

The Importance of Writing

Through the Lens and Practices of Eminent Personalities Throughout the Centuries



Notes taken from the lessons of
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إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا يَكْتُبُ إِنْسَانٌ كِتَابًا فِي يَوْمِهِ إِلَّا قَالَ فِي غَدِهِ: لَوْ غَيَّرْتُ هَذَا
لَكَانَ أَحْسَنَ، وَلَوْ زِيدَ كَذَا لَكَانَ يُسْتَحْسَنُ، وَلَوْ قُدِّمَ هَذَا لَكَانَ أَفْضَلَ،
وَلَوْ تُرِكَ هَذَا لَكَانَ أَجْمَلَ. وَهَذَا مِنْ أَعْظَمِ الْعِبَرِ، وَهُوَ دَلِيلٌ عَلَى اسْتِیْلَاءِ
النَّقْصِ عَلَى جُمْلَةِ الْبَشَرِ.

*“I have realised that when a person writes a book one day, the next day he
says if such and such was changed it would have been better, if this was
added it would have been perfect, if this was placed earlier it would have
been more suitable, if this was deleted, it would have been beautiful. This
is one of the greatest lessons and proof that all human beings have
shortcomings.”*

Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Baysānī

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Advice for writing

Imām Muslim [d. 261 AH]

(Muqaddimah of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, v. 1 p. 4)

Imām Muslim RH was asked to produce a ḥadīth collection by some people. Whilst doing so, he mentioned:

كَانَ أَوَّلُ مَنْ يُصِيبُهُ نَفْعُ ذَلِكَ إِيَّايَ خَاصَّةً قَبْلَ غَيْرِي مِنَ النَّاسِ
لَأَسْبَابٍ كَثِيرَةٍ يَطُولُ بِذِكْرِهَا الْوَصْفُ

“The first to receive the benefit of this writing initiative is myself before anyone else for many reasons which will be lengthy to describe in this context.”

The person who writes benefits the most from his own work, therefore, he should not be concerned about its publication. Rather, when they have the initiative and motivation to write, they should just start.

Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā bin Sharaf al-Nawawī [d. 676 AH]

(Al-Majmū‘ Sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab, v. 1 pp. 29-30)

In one of his most prominent books on Shāfi‘ī fiqh, Imām Nawawī RH encouraged young graduates to focus on writing if they find themselves to be qualified. By writing such books, a young scholar is able to discover the true nature of knowledge as well as its priceless secrets. It forces one to do more research and investigation in order to authenticate information and allows them to potentially gain the characteristics of a *mujtahid*.

Thereafter, Imām Nawawī RH presented a number of valuable pieces of advice for one who desires to undertake the path of writing:

- ❖ One should be careful of writing whilst being unqualified, as well as publishing books without it undergoing the editing, proofreading and revision process.
- ❖ One should make sure their writing is comprehensive, ensuring that they are not writing in such depth and detail that they cause confusion, nor should they write so briefly that the key message cannot be easily derived.

- ❖ One should write about a relevant topic which has not been written about and will benefit as many people as possible.
- ❖ If one chooses to write about a topic that has been written about countless times, they should try to bring something unique and new to their writing in regards to the topic.

Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Mālikī [d. 543 AH]

(‘Ārīdah al-Aḥwadhī Sharḥ Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī, v. 1 pp. 8-9)

Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Mālikī RH mentioned that it is not befitting for an intelligent person to start writing except for two purposes:

1. To create something new.
2. To be creative in describing a subject which has been discussed previously in a unique and innovative way.

If one does not achieve either of the above, they are essentially just darkening a paper by putting ink on it and thus wasting paper and decorating themselves with the jewel of plagiarism.

‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī RH [d. 1031 AH]

(Fayḍ al-Qadīr, v. 1 p. 437)

إِذَا مَاتَ الْإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثَةٍ: إِلَّا مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ، أَوْ عِلْمٍ
يَنْتَفَعُ بِهِ، أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ.

“When man dies, his actions come to an end except for three: a continuous charity, knowledge which is benefited from or a pious child who supplicates for him.”¹

‘Allāmah al-Munāwī RH comments regarding the above ḥadīth that knowledge is benefited through teaching and authoring books. Delving into which of the two is superior, ‘Allāmah al-Munāwī RH quotes ‘Allāmah Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī RH [d. 771 AH] who stated that writing is better than teaching as it will continue to remain despite the passing of time and hence people may benefit from it even after the demise of the author.

Some commentators have stipulated the condition that before one undertakes the task of writing, they must ensure that they bring something new in addition to what the previous scholars have already mentioned, otherwise it is

¹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 1631.

like wasting paper. Likewise, teaching will not prove to be of service if the teacher does not build on what the learned ones have already recorded.

Al-Mundhirī RH mentioned that transcription of knowledge is fruitful as one will reap two-folds of rewards; his reward and the reward of all those who read, write or strive to preserve it.

Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin ‘Alī bin Muḥammad al-Jawzī [d. 597 AH]

(Ṣayd al-Khāṭir, pp. 241-2)

This book contains the thoughts and ideas of Ibn al-Jawzī RH; an indirect autobiography which includes additional tips for the reader.

Ibn al-Jawzī RH believes that writing has a greater benefit than teaching as teaching only addresses the people present in the gathering. When writing, one can reach people who are yet to come into this world, and individuals can learn extensively from the books and legacy left behind by previous scholars.

However, this does not imply that teaching is unnecessary as without teaching, how can one acquire the knowledge to read? Teaching and writing come hand in hand because teaching is needed for the writing to be conveyed. Scholars who partake in teaching should, therefore, not be underestimated. One should also take caution that they have sufficient knowledge before they start teaching and bear in mind that there is no age restriction to start writing.

In addition, Ibn al-Jawzī RH encouraged scholars to focus and dedicate their time to writing if their writing skills prove sufficient. Allāh ﷻ has given individuals the ability to look at a range of works through different lenses and collate them into one place. In addition to that, one can put in order that which is in disorder or explain that which was left out using his own words. This is what is termed as beneficial writing. Beneficial and purposeful writing adds to people's knowledge as opposed to one who just copies and pastes.

Ibn al-Jawzī RH further advised that it is preferable to utilise the middle age for writing as during this period, one is at the peak of their life and hence is the most ideal time for writing. He suggests that early life is the time for learning and towards the end of life, one may possibly experience a

lack in understanding as they age. Specifically, Ibn al-Jawzī RH states that until the age of forty, one should utilise their time in seeking knowledge, establishing a livelihood and fulfilling responsibilities. After that, one is mature enough to undertake the path of writing.

Note: a person must gain sufficient knowledge and experience to write books but it is not necessary for them to wait until they become forty years old. Imām Nawawī RH passed away at the age of forty-five and started writing before he turned forty. ‘Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī RH wrote his section of the renowned *tafsīr* book, *Tafsīr al-Jalalayn*, when he was around the age of nineteen in forty days.

After reaching the age of sixty, he recommended focusing more on teaching. Once someone surpasses the age of seventy, it is best to start preparing for the afterlife, unless the person believes they are still capable of teaching.

‘Allāmah Badr al-Dīn Zarkāshī [d. 794 AH]

(Al-Burhān Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān v. 1 p. 37)

‘Allāmah Badr al-Dīn Zarkāshī remarked that in today’s age, individuals show pride when they have written lengthy pieces without having done any prior reading. In reality, this is a shortcoming of one’s work. His writing is not truly complete and he is undeserving of recognition and appreciation.

Practice of the pious predecessors

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī RH [d. 852 AH]

Ibn Ḥajar RH spent his early life looking into the books of grammar. During his prime years, his focus was on reading large books and writing an abridged or summarised version of it. This teaches one the importance of becoming proficient in the art of the language they are learning before moving on. On top of that, one should ensure to read books written by other scholars in order to comprehend and understand the method of writing, compiling, and selecting information. A person can first start off their journey of writing by doing *taḥqīq* (editing) of manuscripts.

Ibn Ḥajar RH would choose reliable sources for his works and was selective about what information he used. When quoting early scholars, he would only use primary sources; secondary sources did not suffice. Ibn Ḥajar RH had a number of ongoing projects including his magnum opus, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, which took him twenty-six years to complete! This demonstrates the consistency that Ibn Ḥajar RH had in his works and his perseverance, such that despite having many pauses and gaps throughout the years, he did not give up; his

zeal and passion drove him to continue.² Ibn Ḥajar RH would warn people from speaking or writing in regards to a field which they do not specialise in. He would say:

إِذَا تَكَلَّمَ الْمَرْءُ فِي غَيْرِ فَنِّهِ أَتَى بِالْعَجَائِبِ

“When one talks about something which is not his field, he will come up with strange ideas.”³

Mullā ‘Alī Qārī RH [d. 1014 AH]

One of Mullā ‘Alī Qārī’s most prominent and well-known books which he penned is *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, a *sharḥ* (commentary) of the renowned *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*. In it, he makes a mention of the reason why he collated this book. He stated that the *shuruḥāt* that were available in his locality were based on manuscripts which had mistakes in them or which were not fully verified and due to this, he felt the need to compile one which was based on authentic manuscripts.⁴

² For more details, see: *al-Jawāhir wa al-Durar* by Sakhāwī, v. 2 p. 659, *Unwān al-Zamān* by Biqāi‘ī, v. 1 pp. 141-152, and *Muṣannafāt Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Ḥajar* by Biqāi‘ī (edited and annotated by Mawlānā Maḥfūz Aḥmad Sylheti), pp. 63-71.

³ *Fath al-Bārī*, v. 3 p. 584.

⁴ See, *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ*, v. 1 p. 40.

‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī RH [d. 1304 AH]

Despite passing away at the young age of thirty-nine, he produced over a hundred books in Arabic covering different Islamic disciplines, and was therefore considered an Imām in the field of ḥadīth and fiqh.

Muftī Muḥammad Taqī ‘Uthmānī [b. 1362 AH]

Mawlānā Maḥfuz had the honour of meeting Muftī Muḥammad Taqī ‘Uthmānī on the 5th of August 2016 at Azhar Academy, London. The following is what was heard and learnt from that day:

Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī has penned many literary works, one of his Urdu books being *Huzur ne Farmaya* (Sayings of the Prophet ﷺ). He mentions that his father, Muftī Muḥammad Shāfi‘ ‘Uthmānī, would advise him that whenever he had multiple tasks to complete, he should allocate a specific time for each task. Between his last lesson and the time for ‘Aṣr Ṣalāḥ, Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī had a break for fifteen minutes which he would utilise to write.

Not long after being published, his book became widely available. A man from Peshawar visited Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī and informed him of a bookstore in Peshawar in which he found his book, *Huzur ne Farmaya*. The man said that he did not buy the book due to certain reasons. He further narrates that during that night, he had a dream in which he saw Rasūlullāh ﷺ come and ask him why he did not buy the book. The man, when relating the dream, said that he saw four books in the hand of Rasūlullāh ﷺ:

- *Huzur ne Farmaya*
- *Dil ki Duniya*, Muftī Shāfi‘ ‘Uthmānī
- *Sirat-e-Aishah*, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī
- *Aab-e-Hayat*, ‘Allāmah Qāsim Nānotwī

Despite the fact that dreams can not be taken as evidence for legal matters, they can still be considered as *mubāshirāt* (glad tidings) as mentioned in ṣaḥīḥ narrations.

Additionally, Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī’s father authored a book called *Gunahe be Lazzat* (Unsavoury Sins) which gained much attention and praise. This motivated Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī to write a book with a similar title to his father’s called *Thawab be Mehnat* (Effortless Good Deeds). However, he later decided to change it to *Aasaan Nekiya* (Easy Good Deeds).

This is an exemplary lesson reminding us to utilise every amount of free time that we have. Through the small effort one puts in everyday, they can produce something so great that it benefits many people.

Muftī Taqī said that there were times where he would lose motivation to complete his tasks and writing, especially in the field of Islamic finance. He realised that it was a test from Allāh ﷻ, made du‘ā’ and continued as there is no other solution but to continue the work whilst seeking the help of Allāh ﷻ (susti ka ilaj chusti). He said that before he started writing, he would do *istikhārah*, pray two rak‘āh ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and make the following du‘ā’:

“Oh Allāh, if this writing is in accordance with Your pleasure, then let me complete it or else let me not.”

Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abdul Mālīk [b. 1389 AH]

1. When the ‘Ulamā’ read the comment of Ibn ‘Arabī as mentioned previously (under the chapter ‘*advice for writing*’), some become demotivated and others become arrogant thinking they can write about anything and everything. One should bear in mind

that there are various different fields to write about from which he should select what he feels that he is competent in:

- ❖ Da‘wah for the general public
- ❖ Classical books which can be taught
- ❖ Academic writing
- ❖ Translation
- ❖ Collections of information
- ❖ Gather and assemble the beneficial information from larger collections (*fawā'id*)
- ❖ Produce abridged versions of lengthier texts
- ❖ Comparative writing (relating to religions and ideologies)
- ❖ Refutative writing
- ❖ Collections of Quranic verses, ḥadīth or supplications which can be memorised.
- ❖ Sharḥ (commentary) of classical works
- ❖ *Taḥqīq* and *ta'līq*
- ❖ Preparing various types of *fahāris* (contents pages) for larger works
- ❖ Essays and articles
- ❖ Writing for the sake of training

2. Many argue that they do not have the resources to write. Shaykh ‘Abdul Mālik says that the reason why people complain in this way is because they do not understand that:

مَا لَا يَدْرِكُ كُلَّهُ لَا يَتْرَكُ كُلَّهُ

“Though something cannot be achieved fully, it should not be completely abandoned.”

3. When someone is writing, they should be eloquent and use a style which encourages the reader to continue reading. *Itqān* (perfection) is required when writing however, one should also keep in mind the words of Muftī Muḥammad Shāfi‘ ‘Uthmānī:

الاسْتِقْصَاءُ سُؤْمٌ

“To seek perfection in everything is a curse.”

One should ensure that they know the *qawā‘id* (rules) of writing as well as spend some time with an experienced writer. One should never get their book published without it having been reviewed by the experts of the field.⁵

⁵ *Ṭālibān-e Ilm: Poth o Patheo* (Bengali), pp. 237-42.

Referencing

Checking references

It is mentioned in *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā*⁶ that Imām 'Āmir bin Sharāḥīl al-Sha'bī RH [d. 100 AH] was well-versed in the Arabic language such that whenever anyone would recite anything to him, he would memorise it. The only thing that he would remember least was poetry, yet if he started reciting poetic verses, he could recite it for a whole month without repeating a verse. He was once asked: “How did you attain all of this knowledge?” to which he highlighted the following four factors:

بَنَيْتِ الْأَعْتِمَادَ، وَالسَّيْرَ فِي الْبِلَادِ، وَصَبِرَ كَصَبْرِ الْجَمَادِ، وَبَكُورَ كَبُكُورِ الْغُرَابِ

1. He would not rely on anyone else's statement or reference; rather, he would exert himself in reviewing and authenticating information himself. This does not mean that one should not trust the 'Ulamā' but referencing should be done out of

⁶ V. 4 p. 302.

caution as there is a possibility that they may have made a mistake.

2. He would travel extensively.
3. He maintained immense patience.
4. He would rise early, like the morning crow.⁷

In his book, *Aap Fatwa ke se de*⁸ (The Art of Giving Legal Verdicts), Muftī Saʿīd Aḥmad Pālanpūrī [d. 1441 AH] mentions that when he graduated, he sought advice from his teacher, Muftī Maḥdī Ḥassan Shāh Jaḥānpūrī [d. 1396]. His teacher responded by saying: “Even if you are on the verge of death, do not rely on anyone else’s reference.” Muftī Saʿīd asked in astonishment whether he could rely on the reference of a great personality such as Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar RH. Muftī Maḥdī replied:

“Even if an Ibn Jabal were to give a reference, one should still not rely on his statement.”

After quoting a Ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth, some people mention Shaykh Albānī’s classification of that particular ḥadīth. However, it

⁷ See, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ* by Imām Dhahabī, v. 4 p. 300 and *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* by Imām Dhahabī, v. 1 p. 64.

⁸ P. 26

would be more appropriate to quote the opinion of a more classical scholar, as the famous saying goes:

الْأَقْدَمُ فَالْأَقْدَمُ

“Old is gold.”

In 2020, there was a course called *Tahqīq al-Turāth* organised by Umm al-Qurā University delivered by Dr ‘Abdur Raḥman bin Ḥassan Qā’id. In his lecture, he described how some individuals only refer to Shaykh Albānī’s ḥadīth classifications as though he is the only figure in the field.

These individuals do not realise that by solely relying on Shaykh Albānī, they would be ignoring the contributions of the scholars who preceded him in both time and expertise. The work of early scholars was based on *ṣuḥbah* (companionship and experience) with their teachers as well as written knowledge, whereas Shaykh Albānī’s comments were based on his independent study of literary works.

A better understanding of sources is required in order to ensure that secondary sources such as Shaykh Albānī are not given preference over primary sources such as Imām Nawawī, Zayla‘ī, Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar.

An example of this lack of awareness is, for instance, to quote a ḥadīth from *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmīdhī* in which Imām Tirmīdhī - a leading expert in the field - comments on the level of the ḥadīth, and then to supplement with Shaykh Albānī’s explanation. This incorrectly suggests that Imām Tirmīdhī’s opinion is insufficient.

Advice on referencing

Shaykh ‘Abdul Fattaḥ Abū Ghuddah [d. 1417 AH] mentions in *Ṣafaḥāt min Ṣabr al-‘Ulamā’*⁹ that when someone writes, they must add references so that the reader can understand and appreciate the value of the information provided.

Musnad Abū Bakr was compiled by ‘Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī [d. 911 AH] and edited by Shaykh ‘Abdullāh bin Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī [d. 1413 AH] who stated in his introduction¹⁰:

السُّيُوطِيُّ دَقِيقٌ فِيمَا يَعُزُّوهُ إِلَى غَيْرِهِ، لَا يَكَادُ يَحْصُلُ لَهُ غَلَطٌ فِي عَزْوِهِ لِدِقَّتِهِ

“Al-Suyūṭī was very precise when he referenced others and rarely fell into errors due to his precision.”

⁹ P. 7.

¹⁰ See, *Musnad Abū Bakr* by Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī, (ed. Ghumārī), p. 4.

Maintaining trustworthiness whilst referencing

One of the fundamental principles with regards to referencing is attributing the relevant work to its author and giving due credit to the people or books from which one received the information.

In *Qīmat al-Zaman*¹¹, Shaykh ‘Abdul Fattaḥ Abū Ghuddah RH states:

مِنَ الْأَمَانَةِ فِي الْعِلْمِ عَزُّوهُ إِلَى قَائِلِهِ أَوْ نَاقِلِهِ

“It is an *amānah* (trust) of knowledge to attribute it to the one who said it or conveyed it.”

Muftī Muḥammad Taqī ‘Uthmānī mentions in his book, *Mere Wālid Mere Shaykh*¹² (My father, My Shaykh), “Generally in our time, people get their ideas from prominent authors and write it as if it is their own, whereas my father (Muftī Shafī‘ ‘Uthmānī) was the complete opposite of that. When my father was writing *Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān*, he came up with many new thoughts and ideas through his own research regarding the tafsīr of an āyah. However, he would not write it in his book until he searched through different books of

¹¹ P. 15.

¹² P. 115 (from the Bengali translation).

tafsīr to see if something similar had already been mentioned. If he found it in another book, he would attribute it to the early source rather than to himself.”

Imām Nawawī RH mentions in *Bustān al-‘Ārifīn*¹³:

وَمِنَ النَّصِيحَةِ أَنْ تُضَافَ الْفَائِدَةُ الَّتِي تُسْتَعْرَبُ إِلَى قَائِلِهَا. فَمَنْ فَعَلَ ذَلِكَ بَوْرِكَ لَهُ فِي عِلْمِهِ وَحَالِهِ، وَمَنْ أَوْهَمَ ذَلِكَ فِيمَا يَأْخُذُهُ مِنْ كَلَامٍ غَيْرِهِ أَنَّهُ لَهُ فَهُوَ جَدِيرٌ أَنْ لَا يَنْتَفِعَ بِعِلْمِهِ وَلَا يُبَارَكَ لَهُ فِي حَالِهِ. وَلَمْ يَزَلْ أَهْلُ الْعِلْمِ وَالْفَضْلِ عَلَى إِضَافَةِ الْقَوَائِدِ إِلَى قَائِلِهَا.

“It is an act of sincerity to attribute the benefit which you attain to the one who said it. Whoever does that will be blessed in his work and state. Whoever plagiarises work, passing it off as their own, his knowledge will not be beneficial nor will he have any blessings in that knowledge. The people of knowledge and virtue continue attributing credit to the one who said it.”

¹³ P. 46-47.

‘Allāmah Zāhid al-Kawtharī [d. 1371 AH] mentioned in his *Maqālāt al-Kawtharī*¹⁴:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَا يَجِبُ عَلَى الْعَالِمِ الْأَمَانَةُ فِي النَّقْلِ

“Indeed, one of the first things which is necessary upon a scholar is to have trust when transmitting.”

When refuting or challenging someone, one must refer to the original source (i.e. the work of that individual) and not secondary sources. This is to verify if what they are going to refute has actually been said by the author. It is mentioned in *Muqaddimāt al-Kawtharī*¹⁵ that ‘Allāmah Zāhid al-Kawtharī stated:

شَأْنُ الْبَاحِثِ أَنْ يَحْتَاطَ فِي نَسْبَةِ قَوْلٍ إِلَى قَائِلٍ حَتَّى يَجِدَهُ فِي كِتَابٍ لَهُ
مُسْتَفِيزٍ عَنْهُ.

“The position of a researcher should be that he is cautious when attributing a statement to someone until he finds it in his own book which is well-known.”

¹⁴ P. 41.

¹⁵ See, P. 52 and 111.

When he did *taḥqīq* of *Muṣṣannaḥ Ibn Abī Shaybah*¹⁶, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Awwāmah [b. 1358 AH] wrote the following piece of advice:

إِنَّ اسْتِفَادَةَ الْمَرْءِ مِنْ عَمَلٍ غَيْرِهِ بَعْدَ مُرَاجَعَتِهِ وَتَثْبِيْتِهِ بِنَفْسِهِ وَعَدَمَ ذِكْرِهِ لِعَمَلِ
غَيْرِهِ لَا يُعَدُّ انْتِحَالًا وَلَا سَرَقَةً.

“If a person benefits from the work of another, reviews it and confirms it himself, then does not mention the work of others, it is not considered plagiarism or theft.”

If one comes across something in a secondary source, they should refer to the primary source and extract the information from there. In this case, there would be no need to reference the secondary source; referencing the primary source will be sufficient as long as they have verified it themselves. This principle will only be applicable if the person took a small amount of information from the secondary source. However, if one was to copy and paste everything from the secondary source, then this would be considered plagiarism.

¹⁶ See, v. 1 p. 42.

On the other hand, if one refers to the primary source directly instead of the secondary source without having verified the information, it will be considered plagiarism.

Women in the field of writing

Regarding prohibiting women from writing, there is no authentic evidence in Islamic literature to support this. However, it is important to note that there is a narration which is circulated by some stating, ‘Do not teach them [women] how to write.’ This narration, according to most ḥadīth experts, is not authentic¹⁷. There is no sound ḥadīth that suggests that women should not be taught to write. On the contrary, there are authentic ḥadīth, which affirm the opposite. For instance, Al-Shifā’ bint ‘Abdullāh narrated that when she was with Ḥafṣah, the Prophet ﷺ entered and said, ‘Why do you not teach this one the spell for skin eruptions as you taught her writing?’¹⁸ The commentators of ḥadīth, like Al-Khaṭṭābī¹⁹, have explicitly stated that this account implies there is no issue with teaching women how to write. Shams al-Ḥaq Azīmabādī [d. 1329 AH] penned a detailed book on the issue which is titled as “*Uqūd al-Jumān fī Jawāz Ta‘līm al-Kitābah li al-Niswān*” (Chain of gems on the permissibility of teaching writing to women).

¹⁷ See, ‘*Awn al-Ma’būd*’ by Shams al-Ḥaq ‘Azīmabādī, v. 10 p. 269.

¹⁸ Sunan Abū Dāwūd: 3887.

¹⁹ Ma‘ālim al-Sunan, v. 4 p. 227.

As for books written on any discipline of science, be it religious or secular, it is understandable that not many written contributions by women can be traced back. This has multiple reasons, which will be mentioned below.

One is that, commonly, women did not have the free time dedicated to writing because they were occupied in tending to their duties towards household matters. In addition, they go through the journey of pregnancy, delivery of the child and breastfeeding. The second reason is that women are, generally, inclined towards listening and speaking more than writing. Therefore, when looking at the female scholarship from the Islamic bibliographical dictionaries, it is clear that most of the female scholars were engaged in ḥadīth literature as it is based on memory, not writing. The third reason is that collecting information concerning a woman's personal life proved to be difficult, especially for men. That means there could have been more female authors, however, there is no record of their works and contributions. Though there has been much advancement in technology and gender roles are not adhered to as strictly, a comparison between male and female scholarship in the twenty-first century reinforces this idea, as the number of female writers is still less than male.

However, there are surviving works which have mentioned the names of female authors, who have contributed to the Islamic legacy through their writing. One of the most celebrated bibliographical encyclopaedias *al-ʿAlām* of Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī [d. 1396/1976], which covered the biography of thousands of Muslim authors, listed just thirteen female authors. Another bibliographical dictionary titled *Hadiyyat al-ʿĀrifīn* of Ismāʿīl al-Babānī named only two female authors. ʿUmar Rida Kaḥḥāla [d. 1408/1987], in his popular Arabic work known as *Aʿlām al-Nisāʾ* mentioned almost two thousand female scholars. However, only ten amongst them can be found as authors. Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf (2000) has penned a considerably detailed account of female authors in Islamic history. Taking only Arabic works into consideration, Yūsuf was able to list thirty-six female authors until the thirteenth century hijrī, who compiled around seventy books collectively. The subject matters of those works remain within the traditional disciplines of Islamic studies including mostly ḥadīth, History, Fiqh, Taṣawwuf and Adhkār.

Furthermore, many examples are found where women made significant contributions to scribing the Islamic manuscript. One example is the manuscript of the book *Tuḥfat al-Aṣḥāb*

wa al-Aqrān fī Dhikr Dawlat Āl ʿUthmān Mulūk al-Arḍ fī al-Ṭūl wa al-Arḍ (The masterpiece of companions and peers in the remembrance of the state of the ʿUthmān family, kings of the earth in length and width) by Muḥammad bin ʿAlī Sepahizadeh, preserved in the British Library under the number Or.16777, at the end of which the note of the scribe attracts the reader. It was written by the manuscript transcriber Zainab, daughter of ʿAbdullāh al-Ṭabariyyah Meccan Ḥanbalī, who wrote it under the dome of the blessed Zamzam water towards the Kaʿbah in the Masjid al-Ḥaram, where she said at the end of the manuscript, *‘... I wrote it in a fee drawn by Judge Burhān al-Dīn al-Qunawī – may God support him with his success – and I ask him or those who read it, if he finds an error, an omission, or a slip of a pen, to correct it, because while I was writing it with my right hand, I was breastfeeding and shaking my son with my left.’* Such observations by copyists require scientific thesis and academic research that illuminate this aspect of the history of manuscripts.

“I shall be my own reader and I shall be my own teacher. If no one reads my writing and no one learns from it, what is there to be sad about? I shall continue writing and I shall continue reading my writing and I shall continue to learn from it.”

Mawlānā Abū Ṭāhir Miṣbāḥ