

A Critical Analysis of Muḥaddith Nūrī's Basis in the Authentication of Ḥadīth Sources

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Introduction

In the fourth benefit (fā'ida) of the conclusion to Wasā'il al-Shī'a, Shaykh Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, after listing the reliable sources he utilized in the compilation of Wasā'il al-Shī'a, explicitly states that although numerous other ḥadīth collections existed, he refrained from consulting them for certain reasons (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1409 AH, vol. 30, p. 152). Likewise, in the introduction to Mustadrak al-Wasā'il, Muḥaddith Nūrī categorizes the traditions he presents as a supplement to Wasā'il al-Shī'a into three groups: Traditions found in early sources that were not accessible to the author of Wasā'il; Traditions from books whose authors were unknown to the compiler of Wasā'il, leading him to disregard them; Traditions embedded within sources deemed reliable by the compiler of Wasā'il, which were omitted due to oversight or lack of awareness (Nūrī, 1408 AH, vol. 1, p. 60). In certain sections of the conclusion to Mustadrak al-Wasā'il, Muḥaddith Nūrī attempts to clarify the reasons for Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī's disregard of certain sources and to explain the criteria for accepting and narrating from these otherwise unreliable works. The present study is the result of scholarly investigation into the aforementioned sections of Mustadrak al-Wasā'il, aiming to uncover Muḥaddith Nūrī's epistemological foundations in assessing the authentication of ḥadīth sources.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted using a library-based approach and employed descriptive-analytical methods. To this end, all volumes of the Khātimah (Conclusion) of Mustadrak al-Wasā'il, as well as portions of the main volumes of Mustadrak al-Wasā'il and other works authored by Muḥaddith Nūrī, were examined. The research aimed, as far as possible, to extract and analyze the foundational principles underlying Muḥaddith Nūrī's criteria for validating ḥadīth sources.

Results and Findings

Muḥaddith Nūrī, in evaluating the authenticity of ḥadīth sources, considers various elements and factors (such as proving the popularity and credibility of the original source, the recognition of a book as one of the fundamental sources, the tradition of consensus among the companions from the mentioned books, the inclusion of the book's name in the permits granted by the scholars to their students, etc.). These can be divided into two sections: components of source authentication that either possess or lack sufficient scholarly credibility:

1. Components of Source Authentication with scientific Credibility:

Some of the elements that Muḥaddith Nūrī refers to in granting credibility to ḥadīth books were already considered to have strong scientific authenticity in the views of earlier ḥadīth researchers. There is ample evidence showing the special attention paid by the early scholars to these factors. These include: the popularity of the book, the integrity of the text free from content-related criticism, the tradition of consensus among the companions from the mentioned book, the inclusion of the book's name in the scientific permits (ijazāt) granted by scholars, and the attention given to the time of authorship relative to the author's intellectual integrity and steadfastness.

2. Components of Source Authentication Lacking Sufficient Scientific Credibility:

Among the components that Muḥaddith Nūrī refers to in establishing the credibility of certain books, there are some that seemingly lack sufficient scientific credibility. These include: reliance on the book solely based on the high status of its author, the credibility of books due to their frequent citation by earlier authors, the establishment of a book's credibility based on its mention by al-Najāshī and al-Ṭūsī, and the credibility of the foundational ḥadīth texts of the companions of the Imams.

Conclusion

An analysis of the criteria Muḥaddith Nūrī considered in assessing the credibility of ḥadīth sources reveals that some of the elements he employed—such as the fame of a book and the verification of its textual integrity from interpolation or exaggeration (i.e., content criticism)—hold scientific legitimacy. Among early scholars, al-Najāshī, and among later ones, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, emphasized the significance of a work's renown in establishing its authenticity. Content-based evaluation of ḥadīth sources has consistently been a subject of scientific attention, both in early and later periods. Scholars would critique the text of a tradition—weakening it due to perceived flaws or praising it for its strengths. Surviving statements from early authorities concerning the authentication of ḥadīth demonstrate that they paid close attention to the textual content and based their judgment of authenticity or weakness accordingly.

In contrast, other criteria—such as accepting a book solely on the basis of the author's credibility or regarding a source as reliable due to frequent citation by earlier scholars—do not possess the same level of academic rigor. These approaches sometimes contradict Muḥaddith Nūrī's own methodological principles. For instance, despite his emphasis on the textual scrutiny of ḥadīth sources, in certain cases he overlooks this criterion and accepts books purely on the basis of the author's reliability or the fact that earlier scholars frequently cited them, without subjecting their contents to critical analysis. However, the contents of some of these sources occasionally conflict with foundational Shi'i theological principles.

Keywords: Muḥaddith Nūrī, ḥadīth sources, bases, authentication.