**The Reliability of Hadith**

**Abstract**

Hadith Literature has been a highly controversial topic over the centuries among both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some claim that they are reliable and some claim that they have no true basis. This paper will investigate and present the different point of views of these people providing my own point of view about the topic but also presenting the facts and different point of views of different scholars. The science of Hadith will also be discussed in its different aspects to determine whether there is any truth to this topic or if it is all just preconceived thoughts brought down to us by our fathers.

**Introduction**

When Islam was first introduced to mankind, it was done so by God; he delivered it directly to the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), a messenger, who then translated and conveyed this religion to rest of humanity. No one other than the Prophet had the knowledge to understand the meaning of this religion, therefore his role in the formation of Islam in the past was highly significant, and it was the determining factor, in my point of view, of what Islam is in the present and what it will continue to be in the future. It started out as a concept, revealed by God, that the Prophet preached and addressed, then this concept became steadily supported by facts and ideas from God himself and so, it grew into the religion that it is today.

The basis of Islam will forever be the Quran providing that its interpretation is something extremely vital in the formation of this religion. When the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), it came so in pieces, verses (Ayat) of chapters (Surahs), related to the events and circumstances occurring at the time. If a certain event took place, God would determine and exhibit its significance to us by revealing a verse relating to it. In my opinion, this was to show people of the future (the people living at the time of reference) what is to happen if a certain situation was to take place. It was to be used as an example. Then all these verses summed up to the chapters which then amounted to be what the Quran is today.

My belief is, as most Muslims’, the Quran has a greater knowledge that cannot be comprehended by humans; the highest form of understanding the Quran comes from the Prophet’s point of view and practices. His sayings and deeds aid us in the understanding of the true form of Islam and the meaning of the Quran, because if Islam were to be revealed without a Prophet or a messenger, there would be no true meaning and every person would interpret the religion according to their own point of view without any true basis. This would lead to many misunderstandings in the religious faith. However, even though there are many differences of opinions in regards to some religious topics, I do believe that these differences were minimized by the presence of theProphet, rather than maximized by the absence of a figure that knows best.

God sent us a Prophet to guide us and teach us sinc communication with God is not always responsive to our questions and our speculations. Asking God a question does not yield an immediate answer, however, this privilege was available with the Prophet. Any speculations about rules or provisions relating to Islam and its shariah were clarified by him, and that was his role, clarifying and spreading the right Islam so it is not misinterpreted. He was there to show that this is the word of od and to translate it in the correct manner so the information does not get lost on the way and we are not misled by it.

Islam is based on the Quran and all Muslims unanimously agree to this concept of application. However, the common perception of Islam is that it has two bases rather than one, the essential one being the Quran, and the less prioritized basis is the tradition, also known as Hadith. Most Muslims agree with this and apply it giving the Quran priority, but some scholars have completely disregarded the Hadith literature and questioned the validity of it. I believe that the previously mentioned scholars do have a right to question and speculate about the extent of validity of the Hadiths but should not completely disregard it.

**Queries**

Hadith in its literal meaning refers to conversation or talk, but with regard to its Islamic terms, it refers to the traditions relating the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), of words and deeds [5]. According to the article “Assessing Islamic Information Quality on the Internet: A Case of Information About Hadith”, Hadith is “any word, deed, approval, and physical or moral description attributed to the Prophet whether truly or supposedly even the moves and rests in the awakening or sleep” [2]. When looking into this definition historically, we believe that it is unlikely for these ‘hadiths’ to have been preserved perfectly from the time they occurred up to recent times. Since the text was ‘codified’ at a later time than the occurring event, there is a gap between the text and the event it entails and so doubts may arise. In the article “The Reliability of the Traditional Science of Hadith: A Critical Reconsideration”, K. Amin introduced some queries that pose historical dilemmas with regards to the Hadith literature. Amin asked questions such as, what is the accuracy of the events narrated in these Hadiths? Are the Hadiths transmitted really the Prophet’s or were they just a reflection of the interests of the public? [1]

Quranists, a group that believes only in the Quran, question the Hadith literature because, in their point of view, the Quran explains everything and the Hadith is unnecessary. They deny its validity because, since it is quoted by transmitters and narrators, there is a chance it is forged; there is also a chance that these transmitters forget or make a mistake in some way, while the Quran is free of any mistake [6]. According to the article “Pillars, proofs and requirements of the Quran-Sufficiency Theory, along with its criticism”, by S. Dolatabad, H. Moghadam and A. Asiya, they mention an example of these speculations when Imam AlShafi’i was approached by someone that addressed him by saying, “You're Arab and the Quran was revealed in the same language and you are more aware to preserve the Quran. The God practices are given in the Quran that if anyone doubts the truth of them, must repent, otherwise, should be killed and God said in the Quran that “The Quran is explanation and description of everything”. However, how this is eligible to you and other persons to claim that sometimes the God obligations are general and sometimes specific. Sometimes the evidence implies obligation, some time it is not cited and so on. You here refer to a Hadith cited from the Prophet (PBUH) by one or some intermediaries, while you and advocates of such a movement, believe that no one of these Hadiths are fully pure due to factor such as honesty, forgetfulness, and mistakes in quoting them, etc., is it permissible that citing such Hadiths, to raise opposite with these features with appearances of Quran orders and replace the Hadiths with Quran verses?”[7] These are just examples of the infinite speculations that our minds think of on a daily basis.

**Orientalist View**

The study of Islam in all its aspects requires the investigation of the validity and correctness of all the distinct characteristics of it. Western Orientalists started investigating the historical accuracy of Hadith since the 19th century, in order to study Islamic history, law and the Quran, nevertheless studying Hadith literature was a crucial part of this study. It all started with the German scholar Gustav Weil, who was skeptical of all Hadiths and who claimed that Bukhari’s Hadiths should all be rejected. In my opinion, he cannot completely reject the Bukhari’s Hadiths since they were based on a process, and I believe that as a non-Muslim, he simply cannot understand the significance that the Hadith literature presents to Muslims. Weil was followed by Aloys Sprenger who mentioned in his book, that the Hadiths in question contain more authentic (Sahih) texts than forged (Maud’u) ones, however, he was skeptic about the Hadiths as a historical source. Another scholar, William Muir, argued that there is historical truth to the Hadiths and the uncertainty merely comes from the distortions due to the narrators of the text, and Reinhart Dozy came along to further add to Muir and Sprenger’s ideas, and claimed that half of Bukhari’s Hadiths are actually authentic, and the reason that its only half, is that the Hadith was prohibited to be written down until two centuries after the Prophet had passed. I understand Dozy’s point of view the best because of the fact that the Hadiths were written two centuries after their occurrence does propose a risk of historical inaccuracy.

Later came a Hungarian scholar, named Ignaz Goldziher, who is the leading orientalist referred to when the study of Hadith literature is mentioned, and this is because he subjected the Hadith to be studied critically. Goldziher argued that the majority of Bukhari’s sahih was actually constructed and fabricated with regard to the social and political state that was present at the time. He claimed that people would either fabricate a whole Hadith or manipulate an existing one to benefit their political needs. He also criticized Muslim scholars for their over-reliance on the Isnad of the text rather than the matn, which will be discussed further into this article, and explained that this led to the scholars not paying attention to the historical and logical capacities that are contextually within the Hadith. He regarded it as an “invaluable source for beliefs, conflicts, and concerns” [1]. Goldziher stayed unmatched without any similar studies conducted after his systematic study of Hadith except when one, Joseph Schacht, appeared in 1950 and said that “isnads have a tendency to grow backwards.” Schacht believed, like Goldziher, that the majority of Hadith did originate with the manipulation and fabrication of individuals of new or existing Hadiths. However, he also believed that by carefully studying the Hadith, an estimate of where, when and by who a Hadith originated was possible to discover. This was G.H.A Juynboll’s method, where he analyzed the isnad of the Hadith to date it. Some scholars do however represent the opinion that the companions of the Prophet did maintain the written records of the Hadith and they were compiled when they were studied and accepted.

**Quranist View**

Muslim Scholars unanimously agreed that the Quran is the ultimate basis of Islam, however, they do not all share the same opinion that the Hadith and Sunnah is a part of it. Following the orientalist approach to the Hadith, a group emerged called the Quranists that claimed that, “Quran is the only source and reference of knowledge about religion and world affairs, and the Prophet’s Sunnah is not of the religion.” [6] They only rely on the Quran since they believe it is the only source of divine revelation being the word of God, but the Hadith is not a source of revelation and because of that it should not be taken into account. Many Muslims believe, as has been mentioned before, that the Quran and Hadith go hand in hand and the Hadith aids in the justification and further explanation of the Quran. No one is in argument that the Quran is the source of all divine revelation and the disagreement is merely on the topic of whether the tradition helps in explaining the Quran or not. Quranists believe that the Quran stands alone and it is not necessary to explain it using Hadiths and tradition. They use the fact that the writings of Hadiths were prohibited after the Prophet’s death as a justification to why these Hadiths are not eternal nor sufficient while the Quran is. I think that even though they are right to say that the Quran is self-sufficient and is the ultimate supreme revelation, it is also incorrect to invalidate all of the Prophet’s Hadiths and decide that they are insignificant, since, they do not define a new religion or distort the current religion in any way. They merely add more details and specifications to the Quran while aiding in the explanation of it. In rank, after God coming first, I think that the Prophet is who knows this religion best and that as Muslims we should do as he did since he was and still is the best Muslim to ever exist.

**The Position of Hadith in Islam**

As a counter argument To Quranism, many scholars do believe that within the interpretations of several verses of the Quran, when God mentions the Prophet and following him, what he is insinuating is that we follow his Hadiths. An example is the verse of (Say, “Obey God and obey the Messenger.” But if they turn away, then he is responsible for his obligations, and you are responsible for your obligations. And if you obey him, you will be guided. It is only incumbent on the Messenger to deliver the Clarifying Message) (AlNur 54). According to Bin Baz, this has been interpreted as an order to follow both God and the Prophet but to follow the Prophet from sayings, deeds, and reportings delivered to us by these Hadiths. Other verses include (If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger,) (Nisaa: 59), and (Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you) (Nisaa: 59). In my opinion, these verses show the importance and significance of the Prophet Mohammed and since the above-mentioned groups deny his sayings truth and authenticity, this translates as them disregarding his existence and saying that it was not that important, he was merely here to give us the message and go. However, I think that his message is supposed to live on and God’s recurrent mentioning of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) in his Quran shows his significance which also means that anything he had said is significant. I think that Hadith explains and details on issues and statements mentioned in the Quran generally, for example, the method of praying and ablution. He was there to clarify the essentials in details rather than every person reading it and translating it how they would want to. I firmly believe that the two complement each other and must be followed together, of course giving higher importance to the Quran. The Quran did not mention details of the religion and how to follow it because it has numerous amounts of knowledge it had to include and could not break all the issues proposed into details. AlShafi’i also said that in the verse (We have sent down to you the Book and the Wisdom) (Surat Al 'Imran, 113), what is meant by wisdom is actually the sunnah (Hadith).

As mentioned above, the Quran was revealed under certain events and circumstances and referenced these events in its midst. These events, however, were supposed to be used, in my opinion, as analogies to different events that occur among different ages to know what is right and what is wrong. Furthermore, the Quran did not cover all habits, possibilities and problems humans may face, socially, legally or even economically since it was finite and could not include the infinite possibilities of humankind, even though it is applicable for all mankind during all ages. Since the Prophet’s guidance was first-hand guidance on everyday matters concerning his companions and even regular people, I think that the detailed descriptions and provisions that were provided through his Hadiths should be taken into account and considered in our lifestyle.

**THE SCIENCE OF HADITH**

Over the centuries, most scholars who studied the science of Hadith have agreed on the categorization of Hadith. Hadiths were categorized as Sahih (Authentic), Hasan (Good by its own virtue), Da’if (Weak), and Mau’du (fabricated). The first two categories are accepted Hadiths and are followed and practiced by Muslims, the third being unacceptable only under certain conditions, and the last being completely unacceptable. During the early centuries, the hadiths were only categorized into Sahih and Da’if, but as the science of Hadith evolved, new categories were introduced.

Sahih literally translates to authentic and is an antonym of the Arabic word for genuine. A Hadith is said to be sahih it, according to Imam Al Shafi’i, “Each reporter should be trustworthy in his religion; he should be known to be truthful in his narrating, to understand what he narrates, to know how a different expression can alter the meaning, and report the wording of the Hadith verbatim, not only its meaning. This is because if he does not know how a different expression can change the whole meaning, he will not know if he has changed what is lawful into what is prohibited. Hence, if he reports the hadith according to its wording, no change of meaning will be found at all. Moreover, he should be a good memorizer if he happens to report from his memory, or a good preserver of his writings if he happens to report from them. He should agree with the narrations of the huffaz (leading authorities in Hadith), if he reports something which they do also. He should not be a Mudallis, who narrates from someone he met something he did not hear, nor should he report from the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) contrary to what reliable sources have reported from him. In addition, the one who is above him (in the isnad) should be of the same quality, [and so on,] until the Hadith goes back uninterrupted to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) or any authority below him.” On the other hand, Ibn Salah says that, "A Sahih Hadith is the one which has a continuous isnad, made up of reporters of trustworthy memory from similar authorities, and which is found to be free from any irregularities (i.e. in the text) or defects (i.e. in the isnad).” The following grading is given for Sahih Hadith only: those that are in both Al-Bukhari and Muslim whether separately or collectively, and those who are not found in either but agree with the requirements of both or separately, and those declared Sahih by other scholars [8]. Hadith hasan has the Arabic to English translation of “good by its own virtue” and is it derived from the Arabic word meaning goodness and beauty. It is defined to be a Hadith whose one of its narrators have been reported to be less reliable than those reporting the Sahih. It is not Shadhdh, a phenomenon that will be explained later, nor contains an unreliable reporter in its transmitters, and is reported through more than one route of narration, and its source is known**.** It is divided into two categories, one where there is a screened reporter, where he is totally careless in reporting, and one where even though the reporter is truthful and reliable, he is a degree less in memory with respect to the reporters of the sahih.

Da’if translates to weak, and this weakness usually attains to the discontinuity relations to the narrators. Maudu’, finally is the fabricated Hadiths that orientalists spoke of, its narrators usually compose of “liars” or its context contradicts the norms of the Prophet and his companions. Reasons for this include political, racial, economic and possibly social reasons to manipulate the public for one’s own self-gain.

During the first century, Muslim scholars realized that some Hadiths may be unreliable and so developed a system to distinguish and evaluate the reliability of these Hadiths. They first investigated the chain of transmissions (riwayat), then they provided information about the narrators, and then looked at the content of the Hadith. From this system the scholars can determine the reliability, by evaluating the missing transmitters, and checking if the Hadith stops with a companion rather than the Prophet, they also find out date and place of birth, moral and religious beliefs, death date, teachers, students, and family, to see if the narrators could've met each other. Hadith is also only considered genuine if it is free from illa which means it is sound and not shadhadh meaning not strange. The most reliable Hadiths were studied by Bukhari and Muslim and were gathered in their respective sahihs and included all thousands of Hadiths they uncovered as genuine. Though they had their differences, generally speaking, when defining a Hadith as sahih, it is necessary to have continuity of transmission, the transmitters must be “adl”, all transmitters must be “dabit”, isnad and matn are free from shudhudh and finally the isnad and matn free from illa [1].

**Isnad**

Hadith is composed of two parts, the Isnad which is the transmitters and their chain of narrations, and the Matn which is the actual context of the Hadith. The transmitters narrate the Hadith and are listed chronologically from whom they heard the Hadith, all the way to the original narrator followed by the Matn [5]. Isnad is a crucial part of Hadith and without it, the Hadith is not accepted, as Imam Abdullah Bin Mubarak said, “Isnad is a part of the religion and without Isnad whoever would have said whatever he wants” [5]. It is studied to differentiate between the Hadiths and their acceptance. “The authenticity of Hadith depends on the reliability of its reporters, and the linkage among them.” The interruption of the chain of narrations effects the authenticity of the Hadith, in addition to “if there is an opposition by a lesser authority to a more reliable one or a text is found containing a vulgar expression, if there is an unreasonable remark or obviously-erroneous statement, if an expression or statement is proven to be an addition by a reporter to the text, and if there is a hidden defect found in the text of a Hadith [2].”

According to Siddiqi, to check the chain of transmitters also known as isnad, investigating the life, career, and character of the narrator is essential. In addition to the characters of the different links in the chains of isnads. However, to understand the context, one must understand the meaning of the different expressions used and compare them in relation to other traditions to test its authenticity [2]. As mentioned above, one of the conditions of the Hadith to be sahih is that there is a continuity of transmission. This means that all the transmitters have transmitted the Hadith reliably, and this is why the biographies of each transmitter are studied to check if he had come in contact with the previous narrator. To be reliable, the transmitter must be “adil” which means his character must be religiously acceptable in the sense that he did not commit any major or minor sins. He must also be morally behaved, does not violate Islamic law, fears God and is a sane adult. He must also be “dabit" in the sense that he has high accuracy as a transmitter. There are a lot more technical steps that these Hadith scientists go through to assess the validity of this isnad and I don't think that this deems unreliable, because there is a historical basis to what they are investigating here, and they are looking at it from moral, social and religious aspects.

**Free from Shudhudh**

Another condition for the Hadith to be accepted is that it must not be a shadhdh Hadith. A shadhdh Hadith means it is an irregular Hadith where, according to Alshafi’i, it is a Hadith where even though the transmitter is trustworthy, it contradicts another transmitter that is even more trustworthy. The general definition of a shadhdh Hadith is considered to be when it has more than one transmitter in which all of them are reliable, and its matn or sanad contradicts another, more reliable transmitter. Some scholars even argued that any Hadith that has only one transmitter should be regarded as shadhdh since it cannot be confirmed by any of the other reliable transmitters.

Regarding Alshafii’s approach, I agree that if there are two contradictory contexts, one should definitely be disregarded since they both cannot be valid and correct. However, when regarding the sole transmitter approach, I do not feel that just because he is the sole transmitter, we should disregard the Hadith. If he is reliable, I do believe we should take it into account since, even though it cannot be confirmed, the uncertainty of it is less than the reliability and it should be considered but studied more in depth. If the matn is studied and deemed to be non-contradictory to any other contexts of Hadith and shariah or even Quran, I don't see any harm in considering the Hadith. However, to eliminate any doubt I understand why they would think the safest approach is to eliminate the Hadith all together to minimize doubt. Some Western scholars also agreed that there is no historical truth if only one transmitter is transmitting a Hadith since the margin of error and uncertainty is huge if a sahih was just recited for one person that wrote it down and passed it down to another one person until it has reached us. However, I still think that since the reliability of this transmitter was already deeply studied, the Hadith should not be disregarded, and with its matn excruciatingly studied and approved, I don't see the reason for it to be disregarded since it is not harmful or contradictory to anything that is already existing.

**Free from Illa**

Illa in its meaning is defectiveness and so Defective Hadiths appear to be genuine but when investigated crucially, factors appear that lead to its disqualification. Factors such as the wrong declaration of the hadith in the wording that it is transmitted in. The words following the transmitters and preceding the Prophet provide to be important in this sense that the declaration of the Hadith into types is due to it. After that, the Hadith is studied further in more technical terms. Furthermore, attributing the Hadiths to incorrect companions or teachers that the claiming transmitter could not have met with regards to their birth date, death date, and location. Only experts and well-versed scholars can distinguish these defects and decide that they are unreliable. It is said that “it is not safe to judge transmitters as reliable or unreliable before checking what they transmit” [1], and I totally agree with this statement because if what is transmitted contradicts the previously validated Hadiths or the shariah or the Quran, how can we accept the Hadith or even the transmitters as reliable. There might be some truth to the Hadith, but one of the respective transmitters must have made a mistake while telling Hadith and so it was distorted. An example to explain this is mentioned in the article "The Reliability of the Traditional Science of Hadith: A Critical Reconsideration”, by K. Amin, where Amin mentioned that Ibn Main went to Affan, a student of Hammad b. Salamah, to read the books of Hammad to him, after reading them to other students of Hammad. He claimed that Hammad made mistakes and the student also added to some mistakes, so when going to each student and if he saw that the majority are making the same mistake then it is Hammad’s mistake, but if the majority say something and one individual says something different then that is the mistake of the student. By this method, he could determine the scholar’s mistake in addition to his students’ mistakes.

**Conclusion**

As Muslims, a large portion of our religion depends on faith and believing that God exists and that whatever happens is God’s will. Believing in God and the Quran is essential in Islam because to enter Islam the statement said is “I bear witness that there is no God to be worshiped but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah” and within this statement God is mentioned, but also the Prophet, insinuating the significance of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) in our religion. I am a firm believer in the shared opinion among the majority of Muslims that the Hadith is essential in our region because it provides details and explanations to things that the Quran did not. It also justifies things in the Quran that us as humans cannot interpret without the aid of the Prophet. I do believe that he is the most superior compared to all humans and knows more with regards to religion than we do and we must abide by his deeds and sayings. I also believe that since the companions spent their lives with him, they have more understanding of how he lived his life and his thoughts and practices, so after him, they are the batch of people that know best about Islam.

There is a science to determine if a Hadith should be followed or not and since there was a starting point for this science and it was not refuted and still exists in our lives today, I think that this shows that there is just speculation about the reliability of it. Since it still not proven to be false then it is true. I also truly believe that since it has been through 1,400 years and it is still existing that means that God saved it for us Muslims to use at any time and age. The science of Hadith studies it in such intricate detail and analysis to determine whether it is authentic or not, and I think disregarding the entire process doesn't make sense because since there is a process that survived centuries and centuries and wasn't rebuked and substituted or even cancelled completely does give it a sense of validity in my opinion.

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