

Jarh And Ta'dil

After finishing discussion on *hadith* books, I am going to talk about *jarh* (sarcasm) and *ta'dil*, saying: When *riwayah* was inflicted with that corruption, and sahih traditions were mixed with incorrect ones, with capricious and irreligious people allowing themselves to falsify and fabricate traditions, ascribing them to the Messenger of Allah, for satisfying their desires and due to differences in conditions of narrators, among whom there being those lacking accuracy and reliability – the two provisions necessary for veracity of narration—some notable *ulama'* undertook the task of criticizing the narrators so as to make people – through studying their biography – acquainted with the level of the narrations reported by them. This criticism was called '*jarh* and *ta'dil*'.

Muslim reported from Muhammad ibn Sirin as saying: This knowledge is verily a religion, so you should know well from whom you take your *Din*. He said too: They were not inquiring about *isnad* (chain of transmitters), but when fitnah (sedition) occurred they started to say: Bring in the names of your *rijal*.

Al-Nawawi said: *Jarh* (criticizing) the narrators is permissible, and rather is obligatory as agreed by *ulama'* in cases of necessitating exigency, for the purpose of safeguarding the holy Shari'ah, and it can't be considered of forbidden backbiting, but rather it is a counsel sincerely for sake of God and His Messenger (S) and the Muslims.

Scrutiny is something prescribed and called to by the Qur'an, when the Most High said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا

“O ye who believe! If an evil-liver bring you tidings, verify it, ...” (, 49:6), ,

and said:

وَأَشْهَدُوا ذَوِي عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ

“... and call to witness two just men among you... (65:2)

and also said:

مِمَّن تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

“... of such as ye approve as witnesses...” (2:282)

In another place He praised saying:

نِعَمَ الْعَبْدِ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ

How excellent a slave! Lo! He was ever turning in repentance (toward Allah)”. (38:30)

And He censured saying:

هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ مَّنَّاعٍ لِّلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ

“Detracter, spreader abroad of slander. Hinderer of the good, transgressor, malefactor. Greedy therewithal, intrusive”. (68: 11–12)

It is known that criticizing the *rijal* was an ordinary practice from the lifetime of the Messenger (S). Ibn Adiy (d.365H.), in the introduction to the book *al-Kamil*, has cited number of *rijal* belonging to his time, among whom we can refer to the Companions: Ibn Abbas (68) and Ubadah ibn al-Samit (34). And among the *Tabi'un*, we can refer to al-Shi'bi whose age exceeded one hundred years, and Ibn Sirin (110) and Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab (190).

It is said that Shu'bah, who used to call al-Shi'bi with the title Amir al-Mu'minin in *hadith*, was the first to comment on *rijal*, and he was born in 82 H. and dead in 160H.

He mentioned many critics of the 2nd century. What he said about this century: In its beginnings there were some unreliable narrators among the *Tabi'un*, the weakness of most of whom often originated before their being able to control the exactitude and correctness of *hadith*, as they used to narrate many *mursal* traditions and make the *mawquf* as *marfu'*, with committing several mistakes.

The most eminent critics in the end of the 2nd century were the authority Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan (198) and Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi (198). Since they were both trusted by people, whoever was deemed trustworthy by them would attain approval among people, and that deemed untrustworthy by them would be of no worth among people. And in regard of one concerning whom difference of opinion was there, people would refer to what they preponderated.

The first one undertaking the task of collecting his utterance on jarh and ta'dil was Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan. After him, another one of his disciples, Yahya ibn Mu'in (d.233), had a commentary too, in which his opinions and expressions differed regarding some of the *rijal*. Among the disciples of Yahya ibn Mu'in we can refer to Ahmad ibn Hanba (d.241) and Ali ibn al-Midyani (d.224) and others.

About this subject a commend is ascribed to Muhammad ibn Sa'd (d.230), the scribe of al-Waqidi in his *Tabaqat*, whose statement was good and reasonable.

I am not to cite the names of all those who discussed the subject of *jarh* and *ta'dil* as this being out of scope here.

Reasons of Jarh

Ibn Hajar says: Reasons of jarh are different, that can be restricted in five main things: *Bid'ah* (heresy), or contradiction, error, or ignorance of conditions, or claim of interruption in the *sanad*, as when claiming that the narrator was defrauding or giving *mursal hadith*.¹

Disagreement Regarding Jarh and Ta'dil

There was disagreement among *ulama'* of *jarh* in regard of jarh and ta'dil proportionate to difference of their madhahib (schools) and conditions.

Al-Hazimi,² in *Shurut al-A'immah al-Khamsah*, says: The leaders (imams) of *naql* (reporting), with their multifarious madhahib and inconsistent states in usage of items, differ in most of them. There may be a narrator regarded trustworthy by Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi but deemed defamed by Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan, and vice versa. And it is known that these two were notable imams, being axis of criticism in *naql*, and from whom most of traditions were taken.

Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi said: Some of men of *hadith* have commented against a group of venerable *ulama'*, charging them with weakness, before their being memorizers, while others deemed them reliable due to their venerated status and truthfulness, though they might have misconceived in some narrations. Then Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan spoke against Muhammad ibn 'Amr, reporting from him afterwards. Further, Ibn Abi Layla used to narrate something in one way, narrating it in another way another time without any *isnad*, as this was done out of his memory, due to the fact that most of the earlier men of knowledge were never writing down the traditions, and those who wrote down had done this only after hearing.³

Following are some samples of their disagreement,⁴ I cite just as examples not for the sake of restriction, since this task requires a separate full book.

1- Ahmad ibn Salih al-Misri, Abu Ja'far ibn al-Tabari, one of the learned pious leaders of *hadith*, having both knowledge of *fiqh* and of *hadith*. From him many traditions were reported by al-Bukhari and Abu Dawud, and he was deemed reliable by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Yahya ibn Mu'in and Ali ibn al-Midyani and

others. But al-Nasa'i had a had opinion of him, as once he mentioned him saying: He is neither a *thiqah* (trustworthy) nor reliable.

2- Ahmad ibn al-Miqdam ibn Sulayman al-'Ijli, who was deemed trustworthy by Abu Hatam and al-Nasa'i. About him Abu Dawud said: I never report *hadith* from him since he used to teach the impudent how to jest.

3- Khalid ibn Mukhallad al-Qutwani al-Kufi, who was one of the eminent shaykhs of al-Bukhari, from whom he reported and from another narrator from him. Al-'Ijli says: He is a *thiqah* in whom there is *tashayyu'*. About him Ahmad ibn Hanbal said: He had (reported) some *munkar* (disapproved) traditions.

From him al-Bukhari singly reported the *hadith*: "Whoever contracts the enmity of a friend of mine...etc.",⁵ which was considered by the traditionists as one of the odd traditions reported by al-Bukhari. Some of the leaders of *hadith* deemed some of his *rijal* to be unreliable, with being charged with reporting from those known of narrating weak and disapproved traditions, by Ibn Abi al-Dunya and al-Tabarrani through asanid about each of which there is lengthy discussion.

4- Ikrimah, mawla of Ibn Abbas, who was counted as authority (in argument) by al-Bukhari and authors of *Sunan*, but ignored by Muslim. Also Ibn Sirin said to his mawla Burd: Don't tell me lies as done by Ikrimah against Ibn Abbas.

5- Al-Waqidi: He was deemed as a liar by al-Shafi'i and trustworthy by others. In *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* it is said about him: There is concurrence that he being the most knowledgeable among *ulama'* of the *millah* (cult)! Al-Thawri had a commentary on Abu Hanifah, Ibn Mu'in on al-Shafi'i, and al-Dhuhali on al-Bukhari.

The author of *al-'Ilm al-shamikh* said: Opinions and judgements of people regarding *jarh* and *ta'dil* differed, as we find views differing in regard of one narrator, in a way once he would be labelled as Amir al-Mu'minin, and another time as the biggest liar, or something similar to these expressions.

Herewith is an all-inclusive statement about this subject, uttered by al-Sayyid Rashid Ridha' (may God's mercy be upon him):

"Authenticating everyone deemed trustworthy by the earlier, though the opposite is proved, opens the door for defamation against ourselves, by discarding the *dalil* (proof), adopting its preliminaries in respect of *taqlid* (imitation), and contradicting the guidance of the holy Qur'an".⁶

Al-Allamah never adopted their rule of *jarh* and *ta'dil* of *rijal* in its absoluteness, saying:

"Everyone deemed as reliable unanimously by all earlier men of *jarh* and *ta'dil*, is verily reliable though proving to have for the latter some causes of *jarh* that were never found by the earlier. Those free-thinking men never approve of such utterance". In the end of this book the reader will come across the complement to this discussion.

This saying and others, which were disclosed by this Allamah, had no alike by other *sunni ulama'*, and no one could be found to have deeply studied the *hadith*, reaching the depth of its kernel and real knowledge, in the present time, or rather in many ages. No wonder for this since he being the most eminent among the disciples of al-Ustadh Muhammad Abduh, and his companion who undertook the task of propagating his knowledge and interpreting his *madhhab*, with complementing, preserving and writing it down. His position to him was like that of the companions of Abu Hanifah and al-Shafi'i to both of them, as stated before.⁷

Al-Wazir al-Yamani, in al-Rawd al-basim, writes: Many of leaders of *jarh* and *ta'dil* hesitate in regard of the narrator, authenticating him once and raising doubt about his reliability, another time, since taking his misconception into fold of multiplicity can never be measured with known balance, but it depends on surmise only and it necessitates investigation and *ijtihad* (strival) to be sure. His judging him turned to be like judgement of *fuqaha'* regarding the surmise events, consequently Ibn Mu'in would have two views about the narrator: authentication and deeming with weakness, and alike.

To guard against *wahm* (misconception) is something infeasible, and *'ismah* (infallibility) can never be trait of reliable narrators, but rather *ismah* never protects against *wahm* but only in *tabligh* (propagation).⁸ The Messenger of Allah (S) has imagined that he performed some obligatory prayers in complete forms, when Dhu al-Yadayn said to him: O Messenger of Allah, have you broken the prayer or forgotten that? In the Sahih the *hadith* was thus: And he (S) said: May God's mercy be on so and so, he reminded me of a verse I have forgotten. (This *hadith* was reported by Muslim).

Also in the two Sahihs, it is reported from 'A'ishah as saying about Ibn Umar: he has never lied but misconceived.⁹

Here is an example on this: Abu Ja'far al-Razi 'Isa ibn Mahan, and it is said: Abd Allah ibn Mahan, about whom al-Dhahabi said: 'He was of good *hadith*', narrating about him difference of opinion afterwards. Al-Hafiz Abd al-Azim said: There was disagreement in the views of Ibn al-Midyani and Ibn Mu'in and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Al-Midyani once said: He is *thiqah*, and another time said about him: He was commingling and confusing! Ahmad said once: He was not so strong (authentic), and another time he said: He is *thiqah*...he writes his *hadith* but commits mistakes. Abu Zar'ah al-Razi said: He is accused most of the time Al-Fallas said: He was of bad memory.

So there was uncertainty regarding his reliability, as knowing the limit of misconception with which the truthful should be forsaken, is something minute and assiduous about which there being two views for the memorizer, as there being two views by the *faqih* regarding the minute fiqhi issues.¹⁰ Al-Imam al-Shafi'i has abundantly narrated from Ibrahim ibn Abi Yahya al-Aslami, and authenticated him while being opposed by most of the traditionists in this regard. Ibn Abd al-Barr, in his Tamhid, said: All the traditionists unanimously concurred – except al-Shafi'i – concerning *tajrih* (vilification) of Ibn Yahya.¹¹

I give here another example: Muhammad ibn Ishaq, the greatest historian in the field of first episodes of

Islam. Qatadah said: People are still in knowledge as long as Muhammad ibn Ishaq is living among them. About him al-Nasa'i said: He was not so strong. Sufyan said: I have never heard anyone accusing Muhammad ibn Ishaq (with weakness). But al-Daraqutni said: Neither him nor his father can be taken as (reliable) authority. Malik said about him: I give witness that he is a liar. [12](#)

Jarh Precedes Ta'dil

Ibn al-Salah said: When *jarh* and *ta'dil* come together in one person, the *jarh* would be given priority over *ta'dil*, as the *mu'addal* (moderated) narrator tells of his apparent condition, while the *jarih* tells of a hidden reality about the *mu'addal*. So if the number of the moderated being more than others, then priority would be given to *ta'dil*, while the correct notion held by all the *jumhur* (*Ahl al-Sunnah*) being: the *jarh* should be given priority. [13](#)

The philosopher Ibn Khaldun, when discussing the reason compelling some of the narrators to reduce number of their narrations, said:

The only reason that made every narrator decrease number of his narrations lies in the slanders facing him regarding them, and the defects intercepting his way, particularly the majority giving priority to *jarh*. Hence *ijtihad* would lead him to abandon adopting such interceptors befalling the traditions and ways of *asanid*. On multiplicity of this, his *riwayah* would become less due to the weakness in the *turuq* [14](#).

A General Word

It is inevitable to state here that *ulama'* of *jarh* and *ta'dil* have exerted great effort on purifying all the traditions reported from the Messenger of Allah, the act deserving much applause and appreciation.

But, despite their favour and precision, they could not achieve the purpose of their striving as the *hadith* books are still containing numerous dubious traditions or those which seemed to be fabricated. And this was not of their fault, as they have done their full utmost in their work, but that was beyond their human capability, as their judgement on *rijal* was only regarding their apparent conditions and what they came to know of their news, inward facts, intentions and hidden consciences, which all being beyond their reach and can never be recognized but only by Knower of Hidden things.

There may be some man of good looking and appearance, but when divulging his inner intention we would be aware of his bad true state, the fact regarding which no one can doubt. About it several investigating *ulama'*, like *mujtahid* of Yemen al-Wazir al-Yamani who said in al-Rawd al-basim: [15](#)

There is unanimity among *ulama'* on considering the exterior not the interior, and anyone whose hypocrisy appeared and infidelity was proved, his traditions would be abandoned. And that whose Islam and honesty could be manifested for all and uttered the truth, he would have good status though his inner truth being the opposite of what is outwardly known about him. Thus we would have undertaken

our obligation and exerted the required effort to seeking the truth.

The Messenger of Allah used to act according to the outward and repudiate knowledge of inward, the fact to which the Qur'an referred:

لَا تَعْلَمُهُمْ نَحْنُ نَعْلَمُهُمْ

"...whom thou (O Muhammad) knowest not. We, We know them..." (9: 101)

i.e. he (S) had no knowledge of the hypocrites the text of which is thus:

وَمِمَّنْ حَوْلَكُم مِّنَ الْأَعْرَابِ مُنَافِقُونَ وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْمَدِينَةِ مَرَدُوا عَلَى النِّفَاقِ لَا تَعْلَمُهُمْ نَحْنُ نَعْلَمُهُمْ سَنُعَذِّبُهُمْ مَّرَّتَيْنِ ثُمَّ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ عَظِيمٍ

"And among those around you of the wandering Arabs there are hypocrites, and among the townspeople of al-Madinah (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy whom thou (O Muhammad) knowest not. We, We know them, and We shall chastise them twice; then they will be relegated to a painful doom." (9: 101)

Dr. Taha Husayn, in a valuable word [16](#) with which he reviewed my book *Adwa'*, indicating the efforts exerted by men of *jarh* and *ta'dil*, said:

The earlier *muhaddithun* took notice of all this and did their best in seeking and finding the *sahih* traditions, purifying them of falsities of falsifiers and affectation of feigners. The method they adopted in this endeavour was studying the biographies of the *rijal* who transmitted the traditions throughout ages till the time they were written down. They used to follow up each and every one of these men, verifying whether he had an honest conduct and true faith in Allah and His Messenger, caring much to be truthful in all the traditions in general and those reported from the Prophet in particular.

That was a commendable and fruitful effort exerted by the precise among *ulama'* of *hadith*, who did their utmost to bring out *hadith* in a *sahih* form. But all this exertion, despite its intensity and fertility, was not enough, as it is too difficult to follow up biographies of people, with searching, investigation and trying to find their minute details and what their hearts harbour inside, with what they hide of weak points in their souls and conduct.

It was inevitable to add to this effort another one, which being investigating the text itself, since the narrator might be honest and trustworthy ostensibly to the extent the judges admitting his testimony when giving witness, but Allah alone has the knowledge of minds and what the hearts hide, or inner consciences. Or the *rijal* from whom he narrated might be truthful and honest like him, of acceptable testimony by judges, but their innermost hearts conceal truth from people, the fact making it necessary

to deeply studying the text of *hadith* reported by him from his counterpart reliable narrators, so as to explore the extent of its compatibility with the Qur'an to which doubt can never reach nor suspicion can afflict from any side. That is due to the fact that the Qur'an has never reached us through narrators – individuals or groups – but generations of the Islamic *Ummah* have unanimously exchanged and conveyed it in the form we know it today.

These generations have not conveyed it out of memory but in written form, as it was written during the lifetime of the Prophet himself, collected during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, and was inscribed in *masahif* and sent to all towns during caliphate of Uthman, the fact making it gather the written *riwayah* and memorized one, with compatibility of the two with each other. Thus it becomes meaning less to doubt even little any of the Qur'anic texts since they reached us through a firm way having no room for suspicion or doubt.

While citing all these realities as they are, and manifesting these historical events after verifying and rectifying them, my aim is not harming anyone but what I am after is to display, without any reluctance, the real character of the Companions, their being ordinary people like others, containing the righteous and sinner, truthful and liar, living and enjoying life like others. All this can never be detrimental to Islam in a way or another, and its light will verily continue to shine out of its great Book, covering all people till the Day of Resurrection.

[1.](#) Huda al-sari, vol. II, p. 111.

[2.](#) Al-Hazimi, op. cit., pp. 58, 59.

[3.](#) Tawjih al-nazar, pp. 75, 76.

[4.](#) Ibid., p. 101 and following pages.

[5.](#) When al-Dhahabi cited this hadith in biography of Khalid ibn Mukhallad al-Qatwani in al-Mizan he said: This is a very odd hadith, and if not be for the status of the Sahih I would have considered it one of Ibn Mukhallad's oddities. See the full text of the hadith in my book Shaykh al-mudirah, and it was reported by Abu Hurayrah.

[6.](#) Al-Manar Journal, vol. XXVII, p. 615.

[7.](#) See p. 34.

[8.](#) That is the Prophet's propagation from Allah.

[9.](#) Al-Rawd al-basim, vol. I, pp. 80, 81.

[10.](#) Ibid., pp. 135, 136.

[11.](#) Ibid., p. 163.

[12.](#) Fajr al-Islam, p. 366.

[13.](#) Muqaddimat Ibn al-Salah, p. 42.

[14.](#) Muqaddiamt Ibn Khaldun, p. 444.

[15.](#) Al-Rawd al-basim, vol. I, p. 151.

[16.](#) This speech was published in the Egyptian Newspaper al-Jumhuriyyah, issue dated November 25, 1958, and with it I initiated this edition of my book.

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