

## The Status of *Hadeeth* in Islam

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### Introduction

‘The Status of *Hadeeth* in Islam’<sup>1</sup> is a landmark book (“Book”) that challenges the authoritative status of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad as a source of Islamic law. Using “*Hadith*” and “*Sunnah*” interchangeably, the Book critically evaluates the legal authority of *Sunnah*, the historical authenticity of the *Hadith* literature, and the concept of revelation in terms of its relationship with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. Shunning the idea that Islam is based on the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, the Book posits that Islam, unlike other religions, is a complete code of life based entirely on the Quran. It theorises that the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad is incorrectly regarded as a source of Islamic law because the Prophet Muhammad neither aimed to make his *Sunnah* binding on his followers nor made any arrangements for its preservation. Holding the Quran in the highest esteem, the Book designates it as the only source of Islam and rejects the authority of *Ahadith*<sup>2</sup> altogether, regardless of what they purport to narrate from the Prophet Muhammad.

The Book was authored by Ghulam Ahmed Parwez (d. 1985) and Muhammad Aslam Jairajpuri (d. 1955) (collectively referred to as “authors”), both of whom were distinguished Islamic scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parwez was a bureaucrat in the Indian subcontinent. After his retirement, he served as a member of the Law Commission formed under the Constitution of Pakistan of 1956. Notably, he was the founder of the *Tolu-e-Islam* movement, chairperson of the Quranic Education Society, and the director of the Quranic Research Centre, Lahore. His scholarly contribution is considerable, including *Ma’arif-ul-Quran* in eight volumes, *Lughat-ul-Quran* in four volumes, *Mafhoom-ul-Quran* in three volumes, and *Tabweeb-ul-Quran* in three volumes. Similarly, Jairajpuri was an

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<sup>1</sup> Ghulam Ahmed Parwez and Muhammad Aslam Jairajpuri, *The Status of Hadeeth in Islam* (Ejaz Rasool ed tr, Tolu-e-Islam Trust 2016).

<sup>2</sup> *Ahadith* is the plural of *Hadith*.

eminent professor of Arabic and Persian at the Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia. He was one of Parwez's teachers and mentors. His scholarly contribution includes *Sareekh-al-Ummat* and *Novadraat*.

The Book comprises 12 chapters. Chapters 1–3 deal with the status, science, and development of *Hadith*. Chapter 4 discusses the interpretation of the Quran in light of the *Hadith*. Chapter 5 sheds light on “temporary marriage” (*Mut'ah*) and its legitimacy in light of the *Hadith*. Chapter 6 discusses some examples from the Books of *Hadith* about the hereafter, particularly reaching paradise. Chapters 7 and 8 lay out the views of some renowned Islamic scholars on the status of *Hadith*. Chapters 9 and 10 cover aspects of *Hadith* relating to the Quran and Prophet Muhammad. Chapter 11 discusses everyday problems in the light of some *Ahadith* from *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Finally, Chapter 12 reproduces a letter by a reader of the Book to Parwez and his response to it. The Book is intended for all Muslims, irrespective of their sects, to read and ponder upon. It heavily draws on the Quran and wide-ranging Islamic literature, quoting the views of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, various renowned Islamic scholars, academics, and philosophers. These views are presented as answers to thought-provoking questions to keep the reader involved, and each argument is substantiated with evidence and examples to make the authors' case easy to understand.

### **An Overview of the Book: Discussion and Analysis**

Addressing the complications with the traditional understanding of *Sunnah* and *Hadith* and providing an alternative theory to untie the knot, the authors of the Book put forward a dissenting view on the authoritative status of the *Sunnah* as a source of Islamic law and the authenticity of *Hadith*. To understand the essence of the Book, it is necessary, at the outset, to appreciate the traditional understanding of the concept of *Sunnah* in Islamic jurisprudence and the challenges it has faced. To the traditional scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, the *Sunnah* is: “All that has been related from the Prophet Muhammad ... in terms of his speech, action, or approval.”<sup>3</sup> This understanding of the concept of *Sunnah* has received significant criticism from modern scholars, particularly Western orientalist like Ignaz Goldziher, D.S Margoliouth, and Joseph Schacht, who are highly celebrated for

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Mustafa as-Sibae, *The Sunnah and its Role in Islamic Legislation* (Faisal Ibn Muhammad Shafeeq tr, International Islamic Publication House 2008) 73.

their critical analyses of the meaning, historical authenticity, and authority of the *Sunnah*. Goldziher argues that “the Islamic concept of [*Sunnah*] is a revised statement of ancient Arab views.”<sup>4</sup> He says that before the emergence of Islam, *Sunnah* was a prevalent concept in Arab societies. For them, *Sunnah* denoted the traditions of Arabs and the customs and habits of their ancestors. When Islam emerged, the content of the old concept and the meaning of the word changed. To the followers of Prophet Muhammad, *Sunnah* meant all that could be shown to have been the practices of the Prophet. He claims that *Ahadith* were falsely developed by the Umayyads and Abbasids after the demise of the Prophet for their personal political gains, and therefore, they are, on the whole, untrustworthy.<sup>5</sup> Advancing the work of Goldziher, Margoliouth asserts that *Sunnah*, as a principle of law, initially only denoted the normative usage of the Muslim community, and it was only later that it acquired the restricted meaning of the precedents set by the Prophet.<sup>6</sup> Schacht, influenced by the work of Goldziher and Margoliouth, confirms Margoliouth’s conclusion and contends that the *Sunnah* is nothing more than a “precedent” or a “way of life.”<sup>7</sup> He uses the term “living traditions” for the concept of *Sunnah* to show that it bridges the ancient meaning of the *Sunnah* to the generally agreed practices of the later communities, arguing that they are all inter-related and interchangeable to the extent that they could not be isolated from one another.<sup>8</sup> Although the Book is divided into various thematic chapters, the following three ideas can be regarded as its central ideas.

### **The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad does not Constitute a Source of Islamic Law**

Challenging the authoritative status of the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad, the Book puts forth the idea that holding the *Sunnah* of the Prophet as a source of Islamic law is based on misinterpretations of Quranic verses. Parwez argues that the Quranic saying, “Obey Allah and Obey the Messenger,”<sup>9</sup> does not mean two

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<sup>4</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien)* (S. M. Stern ed, C. R. Barber and S.M. Stern tr, State University of New York Press 1890 vol 2) 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 145–164.

<sup>6</sup> D. S. Margoliouth, *The Early Development of Mohammedanism: Lectures Delivered in the University of London* (Williams and Norgate 1914) 65–98.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Schacht, *The Origin of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford University Press 1979) 58.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Quran, 3:132; 5:92; 8:1; 8:20; 8:46; 47:33; 58:13.

separate submissions, i.e., the obedience of Allah through the Quran and obedience of the Prophet through following his *Sunnah*. Instead, when such a phrase appears in the Quran, it means obeying a central authority (Markaz-e-Millat) whose commands are based on and rooted in the Quran. Prophet Muhammad, according to Parwez, was the ruler and central authority of his time who established a state purely based on the Quran – implementing Quranic laws without any amendments and enacting sub-laws based on Quranic principles and according to the needs of the time through consultation with the Islamic community. Therefore, following Prophet Muhammad today would result in the establishment of a similar governance system, one based entirely on the Quran, and obedience to it will be equivalent to “obedience of Allah and His Messenger.”

This doctrine of Quranic self-sufficiency, as articulated by the authors, makes an appealing case; it can limit disagreements that may arise in relation to the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, questions persist: What makes Prophet Muhammad different from an ordinary person, except that he was the deliverer of Allah’s message? And what remains the reason for the twenty-three years of prophetic life of Prophet Muhammad, when considering that his purpose was solely to establish a Quranic-based system and not to hold authority over Muslims? A contextual analysis of Parwez’s claim of Prophet Muhammad being a mere ruler of his time in light of the Quran reveals that Parwez has failed to consider the Quranic verse: “O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger.”<sup>10</sup> This verse clearly distinguishes the obedience to “Allah and His Messenger” from “those in authority.” It also clarifies that one may disagree with the authority amongst them but cannot disagree with “Allah and His Messenger.” Interestingly, if the obedience to “authority” is the “obedience of Allah and His Messenger,” as the authors suggest, then there would have been no need to mention them separately.

Further, Parwez’s argument involves the idea that Prophet Muhammad was only the deliverer of the Holy Quran in his prophetic capacity. All other responsibilities, i.e., the interpretation of the Quran, the sanctifying of people, and the struggle for an Islamic system by Prophet Muhammad, were in his personal

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<sup>10</sup> Quran, 4:49.

capacity. Such a claim cannot be reconciled with the Quran. The Holy Quran mentions: “It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in scripture and wisdom – although they had been, before, in manifest error.”<sup>11</sup> This Quranic verse defines the status of Prophet Muhammad and does not reduce the Prophet to a mere deliverer of Allah’s message. Instead, it enjoins Prophet Muhammad with the duty to purify the people and instruct them in the Quran and its wisdom, in addition to delivering Allah’s message. Here, the word “wisdom” following “scripture” is of particular importance. Wisdom means “to put everything in its place on time.”<sup>12</sup> It would mean such an interpretation and explanation of the scripture, which is according to the will of the scripture’s giver.

Hence, one of the main duties of Prophet Muhammad was to make it evident to the people what Allah meant in His Book, indicating His general and specific commands. This is why Al-Shafi’i regarded “wisdom,” as used here, to be synonymous with the model behaviour of Prophet Muhammad, which makes it evident to the people what Allah meant in His Book.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the work of Sayed Abul Ala Maududi in his Book *Sunnat Ki Aini Haisiyat*<sup>14</sup> is of particular importance in further investigating the issue of the authority of the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. In the said work, Maududi not only invalidates the argument that Prophet Muhammad was just the deliverer of Allah’s message in his prophetic capacity but also demonstrates, in light of a large number of Quranic verses, that Prophet Muhammad was given a multidimensional role as a prophet, and his *Sunnah* was meant to be followed by Muslims.

### **Hadith Literature is the Historical Record of the Life of Prophet Muhammad**

The authors consider *Hadith* literature to be the historical record of the life of Prophet Muhammad. According to traditionalist Islamic scholars, *Hadith* literature contains narrations of Prophet Muhammad and describes the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Any *Hadith* that satisfies the authenticity tests and reveals any *Sunnah* of

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<sup>11</sup> Quran, 62:2.

<sup>12</sup> Mahmud b. Abdullah al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Mani fi Tafsir al-Quran* (Dar Ihia al-Turath al-Arabi 2010) Verse 2:129.

<sup>13</sup> Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi’i, *Al-Risala fi usul al-fiqh* (Majid Khadduri tr, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Islamic Text Society 1961) 109–112.

<sup>14</sup> Abul A’la Maududi, *Sunnat ki Aini Haisiyyat* (Islamic Publication Ltd. 2005).

the Prophet is considered authoritative for Muslims. However, the authors, as mentioned previously, question the very concept of *Sunnah*. They argue that it is only the Quran that was given to humanity in its pure and authentic form, and the same is not true for *Ahadith* because the Prophet Muhammad never made any arrangements for their preservation as opposed to the Quran, which was sought to be meticulously recorded in the Prophet's lifetime. Instead, the authors construct a proposition that the penning down of *Ahadith* was done against the express will of Prophet Muhammad and his companions to compromise the meaning of the Quran. After investigating the development and compilation of *Hadith*, Parwez concludes as follows: most of the compilation work of *Ahadith* was done by Iranians; all this work was done approximately two hundred years after the death of Prophet Muhammad; the scholars of *Hadith* found millions of *Ahadith* but declared only a few thousand authentic; and all these *Ahadith* were communicated to them orally. Based on these findings, Parwez argues that all the *Ahadith* are probable, and probable narrations may be regarded as a historical record of the life of Prophet Muhammad but cannot be considered a source of religion.

Although the authors have attempted to substantiate their findings with evidence from the early Islamic literature, in most instances, interestingly, they support their assertions with the same *Hadith* literature which they regard as probable and untrustworthy. Also, the authors have, in certain instances, partially quoted different *Ahadith* and views of other academics, only to the extent that supports their narrative. For example, to prove that Prophet Muhammad was against the recording of *Ahadith*, Parwez quotes a *Hadith*: "Do not write anything from me other than the Quran. Whoever has written anything other than the Quran, should erase it." But interestingly, this is half the *Hadith*, and the full text of the *Hadith* is as follows: "Do not write down what I say, and whoever has written anything from me other than the Quran, let him erase it. Narrate from me, and there is nothing wrong with that, but whoever tells a lie about me, let him take his place in the fire."<sup>15</sup>

Amongst the recent scholarship, Jonathan Brown gives a very important account of the authenticity of *Hadith* in his work "Authenticating of *Hadith* and the

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<sup>15</sup> Imam Abul Hussain Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim: The Book of Zuhd and Softening of Heart* (Huda Khattab ed, Nasiruddin al-Khattab tr, Darussalam Publishers 2007 vol 7) *Hadith* no. 7510.

History of *Hadith* Criticism.”<sup>16</sup> Brown gives a detailed explanation of the causes of forgery in the *isnad* and *matn* of *Hadith* and describes how the scholars of *Hadith* developed a sophisticated and effective science of *Hadith* criticism to separate authentic *Ahadith* from false ones.

### **Revelation is Confined to the Quran**

Another notable point in the Book is the authors’ view on the concept of revelation (*Wahi*). The authors believe that revelation from Allah is confined to the Quran. According to traditionalist Islamic scholars, the revelation that Prophet Muhammad received from Allah was of two kinds. One was the “recited revelation” (*Al-Wahy-Al-Matluww*), i.e., the revelation that can be recited, which is confined to the verses of the Quran.<sup>17</sup> The other kind of revelation was “the unrecited revelation” (*Al-Wahy-Ghair-Al-Matluww*), i.e., the revelation received by Prophet Muhammad which is not conveyed to people verbally but has been demonstrated through the sayings and acts of the Prophet.<sup>18</sup> Parwez strongly disagrees with this differentiation in revelation and asserts that Prophet Muhammad received only one kind of revelation: what we have in the form of the Quran. He claims that neither the Quran nor any early Islamic literature suggests any differentiation or categorization as regards revelation. He furthers his case through a very critical question: if the *Sunnah* or the *Hadith* is also a revelation from Allah similar to the Quran, and He has taken on the responsibility for the protection of revelation, then why is the *Sunnah* not protected in the same manner as the Quran?

When the author’s narrative about the revelation is examined in light of the Quran, it does not hold. The Quran says: “*It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with God’s permission, what God wills: for He is most high, most wise.*”<sup>19</sup> This verse suggests that sending a messenger (the angel *Jibreel* in the case of the Quran) to reveal Allah’s message is not the only mode of communication between Allah and humankind. Further, the Quran refers to several

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<sup>16</sup>Jonathan Brown, ‘Authenticating Hadith and the History of Hadith Criticism’ (2021) <<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/authenticating-hadith-and-the-history-of-hadith-criticism>> accessed 6 Sep 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 23.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Quran, 42:51.

events that are not part of the Quran but regards them to be from Allah – showing that revelation from Allah is not confined to the Quran; instead, there is another kind of revelation that does not form part of the Quran, yet it is a revelation from Allah. For instance, the Quran mentions: “*We made the Qiblah (prayer direction towards Jerusalem) which you used to face, only to test those who followed the Messenger (Muhammad) from those who would turn on their heels (i.e., disobey the Messenger).*”<sup>20</sup> After Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madinah, Muslims were ordered to direct their faces in prayers towards *Bayt al-Muqaddas* (Jerusalem). After seventeen months, the Quran abrogated its earlier order, and Muslims were ordered to regard the mosque in Makkah as their *Qiblah*: “*So turn your face in the direction of Al-Masjid-al-Haram (at Makkah).*”<sup>21</sup> This new order was objected to and criticised by some disbelievers who questioned the change in *Qiblah*. This objection was answered through the verse quoted above, which stated that the appointment of the earlier *Qiblah*, attributed to the command of Allah, was to test the believers on whether they would follow Prophet Muhammad. But interestingly, this order, to which retrospective indication has been made, is nowhere in the Quran. This direction was given to Muslims by Prophet Muhammad with no reference to any verse of the Quran. Yet, this order was mentioned by the Quran as the order of Allah. Hence, this example indicates that the revelation is not confined to the Quran, and the acts and words of Prophet Muhammad were also divinely inspired, which traditionalists refer to as “unrecited revelation.”

## **Conclusion**

The *Sunnah*, which is understood as the model behaviour of Prophet Muhammad and held as the second source of Islamic law, is regarded by the authors as a fabricated concept that has emerged from the development of *Hadith* approximately two centuries after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The authors also find the *Hadith* literature probable and say that a probable element cannot be regarded as a source of religion. Further, they are of the view that Prophet Muhammad only followed the Quran and preserved it for his followers. Thus, the only source of Islamic law is the Quran, and anything other than it has no authoritative status.

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<sup>20</sup> Quran, 2:143.

<sup>21</sup> Quran, 2:144.



Accordingly, this book provides a thought-provoking critique of the traditional understanding of the concept of *Sunnah* and the authoritative status of *Hadith* in Islamic jurisprudence. It invites the reader to challenge long-held beliefs about the impeachable status of *Sunnah* and authentic *Ahadith*. Although the findings of the authors appear quite untenable, there is no gainsaying their hard work in terms of opening a new avenue of inquiry for students and scholars of Islamic jurisprudence.