

Methodology of Imami Theologians in Proving the Tawātur of Imamate Hadiths

Ali Asghar Parsamoghaddam 

Graduated from the fourth level of explanatory Imamate at the Imamology Center of Qom Islamic Seminary,
Qom, Iran. Email: aliasghar.parsamoghaddam@gmail.com

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received
16 February 2025
Received in revised form
26 February 2025
Accepted
10 March 2025
Available online
23 August 2025

Keywords:

imamate traditions,
methodology,
Imāmī theologians,
proof of tawātur

ABSTRACT

As the second source for understanding religion after the Qur'ān, the *Ḥadīth* holds particular significance in the comprehension of Islamic doctrines. Among these, the *mutawātir ḥadīth* (a report of mass transmission) occupies a prominent position in theological (*Kalām*) discussions due to its absolute authority (*hujjiyyah*) and its capacity to confer definitive knowledge. Furthermore, the utilization of shared and methodologically sound principles is a fundamental component of substantiating claims in theological dialogues. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology and based on library research, this study investigates the methods used by Imāmī theologians (*mutakallimūn*) to prove the *tawātur* of traditions concerning the Imamate (*imāmah*). The findings indicate that Imāmī theologians have utilized five principal methods to establish *tawātur*: Principle-Based *Tawātur* (based on the foundational principles of *ḥadīth* sciences), Transmission-Based *Tawātur* (based on works that compile the various chains of transmission—*ṭuruq*—of a *ḥadīth*), Confessional *Tawātur* (established through the acknowledgment of a tradition's authenticity by theological opponents), Criterion-Based *Tawātur* (which involves defining specific criteria for *tawātur* and demonstrating that the traditions meet them), and Collective *Tawātur* (proven by collating the chains of transmission from diverse Islamic and inter-sectarian sources). These methodologies provide a methodologically sound and effective framework for utilization and argumentation (*iḥtijāj*) in theological dialogues concerning the Imamate, which can be highly influential in advancing innovation within the field of *Kalām*.

Cite this article: Parsamoghaddam, A. A. (2025). Methodology of Imami Theologians in Proving the Tawātur of Imamate Hadiths. *Theology Journal*, 12(1), 3-25.
<https://doi.org/10.22034/pke.2025.20620.1965>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: Al-Mustafa International University.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/pke.2025.20620.1965>

Introduction

In the constellation of religious knowledge, ḥadīth serves as the second primary source of cognition after the Noble Qur'ān, consistently playing a fundamental role in the deduction, explication, and transmission of Islamic teachings. The Noble Qur'ān, through its recurrent references to the sunnah of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam) and the imperative of obedience to him, has firmly embedded the validity of the sunnah within the intellectual framework of Muslims. Accordingly, ḥadīth, which embodies the Prophetic sunnah (ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam), has been at the center of attention among Islamic scholars since the earliest centuries.

In this context, the significance and credibility of a ḥadīth are evaluated not only in terms of its content but also with regard to its issuance and chain of transmission (sanad). Islamic scholars have devoted particular attention to aspects such as the chain of transmission, the narrators (ruwāh), the text (matn), and the multiplicity of transmission paths (ṭuruq) in assessing the veracity or falsity of ḥadīths. One of the key concepts in this domain is "mutawātir ḥadīth." A mutawātir ḥadīth is one that, due to the abundance of transmitters across all generations (ṭabaqāt), renders collusion upon falsehood impossible and is thus deemed to engender certainty (yaqīn). Such a ḥadīth holds an elevated position in the derivation of doctrinal beliefs ('aqā'id) and legal rulings (aḥkām) and is accepted by all Islamic schools of thought.

In Imāmī kalām (theology), the proof of the imamate of the Ahl al-Bayt ('alayhim al-salām) constitutes one of the principal axes of doctrinal discussions. Establishing this doctrine through valid and certitude-inducing ḥadīths is an essential necessity, as audiences confronting claims of imamate seek definitive and unassailable proofs. Particularly in interdenominational dialogues, the utilization of ḥadīths whose tawātur (mutawātir status) can be demonstrated strengthens argumentation and fosters broader acceptance. Consequently, Imāmī theologians (mutakallimūn) throughout history have endeavored to establish the tawātur of ḥadīths pertaining to imamate through rigorous and diverse methods.

Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical approach and a library-based method to examine the methods utilized by Imāmī theologians in establishing the tawātur of ḥadīths related to imamate. Initially, key concepts such as mutawātir ḥadīth, imamate, method, and methodology are defined. Subsequently, drawing upon ḥadīth and kalām works, five overarching methods are identified and analyzed. The primary objective of this research is to provide a systematic portrayal of the tools and methodologies that Imāmī theologians have employed to substantiate the tawātur of imamate-related ḥadīths.

Findings

The research reveals that Imāmī theologians across various periods have utilized five overarching methods to establish the tawātur of imamate-related ḥadīths. These methods operate independently yet complement one another, collectively forming a methodological framework for proving tawātur.

1. Foundational Tawātur (Tawātur Mabnā'ī):

This method relies on the fundamental principles of ḥadīth sciences and the fourfold conditions of a mutawātir ḥadīth (abundance of narrators in generations, reliance on sensory perception, impossibility of collusion upon falsehood, and generation of necessary knowledge). The researcher, employing knowledge of rijāl (narrator evaluation), documentary sources, narrator generations, and comparative analysis of narrations, seeks to demonstrate the fulfillment of these conditions, thereby establishing tawātur. A prominent example of this approach is the effort of 'Allāmah Mīr Ḥāmid Ḥusayn in 'Abbāqāt al-Anwār and 'Allāmah Amīnī in al-Ghadīr.

2. Path-Based Tawātur (Tawātur Ṭarīqī):

In this method, the focus is on compiling and categorizing various transmission paths (ṭuruq) of the ḥadīth from diverse sources. Imāmī theologians and ḥadīth scholars, by assembling collections of ḥadīth paths (e.g., ḥadīth al-Ghadīr or ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn), aim to illustrate that the ḥadīth has been transmitted across different times, places, and generations with similar wording. This method is significant as it can substantiate numerical abundance and source diversity as corroborative evidence for tawātur. The book al-Wilāyah by Ibn 'Aqda is a notable work in this regard, compiling ḥadīth al-Ghadīr through over 110 paths from the Companions (ṣaḥābah).

3. Confessional Tawātur (Tawātur Iqrārī):

This approach bases its argumentation on the confessions of Ahl al-Sunnah scholars regarding the tawātur of a ḥadīth. Imāmī theologians, by referring to statements from figures such as al-Dhahabī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī, and Ibn Kathīr, endeavor to show that even opponents have acknowledged the tawātur of certain ḥadīths (including ḥadīth al-Ghadīr, al-Ṭayr, and al-Thaqalayn) in some instances. Their testimonies, as external and independent witnesses, can effectively bolster the validity of the ḥadīth, particularly in interdenominational forums where reliance on sources acceptable to the counterpart holds importance.

4. Criterion-Based Tawātur (Tawātur Mi'yārī):

Certain Ahl al-Sunnah scholars have outlined criteria in their works for identifying a mutawātir ḥadīth, such as transmission by four, six, or eight Companions. Imāmī theologians, by extracting these criteria from Ahl al-Sunnah sources and applying them to their pertinent ḥadīths—such as the ḥadīth on Abū Bakr leading the prayer (ḥadīth ṣalāt Abī Bakr)—have sought to utilize these standards to prove the tawātur of imamate-related ḥadīths. For

instance, Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Taymiyyah have, in certain cases, deemed transmission by four Companions sufficient for establishing tawātur.

5. Shared Tawātur (Tawātur Ishtirākī):

This method focuses on ḥadīths transmitted across various Islamic sects through independent chains. When a ḥadīth is narrated in both Shi‘i and Ahl al-Sunnah sources by diverse narrators and with varied chains, this multiplicity and diversity can serve as an indicator of tawātur. From this perspective, the practical consensus (ijmā‘ ‘amalī) or general acceptance among Muslims regarding a ḥadīth attests to its definitive issuance. Shaykh al-Mufīd, Shaykh al-Tūsī, and others have invoked this method in cases such as ḥadīth al-Ghadīr, al-Thaqalayn, and al-Manzilah.

Conclusion

The aggregate of the fivefold methods employed by Imāmī theologians attests to a cohesive and diverse framework for establishing the tawātur of ḥadīths pertaining to imamate. Each method, within its specific context, serves as an effective tool for rational and theological argumentation. Foundational and path-based tawātur are primarily grounded in chain-of-transmission and rijāl analysis, whereas confessional and criterion-based tawātur emphasize discursive analysis of statements and standards from other schools. Shared tawātur, meanwhile, seeks to leverage the breadth of narration across the Islamic world.

This study demonstrates that the Imāmī methodology for proving tawātur has not only addressed historical needs but also possesses the potential to function in contemporary interdenominational dialogues and against modern objections. Particularly in circumstances where Ahl al-Sunnah sources have confessed to the mutawātir status of certain imamate narrations, a favorable opportunity arises for referencing those very sources to affirm the legitimacy of the Imāmī perspective. Therefore, the study and development of these methods represent an indispensable necessity in the domains of Imāmī kalām and Shi‘i ḥadīth studies, from epistemological, historical, and practical standpoints.

Author Contributions: This is a single-author article.

Data Availability Statement: Not Applicable.

Acknowledgements: No acknowledgements are made.

Ethical Considerations: The author avoided data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and misconduct.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: No artificial intelligence was used.