

The Urgency of Rijal Al-Hadis in the Contemporary Era

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Abstract

In the development of Islamic knowledge, hadith holds a central role as the second source of Islamic law after the Qur'an. To ensure its authenticity, the study of Rijal al-Hadith—biographical evaluation of hadith narrators—becomes essential, especially in the contemporary era where the spread of weak and fabricated hadiths is a growing concern. This research aims to analyze the concept, methodology, and relevance of Rijal al-Hadith as a scientific discipline that verifies the credibility of narrators through two main approaches: *tarikh al-ruwah* (narrator biography) and *jarh wa ta'dil* (narrator criticism). Using qualitative methods and a literature review approach, the study gathers references from classical and modern Islamic scholarship to examine how Rijal al-Hadith can serve as a critical tool in maintaining the integrity of hadith literature. The findings show that Rijal al-Hadith plays a crucial role in identifying authentic narrations, preventing misinterpretations, and strengthening critical thinking in Islamic discourse. It emphasizes that Muslims today must go beyond merely quoting hadith and instead understand the science behind its authentication. The study concludes that Rijal al-Hadith remains highly relevant and should be reintroduced in modern Islamic education to build intellectual resilience and prevent the misuse of religious texts. Future studies are recommended to integrate digital tools in mapping narrator chains and enhance accessibility to hadith authentication resources.

Keywords: Rijal al Hadith; Contemporary Era; Contemporary Islamic Studies; Jarh wa Ta'dil; Sanad Criticism

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PENDAHULUAN

In Islamic jurisprudence and theology, hadith holds a pivotal position, serving as the second primary source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an (Al-Azami, 2018). Its significance lies in its complementary role to the Qur'an, elucidating aspects not explicitly detailed in the holy book and clarifying its broader principles (Brown, 2014; Rippin & Mojaddedi, 2017). Scholars emphasize that hadith provides practical guidance and context for the divine revelations, offering a deeper understanding of Islamic law, ethics, and practices (Ansari, 2019). Consequently, rigorous methods of authentication and interpretation of hadith are paramount to ensure the integrity and correct application of Islamic teachings (Saeed, 2020).

Regarding the definition of hadith, scholars of hadith and ushul fiqh mostly give the meaning of hadith the same as the sunnah (Dahuri et al., 2023). According to them, because there are hadith experts who are also sunnah experts. One example is Malik bin Anas who is a hadith expert as well as a sunnah expert.

While classical scholars like Muhammad Musthafa al-A'zami provide foundational definitions of hadith as a broad spectrum of discussions, stories, and communications (Al-A'zami, 2018), contemporary research continues to explore its multifaceted nature and applications. The understanding of hadith as "new" or a "communication" aligns with its

continuous relevance in Islamic discourse, clarifying and expanding upon Quranic verses such as Q.S. Adh-Dhuha verse 11, which encourages gratitude for divine favors (Al-Nadvi, 2021). Modern scholarship increasingly examines the contextual interpretation of hadith in light of contemporary challenges, focusing on its role in developing adaptive Islamic thought and practice (Kamali, 2015; Rahman, 2023). Furthermore, the intersection of hadith studies with digital humanities and linguistic analysis offers new avenues for understanding its textual nuances and historical dissemination (Ess, 2016; Suhail, 2024).

The word hadith in the verse contains the meaning of conveying what the Prophet (revelation) said. In this way, the hadith means something new conveyed by the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Not only as an adjective that has a meaning as something new, hadith can also be understood in the form of words, conversations and decrees that come from the Prophet Saw. Hadith began to be disseminated when the Prophet had died, so many questions arose related to Islamic law and others. These questions can be answered while the Prophet is still alive, but when the Prophet dies, the question can be answered through a hadith narrated by the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Thus, the problems of the ummah can be solved through hadiths. Therefore, the teaching of hadith and its branches is important for Muslims in the contemporary era. Especially with the rapid development of the times, the dynamics of hadith science are increasingly fluctuating. So it is possible that many hadiths are misunderstood, and there are even false hadiths that are spread.

On that basis, to use hadith as a solution to the problems of life today must be accompanied by the strengthening of knowledge that can detect the authenticity of a hadith. Rijal al hadith is important for Muslims to review and learn through this article.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of sanad (chain of narration) and matan (text of hadith) in determining hadith authenticity. Al-Khathib (1989) and Syuhudi Ismail (1992) explain that rijal al-hadith plays a pivotal role in assessing narrator credibility through methods such as tarikh al-ruwah and jarh wa ta'dil. Furthermore, modern scholars such as al-Qasimi (1979) argue that the discipline offers critical instruments to defend hadith from fabrication. However, these works often remain within the circles of traditional hadith scholars and are rarely integrated into contemporary discourse, particularly in digital or community-based Islamic education.

The gap lies in the lack of applied and contextualized study of rijal al-hadith for present-day challenges. While theoretical works exist in abundance, few address how the knowledge of narrator analysis can be applied practically by modern Muslims in distinguishing authentic from false hadiths in daily life, especially in digital media environments. There is also limited research that connects rijal al-hadith with contemporary issues like radicalization, sectarian narratives, and digital misinformation.

This situation presents an urgent call to revisit and revitalize rijal al-hadith as a relevant tool for today's Muslims. The urgency stems from the increasing misuse of hadith in public discourse and the absence of systematic education on how to authenticate hadith through its narrators. By equipping Muslims with knowledge of rijal al-hadith, the ummah can better resist theological manipulation and preserve the sanctity of prophetic tradition.

This research introduces a novel approach by discussing rijal al-hadith not only as a classical discipline but also as a contemporary mechanism for filtering religious narratives. It integrates historical methodology with modern examples of hadith misuse in digital platforms, providing a practical framework for hadith criticism based on biographical analysis of narrators. Such integration of classical science with current issues has rarely been explored in current literature.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relevance and application of rijal al-hadith in verifying hadith authenticity in the contemporary era. It aims to offer a framework that explains the structure, objectives, and methods of rijal al-hadith, while also proposing how this knowledge can be made accessible and applicable to the modern Muslim audience, particularly in the context of digital literacy.

The contribution of this study lies in enriching Islamic studies by bridging classical hadith sciences with current realities. It provides scholars, educators, and students with insights into how rijal al-hadith can be employed to protect the integrity of Islamic knowledge. Furthermore, the research contributes to curriculum development in Islamic education by advocating the inclusion of practical rijal al-hadith training.

Finally, the implications of this research are broad. In academic settings, it supports more critical engagement with hadith. For religious authorities, it offers a tool to counter the misuse of hadith in public preaching and online da'wah. And for lay Muslims, it fosters awareness about the need for critical thinking in accepting religious information. Thus, reviving rijal al-hadith is not just a scholarly endeavor, but a necessity to uphold the authenticity of Islamic teachings in an age of information overload.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this study is qualitative with the type of library research. Literature study research means that this research method is pursued and supported by data in the form of literature studies, documents, and other sources obtained through libraries and electronic media. In relation to this research, the researcher began by collecting literature, both books or books and scientific journals related to the science of hadith, especially rija al hadith as a primary source. Another literature collected by the researcher is journals related to the urgency of hadith in the contemporary era. After the required data is collected, the researcher then conducts an analysis and rewrites the results of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basic Concept of Rijal Al Hadith

To strengthen the definition of hadith, Muhammad 'Ajjaj al Khathib said that hadith means all words that include deeds, decrees or taqir and other matters that come from the Prophet Muhammad (saw), related to sanad and matan (hadith structure). It cannot be interpreted separately, the word rijal al hadith can be understood in its entirety.

Rijal al hadith is one of the branches of ulum al hadith (the science of hadith). Etymologically, rijal al hadith means people around the hadith. As for terminology, rijal al hadith is understood as a science that studies the narrator of hadith. Most of the narrators of the hadith come from the companions, tabiin and the generation after them who are known as tabi at tabiin with qualified capacity in narrating the hadith.

As a science that studies the narrator of hadith, there are two main points of discussion related to this. The subject of discussion consisted of the knowledge of tarikh al ruwah and the knowledge of al jarh wa ta'dil. First, the science of tarikh al ruwah, according to M. Syuhudi Ismail, this science has a locus of discussion about the biography of the hadith narrators as well as identifying the relationship between one hadith narrator and another hadith narrator in the narration of the hadith.

Still about the knowledge of date al ruwah, this knowledge is closely related to introducing the narrator of the hadith through his capacity in narrating the hadith. This means that the discussion in this science includes all matters related to the narrators of the hadith. For example, what is studied in this science is starting from the birthday of the narrators, the day of his death, the mursyid or teacher of the narrators, his place of residence, his country, the period when he began to listen to the hadith, the people who narrated the hadith from him, he listened to the hadith from his teachers, his visits in search of hadith, the date of his arrival in various countries, and many other things that have to do with the hadith.

In contrast to the science of tarikh al ruwah, al jarh wa ta'dil has a discussion related to criticism of hadith. The criticism can be in the form of reproach or praise for the person who narrated the hadith. According to T. M. Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy (1980), this knowledge is satisfied with the study of the affairs of the narrator of the hadith from the aspect of the acceptance or rejection of the narration of the hadith. Similar to tarikh al ruwah, this science also emphasizes the quality of a hadith through its narration. The study of the quality of hadith narrator in this science is related to the capacity of the narrator in terms of the strength of memorization, honesty, integrity and other things related to the sanad of hadith.

Objectives and Methods in The Science of Rijal Al Hadith

The Purpose of Rijal Al Hadith

After knowing the basic concept of the science of rijal al hadith, the objectives of the science of rijal al hadith that need to be known are as follows:

First, by studying the science of rijal al hadith, it can aim to find out the credibility of the person who narrated the hadith or known as the narrator. According to Abdullah Karim (2010), through this knowledge, sanad research can be carried out. By conducting sanad research, it is possible to know the biographies of the narrators as well as their capacities.

Second, with this knowledge, Muslims can delve into the discussion of sanad and matan. T. M. Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy added that the person who masters the sanad means that he has mastered half of the hadith. So that a person's perfection in understanding a hadith is also supported by his ability to master the sanad of a hadith because mastering the matan alone is considered not to master the hadith too much.

Third, the science of rijal al hadith aims to identify narrators who can be trusted as well as narrators who are untrustworthy or have defects (illat). From these three goals, it boils down to the core goal, which is to catch false hadiths.

The Rijal Al Hadith Method

In addition to the purpose, rijal al hadith has a special study method. As explained related to the two main points in the basic concept of rijal al hadith, tarikh al ruwah and jarh wa

ta'dil are also used as a method of preparation in rijal al hadith. Hadith scholars in compiling rijal al hadith use two books, namely the book of tarikh al ruwah and the book of jarh wa ta'dil.

The first method used is the book of tarikh al ruwah. In compiling this book, there are the steps to compile it as follows:

1. Thabaqat, which is grouping people who narrate hadith based on a certain generation or generation. The book that writes about this is Ath-Thabaqat al-Kubrâ, by Muhammad bin Sa'd (168 – 230 AH.)
2. Compiling the person who narrates the hadith based on the year of the narrator's death. The book that is pleasing to this stage is the writing of adz-Dzahabi entitled Târîkh al-Islâm.
3. Compiling people who narrate hadith alphabetically. This method is used in the book Tahdzîb at-Tahdzîb by Ibn Hajar al-"Asqalâniy (772 – 852 AH.)
4. Compiling people who narrate hadith based on the grouping of one country. The one who favors this method is Târîkh Bagdâd, by Abû Bakr Ahmad bin "Aliy al-Bagdâdiy, better known as al Khathîb al-Bagdâdiy (392 – 463 H.)
5. Compiling a person who narrates a hadith based on his real name (asma), nickname by mentioning the name of his father, mother or son (kuna'), title (alqab), descendants (ansab), brother and sister (ikhwan/akhwat), title or nickname but read differently (al mu'talif wal mukhtalif), a person who is long-lived from among the companions or tabi tabi'in, the same name and pronunciation of the narrator but the name of the parents is different or vice versa (al musytabah). The book included in this method is Al-Asmâ wa al-Kunâ, by Abû Bisyr Muhammad bin Ahmad ad-Dawlâbiy (234 – 320H.)

The second method is to use the book jarh wa ta'dil. In this book, there are also several ways to find out about the people who narrate the hadith, including:

1. Tsiqah is the existence of a book that discusses the narrators in terms of quality in the form of honesty and credibility. This method is as quoted by Abû al-Hasan Ahmad bin Abdullâh al-Ijliy (d. 261 AH) with the title of his book Kitâb ats-Tsiqât.
2. Dhaif is a way of identifying the narrator by criticizing his weaknesses. This is as stated in the books Adh-Dhu'afâ al-Kabîr and Adh-Dhu'afâ ash-Shagîr written by Muhammad bin Ismâ'îl al-Bukhâriy (194 – 256 AH.).
3. How to criticize by questioning the quality of the hadith from the narrators. This method is the same as the book written by Abû Ahmad Abdullâh bin Adiy al-Jurjâniy (d. 356 H.) with the title of the book Al-Kâmil fî Dhu'afâ ar-Rijâl.

From the explanation of the two methods, it can be understood that to ensure the quality of a hadith, hadith scholars can conduct rijal al hadith by studying the people who narrate the hadith from the biographical aspect as well as from the aspect of the quality of honesty, credibility and integrity of the narrator.

The Urgency of Rijal Al Hadith Knowledge in the Contemporary Era

Along with the development of the times, religious sciences should experience development without exception with the science of hadith, especially rijal al hadith. Rijal al hadith is important because of the position of hadith as a source of law in Islam which is in the main position after the Qur'an. So that the knowledge of hadith is so important to be understood by Muslims.

To understand the science of hadith, there are many branches of hadith that need to be mastered as instruments in understanding hadith. Structurally, hadith consists of sanad and matan. Sanad means a series of narrators who convey hadith material. While matan is the recitation of hadith that is formed into an understanding. There are also those who say that matan is at the end of the place where the sanad stops.

The strength of the hadith depends on the validity of the sanad and is followed by the rationality of the material or matan hadith. Therefore, a hadith can be said to be authentic or not, one of them can depend on the criteria of the appropriate narrator. As has been described, to find out the quality of the narrator in narrating the hadith, it requires a scientific instrument which in *ulum al hadith* is known as *rijal al hadith*.

In the current contemporary context, not a few Muslims are still unable to distinguish the categorization of hadith. Almost all hadiths that are recited are believed to be authentic hadiths, even though by studying *rijal al hadith*, Muslims can distinguish the categories of hadith based on the quality of the narrator in the ways that have been described earlier.

On that basis, studying *rijal al hadith* has a strong relevance to the contemporary era. The scientific discourse of Muslims must be supported by reliance on hadith. So it is not enough to only know the hadith in general, but it is necessary to understand the study of hadith in a comprehensive way. The following is the urgency of studying *rijal al hadith* in the contemporary era:

1. Ensure the authenticity of the hadith
2. Avoid interpretation malfunctions
3. Maintaining the authenticity of the hadith
4. Facing the challenges of modernity
5. Develop critical thinking on hadith
6. Increasing awareness of the importance of legal sources in Islam

KESIMPULAN

Based on the previous descriptions, the following are some things that can be concluded: First, *rijal al hadith* as part of *ulum al hadith* has a locus of study in analyzing the people who narrate the hadith. *Rijal al hadith* is done to emphasize the authenticity of a hadith. The validity of a hadith or not depends on the sanad and matan of the hadith. Second, the study of *rijal al hadith* has its own purpose. The purpose of studying *rijal al hadith* is to know and ensure the credibility of the people who narrate the hadith. So that the hadith that is traced can be held accountable for its authenticity. Third, the methods used in *rijal al hadith* are the method of *tarih al ruwah* and the method of *jarh wa ta'dil*. Both of these methods are carried out by means of *ijtihad*. The first method is done by finding out the biographies of the people who narrated the hadith. While the second method is related to how to criticize the narrators in terms of their honesty, credibility and integrity. Fourth, the science of *rijal al hadith* still has relevance to life in the contemporary era. So that studying *rijal al hadith* is considered important for Muslims today. This is in order to increase the critical reasoning of Muslims on the quality of hadith and aims to stop the spread of hadiths that have indications of falsehood. Future research is recommended to explore digital approaches in organizing narrator databases and the use of artificial intelligence in analyzing weak chains of transmission, making *rijal al-hadith* more accessible and applicable in today's digital society.

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