

PROPHETIC TRADITIONS OF MUHAMMAD (PBUH): THEIR INFLUENCES ON ARABIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Abstract:

Prophetic Traditions are meant for the branch of Arabic literature that consists of accounts, information, interpretations, speeches, addresses etc. of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In this connection, a distinct term “hadith” (*ahâdith*’ in plural form) finds in Arabic literature which technically implies sayings, doings and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 A.D.). After his demise, his versions were compiled that gave a fillip to the development of Arabic prose literature. This paper deals with the linguistic and literary influences of Prophetic Traditions(i.e. hadith literature) that exerted on Arabic language and literature.

Keywords: Prophetic Traditions, hadith, literature etc.

Introduction:

Prophetic traditions stand for the whole range of activities of Muhammad (PBUH) relating to his religious admonitions, his mundane behaviours, his observations, his explanations of the Qur’ânic verses, his reactions to the different types of social conditions, his apostolic career, wars, dealing with friends and enemies, his speeches, correspondence with Arab and non-Arab monarchs, his solutions to the intertribal affairs, his economic deals, and his private and marriage life. In fact, he had practical dealings in political, social, economic, religious and judicial affairs. As a prophet of Islam, he was accustomed to communicate with different people irrespective of castes and creeds. In this connection, it has been noticed that he had the capability to express anything in pure Arabic language and also to communicate with the people of different dialects of Arabic language; he declares himself to be the most eloquent among the Arab nationals. In the history of Arabic literature, his sayings and orations are considered as the best specimen of the Arabic language.

Description:

It is reported that the Rightly Guided first four Caliphs (632 -660 A.D.) did not pay due attention to compile the prophetic traditions; but their preservation was initiated during the Umayyad period as and when an order was passed by the Caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (R. 717 - 719 A.D.), who declares: “*observe the hadith of the messenger of Allah, and keep it in black and white, because I am afraid of disappearance of scholars and the lessons of the science* (i.e. *ilm al-ḥadith* or the prophetic traditions)⁽¹⁾ Then the order of the Caliph was carried out under the supervision of the Traditionist-cum-jurist Ibn Shihâb al-Zuhrî (d.741 A.D.). He was also one of the legal advisers to the Caliph. During the Abbasid period, the Caliph Abu Ja‘far al-Mansûr (R.754 - 775 A.D.) gave an order to Malik binAnas (d.795 A.D.) to have compilation of the prophetic traditions; accordingly he carried out the caliph’s order and compiled *al-Muwatta*. In fact, it was the first great corpus of Muslim law because of its arrangement was made in conformity with the subject matter of Islamic jurisprudence.⁽²⁾

Thereafter, the preservation of the Prophetic Traditions was more perfected with the compilation of the “Six Canonical Books” which is known in Arabic as *al-Ṣiḥâḥ al-Sittah*). In fact, they occupied a unique and unparalleled position in comparison to other texts of the prophetic traditions. Here an attempt has been made to shed light on these six canonical books belonged to *jâmi*⁽³⁾ and *sunan*⁽⁴⁾ classes; they are as follows:

Jâmi‘ Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî:

It is compiled by Abu ‘AbdAllâhMuḥammadibnIsmâ‘îlbnBardizbah al-Bukhârî(810 – 870 A.D.). It falls in the category of *al-jâmi‘ al-ṣaḥîḥ* and it is an authentic work for the consideration of its chain of transmission and the main text. In fact, it occupies a unique place in the awe and esteem of Muslims as a work of great historical import and deep piety.⁽⁵⁾ Within a period of sixteen years of his editorial pains and scrutiny, he selected and preserved only 7,397 traditions with full chain of transmission from 600,000 memorized items thereof. It was arranged with 97 chapters and 3,450 sub-chapters. In fact, it achieved the reputation of sacred book just after the holy *Qur’ân*. Undoubtedly it exerted a great influence on the mindset of Muslim people.⁽⁶⁾

Ṣaḥîḥ of Imam Muslim:

It is compiled by Imâm Muslim Ibn al-Hajjâj (d. 875 A.D.).⁽⁷⁾ He collected about 300,000 items of hadith and out of which he selected 4,000 traditions for compilation; and this amount is also inclusive of repetition of hadith. In fact, according to the nature of hadith, it falls in the category of *Ṣaḥîḥ* (i.e. authentic) of the prophetic

traditions.⁽⁸⁾ It is reported that the transmitters of his compilation for authentic prophetic traditions are counted as 218 only; they belonged to the companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It has been observed that his compilation of *Ṣaḥīḥ* bears a peculiar arrangement of the prophetic traditions; because they are arranged in conformity with the Islamic Jurisprudence (*‘ilm al-fiqh al-islamī*). It has been observed from the contents of this work that it consists of 52 chapters; all they deal with the common subjects of Islamic legislations and finally it is ended with a chapter on the Qur’ānic commentary (*tafsīr*).⁽⁹⁾

Sunan Abū Dāwūd:

It is compiled by Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash‘ath al-Sajistānī (d. 889 A.D.).⁽¹⁰⁾ He spent most part of his life in Baghdad and was engaged there in compiling his *kitāb al-sunan*. In the pursuit of knowledge and collection of *hadith*, he travelled far and wide through the countries of Iraq, Khurasan, Egypt, Syria, Hijaz, and Arabian Peninsula. He collected about 500,000 traditions; out of which he compiled the *Kitāb al-Sunan* with the selection of 4,800 traditions. It is worth mentioning that Imām Tirmidhī and Imām Nasā’ī studied *hadith* under Imām Abū Dāwūd. As a book of *hadith* literature, *Kitāb al-Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd occupies the rank of authentic traditions just after the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (i.e. *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*) in the domain of the Six Canonical Books.⁽¹¹⁾

Jāmi‘ Tirmidhī:

It is compiled by Abū ‘Isā Muhammad ibn ‘Isā ibn Sawra ibn Musā ibn Dahāk al-Sulmi al-Bughī al-Tirmidhī (d. 892 A.D.).⁽¹²⁾ He received *hadith* from Imām Bukhārī, Imām Muslim and Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī.⁽¹³⁾ In fact, the scholars of Iraq, Hijaz and Khurasan praised this work with an excellent comment that ‘in which house this book is available, perhaps, the Prophet (PBUH) is speaking there’. It is an authentic work of *hadith* literature belonging to six canonical books.

Sunan al-Nasā’ī:

It is compiled by Abū ‘Abd al-Rahman Ahmad ibn Shu‘aib ibn ‘Ali ibn Bahr ibn Sinan (d. 915 A.D.); and he was known as *al-Nasā’ī* due to his born at the place of Nasā’, a famous city of Khurāsān. *9/8 Accordingly his work has been entitled as *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*. For the authenticity of *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, it has occupied a remarkable

position in the annals of *sihâh al-sitta* (The Six Canonical Books) and its rank has been identified after the position of *Sahîhayn* and *Sunan* of Imam Tirmidhî and Imam AbûDâwûd.⁽¹⁴⁾ It appears from the contents of *Sunan al-Nasâ'î* that it has 51 chapters, each of which has been again divided into sub-chapters.⁽¹⁵⁾

Sunan Ibn Mâja:

It is worth mentioning that *Sunan Ibn Maja* is one of the distinguished works of the Prophetic Traditions. Its rank has been identified with the sixth position among the Six Canonical Books (*al-ṣiḥâḥ al-sitta*). It is compiled by Abû 'AbdAllâh Muhammad ibnYazid al-Rabâ'î al-Qazwinî (d. 887 A.D.).⁽¹⁶⁾ The investigation into the contents of the *Sunan Ibn Mâja* has shown that it contains about 4,000 traditions; all they are arranged in 32 chapters and 1500 sub-chapters.⁽¹⁷⁾

Linguistic Characteristics of the Prophetic Traditions:

It appears from the history of Arabic language and literature that the language spoken by the Prophet (PBUH) was of the best eloquent model in expression with utmost distinction among human beings especially in the realm of Arabic prose style. In this connection, Prof. Muhammad Sabbâgh is of the opinion that as for the language of the Prophetic Traditions is concerned; it bears some linguistic characteristics that justified from the literary point of view of Arabic language. In fact, the modality of the prophetic traditions has made an extension to the beautification and fascination of Arabic language. Here an attempt has been made to show the linguistic characteristics of the prophetic traditions as follows:

- (1) The prophetic traditions bear literary elegance with excellent composition of words.
- (2) They have clear semantics or meaning.
- (3) They bear minuteness in expression and description.
- (4) They are consisting of similes and portrayals with unique character of language.
- (5) They have musical charms in matters of composition of words.
- (6) They have excellent expression in the mode of dialogue.
- (7) They bear original purity of linguistic diction and style.
- (8) They are consisting of brief speech together with wide comprehension (*jawâmi' al-kalim*).
- (9) They all have excellent impression extended with the semantics of the Holy *Qur'ân*.
- (10) They have suitability in expression as required to the linguistic condition.
- (11) They are free from constraint and obscurity.⁽¹⁸⁾

Influence of the Prophetic Traditions:

It has been observed that the Prophetic Traditions have some notable factors that exerted influence on Arabic language and literature; they are brought to mention as follows:

- 1) The Prophetic Traditions have innumerable components to explain, protect and preserve the contents of the Holy Qur'ân. As such, a lot of commentaries and interpretations have been produced from the contents of Prophetic Traditions, which led to the development of Arabic language.
- 2) Some new words have been technically produced by the influence of Islam and its laws (Jurisprudence) that appeared in the consistence of Prophetic Traditions. In such a way, the scope of Arabic language has been widened.
- 3) In course of times, a galaxy of scholars of different cities of Arab world have come forward to study, protect, explain and work on the prophetic traditions, which led to the development of Arabic language.
- 4) Innumerable theological works have been carried out in Arabic language for the influence of the prophetic traditions, which really led to the development of Arabic language and literature.
- 5) Historical writing was largely emerged from the sources of prophetic traditions; it not only gave a fillip to work on the life of the Prophet (PBUH), but also inspired scholars to write biographical accounts on the companions and their followers (*tab'iyûn*), huffâz (those who know the Qur'ân by heart), narrators, and traditionists. As a result of which, the subject of history came into view in the realm of Arabic language and literature with its full-fledged literary development.
- 6) The Prophetic Traditions are a valuable literary stock, from which well-educated persons have made an extension in their letters and poetry and prose works with the traditional examples and maxims. So, it has given a beautiful flowery art and literary elegance to the Arabic language and literature.
- 7) The Prophetic Traditions bear an easy narrative prose style along with flow of language and composition of words that influenced the Arabic language to a great extent. Another significant merit is held by the Prophet (PBUH) that he spoke to the different delegates of the Arab world in their dialects whatever ran over their tongues. Because, he was well conversant with the major dialects of the Arabic language as well as well versed in rhymes and obsolete words. Due to having such type of

command over language, the Prophet (PBUH) once delivered lecture in the dialect of the tribes of Tahafa Ibn AbiZuhair al-Hadhalî and Laqîl Ibn ‘Amar without any hesitation and problem.

- 8) It is a notable factor that some religious technical terms are not found in the Holy *Qur’ân*, but they are available in the contents of the Prophetic Traditions. From this point of view, the Prophetic Traditions occupied an important and remarkable position for adding a good number of terminologies to the word-stock of Arabic language.
- 9) Since the Prophet (PBUH) was conferred divine inspirations, he happened to acquire unparalleled command over Arabic language and became champion among his own tribe and others as well. As such, Arabic language has been influenced to its utmost extent in the formation of Arabic words and their derivations, acquisition of excellence and eloquence due to the superiority of the language of prophetic traditions.
- 10) It is aware of the fact that the speech of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) bears clear expression and comprehensive meaning; because, it keeps relation between words and clauses in a complete sense of sentence with the appropriate conjunction and preposition. Here it may be reiterated that the prophetic traditions give clear meaning, transparent analysis and comprehensive limit of sense, pleasing indication, incomparable elegance and plain eloquence. In fact, the linguistic style of the prophetic traditions perfectly occupies the culminated superiority over all the creative writings of the legists, rational scholars, intelligent rhetoricians, litterateurs and poets.⁽¹⁹⁾

Criticism:

Here mention may be made that the language of the Prophet (PBUH) was well understood and perceived in every sort of communications that he had with his native people or any of the tribal delegates of the Arab world. Prof. Ahmad Husayn Zayyâtis of the opinion about the language of the Prophetic Traditions as follows:

The language of the Prophetic Traditions has been distinguished in giving clear and definite meaning with elegant style, harmonious expression and appropriateness of used words and sections; agreement of the sense for the required condition; suitability of the language expression in his addresses. It was more evident when the Prophet addressed the delegates. So, the Prophet used the strange words and adhered to rhymed prose (saja’); and could follow words of desert-languages in accordance with approach of the delegates.⁽²⁰⁾

Here it must be admitted that the language of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) shows an especial peculiarity in his spontaneous utterances like that of the soothsayers' rhyming prose style, but this point of view cannot be exactly applicable to him, although some of the scholars hold this opinion. Because, the Prophet (PBUH) tried his best to let the people understand through comprehensive expressions. Of course, he had the mastery and command over Arabic language and it was his innate capability to speak Arabic with a flowery art of language. It can be well perceived in the invocation of the Prophet (PBUH), which is translated as follows:

Oh the people! Spread the peaceful greeting, feed the festive food, keep peaceful relationship and accomplish salat (for Allah) while people are sleeping, enter the paradise with tranquility. (al-Tirmidhî narrated it.)⁽²¹⁾

On the other hand, the soothsayers endeavoured to apply rhymed prose with a view to attracting people by virtue of artificial heart touching expressions. But their rhyming capability was not free from constraint. So, the language of the fortunetellers (*saja 'u'l-kuhhân*) cannot be compared with that of the credit and high order of flowery language of the Prophet (PBUH).⁽²²⁾

Conclusion:

In fact, the Prophetic Traditions bear the best modality of speech of Arabic language; they are free from any constraint and obscurity. In course of times, the Prophetic Traditions were compiled for their gravity and religious essence. As a result of which, a good number of compilations were made for the preservation of the Prophetic Traditions. They have played a key role in the development of Arabic language and literature. Undoubtedly the Prophet Muhammad was regarded as the most eloquent speaker among the Arab nationals, because of which the purity of Arabic language finds in the Hadith literature. After the holy *Qur'ân*, the Hadith literature has been the second evolutionary source for the development of Arabic language and literature. Finally it must keep in mind that the Prophetic Traditions have exerted enormous influences on Arabic language and literature in various dimensions of its linguistic and literary development.

References & Notes:

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2. Ibid, p. 55
3. The Arabic term *jâmi'* technically used for the compilation of those canonical books that comprised of eight chapters relating to *al-'aqâ'id* (religious philosophy of Islam), *al-aḥkâm* (ordinances), *al-siyar* (characters of personage), *al-adab* (etiquette), *al-tafsîr* (commentary), *al-fitan* (charms of devil design), *ashrât al-sâ'ah* (conditions of the day of resurrection), and *al-manâqib* (good and noble conducts). In this connection, we find only two canonical books of the prophetic traditions namely *Ṣaḥîḥ Bukhârî* and *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*.
- (4) The Arabic term *sunan* technically implies those canonical books that comprised of the prophetic traditions related only to *al-aḥkâm* (i.e. religious ordinances) and the chapters thereof based on Islamic jurisprudence. In this connection, we find four canonical books of hadith compilation namely *Sunan Abî Dâwûd*, *Jâmi' al-Tirmidhî* (or *Sunan al-Tirmidhî*), *Sunan al-Nasâ'i*, *Sunan ibn Mâja*.
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