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**WIFE PROSTRATING UPON THE HUSBAND FROM THE
PERSPECTIVE OF *FIQH AL-HADITH***

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Abstract

The stature of the Prophet's hadith, undeniably, constitutes as one of the sources that governs the human affairs; inclusive that of the women. The hadith pertaining to the women affairs include utterance, actions and *taqrir* of the Prophet (pbuh) are in the form of advice or protection bestowed upon them. There are a number of the Prophet's hadiths that show reverence toward his wives, thereby conveying the message that women are to be treated decently. However, there are a number of hadiths that deserve an analytical critique; among them is the one that narrates that wife prostrating upon the husband which is highly controversial and could evoke misunderstanding if not studied thoroughly. As such, this paper intends to scrutinize the above mentioned hadith and its understanding from the perspective of *fiqh al-hadith*. In order to achieve the objective, qualitative reading of the analysis is conducted through several data collections such as way of the others uses the great hadith as references and other compilations of the uses of hadith will be analysed using inductive and deductive methods. The finding of this study shows that there are a number of backgrounds information that gave importance to this hadith if viewed as a whole. And that the Prophet (pbuh) commands the wives to prostrate to their husbands if the prostrations upon other beings than Allah were allowed by syarak.

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Keywords: Wife, prostrating, husband, *fiqh al-hadith*.



1. Introduction

In Islamic Law, hadith is the second most important source of reference after the Quran. It is also closely related with the Quran as it explains abstract (*mujmal*) Quranic verses, binds the absolute (*mutlaq*), specifies the general, explains the ambiguous, states new rulings that are not mentioned in the Quran, and others. Thus, the role of hadith has great significance and it cannot be separated from the Quran. Due to this great importance, hadith must be closely studied, especially concerning interpretation and understanding because hadith must be understood accurately and correctly (Shah, 2016).

Comprehensive understanding of knowledge on hadith is necessary as it covers two main elements namely *sanad* and *matan* (Al-Ghawri, 2012). *Sanad* or chains of transmission has its own role, and Islamic scholars have pointed it out as part of the religion (Muslim, n.d.). However, specific attention must also be given towards the understanding of *matan* or hadith texts to avoid misconceptions in the understanding of a hadith. In this context, al-Baghdadi had recorded the words of ‘Ali b. al-Madini who was a teacher to al-Bukhari, as follows:

Translation: Deep understanding of the meanings of hadith is half of knowledge and knowing the narrators is the other half of knowledge (Al-Baghdadi, n.d.).

The statement by ‘Ali al-Madini clearly shows the importance of knowledge in understanding of hadith texts and this understanding is equal to the importance of knowing the narrators (*sanad*). Accurate understanding of the functions and roles of hadith can prevent misconceptions of hadith. However, accurate understanding of hadith requires appropriate context of knowledge on the methods and ways of understanding hadith. Among the knowledge in the branch of *dirayah al-hadith* (comprehension of hadith) that must be understood well is the knowledge of *asbab wurud al-hadith*. It is through this knowledge that one can identify the event associated with the background of a hadith and the reasons why the Prophet (p.b.u.h) conveyed the hadith (Basfurat, 2016).

One of the issues that are often debated currently concerning the hadiths that these hadiths are claimed as saying the Prophet (p.b.u.h) had instructed that a wife prostrate to her husband. These hadiths are among several that are considered as disrespecting and degrading towards women (misogyny). However, does the correct interpretation of the hadith truly degrade women? Did the Prophet (p.b.u.h) convey the hadith without background context behind his speech?

To the best of the researcher’s reading, this topic has not been a subject of research by many researchers. However, it is undeniable there exist in the works of the previous and present scholars in respect of the hadiths that dictate the wives’ insistence to prostrate before their husbands ; among others is *Tuhfah al-Ahwadhi*, penned by al-Mubarakfuri. But the discussions on it are not specifically linked with the aspects of *fiqh al-hadith*. In addition, the discourse about this issue is also available in *Speaking in God’s Name* by opining that wives are required to obey husbands in all matters as evidenced by those hadiths by which are considered as contributing to general denigration of the moral status of women (El-Fadl, 2001). As such, this paper will study these hadiths from the view point of *fiqh al-hadith* in order to present a clearer picture of the concept of the wives’ expectation obeying their husbands.

2. Problem Statement

The comprehension of hadiths is vital given the position to which it is accorded namely as the main reference in Islam, second only to al-Quran. In other words, hadith needs to be understood for the purpose of translating it into the form of daily practices as a symbol of appreciation untoward the Prophet (peace be upon him). As such, the understanding that meets the spirit and intention of the hadith is a pre-requisite. For that purpose, the hadith scholars had formulated guidelines to facilitate the efforts towards understanding the hadiths of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) that which is named *fiqh al-hadith*.

There are room though for debate when it comes to the comprehension of the concept of *fiqh al-hadith*. Case in point is the definition itself, whereby different hadith scholars have their own interpretations of what constitutes the science of *fiqh al-hadith*. There are a number of hadith scholars who define it as deducing rulings from hadith and its meanings and interpretations; as well as clarifying ambiguous words therein to determine the intention of the hadith; besides coordinating the differences via detailed explanation. Meanwhile, there are other scholars who loosely define the science in general, without associating it with the rulings expressed within the hadith, nor the meaning nor the understanding therein.

The current scenario however sees that there exists literal interpretations by a certain quarter for example the feminists, the western scholars even the Muslim scholars themselves against hadith; which more often the case leads to inaccurate understanding that does not conform to the actual text and context of the hadith. To showcase the above observation, hadiths concerning women, specifically that of marriage are often fell victims to bias interpretations which lowers the dignity of women as wives and in so doing placing them as the second class citizen after the men. Among the famous hadiths that creates a lot of confusions as well as degenerative towards women's status in family is one which reads that wife prostrates before the husband, giving an impression that absolute power lies in the husband, whom is the head of the family.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What does it mean by *fiqh al-hadith* according to hadith scholars?
- 3.2. How to comprehend the meanings of prostration of a wife before her husband from the hadith?

4. Purpose of the Study

- 4.1. To study the meaning of *fiqh al-hadith* according to hadith scholars.
- 4.2. To analyze the hadith of wife prostrates to husband.

5. Research Methods

This qualitative study relies solely on library research. This means data was collected from primary scriptures – from the books of hadith and *tafsir*. From the works of hadith, data was taken from key books of hadith written by earlier scholars such as *Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Abi Dawud* and *Sunan Ibn Majah* as well as commentaries of hadith such as *Tuhfah al-Ahwadhi*, written by al-Mubarakfuri. Data are also taken

from principal books of *tafsir* such as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* and *Tafsir al-Baghawi*. The data were then analyzed using the inductive, deductive and comparative method.

6. Findings

6.1. Definition of Fiqh al-Hadith.

The scholars are of different views in defining *fiqh al-hadith*. For the *mutaqaddimin* scholars such as Qadi 'Iyad (1970), *fiqh al-hadith* means deriving rulings and meanings out of hadith. To him, the explanation of vague words and terminologies by using precise interpretation or allegorical interpretation also comes under the science of *fiqh al-hadith*. His definition is echoed by a *muta'akhhirin* scholar by the name of al-Tibi (1971) who defines *fiqh al-hadith* as a science which contains rulings and morals deduced from hadith. Unlike the definition of the former, al-Tibi further includes the elements of moral apart from the obvious rulings that which can be deduced from hadith.

Whereas, for numerous other scholars the likes of Ibn Hajar (2011), define the science as legislating rulings out of the meaning of the hadith or *istinbat*; in addition to securing *fiqh al-hadith* by way of *tarajum al-abwab*. These illustrate the connection with the narrated hadith. Ibn Hajar's definition available in the preface to *Fath al-Bari* reflects the methodology of al-Bukhari whom is a distinguished figure in the *fiqh al-hadith*, as exemplified in the *tarjamah bab* in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*. This definition of Ibn Hajar is in line with that of al-Mubarakfuri (2003) who implies the meaning of *fiqh al-hadith* as a knowledge which weigh up the meanings that which are understood from the textual hadiths as well as the underlying intentions contained therein. In so doing, he uses the Arabic language methods and Shariah principles in order to procure rulings from the hadiths.

The definitions collectively demonstrate that *fiqh al-hadith* drives the meanings of hadith to be comprehensible on whether or not its texts produce rulings.

6.2. Critiques on The Hadith of Wife Prostrating Upon Her Husband.

The rights of women in the domain of their household is one of the important issues often the centre of attention of the scholars or the community at large. The position of a woman as a wife is inherently construed to be subject to absolute power of her husband. The above observation, according to the feminists roots from dictates of the hadith of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) concerning women which they took as anti-women and derogatory. Their claim is seen as a form of attack on al-Sunnah.

There are some quarters of the community who are confused in understanding the intent of the hadith, resulting in them rejecting some of the hadiths including hadiths concerning the household matters. One outstanding hadith of such stature is the hadith of the wife prostrating before her husband which more often than not is misconstrued as demeaning the position of the wife. This is indeed a rushed conclusion arrived at without proper discourse detailing the true meaning from the perspective of *sabab al-wurud* hadith as well as the opinions of the majority of the scholars. Therefore the *sabab al-wurud* of hadith plays a vital role in understanding the substance of the hadith based on the circumstances for which the Prophet (p.b.u.h) utters the said hadith; while in truth the said hadith does not by any means command the wife to worship the husband (Ali, Ibrahim, & Sayska, 2011).

6.3. Hadith Text on Wife's Prostration To Her Husband.

There are several main hadiths that touch on prostration of a wife to her husband; the three most important ones are as follows:

Hadith 1: Hadith narrated by Abdullah b. Abi Awfa:

Translation: Azhar b. Marwan narrated to us, Hammad b. Zayd from Ayyub from al-Qasim al-Syaibani from 'Abdullah b. Abi Awfa he said: "When Mu'adh b. Jabal came from Syria, he prostrated to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who said, "What is this, O Mu'adh?" He said: "I went to Syria and saw them prostrating to their archbishops and patriarchs, and I wanted to do that for you." Rasulallah (p.b.u.h) said, "Do not do that. If I were to command anyone to prostrate to anyone other than Allah, I would have commanded women to prostrate to their husbands. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no woman can fulfil her duty towards Allah until she fulfils her duty towards her husband. If he asks her (for intimacy) even if she is on her camel saddle, she should not refuse" (Ibn Majah, n.d.).

Hadith 2: Hadith narrated by Qays b. Sa'ad:

Translation: 'Amr b. 'Aun narrated to us, Ishaq b. Yusuf from Syarik from Ḥuşayn from al-Sya'bi from Qays b. Sa'ad he said: "I went to al-Heerah (one of the states in Kufa) and saw them prostrating to a noble of theirs (i.e., a courageous knight who was prominent among them). I thought: 'Rasulallah (p.b.u.h) is more deserving that people should prostrate to him.' Qays b. Sa'ad said: "So I came to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and said: I went to al-Heerah and saw them prostrating to a noble of theirs, but you are the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and are more deserving that people should prostrate to you. He said: "If you were to walk pass my grave, would you prostrate to it?" Qays b. Sa'ad said: "I said: No" He said: "Do not do that. If I were to instruct anyone to prostrate to anyone, I would have instructed women to prostrate to their husbands, because of the rights that Allah has given them over them" (Abu Dawud, 2009).

Hadith 3: Hadith narrated by Hadith Anas b. Mālik

Translation: Husayn narrated to us from Khalaf b. Khalifah from Ḥafş whose uncle Anas b. Malik said: "A family of the Ansar owned a camel for watering their farm; the camel was suddenly difficult for them to tame and it ran so we could not ride it, so the Ansar came to the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) and said: "O Messenger of Allah, we have a camel for watering our farm, but the camel is suddenly difficult for us to tame and it ran so we could not ride it, when our crops and date trees are dry. The Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) said: "Stand up", so they stood and entered the garden, the camel was at one side so the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) drew close to it and the Ansar said: "O' Messenger of Allah, the camel may behave like a crazed dog and we fear that it may hurt you," so the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: "I have no problem with this camel," and when the camel saw the Prophet (p.b.u.h) it walked to Prophet (p.b.u.h) and knelt down and

prostrated to him. So the Prophet (p.b.u.h) touched the crown of its head and tamed it when it had never been tamed before. Thus the Companions said to the Prophet (p.b.u.h): “O Messenger of Allah, verily this animal has not been bestowed with wisdom but it prostrated to you whereas us the people who are bestowed with wisdom are more deserving to make prostration to you, so the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: “It is not appropriate for anyone to prostrate to anyone else. If it were appropriate for anyone to prostrate to anyone else, I would have instructed the wife to prostrate to her husband, because of the great rights that Allah has given him over her. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, if a husband has a boil oozing pus or blood anywhere from his feet to his head and the wife kisses and licks it clean, she has yet to do him full justice” (Ahmad, 2001).

These hadith were narrated by many Companions, including Abdullah b. Abi Awfa, Qays b. Sa‘ad, Anas b. Malik, Abu Hurayrah ,(Al-Tirmidhi, 1998) Aisyah, Mu‘adh b. Jabal,(Ahmad, 2001), Ibn ‘Abbas, Suraqah b. Malik, (Al-Tabarani, 1994) Ibn Mas‘ud (Al-Tabarani, n.d.) and a few others.

Among the rights of a husband that must be fulfilled by his wife as Allah SWT has said in surah al-Nisa’ verse 34 that men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. Such is the magnitude of a husband’s rights, thus the Prophet (p.b.u.h) instructed that wives make prostrations to their husbands if prostration to those other than Allah is allowed in Islam. The obedience of a wife towards her husband is also one of the reasons that will allow for her to choose which door of the Paradise she would like to enter from (Ahmad, 2001). Ibn Taimiyyah was asked about a wife who refused when her husband asked for her, and he answered that it is forbidden in Islam because a wife must fulfil the request of her husband. He went on to say: “No duty is bigger to a wife after her duties to Allah and His Messenger than those towards her husband” and he narrated the hadith on prostration of a wife to her husband (Ibn Taimiyyah, 1995).

6.4. Analysis of The Hadith Based on *Fiqh al-Hadith*

From the perspective of *fiqh al-hadith*, prostration to those other than Allah is forbidden at all costs and this is proven through the hadith as narrated by Abdullah b. Abi Awfa. The hadith explains that if the act of making prostration to those other than Allah is allowed, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) would have commanded that wives prostrate to their husbands because of the magnitude of the husband’s rights over his wife. In fact, in the narration by Anas b. Malik, it was mentioned that if a husband has a boil oozing pus or blood anywhere from his feet to his head and the wife kisses and licks it clean, she has yet to do him full justice.

Overall, there are a few contextual reasons (*sabab wurud*) behind the hadith. One of them is that this hadith was conveyed when Mu‘adh b. Jabal was in Medina after coming back from Syria, and he immediately prostrated to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) because he saw the Jews and Christians in Syria prostrating to their knights and commandants. Mu‘adh thought the Prophet (p.b.u.h) was more deserving for people to honour with prostration, thus the Prophet (p.b.u.h) conveyed this hadith. The second one is that this hadith was conveyed when Qays b. Sa‘ad who had just returned from Heerah (a town near Kufa) was going

towards Medina. When Qays met the Prophet (p.b.u.h), he prostrated to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) because he had seen people prostrate to courageous knights so he believed the Prophet (p.b.u.h) was more deserving that people prostrate to him, thus the Prophet (p.b.u.h) conveyed this hadith. Another *sabab wurud* is that the hadith narrated by Anas b. Malik was conveyed when the Prophet (p.b.u.h) travelled with the Ansar and the Muhajirin and they saw a camel prostrated to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) when the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) drew close to it. Thus, they believed the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) was more deserving to receive prostration from the people because compared to the camel, the people are the ones who have been bestowed with wisdom. Based on the contextual reasons listed above, the types of prostration can be divided into two categories ; first, prostration as an act of worship which is reserved only for Allah, and second, prostration to offer honour, gratitude and nobility which could be performed to those other than Allah (Al-Baghawi, 1997). An example of prostration in the second category was when the angels prostrated humbly to Prophet Adam to respect Adam as the caliph appointed by Allah, as well as prostration by the family of Prophet Yusuf to Prophet Yusuf a.s. as a show of respect. However, the hadith above did not occur in regard to the duties of a wife to her husband because people are not allowed to prostrate to others as an act of worship, and prostration as a show of respect was the practice of the earlier people which had been abolished during the time of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) (Ibn Kathir, 1999).

In addition, the hadiths on prostration of a wife to her husband are not instructions, in fact, they prohibit people from prostrating to anyone other than Allah (Al-Qari, 2002). This can be seen through the expression of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) who used the expression “*Law*” which means if. Thus, the meaning of prostration here does not refer to an instruction, instead it was only used as a parable to indicate on the magnitude of a wife’s responsibility in fulfilling the rights of her husband (Al-Mubarakfuri, n.d). The word “*Law*” in Arabic means condition at the time of *maḍi* (in the past) and is rarely used in *istiḡbal* (the future), however, in the context of its purpose, it is acceptable (Ibn ‘Aqil 1980). Based on the hadith listed above, the word *law* also carries the meaning *ḥarf imtina’ li al-imtina’* (Al- Zarkasyi, 1994) which is a refute of answer due to refute of condition, that was, if the Prophet (p.b.u.h) could instruct someone to prostrate to those other than Allah, then he would have instructed for wives to prostrate to their husbands.

Among the rights of a husband over his wife to the point that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) has conveyed the hadith to relay the greatness of a husband’s rights is for the wife to be obedient to her husband. The best of women are those who are constantly obedient, pleasant and do not oppose her husband so he would not harbour contempt for her. This is reflected in the words of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) as follows:

Translation: Abu Hurairah r.a. narrated that it was asked to the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h): “Who is the best of women?” The Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: “The best of women is one that pleases her husband when he glances at her; obeys him when he commands her and does not oppose him and displease him in matters regarding her body and wealth” (Al-Nasa’i, 1986).

Furthermore, a woman's place whether in the Paradise or Fire is also determined through her treatment towards her husband, whether she was obedient or disobedient to him, based on the hadith as follows:

Translation: From al-Husain b. Mihsan, his aunt had once come to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) for some need. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) then asked: "Do you have a husband?". She said, "Yes.". The Prophet (p.b.u.h) then further asked: "How are you towards your husband?" She responded, "I do not fall short in his service except with regard to what I am unable to do." He said, "Then look to your standing with him, for indeed he is your Paradise and your Fire (Ahmad, 2001).

However, the obedience of a wife to her husband is not absolute because if the instruction of a husband is in disobedience towards Allah, then the wife must not fulfil the instruction, as the Prophet (p.b.u.h) has said that "there is no obedience if it is disobedience to Allah, verily obedience is only for good conducts" (Ahmad, 2001). Hence, the duty of a wife to be obedient to her husband is one of the rights of the husband which had made the Prophet (p.b.u.h) conveyed the hadith that appear as though he was instructing women to prostrate to their husbands, but the hadith are not actual instructions for wives to make prostration to their husbands.

7. Conclusion

Based on the discussion in the chapter of hadith analysis from the perspective of *fiqh al-hadith*, it can therefore be surmised that the hadiths on wives making prostration to their husbands must be understood contextually. Among others, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) would have instructed wives to prostrate to their husband if the act of prostrating to those other than Allah is allowed in Islam, but the hadith are not instructions and they are instead prohibitions to make prostration except for Allah. Furthermore, there were contextual reasons behind these hadiths, for example, one of the hadiths was conveyed when the Ansar and Muhajirin prostrated to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) upon seeing a camel which did not have wisdom as bestowed on people, prostrated to the Prophet (p.b.u.h). It must also be understood that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) used the expression "Law" meaning "if" and thus the meaning of prostration here does not mean as an instruction, instead it was merely used as a parable to indicate the magnitude of a wife's duty in fulfilling her husband's rights, and among the rights of a husband is the obedience of his wife in good conducts.

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