traditions. For instance, he gave a share to the wife of the slain bloodwit and withdrew his personal opinion to distribute among agnates of the slain (Al-Shàfi'ì, al-Risälah,401-459).

Ahad is further classified into: "Mashor", "Aziz", & "Gharib" .Mashor Ḥadith has already discuss earlier. Aziz narration is one if at any stage in the isnad, only two reporters are found to narrate the Ḥadith no matter if in other stage it has more than two narrators but in any stage if it has two narrators whether from companions of Prophet (SAW), their successors, or followers of successors. A Ḥadith is termed "Gharib" ("scarce, strange") when only a single reporter is found relating it at some stage of the isnad (narration)  whether from companions of Prophet (SAW), their followers or followers of the followers of companions of Prophet (SAW).[24]

**Discussion on Issue of Authority and Authenticity of Ḥadith:**

Mainly from non-Muslims and some of so-called Muslim scholars have two trends of rejecting the status of Ḥadith. One is rejecting the authority of Ḥadith and other rejects the authenticity of Ḥadith especially "Khabar-al-wahid" or solitary tradition. There is another group which does not oppose the status of Ḥadith but raised question mark on the authority of text of Ḥadith. Throughout the history many people who claimed to be scholars of Islam have rejected the authority or authenticity of Ḥadith e.g Rashid Khalifa and Ahmad Mansoor from subcontinent, Kassim Ahmed from Malaysia, and many others who even have left their Muslim homeland in order to protect their ideology.

In India sub-continent Ghulam Ahmad Parwez and Javaid Ahamed Ghamidi are the most radical of the deniers of Ḥadith. All of the rejecters of Ḥadith have the opinion that Qur'an is complete, perfect and fully enough to follow. And the responsibility of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was only to deliver the Qur'an and obeying Prophet (SAW) is only in following the Qur'an. For the rejecters of Ḥadith Qur'an is the only religious guidance and Ḥadith for Muslims. There is an official website named "Ahl-al-Qur'an.com" which is promoting the satanic ideas of such people who rejects the status of Ḥadith [25]

First of all if we look into the lives of all so-called scholars from Muslim community who rejects the Ḥadith as source of guidance ,almost all of them are influenced or lived in western culture.So ultimately their Ideas are generated from the western Orientalist[26].

Initially among the Muslim scholar who has dispensed with the argument raised regarding the authority and authenticity of the Ḥadith is Muhammad Ibn-e- Idris al-Shaffi through his Book the *Risala*3 and *Kitab Jimaal-illm* attributed as " *Risala* ". Imam Shaffi has argued in this book that the Qur'anic commands to obey Prophet Muhammad (SAW)'s Sunnah which is an authoritative and authentic source of law . And that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) 's Sunnah is well-maintained in the *Ḥadith*. In order to support his view Imam Shaffi has described Allah's Messenger (SAW)s Ḥadith in which Prophet (SAW) has indicated those people who claim to be Muslims but when any Ḥadith or command from Sunnah will come to them they will reject it with saying they only accept only Qur'an as command from Allah Almighty. In his book " *Kitab Jimia al-IIm*" Imam Shaffi has mentioned a detailed debate between his own view and those who have rejected the use of some or all Ḥadith [27].

In the same book Imam Shaffi has made some arguments against the rejecters of Ḥadith but the same debate has been discuss in detailed view of Imam Shaffi in his another book named "Al- Risala" where he has identified two different categories of rejecters of Ḥadith claimed to be "Ahl al-Kalam".According to Imam Shaffi some of them rejects all traditions of Prophet (SAW) few rejects some particular reports and reporters of Ḥadith. In addition to this Imam Shaffi has given his arguments against both rejecters of Ḥadith on the same foundations: that obedience to the Prophet (SAW) requires the acceptance of all narrations from Prophet (SAW) which constitute a form of divine revelation that is complementary to the Qur'an and necessary for the implementation of the divine commands contained in it. [28]

This is a clear fact that even during the pre-classical period of Islamic thought the Qur'an and Sunnah discourse was considered to be organically intertwined and symbiotically interdependent as these two sources were conceptualized is a single, coherent hermeneutic unity. Furthermore, they were not textually fixed and were often understood as more abstract ethico-religious concepts whose purpose was to facilitate the benefit of the Muslim community and elevation of hardship based on principles of ethically objective value such as "Maruf (that which is commonly good). Based on these considerations, fact is clear that Prophet (SAW)'s embodiment of the Qur'anic message as one of its most authoritative (if not the most authoritative) interpreters, this

interpretational vacuum was filled by taking recourse to the concept of Ḥadith that appears in the Qur'an in the oft repeated form of 'Obey Allah and His Messenger'. Sunnah was a well known pre-Qur'anic concept existing among Arabs of the region, connoting an authoritative source of knowledge/practice or a normative example to be followed. [29]

The usage of the term Ḥadith of the Prophet (SAW) existed early on most likely at the time of the Prophet (SAW) himself.(Ibid). Furthermore, Qur'an and Ḥadith existed in a conceptually unified and symbiotic hermeneutical relationship. Thus their scope and nature were considered to be the same. Put differently, they were considered as two sides of the same coin.

They accommodated extra-textual sources of knowledge to the same extent and by the term they concern themselves with themselves with a number of dimensions of human existence including belief, ethics, law and ritual. Ḥadith or Sunnah of Prophet (SAW) consisted of four elements reflecting the nature and the elements of the Qur'anic discourse, namely: Sunnah "Aqidiyyah" (belief-based Sunnah), Sunnah "Akhlaqiyyah" (ethics-based Sunnah), Sunnah "Fiqhiyyah" (law-based Sunnah) and Sunnah number of dimensions of human existence including belief, ethics, law and ritual. So all of the components of Sunnah, apart from its "Ibadiyyah" (worships) and "Rahmaiyyah" (blessing) measurement which is in essence and requires no elucidation and which is not reliant on on written trans mission of acquaintance but is practically perpetuated and unswervingly linked to the Qur'an.

This, in turn, infers that the Sunnah compliance or otherwise of convinced principles, or actions is entirely dependent on the way Qur'an is deduced. In this regard the most critical and pivotal factor in instituting Sunnah is based on the approach and method of Qur'anic interpretation, i.e. the questions pertaining to Qur'anic hermeneutics even if the Qur'anic literal text itself is silent on the issue under consideration and not an instinctive question of reliability to body of Ḥadith literature as either authenticated by the "Muhadathin"(experts of Ḥadith) or 'Usuliyyin (experts of Islamic law).

The approach and method of experts of Ḥadith and law is a conceptual and hermeneutical link with the Qur'an that was obvious in the pre-classical Islamic scholarship.  (30). The assessment and evaluation of a particular Ḥadith in relation to the normative fountainheads of the Islamic theological foundations, namely Qur'an and Sunnah, according to both classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship, has been approached via three avenues [31]

One method was developed by the specialists in Ḥadith authenticity/ criticism, transmission, compilation and classification, namely called "MuḤadithin" (experts in Ḥadith sciences) have predominantly focused on

assessing Ḥadith authenticity and reliability by probing their isnad (chain of transmission) which, in essence, largely amounts to concerning themselves with the reliability of the "Rijal" ( men quoting Haith) that are responsible for its transition. To a lesser extent they also examined Ḥadiths body of text or matan. Based on this approach Ḥadiths overall authenticity/ reliability was evaluated and their subsequent classification ranging from authentic to unreliable was developed [32].

In view, the question of the importance of the Sunnah in the performance of the religious obligations does not arise for neglect of it in this case, could be viewed as an expression of implicit disbelief (khufr khafiyy) or as down -right stupidity. He argues that Prophet (SAW) has laid down in unmistakable terms that the performance of the salat in congregation (jama 'ah) is twenty-seven times more meritorious than performing it alone. In the light of this saying of the

Prophet, how could one condone an act of neglect of the Sunnah on the part of the Believers without any valid excuse? The omission of the Ḥadith in the fulfillment of religious duties could be taken as an expression of "kufr" (Disbelief), he proceeds to elaborate on the nature of this type of kufr which often finds a fertile soil in the mind of many a believer. This state of kufr occurs when there arises a feeling in you that the words of the Ḥadith do not mean what they appear to suggest literally. [33].

**Findings:**

- Keeping in view all the discussion of the paper following are the findings of research.
- Every Muslim believes in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a source of guidance and wisdom after Qur'an.
- According to the expert's narration and narrators Ḥadith is classified two major kinds in respect of the chain.
- Mutawatir traditions transmitted by a large number of people (2) Ahäd (solitary) traditions. "Ahad" traditions have again been sub-divided e.g Hanafis have divided it into three kinds, namely "Mashoor", "Aziz" and "Gharib" but constantly transmitted and widely-known as "Aähäd" (solitary).
- Mainly from non-Muslims and some of so-called Muslim scholars have two trends of rejecting the status of Ḥadith. One is rejecting the authority of Ḥadith and other rejects the authenticity of Ḥadith especially "Khabar-al-wahid" or solitary tradition.

- The earliest extant Muslim scholar who deal t with the argument over the authority and authenticity of the Ḥadith is Muhammad Ibn Idris al-Shafi4i (d. 204 AH/820 CE) through his Book the Risala3 and Kitab Jimaal-iIlm attributed as "Risala ". Imam Shaffi has argued in this book that the Qur'anic commands to obey Prophet Muhammad (SAW)'s Sunnah which is an authoritative and authentic source of law.

- The rejects Ḥadith are of two types one are those who reject all narratons of Prophet (SAW) and claimed to be Ahl-ul-Kalam. They are in majority who rejects all traditions of Prophet (SAW) but few of them reject some particular reports and reporters of Ḥadith.

- Our obligation to the obedience of Prophet (SAW) requires the acceptance of all narrations from Prophet (SAW) which constitute a form of divine revelation that is complementary to the Qur'an and necessary for the implementation of the divine commands contained in it.[28]

**Conclusion:**

The Ḥadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the second fundamental source of Islam, It embodies the entire pattern of life of Prophet (SAW) and includes every detail concerning his utterances, his actions, his conduct and his attitudes whether explicit or implicit. Every aspect of his life and conduct has been reported to us in the vast collections of Ḥadith. In addition to al-Qur'an, therefore, every Muslim believes in the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) as a model of guidance and wisdom. Prophet (SAW)'s embodiment of the Qur'anic message as one of its most authoritative (if not the most authoritative) interpreters, this interpretational vacuum was filled by taking recourse to the concept of Ḥadith that appears in the Qur'an in the oft repeated form of 'Obey Allah and His Messenger'. Sunnah was a well-known pre-Qur'anic concept existing among Arabs of the region, connoting an authoritative source of knowledge/practice or a normative example to be followed.

In order to create a link between Qur'an and Ḥadith the Qur'anic hermeneutic models is enough to justify the authority and authenticity of Ḥadith which are based on objective-based nature of ethical value or which permit a more contextual-based approaches in giving hermeneutic primacy to ethical/ moral or objective-based (Maqasid) approaches to explanation of Islam and its scope in a global environment which is no doubt a vital and avoidable.

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