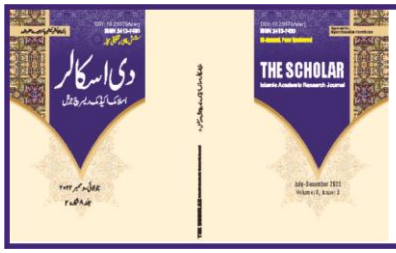

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WOMEN IN HADITH: FEMALE NARRATORS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Masood Ahmed

ABSTRACT:

The paper is an investigation into an important but neglected role of Islamic scholars: women as transmitters and preservers of Hadith, or recorded words and practice of Prophet Muhammad, in the Islamic academic tradition. Confronting the unwarranted view that Islamic scholarship has been traditionally the preserve of men, it demonstrates how Prophetic and medieval women were active reporters, teachers and transmitters of Hadith with accepted scholarly standards of integrity. Important figures including ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr. The paper appeals to classical biographical dictionaries and academic publications in showing the existence and presence of women in the formal learning institutions, transmission licenses ((ijāzahs) they issued and how they continued to have their impacts in key cities of Islam. Although visibility of female Hadith scholars greatly reduced following the 15th century with changes in social and political tides and colonial influence, current revivals opened the doors to renewed academic and communal awareness and intellectual interest in female Hadith scholars. The paper promotes the idea of reinstatement of these contributions in the study of Islamic education and scholarship, honorable legacy of women always present and respected in the Islamic intellectual community as central and reliable relayers.

KEYWORDS: Hadith, Female Scholars, Transmission, Biographical Dictionaries, Ijazah, Islamic Scholarship

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I. Introduction:

Standing as one of the pillars of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, ethics, and socio-culture, the Hadith literature has an immense standing. With Hadith serving as the second most authoritative source of Islamic jurisprudence after the Qur'an, it encompasses the documented statements, practices, and silent consents of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Hadith serves as an interpretive and legislative source of Islamic law. The scholarly tradition that emerged due to its compilation, preservation, and rigorous transmission methods that focused on isnads, as well as the character of the transmitter, and stringent authenticity standards is remarkable. Within this intricate scholarly tradition, the role of narrators transformed from a technical position to an intellectual one. The narration's authenticity was bound to its narrators' credibility. Hadith scholarship required high levels of devotion, precision, memorization, and moral character from male and female narrators, thanks to the nature of the discipline.[1]

Alongside the soaring male scholarship visibility in the Islamic history, women were not sidelined in the transmission of Hadith. Women were some of the earliest companions of the Prophet, memorizing and narrating his teachings. One of the earliest and most prolific narrators, ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr, has been and continues to be cited as one of the earliest and most influential figures in Islamic jurisprudence.

However, more recently, modern views caused by cultural restrictions or colonial critiques have greatly changed the perspective of women's roles in the Hadith sciences. Many people still believe that Islamic scholarship has

[1] Jonathan A.C. Brown, Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 45.

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been, to a great extent, dominated by men, and that the contribution of women, in comparison, was only insignificant. This misconception arises from both rigid traditionalism and simplistic Orientalism, which ignores the women's scholarship in the Islamic thought history.

Women actively participated in the educational circles by not only narrating the Hadiths, but also teaching them, giving fatwas, and engaging in the public transmission sessions. Their narrations were included in canonical Hadith collections alongside women's names in biographical dictionaries which were documented with great esteem. Some of the greatest scholars such as Imām Mālik, Imām al-Shāfiʿī, and al-Bukhārī accepted Hadiths from female narrators. Additionally, women were frequently commended for their accuracy and authenticity, with some being viewed as more reliable than their male peers. Other than receive knowledge, women actively generated and transmitted knowledge in Islamic centers such as Medina and Kufa and later during civilization in Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo. To argue that women "became" transformed through the transmission, authentication, and preservation of the Hadith, is to field that they greatly and directly influenced the Islamic intellectual tradition. The study seeks to elucidate the roles played by female Hadith transmitters in the Prophetic, classical, and medieval periods using a variety of primary and secondary sources, including biographical dictionaries, and modern scholarly works. The study aims to reorient the existing narratives of authority and Islamic patriarchy, in the Islamic authority, by incretion the attention given to these silenced women scholars once more in history to give more integral understanding of their contributions to the Islamic intellectual histology and tessellation.

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II. Women in the Prophetic Age:

The place of women in the early Islamic society was not just limited to the domestic arena or at the fringe of piety, but their position in the intellectual, legal and spiritual of the emerging Muslim community went deep down. The Prophetic age (610–632 CE)) lends significant support to the view that women were actively involved in the collection and distribution of knowledge and more so as regards the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Contrary to the passive onlookers, women of this early stage not only were direct witnesses of actions of the Prophet, but were also involved into legal reasoning and theological exegesis. This led to the possibility that women might engage in religious scholarship as it allowed them to approach the household of the Prophet and be dedicated to receiving knowledge.

One of the most notable women in this respect is ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr She is considered as among the most abundant Hadith reporters since she reported Hadith over 2,200 times. Āʾisha was quite well suited to play a role in the preservation of the Prophetic tradition because of her closeness to Prophet Muhammad, her intellectual ability. Her opinions were sought by senior male companions in matters of ritual purity, inheritance and she asserted herself in correcting mistaken interpretations even those, advanced by leading companions. She was a jurist herself (faqīha), in her own right, which is why her narrations often dealt with legal and ethical nuances.[2]

What was methodologically rigorous in Āʾisha was her Hadith transmission. She demanded accuracy and verification of narrations, and was publicly

[2] Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), 123.

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known to deny reports that were not well contextualised or were not aligning to the values of the Quran. This way, she defended the intellectual integrity of Islamic jurisprudence and claimed the relevance of rational thinking in the assessment of Hadiths.

Other wives of the Prophet did equally great contributions to the corpus of Hadith. Another notable wife of the Prophet Umm Salama recorded nearly 400 Hadiths and she is especially known for her impeccable understanding when it comes to the problems of women and family life. She served as an important consultant during the major historical incidents like the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, where her advice directly affected the line of strategy used by the Prophet. She addresses issues of divorce, menstruation, prayer and the spiritual position of women based on her thorough knowledge of Islamic laws and the social morals.

Another influential figure was Hafsa bint ʿUmar (daughter of the second Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and wife of the Prophet). Her hadith narrations are fewer, but she contributed much to the preservation of the Quran. Her copy of the manuscript of the Quran was the one that was used as reference during the compilation under caliph Uthman. The position that she holds illustrates the confidence Iranians have in women with regards to the guarding of sacred knowledge and the intervalidity of Quranic and Hadith sciences.

Other women companions like Asma bint Abi Bakr, Umm Ataiyya al-Ansariyaand the Umm Waraqah were not the only wives of the Prophet who engaged in the transmission of Hadith. These women formed a part of the community that would often appear in social events, military campaigns as well as in the religious ceremonies which allowed them to be the representatives who could report firsthand about the activities of the Prophet and his teachings. Their accounts, which have been passed down on the

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larger Hadith, served to form practice in Islamic law and worship.

The influence of these narrators was not narrowed to their own generation only. Their chains (isnads) became the foundation of Hadith compilations and later generations of Muslim scholars used them. Their reports were similarly treated with strong caution just like those of their male contemporaries, and they were listed among the most authentic reporters in the biographical dictionaries. Such parity in intellectual assessment disputes any idea that Islamic tradition naturally sidelined female scholars during its early centuries.

So, the Prophetic age can be taken as the example witnessing the full involvement of women in the transmission and preservation of the Sunnah. The fact that the Prophet not only permitted but positively promoted the educational aspect, but also allowed women and the societal acceptance of women into scholarcic life created a precedent of normative aspect regarding the role of women in the production of Islamic knowledge- a precedence that would reverberate through future Hadith scholars.

III. The Early Islamic Period Female Hadith Narrators:

The widespread Islamic scholarship that extended throughout the rest of the Muslim world was an early feature of the Islamic period which came after the physical passing of the Prophet, and especially during the era of the Tābiʿūn (generation following the Companions). In this period of intellectual renewal, women continued to be involved with and respected in the relay of Hadith. Following the work of the female Companions, their students and disciples propagated and maintained the sayings of the Prophet and this fact speaks of continuation of scholarly work of women as it is evidenced by their existence in teacher-pupil (student) and judicial settings in the major centres of Islamic civilisation, Medina, Kufa, Mecca and later

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Basra and Damascus.[3]

In Medina, the origin of the scholarly eminence that it enjoyed until the end of the first centuries of Islam, moons of hadith were not uncommon to women. These lessons took place in the mosques, private houses and in academic conventions with women and men studying with bona fide minds with many of them being women. One of the best examples of the Tābiʿūn was ʿAmra bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. One of the most trusted of transmitters of the Hadiths of her teacher was a student of Āʾisha who was Amra. Her narrations were often quoted by the great scholars like Imam Malik Ibn Anas, the founder of Malik school of jurisprudence. She was also acute in judgment and a woman of sweet memory which led to being admired among her peers and male jurists regularly tried to seek her advice on complicated legal problems.[4]

In Kufa, Iraq... a crucible of scholarship, female transmitters were responsible for disseminating Hadith (oral traditions). If woman were not so rigid, both the oral and written modes of transmission among Kufa would have been totally different! In the Kufa school, with Fatima bint al-Mundhir a key Tābiʿiyya of Medina who later taught in the city She learned over 2,210 Hadiths during her time of study from some sheikhs like Asma bint Abi Bakr and she was a narrator of the Hadiths that can be found in main collections like Sahih al-Bukhari Her narrations have great importance regarding Islamic rituals as well as ethical conduct. [5]

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[3] Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45.
[4] Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat*, 167.
[5] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1957), vol. 12, 231.

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Mecca was a city that focused on spiritual and intellectual activities that developed an intellectual academic environment where women participated in Hadith studies. Widespread transmission opportunities were created by the pilgrimage traffic that brought scholars into the city across a large area. In Mecca, even such women as Umm al-Dardāʾ al-Ṣughrā was recognized by people because of her narrations and teaching in the mosque. Top male jurists and Hadith collectors used to attend her lectures. She was a teacher in Damascus and Jerusalem and her pupils were traditionists and qadis. The fact that she could have both male and female students of various regions was the testimony to the respect that female Hadith authorities enjoyed at the time.[6]

The admiration that male scholars always had towards their female instructors was also a highlight of this period. Such scholars as Imam al-Shafi and Imam AH mad ibn Hanbal documented Hadiths of women thus giving credit to women and their knowledge. As written by biographical dictionaries like Tabaqāt Ibn Saʿd and Tahdhīb al-Kamāl, there are extensive accounts of men getting Ijāzah (transmission licences) given by women. Such conduct countermands subsequent narratives that downplayed female roles in the Hadith sciences because it denotes the legitimate acknowledgment of female authority within Hadith sciences. Such women were not, however, singular, exceptional examples without cultural parallels but part of the academic culture as a whole during early Islam.[7]

However, women's involvement in the realm of Hadith recitation during this formative phase was far from taking place in a vacuum. Social norms en gender dynamics were visible in how knowledge was received en shared.

[6] Sayeed, Women and the Transmission, 89.
[7] Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, ed. E. Sachau (Leiden: Brill, 1904), vol. 8, 345.

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Although women normally taught from behind a curtain, or in gender-segregated spaces, this did not preclude their having an influence on the sciences. If anything, by reinforcing that modesty protocol facilitated the view of them being upstanding people and in turn enhanced the confident with which people could listen to them. Women were also uniquely situated in those narratives near domestic spheres where they had direct access to Prophetic practice, especially when it related to matters of ritual purity, marriage and menstruation, buIuu and sha'worthy liugness: areas of life and law that are central to day-to-day Muslim duties as well.

Such scholarly engagement had a cumulative impact, contributing to the institutionalization of women in Islamic knowledge networks. A history of female Hadith scholars during the formative period of Sunni orthodoxy who were known for their public teaching, legal scholarship and in many cases transmitting comprehensive sets of Hadith. Their isnads, invariably well-preserved and frequently so by multiple (tawatur) chains became the cornerstone of many canonical Hadith compilations in the centuries that followed. So, rather than just aping the words of male scholars, these women were in fact pivotal figures in defining Islamic tradition as a whole: its methodologies, ethics and contents.

IV. Biographical works and biographical dictionaries:

The history and authentication of Hadith in the religious tradition of Islam required such biographical and recordkeeping methodologies. Some of the tools utilized consisted of biographical dictionaries (*kutub al-rijāl*) and Hadith collections, the backbone of establishing the authenticity of a male or a female reporter. The dictionaries have recorded the whole existence of life, intellectual and scholarly integrity, geographic mobility and intellectual

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product of thousands of transmitters throughout the centuries. Although in subsequent historical sources most of these scholarship women were rendered invisible based on gender, the field of Hadith was well enough documented to recontextualize their contributions.[8]

The *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* by Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH/1341 CE) lists more than 8,000 reporters of Hadith. The methodology followed by Al-Mizzī was one of cross-referencing which indicated similarities and differences in the different biographical accounts so as to have an analytical account of each of the narrators in question. In its entries, one is to find the female narrators like Karīma bint Aḥmad al-Marwaziyya who was a highly respected transmitter of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and taught the text to several leading scholars of her period. Her transmission was considered reliable and cautious and her reports are quoted with complete assurance later on in other collections. [9]

In the same way, the Tabaqāt al-Kubrā of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230 AH/845 CE) can provide one of the first comprehensive efforts to list female reporters. His contribution also encompasses the various work entitled, Tabaqāt al-Nisāʾ, a work containing biographical sketches of the Women who were among the Companions, Tābiʿāt, and others afterwards. Ibn Sa ad does not just record the detail of their transmission of Hadith but also their legal dictums, public activities and the relations they had with male scholars. The fact that such female scholars as Umm al-Dardāʾ, Fatima bint al-Mundhir, and

[8] Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 66.

[9] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1957), vol. 12, 231.

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ʿĀmra bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān were already included indicates how widespread the female scholastic authority was in early Islam.[10]

Another very important contribution is that of *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ* by al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH/1348 CE), a monumental biographical encyclopaedia that combines historical narrative with analytical aspects of Hadith. Al-Dhahabī, though sometimes conservative, gives excellent entries of female scholars of Hadith who were customary in the scholastic tradition (especially those who formed part of the *isnāds*). His recognition of Karīma al-Marwaziyya, like many of his other testimonies to women, falls under his praise of her piousness memorization and reliability, a testament that chances on symmetry with that of his testimonies granted to elite male scholars.[11]

Such biographical dictionaries adhered to rigor of traits in assessing the narrators by using the same standards between women and men. The main ones were (a) soundness of character and scrupulousness (*ʿadālah*), (b) accuracy of the memory (ḍabṭ); (c) coherence of the flow and text (*ittiṣāl*); and (d) purity of the tradition, positive freedom of defamation (*ʿillah*). Under such rubrics, female scholars were judged without the lower benchmark Actually, as reported by some scholars like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, [12] fabrication of Hadith since they were naturally more conservative in religious issues, and they had less exposure to politically

[10] Ibn Saʿd, *Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, ed. E. Sachau (Leiden: Brill, 1904), vol. 8, 345.

[11] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1981), vol. 19, 97–101.

[12] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah fī ʿIlm al-Riwāyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1972), 164.

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sensitive scholarly jurisdiction

The equality in evaluation is strongly present in looking at male and female narrators in these sources. To mention a few, whereas a male narrator may be rated as weak (*ḍaʿīf*) due to inconsistency in memory, the same rating is also adopted in the entry of female narrators with the same shortcoming. Women such as Fāṭima al-Juzdāniyya and Zaynab bint al-Kamāl were commonly referred to as thiqa (trustworthy), ḥāfiẓa (memorizer) and ʿālimah (scholar) as well. Consistency of this evaluation refutes the idea that the female contributions to scholarship were even artificially advanced or evaluated in a lenient way because of their gender.[13]

But subsequent histories were frequently written in such a way as not to indicate their former eminence as in these dictionaries. As the patriarchate norms became further established in the medieval Islamic society, the treatment of female transmitters in the popular retellings and curricular decreased. However, the original biographical works are still extant and they have meticulously listed women who had passed *ijāzāt* (certificate of transmission), and women who had taught in mosques and attended scholarly councils. Contemporary scholars such as Mohammad Akram Nadwi have painstakingly culled more than 9,000 such profiles out of the archives documenting the immense extent of women participation in Hadith studies over the centuries. [14]

What is more, these writings reflect fluidity of the gendered borders within the early Islamic scholarship. No wonder the male scholars used to travel

[13] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission*, 74.

[14]Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), 44.

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long distances to have Hadith be taught to them by great women teachers. Chains of narrator by scholars such al-Samʿānī, Ibn ʿAsākir, and al-Mundhirī, and al-Mundhir are no exception and women are included in those chains of narration because culture valued knowledge over the gender-based restriction. In other instances, these women were the only reporters of certain Hadiths, and conveyed rare, or otherwise extinct, Prophetic traditions.[15]

Therefore, the Hadith literature as preserved in the traditional sources (i.e., Tahdhīb al-Kamāl, Tabaqāt Ibn Saʿd, and *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*) provides abundant and never leveraged source with regard to restoring the past record of females in Islamic learning. It is not accidental or peripheral that they were included in it. These dictionaries prove that women were no secondary figures in the formation of the Hadith canon or the process of transmission of Islamic tradition. New access to these sources in contemporary times means an even more inclusive and historically comprehensive contribution in Islamic intellectual history.

V. Women in Teaching and Scholarship of Hadith during the medieval period:

With the medieval expansion of Islamic civilization (around 10th15th century CE), religious and scholarly centers like Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo and Jerusalem became the centers of religious, intellectual and educational activity. Quite contrary to current postulations, these cities were not male only realms of study. Female Hadith scholars were frequently at the theoretical helm meaning that the said intellectuals were a part of the

[15] Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 152.

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institutional learning culture that had also existed during the time. They participated in large scholarly institutions, such as the schools, mosques, and madrasas, and taught Hadith to students, succeeding generations of them, some of the greatest male scholars in the history of Islam.[16]

Cities such as Damascus and Baghdad were most conducive to admit women scholars. The Umayyad Mosque was one of the educational grounds where male and female scholars even learnt within Damascus. . Karīma bint Aḥmad al-Marwaziyya (d. 463 AH/1070 CE) in Mecca but who had influence as far away as Baghdad was one of the most respected transmitters of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. She tutored many male students who travelled major distances in order to study with her. Her transmission of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī is thought to be one of the most accurate, and her isnād can be found in several trusted versions of the text.[17]

Fāṭima bint Saʿd al-Khayr (d. 600 AH/1204 CE) is another illustrious example since she went on many journeys to study and took students of her own to cities like Isfahan, Aleppo, and Baghdad. Her name is found in the chains of narrators of some of the important Hadiths collections. She taught in other mosques and was recognized as such who was respectfully studied and her name was ususued by other scholars including male traditionists which she was included in their isnād ad chains with full appreciation of her

[16] Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 88.

[17]Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1957), vol. 12, 231.

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scholarly role. [18]

These women were not on the periphery but these women were very much positioned in the institutionalised academic life of that era. They also taught in established academic institutions and granted *ijāzahs* (certificates of authority) to their students, or others who may have studied their work, as a means of authorizing their validation of a specific text. The *ijāzah* was not in name only; it denoted academic permission through both knowledge and moral integrity. The certificates that were issued by women were as valid as those issued by their male counterparts. Zaynab bint al-Kamāl (d. 740 AH/1339 CE) was a scholar who knew the study of Hadith well and issued more than 1,000 *ijāzahs* to students all over the Islamic world, including other future jurist, Hadith collectors, and educators.[19]

One of the strongest points proving the academic integrity of the female transmitters is the existence of the chains of their narrations (*isnāds*). The authenticity of a Hadith is often based on the chain of trustworthy reporters and women are mentioned in these chains under the term *thiqa* (trustworthy) and *ḥāfiẓa* (memorizers) in numerous occasions. Scholars such as Ibn ʿAsākir, al-Samʿānī, and al- Mundhirī did not hesitate to include some women in their isnads with respectability and no qualification attached to them.[20]

What is most interesting is how often men scholars lauded their female

[18] Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), 211.

[19] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission*, 101.

[20] Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 134.

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teachers in biographical writings. For example, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī calls the ladies who sent him Hadith models of piety and accuracy. In Muʿjam al-Shuyūkh, he talks about how he learned from women who were not only great teachers but also great examples of how to be devout. Al-Dhahabī, also, in *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, characterizes women teachers in terms of their endowed memory and their trustworthiness in transmission. These testimonies are not anecdotal they lie in a powerful culture of scholarly appraisal under which ethical and technical standards measured narrators, irrespective of gender.[21]

Even the rigorous critiques that were foundational to Hadith authentication were applied equitably. If a female narrator had weak memory or questionable isnād links, she was assessed accordingly. Yet those who excelled, like Karīma al-Marwaziyya and Fāṭima al-Juzdāniyya, were elevated to the same ranks as leading male traditionists. The objective standards of narrator authentication—ʿadālah (uprightness), ḍabṭ (precision), and ittiṣāl (continuity)—created a merit-based scholarly ecosystem in which women could thrive. Their presence in the transmission of key texts like Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, and al-Muwaṭṭaʾ attests to the depth of their engagement and the high standards they upheld. [22]

Moreover, the relocations that women academicians in the medieval world got involved in show how seriously they took their studies as well as the support they had within the community. There were male relatives or

[21] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1981), vol. 19, 98.

[22] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah fī ʿIlm al-Riwāyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1972), 165.

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maḥrams that some traveled with, and they engaged in such things as riḥla (scholarly journeys) throughout the Islamic heartlands-Andalusia to Central Asia. These travels do not only enlarged their knowledge but also helped in spreading Hadith sciences to different regions. The fact that these female teachers could be found in other cities such as Cairo, Nishapur, and Jerusalem reveals the pan Islamic reach of their teaching. [23]

The system of ijāzah contributed more towards formalizing female scholarship in education in particular The ijāzah of a female teacher was not considered any lesser or weaker; actually he/she was a serious student who would also seek a female teacher and sometimes even preferred, because of the barakah (spiritual blessing) of pious and learned women. In most instances, male scholars would go out of their way in order to seek ijāzah of women like Zaynab bint al-Kamāl and ʿĀʾisha bint Muḥammad al-Miṣriyya. Through this system, women acquired the authority to officially certify the transmission of Hadith and thus this system guaranteed the continuity and authenticity of Islamic knowledge base.[24]

Medieval evidence corroborates more typical free-wheeling Hadith transmission and suggest that women were not merely accidental participants in the preservation of Islamic knowledge, but rather integral to the structure and institutionalization of Islamic intellectual life. It illustrates that women played an integral role in shaping the Hadith tradition as proved by their enablement of education, participation in scholarly travel, issuance of ijāzahs and preservation of isnāds. To this point within any modern-day story that misses out on mentioning this contribution is to have given a

[23]Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat*, 225.

[24] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission*, 103.

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narrative about Muslims that is historically incomplete, and has done an injustice against the rich Islamic scholarly legacy.

VI. Decline and Marginalization of Female Scholars:

Although the history of female Hadith scholars is relived with considerable triumph in the formative and medieval centuries of Islamic history, the post-15th-century centuries witnessed a prominent diminution in the presence and prominence of female Hadith scholars once again. This was not motivated by religious causes but by changing political, social, and intellectual milieu that increasingly pushed women out of the state (public) position of religious knowledge transfer. A number of historical factors came together to limit women to formal education and other platforms of religious scholarship thus changing the course of female involvement in the intellectual life of Islam.[25]

Institutional and infrastructural breakdown which led to regionalism with the fragmentation of Islamic political unity after the Mongol invasions and sack of Baghdad 1258 CE, undermined the institutional foundations which had formerly united scholars in dialogue and participation in culture especially on the parts of women. Increased instability in fact led to a turn-inward by many scholarly foundational institutions which became more conservative with respect to their worldview to a greater extent. In the case of religious learning, it would come under tighter regulation and focus less on an active engagement of interpretation and much more on legal conformity and rote learning. Women were deprived of a general possibility of participating in scholarly activity in the programs of the formalization

[25] Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 114.

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and centralization of publicly established religious power dominated by hierarchical clerical structures. [26]

Also, during the same era, there was a new focus on closing the gap between women and domestic careers within a number of Islamic cultures that only limited access to education. Whereas informal learning was still being practiced in certain families, the wane of female teachers in formal institutions stalled the intergenerational chain of female scholarly agency. Male scholars who in the past had proudly named their female teachers and mentors in their isnads came to stop doing so as these relationships grew hard to come by or socially restrictive. The same tendency is seen in the later versions of *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* and *al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*, where the number of women diminishes greatly as a sign of not only historiographical but also of sociopolitical shift.[27]

All this was exacerbated by the spread of European colonialism over most of the Muslim world during the 18th century and afterward. In many cases, colonial administrators and scholars leaning on orientalists would distort historical narrations of Islamic societies asserting they were oppressed to women, chiefly by focusing on veiling and isolation practices at the expense of writing the legacy of women scholars. Such misrepresentations made their way back to the self-perceptions of Muslims, at least insofar as elites

[26] Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 156.

[27] Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*, ed. Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Ḥaqqī (Beirut: Dār Ihyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1952), vol. 4, 250; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1986), vol. 35, 125.

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in colonized societies emulated Western models of education and gender relations. Government policies of colonization in most instances directly undermined the traditional mode of education including the *madāris* and learning circles in the mosques that women had benefited theretofore.[28]

This transferred to influencing curricula within Muslim seminaries and universities also as they were founded on a new basis. Although Muslim societies attempted to rediscover intellectual and religious traditions during the post-colonial period, formal programs and literature neglected to mention the role of female scholars of Hadith. Classical literature created by women or handed down by women received less attention, a classical source of the life of women such as a biographical dictionary was seen as a secondary source instead of a first piece to arrive at. Thus the students and scholars who have grown up over several generations are barely aware or unaware that it was primarily women that could play a major role in the preservation as well as the transmission of Hadith. Even more classical work such as *Tārīkh Baghdād* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and *Tārīkh Dimashq* by Ibn ʿAsākir both of which preserved names of women scholars was not put to use to this end.[29]

It is the later context of contemporary socio-political realities that further support modern disregard of this legacy. Structural problems of access to

[28] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 152–54.

[29] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), vol. 6, 279; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿUmar ibn Gharāma al-ʿAmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), vol. 69, 311.

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higher education by women, under-financing of study, and the inability of women to reach the scholarly establishment have persisted in most of the Muslim world to ensure that women continue to be marginalized in religious discourse. Though in recent decades their work has been experiencing revived interest, especially as performed by researchers such as scholar Mohammad Akram Nadwi, who enumerated more than 9,000 female Hadith scholars, it has not yet been properly incorporated into mainstream education and religion.[30]

This marginalization has a historical explanation, which is necessary to rediscover a better-balanced view of Islamic scholarly tradition. It was not outlawed by theology; instead, certain factors, including political unravelling, a patriarchal social change in the society, as well as colonial epistemologies, caused this decline. Restoring the heritage of female Hadith scholars is not, thus, solely a question of historical rectification but a badly needed maneuver on the way to a more comprehensive and inclusive treatment of Islamic intellectual tradition.

VII. Modern Rediscoveries and Reconstruction:

The history of female Hadith scholars has seen a major upsurge in the past few decades due to revisit of the academic interest, online availability of traditional texts, as well as new curiosity among a large part of the population towards the Islamic tradition. Such initiatives have allowed scholars to revisit the role of women that have been retained in early biographical dictionaries and Hadith collections, neglect of which in

[30] Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), 253.

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contemporary curricula has long been a problem.[31]

One of the pillars of such a revival is the reversion to primary Islamic sources, including Tabaqāt al-Kubrā by Ibn Saʿd, Tārīkh Baghdād by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, and Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalā' by al-Dhahabī.). These manuscripts document several dozen famous female Hadith reporters that the male non-contemporaries trusted. As an example, one of the first foremost authorities al-Khaṭīb cites on Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī is Karīma bint Aḥmad al-Marwaziyya, and her isnad was repeated in numerous later recensions of the text. By the same token, Zaynab bint al-Kamāl of Tārīkh Dimashq gave out hundreds of ijāzāt and educated scholars who become major scholars in their own right. [32]

The exploration of these early works has resulted in the re-discovery of these women due to digital access to such collections on websites and archives such as Al-Maktaba al-Shāmila, Dār al-Manẓūmah, and institutional archives. Search of *al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl* by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* by al-Mizzī, and *al-Istiʿāb fī Maʿrifat al-Aṣḥāb* by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr reveals that female reporters regularly were stamped as thiqa (reliable) and incorporated into significant isn ad chains. In a similar manner, *Usd al-Ghābah* by Ibn al-Athīr contains much material on whether the female Companions were biographied on in the detail that man and woman may be described. Such rediscoveries have not just recontextualized

[31] Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 141.

[32] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), vol. 12, 441; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 69, 311.

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the historical reading but also did reestablish the isnad tradition as such among modern students and scholars.[33]

As a reaction, certain Islamic seminaries and contemporary, or modern *madāris* have reinstated classical ijāzah practices toward women, especially within the urban centers such as Cairo, Damascus, Istanbul, and Kuala Lumpur. Some of the modern ijazah chains go back to female figures cited in *Tabaqāt Ibn Saʿd* or *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ* or vindicate a tradition of female-certified to a Hadith. The traditional adab of hadith scholarly tradition is also stressed in these institutions and it shows continuity in medieval and contemporary practice.[34]

Particularly, this resurgence has spread outside the upper-echelon of academia. In regions with majority Muslim populations like Indonesia, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Hadith circles organised by women (*ḥalaqāt*) became spaces of both spiritual and academic revival with some circles attached to traditional scholars and others led by grassroots activists. Other modern female Hadith scholars do give ijazah to others after studying carefully a work like *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, or *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, returning to the role played by, e.g., Fāṭima bint Saʿd al-Khayr and Umm al-Dardāʾ.[35]

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[33] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*, vol. 4, 250; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 35, 125; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istiʿāb fī Maʿrifat al-Aṣḥāb*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), vol. 4, 190–195; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Maʿrifat al-Ṣaḥābah*, vol. 7, 115.

[34] Ibn Saʿd, *Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 8, 345; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, vol. 19, 97–101.

[35] Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in*

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Critical engagement has also taken the form of contemporary scholarly analysis with regard to the Islamic epistemology. Instead of applying some foreign ideological models, other scholars place emphasis on gender-balanced pedagogy as it is described in the Islamic tradition. As an illustration, researchers such as Asma Sayeed and Mohammad Akram Nadwi incorporate early literature in an attempt to prove how women were entwined in the sciences of Hadith. Even their work goes beyond reconstruction contrary, but their work wants an overhaul of the curricula so that posterity does not become victims of a one sided development.[36]

Most important of all is the revitalization to community level by way of education, translation and narration. Biographies of women Hadith scholars are now available today to both genders, at school. Such names as ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr, ʿĀmra bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and Karīma al-Marwaziyya are not only put in front of the reader as historic examples, but also as examples of spiritual guides. Through this, the revival is not only reestablishing the knowledge but also the confidence particularly in the Muslim women wanting to become reacquainted with the intellectual tradition of their faith. This rediscovery attests to the fact that the forgetting of women in Islam was never a doctrural act-it was a historical one. The process of rereading early Islamic literature, raising the voices of underrepresented figures, and incorporating their heritages into the contemporary Islamic education is a demonstration of the fact that the transmission of Hadith was and continues to be a collective effort by different communities and scholars.

VIII. Conclusion:

Islam (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), 211.

[36] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission*, 157.

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Other scholarly accounts of the history when approached scientifically with valid references to original classical works, leave very fewer doubts that women were not side-accompanyers in the Hadith transmission process, but at the forefront of the work of Hadith preservation, validation, and propagation. Females have been a part of Islamic intellectual tradition since the earliest companions of the Prophet ﷺ and throughout the medieval scholarship they issued *ijāzahs* and taught canonical works of Hadith in the great cities of Islam. Their names are also well-known in the foundational works on *ʿilm al-rijāl* and can be found in the isnad of the most authoritative Hadith collections in the Sunni school of Islam.

The researcher intended to prove this thesis of this study that women had been a dynamic agent and esteemed reciters of the Hadith sciences by revisiting the classical biographical dictionaries, authenticated isnad chains as well as documented teaching roles across centuries. Based on observing the active participation of women as students of tenth-century icon ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr, teachers of Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the 11 th century, or as the current flagship of ijazah programs, women scholars have projected piety, precision and have ascended to the top of the scientific tree.

Regardless of this heritage, the decidedly secondary status of their contributions even as late as the post-15th century post-history and as part of teaching the history and guiding pedagogy is reflective of a historical discontinuity, which has to rather sharply be corrected. The systematic removal of female names in records of ijāzah and classroom textbooks along with their erasure in discourse has not any Islamic basis, but it has to do with both sociopolitical fluctuations and colonial imposition and evolving patriarchal conventions. This highlights the desirability to reinstate feminine research to the mainstream of Islamic scholarship- both in academia and the various seminaries.

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To be able to achieve this, a number of things are required. First, Islamic seminaries and the contemporary higher education institutions should actively incorporate the biographies, narrations, and the methodological contributions of females Hadith scholars into their curricula. Second, the classical works on biography that involve female scholars should be translated and distributed massively. Third, these individuals should be used as role models of Islamic education and devotion through public awareness campaigns, documentaries and educational programs on the youth.

Finally, the last gap is on further academic studies on under examined manuscripts, isnad traditions and regional lineages of female transmission. The greater part of the heritage has not been edited or published, especially in personal and local archives. This will take the form of collaborative research between the male and female scholars who are working across linguistic, geographic, and sectarian borders to restore the balance that was apparent in the Islamic scholarly enterprise at its most vibrant periods.

It is not a matter of writing history when we recover the heritage of women in the transmission chain of Hadith but recovering it. The fact that women are among earliest and richest, verified, and multi-generational sources of Hadith sciences is a testament to the inclusivity and intellectual openness of the Islamic tradition once that tradition is studied in its original sources.