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A CRITICAL APPROACH TO PROPHETIC TRADITIONS: Substantive Criticism in Understanding Hadith

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Abstract

Hadith scholars has developed a rigorous discipline for studying and examining the validity of reports assigned to the Prophet Muhammad. Much has been written about research on hadith with respect to its narration (sanad) and text or content (matn). What remains underdeveloped is the role of substantive criticism in determining the validity of hadith. This article aims to critically examine the discourse of hadith criticism and provide analytical description and a critical approach to how the validity of a hadith can be determined. It argues that substantive criticism is necessary for proper and acceptable understanding of hadith and in turn for determining the validity of hadith. In addition to the methods of hadith criticism, the article will examine how the meaning of hadith is important in the hadith studies. The article's main argument concerns the significance of contextual understanding of hadith in any critical study of hadith.

Keywords: *Hadith criticism, sanad, matn, hadith understanding, contextual understanding*

A. Introduction

Among the valuable legacies left from the early generations in the effort to preserve the authenticity of hadith are the methods of research on

chains of narrators and the text of hadith. What came to be known as 'hadith criticism' is reflected in several traditional subjects.¹ The research effort (or criticism) of hadith is important considering that not all hadiths were written at the time of the Prophet,² and not everything that was said to be narrated by the Companions was actually from the Prophet himself, and everything that came from the Prophet was recorded by them. Apart from that, some of information allegedly narrated from the Prophet are in fact forged narrations.³

The essence of hadith criticism (naqd al-ḥadīth) is to examine the sanad and matn of hadiths so that their originality can be ascertained.⁴

¹ These subjects include 'ilm rijāl al-ḥadīth covering *ṭabaqah* and *tārīkh al-ruwāt*, 'ilm al-Jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl, 'ilm gharīb al-ḥadīth, 'ilm asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth, *tārīkh al-mutūn*, 'ilm al-naskh wa al-mansūkh, 'ilm 'ilal al-ḥadīth, 'ilm al-mubhamāt, and 'ilm al-taṣḥīf wa al-taḥrīf. All these subjects are auxiliary sciences in an effort to study hadith. It is also possible to study by study hadith by employing other non-traditional disciplines (interdisciplinary), such as Archeology, History, Geography and others.

² Although officially the writing of hadith was only undertaken during the Caliphate of 'Umar bin Abd al-'Azīz, but that does not mean that the writing did not exist at the time of the Prophet. There was indeed a prophetic prohibition on writing hadith, but it was valid as long as there were concerns about the mixing of hadith with the Qur'an and as long as a hadith could be memorized well by the Companions. However, for the Companions who are able to distinguish between hadith and the Quranic writings and have difficulty memorizing certain traditions or are worried about being forgotten, then writing was allowed. In addition, the prohibition on writing was intended for the Companions who were unable to write, while for the Companions who were able to write the prohibition did not apply, such as in the case of Abdullah Ibn Umar. See Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyutī, *Tadrib ar-Rajl al-Fāḥish* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), 152.

³ During the time of the Prophet, although it was rarely alleged that there had been falsification of hadith, this could at least be understood from the cause of the emergence of the hadith that threatened to get a seat from the hell fire for those who deliberately denies the hadith; where a man came to propose to a woman from Bani Lais, but the woman refused, then the man stated that he was commissioned and ordered by the Messenger of Allah to set the law property and blood for the area of Bani Lais. Hearing this, a messenger from Bani Lais came to the Messenger of Allah and said this. Then the Messenger of Allah said the enemy of Allah had lied, so he sent a friend to find the man and ordered him to kill him if he was found alive and burn his body if he was found dead. The friend found the man had died from being bitten by a snake, then he burned it and conveyed it to the Messenger of Allah. Then he read the hadith above, but a massive forgery only occurred when there was a slander against the Caliph Usman which then continued when a conflict arose between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah, and became more fertile when the Muslims were divided on the Khawarij, Shia and Sunni. Muhammad Abu Zahw, *al-Hadīth wa al-Muhajjadi* (n.p.: al-Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, n.d.), 480.

⁴ The original understanding here is that there is no longer any doubt about the level of truth and validity of the hadith because the *sanad* and *mata* are valid. See Jalāl ad-Dīn bin

Although this effort has existed since the time of the Prophet, the term naqd (criticism) was only known in the second century of Hijra.⁵ Al-Qur'an itself does not use the term naqd to denote the meaning of criticism, but rather yamīz, as seen in the Qur'an Ali 'Imrān (3): 179.

The term tamyīz is also used by a hadith scholar of the third century of Hijra, Imam Muslim in his book entitled "al-Tamyīz" which contains the methodology of hadith criticism.⁶ Other hadith scholars, such as Ibn Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327 H) although in his book he mentions the term al-naqd wa al-nuqqād, his book ³⁰ on hadith criticism is entitled "al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl". Meanwhile, Ibn Hibbān al-Buṣṭī (d. 354 H) wrote a book on narrator criticism with the title "Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn". Likewise, Imām al-Bukhārī wrote a book on narrator criticism with the title "al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr". Thus, it can be seen that the concept of criticism of hadith has been known since the beginning of Islam, but the use of the term naqd only appeared later.

This article aims to critically examine the discourse of hadith criticism and provide analytical description on how the validity of a hadith can be determined. It argues that substantive criticism is necessary for proper and acceptable understanding of hadith and in turn for determining the validity of hadith. The article will discuss firstly about hadith criticism and its methods, both with respect to its historical validity and its content. Then, the article will examine how the meaning of hadith is important in the hadith studies. The final section is devoted to the article's argument concerning the significance of contextual understanding of hadith in any critical study of hadith.

Ahmad al-Adlabi>, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn 'Inda 'Ulama al-H}adi>sl an-Nabawi>* (Beirut: Da>r al-Fala>q al-Jadi>dah, 1983), 31

⁵ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature* (Oak Brook: American Trust Publications, 2012), 47. Others argue that this discipline emerged in the third century of Hijra. See Umi Sumbulah, *Kritik Hadis: Pendekatan Historis Metodologis* (Yogyakarta: Sukses Offset, 2008), 32.

⁶ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology*, 48.

B. Hadith Criticism: Historical and Eidetic Criticism

The term hadith criticism (naqd al-ḥadīth) etymologically consists of naqd and ḥadīth. Naqd means sorting, researching and criticizing, as in the expression naqada al-darāhima wa ghairahā which means **mayyazahā wa naẓarahā li ya'rifa jayyidahā min radī'ihā**, sorting and criticizing it so that it is known which hadith is correct (ṣaḥīḥ) and vice versa. In the usage of hadith scholars, as Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī notes, naqd al-ḥadīth means:

Determining the quality of a rāwī by assessing deficiency or righteousness, through the use of certain terms and by using the reasons that have been determined by hadith scholars, and by examining the text (matn) of hadiths whose sanads are sound in order to determine the soundness and weakness of the text, and to eliminate the ambiguity in the sound hadiths whose meaning seems problematic and to eliminate contradictions in their content by applying profound, accurate standards.⁷

This definition shows that there are two objects of hadith criticism: first, sanad criticism, better known as al-naqd al-khārijī or external criticism, namely criticism of a series of hadith narrators with certain criteria so that the source of the narration of a hadith is known. This criticism is to investigate the level of validity of sanad. Secondly, al-naqd al-dākhilī or internal criticism, namely **criticism of the text (matn) or the content of a hadith**, that is to determine the validity of the text.⁸

In short, the criticism of hadith is an attempt to examine the level of validity and originality of sanad and matn, so that it can be determined which hadith in fact comes from the Prophet and become a reliable source of the Prophet's sunnah, and which is not. Thus, we can conclude that hadith criticism is something important, because by such criticism it can be

⁷ Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juḥūd al-Muḥaddisīn fī Naqd Matn al-Ḥadīth al-Ḥabawī asy-Syariḥ* (Tunisia: Mu'assasa 'A. Ibn 'Abd Allaḥ, n.d.), h. 94.

⁸ Sa'ād-Dīn bin Ahmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn*, 31.

determined the quality of narrators (sanad) and a text, which in the end will determine the quality of a hadith.

From the definition of hadith criticism that has been described above, it can be understood that in order to know the authenticity and validity of a hadith, it must be examined further the chain of narration and the text of the hadith. According to Hassan Hanafi, the criticism of sanad is "historical criticism", while the criticism of matn especially those related to the meaning of hadith, is called "eidetic criticism". Apart from these two criticisms, Hanafi proposes another stage of criticism and is a final stage of criticism, namely "practical criticism" or application of the meaning obtained from eidetic criticism into the present context.⁹

Sanad criticism or historical criticism is based on the assumption that it is impossible to have a valid understanding if there is no certainty about what is being understood is historically authentic. This will plunge people into mistakes, even if their understanding is correct.¹⁰ The authenticity of religious texts must be tested on the basis of historical criticism, not on belief, nor on theological, philosophical, mystical or spiritual criticism.¹¹

Historical studies of hadith show that a hadith has experienced a long historical process before it becomes a textual discourse as contained in the hadith books. It experienced the tradition of verbal transmission (al-naql al-shafahī) and the tradition of practical transmission (al-naql al-'amalī) before it entered the stage of textual transmission (al-naql al-kitābī). This is different from the Qur'an, because the transmission of the Qur'an is a textual transmission. It is a revelation in verbatim, which is exactly the same as the first spoken words because it was written immediately after the revelation

⁹ See Hassan Hanafi, *Dirasat Islamiyah* (Kairo: Maktabat al-Anjila al-Misriyyah, 1987), 69. See also Hassan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, trans. Pustaka Firdaus team (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1994), 1-2.

¹⁰ Hasan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

was under the supervision and correction of the Prophet himself.¹² Thus, the transmission of the Qur'an has high validation to guarantee the authenticity of the text compared to the transmission of hadith. This means that the authenticity of the Qur'an has been tested historically, while the hadith at this historical level of criticism faces problems regarding its historical authenticity.

The crucial problem that arises in this discourse is why criticism of sanad is considered important and the hadith scholars seem to treat sanad in a special way compared to matn of hadith. This hadith scholars' attitude is reasonable since criticism of matn would have meaning and could be carried out after sanad criticism was completed. This is because a matn of a hadith will never be stated as originating from the Prophet if it is not accompanied by sanad. Therefore, in the writer's opinion, it is logical if hadith critics take criticism of sanad first and then follow it with the criticism of matn.

If sanad criticism is commonly known as external criticism (*al-naqd al-khārijī*), matn criticism concerns the internal aspect of hadith (*al-naqd al-dākhilī*). This term is associated with the critical orientation of the matn itself, focusing on the hadith text which is the essence of what the Prophet had said which was transmitted to subsequent generations until on the hands of mukharrij of hadith, both verbally and substantively.

It can be emphasized that sanad criticism is needed to find out whether a narrator is trustworthy, devout, and has a strong memory, and whether or not the sanad is continued. Meanwhile, internal criticism is needed to determine whether the hadith contains a form of *shāz* or *'illah* which makes the hadith unacceptable (*mardūd*) as a hadith from the Prophet.

Broadly speaking, the hadith scholars have developed a methodology of matn criticism which consists of two basic frameworks of activities: first,

¹²Hasan Hanafi, *Dirasat*, 37.

examining the validity and integrity of the text of matn (also known as naqd mabnā al-matn); secondly, examining the validity of the content of Islamic teaching presented verbally by the hadith narrators in the form of conceptual expression of the matn (naqd ma'nā al-ḥādīth).¹³ If we compare the concept of matn criticism as elaborated by the hadith scholar with Hassan Hanafi's hermeneutical proposal, what Hanafi terms "eidetic criticism" is comparable to the criticism of the meaning of hadith. According to Hanafi, eidetic criticism is intended as a step to understand religious texts, including hadith, which is carried out according to grammatical rules and historical situations.¹⁴

The term matn criticism is understood as an attempt to examine the validity of the matn of a hadith which is carried out to separate valid from invalid hadiths. Thus, the matn criticism is not intended to deconstruct or destabilize the basis of Islamic teachings by looking for the weaknesses in the Prophet's words but it rather is directed at editorial analysis and meaning in order to establish the validity of a hadith. Because of this, criticism of the matn is a positive effort in order to maintain the authenticity of the hadith, as well as to have a more accurate understanding of the hadith of the Prophet.

C. Criticism of the Meaning of Hadith

Critical studies of the hadith's matn, as mentioned earlier, include both criticism of the wording or structure of the text and criticism of its meaning. These two components of matn criticism have implications for the acceptance or rejection of a matn. Criticism of the structure of matn, as discussed in the previous section, aims to obtain the authentic composition of the matn sentence and the degree of hadith authenticity. The validity of a text and the authenticity of matn is a guarantee for the authoritativeness of hadith as well as the groundwork for istinbāt (deductive inference). Any expression

¹³ On the distinction between *naqd mabna> al-matn* and *naqd ma'na> al-h}adi>s/* above, see *Muh}ammad T{a>hir al-Jawa>bi>, Juhu>d al-Muh}addis/in*, chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁴ Hassan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, 16.

of matn is open to a very varied textual understanding (dalālah). The dominant textual implications are: 'ibārah al-naṣṣ, 'isyārah al-naṣṣ, dalālah al-naṣṣ, iqtidā' al-naṣṣ, and mafhūm mukhālafah.¹⁵ A standard edition of the hadith text is very significant for understanding textual (lexical), structural, semantic and contextual understanding. From this understanding, a normative concept of Islamic teachings according to the hadith would be produced.

The criticism of the meaning of hadith is related to the substance or the concept of the teachings brought by matn. Whether a hadith is accepted or rejected will very much depend on how it is understood. A correct understanding of matn based on a reliable method will reveal the identity of the matn and in turn will lead to whether it is accepted or rejected.

The meaning of hadith is a description of the substance that a person may understand from the text of a hadith by enabling his or her intellectual potential. Understanding the meaning of hadith has long been part of the discipline of hadith. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī in Kitāb Ma'rifah 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth includes the topic "Ma'rifah fiqh al-ḥadīth" as the twentieth branch of the science of hadith.¹⁶ This topic is considered as the ultimate goal or fruit of hadith science. Although it became the intellectual field of fiqh scholars, according to al-Ḥākim, the scholars of hadith also had the same concern.

The work of formulating the meaning of hadith is a prominent activity of hadith scholars and their documentary data are scattered in the books of hadith commentaries. The tendency of commentaries is influenced by cultural background, scientific specialization, school, orientation of the review methodology and others. Hadith commentaries describe a series of activities explaining vocabulary, reviewing the pronunciation of gharīb,

¹⁵ See 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallaḥ, *ʿIlm Usūl al-Fiqh* (Kuwait: Daʿr al-Qalam, 1978), 143-160; Muḥammad Abu Zahrah, *Usūl Fiqh* (Kairo: Daʿr al-Fikr al-ʿArabi, 1958), 139-156.

¹⁶ Al-Ḥākim an-Naysābūrī, *Kitāb Ma'rifah*, 246.

explaining the meaning of sentence structure, estimating the depth of meaning and drawing conclusions about the essence of its teachings.¹⁷

Efforts to formulate a complete concept of an Islamic doctrinal theme cannot be separated from the perspective of hadith as a source of teachings in Islam. To be accepted as part of the teachings, the substance contained in the hadith must first pass a series of reliability tests. From the perspective of hadith understanding, a hadith cannot be acknowledged and accepted if its substance contradicts other stronger arguments which are recognized by Sharia.

The fact that is found regarding the substance of the hadith is that there are not a few observations of hadith that seem inconsistent with other arguments. This has long been recognized and studied by scholars. They, especially scholars of legal theories (uṣūliyyūn) call this kind of situation in terms of contradicting arguments, ta'āruḍ or ta'ādul.

According to the Islamic legal theorists, ta'āruḍ is the existence of two propositions which require the realization of something and at the same time demand its elimination, on condition that both have the same level of authority. Meanwhile ta'ādul has a more specific meaning than ta'āruḍ, because ta'ādul used to demand the mutual negation of the two arguments.¹⁸

The condition of the contradiction between the arguments of Sharia is considered to occur if the two opposing arguments have the same level of strength. On this basis, it is not considered ta'āruḍ if the conflict occurs between strong and weak propositions. The legal contents shown by the two arguments must also be contradictory, for example one justifies while the other forbids. Apart from that, the object and the time when the two arguments were born must also be the same and one.

¹⁷ 1 -Mubarakfu>ri>, *Tuh}fah al-Ahwaz}li>*, Vol. I (Kairo: Da>r al-fikr, 1979), 29-30.

¹⁸ Muh{ammad T}a>hir al-Jawa>bi>, *Juhu>d al-Muha}ddi>si>n*, 362-363.

According to some legal theorists, the existence of these arguments is not a real contradiction. This is because it is impossible for religion to deliberately emphasize two or more contradictory propositions. This contradiction is purely outward due to the limited ability of the mujtahid to understand the meaning of this argument. Other scholars deny the contradiction of the qaṭ'ī arguments but not the arguments that are zannī.¹⁹

The scholars differed in their handling of the contradiction of this argument.²⁰ For the Shafi'iyyah scholars, the first step that must be taken is to compromise the arguments that are contrary to these (al-jam'). If it is not possible to make a compromise, then look at the history or time of wurūd and šubūt. If this can be known, the texts that came later are said to be deleted (mansūkh) by the texts that came later (nāsikh). If the history of the text cannot be known, then another argument is sought that can support one of the two. If it is impossible to practice both at the same time, then an attempt is made to do tarjīh. However, if it is possible to practice the two arguments that are contradictory even though only from one side, then instead of doing tarjīh, the two arguments must be equally practiced, because the principle that practicing the argument is more important than ignoring it (i'māl al-kalām awlā min ihmālihi). If the latter is also not possible, then it must be chosen (takhyīr) between the two propositions.

As for the Hanafiyah ulama, the first step that must be taken to solve conflicting arguments is to do naskh, if the history is known. If not, then strive for tarjīh, so that what is practiced is the argument which is rājiḥ. If this step cannot be taken, a compromise should be made (al-jam') wherever possible. If compromise cannot be taken, then both arguments must be ignored (al-tasāqut)). This method is the opposite of the Shafi'iyyah way which takes the path of takhyīr. For Hanafiyah, takhyīr is not logical to do because it means strengthening a proposition without any supporting

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 363-366.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 372-373.

arguments (tarjih bilā murajjih). When he came to a dead end, the Hanafiyyah ulama suggested turning to other arguments of a lower status. For example, when two verses of the Qur'an contradict, one must turn to the guidance of the Sunnah. If no other argument is found with a lower status, then it must be returned to the more general norm which underlies the two contradictory arguments.

In *Nuzhah al-Nazar*, Ibn Hajar proposed a method similar to that offered by the Shafi'iyah ulama. The difference is in the fact that Ibn Hajar chose to take the tawaqquf position. This means stopping and not putting into practice either of the two propositions. Tawaqquf differs from the Hanafiyyah version of the term *tasāquṭ*, because the underlying assumption of tawaqquf is that it is difficult to perform tarjih due to the current interpreter's inability to solve it. Other interpreters may someday reveal its meaning.²¹

Hadith in some cases may not seem to go hand in hand with the evidence of other stronger arguments, both the naqlī arguments and the rational arguments. If it is found that there is ta'āruḍ between the hadiths and these arguments, the ²² methods and steps that have been formulated by the scholars above can be used as a guide for a more precise understanding of the hadiths. As a guideline, a hadith observance can be accepted and recognized for its authenticity if it corresponds with the Qur'an, other stronger traditions, sīrah nabawiyah, scientific and ²³ religious experiences of the generation of Companions, religious behavior of the people of Medina ('amal ahl al- Madīnah) - for the Maliki community, and other shar'i arguments.

Awareness of the existence of traditions that contradict other arguments and at the same time efforts to resolve them have been the concern of scholars for a long time and are even assumed to have existed

²¹ *Ibid.*, 373-374.

since the time of the Prophet. Based on the available narrations, some of the senior companions such as 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb and Aishah have established, albeit casually, some of the rules used in dealing with these traditions. According to Azami, the companions and scholars of hadith afterward have used two approaches, namely mu'āraḍah or muqāranah and rational criticism (al-naqd al-'aqlī).²² Mu'āraḍah is undertaken by cross-reference and comparison with other narrations, such as comparing with the al-Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Meanwhile, with rational criticism, in addition to emphasizing the sanad aspects of hadith, scholars also use a basis of reason in seeing their eyes. Consideration of reason used by the muḥaddith on several occasions, among others: when hearing the narrative, when delivering the hadith (taḥdīth), when evaluating the narrators, and when evaluating the hadith itself.²³

Many hadith scholars have offered methodological criteria in testing the accuracy of hadith observations and at the same time resolving the contradictions that may arise from hadith. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, for example, in Kitāb al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwāyah states that the solitary hadith cannot be accepted if it contradicts reason, the certain instructions of the Quran (muḥkam), the sunnah of the Prophet, the practice which is in line with the sunnah, as well as other conclusive arguments.²⁴

Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah also provided guidelines for the validity of a hadith observation. In al-Mannār al-Munīf, he outlines several criteria for the weaknesses of certain hadiths, namely, among others: containing excessive replies and threats that the Messenger of Allah could not say; contain things that are contrary to the senses; too loose and sedated; very contrary to the sunnah; show that the Prophet did something clear in front of all the Companions and all agreed to hide them and not narrate them; they do not

²² Muh}ammad Mus}t}afa> al-A'z}ami>, *Manhaj al-Naqd*, 50, 59, 67, 81-82. Also, see Muh{ammad T}a>hir al-Jawa>bi>, *Juhu>d al-Muha>ddi>sli>n*, 489.

²³ Muh}ammad Mus}t}afa> al-A'z}ami>, *Manhaj al-Naqd*, 83.

²⁴ Al-Khat}i>b al-Bagda>di>, *Kita>b al-Kija>yah fi> 'Ilm ar-Riwa>yah*, 432.

show anything like the words of the Prophet; the editorial is not similar to the words of the Prophets; contrary to historical reality; more similar to the testimony of a doctor; their contents are nullified by a number of strong evidence; contradict the clear verses of the Quran; there are a number of indications that indicate its cancelation.²⁵

In general, contemporary hadith scholars agree on several benchmarks or criterion for criticism of hadith. These benchmarks are basically the result of a reformulation of the existing criteria many previous scholars stated. Among these are: (1) not violating the explicit instructions of the Qur'an; (2) not violating a hadith that has been recognized for its existence and not violating the sīrah nabawiyah facts; (3) not violating common sense views, empirical data, and historical facts, and (4) eligible as an expression of the authority of prophecy.²⁶

D. The Significance of Understanding Hadith

Judging the validity of the text of hadith, whether it is acceptable or not, requires a certain understanding of the text itself. An understanding may have implications for rejection of the text. However, when it is interpreted differently it may make it acceptable.

In Arabic, the word understanding (to understand correctly) is represented by the word fiqh. Linguistically, fiqh means knowing something and understanding it.²⁷ In the hadith scholarship, there are several terms that are usually used in the sense of understanding and coupled with hadith,

²⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah, *al-Manāʾir al-Munīf fī as-Saḥīḥ wa ad-Dʿaʿi*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿAbū Guddāh (Halb: Maktab al-Matbuʿat al-Islāmiyyah, 1970).

²⁶ Saʿālah ad-Dīn bin Ahmad al-Adlabī, *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn*, 238; Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis Nabi saw.: Antara Tekstual dan Kontekstual*, trans. Muhmmad Al-Baqir, 6th ed. (Bandung: Mizan, 1998); Yuṣuf al-Qaradawī, *Kaifa Nataʿamal maʿa as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyah, Maʿalim wa Dʿawābit* (USA: al-Maʿhad al-Alami li al-Fikr al-Islāmi, 1990), 111-150; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Jawābī, *Juhūd al-Muḥaddisīn*, 456-494.

²⁷ Louis Maʿlūf, *al-Munjid fī al-Lughah wa al-ʿAlām* (Beirut: Daʾir al-Masyriq, 1986), 591.

namely fiqh, ma'ānī, and syarḥ. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, for example, uses the term "fiqh al-ḥadīth".²⁸ M. Syuhudi Ismail wrote a book on the understanding of hadith with the title "Ma'āni al- Ḥadīth".²⁹ Meanwhile, the term syarḥ has long been used by scholars to mean comments and descriptions that explain the contents of the hadith text in a hadith book.

In general, there are two approaches to understanding hadith, namely textual and contextual approaches. The textual approach rests on the outward meaning of the hadith text, while the contextual approach focuses more on revealing the context surrounding the birth of a hadith. As will be seen below, both of these approaches were found ¹⁸ in the early period of Islamic history.

The textual approach in interpreting the hadith requires adhering to the text in a rigid manner and relying on the outward-ḥarfīyah linguistic aspects of a text. Understanding the hadith text from these aspects is basically the first step in the understanding process. However, in the textual approach the understanding of the language is also the end of the process. For textualists, the meaning of hadith is standardized and its application is universal. More than that, as emphasized by the text itself, the teachings of Islam have been perfect, so that all the problems of the life of the people have been regulated in it. Therefore, there is no need for elaboration, clarification or justification that is just based on reason.³⁰

²⁸ Al-H{a}kim al-Naisa>bu>ri>, *Kita>b Ma'rifah 'Ulu>m al-H{adi>th} wa Kamiyyah Ajna>sihi*, ed. Ah{mad ibn Fa>ris as-Salu>m (Beirut: Da>r Ibn H{azm, 2003), 246; Muh{ammad Jama>l ad-Di>n al-Qa>simi>, *Qawa' id at-Tah{di>sl min Funu>n Mus{t}alah{ al-H{adi>sl*, ed. Muh{ammad Bahjah al-Bayt}a>r, 2nd ed. (Kairo: Da>r Ih{ya>' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1961), 269.

²⁹ M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Hadis Nabi yang Tekstual dan Kontekstual: Telaah Ma'ani al-Hadis tentang Ajaran Islam yang Universal, Temporal, dan Lokal* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1994), 6, 89.

³⁰ The explanation of the views of the textualists regarding hadith refers to the similar explanation of the textualists' views in Qur'anic interpretation. See Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting*

Textualists adhere to the referential theory of meaning, which means that the meaning of a word is in the object to which the word refers. This theory places language and meaning in a completely real extralinguistic world. The single objective meaning of language has become their ideal target. This belief in the objectivity of meaning is based on two assumptions. First, the text of the hadith uses Arabic, so if someone can find out the use of the language used by the hadith by referring to linguistic evidence then he may be able to ascertain its meaning. Second, meaning objectivity can be achieved if one refers to historical history such as the views of Companions or Followers.³¹ Because of this belief in the objectivity of meaning, textualists tend to be rigid in understanding. They try to limit the meaning of the text to one meaning and deny the possibility of other meanings from the text.

The textual approach is guided by the principle that a text is interpreted from the general form of the pronunciation and not from the specific context that caused its birth (al-'ibrah bi-'umūm al-lafz lā bi-khuṣūṣ al-sabab).³² Therefore, text understanding is uprooted from its socio-historical context.

An understanding that rests on the linguistic aspect of this text has appeared even since the time of the Prophet. In a hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī and quite popular among scholars of Islamic law, the Holy Prophet forbade his companions to pray Aṣr except in the settlements of Banī Quraizah. By relying on the sound of the hadith text, not a few companions did the Aṣr prayer after arriving at Banī Quraizah even though the Aṣr prayer time had passed.³³

¹² *the Qur'a>n: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 3, 55-56.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

³² See Muh{ammad ibn 'Alī> asy-Syauka>ni>, *Irsya>d al-Fuh{u>l ila> Tah{qi>q al-H{aqq min 'Ilm al-U>su>l* (Beirut: Da>r al-Fikr, n.d.), 133-135.

³³ See Muh{ammad Abu> al-Fath{ al-Baya>nu>ni>, *Dira>sa>t fi> al-Ikhtila>fa>t al-Fi>hiyyah* (Riyad: Da>r as-Sala>m, 1983), 46-47.

Among jurists, the Zāhiriyyah school, followers of Dāwud al-Zāhirī, is known as a school of law that limits itself to textual interpretation. The meaning of the text (hadith) can only be captured from its outward meaning. One of the main followers of this school, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 H) made the sound of the text (naṣṣ) from both the Qur'an and hadith as a source of teachings. He even rejected attempts to rationalize the text based on the qiyas method, as is generally accepted among Sunni scholars.³⁴

Another approach is a contextual approach. The underlying assumption of this approach is that as a text, a hadith faces the same problem as other texts, namely that it cannot present the whole idea thought and the situational setting that surrounds it. When anything related to the Holy Prophet is written in the formulation of the hadith, then a narrowing and drying of meanings and nuances is inevitable.

For the supporters of contextual understanding, contextual understanding of the Prophet's hadith is considered important because in understanding the hadith in general, scholars tend to focus on riwāyah data by emphasizing grammatical commentary with reference to the previous people's mindset. This condition is admittedly problematic if the thoughts put forward by previous scholars are understood as something final and dogmatic. It must be understood that their thoughts emerge within a certain time and space framework, and with the changing context of space and time, it is naive to impose this as a timeless essential truth.³⁵

In contrast to the textual understanding model, contextualists see that in the understanding of hadith there are inherent subjective and dynamic elements that underlie every effort to understand. Therefore, it becomes difficult to accept if the meaning of the text is then considered by an

³⁴ Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Ibn Ḥazm: Ḥāya>tuḥu wa 'As}ruhu - Ara>'uhu wa Fiqḥuhu* (Kairo: Da>r al-Fikr al-'Arabi>, 1978), 255.

³⁵ Suryadi, *Metode Kontemporer Memahami Hadis Nabi: Perspektif Muhammad al-Ghazali dan Yusuf al-Qaradhawi* (Yogyakarta: TERAS, 2008), 7.

interpreter to be established and objective. In the contextualist view, an interpreter cannot approach the text without bringing with him his experiences, values, beliefs and prejudices. He is like a historian, because a hadith is a historical document that demands knowledge of a certain period. In giving meaning to the historical record, he departs from his unique experience and world view which is then seen from the results of his understanding. With this in mind, contextualists make it impossible for a truly objective understanding.³⁶

Contextualists believe that an understanding that only relies on the external aspects of the text will only dwarf the text itself. Hadith texts were not born in a vacuum; it appears in a certain time, time and situation. Therefore, a complete understanding of the text requires knowledge of the entire context in which it appeared. Contextualists emphasize the sociohistorical context of the hadith observations. They argue that the understanding of hadith must be in the light of its political, social, historical, cultural and economic context, in which the contents of the hadith are uttered, interpreted and applied.

The sociohistorical context provides a basis for understanding the relationship between the teachings contained in the observations of the hadith and the reasons for the introduction of these teachings in the Hijaz in the 7th century AD. Understanding this context requires adequate knowledge of the Prophet's life in Mecca and Medina, the spiritual atmosphere, political, economic, social and legal environment, as well as various teaching systems and norms, institutions, and cultures that existed in the Hijaz at that time.

In the traditional scientific tradition, a contextual approach is evident in the theory of *asbāb al-wurūd*. In the theory of *asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth*, there are always various backgrounds and causes of events, situations and individual or social psychological conditions that led to the birth of a hadith.

³⁶ Cf. Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'a>n*, 103-104.

² This is because, as with the Qur'an, the Prophet's hadith appeared through his words and deeds to answer questions and resolve problems that occurred and were faced by the Arab community, especially as the first object of the Prophet's message. Based on this theory, the principle of contextual understanding focuses more on the specific context that causes the birth of the text, and not on the external form and generality of the text (al-'ibrah bi-khuṣūṣ al-sabab lā bi'umūm al-lafz).¹⁶³⁷ Through this method, a person who studies hadith will find the meaning of the hadith and its significance for the historical needs of the interpreter so that he can find solutions to the problems faced and is able to reflect the benefits which are the main objectives of the Sharia.³⁸

However, the concept of asbāb al-wurūd has striking limitations. In addition to its many conflicting histories, its historical accuracy is also questionable. Therefore, in addition to this concept, adequate anthropological knowledge is needed so that our knowledge of the sociohistorical context at that time will be clearer.

The roots of the contextual approach to hadith can be found since the first century of Hijra. The criticism of the hadith history that is often done by 'Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, is an attempt to interpret the hadith history critically and contextually. As when responding to the hadith conveyed by Abū Hurairah that "actually the corpse will be tortured because of the crying of his family", "Aisha, based on the reason for the hadith, said that Abū Hurairah had misunderstood the Prophet's words.³⁹

E. Contextual Understanding

The contextual understanding as expressed in the previous paragraph rests on the idea that the correct understanding of a hadith becomes very

¹⁰³⁷ See Muh{ammad ibn 'Alī> asy-Syauka>ni>, *Irsya>d al-Fuh{u>l*, 133-135.

³⁸ See Yusu>f al-Qarad}a>wi>, *Kaifa> Nata 'amal*, 125.

³⁹ On 'Aisha's criticism, see S}ala>h} ad-Di>n bin Ahmad al-Adlabi>, *Manhaj Naqd al-Mam*, 85-103.

urgent in order to have hadith relevant so that it become a living discourse and able to dialogue with the changing situation of the times. Hadith texts that were born centuries ago were brought back in a completely different situation and context from the time when the hadith appeared. This is where the hadith must intersect with contextualization efforts. Because, as the second source after the Qur'an which contains flexibility and dynamic elasticity, the hadith must always be integrated with the dynamics of human life throughout the ages.

The process of understanding and interpreting a text, including the hadith text, always assumes that there are three subjects involved, namely the world of the author, the world of the text and the world of the reader. Therefore, inherently a triadic structure of the art of interpretation can be described, namely 1) a sign or message or text, 2) an intermediary or an interpreter, and 3) an audience. This triadic structure implicitly contains problems in the hadith, namely 1) the nature of the text, 2) the methods used to understand the text and, 3) how the understanding and interpretation are determined by the presuppositions and horizons of the audience that is the target of the text.⁴⁰

In relation to hadith, the essence of the hadith text is that it is the result of the narrators' capture and understanding of what was said, done and what became the behavior of the Prophet. The Prophet is believed to be the creator or author. For the majority of Muslims what originates from the Prophet in essence comes from God and is revelation. The methods used to understand the hadith will depend on the results of a study of the three components of hadith, namely: a study of authenticity based on the continuity of sanad (ittiṣāl al-sanad), a study of the validity of the text based on the observational criticism of various aspects, including the aspect of

⁴⁰ Van. A. Hervey, "Hermeneutics " in Mircea Eliade (ed)., *Encyclopedia of religions*, vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Publishing and Co.), 279.

asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth, tawārīkh al-mutūn and various historical events, both directly and indirectly, are related to the emergence of a hadith observation.

The distinction of time, place and cultural atmosphere between the audience and the text and its owner certainly creates alienation and gaps on the one hand and even a deviation of meaning on the other. The issue of alienation is the main concern of an interpretation theory, so that understanding the text requires a distinction between the meaning of the text and the significance of the context.

In relation to the hadith, the distinction between the meaning of the text and the significance of the context can be attempted by making a critical historical-contextual analogy between Muhammad's all-Arab world and other Muslims living in completely different times and regions. This reminds us of the need to carry out historical and cultural verification of every hadith text.

Contextual understanding has in fact attracted the theoretical attention of scholars. Many scholars have long seen the significance of referring to the socio-historical context of a hadith. The concept of asbāb wurūd in the hadith study as mentioned earlier shows this tendency. More than that, the scholars have offered a theoretical framework for how a contextual understanding of hadith can be accounted for.

The fundamental criterion for responsible contextual understanding work, of course, relates to the subject who carries out the understanding. Muslim legal theorists have long discussed and debated the criteria the subject should have when discussing the terms of a mujtahid. Al-Shāṭibī, for example, outlines two main criteria for an interpreter (mujtahid), namely perfect knowledge of the objectives of shari'ah (maqāsid al-sharī'ah) and ability to perform istinbāṭ. Regarding the discovery of legal norms, the scholars put forward more specific and detailed conditions, such as that the

person must master Arabic, know Islamic legal theory, hadiths on legal issues, and so on.⁴¹ A person who cannot fulfill the requirements referred to, then he is not authorized or has no authority in performing *ijtihad*.

In Khaled Abou El Fadl's view, an Islamic scholar whose understanding of Islamic sources can be accepted authoritatively must meet five criteria of authority, including: honesty, sincerity, comprehensiveness, rationality, and self-control.⁴² The fulfillment of these five criteria will determine whether one's understanding of the hadith, for example, can be considered authoritative or not. If all five are fulfilled, then the effort to understand them will be trusted and considered authorized. However, if he expects others to follow his understanding and one of these criteria is not met, then he has acted arbitrarily (authoritarian).

Especially with regard to the understanding of the hadith, not a few Muslim scholars and writers have offered methods and ways of understanding a hadith through a contextual approach appropriately and responsibly. Below are some suggestions offered by Muslim scholars and scholars regarding this matter.

One who is considered a pioneer in this effort was Imam al-Qarāfi, a jurist from the Maliki school of thought. He has made a distinction between the roles and functions of the Prophet, whether as the great imam, a judge or mufti.⁴³ On that basis, when the Prophet said or did something, it was necessary to carry out some analysis. Among other things, to whom was the utterance addressed, under what circumstances did the Prophet pronounce

⁴¹ Abu Ishq asy-Sya'ibi, *al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Syari'ah*, Vol. IV (Kairo: al-Maktabah at-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, t.t.), 105-107. See further Wahbah az-Zuhaili, *Usul al-Fiqh al-Islami*, Vol. II (Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, 1986), 1043-1051.

⁴² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Atas Nama Tuhan: Dari Fikih Otoriter ke Fikih Otoritatif*, trans. R. Cecep Lukman Yasin, (Jakarta: Serambi, 2004), 99-104.

⁴³ See Syihab ad-Din al-Qara'fi, *al-Furuq*, Juz I (Kairo: Dar al-Ihya' al-Kutub, 1344 H), 206.

it, and in what capacity did the Prophet speak it, whether as a person of the Prophet, or as a community leader.

Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dahlāwī in al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah has classified the traditions of the Prophet. According to him, hadiths can be grouped into two, namely traditions relating to the delivery of treatises and traditions that are not related to treatises.⁴⁴ The hadiths that are meant for tablīgh al-risālah include knowledge of the afterlife, the supernatural, the provisions of the Sharia, issues of worship, universal wisdom and benefits, as well as the virtues of charity. The hadiths that are not included in the framework of the risālah include the Prophet's actions outside of worship on the basis of adjustments to custom, the Prophet's actions which were adjusted to the particular benefit at that time and did not bind the people as a whole, as well as his decisions in his capacity as a judge. Al-Qāsimī in Qawā'id al-Taḥdith honestly following al-Dahlāwī's classification.⁴⁵

Maḥmūd Shaltūt in his description of the hadith in al-Islām 'Aqīdah wa Sharī'ah refers to the division of the Prophet's functions as proposed by al-Qarāfī above. He then made a distinction between the traditions of the Prophet which have the value of sharia (sunnah tasyrī'iyah) and those that have no legal implications (sunnah ghair tasyrī'iyah).⁴⁶

In 1990s, Muḥammad al-Gazālī is considered to have made a big breakthrough in the study of traditional hadith, because of his radical efforts in criticizing the hadith observations and at the same time providing a re-understanding of it. There were many valid hadiths that he rejected because according to him their texts were contrary to the demands of the Quran, the sunnah which was more authentic and more valid, historical evidence or scientific knowledge. In his criticism, al-Gazālī smoothly explores the

⁴⁴ Sha>h Wali> Alla>h ibn 'Abd ar-Rah}>i>m ad-Dahla>wi>, *H{{ujjah Alla>h al-Ba>ligah*, ed. al-Sayyid Sa>biq, vol. I (Beirut: Da>r al-Jail, 2005), 223-224.

⁴⁵ Muh{ammad Jama>l ad-Di>n al-Qa>simi>, *Qawa>'id at-Taḥ{di>sl*, 269-270.

⁴⁶ Mah{mu>d Syaltu>t, *al-Islam 'Aqī>dah wa Syari>ah* (Kuwait: Da>r al-Qalam, 1990).

historical context of a hadith. For example, when criticizing a hadith about the failure that will befall a society led by a woman, he requires that the understanding of the hadith be returned to its context (sabab al-wurūd). On such basis, in al-Gazālī's understanding, the hadith is specifically intended to respond to the political conditions in Persia at that time and could not be generalized.⁴⁷

Apart from emphasizing the historical context of the emergence of hadith, al-Gazālī also shows the importance of differentiating the context and conditions of the Prophet's time and the present. The understanding of the Quran and also the hadiths cannot avoid contextualization, the context and current benefits must be considered in reinterpreting the religious texts. In this context also, al-Gazālī differentiates between religious teachings which are only a means and those that become goals, or between those that change and are permanent.⁴⁸

In his efforts to interpret the hadith contextually, Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī states that in order to interpret the hadith correctly, an understanding must be in the light of the context that surrounds the emergence of a hadith and its purpose (maqāṣid). The purpose or reason (‘illah) for the issuance of the hadith can be known either through the text itself, or inferential, or through the event in which it was born. With an analysis like this it is very possible that the researcher will find hadiths which are casuistic solutions and are based on considerations of benefit which are limited by the time and place at that time. In fact, according to al-Qarāḍāwī, unlike the Qur'an, there were quite a few hadiths which were basically solutions to specific problems at that time.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Studi Kritis atas Hadis Nabi saw.*, 64-67. See further Suryadi, *Metode Kontemporer Memahami Hadis Nabi*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 163-170.

⁴⁹ Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī, *Kaija Nata'ama*, 145-146.

For al-Qarāḏāwī, an interpreter must use a historical study of the true meaning of hadith recitations at the time the hadith in question appeared and the shifts in meaning that occurred in the next stretch of history. This is important because it shows that the meaning of the hadith pronunciation is very possible to ¹³ change from one period to another from one cultural environment to another.⁵⁰

Like Muḥammad al-Gazālī, Yūsuf al-Qarāḏāwī also states that a hadith contains two dimensions, an instrumental (*wasīlah*) and an essential dimension (*ghāyah*). The first one is clearly very vulnerable to the attraction of changing space and time so that it is temporal, while the second is permanent. When an interpreter is unable to distinguish between these two dimensions, then he will be trapped in a mistake.⁵¹

A (neo-)modernist Muslim intellectual, Fazlur Rahman, in his study offered radical conclusions regarding the essence of hadith and sunnah and their understanding. According to him, in broad terms the Prophet's sunnah is more appropriate if it is seen as a general umbrella concept than that it has a special content which is absolutely specific. The reason is that theoretically it can be concluded directly ² from the fact that sunnah is a behavioral term. Therefore, in practice, there are no two cases that have completely the same situational background morally, psychologically and materially, so the sunnah must be able to be interpreted and adapted. The Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, said Rahman, is more of a pointer in a direction than a series of rules that have been determined with certainty.⁵² This is in accordance with the character of Islam as a religion that prioritizes ethics and morals that are more dynamic and elastic.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵¹ See *Ibid.*, 139.

⁵² Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), 12.

Based on these assumptions, Fazlur Rahman introduced his theory of the situational interpretation of hadith. He emphasized that the need of Muslims today is to re-evaluate the various elements in the hadith and their perfect reinterpretation in accordance with the social-moral conditions that have changed in the present. This can only be done through a historical study of the hadith by reducing it to a living sunnah and by clearly distinguishing the real values it contains from its situational background. The traditions, including in this case the legal traditions, must be interpreted according to their proper historical perspective and according to their proper function in their clear historical context. The legal traditions, continued Rahman, must be viewed as a problem that must be reviewed and not seen as a ready-made law that can be directly used.⁵³

The situational interpretation through historical study in order to dissolve the hadiths into this "living sunnah" will enable us to deduce the norms from it for ourselves through an adequate ethical theory and then the re-establishment of new laws from the theory. This historical study, according to Rahman, is very important, because only by understanding the background which consists of things that are certain to be known about the Prophet and early Muslims (besides the al-Qur'an), we can interpret the hadith.⁵⁴ With principles like these, Rahman rejected Ibn Taimiyah's textual "return to the Qur'an and Sunnah" invitation which became a central issue for many reform movements. Rahman rejects the understanding of hadith only by using the perspective of the past. According to him, the hadiths as a legacy of the past must be understood using a present perspective. In this connection Rahman firmly states:

But this means not just a simple "return" to the Qur'an and the sunnah as they were acted in the past but a true understanding of them that

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-81

would give us guidance today. A simple return to the past is, off course a return to the graves.⁵⁵

These descriptions indicate that the situational interpretation is strategic. That is to understand the hadith Prophet's text and then understand its situational background, which concerns the situation of the Prophet and society during the Prophet's period in general, including in this case *asbāb al-wurūd*. Besides that, also understand the relevant Qur'anic instructions. From this one can understand and distinguish the real values or legal objectives (*ratio-legis*) from the legal specifications, and thus the ideal moral principles of the hadith can be formulated.

Hassan Hanafi, when explaining the stage of eidetic criticism in his hermeneutics, said that understanding the text, including hadith, must be done in the original language. This understanding is carried out according to grammatical rules and historical situations. According to him, it is impossible to imagine any understanding that predates the rules of grammar. On this basis, Hanafi requires starting a process of understanding texts with linguistic studies. This study, for example, concerns the form of words and the meaning of words; whether he uses a verb, a noun, the form *amr* or *nahy*, or distinguishes it from the true meaning and metaphorical meaning, the meaning of *'ām* or *khāṣṣ* and so on; also, a study of language style. These various Hanafi linguistic recitation methods clearly refer to various *al-qawā'id al-uṣūliyyah al-lughawiyah* which are extensively reviewed and discussed by scholars in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature.⁵⁶ In addition, efforts to understand this must also consider other hadith texts that have a theme that is relevant to the hadith theme in question in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding. In addition, confirmation of the meaning is also acquired through the instructions of the Quran.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 143.

⁵⁶ Hassan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, 16-20.

In an effort to understand the text of the hadith, in addition to the linguistic aspects of Hanafi, he also sees the significance of historical situations, both the situation in the presence of the text or the historical situation that gave birth to the text. In this stage, the meaning or meaning of a statement is understood by studying the reality, situation or historical problem in which the statement of a hadith appears. In other words, understanding the hadith is a response to the general situation of the people of the Prophet's period as well as to specific situations.

As in Fazlur Rahman's dual movement, Hanafi also demands that the understanding of the text in accordance with its socio-historical context be forwarded to the generalization stage. The meanings obtained based on linguistic analysis and historical situations are generalized by transforming the universal meaning included in the hadith, or - borrowing the meaning of Fazlur Rahman - we find the "moral ideal" that a hadith text wants to manifest. This is because every statement of the Prophet must be assumed, has a moral-social purpose that is universal. Thus, at this stage of generalization, an interpreter must be able to find universal rational constructs as the essence and essence of the meaning of a hadith text.⁵⁷

In his book, Textual and Contextual Hadiths of the Prophet, M. Syuhudi Ismail, in addition to emphasizing the significance of contextual understanding, also offers criteria so that this contextual understanding can be applied appropriately. According to him, in interpreting the hadith it is important to consider aspects that are closely related to the Prophet and the context behind or that causes the birth of the hadith. For him, the contextual understanding of hadith is taken if there is a strong indication behind the text of the hadith not to apply textual understanding. With this assumption, in M. Syuhudi Ismail's view, not all hadiths must be interpreted contextually. There are hadith observations that are quite interpreted textually and do not

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21-22; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6-7

require contextual understanding, in addition there are hadith observations that require both textual and contextual approaches.⁵⁸ Even though in the end what is used is a textual understanding, this can only be taken after considering all the contexts surrounding a hadith that will be interpreted. All these understandings, both textual and contextual, are intended to reveal the character of Islamic teachings, both universal, temporal and local.⁵⁹

From the above paragraphs it can be seen how Muslim scholars and scholars require the Prophet's hadith, although not entirely, to be understood contextually. In addition, it is also seen how they provide methods and guidelines for contextual understanding that are more accountable so that they do not slip into excessive ideology and subjectivism.

F. From Hadith Understanding to Practical Criticism

After efforts to understand the hadith text from the linguistic side, its socio-historical context and universal moral meaning, the next step in understanding hadith is related to how the results of this understanding are embodied in the present context. In the Hassan Hanafi language, this step is called practical criticism. It is an effort to introduce the meaning of religious texts into human life today.⁶⁰

In Islamic legal theory (uṣūl al-fiqh), the effort to embed the meaning of the text into the present situation and context is called ijtihad in applying law in certain cases (taṭbīq or taḥqīq).⁶¹ Intellectual work in this area is generally carried out by muftis and judges. With the ability to formulate Islamic laws (istinbāt) from religious texts, such as hadith, they then apply the results of this understanding into concrete events. This stage is included as an activity of ijtihad, because in this application process one must really do

⁵⁸ M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Hadis Nabi yang Tekstual dan Kontekstual*, 6, 89.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶⁰ Hassan Hanafi, *Dialog Agama & Revolusi*, 22-25.

⁶¹ Abu Ishāq asy-Syātibī, *al-Muwāfaqāh fi Usūl asy-Syari'ah*, Vol. IV, 235-237; Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Usūl al-Fiqh* (Kairo: Da'ir al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1958), 379.

everything in his power to find the relevance of the meaning obtained through istinbāt in certain events; whether this incident is included in it or not, whether the legal provisions as a result of understanding the text can be applied to the case or not. For this reason, at this stage, a person is required to really understand the content of the text and also know the details of the events and the social context that surrounds them.⁶²

At the stage of practical criticism of the understanding of hadith, universal rational constructs or universal moral-social objectives obtained from the generalization process at the previous stage (eidetic criticism) are projected into the reality of contemporary life so that they have practical meaning for solving contemporary social problems. He must be embodied into a concrete socio-historical context in the present. In the construct of his theory of double movements, practical criticism can be matched with Rahman's second movement. In this second movement, the results of understanding the text in the first movement are faced with today's realities.

In this regard, a ¹⁹ careful study of the current situation and analysis of the various realities faced is needed, so that we can assess the current situation and change its conditions as needed and determine new priorities to be able to implement new hadith values as well. In the present and historical reality analysis stage, it is clear that interdisciplinary involvement is needed. This means that at that point the presence or at least confirmation of social, political, economic and other experts is very important.

If eidetic criticism moves from a specific situation now to the past to obtain universal rational constructs or universal moral-social values through a process of generalization - hence, this process is inductive in nature - then practical criticism moves from the past to the present historical reality by trying to projecting and growing back universal rational constructs or universal moral-social values to the present socio-historical realities, so that

⁶² Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 7.

this process has a deductive character. The interpretation and understanding of hadith with an approach like this will clearly give birth to a new, dynamic and creative discourse of hadith, so that the norms and ideals of the Prophet's sunnah can be realized progressively in a variety of phenomena and social environments, therefore he can always seek new and fresh forms for his self-realization. Thus, the hadith can no longer be a static discourse but a living sunnah.

G. Concluding Remarks

In the previous discussion, the article demonstrates the significance of understanding in hadith criticism and how it is necessary in determining the validity of hadith. This is an additional method to the well-established methodology of hadith criticism. Traditionally, hadith criticism consists of sanad criticism or external, historical criticism, that is criticism to investigate the level of validity of chains of narrators, and matn criticism or internal, eidetic criticism, that is criticism of the text or the content of a hadith. This latter criticism includes both criticism of the wording or structure of the text and criticism of its meaning, all of which have implications for the acceptance or rejection of a matn.

This article has argued that the acceptability and validity of hadith is highly determined by how the hadith is understood and interpreted. Hadith understanding is accordingly a necessary component of hadith criticism. The article has also suggested that contextual understanding is the most reliable approach to understanding hadith.

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