

A Comparative Study of al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil in Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah

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Abstract

The science of al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil occupies a central position in hadith criticism as the primary instrument for evaluating the credibility of hadith narrators. Ahl al-Sunnah developed this discipline around the criteria of 'adālah and ḍabt, while Shī'ah Imāmiyyah developed a parallel discipline known as 'Ilm al-Rijāl, which places strong emphasis on a narrator's loyalty to Ahl al-Bayt. This methodological divergence carries significant implications for the corpus of hadith accepted by each school, yet a focused comparative study of the two traditions remains limited. This study aims to compare the concepts, criteria, and epistemological foundations of al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil in the Sunni tradition with 'Ilm al-Rijāl in the Imāmī Shī'ah tradition, and to examine how these methodological differences shape the acceptance of contested hadith such as the hadith of Ghadīr Khum and the hadith of the twelve caliphs. This research employs a qualitative library research design with a thematic (mawḍū'ī) approach, a descriptive-analytical method, documentation as the data collection technique, and content analysis as the data analysis technique. Primary sources include Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, and classical rijāl literature from both traditions, supported by relevant secondary scholarship. The findings show that although both schools share the goal of safeguarding the authenticity of hadith and use comparable narrator classifications such as thiqah and ḍa'īf, they differ fundamentally in their standards for evaluating the Companions, their sources of religious authority, and the resulting corpus of accepted hadith. These differences are

not merely technical but reflect divergent paradigms in understanding religious authority and the transmission of Islamic teachings.

Keywords: al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil, 'Ilm al-Rijāl, hadith criticism, Ahl al-Sunnah, Shī'ah Imāmiyyah.

Abstrak

Ilmu al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil menempati posisi sentral dalam kritik hadis sebagai instrumen utama untuk menilai kredibilitas para perawi hadis. Ahlus Sunnah mengembangkan disiplin ini melalui kriteria 'adālah dan ḍabṭ, sementara Syi'ah Imamiyyah mengembangkan disiplin paralel yang dikenal sebagai 'Ilm al-Rijāl, yang menekankan loyalitas perawi terhadap Ahlul Bait. Perbedaan metodologis dan landasan epistemologis ini berimplikasi signifikan terhadap korpus hadis yang diterima oleh masing-masing mazhab, namun kajian komparatif yang secara khusus membandingkan keduanya masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membandingkan konsep, kriteria, dan landasan epistemologis al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil dalam tradisi Ahlus Sunnah dengan 'Ilm al-Rijāl dalam tradisi Syi'ah Imamiyyah, serta mengkaji bagaimana perbedaan metodologis tersebut membentuk penerimaan terhadap hadis-hadis yang diperselisihkan, seperti hadis Ghadir Khum dan hadis dua belas khalifah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian kepustakaan (library research), pendekatan tematik (maudhu'i), metode deskriptif-analitis, teknik pengumpulan data berupa dokumentasi, serta teknik analisis data menggunakan content analysis. Sumber data primer meliputi Sahih al-Bukhari dan Sahih Muslim, serta literatur rijal klasik dari kedua tradisi, didukung oleh kajian sekunder yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kedua mazhab memiliki tujuan yang sama dalam menjaga otentisitas hadis dan menggunakan klasifikasi perawi yang sebanding seperti tsiqah dan da'if, keduanya berbeda secara mendasar dalam standar penilaian terhadap sahabat, sumber otoritas keagamaan, serta korpus hadis yang dihasilkan. Perbedaan ini tidak sekadar bersifat teknis, melainkan mencerminkan perbedaan paradigma dalam memahami otoritas keagamaan dan transmisi ajaran Islam.

Kata Kunci: al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil, 'Ilm al-Rijal, kritik hadis, Ahlus Sunnah, Syi'ah Imamiyyah.

A. Introduction

Hadith stands as the second source of Islamic teaching after the Qur'an, occupying a central place in the formation of Islamic law, theology, and ethics. Unlike the Qur'an, whose text was transmitted in its entirety through *mutawātir* channels, hadith reached later generations through chains of transmission (*sanad*) involving numerous individuals across successive generations. This mode of transmission called for a scholarly mechanism capable of establishing whether a report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad could genuinely be traced back to him. It was this need that gave rise to the various disciplines of hadith scholarship, among them the science of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, the discipline concerned with assessing the credibility of hadith transmitters in terms of both moral integrity ('*adālah*) and precision of memory (*ḍabṭ*).¹

The urgency of verifying reports and information is affirmed in the Qur'an itself. Allah, exalted is He, says:

¹ Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil," *Mukaddimah: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 2 (2017): 287–302.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا
عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

“O you who believe! If a corrupt person brings you a report, verify it carefully, lest you harm a people in ignorance and then come to regret what you have done.”²

This verse became one of the normative foundations for the emergence of a tradition of transmission criticism in Islam. Hadith scholars held that the validity of a report depended heavily on the credibility of the person conveying it. It was this principle that developed into the methodology of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, used to assess the quality of hadith transmitters.³

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ likewise gave an important indication of the caution required in receiving and transmitting reports. In one hadith he said:

مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

“Whoever deliberately lies about me should take his seat in the Fire.”⁴

This hadith became an important basis for scholars in constructing a rigorous system of hadith verification. Consider what would happen if such reports were transmitted by unreliable narrators, given that hadith is itself a source of Islamic teaching: the danger this would pose, to individual Muslims and to Islam itself alike, can hardly be overstated. From the generation of the Companions onward, attention to the validity of *sanad* steadily increased, giving rise to the science of transmitter criticism known as *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*. Through this discipline, scholars sought to distinguish reliable transmitters (*thiqah*) from unreliable ones, so that accepted hadith could be justified on scholarly grounds.⁵

Within the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, the science of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* developed systematically, taking moral integrity, intellectual capacity, and continuity of transmission as the principal parameters for evaluating a transmitter. Figures such as Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī produced foundational works that remain primary references in the study of hadith criticism to this day.⁶

Shīʿah Imāmiyyah, for its part, developed a parallel system of transmitter criticism known as *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*. Although the two traditions share the same underlying aim, namely establishing the validity of hadith, a number of fundamental differences separate Imāmī and Sunni methodology, particularly with regard to the standing of the Companions, the authority of Ahl al-Bayt, and the criteria governing the acceptance or rejection of a given report. These epistemological differences bear directly on the corpus of hadith accepted by each school.⁷

A number of earlier studies have examined the science of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* from various angles. Ali Imron's study, *Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh wa Ta'dil*, sets out the concept, history, and basic rules of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* within the Sunni hadith

² QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6.

³ Ali Imron, “Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil,” p. 289–291.

⁴ Hadith narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 1291, and Sahih Muslim, no. 4.

⁵ Nurjannah Ismail, “The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication,” *El-Sunan: Journal of Hadith and Religious Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024).

⁶ Budi Suhartawan, “Memahami Konsep Metodologi al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil,” *Dirayah: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 4, no. 2 (2024).

⁷ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, “Syīʿah Imamiyyah: Studi tentang Persamaan dan Perbedaannya dengan Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islamic Resources* 18, no. 1 (2021).

tradition, but does not extend to a comparison with Imāmī Shi'i methodology.⁸ Nurjannah Ismail's study, *The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication*, highlights the function of this science in hadith authentication, but remains confined to a general perspective on hadith scholarship without a cross-school comparative dimension.⁹ Ilham Syamsul and colleagues, in their comparative study of the methodologies of Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, examine differing methods of hadith criticism within the Sunni tradition but do not address methodological divergences between Sunni and Imāmī Shi'i scholarship.¹⁰ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany's study of Shī'ah Imāmiyyah, meanwhile, concentrates on theological aspects and the doctrine of *imāmah* rather than on the methodology of hadith criticism and *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*.¹¹

This review of the literature suggests that scholarship specifically comparing the concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* between Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah remains relatively limited. The present study therefore sets out to understand the methodological similarities and differences between the two schools in assessing the credibility of hadith transmitters, together with the implications of these differences for the acceptance of hadith within each tradition. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the development of hadith scholarship while enriching our understanding of the methodological dynamics of hadith criticism within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

B. Literature Review

The study of transmitter credibility rests theoretically on the theory of hadith criticism (*naqd al-ḥadīth*), the scholarly framework used by hadith specialists to assess the soundness of a report along two principal lines: criticism of the *sanad* (chain of transmission) and criticism of the *matn* (the wording or content of the report). It is within this framework that *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* is positioned as the principal applied theory in the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, built on two core criteria: *ʿadālah* (moral integrity) and *ḍabṭ* (precision of transmission).¹² By comparison, the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah tradition developed a parallel theoretical framework known as *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*, which likewise aims to assess transmitter credibility but operates within a distinct epistemological framework, one that treats the authority of Ahl al-Bayt as an additional determining variable in evaluating a transmitter, alongside integrity and precision of transmission.¹³ Both theoretical frameworks, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* and *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*, are used in this study as two analytical lenses set side by side. This approach allows the author to map the fundamental similarities and differences between the two traditions in assessing the credibility of hadith transmitters, and to observe how these theoretical differences bear on the corpus of hadith accepted within each school.

⁸ Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil."

⁹ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication."

¹⁰ Ilham Syamsul, et al., "Ilmu Al-Jarh Wa At-Ta'dil dalam Hadis: Studi Komparatif Metodologi Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani dan Ibnu Hatim Ar-Razi," *Tasamuh: Jurnal Studi Islam* (2024).

¹¹ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syī'ah Imamiyah: Studi tentang Persamaan dan Perbedaannya dengan Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah."

¹² Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil," *Mukaddimah: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 2 (2017): 287.

¹³ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syī'ah Imamiyah: Studi tentang Persamaan dan Perbedaannya dengan Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islamic Resources* 18, no. 1 (2021).

The discipline of al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl occupies a central position in the science of hadith because it provides the methodological foundation for evaluating the reliability of narrators and preserving the authenticity of prophetic traditions. Classical Muslim scholars developed this discipline as a systematic mechanism to distinguish authentic narrations from weak or fabricated reports by examining the moral integrity (ʿadālah) and precision of transmission (ḍabṭ) of each narrator. Through this process, hadith criticism became one of the most sophisticated systems of source verification in pre-modern scholarship. The emergence of al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl was closely connected with the expansion of hadith transmission across different regions and generations after the Prophet Muhammad's death. The increasing number of narrators, combined with the appearance of fabricated traditions motivated by political, theological, and sectarian interests, encouraged Muslim scholars to formulate rigorous standards for narrator criticism. Consequently, the evaluation of narrators evolved into an independent branch of hadith studies supported by comprehensive biographical dictionaries and methodological treatises. Contemporary scholarship continues to recognize al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl as an important intellectual heritage that demonstrates the critical methodology employed by early Muslim scholars in preserving religious knowledge.

Within the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl developed into a highly structured discipline with clearly defined principles governing the acceptance and rejection of narrators. Scholars such as Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, ʿAlī ibn al-Madīnī, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Dhahabī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī made significant contributions by establishing criteria for assessing narrator credibility and compiling extensive works on narrator biographies. Their methodology combines an examination of personal character, religious commitment, intellectual honesty, memory accuracy, and consistency in transmission. The discipline also categorizes narrators into various levels of reliability, ranging from *thiqah* to *matrūk*, thereby providing a nuanced framework for assessing hadith authenticity.¹⁴ The Sunni approach emphasizes methodological objectivity by evaluating narrators according to established scholarly standards rather than theological affiliation alone. Although complete neutrality may be difficult to achieve in any historical discipline, Sunni scholars consistently attempted to separate doctrinal disagreements from technical assessments of transmission reliability. As a result, al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl became an essential methodological instrument supporting the authority of the Sunni hadith canon.

In the Shīʿah Imāmiyyah tradition, narrator criticism developed primarily through the discipline known as ʿIlm al-Rijāl. While sharing the same objective of preserving authentic religious teachings, this discipline evolved within a theological framework that recognizes the authority of the Imams from Ahl al-Bayt as divinely appointed successors to the Prophet. Classical Shīʿah scholars, including al-Kashshī, al-Najāshī, and al-Ṭūsī, produced important biographical works documenting the reliability and doctrinal orientation of narrators.¹⁵ The evaluation process extends

¹⁴ Razwan ul-Haq, "The Nature of Islamic Art: Locating a Tradition of Fitrah in the Art and Culture of Islam, with Particular Reference to Calligraphy," *Contemporary British Muslim Arts and Cultural Production: Identity, Belonging and Social Change*, 2023, 51–57, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003330714-6>.

¹⁵ Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali et al., "Al-Jarh Wa Al-Ta'dil (Criticism and Praise): It's Significant in the Science of Hadith," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 2S1 (2015): 284–92, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n2s1p284>.

beyond technical competence and moral integrity by considering the narrator's commitment to the doctrine of imāmah and loyalty to Ahl al-Bayt. Consequently, theological affiliation becomes an integral component of narrator criticism in many Shī'ah evaluations. Nevertheless, Shī'ah scholars also employ rigorous methods for examining chains of transmission, identifying weak narrators, and distinguishing authentic reports from unreliable ones. Therefore, despite doctrinal differences, 'Ilm al-Rijāl represents a comprehensive scholarly tradition with its own methodological consistency and historical development.

Previous academic studies have examined al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil primarily within the framework of Sunni hadith sciences, focusing on its historical development, methodological principles, and contribution to hadith authentication. Research has highlighted the systematic nature of narrator criticism and its significance for preserving the integrity of Islamic intellectual heritage. Similarly, studies concerning Shī'ah 'Ilm al-Rijāl have explored the development of narrator evaluation within the context of Imāmiyyah theology and the authority of Ahl al-Bayt. These studies demonstrate that both traditions possess sophisticated mechanisms for assessing narrators despite relying on different epistemological assumptions.¹⁶ However, much of the existing literature remains confined to internal analyses of each tradition independently. Comparative discussions often appear only as brief sections within broader studies of hadith methodology rather than as comprehensive investigations devoted specifically to comparing narrator criticism across both schools. Consequently, the comparative dimension remains insufficiently explored in contemporary academic literature.

A number of comparative studies have attempted to identify similarities and differences between Sunni and Shī'ah hadith methodologies, particularly concerning the acceptance of narrators and the authority of the Companions. These studies generally acknowledge that both traditions share fundamental principles such as the necessity of verifying transmission chains and evaluating narrator reliability. Nevertheless, important differences emerge regarding the status of the Companions, the authority of the Imams, and the theological assumptions underlying narrator evaluation. In the Sunni tradition, the Companions are generally presumed to possess collective integrity, whereas the Shī'ah tradition subjects individual Companions to historical and theological evaluation. Such distinctions significantly influence the composition of accepted hadith collections and the interpretation of prophetic traditions. Existing comparative research often emphasizes theological disagreement without adequately examining how methodological principles are operationalized in practical narrator criticism.¹⁷ Consequently, there remains considerable room for deeper comparative analysis integrating historical, methodological, and epistemological perspectives.

The relationship between theology and hadith criticism has become an increasingly important subject in contemporary Islamic studies. Modern scholars

¹⁶ Khoirul Anam et al., "Beyond Al-Jarh Wa al-Ta'dil: A Critical Study of the Narrators Accused of Lying in Sunan Ibn Mājah," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025): 241–76, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5736>.

¹⁷ Hasan Al-Rizzo, "The Use of Smart Computing in the Study of the Fundamentals of Hadith and Exploring the Hadith Logic of the Imams of Al Jarh Wa At-Ta'dil," *Proceedings of 2018 JCCO Joint International Conference on ICT in Education and Training, International Conference on Computing in Arabic, and International Conference on Geocomputing, JCCO: TICET-ICCA-GECO 2018*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCA-TICET.2018.8726214>.

recognize that the development of narrator criticism cannot be entirely separated from broader intellectual, political, and sectarian developments in early Islamic history. The emergence of competing theological schools influenced both the selection of narrators and the interpretation of transmitted reports. While methodological principles sought to establish objectivity, every scholarly tradition inevitably operated within its own epistemological framework. Comparative scholarship therefore increasingly emphasizes the need to distinguish between technical procedures of narrator criticism and the broader theological assumptions informing those procedures. This perspective encourages a more balanced understanding of similarities and differences between Sunni and Shī'ah methodologies without reducing the discussion to sectarian polemics. Such an approach contributes to a more historically grounded appreciation of the diversity of Islamic intellectual traditions.

Case studies involving the hadith of Ghadīr Khum and the hadith of the Twelve Caliphs illustrate how differences in narrator criticism intersect with divergent theological interpretations. Both hadith are transmitted through numerous chains and are acknowledged in varying forms by scholars from both traditions. However, differences arise not only from the evaluation of specific narrators but also from contrasting assumptions regarding religious authority and leadership after the Prophet. Sunni scholars generally interpret these traditions within their historical and contextual circumstances without considering them definitive evidence for hereditary political leadership. In contrast, Shī'ah Imāmiyyah scholars regard these narrations as central textual foundations supporting the doctrine of imāmah. These contrasting interpretations demonstrate that narrator criticism cannot be fully understood apart from broader theological frameworks. Accordingly, examining both methodological evaluation and interpretative application provides a more comprehensive understanding of hadith criticism across Islamic schools.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on hadith criticism, a significant research gap remains regarding comprehensive comparative analyses of *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl* and *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*. Most previous studies emphasize either the Sunni or the Shī'ah perspective without systematically comparing their methodological foundations, evaluation criteria, epistemological assumptions, and practical implications. Furthermore, relatively few studies integrate theoretical discussion with concrete case studies illustrating how methodological differences influence the authentication and interpretation of disputed hadith. This limitation restricts a fuller understanding of how the two traditions construct scholarly authority and preserve religious knowledge. The present study addresses this gap by providing a systematic comparative examination of narrator criticism in Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah through methodological analysis and selected case studies. By integrating historical, epistemological, and practical dimensions, the study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding similarities and differences between the two traditions. It also contributes to contemporary discussions on hadith studies by encouraging objective academic dialogue based on scholarly methodology rather than sectarian assumptions.

C. Method

This study is a qualitative study employing a library research design. A library-based design was chosen because the object of inquiry here concerns the concept, theory, and comparative development of scholarly thought regarding *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*, the whole of whose data derives from the literature rather than from field

observation or interviews. Library research allows the author to undertake a close reading of both classical scholarship and contemporary academic work concerning the application of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* and its implications for the acceptance of hadith within each tradition.¹⁸

The study adopts a thematic (*mawḍūʿī*) approach, chosen because the discussion centres on a single theme, namely the divergence in *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* scholarship in the present day. Through this thematic approach, data drawn from hadith compilations, works of *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, books, and journal articles can be gathered, grouped, and analysed according to interrelated themes, producing a coherent and systematic discussion.¹⁹

The research method employed is descriptive-analytical. The descriptive component is used to set out the concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, its historical development, function, and forms of application in contemporary hadith scholarship. The analytical component, in turn, is used to examine the divergences that arise, such as differing criteria for evaluating transmitters, differing attitudes toward the Companions, and the implications of these differences for the corpus of hadith accepted by each school. This method was chosen because the study aims not merely to describe a phenomenon but to offer a critical analysis of it, from which relevant conclusions can be drawn.²⁰

The data sources for this study comprise both primary and secondary material. Primary sources consist of the major hadith compilations, such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, together with literature addressing hadith methodology. Secondary sources include research-methodology texts, works of *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, and prior studies addressing hadith criticism, *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*, and comparative studies of Islamic schools of thought.

Data were collected through the technique of documentary study, that is, by gathering and cataloguing written documents relevant to the object of research. This technique was chosen because all the required data exist in the form of published scholarly documents, allowing them to be traced, verified, and compared on an academic basis. The use of documentary technique also allowed the author to draw on a wider range of data unconstrained by space or time, while preserving the objectivity of the research through the use of credible sources.²¹

The data were then analysed using content analysis, carried out in several stages: (1) identifying literature relevant to the research theme; (2) classifying data by subject, covering the concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, the concept of *ʿIlm al-Rijāl*, and their implications for hadith scholarship; (3) interpreting the data from the perspective of hadith methodology and comparative studies of Islamic schools of thought; and (4) drawing conclusions from the synthesis of the various sources analysed. Content analysis was chosen for its capacity to uncover meaning,

¹⁸ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2023), p. 9–13.

¹⁹ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, rev. ed. (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018), p. 6–11.

²⁰ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), p. 41–47.

²¹ Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik*, rev. ed. (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2019), p. 274–282.

tendencies, and relationships between ideas across a body of literature, making it well suited to the character of library research.²²

The combined use of library research, a thematic approach, a descriptive-analytical method, documentary technique, and content analysis is thus expected to produce a comprehensive account of the divergence in *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* scholarship, while contributing academically to the development of comparative hadith studies.

D. Result and Discussion

I. The Concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* in the Ahl al-Sunnah Perspective

The science of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* is one of the principal branches of hadith scholarship, serving to assess the credibility of hadith transmitters in terms of both honesty (*'adālah*) and precision in transmission (*ḍabṭ*). Within the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, this science developed systematically as a response to the need to safeguard the purity of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ hadith from fabrication and error in transmission.²³

Terminologically, *al-jarh* denotes a negative assessment of a transmitter that leads to his report being rejected or doubted, while *al-ta'dil* denotes a positive assessment indicating that a transmitter's report may be accepted. The science of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* thus becomes an essential instrument in determining the quality of a hadith, that is, whether it is to be classed as *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (fair), or *ḍa'īf* (weak).²⁴

In the Ahl al-Sunnah perspective, two principal criteria govern the evaluation of a transmitter: *'adālah* (moral integrity) and *ḍabṭ* (precision of memory or record-keeping). A transmitter is judged *'ādil* if he is Muslim, of age, of sound mind, free of major sins, and not habitually given to minor ones. *Ḍabṭ*, meanwhile, concerns a transmitter's ability to preserve and convey a hadith accurately, whether through memorisation or written record.²⁵

Beyond these two criteria, hadith scholars also attend to the continuity of the *sanad* (*ittiṣāl al-sanad*), the absence of hidden defects (*'illah*), and the absence of irregularity (*shudhūdh*). Together, these criteria show that the Ahl al-Sunnah methodology of hadith criticism is comprehensive and rigorous in safeguarding the validity of a report.²⁶

The development of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* within the Sunni tradition owes much to the great scholars who devoted themselves specifically to the criticism of transmitters. Among the most influential are Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, whose monumental works remain the principal references for assessing transmitter credibility.²⁷

Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn, for instance, was known for his exacting standards in evaluating transmitters, and did not hesitate to level sharp criticism at those he judged weak. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, by contrast, proceeded more cautiously, weighing a

²² Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019), p. 24–36.

²³ Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil," *Mukaddimah: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 2 (2017): 287.

²⁴ Budi Suhartawan, "Memahami Konsep Metodologi al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil," *Dirayah: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 4, no. 2 (2024): 45.

²⁵ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication," *El-Sunan* 2, no. 1 (2024).

²⁶ Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil," p. 290.

²⁷ Budi Suhartawan, "Memahami Konsep Metodologi al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil," p. 47.

range of considerations before passing judgment on a transmitter. Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, in his works *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* and *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, produced a systematic classification of transmitters that remains in use in hadith studies today.²⁸

In practice, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* also observes certain rules, such as giving precedence to an explicit (*mufassar*) criticism over a positive assessment, and the importance of knowing the grounds on which a judgment of a transmitter rests. This shows that the assessment of a transmitter is not undertaken arbitrarily but through careful, reasoned analysis.²⁹

By way of illustration, a transmitter judged *thiqah* (reliable) by the majority of scholars may nonetheless have a particular report rejected if it is shown to contain a specific defect in that instance of transmission. Conversely, a transmitter judged weak does not automatically have the whole of his transmission rejected without regard to context or corroborating chains. This reflects both the flexibility and the rigour of the Ahl al-Sunnah methodology of hadith criticism.³⁰

It may thus be concluded that the concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* in the Ahl al-Sunnah perspective constitutes a comprehensive and methodical scholarly system for assessing the credibility of hadith transmitters. This system functions not merely as a tool for verifying reports, but as a form of scholarly responsibility in safeguarding the authenticity of Islamic teaching as it derives from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

2. The Concept of al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil in the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah Perspective

Within the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah tradition, the study of transmitter criticism is known as *ʿilm al-Rijāl*, the science concerned with the identity, character, and credibility of hadith transmitters. In general terms, this science shares the same aim as *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* in the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, namely to establish the validity of a hadith report.³¹

A brief look at the history of Shī'ah Imāmiyyah attitudes toward hadith shows that many Shi'i scholars set aside reports found outside the four principal hadith compilations (*al-Kāfī*, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*, *al-Istibṣār*, and *al-Tahdhīb*), treating these four works as the foundation of their religious teaching. They nevertheless paid little attention to the science of *Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* until the tenth century of the Hijrah, when Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, known as al-Shahīd al-Thānī, wrote the first work on hadith terminology for Shī'ah Imāmiyyah.³²

A thesis written by Danni Nursalim in 2024, titled:

تقسيم الحديث النبوي عند الشيعة الإمامية في كتاب الدراية في علم مصطلح الحديث
لزين الدين بن علي الجبعي العاملي: دراسة تحليلية نقدية³³

reports that the science of hadith terminology among Shī'ah Imāmiyyah amounts to little more than an imitation of the corresponding Sunni science, given

²⁸ Abdul Karim, et al., "Strategi Pelestarian Lingkungan dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an dan Hadis," *AHCS* 3, no. 2 (2022).

²⁹ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Taqrīb al-Tahdzīb*.

³⁰ Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil," p. 295.

³¹ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syī'ah Imamiyah: Studi tentang Persamaan dan Perbedaannya dengan Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islamic Resources* 18, no. 1 (2021).

³² Danni Nursalim, "تقسيم الحديث النبوي عند الشيعة الإمامية في كتاب الدراية في علم مصطلح الحديث لزين الدين بن علي الجبعي العاملي: دراسة تحليلية نقدية" (Tesis, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2024).

³³ Danni Nursalim, "تقسيم الحديث النبوي عند الشيعة الإمامية في كتاب الدراية في علم مصطلح الحديث لزين الدين بن علي الجبعي العاملي: دراسة تحليلية نقدية" (Tesis, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2024).

that Shi'i scholars themselves originally regarded such a science as unsuited to their tradition. Zayn al-Dīn al-Āmilī was, in effect, compelled to introduce fundamental changes to its definitions so as to bring it into line with Imāmī doctrine, going so far as to devise new categories of hadith for this purpose. The existence of this science did nothing to alter Shī'ah Imāmiyyah confidence in the weak (*ḍa'īf*) reports that form the basis of their religious teaching, which they have continued to defend by every available means.

A fundamental difference in epistemological foundation separates the two schools, Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah. In the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah perspective, religious authority derives not only from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ but also from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, who are regarded as holding a distinguished rank and elevated scholarly authority. This bears directly on the structure of hadith transmission, in which the *sanad* frequently centres on the line of Ahl al-Bayt.³⁴

Terminologically, the Shī'ah conception of transmitter evaluation likewise recognises categories such as *thiqah* (reliable), *ḍa'īf* (weak), and *majhūl* (unknown). The standards applied, however, are not entirely identical to those used in the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition. One significant difference lies in the attitude toward the Companions: not all Companions are automatically regarded as *'ādil* in the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah perspective.³⁵

In the Shī'ah system of hadith criticism, the credibility of a transmitter is strongly shaped by his loyalty to Ahl al-Bayt. A transmitter who shows a tendency to support, or to transmit from, the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt tends to be more readily accepted, whereas one deemed to hold an opposing stance may have his credibility called into question. This indicates that theological considerations exert a significant influence on the process of evaluating a transmitter.³⁶

The biographical-evaluative (*rijāl*) works of the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah tradition serve as the principal sources for assessing hadith transmitters. Among the best known are *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, and *Fihrist al-Tūsī*. These works contain biographical information on transmitters, their relationships with the Imams, and assessments of their credibility.³⁷

Where the Ahl al-Sunnah approach emphasises a balance between the moral and technical dimensions of transmission, the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah approach places greater weight on continuity of scholarly authority through the line of Ahl al-Bayt. The validity of a hadith is thus determined not only by a transmitter's honesty and precision, but also by the conformity of the *sanad* with the line of religious authority recognised within that school.³⁸

In practice, Shī'ah methods of hadith criticism likewise involve analysis of both *sanad* and *matn*, albeit through a different approach. Some contemporary Shī'ah scholars have even sought to develop a more systematic methodology of hadith criticism by adopting elements of the scholarly approach found within the Sunni tradition, while still preserving the basic principles of their own school.³⁹

³⁴ Danni Nursalim, "...تقسيم الحديث النبوي عند الشيعة الإمامية".

³⁵ Sumbulah, Umi. "Kajian Hadis di Indonesia: Studi atas Tradisi dan Otoritas Keilmuan," *Jurnal Living Hadis* 2, no. 1 (2017).

³⁶ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syi'ah Imamiyah."

³⁷ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syi'ah Imamiyah."

³⁸ Sumbulah, Umi. "Kajian Hadis di Indonesia."

³⁹ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication," *El-Sunan* 2, no. 1 (2024).

A transmitter judged *thiqah* in Shī'ah literature, for example, is not necessarily accepted within the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, and the reverse holds equally true. This shows that the evaluation of a transmitter is shaped decisively by the epistemological and theological framework of each school, a difference that in turn produces divergent corpora of hadith accepted and used as a basis for teaching within each tradition.⁴⁰

It may thus be concluded that the concept of transmitter criticism in Shī'ah Imāmiyyah shares the same underlying aim as the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, namely safeguarding the validity of hadith, yet differs in its epistemological foundation, its evaluative criteria, and its source of scholarly authority. This difference stands as one of the principal factors distinguishing the construction of hadith between the two schools.⁴¹

Having set out the concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* from the perspectives of both Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah, it is now possible to observe that, although the two schools share the same underlying aim of safeguarding the validity of hadith, fundamental differences remain at the methodological and epistemological level.

For ease of reference, a comparison of the two schools is set out in the table below:

Table I Compariosn of two school

Aspect	Ahl al-Sunnah	Shī'ah Imāmiyyah
Term Used	al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl	'Ilm al-Rijāl
Source of Authority	The Prophet ﷺ and a reliable sanad	The Prophet ﷺ through the line of Ahl al-Bayt
Status of the Companions	Generally regarded as ('udūl)	Evaluated individually
Transmitter Criteria	'Adālah and Ḍabṭ	'Adālah, Ḍabṭ, and loyalty to Ahl al-Bayt
Reference Works	<i>Tahdzib al-Tahdzib, al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl</i>	<i>Rijāl al-Najāshi, Rijāl al-Tusi</i>
Critical Approach	More objective-historical	More theological-authoritative
Sanad	Very strict (ittiṣāl al-sanad)	Focused on the line of the Imams

⁴⁰ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication."

⁴¹ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syi'ah Imamiyah."

Source: Author's Elaboration (2026)

The table above allows the similarities and differences between the two schools to be examined more closely. Notable differences emerge alongside a number of fundamental similarities. First, both Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah recognise hadith as a source of religious teaching and regard verification of the *sanad* as essential to establishing its validity. This indicates that both traditions share a scholarly awareness of the importance of safeguarding the authenticity of Islamic teaching.⁴²

Second, both traditions employ comparable classifications of transmitters, such as *thiqah* (reliable) and *ḍa'īf* (weak), albeit measured against different standards. This points to a shared conceptual foundation underlying the science of hadith criticism in both schools.⁴³

The most fundamental difference lies in the epistemological foundation used to evaluate a transmitter. In the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, the evaluation of a transmitter rests on moral character and on a capacity for transmission that can be verified historically. In the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah tradition, by contrast, strong emphasis is placed on the authority of Ahl al-Bayt as a source of scholarly legitimacy.⁴⁴

A further difference appears in attitudes toward the Companions of the Prophet. Ahl al-Sunnah generally regards the whole body of Companions as *'ādil*, such that their reports may be accepted without deeper scrutiny of individual integrity. Shī'ah Imāmiyyah, by contrast, evaluates the Companions individually, such that not all of them are regarded as trustworthy. This difference has a significant bearing on the number and character of the hadith accepted by each school.⁴⁵

Methodologically, the Ahl al-Sunnah approach tends to be more systematic, resting on a structured body of scholarly rules such as rigorous *sanad* and *matn* analysis. The Shī'ah Imāmiyyah approach, by contrast, is more strongly shaped by theological considerations, particularly in relation to the doctrine of *imāmah* and the authority of Ahl al-Bayt.⁴⁶

These methodological differences carry broad implications for the construction of hadith in both schools. First, the corpus of hadith accepted by Ahl al-Sunnah and by Shī'ah Imāmiyyah differs, both in quantity and in content. Second, this difference also affects the method of legal derivation (*istinbāṭ*), producing corresponding differences in religious practice.⁴⁷

More broadly, these differences show that the science of hadith is not merely technical but is shaped by the theological and epistemological frameworks underlying it. A comparative study of this kind is therefore valuable for understanding the dynamics of hadith scholarship across the various traditions of Islamic learning.⁴⁸

From the comparative analysis above, it may be concluded that, although Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah share the same aim of safeguarding the validity of hadith, the two differ significantly in method, criteria, and epistemological foundation.

⁴² Ali Imron, "Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dil," *Mukaddimah* (2017).

⁴³ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication," *El-Sunan* (2024).

⁴⁴ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syī'ah Imamiyah," *Islamic Resources* (2021).

⁴⁵ Sumbulah, Umi. "Kajian Hadis di Indonesia," *Jurnal Living Hadis* (2017).

⁴⁶ Sumbulah, Umi, "Kajian Hadis di Indonesia."

⁴⁷ Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syī'ah Imamiyah."

⁴⁸ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication."

This difference is not merely technical, but reflects a difference in paradigm in understanding religious authority within Islam.

As a further point of comparative analysis, the author examines two well-known hadith over which Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah are divided. The first is narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in which the Prophet ﷺ said:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ أَلَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ فَإِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ يُوْشِكُ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ رَسُولُ رَبِّي فَأُجِيبُ وَأَنَا تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ ثَقَلَيْنِ أَوَّلُهُمَا كِتَابُ اللَّهِ فِيهِ الْهُدَى وَالنُّورُ فَخُذُوا بِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَاسْتَمْسِكُوا بِهِ وَأَهْلُ بَيْتِي أَذْكُرُكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِي أَذْكُرُكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِي

"Now then, O people, I am only a man; the messenger of my Lord is soon to come to me and I shall answer his call. I am leaving among you two weighty things: the first is the Book of God, in which there is guidance and light — hold fast to the Book of God and cling firmly to it — and my Ahl al-Bayt. I remind you of God with regard to my Ahl al-Bayt; I remind you of God with regard to my Ahl al-Bayt; I remind you of God with regard to my Ahl al-Bayt."⁴⁹

Scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah are agreed that this hadith is authentic. It has, however, an additional clause transmitted through another chain, namely the phrase:

مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيْ مَوْلَاهُ

"Whoever has me as his *mawlā*, has 'Alī as his *mawlā* also."⁵⁰

According to Ahl al-Sunnah, scholars are not agreed on the authenticity of the report bearing this addition. Some have judged it sound, among them al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852 AH), and Shaykh al-Albānī.

وَقَالَ الْإِمَامُ الذَّهَبِيُّ : وَأَمَّا حَدِيثُ : مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَلَهُ طَرُقٌ جَيِّدَةٌ

Imām al-Dhahabī stated: "As for the hadith 'Whoever has me as his *mawlā*', it has good chains of transmission."⁵¹

قَالَ الْحَافِظُ : وَأَمَّا حَدِيثُ "مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيْ مَوْلَاهُ" فَقَدْ أَخْرَجَهُ التِّرْمِذِيُّ وَالنَّسَائِيُّ ، وَهُوَ كَثِيرُ الطَّرُقِ جَدًّا ، وَقَدْ اسْتَوْعَبَهَا ابْنُ عُقْدَةَ فِي كِتَابِ مُفْرَدٍ وَكَثِيرٍ مِنْ أَسَانِيدِهَا صَحَاحٌ وَجِسَانٌ

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar stated: "As for the hadith 'Whoever has me as his *mawlā*, has 'Alī as his *mawlā*', it was transmitted by al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī, and it has a great many chains of transmission. Ibn 'Uqdah compiled them fully in a work of his own, and many of its *isnāds* are sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or fair (*ḥasan*)."⁵²

Others, however, judged it weak, among them Ishāq al-Ḥarbī, Imām Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH), Imām al-Zayla'ī (d. 762 AH), and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH).

قَالَ الْإِمَامُ ابْنُ حَزْمٍ : وَأَمَّا مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيْ مَوْلَاهُ فَلَا يَصِحُّ مِنْ طَرِيقِ الثَّقَاتِ أَصْلًا

Imām Ibn Ḥazm stated: "As for 'Whoever has me as his *mawlā*, has 'Alī as his *mawlā*', it is not sound at all through any reliable chain."⁵³

قَالَ الْإِمَامُ الرَّيْلِيُّ : وَكَمْ مِنْ حَدِيثٍ كَثُرَتْ رَوَاتُهُ وَتَعَدَّدَتْ طُرُقُهُ وَهُوَ حَدِيثٌ ضَعِيفٌ كَحَدِيثِ "مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيْ مَوْلَاهُ"

⁴⁹ Shahih Muslim, IV: 1874, No. 2408, Kitaab Fadhaa'il Ash-Shahaabah, Bab Min Fadhaa'il 'Ali bin Abi Thaalib Radhiyallaah 'anhu.

⁵⁰ Sunan At-Tirmidzi, V:633, No. 3713. A variant wording of this hadith, narrated on the authority of Zaid, is also related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in Musnad Ahmad, IV:372, No. 19347, Kitaab Fadhaa'il Ash-Shahaabah, II:613, No. 1048.

⁵¹ Tuhfah Al-Ahwadzi Syarh Sunan At-Tirmidzi, X: 154.

⁵² Fath Al-Bari Syarh Shahih Al-Bukhari, VII: 74.

⁵³ Al-Fashl fii Al-Milal wa Al-Ahwaa wa Al-Nihal, IV: 224.

Imām al-Zayla‘ī stated: “How many a hadith has numerous transmitters and multiple chains, and yet is weak, such as the hadith ‘Whoever has me as his *mawlā*, has ‘Alī as his *mawlā*’.”⁵⁴

وَقَالَ شَيْخُ الْإِسْلَامِ ابْنُ تَيْمِيَّةَ : (وَأَمَّا قَوْلُهُ مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيْ مَوْلَاهُ فَلَيْسَ هُوَ فِي الصَّحَاحِ لَكِنْ هُوَ مِمَّا رَوَاهُ الْعُلَمَاءُ وَتَنَازَعَ النَّاسُ فِي صِحَّتِهِ فَقِيلَ عَنِ الْبُخَارِيِّ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الْحَرَبِيِّ وَطَائِفَةٍ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ بِالْحَدِيثِ إِنَّهُمْ طَعَنُوا فِيهِ...)

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah stated: “As for his saying, ‘Whoever has me as his *mawlā*, has ‘Alī as his *mawlā*’, it is not found in the sound collections, though it is among what scholars have transmitted, and people have disputed its authenticity. It has been related from al-Bukhārī, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī, and a group of hadith specialists that they cast doubt upon it...”⁵⁵

A further addition, transmitted through yet another chain, reads:

اللَّهُمَّ وَالِ مَنْ وَالَاهُ وَعَادِ مَنْ عَادَاهُ وَانصُرْ مَنْ نَصَرَهُ وَاخْذُلْ مَنْ خَذَلَهُ

“O God, be a friend to whoever befriends him, and an enemy to whoever opposes him. Aid whoever aids him, and abandon whoever abandons him.”

Scholars are agreed that the report bearing this addition is weak. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah states:

وَأَمَّا قَوْلُهُ: اللَّهُمَّ وَالِ مَنْ وَالَاهُ وَعَادِ مَنْ عَادَاهُ وَانصُرْ مَنْ نَصَرَهُ وَاخْذُلْ مَنْ خَذَلَهُ فَهُوَ كَذِبٌ بِاتِّفَاقِ أَهْلِ الْمَعْرِفَةِ بِالْحَدِيثِ

“As for his saying, ‘O God, be a friend to whoever befriends him, and an enemy to whoever opposes him. Aid whoever aids him, and abandon whoever abandons him’, this is a fabrication by the consensus of those versed in hadith.”⁵⁶

Shī‘ah scholarship treats this hadith as a foundation of its teaching, on the assumption that it was on this occasion that the Prophet ﷺ designated ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu as his successor. This assumption rests on the version of the report bearing the additional clause, “man kuntu mawlāhu fa ‘Alīyun mawlāhu”, which is read as meaning that *mawlā* signifies “leader” and “caliph”, implying that ‘Alī became caliph after the Prophet’s death.

Shī‘ah scholarship further treats the hadith of Ghadīr Khum as continuous with verse 67 of Sūrah al-Mā‘idah, taking the hadith as a second layer of confirmation of that verse’s bearing on ‘Alī’s right to leadership. According to Ahl al-Sunnah scholarship, however, this argument is judged to rest on insufficient grounds. Examined from various angles, the hadith is not seen as explicitly indicating ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu’s right to leadership⁵⁷, a conclusion supported by the following considerations:

First, the interval between the revelation of the verse and the event of Ghadīr Khum. The revelation of verse 67 of Sūrah al-Mā‘idah bears no relation to the event of Ghadīr Khum, still less to any designation of ‘Alī as caliph after the Prophet ﷺ. The verse was revealed considerably earlier, well before the Farewell Pilgrimage, whereas the day of Ghadīr fell on 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah, 10 AH, after the Prophet ﷺ had returned from that pilgrimage. On this chronology, Ahl al-Sunnah scholars judge that any claim linking the revelation of the verse to the day of Ghadīr lacks adequate historical support.

⁵⁴ Nashb Ar-Rayah li Ahaadits Al-Hidaayah, I: 189.

⁵⁵ Minhaj As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah fii Naqdh Kalaam Asy-Syi’ah wa Al-Qadariyyah, VII: 319.

⁵⁶ Minhaj As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah, VII: 55

⁵⁷ Minhaj As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah, IV: 84.

Second, the reading of *mawlā* as “leader” is linguistically imprecise. In terms of usage, the word *mawlā* in the hadith of Ghadīr Khum can hardly be read as meaning “leader”: such a sense was never current in Arabic speech and is accordingly absent from Arabic dictionaries. The imprecision of reading *mawlā* as “leader” is further evident from the word’s antonym later in the same hadith. The full wording of the Ghadīr hadith, together with its corresponding sense, reads as follows:

مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيْ مَوْلَاهُ اللَّهُمَّ وَالِ مَنْ وَالَاهُ وَعَادَ مَنْ عَادَاهُ

“Whoever has me as his *mawlā* (helper), has ‘Alī as his *mawlā* also. O God, love whoever loves him, and be an enemy to whoever opposes him.”

According to Ahl al-Sunnah scholars, reading *mawlā* as “leader” is judged imprecise, since the continuation of the hadith reads, “be an enemy to whoever opposes him.” On this basis, they hold that the more fitting sense of *mawlā* in this hadith, both textually and contextually, is “helper”, since the opposite of a helper is an enemy.⁵⁸ Ahl al-Sunnah scholars likewise point to the occasion of the Prophet’s ﷺ statement (*sabab al-wurūd*): as related in various reports, the circumstances surrounding the statement indicate that the episode bore no relation, whether directly or indirectly, to the question of ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu’s leadership. The Shī’ah argument is, moreover, at odds with numerous statements from figures within Ahl al-Bayt itself. When al-Ḥasan al-Muthannā (son of Sayyidinā al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī) was asked whether this hadith constituted a formal designation of ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu to the caliphate, he replied: “Had the Prophet ﷺ intended to designate Sayyidinā ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu as caliph through this hadith, he would surely have said: ‘O people, this is the one entrusted with my affairs, and your leader after me; submit and obey his every command.’”

On another occasion, when Imam al-Ḥasan was asked the same question, he replied: “By God, no! Had the Messenger of God ﷺ intended the caliphate, he would surely have stated it plainly and clearly, just as he explained the prayer and almsgiving, saying: ‘O people, ‘Alī is indeed entrusted with your affairs after me, and leader of all people.’” This statement of al-Ḥasan carries considerable weight, since the core tenets (*uṣūl*) of Islamic teaching must rest on clear and explicit (*ṣarīḥ*) evidence, as with the Qur’anic text on prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the like, whereas in the Shī’ah perspective *imāmah* itself ranks among the core tenets of religion.⁵⁹ The proper reading of the Ghadīr hadith, on this basis, is as follows: love for Sayyidinā ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu is required in the same way that love for the Prophet ﷺ is required, while enmity toward Sayyidinā ‘Alī Raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu is forbidden, just as enmity toward the Prophet ﷺ is forbidden. Understood in this way, the hadith of Ghadīr Khum stands in sharp contrast to the Shī’ah assumption and claim, and accords instead with the understanding held by figures of both Ahl al-Bayt and Ahl al-Sunnah.

The second well-known hadith over which Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī’ah are divided is the Prophet’s ﷺ statement:

لَا يَزَالُ هَذَا الدِّينُ عَزِيزًا مَنِيعًا إِلَى اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً

“This religion will continue to be mighty and unassailable through twelve caliphs.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Al-Qifari, *Ushul Madzhab asy-Syiah*, vol. 2, p. 840.

⁵⁹ Syah Abdul Aziz Ghulam Hakim ad-Dahlawi, *Mukhtashar at-Tuhfah al-Itsna ‘Asyariyah*, p. 213.

⁶⁰ Shahih Muslim, *Bab Manusia Mengikuti Quraisy dan Kekhilafahan pada Quraisy*, no. 1821.

This divergence in interpretation reappears in the understanding of the hadith of the twelve caliphs, narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Within the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, this hadith is read in an open sense, without being tied definitively to any specific list of figures. Sunni scholars tend to interpret it as a symbol of the political stability of Islam during a given period, rather than as a foundation for any fixed doctrine of leadership.⁶¹

Shī'ah Imāmiyyah, by contrast, reads the hadith as a direct endorsement of the concept of the twelve Imams (*ithnā 'ashar*), beginning with 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and ending with the Imam al-Mahdī. This reading shows that the hadith is understood not merely as a historical text, but as part of an already-established theological construction.⁶²

These two case studies show that the divergence between Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah lies not only in the method of evaluating transmitters, but also in the manner of interpreting the meaning of a hadith itself. Ahl al-Sunnah tends toward a historical-critical approach that seeks to hold text and theological interest apart, whereas Shī'ah Imāmiyyah integrates the understanding of hadith into the theological framework of *imāmah*.

The implications of this difference are considerable, particularly for the construction of religious authority and the formation of Islamic law. Differences in evaluating transmitters and interpreting hadith give rise to divergent corpora of hadith, which in turn shape religious practice within each school. It may thus be affirmed that the difference in the concept of *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* between the two schools is not merely a technical matter, but reflects a difference in paradigm in understanding the authority and transmission of Islamic teaching.⁶³

⁶¹ Imam Nawawi, *Syarh Sahih Muslim*.

⁶² Mursalin Ilyas and Abdul Ghany, "Syi'ah Imamiyah."

⁶³ Nurjannah Ismail, "The Role of Jarh wa Ta'dil in Hadith Authentication," *El-Sunan* (2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the concepts of al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl in the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition and 'Ilm al-Rijāl in the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah tradition share the common objective of preserving the authenticity of the Prophet's hadith through the critical evaluation of transmitters and verification of the sanad. Both traditions employ comparable classifications of narrator reliability, such as *thiqah* and *ḍa'īf*, yet they differ substantially in their epistemological foundations, criteria for evaluating transmitters, and understanding of religious authority. In the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition, transmitter criticism is grounded in the principles of *'adālah* (moral integrity) and *ḍabt* (accuracy of transmission), whereas the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah approach is closely shaped by the doctrine of *imāmah* and the authority of Ahl al-Bayt. These differences are clearly reflected in the interpretation of the hadith of Ghadīr Khum and the hadith of the Twelve Caliphs, which are understood primarily within their historical context in the Ahl al-Sunnah tradition but serve as theological foundations for the doctrine of *imāmah* in the Shī'ah Imāmiyyah tradition. Accordingly, the divergence between the two schools extends beyond methodological issues and represents distinct paradigms in understanding religious authority and the transmission of Islamic teachings.

This study also contributes to the existing body of scholarship by providing a comparative analysis of al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl and 'Ilm al-Rijāl, an area that has received relatively limited academic attention. By systematically mapping the differences in narrator-evaluation criteria, attitudes toward the Companions of the Prophet, and sources of scholarly authority, the study broadens the understanding of hadith criticism across the two major Islamic traditions and encourages a more balanced and objective perspective on inter-school differences. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. As a library-based study, the analysis relies primarily on published primary and secondary sources and focuses only on the hadith of Ghadīr Khum and the Twelve Caliphs as representative case studies. Future research incorporating a wider range of disputed hadith and empirical approaches, such as interviews with scholars from both traditions, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary development and application of hadith criticism within Ahl al-Sunnah and Shī'ah Imāmiyyah scholarship.

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