Early Islamic methodology comparative study of Hadith literature through al-Bukhari *

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Abstract

There is almost a consensus among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars that the third century of Al-Hijrah, was the most active century for searching and investigating Islamic tradition. A large number of Muslim Ulama' and Hadith Imams were driven by a deep sense of religious and social obligations to collect and preserve the Prophet's (Peace Be Upon Him-PBUH) Hadith in a written form. Some of them have spent most of their lives traveling, interviewing, studying, and searching the truth about Hadith and its narrators. They applied several methods and available possible means to achieve that goal. An early landmark in this process was al-Imam al-Bukhari (d. 256/870). His book (Sahih) the genuine was the first systematic book in the field. The Islamic rules of life have been reserved in every particular in that book. This paper is an attempt to discuss and analyze Hadith literature development through the early Islamic methodology in general and al-Bukhari in particular, and tries to answer the question whether or not that methodology was scientific in the sense of contemporary research measures.

Keywords: Islamic methodology, Hadith, al-Bukhari.

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Introduction

"The strong tendency of contemporary society has been to minimize the importance of religion and to treat it as a matter of superstition which has no place in the enlightened thinking of modern civilized man". This tendency, whether it is relatively true or not, is one of several difficulties that face researchers and investigators of religious topics. Other difficulty is the way we deal with such topics. We mean by this the method we apply to study these topics subjectively or objectively. While some scholars justifies using both approaches, each has its biases and errors which stem from researchers' ideologies and credibility, in addition to time and scholarship factors. But questions might be raised, such as, can we construct religious research with the least possible error? And who will suppose to conduct that research—the religious people or the scientists? In other words, the traditional or the nontraditional? If we try to answer these questions and support each of them, we hardly escape critics of supporters of each view. This, in our opinion, is not the way to find an agreement among advocates of both toward solid acceptable view. Researchers and scientists, we believe, agree that both views lack exhaustiveness in nature, and that what suits research methodology in one of them is not necessarily suit the other, and that also has its own credibility and characteristics. To escape subjectivity approach, this paper will not discuss the content of Hadith, instead, it will discuss the "How" al-Bukhari synthesized his "Sahih" genuine? Why Hadith was not written in the form as al-Bukhari did? Why we chose al-Bukhari for this study? And lastly, is his methodology scientific in the sense of contemporary research measures? Discussion will not be systematically handled.

Hadith Writing: Traditional leaders of faith were divided into two main directions concerning writing Hadith. One direction was supporting, while the other was opposing. Each view has its sold rule which stems from the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings. This did not necessarily mean that Hadith or some Hadith was not written in the early years of Islam, or that oral Hadith was the only authority. By the passage of time, circumstances have been changed, and traditionalists feel that oral Hadith began to lose its popularity for political, religious, and social reasons. The need to protect Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) was raised as a priority and demand to face spurious and false hadiths. The unity of faith interpretation was acquired traditionists by all means to

collect and writing down Hadith or what remains of it in the memories of the authentic people, in addition to Qur'an commentaries and interpretations.

New methods were set up in this regard for reproducing the Sunnah in most authentic manner to serve the Muslim society "the Ummah of Islam" and to distinguish reliable and authentic traditions from inference ones. Al-Bukhari was the landmark in this field. His work was honored and was highly respected. His book "Sahih" is the fruition of the traditionists' efforts in the third century of al-Hijrah.

Hadith methodology and science

Was Islamic methodology in general and Hadith in particular scientific in the contemporary research measures? To answer this question without considering time, place, and subject matter factors is arbitrary and unfair in comparative analysis. We can confidently say that the Islamic methodology was not exhaustive in nature, and that it has its own characteristics and concepts which distinguish that methodology from others. This, of course, does not mean the opposite of what is known about contemporary methodology. But it simply means—to judge fairly—that contemporary research measures are invalid to judge other methodology used one thousand years ago. Inaccuracy of these measures stems from time, place, subject matter and accumulative knowledge available for these methodologies. In the study of religion, in general, and Hadith (in our case) in particular, involves a broad framework of theoretical propositions at any given stage of its development. Religious studies tended to be under two categories, normative and positivistic thinking. The first relies on subjectivity, while the second relies on reason analysis of results or what as rationalistic approach.

Parsons, for instance, justifies using both approaches in religious research. It will be hard and inaccurate to judge Islamic methodology regarding these approaches for the above mentioned reasons. To serve the argument whether Islamic methodology is scientific or not is to define science. Science is described as "a way of generating data and testing the truth of statements about events in the world of human experience."

Science has two aspects; one is a body of useful and practical knowledge and a method of obtaining it. Scientists almost emphasize and agree that science is the method of collecting data,

and that every scholar has to choose the method which suits her/his study. By analogy we say that a method applied in one's research in a specific time and place might not be applicable in other's research. From this discussion we might deduce supportive conclusion to the view that early Islamic methodology is scientific in the sense of collecting data methods used by Muslim scholars as al-Bukhari. Al-Bukhari was one of the leading Imams who represented the final stage of the Hadith collection. The other stages are:

1. The companions of the Prophet (PBUH), or Ahab al-Suffah of Madina Mosque, such as Abu Hurayrah, Jabir b. Abdullah, the Mother of Faithful A'ishah, Umar, Ali, Sa'ad b. 'Ubadah, and Abdullah b. Abbas, and many others.
2. After the death of the Prophet (PBUH), the Qur'an was the method of decisions, and the Prophet's (PBUH) saying which obtained wide reputation publicly.
3. Hadith restored to different public centers, and writing Hadith became common. The collection of Hadith by Imam Malik, Imam Hanbal and others became known.
4. The fourth stage was the permanent shape, and came to have the forms of Masanid (Authorities) musannafat (classifications) according to topics.
5. Here, where al-Bukhari belongs, we find that the traditions were collected together, the Sihah-Sittah, (The six Authentic books) are the most authentic collection representing this stage.

In his methodology al-Bukhari was reliable and authentic in collecting data in an age where people lie and falsify hadith for several reasons. It was a challenge to proof the truth. This challenge dictated and supported the research which will be discussed thoroughly in the following pages.

Al-Bukhari and his methodology

In this section we will discuss why al-Bukhari was chosen for this study, and what was his methodology of Hadith collection, and finally, why he was considered as a pioneer in this field, and what was the impact of his work on other scholars during and after his time? With the fact that complete knowledge does not exist in man, al-Bukhari applied what he thought, the accurate measurement of obtaining solid information to be reserved in a written form against fabrication,

which was the phenomenon of the time. Logically, his work will be a reflection of spurious fabricated Hadith, or a solid reaction against falsification in his period of time. The first option was and is unthinkable, for one reason that Muslim scholars and the public consider his work as the most genuine book after Qur'an, and the most ancient and authoritative collection. Most scholars and historians consider also, the third century as the golden age for Hadith science (figure1.) It was the shift from the four Imams of jurisprudence, and their methodology of interpreting Qur'an and Hadith, to a new treatment of collecting what the Prophet (PBUH) had said and did in his life.

Hijrah Years

80 150 160 170 180 190 200 210 220 240 260 280 300 310

Abu Hanifah   80 – 150 (772 A.D)

Malik   93 --------------179 (800)

Al-Shafi'I   150 ----------------- 204 (824)

Ibn Hanbal   164 -------------------- 241 (884)

Al-Darimi   ------------------------- 255 (869)

Al-Bukhari   194 ----------256 (870)

Muslim   204 -------261 (874)

Ibn Majah   -----------------273 (885)

Abu-Daud   203 ------------275 (887)

Al-Tarmidi   209 ------------279 (891)

Al-Nasa'I   ------------ 303 (914)

Figure 1. Jurisdiction Imams and collectors of the tradition.

Al-Bukhari was an encyclopedia pious man. He spent most of his life studying or traveling for the sake of knowledge. He has a strict criteria to judge people and documents. He was enslaved to that strict methodology and neglected many genuine traditions simply because these traditions failed to commensurate with his conditions and evaluation. For his criteria, he was and still is highly respected by Muslims in all times and places. Al-Bukhari was the first to apply what we can confidently describe as scientific investigation with the least possible error. Concerning definition of methodology which is a system of explicit rules and procedures upon which research is based and against claims for knowledge are granted. Al-Bukhari applied research methods such as historical, comparative, and field research methods under a system of strict rules and procedures. What was important in this case was the impact of these methods on other scholars who used some of his conditions and methods to accept accurate data in recent years. Al-Bukhari has authored many books in history, culture, and Qur'anic commentaries. His works have been crowned by his famous "Sahih."

Another impact of his methodology was mirrored in hundreds of exegeses which exceeds 25 volumes by later scholars such as Ibn Hajar (d. 852), Qastallani (d. 923), and others.

Methodology assumptions

The tendency of al-Bukhari's work was "to compile a manual of Hadith according to the wishes of his shaikh Ishaq b. Rahawayh." This was the authority to begin a long journey to look for viable and reliable content to his manual. We will cite an assumption for his methodology and theoretical propositions to see how al-Bukhari compiled his manual or how, if we put ourselves in his shoes, how he death with theoretical and methodological problems. His research proposition, we assume, will be as follows:

Proposition 1. Authentic narrators give authentic Isnad (chain of transmitters) and Matn (the words of Hadith).

Proposition 2. Authenticity of both Isnad and Matn results authentic Hadith.

These two assumptions need to be tested in order to prove their reality or their truth. To do so, we have to have hypotheses to test on the ground of these propositions. Before doing so, we have to point out the variables used in the above propositions. The independent variable will be the authenticity of narrators, while authenticity of Hadith (Isnad and Matn) will be the dependent variable. These variables to be tested we compile the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. There is positive relationship between authenticity of narrators and authenticity of Hadith (Isnad and Matn).

Hypothesis 2. There is positive relationship between disauthenticity and Hadith falsification.

Insofar, we have propositions, variables, and hypotheses. What we need is to assume how al-Bukhari tested his hypotheses, or how has he collected data for his study? Figure 2. Gives both dependent as well as independent variables, To illustrate, suppose he wants to collect Hadith. This means, of course, to contact narrators of Isnad and Matn. Neither Isnad nor authenticity alone nor authenticity of Matn alone makes Hadith acceptable under the conditions of al-Bukhari. He has prove authenticity of both in order to accept and edit Hadith in his "Sahih." To prove Isnad he has to examine two sources: men and available history materials. Regarding the first, he has to ask people about the narrators, their students, and their shaikhs, about their reputation, their behavior, and their authenticity (Thiqah), then he will ask these men or women themselves about many items as if he has a questionnaire. Some of these items are constructed (see table 1.) to cover the narrator's personal, professional, and public life. Such items as the name of the narrator, his father's and mother's name, his grandfather's name, his nickname, and his tribe, his teachers and disciples, his sample of narrations and titles. In additionm he asks about his creed, journeys he made, when, why, and who were the scholars he has met, and what proof he has. These information were used to prove Isnad's authenticity. The process was the same for any other informant. Otherwise, his or her Isnad will not be acceptable, and no need to check the Matn.

1. INDEP. VAR.   2. DEP. VAR.

Isnad   Matn

Men History   Qur'an-Hadith ('Aql) Reason

Language   Authentic HADITH

Culture   SAHIH

History (Genuine)

Biographies Documents OR(Authentic Reputation Books Hadith)

Reliability Biographies   Time and Space

Figure 2. Independent and dependent Variables.

History will be checked through documents, books, and biographies to prove or to make what he has been told was reliable and valid. He has to examine the kind of papers, ink, and the way the documents were written, and examine times and places of these writings.

Table 1. Information to be collected about the Narrators*

Name ------------------------------ Father's Name ---------------------

DOB ------------------------------- Grandfather's Name ----------------

Nickname ------------------------- Job ------------------------------------

Tribe ------------------------------ Narration Time ---------------------

City/Village ----------------------- Narrations place --------------------

His Shaikhs ----------------------- His Disciples -----------------------

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<u>Sample of Narrations</u> His biography ----------------------

With Isnad ------------------------ Places he visited --------------------

Titles of Narrations --------------- Scholars he Met ---------------------

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<u>Personal Descriptions</u> When ---------------------------------

Bodily ----------------------------- Where ------------------------------

Condition ------------------- Evidence ----------------------------

His Creed ------------------------- Date of Death -----------------------

Neutral ----------------------------- (If not known,

Support --------------------------- to any related event) ---------------

Against -------------------------- --

His Battles ----------------------- His Activities ----------------------

His Social Status ----------------- --

His Character --------------------- Memory Conditions --------------

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*This narrator Identification Card as projected and collected by the writer from al-Bukhari methodology and several sources cited in the bibliography.

If al-Bukhari is convinced by the evidence that Isnad was authentic, we assume that he would turn to the matn to examine its authenticity. The main criteria he has, the Qur'an, Hadith, and

Reason if Hadith was not in contradiction with Qur'an, it will be accepted primarily, but that was not enough. We assume for more tests that he will turn to examine the matn's

Table 2. Hadith Concepts According to the Number of Narrators.

Narratorby One Ghareeb (Unfamiliar)

Narrated by Two Aziz (Strong)

Two to Five Mashhur or Mustafeed (Widspread)

More than Five Mutawatir (Undoubted)

Complete Isnad Muttasil (Continuous)

One or Two Missed Munqati' (Discontinuous)

Missing Isnad

At the start Mu'allaq (Suspended)

At the End Mursal (Open)

Table 3. Concepts of Fabricated Hadith According to the Rawi (the narrator)

Narrator* Narration

Known as a Lier Mawdu' (Spurious)

Accused Matrook (Suspended)

Fasiq (evil) Mubham (Ambigious)

Ignorant Ma'oon (Biased)

Innovative Mardood (Rejected)

*For more of these concepts, see Ibn Hajar (d. 852), he classified 12 levels of narrators.

content. Comparing it with another Hadith, if available, and if it was not, he will examine the content linguistically, culturally, and historically. If these tests support positively the authenticity of the matn, without contradiction, it will be accepted as genuine. Al-Bukhari was fair enough to say whyhe accepted or rejected some Hadiths. He has his own technical terminology for Hadith and Musnids. (Tables 2 and 3)

Criticism

Several claims of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars were made about Hadith in general and al-Bukhari in particular. Despite the fact that Hadith was written in several stages of traditional development Schacht who was in conformity with Goldzihar work, followed Necholson and claimed that Hadith was invented in the second century without checking new developments and discoveries in the field. Schacht also claimed that Hadith Matn in some points was contradictory to Qur'an. This claim in essentially violates the rules of collecting Hadith, which clearly emphsize that no reported saying or action of the Prophet (PBUH) is accepted as authentic and reliable (aadel) unless it was in conformity with the letter and spirit of Qur'an. Muslim scholars criticized al-Bukhari's work, this critic was to about 80 narrators and some 100 Hadiths. The criticism showed that these Hadiths and narrators did measure up to the standard of his conditions.

Conclusion

Al-Bukhari's work was not mutually exclusive. He described his work as manual, but what was not included from Hadith in his book "Sahih" does not mean that it was not authentic. This was emphasized by al-Bukhari himself. If al-Bukhari committed errors in his methodology, these errors would not defame his great work. Instead, they called reasons ('aql) to examine these errors carefully and objectively side by side with concrete unchangeable beliefs toward the truth of Islamic legacy through the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings and actions.

In conclusion, the honor for al-Bukhari's work stems from the honor of his subject matter, which might draw what is called an "error" of respect in contemporary research methods. This "error"

of respect actually did not prevent al-Bukhari from rejecting many hadiths for a simple reason, such as a missing member in the chain of narrators, or lack of historical connection between narrators and their place of origin, etc., In our judgment, if the error of respect was true in al-Bukhari's case, in research conceptualization, we might see thousands of Hadiths, not only 2,602 Hadiths, which are included in his Sahih, and which only consists of a small proportion of less than 2 percent of what he has memorized. May Allah reward him for his great work as well as us.

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