

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMAM TIRMIDHI’S ‘SUNAN’ IN ISLAMIC HISTORY

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ABSTRACT	KEY WORDS
This article presents reflections on the life and hadith activities of Imam Termizi. It also makes scientific conclusions about the significance of Imam Termizi’s work ‘Sunan Termizi’ in the history of Islam and its role today.	Imam Tirmidhi, hadith, Sunan, ‘Sunan Tirmidhi’, Termiz, history, Tirmidhis, Islam.

Introduction

Imam Tirmidhi was meticulous in his approach to compiling hadith. He not only gathered narrations but also classified them based on their authenticity. In his work, he categorized hadith into three types: sahih (authentic), hasan (good), and da’if (weak). This classification helped scholars and students of knowledge discern which narrations could be relied upon in matters of faith and practice. Imam Tirmidhi's "Sunan" is one of the six major hadith collections in Sunni Islam and holds significant importance in Islamic history.

Jami’ at-Tirmidhi is a collection of hadith compiled by Imam Abu Isa Muhammad at-Tirmidhi (rahimahullah). His collection is unanimously considered to be one of the six canonical collections of hadith (Kutub as-Sittah) of the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ). It contains roughly 4400 hadith (with repetitions) in 46 books.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

He is Abu Isa Muhammad ibn Isa ibn Sawrah ibn Musa ibn al Dahhak al-Sulami at-Tirmidhi (209-279 AH/824–892 AD). Imam at-Tirmidhi was born in the year 209 A.H. during the reign of the Abbasid Khalifa Ma’mun al-Rashid. The Abbasid Caliphate, despite its brilliant contributions to Islam, brought along with it many problems. Greek philosophy had a free flow into the Islamic world. This was fully sanctioned by the government until eventually it declared the Mu’tazila school of thought as the state religion. Anyone who opposed the Mu’tazila school of thought would be opposing the state. With the influence of Greek philosophy among the people, many Muslims began attempting to reconcile between (this brand of) reason and revelation. As a result many deviations were introduced and many innocent and weak Muslims were led away from Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ). Many scholars of Islam had come to the fore in order to defend the Shari’ah. Forgeries and interpolations in Hadith by rulers who wished to fulfill their personal motives were common. In the first century ‘Umar bin Abdul ‘Aziz (ra) initiated a movement for the compilation of the hadith of the Prophet (s) as there was a fear of

them being lost. A number of scholars of Islam undertook this task, six among them stand taller than the rest. One of the six was Imam Abu 'Isa Muhammed ibn 'Isa at-Tirmidhi.

Having grown up in an environment of learning and possessing many great qualities naturally drove Imam Tirmidhi to dedicate his life totally towards the field of Hadith. He obtained his basic knowledge at home and later travelled to far off lands in search of knowledge of this science. He studied Hadith under great personalities such as Imam al-Bukhari, Imam Muslim and Imam Abu Dawud. In some narrations Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim are his students as well. Once Imam al-Bukhari mentioned to him 'I have benefited more from you than you have benefitted from me.' Musa ibn 'Alaq once said: 'When Imam al-Bukhari passed away, he left no one in Khurasan who compared with Abu 'Isa Tirmidhi in knowledge, memory, piety and abstinence.' Imam at-Tirmidhi said that he compiled this book and presented it to the learned scholars of Hijaz, Iraq and Khurasan and they were pleased with it.

Imam Tirmidhi had an exceptionally remarkable memory. If he heard something once he never forgot it. Once on his way to Makkah, Imam Tirmidhi met a scholar of hadith (muhaddith) from whom he had previously copied two chapters of hadith. Thinking that he had the notes with him he asked the scholar if he would allow him to read out these two chapters so that he could correct any errors. After realizing that he did not have those notes with him he took a blank piece of paper and read out the entire two parts from memory. When the muhaddith realized what he was doing he rebuked Imam Tirmidhi saying: 'Have you no shame, why are you wasting my time.' Imam Tirmidhi assured him that he had committed all the ahadith to memory. The scholar was not convinced, even though Imam Tirmidhi had recited all the hadith from memory. Imam Tirmidhi requested him to recite to him some other hadith. The scholar recited forty ahadith, which Imam Tirmidhi then repeated without making a single error, thus showing his remarkable power of committing hadith to memory.

Many books of hadith were compiled before Imam Tirmidhi decided to compile his Jami'. Dawud Tayalisi and Ahmed ibn Hanbal had compiled books consisting of both authentic and weak hadith. Later Imam al-Bukhari compiled his Sahih and omitted all weak narrations from it. His main objective was to derive masa'il (laws) from the relevant hadith. Later Imam Muslim compiled his book with a primary focus on the isnad (different chains of narrators). Imam an-Nasa'i's aim was to mention the discrepancies of the hadith whilst Abu Dawud prepared a book which became the basis for the fuqaha. Imam at-Tirmidhi combined the styles of al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and an-Nasa'i by mentioning discrepancies regarding the narrators and also making his compilation a basis for jurists. Imam Tirmidhi had a large number of students from all over the world. The most famous amongst them were Haytham ibn Kulaib, Abul Abbaas and Muhammad ibn Ahmad Shah Abdul 'Aziz, who describes Imam Tirmidhi in the following words: 'His memory was unique and his piety and fear of Allah ta'la was of a very high caliber. He would cry so much out of the fear of Allah, that towards the end of his life he lost his sight.' According to Ibn Taymiyya and Shah Waliullah, Imam Tirmidhi was an independent jurist (*mujtahid*).

In the year 279 A.H. in a village called Bawag at the age of 70, Imam Tirmidhi passed away.

This collection is titled *Al-Jami' al-Mukhtasar min as-Sunan 'an Rasulu Allah wa Ma'rifatu as-Sahih wa al-Ma'lul wa ma 'alaihi al-'amal* otherwise known as Jami' at-Tirmidhi.

According to the commentators of Al-Jami', Imam Tirmidhi maintained the following conditions throughout the compilation of his book:

He never narrated hadith from those who fabricated hadith.

Tahir Muqaddisi mentions that al-Jami' ut-Tirmidhi contains four types of hadith:

Those ahadith that conform with the conditions of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

Those ahadith that conform with the conditions of Abu Dawud and Nasa'i.

Those ahadith that have certain discrepancies either in the sanad or matan.

Those weak hadith that some fuqaha have relied on.

Imam Tirmidhi accepts a hadith which is narrated with the word 'an provided both the narrators are contemporaries.

After mentioning a weak hadith, he explains the state of its weakness.

A mursal hadith is accepted by Imam Tirmidhi when a chain of narrators which is not broken supports it.

The status of Jami' at-Tirmidhi is among the six authentic books of hadith. It has been categorized as fifth amongst the six most authentic books of hadith. According to the most preferred opinion, al-Bukhari enjoys the highest status, followed by Muslim, Abu Dawud, Nasai, Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah respectively. Haji Khalifa in al-Kashf al-Dhunun has categorized Tirmidhi in third position. Al-Dhahabi has written that Tirmidhi in actual fact should be holding the third position, but due to him bringing weak narrators like Kalbi and Masloob its status has dropped. However, looking at the manner in which he set out his book it seems that Haji Khalifa's opinion is best.

It is a Sunan and a Jami'.

Only 83 hadith are repeated.

Imam Tirmidhi omits the major portion of the hadith and only mentions that part which is relevant to the heading. (title)

After mentioning a hadith he classifies its narration (whether it is authentic or weak, etc.)

He specifies the narrators names, e.g. if the narrators kunya (honorific name) was mentioned, he would then mention his proper name and vice versa.

One hadith in Tirmidhi is a thulaathiaat i.e. the transmitters of the hadith between Imam Tirmidhi and the Prophet (s) are only three.

Every hadith in Tirmidhi al-Jami' is *ma'mul bihi* (practiced upon by the jurists.)

He explains the different madhahib together with their proofs.

He gives an explanation to all difficult ahadith.

His book has been set out in an excellent sequence, making it easy to look for a hadith.

There is no fabricated hadith in the entire book.

CONCLUSION

Imam Tirmidhi's "Sunan" is a cornerstone of hadith literature that has played a vital role in shaping Islamic thought, jurisprudence, and scholarship. Its contributions to the preservation and understanding of the teachings of Islam make it an indispensable resource for Muslims throughout history and into the present day.

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