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THE SHI'A APPROACH TO ISNAD CRITICISM

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Abstract

Sanad criticism constitutes one of the primary instruments in hadith studies for determining the authenticity of transmitted reports. Differences in sanad criticism methodologies between Twelver Shi'ism and Sunni Islam have significantly influenced the acceptance and utilization of hadith within Muslim scholarly traditions. This study aims to analyze the concepts, principles, and criteria of sanad criticism in Twelver Shi'i tradition and compare them with those developed in Sunni hadith scholarship. Employing a qualitative method with a library research approach, this study examines classical hadith literature, rijāl works, and relevant academic sources. The findings reveal that Shi'i sanad criticism emphasizes the continuity of transmission to the infallible Imams (Imam Ma'ṣūm), the narrator's loyalty to Ahl al-Bayt, and the assessment of reliability and precision in transmission. In contrast, Sunni scholarship focuses primarily on the integrity ('adālah) and accuracy (ḍabṭ) of narrators, grounded in the principle of the collective uprightness of the Companions ('adālat al-ṣaḥābah). These methodological differences result in distinct classifications of hadith, varying perceptions of narrator authority, and divergent evaluations of hadith authenticity. A case study of a narration found in Al-Kāfī demonstrates that Shi'i sanad criticism also applies rigorous scrutiny to both narrator credibility and chain continuity. The study concludes that methodological differences in sanad criticism have contributed significantly to the formation of distinct hadith corpora and legal interpretations within Sunni and Shi'i traditions

INTRODUCTION

Hadith is one of the main sources of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an, in aspects of theology, law, and ethics(Jayadi, 2011). However, the validity of a hadith greatly depends on the strength of its isnad, which is the chain of narrators transmitting the hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to its recorder. In Islamic tradition, the study of isnad criticism has developed as part of the hadith sciences aimed at assessing the authenticity of reports. The Twelver Shia have their own approach to isnad criticism, which differs both in principle and in practice from Sunni. Shiites place the Ahlul Bait as the center of scholarly authority and make loyalty to them the main requirement for the

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acceptance of hadith transmission(Lestari, 2019)[1]. Therefore, principles such as territory is, of narrators, and the context of taqiyah become important elements in the analysis of isnad according to the Shiite version. Meanwhile, Sunnis evaluate narrators more on personal integrity and honesty, without raising issues regarding the theologial affiliation of the narrators to the Ahlul Bait.

This paper will discuss the theory and principles of isnad criticism according to Shiites, then compare it with the method of isnad criticism in the Sunni tradition, and present a case study of a hadith narration from the book Al-Kafi as an example of the implementation of the Shiite method of isnad criticism. Thus, this discussion is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the methodology of hadith in Shiism as well as its points of difference with others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study of Sanad Criticism in Hadith Science Sanad criticism is one of the main branches (Lestari, 2019)in hadith science aimed at assessing the authenticity of the transmission chain of a narration through examining the continuity of the sanad and the credibility of the narrators. In the Islamic tradition, sanad criticism developed through the disciplines of 'rijal' and 'jarh wa ta'dil', which are used to evaluate the aspects of the narrators' integrity and precision (dhabt). The existence of the sanad is regarded as a fundamental instrument in maintaining the authenticity of hadith, so that the quality of a hadith is determined not only by its content (matan), but also by the validity of its chain of narration. According to Mahmud ath-Thahhan, sanad is a chain of narrators that connects a hadith text to its original source. Therefore, the study of sanad becomes an inseparable part of the process of verifying hadiths in various Islamic schools of thought.

Sanad Criticism in the Perspective of Twelver Shi'ism In the Twelver Shi'a tradition, sanad criticism has characteristics different from the Sunni tradition because it is based on the concept of imamah and the authority of Ahlul Bayt. Shi'as consider the Ma'sum Imams as authoritative sources in the transmission of hadith, so the continuity of the sanad to the Imams becomes one of the important elements in the evaluation of hadith. In addition, the loyalty of narrators to the Ahlul Bayt is also taken into account in determining the credibility of narrators.

Twelver Shi'as develop a system of evaluating narrators through the science of rijal, which includes assessment of justice, accuracy of memorization, moral integrity, as well as the alignment of narrators' beliefs with the principles of Imamiyah. Based on the quality of the sanad and the status of the narrator, hadiths in the Shi'a tradition are classified into four main categories: sahih, hasan, muwaththaq, and dha'if.

Comparison of Hadith Criticism between Shia and Sunni Studies on the differences in hadith methodology between Shia and Sunni have been conducted by several researchers. Miskaya et al. explain that the fundamental differences between the two traditions lie in the parameters of hadith authenticity, the status of the companions, and the authority of transmission. Shia do not automatically consider all companions as just, while Sunni adhere to the principle of 'adālat al-ṣaḥābah, which views all companions as individuals of integrity in hadith transmission.

Another study by Nasir shows that the criteria for hadith authenticity in Shia do not only rely on the aspects of the narrator's justice and accuracy, but also on the narrator's

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affiliation with Imamiyyah teachings and the chain of transmission's relationship with the Ma'shum Imam. Meanwhile, the Sunni tradition emphasizes the personal integrity and intellectual capacity of the narrator through the mechanism of jarh wa ta'dil.

Previous Research everal studies relevant to this theme include Lestari (2019) discussed the epistemology of hadith from the Shi'a perspective with a focus on the sources of hadith knowledge and the authority of the Ahlul Bait. This study has not specifically examined the mechanism of sanad critique comparatively. Nasir (2014) studied the criteria for the authenticity of hadith according to the Twelver Shi'a and explained the elements used in assessing the validity of hadith. However, the research did not compare it in depth with Sunni methodology. Miskaya et al. (2021) researched hadith from both Sunni and Shi'a perspectives with a focus on historicity, evidentiary aspects, and parameters of hadith authenticity. This study is still general in nature and has not analyzed the application of sanad critique on specific narrations. Bahrul Ulum and Zainudin MZ study the analysis of the narration of Shia hadiths comparatively with Sunni. This research highlights methodological differences in narration, but has not detailed the application of isnad criticism on hadiths in the main Shia hadith books.

Position and Novelty of the Research Based on previous studies, research on Shia hadith has largely discussed epistemology, criteria of authenticity, and general comparisons with Sunni traditions. However, there is still room for research related to more specific analysis of the principles of Shia Imami sanad criticism and its implementation in assessing a hadith narration. Therefore, this study not only examines the theory and principles of sanad criticism in Shia Imami, but also compares it with Sunni sanad criticism methodology and applies it to case studies of hadith in Al-Kāfī. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the characteristics of Shia sanad criticism and its implications for determining the authenticity of hadith.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative study with a library research approach. Research data were obtained from primary sources in the form of Hadith books and Shia rijal, particularly Al-Kāfī, as well as secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and previous research discussing isnad criticism in Shia and Sunni traditions. Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation studies, while data analysis used a descriptive-comparative method. Analysis was carried out by describing the concepts and principles of isnad criticism in Imami Shia, comparing them with the Sunni isnad criticism methodology, and examining their application through case studies of Hadith in Al-Kāfī. The results of the analysis were then used to identify the characteristics, similarities, and differences of isnad criticism methodologies in both traditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistically, the word sanad (السند) comes from Arabic and means something that serves as a support, a place to lean on, a prop, or reinforcement. In Arabic, sanad al-jabal means the slope or part of a mountain that is used as a place to lean on. Therefore, the chain of hadith narration is called sanad because scholars rely on it to ascertain the authenticity of a report(Maesaroh, 2022)[2]. Sanad means something that is relied upon, a place to lean on, a peg, or something that can be trusted and used as a reference. In hadith

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science terminology, sanad is a sequence or genealogy of narrators who transmit a hadith consecutively, starting from the last person who narrated it up to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the main source of that hadith(Shobah et al., n.d.)[3]. In other words, sanad is the path that connects the matn (content) of the hadith to its original source through the narrators who convey the report. In the classical book Taisîr Musthalah al-Hadîts by Mahmud ath-Thahhan, it is stated

السند هو سلسلة الرجال الموصلة إلى المتن

"Sanad is a series of narrators that leads to the matan of the hadith."[4]

Sanad criticism is an effort to assess and determine the status of hadith narrators, whether they can be trusted ('adl) or defective, as well as to evaluate the continuity of the isnad to establish the validity of the hadith. According to the Shia perspective, sanad criticism has characteristics and approaches that differ from the view of Ahl al-Sunnah, although both emphasize the importance of the isnad in assessing the authenticity of hadith.

Theory and Principles of Shi'a Sanad Criticism The theory and principles of isnad criticism in Twelver Shia have unique characteristics that center on the authority of the infallible Imam (considered free from error) and historical methodological development. The basic theory of Shia isnad criticism is that the isnad must be connected to the Shia Imams who are considered infallible, even if not directly to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The sayings of the Imam are considered as hujjah (authoritative arguments) without the need to trace the isnad to the Prophet. Shia have restrictions on their narrators; they only accept narrators from the Twelver Shia who are loyal to the Ahlulbait, while Sunni narrators or other Shia groups such as the Zaidis are not accepted or are rejected.

The criteria for narrators in isnad criticism according to Twelver Shia scholars include several important aspects that are required for a hadith to be accepted and deemed authentic. The following is a summary of the main criteria for narrators in Shia isnad criticism based on scholarly studies 1)The chain of transmission continues to the Ma'shum Imam or Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) The chain of hadith must be continuously connected (without interruption) to the Ma'shum Imam (the imams protected from sin) or Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Narrations that are not connected to the Ma'shum Imam are considered less authoritative.2) The narrators must be from the Shia Imamiyah group All narrators in the chain must be from the Shia Imamiyah who are loyal to the Ahlulbayt. Hadiths narrated by narrators outside this group are generally not accepted. 3) Just (having good character and God-fearing)he narrators m ust be just, meaning having good character, being God-fearing, not committing major sins such as polytheism, innovations, or corrupt acts, and maintaining personal dignity (muruah). This justice includes steadfastness in the Imam and consistency in practicing Shia teachings(Semeer & Zeid, 2011). 4) Dhabit (having strong memorization and precision A narrator must be dhabit, meaning they have a strong memory, are able to memorize narrations well, and maintain precision in transmitting hadith without

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significant forgetfulness or negligence. If mistakes and forgetfulness occur more frequently than accuracy, then their dhabit status is doubtful. 5) Being mukallaf (sane and of mature age) A narrator must be mukallaf, meaning they have reached the age of maturity (baligh) and possess sound intellect.

Narrations from small children, insane people, or those who are extremely forgetful are not accepted(Muslim, 2006). Believing and loyal to the Ahlulbait A narrator must be a believer and acknowledge the leadership of the 12 Shia Imams as the leaders of the community. This faith and loyalty are important prerequisites for accepting their narrations. Avoiding anomalies (Syudzudz) The narrated hadith must not contain anomalies or contradictions with the basic principles of Shia and the Qur'an. The chain of narration (sanad) and the text (matan) must be consistent and should not raise doubts. Never falsify hadith The narrator must be honest and never commit hadith forgery. This credibility is very important to maintain the authenticity of the narration. Do not frequently narrate from weak or unknown narrators A narrator who often narrates from weak or unknown (majhul) individuals will have their credibility questioned(Miskaya et al., 2021).

These criteria become the main standard in the Shia isnad criticism to evaluate the validity and authenticity of a hadith, with a special emphasis on loyalty to the Ahlulbait and the continuity of the isnad to the infallible Imam In the Twelver Shia, hadiths are classified based on the quality of the isnad and the credibility of the narrators. Here are the four main classifications of hadiths based on isnad in Shia Authentic hadith (Sahih) is a hadith narrated by trustworthy narrators (tsiqah) whose chain of transmission (isnad) is connected to the Imam through narrators of the Imamitah who are just and reliable, from the Shia Imamiya group from beginning to end without any defects or weaknesses. This hadith is used as a basis for fiqh and creed. Good (Hasan): a hadith narrated by narrators praised for their honesty (just), but whose level of trustworthiness (tsiqah) is not precisely known or not specifically documented as trustworthy by the scholars of hadith narrators (ulama rijal)(Alfani & Rochmawati, 2023)[5]. This hadith is still used as evidence (argument), especially if supported by other hadiths. Muastaq: a hadith narrated by a narrator who is considered trustworthy, but the narrator does not come from a neutral non-Imamiyah group (such as Sunni, Zaidiyah, or others). This hadith is still accepted selectively and cautiously, sometimes used as supporting evidence if it aligns with Shi'a principles. Dha'if: this hadith has a broken chain of transmission or its narrator is weak and not trusted, unknown (majhul), corrupt, or a liar. This hadith cannot be used as proof, except in some cases for reinforcement if there are other supporting hadiths.

Comparison with Sunni Sanad Criticism Attitude Towards the Companions of Prophet Muhammad SAW Sunni Majority Sunni scholars hold the view that all companions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are udul (just and trustworthy). Their virtue as the early generation of Islam who interacted directly with the Prophet is considered as a guarantee of their honesty and integrity in narrating hadiths. Although there are a few opinions that permit criticism of the companions in terms of narration if there is an indication of error, the dominant view remains in 'adalah al-shahabah (justice of the companions). This means that, in Sunni sanad criticism, narrators from among the companions are generally accepted without the need for thorough investigation regarding their personal credibility. The focus of criticism is more directed at the continuity of the sanad after the generation of the companions and the credibility of narrators from the tabi'in generation (followers of the companions) and beyond.

Shia The Shia community has different views regarding the companions. They do not consider all companions as just. According to Shia views, justice is only possessed by certain companions, especially the Ahlul Bait (the family of the Prophet)(Andrean, 2021) and their loyal

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followers. They argue that some companions, after the Prophet's death, deviated from the true teachings and were even involved in political disputes. Therefore, in Shia criticism of chains of narration (isnad), the credibility of companions is not automatically accepted and is open to scrutiny just like transmitters from subsequent generations(Ulum, 2013). This fundamental difference in viewing the status of the companions has significant implications for the acceptance of hadith. For Sunnis, hadith narrated by a companion is generally considered authentic (sahih) as long as the chain of narration is unbroken and the narrators after the companion are trustworthy(Brown, 2017)[6]. Conversely, for Shia, hadith narrated by companions who are viewed as problematic by them can be rejected or considered weak (dha'if) even though the chain of narration appears to be continuous.

Jarh wa Ta'dil Method (Criticism and Praise of Narrators) Sunni scholars extensively developed the science of jarh wa ta'dil as a methodology for evaluating the credibility of hadith narrators. This method involves in-depth research into the biography of narrators, including honesty, precision of memory (dhabit), morality, and involvement in innovations (bid'ah) or matters that could impair their justice. Criticism (jarh) can be in the form of negative assessments that weaken or reject a narrator's account, while praise (ta'dil) provides positive assessments that strengthen the account. In the Sunni tradition, this science is strictly applied to narrators from the generation of the tabi'in and onwards. Considering the principle of 'adalah al-shahabah, the application of jarh wa ta'dil to the companions is very limited, and if it exists, it is usually related to errors in narration, not to their personal integrity.

The Shia also have a method of critiquing narrators, although its development has some historical differences with the Sunni. They also pay attention to the honesty, memorization, and justice of the narrators(Modarressi, 2003). However, due to differing views regarding the companions, the criteria of jarh wa ta'dil are also applied to some companions who are considered not to meet the standards of justice according to the Shia perspective. In addition, in the Shia tradition, the emphasis on the continuity of the chain of transmission (sanad) up to the Infallible Imam (the Ahlul Bait Imams who are considered pure and free from error) becomes a distinctive feature. Differences in the application of jarh wa ta'dil, especially concerning the companions, result in differences in the assessment of the authenticity of hadith. Hadith accepted by Sunnis because it was narrated by a just companion may be rejected by the Shia if the companion is considered problematic. Moreover, the Shia emphasis on transmission through the Infallible Imam can causing the rejection of hadiths whose chains of transmission do not go through the Ahlul Bait, even though other narrators are considered trustworthy according to Sunni standards. Authority of the Narrators In Sunni tradition, the authority of narrators is based on the criteria of 'adalah (integrity) and dhabit (accuracy of memory). Narrators who meet both of these criteria are considered thiqah (trustworthy) and their reports are accepted. The status of companions as udul gives special authority to their reports. As long as the chain of transmission passes through trustworthy narrators, the hadith has authority as a source of Islamic law. For Shia, the authority of narrators does not only depend on honesty and memorization, but also on their closeness to Ahlul Bait and their acceptance of the teachings of the Ma'sum Imams. Reports from narrators considered loyal to the Ahlul Bait and transmitting from them have higher authority. Indeed, reports directly originating from the Ma'sum Imam hold a very high position, almost equivalent to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in certain aspects(Umam et al., 2023)[7].

Differences in views regarding the authority of narrators directly impact the corpus of hadith accepted by each group. Sunnis have a wide collection of hadith, which

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includes narrations from various companions and tabi'in who are considered reliable through the science of jarh wa ta'dil. Meanwhile, Shi'as tend to be more selective and give priority to narrations that originate from or through the line of Ahlul Bait. This results in significant differences in the main hadith books that serve as references for these two traditions after the Qur'an. For example, Sunnis have the Kutub al-Sittah (six main hadith books), with Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim holding the highest positions.

On the other hand, Shia has Al-Kutub Al-Arba'ah (the four main hadith books), with Al-Kafi by Al-Kulayni being the most authoritative book. Fundamental differences in attitude toward the companions, the methodology of jarh wa ta'dil, and the authority of narrators between Sunni and Shia result in significant differences in sanad criticism and, ultimately, in the corpus of hadith that is accepted and used as a source of law. Sunnis tend to be more inclusive in accepting the narrations of the companions and focus on the credibility of later narrators through the science of jarh wa ta'dil. Meanwhile, Shia are more selective regarding the narrations of the companions and give special authority to narrations that come from or through the Ahlul Bait. These differences have broad implications in various aspects of the teachings and religious practices of these two Islamic traditions.

Case Study There are several things that can be understood from the concept of determining the authenticity of hadith among the Shiites, such as the necessity of continuity of the isnad from one level (thabaqat) to the levels above and below it. Shiites also determine every narrator as just from their group who affirms the twelve Imams, and there must be no contradiction of a hadith with another hadith of a higher degree of authenticity, commonly known as not being Shaz, as well as not having any defects ('illat') in the narration or the text (matn) as explained above. This is a basic requirement in determining the authenticity of hadith as summarized by Shiite muhaddiths.

Example of Authentic Shiite Hadith

دَّةٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا عَنْ سَهْلِ بْنِ زِيَادٍ وَ عَلِيُّ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ جَمِيعاً عَنِ ابْنِ أَبِي نَجْرَانَ عَنْ عَاصِمِ بْنِ حُمَيْدٍ عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ قَالَ سَأَلْتُ أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ عليه السلام عَنِ الْمُتْعَةِ فَقَالَ نَزَلَتْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ فَمَا اسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ فَآتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً وَ لا جُناحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيما تَرَاضَيْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الْفَرِيضَةِ

It means: “Some of our companions, from Sahli bin Ziyad and Ali bin Ibrahim, from their father all. From Ibn Abi Najran, from ‘Asim bin Humayd, from Abi Bashir: I asked Abu Ja’far about (the proof of) temporary marriage (nikah mut’ah).” Abu Ja’far answered: “It was revealed in the Qur’an: So for those wives whom you have married (interfered with) among them, give them their dower (completely), as an obligation; and there is no blame on you for what you mutually agree upon, after specifying that dower[8].

This hadith is narrated by al-Majlisi and al-Kulayni in their books, so what needs to be known next is the quality of the narrators from each of their levels as well as the continuity between one and another with the narrators below them(Nasution, 2018)[9]. Therefore, it is necessary to refer to the Shi’a Hadith Rijal books to learn the biography of the narrators and how scholars commented on them: As mentioned in the hadith above, that Abi Bashar received the hadith from Abu Ja’far, in al-Majlisi’s narration he judged that Abi Bashar was a weak narrator. This hadith was conveyed to Ashsim bin Muhaidi, who is an unknown person or majhul, and is not mentioned in the Shi’a rijal books; in Sunni rijal books he is mentioned, but there is not a single hadith narrator who narrated a

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hadith from him.

The next narrator is Ibn Abi Najran, who is no different from Muhaidi. Abi Najran is a weak narrator who is not mentioned in the Shiite biographical books. Abi Najran then conveyed his Hadith to Ali bin Ibrahim and Sahal bin Ziyad. According to al-Majlisi, Ali bin Ibrahim is a person whose beliefs are corrupted regarding his faith in the alteration of the Qur'an. As for Sahal bin Ziyad, he is someone who excessively lies. In the biographical book of an-Najasyi, it is mentioned that Bin Ziyad is a person who is magha kajjab, meaning he greatly likes to lie in narrating Hadith. An-Najasyi states that Bin Ziyad has narrated Hadiths as many as 1758.

Not different from al Majlisy in his Al-Maudhu'at, it is mentioned that Sahal bin Ziyad was known as a liar who liked to fabricate hadiths attributed to the Imam. Al Majlisy added that he was a sinful person in narrating hadiths and that his school of thought was corrupt. From the perspective of narration, we can see that there are many problems in his narrations, because the hadith transmitters were people who liked to lie.

This hadith is indeed narrated through another route, namely from the route of Abd ar Rahman bin Abi Abdullah, but according to Majlisi, the hadith is of Hasan quality. If we look at other books such as al-Istibshar by al-Thusy, and Tahdhib al-Ahkam, it comes from the route of Ibn Maskan. However, al-Majlisi judges its quality as majhul (unknown). This is because in its narration there is Abdullah bin Ismail, who is one of the narrators that is majhul (unknown). Therefore, the hadith from this route is rejected in terms of narration, but many Shia scholars use this hadith as evidence that the Qur'an validates the existence of mut'ah.

CONCLUSION

The criticism of sanad in the Shia and Sunni traditions shows fundamental differences in the approaches and criteria used to assess the authenticity of hadith. Shia emphasize the importance of a sanad that is connected to the Ma'sum Imam and loyalty to the Ahlul Bait, while Sunnis focus more on the personal integrity and honesty of the narrators. The criteria established by Shia for accepting hadith are very strict, including conditions such as justice, good memory, and not being involved in anomalies. On the other hand, Sunnis tend to be more inclusive toward the Prophet's companions, considering them automatically just, which implies a broader acceptance of hadith. This difference results in different corpora of hadith between the two traditions. Sunnis have a larger collection of hadith, whereas Shia are more selective and give priority to narrations originating from the Ahlul Bait. This creates variations in the understanding and practice of Islamic teachings between the two groups. Through case studies taken from the book Al-Kafi, it can be seen how the Shia isnad critique method is applied practically, providing a clearer picture of how these principles function in the evaluation of hadith. Awareness of these differences is important for building constructive dialogue between the two traditions, as well as for deepening understanding of hadith methodology in Islam as a whole.

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