

The Scholarly Gatherings of Nineteenth Century India: *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* and Reconsidering the Position of Hadiths

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between hadith and fiqh in nineteenth-century India through the work *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* by one of the leading Hanafi scholars of the period ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī. By analyzing al-Laknawī’s responses to the questions posed by Husayn Lāhōrī, a member of the Ahl al-Hadith, the study aims to contextualize the internal debates and methodological approaches of the science of hadith within the unique scholarly environment of the Indian subcontinent. Despite the intellectual backdrop shaped by various challenges faced by Indian scholars –such as colonialism, the academic activities of orientalists, the intensive work of missionaries in the region, and the famous uprising of 1857 –the original approaches developed by scholars demonstrate how the hadith-fiqh relationship, and more specifically the Ahl al-Hadith-Ahl al-Ra’y connection, is positioned. In this context, al-Laknawī emphasized his partial departure from the traditional Hanafi preferences by avoiding taqlid in some fiqh issues such as his approach to narrations, evaluation of isnad and rawi, the authority of primary hadith sources, and the methodology to be followed when confronted with contradictory narrations. In conclusion, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* can be seen as polemical texts, as well as a reflection of the new Hanafi understanding of hadith that took shape in India in the nineteenth century. The style used in the work, the topics discussed, the way they are presented, and the sources utilized take the reader to the scholarly gatherings of the period, revealing the vitality and intellectual depth of the discussions. At the same time, the article reveals that Laknawī’s method is not merely a reflection of the Hanafi line represented by renowned scholars of the region such as ‘Abd al-Haqq Dihlawī and Shāh Walī Allāh. Accordingly, although al-Laknawī ostensibly draws on the scholarly heritage represented by ‘Abd al-Haqq Dihlawī and Shāh Walī Allāh, he actually benefited from the atmosphere of scholarly debate and accumulation of his time and brought the traditional accumulation of the past to a new level. In terms of the balance he sought to establish between hadith and fiqh, by reinterpreting the approach begun by ‘Abd al-Haqq al-Dihlawī and systematized by Shāh Walī Allāh, he represented one of the original lines of Hanafism in the Indian subcontinent; in other words, the third main strand of this tradition. In conclusion, the study contributes to the repositioning of the hadith-fiqh relationship in the Indian subcontinent through the example of Laknawī and emphasizes the unique place of the region in the field of Islamic sciences.

Keywords

Hadith, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, Hanafi, Ahl al-Hadith, al-Laknawī.

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19. Asır Hindistan İlim Meclisleri: *el-Ecvibetü'l-fâzıla* ve Hadislerin Konumunu Yeniden Tartışmak

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Öz

Bu makale, 19. yüzyıl Hindistan'ında hadis ve fıkıh ilişkisini, dönemin önde gelen Hanefî âlimlerinden Abdülhay el-Leknevî'nin *el-Ecvibetü'l-fâzıla* adlı eseri üzerinden incelemektedir. Çalışma, Leknevî'nin Ehl-i Hadis mensubu Hüseyin Lâhôrî'nin sorularına verdiği cevapları analiz ederek, hadis ilminin iç tartışmalarını ve metodolojik yaklaşımlarını, Hint alt kıtasının kendine özgü ilmî zemini içerisinde konumlandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Hindistan ulemasının karşı karşıya kaldığı sömürgecilik, oryantalistlerin yürüttüğü akademik faaliyetler, misyonerlerin bölgedeki yoğun çalışmaları ve 1857'de meydana gelen meşhur ayaklanma gibi pek çok sorunun şekillendirdiği düşünsel arka plana rağmen, âlimlerin geliştirdiği özgün yaklaşımlar, hadis-fıkıh ilişkisinin daha husûsî bir ifadeyle Ehl-i Hadis-Rey/Mezhep bağının nasıl konumlandırıldığını göstermektedir. Bu anlamda Leknevî, bazı fikhî konular, rivayetlere yaklaşım, isnad ve râvî değerlendirmeleri, temel hadis kaynaklarının otoritesi ve çelişkili rivayetler karşısında izlenecek yöntem gibi konularda geleneksel Hanefî tercihlerden kısmen ayrılarak taklitten uzak bir tavır benimsediğini vurgulamıştır. Bu yönüyle Leknevî ve eseri *el-Ecvibetü'l-fâzıla*, yalnızca bir polemik metni değil, aynı zamanda 19. yüzyılda şekillenen yeni bir Hanefî hadis anlayışının da yansıması olarak değerlendirilebilir. Eserde kullanılan üslup, ele alınan konular, konuların anlatım biçimi ve kaynaklar; okuyucuyu dönemin ilim meclislerine taşıyarak tartışmaların canlılığını ve entelektüel derinliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Aynı zamanda makale Leknevî'nin metodunun Abdülhak Dihlevî ve Şah Veliyyullah Dihlevî gibi bölgenin meşhur âlimlerinin temsil ettiği Hanefî çizginin bir yansımasından ibaret olmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Buna göre Leknevî her ne kadar görünürde Abdülhak Dihlevî ve daha ziyade Şah Veliyyullah'ın temsil ettiği ilmî mirastan besleniyor gibi görünse de, esasen yaşadığı dönemin ilmî tartışma atmosferi ve birikiminden istifade ederek geçmişteki geleneksel birikimi yeni bir düzleme taşımıştır. Hadis ve fıkıh arasında kurmaya çalıştığı denge üzerinden bakıldığında, Abdülhak ed-Dihlevî ile başlayan ve Şah Veliyyullah tarafından sistemleştirilen yaklaşımı yeniden yorumlayarak, Hint alt kıtası Hanefiliğinin özgün çizgilerinden birini; başka bir ifadeyle, bu geleneğin üçüncü ana damarını temsil etmiştir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, Leknevî'nin örnekliğinde Hint alt kıtasındaki hadis-fıkıh ilişkisinin yeniden konumlandırılmasına katkı sağlamakta ve bölgenin İslamî ilimler sahasındaki özgün yerini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Hadis, *el-Ecvibetü'l-fâzıla*, Hanefî, Ehl-i Hadis, Leknevî.

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Introduction*

Nineteenth-century India holds a special position in the history of hadith. During this time, the methodology and credibility of hadith science, which had been passed down through transmission, had been seriously questioned due to various factors. The influence of modernity and colonization, particularly the involvement of non-Muslim western scholars in hadith studies, historically set these debates apart from those in other regions. The challenges faced during this period required Indian scholars to engage with a wide range of scholarly and political issues. When we look at the observable outcomes today, it can be said that these conditions were effectively utilized, leading to a scholarly production that has equipped other Muslims-particularly in hadith-centered discussions-with substantial intellectual resources. Indeed, the scholarly works produced in 19th century India continue to serve as strong references in contemporary hadith-related debates. Likewise, the intellectual and religious movements that made their mark on the subcontinent still leave their imprint, as their reflections can be observed in various Islamic countries today.

This situation, driven by scholarly-historical curiosity, draws attention to the issues that frame the debates between religious groups as well as schools in India and the methodological approaches that emerge in the evaluation of these issues. For instance, it is well known that the Ahl al-Hadith community and the Hanafî school in India hold differing methodological positions. However, a broader analysis reveals that the main point of divergence between these two traditions tends to revolve around the positioning of “hadith” and “sect-based fiqh methodology”. It should be noted from the outset that generalizing this observation may not always yield accurate or valid conclusions when applied to Indian scholars. Contrary to common expectations, some Indian Hanafî scholars have approached the relationship between hadith and fiqh-and related issues-in uniquely distinct ways, based on their own evaluations.

This article, shaped by the particular circumstances of India, focuses on the relationship between *hadith*, *fiqh*, and *madhhab* in nineteenth-century India, as seen through the core issues engaged by a particular scholar, along with the figures and debates that surrounded him. The subject of this study, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawî (d. 1886),¹ one of the prominent Hanafî scholars of the nineteenth century, occupies a distinctive position in terms of the discursive tools employed in the debates between the Ahl al-Hadith and the Hanafîs. An examination of assessments of his work reveals that he is frequently described as an ‘inquisitive’ scholar known for his critical and analytical approach, especially in addressing issues related to *hadith* and *fiqh*. Al-Laknawî was raised and educated in Lucknow, a major center of Islamic learning where Ḥanafism predominated, where he became distinguished

* I would like to express my gratitude to my esteemed professors Eyüp Öztürk, Mustafa Gargar and Muhammet Ali Tuzlu who checked the English translation of the text and made suggestions.

1 For studies on him, see Sırrı Fuat Ateş, *Abdülhay Leknevî Hayatı, Eserleri ve Fıkhi Görüşleri* (İstanbul: Kitaparası Yayınları, 2024), see 291 ff. For his works, see also: Ateş, *Abdülhay Leknevî Hayatı, Eserleri ve Fıkhi Görüşleri*, see 37 ff.; Veliyyüddin al-Nadwî, *Al-İmâm ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawî: ‘Allâmat al-Hind wa Imâm al-Muḥaddithin wa’l-Fuqahâ’* (Damascus: Dâr al-Kalâm, 1415 AH); Rahmân ‘Alî, *Tadhkirat al-‘Ulamâ’ al-Hind*, trans. Muhammad Eyyub Qadiri (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1961), 287–292; İbrahim Hatiboğlu, “Leknevî”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2003), 27/133-136; Renate Würsch, “‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawî”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

for his mastery of *fiqh*. In addition to his deep engagement with Hanafi jurisprudence, he explicitly expressed a strong interest in the disciplines of transmission (*riwāyah*).²

The focus of this study on al-Laknawī arises primarily from his engagement with contemporary debates in nineteenth-century India, particularly during the latter half of the century. In this context, one of the key texts that both preserves a wealth of data and enables analytical engagement is al-Laknawī's well-known work *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*. Importantly, the person who posed the questions or issues that led to the writing of this work was a scholar affiliated with the Ahl al-Hadith community in India. This characteristic positioned the book as part of the scholarly debates of its time. As will be shown below, the questions that shape the content of the work reflect contemporary concerns - around dynamic issues of the time - that were discussed in scholarly circles and intellectual gatherings.

A general analysis of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* reveals that the questions and the answers to them, which are related to the hotly debated issues of the time,³ go beyond a simple exchange of information between two individuals. At the center of the text is a series of questions posed by a scholar from the Ahl al-Hadith community to a Hanafi jurist who sees adherence to a particular school of law as problematic. These questions reflect long-standing debates between two different methodological orientations. While the specific issues under discussion bear the imprint of their own historical moment, they also have deep historical roots in the Indian subcontinent. This is evident when one examines the scholarly debates and polemics of the previous century. In this context,⁴ Mehmet Özşenel and Erdiñç Ahatlı explored these issues in their article titled "Hadith-Fiqh Centered Discussions in the Indian Subcontinent in the 12th/18th Century: In the Context of Tattavī's *Zabbu Zubābati 'l-Dirāsāt*." As the title suggests, this article deals with a selection of scholarly issues discussed in the eighteenth century. However, this study does not merely take us back a century from the nineteenth century; rather, it provides insight into both continuities and changes in the polemical discourse of Indian scholarly circles. As such, it serves as a complementary contribution that allows for comparative analysis between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It should be emphasized that the unique approaches of certain scholars-especially al-Laknawī-and the particular circumstances of 19th century India distinguish this work from those of the 18th century. Our focus on the second half of the nineteenth century and al-Laknawī as the central figure of this study stems directly from the exceptional character of this period. As a reflection of this, al-Laknawī addresses many previously unexplored issues in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, revisiting long-standing historical questions through an original methodological lens, thereby filling a significant gap in the history of hadith studies.⁵

Although numerous studies have been conducted on al-Laknawī, there appears to be

2 Nizameddin İbrahim oğlu, "Kendi Kaleminden İmam Leknevî (1264-1304/1848-1887): Hayatı ve Eserleri", *İslâm Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6 [Son Asır İslâm Hukukçuları Özel Sayısı] (2005), 51.

3 For general reference, see Selim Demirci, *Sömürge Döneminde Hadis ve Yorum İngiliz İdaresi Gölgesinde Hint Alt Kıtası Hadis Âlimleri ve Şerhleri* (İstanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2024).

4 Mehmet Özşenel - Erdiñç Ahatlı, "XII/XVIII. Asır Hint Altkıtası'nda Hadis-Fıkıh Merkezli Tartışma Konuları -Tettevî'nin Zebbü Zübâbâtı'd-Dirāsât'ı Çerçevesinde-", *Usûl: İslâm Araştırmaları* 5 (2006), 109-162.

5 Abū al-Hasanāt 'Abd al-Ḥayy b. Muḥammad al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah li'l-as'ila al-'āshira al-kāmila* (with *at-Ta'liqāt al-hāfila 'alā al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* by 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah), critical ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyya, 2005), 7.

no comprehensive work that examines his *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* within the specific context outlined above. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate the text both in terms of its historical context and its relationship to the broader scholarly tradition in India. The principal motivation behind the present article is the desire to address this noticeable gap in the literature by offering a meaningful contribution. Furthermore, an analysis of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* will shed light on the nature of interrelations among religious groups in India, the character of their disputes, the arguments advanced, and the overall tone and level of scholarly discourse. In this context, a noteworthy study is Umar Muhammad Noor's article titled "Disagreement Amongst Hadith Critics: A Critical Review on Laknawī's Rules of Reconciliation." However, as this work focuses exclusively on al-Laknawī's approach to *ikhṭilāf al-ḥadīth* (conflicting hadiths), it does not engage with other dimensions of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, particularly those concerning his assessments at the intersection of hadith and fiqh.⁶

Although many studies have been conducted on al-Laknawī, no comprehensive work has examined *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* within the specific context outlined above. The study that presented *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* as a master's thesis in Türkiye was prepared by Ömer Sadiker in 2014 under the title *Abd al-Ḥayy Laknawī (d. 1304/1886), His Life, Works and Hadithism in the Specific Context of His Work Named al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* (Abdülhay Leknevî (v. 1304/1886), Hayatı, Eserleri ve el-Ecvibetü'l-Fâdile Adlı Eseri Özelinde Hadisçiliği). This work was later published in 2018 under the title *Principles of the Science of Hadith with Questions and Answers (Sorular ve Cevaplarla Hadis İlmine Dair Esaslar)*. The study, which retains the structure of a master's thesis, outlines al-Laknawī's biography and lists the questions found in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, accompanied by brief content summaries. Another notable study is a general book review written by Mahmut Samar in 2016: 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah li'l-As'ilat al-'Asharat al-Kāmilah, Dār al-Bashā'ir*, Beirut, 2005 (301 pp.) (Abdülhay el-Leknevî, *el-Ecvibetü'l-fâziletü li'l-es'ileti'l-aşarati'l-kāmileti*, Daru'l-beşâir, Beyrut 2005 (301 s.)). As these examples show, a comprehensive study of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*—particularly in relation to the debates between scholarly circles and legal schools in India—remains a scholarly necessity."

This study is based on qualitative research methods, with documentation and source analysis forming the foundation of the research. In this context, 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī's *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* has been examined, and the debates contained within the work have been contextualized from historical, sectarian, and methodological perspectives. *Al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* has been analyzed not only in terms of its content, but also with regard to the discourse and stylistic features of the text, particularly the language of communication that al-Laknawī employed in addressing his interlocutor (the Lāhorī scholar) or interlocutors—whether from the Ahl al-Hadīth, Hanafī, or Iḥyā circles. Although *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* was selected as a case study, its content effectively reflects the religious-intellectual landscape of nineteenth-century India and the dynamics of the hadith–fiqh relationship during that period.

6 Umar Muhammad Noor, "Disagreement Amongst Hadith Critics: A Critical Review On Laknawī's Rules of Reconciliation", *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences Role(s) and Relevance of Humanities for Sustainable Development* (23 September 2019).

1. *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*: Composition, Style, Methodology, and Sources

Al-Ajwibah al-fāḍila, regarded as one of the works that demonstrate al-Laknawī's depth in the science of hadith, was completed on the night of Monday, 2 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1291 AH (10 January 1875 CE).⁷ Given that al-Laknawī was born in 1848, he would have been 27 years old at the time of its completion. Although al-Laknawī himself notes that the book was completed in a short period, no definitive information is available regarding the exact time it took.

Al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah was written in response to a series of questions posed by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Lāhorī (d. 1338/1919), whom al-Laknawī refers to—without mentioning his name—as “the learned one” (*al-fāḍil*), as identified by ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (d. 1997). Muḥammad Ḥusayn Lāhorī, who played an active role in the emergence of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, was born in 1256/1840. He studied the major hadith texts under Nāẓir Ḥusayn (d. 1902), one of the prominent figures of the *Ahl al-Hadīth* movement. Lāhorī adopted the general outlook of the *Ahl al-Hadīth*, characterized by a rejection of adherence (*taqlīd*) to a particular legal school and the prioritization of acting directly upon hadith.⁸

We have found no information regarding the extent or nature of al-Laknawī's connection with Lāhorī. Ḥusayn Lāhorī also carried out his scholarly activities, like al-Laknawī, in the second half of the 19th century. However, considering that al-Laknawī—who is known for his heated and sometimes harsh debates with Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1890), a prominent figure of the *Ahl al-Hadīth*—had already made a name for himself in Indian scholarly circles, particularly within the *Ahl al-Hadīth* group, it is reasonable to assume that he exerted some influence on his contemporaries. In contrast, the responses directed to Lāhorī, who was part of the *Ahl al-Hadīth* group, appear as scholarly discussions or efforts to clarify a particular issue, rather than as polemical exchanges. At this point, it should be stated that the work stands in a different position from al-Laknawī's debates, especially those with Şiddīq Ḥasan.⁹

The first edition of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, completed in 1291/1875, was published during al-Laknawī's lifetime.¹⁰ Today, the critical edition (*tahqīq*), enhanced with the scholarly annotations of ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (*at-Ta’līqāt al-ḥāfila ‘alā al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*), is widely used. Frequently referred to in academic studies and scholarly debates, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* has also been translated into Turkish by Harun Reşit Demirel under the titles *Temel Hadis Meseleleri* (Konya: Hüner Yayınları, 2014) and *Hadis İlminin Temel Konuları* (İstanbul: Takdim, 2019).

al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah, written far from the concern of responding to an opposing view, offers readers –through its systematic and comprehensible style– an opportunity to observe the level of a hadith lesson held in an *ilm gathering* (‘ilm majlis) in India. The author's adoption of a modest tone, reflecting scholarly decorum and Sufi discipline rather than

7 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 227.

8 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 7-9.

9 Sümeyye Onuk Demirci, “19. Yüzyıl Hint Alt Kıtasında Birbirine Muhalif İki Âlim: Leknevî ile Şiddîk Hasan Han Arasındaki Reddiyeleşmeler”, *İslâm Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi* 44 (2024), 365-394; Mehmet Sait Uzundağ, *Hindistan Ehl-i Hadîs Ekolü ve Şiddîk Hasan Han* (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2018), 55-60.

10 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 9-10.

self-promotion,¹¹ has made *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah* one of the texts that embodies the scholarly character of the Indian 'ulamā'. al-Laknawī stated that he wrote this work quickly due to various preoccupations yet emphasized that it consists of concise and succinct information.¹² A closer look at some of Abū Ghuddah's evaluations suggests that these remarks are indeed a reflection of humility. In terms of its content, methodology, and conclusions, the book has attracted the attention of many scholars and has become one of the reference texts in contemporary *scholarly gatherings* ('ilmī majālis) and hadith discussions. One notable example of this can be found in Taqī 'Uthmānī's lectures on *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, as this work includes direct references to al-Laknawī's *al-Ajwibah*, summaries of certain topics, and, in some parts, even the continuation of his compositional style.¹³

The manner in which the questions are formulated in *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah* is also noteworthy. Abū Ghuddah described these questions as indicative of subtle insight and scholarly depth,¹⁴ yet there is an additional aspect of their content that deserves attention: the text reveals a striking harmony, a compelling flow, and a stylistic coherence between question and answer that complement each other. In fact, when the questions and answers are read together, they give the impression of having come from the same mouth or pen. This may be seen as a reflection of the questioner's depth and the respondent's skill. However, it becomes clear that al-Laknawī did not transmit the questions exactly as they were posed but rather reshaped them according to his own style and the topics he intended to elaborate on. For when examined closely, the questions reflect not merely an effort to learn what is unknown, but also a deliberate attempt to guide the addressee. As a result, the inclusion of sub-questions anticipating the answer in each case is significant in terms of the scholarly level and style of the Indian 'ulamā'. For instance, the question on resolving apparent contradictions between hadith (*ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*) spans an entire page. It reflects a mind already deeply engaged with the issue and anticipating the response.¹⁵ A similar pattern can be observed in the preceding fourth question included in the work.¹⁶

In addition, *al-Ajwibah* follows a systematic logical sequence in the ordering of its questions. It proceeds through a three-stage progression addressing the importance of isnād and its place in religion, the content of hadith collections, and cases where hadiths conflict with each other or with certain practices of their narrators. The answers begin with a very clear introductory statement, followed by an explanation of this view supported by evidence; then some related detailed points are addressed, and finally, the initial statement is reiterated more explicitly as a concluding sentence. Therefore, although the text deals with contentious issues, it does not leave the reader at an "uncertain/ambiguous" point.

al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah holds an important position in terms of the hadith-madhhab debates of its time. During Laknawī's era, the background of the differing approaches among religious groups was largely shaped by hadith-centered discussions. Particularly, the Ahl al-

11 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah*, 15.

12 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah*, 19-20.

13 Muhammed Taki Osmanī, *Tirmizi Dersleri Mukaddime*, trans. Hayri Demirci (İstanbul: Darü'l-Kütübü'l-Arabiyye, 2024).

14 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah*, 9.

15 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah*, 182-183.

16 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fâḍilah*, 160-161.

Ḥadīth community criticized the Hanafis on the grounds that they “imitated” their madhhab instead of following authentic hadiths. Accordingly, the way al-Laknawī, a Hanafi scholar, approaches the deductions of his madhhab in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* is significant. Within this context, when looking specifically at Hanafi scholars of the Indian subcontinent, three types of Hanafi scholar profiles emerge:

- *Activist-muqallid Hanafis*, like Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1905), who openly declare themselves followers of the madhhab,
- *Muḥaqqiq Hanafis*, like Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī (d. 1933), who was an erudite scholar although he defined himself as a muqallid, but whose theological-philosophical aspects were shaped by the preferences of the madhhab,
- *Hanafis like al-Laknawī*, who define their scholarly method as *tahqīq* rather than imitation, but whose *tahqīq* centers on hadith.

As can be seen, in this classification al-Laknawī, in principle, does not belong to the group of followers (*muqallid*) of the madhhab but rather to the investigators (*muḥaqqiq*), standing apart from the other two groups in terms of his scholarly method. Indeed, as noted in a study, Al-Laknawī stated that he would abandon a juristic ruling that contradicts a clear and authentic hadith, yet he would excuse the mujtahids who issued that ruling, affirming that even if they erred, they would still earn reward.¹⁷ With this method, al-Laknawī sought a middle path between imitation (*taqlīd*) and critical investigation (*tahqīq*), trying to avoid madhhab fanaticism while not abandoning his juridical madhhab.¹⁸ In contrast, the leading Hanafi scholars of the region opposed the view that following a juridical madhhab amounted to mere imitation. They sought to dispel accusations against the Hanafis by emphasizing the nature and importance of *taqlīd* on various occasions. For example, Sahāranpūrī (d. 1927), in his work focused on matters of creed, addressed the juridical issue of “the ruling on adherence to one of the four madhhabs.”¹⁹ Taqī ‘Uthmānī also discussed the “legal status of *taqlīd*, its necessity, and benefits”²⁰ in his lectures.

The Hanafis of India did not concern themselves solely with the issue of adhering to a single school of law. They also responded to criticisms directed at the Hanafis, and particularly at Abū Ḥanīfa. As a reflection of these debates, al-Laknawī, in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, sought to demonstrate that some of the criticisms made by certain hadith scholars against Abū Ḥanīfa were unfounded. In addressing certain issues, both the subject matter and the selected examples were brought into the context of Abū Ḥanīfa. For instance, when analyzing the content of Dāraquṭnī’s (d. 385/995) work, he criticized Dāraquṭnī’s reproach of Abū Ḥanīfa.²¹ That this issue has continued to be present in scholarly circles is also evident from the notes compiled from Taqī ‘Uthmānī’s lessons on *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*. Indeed, he addressed Dāraquṭnī’s aforementioned statements as the first of the criticisms directed at

17 Muhammed Tayyib Kılıç, “Hint Alt Kıtası Haneḫī Fıkıh Birikimine Bir Örnek: Fakih Olarak İmâm Leknevī”, *Dicle Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* XVI/1 (2014), 213.

18 Ahmet Aydın, “Abdülhay el-Leknevī” (Accessed 28 March 2025).

19 Halil b. Ahmed Sehārenpūrī, *Akâid-i Ehl-i Sünnet Diyobend Âlimlerinden Vehhâbilere Cevaplar*, trans. Macit Bige (İstanbul: Misvâk Neşriyat, 2024), 50-52.

20 Osmanî, *Tirmizi Dersleri Mukaddime*, see 291 ff.

21 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 77.

Abū Ḥanīfa.²²

Laknawī's effort to defend Abū Ḥanīfa was not merely a reference to a historical debate. This is because the claims concerning Abū Ḥanīfa were reiterated even in the scholarly circles of Laknawī's own milieu in the second half of the 19th century. For example, Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān, a prominent figure among the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, described Abū Ḥanīfa as weak in both the science of hadith and the Arabic language²³ -an indication that the relationship between Abū Ḥanīfa and hadith was still a topic of discussion in 19th-century scholarly gatherings. Şiddiq Ḥasan even regarded the Hanafī school as one of the reasons for the underdevelopment of hadith studies in India.²⁴ However, the fact that 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī (d. 1935), one of the leading scholars of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, included a biography of Abū Ḥanīfa in *Tuhfat al-aḥwazī*, offered praise for him, acknowledged his engagement with hadith, and referred to Hanafī hadith sources, shows that there were also differences within the Ahl al-Ḥadīth themselves.²⁵

The debates surrounding hadith in the context of madhhab and fiqh in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* also shaped the selection of specific examples. For instance, the weakness of the report regarding the wiping of the neck during ablution is analyzed in light of both hadith scholarship and the principles of the science of fiqh. As is well known, the Hanafis regard the wiping of the neck during *wuḍū'* as sunnah or something that possesses virtue (*faḍīla*), while the majority (*jumhūr*) have claimed that it is *makrūh* or even an *innovation* (*bid'a*).

Prompted by these debates, al-Laknawī authored an independent treatise titled *Tuhfat al-ṭāliba fī taḥqīq mash' al-raḳaba*, in which he examined the relevant reports.²⁶ According to him, "even if the chain of transmission is weak, there are narrations regarding the wiping of the neck, and although weak, these reports are sufficient to express the *faḍīla*/*mustaḥabb* of the act." Al-Laknawī criticized the Mālikīs and Shāfi'īs for labeling the practice as a *bid'a*, asserting that it is not sound to declare something an innovation when it rests on a transmitted report,²⁷ however weak. In addressing this and similar issues, al-Laknawī did not confine himself to citing reports and assessing their reliability. Rather, as a result of his mastery of the principles of the science of fiqh, he also sought to ground the narrations through established legal principles (*qawā'id*). The assessment that "if the recommendability (*mandūb*) or permissibility (*jawāz*) of something is not established by a sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) hadith, but a report exists whose weakness is not severe, then—provided it does not contradict the established principles of Islamic law (*shar'ī* foundation) or sound evidence—its status as *mustaḥabb* or permissible may be determined on the basis of that weak report"²⁸ is an example of this approach. This general *principle* is of particular significance in the context of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth's criticisms of the Hanafis. Rather than addressing individual

22 Osmanī, *Tirmizi Dersleri Mukaddime*, see 265 ff.; 276 ff.

23 Abū al-Ṭayyib Muḥammad Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān, *Abjad al-'Ulūm*, ed. 'Abduljabbār Zakkār (Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1978), 3/121–122; Uzundağ, *Hindistan Ehl-i Hadīs Ekolü ve Şiddik Hasan Han*, 67.

24 Uzundağ, *Hindistan Ehl-i Hadīs Ekolü ve Şiddik Hasan Han*, 68.

25 al-Mubārakpūrī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm, *Tuhfat al-aḥwazī bi-sharḥ Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (Introduction). Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005, 113–119, 129–132.

26 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 37.

27 For the issue and citations see Ateş, *Abdülhay Leknevî Hayatı, Eserleri ve Fikhî Görüşleri*, 109–113.

28 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 55.

cases and reports, Laknawī articulated the relationship between “weak ḥadīths” and *fiqhī* rulings in the form of a structured rule. The presence of two categories in Taqī ‘Uthmānī’s work –hadiths that are *ṣaḥīḥ* but not acted upon, and hadiths that are weak yet acted upon²⁹ indicates the framework within which this subject continued to be discussed in scholarly gatherings (‘ilmī majālis).

In some parts of *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, attention is drawn to common misconceptions prevalent among the general public.³⁰ This has made the book not only a text reflecting the agenda of scholarly gatherings (ilmī majālis), but also one that portrays the contemporary understanding of the Muslim community/public. Because of this, when appropriate, it includes evaluations of hadiths found in widely popular works such as *Iḥyā’*, even pointing out the presence of some unfounded narrations.³¹ Not only *Iḥyā’*, but also hadith reports found in fiqh sources like *al-Hidāya*—which is extremely widespread in Hanafī circles—have been subjected to critical examination.

Another important aspect to mention regarding the work is the intellectual sources that nourish al-Laknawī in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*. From the perspective of Laknawī’s method, two main situations must be addressed: one is the intellectual background guiding him when dealing with issues, and the other is the prominent reference sources he draws upon in composing his work.

First of all, it should be noted that there are two main lines guiding the methods of Indian Hanafī scholars. One of these is the adoption of the Hanafī madhhab by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī (d. 1052/1642) in Hijaz under the guidance of his teacher ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī (d. 1001/1592). This guidance enabled Dihlawī to carry out activities in India that centered on Ḥanafism and also promoted the science of hadith. Thus, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī’s efforts represent an important stage for Ḥanafism in the subcontinent. In contrast, the method of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762), who placed hadith sources at the core of fiqh education, represents a different threshold for Ḥanafism in the subcontinent. From this perspective, al-Laknawī has been compared to Shāh Walī Allāh “in terms of his criticisms of certain practices and customs and his critical stance against innovations and superstitions.”³² This similarity should also be emphasized in the domain of fiqh. It can even be considered that, through his fiqh method and preferences, al-Laknawī brought some aspects of the Hanafī trend –developed as a result of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī’s activities³³ into question. For example, regarding the issue of the necessity of ablution after eating camel meat, Laknawī’s preference, which he described as the “stronger view in terms of evidence,” was decisively shaped by “reports.”³⁴ In this sense, it can be said that Laknawī’s scholarly approaches align more closely with Shāh Walī Allāh than with ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī.

Not only the Hanafis but also the Ahl al-Ḥadīth were inspired and influenced by Shāh

29 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 222-227.

30 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 117.

31 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 35.

32 Aydın, “Abdülhay el-Leknevî”.

33 Abū al-Majd ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Sayf al-Dīn b. Sa‘dullāh ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī, *Lama’āt al-Tanqīḥ fi Sharḥ Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, critical ed. Taqīyuddīn al-Nadwī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2020), 1/42.

34 Ateş, *Abdülhay Leknevî Hayatı, Eserleri ve Fikhi Görüşleri*, 156.

Walī Allāh's ideas.³⁵ However, the intellectual formation of Laknawī did not come solely from Delhi, which was primarily a center of hadith education, but also from the accumulated knowledge of Lucknow—the center of fiqh education—and from the tradition of Hyderabad, a city known for kalām (theology) and logic. This diverse background placed him in a distinct position. Particularly, his witnessing of the events and aftermath of 1857 made al-Laknawī an “original Hanafi” in terms of his approach to religious sources. In other words, to perceive him merely as a typical imitator of Shāh Walī Allāh in the nineteenth century would mean overlooking Laknawī's original aspects. In fact, when addressing the relationship between hadith and fiqh, one should speak of three complementary stages that shaped and developed Ḥanafism in India: ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī, Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī, and Laknawī-Kashmīrī. At this point, as a Hanafi jurist, al-Laknawī did not engage in the widespread mass activities common among the scholars of his time, nor did he conduct his work through an institutional reform program. As stated in various studies,³⁶ unlike some scholars in the subcontinent, he did not choose to be a classical revivalist personality by planning a reform or teaching program. For example, unlike Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān, al-Laknawī did not have an area of activity that involved organizing hadith scholars, establishing madrasas and libraries, commissioning others to write books, organizing translations of hadith books, printing and distributing books, or rewarding hadith studies.³⁷

The methodological focus of Laknawī's work has also influenced his sources. In this regard, in *al-Ajwibah* one can encounter referenced scholars such as Ibn al-Salāh (d. 643/1245), al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734/1334), Ṭibī (d. 743/1343), Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350), Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and ‘Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605). According to one observation, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah* was compiled drawing upon as many as 160 sources.³⁸ What stands out here is Laknawī's ability to integrate different spheres within the Islamic scholarly tradition without limiting himself to a single orientation or historical period. Notably, by referencing scholars from the Iranian sphere such as al-Jurjānī and Ṭibī and comparing their approaches with those of scholars like Ibn al-Salāh and al-Nawawī, he reflects the diversity of sources present in India.

2. Questions in *al-Ajwibah*: The Quest for Answers to Contentious Issues

In a general framework, *al-Ajwibah* is a text that stands out with its emphasis on the methodology of hadith, fiqh, and uşūl al-fiqh, and contains detailed discussions. The work systematically discusses the isnād system—which holds central importance within the traditional Islamic sciences—as well as the primary sources of hadith. In the early chapters of the book, reference is made to the classical understanding of isnād-centered transmission (*al-mutaqaddimūn*) and the major hadith compilations that replaced the isnād system in the

35 Sayyid ‘Abd al-Mājid Gavri, *al-Muḥaddithūn min Jamā‘at Ahl al-Ḥadīth fī al-Hind* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1443/2021), 6.

36 Kılıç, “Hint Alt Kitası Hanefî Fıkıh Birikimine Bir Örnek”, 129-130.

37 Zaferullah Daudi, *Pakistan ve Hindistan’da Hadis Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1995), 181-185; Abdülhamit Birişik, *Hind Altıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri* (İstanbul: İFAV, 2019), 110-111.

38 Selman Başaran, “el-Ecvibetü'l-Fâzıla”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1994), 10/386.

later period (*al-muta'akhhirūn*). In the second stage of *al-Ajwibah*, the disagreements that arise among the *muḥaddithūn* concerning the grading of the authenticity of hadiths, along with the procedural principles to be followed in cases of contradiction in meaning between sound reports, are brought into discussion. In this context, the second group of questions is directly related to the area of disagreement. Where disagreement exists, there will not only be debates but also methodological tendencies and distinct scholarly schools. Accordingly, eight of the ten questions included in the work—constituting the majority—pertain to the domain of scholarly disagreement.

In *al-Ajwibah*, the questions that encompass two main axes—focusing on the sources of hadiths and the conflicts that arise among the reports—can be classified as follows, within the framework of the answers provided by Laknawī and the scholarly context of India:

The first question is a detailed inquiry into whether isnād is necessary as a source of knowledge. In fact, it would not be expected for the question of whether isnād is necessary in the religious sciences to serve as an opening question, especially in a relatively late period such as the 13th/19th century. That is, at first glance, the function, formation, and problems of isnād in terms of the transmission of knowledge pertain more to the early centuries. It would not be entirely accurate to assume that al-Laknawī is taking us back to the early centuries with this question. For in 19th-century India, hadith, their isnāds, and the books that record hadiths along with their isnāds constituted areas of knowledge that were to be approached with suspicion—or even viewed as problematic—by the “modernist” or “reformist” approach.³⁹ This approach does not merely problematize the most robust and assertive domain of the Islamic scholarly tradition. It also proposes, as a methodological principle, the re-evaluation of the reports found in hadith sources based on their content—that is, “matn criticism.” As Taqī ‘Uthmānī also notes, in the eyes of the proponents of this approach, hadiths do not originate from a reliable source.⁴⁰ Given that the isnad is the key element in the transmission of hadiths, this assumption implies that the isnads are either unreliable or incapable of ensuring the reliability of the information. In the Indian subcontinent, there were prominent figures in the 19th century who openly expressed this view. For example, the presence of prominent modernists such as Sayyid Ahmad Khān (d. 1898),⁴¹ who criticized the neglect of hadith texts in favor of emphasizing isnad as the sole determining factor, is important for understanding both Laknawī’s audience and the broader intellectual context of the 19th century. Thus, it can be said that isnād, which after the early centuries had become a symbolic means of preserving tradition, emerged in this period as one of the areas to which scholarly debates turned with serious attention.

Conversely, within the Ahl al-Ḥadīth community and Hanafī circles of the Indian subcontinent, isnād retained its traditional significance. Although there are differences in detail, both groups are, in principle, meticulous regarding isnād. In other words, the primary addressees of the first question in *al-Ajwibah* are those who hold exclusionary views toward

39 For general reference, see İbrahim Hatiboğlu, *Çağdaşlaşma ve Hadis Tartışmaları Hint Alt Kıtası, Mısır ve Türkiye’de Hadis Tartışmaları* (İstanbul: Hadisevi, 2004).

40 Osmanî, *Tirmizi Dersleri Mukaddime*, 64.

41 Mustafa Öz, “Ahmed Han, Seyyid” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1989), 2/75; Osmanî, *Tirmizi Dersleri Mukaddime*, 61–62.

hadith methodology and those influenced by them. However, the subtopics of isnād and the examples provided concern matters relevant to both the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and Hanafis. For instance, the issue of weak (ḍaʿīf) and fabricated (mawḍūʿ) reports—addressed as topics related to isnād—emerges as a field of debate, demonstrating that not all knowledge transmitted with isnād is regarded equally. Through these issues, Laknawī offered assessments relevant to the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and contemporaries who shared similar views. This point represents the theoretical domain illustrating the disputes between the two groups. Notably, the emphasis on the possibility that weak hadiths, under certain conditions, may serve as evidence in juridical matters is significant in terms of the periodical criticisms directed at the Hanafis.⁴² Accordingly, al-Laknawī opened the debate in *al-Ajwibah* regarding whether weak ḥadīths are authoritative (ḥujjah) in matters of fiqh. This is exemplified by the weak ḥadīth stating that laughter invalidates wuduʿ, which, despite contradicting qiyās, was acted upon by the Hanafis. Indeed, the Hanafis accepted this hadith in practice. While the majority of jurists (jumhūr) hold the view that laughter during prayer does not invalidate wuduʿ, the Hanafis maintain that it does. The basis for the majority's position is either the absence of an authentic ḥadīth on the matter or the weakness of the isnāds of the relevant reports. Laknawī not only addressed this issue—one of the debated topics of his time—in *al-Ajwibah*, but also authored a separate treatise entitled *al-Ḥashishah bi nakzi'l-wudūʿ bi'l-kahkaha*. In this work, he argued that even if some problems exist within the narrations, the hadiths possess a basis that can be regarded as sound and, therefore, may be utilized as valid evidence.⁴³

Al-Laknawī emphasized that after the early centuries, the place of ḥadīth isnāds was taken by books.⁴⁴ In this context, moving to the second question, Laknawī discussed the content and binding authority of the primary sources that compile hadiths from the perspective of hadith methodology. There is a connection between the books whose content he examined and the prominent hadith-centered fiqh education in the Indian subcontinent. In particular, the use of hadith books in fiqh education began to spread with ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī and was systematized by Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī. The process initiated by ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī with *Mishkāt al-Masābīḥ* was taken to a different level by Shāh Walī Allāh, who placed the *Muwattaʿ* and the *Sunan* collections at the center. These books were actively used in educational activities by religious groups in 19th-century India who valued tradition. In other words, the questioner in *al-Ajwibah*, the Ahl al-Ḥadīth scholar from Lahore, and the respondent, the Hanafī jurist Laknawī, were both trained within this system. Thus, the question is of great importance with regard to 19th century Indian hadith education and fiqh activities.

Laknawī's detailed introduction of the literature, particularly the *Muwattaʿ* and the *Sunan* collections, in the second question should not surprise readers. Similarly, the special analysis devoted to *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*,⁴⁵ which hold a distinct position in the scholarly activities of the region, relates to the fact that juridical debates were conduct-

42 Osmanī, *Tirmizi Dersleri Mukaddime*, see 224 ff.

43 Ateş, *Abdülhay Leknevî Hayatı, Eserleri ve Fikihî Görüşleri*, 106-109.

44 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 59-60.

45 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 67-70, 73-75.

ed reciprocally based on these texts. The discussions of Hanafī scholars such as Kashmīrī and Sahāranpūrī (d. 1927), as well as Ahl al-Ḥadīth scholars like ‘Azīmābādī (d. 1911) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, which focus on the content of these books, reflect the fundamental reference value of the *Sunan* collections. The statement used by Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān regarding the hadith sources—that they “are sufficient to meet the religious needs of Muslims at every level”⁴⁶—is a typical reflection of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth’s perspective on these books. Therefore, it can be said that, taken as a whole, hadith books achieved one of their most charismatic positions in history in India in the nineteenth century. Historically, some hadith books may have held particular significance for certain Islamic regions. However, the collective adoption of the literature as a whole, along with systematic readings, commentaries, marginalia, and ta’līqs, was not a widespread phenomenon.

In the third question, al-Laknawī critically examines the implications of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān’s aforementioned perspective. The questioner raises the issue of whether the hadiths found in the primary texts can serve as evidence in fiqh discussions. Directly related to the hadith-fiqh relationship, this question also concerns the sufficiency of the hadith collections. Since these books contain narrations that the madhhabs both act upon and consider unsuitable for practice, Laknawī holds that not every hadith found in these texts possesses the qualification to serve as proof in matters of legal rulings (Aḥkām). The central emphasis in his response lies in the detail that those who delve deeply into the narrations and possess the competence to distinguish what is actionable are the qualified individuals. Accordingly, the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and the Hanafīs who lack this depth in narrations are implicitly warned. Because these books contain ṣaḥīḥ, ḥasan, and *ḍa‘īf* hadiths, a certain depth of discernment is required first and foremost.⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya is quoted as saying that if a person is not competent in this matter, he should consult competent hadith scholars.⁴⁸

The discussion of the content of the hadith books in terms of their applicability is directly related to the scholarly circles in India. This is because the Ahl al-Ḥadīth group keeps itself outside the madhhabs, relying on the hadiths and, naturally, on the content of the existing books. It is noteworthy that al-Laknawī addresses the issue here in the context of “expertise” in hadith; that is, he does not explicitly state that the jurisprudence(s) of the madhhabs or a particular hadith book should be taken as a basis. In doing so, he addresses the foundations of his madhhab on a hadith-centered basis. In other words, non-specialists should leave the determination of what is applicable in practice and the determination of authentic hadiths to others. Only those who are qualified will be able to evaluate the authenticity of the narrations.⁴⁹ This commentary not only serves as a response to the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, who consider hadith books as an absolute authority, but also relates to contemporary Hanafī scholars in India who do not open the madhhab’s ijtihads to discussion. For example, when evaluating a shariah-related (fiqhī) issue that also involves consideration of hadiths, Hanafī scholars like Shaykh al-Hind Maḥmūd Ḥasan have stated, “We are followers (muqallid); our duty is to follow our Imam Abū Ḥanīfa.”⁵⁰ As seen here, the emphasis is not

46 Uzundağ, *Hindistan Ehl-i Hadîs Ekolü ve Siddîk Hasan Han*, 69.

47 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 140-141.

48 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 142.

49 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 142, 144-4-149, 150, 151.

50 Qāsim b. Kutlubughā, *Khulāṣat al-afkār fī sharḥ mukhtaṣar al-Manār*, critical ed. Ḥāfiẓ Sanā‘ullah az-Zāhidi

on the narrations but on *ijtihād*/madhhab determination. According to the Ahl al-*Hadīth* community, however, the narrations in the books should be the primary basis. At this point, it can be said that Laknawī sought a balance between *hadīth* and *fiqh* thought.

As seen, al-Laknawī emphasized that those not competent in the matter of *hadīth* authenticity should refer to *hadīth* scholars. At this point, the critical issue is the work's fourth question: What should be done in case of disagreement among *muhaddiths* regarding *hadīth* evaluations? Laknawī's response to this rather lengthy question is clear: When assessments concerning *hadīth* conflict, one of the opinions should be preferred.⁵¹ In *al-Ajwibah*, the criteria and basis for making such a preference are also discussed. Particularly noteworthy in this section are the details regarding "excessive leniency" (*tasāhul*) and "excessive strictness" (*tashaddud*), which are extremely important in terms of the subjectivity of *jarh wa ta'dil* and naturally, the evaluation of authenticity. It can be said that Laknawī demonstrates his expertise in the science of *rijāl* under this heading.

3. The Emphasis on *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth* in *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*

The fundamental issue in the relationship between *hadīth* and *fiqh* is not merely which opinion should be preferred when there is disagreement among the *hadīth* scholars (*muhaddithūn*), but rather which narration should be given preference when contradictory reports exist on the same matter. More than half of the questions included in *al-Ajwibah* pertain to this issue—namely, *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth* (conflicting *hadīths*). Laknawī's focus on this topic reflects the natural result of the methodological divergence between the Ahl al-*Hadīth* and the Hanafīs in nineteenth-century India. It is important to highlight that as a Hanafī jurist, al-Laknawī inclined, in terms of scholarly orientation, toward the approach of the *hadīth* scholars when it came to conflicting reports. In this regard, it may be said that he deviated from the path represented by the Hanafī tradition of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī and was closer to the methodology of Shāh Walī Allāh.

Issues related to *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth* are presented in *al-Ajwibah* from the fifth question onward in a manner that complements each other. The first question dealing with *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*—which is the fifth question overall in the book—asks what method should be followed when two pieces of evidence contradict each other. As is well known, the commonly accepted sequence among the majority of scholars is: *jam'*, *tarjih* and *naskh*. Among the Hanafīs, however, the order is reversed: *naskh* comes first, followed by *tarjih*, and finally *jam'*.⁵² As seen, by prioritizing *naskh* (abrogation) between two conflicting reports, the Hanafīs naturally tend to dismiss one of the contradictory narrations. However, Laknawī departs from the general Hanafī approach by theoretically giving precedence to *jam'* (reconciliation), that is, the attempt to harmonize the two reports. At the core of his approach lies the concern—common among *hadīth* scholars—not to invalidate any narration.⁵³ By

(Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1439/2018), 145–146 (Note 8).

51 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 161.

52 İsmail Lütü Çakan, *Hadislerde Görülen İhtilaflar ve Çözüm Yolları* (İstanbul: İFAV, 2010), 179–180. For detailed information on Laknawī's approach to *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*, see Yunus Emre Acaroğlu, Yusuf Açık, "Leknevî'nin İhtilâfu'l-Hadis İlmine Yaklaşımı", *Tokat İlmîyat Dergisi* 9/1 (June 2021), 77–104.

53 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 183–187. See Muhammed İsa Yüksek, "Bir İşkâl Çözüm Yöntemi Olarak Neshin Aidiyeti", *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 25/3 (Aralık 2021), 1065–1080.

contrast, some Hanafī scholars of the subcontinent, such as Kashmīrī, consider the sequence that prioritizes naskh and tarjīḥ over jamʿ to be more accurate.⁵⁴ However, Kashmīrī stipulates that naskh, “the method Hanafis usually apply first, must be established through transmission—i.e., it must be reported from the Prophet or his Companions. If naskh is the result of ijtihād, he recommends that it be used only after tarjīḥ, as the third method in the sequence.”⁵⁵ This, in fact, means that transmission once again occupies a central position in the methodology. In other words, a more detailed examination of al-Kashmīrī’s methodology reveals a point of intersection with al-Laknawī’s approach.

The reconciliatory stance observed in contentious issues led Hanafis in the Indian subcontinent to adopt positions different from the traditional Hanafī position on certain debated matters. This, in fact, reflects the influence of the hadith-centered scholarly tradition prevalent in India on Hanafī scholars. For example, as is well known, in the Hanafī school, the hands are raised only at the beginning of the prayer (during the *takbīrat al-iḥrām*) to the level of the ears, and are not raised again during the prayer. However, as a result of methodological debates within scholarly gatherings, numerous treatises were written on this subject. It has also been addressed in detail within the commentaries. Accordingly, referring to the narration transmitted from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, which states that the Prophet raised his hands during transitional *takbīrs* within the prayer, al-Laknawī notes that similar reports exist from other Companions as well. While also acknowledging the authenticity of the narration from ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd, which indicates that the hands should not be raised, al-Laknawī affirms both practices.⁵⁶ It is particularly noteworthy that one of the leading Hanafī scholars of the region, Kashmīrī, authored a work titled *Nayl al-Farqadayn fi mas‘alat raf‘ al-yadayn*, in which he regarded both practices as established by the Sunnah, even describing them as practically mass-transmitted (‘amālī mutawātir). Accordingly, Kashmīrī, who considered both practices permissible, addressed the issue not in terms of identifying which one constitutes the Sunnah, but rather in the context of determining which is more virtuous.⁵⁷ In contrast, al-Mubārekpūrī, one of the leading figures of the Ahl al-Hadīth, regarded the narrations from the Kufans—especially those attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd—that report the hands were not raised during prayer as defective (*with ‘illa*). As a result, he did not give importance to the Kufan practice and, based on the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the narrations he accepted as authentic, concluded that raising the hands during prayer is necessary.⁵⁸

As can be seen from the examples mentioned above, there is a clear difference between the attitudes of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and the Hanafis regarding ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth. There are

54 Muhammet Raşit Akpınar, *Muhammed Enver Şah el-Keşmîrî ve Fıkıh Düşüncesi* (Gaziantep: Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2017), 306.

55 Akpınar, *Muhammed Enver Şah el-Keşmîrî ve Fıkıh Düşüncesi*, 306.

56 For an example of al-Laknawī’s approach to the subject, see Abū al-Ḥasanāt ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Muḥammad al-Laknawī, *at-Ta‘līqu’l-mumajjad ‘alā Muwaṭṭa’i’l-Imām Muḥammad*, critical ed. Takīyyuddīn an-Nadwī (Dimashq: Dār al-Kalām, 2011), 1/374–399.

57 Akpınar, *Muhammed Enver Şah el-Keşmîrî ve Fıkıh Düşüncesi*, 54; Harun Özçelik, “Muhammed Enver el-Keşmîrî’nin Bazı Hadis Meseleleri Hakkındaki Görüşleri”, *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 23 (2005), 200.

58 Serdar Murat Gürses, “Hanefî ve Ehl-i Hadis Prensipleri Açısından Keşmîrî ile Mubārekpūrî’nin Tirmizî Şerhleri”, *HADITH* 3 (2019), 52.

also other issues that have been points of contention between the Hanafis and the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, and which, especially in light of the general approach of the Hanafis, can be said to have been “relaxed.” Legal issues such as the recitation of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa by a follower in prayer and the audible utterance of “Āmīn” are among the main examples. At this point, it is particularly noteworthy that some Hanafis, such as Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sindhī, hold the view that, in matters of subsidiary issues of Islamic jurisprudence (furūʿ al-fiqh), where it is acknowledged that the established rulings contradict sound hadiths,⁵⁹ those reports must be acted upon.

What makes al-Laknawī distinctive in the matter of *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth* is not merely that he made unique choices in certain individual issues. Rather, he provided a theoretical foundation for the positions taken by some Hanafis in debated matters and sought to reconcile them with the majority (jumhūr) approach. For instance, al-Laknawī emphasized that reconciling (jamʿ) two reports—allowing both hadiths to be acted upon—should take precedence not only over naskh but also over tarjīḥ. In the context of the sixth question, while referring to the difference between the Hanafis and the Shāfiʿīs on this issue, al-Laknawī notes that although each opinion has its own justification, *jamʿ* should be prioritized over *tarjīḥ*.⁶⁰ When conflicting reports cannot be reconciled through *jamʿ*, the concept of *tarjīḥ*—which represents one of the stages in the process—along with the fundamental arguments supporting it and the manner in which preference should be exercised when necessary, are among the issues addressed in *al-Ajwibah*. Within the framework of the seventh question, al-Laknawī engaged with the preference criteria highlighted in the debates. In fact, this question effectively summarizes the arguments traditionally employed by hadith scholars and jurists when preferring certain reports. Accordingly, factors such as the presence of a hadith in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim), *the narrator’s status as a jurist*, and *the multiplicity of the chains of transmission (isnāds)*⁶¹ have been examined.

While addressing this issue, al-Laknawī evaluated each criterion from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In this context, he opened for discussion certain principles accepted by both the Ahl al-Ḥadīth group and the surrounding Hanafis. Emphasizing the importance of the multiplicity of versions once the authenticity of a report has been established, al-Laknawī⁶² also referred to the famous debate between Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Awzāʿī concerning the juristic status of the narrator. Addressing the historical reality of this event, al-Laknawī⁶³ corrected certain misunderstandings and emphasized the importance of this condition from the Hanafi perspective. In particular, he analyzed the approach that regards this not merely as a criterion for preference but as a decisive merit of the narration.⁶⁴ According to him, “when the conditions of *ḍabt*, *ʿadālah*, and others are equal, and the contents are contradictory, the narrator who is a jurist (*faqīh*) is preferred over the one who is not.”⁶⁵

59 Ahmet Aydın, *Yavana İslam Medeniyetinin Büyük Havzası: Hint* (İstanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2021), 238.

60 al-Laknawī *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 196.

61 al-Laknawī *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, see 202 ff.

62 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 207-210.

63 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 212-214.

64 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 217-218.

65 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 219.

Al-Laknawī followed a middle path regarding the issue of the faqīh rāwī, which was one of the important debates of his time. Kashmīrī's explanation is significant in terms of the foundation on which Laknawī's approach is based, as he notes that the condition of faqīh rāwī in Hanafī sources is problematic.⁶⁶ In the context of one issue, al-Kashmīrī found it extremely audacious that "Abu Hurayra was accused of lacking the capacity for fiqh. Nevertheless, even if this is accepted for a moment, he states that a similar narration by Ibn Mas'ud, who can be considered among the most faqīh of the Companions, cannot be ignored." It can be said that the methodology of these two prominent Hanafī scholars regarding the faqīh rāwī also reflects a characteristic unique to the Indian subcontinent.

Another topic addressed in *al-Ajwibah* is the issue of whether *ijtihād* and *ra'y* are sufficient criteria for preferring one narration over another. The eighth question, which briefly addresses this issue, is answered directly in its opening statement of the issue, stating that reconciliation (*jam'*) and preference (*tarjīh*) "are not valid unless they are based on explicit or implicit shari'ah evidence, or on a principle firmly established by such evidence".⁶⁷ In this inference, which combines Laknawī's interest in the sciences of narration (*riwāyah*) with his methodological aspect (*uṣūl*), both narrations and the jurisprudential principles derived from them are cared.

In some cases, the two reports do not contradict each other, but problems arise due to the attitude of the narrator transmitting them. For instance, when a narrator fails to act upon the apparent meaning of the hadith, this may create a perceived contradiction.⁶⁸ The ninth question and its answer, which address this issue, are also quite brief. Laknawī stated that the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the hadith cannot be abandoned based on the narrator's failure to act upon it. According to him, the narrator's attitude may have various reasons, but these do not invalidate the apparent meaning.⁶⁹ A similar situation applies to some Companions who acted contrary to a *marfū'* ḥadīth. In the tenth question and answer, al-Laknawī, discussing the reasons for this situation, emphasized that the Companion's ḥadīth cannot be abandoned due to practices that contradict the narration.

The issue of contradiction (*ta'āruḍ*) arising from a narrator's practice, as discussed by Laknawī, appears to have a basis in the traditional literature. However, certain issues have been re-examined methodologically in light of India's local religious and social conditions. These topics, which are also found in classical works on hadith methodology, often revolve around cases where the narrator either forgot the narration he transmitted or did not act in accordance with it.

As can be seen, the issues on which al-Laknawī builds his theoretical discussions are generally those debated directly in scholarly gatherings. This is because the Ahl al-Hadīth in India can be easily distinguished from the Hanafī followers in the region by their practice of loudly saying "Āmīn" after *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, folding their hands over the chest during the standing (*qiyām*), excessively spreading their feet, advocating the view of raising the

66 Akpınar, *Muhammed Enver Şah el-Keşmîrî ve Fıkıh Düşüncesi*, 147.

67 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 220.

68 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 222.

69 al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*, 224-225.

hands (raf' al-yadayn), and their distinct style of keeping long beards.⁷⁰ An examination of hadith commentaries and fiqh works produced in India reveals that these topics were recurring and discussed in great detail. Al-Laknawī approached these matters through the lens of hadith transmission (riwāyah), first exploring their theoretical foundations and then attempting to strike a balance between the Ahl al-Ḥadīth community and conservative Hanafīs.

Conclusion

Several factors contribute to India's significance in the history of hadith and modern hadith debates. In the 19th century, despite facing political and social upheavals, scholars in the region produced important works in hadith commentary, marginal notes (ḥāshiyah), and annotations (ta'liq). Although their native languages differed, these scholars chose to write in Arabic, which facilitated intellectual ties with the wider Islamic world. As a result, many hadith works written in India remain essential sources in contemporary scholarly discussions.

In the 19th century Indian scholarly gatherings, three main groups shaped the debates: the Hanafīs representing doctrinal understanding, the Ahl al-Ḥadīth community reviving a narration-centered approach, and modernist/reformist movements critical of both. Additionally, colonial influences played a significant role in shaping religious debates and the intellectual agenda.

In the 19th century scholarly circles, one of the most notable figures, especially in discussions on the hadith-fiqh relationship, was 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī. Al-Laknawī, who cannot be viewed as a classical Hanafī jurist in the strict sense, occasionally went beyond the methodology shaped by his own school of thought and made original doctrinal choices based on hadith-centered evaluations. In this context, one of his most notable works is *al-Ajwibah al-fāḍilah*. The content of this work provides the opportunity to both observe Laknawī's method and evaluate the scholarly discussions of the period. First of all, it is noteworthy that the person who asked the questions discussed in the book was a member of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth community. Both the style of the questions and the responses are quite nuanced and detailed. Therefore, Laknawī's work serves as a text that reflects the shared agenda of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and the Hanafīs.

The ten questions addressed in the book revolve around three main thematic categories: the sources of hadith (i.e., isnād and hadith compilations), the methodology to be followed in cases of disagreement among muḥaddithūn regarding the authenticity of a hadith, and the procedure for resolving apparent contradictions between hadiths with similar content. The question and answer concerning isnād serve as a defense against critiques that challenge the reliability of traditional modes of transmission. In doing so, al-Laknawī also opens for discussion the content of certain widely circulated works that include reports lacking isnād, questioning their legitimacy within the classical tradition. The assessments regarding hadith sources and their content are directly linked to the hadith-fiqh educational structure in India. Scholars in the region prioritized major hadith compilations in their

70 Aydın, *Yavana İslam Medeniyetinin Büyük Havzası: Hint*, 322.

teaching and engaged with them in a systematic and categorical manner. Accordingly, one of the questions presented in the book can be interpreted as a defense of the educational framework and the centrality of these sources in the region. The remaining questions center on the theoretical foundations of *furūʿ al-fiqh* issues debated in scholarly gatherings. While special illustrative cases are occasionally provided, the overall emphasis is on methodological orientation. In this regard, the discussions between Hanafī scholars and the Ahl al-Ḥadīth are informed by the intellectual and historical trends of the Indian subcontinent.

Although Laknawī may outwardly appear to draw upon the intellectual legacy represented by Shāh Walī Allāh, in reality he benefited from the scholarly climate and intellectual accumulation of his own time thereby transporting the traditional legacy into a new intellectual plane. From the perspective of the balance he sought to establish between hadith and fiqh, he reinterpreted the approach initiated by ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī and systematized by Shāh Walī Allāh, thereby representing one of the original trajectories of Ḥanafism in the Indian subcontinent—in other words, the third generation of this tradition.

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