

Life and works of Imam Tirmizi (RA)

Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) was born in the year 209 A.H. during the reign of the Abbasid Khalifa Mamoon al Rasheed. The Abbasid Caliphate, despite its brilliant contributions to Islaam, brought along with it many thorny 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 infiltrating within the people, many Muslims began attempting to reconcile between reason and revelation. As a result they deviated themselves and misled many innocent weak Muslims away from Allah and His Rasul [sallallahu alyhi wasallam]. Many scholars of Islaam had come to the fore in order to defend the Shariah. Forgeries and interpolations in Hadith by rulers who wished to fulfil their personal motives was common. In the first century Umar bin Abdul Aziz

(R.A.) initiated a movement for the compilation of the Mubarak Hadeeth of Nabi [sallallahu alayhi wasallam] as there was a fear of it being lost. Eventually this gigantic task was undertaken by six towering scholars of Islaam. One of them was.

Imaam Abu Isa Muhammed ibn Isa Tirmizi (R.A.)

Having grown up in an environment of learning, together with possessing many great qualities naturally drove Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) 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 this great science. He studied Hadith under great personalities such as Imaam Bukhari (R.A.), Imaam Muslim (R.A.) and Imaam Abu Dawood (R.A.). In some narrations Imaam Bukhari and Imaam Muslim (R.A.) are his students as well. Once Imaam Bukhari (R.A.) mentioned to him "I have benefited more from you than you have benefitted from me." Moosa ibn Alaq (R.A.) once said : "When Imaam Bukhari passed away, he left no one in Khurasaan who compared with Abu Isa Tirmizi (R.A.) in Ilm, memory, piety and abstinence." According to Abdullah ibn Muhammed Al-Ansaari (R.A.), Imaam Tirmizi's Al-Jami is more beneficial than the works of Bukhari and Muslim (R.A.) since their compilations can only be understood by a very deep sighted scholar whereas Al Jami can be understood by both the scholar and the lay man. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) said that he compiled this book and presented it to the learned of Hejaaz, Iraaq and Khuraasaan and they were pleased with it. Who ever has this book in his home, it is as though he has the Prophet [sallallahu alyhi wasallam] speaking to him there.

His remarkable memory:

Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) had an exceptionally remarkable memory. If he heard something once he never forgot it. Once on his way to Makkah, Imaam Tirmizi

(R.A.) met a Muhadith from whom he had previously copied two chapters of hadith. Thinking that he had the notes with him he asked the Muhadith if he would allow him to read out these two chapters so that he may 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 Muhadith realized what he was doing he rebuked Imam Tirmizi (R.A.) saying: "Have you no shame, Why are you wasting my time." Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) assured him that he had committed all the ahadith to memory. The Muhadith was not convinced, even though he recited all the Ahadith from memory. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) requested him to recite to him some other Ahadith. The Muhaddith recited 40 ahadith which Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) repeated without making a single error, thus showing his remarkable power of committing Ahadith to memory.

Another incident has been recorded by Hakeemul Ummat (R.A.) in his Al-Misk-us-Zaki, depicting the profound memory of Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.). He writes:

"Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) had lost his sight towards the latter portion of his life. Once whilst on a journey, at a certain point he bowed his head. When asked as to why he did this, he replied: "Is there not a tree here whose branches hang over in such a manner that it harms those who are passing by." They answered in the negative. He was quite shocked when he heard this as he distinctly remembered there being a tree and was worried as to whether his memory was failing him or not. He stopped the caravan immediately and asked his companions to enquire from the locals whether a tree had existed there or not. "If it is established that no tree existed then I will stop narrating the Hadith of Nabi [sallallahu alyhi wasallam] due to my weak memory." On inquiry it was shown to them that a tree had previously existed over there but due to it being a hindrance to travelers it was removed."

Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) had a large number of students from all over the world. The most famous amongst them were Haysam ibn Kulaib (R.A.), Abul Abbaas (R.A.) and Muhammed ibn Ahmed (R.A.) Shah Abdul Aziz (R.A.) describes Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) 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 Taimiya (R.A.) and Shah Waliullah (R.A.), Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) was an independent Jurist (Mujtahid). Hazrat Moulana Anwar Shah Kashmiri (R.A.) is of the opinion that he was a Shafi.

In the year 279 A.H. in a village called Bawag at the ripe age of 70 , Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) left this temporary abode for the ever lasting life of the hereafter. May Allah Ta'ala fill his Qabar with Noor. Aameen. The enormity of his sacrifices and the extent to which he served Deen can never be fully comprehended.

Many books of hadith were compiled before Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) decided to compile His Al-Jami. Dawood Tayalisi (R.A.) and Ahmed ibn Hambal (R.A.) had compiled books consisting of both authentic and weak Ahadith. Later Imaam Bukhari (R.A.) compiled his Sahih Bukhari and omitted all weak narrations from it. His main objective was to derive masail / laws from the relevant Ahadith. Later Muslim (R.A.) compiled his book concentrating mainly on the Isnaad (different chain of narrators). Hazrat Imaam Nasai's aim was to mention the discrepancies of the hadith whilst Abu Dawood (R.A.) prepared such a book which became the basis for the Fuqaha. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) had combined the styles of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood and Nasai (R.A.) by mentioning the discrepancies regarding the narrators and also making his compilation a basis for the Jurists.

The Special characteristics of Jaami ut Tirmizi

1. It is a Sunan and a Jami.
2. Only 83 Ahadith are repeated.
3. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) omits the major portion of the hadith and only mentions that part which is relevant to the heading. (title)
4. After mentioning a hadith he classifies it i.e. whether it is authentic or weak, e.t.c.
5. 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.
6. One hadith in Tirmizi Shareef is a sulaasiyaat i.e. the transmitters of the hadith between Imaam Tirmizi(R.A.) and Nabi (Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam) are only three.
7. Every hadith in Tirmizi Shareef is "Ma'mool bihi" (practised upon by the jurists.)

8. He explains the different mazahibs together with their proofs. 9. He gives an explanation to all difficult Ahadith. 10. His book has been set out in an excellent sequence, hence to look for a hadith is very easy. 11. There is no fabricated hadith in the entire book.

The conditions of Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) in the selection of hadith

According to the commentators of Al-Jami Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) maintained the following conditions throughout the compilation of his book.

1. He never narrated hadith from those who fabricated hadith. 2. Allama Tahir Muqaddisi (R.A.) mentions that Jaami ut Tirmizi contains four types of hadith

[1] Those ahadith that conform with the conditions of Bukhari and Muslim (R.A.).

[2] Those ahadith that conform with the conditions of Abu Dawood and Nasai (R.A.).

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

[4] Those weak Ahadith that some Fuqaha have relied on.

3. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) accepts a hadith which is narrated with the word "a'n" provided both the narrators are contemporaries. 4. After mentioning a weak hadith, he explains the state of its weakness. 5. A Mursal Hadith is accepted by Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) when it is supported by a chain of narrators which is not broken.

The status of Al-Jami-ut-Tirmizi among the 6 authentic books of hadith. Al Jami-ut-Tirmizi has been categorized as fifth amongst the 6 most authentic books of hadith. According to the most preferred opinion, Bukhari Shareef enjoys the highest status, followed by Muslim, Abu Dawood, Nasai, Tirmizi and Ibn Maja respectively. Haji Khalifa in Al Kashf-uz-Zunoon has categorised Tirmizi in third position. Allama Zahabi (R.A.) has written that Tirmizi 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.

An introduction to the commentaries of Tirmizi

{1.} 'A'ridat-ul-Ahwazi

An Arabic compilation of Qazi Abu Bakr ibn Arabi (R.A.) in 7 volumes.

{2} Qut-ul Mughtazi

Compiled by Jalaal ud Deen Suyuti (R.A.).

{3} Tuhfat-ul Ahwazi

Written by Sheikh Abdur Rahmaan Mubaarak Puri (R.A.) in 10 volumes. He is very critical against the Ahnaaf.

{4} Kaukab-ud-Durri

A collection of the lectures of Hazrat Moulana Gangohi (R.A.) by Mol. Yahya (R.A.). Sheikhul Hadith Hazrat Moulana Zakariyya (R.A.) later added his own footnotes and had the kitaab printed in India. This commentary is excellent for understanding the words of hadith.

{5} Al 'Arf ush Shazi

A compilation of the discourses of Hazrat Moulana Anwar Shah Kashmiri

(R.A.) by one of his students Moulana Chiraagh Mohammed (R.A.)

{6} Ma'rif us Sunan

This commentay was written by Hazrat Moulana Yusuf Binnawri (R.A.) in 6 volumes. However this commentary is incomplete and ends at the chapter of Haj.

{7} Imaam Tirmizi wal muwazanatu bayna Jami'ihl wa bayn Saheehain

Written by Sheikh Noor ud deen A'ttaar comparing Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) Jami to Bukhari and Muslim.

{8} Dars Tirmizi

A compilation of the lectures of Hazrat Mufti Taqi Uthmaani (D.B.) by Moulana Rashid Ashraf Saifi (D.B.). He deals with many contemporary issues which were not dealt with before.

{9} Taqreer Tirmizi

An extremely concise commentary written by Sheikh ul Hind (R.A.) dealing with the "Mukhtalaf fi Masail". This commentary is found at the begining of the Tirmizi itself.

{10} Al Misk-uz Zaki

This is a short compilation by Hazrat Moulana Thanwi (R.A.) dealing mainly with the explanation of the ahadith.

The Terminology of Imam Tirmizi (r.a.)

The classification of hadith was firmly established by Ali ibn Madini (R.A.) and later by his student Imaam Bukhari (R.A.). However Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) was the first Imaam to base his book on these classifications.

Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) classifies most of the Ahadith and mentions its reliability. Altogether Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) uses 9 different terminologies.

1.) SAHEEH:

That hadith wherein each reporter must be trustworthy, he must have the power of retention and the sanad of the hadith must go back to Nabi (sallallahu alyhi wasallam) without any interruption, it must agree with those of other reliable reporters and there should be no hidden defect in the matan or the sanad. N.B. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) does not consider it a prerequisite that a Saheeh Hadith must have several chains of narrators.

2.) HASAN:

That hadith which does not contain a reporter accused of lying, it is not shaaz and the hadith has been reported through more than one sanad.

3.) DAEEF:

Such a hadith wherein the narrators are not trustworthy, or they don't possess the ability of retaining, or there is a break in the chain of narrators, or the hadith is Shaaz or Mu'alall.

4.) GHAREEB:

According to Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) a hadith is classified Ghareeb for one of the following reasons..

- (a) It is narrated from one chain only.
- (b) There is some addition in the text.

(c) It is narrated through various chains of transmitters but having within one of its chains an addition in the sanad.

5.) HASANUN GHAREEBUN:

These two can be combined. i.e. Hasan refers to the uprighteousness of the narrators whilst ghareeb implies that he is alone in transmitting the hadith.

6.) SAHEEHUN GHAREEBUN:

This term implies that the hadith is authentic but there is only one sanad.

7.) HASANUN SAHEEHUN GHAREEBUN:

This hadith is hasan since it has several chains of transmitters, it is saheeh as the chains are all authentic and it is ghareeb in the words that Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) narrated.

8.) HASANUN SAHEEHUN:

This term has caused much confusion amongst the Muhadditheen since hasan is lower in rank than Saheeh. While Saheeh indicates to the excellent retention power of a narrator, Hasan indicates to a deficiency in this regard hence it seems that both are opposites and is not possible to reconcile. The mutaqaddimeen have given many explanations to this:

[1] Ibn Hajar (R.A.) has mentioned that the word "aw" is omitted hence the hadith will be either hasan or Saheeh. [2] Ibn Salaah (R.A.) is of the opinion that when a hadith is reported with two sanads, one should be considered as Hasan and the other as Saheeh. [3] Ibn Katheer (R.A.) says that Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) has made up a new term which implies the hadith to be higher than Hasan but lower than Saheeh. [4] Ibn Daqeeq ul Eid (R.A.) is of this opinion that Saheeh and Hasan are not opposites. Rather they belong to the same category. However Hasan will be considered as inferior to Saheeh hence they both can be combined. This opinion has been given most preference by the Muhadditheen.

CONCLUSION

By the third century A.H. a number of collections on hadith were compiled. Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) was one of those scholars who contributed greatly towards this field of hadith. In this modern age the world at large is deeply indebted to Imaam Tirmizi (R.A.) for his compilation of hadith. May Allah Ta'ala make it

possible for all of us to benefit tremendously from this priceless collection of hadith. Aameen.