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**REINTERPRETATION OF SEXUAL ETHICS IN THE HADITH
THROUGH MUHAMMAD SHAHRUR'S THEORY OF LIMITS**

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Abstract

The discourse on sexuality in classical Islamic law often places women in a passive position, prioritizing the husband's sexual rights over the wife's satisfaction. This article aims to explore Muhammad Shahrur's thoughts on sexual ethics within marriage, specifically regarding the prophetic tradition (hadith) that prohibits stopping sexual intercourse before the wife achieves climax. Utilizing a qualitative methodology with a library research approach, this study analyzes the text of the hadith through the framework of Shahrur's Limit Theory (Nazariyyah al-Hudud). The results indicate that from Shahrur's perspective, a wife's sexual satisfaction is not merely a moral recommendation (sunnah), but rather serves as al-hadd al-adna (the lower limit or minimum threshold) that must legally be fulfilled to maintain justice within the marital relationship. This reinterpretation shifts the traditional, patriarchal understanding of Islamic jurisprudence toward a framework rooted in human rights, medical science, and gender equality. Consequently, this study provides a theoretical foundation for reforming Islamic family law regarding reproductive rights and preventing marital sexual deprivation.

Keywords: Muhammad Shahrur, Limit Theory, Sexual Ethics, Hadith, Wife's Satisfaction.

Abstract

Wacana seksualitas dalam hukum Islam klasik sering kali menempatkan perempuan dalam posisi pasif. Dominasi tafsir patriarkis cenderung memprioritaskan hak seksual suami di atas kepuasan istri. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pemikiran Muhammad Shahrur mengenai etika seksual dalam rumah tangga, khususnya terkait hadits tentang larangan menghentikan hubungan intim sebelum istri mencapai kepuasan. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi pustaka, penelitian ini membedah teks hadits tersebut menggunakan instrumen Teori Limit (*Nazariyyah al-Hudud*). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam perspektif Shahrur, kepuasan seksual istri bukan sekadar anjuran moral, melainkan *al-hadd al-adna* (batas bawah) yang wajib dipenuhi dalam kerangka keadilan hubungan. Reinterpretasi ini menggeser pemahaman tradisional yang bersifat patriarkis menuju pemahaman yang lebih berbasis pada hak asasi manusia, sains, dan kesetaraan gender dalam Islam. Pendekatan ini memberikan landasan teoritis bagi pembaruan hukum keluarga Islam terkait hak reproduksi dan pencegahan penelantaran hak biologis perempuan.

Kata Kunci: Muhammad Shahrur, Teori Limit, Etika Seksual, Hadits, Kepuasan Istri

I. INTRODUCTION

The discourse on sexuality in classical Islamic law (fiqh al-munakahat) is often trapped in patriarchal reasoning that positions women merely as objects to satisfy men's biological needs (Ali 2006; Engineer 1992). Conventional Islamic jurisprudence tends to prioritize the



husband's sexual rights (milk al-budj) and conceptualizes the dowry as a form of compensation for this authority (Mernissi 1991; Wadud 1999). As a result, women's biological rights and wives' sexual satisfaction are often sidelined or relegated to mere morality, rather than as legally binding rights (Barlas 2002; Engineer 1992).

One crucial text governing the etiquette of intimate relationships is the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which forbids a husband from hastily ending intercourse before his wife achieves her biological needs or satisfaction. This hadith, narrated by Ibn Majah, explicitly emphasizes the importance of reciprocal attention in sexual activity. However, within the tradition of hadith commentary and codification of Islamic family law, this text is often categorized as mere advice (sunnah), adab, or a call for private pious morality (Abjad 2018; Al-Asqalani 2000). The implication is that if a husband neglects his wife's sexual satisfaction, such action has no clear legal consequences in religious courts.

Muhammad Shahrur (1929–2019), a contemporary Syrian thinker, developed the project "Contemporary Reading" (al-Qira'ah al-Mu'ashirah) to overhaul the conventional structure of ushul fiqh, which he deemed inadequate in responding to modern realities (Shahrur 1990). Through the Theory of Limits (Nazariyyah al-Hudud), Shahrur offered a mathematical-linguistic approach to mapping God's law so that it is dynamic, elastic, and aligned with scientific developments and human values (Shahrur, 2000; Syahrur, 2004). For Shahrur, religious texts must be read dialectically with objective reality to maintain the essence of Islamic justice (Abu Zayd 1995; Arkoun 1994).

This article examines and reinterprets the hadith on sexual ethics through the analytical tool of Muhammad Shahrur's Limit Theory. The focus of this study is how to redefine the legal status of "wife satisfaction," originally viewed as an ethical-scripturalistic domain, into a legally binding (legal-mandatory) standard. The urgency of this research is based on the need to deconstruct gender bias in Islamic family law in order to provide robust legal protection for women's reproductive and biological rights within the contemporary institution of marriage.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a type of normative legal research (doctrinal legal research) focused on the study of hadith texts using a philosophical, methodological, and conceptual approach (Marzuki 2005). The primary data sources in this study are the monumental works of Muhammad Shahrur, specifically *Al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira'ah Mu'ashirah* (1990), *Dirasat Islamiyyah Mu'ashirah fi al-Dawlah wa al-Mujtama'* (1992), and *Nahwa Usul Jadidah li al-Fiqh al-Islami* (2000). Secondary data were obtained from standard hadith books such as *Sunan*

Ibn Majah, books on hadith commentary, and supporting literature in the form of books, monographs, and accredited scientific journals discussing Shahrur's thoughts, gender, and sexual ethics in Islam.

Data collection techniques were conducted through document study (library research) by in-depth searching of relevant literature. Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically using a qualitative reasoning model. The Limit Theory (Nazariyyah al-Hudud) instrument is applied directly to analyze the substance of the hadith text prohibiting unilateral termination of sexual relations. This framework is used to trace the transformation of the text's meaning from its 7th-century historical context to its legal significance in the modern era, based on the equality and validity of medical science.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Muhammad Shahrur's Theory of Limits and the Classification of the Sunnah

Muhammad Shahrur's most important epistemological contribution to the reform of Islamic law is the Nazariyyah al-Hudud (Theory of Limits). Shahrur assumes that Allah's laws in the Qur'an are not a single, rigid point, but rather a highly elastic boundary (Shahrur 1990; Kurzman 1998). Humans are given complete freedom to conduct *ijtihad* and formulate positive law within this boundary according to the demands of the times. In this theory, Shahrur divides legal boundaries into several main forms, including: a. Lower Limit (Al-Hadd al-Adna): The minimum standard or lowest threshold whose legality is recognized by sharia. Actions below this limit are categorized as violations of the law (*tajaawuz al-hudud*); b. Upper Limit (Al-Hadd al-A'la): The maximum standard or upper limit that must not be exceeded in law enforcement; c. The Domain of *Ijtihad*: A dynamic space stretching between the lower and upper limits, where positive law is formed based on public interest (Syahrur 2004).

In addition to formulating the Theory of Limits, Shahrur radically reconstructed the position of the Prophet's Sunnah (Hadith). Unlike classical scholars of *ushul fiqh* who viewed all of the Prophet's actions as a generally binding source of law (Al-Shafi'i 1940), Shahrur divided the Sunnah into two fundamental categories (Shahrur 2000): a. Sunnah Risalah: Relating to the transmission of the Qur'anic revelation and the explanation of *mahdhah* worship, which is absolute, universal, and eternal (*tsabit*); b. Sunnah Nabuwah: Relating to the *ijtihad* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a community leader in worldly, social, political, medical, and ethical matters, as well as human interaction. This Sunnah is temporal, local, and conditional (*mutaghayyir*).

According to Shahrur, the hadiths that regulate the technical aspects of husband-wife interaction, including the ethics of sexual intercourse (jimak), are absolutely categorized as the Sunnah of Prophethood (Shahrur 1992). These hadiths are a manifestation of the Prophet's humanitarian ijthad to uphold socio-biological justice within the patriarchal structure of 7th-century Arab society. Therefore, the task of contemporary Muslim thinkers is not to copy the cultural aspects outright, but rather to extract the universal values behind these hadiths to synthesize them into a modern legal system using the analytical tool of Limit Theory.

3.2. Reinterpretation of the Hadith on Sexual Ethics

The hadith that serves as the object of this study is a text narrated by Imam Ibn Majah and Abu Ya'la, which specifically discusses the prohibition of unilaterally ending sexual intercourse before the couple reaches satisfaction:

إِذَا جَامَعَ أَحَدُكُمْ أَهْلَهُ فَلْيَصِدُّوْهَا، ثُمَّ إِذَا قَضَى حَاجَتَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَقْضِيَ حَاجَتَهَا فَلَا يُعْجَلُهَا حَتَّى تَقْضِيَ حَاجَتَهَا

If one of you has sexual intercourse with his wife, let him do it seriously (with full attention). Then, if he has achieved his desire (ejaculated/satisfied) before his wife has achieved her desire, then he should not rush (remove/finish) until his wife has achieved her desire too. (HR. Ibnu Majah, No. 1920; Al-Haitsami, Majma' al-Zawaid, 4/294).

Genealogically, classical fiqh discourse views this hadith as merely a complement to morals (makarim al-akhlaq) or sunnah adab in marriage (Al-Ghazali 1992). Formal jurisprudence considers that the contractual obligations of marriage are fulfilled only by penetration and provision of external support (Al-Nawawi 1929; Ibn Rushd 2004). As a result of this scripturalistic perspective, aspects of sexual satisfaction for women are in a legal vacuum. If a husband is selfish and leaves his wife biologically unsatisfied, Islamic law does not consider it a crime or a violation of contractual rights.

When this hadith is analyzed using Muhammad Shahrur's Theory of Limits, a radical shift in the legal paradigm occurs, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 3.1 Lower Limit

Parameter Analisis	Pendekatan Fikih Klasik / Tradisional	Pendekatan Teori Limit Shahrur
Kategori Teks	Dogma statis, anjuran moralitas (<i>sunnah/adab</i>)	Sunnah Nubuawah yang bersifat dinamis-kontekstual
Posisi Kepuasan Istri	Hak opsional, pelengkap kenyamanan rumah tangga	Batas Bawah (<i>Al-Hadd al-Adna</i>) yang wajib dipenuhi
Status Hukum Pelanggaran	Makruh secara moral, tidak ada sanksi hukum formal	<i>Tajaawuz al-hudud</i> (pelanggaran hukum berat/kezaliman)
Relasi Suami-Istri	Hirarkis-patriarkis (<i>milk al-budj</i> / hak milik sepihak)	Kontrak kemitraan setara (<i>mutual humanistic contract</i>)

Through the logic of Limit Theory, the phrase "let him not rush until his wife also fulfills her desire" is conceptualized as the Lower Limit (Al-Hadd al-Adna) in ethics and biological justice. Shahrur defines marriage in Islam as an equal human partnership, not a master-slave relationship (Shahrur 1992). Because it is a reciprocal contract, the fulfillment of both parties' biological rights must not fall below the minimum level of satisfaction.

When a husband intentionally neglects his wife's orgasm or satisfaction for his own selfish purposes, he automatically violates the limits of God's law. Unilaterally stopping intercourse before a wife reaches climax is no longer merely an act of "disrespect" or makruh (reprehensible), but rather a form of biological injustice, a disregard for reproductive rights, and can be categorized as marital sexual deprivation, which has real legal consequences (Munir 2006; Roded 1994).

3.3. Integrating Science and Islamic Family Law

One of the fundamental principles of Shahrur's contemporary epistemology is that the understanding of religious texts must not contradict scientific reality and empirical objective truth (al-haqiqah al-waqi'iyah) (Shahrur, 1900; Hoodbhoy 1991). If a legal interpretation contradicts valid modern scientific findings, then the interpretation is flawed and must be deconstructed (Shahrur 2004).

In the context of modern sexology, Masters and Johnson (1966) and Kaplan (1979) formulated that the human sexual response cycle differs markedly between men and women. Men generally have a refractory period (a period of rapid resolution) after ejaculation, while women require longer, more constant stimulation and do not experience an instant resolution period, enabling them to achieve multiple orgasms.

Sexual Response Cycle (Modern Science):

Men: Stimulation —▶ Ejaculation (Fast) —▶ Instant Resolution (Complete)

Women: Stimulation —————▶ Orgasm/Desire (Takes Longer)



[Lower Limit / Hadd al-Adna]

(Husbands Must Wait and Maintain Stimulation)

Ibn Majah's hadith, which forbids a husband from hastily ending intercourse before his wife reaches satisfaction, is empirical evidence that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) possessed a profound awareness of this biological reality long before modern science

mapped the female orgasm cycle (Abu Syuqqah 1999). The Prophet acted as a humanist leader, destroying the culture of sexual barbarity of the Jahiliyah (Islamic period) that considered women merely sexual property (Armstrong 2006).

Using Shahrur's analysis, the humanitarian values and scientific truths in this hadith are integrated into the dynamics of contemporary family law. This text should not be viewed as a frozen medieval dogma, but rather as a legal imperative requiring adjustment of sexual behavior to current medical knowledge to ensure the physical and psychological well-being of the wife (Esack 1997; Rahman 1982).

In the practical implementation of Islamic family law, this reinterpretation opens up a new space for *ijtihad*: the husband's inability or unwillingness to fulfill his wife's biological satisfaction rights on an ongoing basis—as proven through professional medical or psychological assessment—can be used as a valid legal reason (*al-syarat al-syar'i*) for the wife to file for divorce (*khulu'* or *fasakh*) or demand mandatory marriage counseling in court (An-Na'im 1990; Tucker 2008). This step completely shifts the orientation of family law from its original patriarchal character to a gender-responsive law based on the fulfillment of Human Rights (HAM).

IV. CONCLUSION

The reinterpretation of sexual ethics through Muhammad Shahrur's Limit Theory provides a significant methodological contribution in positioning women's biological rights in Islam. This approach successfully shifted the position of the hadith prohibiting unilateral cessation of intercourse, from being merely considered moral advice or loose *sunnah adab*, to a legally binding standard of justice (legal-mandatory). Within the framework of *Nazariyyah al-Hudud*, a wife's sexual satisfaction is firmly positioned as *al-hadd al-adna* (lower limit) in husband-wife interactions. Neglect of this biological right is categorized as an act of exceeding the limits of God's law (*tajaawuz al-hudud*), which has implications for domestic injustice. The integration of sharia principles and the validity of modern sexological science in Shahrur's thinking provides a new direction for the renewal of contemporary Islamic family law that is more just, humane, and accommodating to women's reproductive rights and human dignity.

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