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THE CONCEPT OF FABRICATED HADITH IN ZAFAR AHMAD AL-
TAHANAWI'S WORK *I'LA' AL-SUNAN*

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The Indian ḥadīth scholar Zafar Ahmad al-Tahanawi (d. 1393/1974) discussed the issue of fabricated ḥadīth in detail in his work *I'la' al-Sunan*. The introduction of this work is particularly notable for its comprehensive conclusions on the subject.

The Arabic term for fabricated ḥadīth is *al-mawḍūʿ* (الموضوع). Linguistically, it means “placed,” “fabricated,” or “low in rank.” In technical terminology, it refers to a fabricated lie — a report artificially produced and falsely attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The reason such a report is called *mawḍūʿ* is that the person who commits this act inevitably lowers their own status; the thing itself is also considered base and reprehensible.

According to al-Tahanawi, the fabrication of ḥadīth began during the period of the Successors (*tābiʿūn*). The emergence of early political conflicts at that time led to the appearance of some fabricated ḥadīths. However, the continued presence of just and upright Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) prevented these activities from spreading widely. In the period following the Successors, Islam spread widely among various nations, political disputes intensified, and people became distanced from authentic religious knowledge. Consequently, fabricated ḥadīths on various subjects multiplied.

This shows that the noble Companions had an extremely serious attitude toward ḥadīth. In later generations, however, attitudes toward the Prophet's ḥadīths varied. Among Muslims, the number of those who memorized ḥadīths, understood them properly, and were acquainted with their original texts and chains of transmission (*isnād*) decreased. At that time, people who sought to degrade the status of ḥadīth also began to appear. As a result, we can observe the emergence of various false movements, sects, and incorrect creeds.

After that, scholars undertook a great task: to purify the pure Shariah and the noble Sunnah, and to protect ḥadīths from defects and additions. Consequently, authentic ḥadīths began to be distinguished from false and fabricated ones. Distinguishing fabricated ḥadīths from authentic ones is certainly not an easy task. When ʿAbdullah ibn al-Mubarak (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked who could identify fabricated ḥadīths, he replied: “Only skilled scholars who have devoted their lives to the science of ḥadīth.” This indicates that only those proficient in ḥadīth studies undertook this task.



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The researcher Abd al-Fattah Abū Ghuddah emphasizes that the statement sometimes cited in books as “*ṭalab al-‘ilm min al-mahd ilā al-laḥd*” or “*uṭlubū al-‘ilm min al-mahd ilā al-laḥd*” (seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave) is not a Prophetic ḥadīth, but rather a saying of people about seeking knowledge. Nevertheless, some people attribute such words to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Indeed, no word or action that the Messenger of Allah did not say, do, or approve can be attributed to him. Even if the meaning of these words is correct and the action they encourage is appropriate, that does not permit attributing them to him.

Ḥāfiẓ Abū al-Ḥajjāj al-Ḥalabī states: There is no human being on earth who has the right to fabricate even a single letter in the name of the Messenger of Allah, even if its meaning is correct. Not every true statement is something the Messenger of Allah said. However, every statement that the Messenger of Allah said is true.

Scholars have expressed various opinions regarding the use of the term “fabricated ḥadīth” (*ḥadīth mawḍū‘*) — that is, adding the word “ḥadīth” after “*mawḍū‘*.” For instance, Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar said: “I do not approve of calling a fabrication (*mawḍū‘*) a ‘ḥadīth,’ because it is not from the Prophetic ḥadīth. Some scholars call the fabricated ‘the worst kind of weak ḥadīth,’ but this does not mean that it is counted among ḥadīths.” Dr. Māhir Maṣṣūr ‘Abd al-Razzāq states: In truth, calling a fabrication “ḥadīth” is not correct. However, the majority of scholars give three reasons for calling it “ḥadīth”:

1. The linguistic meaning of “ḥadīth” is intended.
2. It is called so from the perspective of the fabricators themselves.
3. Because one must refer to ḥadīth and its methodologies in order to recognize and distinguish fabrications.

It is known that a weak (*ḍa‘īf*) ḥadīth can be considered as such only if it is potentially something the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) actually said, but a defect occurred among its narrators. Therefore, a weak ḥadīth is superior to a person’s mere opinion. However, a fabricated ḥadīth is completely invented by persons who are not part of the chain of narrators.

Scholars have emphasized that knowingly narrating fabricated ḥadīths is absolutely impermissible, even if one knows they are fabricated. As evidence, they cite the following ḥadīth narrated by Imam Muslim and Imam Aḥmad: Samurah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever narrates from me a ḥadīth that is clearly false is one of two liars.” This ḥadīth serves as a sufficient refutation for those who narrate fabricated reports.

Regardless of the subject matter — whether concerning legal rulings, stories, encouragement (*targhīb*), or deterrence (*tahdīd*) — knowing that a ḥadīth is fabricated, it is not permissible to narrate it. However, some scholars have said that if one clearly states its fabricated nature, then narrating it is permissible.

In conclusion, a fabricated ḥadīth is a false report deliberately invented in the name of the Prophet. Such ḥadīths began to appear in the early periods of Islamic history, especially during the time of the Successors, due to political and sectarian conflicts. The



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Indian ḥadīth scholar Zafar Ahmad al-Tahanawi, in his work *I'la' al-Sunan*, provides a detailed explanation of this issue, emphasizing that the proliferation of fabricated ḥadīths was caused by distancing oneself from authentic religious knowledge and the spread of various false movements.

According to al-Tahanawi, although the Companions narrated ḥadīths with extreme caution, later generations distanced themselves from ḥadīth sciences, leading to the practice of fabrication. Therefore, ḥadīth scholars undertook great scholarly efforts to examine ḥadīths and distinguish the authentic from the fabricated. The statement of ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak — “Only skilled scholars can identify fabricated ḥadīths” — shows how delicate and responsible this task is.

I'la' al-Sunan also emphasizes that attributing to the Prophet a statement he did not make is a grave sin. Even wise sayings with good meanings cannot be called ḥadīth without authentic evidence. Hence, scholars considered it prohibited (*ḥarām*) to knowingly narrate fabricated ḥadīths.

Thus, in *I'la' al-Sunan*, fabricated ḥadīths are evaluated as a factor causing great harm to Muslim society. Scholars such as al-Tahanawi consciously understood that preserving the science of ḥadīth and protecting the Sunnah from falsehoods and fabrications is the most important duty of every ḥadīth scholar.

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