INTRODUCTION

The Sunnah of Rasul-Allah has been accepted as an important source of Islamic Shari'ah, next in importance only to the Qur'an. The authority and status of the Sunnah has remained undisputed and unchallenged throughout the centuries. There have been many differences among the Muslim scholars and jurists in the juristic opinions and views, but the authenticity and the authority of the Sunnah was never challenged or denied by any reputed jurist. All those individuals who challenged its authority separated themselves from main stream of the Muslims (sawad-i-a'zam).

The position of the Sunnah is still same, but some orientalists and some of their followers had tried, during the last century to cast some doubts about the status of Sunnah and particularly about its collection and compilation. Some sects e.g. Ahl al Qur'an and Munkir-i-Hadith were results of these doubts.

The present thesis intends therefore, to present status of Sunnah in Islam, a historio-conceptual analysis of Hadith collection, compilation and classification as a case study of Imam Ibn Taimiyah.

The Divine revelation was not limited to the Qur'an the Rasul-Allah received two different kinds of revelation from Allah.

a) The revelation of the Qur'an, the Holy Book, named in the Islamic terminology as obvious revelation and recited revelation (al wahy al jalli, al wahy al matlu). This kind of revelation is confined to the verses of the Qur'an and is written and preserved in its folds. The entire text of the Qur'an has come down to us through continuous testimony (tawatur).

b) The revelation received by Rasul-Allah from time to time to let him know the commandments and will of Allah in day-to-day affairs and the details of the principles laid down in the Qur'an with their correct interpretation. This kind of revelation is called hidden revelation and unrecited revelation (al wahy al khafi, al wahy ghair al matlu). It has been demonstrated through the sayings and acts of the Rasul-Allah. The life of the Rasul-Allah which was essentially to be obeyed in its precepts by the people was not left without Divine guidance. The fact that the things other than the Qur'an were revealed to the Rasul-Allah is witnessed by the Qur'an itself. Here are few examples.
a) The Qur'an was revealed piece-meal and the arrangement and order of the chapters (suwar) and verses (ayat) was directed by Allah (tawqifi). But these directions have not been mentioned in the Qur'an.

b) In surah al Anfal it has been stated about the battle of Badr, that Allah had promised that the Muslims would be made victorious over one out of the two groups.

The Qur'an says:

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\text{وَإِذْ يَعْمَدُ نَفْسُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِلَى الْكُفَّارِ أَحَدَنَّهُمْ مَعَ أَحَدِنَّهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُهْدَى أَوْلاَيْهِمُ الْكُفَّارُ، وَيَتَّخِذُونَ أَنْ عَضُورًا.}
\]

Behold! Allah promised you one of the two [enemy] parties, that it should be yours: ye wished that the one unarmed should be yours, but Allah willed to justify the Truth according to His words, and to cut off the roots of the unbelievers. (al Anfal 8:7)

One group was the caravan led by Abu Sufyan and the other was army of the Makkans. But the promise of Allah which has been referred to in this verse is not contained in the Quranic verses.

The Qur'an says:

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\text{وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الْأَلِيِّى كَسْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا بِتَبَيِّنِ مِنْ يَتَبَيِّنُ الْأَرْضَ.}
\]

And we appointed the qibla to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Rasul-Allah from those who would turn on their heels [from the Faith]. (al Baqarah 2:143)

Here the appointment of the previous qibla has been attributed to Allah which is clear indication of the fact that the appointment of previous qibla (Bayat al Muqadas) was done by the order of Allah Him self. But this order is nowhere in the Qur'an, thus it, evidently proves that the previous order given by the Allah was based on unrecited revelation (wahy al khafi). The verse of the Qur'an quoted above proves the following facts:
a) The Rasul-Allah used to receive some revelations (not in the form of Quranic verses) which are not contained in the Holy Qur’an.
b) These revelations were from Allah, so much so that the orders based on such revelations were attributed to Allah.
c) The orders based on such revelation were as binding on the believers as the orders of the first kind of revelation i.e. the verses of the Qur’an.
d) These orders were sometimes given so as to test whether or not follow the Rasul-Allah irrespective of the question that his orders are contained in the Holy Qur’an or not.

Imam Shafi‘i said:

The whole Sunnah of Rasul-Allah was revealed on him the word *hikmah* used in the Qur’an means the Sunnah, therefore, the Sunnah of Rasul-Allah was revealed by Allah.\(^2\)

Famous Islamic scholar Jalal al Din Sayuti narrates from Abu Muhammad Juwaini in his book as:

Allah’s revelation is of two kinds. First in which Allah orders Jibril to take His message to Rasul-Allah that Allah says to do such and such thing in such and such manner. Jibril listens to the message, understands it, comes to Rasul-Allah and conveys the message. The direction is from Allah but in the language of Jibril. For the sake of illustration it is like a king who sends a message to his officer to do some thing. The officer is given the message by the envoy in his own words and not in the words of the king. The second is in which Jibril comes and reads word for word what Allah had said. The first kind of revelation is the Sunnah and the second is the Qur’an.\(^3\)

It is a belief of every Muslim that, Rasul-Allah not only spoke but acted under the Divine influence.

The word Sunnah, according to Arabic lexicographers means: a way, course, rule, mode or manner of acting or conduct of life. In the Qur’an, the word Sunnah and its plural *Sunan* have been used sixteen times. In all these cases it is used in the sense of established course of rule, mode of life and line of conduct.

According to the ‘ulama of Sunnah, Sunnah refers to all that is narrated from Rasul-Allah, his acts, his sayings and whatever he has tacitly approved plus all the reports which describe his physical features and character.
The ‘ulama of jurisprudence, however, exclude the description of the physical features of Rasul-Allah from the definition of the Sunnah. As we quoted above Imam Shafi‘i’s interpretation, which also represents the view of the majority. The word *hikmah* in this context means the Sunnah of Rasul-Allah. Rasul-Allah himself used the term Sunnah, in a famous Hadith, Rasul-Allah said:

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\text{تركت فيكم أمرين للاسترشاد بهما كتاب الله وسننتي}
\]

I left two things among you. You shall not go astray as long as you hold them: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah.⁴

The Sunnah is divided into three types, viz. verbal (*qawli*), practical (*fi‘li*) and tacitly approved (*taqriri*).

The verbal Sunnah consist of the sayings of Rasul-Allah on any subject, such as the *Hadith fi al saimah zakah* ‘the livestock is liable to *zakah*,‘⁵. The practical Sunnah of Rasul-Allah consist of his deeds and actual instructions such as the way he performed the *salah*, *sawm* and *hajj* etc. Similarly, the fact that Rasul-Allah authorized amputation of the hand of the thief from the wrist illustrated, in actual terms as to how the Quranic *ayah*:

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\text{وَالشَّرِّقٌ وَالشَّرَاقَةَ فَأَقْطَعُوا أَيْدَيْهِما جَزَاءً إِنَّمَا كُسِبَ الْكَفَاةَ مِنَ اللَّهِ}
\]

As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from Allah, for their crime: and Allah is Exalted in Power. Full of Wisdom. (al Ma‘idah 5:38)

Should be implemented, the tacitly approved Sunnah consist of the acts and sayings of the Companions which came to the knowledge of Rasul-Allah and he approved it. The tacit approval of Rasul-Allah may be inferred from his silence and the absence of disapproval, or from his expressions which indicate approval and verbal confirmation. An example of such Sunnah is the report that two of the Companions went on a journey, when they failed to find water for ablution, they both performed the obligatory *salah* with *tayamum* (that is wiping the hands, face with clean soil) later when they found water, one of them performed the ablution and repeated his *salah* whereas other did not, upon their
return, they related their experience to Rasul-Allah ﷺ, who is reported to have approved both courses of action. Hence it became Sunnah taqriri.

The ‘ulama’ are unanimous that Sunnah is a source of Shari’ah and in its rulings with regard to lawful (halal) and unlawful (haram) it stands on the same footing as the Qur’an. The Sunnah of Rasul-Allah ﷺ is an authority (hujjah) for the Qur’an testifies to its authority and enjoins the Muslim to comply with it. The words of Rasul-Allah ﷺ should be implemented, as the Qur’an tells us, are Divinely inspired

وَمَا يَبِطَقُ عَنْ أَلْحَوْيِي إِنَّهُوَ أَلَّا وَحْيٌ يَوْحَيْنَ

Nor does he say [aught] of [his own] Desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him: (al Najm 53:3-4)

His acts and teachings that are meant to establish a rule of Shari’ah constitute a binding authority. While commenting on above mentioned Quranic verse, al Ghazali writes that some of the Divine revelations which Rasul-Allah ﷺ received constitute the Qur’an whereas the remainder is Sunnah. The words of Rasul-Allah ﷺ are authority on anyone who heard Rasul-Allah ﷺ saying them.

On various occasions, the Qur’an enjoins obedience to Rasul-Allah ﷺ and makes it obligatory on the believers to submit to his judgement and authority without any question.

فَلَآ أَطِيعُواُ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ ﻮَعَالَاتُ فَذَا ظَهَرَهُمُ اللَّهُ لَأُكَفِّرُواَ فَاللَّهُ لَأُكَفِّرُ

Say: Obey Allah and His al Rasul ﷺ: but if they turn back, Allah loveth not those who reject Faith. (al ‘Imran 3:32)
O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey al Rasulﷺ, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His al Rasulﷺ, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination. (al Nisa 4:59)

And obey Allah and al Rasulﷺ that ye may obtain mercy. (al'Imran 3:132)

O Ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey al Rasulﷺ and make not vain your deeds! (Muhammad 47:33)

In these verses the obedience to Rasul-Allahﷺ has been ordered as an obligatory command. There are other verses in which the results of the obedience to Rasul-Allahﷺ have been described. Here again the obedience to Rasul Allahﷺ has been combined with the obedience to Allah.

Those who obey Allah and His Rasulﷺ will be admitted to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath; to abide therein [forever] and that will be the supreme achievement. (al Nisa 4:13)

He that obeys Allah and His Rasulﷺ has already attained the highest Achievement. (al Ahzab 33:71)

He who obeys al Rasulﷺ obeys Allah; (al Nisa 4:80)

For any that disobey Allah and His Rasulﷺ, for them is Hell: they shall dwell therein forever. (al Jinn 72:23)
It is noteworthy that whenever the obedience to Allah is mentioned in the Qur’an, it is always followed by the obedience to Rasul-Allah which has never been missed even in a single verse. There is no verse in the entire Book where the obedience to Allah has been mentioned alone with no reference to the obedience to Rasul-Allah.

On the contrary, there are some verses where only the obedience to Rasul-Allah has been mentioned, and there is no reference to the obedience to Allah.

وَأَقِيمُوا الْصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْمَسَنَّ مُنْكَرًا

So establish regular salah and give regular zakah; and obey al Rasul; that ye may receive mercy. (al Nur 24:56)

يَوْمَ يُقَادِرُ الْأَزَمِّينَ كَفَرُوا وَعَصُوا الرَّسُولَ لَوْ نَسَوا بِهِمْ الْأُرْضَ وَلَا يَكْتُمُونَ اللَّهَ حَدِيثًا

On that day those who reject Faith and disobey al Rasul will wish that the earth were made one with them: but never will they hide a single fact from Allah! (al Nisa 4:42)

The reason for so much stress upon the obedience to Rasul-Allah is that the obedience to Allah cannot be carried out except through the obedience to Rasul-Allah. Therefore, when Rasul-Allah approves or forbids something, he does not do it in his private capacity, rather, he does so as a Rasul of Allah. When Allah Himself has commanded to obey Rasul-Allah, the obedience to Rasul-Allah is actually the obedience to Allah. This point has been clearly established by the Qur’an in the following words:

مَنْ يُطِبِعُ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَابَ عَلَيْهِ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ تَوَلَّى فَمَنَ أُرْسِلْتُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا

He who obeys al Rasul obeys Allah; but if any turn away, We have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds). (al Nisa 4:80)
Rasul-Allah ﷺ himself was not a mere postman who delivered the Book of Allah and then disappeared and has no concern with it whatsoever. Anbiya' are not sent merely to deliver the word of Allah, they are also required to explain the Divine Book, to interpret it, to expound it, to demonstrate the ways of its application and to present a practical example of its contents. Acting under Divine guidance Rasul-Allah ﷺ not only delivered the message, but also launched a movement. He changed man and society; founded a community, established a state; and spent every movement of his *Nubuwah* in guiding, directing and leading his followers. His life, under Allah’s guidance, consisting of whatever he did or said or approved, is the Sunnah.

About compilation of Sunnah two misconceptions have been spread. Sunnah has not been preserved in a trustworthy manner and Hadith books were compiled in the third century A.H so their reliability is doubtful. Secondly, Sunnah were orally transmitted thus the sense uttered by Rasul-Allah ﷺ could change during the oral transmission. It is faith of every Muslim including of those who doubt reliability of Hadith that Rasul-Allah ﷺ has a Divine authority for all times to come and that his obedience is mandatory for all Muslims of whatever era. Important thing to note here is that if obedience is mandatory but Sunnah is not reliable how can we carry out this obedience? Doesn’t it mean that Allah has enjoined for us to obey Rasul-Allah ﷺ, but did not preserve his Sunnah? It cannot be envisaged that Allah will bind all the people with something (*uswah hasanah*) which does not exist or cannot be ascertained. If Allah has made it obligatory to follow the Sunnah, He has certainly preserved it for people in a reliable form.

إِنَّا نُحْفِظُ نِّصْبًا لَّنَا أَلِيدًا نَّزُولًا وَإِنَّا لِلْهِ أَحْدَاثُونَ

We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption). (al Hijr 15:9)

In this verse, Allah has assured the preservation of the Qur’an. This implies that the Qur’an will remain un-interpolated and that it shall always be transferred from one generation to the other in its real and original form, undistorted by any foreign element. The question now is whether this Divine protection is restricted only to the words of the Qur’an or does it extend to its meaning as well. If the Divine explanation is necessary to understand the Qur’an correctly, then the preservation of the Qur’an cannot serve the purpose unless the Divine explanations are also preserved.
We have sent down unto thee [also] the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought. (al Nahl 16:44)

The methods used by Rasul-Allah ﷺ to teach his Sunnah or Hadith may be put in three categories:

1. Verbal Teaching.
2. Written Medium (Dictation to scribes).
3. Practical Demonstration.

1. Verbal Teaching

Rasul-Allah ﷺ himself was the teacher of his Sunnah. To make memorizing and understanding easy he used to repeat important things thrice. After teaching the Companions he used to listen to what they had learned. Deputations arriving from outlying areas were given in charge of Sahabah, not only to be hosted or accommodated but also for education in the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Rasul-Allah ﷺ asked them questions to discover the extent of their learning.

2. Written Method

All the letters of Rasul-Allah ﷺ to kings, rulers, chieftains and Muslim governors can be included in the teaching of the Sunnah. We can estimate the numbers of letters which were probably sent by Rasul-Allah ﷺ and recording activities related to them if we remember that he had at least 45 scribes who took his dictation at sometime or the other. In the same category, we may put what was dictated by Rasul-Allah ﷺ to different Companions; such as ‘Aliyy Ibn Abi Talib and some of the writings of ‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Amr Ibn al ‘As, and Rasul-Allah’s ﷺ orders for delivering a copy of his lecture (khutba) to Abu Shah Yemeni.

3. Practical Demonstration

As far as practical demonstration is concerned, Rasul-Allah ﷺ taught the method of wade, salah, swam and hajj etc. in every walk of life, Rasul-
Allah gave practical lessons in excellence, with clear instructions to follow his practice. He said ‘offer *salat* as you see me offering’. He further said, ‘learn from me the rituals of *hajj*’. In answer to many questions, he used to tell the questioner to stay with him and learn by observing his practice.

In the lifetime of Rasul-Allah the methods of Ahadith preservation were memorization, discussion, practice and writing. It is writing of Hadith in the life of Rasul-Allah whose reliability has been challenged by orientalists and their followers.

There is a Hadith which narrates that Rasul-Allah had forbidden some of his Companions from writing anything other than the verses of the Qur’an.

Abu Said Kauri reported that Allah’s Rasul said: Do not take down anything from me, and he who took down anything from me except the Qur’an, he should efface that and narrate from me, for there is no harm in it and he who attributed any falsehood to me and Hammam said: I think he also said ‘deliberately’ he should in fact find his abode in the Hell Fire.

However, this prohibition was neither permanent nor because the Ahadith had no authoritative value, because in the same Hadith Rasul-Allah ordered them to narrate his Ahadith orally. What Cattail said about this Hadith is:

Rasul-Allah only prohibited writing of the Ahadith along with the Qur’an in the same document; the mixing up of the two could cause confusion to the reader.

Dr. Hamid Allah, after mentioning all the Ahadith of prohibition, writes:

All these Ahadith mean that round about the year 7 A.H. Rasul-Allah made some important speeches. Some newly converted Muslims had come from Yemen. Some of them were literate. Some *suwar* of the Qur’an were given to them to read and memories. When they heard that speech of Rasul-Allah some
of them wrote it on the same papers on which the Qur'an had been written. At this Rasul-Allah prohibited to write anything from him other then the Qur'an and ordered to cancel what had been written.11

Some important Ahadith about Hadith writing:

Abd Allah Ibn ‘Amr reported that, I used to write whatever I heard from Rasul-Allah and wanted to learn it by heart. Some people of the Quraish dissuaded me as said ‘Do you write every thing you hear from Rasul-Allah? While he is a human being and sometimes he may be in anger as any other human being may be?

‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Amr conveyed their opinion to Rasul-Allah. In reply Rasul-Allah pointed to his lips and said:

فقال أكتب فوالذي نفسي بيده ما بخرج منه إلا حق

(1) I swear by the one in whose hands is the soul of Muhammad, nothing comes out from these two [lips] except truth. So, do write.12

It was a clear and absolute order given by Rasul-Allah to write each and every saying of him without any hesitation or doubt about its authoritative nature.

(2) One of the Companions among the ansar complained to Rasul-Allah that he hears from him some Ahadith, but sometimes forgets them, Rasul-Allah said:

أنتين بسميك وأوما ييدو للكتاب

Seek help from your right hand and pointed out to writing.13

(3) Rafa‘ Ibn Khatij says: I said to Rasul-Allah we hear from you many things, should we write them down?’ He replied:

أكتبوا لحرج

You may right, there is no harm.14

(4) Anas reports that Rasul-Allah has said:
‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Amr Ibn al ‘As reports that Rasul-Allah ﷺ said to him:

Preserve knowledge

He asked: how should it be preserved? Rasul-Allah ﷺ replied

By writing it.¹⁶

Many books of Ahadith were compiled by the Sahabah of Rasul-Allah ﷺ. The remarkable one are Sahifah Sadiqah by ‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Amr Ibn ‘As, Sahifah ‘Aliyy, Sahifah Abu Bakr, Sahifah Jabir, Sahifa Samurah Ibn Jundab and Sahifah Sahihah by Abu Hurairah.

This is sufficient proof to remove the misconceptions that Ahadith were only transmitted orally and the writing of the Ahadith started one hundred years after the demise of Rasul-Allah ﷺ.

Imam Ibn Taimiyyah acknowledges the Qur’an as undisputed primary source of law none of the a’imah disagreed on this he said. The authentic Sunnah, according to him is inseparable from the Qur’an, because it reveals the intent of the Divine revelation. Both the Qur’an and the Sunnah in the Hanbali tradition are referred to as the texts (nusus), and as such they are held in a unique authoritative position, as the authority of the Sunnah is an extension of the authority of the Qur’an itself, by Divine witness (al Hashr 59:7). Imam Ibn Taimiyyah holds this injunction to validate the authentic Sunnah whether it directly interprets Quranic prima facie expressions in which case either it becomes complementary to it, or it introduces a new ruling not therefore, indicated by the Qur’an, such as the determination of the amount of reparation penalty for theft, or the sentence of punishing an adulterer by stoning etc. Imam Ibn Taimiyyah is convinced that the Sunnah must be held in the highest regard in legislation because it is the key to understand the Qur’an, and because authentic Sunnah can never contravene the Qur’an. Imam Ibn Taimiyyah refutes the Kharjis, for example, for rejecting some portions of the valid Sunnah. He cites the Hadith.

Will you not trust me when he who is in heaven trusts me?¹⁷

The inseparableness of the Qur’an and the Sunnah in Ibn Tamiyyah’s views is evident from his books and treatises. According to him Muhammad Rasul-Allah’s mission was to deliver Allah’s message to His people. Allah had
commanded him clearly and that was his obligation. The message communicated through the Ahadith is no less important than the Qur'an itself. He makes it clear that there should be neither doubt nor controversy that the Qur'an is indeed the word of Allah, sent down directly in its every utterance upon Muhammad Rasul-Allah as an expression of His Holy and Gracious will. It is complete and clear that Muhammad Rasul-Allah was given all authority and wisdom necessary and sufficient for furnishing its clarifications. Imam Ibn Taimiyyah’s method for interpreting the Qur’an, is the interpretation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an and then by the Ahadith. While expressing his views and declaring verdicts (fatawa) regarding legal, social, political and economic matters he quotes Quranic verses and Sunnah first and if felt necessary he cites views of Companions and other a’imah and jurists about the matter concerned.
NOTES

1. Dr. Tawfiq Siddiqi, Mu'mar Qadafi, Syed Ahmad Khan, Maulvi Chirag 'Aliyy, Maulvi Ahmad al Din, 'Abd Allah Chakdalwi, Aslam Jirajpuri, Ghulam Ahmad Parvaiz, Dr. Ghulam Jilani Barq et al.
4. Agreed Upon.
6. BU, 585.
7. MU, 2285.
9. MU, 5326.
12. AD, 3161.
13. TM, 2590.
16. Ibid, p.73.