Hidden Defects in Ḥadīth (ʿilal al-Ḥadīth) as a Branch of Ḥadīth Sciences

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Abstract

The religion of Islam is derived from two divine sources; Qurʾān and ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ. The second source, ḥadīth has been meticulously preserved by the scholars through various means. These methods have been codified and organised. Now, they are well-known as ḥadīth sciences. This is an extensive field which requires one to have an abundance of knowledge in order to master it. One of the highest and most complicated of its branches is the knowledge of hidden defects, termed as ʿ’ilal al-ḥadīth. In this paper, the term ʿ’ilal al-ḥadīth is explained and its significance is brought to light. There have been a handful of classical scholars who mastered this art and have made an impact on this science. They will be mentioned with their accomplishments. The hidden defect can occur either in the matan (text) of the ḥadīth or its sanad (chain). This aspect is discussed in detail and examples of ʿ’ilal (causes) are explored in this paper.

Keywords: ʿillah, muḥaddith, maʿlūl, sanad, matan

INTRODUCTION

Ḥadīth science is a meticulous field, which deals with authenticating the sunnah of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. The scholars used detailed criterions and principles to grade aḥādīth, thus, Muḥaddithīn have been able to categorize aḥādīth into ṣaḥīh, ḥasan and 全力打造. This helped preserve the knowledge and teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and allowed Muslims to use these aḥādīth for deducing rulings, while filtering out any unauthentic and fabricated narrations. ʿIlal al-ḥadīth is a branch of this knowledge used for categorizing aḥādīth.
Defining ʿilal al Ḥadīth

Linguistically ʿilah (singular of ʿilal) is derived from root words (ع ل ل). ʿAlla yaʾillu means to be or fall sick (Lane’, n.d.). ʿAlīl is a sick person and ʿillah is sickness, disease, defect or deficiency (Wehr, n.d.). Technically in its general sense, it means any defect that affects the authenticity of a ḥadīth. Muʿallah is a ḥadīth which has a defect, ʿillah (Al-Bustānī, n.d.). According to muḥaddithīn, there is a slight difference in the definition, they have a more specific definition: an obscure, hidden reason which blemishes the authenticity of a ḥadīth (at-Ṭahhān, 2004). In this study, we will use the term in its specific sense, as the muḥaddithīn used it. Thus, for a ḥadīth to be maʿlūl it should fulfil two conditions:

a) The defect should be hidden.

b) It should affect the authenticity of the ḥadīth.

Dhahabi defines ʿillah in a similar manner and excludes the ḥadīth from maʿlūl category if it is narrated by a weak narrator and in a different chain by a thiqāh (trustworthy narrator). Since, this weakness does not affect the final ruling of the ḥadīth therefore it is not considered ʿillah (Dhahabi, 2001). Ḥākim defines the scope of this discipline and says that this science is applied on authentic aḥādīth by trustworthy narrators because clearly the mardūd aḥādīth don’t need such detailed examination (Kamali, 2005). So, a ḥadīth which is apparently narrated by thiqāṭ, has a muttaṣil chain and can be passed as a ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth qualifies for further analysis for a hidden fault.

Significance

This is one of the most profound criterions which only the scholars of highest level can achieve after an exhaustive study of aḥādīth. It requires that one be familiar with the language and style of the Prophet ﷺ, because a hidden defect - ʿillah- can occur in the matn of ḥadīth. Also, one should be an expert in the science of jarḥ wa taʿdīl, for an ʿillah can occur in the sanad (Al-
Very few have mastered the science of ʿilal and are known as nuqād, amongst them are: ʿAli ibn al-Madīnī, Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, Bukhārī, Abi Ḥātim and ad-Daraquṭnī (at-Ṭaḥḥān, 2004), Yaḥya bin Maʿīn, Ibn Shaybah, Abu Zurʿah and Al-Bazzār (Yusuf al-Jadī’, 2003).

ʿAli ibn al-Madīnī said that it might be after 40 years of studying a ḥadīth that he finds an ʿillah in it. (Al-Muṭayri, n.d.) Baghdādi, Ḥākim and Ibn Ṣalāḥ said it is the most noble of all the various ḥadīth sciences. ʿAbdur-Raḥmān bin Mahdi compared the knowledge of ʿilal with inspiration due to its undetectable and subtle nature and said, “Our knowledge of this science seems like divination to the ignorant people.” (Mosleh, 2014). Ibn Rajab lists the scholars who perfected this knowledge, the first who excelled was Ibn Sirīn, and he says there were very few scholars who reached this level throughout history. Finally, he quotes Ibn al-Qayyim who wrote in his book Al-Mauḍū‘āt: there are very few who understand this, rather, it has become non-existent (Al-Muṭayri, n.d.).

Yusuf al-Jadī’ (2003) quotes ʿAbdur-Raḥmān bin Mahdi that knowing an ʿilah of a ḥadīth is more beloved to me than writing down twenty aḥādīth which I do not have. As mentioned above, there are few scholars who mastered this knowledge mainly for the reasons summarized below:

1. ʿIlal is a hidden fault and doesn’t appear except after profound study for a very long time.
2. It requires meticulousness and subtle understanding. Ibn Daqīq said this knowledge, unlike what people think, requires more than just memorizing and narrating.
3. One should possess vast amount of information by heart.
4. Knowledge of trustworthy narrators and levels within them. And in the event of conflict be able to prioritize one above the other based on sound knowledge of their background.
Furthermore, the subject of ‘ilal itself is complicated because there are many various reasons a ḥadīth can have a hidden defect and these can’t be listed as a checklist. Al-Ḥafīz Abū Ya’la al-Khalīli said that ‘ilah occurs in the ḥadīth in various forms and it is not possible to enumerate and limit it (Yusuf al-Jaḍī’, 2003).

This field is also noteworthy in proving the falseness of the claims made by orientalists that aḥādīth of the Prophet  cannot be used as a source because they were not preserved, rather, were lost over the years. In fact, the scholars went to great lengths to preserve them and successfully sifted out even the minutest or the most concealed form of discrepancy. Secondly, another false claim is made that scholars only checked the asnād and did not pay heed to the matan. This will be disproved with examples given for ‘ilal found in the matan to the extent that any additional words which were not part of the original narration were pointed out.

TYPES OF ‘ilal

Mostly an ‘illah occurs in the chain. Its various forms can be: by making a mauqūf ḥadīth marfū‘, making mursal muttaṣil or due to various forms of tadlīs. Ibn Ṣalāḥ concludes that ‘illah can affect the text of the ḥadīth but sometimes it does not. In the matn it can occur in the form of idrāj (addition made by one of the narrators) and is not indicated that it is not part of the saying of the Prophet  or slight changing of the original words or mixing up words of two different aḥādīth.

Yusuf al-Jaḍī’ (2003) eliminates two types of terminologies often wrongly referred to as ‘ilal; nāsikh wa mansūkh and mushkil al-aḥādīth. Whereas, Ibn Ṣalāḥ expands the use of this term to even include šahīh ma’lūl as used by some scholars and he mentions that Tirmidhī uses the word ‘illah to refer to naskh too. There is a slight variation between scholars on the usage of this word in a wider sense, therefore, one would have to check the scholar’s style before understanding the context he used it in.
Examples of ‘ilal in chain

The learned muḥaddithīn know the narrators, their background, and their character, thus are able to identify a strong sanad from a weak one. The experts of ‘īlal can tell if there is any hidden defect in the sanad from the above mentioned ones. They can even recognize the styles of various narrators. An example of this is mentioned by Ibn Rajab about a narrator named Sinān bin Sa’d, who is said to report form Anas bin Mālik. Imām Aḥmad says that he left narrating from the said narrator because his narrations resemble sayings of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī rather than the aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ.

To identify an ‘illah in a chain, Ibn al-Madīni says that all the isnād of that particular ḥadīth have to be analysed. He collected all the ruwāt for each companion, then pointed out a discrepancy that occurs commonly in aḥādīth famously quoted by Sufis as being narrated from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who narrated directly from ‘Ali. Whereas, ibn al-Madīni pointed out that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī did not meet ‘Ali, and there is a small possibility that they might have met in Madinah when Ḥasan was a child. (Islamic-awareness.org, n.d.)

Sometimes, the narrator quotes his contemporary whom he has met, but the narrator has not actually heard that particular ḥadīth from him. For example, Yaḥya bin Kathir met Anas bin Mālik and therefore he narrated from Anas:

“When the Messenger of God broke his fast in someone’s house, he would say: observers of fast opened their fast with you and ate your pure food and the angels prayed for you (or peace descended on you).”

After thorough study it was revealed that though Yahya was Anas’s contemporary and did meet him, yet, he never heard this particular ḥadīth from him. Therefore, despite the sanad appearing to be sound there is a discrepancy there. (Kamali, 2005)
An example of an 'illah which does not discredit the matan is when a thiqah rāwi is replaced by another thiqah rāwi as indicated in the coming example (Muḥammad ʿAbbās, 2004). It was narrated from Sufyān, from ʿAbdullāh bin Dīnār, from Ibn ʿUmar, from the Prophet ﷺ who said: “Two traders have the choice as long as they have not separated…” reported by Nasāʾi and others. But another narrator - Yaʿla bin ʿUbayd - mistakenly replaced the name of ʿAbdullāh bin Dīnār by ʿAmr bin Dīnār. Upon investigation it was found that both Dīnārs are thiqah and therefore the matan remains unblemished and the maʿlūl chain of Yaʿla does not affect it.

On the contrary, if a weak narrator is mistaken for a thiqah then the 'illah discredits the chain and the text. Abdur-Raḥmān bin Yazid bin Jābir and Abdur-Raḥmān bin Yazid bin Tamīm are two narrators from Shām who came to Kufah. Former is a thiqh while latter is a weak narrator. Ḥammād bin ʿUsāmah met the latter and heard from him and upon asking his name he was told Abdur-Raḥmān bin Yazid. Ḥammād bin ʿUsāmah assumed it was Ibn Jābir. Apparently, a thiqah - Ḥammād bin ʿUsāmah - is narrating from another thiqah - Abdur-Raḥmān bin Yazid bin Jābir – and the sanad seems solid. But the minute, hidden discrepancy was pointed out by Bukhāri and Abū Ḥātim and the chain with its text was discredited.

Examples of 'ilal in text

In some instances, a sanad can be solid with no weakness but the matan is either criticized due to its content or language or its style being different than the speaking style of the Prophet ﷺ. Following ḥadīth was criticised for its matan due to its content:

"Allah created the land on Saturday; He created the mountains on Sunday; He created the trees on Monday; He created the things entailing labour on Tuesday; He created the light (or fish) on Wednesday; He scattered the beasts in it (the earth) on Thursday; and He created Adam after the afternoon of Friday, the last creation at the last hour of the hours of Friday, between the afternoon and night." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Hadith 2149)
Ibn Taymiyyah said: “Men more knowledgeable than Muslim, such as al-Bukhari and Yahya b. Ma‘in, have criticised it. Al-Bukhari said, “this saying is not that of the Prophet ﷺ, but one of Ka‘b al-Ahbar.” But the authenticity of this hadīth is debated. Ibn Al-Jawzi agrees with Muslim while Bayhaqi sides with Bukhāri. Bukhāri’s own two teachers differed over this hadīth, ibn Madīni didn’t find fault with it while ibn Ma‘īn did. The ‘illah which compromised the authenticity of the matan is said to be the contradiction with the Qur’ānic texts which mention that creation of the heavens and the earth was in six days, each of which may be like a thousand years. The hadīth only indicates creation of the earth, in days which are shorter than those referred to in the Qur’ān. (Islamic-awareness.org, n.d.)

It is also possible for an ‘illah in the matan to not affect the authenticity of the hadīth. If a narration is narrated with slight difference of words but all of the words mean the same then this ‘illah does not weaken the sanad or the matan. Whereas, in the following example it makes a difference because the words have different meanings and a mistake was made due to similar sounding words.

On one occasion, jizyah was collected from Bahrain, the Prophet ﷺ addressed the people after fajr and said:

“By Allah, I do not fear poverty for you, rather I fear that you will enjoy ease and plenty like those who came before you, and that you will compete with one another as they did, and you will be destroyed as they were.” (Ibn Majah, Book 36, hadith 72)

The last words were reported as: fa-tulhikum kamā alhakahum (it will distract you just as it distracted them.) while the authenticated words are: fa-tuhlikukum kamā ahlakahum (it will destroy you as it destroyed them). Slight difference occurred in the wording because the words sound similar and thus an error was made in narrating. (Kamali, 2005)

If different wordings were narrated due to a misunderstanding on part of the narrator then the sanad and the matan is discredited. It is narrated by Bukhāri:
Narrated Anas bin Malik: The Prophet, Abu Bakr and `Umar used to start the prayer with "Al ḥamdu lil-lāhi Rabbi l-ʿālamīn". (Bukhāri, Book 10, Hadith 137)

In one of the narrations it says:
“*They did not recite bismillāh ir-raḥmā nir-raḥīm neither in the beginning of the recitation nor at the end of it.*”

This is a misinterpretation of the original ḥadīth and makes it maʿlūl. In another version, it is reported that:

Anas b. Malik had narrated to him: I observed prayer behind the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and Abu Bakr and Umar and 'Uthman. They started (loud recitation) with: AI-hamdu lillahi Rabb al-'Alamin and did not recite Bismillah ir- Rahman-ir-Rahim.

Later, it was established that the part about not reciting basmalah was an addition to the rest of the authentic narration. (Kamali, 2005) This is an example of 'illah due to idrāj.

**Examples of 'ilal in text and chain**

The following ḥadīth has a defect in sanad and matn, narrated by Yūnus, from Zuhri, from Sālim, from IbnʿUmar, from the Prophet ﷺ:

“One who captures one unit of the Friday or other prayers, has captured the whole.”

Rāzi stated that the correct chain is: Zuhri, from Abū Salama, from Abū Hurayrah, from the Prophet ﷺ. Secondly, the word ‘Friday’ is extra. The original wording was:

“One who captures one rakʿah of a prayer has captured it.” (Kamali, 2005)
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many scholars have written books dedicated to the topic of ʿilal al-ḥadīth. One of such collections is Kitāb ul-ʿilal by Ibn Abī Ḥātim which lists maʿlūl aḥādīth according to fiqh topics. It collects comments of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s father, nāqid (ḥadīth critic) Abū Zurʿah and other scholars (Abū Ḥātim, 2006). It is a useful resource in locating aḥādīth related to specific chapters of fiqh and getting the perspective of Abū Zurʿah, a well esteemed scholar specialized in the field of ʿilal. An-Nahḥās (2009) has collected the opinions of Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal on various aḥādīth in Al-Jāmiʿ li-ʿUlūm al-Imām Aḥmad-ʿilal al-ḥadīth. These were collected from a wide range of books and sources and include the aḥādīth he deemed to be maʿlūl.

Another comprehensive compilation of ʿilal al-ḥadīth is ʿIlal Ad-Daraquṭnī-al-ʿIlal al-Wāridah fil-Aḥādīth an-Nabawiyyah. It is distinguished because it categorized aḥādīth based on the companion who narrated them, similar to a musnad. Zayn-ullāh (1985) lists some of the qualities of ad-Daraquṭnī’s book such as: he presents more chains for a certain ḥadīth than Ibn Madīni’s compilation on ʿilal, he focuses more on the ʿilal while the book Kitāb al-ʿIlal wa Maʿrifa ur-Rijāl of Imām Aḥmad goes into detail about biography and jarḥ wa-taʿdīl of narrators rather than explain the ʿilal and Al-ʿIlal al-Kabīr li-Tirmidhi quotes other scholars and their views of a particular hadīth while ad-Daraquṭnī gives various the chain and points out the īlah. The advantage that the book of ad-Daraquṭnī has over many other collections is the number of chains he has collected for each hadīth.

Ibn al-Madīni (1980) compiled Al-ʿIlal where he lists aḥādīth according to the last narrator who collected the hadīth and explains the chains and where the discrepancy occurs. In the end he lists the aḥādīth and labels them by their content. It is a scholarly work and a detailed reference.

Ibn Rajab (1987) wrote a Sharḥ of ʿIlal at-Tirmidhi. This a very diverse book comprising of Imām Tirmidhi’s work and categorization of aḥādīth, explanation of terms used by him, a vast resource of maʿlūl aḥādīth collected by him, information on isnād, jarḥ wa taʿdīl of narrators listed by their names. Ibn Rajab further adds to the list of commentary on narrators. In the end he
derives a set of nineteen rules based on the study of narrators to easily identify discrepancies in the isnād as mentioned by scholars.

Amongst the contemporary books is Tahrīr 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth by Yusuf al-Jadī (2003) which is a simple yet detailed explanation of the guidelines of this science. He has a complete chapter dedicated to the types of 'ilal as defined by the nuqād and he gathers all possible 'ilal to his best ability. He covers the art of 'ilal and the method of application in a separate chapter which is very useful for understanding how the scholars reached their conclusions. Another very famous contemporary book is Muqaddimah Ibn Ṣalāḥ (1986) which defined 'illah.

METHODOLOGY

Initially, the importance and significance of the field 'ilal al-ḥadīth was researched from classical and contemporary books. Basic terminologies of the science of hidden defects in aḥādīth were outlined and defined. The subtle nature of this science was outlined with the fact that there were very few scholars who mastered this art. These names were listed and their works were discussed in the literature review of the paper. Then, its application was discussed with examples taken from various sources to help point out the different types of 'ilal that can possibly occur.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ holds an extremely crucial and central position in the religion of Islam. To purify this source of knowledge from any alteration or fabrication, one of the tools used is the identification of 'ilal found in them. This service has been done by great scholars in the past. Since it is a very challenging art, very few have reached the level of defining 'ilal in aḥādīth.

It is a very valuable and vital science and many books are dedicated to define the rules and regulations of this field. Many books have been complied to separate the weak, maʿlūl aḥādīth, for future reference and for the benefit of the public. Yet, most of the literature is only available in Arabic.
CONCLUSION

Finding 'ilal in aḥādīth is a very difficult task and has been done by the most knowledgeable scholars in the past. Only the aḥādīth categorized as ṣaḥīḥ are qualified for this minute inspection because weak or rejected aḥādīth do not need to be further investigated and the ruling about them is clear. There are various types of 'ilal which can be found in the matan or the sanad of a hadīth. Depending upon the type of the 'illah, it might weaken a hadīth which seems as authentic at first glance or might not affect the authenticity after all. For finding out whether a hadīth has an 'illah or not, there are plenty of classical and contemporary books which can be used for investigating the ruling regarding a particular hadīth. These books have collected the comments of nuqād, like Abū Zurʿah, Ibn Maʿīn, Bukhārī Ibn al-Madīni, Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, Abi Ḥātim, ad-Daraquṭnī and others to give a complete picture of a given hadīth and its ranking. They are very resourceful for Arabic speakers and provide in-depth insight into aḥādīth related to fiqhi and aqīdah matters. Finally, this science in its detailed form is a refutation of the incorrect claims made by orientalists trying to attack one of the major sources of Islamic knowledge.
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