

The Implication of Mihnah Khulq Al-Quran on the Status of Hadiths Assessed By the Hadith Scholars

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The Mihnah Khulq al-Quran that went on for a span of 15 years during the Abbasid Caliphate undeniably had had a tremendous effect on the assessment done by some Hadith narrators when they were forced to express their stance on whether or not the recitation or utterance of al-Quran is a creation, resulting in polemics from among themselves. Hence this writing aims to present an overview upon the aforementioned unfortunate occurrence apart from analyzing the criticism amongst the hadith scholars that impacted the rijal al-hadith as well as studying the standing of hadith scholars involved in the event. In order to achieve the above goals, this research applies a qualitative study method by analyzing relevant documents and thereafter analyzing the data based on inductive and deductive methods. The findings of the research show that the dispute between the hadith scholars stems from their misunderstanding of the intended purpose of the hadith. This research therefore is of significance as it lays out the foundations and principles of the scholars at the material time. Apart from the academic points, this research also offers a glimpse into understanding the fragmentation of the dark history that prevailed during the Abbasid Empire rulership.

Key words: *implication, mihnah khulq al-quran, assessment, hadith narration, rijal al-hadith.*

Introduction

The Abbasid Empire was founded in 132 Hijrah after the fall of the Umayyad Empire. During the reign of the Abbasid dynasty, the empire had produced a multiple number of renowned Muslim scholars whose names are mentioned as reference to date. Among them are Muhammad bin Idris al-Shafie, Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, Ahmad bin Hanbal and Abu Hatim. Although the Abbasid dynasty was credited as a golden era for given birth to a lot of scholars and the development of knowledge, however, the empire had once been ruled by the Muktaizilah sect. As a result, there had been a time, in particular during the reign of Caliph al-Makmum, where a new idea on faith was spawned which claimed that the al-Quran was a creature (Abu Zahrah, 1996). The said event was known by the term *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* which means stating the utterance of al-Quran as a creature or otherwise.

As such, the *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* was a dark episode that haunted the great scholars during a fraction of the Abbasid era. Although the dark era subsisted for only 15 years from the whole reigning period, (Muhamad Aidil Zali, et.al 2018), it was enough to stir chaos in the field of hadith sciences, in particular the evaluation of hadith and the assigning of hadith status thereof. In other words, there were clashes among the hadith scholars to the extent some even concealed the name of certain teachers off the chain of narrators in the hadith sanad, causing some hadith figures to be valued as dhaif. This indirectly has a large affected on the narration of hadith (Abu al-Ghudah, 1972).

In short, the Muktaizilah rulers were successful in steering quite a number of scholars to engage in the *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* ordeal. There were in fact scholars that were tortured and incarcerated in order to coerce confessions out of them, pertaining to their stands to be in line with that of the ruling authority. Nevertheless, out of devotion and strong faith that stand in the right principles, some were unwavering in defending the truth for which they paid a high price.

The Historical Emergence of The Mihnah Khulq Al-Quran

The Muktaizilah is the culprit behind the emergence of the *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran*, pioneered by Caliph al-Makmum al-Rashid. He ascended the throne in 198H as the 7th caliph to replace his brother Muhammad Ibn Harun al-Amin (Khalad A'zam, 2009). Throughout his reign, he had done much good for the development of the government he led. However, his openness advocated the Muktaizilah sect as the national religion of the nation, this coupled with the campaign that the al-Quran was a creature had somewhat tarnished his ruling.

Caliph al-Makmum's tendency towards this can be traced from his educational background. He was a ruler who had deep interests in knowledge and was a master in the fiqh and hadith sciences. As he grew older he was more inclined to the Greek philosophy. During his reign he

declared the MuktaZilah sect as the official religion of the nation and henceforth commenced the intimidation towards the scholars in relation to concurring the al-Quran a creature, in particular during the month of *rabi' al-Awal*, 218 Hijrah that was four months before his demise. (Ahmad Lahmi, 2015). To further push his agenda, the caliph had written to the state leaders in his empire to run inspection on each official as well as the judges to ensure everyone was in line with the official decree of al-Quran being a creature. In the event of non-compliance, the party so in defiance faced dismissal of respective positions. (al-Tabari, 2009).

Therefore, in order to safeguard the purity of faith, Ahmad bin Hanbal was tortured and imprisoned for 28 months during the reign of al-Mu'tasim (Abu al-Ghudah, 1972) for having resisted the ruler. Along with that, there were also several other scholars at the time of this incident, such as Muhammad bin Yahya al-Dhuhli, al-Bukhari, Yahya bin Ma'in and others who prior to the dark era had had massive contributions in the narration, compilation as well as in depth knowledge in the sciences of Hadith. The consequence of the rift among the scholars saw that they no longer collaborated in narrating hadiths to a magnitude that al-Dhuhli's real name was concealed by al-Bukhari resulting in that narration being labelled as *majhul* which literally means unknown (al-Suyuti, 2010).

Implications Towards Rijal Al-Hadith

The writer shall elaborate about the disputes among a few scholars for which they were divided into two groups; whereby one defended their faiths and the other concealed their stance for fear of persecution. The sad thing was they, prior to the dark event, were friends.

The digression between al-Bukhari and Muhammad bin Yahya al-Dhuhli

As had been aforementioned, the *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* had dragged some of the hadith figures to a realm where they nullified the efforts of each other by way of conferring a *dhaif* status against the hadith narrated by the party whom they were dissatisfied with. This unfortunate outcome did not spare al-Bukhari which involves his own teacher, Muhammad bin Yahya al-Dhuhli. In fact, not only did al-Dhuhli blame him, but his other teachers such as Abu Zurah, Abu Hatim and Ibn Abi Hatim also criticized al-Bukhari due to the *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* (Mujib Abd Rahman, 2013).

The history has it, that there were a few incidents that triggered the clash between al-Bukhari and al-Dhuhli. According to al-Hakim Abu Abdullah, when al-Bukhari arrived at Nisaibur, in 250H, the latter's teacher encouraged the students in his lectures to meet al-Bukhari and listen to the latter's lectures but in so doing, it drained al-Dhuhli's lectures off his own students. Thus, envy and jealousy arose against al-Bukhari (al-Dhahabi, 2006).

But according to Hatim bin Ahmad, when al-Bukhari arrived at Naisabur, al-Dhuhli suggested to his students to meet al-Bukhari but cautioned his students to not ask about the problem of whether or not the expression of al-Quran was a creature. However on the third day of al-Bukhari's lecture, one student posed that very question which al-Dhuhli so prohibited from asking; to which al-Bukhari answered "our words are creatures and our utterance are from our actions". This answer had caused him to be defamed by an allegation that al-Bukhari claims that al-Quran is a creature (Abu Ghudah, 1972).

Abu Ahmad bin Addi on the other hand was of the view that the religious scholars in Naisabur felt jealous of the acceptance and welcome accorded to al-Bukhari when he arrived there. Therefore, a plan was plotted to let a student ask al-Bukhari the debatable and sensitive question, so he could be framed by his own answer. Hence the question was asked repeatedly three times and relatively al-Bukhari answered the same question saying "al-Quran is the words of Allah and not a creature and the deeds of the servants are creatures" (Ibn Hajar, 2008).

From the answer given, the students had formed an opinion that al-Bukhari claimed that the al-Quran is a creature. As such his studies lectures were abandoned because he was accused of being a bid'ah. His answer reached his teacher al-Dhuhli who responded with the following comments:

"al-Quran is the word of Allah not a creature from all angles. Whomsoever believes that the utterance of the al-Quran is a creature therefore he is a disbeliever and he is expelled from faith and his marriage is annulled with the option of ba'in reconciliation. If he does not repent, I will strike his neck and his property will be made fal' property for Muslims, and he shall not be buried in the Muslim cemetery. And whoever is manquf, verily he is akin to a disbeliever. Anyone claiming the recitation of al-Quran is a creature then he is a muftadi'. Do not sit down and talk to him. Whoever goes to see Muhammad bin Ismail then disgrace him. Do not go to his council unless he is also of the same sect". (al-Dhahabi, 2006).

This harsh comment by al-Dhuhli instigated al-Bukhari to be denounced. Thus, becoming aware of this condition, al-Bukhari decided to alienate himself and took his leave from Naisabur (Abu Ghudah, 1972). This whole incident proves that there was a dispute between al-Bukhari and his teacher, al-Dhuhli.

Rift between Ahmad bin Hanbal and al-Husain Bin Ali Al-Karabishi

History shows that initially, Ahmad bin Hanbal and al-Husain Bin Ali Al-Karabishi were close friends in their pursuit for knowledge. Al-Shafi'e was even the teacher for both of them.

(Ibn Shaibah, 2008). Nevertheless, with the advent of this dark period, they had strayed apart to a degree that they even *tarjih* each other.

In the context of *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* issues, al-Karabisi commented that the expressions of the al-Quran are a creature because those utterance are pronounced by humans (Ibn Hajar, 2008). Ahmad bin Hanbal responded to al-Karabisi's commentary as *bid'ah* (Ibn Hajar, 2008). The *tajrih* by al-Karabisi upon Ahmad bin Hanbal had no effect on the latter because of his high stature in knowledge. Hence from the exchange of accusation between the two, it is clear in the fold of history that there had been a dispute that resulted in the isolation and denouncement of al-Karabisi by Ahmad bin Hanbal and his other disciples (Ibn 'Abd al-Bar, 2010).

Disputes between Yahya bin Ma'in and Ahmad bin Hanbal

With the notorious popularity of the dark event there were not many scholars who were willing to defend their beliefs to confirm that al-Quran is not a creature as opposed to what was advocated by the ruling authority. There were some others who were coerced to admit and concur with the ruling power due to threats that could befall them. Among them was Yahya bin Ma'in.

Yahya bin Ma'in expressly supported the decree passed by the ruler for fear of the sword, as a consequence for recalcitrant. (al-Suyuti, 2013). Upon knowing of Yahya bin Ma'in's admission, Ahmad bin Hanbal criticized him and commented that he was among the earliest to have lost his conscience over the issue. (Ahmad bin Amin, 1996).

Granted that he held the opposing view than what he had expressed as gathered from the expressions stated by al-Asam that he heard Yahya bin Ma'in stated that al-Quran is not a creature. (Ahmad bin Amin, 1996). The departure from his original stance was understandably due to the pressing circumstances that compelled him to conceal his belief in light of greater harms threatened by the powers that be for going against their rulings. Hence it is no surprise that he pledged against his beliefs.

Disputes between Ahmad bin Hanbal and 'Ali al-Madani

The writer unfortunately only found one reference describing the dispute between Ahmad bin Hanbal and 'Ali al-Madani. The dispute became apparent when Ahmad bin Hanbal decided to dismiss and abandon the narrations by 'Ali al-Madani; no explanation or reasons were offered though. This observation was made by Abu Hatim al-Razi. Corroborated by al-Dhuhli as follows:

“Ibn al-Madini is a figure in the knowledge of Hadith, but Ahmad bin Hanbal had never mentioned about him. He (al-Madini) was said to be a prominent figure in the field of Hadith but I have never heard Ahmad bin Hanbal mention him” (al-Dhahabi, 2006).

The writer is of the view that this transpired due to the polemic of the expressions of the al-Quran. It is evidenced in *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* with the acknowledgment of Abdullah ibn Ahmad bin Hanbal that his father had narrated a hadith from ‘Ali al-Madani before the *mihnah* that which is available in Musnad Talaq bin ‘Ali. However, subsequent to the *mihnah* Ahmad bin Hanbal no longer narrated hadiths from ‘Ali al-Madani on account of the latter submitting himself to the *mihnah* (Ibn Hajar, 2008).

Enmity between Yahya bin Ma’in and ‘Ali al-Madani’

Ali al-Madani and Yahya bin Ma’in were two scholars who contributed greatly to the knowledge and sciences of Hadith. However, the camaraderie between the two of them did not last long in light of the *mihnah* which consequence caused them to *tarjih* one another.

As such, Ibrahim bin Abdullah recorded the rifts between the two by quoting the sayings of Yahya bin Ma’in:

“Nothing remains as long as he is with a human except apostasy and some asked: Is he an apostate while he is still in Islam? Yahya bin Ma’in said: A cowardly man” (al-Dhahabi, 2006).

It is clear that the expression which Yahya bin Ma’in made was harsh and extremely rude. Again, this showcases how damaging the *mihnah* had impacted the *rijal al-Hadith* and the ensuing tribulations that they had been through where conscience had never been so compromised before. Apart from the threats from the government authorities, the narrators also had to deal with the *tarjih* exercise from their own brethren in faith. However, the expletives of Yahya bin Ma’in had backfired when he had to taste his own medicine by succumbing to the ruler’s orders pertaining to the creature issue of utterance of the al-Quran, for fear of the sword.

Implications on the *Rijal al-Hadith*

Basically, from the point of disputes amongst the members of the Hadith fraternity, it was already apparent to the researchers that there had been indirect *tarjih* practices among themselves. As a consequence, this sorry state of affairs had directly and negatively impacted the sciences of hadith narrations.

The feud between al-Bukhari and al-Dhuhli had resulted in the narrations by al-Bukhari dismissing his teacher's name in full, from the chain of narrators when narrating the hadith. He however restyled his narration by mentioning *haddathana Muhammad* or *haddathana bin Khalid* instead (the name of the grandfather of his teacher; Muhammad bin Yahya bin Abdullah bin Khalid al-Dhuhli) as mentioned by Ibn Khalilikan in the biodata of Imam Muslim (al-Dhahabi, 2006).

In the *Sahih Bukhari*, he had recorded 30 hadiths narrated by al-Dhuhli despite what transpired between them. As a result, al-Dhahabi had positioned al-Bukhari in his work entitled *al-Dhua'fa w al-matrukin* (al-Dhahabi, 2009). Al-Dhuhli consequently sent letters to Abu Zur'ah and Abu Hatim in a smear campaign causing them both to refuse the narrations by al-Bukhari (Abu Ghudah, 1972).

The same was the case with al-Uqaili who had made a *tarjih* against Ali al-Madini and placed his name in the book *al-Dhu'afa al-Kabir* owing to the rifts between him and the scholar (al-'Uqaili, 2016). However, in other aspects, al-Dhuhli too had erred in his hadith evaluation by placing al-Bukhari in his book *al-Dhua'fa al-Matrukin* (al-Dhahabi, 2009). Apart from the above, the researcher also was able to discover that Sufyan bin Waki' who died in 246H, had defended the argument of Ahmad bin Hanbal during the ongoing dispute between the latter and several other figures in the field of Hadith, as elaborated earlier. To him, whoever scorns Ahmad bin Hanbal, he is a *fasik* (violating law) (Ibn 'Asakir, 1996).

Conclusion

The ill-fated period of *Mihnah Khulq al-Quran* although survived in a span of 15 years only, during the reign of the Abbasid empire, it however had directly impaired the narration exercises of hadith as a whole. This ensured that several prominent hadith scholars were defamed and unjustifiably placed among the lesser of narrators or *dhaif* narrators and concurrently their narrated hadiths were also valued as *dhaif*. This was attributable to the *tarjih* levelled at each other quite haphazardly. All this prominence became immaterial because of the malevolent dark period. As such the researchers conclude that, despite the vindictive *tarjih* practices amongst themselves, it was by no means annihilates the great contributions that these scholars perfected in the sciences of hadith narrations.

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