

History and Compilation of Hadith

Hadith is the second major source of guidance given by Allah the Almighty. The commandments of Allah are present in the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The authority of the Qur'an and Sunnah are equal as explained in the earlier chapters. The Companions sought guidance directly from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in every matter. In the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Companions also strived to learn and comprehend Ahadith, the way they tried to learn the Qur'an. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also ordered Companions to write down Ahadith and memorize them on several occasions in his life. After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Companions started transmitting Ahadith to other Companions and Successors. They conveyed Ahadith they had learnt by heart, as the memory was considered the source of recording in that era. Secondly, they also dictated Ahadith to their students. So, compilation of Ahadith was done in every era with precision. The history of the compilation of hadith is generally divided into 4 eras which are mentioned as follows.

Era of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

The Prophet Muhammad a used to teach commandments of Allah through his Sunnah. He urged Companions to learn and memorize his teachings. He used to repeat his words thrice so it would be easy for them to learn. He also asked Companions what they had learnt.¹ The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also ordered Companions to write down his Ahadith on several occasions. It was the practice of Companions to write down Ahadith in the supervision of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself. Some of the examples are mentioned as follows:

1. 'Abdullah bin Amr ؓ said: "I used to write everything which I heard from the Prophet Muhammad a. I intended (by it) to memorize it. The Quraysh prohibited me, saying 'Do you write everything that you hear from him, while the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a human being (bashr), he speaks in anger and pleasure?' Therefore, I stopped writing, and mentioned it to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He pointed with his finger to his mouth and said: 'Write, by Him in whose hand my soul lies, only right (Haqq) comes out from it.'" ²
2. Hazrat Abu Hurayra ؓ says that once The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ delivered a sermon. After hearing the sermon, a Yemeni man (Abu

Shah) came and said, O’ The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ! Write this down for me. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

اكتبوا لأبي شاه

“Write it down for Abu Shah” ³

3. Hazrat Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه said that an Ansari used to sit in the gathering of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and listen to his Ahadith. He said: “I hear Ahadith from you, but I do not remember”. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

اسْتَعِنْ بِيَمِينِكَ. وَأَوْمَأْ بِبِيَدِهِ لِلْخَطِّ

“Get help with your right hand and his gesture was to write with your hand.”⁴

The Companions used to memorize Ahadith by heart, as well as, by writing them. Therefore, there were number of written manuscripts of Companions which are available in written form today.

4. Sahifa Ali رضي الله عنه.⁵

5. Sahifa Sadiqa written by Abdullah Ibn Amr رضي الله عنه.⁶

6. Sahifa Amr bin Hazam رضي الله عنه.⁷

Several manuscripts pertaining the commandments given by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are also found. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ gave these commandments to his governors, converted Muslims and other people regarding creeds and other worships. The prophetic commandments were written and saved in these manuscripts.

7. The Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ written commandments are also saved in his letters that he had written to different rulers and kings. As per the research of Dr. Hamidullah, around 250 letters of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ found that have been published.⁸

It has been categorically proved in the light of above-mentioned narrations that Ahadith were being recorded in the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on his instructions and supervision.

Compilation of Hadith in the Companions' Era

The Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used to learn Hadith through memorization, recording & writing and through practice.

Learning by Memorizing:

As the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was living among the Companions so they used to listen to every word of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with utmost care. They were blessed because they learnt the Qur'an and the Hadith directly from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This was the practice of the Companions to learn Ahadith by discussing with each other and this practice remained continued throughout their life. This is evident from the statement of Anas b. Malik رضي الله عنه. He was the servant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and he remained in his blessed company for 10 years.

He says, "We sat with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, maybe sixty persons in number and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught them Hadith. Later, when he went out for any necessity, we used to memorize it amongst us, when we departed it was as if it was cultivated in our hearts."

Writing of Ahadith

It was also the practice of Companions to write down Ahadith from different Companions.

"Hazrat Salma R.A. narrates that I have seen Abdullah Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه he was writing Ahadith from Abu Rafi R.A. the servant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ."

Official Commandment for the Teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah

In the reign of Hazrat Umar رضي الله عنه, the second Caliph, has deputed senior scholar Companions in different provinces. It was their duty to teach the Qur'an and the Sunnah to the people. So, the Hadith was directly transmitted to the people from the direct students of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Hadith Circles of the Companions

Other than the official teachers, several senior Companions like Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه, Abdullah Ibn Masood رضي الله عنه, Abdullah Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه, Anas bin Malik رضي الله عنه has established their hadith circles in different cities. They used to

narrate and dictate Ahadith to number of Successors. They learnt Ahadith and compiled them in the form of books. Several manuscripts of these successors are found in the written form. One of the finest example of these manuscripts will be discussed as follows:

Sahifa Hammam bin Munaba

Hammam ibn Munabbih (d. 719 CE) was known to be a disciple of Abu Hurairah (d.677-78 CE). It is understood that Hammam wrote a 'sahifah' which comprised approximately 140 ahadith which he had heard from his tutor Abu Hurairah.

Dr. Hamidullah, a scholar from the Indian subcontinent published a document entitled 'Sahifa Hammam ibn Munabbih' in which he attempted to argue that the manuscripts he cited provided evidence of Abu Hurairah's accounts as recorded by Hammam. Not only did he cite the Berlin, and Damascus manuscript, he also cited a manuscript at Cairo.

This whole manuscript was already present in the Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal. There was a gap of approximately 200 years between the compilations of these two books. There was no contradiction in the text of traditions of these books. This is an irrefutable reference on the authenticity of compilation of hadith text.

The Era of the Successors (Tabi'in)

After Islam had spread in the Asia, North Africa and other lands the narration of Hadith had become extensive. Then some people began to fabricate Ahadith. To counter this progress, Caliph Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz wrote letters to the senior scholars of hadith and ordered them to compile the Ahadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The scholars had already begun composing books containing biographical data on the various narrators of hadith to expose the liars and fabricators. Abu Bakr ibn Hazm was among those directed by the Caliph to compile the Hadith. Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz requested him to write down all the Ahadith of the Prophet Muhammad a and to focus on gathering the Ahadith of 'Amrah bint 'Abdir Rahman, who was at that time the most respected custodian of the narrations of 'A'ishah R.A. Sa'd ibn Ibrahim and Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri were also requested to compile books. al-Zuhri became

the first compiler of hadith to record the biographies of the narrators with reference to their character and honesty.

The Era of the Followers (Taba Tabi'in)

The most frequent work on the Compilation of hadith literature took place during the period of Taba Tabi'in (Followers). This period in the history of collection of Hadith is being regarded as golden period for the compilation of hadith. In this period not only Ahadith were compiled but also the sayings of the Companions and their Followers were recorded carefully. It was the period in which famous and important books on the Hadith were written along with complete authentic Isnad. Principles were laid down to differentiate a Sahih hadith from a fabricated one. In this period, not only unwritten traditions were collected but also written traditions were rearranged in different chapters and under various topics.

Six valuable books are the main outcome of this period, and these are: Sahih al-Bukhari of Imam Bukhari; Sahih Muslim of Imam Muslim; Sunan of Abu Dawud; Sunan of Tirmidhi; Sunan of Nisa'i; Sunan of Ibn Maja.

In the light of above mentioned references this point is categorically clear that the hadith compilation starts in the era of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He himself ordered to compile ahadith and monitored this whole process. Afterwards, it was successfully transmitted through unbreakable chain of transmitters. Companions, Successors and Followers were so much conscious regarding the preservation and preaching of hadith. It is because of their efforts that we still have a huge collection of hadith literature in this era.

¹ Sahih al- Bukhari, 30 & 70

² Sunan Abu Dawud, 117

³ Sahih al-Bukhari, 36

⁴ Jami' Tirmidhi, 128

⁵ Sahih al-Bukhari, 446

⁶ Tabaqat Ibn Saad, v. 2, p. 407

⁷ Ibid p. 39

⁸ Rasool Ullah ki Sayasi Zindige, p. 311