

# The Relationship Between Text and Context in Hadith Studies: The Theory of *Asbāb al-Wurūd* and its Significance in Understanding Hadith

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## Abstract

Understanding ḥadīth requires more than a literal reading of the text; it must also take into account the historical, social, cultural, and linguistic contexts behind the Prophet Muhammad's sayings. The theory of *asbāb al-wurūd* serves as a critical approach in ḥadīth studies, as it helps to uncover the underlying reasons or circumstances surrounding a particular prophetic statement. Through a qualitative library-based research method, this study explores the relationship between text and context in ḥadīth, and highlights the significance of *asbāb al-wurūd* in preventing misinterpretation and deepening the understanding of Islamic legal rulings. The findings reveal that *asbāb al-wurūd* not only clarifies the meaning of a ḥadīth more accurately but also provides a dynamic, inclusive, and contextually grounded interpretation aligned with the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Nevertheless, this approach faces certain limitations, particularly when the context is not explicitly recorded or relies on weak chains of narration. Therefore, methodological caution and a critical approach are essential in applying the *asbāb al-wurūd* theory in contemporary ḥadīth scholarship.

**Keywords:** *Ḥadīth, Asbāb al-Wurūd, Contextual Interpretation, Legal Derivation (Istinbāt al-Ḥukm)*

## Introduction

Ḥadīth, as the second source of Islamic law, holds a central position in the formation of *sharī'ah*, Islamic thought, and guidance for the lives of Muslims. However, understanding ḥadīth cannot be achieved solely through a literal reading of the text. Ḥadīth possesses historical and situational dimensions that are closely linked to the context in which the sayings were delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon

him). Therefore, a contextual approach is required to comprehend ḥadīth, one of which is through the theory of *asbāb al-wurūd*. Because, a comprehensive understanding of Ḥadīth, with their narrative background in Islamic tradition, would require the application of the principle of *asbāb al-wurūd* (discerning the specific circumstances for the reason or purpose of revealing Ḥadīth), an approach which gives detailed information about narrated Ḥadīth.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of *asbāb al-wurūd* is a crucial method in ḥadīth studies that emphasizes the background or reasons behind the emergence of a ḥadīth. This concept is similar to *asbāb al-nuzūl* in tafsir studies, which examines the background of Qur'anic revelations. By understanding *asbāb al-wurūd*, a ḥadīth scholar can interpret the meaning of ḥadīth more accurately, fairly, and in alignment with the values inherent in Islam.

*Asbāb al-wurūd*, meaning the causes of a ḥadīth's occurrence, refers to events or situations that prompted the Prophet to speak a particular ḥadīth. This knowledge is key to understanding the context and legal implications contained within a ḥadīth <sup>2</sup>. Another definition states:

علم يبحث فيه عن الأسباب الداعية إلى ذكر رسول الله -صلى الله عليه وسلم- الحديث أولاً, وهذا السبب قد يكون سؤالاً, وقد يكون قصة, وقد تكون حادثة

This refers to the science that investigates the causes that prompted the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to narrate a ḥadīth. These causes may include questions, stories, or incidents, which led the Prophet to respond through a ḥadīth<sup>3</sup>

According to Muḥammad Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb, understanding *asbāb al-wurūd* helps the Muslim community correctly comprehend the intended meaning of a ḥadīth, determine whether its meaning is general or specific, and grasp its social, political, and historical context<sup>4</sup>. From this, it can be concluded that the textual content of ḥadīth is

<sup>1</sup> Muhamad Rozaimi Ramle and Miftachul Huda, 'Between Text and Context: Understanding Ḥadīth through Asbab al Wurud', *Religions*, 13.2 (2022), p. 92 (p. 1), doi:10.3390/rel13020092.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Suyuti, *Tadrib Al-Rāwī Fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī* (Dar Ihya al Kutub al Arobiyah, 2002), p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Abu Syuhbah, *كتاب الوسيط في علوم ومصطلح الحديث* (Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1977), p. 466.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Ajjaj Al Khatib, *Uṣūl Al-Ḥadīth: 'Ulūmuḥu Wa Muṣṭalaḥuḥu* (Daar El-Fikr Dimasyq, 1989).

dynamic. That is, in certain conditions, the interpretation of a ḥadīth may be adjusted to suit the context faced by the ummah, considering that the Prophet himself spoke in response to contextual problems, thus making the ḥadīth a form of answer, solution, or religious education for his followers. As stated by Imām al-Shāṭibī:

أَنَّ وَضْعَ الشَّرَائِعِ إِنَّمَا هُوَ لِمَصَالِحِ الْعِبَادِ فِي الْعَالِجِ وَالْآجِلِ مَعًا

*"Indeed, the establishment of shari'ah is solely for the benefit of the servants in both this world and the hereafter."*<sup>5</sup>

Hence, every ḥadīth has a purpose and a meaning that can be interpreted (reinterpreted) through the approach of *asbāb al-wurūd*. In terms of legal analogy (*qiyās*), *asbāb al-wurūd* provides a picture of the problem or *taṣwīr al-mas'alah* that can serve as the legal basis for similar issues, from which legal rulings (*istinbāṭ al-ḥukm*) can be derived according to contemporary contexts.

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to explore in greater depth how the relationship between text and context operates in ḥadīth studies and to highlight the significance of the *asbāb al-wurūd* theory in uncovering the meaning of ḥadīth more profoundly and contextually. Although the contextual approach to the understanding of ḥadīth has long been recognized within the Islamic scholarly tradition, academic debate continues regarding the extent to which *asbāb al-wurūd* can function as a systematic methodological instrument in ḥadīth interpretation. Some studies tend to treat it merely as supplementary historical information, while others employ it normatively without a clear methodological framework. Therefore, this research departs from an academic problem, namely the absence of a comprehensive formulation of the methodological role of *asbāb al-wurūd* in mediating the relationship between the ḥadīth text and its socio-historical context.

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing a library-based research approach, which is commonly used in normative, textual, and historical studies within Islamic scholarship. Library research is understood as a systematic method of collecting, evaluating, and interpreting written sources in order to construct conceptual and analytical insights rather than empirical generalizations. In the context

<sup>5</sup> Abu Ishaq Ibrhm ibn Msá Al-Shatibi, with Robarts - University of Toronto, *Al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-shari'ah* (Misr Matba'at al maktabah al-tujariyah, 1920), pp. 9-10 <<http://archive.org/details/almuwafaqatfiusu01shibuoft>> [accessed 24 June 2025].

of ḥadīth studies, this approach is particularly relevant because it allows for in-depth engagement with classical texts (*kutub al-ḥadīth* and *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*) as well as contemporary scholarly discussions concerning interpretation and methodology.

Data collection is conducted through documentation techniques, including close reading, note-taking, and thematic classification of materials drawn from primary sources—such as canonical ḥadīth collections and classical works on *asbāb al-wurūd*—and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and academic monographs. The selection of data follows purposive criteria, focusing exclusively on ḥadīths that explicitly mention or are historically known to possess identifiable *asbāb al-wurūd*. This selective process is intended to ensure analytical relevance and methodological consistency.

The analytical procedure consists of several stages. First, the selected ḥadīths are examined textually by analyzing their *matn* to identify key legal, ethical, or moral themes. Second, the contextual background (*asbāb al-wurūd*) of each ḥadīth is reconstructed based on reliable historical reports and classical commentaries. Third, a descriptive-analytical and interpretive approach is applied to explore the relationship between the textual meaning and its contextual circumstances, highlighting how context shapes, limits, or specifies the intended meaning of the ḥadīth. Finally, the study compares interpretations derived from purely textual readings with those informed by contextual analysis in order to demonstrate the significance of *asbāb al-wurūd* for achieving more accurate and proportionate understandings.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, data validation is carried out through triangulation, which involves cross-checking interpretations across multiple sources and scholarly perspectives. Source criticism is also applied, particularly when consulting classical texts, to assess their authenticity, authority, and relevance. Through this methodological framework, the study aims to demonstrate that integrating textual and contextual analysis constitutes a rigorous and academically sound approach to ḥadīth interpretation.

Studies on *asbāb al-wurūd* of ḥadīth have been undertaken by several scholars. For instance, Misrawi (2007), in *Membumikan Islam Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*, emphasizes that a contextual understanding of ḥadīth is crucial to avoid extreme interpretations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Membumikan Islam Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*. (The Wahid Institute, 2007).

Hasan Hanafi<sup>7</sup> argues that a contextual approach to ḥadīth is necessary to reconstruct an Islamic understanding that is relevant to the modern era. However, many studies have not explicitly addressed the epistemological implications of *asbāb al-wurūd*, particularly in relation to the interplay between text and context.

Within the historical framework of ḥadīth, Fazlur Rahman<sup>8</sup>, criticizes approaches that rely solely on textualism in ḥadīth studies. Rahman advocates for a historical understanding of ḥadīth in order to uncover its universal moral message from the time it was first uttered. His thought reflects a more open and dynamic engagement with ḥadīth. Similarly, Harun Nasution emphasizes the importance of rational approaches in understanding religion, including ḥadīth<sup>9</sup>.

A related study was conducted by Fatimah, who compared the thoughts of two prominent scholars, M. Syuhudi and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī. Her comparison concludes that both scholars prioritize the role of *asbāb al-wurūd* as a foundation for a more dynamic interpretation of ḥadīth. The main difference lies in how they articulate and elaborate their arguments. M. Syuhudi categorizes ḥadīth into three types: universal, temporal, and local. Al-Qaraḍāwī, on the other hand, emphasizes the surrounding conditions of the ḥadīth—where, for what purpose, and for whom it was spoken—and distinguishes between specific and general causes, as well as temporary, permanent, partial, and total meanings<sup>10</sup>.

Although the literature addressing *asbāb al-wurūd* and contextual approaches in understanding ḥadīth is considerable, few studies have systematically examined the methodological link between *asbāb al-wurūd* and the relational understanding of text and context. In particular, there is a lack of analysis that explicitly connects *asbāb al-wurūd* theory to epistemological and methodological perspectives in ḥadīth interpretation. Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the contribution of *asbāb al-wurūd* theory in clarifying the relationship between ḥadīth

<sup>7</sup> *Dialog Islam-Barat* (Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), pp. 45–50.

<sup>8</sup> *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Harun Nasution, *Akal dan Wahyu Dalam Islam* (UI Press, 2002), pp. 45–50.

<sup>10</sup> Siti Fatimah, *Metode Pemahaman Hadits Nabi Dengan Mempertimbangkan Asbabul Wurud (Studi Komparasi Pemikiran Yusuf al-Qaradhawi Dan M. Syuhudi Ismail)*, 2009 <<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/167b2fbe669c28646123aa365c31da5023c2bf1f>>.

texts and their historical contexts, as well as its practical significance in holistic ḥadīth understanding.

This study offers novelty at both the methodological and epistemological levels in ḥadīth studies. First, rather than merely reiterating the classical consensus that ḥadīth must be understood contextually, this article explicitly positions *asbāb al-wurūd* as a critical methodological instrument for managing the dialectical relationship between the normative text of ḥadīth and the socio-historical dynamics underlying it. Accordingly, *asbāb al-wurūd* is not treated merely as supplementary historical data, but as an analytical tool that functions to guide the proportional application of ḥadīth meanings.

Second, this research formulates a typology of the functions of *asbāb al-wurūd* in ḥadīth interpretation, encompassing: (1) a clarificatory function (explaining the circumstances surrounding the emergence of a ḥadīth), (2) a limitative function (restricting the applicability of the generality of the wording), and (3) a contextual-transformative function (mediating prophetic messages in relation to social change). This typology enriches ḥadīth studies, which have hitherto tended to emphasize descriptive-historical aspects without a systematic methodological formulation.

Third, this article contributes to contemporary discourse by linking classical *asbāb al-wurūd* with modern approaches to ḥadīth hermeneutics as developed in recent academic scholarship. Through this approach, the study seeks to fill a research gap between the tradition of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth* and contemporary methodological debates concerning textuality, context, and the authority of ḥadīth meaning.

### The Relationship Between Text and Context in Ḥadīth Studies

In general, ḥadīth texts consist of two primary components: the *isnād* (chain of transmission) and the *matn* (text or content of the ḥadīth). The *matn* of a ḥadīth does not stand alone; its understanding is intrinsically tied to temporal dimensions, social space, community conditions, and the specific circumstances at the time the Prophet delivered the saying. This relationship is essential to examine so that interpretation does not become reduced to a literal or narrow meaning. As Fazlur Rahman<sup>11</sup> assert, “The correct understanding of hadith requires locating it within the socio-historical

<sup>11</sup> *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, p. 6.

*setting of the Prophet's time; otherwise, it risks being misused or misapplied*". According to Rahman, a proper understanding of ḥadīth requires positioning it within the socio-historical context of the Prophet's era; otherwise, it may be misinterpreted or misapplied.

The *asbāb al-wurūd* approach thus becomes essential because contemporary ḥadīth studies are no longer confined to assessing the validity of the *isnād* and the authenticity of the *matn*, but also involve understanding the meaning and intent of the ḥadīth more comprehensively and dynamically. The development of knowledge demands a more rational approach, including the exploration of the social, cultural, political, and psychological contexts surrounding a ḥadīth's utterance.

Historical context refers to the events or situations occurring at the time the ḥadīth was spoken. Understanding this context facilitates insight into the reasons and underlying motivations for the ḥadīth, making it a useful reference for contemporary application. Social and cultural contexts influence the intent of the ḥadīth, as many ḥadīths were responses to the prevailing societal conditions. These conditions are inherently situational and particular; thus, many ḥadīths may be interpreted in light of the evolving social and cultural contexts of today's Muslim communities, therefore, contextual understanding is the most reliable approach to understanding the hadith.<sup>12</sup>

Psychological and personal factors also play a role—particularly regarding the companions who received the ḥadīth. Some ḥadīths were directed at individual issues and should not be generalized without considering these psychological distinctions. Another important element is the linguistic style of the ḥadīth. Not all ḥadīths were delivered in formal or literal language; sometimes the Prophet used metaphors, softened expressions, or simplified speech with multilayered meanings suitable for his audience. Therefore, understanding context through the *asbāb al-wurūd* approach is crucial to prevent misinterpretation that may arise when ḥadīths are interpreted literally without acknowledging their background.

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<sup>12</sup> Wasman Wasman, Mesraini Mesraini, and Suwendi Suwendi, 'A Critical Approach to Prophetic Traditions: Contextual Criticism in Understanding Hadith', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 61.1 (2023), pp. 1–17 (p. 13), doi:10.14421/ajis.2023.611.1-17.



## The Theory of *Asbāb al-Wurūd*: Definition and Its Role

*Asbāb al-wurūd* is a compound phrase structured in an *idāfah* (genitive) construction derived from the words *asbāb* (plural of “*sabab*”, meaning “rope” or “means”) and *al-wurūd* (meaning “arrival” or “occurrence”). Linguistically, it refers to “the causes of something’s occurrence”<sup>13</sup>.

According to Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr, *asbāb al-wurūd* refers to events that occurred when a ḥadīth was conveyed by the Prophet.<sup>14</sup> Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī describes it as something that clarifies whether a ḥadīth is general or specific, restricted or absolute, abrogated or still applicable.<sup>15</sup>

The theory of *asbāb al-wurūd* is an approach that seeks to identify the reasons or background behind a prophetic saying. According to ḥadīth scholars, knowledge of *asbāb al-wurūd* is essential in eliminating ambiguity, grasping the intended meaning, and deriving legal rulings more precisely.

## The following are several key functions of *asbāb al-wurūd*:

### 1. Explaining the Historical Context of the Ḥadīth

*Asbāb al-wurūd* sheds light on the historical background of a ḥadīth by uncovering the events, causes, or circumstances that led the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ to speak or act in a certain way. Through understanding the context in which a ḥadīth emerged, we gain deeper, clearer, and more accurate insight into its meaning—whether it be a social, political, cultural, or personal context.

For example, the ḥadīth prohibiting the preservation of sacrificial meat for more than three days was a response to the food crisis in Madinah at the time. In later periods when such scarcity no longer prevailed, the prohibition no longer applied, and the Prophet ﷺ allowed the preservation of meat:

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Alfreda Daib Insan Labib, ‘Epistemologi Ilmu Asbāb Al-Wurūd Hadis: Cabang Ilmu Hadis, Ilmu Asbabul Wurud, Epistemologi, Sejarah Ilmu’, *Taqaddumi: Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies*, 2.1 (2022), pp. 26–39 (p. 30), doi:10.12928/taqaddumi.v2i1.6128.

<sup>14</sup> Nurudin Atr, *Manhaj Al-Naqd Fi ‘Ulum al-Hadis. Suriah: Daar El-Fikr Dimasyq*, 1997 (Daar El-Fikr Dimasyq, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Jalaludin Assuyuti, *Asbabul Wurud al Hadis Aw Al-Luma’ Fii Asbab Wurud al-Hadis* (Daar Al Kutub Al Ilmiyah, 1984).



قَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ: "كُلُوا، وَادَّخِرُوا، وَتَصَدَّقُوا"

"Eat, store, and give (your sacrificial meat) in charity."<sup>16</sup>

By knowing the *asbāb al-wurūd*, we can understand to whom, when, and under what circumstances the Prophet ﷺ delivered a ḥadīth.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Clarifying the Meaning and Purpose of the Ḥadīth

Understanding the hadith without considering the context of *asbab al-wurud* risks producing a rigid and erroneous interpretation. Many Prophetic traditions emerged under specific social conditions that require contextual interpretation. Therefore, interpreting hadith without considering *asbab al-wurud* can produce distorted meanings, especially when applied to contemporary social issues.<sup>18</sup> Using the *asbāb al-wurūd* approach, it becomes clear that each prophetic saying has a specific intention and objective. It helps avoid misinterpretation or misuse outside of its intended context<sup>19</sup>.

## 3. Distinguishing Between General and Specific Legal Rulings

The Prophet might have spoken a ḥadīth to teach the ummah, to recount a personal experience, to respond to a phenomenon, to answer a question, or for other purposes. It is crucial to recognize that some ḥadīths were delivered in response to particular cases and are not universally applicable unless supported by other evidence<sup>20</sup>. *Asbāb al-wurūd* helps clarify whether a ḥadīth is temporally and locally specific or universally relevant. An example is the ḥadīth on intention: **Innamā al-a'māl bi al-niyyāt** "Actions are judged by intentions."

<sup>16</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (n.d.), no. 5569; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (n.d.), p. 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Shubḥī aṣ-Ṣāliḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīts Wa Muṣṭalaḥuhu* (Darul Ilmi Lil Malayin, 1977), p. 273; Jalāluddīn As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān Juz 1* (Darul Fikr, n.d.), p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Irfani and Zulfiyani Sudirman, 'Dari Teks Ke Konteks: Telaah Makro Dan Mikro *Asbāb al-Wurūd* Dalam Pemahaman Hadis', *Journal of Hadith Studies*, 3.2 (2020), pp. 117–29 (p. 117), doi:10.32506/johs.v3i2-05.

<sup>19</sup> Manna' Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīts* (Maktabah al-Maarif, 2006), p. 348; Tafid Adnan Amal, *Studi Hadis: Pendekatan Historis Dan Kritik Matan* (LKIS, 1994), pp. 58–60.

<sup>20</sup> aṣ-Ṣāliḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīts Wa Muṣṭalaḥuhu*, p. 271.

Its *asbāb al-wurūd* involves a companion who migrated with the intention of marrying a woman. In the broader context, however, the ḥadīth serves as a general principle that intention determines the value of worship and actions<sup>21</sup>.

#### 4. Reconciling Apparently Contradictory Ḥadīths

The ḥadīth that recommends immersing the entire wing of a fly into a drink it has landed in may appear to contradict another ḥadīth which states that “*Allah is pure (ṭayyib) and accepts only what is pure.*” As in a hadith of the Prophet stated: “*If a fly falls into the drink of one of you, let him fully immerse it, then remove it, for one of its wings contains disease and the other contains a cure.*” Contradictory to: “*Indeed, Allah is pure and accepts only that which is pure.*”

This apparent contradiction lies between the command to dip an insect into a drink and the Islamic emphasis on cleanliness. To reconcile this contradiction, scholars propose two approaches. The first is reconciliation (*al-jam‘ wa al-tawfīq*), suggesting that the ḥadīth about the fly indicates legal permissibility due to its underlying medical wisdom (i.e., one wing contains an antidote). The ḥadīth about purity and cleanliness conveys a general teaching applicable in normal circumstances. Thus, if someone is not disgusted or is in a situation of necessity (e.g., limited access to drinkable water), there is no harm in following the fly ḥadīth. On the other hand, if someone finds it repulsive or has alternative options, it is permissible to avoid it in order to uphold cleanliness and personal dignity.

The second approach involves examining the context of *asbāb al-wurūd*. The ḥadīth about the fly emerged within the environmental conditions of the Arabian Peninsula, where water and beverages were scarce, and conserving water was a wise and necessary practice at the time. Thus, the Prophet ﷺ offered a practical solution, not an encouragement to deliberately seek out flies and immerse them in drinks. There are, in fact, many other ḥadīths that appear contradictory on the surface. Quoting As-Sibā’ī and Khaṭīb, such seemingly conflicting ḥadīths can, in essence, be explained and

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath Al-Bārī Bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Jil. 1* (Dar al-Marifah, n.d.), pp. 10–12; An-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Jil 13* (Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, n.d.), pp. 53–55.

reconciled by understanding the specific causes (*asbāb al-wurūd*) behind each narration<sup>22</sup>.

#### 5. Strengthening Legal Derivation (*Istinbāt al-Ḥukm*)

*Asbāb al-wurūd* aids in clarifying the intention, context, and scope of the Prophet's rulings. It helps determine whether a ḥadīth contains general or specific laws, temporary or enduring commands, or obligatory versus recommended actions. Legal reasoning (*istinbāt al-ḥukm*) depends on understanding both the legal cause (*'illah*) and the objective (*maqāṣid*) of the Sharī'ah. Imām al-Shāfi'ī emphasized the importance of knowing the context of the Prophet's commands to avoid misinterpreting the intended legal meaning<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, in legal derivation, *asbāb al-wurūd* is crucial to properly understand the boundaries and application of the Prophet's rulings<sup>24</sup>.

### Implications of Contextual Understanding of Ḥadīth

#### 1. The Prohibition of Writing Other Than the Qur'an

*"Do not write anything from me. Whoever has written anything from me other than the Qur'an, let him erase it..."*<sup>25</sup>

Viewed purely from its literal meaning, this ḥadīth appears to contradict the vast collection and publication of ḥadīth that exist today. However, when viewed through its *asbāb al-wurūd*, it becomes clear that the prohibition was temporary—intended to ensure the companions' undivided focus on preserving the Qur'an. Once the Qur'an had been firmly memorized and established, the recording of ḥadīth was permitted. This is further reinforced by another narration in which the Prophet ﷺ encountered a companion who struggled to memorize and thus instructed him to write, on the condition that it not be mixed with Qur'anic revelation.<sup>26</sup> Prophet's command: **"Write for Abū Shāh"**<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Musthafa as-Sibā'ī, *As-Sunnah Wa Makānātuha Fī at-Tashrī' al-Islāmī* Penerbit: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut Tahun: 1976 (al-Maktabah al-Islami, 1976), p. 217; Khatib, *Uṣūl Al-Ḥadīth: 'Ulūmuhu Wa Muṣṭalaḥuhu*, p. 242.

<sup>23</sup> Imām ash-Shāfi'ī, *Ar-Risālah*, ed. by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir (Dar Al-Fikr, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> ash-Shāfi'ī, *Ar-Risālah*, pp. 508–09.

<sup>25</sup> Muslim Bin Al-Hajaj, *Shahih Muslim* (Dar Thuqin Najah, 2012), p. Juz VIII Hlm. 229.

<sup>26</sup> Khatib, *Uṣūl Al-Ḥadīth: 'Ulūmuhu Wa Muṣṭalaḥuhu*.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi, *Taqyid Al-Ilm* (Dar Al-Ihya Al-Sunah An-Nabawy, 1974), p. 58.

Based on this evidence, the majority of scholars agree that recording ḥadīth is permissible. Historical records indicate that such writings began during the Prophet's lifetime, albeit not yet compiled into formal books, but inscribed on palm leaves and other materials. This is supported by references to companions such as Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, who possessed written records, as well as *ṣaḥīfah* collections by Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, Zayd ibn Arqam, and others<sup>28</sup>. Mustafā al-A'zamī's research further confirms that the documentation of ḥadīth had already begun in the early Hijrah period<sup>29</sup>.

"Allah benefited me with a statement I heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during the days of the Battle of the Camel. I was about to join the people of the Camel and fight alongside them. He said: *'When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was informed that the people of Persia had appointed the daughter of Kistrā as their ruler, he said: A nation that places its affairs in the hands of a woman will never succeed.'*" (Narrated by al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth no. 7099). This ḥadīth was uttered in response to a specific political event—the appointment of Būrān, daughter of Kistrā, as ruler of Persia following political instability and the assassination of her father, Kistrā ibn Abrawayz ibn Hurmuz. Her rise to power was not due to merit or readiness, but a lack of viable heirs, as her brother had also been killed.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, this ḥadīth should not be interpreted as a blanket prohibition against female leadership. The Prophet ﷺ was responding to the particular sociopolitical condition of the Persian empire. His statement was contextual, not a normative principle to be applied universally in all circumstances. In fact, the Prophet ﷺ acknowledged and respected strong female figures. He praised and emulated Khadījah before marrying her, a woman known for her independence and business acumen. Moreover, the Prophet accepted the legitimacy of Queen Bilqīs, who ruled during the time of Prophet Sulaymān.

As M. Quraish Shihab asserts, women have the right to hold leadership positions. He argues that there is no definitive textual evidence prohibiting women from becoming leaders in political, social, or religious spheres. Leadership is

<sup>28</sup> Ibnu Hajar, *Tahdzib At-Tahdzib Juz 3* (Muasasah Ar-Risalah, 1995), p. 394; Imam An-Nawawi, *Shohih Muslim Syarah An-Nawawi Jus 13* (Matbaah Al Misriyah, 1929) lihat juga dalam tulisan ; Rosnawati Anwar, *Pengantar Ilmu Hadits* (Ilham Abati Enterprise, 1997), p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Metodologi Kritik Hadits* (Pustaka Hidayah, 1996), p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Ihsan Satyrya Azhar, 'Hadits Riwayat ABu Bakrah Tentang Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pemerintahan Islam', *Ihya Al Arobiyah*, 1.1 (2011), pp. 113-14 (pp. 113-14).

determined not by gender, but by capability, integrity, and competence. Regardless of whether the leader is male or female, so long as the requirements are met, leadership is valid.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. The Ḥadīth on Women Being Deficient in Intellect and Religion

*"It was narrated from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'O women, give charity and seek forgiveness often, for I have seen that you are the majority of the inhabitants of Hell.' A wise woman among them asked, 'Why is that, O Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intellect and religion who can overpower a man of sound mind than one of you.' The woman asked again, 'What is the deficiency in our intellect and religion, O Messenger of Allah?' He answered, 'Is not the testimony of two women equal to the testimony of one man?' They said, 'Yes.' He said, 'That is the deficiency in her intellect. And does she not abstain from prayer and fasting during menstruation?' They said, 'Yes.' He said, 'That is the deficiency in her religion.'"*  
(Narrated by al-Bukhārī no. 1462; Muslim no. 80)

The expression "deficient in intellect and religion," if interpreted without considering its context, may be misunderstood as discriminatory. However, the Prophet ﷺ was responding to a specific situation using a rhetorical style to deliver a moral lesson.

The "deficiency in intellect," as explained in the ḥadīth, refers to the fact that two women's testimony equals that of one man, as stated in the Qur'anic verse (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 282): "...Then bring two witnesses from among your men. If two men are not available, then one man and two women of your choice as witnesses—so that if one of them forgets, the other can remind her...". This indicates a psychological and social consideration—not inferiority in rational capacity per se. The verse implies that women, especially in certain legal contexts, may face greater emotional or psychological burdens. It emphasizes the need for support and affirmation when a woman is called to testify, especially in sensitive cases involving moral or criminal accusations.

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<sup>31</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *M. Quraish Shihab Menjawab 1001 Soal Keislaman Yang Patut Anda Ketahui* (Lentera Hati, 2008), p. 655.

From a psychological perspective, studies in neuroscience indicate that women tend to exhibit heightened emotional sensitivity and stronger activity in brain areas related to empathy and emotional processing.<sup>32</sup> Women also tend to respond more emotionally in high-pressure situations.<sup>33</sup>

However, such characteristics are not static. Cultural, intellectual, and social advancements can reshape perceptions and capabilities. Numerous examples—from Cut Nyak Dhien to Shirley Ann Jackson and Mariyam al-Asturlābiyyah, demonstrate that women can excel in science, leadership, and innovation.

As for the “deficiency in religion,” it relates to women being exempt from performing certain religious obligations, such as prayer and fasting, during menstruation or postpartum periods. This is a matter of ritual law (*fiqh*), not a measure of spiritual worth. It does not imply spiritual inferiority or disqualification from intellectual or social advancement. Many women throughout Islamic history have been scholars, leaders, and role models, including Khadījah bint Khuwaylid and Fāṭimah al-Fihriyah, each representing strength, intellect, and leadership.

### 3. A Critical Perspective on the Limitations of *Asbāb al-Wurūd*

The discussion of *asbāb al-wurūd* opens critical space for Muslims to reflect on the meaning of ḥadīth. However, despite its importance, *asbāb al-wurūd* is not without limitations. One of its major challenges is that not every ḥadīth was transmitted with a clearly recorded or authoritative context. Some ḥadīths, even if authentic in *matn*, lack contextual details in their *isnād* or historical background.

For example, consider the authentic ḥadīth: “Religion is sincere advice.” We asked, “To whom?” He replied, “To Allah, to His Book, to His Messenger, to the leaders

<sup>32</sup> Larry Cahill, ‘Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience’, *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 7.6 (2006), pp. 477–84, doi:10.1038/nrn1909.

<sup>33</sup> Fimela.com, ‘Penelitian Membuktikan, Perempuan Lebih Unggul secara Intelektual, Emosional dan Mental’, fimela.com, 9 March 2022 <<https://www.fimela.com/lifestyle/read/4906969/penelitian-membuktikan-perempuan-lebih-unggul-secara-intelektual-emosional-dan-mental>> [accessed 12 April 2025]; Rahma Khairani, *Perbedaan Kematangan Emosi Pada Pria Dan Wanita Yang Menikah Muda*, 03.Oktober 2009 (2009) <[https://core.ac.uk/outputs/143963994/?utm\\_source=pdf&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1](https://core.ac.uk/outputs/143963994/?utm_source=pdf&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1)> [accessed 9 July 2025]; ‘Penelitian Mengungkap Bahwa Perempuan Lebih Emosional daripada Lelaki - Semua Halaman - National Geographic’, n.d. <<https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/13909727/penelitian-mengungkap-bahwa-perempuan-lebih-emosional-daripada-lelaki>> [accessed 12 April 2025].

of the Muslims, and to the general public.” (Narrated by Muslim; H. Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, 1433). No *asbāb al-wurūd* is explicitly reported for this ḥadīth in the major ḥadīth collections. This suggests the ḥadīth was conveyed as general guidance (*tarbiyah*), applicable across time and context.

Moreover, the authenticity of reports concerning the *asbāb* often varies. Some are based on weak chains of narration or even speculative reconstructions. As Siddiqi<sup>34</sup>, “*The causes of hadith statements are sometimes reconstructed by scholars based on historical speculation, not clear isnād. Caution must be exercised in using them for legal derivation*”. Similarly, ‘Alī Mustafā Ya’qūb argues that conflicts between ḥadīths may sometimes be due not to contradiction in the text but to the absence of contextual information in the transmission—and occasionally, the *asbāb* reported are themselves weak<sup>35</sup>. For instance, the ḥadīth: “Whoever cheats is not one of us.” (Narrated by Muslim no. 102). Though the ḥadīth is ṣaḥīḥ, al-Nawawī (in his *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*) notes that additional contextual explanations sometimes lack chains as reliable as the main text<sup>36</sup>.

Nonetheless, scholars generally accept the *matn* of a ḥadīth if its primary chain is sound<sup>37</sup>. Interpretation, however, should go beyond the text and consider contextual appropriateness, ethical intent, and public interest—even when historical contexts are not explicitly preserved. This aligns with the interpretive framework promoted by scholars like Quraish Shihab<sup>38</sup>, who emphasizes the need to understand the spirit and objectives of religious texts.

The use of *asbāb al-wurūd* must therefore be guided by a critical, reflective approach—one that examines the quality of *isnād*, source credibility, and methodological historical reconstruction. Contemporary scholars must also be aware of the risk of falling into instrumental rationality—interpreting ḥadīths through the lens of present-day utility while neglecting the underlying values and purposes. As

<sup>34</sup> *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features* (Calcutta University, 1961), p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> A.M. Yaqub, *Hadits-Hadits Bermasalah* (Pustaka Firdaus, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> H. Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Syarf An Nawawi, *Al-Minhaj Syarḥ Shahih Muslim Cet. 1* (Dar Ibn Hazm, 1433).

<sup>37</sup> A.M. Al-Zindani, *Asbāb Wurūd Al-Hadīth* (Markaz al-Buhuts al-Islamiyyah, n.d.).

<sup>38</sup> Referring to his opinion in interpreting religious texts by M.Q. Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur’an* (Mizan, 1994).



Habermas<sup>39</sup> warns, such rationality may obscure ethical reasoning in favor of convenience or bias. Festinger<sup>40</sup>, further distinguishes between true rationality and mere rationalization, the latter being the justification of actions based on emotional or subjective motives.

Therefore, while *asbāb al-wurūd* is essential for enriching our understanding of ḥadīth, it must be applied with critical awareness, avoiding weak contexts, ethical oversights, or unreflective modern reinterpretations.

## Conclusion

The relationship between text and context in ḥadīth studies is a key element in comprehending the Prophetic tradition holistically and avoiding rigid or literalist interpretations. The theory of *asbāb al-wurūd* plays a crucial role in ḥadīth scholarship, as it explains the causes or historical circumstances behind the utterance of a ḥadīth by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. This theory significantly contributes to uncovering the historical and social dimensions embedded in ḥadīth texts, enabling interpretations that are more dynamic, accurate, and in harmony with Islamic values.

The connection between text and context in ḥadīth is inherently intertwined. Understanding the *matn* of a ḥadīth cannot be separated from the event or situation surrounding its delivery. Without consideration of *asbāb al-wurūd*, interpretations risk becoming narrow, rigid, textualist, and potentially divergent from the Prophet's intended message. Conversely, a contextual understanding provides space for more rational, just, and applicable interpretations.

The significance of *asbāb al-wurūd* is evident in many ḥadīths that are prone to misinterpretation when context is neglected such as those prohibiting the writing of anything besides the Qur'an or statements regarding women. In these cases, contextual reading can prevent misapplication and doctrinal confusion.

In the modern era, the *asbāb al-wurūd* approach remains highly relevant for addressing interpretative challenges, particularly concerning contemporary issues such as human rights, gender, pluralism, and social justice. It serves as a hermeneutical tool to revive the universal values of Islam in today's reality.

<sup>39</sup> J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Beacon Press, 1984).

<sup>40</sup> L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford University Press, 1957).

Nevertheless, it must also be recognized that the theory has its limitations, not all ḥadīths have explicit or authenticated *asbāb al-wurūd*, and in some cases, the contextual narratives rely on weak or speculative reports. Therefore, this approach must be accompanied by rigorous source criticism and sound historical methodology.

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