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Imam Muslim is Abu'l-Husain 'Asakir-ud-Din Muslim b. Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naisaburi (202 - 261H)

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The full name of Imam Muslim is Abu'l-Husain 'Asakir-ud-Din Muslim b. Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naisaburi. "Muslim," as his nasba shows, belonged to the Qushayr tribe of the Arabs, an offshoot of the great clan of Rabi'a. He was born in Naisabur (Nishapur) in 202/817 or 206/821. His parents were religiously minded persons and as such he was brought up in a pious atmosphere. This left such an indelible impression on his mind that he spent the whole of his life as a God-fearing person and always adhered to the path of Righteousness. He was in fact a saint of high calibre. His excellent moral character can be well judged from the simple fact that he never indulged in backbiting, a very common human failing.

Imam Muslim travelled widely to collect traditions in Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, where he attended the lectures of some of the prominent Traditionists of his time: Ishaq b. Rahwaih, Ahmad b. Hanbal, 'Ubaydullah al-Qawariri, Qutaiba b. Sa'id, 'Abdullah b. Maslama, Harmalah b. Yahya, and others.

Having finished his studies, he settled down at Nishapur. There he came into contact with Imam Bukhari, and was so much impressed by his vast knowledge of Hadith and his deep insight into it that he kept himself attached to him up to the end of his life. He was an ardent admirer of another great-teacher of Hadith, Muhammad b. Yahya al-Duhali and attended his lectures regularly, but when the difference of opinion between Muhammad b. Yahya and Imam Bukhari, on the issue of the creation of the Holy Qur'an, sharpened into hostility, Imam Muslim sided with Imam Bukhari and abandoned Muhammad b. Yahya altogether. He was thus a true disciple of Imam Bukhari.

He wrote many books and treatises on Hadith, but the most important of his works is the collection (Jami') of his Sahih. Some of the commentators of Ahadith are of the opinion that in certain respects it is the best and most authentic work on the subject. Imam Muslim took great pains in collecting 300,000 Traditions, and then after a thorough examination of them retained only 4000, the genuineness of which is fully established.<sup>1</sup>

He prefixed to his compilation a very illuminating introduction, in which he specified some of the principles which he had followed in the choice of his material.

Imam Muslim has to his credit many other valuable contributions to different branches of Hadith literature, and most of them retain their eminence even to the present day. Amongst these Kitab al-Musnad al-Kabir 'Ala al-Rijal, Jami' Kabir, Kitab, al-Asma' wa'l-Kuna, Kitab al-Ilal, Kitab al- Wijdan are very important.

His Methods of Classification and Annotation

Muslim's Sahih comes next to it. However, in certain respects the latter is considered superior to the former. Imam Muslim strictly observed many principles of the science of Hadith which had been slightly ignored by his great teacher Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on both of them). Imam Muslim considered only such traditions to be genuine and authentic as had been transmitted to him by an unbroken chain of reliable authorities and were in perfect harmony with what had, (been related by other narrators whose trustworthiness was unanimously accepted and who were free from all defects.

Moreover, Imam Bukhari, while describing the chain of narrators, sometimes mentions their kunya and sometimes gives their names. This is particularly true in case of the narrators of Syria. This creates a sort of confusion, which Imam Muslim has avoided.

Imam Muslim takes particular care in according the exact words of the narrators and points out even the minutest difference in the wording of their reports.

Imam Muslim has also constantly kept in view the difference between the two well-known modes of narration, haddathana (he narrated to us) and akhbarana (he informed us). He is of the opinion that the first mode is used only when the teacher is narrating the hadith and the student is listening to it, while the second mode of expression implies that the student is reading the hadith before the teacher. This reflects his utmost care in the transmission of a hadith.

Imam Muslim has taken great pains in connecting the chain of narrators. He has recorded only that hadith which, at least, two reliable tabi'in (successors) had heard from two Companions and this principle is observed throughout the subsequent chain of narrators.

His Students

Imam Muslim had a very wide circle of students, who learnt Hadith from him. Some of them occupy a very prominent position in Islamic history, e.g. Abu Hatim Razi, Musa b. Harun, Ahmad b. Salama, Abu 'Isa Tirmidhi, Abu Bakr b. Khusaima, Abu 'Awana and Hafiz Dhahabi.

#### His Death

Imam Muslim lived for fifty-five years in this world. Of this short span of his life he spent most of his time in learning Hadith, in its compilation, in its teaching and transmission. He always remained absorbed in this single pursuit and nothing could distract his attention from this pious task. He died in 261/875, and was buried in the suburbs of Nishapur.

#### NOTES

1 It is essential to remove one of the serious misgivings under which so many Orientalists and westernised Muslim scholars are labouring. When they are told that Imam Muslim selected 4,000 ahadith out of a total collection of 300,000, they think that since quite a large number of ahadith were unreliable, therefore, these were rejected, and then jump to the conclusion that the whole stock of hadith is spurious and should be rejected outright. This betrays utter ignorance of the critics even about the elementary knowledge of hadith. Matn (text) is not the basis on which is calculated the number of ahadith. Hadith is counted on the chain of transmission. Thus when we say that Imam Muslim collected 300,000 ahadith and included only 4,000 in his compilation, it does not imply that he rejected the rest of the whole lot of the Prophet's sayings being unreliable. What this means is that the words and deeds of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) were transmitted to Imam Muslim through so many chains of transmission out of which he selected 4,000 chains as most authentic and narrated the text on their authority. A text (matn) which is transmitted through one hundred isnads is in Hadith literature treated as one hundred traditions. For example, the text of the first hadith in Bukhari (The Actions Are Based on Intention) is counted as a selection of one out of 700 ahadith since it has been transmitted through such a large number of isnads.