

## Gender Analysis of Hadith on the Virtues of Women's *Shaf* in Congregational Prayer in the Modern Context

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### Abstract

*This article aims to examine how the hadith regarding women's shaf in congregational prayer can be analyzed through a gender perspective. The approach used is qualitative, focusing on descriptive-analytical methods, while the data analysis technique employed is content analysis with an emphasis on gender analysis. The findings of this study indicate that using a gender analysis allows the hadith to be understood in a way that does not discriminate against women and offers a more egalitarian perspective on the arrangement of men's and women's shaf. In the modern context, such rules are not perceived as discriminatory, and religious teachings can be detached from patriarchal imagery. This research recommends further exploration by academics and is expected to serve as an additional reference for studies on hadith related to women's and men's shaf in congregational prayer.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Hadith, Women, Shaf

### Abstrak

*Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana hadits tentang shaf sholat berjamaah perempuan dikaji menggunakan analisis gender. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan berfokus ke deskriptif analitis, sedangkan teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis isi dengan lebih fokus ke analisis gender. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa dengan menggunakan analisis gender maka hadis ini bisa dipahami tanpa mendiskriminasi perempuan dan menawarkan perspektif yang lebih egaliter*

*terkait susunan shaf perempuan dan laki-laki. Dalam konteks modern, aturan yang demikian tidak dinggap mendiskriminasi serta ajaran-ajaran agama akan lepas dari citra-citra yang patriarki. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan kepada kalangan akademisi untuk mengembangkan lebih jauh lagi. Diharapkan pula menjadi literatur tambahan terkait kajian hadis seputar shaf perempuan dan laki-laki dalam salat berjamaah.*

**Kata kunci:** Gender, Hadis, Perempuan, Shaf

## Introduction

The issue of gender differences often sparks debates, with the position of women in social spheres frequently becoming a compelling topic of discussion.<sup>1</sup> Before the advent of Islam, women faced dire conditions; the birth of a daughter was often considered shameful, leading to practices such as burying baby girls alive.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, historical records have proven that Islam never marginalized women, even in matters of career and participation in public spaces. During the Prophet's (PBUH) era, women were not only positioned as wives, companions, and complements to men but were also recognized as individuals with equal responsibilities and obligations before Allah (SWT).<sup>3</sup>

The arrangement of women's *shaf* in congregational prayer is one of the key topics in the discourse of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). A hadith that literally states the best *shaf* for women are the ones at the back has long served as a reference in determining the position of women in congregational prayer.<sup>4</sup> This normative understanding is often regarded as a final decision to be followed in various contexts, without considering the evolving dynamics of gender and society in contemporary times. With the growing collective awareness of justice and gender equality, the relevance and interpretation of this hadith in the modern context have been called into question. Is the arrangement of women's *shaf* in congregational prayer, as mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet, still relevant, given the significant changes in women's roles and participation in society?<sup>5</sup> Reexamining this hadith through a gender perspective has become increasingly urgent to understand whether this rule reflects the equitable and inclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Tika Nadila, Syarifah Mudrika, and Angriani Ramli, "Childfree Dalam Perspektif Hadis," *Al-Bukhari Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 5, no. 2 (2022).

<sup>2</sup> Rizki Anggraini, Muhammad Ghifari, and Abil Ash, "Promoting Wives' Rights From a Hadith Perspective Rizki," *Al-Bukhari Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 7, no. 1 (2024): 50–62.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Hasbulloh, Fathur Rozi, and Budi Ichwayudi, "Women's Leadership in The Views of Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī: Hermeneutical Analysis of The Hadith Narrated by Abū Bakrah," *Al-Bukhari Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 7, no. 1 (2024): 34–49.

<sup>4</sup> Abū Al-Husain Muslim bin Al-Hajjāj bin Muslīm, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslīm* (Turki: Dār Al-Ṭabāḥ Al-Āmirah, 1916), hal. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), hal. 85.

teachings of Islam or merely represents social conditions specific to a particular time and place.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the gender approach in Islamic studies plays a crucial role, as it not only seeks to understand texts from a critical perspective but also attempts to connect the texts with existing social realities.<sup>7</sup> Gender analysis is one method used to comprehend social realities. It is a technique for understanding and evaluating how roles, responsibilities, access, control, and benefits differ between men and women in social, cultural, economic, or political contexts. This approach aims to identify gender inequalities and develop strategies to address them, thereby fostering gender equality and justice.

Based on this, a gender analysis of the hadith regulating women's *shaf* in congregational prayer is relevant to address new challenges in fostering a more just and inclusive religious practice for everyone, regardless of gender. Empirical studies on women's rows have been extensively explored by academics, including Aulia Imani (2024), Moh. Sa'i Affan (2024), Yulianti Muthmainnah (2024), Muh. Ridwan (2023), Uswatun Hasanah (2015), Retno Suci Lestari (2024), and Susi Yanti (2023). However, studies specifically addressing women's *shaf* in the modern context using a gender approach remain limited among scholars. Previous research on related themes highlights several tendencies, including:

*First*, the blending of men's and women's *shaf* during both congregational obligatory prayers and Eid prayers, as practiced at the Al-Zaytun Islamic Boarding School.<sup>8,9</sup> *Second*, studies on the same theme discussing the legality of men's and women's *shaf* being parallel, but through comparisons of the opinions of different madhhab.<sup>10,11</sup> *Third*, research specifically employing a thematic approach,<sup>12</sup> serta . examining feminist perspectives on the concept of *sutrah* in prayer.<sup>13</sup> *Fourth*, broader research interpreting the concept of the best prayer for

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<sup>6</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), hal. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), hal. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Moh. Sa'i Affan, "Moderasi Beragama Sosial Distancing Shalat Idul Fitri Berdampingan Laki-Laki Perempuan Di Ponpes Al-Zaytun," *Jurnal Keislaman* Vol. 1, no. No. 1 (2024).

<sup>9</sup> Aulia Imani, "Analisis Kasus: Shaf Shalat Jama'ah Pria Dan Wanita Bercampur Di Al-Zaytun Dalam Perspektif Hadist," *Taqrib: Jaournal of Islamic Studies* Vol. 1, no. No. 2 (2024).

<sup>10</sup> Susi Yanti, "Hukum Shaf Perempuan Seajar Dengan Laki-Laki (Studi Perbandingan Mazhab Hanafi Dan Mazhab Syafi'i)" (UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Retno Suci Lestari, "Analisis Komparatif Empat Imam Mazhab Tentang Hukum Shaf Laki-Laki Seajar Dengan Shaf Perempuan Saat Shalat Berjamaah" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta., 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Uswatun Hasanah, *Perspektif Hadits Tentang Shaf Utama Dalam Sholat Berjamaah (Kajian Tematik Hadits)* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Muh. Ridwan, "Sutra Dalam Shalat: Pemahaman Kaum Feminis Terhadap Hadits Yang Menyetarakan Perempuan Dengan Hewan," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 3, no. 1 (2023).

women from its contextual perspective.<sup>14</sup> From these four tendencies in previous research, it is evident that a study focusing specifically on a gender analysis of the hadith about the primary *shaf* for women in congregational prayer within a modern context has not yet been conducted. To fill this gap, this study will explore the following questions: (1) how can the hadith on the virtues of women's *shaf* be described in the historical context of Islam? (2) how relevant is the hadith on the virtues of women's *shaf* to the principles of gender justice today? (3) how can a gender approach reinterpret the hadith on women's *shaf* to promote inclusive worship practices?

This research is based on the argument that the interpretation and implementation of the hadith on the virtues of women's *shaf* significantly influence daily worship practices and interactions within Muslim communities. Additionally, substantial changes have occurred in society, particularly regarding gender roles. By evaluating the relevance of this hadith in the modern context, this study aims to provide guidance that is more gender-equitable. Moreover, it seeks to bridge the gap between traditional understandings and contemporary practices, ensuring that religious interpretations remain adaptive to social changes.

Thus, this research is expected to contribute both empirically and practically. Empirically, it aims to enrich Islamic studies on religious practices, particularly women's prayer practices, by employing a more equitable gender analysis. This research is anticipated to serve as a reference and be further explored by other researchers interested in similar themes. Practically, it is hoped that this study can act as a guideline for implementing gender-equitable arrangements of *shaf* in congregational prayer.

This study uses a qualitative approach, specifically employing a descriptive-analytical method. This approach was chosen because it allows for a broader exploration of the hadith texts related to the virtues of women's *shaf* in congregational prayer and enables the interpretation of these texts through a gender lens and modern context. The primary data source for this research is the hadith texts related to the virtues of women's *shaf* in congregational prayer, taken from hadith books. Secondary data sources include academic literature relevant to the research theme. The data collection technique used is library research.

The collected data will be analyzed using content analysis, which will focus on examining the hadith texts related to the virtues of women's *shaf* by considering the historical context, the hadith's *matan*, and exploring various interpretations proposed by scholars. Gender analysis will be used to evaluate the

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<sup>14</sup> Yulianti Muthmainnah, "Penafsiran Sholat Terbaik Bagi Perempuan, Di Masjid/Mushalah Ataukah Rumah: Ijtihad, Kejumudan Dan Inovasi," *Jurnal Hawa: Studi Pengarus Utamaan Gender Dan Anak* 6, no. 1 (2024).

representation and roles of women mentioned in the hadith texts. The researcher will examine potential gender bias in the interpretation of these hadiths and assess their relevance to the concept of gender equality in Islam.

### Description of the Hadith on the Virtues of Women's *Shaf* in the Historical Context of Islam

The hadith regarding the virtues of women's *shaf*, as referred to in this study, can be found in various collections of hadith, including *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan Abu Dawud*,<sup>15</sup> *Jâmi' Al-Tirmizî*,<sup>16</sup> *Sunan Al-Nasâi*,<sup>17</sup> *Sunan `Ibn Mâjah*,<sup>18</sup> *Musnad Al-Dârimî*,<sup>19</sup> and *Musnad `Aḥmâd*.<sup>20</sup> The literal wording of the hadith in *Sahih Muslim* is as follows:

حدثنا زهير بن حرب، حدثنا جرير، حدثنا سهيل، عن أبيه، عن أبي هريرة قال: قال رسول الله  
(خير صفوف الرجال اولها وشرها آخرها، وخير صفوف النساء آخرها وشرها اولها).

*"Zuhair ibn Harb narrated to us, Jarir narrated to us, from Suhail, from his father, from Abu Huraira, who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: The best shaf for men is the first, and the worst shaf is the last, while the best shaf for women is the last, and the worst shaf is the first."*<sup>21</sup>

The hadith discussing the *shaf* of men and women above has three *syâhid*: Jabir Ibn `Abd Allah, Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri, and Jabir. Based on the study of *sanad*, it is found that the *sanad* of this hadith is uninterrupted, without any *syadz* or *illat*, all the narrators are just (*`adil*) and *dhabit*, and their transmission is recognized for its reliability. The first narrator, `Abû Hurairah, was a companion of the Prophet, specifically, regarding the narrators among the companions, the majority of scholars agree that all companions are considered just (*adil*).<sup>22</sup> The second narrator, `Abû Salih al-Dzakwani, was a narrator who was born during the

<sup>15</sup> `Abû Dâwud Sulaimân `ibn `Asy'aş, *Sunan `Abî Dawûd*, Jilid II (Beirut: Maktabah Al-Ashriyah, n.d.), hal. 181.

<sup>16</sup> `Abû `Isâ Muḥammad `ibn `Isâ Al-Tirmidzî, *Sunan Al-Tirmidzî*, Jilid I (Beirut: Dar Al-Garb Al-Islam, 1996), hal. 263.

<sup>17</sup> `Abû `Abd Al-Raḥman `ibn Syu'aib Al-Nasâ'i, *Sunan Al-Nasâ'i Al-Mujtabâ*, Jilid II (Damaskus: Dar Al-Risalah Alamiyah, 2018), hal. 165.

<sup>18</sup> `Ibn Mâjah `Abû `Abd Allah Muḥammad `Ibn Yâzîd, *Sunan `Ibn Mâjah*, Jilid I (Kairo: Dar Ihya Al-Kutub Al-Arabiyyah, n.d.), hal. 319.

<sup>19</sup> Abû Muḥammad `Abd Allah bin `Abd Al-Raḥmân, *Musnad Al-Dârimî Al-Ma'rûf Bi Sunan Al-Dârimî* Jilid II (Arab Saudi: Dar al-Mughni li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi, 2000), hal. 807.

<sup>20</sup> Aḥmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imâm Aḥmad Bin Hanbal*, Jilid II (Beirut: Muassasat Al-Risalah, 2001), hal. 320.

<sup>21</sup> Abû Al-Husain Muslim bin Al-Hajjâj bin Muslîm, *Ṣaḥîh Musîm*, Jilid II, hal. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Mohammad Nor Ichwan, *Studi Ilmu Hadis* (Semarang: Rasail, 2007), hal. 125.

caliphate of 'Umar, spent much time with 'Abû Huraira, and is regarded as *tsiqqah*.<sup>23</sup>

The third narrator is Suhail 'ibn 'Abî Shâlih, who is considered *tsiqqah*, according to Aḥmad 'ibn Hanbal, the hadith narrated by Suhail 'ibn 'Abî Shâlih is free from issues.<sup>24</sup> The fourth narrator is Jarîr 'ibn 'Abd al-Hamîd 'ibn Jarîr bin Qurṭ, who is also regarded as *tsiqqah*,<sup>25</sup> likewise Zuhair 'ibn Harbin is considered *tsiqah*, *hafîdz*, and *muhaddits*. He received hadith, including from Jarîr 'ibn 'Abd al-Hamîd 'ibn Jarîr bin Qurṭ, and his narrations are found in collections by Al-Bukhârî, Muslim, 'Abû Dâwûd, 'Ibn Mâjah, and Al-Nasâ'î.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the explanation above, if we refer to the definition of hadith *sahih* in *Al-Manzhûmah Al-Bayqûniyya* <sup>27</sup>, the hadith under review qualifies as *sahih* in terms of its quality. It is evident that while there are differences in the *sanad*, all three chains converge at Suhail ibn Abi Shalih, who is considered *muttafaq* in hadith transmission, while the *maqta al-isnad* includes Jarir, Khalid, and Ismail ibn Zakariya.

"The best row for men is the first," as mentioned in the hadith above, refers to the *shaf* closest to the imam. The term '*first*' can refer to the *shaf* immediately behind the imam, without any barrier such as a mihrab. Some scholars also interpret the '*first*' *shaf* as referring to the *shaf* occupied by those who arrive earliest at the mosque, even if they are in the last *shaf*. However, according to Imam An-Nawawi, the most authentic view is the first interpretation, where '*first*' refers to the *shaf* closest to the imam.<sup>28</sup>

The "*worst*" *shaf*, as mentioned in the hadith, refers to the *shaf* that receives the least amount of goodness and reward.<sup>29</sup> The reason the best *shaf* for men is the first one is because it is closest to the imam, allowing the worshippers to observe his movements, hear his recitations, and follow his actions more easily. The worst *shaf* for men is considered the opposite of the first *shaf*, as it is the furthest from the imam.<sup>30</sup> Al-Darimi has narrated with a *shahih sanad* that the Prophet (peace be upon him) would seek forgiveness for the first *shaf* three times

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<sup>23</sup> Muhammad 'ibn 'Aḥmad bin Utsmân al-Dzahabî Syams al-Dîn, *Sîr A'lâm Al-Nubalâ'î* Jilid V (Beirut: Maktabah Al-Risalah, 1985), hal 36.

<sup>24</sup> Jamâl Al-Dîn 'Abû Al-Hajjâj Yusûf Al-Mizzî, *Tahzîb Al-Kamâl fî Asmâ' Al-Rijâl*, Jilid XII (Beirut: Maktabah Al-Risalah, 1992), hal. 226-227.

<sup>25</sup> Syams al-Dîn, *Sîr A'lâm Al-Nubalâ'î*, Jilid IX, hal 13.

<sup>26</sup> Syams al-Dîn, *Sîr A'lâm Al-Nubalâ'î*, Jilid XI, hal. 189.

<sup>27</sup> 'Umar 'ibn Muḥammad Futuḥ Al-Bayqûnî, *Manzhûmah Al-Bayqûniyyah* (t.tp: Dar al-Mughni li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1999), hal. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Mûsa Syâhîn Lâsyîn, *Fath Al-Mun'im Syarh Shahîh Muslim* (Dâr Al-Syurûq, 2002), hal. 601.

<sup>29</sup> Safi Al-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Minnat Al-Mun'im Fi Sharh Muslim* (Riyadh: Dâr Al-Salâm li Al-Nasyr wa Al-Tawzi', 1999), 291.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Al-Amîn ibn Abd Allah Al-Uramî Al-A'lawî Al-Hararî, *Al-Kawkab Al-Wahhaj Syarh Shahîh Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjâj* (t.tp: Dâr Al-Minhaj, 2009), hal. 249.

and for the second *shaf* once. Furthermore, Al-Tabarani has narrated with a *shahih sanad* that indeed, Allah (SWT) and the angels send blessings upon the first *shaf*.<sup>31</sup>

For women, “*the best shaf is considered to be the last one*”. The explanation of “*the best*” here means the *shaf* that earns the most reward and has the highest status. Ibn Al-Malik stated that since women have a lower status than men, the last *shaf* is more appropriate for their position<sup>32</sup>. The hadith mentioned applies when men and women pray together in the same mosque without any barrier between them,<sup>33</sup> however, if the context involves women praying separately from men, then their best *shaf* would be the first, and the last *shaf* would be the worst.<sup>34</sup>

Another reason why men are preferred to be in the first *shaf* and women in the last *shaf* is to avoid *fitnah* (temptation) and the concern of attraction between the sexes.<sup>35</sup> The hadith regarding the virtues of men's and women's *shaf* does not indicate that it is forbidden for men to be in the last *shaf* and women in the first *shaf*, but it is considered an act of neglecting what is better or more virtuous.<sup>36</sup>

Syam al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khatîb al-Syarbîni used this hadith to explain the verses of QS. Al-Hijr/15:24-25. The phrase *al-mustaqdimîn* (those who are first) can be interpreted as those who hasten in prayer and place themselves in the front *shaf*, while *al-musta'khirîn* (those who are last) refers to those who choose to be in the back *shaf*. There are two opinions regarding the *asbab al-nuzul* of QS. Al-Hijr/15:24-25. *First*, there was a beautiful woman was praying behind the Prophet (peace be upon him), and some men tried to move forward to the front *shaf* so they would not be seen by her, while others moved backward to the last *shaf*. When those who moved back to the rear *shaf* went into *rukû*, they saw the woman from beneath their armpits. The Prophet (peace be upon him) then spoke regarding this situation.

*Second*, the Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraged filling the front *shaf* in prayer, so many people made efforts to get closer to him. Some companions, even those who lived far from the mosque, intended to sell their homes and buy houses closer to the mosque. This verse was revealed in response to that

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<sup>31</sup> Muhammad ibn ‘Alî ibn Âdam Al-Aşyûbî, *Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥîṭ Al-Tajâj Fî Syarḥ Shahîḥ Al-Imâm Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjâj* (Riyadh: Dâr Ibn Jauzî, 2014), hal. 275.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Hararî, *Al-Kawkab Al-Wahhaj Syarḥ Shahîḥ Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjâj*, hal. 249.

<sup>33</sup> Abû Zakariyâ Muhyî Al-Dîn ibn Syaraf Al-Nawawî, *Al-Majmu’ Syarḥ Al-Muḥaṣṣab* (Kairo: Idârah Al-ṭaba’ah Al-Munîriyah, 1928), hal. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Mûsa Syâhîn Lâsyîn, *Fath Al-Mun’im Syarḥ Shahîḥ Muslim*, hal. 602.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Abd Al-Azîz ibn ‘Abd Allah Al-Râjhî, *Tawfîq Al-Rabb Al-Mun’im Bisyarḥ Shahîḥ Al-Imâm Muslim* (t.tp: Markaz ‘Abd Al-Azîz ibn Abd Allah Al-Râjhî, 2018), hal. 97.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Hararî, *Al-Kawkab Al-Wahhaj Syarḥ Shahîḥ Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjâj*, hal. 250.

situation.<sup>37</sup> The connection between the *asbab al-nuzul* of QS. Al-Hijr/15:24-25 and the hadith discussed in this study is significant, as both address the issue of positions in congregational prayer. The link between the verse and the hadith can be aligned, as both aim to prevent *fitnah* and the potential attraction between men and women.

The separation of *shaf* in prayer is part of the social and cultural norms of the time and is not a judgment on the value of women. Rather, it was a practical adjustment to the social conditions at that time. In a social context, this rule can be understood as part of the social norms that were built in the society when the hadith was narrated, where the division of space often reflected institutionalized gender differences. However, with the development of thinking on gender equality and a deeper understanding of Islamic principles of justice, this rule can be reinterpreted to avoid potential discrimination.

### **The Relevance of the Hadith on the Virtue of Women's *Shaf* with the Principles of Gender Justice**

The above hadith, as previously mentioned, discusses the arrangement of *shaf* in congregational prayers in the mosque, indicating that the best *shaf* for men is the first, while for women, it is the last. From a gender perspective, we cannot ignore the social and historical context in which this hadith was articulated, as explained earlier. Based on this, we can assess that this rule reflects the social and cultural norms of that time, where the separation of *shaf* between men and women was applied to maintain order and focus during prayer.

Discussing about gender justice and equality, we cannot separate it from its principles, which are providing rights and treatment that are fair based on the specific needs and context of individuals. Granting rights and fair treatment to individuals, if we reflect on the socio-historical context of the Arab society 14 centuries ago, the concept of gender equality and justice had not been voiced at all. However, Islam came to elevate the status of women toward justice and equality, as seen from the concept of monotheism and the importance of moral values preached by Allah's messenger through the Prophet.

One thing that cannot be denied is that times are changing, and the equality and justice that Islam established 14 centuries ago are, according to some, no longer considered just and equal, and even marginalize women. In this case, it is not Islam itself that should be blamed, but rather the way we view the religion that needs to be changed. This is because, in reality, biases in the interpretation of

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<sup>37</sup> Syamsu Al-Dîn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Khatîb Al-Syarbîni, *Al-Sirâj Al-Munîr Fî Al-I'ânah 'Alâ Ma'Rifah Ba'dh Ma'ânî Kalâm Rabbinâ Al-Ḥakim Al-Khabîr* (Kairo: Maṭba'ah Bûlaq (Al-Amîriyyah), 1868), hal. 199.



religious texts are evident. The factors that contribute to the emergence of these biased interpretations cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context surrounding the interpreters. Therefore, it is important to examine the relevance of this hadith in relation to the principles of gender equality and justice.

The main principle of gender equality and justice is the equal access to rights and opportunities.<sup>38</sup> When this principle is juxtaposed with the hadith mentioned above, the question arises: why is the last row for women considered the most preferred? Shouldn't women also want to hear and see clearly the movements of the imam, just as men are placed in the front *shaf* for its importance?

The researcher believes that placing women in the last *shaf* as the most preferred *shaf*, with the rationale of avoiding *fitnah* and attraction or because women's status is considered lower than men's, is an argument that marginalizes women. As it is widely understood, women are not the source of *fitnah*,<sup>39</sup> and viewing women as inferior to men is an argument that is irrelevant to the egalitarian values often emphasized by Islam.

Based on the above, the relevance of gender principles to the hadith being examined lies in the disparity of access between women and men, caused by the perception that women are of lower status and are seen as beings capable of causing temptation and disrupting the focus of congregational prayer. Such discriminatory views towards women are, of course, in stark contrast to the teachings of Islam, which came to elevate the status of women.<sup>40</sup>

### **Gender Perspective Analysis of the Hadith on the Virtue of Women's *Shaf* in the Modern Era**

Gender analysis, similar to other analytical theories such as class analysis, cultural analysis, and discourse analysis, serves as a tool to understand reality. As a theory, the primary task of gender analysis is to provide meaning to conceptions, assumptions, ideologies, and practices of new relationships between men and women and their implications for a more universal life—perspectives often overlooked by other theories or analyses.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, using this analysis offers an alternative way to view matters from a different standpoint. This analysis will be employed to interpret the following hadith text:

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<sup>38</sup> Musdah Mulia, *Ensiklopedia Muslimah Reformis; Pokok-Pokok Pemikiran Untuk Reinterpretasi Dan Aksi* (Tangerang Selatan: Penerbit Baca, 2020), hal. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Zahrul Mubara and Mazani Hanafiah, "Konseptual *Fitnah* Perempuan," *Jurnal Al-Nadhair* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1.

<sup>40</sup> Tajamul Ahmad Sheikh, "Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Islamic Text (Qur'an and Hadith)," *Insight Islamicus* 19, no. 2 (2018): hal. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), hal. xii.

حدثنا زهير بن حرب، حدثنا جرير، حدثنا سهيل، عن أبيه، عن أبي هريرة قال: قل رسول الله  
(خير صفوف الرجال اولها وشرها آخرها، وخير صفوف النساء آخرها وشرها اولها).

*"Zuhair ibn Harb narrated to us, Jarir narrated to us, from Suhail, from his father, from Abu Huraira, who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: 'The best shaf for men are the first, and the worst are the last. The best shaf for women are the last, and the worst are the first.'"*<sup>42</sup>

When read superficially, this hadith does not appear to address specific gender roles. However, upon deeper analysis, it reveals a depiction of the relationship between men and women, particularly within a place of worship (the mosque) and in the arrangement of *shaf* for men and women during congregational prayer. Referring to the interpretation of the hadith as discussed earlier, which explains the reasons why men are given precedence in the first *shaf* while women are prioritized in the last *shaf*, a gender analysis reveals elements of subordination and stereotypes against women. Subordination is a form of injustice experienced by women based on gender differences, where one gender is perceived as less significant or less important.<sup>43</sup>

The subordination found in the interpretation of this hadith can be observed in the reasoning that women's position is deemed lower than men's, making the back *shaf* more appropriate for them. On the other hand, stereotyping, as a form of gender injustice, occurs when negative labels are attached to one gender.<sup>44</sup> In the context of this hadith's interpretation, stereotyping is evident in the assertion that women are prioritized in the back rows to avoid the potential for *fitnah*. As we understand, before the arrival of Islam, women were often associated with being the cause of *fitnah*.

The understanding that women hold a lower position than men and are beings capable of causing *fitnah* reflects a discriminatory mindset. Therefore, such views should be minimized by implementing a new arrangement of prayer *shaf*. However, this does not mean mixing the *shaf* of men and women during prayer. Instead, it focuses on aligning the *shaf* of both genders while still maintaining separation using curtains, screens, or other dividers, as has increasingly been implemented in many mosques today.

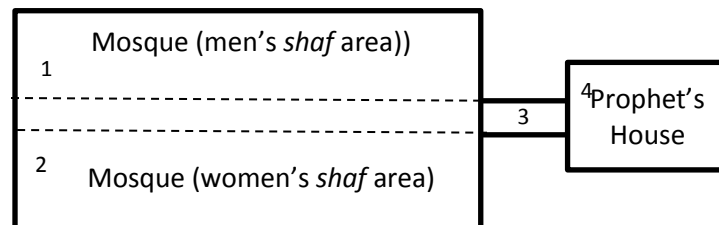
A significant example can be observed in the implementation at the Istiqlal Mosque, the largest mosque in Southeast Asia and the national mosque of Indonesia. The arrangement of *shaf* for men and women differs from what is mentioned in the hadith, as it aligns men and women in one large hall while still maintaining separation through *shaf* dividers. The rationale behind this, as stated

<sup>42</sup> Abû Al-Husain Muslim bin Al-Hajjâj bin Muslîm, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslîm*, hal. 32.

<sup>43</sup> Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial*, hal. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial*, hal 13.

by the Grand Imam, Nasaruddin Umar, is that the context today is no longer the same as the social context when the hadith was spoken. He provides a historical explanation for why the hadith reads as it does, pointing to the layout of the Prophet's house at that time as follow:<sup>45</sup>



The image labeled with code number one depicts the position of the men's *shaf* located at the front of the mosque. Meanwhile, the image labeled with code number two illustrates the women's *shaf* situated at the back of the mosque. The dashed line connecting to the image labeled with code number three, which separates the men's and women's *shaf*, represents the pathway leading to the house of the Prophet. The image labeled with code number four represents the house of the Prophet.

Based on the image above, it can be seen that the men's and women's *shaf* are separated by the path leading to the Prophet's house. This is also the reason why the men's *shaf* is considered superior at the front, as it is farther from the path, which is a place of frequent movement. Similarly, the women's best *shaf* is at the back, as it is farther from the path, reducing the possibility of distractions and preserving the focus of the prayer, which could be affected by people passing towards the Prophet's house.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, the reasoning that positions women as inferior and a source of *fitnah* needs to be reconsidered in order to find arguments that are not discriminatory towards any gender, especially women. Furthermore, a servant who sets their intention to go to the mosque to seek closeness to Allah SWT. will surely strive to earn His pleasure, one of which is by not placing any gender in a position that could be seen as a source of *fitnah*.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion and analysis, it can be concluded that the hadith regarding the virtue of the women's *shaf* in congregational prayers was mentioned in a time when women's status was still influenced by a patriarchal culture, where they were considered inferior to men and regarded as a source of *fitnah*. This has

<sup>45</sup> Nasaruddin Umar, *Perkuliah Pendidikan Kader Ulama Perempuan Masjid Istiqlal*, 05 Juli 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Nasaruddin Umar, *Perkuliah Pendidikan Kader Ulama Perempuan Masjid Istiqlal*, 05 Juli 2024.

affected the interpretation of the hadith, and in the present era, such views are considered discriminatory toward women. Therefore, it can be said that the ideal position for women in the modern context is to align their *shaf* with the men's, but with a separation using a hijab (barrier).

Based on this, this paper aims to correct such views by offering a more egalitarian perspective that does not discriminate against any gender. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. However, this study has limitations, particularly in its analysis, which remains too general and does not focus on a specific theory proposed by a prominent figure. Therefore, the researcher recommends that future studies analyze this hadith using a more specific gender analysis.

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