

The Hadith on the Veil (Niqab): A Critical Analysis by Muhammad al-Ghazali

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze hadiths related to the practice of wearing the niqab (face veil) by Muslim women using the approach of sanad (chain of transmission) and matn (text) criticism as developed by Muhammad al-Ghazali. The study is motivated by the diversity of scholarly opinions regarding the legal status of the niqab, ranging from obligatory, recommended (sunnah), to merely a cultural tradition. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a library research approach. The process of takhrij (verification) of hadiths was conducted to trace the reliability of the sanad, followed by matn analysis based on al-Ghazali's principles: consistency with the Qur'an, comparison with more authentic hadiths, historical context, and scientific reason. The findings indicate that most of the hadiths used to justify the obligation of the niqab have weaknesses in their chain of transmission and do not fully align with core Islamic values such as justice, ease, and public benefit (maslahah). Muhammad al-Ghazali asserts that covering the face is not an Islamic obligation unless supported by an authentic and definitive (qath'i) textual basis. Therefore, the use of the niqab is better understood as a personal choice or a cultural tradition rather than a religious obligation.

Keywords: Niqab, Hadith Criticism, Muhammad al-Ghazali

INTRODUCTION

The niqab, or face veil worn by Muslim women, has become a prominent phenomenon frequently discussed within Islamic legal discourse and socio-cultural issues. In Islam, the niqab is often associated with the shariah requirements concerning the *awrah* (parts of the body that must be covered) of women. However, understandings of the niqab are not monolithic, either among scholars or within society. Some scholars consider it obligatory, while others regard it as a recommended practice (*sunnah*) or a cultural tradition influenced by specific social contexts. This discourse often refers to several hadiths of Prophet

Muhammad SAW that address the boundaries of female *awrah*, particularly in relation to covering the face and hands.¹ Therefore, studying these hadiths through the lens of hadith criticism is essential to provide a clear and relevant theological foundation.

One of the prominent figures in contemporary hadith studies is Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996), an Egyptian scholar and thinker known for his critical approach to hadith texts. In his monumental work, *al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah baina Abl al-Fiqh wa Abl al-Hadith*, al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of *matan* (textual) criticism of hadith by considering its conformity with the Qur'an, more authentic hadiths, historical context, and scientific truth.²

Al-Ghazali's critical approach to hadiths concerning the niqab reflects an effort to understand religious texts contextually and rationally. This is crucial in addressing the challenges of the modern era, where interpretations of religious teachings need to be aligned with developments in science and human values.³

Therefore, the study of the hadith criticism method applied by al-Ghazali is expected to provide a significant contribution to understanding the position of the niqab in Islam in a more objective and comprehensive manner.⁴

Several previous studies related to this topic have been conducted. One of them is by Abdul Basid (2017), entitled *Critique of Muhammad al-Ghazali's Method in Understanding the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW*, which examines the hadith interpretation method developed by Muhammad al-Ghazali. However,

¹ Al-Bukhari, 2001; Al-Qaradawi, 2005).

² Didi Suardi. "Metode Pemahaman Hadist Menurut Muhammad Al-Ghazali." *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadist*, Vol. 4 No. 1, 2020

³ Badri Khairuman. "Hadis Nabi Dalam Pandangan Syaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali." *Diroyah: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Hadis*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 2019.

⁴ Abdul Basid. "Kritik Terhadap Metode Muhammad Al-Ghazali Dalam Memahami Hadits Nabi Muhammad SAW." *Kabillah: Journal of Social Community*, Vol. 2 No. 1, 2017

this study places greater emphasis on the context of using *abad* hadiths in establishing creed and highlights *matan* criticism.

Another study was conducted by Dwi Widya Djaya, titled *Communication Behavior of Muslim Women Wearing Niqab in Makassar City (A Social Study of the Niqab Squad Makassar Community)*. In this research, the author attempts to explore the self-concept and communication behavior of Muslim women wearing the niqab within the Niqab Squad Makassar community. The results indicate that their self-concept and communication behavior are influenced by religious understanding and community interactions.⁵

Meanwhile, this study aims to analyze hadiths specifically related to the niqab using the *sanad* and *matan* criticism approach as developed by Muhammad al-Ghazali. Unlike previous studies that focus more on al-Ghazali's interpretative method or normative position regarding the use of the niqab, this research will more specifically investigate the quality of the *sanad* and the construction of the *matan* meanings of frequently cited hadiths about the niqab, while also revealing how al-Ghazali assesses the validity and relevance of these hadiths in contemporary contexts.

This study employs a qualitative method, producing descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observed subjects.⁶ It is a library research, involving the collection of books and literature relevant to the study. The data sources include both primary and secondary materials.

In this study, the researcher sources primary data from several original classical books and also utilizes digital applications such as Al-Maktabah Al-

⁵Dwi Widya Djaya, *Perilaku Komunikasi Perempuan Muslim Bercadar di Kota Makassar (Studi Sosial Komunitas Niqab Squad Makassar)*

⁶ Albi Anggito Setiawan Johan, *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif* (CV Jejak (Jejak Publisher), 2018), 11.

Shamilah, Jami' Kutub Al-Tis'ah, and Jami' Khadim Haramain to perform *takhrīj*, analyze hadiths, and obtain other relevant data. Meanwhile, secondary data consist of literature related to the research topic, including journal articles, books, and others. Specifically, this study employs the *takhrīj* method, also known as the study of *matan* criticism (*naqd matan al-hadith*). Hadith criticism or *takhrīj* is the process of extracting hadiths from hadith collections to examine their authenticity. Subsequently, *sharh* is conducted, which involves explaining the wording (*matan*) of the hadith to derive a comprehensive understanding.⁷

DISCUSSION

Hadith Sanad Criticism

In research, *takhrīj* is often understood as the effort to trace or search for hadiths from various original sources related to the subject of the study, presenting the complete *matan* (text) and *sanad* (chain of narration) of the hadith.⁸ After tracing the hadith using the keyword "*jilbabaha min ra'siha*" through digital applications such as Maktabah Al-Shamilah, Jami' Kutub Al-Tis'ah, and Jami' Khadim Al-Haramain, several hadiths were found.

Among them is the narration by Imam Abu Dawud, No. 1829, with the following text:

1829 - حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ حَنْبَلٍ ، نَا هُشَيْمٌ نَا يَزِيدُ بْنُ أَبِي زِيَادٍ ، عَنْ مُجَاهِدٍ ، عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ : كَانَ الرُّكْبَانُ يَمُرُّونَ بِنَا وَنَحْنُ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ

⁷ Wahyudin Darmalaksana, *Hukum Islam Agroteknologi: Studi Takhrij dan Syarah Hadi* (Sentra Publikasi Indonesia, 2023), 301.

⁸ Drs H. Ahmad Izzan M.Ag, *STUDI TAKHRIJ HADIS: Kajian Tentang Metodologi Takhrij dan Kegiatan Penelitian Hadis* (Tafakur, t.t.), 8.

صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مُحْرِمَاتٌ فَإِذَا حَازُوا بِنَا سَدَلَتْ إِحْدَانَا جِلْبَابَهَا مِنْ رَأْسِهَا عَلَى وَجْهِهَا ، فَإِذَا جَاوَزُونَا كَشَفْنَاهُ .⁹

Narrated to us by Ahmad bin Hanbal, narrated to us by Husyaim, who reported from Yazid bin Abu Ziyad from Mujahid from Aisyah, she said: People riding past us while we were in ihram with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and when they approached us, one of us would draw her jilbab from her head over her face, and when they had passed, we would uncover it.

The next stage involves the evaluation of the narrators (*rawi*) and the continuity of the *sanad* of the hadith narrated by Imam Abu Dawud, as shown in the table below:

No.	Narrator Name	Birth/Death (H)		Scholarly Comments	Category
		L	W		
1.	Aisyah binti Abi Bakar Ash Shiddiq	-	58	- Ummu al mukminin	companions
2.	Mujahid bin Jabar	21	102	- Ibnu Hajar Al Asqalani: <i>Tsiqah</i> - Adz Dzahabi: <i>hujjah</i>	Middle Tabi'in
3.	Yazid bin Abi Ziyad	47	136	- Ibnu Hajar Al Asqalani: <i>dbaif</i> - Adz Dzahabi: <i>shadunq, syi'ah</i>	Ordinary Tabi'in
4.	Husyaim bin Basyir	105	183	- Ibnu Hajar Al Asqalani: <i>Tsiqah Tsabat Hujjah</i> - Adz Dzahabi: <i>Imam</i>	Tabi'in

⁹ "سنن أبي داود - ت الأرئوط | تراث" diakses 12 Mei 2025,
<https://app.turath.io/book/117359>.

5.	Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hambal	164	241	- Ibnu Hajar Al Asqalani: <i>Tsiqah Hafidh</i> - Adz Dzahabi: <i>Imam</i>	<i>Tabi'ul Atba'</i>
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Based on the table above, the narrators of the hadith transmitted by Imam Abu Dawud from Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hambal form a continuous chain (*ittisāl al-sanad*) from Imam Abu Dawud back to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as evidenced by the documented teacher-student relationships. However, Yazid bin Abi Ziyad is considered weak (*da'if*) due to his poor memory, which affects the overall strength of the hadith, potentially classifying it as weak (*da'if*). This hadith falls under the category of *ahad* because it does not meet the conditions of *mutawatir*; that is, the number of narrators at each level of the chain is limited.

In Nashiruddin al-Albani's *Dha'if Abi Dawud*, this hadith is classified as having a weak (*da'if*) isnad (chain of narration). All narrators are considered trustworthy (*thiqqah*) except for Yazid bin Ziyad, who is weak in memory. In *Aun al-Ma'bud 'ala Sunan Abi Dawud*, according to al-Mundhiri and Yahya bin Mu'in, Mujahid did not hear directly from Aisyah; Abu Hatim al-Razi also states that Mujahid's narration from Aisyah is *munqati'* (disconnected). Therefore, this hadith is regarded as *mursal* (an incomplete chain). However, Imam al-Shawkani considers this hadith to be *hasan li ghairihi* (good due to supporting narrations) because of the presence of stronger corroborating hadiths.¹⁰

Scholars of the major Islamic schools of thought generally agree on the obligation for Muslim women to cover their *awrah* based on the Qur'an and

¹⁰ "223/2" تراث | الأم - داود - ضعيف أبي داود, diakses 29 Mei 2025, <https://app.turath.io/book/5914>.

hadith. The Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'i schools concur that a woman's face is not considered *awrah*. Only the Hanbali school holds the view that the entire body of a woman, including the face, is *awrah*. Regarding prayer, all schools agree that women may uncover their faces. Outside of prayer, only the Hanbali school mandates that women cover their faces with a niqab. The other three schools generally consider it recommended (*sunnah*), becoming obligatory only if there is a fear of *fitnah* (temptation or harm), especially for women who are considered beautiful.¹¹

Kritik Hadis Metode Muhammad al-Ghazali

Based on Muhammad al-Ghazali's method, the criticism of the *matan* (content) of hadith involves the following approaches: 1) examining the hadith *matan* by comparing it with the Qur'an, 2) comparing the hadith *matan* with other hadiths of similar meaning, 3) reviewing the historical background of the narration, and 4) assessing the hadith *matan* through the use of reason and scientific truth.¹²

1. Examining the Hadith Matan with the Qur'an

For example, in Surah An-Nur, verse 30

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do." (Qur'an, Surah An-Nur, 24:30)

¹¹ Toha Andiko, "Larangan Bercadar di Perguruan Tinggi Perspektif Sadd al-Dzarî'ah," *MADANIA* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Juni 2018): 127.

¹² Sri Purwaningsih, "KRITIK TERHADAP REKONSTRUKSI METODE PEMAHAMAN HADIS MUHAMMAD AL-GHAZALI," *Jurnal Theologia* 28, no. 1 (14 September 2017): 85, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2017.28.1.1189>.

According to al-Ghazali, if all women's faces during the Prophet's lifetime were covered, why then were believing men commanded to "lower their gaze"? It is explained that in the above verse, the command to "lower the gaze" refers specifically to looking directly at a woman's face. A man's heart is attracted when he sees a woman's face, so he should avoid repeating his gaze. Al-Zamakhshari interprets guarding the gaze as protecting oneself from what Allah has forbidden, and even further, to prevent actions leading to immoral behavior (such as adultery). All of this is to safeguard the honor of both parties. This means that women are required to cover their *amrāh* except for the face and palms, while men must guard their gaze except in cases permitted by Shariah.¹³

It can be concluded that if the above hadith is used as a basis to recommend wearing the niqab (face veil), it does not align with the Qur'anic verse, which commands guarding the gaze rather than wearing the niqab.

2. Examining the Matan with Similar Hadiths

حَدَّثَنَا يَعْقُوبُ بْنُ كَعْبٍ الْأَنْطَاكِيُّ وَمُؤَمَّلُ بْنُ الْفَضْلِ الْحَرَّانِيُّ قَالَا حَدَّثَنَا الْوَلِيدُ عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ بَشِيرٍ عَنْ قَتَادَةَ عَنْ خَالِدٍ قَالَ يَعْقُوبُ ابْنُ دُرَيْكِ عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا أَنَّ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتَ أَبِي بَكْرٍ دَخَلَتْ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَيْهَا ثِيَابٌ رِقَاقٌ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْمَاءُ إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ إِذَا بَلَغَتْ الْمَحِيضَ لَمْ تَصْلُحْ أَنْ يُرَى مِنْهَا إِلَّا هَذَا وَهَذَا

¹³ Sabhamis, "Kritik matan hadis menurut muhammad al ghazali (w.1996) (kajian atas kitab al sunnah alnabawiyah baina ahl al fiqh wa ahl al hadith)" (doctoralThesis, Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2023), 166, <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/77531>.

وَأَشَارَ إِلَى وَجْهِهِ وَكَفَّيْهِ قَالَ أَبُو دَاوُدَ هَذَا مُرْسَلٌ خَالِدُ بْنُ دُرَيْكٍ لَمْ يُدْرِكْ
عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا¹⁴.

"Narrated to us by Ya'qub bin Ka'b Al-Anthaki and Muammal Ibnul Fadhl Al-Harrani, both said: Al-Walid narrated to us from Sa'id bin Basyir from Qatadah from Khalid, who said that Ya'qub bin Duraik narrated from 'Aisyah (may Allah be pleased with her) that Asma binti Abu Bakr entered upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ wearing thin clothes, so the Prophet ﷺ turned away from her and said, "O Asma', when a woman reaches puberty, it is not permissible for anything to be seen of her except this and this"—he pointed to the face and both hands. Abu Dawud commented, "This is a mursal hadith. Khalid bin Duraik never met 'Aisyah (may Allah be pleased with her)."

Muhammad al-Ghazali emphasizes that it is undeniable that women in the pre-Islamic era as well as during the time of Islam covered their faces while leaving their eyes visible. This practice was clearly a cultural custom and not part of religious worship. He argues that no act of worship is valid without a clear basis from the Qur'an. The hadith often cited as a basis for covering the face contradicts the narration of Asma binti Abi Bakr, who entered the house of the Prophet ﷺ wearing thin clothing. The Prophet ﷺ turned away and said, "O Asma', a mature woman should not display more than this," while indicating the face and both hands.¹⁵

Imam Al-Qurtubi, as quoted by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, concludes that scholars agree women may see parts of a man's body that men are allowed to see of women, such as the face and ears, but are not permitted

¹⁴ "سنن أبي داود - ت الأرئوط | تراث"

¹⁵ Sabhamis, "Kritik matan hadis menurut muhammad al ghazali (w.1996) (kajian atas kitab al sunnah alnabawiyah baina ahl al fiqh wa ahl al hadith)," 90.

to see parts considered *anrrah*. According to al-Ghazali, the mistaken understanding regarding face covering actually burdens women, as they would be compelled to wear a burqa or niqab that covers the lower part of the face to be able to move about. Covering the face with a veil from above also obstructs vision. Therefore, al-Ghazali argues that the existing verses do not mandate covering the face.¹⁶

3. Examining the Matan through the Historical Background of the Narration

Muhammad al-Ghazali, in his analysis, highlights the contradictions between hadiths that support the niqab and other hadiths that provide clearer guidance regarding the boundaries of a woman's *anrrah*. He notes that the hadiths often cited to mandate the niqab are not as strong as other more valid narrations, such as the story of Ummu Khallad. Al-Ghazali also emphasizes that covering the face, as practiced by some women during the pre-Islamic era and early Islam, was more a social custom than a religious obligation.¹⁷

In the hadith narrated by Asma binti Abi Bakr, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ affirmed that an adult woman should not expose more than her face and hands. Furthermore, he refers to the importance of lowering the gaze for both men and women, underscoring that Islam stresses behavior and ethics in social interactions. Dress customs can also be influenced by local culture and varying religious interpretations, which sometimes result in practices not fully aligned with clear Islamic teachings. Therefore, this analysis invites a deeper discussion on the interpretation of religious texts and their application in diverse social

¹⁶ Sabhamis, 91.

¹⁷ Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah Baina ahl Fiqh wa Ahli al-Hadis* (Dar Al Ilm, t.t.), 42.

contexts, where each community may have different understandings and practices, making respectful dialogue essential.

In a hadith narrated by Imam Abu Dawud, the Prophet ﷺ instructed two women to cover themselves in the presence of a blind man, emphasizing that even though the man could not see, the women were still required to cover their *awrah*. He posed a rhetorical question, “Are you both blind as well?” indicating that the act of covering remains important even in that context. However, a misunderstanding of the use of the niqab can burden women, as they may feel compelled to wear a burqa or face veil that covers the lower part of the face to carry out daily activities.

Muhammad al-Ghazali argues that the verse in question does not mandate covering the face. He notes that in both the pre-Islamic period and during Islam, some women covered their faces while leaving their eyes uncovered, which was clearly a social custom rather than an act of worship. In his view, no act of worship is valid without a clear basis from the Qur’an and authentic hadith. Moreover, the Prophet ﷺ himself saw women with uncovered faces in various gatherings, whether in the mosque or the marketplace, without ever commanding them to cover their faces.¹⁸

4. Examining the Matan Based on Scientific Truth

One important approach in hadith criticism according to Muhammad al-Ghazali is to examine the *matan* (content) of hadith based on the principle of scientific truth. Al-Ghazali asserts that Islam, as a religion of revelation, cannot contradict sound reason, empirical facts, and objective reality. If a hadith textually conflicts with these

¹⁸ Sabhamis, “Kritik matan hadis menurut muhammad al ghazali (w.1996) (kajian atas kitab al sunnah alnabawiyah baina ahl al fiqh wa ahl al hadith),” 88.

principles, it must be critically reviewed both from the perspective of its *sanad* (chain of narration) and *matan*.

In his book *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah bayna Ahl al-Fiqh wa Ahl al-Hadith*,¹⁹ al-Ghazali emphasizes that one indicator of problematic *matan* is if its content contradicts the fundamental values of Islam, such as justice, ease (*taysir*), and public welfare (*maslahah*). He criticizes some scholars who accept all hadiths literally without considering rationality, historical context, and consistency with the Qur'an, which is the primary source of Islamic teachings.

Regarding the hadiths about the niqab, al-Ghazali points out that some narrations used as the basis for the obligation to cover the face are weak in terms of *sanad* and their content does not align with the Qur'anic spirit, which emphasizes moral responsibility in guarding the gaze (QS. An-Nur: 30–31), rather than mandating total face covering. He stresses that if all women in the Prophet's time covered their faces, then the command for men to lower their gaze would be irrelevant.

Furthermore, al-Ghazali highlights that certain religious practices, such as the absolute use of the niqab, often result from the assimilation of Arab cultural customs during early Islam. Therefore, he rejects using cultural customs as standards of worship unless supported by definitive (*qat'i*) evidence. He states: "Indeed, no act of worship is valid except based on clear evidence from the Qur'an or authentic and reliable hadith."²⁰

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah Baina ahl Fiqh wa Ahli al-Hadis*, 108.

²⁰ Al-Ghazali, 110.

A similar view is expressed by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who argues that covering the face is not a legal obligation (*wajib syar'i*) because it lacks strong textual support. He adds that imposing the niqab on women contradicts the fundamental Islamic principle of ease and facilitation.²¹ With this approach, it can be concluded that hadiths about the niqab need to be studied objectively and scientifically. If the content of the hadith causes complications that conflict with the *maqasid shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), reinterpretation is necessary to ensure alignment with the core values of Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and analysis of hadiths related to the niqab (face covering for Muslim women), it can be concluded that the obligation to wear the niqab is not founded on strong and definitive (*qath'i*) evidence, either from the perspective of the *sanad* (chain of narration) or the *matan* (content) of the hadiths. Muhammad al-Ghazali, as a reformist figure in contemporary hadith studies, emphasizes the importance of in-depth criticism of the *matan* using a comprehensive approach. He proposes four criteria for examining the authenticity of the *matan*: conformity with the Qur'an, consistency with other more authentic hadiths, relevance to historical context, and logical as well as scientific accuracy.

Through these criteria, al-Ghazali demonstrates that many hadiths used to mandate the niqab do not meet these standards. Furthermore, al-Ghazali

²¹ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fatawa Mu'ashirah*, 2005.

stresses that the Qur'anic command to guard one's gaze indicates that women's faces during the Prophet's time were not always covered, since if all faces had been covered, such a command would be irrelevant.

Thus, through a systematic and rational hadith criticism approach, this study affirms that the niqab is not a sharia obligation but rather a permissible choice, provided it is not regarded as the sole standard of piety. The approach offered by Muhammad al-Ghazali is relevant in providing a more contextual, moderate, and proportional understanding of religious practices within contemporary Muslim societies.

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