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The impact of *ḥadīth* perception on disputes between *ahl al-Sunnah* and *al-Shī‘ah al-Imāmiyyah al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah*

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Abstract: One of the main reasons for the controversies among legal schools in Islam revolves around the methodology of distinguishing authentic *aḥādīth* from those of rejected ones and applying the acceptable *aḥādīth* to different cases. This article studies *ḥadīth* perception in the light of this methodology to reveal the nature of disputes between *ahl al-Sunnah* and *al-Shī‘ah al-Imāmiyyah al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah* which is the biggest *madhhab* (school) among other *madhāhib* apart from the *ahl al-Sunnah*. The disagreements among the *madhhab* of the *ahl al-Sunnah* are confined to *al-furū‘* (applications related to secondary issues), whereas the disputes between the *Sunni* and the *Shī‘ah* schools are based on both *al-uṣūl* (principles) and *al-furū‘*. The main ground for this difference is their perception of *ḥadīth*. If this fact is overlooked, the differences between the two schools cannot be grasped appropriately.

Keywords: methodology, *ḥadīth*, *ahl al-Sunnah*, *al-Shī‘ah al-Imāmiyyah*, disputes

Abstrak: Salah satu punca utama kepada kontroversi antara aliran undang-undang dalam Islam berkisar di sekitar kaedah dalam membezakan *aḥādīth* yang sah daripada yang tidak dan menggunakan *aḥādīth* yang telah diterima kepada kes-kes yang berlainan. Makalah ini mengkaji persepsi *ḥadīth* dari sudut kaedah ini untuk memperlihatkan punca percanggahan antara *Ahl al-Sunnah* dan *al-Shī‘ah al-Imāmiyyah al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah* yang merupakan mazhab yang paling utama antara *madhāhib* yang lain selain daripada *Ahl al-*

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Sunnah. Pertikaian dalam kalangan *madhab ahl al-Sunnah* terbatas kepada *al-furū'* (aplikasi berkaitan dengan isu sekunder), manakala percanggahan antara aliran *Sunni* dan *Shia* adalah berdasarkan kepada kedua-dua *al-uṣūl* (prinsip) dan *al-furū'*. Alasan utama bagi perbezaan ini adalah persepsi mereka terhadap *ḥadīth*. Jika fakta ini terlepas pandang, perbezaan antara kedua aliran ini tidak boleh difahami dengan sewajarnya.

Kata kunci: kaedah, *ḥādīth*, *ahl al-Sunnah*, *al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyyah*, pertikaian

One of the most crucial reasons for the controversies among *madhāhib* (legal schools in Islam) revolves around the methodology of discerning *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) *aḥādīth* (singular: *ḥadīth*) from those of *saqīm* (defect/rejected) ones and applying the acceptable *aḥādīth* to different cases. Disputes among scholars with regard to interpretation of the verses of the Qur'ān may sometimes be traced back to these controversies in methodology in the field of *ḥadīth*. Numerous disputes, especially in the field of *fiqh* (jurisprudence/ the knowledge of detailed legal rules pertaining to conduct derived from their specific evidences) can be attributed to *ḥadīth*. Acceptance or rejection of a *ḥadīth*, or matters such as preference of a narration to another one is an issue of *ijtihād* (deduction of legal rulings on new incidents) by *ḥadīth* experts within a unique methodology.

Such methodological differences among *madhāhib* of the Sunnites (*ahl al-Sunnah*) are the main sources of judicial richness. The *sunnah* plays a pivotal role in the determination of the interpretations of the verses of the Qur'ān, reasons for revelation and their application to cases. Therefore, without a sound perception of the *sunnah*, Islam cannot be properly and profoundly conceived. The *sunnah* is considered determinative due to its secondary role after the Qur'ān in judicial terms. This essential and decisive role of the *sunnah* has been agreed upon unanimously by the *madhāhib* of the Sunnites.

There are numerous other *madhāhib* apart from the Sunnite. Today the biggest *madhāhib* among others is the Shiite (*Shī'ah*) school. Could it be claimed that the perception of the *sunnah* for the Shiite is as decisive as it is for the Sunnite? What is the impact of the perception of the *sunnah* between the two schools on contentious

issues extending from belief and worship practices to determination of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (lawful and unlawful in Islam) and the ethical system? Should it play a role, and what is the extent of the dispute arising from this perception?

This article studies the Shiite school called *al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyyah al-Ithnā 'Ashariyyah*, also known as the Ja'farī School. The need to refer to this arises from the fact that although the name '*Shī'ah*' refers to the 'Ja'farī *madhhab*' in the minds of the majority, this, however, does not reflect the reality entirely. Many Shiite schools have emerged throughout history and they have been parties to various religious and political disputes both in the Shiite realm and other realms. They have produced many academic works and have numerous prominent figures in politics and religious affairs. Since many conflicts exist among these sects, they should not be mistaken for each other.

For example, al-Nawbakhtī, an eminent Shiite scholar of the year 300 AH, mentioned about 60 sects within the Shiite school in his renowned book *Firaq al-Shī'ah* (Sects of the Shiites, al-Nawbakhtī, 1992). Likewise al-Qummī mentions a similar number in his famous book, *Kitāb Firaq al-Shī'ah* (al-Qummī, 1992). Although this number increased in later years, this proliferation did not last long and these sects, with the exception of a few, vanished gradually. The Ja'farī School has been the most outstanding among all the others. Today, with its systemic religious structure and the political power it has acquired, it stands as the biggest Shiite school. This school, residing in the geopolitical centre of the Middle East, has been one of the key players in regional and global political equations.

Perception of *ḥadīth* in Sunnite and Shiite schools

For this Ja'farī school, *ḥadīth* constitutes the second fundamental source of reference next to the Qur'ān. Followers of this school agree with Sunnites on the authority of the *ḥadīth* in the religion. On the other hand, concerning the essential matters such as sources and interpretations of *ḥadīth* and methods for criticism of narrations, Shiites assert rather different views from those of Sunnites. Should these differences be overlooked, the controversies between the two schools cannot be grasped properly. Hence, in order to determine

the roots of the controversies objectively between these two schools, it is essential to ascertain how each of them perceives the second judicial source of Islam.

According to Sunnites, the definition of the *sunnah*, briefly, is that it is the narrations conveying the words (*al-aqwāl*), acts (*al-a'māl*) and tacit approvals (*al-taqrīrāt*) expressed by the Prophet (SAW) and the narrations which explicate his moral characteristics and physical appearance (Abū Shahbah, 1983, pp. 15-16; 'Itir, 1981, p. 27).

Fuqahā' take the *sunnah* into consideration as it lays the foundation for *tashrī'* (law-making), in other words for *farḍ*, *wājib* and *ḥarām*, as well as negating *bid'ah*. For this reason, the sayings, actions and tacit approvals attributed to the Prophet (SAW) were called '*ḥadīth*' by *fuqahā'*. Since they evaluated *ḥadīth* on judicial basis, they did not regard the narrations pertaining to the physical description and moral characteristics of the Prophet (SAW) as *ḥadīth*, which distinguishes the *fuqahā'* from *ḥadīth* scholars (Azami [n.d.], p. 3; 'Itir, 1981, p. 23). Nevertheless, in the major books of *ḥadīth*, including *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, we see that narrations about the human aspects of the Prophet (SAW), such as his moral and physical characteristics, were categorized as *ḥadīth*. Even when a narration does not contain a regulation, as it conveys a piece of information related to the Prophet (SAW), it is regarded as *ḥadīth*. There is no conflict between *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn* about the fact that *aḥādīth* conveys regulations; the difference in opinion concerns whether or not narrations on the human aspects of the Prophet (SAW) should be regarded as *ḥadīth*.

According to Sunnites, the Prophet (SAW) not only delivered the revelation he received from Allah (SWT) to people but also explained and exemplified them by applying them in his own life. Thus, he was named 'the living Qur'ān.' Sunnites agree that *aḥādīth* pertaining to religious regulations were directly revealed to the Prophet (SAW) from Allah (SWT), and they support their statements with the verse "Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) Desire. It is no less than Inspiration sent down to him" (53: 3-4), as proof. They also assert that the word 'wisdom' in the verse "Allah did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the Signs of Allah,

sanctifying them, and instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error” (3: 164), refers to ‘*sunnah*.’ Narrations from the Prophet (SAW) and his companions support this view. The Prophet (SAW) was quoted as saying “I was given the book (the Qur’ān) and with it something like it (the *sunnah*)” (Abū Dāwūd, vol. 4, p. 328). In light of the aforementioned verses and *aḥādīth*, Sunnites regard *aḥādīth* pertaining to religious rulings as direct revelations from Allah (SWT) to the Prophet (SAW) and consider *ḥadīth* to be the secondary source for jurisdiction next to the Qur’ān (Abdullah & Abdul Manas, 2006, pp. 31-52; Azami, [n.d], pp. 5-8).

According to Shiites, the *sunnah* constitutes the narrations conveying the words, acts and tacit approvals attributed to *al-Ma’sūmīn* (the infallibles) also, including those which explicate their moral characteristics and physical appearances. *al-Ma’sūmūn*, also known as the ‘Fourteen *Ma’sūmūn*’ denote the Prophet (SAW), his daughter Fāṭimah, her husband ‘Alī and his descendants, which include eleven Imāms.

The Twelve Imāms (including ‘Alī) are as follows (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, pp. 415-452.):

- 1) ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Murtaḍā (d. 40 A.H./ 660 A.D.)
- 2) Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Zaky (d. 50 A.H. / 670 A.D.)
- 3) Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī Sayyid al-Shuhadā’ (d. 61 A.H. / 681 A.D.)
- 4) ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. 95 A.H. / 713 A.D.)
- 5) Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Bāqir (d. 114 A.H. / 732 A.D.)
- 6) Ja’far ibn Muḥammad as-Şādiq (d. 148 A.H. / 765 A.D.)
- 7) Mūsā ibn Ja’far al-Kāzīm (d. 183 A.H. / 799 A.D.)
- 8) ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203 A.H. / 818 A.D.)
- 9) Muḥamad ibn ‘Alī al-Jawād (d. 220 A.H. / 835 A.D.)
- 10) ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī (d. 254 A.H. / 868 A.D.)
- 11) Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-‘Askarī (d. 260 A.H. / 873 A.D.)
- 12) Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Mahdī (d. 260 A.H. / 873 A.D.)

Al-Sayyid Ḥasan al-Şadr defines ‘*sunnah*’ as “words, acts and tacit approvals, apart from the ordinary ones and the Qur’ān of the *al-Ma’sūm*.” (al-Şadr, [n.d.]. p. 85). ‘Abd Allāh al-Māmaqānī, narrates

the definition as “words, acts and tacit approvals, apart from the ordinary ones, of the Prophet (SAW) who himself is the absolute *al-Ma‘šūm*” (al-Māmaqānī, 1411h., vol.1, p. 68) and adds that he deems “words, acts and tacit approvals, apart from the ordinary ones, of the one who is not permitted to lie or to err” as the best definition (al-Māmaqānī, 1411h., vol.1, p. 69). Since *al-Ma‘šūmūn* may express words, acts and tacit approvals following the practice of *taqiyyah*/dissimulation (al-Māmaqānī, 141h., vol.1, p. 69) the term ‘*lā ‘ādī*’ (not ordinary) applies only to the words, acts and tacit approvals out of the scope of *taqiyyah*. The issue of discernment of what constitutes the *sunnah* with regard to *taqiyyah* and to religious declarations is a complex topic to be addressed separately.

As can be deduced from the various definitions above, there are deeply rooted differences between Sunnites and Shiites concerning what constitutes the *sunnah*. Although Sunnites regard only the Prophet (SAW) to be free from error or sin, for Shiites, the number of *al-Ma‘šūmūn*—sources of religious jurisdiction—reaches up to fourteen. The Prophet (SAW) is the only common authority in terms of source of jurisdiction between these two schools. Apart from this common authority, Imāms regarded as infallible by Shiites are not deemed as sources or jurisdiction for Sunnites. The fact that more than 90 per cent of the Shiite *ḥadīth* collection consists of the words, acts and tacit approvals of these Imāms (Nu‘mānī, [n.d.], p. 110) emphasizes the undeniable reality that the differences between these schools are found not only within the secondary issues but also in the primary ones. The core of the matter is the concept of *al-Imāmah* (Imamology), the foundation on which the Shiite school rests, is the main issue distinguishing the two schools. From this belief emerges differences in jurisdiction and faith.

According to the doctrine of *al-Imāmah*, Imāms and the Prophet (SAW) enjoy an equal authority in religious affairs. ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī states that a *ḥadīth* heard directly from the mouth of the Prophet (SAW) or one of the Imāms is accepted to the same degree as the Qur’ān (Tabāṭabā’ī, [n.d.], p. 102). The words of Imāms are decisive not because they are trustworthy narrators of the *aḥādīth*; on the contrary, it is due to their role as judicial sources and conveyers of decrees they receive from Allah (al-Muḥaffar, [n.d.], vol. 3, p. 61). They, as mentioned in the end note, have been appointed by

Allah as Imāms in a definite order (al-Amīn, 1986, p. 19). To clarify this issue further, we shall try to explicate what ‘Imāms’ denote in the Shiite belief system, and the relationship of this belief with the *sunnah* by referring to Al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī, esteemed to be the most authentic source after the Qur’ān.

Imāms as authorities of jurisdiction and their role in controversies

The doctrine of ‘*al-Imāmah*,’ as one of the foundations of faith in the Ja‘farī School assigns a special mission to Imāms. This mission essentially is not much different from the mission of Prophet Muḥammad (SAW). It sometimes even exceeds the dimensions of the missions attributed to the Prophet (SAW) by Sunnites. According to the main Shiite source, the Twelve Imāms are determined in a specific order by divine will and their political and religious authority is not subject to the *ijtihād* of the believers (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 279). All Imāms are *ma’sūm* (free from sin or error) (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 269). Imāms know the past and the future and are informed of secrets and hence nothing is concealed to them (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 260). Those who deny the Imāms are not true believers (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 187). *Muqarrab* angels (angels close to Allah) or even prophets cannot ascend to the lofty position of the Imāms (al-Kulaynī, vol. 8, p. 10). The Imāms receive divine revelation through angels (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 271) and determine *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 441).

By reminding that Shiite scholars believe in these qualities attributed to the Twelve Imāms and in the doctrine of *al-Imāmah* as an indispensable pillar of faith, attention is drawn to a quotation by Rūḥ Allāh al-Khumaynī, the ultimate leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran: “[the] Imām holds such an elevated status and authority of cosmological significance that all particulars of the cosmos are under his command. Our Imāms occupy such a sublime position that neither a *muqarrab* angel nor a prophet sent as a messenger can attain it!” (al-Khumaynī, [n.d.], p. 47).

This mission assigned to the Imāms and such power attributed to them elevate them to a position of super beings, far above humans. According to Sunnites, on the other hand, such a cosmological initiative cannot be attributed to prophets, let alone Imāms. Hence,

in the minds of the common Shiite people, prophets are rendered insignificant and barely perceptible in comparison to the Imāms.

This fact is marked by the transmissions in the Shiite *ḥadīth* collections stating that all prophets ranging from Adam to Muḥammad (SAW) were informed of the appointment of the Imāms. The *ḥadīth* transmitted by Al-Kulaynī on the authority of Imām ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā exemplifies this. It states: “[The] succession of ‘Alī is written in [the] pages of all prophets.” (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 437). Another *ḥadīth* pertaining to this matter is the one by the renowned Shiite scholar al-Majlisī who transmitted from Imām al-Bāqir in his interpretation of the verse “We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot: and We found on his part no firm resolve.” (20: 115); “Allah covenanted the succession of Muḥammad and [the] Imāms with Adam. He did not have any firm resolve for his covenant. They were qualified as Ulū al-‘Azm¹ (of firm resolution) because they were given the covenant of Muḥammad, [the] Imāms and Mahdī. Allah (SWT) marked their supremacy in this covenant and their agreement to it” (al-Majlisī, 1404h, vol. 11, p. 35). The prominent scholar Qummī, one Al-Kulaynī’s lecturers with an unquestionable authority in the Shiite world, and a contemporary of Imām Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-‘Askarī, interprets this verse of *Sūrat Ṭāhā* in his exegesis of the Qur’ān which is regarded as one of the fundamental sources in Shiite religious literature (Qummī, 1404h, vol. 2, p. 66).

The *ḥadīth* texts mentioned above give a clear depiction of what Imāms represent in the Shiite perception of religion. The same *ḥadīth* texts define the *sunnah* as a figure moulding the perception of religion as well. In other words, the Imāms are regarded sources for religious jurisdiction like the Prophet (SAW) and such reports about them have changed this perception into a basic element of the belief system. These transmissions, although their source cannot be traced to the Qur’ān, are considered sacred by Shiites. Furthermore, they emerge with a powerful authority that designates the interpretation of the Qur’ān as well as the boundaries of faith and the legal system.

The problem of common authority in the perception of the *sunnah* between the two schools

From the above analysis, it should now be clear that Shiite and Sunnite schools have different perceptions of the *sunnah*. As stated above, in terms of the *sunnah*, the only common ground is the transmissions received from the Prophet (SAW). Nonetheless, this does not mean that these two schools agree on the transmissions coming from the Prophet (SAW) in the *ḥadīth* sources. The Shiite perception of *al-ṣaḥābah* (companions of the Prophet, SAW) and the definition of the accepted *ḥadīth* for scholars of methodology preclude even to agree on the transmissions coming from the Prophet (SAW). Those who saw the Prophet (SAW), attended his educational circle, listened to his speeches, learned from him, observed him in times of war or peace, when he was in a mosque or a bazaar, briefly or in all aspects of his life are *al-ṣaḥābah*, and his message and everything related to him are transmitted from them. Realistically, it could not have been otherwise. Therefore, once *al-ṣaḥābah* are removed from the chain of transmission, it is not possible to attain the Prophet's (SAW) legacy. Rejecting the trustworthiness and uprightness (*ʿadālah/amānah*) of *al-ṣaḥābah* will consequently lead to the rejection of the heritage of the Prophet (SAW) altogether. The *Imamites'* perception of *al-ṣaḥābah* has resulted in this situation.

Shiites, as an inevitable result of their doctrine of *al-Imāmah*, had to abandon all except a few generations of *al-ṣaḥābah* in the chain of transmission. Given this, they have deprived themselves of the Prophetic tradition and legacy. Another repercussion of Shiites' rejection is that in the Shiite collections of *aḥādīth*, the number of *aḥādīth* transmitted from the Prophet (SAW) is much fewer than the *aḥādīth* transmitted from the Imāms. The word 'inevitable' has been specifically employed here to elucidate the doctrine of *al-Imāmah* and its repercussions on the perception of the *sunnah*.

As mentioned earlier, the Ja'farī school believe in the succession of the twelve Imāms in a specific order. According to this belief, the person to succeed the Prophet (SAW) in political and religious realms, the person to lead the Ummah after him should have been 'Alī. The Shiite claim that this was not an option but a command from Allah. However, *al-ṣaḥābah* infringed this command by electing Abū Bakr

as their leader and pledging allegiance to him. They denied and distorted what Shiites claim to be ‘divine decrees.’ It follows that when the messages of *al-ṣaḥābah* transmitted from the Prophet (SAW) are evaluated, their impartiality and uprightness are discredited. When the narrator in the chain of transmission is not regarded as impartial or fair, the messages themselves will not be considered trustworthy. The number of *aḥādīth* advocating this notion of *al-ṣaḥābah* is so abundant in the Shiite collection that accepting the transmissions of *al-ṣaḥābah* is rendered impossible. This perception has separated the two schools throughout history.

Further transmissions can be quoted to illustrate this matter. Al-Kulaynī, in his interpretation of the verse, “Lo! those who believe, then disbelieve and then (again) believe, then disbelieve, and then increase in disbelief, Allah will never pardon them, nor will He guide them unto a way” (4: 137) refers to a transmission from Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq and asserts that the people mentioned in the verse refer to *al-Ṣaḥābah* who acknowledged the *imāmah* of ‘Alī reluctantly in the Prophet’s (SAW) time but after his demise did not pledge allegiance to ‘Alī, and therefore their hearts were left without faith (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 420). A transmission from Imām al-Bāqir maintains that all the *al-Ṣaḥābah* except three became *ahl al-riddah* (the people of apostasy) after the Prophet’s (SAW) demise. These three *al-Ṣaḥābah* were Salmān al-Fārisī, al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad, and Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (al-Kulaynī, vol. 8, p. 245; al-Majlisī, vol. 22, p. 333; al-Kashshī, [n.d.], p. 6). Those acquainted with Shiite literature should know that it contains many such transmissions which have moulded the Shiite perception.

As it is widely acknowledged, *ḥadīth* collections of Sunnite assign a central role to *al-Ṣaḥābah* in extending their sources to the Prophet (SAW). A *ḥadīth* without one of the *al-ṣaḥābahs* in its transmission cannot be regarded as *ṣaḥīḥ* (accepted). Hence, *aḥādīth* coming from Sunnite sources bear no significance to the Shiite. Although sometimes Shiites may use *aḥādīth* coming from Sunnite sources and bring examples from such sources to reinforce their arguments, such occurrences do not imply that Shiites regard these sources acceptable. What is aimed at with such quotations is simply to bind Sunnites with their own arguments and sources. Therefore,

it is explicit that the perception of the *sunnah* plays a divisive role between these two schools.

At this point another question comes to mind: does the Ja'fari school accept *aḥādīth* transmitted by *al-Ṣaḥābah* they consider to be trustworthy in the Sunnite collections as religious texts, and act upon them? Answering this question affirmatively does not seem to be possible since the very description of *ḥadīth* by Shiite scholars prevents this. The criteria of the two schools for *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* are different. As the criteria are different, the accepted and rejected *aḥādīth* also differ. According to Sunnites, *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* is the *ḥadīth* which is narrated by a reporter who is honest, of good memory power, without any break in the chain of narrators, without any *shudhūdh* (rareness/whose narrator is trustworthy but contradicts the narration of trustworthy narrators) and without any *'illah* (defect) (Ibn Ḥajar, *Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikr*, p. 1; al-Suyūṭī, [n.d.], vol. 1, p. 66).

As stated in the definition, all five criteria should be applied in order to prove that a *ḥadīth* can be attributed to the Prophet (SAW). The first three pertain to the criticism of the chain of narrators while the last two refer to both the narrators and the text. According to the criteria, the transmitters should be *'ādil* (of confirmed integrity and probity). *'Adl* indicates abstaining from all kinds of small and big sins such as *shirk* (association of partner with Allah) and *fisq* (departure from the obedience of Allah) and being a sincere and devout Muslim (al-Ghazālī, 1413h, p. 125; al-Rāzī, 1400h, vol. 4, p. 571). The minimum requirement of this condition is that the person has not committed a major sin and does not persist in committing minor ones.

In terms of narrators who are *ahl al-bid'ah* (someone who is heretic in religion), unless they reject matters known by necessity, Sunnites accept their transmissions if they fulfill the criteria of *'adl* and *ḍabt* (the ability of a person to listen to an utterance, to comprehend its meaning as it was originally intended and then to retain it and take all necessary precautions to safeguard its accuracy) (Ibn Ḥajar, *Nuzhat al-Nazar Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikr*, p. 50; al-Sakhāwī, 1403h, vol. 1, p. 324). Trustworthy narrators should possess the abilities of learning *aḥādīth* precisely, and must possess a retentive

memory so that their report may be trusted, or record them in written form in their books. There should also be no hindrance for the reporters to transmit the message from one another; in other words, there should not be any disconnection in the chain of narrators. Furthermore, the trustworthy narrator of a *ḥadīth* should not contradict the narration of those who are more trustworthy and have better retentive memory than he has; if not, such *ḥadīth* are classified as *ḥadīth Shādhdh*. This would denote that the narrator as well as the transmission are *shudhūdh* (abnormal) and out of the boundaries of *ṣaḥīḥ*. Finally, a *ḥadīth* should have no deficiency in either its text or its *sanad* and bear no weakness according to the given criteria. For Sunnites, a *ḥadīth* is regarded *ṣaḥīḥ* if its chain of narration and text satisfy the criteria without being hindered by the mechanism of critique. This demonstrates that Shiites and Sunnites have different perceptions even for *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ*.

Nevertheless, the definition and criteria of *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* in Shiite literature are different from the Sunnite ones. The definition of *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* for Shiite is founded on the fundamentals of the school. They propound three criteria and do not consider the criterion of ‘not containing any *shudhūdh* or defect’ essential for *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ*. In other words, they renounce the critique of the text in determining *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ*. This matter is clarified fully in Shiite books on *ḥadīth* methodology. For example, al-Shahīd al-Thānī defines *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* as: “A *ḥadīth* that is transmitted by *Imamite* transmitters with ‘*adl* and *ḍabt* from other *Imamite* transmitters with the same qualities through a continuous chain of narration, even though it might be *shazz*.” (al-Shahīd al-Thānī, 1404h, pp. 21-22). Mīrdāmād and al-Māmaqānī define *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* as: “A *ḥadīth* that is transmitted by ‘*adl* and *ḍabt* *Imamite* transmitters from other ‘*adl* and *ḍabt* *Imamite* transmitters on the authority of *masūms* (*Imāms*) through a continuous chain of narration.” (Mīrdāmād, [n.d.]. p. 40; al-Māmaqānī, 1411h, vol. 1, p. 147). As can be observed in the definitions, transmitters should not only possess ‘*adl* and *ḍabt* but they should also be *Imamites*. All Shiite sects, except al-Zaydiyyah, are *Imamites*; they believe in the infallibility and *walāyah* (attachment) of the *Imāms*. The number of *Imāms*, however, is not agreed upon. Al-Ismā‘īliyyah believes in six *Imāms*; thus despite being *Imamites*, they are not regarded a part of the Ja‘farī school. For the Ja‘farī school, the criterion for the narrator to be an *Imamite*

refers to being devoted to the Twelve Imāms. In order to be a true believer, the political and religious submission to the Twelve Imāms is essential, and those who refrain from it will not be deemed true believers and will be considered *fāsiq* in the mildest sense, albeit remaining within the borders of Islam. The condition for the transmitter to be an *Imamite* negates the transmissions of Sunnite narrators or narrators from other Shiite sects, even if they possess ‘*adl*, and *aḥādīth* transmitted by them are not considered *ṣaḥīḥ* (al-Māmaqānī, 1411h, vol. 2, p. 28; al-Qummī, Abū al-Qāsim, [n.d.], p. 457).

As the definition of *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* in Shiite literature indicates, none of the *aḥādīth* sourced from the collections of Sunnites, even though recorded in Bukhārī and Muslim, are within the scope of ‘*ṣaḥīḥ*’ from the Shiite perspective. The *ḥadīth* criteria reflecting the sensitivities of the Shiite school do not permit this. This situation, however, should not be interpreted as meaning that Shiite and Sunnite *ḥadīth* collections do not contain any common texts. However, the texts appearing in the collections of both schools are the narrations these schools bring forward according to their own criteria. Although there is a common sphere in regard to some *ḥadīth* text, there also exists a vast domain of controversy.

The criteria for *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* and their sources spanning over centuries manifest considerable diversities. Since *al-Imāmiyyah* has ramified into two sects, *al-Akḥbāriyyūn* and *al-Uṣūliyyūn*, and *al-Akḥbāriyyūn* renounce *ḥadīth* critique and view *ḥadīth* methodology as an innovation of Sunnites (al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, [n.d.], vol. 30, p. 259), the researcher can claim that the controversies are very deeply rooted. *Al-Akḥbāriyyūn* is an influential branch in the Ja‘farī school. This sect had a tremendous impact on Shiite *ḥadīth* literature and its inadequate methodology of *ḥadīth* criticism and ‘*ilm al-rijāl* (study of the narrators). The errors of the methodologists such as delayed classification of *aḥādīth*, problems with the implementation of the methodology, failure to sort out the *aḥādīth* in Shiite *ḥadīth* literature as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, *da‘īf* (weak) or *mawḍū‘* (fabricated) are mainly due to the influence of *al-Akḥbāriyyūn*. This influence is still ongoing. The disputes between *al-Uṣūliyyūn* and *al-Akḥbāriyyūn* still constitute the most problematic area of the *ḥadīth* field both inside and outside the Shiite school.² For example, by declaring the *aḥādīth*

in the *al-Kutub al-Arba'ah* (four major *ḥadīth* collections)³ of Shiite literature (the collection considered to be a counterpart of *al-Kutub al-Sitta* in *Sunnī* literature) to be 'absolute' (al-Subḥānī, *Kuliyāt fī 'Ilmi al-Rijāl*, [n.d.], p. 35), *al-Akḥbāriyyūn* has caused the field of *ḥadīth* to become remarkably controversial. The *aḥādīth* contained in these books contradict each other. The collection contains numerous *aḥādīth* contradicting the principle that Qur'ān is preserved as it was revealed by Allah.

To illustrate that this sect has turned the perception of *ḥadīth* into a problematic area can be seen from Al-Kulaynī's transmission from Imām al-Ṣādiq asserting that the Qur'ān is not the book people hold and read today but once the twelfth Imām (al-Mahdī) reappears, he will bring the original copy of the Qur'ān (al-Kulaynī, vol. 2, p. 633; al-Majlisī, vol. 89, p. 88). Many other transmissions narrating those who distorted and altered the Qur'ān also exemplify the impact of *al-Akḥbāriyyūn* (al-Kulaynī, vol. 8, pp. 124-125). It is an established fact that the Qur'ān is safe from distortion and it is under the protection of Allah (SWT) as the verse of the Qur'ān states: "We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)" (15: 9). The narrations quoted above contradict this fact stated in the Qur'ān. *Al-Akḥbāriyyūn*, by acknowledging all the *aḥādīth* in *al-Kutub al-Arba'ah* as absolute and certain, authenticate these narrations about the distortions in the Qur'ān. Some scholars belonging to the *al-Uṣūliyyūn* sect have also accepted the certainty of *al-Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

There are further examples of how Shiite *aḥādīth* contradict each other, such as the contradictions about the ruling on *mut'ah* or temporary marriage. There are narrations ruling *mut'ah* as *ḥarām* as well as those stating that it is *ḥalāl*. The *ḥadīth* that states that "Rasūl Allāh (SAW) prohibited donkey meat and *mut'ah*" (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, vol. 21, p. 12; al-Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 7, p. 257) contradicts the *aḥādīth* allowing *mut'ah* (Ibn Bābawīh, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh* (1413h), v, 3, p. 459, al-Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 7, p. 249, 250). Similarly, the *aḥādīth* allowing the eating of the meat of falcons and hawks contradict those prohibiting them (al-Kulaynī, vol. 6, p. 208; Ibn Bābawīh, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh* (1413h), vol. 3, p. 320; al-Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 9, p. 32; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, vol. 23, p. 352). The narrations saying that the Imām are free from sin (al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 269), and

those saying that they may lie also mark serious contradiction (al-Kulaynī, vol, 8, p. 292; al-Majlisī, vol. 47, pp. 223-224). These examples show that *ḥadīth* criticism is not well applied by Shiites and, therefore, it does not achieve results in line with their *ḥadīth* methodology.

Conclusion

The disputes between Shiites and Sunnites are unlike the divisions among various *madhhab* of the Sunnite school which share the same belief and faith systems, sources of knowledge, view of the *al-ṣaḥābah* and recognition of the Prophet (SAW) as the only source of *ḥadīth*. Differences in *ijtihād* due to the particulars of methodology do not alter this fact. The disagreement among *madhāhib* of Sunnites are confined to *al-furū'* (applications related to secondary issues), whereas the disputes between Sunnite and Shiite schools are based on both *al-uṣūl* (principles) and *al-furū'*. The main ground for this difference is the doctrine of *al-Imāmah*, and, consequently, the Shiite perception of the *sunnah*. If this fact is overlooked, the differences between the two schools cannot be grasped.

The *sunnah* is a source of knowledge which moulds the perception and practice of the religion. The Shiite thought has been systemized by the tremendous efforts of thousands of scholars over hundreds of years extending up to the contemporary period. The Qur'ān and the *sunnah* constitute the main sources of reference for Shiites except for those Shiite scholars who have been led astray into believing that the Qur'ān has been distorted.

The Shiite doctrine has located itself in the tradition of *ḥadīth*. The field of *ḥadīth* dominates the domains of *kalām* (theology), *tafsīr* (exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), political literature and ethics. This comprises the intra-discipline of the *madhhab*. The Shiite perception of *ḥadīth* studied in this article is as archaic as it is modern. Contemporary Shiite scholars and Shiite followers guided by those scholars believe in the infallibility of the Imāms and the *ḥadīth* definition of the Shiite provided in this study. A quick reference to contemporary books should suffice to shed light on this issue (al-Subḥānī, Ja'far, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth wa-Aḥkāmihī fī 'Ilm al-Dirāyat*; al-Khumaynī, *al-Ḥukūmat al-Islāmiyyat; Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, Muḥammad

Ḥusayn, Shi‘ah; Mishkīnī, Āyatullāh ‘Alī, Sunnah, from Shiites and Sunnites Viewpoints).

In conclusion, we can assert that the disputes between Sunnites and Shiites pertain more to essentials than to forms. This is because the methodology which determines the authenticity of the *sunnah* and sources of narrators are at variance between these two schools of thought. Therefore, the *sunnah* which defines the religion is significantly different for both of them.

Endnotes

1. Ulū al-‘Azm are messengers mentioned by the Qur’ān; “Therefore, patiently persevere, as did (all) messengers of firm resolution; and be in no haste about the (Unbelievers)” (46: 35). They have been also named in the verse: “And remember We took from the Prophets their Covenant: As from thee: from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary: We took from them a solemn covenant” (33: 7).

2. For more information about the conflict of opinion on *ḥadīth* criticism and its legitimacy, between *al- Akhbāriyyūn* and *al-Uṣūliyyūn*, see; al-Subḥānī, *Kulliyāt fī ‘Ilm al-Rijāl*, pp. 31-51; al-Ghayrafi, pp. 16-25.

3. Four major *ḥadīth* collections in Shiite schools are: (i) *al-Kāfī* by Muḥamad ibn Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Rāzī al-Kulaynī (d. 329 A.H. / 940 A.D.); (ii) *Man Lā Yahḍuruḥu al-Faqīh* by Abū Ja‘far, Muḥamad ibn ‘Alī al-Qummī Ibn Bābawīh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381 A.H. / 911 A.D.); (iii) *Istibṣār fīmā Ikhtalafa min al-Akhbār*; and (iv) *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* by Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī. al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 A.H. / 1067 A.D.)

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