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EXAMINING ḤADĪTH ON WOMEN AS A SOURCE OF FITNA: THEMATIC AND CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES

Alwi Padly Harahap^{*}, Fadhilah Is^{**} and Juli Julaiha P.^{***}

Abstract: *Ḥadīth* that refer to women as a source of *fitna* (temptation) are often interpreted in a way that sparks controversy regarding the role of women in Islam. In modern society, such interpretations can lead to gender injustice and discrimination against women. This study examines *ḥadīth* using thematic and contextual approaches. The method involves thematic analysis to identify key patterns and meanings in *ḥadīth* that discuss *fitna* and women, along with a contextual approach to understanding the historical, cultural and social circumstances during the time of Prophet Muḥammad. The findings indicate that *ḥadīth* describing women as a source of *fitna* are not meant to diminish their value; rather, they highlight the importance of maintaining morality and healthy social interactions. The discussion emphasises that holistic and contextual comprehension of these *ḥadīth* can assist to eliminate gender bias and encourage a more inclusive perspective on women's role in Islam. Consequently, thorough understanding of the *ḥadīth* text can help prevent misinterpretations and discrimination. This study underscores the necessity of adopting a more critical and contextual approach in *ḥadīth* studies to support the principle of gender justice that aligns with Islamic teachings.

Keywords: *ḥadīth, women's fitna, thematic, contextual, gender*

INTRODUCTION

Women's rights in Islam have been a persistent topic of discussion. Muslim women are frequently portrayed in the media and public discourse as facing oppression, exclusion, domination and exploitation.¹ This representation is often reinforced by literal readings of religious texts influenced by patriarchal norms and traditions, giving rise to the perception that

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¹ Alwi Padly Harahap et al., "Understanding the Hadith on Perfume: An Effort to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Protect Women," *Buana Gender: Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Anak* 10, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.22515/buanagender.v10i1.10133>.

Islam inherently limits women's freedom and movement.² Furthermore, global mainstream media often reproduces negative stereotypes of Muslim women, portraying them as passive, oppressed or simply as objects subject to masculine structures.³ As a result, negative stigma and prejudice against Muslim women remain entrenched, in social discourse and various written documentation, such as media reports, popular literature and even in decontextualised religious studies.⁴

Pre-Islamic Arab society was heavily patriarchal in the era of Prophet Muḥammad, where women lacked basic rights and were regarded as their husbands' property.⁵ The emergence of Islam brought significant reforms that improved these conditions by elevating the status of women and granting them their rights, including the rights to inherit, receive education and participate in social life.⁶ Nevertheless, some *ḥadīth* related to women, when interpreted without proper context, may lead to the impression that Islam reinforces the patriarchal structure.

A study of *ḥadīth* that are often interpreted negatively toward women, particularly those that refer to women as sources of *fitna*, shows that such understandings have a complex history and are influenced by historical, social and intellectual factors.⁷ These *ḥadīth* are interpreted literally without considering the socio-cultural context of the Prophet's time, which gives rise to the mistaken impression that Islam views women negatively or places them in a subordinate position.⁸ One *ḥadīth* that is often at the centre of debate is the Prophet's statement: "I have not left a *fitna* after my death which is more terrible for men than the *fitna* of women."⁹

If we examine it further, the term in the context of the *ḥadīth* does not refer to *fitna* in the sense of bad accusations, but to the meaning of a test or trial, as understood in Arabic.¹⁰ *Fitna* can arise from various factors, such as wealth, power or social conditions, and is not limited to a gender.¹¹ Thus, stating that women are solely the source of *fitna* is a limited reading. Several

² Jim Glassman, "A Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 4 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2006.00517_8.x.

³ Ahlam Muhtaseb, "Us Media Darlings: Arab and Muslim Women Activists, Exceptionalism and the 'Rescue Narrative,'" *Arab Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.42.1-2.0007>.

⁴ Idris Siregar and Alwi Padly Harahap, "Kontekstualisasi Hadis Tentang Kurangnya Kecerdasan Perempuan Dan Agama" [Contextualization of the Hadith on the Lack of Women's Intelligence and Religion], *Tajdid: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 23, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.30631/tjd.v23i1.442>.

⁵ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad Nāṣr al-Dīn Al-Albānī, *Jilbāb al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah* [The Dress Code for the Muslim Woman] (Dār al-Salām, 2002), 73.

⁶ Tarek Masoud, Amaney Jamal, and Elizabeth Nugent, "Using the Qur'an to Empower Arab Women? Theory and Experimental Evidence from Egypt," *Comparative Political Studies* 49, no. 12 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015626452>.

⁷ Hamka Hasan et al., "Polygamy: Uncovering the Effect of Patriarchal Ideology on Gender-Biased Interpretation," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7970>.

⁸ Agusni Yahya and Muslim Zainuddin, "The Interpretation of the Hadith on the Characteristics of Women and its Implications for Islamic Law," *Samarah* 5, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v5i1.9593>.

⁹ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muṣṭafā Dīb Al-Bughā (Dār Ibnu Kathīr, 1993), no. 4808.

¹⁰ Abū Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Farīs ibn Zakariyyā, *Mu'jam Maqāyis al-Lughah* [Dictionary of Language Standards] (Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 312.

¹¹ Muhammad Hanif Al Hakim and Azhar Alam, "Semantic Analysis of the Term Fitna in the Qur'an," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 3, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v3i1.720>.

modern scholars, such as Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996 CE), point out that, for example, the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī about the “*fitna* of women” focuses on the importance of regulating social interactions and maintaining ethics, not on the abuse of women as a cause of moral collapse.¹²

Nevertheless, this misunderstanding persists in society because religious texts are often referenced without in-depth, contextual analysis. As a result, *ḥadīth* about *fitna* are used to justify discriminatory behaviour against women. In certain regions, women are considered unsuitable for leadership roles or important career positions because they are perceived to trigger *fitna* or social problems. This is evident in cases in Indonesia, where women who aspire to enter politics or assume leadership roles often face greater challenges from society and institutions than their male counterparts. They are considered more likely to trigger *fitna* or social unrest simply because of their gender.¹³

A thorough and contextual analysis of the *ḥadīth* on the *fitna* of women is crucial for correcting perceptions that often marginalise women’s role in Islam. By examining the historical, social and cultural background in which these *ḥadīth* developed, we can uncover more comprehensive meanings and avoid discriminatory interpretations. This approach allows for more inclusive and equitable understanding of women’s position in Islamic teachings. Contemporary scholars, such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (d. 2022 CE), emphasise the importance of interpreting these *ḥadīth* in light of fundamental Islamic principles that uphold justice, compassion and moral equity between men and women. He cautions that many religious texts must be read contextually, not merely textually, to prevent Islam’s core values from being distorted by literal understanding detached from their social context.¹⁴

Amid the currents of globalisation that demand gender equity, a re-examination of religious texts, including *ḥadīth*, has become increasingly urgent. Many *ḥadīth* that have been interpreted with gender bias against women need to be critically re-examined to build a more just and equal foundation in Islam.¹⁵ This study specifically analyses *ḥadīth* that depict women as sources of *fitna* to re-evaluate their meaning and implications through a thematic and contextual approach. To strengthen contextual reading, this study draws on the contextualisation approach formulated by Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, which emphasises the importance of understanding religious texts within the framework of *maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah* (the higher objectives and purposes behind Islamic rulings/law) and the social realities of the *umma* (Muslim

¹² Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī, *Qaḍāyā Al-Mar‘ah Bayn Al-Taqālīd Al-Rākidah Wa Al-Wāfīdah* [Muslim Women in the Struggle Between Tradition and Modernisation] (Dār al-Syurūq, 1994), 71.

¹³ Edward Aspinall, Sally White, and Amalinda Savirani, “Women’s Political Representation in Indonesia: Who Wins and How?,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421989720>.

¹⁴ Yūsuf Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Markaz Al-Mar‘ah Fī Al-Ḥayāh Al-Islāmiyyah* [Women in Islamic Life: Balancing Rights and Roles], ed. Dadang Sobar Ali (CV Pustaka Setia, 2007), 71.

¹⁵ Tasbih Tasbih et al., “Islamic Feminists’ Rejection of the Textual Understanding of Misogynistic Hadiths for the Advancement of Gender Justice in Makassar, Indonesia,” *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i1.19856>.

community).¹⁶ Through this approach, *ḥadīth* that have been understood normatively and literally can be interpreted as more relevant to contemporary challenges, particularly the issue of gender justice. This research employs a qualitative method with thematic-based data collection techniques (*maudū'ī*) on the *ḥadīth* in *Kutub al-Tis 'ah*.¹⁷ It strengthens the analysis through secondary sources, including *ḥadīth* commentary books and scientific journals.

DEFINITION OF *FITNA* IN ISLAM

In Islam, the term *fitna* carries many meanings, contingent on its context. The term originates from the Arabic root *maṣḍar fatana – yaftinu – fatnan* or *fitnatan*, encompassing notions of luring, tempting, persuading, misleading, burning and obstructing.¹⁸ Over time, the definition of this term has broadened to encompass trials (*al-ibtīlā'*), tests (*al-imtīḥān*) and experiments (*al-ikhtibār*).¹⁹ Furthermore, *fitna* can also signify torture, disaster, temptation, chaos and even madness.²⁰ These interpretations illustrate the profound nature of the concept of *fitna* across various dimensions of human experience. However, within the framework of Islamic teachings, *fitna* is frequently associated with upheaval, social discord, the dissemination of falsehoods or incitement that can undermine interpersonal relationships, morality and unity among Muslims.²¹

In the Qur'ān, the term *fitna* is used in various contexts, one of which is the test of faith when a Muslim faces challenges to their steadfastness and patience.²² In other contexts, *fitna* can mean deviating from the truth, whether through oppression, spreading falsehood or incitement that causes division in society, as stated in Surah al-Anfāl: “And beware of *fitna* which will not only affect those who are wrongdoers among you.”²³ Furthermore, *fitna* is used in social and political discussions to describe instability that can lead to conflict or war, as exemplified by the *fitna al-Kubrā* (the great test) that affected the Muslim community shortly after the Prophet's death.²⁴ Throughout Islamic history, this type of social *fitna* posed a

¹⁶ Yūsuf Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayf Nata'āmal Ma'a Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyyah* [Approaching the Sunnah: Comprehension and Controversy] (Dār al-Syurūq, 2004), 2.

¹⁷ *Kutub al-Tis 'ah* is the name for the nine main *ḥadīth* books, which are important references in studying *ḥadīth*. These books are *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, *Muwatta' Mālik*, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, and *Sunan al-Dārimī*. See, Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr, *Manhaj Al-Naqd Fī 'Ulūm Al-Ḥadīth* [Critical Approach to *Hadīth* Science] (Dār al-Fikr, 1997), 14.

¹⁸ Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn 'Alī Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Manzūr al-Anṣārī Al-Ifriqī, *Lisān Al-'Arab* [The Arabic Language], vol. 13 (Dār al-Ṣadr, 1999), 318.

¹⁹ Ibn Zakariyyā, *Mu'jam Maqāyis Al-Lughah*, vol. 4, 472.

²⁰ Zayn al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥanafī Al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār Al-Ṣiḥḥah al-Maktabah al-'Iṣriyyah*, 1999), 234.

²¹ Muḥammad Aḥmad Ismā'īl al-Muqaddam, *'Awdat Al-Hijāb* [The Return of *Hijāb*], vol. 3 (Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2005), 438.

²² See Qur'ān 2:191.

²³ Qur'ān 8:25.

²⁴ Muhammad Najmuddin and Kamaluddin Tajibu, “Avoiding Fitnah: A Review of Islamic Communication Ethics,” *Palakka: Media and Islamic Communication* 4, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.30863/palakka.v4i1.5081>.

significant danger because it could incite discord among the community, ultimately leading to division and severe destruction.

Scholars indicate that the primary reasons for *fitna* include injustice, falsehoods and the dissemination of unfounded issues. In such circumstances, the individual who propagates *fitna* is seen as having committed a significant sin, as it can undermine societal harmony, incite animosity and provoke conflicts and divisions.²⁵ Prophet Muḥammad cautioned about the perils of *fitna* in a *ḥadīth*: “There will be *fitna* resembling a pitch-black night, where an individual is a believer in the morning and an infidel in the evening, or a believer in the evening and an infidel in the morning.”²⁶ This *ḥadīth* demonstrates how *fitna* can rapidly alter a person’s faith due to the turmoil it engenders.

Fitna in Islam is not merely a trial or test; it poses a genuine risk that could undermine personal faith and disrupt social harmony. Thus, Islam places great importance on monitoring one’s speech, thoughts and actions to avoid engaging in or perpetuating *fitna*. Muslims are instructed to steer clear of *fitna* and strive to quash it when it arises, and to uphold unity, justice and peace within their communities.

ḤADĪTH ABOUT WOMEN AS SOURCES OF FITNA

The term *fitna* appears in several versions of the *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* and *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*.²⁷ These *ḥadīth* are all narrated by Usāma ibn Zayd, as detailed in the table below.

Mukharrij	Narrator	Ḥadīth numbers
Al-Bukhārī	Usāma ibn Zayd	4808
Muslim	Usāma ibn Zayd	2740, 2741
Al-Tirmidhī	Usāma ibn Zayd	2780
Ibn Mājah	Usāma ibn Zayd	3998
Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal	Usāma ibn Zayd	21746, 21829

Ḥadīth relating to women as a source of *fitna* have been narrated through various channels, making it impossible to discuss all of them in detail here. However, it can be observed that the *ḥadīth* from various narration channels have substantial similarities in terms of pronunciation. In this study, the authors chose the transmission route through al-Bukhārī for inclusion, considering that *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* holds the highest authority in the tradition of *ḥadīth* science

²⁵ Abū al-Barakāt ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn Al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr Al-Nasafī* [Al-Nasafī’s Interpretation], vol. 1 (Dār al-Kalam al-Ṭayyib, 1995), 685.

²⁶ Abū Dāwud Sulaymān ibn al-Ash’ath ibn Ishāq ibn Bashīr ibn Shaddād ibn ‘Amr al-Azdī Al-Sijjīstānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwud* [], ed. Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn ‘Abd Al-Hamīd (al-Maktabah al-Iṣriyah, 1993), no. 3715; Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā ibn Sūrah ibn Mūsa ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk Abū ‘Īsa Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr and Muḥammad Fuād ‘Abd Al-Bāqī (Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1975), no. 2123.

²⁷ Arnold John Wensinck, *Al-Mu’jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfāz Al-Ḥadīth* [Indexed Dictionary of Ḥadīth Words], ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd Al-Bāqī, vol. 4 (Maktabah Brill, 1936), 63.

and the most credible position among the other *ḥadīth* books included in the *Kutub al-Tis‘ah*. The text of the *ḥadīth* that is the focus of this discussion is:

حَدَّثَنَا آدَمُ: حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ، عَنْ سُلَيْمَانَ النَّيْمِيِّ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عُمَانَ النَّهْدِيَّ، عَنْ أُسَامَةَ بْنِ زَيْدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ: عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: مَا تَرَكْتُ بَعْدِي فِتْنَةً أَضَرَّ عَلَى الرَّجَالِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ.²⁸

Narrated Usāma ibn Zayd: The Prophet said: I have not left a *fitna* after my death which is more terrible for men than the *fitna* of women.

This *ḥadīth* is considered *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic or sound) because it was narrated by al-Bukhārī, who is one of the most authoritative *ḥadīth* scholars and is known to be strict in determining authenticity criteria. Based on the methodology of the science of *muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*, a *ḥadīth* can be declared *ṣaḥīḥ* if its *sanad* (chain of transmission) is continuous (*muttaṣil*), all its transmitters are fair and *ḍabīṭ* (reliable and have strong memorisation), and its *matn* (content) does not contain *shādh* (deviations from stronger narrations) and *‘ilal* (hidden defects).²⁹ In the context of the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī, all these elements have been closely examined. For example, al-Bukhārī only accepted *ḥadīth* from narrators whom he had met directly and with whom he had received *thiqah* (trust), and rejected *ḥadīth* even if its *sanad* was *muttaṣil* if there was any indication of a flaw in the narrator’s accuracy.³⁰ Therefore, the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī is not only due to his authority, but also due to his strict method of verifying the *sanad* and *matn* by the rules of classical *ḥadīth* criticism.

The *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī emphasises that women are one of the greatest trials for men, as the Prophet stated there is no *fitna* more dangerous for men than that which originates from women. This statement contains a serious warning about the great potential that women have in testing a man’s faith, moral stability and spiritual steadfastness. In this context, as explained by Ibn Baṭāl (d. 1057 CE) of the Mālikī school, the term *fitna* is not interpreted as a form of insult to the dignity of women, but as a symbol of a complex and significant test or trial in the social and religious life of men.³¹

In addition to al-Bukhārī’s narration, the *ḥadīth* about women’s *fitna* is also narrated by Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and Aḥmad,³² using the same term to describe the potential threat that women pose to men. Each narrator presents a context and wording that highlights different aspects of the term’s meaning. Muslim’s narration, while still using the term *fitna*, presents it in a broader and more general way, thus opening the interpretation that women’s *fitna* is not only a moral temptation, but can also encompass social calamities. Meanwhile, the narrations

²⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, no. 4808.

²⁹ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith* (The Islamic Foundation, 2005), 139–40.

³⁰ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalānī, *Hady Al-Sārī Muqaddimah Fath Al-Bārī* [Hady al-Sārī Introduction to Fath al-Bārī] (al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1961), 193.

³¹ Abū Al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Khalf ibn ‘Abd Al-Malik ibn Baṭāl, *Syarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* [Explanation of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī], ed. Abū Tamīm Yāsir ibn Ibrāhīm, vol. 7 (Maktabah al-Rashd, 2003), 188.

³² Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fuād ‘Abd Al-Bāqī (Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1955), no. 2740, 2741; Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2780; Al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* [Musnad of Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal] (Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1995), no. 21746, 21829.

of al-Tirmidhī and Aḥmad also use the term *fitna*, but in a way that emphasises the seriousness of the impact or danger of women's *fitna* on men's spiritual stability.³³

Although the substance of this *ḥadīth* narrative essentially demonstrates a similarity in meaning, differences among the narrators in terms of *sanad* and level of *ṭabaqāt* (translation) result in significant variations, particularly in the choice of diction, syntactic structure and rhetorical style, which influence the semantic nuances. These variations in pronunciation reflect differences in lexical selection and word construction influenced by the strength of memorisation, the oral tradition in which the narrators grew up and the linguistic preferences prevailing in their region or generation. These differences reflect not only linguistic variations but also indicate the narrators' scholarly background and religious orientation. For example, narrators from *fiqh* (law) circles tend to emphasise normative aspects and legal warnings, while narrators more influenced by the Sufi tradition tend to emphasise contemplative and ethical dimensions.³⁴ Their intellectual tendencies can be analysed through the patterns of their narrations and the scholarly authorities that influenced them, as reflected in critical works such as *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* and *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*.

These variations demonstrate that the narrators not only convey the *ḥadīth* textually but also adapt their delivery methods to the social and intellectual context of their time. For example, a firm narration style is more relevant to raise awareness in a society facing moral turmoil or social tension between genders. Conversely, in a culture that is beginning to open to discourse on gender justice or spiritual education, a more reflective delivery style is chosen so the message of the *ḥadīth* is still accepted without causing resistance.³⁵ Thus, these differences in delivery are not solely due to individual differences between the narrators, but are also a response to the contextual needs of *da'wah* (preaching). This reflects flexibility and wisdom in the dissemination of *ḥadīth*, while enriching our understanding of the dynamics of transmission and interpretation of *ḥadīth* across generations and societies.

OPINIONS OF PRE-MODERN AND MODERN SCHOLARS

In this study, the selection of scholars analysed is based on the diversity of their school of thought affiliations, intellectual orientations, and historical backgrounds to present a representative spectrum of views on *ḥadīth* about women as *fitna*. The studies of pre-modern scholars reflect the diversity of classical Islamic scholarly traditions, encompassing various jurisprudence and *tafsīr* approaches. In contrast, the selected modern scholars reflect the spectrum of contemporary thought, ranging from conservative to reformist. This approach aims to reveal the dynamics of *ḥadīth* interpretation over time, while also illustrating how social

³³ Muḥammad Amīn ibn 'Abd Allāh Al-Harārī, *Al-Kawkab Al-Wahhāj* [The Shining Planet, Explanation of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj], vol. 5 (Dār al-Minhāj al-Qawīm, 2009), 169.

³⁴ Yūsuf Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Sunnah Maṣḍaran Li Al-Ma'rifah Wa Al-Ḥaḍārah* [The Sunnah: A Source of Civilisation] (Dār al-Syurūq, 2011), 200.

³⁵ Muḥammad Muṣṭafā A'ẓamī, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (Islamic Book Trust, 1977), 269.

context, scientific methodology and ideological tendencies influence the interpretation of *ḥadīth*, which often forms the basis of gender construction in Muslim societies.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), known as the “Proof of Islam” from the Shāfi‘ī school, in his work *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, articulates that *fitna* about women is a trial that can impact a person’s moral integrity, particularly for men. However, al-Ghazālī does not view women as the primary source of *fitna*; instead, he emphasises the importance of self-restraint in the face of desires and regards temptation as an inherent part of life on Earth. He asserts that men and women must uphold manners and ethics to avoid succumbing to temptation.³⁶

In strengthening his argument, al-Ghazālī cites an incident during the time of the Prophet, when Umm Salamah and Maymūnah—two of the Prophet’s wives—were with him, then ‘Abd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm, a blind companion, entered the room after the *ḥijāb* was ordered to be lowered. The Prophet said, “Observe a veil from him. We asked: Messenger of Allah! Is he not blind? He can neither see us nor recognise us. The Prophet said: Are both of you blind? Do you not see him?”³⁷ According to al-Ghazālī, this story highlights the importance of maintaining one’s views and boundaries of interaction, not solely because of the opposite sex, but also because of the value of self-control.³⁸ Thus, al-Ghazālī emphasises that the solution to temptation is not to blame women but to increase spiritual education, introspection and self-control, especially for men as responsible moral subjects.

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1449 CE), a *ḥadīth* scholar from the Shāfi‘ī school, in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* titled *Fath al-Bārī*, also examines the *ḥadīth* about women as the source of the *fitna* narrated above. He emphasises that the accusations against women in this *ḥadīth* must be seen in a broader context as a warning against the temptations of worldly life, which include aspects such as wealth, status and the opposite sex.³⁹ Ibn Ḥajar does not view women as a form of negative *fitna*, but as a worldly trial commonly faced by mankind. He interprets the Prophet’s statement about women as “the greatest *fitna* for men” as indicating the great potential of women to be a test in men’s lives, not because of their nature, but because of their attractiveness that can test the stability of faith, loyalty and control of lust. In this case, the term “test” refers to a moral and spiritual ordeal that demands a person’s ability to maintain personal integrity and religious values within gender interactions. This interpretation is emphasised by Ibn Ḥajar, who explains it is not women as individuals who are the source of corruption, but the impulses of human desire and the human mind’s weakness in the face of temptation that make it a form of *fitna*.⁴⁰ Therefore, Ibn Ḥajar’s primary emphasis is on the importance of self-control and strengthening spirituality, rather than negatively labelling women as the ones to blame.

³⁶ Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm Al-Dīn* [The Revival of Religious Sciences], vol. 3 (Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1997), 102.

³⁷ Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 3585.

³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm Al-Dīn*, vol. 3, 102.

³⁹ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath Al-Bārī* [Fath al-Bārī Explained Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī], vol. 9 (al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1970), 137.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, 258.

Al-Nawawī (d. 1277 CE), also from the Shāfi‘ī school, discusses in his book *al-Minhāj* that the disturbances arising from interactions between men and women are primarily due to uncontrolled desire.⁴¹ He clarifies that this *ḥadīth* should be interpreted as a caution about the potential trials that may arise when an individual cannot manage their desires. He stresses that the issue does not lie with women, but with the inability of individuals, particularly men, to maintain an appropriate perspective and conduct themselves in a socially acceptable manner. Al-Nawawī further points out that the way to address this challenge is not by blaming or excluding women from public life but by enhancing the ethical standards of individuals and society.⁴²

On the other hand, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 1350 CE), a scholar from the Ḥanbalī school, presents a more explicit and conservative view than other scholars, emphasising the role of women as one of the greatest tests for men in moral and spiritual contexts. He interprets the *ḥadīth* about women’s *fitna* literally and issues a serious warning that women could be Satan’s most effective tool in leading men into sin.⁴³ Therefore, according to Ibn Qayyim, women should not leave the house with flashy makeup, wear clothing that could attract attention, and are advised to guard themselves by not talking to strange men in public spaces.⁴⁴ This view reflects Ibn Qayyim’s preventive approach to maintaining public morality and avoiding potential *fitna* in social interactions between men and women.

Meanwhile, among modern scholars, two figures tend to understand this *ḥadīth* textually, by interpreting the meaning of the *ḥadīth* based solely on its outward wording, without considering the social, historical context, or the *maqāṣid* (purposes) of the Shāri‘a behind it. Muqbil ibn Hādī al-Wādī‘ī (d. 2001 CE), a Salafī figure from Yemen, understands the *ḥadīth* in the framework that women are the greatest *fitna* for men.⁴⁵ This understanding underpins his view that social interactions between men and women must be strictly limited, even in educational aspects, to maintain the society’s moral stability. He rejects the contextualisation approach because he believes the text of the *ḥadīth* must be accepted and obeyed absolutely without interpretation, considering the *ḥadīth* comes directly from Prophet Muḥammad, whose words are considered a form of second revelation.⁴⁶ Thus, according to al-Wādī‘ī, any relaxation of the rules of gender segregation has the potential to open opportunities for the *fitna* that the Prophet feared in his sayings.

Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn (d. 2001 CE), a prominent Saudi Arabian cleric who was once chairman of the Council of Senior ‘Ulamā‘ (scholars), also understands the *ḥadīth* regarding *fitna* of women textually. According to him, this *ḥadīth* is a strong warning from the

⁴¹ Abū Zakariyyā Muḥy al-Dīn Yahyā ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawī, *Al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn Al-Ḥajjāj* [Al-Minhāj in the Explanation of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj], vol. 8 (Dār Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1976), 206.

⁴² Ibid., vol. 4, 161.

⁴³ Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb ibn Sa‘ad Shams al-Dīn ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Ṭarq Al-Hukmiyyah Fī Al-Siyāsah Ash-Shar‘iyyah* [Wisdom Methods in Islamic Politics] (Dār Ibn Hazm, 2019), 238.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 239.

⁴⁵ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Muqbil ibn Hādī Al-Wādī‘ī, *Tuḥfat Al-Mujīb ‘alā As‘ilat Al-Ḥādr Wa Al-Gharīb* [The Masterpiece of the Answer to Questions of the Present and the Strange] (Dār al-Athār, 2002), 339.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 408.

Prophet to men always to be wary of women's temptations, because this *fitna* directly touches men's basic instincts, as confirmed in Āli 'Imrān (Qur'ān 3:14). Al-'Uthaymīn emphasises that the *fitna* of women is not limited to immorality such as adultery, but also includes broader aspects, such as excessive love for the world, which results in neglect of the afterlife.⁴⁷ He gives an example of how women, if they are not guided according to the Shāri'a, can cause someone to fall into servitude to the world – for example, by seeking wealth illegally, abandoning religious obligations, or even sacrificing faith and obedience to Allah.⁴⁸

However, this is different from Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, a Muslim thinker from Egypt. Al-Qaraḍāwī emphasises that this *ḥadīth* should be understood more broadly and not interpreted literally as a judgment against women. Al-Qaraḍāwī emphasises that the *fitna* in question is not merely women as a source of temptation or problems, but is more related to human nature, which is weak against various forms of worldly trials, including relationships between men and women. According to him, what is important is not to isolate women from public life or limit their roles, but to educate men and women to interact fairly, morally and based on Islamic principles that respect each other.⁴⁹

Moderate opinions are also expressed by Muḥammad Naṣr al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 CE), a leading *ḥadīth* scholar of the 20th century. Al-Albānī emphasises that the meaning of this *ḥadīth* must be understood as a warning against the potential temptation of lust posed by women in certain contexts, not as absolute judgment against women. He rejects meanings that demean the women's dignity as a whole. He emphasises that Islam also establishes the same rules of protection, respect and moral responsibility for men and women.⁵⁰

The various opinions of pre-modern and modern scholars regarding the *ḥadīth* about women as *fitna* show a wide spectrum of understanding, from spiritual and ethical approaches to literal and preventive interpretations. Scholars such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, and al-Nawawī emphasise that women are not the main source of *fitna*, but a worldly trial that requires self-control, spiritual education and ethics in social interactions. They draw attention to the importance of moral discipline and do not blame women unilaterally. In contrast, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Salafī figures, such as Muqbil al-Wādi'ī and Ibn 'Uthaymīn, understand this *ḥadīth* literally and emphasise limiting women's public roles to prevent *fitna*, with a cautious approach to interactions with the opposite sex. Meanwhile, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and al-Albānī offer a contextual approach that emphasises the importance of building healthy social relations between men and women through education and Islamic values, without marginalising or isolating women from the public sphere.

⁴⁷ Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ ibn Muḥammad Al-'Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ Riyāḍ Al-Ṣāliḥīn* [Explanation of Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn], vol. 2 (Dār al-Waṭn, 2008), 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:18.

⁴⁹ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Markaz Al-Mar'ah Fī Al-Ḥayāh Al-Islāmiyyah*, 147.

⁵⁰ Al-Albānī, *Jilbāb Al-Mar'ah Al-Muslimah*, 74.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE *ḤADĪTH* ABOUT WOMEN AS A SOURCE OF *FITNA*

When examining the *ḥadīth* relating to the *fitna* of women from a thematic perspective, several key messages arise that should be interpreted carefully to avoid misconceptions regarding women's roles in society. One of the most cited *ḥadīth* says, "I have not left a *fitna* after my death which is more terrible for men than the *fitna* of women."⁵¹ This *ḥadīth* is commonly perceived as a caution about the potential temptations men experience in their interactions with women. However, it is crucial to recognise that Islamic scholars interpret *fitna* not exclusively as a negative trait associated with women but as a challenge for men and women to manage their desires and uphold their morality.⁵²

If examined further, the *ḥadīth* that mentions women as the source of *fitna* does not necessarily depict women as the root of the problem. Instead, the first theme that emerges is men's responsibility to guard their gaze and control their lust. This is reflected in the *ḥadīth* that states Prophet Muḥammad instructed a man to avert his gaze when accidentally seeing something that could arouse lust.⁵³ In this context, *fitna* is understood as a temptation that arises due to the failure of an individual, especially men, to manage their gaze and restrain their lust. On the other hand, some *ḥadīth* demonstrate women's responsibility for controlling their desires and exercising self-control, as seen in the stories of Umm Salamah and Maymūnah. When 'Abd Allah ibn Umm Maktūm—a blind companion of the Prophet—entered the room, the Prophet ordered them to lower their headscarves.⁵⁴ Therefore, these *ḥadīth* cannot be interpreted unilaterally, but should be seen as a universal reminder that men and women have a moral and spiritual responsibility to control their desires and maintain the sanctity of social interactions.

The second theme identified in the *ḥadīth* is the *fitna* of women as a symbol of worldly trials that test faith. In the *ḥadīth*, the Prophet said,

Truly, this world is appealing and prosperous, and Allah has appointed you as stewards in it, and He observes your actions. Therefore, be cautious of the world and women, as the *fitna* temptation that struck the Children of Israel was women.⁵⁵

This *ḥadīth* is commonly linked to cautions about worldly attractions in general, which encompass wealth, power and women. In this context, the *fitna* associated with women represents earthly distractions that can lead a person away from devotion to Allah.⁵⁶ The central theme that emerges from this *ḥadīth* is that life is fraught with *fitna*, and a significant test for

⁵¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, no. 4808.

⁵² Syamsul Bakri, "Womens Leadership in Islam: A Historical Perspective of a Hadith," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 5, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v5i2.3276>.

⁵³ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2776; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, no. 18369.

⁵⁴ Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 3585.

⁵⁵ Al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 4925; Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Mājāh, *Sunan Ibn Mājāh*, ed. Muḥammad Fuād 'Abd Al-Bāqī (Dār al-Ṣadīq, 2014), no. 3990.

⁵⁶ Al-Hararī, *Al-Kawkab Al-Wahhāj*, vol. 4, 179.

individuals is how they navigate their relationships with the opposite sex in a moral and Shāri‘a-compliant manner.

The third theme regarding the *fitna* of women is their position in society and the regulation of social interactions to prevent potential *fitna*. For example, the Prophet said, “The woman advances and retires in the shape of a devil, so when one of you sees a woman, he should come to his wife, for that will repel what he feels in his heart.”⁵⁷ This *ḥadīth* appears to caution against the risks of viewing women with desire. Here, the *fitna* directed towards women is linked to the management of lustful thoughts. Nevertheless, scholars universally assert that this *ḥadīth* is not meant to belittle women, but is a reminder for men to seek permissible means, such as turning to their wives, should they feel tempted.⁵⁸ This is a reminder that lust is a trial that should be addressed in a manner consistent with Islamic principles.

Despite some *ḥadīth* warning against the *fitna* posed by women, Islam continues to regard women highly, recognising their important roles in the family, community and religious life. The *ḥadīth* warning against the *fitna* posed by women are often paired with other *ḥadīth* that emphasise the importance of protecting women’s rights,⁵⁹ the proper treatment of wives,⁶⁰ and the command to treat all women with respect and justice.⁶¹ The Prophet set an example by treating women with compassion, as seen in his interactions with his wives and daughters, and the significant roles allocated to women in various aspects of Muslim society.⁶² For example, in the social and political landscape, many women during the time of Prophet Muḥammad played a significant role in spreading the teachings of Islam. ‘Āisha, for example, is known as contributing the second highest number of *ḥadīth*,⁶³ while Khadījah was the Prophet’s first supporter in his missionary mission.⁶⁴ These active contributions of women in Islamic history show that, despite warnings in religious texts about the *fitna* of women, this was not a form of belittling their status or dignity, but a reminder for men and women to maintain moral integrity in social interactions. Within the broader context of Islamic history, al-Marakebī records a significant event during the Ottoman period, when a group of women gathered at al-Azhar

⁵⁷ Al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2491.

⁵⁸ Al-Nawawī, *Al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Ibn Al-Ḥajjāj*, vol. 4, 312.

⁵⁹ See the *ḥadīth* narrated by Muslim no. 2671. The Prophet said: Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or be silent. And bequeath goodness to women, because indeed women were created from ribs, and the most crooked part of the rib is the top. If you try to straighten it by force, it will surely break; but if you let it, it will remain crooked. So make a will towards women with kindness.

⁶⁰ See the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Tirmidhī no. 3830. The Prophet said: The best of you are those who are best to their wives (and their families), and I am the best of you to my family.

⁶¹ See the *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Tirmidhī no. 1083, which was delivered in the context of the Prophet’s sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage and emphasises the importance of treating women well. In the sermon, the Prophet explicitly reminds Muslims to safeguard women’s rights and treat them with gentleness and responsibility, as part of God’s mandate and the ethics of domestic life in Islam.

⁶² Zunly Nadia, “Women Political Participation in the Era of Prophet Muhammad: Study on the Hadith Transmitters of the Women Companions,” *Al-Albab* 6, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v6i1.608>.

⁶³ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn* [The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History], vol. 2 (Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 608.

⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khath’amī al-Suhaylī ‘Abd al-Mulk ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawīyah Li Ibn Hishām* [The Prophetic Biography of Ibn Hishām] (Dār al-Ṣaḥābah, 2007), 308.

Mosque to express their concerns about the injustices inflicted on society. The public presence and courage of these women prompted scholars to take immediate action and address the issue.⁶⁵ This phenomenon demonstrates that women's participation in the public sphere was not only legitimate but also capable of sparking social and moral changes in Muslim societies.

The selection of three *ḥadīth* in this thematic analysis is based on consideration of their representation, relevance and level of controversy in religious and socio-cultural discourses. The three *ḥadīth* are not only frequently cited in discussions about women's *fitna*, but often become a source of debate due to their potential to be misunderstood textually or used to justify gender-biased views. The first *ḥadīth* reflects the psychological dimension of *fitna*, which tests men's integrity in guarding their gaze; the second *ḥadīth* highlights women's *fitna* as a symbol of worldly temptations that can shake faith if not confronted with spiritual awareness; while the third *ḥadīth* emphasises preventive strategies in social interactions aimed at maintaining the purity of gender relations within the framework of Shāri'a. All three contain a strong moral message about the importance of self-control, as well as an affirmation that women should not be viewed as objects of stigma, but as integral to the social order that must be respected and valued.

The overall thematic examination of the *ḥadīth* concerning the *fitna* of women reveals that the primary objective of these teachings is to educate Muslims, particularly men, on the importance of upholding morality and piety in the face of worldly temptations, including those involving interactions between genders. The *fitna* directed at women is not meant to be a moral critique of women but as a caution regarding the necessity of self-discipline, spiritual growth and ethical social conduct to preserve the integrity of faith and foster a just and harmonious community. Therefore, the theme surrounding the *fitna* of women in these *ḥadīth* focuses more on the moral obligations of men to uphold their conduct, faith and actions amid worldly challenges, including their dealings with women.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE *ḤADĪTH* ABOUT WOMEN AS A SOURCE OF *FITNA*

In the era of Prophet Muḥammad, pre-Islamic Arab society (the *Jāhiliyyah* period) was dominated by a powerful patriarchal mind. In this social structure, women were often treated as men's property and did not have equal rights in the family, social or legal spheres. Their low social status was usually considered an economic and social burden for the family. Objectification of women became commonplace, without moral guidelines that limit men's behaviour towards them. Traditions that are detrimental to women are widespread, such as injustice in inheritance rights and the cruel practice of killing baby girls who are considered to be a disgrace to the honour of the father or tribe, because girls are seen as unable to maintain

⁶⁵ Muḥammad Al-Marakebī, *Al-Majāl al-'Āmm al-Islāmī fī mā Qabl al-Ḥadāthah: Naḥw Sardīyyah Mukhtalifah* [The Islamic Public Sphere in Pre-Modernity: Towards a Different Narrative], vol. 1 (Markaz Maghārib, 2018), 63.

the family's honour or bring benefits like boys.⁶⁶ In addition, interactions between men and women took place without ethical boundaries or strict legal regulations, thus creating unhealthy social conditions that were full of gender inequality.

With the advent of Islam, Prophet Muḥammad initiated significant changes that gradually improved the position of women and recognised their rights in various social, political, and spiritual dimensions. Islam gave women the right to own property, inherit, choose a spouse and participate in community life.⁶⁷ However, as with the practice of slavery, the mistreatment of women did not disappear overnight. Many practices and beliefs from the pre-Islamic era remained deeply ingrained in society. Therefore, the Prophet's efforts to improve the condition of women were gradual and sustained, marking the beginning of a profound transformation that would take time to fully manifest in the lives of Muslims.

The background of al-Bukhārī's *ḥadīth* above, according to al-Aṣḫānī (d. 1038 CE)—a prominent scholar from the Shāfi'ī school—reflects Islam's efforts to reorganise the social order of Arab society, which was previously permissive of unethical behaviour, including adultery, which was rampant during the *Jāhiliyah* era.⁶⁸ In this context, it is not the increase in the status of women that is the cause of the emergence of ethical challenges, but the openness of interactions between men and women, which were previously irregular and without moral boundaries. Islam then came with values and rules to regulate social interactions in a more ethical and dignified manner, including emphasising the importance of the *ḥijāb*, the prohibition of men and women being alone without a close relative (*maḥram*), and the command to lower the gaze, to suppress the potential for moral violations in a society that is beginning to change.⁶⁹ This transformation reveals that the rise in the role of women in society is not the primary driver of deviation, but a component of the social dynamics that must be balanced with the ethical regulations established by Islam.

The term *fitna* in this *ḥadīth* does not imply that women are fundamentally a source of evil or a problem. Instead, it highlights the moral dilemmas that arise from gender interactions. This caution encourages men to be more vigilant in their interactions with women in a still-evolving society, where moral boundaries and social norms are being redefined.⁷⁰ In this societal framework, men are urged to protect themselves from actions that do not align with Islamic principles, such as crossing the boundaries of Shāri'a in their relationships with women. Consequently, this *ḥadīth* cautions men to uphold their ethical standards and conduct when engaging with women, while respecting the rights and freedoms afforded to women by Islam.

⁶⁶ Jennifer Knauss, *The Persistence of Patriarchy Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria* (Greenwood Press, 1987), 14.

⁶⁷ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 26.

⁶⁸ Abū al-Qāsim Ismā'īl ibn Muḥammad Al-Aṣḫānī, *Al-Taḥrīr Fī Sharḥ Muslim* [Editing in the Explanation of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim] (Dār Aṣṣpār, 2021), 619.

⁶⁹ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān* [The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Qur'ān], ed. Aḥmad Al-Birdūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsy, vol. 14 (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), 583.

⁷⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Qadāyā Al-Mar'ah Bayn Al-Taqālīd Al-Rākidah Wa Al-Wāfidah*, 71.

In today's increasingly open society, where men and women have enhanced access to education, job opportunities and social engagement, this *ḥadīth* must be interpreted in light of the moral challenges of such interactions. In a modern context, where gender equity issues are receiving more focus, a straightforward reading of this *ḥadīth* could easily be misconstrued as a rationale for restricting women's roles in society or viewing them as the source of moral issues. However, contemporary scholars highlight that this *ḥadīth* should not be wielded to undermine women's rights. Instead, it should be seen as a moral admonition for men to be mindful of their perceptions and actions and take responsibility for exercising self-control in their interactions with women. This is explained by Mohammad Hashim Kamali, who states that Islam gives ethical duties to men and women to uphold respectful interaction boundaries that are in line with religious principles.⁷¹

This view aligns with the thoughts of Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, who rejects the textualistic approach that detaches *ḥadīth* from the context and objectives of Shārī'a (*maqāṣid al-Shārī'a*). Within the framework of *maqāṣid*, Al-Būṭī emphasises that Islamic law exists to maintain the glory of humans as a whole, including women, and to create a dignified and harmonious social order. He criticises interpretations that one-sidedly blame women for moral corruption and emphasises that Islam views women as spiritual, intellectual and social partners for men in building a pious society. Therefore, according to Al-Būṭī, the responsibility to maintain manners and morality in relationships is not only imposed on women, but is also the responsibility of men, who must keep their views, intentions and behaviour aligned with Islamic principles.⁷² This view confirms that gender justice in Islam is rooted in mutual responsibility and respect for human nature.

Contemporary society necessitates collaboration between men and women across various aspects of life, including work environments, educational settings and community areas. In this regard, the *ḥadīth* is a reminder that, while interactions between genders are becoming more open, it is crucial for everyone to uphold moral and ethical standards. Essentially, this *ḥadīth* emphasises the importance of individuals' conduct and morality in fostering respectful and dignified relationships, rather than advocating for limiting women's mobility or making judgments about a gender. The representation of women in public sectors, such as politics, economics and academia, often encounters obstacles stemming from conservative viewpoints that perceive them as *fitna* or sources of temptation for men.⁷³ However, in today's context of gender equity, this perspective should no longer be applicable. The Qur'ān and teachings of the Prophet underscore the significance of shared responsibilities in upholding morality and ensuring fair treatment for men and women.⁷⁴ In a society increasingly centred on human rights

⁷¹ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Women in the Workplace: Shari'ah and Contemporary Perspectives," in *Economic Empowerment of Women in the Islamic World*, ed. Toseef Azid and Jennifer L. Ward-Batts, vol. 1, Advances in Research on Islamic Economics and Finance (World Scientific, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811212154_0006.

⁷² Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān Al-Būṭī, *Al-Mar'ah Bayn Ṭuḡhyān Al-Niẓām Al-Gharbī Wa Laṭā'if Al-Tashrī' Al-Rabbānī* [Women Between the Tyranny of the Western System and the Mercy of the Islamic Law] (Dār al-Fikr al-Ma'āṣir, 2019), 21.

⁷³ Aspinall, White, and Savirani, "Women's Political Representation in Indonesia," 24.

⁷⁴ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Mar'ah Bayn Ṭuḡhyān Al-Niẓām Al-Gharbī Wa Laṭā'if Al-Tasyrī' Al-Rabbānī*, 22.

and equity, this *ḥadīth* should emphasise the individual's duty to foster moral conduct, rather than be a justification for restricting women's freedoms.

Modern interpretations of the *ḥadīth* that women are a source of *fitna* need to be understood in proportion, considering the context of traditional scholarship and contemporary social realities. Many pre-modern scholars interpret this *ḥadīth* as a moral warning for men to guard themselves against temptation, emphasising individual responsibility for maintaining social ethics. In this context, the *ḥadīth* was not necessarily intended to discredit women inherently, but as a warning of the potential for temptation arising from intergender relations if not framed within Islamic values. Therefore, modern interpretations that emphasise gender equity, women's active participation in the public sphere, and equal moral responsibility between men and women are elaborations of ethical principles also found in classical scholarship. Thus, this approach is not entirely new or contrary to the tradition of Islamic interpretation, but represents a revitalisation of Islamic values in response to the challenges of the times. Therefore, in today's context, the *ḥadīth* concerning women as a source of *fitna* should be interpreted as a more comprehensive ethical caution, emphasising not just gender issues, but also individuals' social and moral duties to uphold balance and harmony within society.

CONCLUSION

This study presented a summary of the findings from thematic and contextual analyses of the *ḥadīth* that mentions women as a source of *fitna*, indicating a diverse spectrum of understanding among scholars. Thematically, this *ḥadīth* relates to the concept of *fitna* as a moral and spiritual test in the dynamics of intergender relations, rather than as a form of stigma against women. Contextually, this *ḥadīth* was a warning from the Prophet against the potential for moral decay if interactions between men and women are not maintained within the boundaries of Islamic ethics. The primary argument of this study emphasised that a more just and inclusive interpretative approach, which emphasises individual moral responsibility and social justice, is more relevant to the realities of modern society than a literal approach that limits women's roles. The main contribution of this study was not to offer a new interpretation, but to revive traditional pre-modern and modern interpretations that position these *ḥadīth* not as instruments of women's subordination, but as efforts to regulate human desires and maintain social harmony. This research demonstrated that such understanding aligns more closely with universal ethical values and contemporary principles of gender equity. However, the limitations of this research lie in the focus of the *ḥadīth* data studied—which does not yet cover the entire spectrum of *ḥadīth*—as well as the geographical and socio-cultural scope that is limited to certain contexts, so further studies are needed with an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach to obtain a more comprehensive and representative understanding of the response of Muslims to similar *ḥadīth* in various parts of the world.

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