THE BAHR AL-MĀDHĪ OF SHAYKH MUḤAMMAD IDRĪS AL-MARBĀWĪ: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

By:

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Abstract
The Bahr al-Mādhī of Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbāwī can be aptly considered as one of the greatest literary masterpiece of Malay Muslim scholarship in the twentieth century. It was composed as a commentary to the Jāmiʿ al-Tirmīdhī and the only one of its kind to have been written in the Malay language. Perhaps, due to the lack of awareness, the book has not received attention or been the subject of any study or scrutiny by contemporary researchers. It is therefore, the intention of this preliminary exposition on the book in terms of its scope, content and analysis of the methodology of its author to pave the way for further analysis and studies in the future.

Abstrak

INTRODUCTION
The advent of Islam in the Malay Archipelago has left a significant impact on the religious, cultural and socio-political aspects of the native communities. The greater part of the archipelago, which was under the influence of

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Hinduism and local animistic beliefs, was rapidly transformed into a new set of theological dogma, embracing a whole new dimension of beliefs and worldview based on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Newly converted Muslims eagerly adopted the new cultural and epistemological dimensions offered by Islam and strived to understand and practice all the injunctions mentioned therein. They began to study the Arabic language and assimilated its alphabets into the Malay language, thus marking a new dawn of Islamic scholarship in the Malay world.

Though a myriad of writings in many different fields were produced, priority was given to the study of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and most of the Malay Muslim scholars often concentrated on translation, explanation, and collection of written materials. Although the number of works produced were quite numerous, none could perhaps the influential exegesis on one of the canonical work of hadīth by twelfth century scholar Muḥammad Ibrāhīm bīn Ṭāhir Al-Ra‘ūf Al-Marbāwī. His masterpiece, entitled “Bahār Al-Maḍīi fi Sharḥ Mukhtasar Sahīḥ Al-Tirmidhī”, is in a class of its own. It is the only

1 He was one of Malaysia’s celebrated scholars specializing in various fields of Islamic studies including hadīth, taṣfiq, fiqh and the Arabic language. He was born in Mecca on Tuesday, 28th Dhū al-Qa‘dāh 1313AH / 12th May 1896CE of Malay parentage (The title of al-Marbāwī his name indicates his genealogical origin, i.e. the village of Lubuk Merbau, Kuala Kangsar, Perak). By the time he was ten, he had already memorized ten juz’ of the Qur’ān by heart including a few other books. In 1333AH/1913CE, he returned to Malaya with his family and his first formal education was at the Lubuk Merbau Malay School in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. He then enrolled in a number of well-reputed traditional religious schools (pondok) during his time such as the school of Shaykh Wan Muḥammad in Bukit Chandan Perak, the school of Tuan Hussain al-Maṣḥūdī in Keda, the school of Shaykh Ahmad al-Fiṭānī in Bukit Mertajam Penang, and the school of H. Muḥammad Yusuf Ahmad (Tok Kenali) in Kelantan. After completing his studies, he worked as a religious teacher in Perak and in 1342AH / 1924CE, he was given the opportunity to further his studies at the famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt where he obtained the al-Āḍiyah degree. It was during his stay in Egypt that he started writing and publishing his ideas, and his magnum opus: Qūmīs Al-Marbāwī (a dictionary of Arabic-Malay words) was first published in Egypt in 1345AH/1927CE. Since then, he had produced quite a number of works in various fields such as Taṣfiq al-Qur’ān Al-Marbāwī, Taṣfiq Sīdīr Yāsīn (translation of Fatḥul-Qadirī al-Taṣfiq by Ibn Ṭabarāh al-Maqdisī [d. 728AH]), Taṣfiq Nīr al-Ya‘qūn, Translation of Bulugh al-Maram (ḥadīth), Jamī al-Uṣūl, Uṣūl al-Islām, Niẓām al-Hayāt, Muṣlim al-Kāfīnāt (4 Volumes), Asas Islam Pada Bicara Mengambil Wafqu Dan Sembahyang Dan Lainnya Dengan Gambar Ringkasan Kamus Melayu-Arab Berbagi Gengan Teladan Belajar Arabnya Yang Senang, Perbandingan Ilmu (first academic encyclopaedia in the Malay language) and Bahār Al-Maḍīi (ḥadīth). However, very little is known of the period after his return from Egypt to Malaya, but it is safe to assume that he continued to teach and propagate to the Muslim communities in Malaya apart from composing works and literatures related to Islam and its understanding. In recognition of his remarkable scholarly efforts, he was awarded by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) an Honorary Doctorate Degree on 5th July 1980. The government of Malaysia has also awarded him the title of “Tokoh Maal Hijrah” at the national level on 1st Muḥarram 1408 AH / 26th August 1987 due to his contributions towards Islam and the Muslims in Malaysia. The exact date of his demise could not be ascertained but is believed to be during or before 1991. See: JAKIM. 20 May 2003. “Tokoh Maal Hijrah 1408H (1987): Allāhāyrah Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs Abū al-Ra‘ūf al-Marbāwī”. Tokoh Maal Hijrah. http://www.islam.gov.my/informasi/islam/tokoh/hijr708.html. p. 1-2. ‘Abd al-Majīd, Abū Bakar. 20 May 2003. “The Truth About Islamic Resurgence”. Capsules: English Articles (IKIM). http://www.ikim.gov.my/ar00-nst29.html. p. 2. Hj. Kāyā, ‘Abd al-Wāḥhāb. 1993. Musāmmīt Mālikī ‘Ulama al-Maḍī wa al-Hādīr. Tarābbīs: Kulliyāt al-Da‘wah al-Islāmiyyah, p. 180. Anbalagan, V. 1991. “Lubuk Merbau’s Centenary Joy”. New Straits Times. 13 December.
exegesis of one of the canonical books in ḥadīth i.e. the Jāmi’ of al-Tirmidhī, ever recorded to be produced in the Malay language. As such, its importance and relevance to the development of ḥadīth studies in the Malay World is evident, as it is widely used as teaching materials and reference for religious matters.

Nevertheless, it is noted that this book has not been studied extensively in a scholarly manner, especially on its methodology and style of writing. Presently, what is available are comments or remarks, often made within the context of other fields of study. It is against this background that this paper sets out to analyze a few selected chapters of the book with the aim of understanding and evaluating its methodological framework and style of presentation so as to present a preliminary evaluation of the book, being one of the most significant products of ḥadīth scholarship in the Malay world.

BAḤR AL-MĀDHĪ: ITS DEFINITION, CONTENT AND PERIOD OF COMPOSITION

As mentioned earlier, al-Marbawi has aptly named his opus as “Baḥr al-Mādhi fi Sharḥ Mukhtasar Sahih al-Tirmidhī”. This title was, in fact, a reflection of his feelings and attitude towards Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī specifically, and the field of ḥadīth studies in general. The phrase “Baḥr al-Mādhi” consist two words: “Bahar” which means sea or ocean, and “Mādhī” which signifies a kind of white honey. As a phrase, it could be translated as the “ocean of nectar”, which is a metaphor intended to express the crucial benefits and the vastness of knowledge contained in the book as if it was an ocean of nectar, pleasing and satisfying one’s desire and thirst, and at the same time healthy and nutritious for the soul. This rhetoric use of the language was indeed a sign of al-Marbawi’s skills and mastery of the Arabic language. Furthermore, the title was also rhythmically composed, i.e. both the words “al-Mādhi” and “al-Tirmidhī” end with the same vowel, which is but another sign of linguistic beauty in the Arabic language.

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3 Fifteen chapters of the book in different issues were selected for the purpose of this study, which accounted for about 30% of the overall content. The chapters are: Purification (Ṭahārah), Benefits of Jihad (Fāḍilat al-Jihād), Medicine (Ṭibb), Knowledge (‘Ilm), Benefits of Qurān (Thawāb al-Qurān), Clothing (Līḥā), Predestination (Qadar), Dreams (al-Ru’ya), Characteristics of Hell (Ṣafāt al-Nār), Disturbances (al-Fitan), Ethics (al-Birr wa al-Ṣilāh), History and Journeys (al-Sayr), and a quick review of the books of Faith (‘Imān), 13 Prayers (Ṣabāt al-A‘idah) and Qurān’s Exegesis (Taṣfi‘).


5 There was also a statement from Baḥr al-Mādhi that led to this meaning, i.e. “...tiap-tiap kali aku mengaji dan menghadrakan guruku... guru hadith yang masyhur... su dahah aku bersungguh aku tiap-tiap pagi pergi menerima padanya dengan ketadaan lugu...”. Al-Marbawi, M.I. n.d. Baḥr al-Mādhi fi Sharḥ Mukhtasar Sahih al-Tirmidhī. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr. Vol. I. Part. I. p.1.
It is also noted that the term “Mukhtasār” was used in relation to Sahīh al-Tirmidhī, which delimits the book as an abridged version of Sahīh al-Tirmidhī. This process was done, according to al-Marbawi, by presenting all the hadīth in Sahīh al-Tirmidhī without its sanad or chain of narrators. It is noted that in fact, the process of abridging Sahīh al-Tirmidhī was not confined to what was mentioned by the author himself but rather it encompassed a wide range of processes related to omitting and/or summarizing all the opinions and commentaries mentioned by al-Tirmidhī at the end of each hadīth. This also included the selective method of presenting a particular hadīth intended for commentaries in the Bahr al-Māḍāḥī. This is based on the observations of the pattern and methods used by al-Marbawi himself throughout his book.

As to the reason for composing Bahr al-Māḍāḥī in the Malay language, al-Marbawi stated in the introductory chapter of the book that it was for the noble cause of propagating the hadīth of the Prophet (s.a.w.) for the non-Arab audience, particularly the Malays, so that they can understand and practise them in their true sense. In addition, as a scholar, the author also felt that it was part of his social and religious obligation to preach and educate his fellow Muslims.

Therefore, the rationale for al-Marbawi to select Jamī al-Tirmidhī as the basis for his commentaries was his preference over the systematic organization and the method of presentation by al-Tirmidhī in his Jamī. Moreover, the Jamī also contained thousands of hadīth covering various fields and issues, followed by views of scholars not confined to any particular school of jurisprudence or thought. As such, this has enabled him to relate the hadīth with other issues or fields of studies. At the same time, the book contained substantive information on the vital aspects of hadīth analysis in

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6 It is to be noted that the actual book referred to by al-Marbawi was titled as “Jamī al-Tirmidhī”. As for naming it “Sahīh al-Tirmidhī”, in my opinion, is not totally accurate. This is because the hadīth in the compilation were not limited to those that are Sahīh (authentic) only, but also included those in the category of Hasan (good) and Dājī (weak), to name a few. In fact, the first person to name it as “Sahīh” was al-Hākim al-Naisabūrī (405 AH), one of the hadīth scholars known for his over-leniency in accepting hadīth. His position in this matter was widely commented and criticized by many scholars such as al-Dhahabi, Ibn Kathir and others. Furthermore, by looking at the content of Bahr al-Māḍāḥī, it is found that the book did not confine itself to authentic hadīth only, but also contains some other hadīth in its varied status. This showed that naming it as “Sahīh” in this sense was not entirely precise. For further details and examples refer to: al-Dimashqī, Muḥammad Ibn Kathir. 1997. al-Baṣīth al-Hadiṭh Shahr Mubīn. Vol. I. pp. 41 and; al-Marbawi, M.I. Bahr al-Māḍāḥī. Vol. I. Part 1. pp. 80, 81, and Vol. X. Part 19. p. 9.


8 Example of the selective method of hadīth classification in Jamī al-Tirmidhī is clear from a comparative analysis of the number of hadīth contained in both books. See Table 1.0 for more details. Furthermore, it is also found that if a particular hadīth was mentioned in Jamī al-Tirmidhī with more than one sanad and/or matan, al-Marbawi has summarized it by selecting only one of the sanad and/or matan for commentary. See ibid. Vol. VI. Part 11. p. 205, and Part 12. p. 126.

9 ibid. Vol. I. p. 3
determining their authenticity that included meticulous discussion on the status of their narrators, among others. This part was crucial, especially for al-Marbawi, as it would not be necessary for him to discuss issues relating to authenticity as contained in the field of Mustalah al-Hadith.\(^10\)

On the organization and scope of the Jami' al-Tirmidhi, it is observed that the book was written based on topical organization. It covered forty-seven topics spanning various subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence (al-Ahkām al-Fiqhiyyah), rules and regulations relating to crime, war ethics, code of conduct, medicine, history, creed, Qur'anic exegesis and eschatology. In addition, each topic was further divided into chapters, where each chapter will usually contain a few relevant hadith. In this regard, it can be concluded that the book was systematically organized for the convenience of its reader.

With regards to the scope of coverage, there were some 24 topics centred on jurisprudence, accounting for about 51% of the total content of the book. In this regard, it can be said that the organization of the book was, in a sense, "jurist-friendly" as it was focused on presenting the hadith that were important for deriving essential legal rulings. It is for this reason that the book was also classified by some as the "Sunan" of al-Tirmidhi, though not in the usual sense\(^11\). However, the Bahr al-Mādhī differed from Jami' al-Tirmidhi in several aspects as shown in Table 1.0.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Topics*</th>
<th>No. of Chapters</th>
<th>No. of Hadith</th>
<th>No. of Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jami' al-Tirmidhi</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2036</td>
<td>3956</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahr al-Mādhī</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>2782</td>
<td>8282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\* According to Jami' al-Tirmidhi's classification.

From Table 1.0, it can be deduced that:

1. Generally, Bahr al-Mādhī was based on the organization of hadith and topics of Jami' of al-Tirmidhi. The published edition used in this study was

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\(^{11}\) The terms "Jami'" and "Sunan" are distinguished based on their differences in scope and content. The former is usually coined to mean "book containing hadith that cover almost all aspects of life", while the latter is usually used to connote a "book containing hadith specialized in treating the issues of jurisprudence". Based on this, the book of al-Tirmidhi was more suitable to be termed as "Jami'" than "Sunan" because its scope was broad and not limited to jurisprudence only. See: al-Khayr Abādi, Muḥammad Abū al-Laith. 1999. Tahrīr al-Hadith: Nasb'atūbu wa Manhajiyatuhu. Selangor: Dār al-Shākir. pp. 113-114, 129.
the one printed by Dār al-Fikr in Beirut, Lebanon (without date). It consisted of twenty-two parts in eleven separate volumes. Nevertheless, it is found that the compilation was not to be a complete work of Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī as the last three topics of Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī, i.e. the books of Daʿawāt (verbal prayers), Manāqīb (virtues), and al-ʿIlal (a branch of the sciences of ḥadīth) were not included in the book. The last part of the published Bahr al-Mādhī centered on the Book of Qurʿānic Exegesis, but it only reached the end of Sūrah al-Kahf. Here, one will find the statement of the author at the last page of Volume 11 that the book will be followed by the next part, i.e. Part 23, but it was never published.

On the other hand, it is found that sometimes, al-Marbawī did substitute the classification of topics in Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī based on his own preference, perhaps more for his own convenience. For instance, the book of Sawm was divided into two topics in Bahr al-Mādhī, i.e. into Sawm and Fikāḥ, while the topic of Riḍā, which was a separate topic in Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī, was included in Bahr al-Mādhī as part of the topic of Nikāḥ. Therefore, the number of topics according to al-Marbawī’s classification totalled 48 i.e. until the end of part 22. This, however, did not include the last three topics of Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī not incorporated by Bahr al-Mādhī, as mentioned earlier.

2. Al-Marbawī did not strictly adhere to the division of chapters under each topic as found in the Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī. As Table 1.0 shows, the number of chapters in Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī totalled 2,036, while there were only 1,832 chapters in Bahr al-Mādhī, excluding the remaining three topics. In contrast, the total number of chapters in Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī according to the contents of Bahr al-Mādhī, i.e. until the end of Part 22, were only 1,797. This signified the addendums and further subdivision made by al-Marbawī to the original classification by al-Tirmīdhī, including 35 additional chapters.

3. The total number of ḥadīth in Bahr al-Mādhī, differed greatly from that of the Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī. This is understandable as the book was intended by al-Marbawī to be a compendium of Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there were 3,154 ḥadīth in Ḥamī al-Tirmīdhī until the end of Sūrah al-Kahf (according to the contents of Bahr al-Mādhī), while the total in Bahr al-Mādhī was only 2,782. This showed that 372 ḥadīth were omitted from the original version.

4. Al-Marbawī has made further subdivisions of the chapters in his book into what he called as “Masāʾil” or issues, which formed the core of his commentaries on the ḥadīth. They were numbered for his own convenience as well as that of his readers, so that reference towards certain issues can be accessed simply by referring to the specific number assigned to that particular
issue. This is but an aspect of al-Marbawi’s creativity in capturing the attention of his reader. In this respect, there were 8,282 issues in *Baḥr al-Mādhī*.

As to the period the *Baḥr al-Mādhī* was written, it is worthwhile to note that al-Marbawi has the habit of mentioning at certain places in his book -usually at the end of a chapter or a part- that he had completed writing it on a particular day and date. Based on this valuable information, one could attempt to put in place the chronology of the book’s composition, as shown in Table 2.0.

**Table 2.0: Chronology of *Baḥr al-Mādhī*’s Composition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Parts</th>
<th>Period of Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Part 1 - Part 5</td>
<td>Unknown- Possibly between 1924 to 1935&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Part 6 - Part 8</td>
<td>Unknown- Possibly between 1935-1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The whole of Part 9</td>
<td>Wednesday night, 29&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Shawwāl 1357 AH/ 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; December 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 10 - 15</td>
<td>Unknown, but probably between 1938 to 1940&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First half of Part 16</td>
<td>Wednesday night, 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Ramaḍān 1359 AH/ 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; October 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second half of Part 16 - Part 19</td>
<td>Unknown, but probably between 1940-1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second half of Part 20</td>
<td>22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Ramaḍān 1374 AH/ 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Part 20</td>
<td>Wednesday night, 25 Ramaḍān 1374 AH/ 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 1955(after a delay of sixteen years starting from the Second World War in 1949&lt;sup&gt;14&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Part 21</td>
<td>Tuesday, 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Rabī’ al-Awwal 1376 AH/ 30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Part 22</td>
<td>Tuesday, 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Jamāḍ al-Akhir 1377 AH/ 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; December 1957, but it is mentioned at the end of Volume 11 that it was published in Ramadan 1379 AH/ March 1960.</td>
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</table>

<sup>12</sup> This is based on the statement of the author himself that he began writing the book when he was studying at al-Azhar University, Egypt. As his biography showed that he was in Egypt since 1924, it could be assumed that he began writing no earlier, than 1924. On the other hand, according to the third reprint of his *Qāmūs al-Marbawi* in Egypt (Rabī’ al-Akhīr 1354AH/ July 1935), it was mentioned that at the time the dictionary was published, the first five parts of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* were already published. This showed that at least 5 parts of the book were completed before 1935, though one could also assume that a number of other parts were also completed, but only the first five parts were ready to be published. See: al-Marbawi, M.I. *Baḥr al-Mādhī*. ibid. Vol. I. Part 1. pp. 2-3, and *Qāmūs Idris al-Marbawi*: *Arabī-Malayawī*. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalābī wa Aulādūhu.

<sup>13</sup> It was also written in the middle of Part 15 that he wrote the sentence in page no. 150 in 1359 AH/ 1940.

Based on Table 2.0, it can be concluded that *Bahr al-Madhi* was written during the period of al-Marbawi's stay in Egypt, i.e. since 1924 onwards. As a student, al-Marbawi has confessed that he was mesmerized by the lectures of his teachers at al-Azhar University, especially *hadith* lectures given by Shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim al-Samaliti, a renowned scholar of *hadith* in al-Azhar University and also a teacher at the mosque of Husseini in Egypt. Al-Marbawi studied quite a number of *hadith* works and commentaries from him, including the celebrated *Sahih* of Imam Muslim. It was during this period that he started writing *Bahr al-Madhi* based on his lecture notes and the commentaries of his teachers. In this regard, it should be noted that the period of composition spanned a few decades, from 1924 until the end of 1957.

It is also worthwhile to understand what al-Marbawi meant when he said that the book's writing was delayed for sixteen years starting from World War II in 1949 and that it was resumed only in 1955. As Table 2.0 shows, the first half of Part 16 was completed on 23rd October 1940, while the second half of Part 16 up to Part 19 was not known. If this was indeed the period meant by al-Marbawi, then it was delayed for about 15 years only and not 16 years as he has written. Furthermore, the period of the Second World War was between 1939-1945, and not in 1949 as he has stated, and it is quite possible that it could be the result of a printing or copying error. As such, it is possible that the second half of Part 16 up to Part 19 were written in 1955 and completed alongside with the second half of Part 20. This assumption is also based on Table 2.0 which showed the proximity of the time spent by al-Marbawi in the writing of his book. For instance, it was stated that the second half of Part 20 was completed on 15th May 1955 while the end of Part 20 (which consists of 255 pages) was completed on 18th May 1955. The same pattern could be observed for the time spent in completing Parts 21 and 22.

As for the date of its publication, it is quite difficult to fix a specific exact date as the writings were published based on the parts completed by al-Marbawi. For instance, it was mentioned that the first five parts of *Bahr al-Madhi* were published as early as 1935, while the last part, i.e. Part 22, was published in March 1960. Since then, the book has been reprinted several times without any addendum or correction, and the one used in this study was published by Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, without mentioning the date of publication.

**BAHR AL-MADHI: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS SOURCES AND METHODOLOGIES**

**The Sources of Bahr al-Madhi.**

In the introduction of *Bahr al-Madhi*, al-Marbawi indicated that the main source for composing the book was derived from his understanding of the
lecture sessions that he had attended during his stay in Cairo, Egypt. He stated that:

“When I returned home (from the lectures), I did not lose any time in jotting down what I have remembered from my classes, supplementing it with the views of al-Shafi‘i in his al-Umm, al-Nawawi’s Sharh Sahih Muslim, and the views of al-Qistillahi, Ibn al-‘Arabi, and others…”¹⁵

Nevertheless, it is found that the sources mentioned therein signified the most important and commonly referred to sources and by no means restrictive or limited. As it was the habit of al-Marbawi to indicate the source of his reference, we are able to classify the sources into two types: oral and written.

His oral sources revolved mainly around the words and teachings of his teachers at the al-Azhar University, where he directly studied and benefited from their lectures. Although one can assume that he had a number of teachers, he has only mentioned Shaykh Muhammad Bakhit (a jurist in the school of Hanafi), and Shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim al-Samaluti, his teacher in the field of hadith the two main figures that had inspired him and aroused his interest in hadith.¹⁷

With regards to the written sources mentioned or referred to in Bahr al-Madhi, they could be classified as follows:

a) **Sources in the field of Islamic Jurisprudence.** Examples are al-Umm of al-Shafi‘i, al-Majmū‘ Sharh al-Muhadhdhab by Muḥy al-Dīn al-Nawawī, and Mukhtašar al-Muzani‘ fi al-Furū‘ al-Shafi‘iyah by Ismā‘īl b. Yahya al-Muzani‘ (d.264AH)¹⁸.


c) **Sources in the field of hadith and its commentaries.** Examples are Iṣḥād al-Sārī li-Shahr Sahih al-Bukhārī by Abū ‘Abbās al-Qistillānī, Sharḥ Sahih al-Bukhārī by Ibn Baṭṭāl (d. 449AH), Fath al-Bārī Sharḥ Sahih al-Bukhārī by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqallānī, ‘Umdat al-Qāri‘ Sharḥ Sahih al-


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g) Encyclopedia, Dictionary and Biographical Sources. Examples are Dāʾirah al-Maʿārif fī al-Qarn al-Isbrīn by Muḥammad Farīd Wajdi, Perbandaharaan

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Based on the above-mentioned references, it could be confirmed that the sources alluded to by al-Marbawi are considered primal and authoritative in their respective fields. Furthermore, his source of reference involved at least forty-five books in seven different types of literature, ranging from various personalities and views in a harmonious blend of classical and contemporary authors. Though priority was given towards supporting the views of the Shāfiʿī School of jurisprudence, other views were also expressed and discussed. Reference to the major works of al-Shāfiʿī, al-Muzani, and al-Nawawi indicated his way of integrating traditional and basic views of the Shāfiʿī School of jurisprudence with contemporary views and thoughts as enhanced and intensified by later scholars of the Shāfiʿī School.

With regards to his sources in the field of Qur’ānic exegesis (tafsīr), the literatures referred to were mainly attributed as being concise i.e. presenting only summarized views and narrations regarding specific issues from the aspects of language analysis, the reasons of revelation, principles derived from the Qur’ānic verses, and some narrations and stories related to particular verses. It is also interesting to note that the famous Tafsīr of al-Jalālayn was constantly quoted together with its side commentaries and annotations such as the Ḥāshiyah of al-Jamal and al-Ṣawī. Nevertheless, references to these sources were limited and based on the subject matter of the hadīth intended for explanation and commentary.

In contrast, the sources related to the field of hadīth studies were extensively used in the book, regardless of the hadīth subject matter. This is due to the fact that most of the books on hadīth commentaries were multidimensional and multidisciplinary in approach, thus giving a more in-depth coverage, complete with comparative analysis on other narrations related to a specific hadīth. This is especially observed through the existence of some common hadīth narrated by some scholars, as well as those hadīth that appeared to be conflicting in their nature. In this regard, the cross-references made to the various books of hadīth commentaries were invaluable. Some of the major hadīth commentaries referred to by al-Marbawi were the Fath al-Bāri of Ibn Ḥajar, Ṭabīṣ al-Qāri of al-ʿAynī, Sharḥ al-Bukhāri of Ibn Baṭṭal, Sharḥ Muslim of al-Nawawī, and apart from the commentaries of al-Mubārakfūrī (Tuḥfat al-Ahwādhi), al-Qistīlānī (Iṣbāḥ al-Sāfī), Maḥmūd Ḥaṭṭāb al-Subki (Sharḥ Sunan Abū Dāwūd) and others.

The sources in the field of theology were rather selective, reflecting al-Marbawi's conviction as a follower of the orthodoxy, i.e. the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. Constant reference to Jawharab al-Tauhid, which was composed in poetry form, was made to address fundamental issues related to the basic principles of creed. However, reference was also made to other books, as seen fit by the author to suit the subject matter being discussed. For instance, in dealing with the issue relating to predestination (qadar), he referred to the writings of al-Juwayni for an extensive treatment of the subject matter.

Themes relating to ethics and morality were mainly derived from and supported by the views of al-Ghazālī in his Ihya while the Mawāhib of al-Qistīlānī was constantly used to explain matters pertaining to the events in the history of the Prophet (s.a.w.). Miscellaneous subjects were tackled with sources that were specific for the particular issue. It is worthwhile to note that references to some of the contemporary sources such as the encyclopaedia of Farīd Wajdī was also made to widen the scope of the book. Another point of interest was the reference made by al-Marbawi to his other writings as a source for the Bahra al-Mādhī. This can be seen from the quotation culled from his own encyclopaedia “Perbendaharaan Ilmu,” as well as his dictionary (Qāmūs al-Marbawi) as a source for linguistic analysis.

This expert utilization of sources was reflective of al-Marbawi's credibility as a scholar and one of the reputable Malay authors in the 20th century. The selection of sources were made with great precision, often by celebrated scholars in their fields to uphold the views and thoughts of the orthodoxy based on the Shāfi'ī School of jurisprudence.

**The Methodology of al-Marbawi in Bahra al-Mādhī**

As stated earlier, Bahra al-Mādhī was composed by al-Marbawi specifically for the non-Arab audience, i.e. Malay speaking Muslims in the Malay world, with the objective of guiding them to understand their religion better, especially in comprehending the injunctions contained in the hadith of the Prophet. As such, its method of presentation was somewhat simple, yet comprehensive as it endeavoured to convey as much information as possible based on the author’s experience and intellectual horizon. A brief exposition of his methodology was given in the introductory note to his book. This was followed by comments on the terms used by al-Tirmidhī in his Jāmī, which was divided into two types: firstly, the terms that were used in the field of sciences of hadith in general, such as sahih, hasan, and daif and secondly, the terms that were distinctly used by al-Tirmidhī in his Jāmī, such as hasan sahih, hasan

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gharīb, and so on. The coherent and concise explanation removed any unnecessary disputations as to the status of the authenticity of the ḥadīth.

Al-Marbawi then proceeded by presenting “the statement of intention”, quoting the ḥadīth of “niyyāt”28, as though reminding himself of the importance of concentrating all his efforts in writing the book for the sake of Allah and not for fame or worldly gains. A detailed commentary on the meaning and purpose of this ḥadīth was also given. This was, in fact, unique only to Bahr al-MAdhī compared to other commentaries of Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī29. Perhaps it could be assumed that al-Marbawi followed the example set by al-Bukhārī in his Jāmi’ al-Ṣahīḥ. However, the order of presentation in the subsequent chapters was still based on the sequence of topics as contained in Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī.

In analysing the book, it is important to examine the methodology used as explained by al-Marbawi in the introductory chapter, which could be summarised as follows:

• no commentaries on the isnād of the ḥadīth were given, as the book was intended to be a compendium of Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī;
• definition of the topics and chapters of the ḥadīth were given according to the arrangement in Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī, save a few addendum and alterations in certain places;
• translation and commentary of each ḥadīth began by commenting on its title before discussing the content;
• discussion of each ḥadīth was based on its content, including the understanding of al-Tirmidhī, to support the views of the Ṣaḥīḥ School of jurisprudence; and
• every issue discussed was numbered for the ease of reference.30

With regards to his method of ḥadīth presentation, al-Marbawi has omitted from mentioning the complete chain of narrators for each and every ḥadīth contained in the book. He only presented the immediate narrators (al-Rāwī al-ʿĀlā) of the ḥadīth, i.e. the Ṣahābah or Tābi’īn. As mentioned earlier, the rationale for this approach was that the isnād of Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī were meticulously selected and presented by al-Tirmidhī in its best form that did

28 The ḥadīth was narrated by ‘Umar al-Khaṭṭāb that the Prophet (s.a.w.) said: “The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended.”. ibid. Vol. VI. Part 12. p. 12.
29 It was the practice of major commentators of Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī to begin their books with the topics of ḥadīth as presented and organized by al-Tirmidhī. See for instance: al-Mubārakfūrī’s Tuhfat al-Ahwadhī bi-Sharḥ Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī.
not require any further re-evaluation, at least for most of the ḥadīth in the book. Moreover, it was the habit of al-Tirmidhī to mention the status of each ḥadīth in terms of its authenticity and reliability where direct judgement on the status of each ḥadīth could be made without any difficulty, saved for a few ḥadīth that appeared to be conflicting with the views of other authorities or judged by other scholars as being fallacious. Nevertheless, in general, it was thought that unnecessary indulgence on the matters pertaining to the status of the ḥadīth would only lengthen the volumes of the book, contrary to al-Marbawi’s intention of making it as concise as possible, focusing on contents and substance.

Therefore, it could be seen that almost all titles for each topic were retained according to their original arrangement in Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī, saved a few addendum and alterations in certain places. These titles (Tarjamah al-Bāb) played a crucial role in determining the subject matter of each ḥadīth presented. For instance, the title of “The Chapter On Who Is The Most Eligible To Be A Leader” though placed in the chapter relating to the issue of leadership in prayer (Ṣalāh), it could also be applicable to matters pertaining to leadership and the characteristics of a leader in general, as could be understood from the universal nature of the ḥadīth presented. That is why it was not uncommon to find comments by al-Marbawi rationalizing the content or placement of certain ḥadīth in particular chapters.

The general model adopted by al-Marbawi in commenting the ḥadīth in Bahr al-Mādhī was primarily based on linguistic aspects. Translation of the title for the topic and chapter of the ḥadīth under study was given in the form of a brief introductory note specifying its content and theme. This sometimes included references to the verses of the Qur’ān, quotations from scholars and literatures related to that particular subject. This would be followed by the translation of the ḥadīth into the Malay language, alongside with its original text in Arabic. Usually the text would be translated phrase-by-phrase, followed by the sayings and views of al-Tirmidhī regarding its authenticity as contained in his Jāmi‘. This would also include the definition of specific terms and expressions stated in the particular topic or chapter, such as defining the meaning of tayammum, holy war, dream, innovative actions in religion (bid‘ah) and so on, from the linguistic and technical aspect.

31 For instance, the book of Fasting (ṣawm) was divided into two smaller chapters by al-Marbawi, i.e. the book of Fasting and Fīskāf. Nevertheless, it is seen that the total number of topics discussed in both books were less than the original content in Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī. This signified alteration in terms of both the organization and content.
34 It is found that al-Marbawi was not consistent in specifying the level of authenticity for the ḥadīth in the book. Most of the time, he would make full mention as in Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī, while at certain places he would assign specific abbreviations for these terms, such as using the alphabet “Hā” and “Mīm” to specify “Hasan Sahīh”, and so on. See: ibid. Vol. VII. Part. 14. pp. 184, 186, 202, 216-217.
Idiosyncratic and metaphorical Arabic words were also explained, especially those peculiar only to the Arabian cultures and localities, sometimes with the help of figures and drawing. In the same manner, any disputation as to the meanings of a certain word would also be stressed and discussed. The use of allegories, parables and similes in the commentary was also evident, and it is interesting to note that even Arab proverbs were included as tools of presentation as they would be easily understood and more comprehensible than plain prose.

With regards to the language used, it would be interesting to note that the book was written using the traditional Arabic-based Malay scripts, i.e. the Jawi script. The language style was a mixture of standard Malay and provincial dialects, especially that from Perak, Kedah and Kelantan. As such, the reader is expected to at least know some of these dialects before attempting to read and understand the book. In addition, there were even a few Arabic words that were “Malaynized” such as mukhtar, sinā‘ah, sāḥah, and sirr. To understand these words would require a basic knowledge of Arabic, which most of the ordinary Malays did not possess. Perhaps it was meant to be an indirect way of persuading the reader to learn Arab vocabularies and at the same times a sign of al-Marbawi’s commitment and devotion to the Arabic language.

Al-Marbawi would then proceed to make his observations and commentaries on the particular ḥadīth, which was listed as issues and numbered for the sake of convenience, as mentioned earlier. It was in these issues that the gist of his ideas and thoughts were expressed. The views of other scholars were also presented as a way of supporting the Šafi‘ī School of jurisprudence. As such, constant references to sources of Shafi‘ite scholars such as al-Šafi‘ī, al-Muzanī, and al-Nawawi dominated most of the issues relating to Islamic jurisprudence. Even in other themes of Islam such as creed, ethics and history, frequent references were made to the writings of major Shafi‘ī scholars such as al-Juwayni, al-Ghazālī, al-Subki, al-Suyūṭī, al-ʿAsqallānī and al-Qistīlānī. Views of major scholars from other schools of thought were also referred to such as those of Ibn al-ʿArabi, Ibrāhīm al-Likānī, among others. Sometimes, certain issues were even elaborated upon by using several verses of the Qur’an and authentic ḥadīth of the prophet, other than what was contained in Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī. The inclusion of ḥadīth and narrations other than those found in al-Tirmidhī’s also served to explain what was left out in Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī, thus completing and supporting the ḥadīth in terms of its authenticity and/or reliability with authoritative

37 For example of clarification based on ḥadīth, refer to: ibid. Vol. VI. Part 11. p. 95.
narrations. Therefore, the approach adopted by al-Marbawi indicated that he was not dogmatic in presenting his views by limiting them to those belonging to his school of thought only. The fact that he made reference to other views and schools of thought, alongside with analytical and comparative approach in dealing with the evidences, depicted his genuine quest for the truth and the facts of the case, even though generally, his preference could be seen as being based on the principles of the Shafi'i School.

It is also observed that logic played an important part in the methodology of al-Marbawi. Certain rulings or commands, which might seem as being unfit to be practiced or implemented were critically discussed and rationalised. *Jizya* (individual tax for non-Muslim in the Muslim State) was a case in point where al-Marbawi has given at least three logical reasons as to why *jizya* was legalised in Islamic Law. In the same manner, catechism was widely used as a means of addressing specific issues. For instance, in the chapter "On Showing Mercy Towards Children", al-Marbawi has formulated his commentaries in the form of a series of questions and answers, i.e. "How to show mercy towards children?" and "How children can show their respects towards their elders", and so on.

On the general theme that could be derived from the methodology used in *Bahr al-Mādhī*, it is observed that al-Marbawi was very much inclined towards deducing rulings relating to the field of jurisprudence (*al-Ahkām al-Fiqhyyah*). This was done either through direct deduction from the content of the hadith under study such as deducing specific rules that could annul one’s fasting in a hadith relating to fasting or through an indirect deduction from the hadith, usually obtained by discussing other themes. As an example, in the chapter on "Migration of the Prophet to Madīnah", al-Marbawi has induced the rulings and discussion regarding migration to the state of Islam to support the migration from the state of sin towards the state of faith and piety.

Alongside the issues of jurisprudence, other themes were also discussed based on their topics and the nature of the hadīth, viz. history, medicine, interpretation of dreams, war, benefits of the Qur'ān, and so on. The field of creed in particular, received much attention from the author. In an effort to defend the orthodoxy and guide people away from heresy, not only were the basic components of faith discussed and defended, an exposition of controversial issues such as the question of predestination, the

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42 For instance when discussing and asserting eschatological-related issues.
stand of a Muslim on the issue of anthropomorphic verses and ḥadīth (al-Āyāt wa al-Ḥadīth al-Mutashābibīt) and the principles of Islamic sects would also be included. It is clear from this that al-Marbawi was concerned with the reality facing the Muslims of his time, particularly that of the Malays in Malaya. One could find many instances where the ḥadīth would be explained in the context of the occurrences and the social reality prevailing in Malaya. This included his criticism of particular customs prevailing among the Malay society, such as their bad habit of taking unnecessary loans and wearing silk and gold chains for the sake of showing off and flaunting their status. Another example could be seen from his attitude towards the political situation of his time, especially mentioning the Bolshevik Revolution and its effect towards religion and the Muslim society in general.

It is observed that a directional and propagative approach was also employed when expounding the theme of a particular ḥadīth. The need to follow the path of the Prophet (s.a.w) was constantly voiced in almost every page of the book, while motivational narrations and religious accounts were occasionally added for better understanding. As an example, accounts from the Jews and the Christians (al-isrāʾīlīyāt) were included in the chapter "On Constraining from what is Prohibited by the Prophet (s.a.w.)" in more than three pages describing the misfortunes and sufferings that befell those who did not obey their prophets.

In terms of issues relating to the field of the sciences of ḥadīth, it is observed that few of these important aspects were discussed, although it was not the objective of the book to explain these issues. At times, the status of a certain ḥadīth would be discussed extensively to support his views regarding an issue, such as backing up a weak ḥadīth in the book with other narrations. In the same way, discussion on the narrator of the ḥadīth through his biographical information and his status of reliability was also included as a determining factor of its authenticity.

At certain places, selective issues were presented as supporting information for the ḥadīth under study. This included the discussion on the differences between the original text and inserted text (al-mudrāj fi al-matn), clarifying the cause for the origin of ḥadīth (asbūb wurrīd al-ḥadīth), specifying unknown names in the text based on comparative analysis with other books, mentioning the level of authenticity for specific ḥadīth based on views of

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scholars, and discussion on the fundamental issue of the reliability of \textit{hadīth} narrations\textsuperscript{49}.

It is also noted that al-Marbawi was very concerned with reconciling a seemingly conflicting \textit{hadīth} in a particular issue (\textit{mushkil al- hadīth}). This was done through several levels of analysis in terms of the \textit{hadīth}'s chain of narration, its narrators, content, as well as its status, such as abrogation\textsuperscript{50}. If there were two seemingly contradictory \textit{hadīth} and one of them has been proven to be weak, the most authentic \textit{hadīth} would prevail as the truth. In this case, there should be no contradiction at all, as only authentic and reliable narrations would be accepted. But even if it assumed that both of the \textit{hadīth} has been proven to be authentic and reliable, it was still possible for al-Marbawi to reconcile the two, based on his method in \textit{Bah\'r al-Mādīh}\textsuperscript{51}. This was usually based on a logical and linguistic reasoning. From the approach taken, it was clear that al-Marbawi was of the opinion that acting with both of the \textit{hadīth} whenever possible was better than disregarding either one of them\textsuperscript{52}. Another example of how he would address contradictions was in dealing with the anthropomorphic contents of a certain \textit{hadīth}, such as reconciling the interpretation of the \textit{hadīth} “Hand of God is with the majority” between the traditional and later scholars as being complimentary and not contradicting\textsuperscript{53}.

On the other hand, it is also observed that at times, al-Marbawi was very selective and critical in accepting the views and opinions of other scholars, particularly that of contemporary scholars. Every idea presented would be the result of a careful and objective selection based on the methodologies of the orthodoxy. As such, it is not unusual to find his criticism towards some of his contemporaries who -in his opinion- did not reflect the views of the majority, or at least proposed ideas that were not in line with his thoughts. Perhaps, the most explicit example of this kind of analysis was his criticism towards the view of Fārīd Wajdī, the author of the encyclopaedia “\textit{Dā'irah al-Ma'ārif al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn}”. In the chapter on “Expelling the Jews and the Christians from the Arabian Peninsula”, it was related that the author has questioned the action taken by the second Caliph, ʿUmar al-Khaṭṭāb in expelling the Christians of Najrān, which according to him, went against the style of Abū Bakar. Al-Marbawi’s reaction was to criticize Wajdī for his lack of information on the matter, as there were \textit{hadīth} from the Prophet ordering his successors to act in such a manner. It was not possible for Abū Bakar to have acted according

\textsuperscript{50} ibid. Vol. VI. Part 11. p. 115.
\textsuperscript{53} Although both group of scholars denied attributing human qualities to God, they however differed in their approaches based on the needs and conditions of the society they lived in. See: ibid. Vol. VIII. Part 15. pp. 22-23.
to the Prophet’s directive as he was facing the problems of apostasy and rebellion during his tenure as the Caliph. However, during the reign of ‘Umar, there was peace and stability and he was able to carry out the orders given previously by the Prophet (s.a.w.).

Another example was his criticism towards the ideas proposed by Sayyid Rashid Riḍā in his book (Tafsīr al-Manār) where he has explained certain Qur’ānic concepts based on modern scientific methods, such as specifying that demons and devils were not beings but they were rather terms signifying what the modern science calls microbes causing diseases, among other things. In this regard, al-Marbawi clearly opposed these ideas as they were going against the literal meaning and context of the Qur’ānic verses as upheld by the Orthodoxy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study of a few selected chapters of Bahr al-Mādhī as presented above, it is observed that the book was composed primarily as a supplement for the Malay speaking Muslims in understanding and practising the religion of Islam based on its second most authoritative source, i.e. the ḥadīth of the Prophet (s.a.w.). It was written as a commentary to the Jāmī of al-Tirmidhī, one of the canonical books of ḥadīth with a distinction in its organisation and approaches towards issues relating to Islam. Nevertheless, some of its contents were summarised and amended by al-Marbawi to suit his methodology as well as the needs of the Malay society of his time. Discussion on matters relating to jurisprudence and religious principles were highlighted and prioritised, while other supplementary issues were also included to complement its diversified nature.

In essence, Bahr al-Mādhī reflected al-Marbawi’s strong commitment in wanting to preserve the methods and teachings of Islam based on the viewpoints of the orthodoxy, through analytical and comparative studies of the approaches of the various Islamic Schools of thoughts. As such, the book is highly academic in nature and should be regarded as one of the authoritative commentary of Jāmī al-Tirmidhī in the Malay language. Indeed, this monumental work of al-Marbawi stands as a landmark of Malay scholarship in the field of Islamic studies and should be made the focus of further studies and analysis.

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