




Research Article

## The Concept of Sunnah: Its Evolution and Implications for Modern Islamic Thought

Unggul Prayoga<sup>1</sup>, Tesa Maulana<sup>2</sup>, Munawir<sup>3</sup>

1. UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia  
E-mail: [unggulalim6@gmail.com](mailto:unggulalim6@gmail.com) 
2. UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia  
E-mail: [nunmawlayazulfah@gmail.com](mailto:nunmawlayazulfah@gmail.com)
3. UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia  
E-mail: [munawir@uinsaizu.ac.id](mailto:munawir@uinsaizu.ac.id)



Copyright © 2026 by Authors, Published by AL-AFKAR: Journal For Islamic Studies. This is an open access article under the CC BY License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>).

Received : November 25, 2025

Accepted : January 12, 2026

Revised : December 27, 2025

Available online : February 22, 2026

**How to Cite:** Unggul Prayoga, Tesa Maulana, and Munawir. (2026) "The Concept of Sunnah: Its Evolution and Implications for Modern Islamic Thought", *al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies*, 9(1), pp. 1655–1667. doi: 10.31943/afkarjournal.v9i1.2957.

### The Concept of Sunnah: Its Evolution and Implications for Modern Islamic Thought

**Abstract.** Sunnah and hadith are two fundamental concepts in Islam that serve as guidelines for the lives of Muslims. This study aims to analyze the development of the meaning of sunnah and hadith from the perspective of classical to contemporary scholars, as well as to explore the transformation of sunnah from the practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW into canonized hadith texts. The method used is a historical literature review, referring to classical books, as well as the thoughts of scholars

such as Imam Shafi'i and Fazlur Rahman, and modern literature. The results of the study show that the Sunnah was initially understood as the practical traditions of the Prophet, while hadiths were verbal narratives about his words, deeds, and decisions. Differences in interpretation arose among scholars, such as muhaddithun who viewed the Sunnah comprehensively, ushuliyyun who emphasized legal aspects, and fuqaha who classified it into categories of fiqh. Fazlur Rahman put forward a theory of the evolution of the Sunnah into hadith through three phases: informal, semi-formal, and formal, in which the dynamic Sunnah changed into a more rigid text. This research makes a significant contribution to understanding the development of the concept of Sunnah and its implications for contemporary Islamic thought.

**Keywords:** Sunnah, Hadith, Fazlur Rahman, Evolution of Sunnah to Hadith

## INTRODUCTION

A part from the Qur'an, Sunnah is one of the main pillars of Islam. All the words, deeds, and decisions of the Prophet SAW that serve as guidelines for Muslims are called Sunnah, which etymologically means path or method. It is very important to understand Sunnah deeply because it provides broad guidance for life, from worship to muamalah. However, the understanding of Sunnah has changed throughout Islamic history.

Since the early days of Islam, there have been differences in understanding the Sunnah. Classical scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik, and Imam Shafi'i had different opinions about the status, position, and way of understanding the Sunnah. These differences continue to this day, with contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman offering new interpretations of the Sunnah. These differences highlight the fascinating dynamics in how Muslims view the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Taufikurrahman, 2013).

The study of hadith and sunnah has also made great strides in line with the development of the times. Hadith scholars have made persistent efforts to collect, classify, and critique the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Thanks to their efforts, many hadith books are now important references for Muslims. However, due to the development of science and human thought, there are new challenges in understanding hadith. As a result, the ongoing study of hadith and sunnah requires a more critical and comprehensive approach.

Previous studies have discussed various aspects related to the concept of sunnah. Some studies focus on the history of the development of hadith, (Andariati, 2020; Hamzah et al., 2023) while others analyze the thoughts of classical scholars on sunnah. (Arifin, 2014; Mukhtar, 2020) However, there is still room for more in-depth research on the development of the concept of sunnah as a whole, especially in relation to the development of modern Islamic thought. This gap is filled by an analysis of the concept of sunnah from a historical perspective and an explanation of how sunnah became hadith.

The main objective of this study is to examine how the concept of sunnah developed from the time of the Prophet SAW to the modern era. This study will also explain how sunnah changed from the practices of the Prophet SAW to the hadith

texts we know today. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will contribute significantly to a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of sunnah and how it influences contemporary Islamic thought.

The literature review method was used in this study. Classical books on *usul fiqh* and *hadith*, which contain the understanding of earlier scholars about the Sunnah, were used as data sources. In addition, this study refers to the writings of contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, who provide new perspectives on the Sunnah. To enhance the analysis, scientific journal articles related to this theme will also be used as references. Historical analysis will be used as the main method for analyzing the data.

## METHOD

Etymologically, the term “method” comes from the Greek word “Methodos” and the English word “Methode,” which literally means ‘way’ or “path.” Thus, a method can be understood as a systematic technique or procedure applied in conducting research. Meanwhile, research is an investigation conducted thoroughly and critically to discover facts and principles of a critical and meticulous investigation in an effort to determine something (M.Si, 2014, p. 84).

In this study, the author used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is descriptive in nature. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the conditions of a context by focusing on detailed and in-depth descriptions of the conditions in a natural setting, about what actually happens as it is (Nugrahani & Hum, 2014, p. 4).

Furthermore, the author conducted this research using library research (Friantika et al., 2022, p. 214) with a historical approach to comprehensively trace the development of the concepts of sunnah and *hadith*, in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and interprets data from various written sources, including classical books in the fields of *usul fiqh* and *hadith*, contemporary thinking from Fazlur Rahman, which offers a new perspective on sunnah, as well as modern literature such as scientific journals and related books to enrich the analysis and ensure the relevance of the findings to the current context, so that this research does not only rely on traditional sources but also pays attention to the latest academic developments in the study of *hadith* and sunnah (Creswell, 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Sunnah and Hadith in the Lens of Classical to Contemporary Scholars

Linguistically, *sunnah* can mean flowing or passing easily, a path, tradition, practice, model of behavior, provision, and regulation (Al-Faizruzzabadi, 1983). Sunnah can also be described as the middle path, the straight and praiseworthy path, and the mediator between various forms of extremism. When Abu Hanifah wrote a letter to Uthman Al-Batti discussing his opinion about a Muslim who commits a sin and refuting the opinion of the Khawarij about people who commit sins, Abu Hanifah said that his opinion was the same as that of the just people (*ahl al-'adl*) and those who are on the middle path (*ahl as-sunnah*) (Rahman, 1965).

In the Quran, the word *sunnah* is mentioned sixteen times in both singular and plural. (Abdul Baqi, 1992) The Quran uses the term *sunnah* in several contexts that broadly relate to two things. First, the decrees of the ancients (*sunnatul awwalin*), which means events that happened to them as a result of their actions. Second, the decrees of Allah (*sunnatullah*), which means the rules that apply to all His servants (Ibrahim, 1998).

A hadith of the Prophet SAW states that anyone from his *ummah* who does not like his *sunnah* is not part of the Prophet SAW's group, making the *sunnah* the way of life of the Prophet SAW, according to the definition of Ibn Mandzur. (Ibnu Mandzur, 2014) Mustafa Azami supports this definition by stating that the word *sunnah* is mentioned in hadith books in more than ten different forms, and these words always mean the way of life and behavior that is followed (Azami, 1994).

Meanwhile, scholars of hadith define *sunnah* as everything that comes from the Prophet SAW, whether it be words, deeds, decisions, physical and moral characteristics, or events that occurred before or after the Prophet SAW's prophethood, such as his seclusion in the Cave of Hira'. (As-Siba'i, 1994) Ushul scholars or *ushuliyun* define *sunnah* as everything attributed to the Prophet SAW other than the Quran, such as words, deeds, or decisions that serve as evidence for Sharia law. On the other hand, *fiqh* scholars define *sunnah* as everything that has been determined by the Prophet SAW, which is not included in the category of obligatory or *fardhu* (Khatib, 1989).

The differences in scholars' interpretations of the concept of *sunnah* are based on their varying perspectives on the position of the Prophet SAW in Islam. *Muhadditsun*, with their focus on the biography and example of the Prophet SAW, tend to interpret *sunnah* comprehensively, covering all aspects of his life. This is based on their view that the Prophet SAW is an ideal figure who should be emulated in all things. Conversely, scholars of *ushul fiqh*, with their primary focus on legislation and legal methodology, tend to emphasize aspects of *sunnah* that are directly related to the formation and establishment of Islamic law. They view the Prophet SAW as the founder of a legal system that provides a framework for *mujtahids* in formulating new laws. Meanwhile, *fuqaha*, with their focus on the application of law in daily life, tend to view the *Sunnah* from the perspective of *fiqh* law. (As-Siba'i, 1994) They classify each of the Prophet's actions into specific legal categories such as obligatory, recommended, permissible, disliked, or forbidden. Thus, these differing views reflect the different disciplines studied by each group of scholars, as well as their differing focuses in understanding the role of the Prophet SAW in Islam.

The word *hadith* comes from the word *hadatsa*, which means *kaun al shai' ba'da an lam yakun*, which means "the existence of something after its absence". (Al-Ashfahani, 2004) *Hadith* can also mean *jadid* (new), or *khabar* (news) (Ibnu Mandzur, 2014) and it can also mean *kalam* (Shubhi Shalih, 1989). The Qur'an mentions the word *hadith* 28 times, 23 of which are in the singular form and 5 of which are in the plural form (Abdul Baqi, 1992). Literally, the word *hadith* in the Qur'an and *hadith* books has several meanings, such as religious communication, message, or the Qur'an itself, as mentioned in Q.S. Az-Zumar verse 23, worldly stories or natural events as mentioned in Q.S. Al-An'am verse 68, historical stories as mentioned in Q.S. Taha

verse 9, or secrets, conversations, or recent stories as mentioned in Q.S. At-Tahrim verse 3 (Azami, 1977).

According to Ignaz Goldziher's perspective, the meaning of 'hadith' is polysemic, meaning it has various connotations. Literally, this word can be interpreted as 'story' or 'narrative', but its meaning extends to include 'communication', 'historical information', both worldly and otherworldly, as well as related to past and present events (Goldziher, 1971).

Everything attributed to the Prophet SAW, whether it be his words, actions, or decisions, as well as his physical characteristics and exemplary behavior, is considered a hadith in the terminology (Sabbaq, 1972). In this sense, the terms hadith and sunnah are used synonymously to refer to the entirety of the Prophet's teachings, which include his words (qaul), his actions (fi'il), his approval (taqrir), and all aspects of his life and character (hal ihwal) (As-Siba'i, 1994). Nuruddin Al-'Itr criticized the above definition of hadith because it does not cover all the narrations found in the books of hadith; he argued that the definition was too narrow. According to him, many narrations do not originate directly from the Prophet SAW, but rather from his companions and tabi'in. Therefore, he proposed a more comprehensive definition, namely everything that is attributed to the Prophet SAW, his companions, or tabi'in, whether in the form of words, deeds, decisions, or physical or moral characteristics (Nuruddin Al-'Itr, 1992).

Khabar and atsar are other terms often used to describe hadith. Al Shahrawy states that there are some scholars who continue to consider hadith and khabar to be the same as anything attributed to the Prophet SAW or to other people because linguistically they have the same meaning (Ash-Shahrawi, 1971). Narrators also took news from the companions and tabi'in, not only from the Prophet SAW (Shubhi Shalih, 1989). Some scholars argue that khabar encompasses all information or stories attributed to someone other than the Prophet SAW. This opinion divides historians and hadith scholars, with muhaddithun being specifically hadith scholars and historians being referred to as akhbariyyun (Khatib, 1989).

In addition, they state that every hadith is khabar, and not every khabar is a hadith because hadith is specific, while khabar is general (Shubhi Shalih, 1989). According to 'Ajaj Al-Khatib, atsar is synonymous with khabar, which is everything attributed to the Prophet SAW, his companions, or tabi'in. However, according to the Fuqaha Khurasan, khabar is synonymous with hadith, while atsar is limited to the words of the companions. In other words, atsar refers to the term hadith mauquf, while khabar refers to the term hadith marfu' (Khatib, 1989).

In previous discussions, some scholars argued that hadith and sunnah have the same meaning. However, reading classical works will show that the meanings and applications of the two are different. According to Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Mahdi, people vary. Some are proficient in the Sunnah but not in the hadith; others are proficient in the hadith but not in the Sunnah (Ar-Razi, 1952). It is clear that hadith and Sunnah have different meanings and uses. Al-A'mashy's statement is another example of research showing that there is a difference between the terms Sunnah and hadith. He stated that he had never seen a people more noble than those who loved and sought

these hadith. In one of his statements, Abu Yusuf recommended adhering to hadith that were in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah (Ahmad Hasan, 1994).

In his commentary on the Prophet's saying about a Muslim who died while in a state of ihram, Ahmad bin Hanbal said, "In this hadith there are five sunnahs." In addition, Aisha said, "In the case of Barirah there are three sunnahs". (Ahmad Hasan, 1994) According to Subhi Saleh, hadith scholars sometimes say, "This hadith contradicts qiyas, sunnah, and ijma'." A book called *As-Sunnah bi Shawahid Al-Hadith* discusses sunnah supported by hadith. The book shows that hadith must support sunnah (Shubhi Shalih, 1989).

There is a clear difference between hadith and sunnah, as indicated by several quotations above. Hasbie Ash-Shiddiqie says that hadith is everything that was narrated by the Prophet SAW, while sunnah is everything that has been practiced by Muslims since long ago, whether narrated or not. (Ash-Shiddiqie, 1991) Mahmud An-Nasir states that sunnah is the practices and customs of the early generations that have been agreed upon and preserved from generation to generation. Hadith, on the other hand, are the fixed and certain rules given by the Prophet SAW to humanity (An-Nasir, 1981).

Syuhudi Ismail said that, based on the quality of its practice and narration, a hadith is below the sunnah. This is because a hadith is a report of an event attributed to the Prophet SAW, even though the Prophet SAW only did it once and only one person narrated it. However, the sunnah is a practice that was carried out continuously by the Prophet SAW and his companions, and continued by subsequent generations. As a result, the Sunnah has greater legal authority than hadith. However, both originate from the Prophet (peace be upon him), even though they are different. Therefore, most hadith scholars believe that there is no difference between hadith and Sunnah (Ismail, 1994).

Sunnah is defined as practical tradition, while hadith is defined as verbal tradition, according to Fazlur Rahman. (Rahman, 1965) In other words, hadith is the verbal form of practical tradition carried out by the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and followers. This shows that sunnah appeared before hadith. Goldziher defines sunnah as reports that have acquired normative quality and become practical principles, while hadith is considered a theoretical (verbal) report. Both have a traditional basis (Goldziher, 1971).

### **The Development of the Meaning of Sunnah and Hadith**

In the early days, the term "sunnah" in pre-Islamic Arab society was used to refer to ancestral traditions, customs, and social practices that had been passed down from generation to generation. "Sunnah" in this context reflected the norms and values of Arab tribes that served as guidelines for life. However, the arrival of Islam brought about a fundamental shift in meaning. After the prophethood of Muhammad SAW, the term "sunnah" was gradually shifted to refer to everything that originated from the Prophet Muhammad SAW whether in the form of words, deeds, or his approval as well as the traditions practiced by his companions. This shift marked the end of the idealistic authority of sunnah that originated solely from custom, and was

replaced by the authority of revelation and the example set by the Prophet (Abdul Qodir, 1942).

In subsequent developments, particularly entering the second century of Hijri, there was a process of narrowing and specializing the meaning of “sunnah” in Islamic scientific discourse. Imam Shafi’i, as one of the founders of *usul al-fiqh*, played a key role in narrowing the scope of “sunnah” terminologically. He defined “sunnah” more strictly as that which originated exclusively from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and no longer included the practices or traditions of the companions in general. This narrowing aimed to emphasize the authority of Islamic legal sources, placing the Prophet’s sunnah as the second source after the Qur’an, and distinguishing it from *ijtihad* or individual opinion. Thus, through Imam Shafi’i’s contribution, “sunnah” underwent a more clear and structured institutionalization of meaning and became the main basis for *fiqh* lawmaking (As-Sarakshy, 1953).

Ignaz Goldziher, a prominent orientalist, argued that the change in the meaning of “sunnah” after the emergence of Islam was rooted in the ongoing sociological phenomenon of pre-Islamic Arab traditions. According to him, early Muslims adopted an attitude of respect and emulation towards the Prophet Muhammad SAW in a way that was structurally similar to the way Jahiliyyah Arab society followed the traditions of their ancestors. In Goldziher’s view, the concept of “sunnah” in Islam is not something entirely new, but rather a transformation and further development of the statements and customs that had existed in ancient Arab society. Thus, he sees a line of continuity between pre-Islamic Arab cultural practices and the formation of normative authority in Islam (Goldziher, 1971).

Goldziher’s view was strongly opposed by Muslim scholars such as M.M. Azami. Azami emphasized that Muslims follow the actions of the Prophet SAW not merely because of cultural factors or the continuation of tradition, but primarily because of obedience to the commands of Allah SWT and His Messenger, which have a clear theological basis in revelation. He emphasized that the motivation behind emulating the Prophet in Islam is transcendental and based on faith, fundamentally different from the worldly traditions of the Jahiliyyah era, which were oriented solely toward social norms. Therefore, Azami rejected the continuity proposed by Goldziher and emphasized the fundamental difference between Islamic teachings derived from revelation and the humanistic customs of Jahiliyyah society (Azami, 1994).

Initially, in pre-Islamic Arabic tradition, the word *ḥadis* (حديث) had a very general meaning, referring to a story, news, or conversation conveyed between individuals or within a community. This word was used in everyday contexts without any specific religious connotations, simply referring to information or events being discussed. After the emergence of Islam, this term continued to be used in its general sense to describe various events or conversations in a socio-religious context, without undergoing any significant change in meaning. However, with the development of Islamic scholarship, the word *ḥadis* underwent a narrowing of meaning (specification). Gradually, this term was no longer used to refer to “ordinary stories,” but was reserved to refer to all accounts attributed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, whether in the form of his words, deeds, approvals, or characteristics. This process

shows how Islam not only adopted Arabic vocabulary, but also gave it new meanings that were more specific and authoritative (Ismail, 1994).

According to Ignaz Goldziher, an Orientalist who extensively studied early Islamic history, this transformation in the meaning of ḥadis was not a random change, but rather reflected the process of institutionalizing prophetic authority within the structure of early Muslim society. Goldziher sees that the narrowing of meaning from “general stories” to “narratives about the Prophet SAW” indicates the Muslim community's efforts to consolidate sources of teaching and legal norms around the central figure of the Prophet Muhammad. In his view, this is in line with the development of the Sunnah as the second source of law after the Qur'an. Thus, according to Goldziher, ḥadis in its distinctive Islamic form as a rigorous discipline with sanad and matan is the result of a deliberate socio-intellectual evolution, which aims to clearly distinguish between ordinary narratives and narratives that have religious authority. Through this process, ḥadis not only changed semantically, but also functioned as a theological and juridical instrument in constructing an Islamic identity that was independent from pre-Islamic Arab traditions (Goldziher, 1971).

According to M.M. Azami's analysis, the semantic shift of the word “hadith” from a general meaning to a specific meaning did not occur suddenly, but rather through a natural process within the early Muslim community. In the early days of Islam, stories, advice, and tales originating from the Prophet Muhammad SAW became the most dominant narratives and were often repeated in social interactions and religious teachings. Compared to other stories circulating in society such as traditional Arab tales, proverbs, or daily news information originating from the Prophet was mentioned much more frequently. This dominance occurred because the Prophet SAW was not only a spiritual and political leader, but also the main source of reference in resolving legal, doctrinal, and moral issues. Thus, in everyday conversation, when someone mentioned “hadith,” what immediately came to mind for the listener was a piece of news or a saying attributed to the Messenger of Allah SAW.

Over time, the use of the word “hadith” became more narrow and exclusive. Arab Muslims gradually emptied the term of its general meaning (as ‘story’ or “news” of any kind) and began to use it specifically for things related to the Prophet. This process was accelerated by the community's need to clearly distinguish between authoritative sources of teaching (those originating from the Prophet) and other narratives that did not have a strong religious basis. In the next phase, the term “hadith” finally underwent full codification of meaning: it was used exclusively to refer to all information, words, deeds, decisions, or characteristics narrated from the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This change reflects how the collective consciousness of Muslims shaped their own religious terminology, while also demonstrating the process of affirming prophetic authority as the primary normative source after the Qur'an (Azami, 1977).

From the above description, it can be concluded that the narrowing of the meaning of “hadith” from a general term to a specific term in Islamic tradition is not merely a linguistic change, but a reflection of a profound socio-theological transformation. This shift confirms that the early Muslim community consciously

built a knowledge system centered on the example of the Prophet Muhammad. As a result, the term “hadith” became absolutely synonymous with the sunnah of the Prophet, which then became the second pillar after the Qur'an in the structure of Islamic law and creed. Thus, this process of exclusivization not only enriched Islamic terminology, but also strengthened the position of hadith as an authentic source that preserves the continuity of Islamic teachings in a maintained and verified manner.

### **The Evolution of Sunnah to Hadith**

As mentioned in the previous explanation, there is a difference in meaning between hadith and sunnah. However, some scholars argue that there is no difference between the two. However, there is strong evidence that there is a significant difference between hadith and sunnah. According to Fazlur Rahman, in the long development of Islam, hadith is the verbalization of the concept of sunnah. Sunnah is a type of situational behavior because no two cases have the same moral, psychological, and material background. Therefore, sunnah must be developed, interpreted, and adapted. Sunnah itself has evolved from generation to generation in this regard. Therefore, sunnah should be seen as an example, not as absolute specific content (Rahman, 1965).

Fazlur Rahman developed a theory about the development of hadith. Informal, semi-formal, and formal hadith are the three stages in this process. The Sunnah was practiced informally during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad; the companions only spoke about the Prophet as part of their daily lives. For practical orientation purposes, the process of transmission (verbal transmission) about the Prophet SAW was not intended. This is because the Prophet SAW had already performed one of the tasks of hadith, which was to teach the people at that time (Rahman, 1965).

During the period of the companions and senior tabi'in after the Prophet SAW passed away, a semi-formal phase began. At this stage, the dissemination of the Prophet's hadith was carried out for practical purposes, namely to become a practice in Muslim society. The dissemination of hadith became a deliberate act. During this period, rulers and judges could not freely interpret the Prophet's hadith according to the situations and circumstances they faced. As a result, what is known as the living sunnah emerged. The semi-formal development of hadith led to differences in actual practices (living sunnah) emerging in various regions of the Islamic empire, sometimes even contradicting one another (Rahman, 1965).

After the semi-formal phase in the development of hadith, the formal phase emerged. In this phase, all Islamic countries must have the same standards. This phase produced a dynamic sunnah that was continuously interpreted into a closed, rigid, and stagnant corpus. To achieve uniformity and unity among the ummah, this was considered a final decision and provision. The goal of this movement, led by Imam Shafi'i, was to maintain legal stability and eliminate the false hadiths that were rampant at the time. Unfortunately, however, the sunnah, which was originally dynamic, became rigid at this point (Rahman, 1965).

Hadith and sunnah must be understood in a more progressive and dynamic way. Today's Muslims need to restore or reinterpret existing hadith into a living sunnah, as was done by the early generations through historical and sociological studies. This

is important because there are many elements in hadith, and their interpretation must always change in accordance with current social and moral conditions. Muslims will be able to establish hadith standards in line with the needs of their time by interpreting the Sunnah historically and situationally (Amal, 1989).

Ignaz Goldziher supported Fazlur Rahman's theory of the evolution of sunnah into hadith, which states that although sunnah was originally related to the customs of the Arab ancestors, its meaning changed to become a model of the Prophet's behavior, no longer the customs of their ancestors (Goldziher, 1971). After that, Orientalists such as Yoseph Schacht developed this idea. Schacht said that the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW was essentially a continuation of pre-Islamic customs along with the free thinking efforts of Islamic legal experts in the early days of Islam. Meanwhile, hadiths were only the work of later Muslims, because their codification was only carried out several centuries after the death of the Prophet SAW (Schacht, 1959).

Contrary to Jaladuddin Rahmat, they argue that hadiths were the first to spread among Muslims, not the Sunnah as claimed by Fazlur Rahman and Ignaz. This assumption is based on the fact that hadiths existed during the lifetime of the Prophet and that his companions memorized and wrote down his sayings (Rahmat, 1995).

Actually, the two models of thinking above can be compromised. This is because the traditions of hadith and sunnah actually occurred simultaneously. Hadith, as mentioned by Fazlur Rahman, already existed during the time of the Prophet SAW. In a narration conveyed by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet SAW ordered one of his companions to write down the sermon he had just delivered at the request of Abu Syah (Al-Bukhari, n.d.). The Sunnah was also preserved and maintained by the generations after the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed away. It is very important to formulate the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him), including the living Sunnah, into the form of hadith. This is because, without an authoritative reference source, the religious ideological structure of the Muslim community would experience endless chaos.

To overcome extremism and arbitrary interpretations of the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW, the canonization of the Sunnah into the form of hadiths has increased. This marks the end of the process of interpreting the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW, including the living Sunnah, because the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW has become verbal. At this time, a new movement emerged, pioneered by Imam Shafi'i, which spread the belief that the Sunnah that must be upheld is the Sunnah that originated from the Prophet SAW, which means that the Sunnah that has validity as a source of Islamic law is only the Sunnah that can be proven to originate from the Prophet SAW through verbal transmission (hadith). "*muthlaq as-sunnah ma yatanawalu sunnata Rasulillah faqath*," said Imam Shafi'i clearly (Musahadi HAM, 2000). The implication is that hadith as accounts and narratives about previous generations must undergo a rigorous process of hadith criticism with the aim of distinguishing between hadith that originate directly from the Prophet SAW and hadith that are only claimed to be the words of the Prophet SAW (Majid, 1986).

## CONCLUSION

Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the verbal tradition or hadith as conceptualized by Fazlur Rahman has existed. The Sunnah of the Prophet, including practices that are alive and thriving in society, has also been preserved by subsequent generations. The need to formulate the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW into the form of hadith has become a fundamental urgency. This is because without clear authoritative references, the religious ideological structure of Muslim society has the potential to experience prolonged chaos. In addition, differences in interpretation of hadith and sunnah among scholars also require a common ground. By viewing hadith as a verbal manifestation of sunnah, the author argues that hadith will always be relevant to the context of the times. This approach is expected to prevent the emergence of antihumanistic, biased, and extreme understandings.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research on “The Concept of Sunnah: Its Evolution and Implications for Modern Islamic Thought,” the author recommends the following for further research that can develop and deepen academic discourse in this field:

First, Comparative Study of Acceptance and Resistance to the Theory of Sunnah Evolution in Various Islamic Academic Environments. This research can examine in depth how the theory of Sunnah-versus-Hadith evolution (as proposed by Fazlur Rahman and criticized by traditional circles) is accepted, modified, or rejected in various Islamic scholarly environments, such as traditional Islamic boarding schools in the archipelago, modern Islamic universities in the Middle East, and Western academic institutions.

Second, Analysis of the Implementation of “Living Sunnah” in the Social-Religious Practices of Contemporary Muslim Communities. Based on the dynamic concept of “living sunnah,” field research can be conducted to observe how social practices that are considered part of the living Sunnah (such as local traditions, community ethics, or non-obligatory rituals) are maintained, adapted, or reconstructed by Muslim communities in the digital age. An approach based on religious anthropology and ethnography will be highly relevant for exploring the meaning, function, and contestation of meaning behind these practices.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdul Baqi, M. F. (1992). *Al-Mu’jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfadz Al-Qur’an*. Dar Al-Fikr.
- Abdul Qodir, 'Ali Hasan. (1942). *Nazharat Al-'Ammah Fi Tarikh Al-Islamy*. Ulum Press.
- Ahmad Hasan. (1994). *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Adam Publisher & Distribution.
- Al-Ashfahani, R. (2004). *Al-Mu’jam Al-Mufradat Fi Gharib Al-Qur’an*. Dar Al-Ma’arif.
- Al-Bukhari. (n.d.). *Shahih Al-Bukhari*. Dar Ibnu Katsir.
- Al-Faizruzzabadi. (1983). *Al-Qamus Al-Muhith*. Dar Al-Fikr.

- Amal, T. A. (1989). *Islam dan Tantangan Modernis: Studi Atas Pemikiran Fazlur Rahman*. Mizan.
- Andariati, L. (2020). Hadis dan Sejarah Perkembangannya. *Diroyah: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis*, 4.
- An-Nasir, M. (1981). *Islam It's Concept and History*. Nusrat 'Ali Nasri.
- Arifin, J. (2014). Pendekatan Ulama Hadis dan Ulama Fiqh dalam Menelaah Kontroversial Hadis. *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, 22.
- Ar-Razi, A.-I. (1952). *Taqdimah Al-Ma'rifah Li Kitab Al-Jarh Wa At-Ta'dil*. Dar Al-Fikr.
- Ash-Shahrawi, I. D. (1971). *Mushthalah Al-Hadits: Shirkat Al-Thaba'at Al-Fanniyyat Al-Muttahidah*. Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah.
- Ash-Shiddiqie, M. H. (1991). *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu Hadits*. Bulan Bintang.
- As-Sarakshy, A. S. (1953). *Ushul As-Sarakshy. Ihya' Al-Ma'arif Al-Nu'maniyyah*.
- As-Siba'i, M. (1994). *As-Sunnah Wa Makanatuha Fi At-Tashri' Al-Islami*. Dar Al-Qawmiyyat Li Al-Thaba'ah Wa An-Nashr.
- Azami, M. M. (1977). *Studies in Hadits Methodology and Literature*. Islamic Teaching Center.
- Azami, M. M. (1994). *Hadits Nabawi dan Sejarah Kodifikasinya*. Pustaka Firdaus.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE.
- Friantika, F. R., Wasil, M., Jumiaty, S., & Honesti, L. (2022). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. PT Global Eksekutif Teknologi.
- Goldziher, I. (1971). *Muslim Studies*. George Allen & Unwin.
- Hamzah, N. H., Irawan, M. M., Palangkey, R. D., & Miro, A. B. (2023). *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Hadis*. *Iqra: Jurnal Magister Pendidikan Islam*, 3.
- Ibnu Mandzur. (2014). *Lisan Al-'Arab*. Dar Islamiyyah.
- Ibrahim, M. I. (1998). *Mu'jam Al-Alfadz Wa Al-'Alam Al-Quraniyyah*. Dar Al-Fikr.
- Ismail, S. (1994). *Pengantar Ilmu Hadits*. Angkasa.
- Khatib, M. 'Ajaj. (1989). *Ushul Al-Hadits*. Dar Al-Fikr.
- Majid, N. (1986). *Imam Syafi'i: Peletak Dasar Metodologi Pemahaman Hukum Islam*. Pustaka Firdaus.
- M.Si, R. K., S. Sos. (2014). *Teknik Praktis Riset komunikasi*. Prenada Media.
- Mukhtar, M. (2020). Corak Pemahaman Ulama Terhadap Hadis Nabi. *Ash-Shahabah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam*, 6.
- Musahadi HAM. (2000). *Evolusi Konsep Sunnah: Implikasinya Pada Perkembangan Hukum Islam*. Aneka Ilmu.
- Nugrahani, F., & Hum, M. (2014). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Solo: Cakra Books, 1(1).
- Nuruddin Al-'Itr. (1992). *Manhaj An-Naqd Fi 'Ulum Al-Hadits*. Dar Al-Fikr.
- Rahman, F. (1965). *Islamic Methodology in History*. Central Institute of Islamic Studies.
- Rahmat, J. (1995). *Dari Sunnah Ke Hadits Atau Sebaliknya*. Paramadina.
- Sabbaq, M. (1972). *Al-Hadits An-Nabawy*. Al-Maktab Al-Islami.
- Schacht, Y. (1959). *The Origin of Muhammeden Jurisprudence*. Oxford.
- Shubhi Shalih. (1989). *'Ulum Al-Hadits Wa Musthalahu*. Dar Al-'Ilm Li Al-Malayin.

Taufikurrahman. (2013). Evolusi Konsep Sunnah Dalam Lintasan Sejarah. Mutawātir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis, 3 No. 1.