PRESERVING HADITH TRADITION IN THE MODERN TIMES: Muḥammad Yāsīn al-Fādânī’s Thought on Sanad in His al-ʻUjālah fi al-ʻAhādīts al-Musalsalah

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Abstract: Before long after the completion of tadwîn (hadith canonization) in the 3/9 century, hadith transmission practice had become a formalistic tradition. The function of sanad (hadith’s chain of transmission) has shifted from being the authenticity determinant into a mere symbol of consecration. While most of modern Islamic reformists seem to undervalue the sanad, traditionalists groups perceive it as one of Islamic traditions that worth preservation. One of them was Muḥammad Yāsīn al-Fādânī (d. 1990), a prominent traditionalist whose name is often preceded by the title musnid al-ʻasr (the musnid of the century). The objective of this paper is to examine al-Fādânī’s view on sanad and its significance in modern times with special attention given to both authenticity and preservation aspects. This study applies document and historical analysis focused mainly on al-Fādânī’s al-ʻUjālah fi al-ʻAhādīts al-Musalsalah. It found that the sanad circulation in the modern period, including what is included in al-Fādânī’s work, is not for theological or legal argument purposes. Instead, it was mainly maintained to preserve past Islamic tradition and to spread spirituality. It comes, however, with several negativities which draw serious criticism from both reformist and traditionalist groups.

Keywords: hadith, sanad, musalsal, tabarruk, salafi, Yāsīn al-Fādânī
Introduction

At the end of the 12/18 century, various Islamic movements that aimed at initiating change in Muslim’s socio-religious state have emerged. They have agreed that the solution for the crisis in the Muslim world can only be achieved through religious reforms based on the spirit of *salafiyyah* (return to the original teaching of Islam) and denouncing heresy’s minds and practices.\(^1\) By the time most of the Islamic countries had successfully deliberated from western colonialism in the second half of the 14/20 century, religious awareness among Islamic communities grows. Discussions about hadith and its related sciences reemerged. Many modern studies in hadith historiography stated that hadith science in this century has entered the “phase of awakening and consciousness (*yaqazhah wa tanabbuh*).”\(^2\) Others believe that it has even entered the “phase of revival (*nahdah*)”.\(^3\) According to Eido, the uniqueness found in modern hadith discourse allowed it to be set in a special category. Although its general structure retains the tradition of later scholars (*muta’akhirîn*), the scholarly works produced in this phase discusses unprecedented topics such as rebuttal to orientalist’s theories, special emphasis on content (*matn*) criticism, and discovering the past scholar’s methodology (*manhaj*).\(^4\)

In the rise of hadith studies in the modern century, Muhammad Yâsîn bin Muhammad ʿIsâ al-Fadânî (1335/1916-1410/1990) has drawn Islamic world’s attention due to his massive contribution to the field of hadith. His name is frequently praised with the various titles of honor including the *musnid al-ʿashr* (the *musnîd* of the century).\(^5\) Although many studies have been conducted to expose al-Fâdânî’s contribution to the science of hadith,\(^6\) there are no scholarly studies that have been made to give a clear understanding of his genuine contribution in the context of modern hadith revival that reaches culmination in the 20th
century. Most of the studies focused their discussions on topics related to his bibliographical scholarship and networking aspects. Al-Fâdânî’s view on sanad, which is his major contribution in the field of modern hadith studies, remains unexplored. Therefore, the significance of the following study lies in the effort to establish the socio-intellectual context in which al-Fâdânî’s contribution should be appreciated. It also facilitates to construct a clear concept to understand the relevance of sanad tradition among modern traditionalists.

The following is to study and analysis one of al-Fâdânî’s scholarly works namely al-‘Ujâlah fi al-Aḥādīts al-Musalsalah. As clearly reflected in the title, it is a compilation of musalsal hadiths transmitted by al-Fâdânî with a full chain of transmission connecting him to the prophet. As will be explained later, musalsal hadith has taken a special position among the past and current traditionalists due to its unique qualities. To this day, the preservation of this kind of hadiths continues to be part of eminent Islamic traditions among scholars and students of hadith. Therefore, the selection of ‘Ujâlah fi al-Aḥādīts al-Musalsalah as the object of analysis in this paper obtains its justification.

The study found that the sanad occupies an important position in al-Fâdânî’s scholarly contribution to hadith modern studies. Although the quality and function of sanad have been changed from what it was in hadith formative periods, al-Fâdânî holds the perception that hadith transmission is an Islamic tradition that worth preservation. Contrary to the view of major reformists in his time who seem to undervalue the traditional sanad, al-Fadânî and his fellow traditionalists faithfully perceive the sanad as a tool by which modern Muslims can be connected to prophetic spirituality (tabarruk). The tabarruk concept has indisputably played a significant role to ensure the preservation of sanad tradition amidst the spirit of renewal in modern-day.
However, it has come with a certain price because it has paved the way for the dissemination of weak and false hadiths among the Islamic community.

To break things down, the presentation in this paper will be divided into three parts. Firstly, it will elaborate on how the function of sanad has changed from hadith formative periods until the current time. The discussion then continued to the second part which displays a brief observation of al-Fâdâni’s biography as well as examines his view on the function of sanad in the modern context. The last part will scrutinize the contents of al-‘Ujâlah fî al-Ahâdîth al-Musalsalah applying critical analysis with special attention has been given to the authenticity aspects.

**Sanad: History and Relevance**

In Arabic lexicography, sanad means “something on which others rely on”. The scholar of hadith subsequently used the word as a technical term that refers to “the source of the Hadith text” (*tharîq matn al-hadîts*). The sanad contains transmitter’s names who reportedly receive and pass on the hadith from one generation to the other in the form of a chain transmission. In its capacity as a source of information, sanad becomes an important object by which the authenticity of hadith can be determined. It is the consensus of the hadith scholars that a sound hadith should be transmitted through transmitters whose ‘adâlah (personal piety) and dhabth (accuracy) have been carefully verified. Also, the sanad must be proven contagious (*muttashil*) and did not contain any hidden defect (*‘illah*) nor peculiarity (*syâdz*). The contiguity of the sanad can be verified through observing the wording used by transmitters while transmitting the hadith to his pupil. The acceptable wording includes direct hearing (*sama‘*)
and reading out loud before the teacher (‘ardh). There is disagreement among past scholars in establishing ijāzah (verbal or written authorization to transmit without having samā‘ dan ‘ardh) as one of the acceptable wordings. More later scholars, however, had agreed to accept it.8

In parallel with the importance of hadith in the formation of Islamic creeds and laws, sanad takes a special place in Islam. It becomes inseparable parts of every Islamic discourse. ‘Abd Allâh bin al-Mubârak (d. 181/797) once said: “Sanad is part of the religion. Without which anyone could say whatever he wants (in regards to religion).”9 Other than scientific values, sanad manifests the superiority of Islamic civilization for no one has such a painstaking mechanism in fact verification. The Damascene Scholar Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) stated: “Sanad is one of the privileges owned by this ummah (Islamic nation). It is one of the high qualities of Islam.”10

However, the function of sanad changes after the completion of tadwîn (hadith canonization) in the 4/10 century. The collective effort initiated by the order of Caliph ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azîz (d. 101/720) has successfully compiled and preserved all prophetic hadiths against any chance of alteration and falsification. The Naysaburian Scholar Abû Bakar al-Bayhaqi (d. 458/1066) pointed out that no single hadith has been excluded from this massive movement. Thus, he argued, that “whoever offers a hadith but its existence could not be verified in any of current hadith compilations, the said claim shall be rejected.”11 Since all hadiths along with its sanads had been preserved in prominent compilations, those sanads that came after are not the same as the previous ones in terms of function and significance. As the Damascene Muhâddits Abû ‘Amr Ibn al-Shalâh (d. 643/1245) asserted, these later sanads (isnâd al-muta’akhîrîn) that circulate after the completion of tadwîn are no longer seen as the authenticity determinant.
Nevertheless, the tradition of transmitting hadith with unbroken sanad must be maintained to “preserve the symbol of Islamic privilege (ibqâ’ silsilah al-isnâd allatî khushshat biha hadzih al-ummah)”.

According to Eerik Dickinson, in the post-tadwîn sanad has turned into some kind of a Prophetic relic that is preserved only for historical and spiritual purposes. Its quality is often determined by the number of transmitters in the chain of transmission. The less the number, the more valuable the sanad in the eyes of hadith seekers, for it reflects proximity to the Prophet. It explains why the sanad ‘alî (elevated sanad) is exceedingly valued by hadith seekers so that they willingly travel thousands of miles to obtain it. However, many hadith scholars notified that fond of obtaining the sanad of hadiths without attempting to comprehend and practice its teachings is void. Any person who did it should not be considered as one of the hadith scholars. This is because the main objective of the hadith studies is to achieve expertise in hadith verification, as well as to understand and apply its teachings in daily life, not merely collecting sanads from various sources.

Entering the modern century, most Islamic reformists have disregarded the importance of sanads and its circulation effort. This attitude can be seen, for instance, in Egyptian reformist Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1323/1905) who declined for granting his ijâzah upon request. He said that the traditional sanad transmission is “a formality that had deprived Muslims of their substantial obligation. It is incapable of liberating mankind from the worldly sufferings nor the tribulations in the hereafter”. Such a view is also exhibited by later reformist-Salafi scholars like ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sa‘dî (d. 1376/1956), Nâshiruddîn al-Albânî (d. 1420/1999), ‘Abd al-‘Azîz Ibn Bâz (d. 1420/1999), Ibn ‘Utsaymîn (d. 1421/2000) and ‘Abd Allâh al-Jibrîn (d. 1430/
These modern scholars perceived the current traditional *sanad* transmission are just empty formalities which have lost its value. They asserted that *sanad* collection does not make ones more knowledgeable.

Nevertheless, some modern scholars maintain the traditional view of *sanad*. They regard it as one of the significant Islamic traditions that should be preserved and kept alive. They are the traditionalists who faithfully uphold and safeguard Islamic tradition despite external and internal challenges. Many of them have internationally known as prominent *musnids* such as Ahmad bin Râfi‘ al-Thahtâwî (d. 1335/1936), ‘Abd al-Sattâr al-Dihlawî (d. 1335/1936), ‘Abd al-Bâqî‘ al-Laknawî (d. 1364/1945-6), and many more. Including Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Hây al-Kattânî (d. 1382/1962) who has developed an interest in *sanad* studies from an early age. He collected *ijâzât* from hundreds of scholars from all over the world. Before reaching the age of 40, he has been recognized as the most-referred scholar in hadith studies and related manuscripts with over 130 scholarly works.

**Al-Fâdânî and His View in Sanad**

Muḥammad Yāsin bin Muḥammad Yassin bin Udîk al-Fâdânî was born in Misfâlah, Mecca, in 1916. The word “al-Fâdânî” refers to Padang, one of the major cities in Indonesia, where his family comes from. Al-Fâdânî begins his religious education by learning under his family members. After that, he furthers his study at a private school namely the Sawlatiyyah where many Asian lecturers thought Islamic sciences to non-Arab students. When a dispute erupts between the school top management and the Jawi lecturers, the latter decided to leave and establish a new school named Dâr al-‘Ulûm al-Dîniyyah. Al-Fâdânî and many other Southeast Asian students moved to
this new institution. After graduated in 1937, he appointed as a lecturer in the same school. Several years later, he is entrusted to navigate the school administration as head principal (mudîr). Under his leadership, countless students from Southeast Asian countries have graduated. Al-Fadânî’s good relationship with the alumni earned him their respect and admiration. After years of dedications, al-Fâdânî passed away in Mecca on Friday morning 28 Zulhijah 1410/1990 and buried in Ma‘la cemetery.\(^{21}\)

Apart from his teaching activities, al-Fâdânî is also known as a prolific author. He has penned more than a hundred books in various fields of Islamic sciences including law (fiqh), jurisprudence (ushûl al-fiqh), balâghah, logic (manthiq), and many others.\(^ {22}\) The versatility of his works is mainly due to his need as a lecturer and school principal to provide textbooks and references for his students.\(^ {23}\) However, al-Fâdânî’s credential is better known among international scholars in hadith transmission sciences, often known as ‘ilm al-riwâyah. It is mainly related to the preservation of centuries-old tradition which faithfully passes down hadith compilations from generation to generation. For this particular discipline, al-Fâdânî has published over 70 works that compile hundreds of ijâzahs he obtained from over 700 world Islamic scholars.\(^ {24}\) His reputation attracted sanad seekers as well as prominent hadith scholars from all over the Islamic world. He becomes famously known with many honorable titles such as musnid al-dunyâ (musnid of the world) and musnid al-‘ashr (musnid of the century). Multiple books have been dedicated to studying al-Fâdânî’s biography and listing down the names of scholars that granted him ijâzah such as Tasynîf al-Asmâ‘ bi Syuyûkh al-Ijâzah wa al-Samâ‘ by Maḥmûd Sa‘îd Mamdûh and Bulûgh al-Amânî fi al-Ta‘rif bi Syuyûkh wa Asânîd Musnid al-‘Ashr al-Sayykh Muḥammad Yâsîn bin Muḥammad ‘Isâ al-Fâdânî by Muḥammad Mukhtâr al-Dîn al-Falimbânî.
Al-Fâdânî’s specialization in ‘ilm al-riwâyah is based on his perception of sanad. For him, sanad and its related traditions are part of the Islamic cultural heritage and Muslim privileges that should be preserved. He also perceives sanad as a representation of prophetic blessing which endows honorable status to its bearers by mentioning his name alongside the Prophet. On top of that, sanad reflects one’s originality and sound connection to the Prophet and past scholars. Meccan scholar Hasan Masyâth stated that “the noblest science is that is connected to the leader of mankind (the Prophet)”.

In short, sanad in the view of traditionalist scholars reflects continuity, identity, and legitimacy, as well as spirituality. It is not just an object of study which lost its value and function after the completion of the hadith canonization process. Instead, the importance of sanad remains in line with how the Islamic sciences should be passed on to the next generation. It must be through direct and face to face (talaqqî) method.

In light of the above explanation, it is understandable if some traditionalists express the negative perception of those who learn Islamic knowledge without the talaqqî method. Ignoring the tradition is one of the major reasons behind the destructive opinions allegedly demonstrated by reformists and Salafi groups. In his criticism to the Salafi Muhaddits Nâshir al-Dîn al-Albânî, Habîb al-Rahmân al-A’zhamî (m. 1412/1992) asserted: “Anyone who knows al-Albânî and reads his biography will find that he did not take his knowledge from the mouth of the scholars, and he did not kneel before them for talaqqî.” Therefore, a reminder of the importance of talaqqî has been emphasized repeatedly by traditional scholars. Muhammad ‘Awwâmah, for instance, said: “The intellectual chaos that is happening today is mainly because of those who involved in discussions are far from two criteria, namely talaqqî and learning in stages”.

9
Hadith Tradition in Modern Times: Between Consecration and Authenticity

Following his concept on sanad, al-Fâdâni presented an outstanding contribution in sanad studies, especially in the transmission of musalsal hadiths. In hadith technical terms, musalsal is a hadith transmitted through a continual form of uniformity abode by all or most of its transmitters. For instance, a hadith famously known as musalsal bi al-awwaliyyah (continual in initiation) demonstrated uniformity in initiation. Most of its transmitters stated that this particular hadith is the first hadith he heard from his teacher. Other hadith is known as musalsal bi al-mahabbah (continual in affection) because everyone in its sanad transmitted the hadith by holding the hand of his disciple and uttering: “I love you.” Uniformity in musalsal includes certain hadiths in which all the transmitter shared similarity in names, sects (madzhab), countries of residence, etc.²⁹

Hadith scholars expressed different views on the exact number of musalsals in hadith compilations. While Syams al-Dîn al-Sakhâwî (m. 902/1497) managed to collect 100 musalsals in his al-Jawâhir al-Mukallalah, his predecessors such as Ibn al-Thayyib al-Sharqî al-Fâsî (d. 1170/1856) and Murtadhâ al-Zabîdî (d. 1205/1790) increased the number into a triple. The Moroccan hadith scholar Muhammad bin Ja’far al-Kattânî (d. 1345/1927) estimated the number of musalsals up to 400 hadiths.³⁰

From the hadith criticism point of view, the musalsal is much regarded for its multiple advantages. This kind of sanads contained specific and detailed information that is useful in ensuring hadith authenticity. And spirituality speaking, musalsal hadiths pave the way for Muslims to identically impersonate the Prophet in his words or actions.³¹ Because of these specialties, later hadith exponents developed a certain interest in collecting
musalsals in series of works. According to al-Mar’ashlî, the first compilation of musalsals belongs to a Baghdadi Muhaddits Abû Bakr Aḥmad bin Ibrâhîm Ibn Shâdhân (d. 383/993). The interest in the musalsals increasingly grows later on, especially after the perception of sanad had changed into a source of prophetic blessing. The number of books in the musalsal collection had multiplied over the centuries.32

Notwithstanding, the biggest concern in the musalsal collection is related to its authenticity. According to al-Dzahabi (m. 748/1348), most of the musalsals are extremely poor (wâhî) or even false (mawdûh). Only a few can be regarded as sound (shahîh).33 Supporting this notion, Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1448) asserted: “The most authentic musalâs in the world is the musalsal bi shûrah al-Shaf (continual transmission with the recitation of al-Shaf chapter).” His disciple Syams al-Dîn al-Sakhâwi (m. 902/1497) added to the list: musalsal bi al-Awwaliyyah.34 Also falls into this category, said Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûthî (m. 911/1505), musalsal bi al-ḥuffâzh (continual transmission through hadith scholars) and bi al-fuqaha’ (continual transmission with the jurists). He even cited Ibn Hajar’s statement in Syarh al-Nukhbah that the sanad which contains musalsal bil ḥufâzh provides definitive knowledge (qath‘i).35

Of all the modern scholars, al-Fâdânî is considered the most influential figure when it comes into the musalsal transmission.36 His contribution covers multiple works in musalsal compilation one of which is al-‘Ujâlah fi al-Aḥâdîs al-Musalsalah. The book is authored at the request of some sanad seekers who purposely come to him in the holy city of Medina. It contains 113 musalsal hadiths. Opened with the musalsal bi al-awwaliyyah and concluded with the musalsal bi khatm al-majlis bi-du‘â’ (continual transmission by reciting the closing prayer). Most of the hadiths mentioned in the book are followed by a technical commentary that explicates
its status of authenticity. His main reference in these commentaries is ‘Uyûn al-Mawârid of Muḥammad bin al-Thayyib al-Fâsî (m. 1170/1856). Observation of al-Fâsî’s commentaries shows his prevalent leniency in hadith criticism. He frequently dismisses the opinions of previous experts on hadith authenticity such as al-Dzahabî and Ibn Hajar to corroborate hadiths they deemed as poor (dhâ‘îf) or false (mawdhû’). Nonetheless, al-Fâsî and al-Fâdânî inevitably acknowledged the weakness of several musalsalāk in the book. Based on al-Fâdânî’s commentaries, 35 hadiths in his al-‘Ujâlah are poor, including those he stated as gharib (peculiar) and tafarrud (uncorroborated), and 7 hadiths identified as false. A total of 18 hadiths left without any comment on their authenticity.

The finding shows that authenticity apparently is not al-Fâdânî’s main concern in al-‘Ujâlah. He did not compose the book to provide a solid argument for any theological or law discourse. Instead, his sole purpose is to keep the sanad tradition alive as well as to disperse prophetic blessing (tabarruk) in modern times. Each hadith in the book is meant to be recited in a completed chain of transmission to connect the reciter to the Prophet. It is worth noticing that hadith recital in hoping for spiritual blessing (tabarruk), not for any learning purposes, has been part of the Islamic culture from the pre-modern era. It is then devotedly preserved by the Sufi-traditionalists despite strong opposition launched by modern Salafi-reformists. And as far as the tabarruk is concerned, the discussion on authenticity did not form a crucial aspect. Therefore, it has always been put aside or at least taken lightly. Hadiths with a poor degree of authenticity, or even convicted as false, are regularly accepted and circulated among traditional scholars. It can be seen, for instance, in al-Fâdânî’s discussion on the authenticity of hadith musalsal bi al-dhiyâfāh (continual by serving date and water to
the guest). After quoting al-Sakhâwî’s opinion that the hadith is false due to bad reputation of its transmitter, namely ‘Abdullah bin Maymûn al-Qaddâh, al-Fâdînî followed the opinion with Ibn al-Tayyib’s comment: “Even though the muhadditsûn strongly reject al-Qaddâh and accuse him of lying, they continue to circulate this hadith for tabarruk and good intention. Therefore, most of the authors of the musalsal collections (al-musalsilûn) refrain from criticizing it.”

The concept of tabarruk, which provides a solid foundation for musalsal circulation, does not only justify the dissemination of false hadiths. It also paved the way for the spread of superstitious sanads which contain fictitious transmitters claimed to be spiritual beings such as Jins and the mu’ammarûn (someone who claimed to have an unbelievably long life). This kind of sanads mostly invented and circulated in much later periods to present higher proximity to the Prophet. The transmission of this kind of musalsals reflects a lenient attitude (tasâhul) that contradicts the basic principle of hadith sciences. These musalsals are found in al-Fâdînî’s compilation, and sometimes without any elaboration on its authenticity status. One of them is hadith renown as musalsal bi al-Fâtihah (continual by al-Fâtihah recitation) which contains a transmitter named Shamhûris, known as the judge of Jinn, and ‘Abd al-Mu’min al-Badrî, claimed as a Jinn who has participated in the Battle of Badr. Upon mentioning this musalsal in al-‘Ujâlah, al-Fâdînî did not provide any explanation on its status of authenticity.

Despite the acceptance of most Sufi-traditionalists, circulating false hadiths and superstitious sanads is heavily criticized by the Salafis and some traditionalists. They agreed to call upon the abandonment of such traditions noting that the tabarruk justification should not be manipulated to spread false and fake hadiths. A prominent Turkish scholar Muḥammad Zâhid al-
Kawtsarî (m. 1371/1952), one of al-Fâdânî’s masters in hadith, asserted: “There is no blessing in the elevated sanad which contains serious defects (maghâmiz).” The same opinion expressed by al-Kawtsarî’s bright student from Syria, and al-Fâdânî’s peer, ‘Abd al-Fattâh Abû Ghuddah (d. 1417/1997). He added that collecting and transmitting falsified hadiths is such a waste of time and ink. Commenting on the recitation of musalsal bi al-mushâfâahah al-mu’ammariyyah (continual shaking hands), Abû Ghuddah points out its falsity then criticizes those who transmit this sanad based on the tabarruk concept. He said: “There is no tabarruk in lies set upon the Prophet’s name.”

**Conclusion**

The modern times have arguably witnessed the revival of the hadith studies as seen in multiple discussions on its various aspects. Muhammad Yâsîn al-Fâdânî is undoubtedly one of the prominent scholars who made a great impact on the current hadith discourse. Of all his scholarly works, his most prevalent contribution is in preserving the traditional sanad in the modern context. He believes that sanad is a precious legacy which worth preserving for the next generations. Therefore, he gave precious contributions in the preservation of sanad through several scholarly works. His opinion, however, came in line with the stance of taking lightly the aspect of authenticity. The tradition conservation often manipulated to justify the circulation of false hadith and pave the way for superstitions to make their way to Islamic society.
References


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Endnotes:


5 Musnad is a technical term commonly given to someone who has vast collection of sanads and is well-known for his dedication in hadith transmission.


8 For further discussion on the acceptance of ijāzah among classical and later exponent of hadith, see ʿUtsmān Ibn al-Shalāḥ al-Šayhrūzūrī, ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīts (Bīrūt: Dār al-Fikr al-Mūʿāṣhir, 2002), p. 151-153; Dhiyāb bin Saʿād al-Ghūmidī, al-Wijāzah


14 Ibn al-Shalâh, *‘Ulûm al-Hadîts*, p. 250.


44 Ibid., p. 273.