



HADITH AUTHORITY AND GENDER: THE PROBLEMATICS OF INTERPRETING HADITH ON WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT

The Prophet's ḥadīths constitute a foundational source in shaping Islamic religious thought, including discourses on gender relations and women's roles in the public sphere. In contemporary public debates, however, several ḥadīths concerning women are frequently interpreted through a literalist framework that neglects their historical and socio-contextual dimensions. As a result, these ḥadīths are often mobilized to legitimize restrictive interpretations of women's social participation. This article aims to examine the problem of interpreting ḥadīths on women in the public sphere, with particular attention to issues of ḥadīth authority and the methodologies employed in understanding their meanings. This study adopts a qualitative approach based on library research, employing the perspectives of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*, matn analysis, and socio historical inquiry. Key ḥadīths—such as those addressing women's "deficiency in intellect and religion" (*nuqṣān al-'aql wa al-dīn*), female leadership, and women as a source of *fitnah*—are examined to demonstrate that the core problem does not lie in the authenticity of their chains of transmission, but rather in the methodologies used to interpret and apply them. The article argues that the *manāhij al-muḥaddithīn* provide adequate and well-established tools for a critical and proportional reading of ḥadīths related to women through the integration of sanad criticism, matn analysis, *asbāb al-wurūd*, and *maqasid al-Shariah*. Through such an approach, ḥadīths can be repositioned as sources of ethical values that promote justice and public welfare, while at the same time preserving their authority within contemporary Islamic discourse.

Keywords: *Hadith, Gender, Hadith Authority, Hadith Interpretation, Public Sphere, Manāhij al-muḥaddithīn.*

**ABSTRAK**

Hadis Nabi SAW berperan penting dalam membentuk pemahaman keagamaan, termasuk dalam pembahasan relasi gender dan posisi perempuan di ruang publik. Namun, dalam praktiknya, sejumlah hadis tentang perempuan kerap dipahami secara literal dan mengabaikan konteks hadis, sehingga berfungsi sebagai pembenaran pembatasan peran Perempuan dalam masyarakat. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis problematika pemaknaan hadis perempuan di ruang publik dengan menitikberatkan pada isu otoritas hadis dan metode yang digunakan untuk memahami maknanya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka dengan pendekatan ulumul hadis, analisis matan, dan kajian sosio-historis. Hadis-hadis kunci seperti hadis tentang نُفُصَانُ الْعُقُلِ وَالذِّينِ, kepemimpinan perempuan, dan perempuan sebagai fitnah dianalisis untuk menunjukkan bahwa problem utama tidak terletak pada validitas sanad, melainkan pada metodologi dalam pemahaman dan penggunaannya. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa *manahij al-muḥaddisin* memiliki beberapa metodologi yang memadai untuk membaca hadis perempuan secara kritis dan proporsional, melalui integrasi kritik sanad, analisis matan, *asbab al-wurud*, dan maqāṣid al-syari'ah. Dengan pendekatan tersebut, hadis dapat diposisikan kembali sebagai sumber nilai etis yang mendorong keadilan dan kemaslahatan, sekaligus tetap menjaga otoritasnya dalam diskursus keislaman kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Hadis, Gender, Otoritas Hadis, Pemaknaan Hadis, Ruang Publik, Manahij al-Muḥaddisin*

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Prophetic ḥadīth occupies a central position in the construction of Islamic law (fiqh), ethics, and social order. As a primary source of normative authority, it not only functions as a legal foundation but also shapes communal perceptions of gender relations, particularly concerning women's status and participation in the public sphere. In practice, a number of ḥadīths have been invoked to justify limitations on women's leadership, social engagement, and religious authority. This phenomenon indicates that ḥadīth operates not merely as a devotional or doctrinal text, but as a formative basis for determining authority within social and political domains.

In contemporary public discourse, women-related ḥadīths are frequently interpreted through a literalist lens that overlooks their historical and contextual dimensions. Reports concerning women's "deficiency in intellect and religion," the prohibition of female political leadership, or the portrayal of women as a source of fitnah are often cited as decisive legal proofs (adilla shar'īyya) without due consideration of their transmission context, the objectives underlying their legislation (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah), or the interpretive methodologies developed by classical scholars. As a result, ḥadīth risks being instrumentalized as a religious justification for discriminatory practices under the guise of ethical guidance oriented toward justice and public welfare.

The underlying problem, however, does not reside in the textual existence of these ḥadīths themselves, but in the mechanisms through which they are interpreted and authorized in the public sphere. In many instances, reports deemed ṣaḥīḥ in terms of sanad continue to generate problematic normative conclusions when interpreted partially and detached from their asbāb al-wurūd. This underscores an important methodological distinction within 'ulūm al-ḥadīth: the authenticity of transmission does not automatically guarantee the correctness of interpretation. The epistemic validity of the sanad does not necessarily correspond to the interpretive adequacy of the matn, particularly when ḥadīths are deployed to address social realities substantially different from those of their initial articulation.



Scholarship on ḥadīth and gender has generally developed along two principal trajectories. The first preserves classical interpretations in a predominantly normative manner, maintaining textual continuity without substantial methodological reassessment in light of contemporary social conditions. The second regards certain women-related ḥadīths as reflective of patriarchal historical contexts and therefore advocates critical reinterpretation. Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Muhammad al-Ghazali have advanced contextual readings grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, while reformist thinkers such as Jamal al-Banna emphasize the need to reassess interpretive mechanisms without negating the normative authority of the Sunnah.

Despite these contributions, a significant academic gap remains. Much of the existing literature focuses either on defending or reinterpreting specific ḥadīths, yet comparatively little attention has been given to examining how ḥadīth functions as authority within the public sphere. The issue, therefore, is not confined to the semantic content of particular reports, but extends to the processes of meaning production and the distribution of interpretive authority. How is ḥadīth positioned as binding normative evidence? Who claims the authority to interpret it? And how does methodological reduction occur when ḥadīth migrates from scholarly discourse into popular religious rhetoric?

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative library-based approach that integrates sanad criticism, matn analysis, examination of *asbāb al-wurūd*, and a *maqāṣid*-oriented hermeneutical framework. Three ḥadīths most frequently cited in contemporary gender discourse are analyzed comparatively to demonstrate that the classical hadith tradition itself contains internal methodological safeguards against reductionist readings. The analysis focuses on how these ḥadīths are interpreted, utilized, and legitimized, and to what extent such interpretations align with the principles of *manāhij al-muḥaddithīn*. Through this approach, the study seeks to formulate a model of hadith interpretation that is more balanced, proportionate, and contextually grounded without compromising the authority of the ḥadīth tradition itself.

The contribution of this article lies in two principal aspects. First, it shifts the debate from a binary opposition between textual fidelity and gender justice toward an epistemological inquiry into the production of



hadith authority in the public sphere. Second, it proposes a critical interpretive model rooted in *manāhij al-muḥaddithīn* while remaining responsive to contemporary social dynamics. Through this framework, ḥadīth may be repositioned not as a static normative text, but as an ethical discourse capable of sustaining a constructive balance between authority and justice in modern Muslim societies.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Analysis of Hadiths Concerning Women

The selection of the three ḥadīths examined in this study the report concerning *nuqṣān al-‘aql wa al-dīn*, the ḥadīth on female leadership (*lan yufliḥa qawmun wallaw amrahum imra’ah*), and the ḥadīth describing women as *fitnah* is grounded in both academic and sociological considerations. From an academic standpoint, all three reports are classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* within the classical hadith canon, particularly in collections such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and therefore possess strong authoritative legitimacy within the Sunni scholarly tradition. Their recognized authenticity renders them methodologically significant case studies for examining how reports deemed sound in transmission may nevertheless generate interpretive tensions at the level of meaning and application. In other words, these ḥadīths provide a suitable framework for analyzing the distinction between *sanad* validity and hermeneutical adequacy.

From a sociological perspective, these reports are among the most frequently cited texts in contemporary public discourse concerning women’s intellectual capacity, political leadership, and moral relations between men and women. Their repeated invocation in sermons, institutional debates, and digital media underscores their continuing influence in shaping normative gender narratives within Muslim societies.



As such, they occupy a strategic position at the intersection of textual authority and social practice.

The criteria guiding the selection of these ḥadīths are fourfold. First, their level of textual authority: each report is transmitted in primary hadith compilations and widely accepted within Sunni orthodoxy, thereby ensuring their normative weight in legal and theological reasoning. Second, their intensity of circulation in contemporary public discourse, whether in religious preaching, institutional argumentation, or online platforms, where they function as legitimizing references in gender-related debates. Third, their thematic relevance to some of the most contested gender issues that directly affect the social construction of women's roles in Muslim societies. Fourth, the existence of interpretive divergence among both classical and contemporary scholars, which allows for comparative analysis and methodological reconstruction within the framework of *manāḥij al-muḥaddithīn*.

Through these criteria, the selected ḥadīths serve not merely as illustrative examples, but as analytically representative texts through which broader questions of authority, interpretation, and gender normativity may be critically examined.

1) *Hadis Naqṣ al-'Aql wa al-Din*

حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ أَبِي مَرْيَمَ، قَالَ أَخْبَرَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ جَعْفَرٍ، قَالَ أَخْبَرَنِي زَيْدٌ . هُوَ ابْنُ أَسْلَمَ . عَنْ عِيَاضِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدِ الْخُدْرِيِّ، قَالَ خَرَجَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي أَضْحَى . أَوْ فِطْرٍ . إِلَى الْمُصَلَّى، فَمَرَّ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ فَقَالَ " يَا مَعْشَرَ النِّسَاءِ تَصَدَّقْنَ، فَإِنِّي أُرِيْتُكُنَّ أَكْثَرَ أَهْلِ النَّارِ " . فُقُلْنَ وَبِمَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ " تُكَيِّرْنَ اللَّعْنَ، وَتَكْفُرْنَ الْعَشِيرَ، مَا رَأَيْتُ مِنْ نَاقِصَاتِ عَقْلِ وَدِينٍ أَذْهَبَ لِلْبَّ الرَّجُلِ الْحَازِمِ مِنْ إِحْدَاكُنَّ " . فُقُلْنَ وَمَا نُفِصَانُ دِينِنَا وَعَقْلِنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ " أَلَيْسَ شَهَادَةُ الْمَرْأَةِ مِثْلَ نِصْفِ شَهَادَةِ الرَّجُلِ " . فُقُلْنَ بَلَى .



قَالَ " فَذَلِكَ مِنْ نُقْصَانِ عَقْلِهَا، أَلَيْسَ إِذَا حَاضَتْ لَمْ تُصَلِّ وَمَ تَصُومُ ". قُلْنَ بَلَى. قَالَ " فَذَلِكَ مِنْ نُقْصَانِ دِينِهَا " (رواه البخاري)

Once Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) went out to the Musalla (to offer the prayer) of `Id-al-Adha or Al-Fitr prayer. Then he passed by the women and said, "O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women)." They asked, "Why is it so, O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) ?" He replied, "You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?" He said, "Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?" They replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?" The women replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her religion."¹

The ḥadīth concerning women's "deficiency in intellect and religion" is narrated by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī in the context of a sermon delivered by the Prophet to a gathering of women during the `Īd prayer. In terms of isnād evaluation, the report satisfies the criteria of authenticity (ṣaḥīḥ) and has been widely received as authoritative within the Sunni hadith tradition. Accordingly, the critical issue does not pertain to the reliability of transmission, but to the interpretive framing of its matn.

Literal readings of the phrase nuqṣān al-`aql have often construed it as a categorical statement regarding women's intellectual capacity. Yet the internal structure of the report itself provides a clarificatory explanation. The Prophet explicitly links the "deficiency in intellect" to the legal regulation of testimony, while the "deficiency in religion" is associated with women's temporary suspension from certain ritual obligations due to menstruation. Within this framework, the notion of deficiency operates in a juridical and situational sense rather than as an ontological claim about

¹ Sahih al-Bukhari 304 - Menstrual Periods - كتاب الحيض - Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) <<https://sunnah.com/bukhari:304>>



women's inherent nature. It reflects differentiated legal responsibilities and biological conditions, not a metaphysical hierarchy of reason or faith.

In his commentary *Fath̄ al-Bārī*, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani underscores that the reference to deficiency should not be interpreted as a denigration of women's status. Rather, he situates the statement within its rhetorical and admonitory context, noting that the Prophet first warned of moral accountability mentioning that he had observed many women among the inhabitants of Hell before explaining the meaning of deficiency. In this reading, the expression serves as moral exhortation and pedagogical clarification. The designation of deficiency thus functions to elucidate distinctions in legal rulings and biological experience between men and women, not to articulate a claim of essential inferiority.

From the perspective of hadith hermeneutics and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the interpretive challenge lies in preventing the abstraction of a context-bound juridical explanation into a universal anthropological judgment. While the report remains authoritative in transmission, its semantic scope is delimited by the legal and rhetorical circumstances in which it was articulated. The tension, therefore, arises not from the ḥadīth's authenticity, but from interpretive expansions that detach its meaning from its normative and contextual framework.² A comparable line of interpretation is advanced by Al-Nawawi, who argues that the phrase *nuqṣān al-ʿaql* should be situated within the legal doctrine of testimony (*shahādah*). According to his reading, the so-called "deficiency" does not concern women's intellectual faculty in an absolute sense, but refers specifically to the evidentiary rule whereby the testimony of two women is equivalent to that of one man in certain financial matters. The issue, therefore, lies within the structure of procedural law rather than in claims about cognitive capacity.

In clarifying this point, al-Nawawī cites the opinion of Al-Mazari, who connects the ḥadīth to Qurʾān 2:282. The verse establishes the requirement of two female witnesses in particular contractual contexts, a ruling that classical jurists understood in light of the socio-economic realities in which commercial documentation was not commonly managed

² Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *Fathul Baari Jil. 2* (Beirut: Risalah al-ʿAlamiah, n.d.). hlm 99.



by women. Within this interpretive framework, the differentiation functions as a legal safeguard tied to circumstance and practice, not as an ontological judgment about women's rational abilities.,

.. أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَهُمَا الْأُخْرَى

.. so if one of the women forgets the other may remind her ...³

وَأَسْتَشْهِدُوا شَهِيدَيْنِ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّنْ تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدُهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَهُمَا الْأُخْرَى

.. Call upon two of your men to witness. If two men cannot be found, then one man and two women of your choice will witness..(al-Baqarah: 282)

In his exegetical treatment of Qur'an 2:282, Al-Tabari maintains that the verse is specifically confined to the documentation of debt contracts and should not be generalized to all forms of testimony.⁴ According to his interpretation, the stipulation concerning two female witnesses in place of one male witness pertains exclusively to financial transactions within the sphere of mu'āmalāt—namely debt agreements, commercial contracts, financial administration, and written documentation. It does not extend to testimonial procedures in ritual matters (ʿibādāt) or criminal law (jināyāt).

This contextual delimitation is significant in legal theory, as it prevents the universalization of a context-bound evidentiary rule. Classical jurists further recognized that testimonial competence in Islamic law is not monolithic but varies according to subject matter. In certain cases that pertain specifically to women's bodily or experiential knowledge such as childbirth, menstruation, virginity, breastfeeding, or female-

³ Imam An-Nawawi, *Al-Minhaj Syarah Sahih Muslim Bin Hajjaj. Terj. Agus Ma'mun Dkk* (Jakarta: Darus Sunnah, 2022), hlm 706. https://archive.org/details/syarah-shahih-muslim-1/SYARAH_SHAHIH_MUSLIM_1/mode/2up.

⁴ Ibnu Jarir ath Thabari, *Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ayi Alquran Terjemahan Jilid 4* (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2007). Hlm 794



specific physical conditions the testimony of women alone is deemed admissible, while that of men is either restricted or irrelevant.⁵

In contemporary scholarship, Yusuf al-Qaradawi cautions that this ḥadīth must be interpreted within the broader framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and prevailing social realities. He argues that isolating the text from its higher objectives and socio-historical context risks transforming a context-specific legal statement into a generalized justification for discrimination. For al-Qaradawi, fidelity to the Sunnah does not entail rigid literalism; rather, it requires an interpretive approach that harmonizes textual authority with the overarching aims of justice, equity, and public welfare embedded within Islamic law.⁶ Accordingly, this ḥadīth is more appropriately understood as a normatively structured and contextually grounded clarification rather than as an absolute assessment of women's intellectual or religious capacity. Its operative meaning lies within a specific juridical and pedagogical setting, not in the formulation of a universal anthropological judgment about women's abilities.

From a socio-historical perspective, the provision equating the testimony of two women with that of one man cannot be construed as an essential judgment on women's intellectual capacity. Rather, it reflects the social and economic conditions of early Arabian society, in which women were generally not intensively engaged in commercial transactions or financial administration. Given their limited participation in such activities, the possibility of error or lapse in highly technical financial documentation was considered more likely when compared to men, who were more regularly involved in mu'āmalāt as part of their socio-economic roles. The evidentiary rule, therefore, operated as a procedural safeguard embedded within a specific historical setting. It was situational and context-sensitive, not a universal valuation of women's cognitive ability.

More broadly, the risk of misinterpretation arises when such ḥadīths are detached from their operative context and read in isolation. Numerous reports concerning women resist purely literalist readings,

⁵ Nur Aisyah, "Kesaksian Perempuan Perspektif Fikih," *Jurnal Al-Qadau: Peradilan Dan Hukum Keluarga Islam* 4, no. 1 (2017): 185, hlm 195. <https://doi.org/10.24252/al-qadau.v4i1.4971>.

⁶ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Kaifa Nata'āmal Ma'a Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyah* (Dār al-Syurūq, 2002). Hlm 145.



particularly when their normative implications intersect with evolving social realities. Sound interpretation requires attention not only to textual formulation but also to the complex interplay of religious, cultural, social, and interpersonal factors that shape meaning. A contextual approach in hadith interpretation is thus indispensable, especially when the report addresses legal or social practices rooted in particular historical circumstances.

At the same time, contextual hermeneutics must remain methodologically disciplined. It cannot be deployed arbitrarily, nor may it override foundational principles established in the Qur'an and the broader normative structure of Islamic law. A responsible interpretive framework must balance historical awareness with doctrinal coherence, ensuring that contextualization does not devolve into relativization. When ḥadīths are interpreted without due regard for their socio historical and legal parameters, they may generate negative perceptions of women and inadvertently contribute to the erosion of their rights. Moreover, such misreadings risk undermining the credibility of ḥadīth as a source of Islamic law and distorting the ethical image of Islam itself.

Kalau ini sudah lebih sesuai dengan rasa akademik yang Anda cari, kita bisa lanjut ke bagian hadis kepemimpinan perempuan dengan kedalaman analisis yang sama agar keseluruhan artikel terasa solid dan konsisten secara epistemologi.⁷

2) The Ḥadīth on female leadership

حَدَّثَنَا عُثْمَانُ بْنُ الْهَيْثَمِ، حَدَّثَنَا عَوْفٌ، عَنِ الْحَسَنِ، عَنِ أَبِي بَكْرَةَ، قَالَ لَقَدْ نَفَعَنِي اللَّهُ بِكَلِمَةٍ أَيَّامَ الْجَمَلِ لَمَّا بَلَغَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّ فَارِسًا مَلَكَوا ابْنَةَ كِسْرَى قَالَ " لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ وَلَوْ أَمَرَهُمْ امْرَأَةٌ ". (رواه البخاري)

Narrated Abu Bakra:

⁷ Idris Siregar and Alwi Padly Harahap, "Kontekstualisasi Hadis Tentang Kurangnya Kecerdasan Perempuan Dan Agama," *TAJIDID: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 23, no. 1 (2024): 218–57. hlm 248 <https://doi.org/10.30631/tjd.v23i1.442>.



During the battle of Al-Jamal, Allah benefited me with a Word (I heard from the Prophet). When the Prophet heard the news that the people of the Persia had made the daughter of Khosrau their Queen (ruler), he said, "Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler."⁸

Asbāb al-wurūd

Prior to advancing any normative interpretation of this ḥadīth, it is methodologically necessary to reconstruct its *asbāb al-wurūd* (occasion of articulation). Attention to the historical background is crucial in order to prevent a purely literalist reading that abstracts the report from its concrete socio-political setting. Within the discipline of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, contextual reconstruction functions as an interpretive control that clarifies whether a prophetic statement was intended as general legislation or as a response to a specific circumstance.

Historical sources indicate that the Prophet's statement was made after he received information from one of his Companions concerning the appointment of a woman as ruler of the Persian Empire. The woman in question was Būrān bint Shīrūyah ibn Kisrā, who ascended the throne following the death of her male relatives amid internal dynastic conflict. Her accession occurred in a context where the royal court sought to preserve political authority within the hereditary line despite the instability that followed successive power struggles. The episode is generally situated around the ninth year after the Hijrah.⁹

The transmission of this ḥadīth by Abū Bakrah is closely associated with the events of the Battle of al-Jamal. The conflict emerged when ‘Ā'ishah, together with Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, set out for Baṣrah with the declared objective of mobilizing support for the prosecution of those responsible for the assassination of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān and urging the incumbent caliph, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, to implement *qiṣāṣ* against the perpetrators. The episode unfolded within a highly volatile political climate

⁸ Sahih al-Bukhari 7099 - Afflictions and the End of the World - كتاب الفتن - Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) <<https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7099>>

⁹ Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman bin Abd al-Rahiim Al-Mubarakfuri, *Tuhfah Al-Ahwazi, Jilid 6* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, n.d.). hlm 447



marked by competing claims to justice and authority in the aftermath of ‘Uthmān’s death.

Within this context, Abū Bakrah reportedly chose not to align himself with ‘Ā’ishah’s forces, despite sharing, in principle, the demand for legal accountability. As the situation escalated into armed confrontation, he recalled the Prophet’s statement concerning a people who entrust their affairs to a woman. This recollection, according to the transmitted reports, informed his decision to abstain from participation in the conflict.¹⁰

Some Classical fuqahā understood this hadith as a report concerning a particular socio-political context rather than as a universally binding normative prohibition. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, allowed room for female leadership by emphasizing considerations of competence and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*).¹¹ Ibn al-Qayyim also emphasized that legal rulings and public policy are deeply connected to context and objectives (*maqāṣid*), rather than being based solely on the literal wording of the text.¹²

Conversely, interpretations that generalize this hadith as an absolute prohibition often overlook the context of its *asbāb al-wurūd* (circumstances of transmission) as well as the historical reality of Islam, which demonstrates women’s active participation in the public sphere. From the perspective of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, neglecting such contextual considerations risks shifting the hadith from its informative function into a rigid legal norm.

Contemporary faqih such as Abdullah bin Bayyah emphasize the importance of understanding Islamic texts, including hadith, within their historical and social contexts, as well as in light of universal humanitarian principles. Accordingly, legal determinations should not rely solely on a

¹⁰ Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *Fathul Baari Bisyarhi Al-Bukhari Jilid 13* (Mesir: Maktabah salafiyah, n.d.).

¹¹ Deswanti Nabilah Putri, Wildan Taufiq, and Ahmad Izzan, “Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Tafsir At-Tabari Dan Tafsir Al-Mishbāh,” *Mashadiruna Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (2024): 61–74, <https://doi.org/10.15575/mjiat.v3i1.33962>.

¹² Rizal Darwis, “Pemikiran Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyah Terhadap Paradigma Perubahan Hukum,” *Adzkiya : Jurnal Hukum Dan Ekonomi Syariah* 5, no. 1 (2017): 67, <https://doi.org/10.32332/adzkiya.v5i1.1006>.



literal reading of the text.¹³ Likewise, Muhammad al-Ghazali affirmed that a text must be analyzed in conjunction with its historical background, social circumstances, and the political realities at the time of the hadith's emergence in order to be applied meaningfully within modern society, including in discussions concerning the position of women.¹⁴ Accordingly, this hadith cannot be detached from its specific political context and should not be employed as the sole proof in discussions of female leadership. This approach demonstrates a continuity between the classical *manhaj* (methodological framework) and contemporary contextual needs.

3) Women as *Fitnah* in Hadith

حَدَّثَنَا آدَمُ، حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ، عَنْ سُلَيْمَانَ التَّمِيمِيِّ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عُمَرَ النَّهْدِيَّ، عَنْ أُسَامَةَ بْنِ زَيْدٍ. رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا. عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " مَا تَرَكْتُ بَعْدِي فِتْنَةً أَضَرَّ عَلَى الرَّجَالِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ " .

Narrated Usama bin Zaid:

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "After me I have not left any trial more severe to men than women."¹⁵

Unlike certain legal hadiths that are reported to have been conveyed in response to a specific incident, no indication is found in major hadith works such as *Fath al-Bārī*, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, or *Sahih Muslim* stating that this particular hadith was transmitted due to a specific event. The narrators merely relate the text itself without clarifying any particular cause or occasion.

The hadith stating that women constitute the greatest *fitnah* for men is narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim and has been widely accepted

¹³ Haidar Masyhur Fadhil, "Understanding Human Rights in Islam: The Ideas of Abdullah Bin Bayyah," *Muṣarrah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.18592/msr.v5i1.10231>.

¹⁴ Muhammad Mundzir and Rania Nurul Rizqia, "HADIS PENGAKUAN ATAS HAK-HAK PEREMPUAN: Reinterpretasi Muhammad Al-Ghazali," *Tahdis* 10, no. 2 (2019): 125–54, <https://doi.org/10.24252/tahdis.v10i2.11086>.

¹⁵ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 5096 - Wedlock, Marriage (Nikah) - كتاب النكاح - Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) <<https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5096>>



within the hadith tradition. However, its interpretation is often narrowed when invoked in public discourse.

In the classical Arabic linguistic tradition, the term *fitnah* does not always carry a purely negative connotation. Ibn Manzur, in his work *Lisān al-‘Arab*, concludes that *fitnah* may denote *ibtilā’* (trial), *imtihān* (test), and *ikhtibār* (examination or evaluation).¹⁶

Taqi al-Din al-Subki stated that Imam al-Bukhari subtly indicated that the negative sense of *fitnah* intended in the hadith refers specifically to situations in which a woman becomes the cause of discord or temptation that leads to enmity and social strife. It does not support the understanding held by some who regard women as inherently ominous or a source of misfortune.¹⁷

This hadith is more appropriately understood as an ethical warning concerning individual moral responsibility in managing one’s desires and social relations, rather than as a stigmatization of women as the source of moral corruption.

In the view of Muhammad al-Ghazali, hadiths—including those addressing *fitnah*—must be understood by examining their historical background, social conditions, and circumstances of emergence, rather than through a purely literal reading of the text. Through this approach, he demonstrates that many hadiths concerning *fitnah* in fact depict context-specific situations of trial or testing. This perspective aligns with the principles of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, which caution against generalizing meanings without adequate contextual grounding.¹⁸

In the context of the contemporary public sphere, this hadith is often invoked to restrict women’s mobility and social roles, reflecting a shift in its function—from an ethical guideline to an instrument of social control. Therefore, critical engagement with this hadith should be directed

¹⁶ Ibnu Manzur, *Lisanul Arab Jilid 13* (Qum Iran: Nasyrul adabi hauzah, 1405 H). hlm 318

¹⁷ Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *Fathul Baari Jilid 25* (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam,). Hlm 124

¹⁸ Didi Suardi, “METODE PEMAHAMAN HADIST MENURUT MUHAMMAD AL-GHAZALI” *Jurnal Albayan*, 32, no. 3 (2021): 167–86, <https://doi.org/10.35132/albayan.v4i1.104>.



at the manner in which it is employed, rather than at the hadith itself as a normative text.

2. Challenges in the Interpretation of Hadith in the Public Sphere

The public sphere constitutes the primary arena in which religious authority operates, including the authority of hadith. It is within this space that hadith is not only understood as a normative text, but also reproduced as a discourse that shapes attitudes, policies, and social relations. In the context of gender issues, interpretations of hadith concerning women in the public sphere often undergo oversimplification and methodological reduction, resulting in the emergence of religious practices that are biased and disproportionate.

1) Religious Pulpits and the Interpretation of Hadith

To understand how the challenges of interpreting hadiths on women operate concretely in the public sphere, this section presents several real-world examples from religious pulpits, religious institutions, and digital media. The mention of specific figures and institutions is not intended polemically, but serves as an academic illustration of interpretive patterns that exert significant influence in contemporary Muslim society.

1. Religious Pulpits and the Narrative of Hadith Concerning Women

In a number of public sermons delivered by popular preachers in Indonesia, the hadith concerning women as *fitnah* is frequently cited as a primary reference in discussions of social morality. The hadith is employed to emphasize the urgency of self-restraint and moral vigilance; however, in its rhetorical deployment, the burden of responsibility is often directed predominantly toward women.¹⁹

In sermons of this kind, the hadith is often understood in a literal and normative manner, without clarification of its historical context of transmission or its ethical objectives. Women are positioned as external

¹⁹ M. Isnaini, Anis Dwi Winarsih, and Karlina Karadila Yustisia, "Gender Representation in Religious Sermons: A Critical Language Study of Popular Indonesian Preachers on YouTube," *KOMUNITAS* 16, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 103–13, <https://doi.org/10.20414/KOMUNITAS.V16I1.13929>.



factors potentially responsible for corrupting male morality, while the dimensions of personal responsibility and the ethics of self-restraint receive less emphasis. This pattern of interpretation illustrates how hadith, within religious pulpits, functions as an instrument for shaping public morality, yet at the same time risks perpetuating gender bias through a narrowly textualist approach.

2. The Hadith on Female Leadership in Institutional Discourse

The hadith concerning female leadership frequently surfaces in institutional debates, particularly when discussing women's positions within public or religious leadership structures. In several official and unofficial statements circulating in the public sphere, the hadith *lan yufliha qawmun wallaw amrahum imra'ah* ("A people will not prosper who entrust their affairs to a woman") is cited as a normative proof to reject women's leadership.²⁰

Such an approach can be found in the discourse of certain religious figures and institutions that interpret the hadith as a universal prohibition. Yet within the classical heritage of fiqh and hadith, there exists a diversity of scholarly opinions regarding its scope and contextual application. The neglect of these interpretive differences demonstrates how the hadith is sometimes employed as a form of structural legitimation without undergoing a comprehensive methodological analysis..

3. Digital Media and the Simplification of Hadith

On social media and digital platforms, the hadith concerning women's "deficiency in intellect and religion" is frequently circulated in the form of brief quotations, da'wah posters, or short sermon clips. Several popular preaching accounts highlight this hadith by emphasizing the phrase *naqṣ al-'aql* (deficiency in intellect), without including the Prophet's

²⁰ Kharirotul Badriyah Adinda Diah Astuti, Eva Arifia, Rizqi Auliya, "LARANGAN KEPEMIMPINAN PEREMPUAN DALAM PERSPEKTIF HADIS," *AQWAL: Journal of Qur'an and Hadis Studies* 1, no. 2 (2020): hal 26, <https://e-journal.uingusdur.ac.id/index.php/AQWAL/article/view/7009>.



explanation regarding the context of testimony and women's biological conditions.²¹

This phenomenon indicates that the hadith is being understood in an overly simplistic manner. It is detached from its dialogical context and presented as a final statement on women's inferiority. In the context of digital media, the authority of hadith is no longer determined by methodological depth, but rather by the popularity of accounts, the number of followers, and visual appeal. As a result, the understanding of hadith circulating in the public sphere tends to be superficial and prone to misuse.

2) *Manāhij al-Muḥaddithīn and a Critical Reading of Hadiths on Women*

The problematic interpretations of hadiths on women in the public sphere require a sound and responsible methodological framework grounded in *manāhij al-muḥaddithīn* as an epistemological foundation. A critical reading, therefore, seeks not to undermine the authority of hadith, but to reinforce it through more proportionate and context-sensitive interpretation.

1) *Isnād Criticism*

Within the methodological tradition of hadith interpretation, *isnād* criticism occupies a fundamental position in determining the validity of a hadith. However, *isnād* criticism was never intended to serve as the final stage in the interpretive process. The authenticity of the chain of transmission merely establishes that a hadith may be accepted as authoritative (*ḥujjah*); it does not automatically determine how the hadith must be understood or applied in every context.

In the case of hadiths concerning women, many reports are deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* in terms of transmission, yet generate difficulties when interpreted literally and detached from their context. For this reason, the *manhaj al-muḥaddithīn* teaches that acceptance of a hadith through

²¹ Abu Bakar and Zufirman Manik, "Hadith Content About Women on Instagram: Analysis of Religious Account Strategies to Attract Followers," *Al-Fikru: Jurnal Ilmiah* 18, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 173–91, <https://doi.org/10.51672/ALFIKRU.V18I2.441>.



transmission must be accompanied by careful scrutiny of its *matn* (textual content). Treating the authenticity of the *isnād* as a justification for a single, non-historical meaning risks contradicting the very objectives of hadith methodology itself.

2) Kritik Matn Criticism and Contextual Analysis

Matn criticism constitutes a crucial dimension of the *manhaj al-muḥaddithīn*, although in contemporary practice it often receives insufficient attention. *Matn* criticism is not limited to examining a hadith's consistency with the Qur'ān and sound reason; it also encompasses linguistic analysis, rhetorical style, and the socio-historical context of its transmission..²²

In hadiths concerning women, *matn* criticism distinguishes between normative, descriptive, and rhetorical elements. Reports on women's "deficiency" or *fitnah* should be read within the framework of classical Arabic and the Prophet's specific communicative context. Thus, they are better understood as contextual ethical guidance rather than ontological judgments about women.

3) The Role of Asbāb al-Wurūd in Understanding Hadith

Asbāb al-wurūd plays a strategic role in achieving a proportionate understanding of hadith. Identifying the circumstances surrounding a hadith's emergence helps prevent excessive generalization of its meaning.²³ In the case of the hadith on female leadership, for instance, attention to the political and social context in which it was articulated opens space to assess whether the ruling it conveys is universal or context-specific.

The *manhaj al-muḥaddithīn* emphasizes that a hadith articulated within a particular context is not necessarily intended to apply absolutely in all circumstances. This approach is consistent with the practice of classical scholars who distinguished between hadiths that are *ta'limī*

²² Wahyu Ramdan et al., "Pemikiran Muhammad Al-Ghazali Dalam Studi Hadis: Telaah Kritis Atas Kitab Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyah Baina Ahl Al-Fiqh Wa Ahl Al-Hadits," *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 10 (May 14, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.15402427>.

²³ Jalaluddin As-suyuti, *Asbab Wurud Al-Hadis* (Beirut Lubnan: Darul Kutub Ilmiyah, 1984). Hlm 6



(didactic), *irshādī* (guiding), and *taḥdīdī* (restrictive or regulatory). Such distinctions are crucial for engaging gender-related issues without negating the authority of hadith.

4) The Integration of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah in Understanding Hadith

Although the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* is more commonly associated with fiqh studies, its integration into hadith interpretation forms part of a responsible critical reading. As a source of Islamic teaching, hadith cannot be detached from the overarching objectives of the Sharī'ah, such as justice, public welfare (*maṣlahah*), and the protection of human dignity.

In the case of hadiths concerning women, a *maqāṣid*-based approach helps assess whether a particular interpretation aligns with the ethical aims of Islam or contradicts them. Interpretations that result in marginalization or gender injustice therefore require methodological reassessment—not by rejecting the hadith, but by reexamining the way it is understood..

5) Interpretive Authority and the Ethics of Hadith Interpretation

The *manhaj al-muḥaddithīn* also encompasses an ethical dimension in the interpretation of hadith. Interpretive authority is not determined solely by technical expertise in *isnād* criticism, but also by moral responsibility in conveying the meaning of hadith to the public. Classical hadith scholars were known for their caution in transmitting and explaining reports, particularly when a hadith carried the potential for misunderstanding.

In the contemporary public sphere, the ethics of hadith interpretation becomes even more crucial. Those who convey hadith are required to clarify the limits of meaning, acknowledge scholarly differences, and explain the context of application. In this way, hadith is not positioned as a tool for legitimizing social restriction, but as a source of illuminating ethical values.

6) A Critical Model for Reading Hadiths on Women

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Hadith Authority and Gender: the Problematics of Interpreting Hadith on Women in the Public Sphere

Ikhsan Nur



Based on the *manāhij al-muḥaddithīn*, a critical model for reading hadiths on women may be formulated through several steps: (1) verification of the *isnād* to establish the report's legitimacy; (2) matn analysis attentive to language and context; (3) examination of *asbāb al-wurūd* to avoid unwarranted generalization; (4) integration of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* as an ethical framework; and (5) reflection on the social implications of the interpretation.

This model enables hadiths on women to be understood comprehensively, without falling into the dichotomy between literal acceptance and radical rejection. Through this approach, hadith is preserved as an authoritative source while remaining responsive to the challenges of the contemporary public sphere.

C. CONCLUSION

Kajian This study demonstrates that the challenges surrounding hadiths on women in the public sphere do not stem from the hadiths as normative texts themselves, but from the ways in which they are understood, employed, and legitimized. Hadiths frequently cited in discussions of women's roles—such as those concerning *naqṣ al-'aql wa al-dīn*, female leadership, and women as *fitnah*—are generally accepted in terms of *isnād* within the hadith tradition. Problems arise, however, when these reports are interpreted literally, without attention to the historical circumstances of their revelation, and detached from their transmission context and normative objectives.

Interpretations of hadith in the public sphere—through religious pulpits, formal institutions, or digital media—tend to exhibit methodological reduction. Hadith is positioned as a final authority that closes space for dialogue and critique, thereby risking the perpetuation of gender bias and the restriction of women's roles. In this context, the authority of hadith is determined not only by the quality of its *isnād*, but also by the mechanisms of meaning-making and the ethical responsibility of interpreters. When hadith interpretation is not balanced with methodological rigor, the ethical and transformative function of hadith is at risk.



Through the *manāhij al-muḥaddithīn* approach, this study emphasizes that a critical reading of hadiths on women does not equate to undermining their authority. On the contrary, scrutiny of *isnād*, analysis of *matn*, study of *asbāb al-wurūd*, and integration of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* serve to maintain the relevance and justice of hadith in responding to contemporary social realities. This approach allows hadith to be understood as context-sensitive normative guidance oriented toward public welfare, rather than as a tool for legitimizing unequal social structures.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of contemporary hadith studies by situating gender issues within the framework of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* methodology. The article also underscores the importance of repositioning the authority of hadith in the public sphere—from being merely a static normative text to serving as a dynamic and dialogical source of ethical values.

The practical implication of this study is the need to strengthen methodological literacy of hadith among preachers, academics, and religious institutions, ensuring that hadith can be conveyed and understood responsibly.

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