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**RULING ON PRACTICING WEAK HADITH ACCORDING TO
MUTAQADDIMIN AND *MUTA'AKHKHIRIN* HADITH SCHOLARS**

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Abstract

The ruling on practicing weak hadith is an issue that is still debated to this day. The debate is caused by differences in the opinions of scholars in determining whether it is permissible to practice from weak hadith. Certain scholars wholly reject acting upon weak hadith, while some accept it and a few others have determined several conditions for it. Thus, this paper aims to study the views of hadith scholars on practicing weak hadith by comparing the opinions of *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars of hadith. To achieve the outlined objectives, this qualitative study employs literature review to gather the necessary data. Selected works written by *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars of hadith are examined. The data obtained are then analysed based on inductive and deductive approaches. The findings show that the differences in opinions of *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars of hadith are caused, among others, by several reports attributed to a few Muslim figures such as Ahmad bin Hanbal who said they were strict when reporting hadiths concerning matters of the permissible and forbidden, and lenient when reporting narrations regarding *fada'il al-a'mal*. The reports by these scholars were understood differently.

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1. Introduction

The growth of hadith in this era of globalisation has seen the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) hadiths continue to spread among Muslims without restrictions nor boundaries. Though the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) had called for the hadiths to be spread, this does not mean that the circulation of hadiths should be allowed without being monitored and observed closely. In this context, the authenticity of hadiths attributed to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) must be determined before they are spread (Shamsudin, 2010).

To be more specific, it is feared that the spread of the Prophet's hadiths without separating the *sahih* and *hasan* hadiths from the weak hadiths like what is still happening today could cause a person to conduct practices or beliefs that are far astray from true Islamic teachings. Worse, it is feared that people would create practices which had never been practiced by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) in his worship and belief, termed as *bid'ah*. To put it briefly, the practices come from believing hadiths whose authenticity from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) are not proven, be they weak or forged hadiths (Shamsudin, 2010).

In general, a weak hadith can be defined as a hadith that does not fulfil the requirements to be *sahih* or *hasan*, whether due to lack of one or more of the requirements namely continuous *sanad*, *'adil* and *dabit* narrators, no *shadh* and no *'illah* that make the hadith inauthentic ('Uyun, 2007). It can be discerned from this definition that weak hadith is categorised as rejected hadith, also termed as *al-hadith al-mardud*, different from *sahih* or *hasan* hadith which are categorised as *al-hadith al-maqbul*. This shows a clear difference in status between *sahih*, *hasan* and weak hadith in terms of their quality. Although most of the writings in *mustalah al-hadith* have categorised weak hadith as rejected hadiths, the ruling on practicing upon weak hadith is an issue that is still debated today particularly in *fada'il al-a'mal* (Shamsudin, 2010). Many scholars of hadith have offered their opinions in this matter, specifically the *Muta'akhhirin* scholars who asserted that their views were based on the thoughts of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars of hadith.

2. Problem Statement

The legal debate over the use of weak hadith has been a polemic ever since the active narration days up till the post narration age, in fact it continues to date. There are three contrasting views namely, total prohibition; permissible in matters relating to jurisprudence, *fada'il* and *manaqib* with certain requirements and permissible in matters relating to *fada'il*, *manaqib* and *targhib wa al-tarhib* only but does not extend to jurisprudence and *'aqidah* albeit the use is subject to certain conditions.

Without understanding the methods of the *Mutaqaddimin*, some of the hadith scholars view that it is absolutely acceptable to practice weak hadith and they rely heavily on expressions made by a few *Mutaqaddimin* hadith scholars, in particular Ahmad bin Hanbal whom was understood to have experienced with weak hadith. However there are some from the *Muta'akhhirin* hadith scholars who opine that what to be understood by the application of weak hadith by Ahmad was not the rejected weak hadith, instead, it refers to *hasan* hadith.

This differing assessments on the validity of the use of weak hadith that which associated with the expression of some *Mutaqaddimin* hadith scholars whereby the same is later on made as the basis of discourse and interpretations by the *Muta'akhhirin* scholars are at present day also becomes the centre of discussions and critics by the contemporary hadith scholars through their works which exhibited diverse views on this issues.

3. Research Questions

3.1 To what extent do the hadith scholars differ on the laws of practicing weak hadith?

3.2 How have the expressions made by the *Mutaqaddimin* hadith scholars, especially Ahmad bin Hanbal understood by the *muta'akhhirin* hadith scholars?

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. To what extent do the hadith scholars differ on the laws of practicing weak hadith?

4.2. How have the expressions made by the *Mutaqaddimin* hadith scholars, especially Ahmad bin Hanbal understood by the *muta'akhhirin* hadith scholars?

5. Research Methods

This qualitative study uses full library research that forms the major component of data collection method. This means data are collected from the primary books in the field of hadith, especially the works in the sciences of hadith authored by the hadith predecessors, among others al-Jurjani's work in *Fan fi Usul Mustalah al-Hadith* and al-Sakhawi's writing entitled *Fath al-Mugith* along with al-Nawawi's *al-Adhkar al-Nawawiyah* as well as contemporary writings discussing this particular matter including *al-Hadith al-Da'if wa Hukum al-Ihtijaj bih* by al-Khudeir. The data then are analyzed based on inductive, deductive and comparative methods.

6. Findings

Undeniably, this is a most important issue to be discussed and it can trigger heated debates. This is due to the conflicting opinions among the scholars consisting of *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars in trying to determine the best rulings, which still has not been resolved to this day. Thus, this paper will try to explore the opinions of the different groups of scholars and pose their arguments.

Essentially, there are different opinions in defining *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars although these two terms have been used widely in various fields of knowledge. Literally, *Mutaqaddimin* means those who lived at an earlier time and *Muta'akhhirin* means those who live at a later time. The reason for using these two terms is to classify scholars into earlier and later scholars (Bazmul, n.d.). Muslim scholars have also engaged in debates to determine the age of time for *Mutaqaddimin* dan *Muta'akhhirin* scholars. According to Hamam (2008), *Mutaqaddimin* scholars refer to scholars who lived in the third century (Hijri) beginning from the time of the Companions until *atba' al-tabi'in*. This means the time of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars ended in *atba' al-tabi'in*. However, scholars of hadith differ in opinions regarding the end of time of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars. Al-Khatib determined the end of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars' time as during the time of Ibn Khuzaimah (d. 311 H.), meanwhile Ibn al-Salah said it went on until the time of Abu Bakar bin Abu Dawud al-Sajistani (d. 316 H.). Meanwhile, al-Dhahabi (n.d.) said in *Muqaddimah Mizan al-I'tidal* the time of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars ended in third century Hijri. However, Hamam saw that there was a contradiction in al-Dhahabi's view because he had still categorised al-Isma'ili as a *Mutaqaddimin* scholar when al-Isma'ili had passed on in the year of 371H. Thus, according to Hamam (2008), a clearer view is the one from Ibn Hajar and al-'Ala'i who said the time of *Mutaqaddimin* ended at the end of fifth century AH and the time of *Muta'akhhirin* began after the fifth century AH. This opinion

is considered as the clearest it looks at one specific century which is the fifth century Hijri, as the separating point between the age of *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin*.

The scholars of hadith, both *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* had debated the ruling on acting upon weak hadith by dividing it into three main opinions. The first opinion says it is absolutely prohibited to practice weak hadith, whether in the matter of rulings or *fada'il* (Al-Jurjani, 2000). This view is reportedly shared by several *Mutaqaddimin* scholars such as Yahya b. Ma'in (d. 233H) (Khayr Abadi, 2003), al-Bukhari (d. 256H), Muslim (d. 261H) as can be understood from their requirements (Al-Jurjani, 2000), as well as several *Muta'akhhirin* scholars such as Abu Bakr b. al-'Arabi (d. 543H), Ibn Hazm (d.456H). It is also reported that a number of contemporary scholars of hadith such as Ahmad Muhammad Syakir and al-Albani (Khayr Abadi, 2003) also share the same opinion.

This opinion is also supported by a few other current scholars of hadith, including al-Khatib (1989) as can be discerned through his words as follows:

There is no doubt that the first *madhhab* is the safest *madhhab*, we have what is *sahih* in *fada'il*, *targhib* and *tarhib* from the whole of the Prophet's speech –a wealth that cannot be explained in words, and it is enough so we do not require reporting of weak hadith concerning these subjects, specifically as *fada'il* and moral virtues are the tenets of the religion, there is no difference between these and the laws and rulings of the lawful and unlawful in terms of their authenticity with *sahih* and *hasan* hadith, therefore it is compulsory that all the sources are from authentic reports.

Their argument is that *fada'il* is equal to shariah ruling, and thus justifying it with weak hadith would open doors for the acts of innovating worship practices and determining religious rulings that contradict with what have been determined by Allah and His Messenger ('Ulwan, 1993). Deraman (2006) had also discussed the issue of using weak hadith for *al-targhib wa al-tarhib* :

It must be mentioned that regarding *al-targhib wa al-tarhib*, certain scholars only accept *sahih* and *hasan* hadiths. Those who do accept weak hadith do so with three strict requirements namely reporting it with *sighah al-tamrid* and not *sighah jazad*. To report weak hadith widely and without requirements is not the tradition of *muhaddithin*.

This shows that this opinion which has been attributed as the opinion of prominent *Mutaqaddimin* scholars such as al-Bukhari and Muslim is accepted by a number of *Muta'akhhirin* and contemporary scholars of hadith.

The second opinion says it is completely acceptable to act upon weak hadith, be it in rulings of the lawful and unlawful as well as *fada'il* provided there is no contradicting evidence in a particular matter, and the weakness of the hadith must not be severe. This opinion is attributed to several *Mutaqaddimin* scholars including Abi Dawud (d. 275 H), Ahmad (d. 241 H), Malik (d. 179 H), Abu Hanifah (d. 150 H) who were of the opinion that weak hadith is better than the view of the people (Khayr Abadi, 2003). They argued that it is probable that the hadith authentically came from the Prophet (p.b.u.h) ('Ulwan, 1993).

According to Ibn al-Qayyim as quoted by Ibn Badran (1981), Ahmad bin Hanbal is widely known for this opinion, as he used weak hadith as the fourth source when issuing ruling (fatwa). He used *mursal* hadith or other weak hadith if there were no contradictions and no certain justification to reject that. This evidence (*dalil*) is prioritised compared to *qiyas*.

However, according to al-Sakhawi (2003) as he cites the view of al-Baghawi that most of jurisprudence matters are derived from the application of *hasan* hadith. This is evidenced from the practice of the *Mutaqaddimin* scholars themselves when they reinforced the chain of various hadith narrators by referring the hadith narrated by the latter as *hasan* hadith and subsequently assigned a matching terminology upon these narrators as *hasan al-hadith*. This is particularly so at the time of the early generation of hadith scholars, that is in the era of Ahmad bin Hanbal and his predecessors, they were more likely to divide the hadiths into either the authentic or the weak which connotes that either a hadith is accepted or rejected. They further categorized the weak into two; namely hadith that is weak that may amount to total rejection effect of which it should not be made to prove or support arguments and secondly weak but good. As such, it is not quite right for those who say that Ahmad substantiated his arguments with weak hadith which is far from authentic, and not of *hasan* also. This is because the pioneer who categorized hadith into three orderly categories was Abu Isa al-Tirmidhi (Al-Tibrizi, 1985). Ibn Rajab (2002) concludes that the allegation that Ahmad argued with weak hadith is feeble and no one disputes that; on the contrary, to him the meaning of weak is closer to the meaning of *hasan* as interpreted by al-Tirmidhi.

The above opinion is in line with al-Khatib (1989) who saw that weak hadiths used by certain *Mutaqaddimin* scholars are not severely weak like *batil* or *munkar* hadiths, instead, they are actually *hasan* hadiths. This view is reflected in his words which mean:

With that, Imam Ahmad did not make practice with weak hadith unless in a situation whereby there was no other evidence in the matter, he prioritised weak hadith than *qiyas*, on certain weak hadith – that is *hasan* for those who come after him.

Concerning this, al-Sabbagh (1990) also said which means:

There are scholars who attributed to Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud that they said it is permissible to practice from weak hadith wholly, and this opinion must be reviewed because understanding of weak hadith as determined by the later scholars consisting of *al-mustalah* scholars is different from the understanding of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars.

Thus, it can be surmised that the term weak hadith used by *Mutaqaddimin* scholars such as Ahmad (d. 241 H) and Abu Dawud (d. 275 H) is a more general term that also includes *hasan* hadith which were called weak hadith during their time. The later scholars had then termed these weak hadiths as *hasan* hadiths, and this is not included in what they meant as prioritizing weak hadith over *qiyas* (Al-Sabbagh, 1990). Al-Qudah (2013) on the other hand espouses the views that interpret weak hadith in the era of Ahmad as referring to *hasan* hadith. This is a more popular view but the former is more inclined to the opinion that it refers to the light-weighted weak hadith.

Hence, according to Khudeir (2014), it must be understood that weak hadiths that Ahmad bin Hanbal used for justifications are not severely weak ones, and it was also required that there was no other justification to reject them. Similarly, Abu Hanifah also prioritised weak hadith compared to people's opinion and *qiyas*. However, the use of weak hadith only happened in situations whereby there was no other hadith to discuss the matter.

The third opinion says it is permissible to practice weak hadith in the matters of *fada'il*, *tarhib*, *targhib*, and the likes (Al-Laknawi, 1981). This opinion is attributed to several *Mutaqaddimin* scholars such as Ibn Mahdi (d. 198 H) and Ibn al-Mubarak (d. 181 H), and it is also the opinion of several

Muta'akhhirin scholars such as Ibn al-Salah (d. 643 H) and al-Nawawi (d. 676 H) (Al-Bugha, 1990). The opinion of al-Nawawi (d. 676 H), for example, can be seen in *al-Adhkar al-Nawawiyah*, which means:

Scholars consisting of *muhaddithin* dan *fuqaha'* and those other than them had said: it is permissible and *sunnat* to practice weak hadith in *fada'il*, *targhib*, *tarhib* so long as the weak hadith is not forged. However, in the rulings of the lawful and unlawful such as *halal*, *haram*, transaction, marriage, divorce and others, it is not permissible to practice except with *sahih* and *hasan* hadith... (Al-Nawawi, n.d.).

Among other *Muta'akhhirin* scholars who allowed the use of weak hadith in aspects regarding *targhib* dan *tarhib* provided it does not contradict the rulings of the lawful and unlawful was Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (d.795); however he required that the hadith must not be severely weak ('Awamah, 2017).

In this context, al-Khatib (1989) denied the opinion linking it with the earlier scholars such as Ibn Mahdi (d. 198 H) when the truth is different from what is thought. He mentioned this in his work, which means:

In our opinion (some people's) understanding of what was written by Imam Ahmad, Ibn Mahdi, Ibn al-Mubarak is far from what was meant by these scholars, so their words (saying it is permissible to practice with weak hadith) in *fada'il a'mal* are lifted and supported with statements that the scholars were lenient in reporting weak hadith without explaining the weakness, the people have allowed for themselves to accept a lot of things in certain aspects of the religion which are not attributed to accepted evidence or source whose stance on weak hadith are known according to early and later scholars.

Also related to this, another scholar, Ashraf Sa'id as quoted by Shamsudin (2010) from his book *Hukm al-'Amal bi al-Hadith al-Da'if* was also found to have criticised the people by clearly supporting al-Khatib in his approach. He said:

The truth is that no practice in shariah is based on weak hadith, not on the rulings of the lawful and unlawful, not on *fada'il*. There is only reporting of it according to the way I have explained before, this can keep the religion free of false elements, and these scholars had been attributed with words which they did not say.

In addition, it must also be noted that there are weak hadiths whose status are not clear (Salim & Yaakob, 2011). Al-Albani when editing al-Mundhiri's work titled *Muqaddimah al-Targhib wa al-Tarhib* also mentioned his view that weak hadiths whose status are not clear could fall under the category of *mawdu'* hadith or *da'if syadid* and what is worse is that someone may practice the hadith thinking it is a weak hadith that can be practiced (Al-Mundhiri, 2003). Al-Qaradawi (2002) also added that the use of doubted, *munkar* and *mawdu'* hadiths among Muslim preachers and speakers is caused by certain scholars' view who said it is permissible to report weak hadith in the matters of *fada'il a'mal*, asceticism (*zuhd*), *al-targhib wa al-tarhib*, stories (*al-qasas*) and the likes.

There are scholars who added a few requirements that must be fulfilled to practice weak hadith in *fada'il* and such. Some *Muta'akhhirin* scholars supported this, including Ibn Hajar (d. 852 H), al-Sakhawi (d. 902 H), al-Suyuti (d. 911 H) and others (Al-Laknawi, 1981). The requirements are listed as follows:

- i. The hadith that will be practiced is not severely weak (Al-Laknawi, 1981). Regarding this, Khayr Abadi (2003) had explained the categories of hadith which are not considered

as severely weak. According to him, *al-Mu'allaq*, *al-Mursal*, *al-Munqati'*, *al-Mudallas* and *al-Mursal al-khafi* hadiths are still acceptable. Reporting these hadiths may be acceptable in *fada'il* because the weakness is not severe and their status could be lifted to *hasan li ghayrih* when reported from similar or better *sanad*. Meanwhile, hadith with deceiver, accused liar, people who practiced *bida'ah* and narrators who made a lot of mistakes in narrating hadiths cannot be accepted even in *fada'il*.

- ii. The hadith has a certain foundation and has been practiced in shariah (Al-Tahanawi, 2000). This means, the ruling for the practice is originally proven from the Quran or accepted hadiths, for example in being kind towards parents and silaturrahim (Khayr Abadi, 2003). In this context, what is really accepted is the Quran or *sahih* and *hasan* hadiths, not weak hadith.
- iii. When practicing it, one must not wholly believe in it, instead they must be careful (Al-Laknawi, 1981). This means, acting upon weak hadith does not result in confidence, instead it merely gives a little hope.
- iv. The weak hadith does not cover detailed explanation, certain specifications and fixing of certain rates as addition to anything that is already proven in *sahih* hadith (Al-Jurjani, 2000). This includes creating additions that are not proven in Islamic rulings (*syarak*), such as prayer with 100 rakaat on the eve of Nisfu Sya'ban, *salat al-ragha'ib* (Khayr Abadi, 2003), the merits of fasting in Rejab (Al-Jurjani, 2000), and such.
- v. The hadith is not made well-known among the people to avoid them from practicing and deciding on rulings which are not part of Islamic ruling, and which may influence ignorant people to consider it as a *sahih* hadith (Al-Jurjani, 2000). Grand celebration of the day of 'Ashura in India for instance (Khayr Abadi, 2003), has spread to Malaysia.

Based on the requirements decided by the third group consisting of *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars of hadith who argued that if the hadith is *sahih*, then those who practice it will earn their merits, and if the hadith is weak, there will be no effects because it only concerns excess in practice without involving the lawful and unlawful, and does not involve the issue of innovation in religion (Khayr Abadi, 2003). Among the scholars of hadith who support practicing hadith with these requirements is 'Itr, a contemporary scholar of hadith who is of the opinion that it is carefully practiced without involving any innovation in the religion. Furthermore, it is required that there be a proven (*thabit*) source and the emergence of the weak hadith is in line with the source of the ruling ('Itr, 1997).

However, the requirements listed are still debated by several other contemporary scholars, including al-Khatib who said even if the requirements are fulfilled, the hadith still cannot be accepted as part of Islamic ruling and source of moral virtues because there is an element of *syubhah* in advocating for careful practice instead of practicing with certainty (Al-Khatib, 1989). Khayr Abadi (2003) also asserted that practitioners of *tasawwuf*, *ghuluw*, *zuhd* or those with certain ideologies would ignore these requirements,

in fact they also practice forged hadiths to fulfil certain interests without realizing that this will break down their *aqidah*.

As such, al-Qudah (2013) is of the opinion that in truth there is no distinction between the view that says weak hadith is rejected on a justification that it does not relate to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and the faction of hadith scholars that set a requirement that for the weak hadith to be applicable, one must recognize and believe that it is not from the Prophet (p.b.u.h). To him, there is no way that one who applies weak hadith believes that it originates from the Prophet (p.b.u.h) unless the former has no knowledge that the hadith is weak. The same can be expected of the content of the weak hadith that which it has to have basis from the al-Quran or other hadith that relate to the Prophet (p.b.u.h). According to al-Qudah, the foundation of acceptance of the said weak hadith lies solely on its contents that which mirror the substance found in the al-Quran and other hadiths which originate from the Prophet (p.b.u.h). To him, what becomes the core of the said weak hadith is the al-Quran and/or the authentic hadiths it selves and not merely relying on the weak hadith per se. Hence he concludes that the observations of both factions of hadith scholars are the same.

A few things can be outlined from the reviews by *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars of hadith on the requirements to practice weak hadith in *fada'il*, namely, certain groups do not fully abide by these requirements, which causes a lot of inauthentic elements to tarnish the religion. In addition, practicing weak hadith is not limited to *fada'il* matters, it crosses the boundaries into other matters including in the rulings of the lawful and unlawful. It is also uncertain that weak hadiths came from the Prophet (p.b.u.h). Thus, weak hadiths are insufficient to become the source of practice for Muslims, particularly concerning *fada'il*.

7. Conclusion

Based from the above discussion, it is understood that the term weak hadith refers to hadith which does not fulfil the requirements of *sahih* or *hasan* hadith. In general, the opinions of both the *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* scholars of hadith concerning the act of practicing from weak hadith can be divided into three different schools of thoughts. The difference in opinion is caused, among others, by their understanding of quotes attributed to several *Mutaqaddimin* scholars of hadith such as Ahmad bin Hanbal who said they were strict when reporting hadiths related to rulings of the lawful and unlawful and lenient when reporting hadiths related to *fada'il al-a'mal*. The quotes were understood differently, hence the difference in opinions among the scholars in deciding the rulings for practicing from weak hadith. However, upon further examination, the writer found that the opinions of *Mutaqaddimin* scholars such as al-Bukhari and Muslim which do not allow weak hadith to be used as a source for any Islamic practices were based on strong informed arguments in order to preserve the authenticity of the Prophet's hadith institution.

In addition, in terms of hadith classification, it is clear that weak hadith is in the rejected hadith category and this can be seen almost throughout the book *Mustalah al-Hadith*. This shows that there is a clear difference in status between *sahih* and *hasan* hadith, and that of weak hadith, in terms of quality. There is no doubt that the quality of *sahih* and *hasan* hadiths are better than weak hadith. Thus, the need to practice from weak hadith particularly from the severe ones should not arise, especially since the scholars of hadith have categorised them as rejected hadiths. The *Mutaqaddimin* and *Muta'akhhirin* as well as

contemporary scholars have worked hard to preserve the Prophet's hadiths and to protect them from elements that could tarnish their authenticity, and they have also put in great effort to compile *sahih* hadiths in their works to separate them from weak hadiths, which demonstrates their dedication towards upholding hadith in its true elevated status.

The Prophet (p.b.u.h) himself had repeatedly warned Muslims to be careful when faced with hadiths attributed to him. Thus, Muslims should only hold onto *sahih* and *hasan* hadiths in their religious practices, without differentiating between the rulings on the lawful and unlawful, and *fada'il*. This stance is the most authentic and the safest for obeying the commands from Allah and His Messenger, and the benefits will be for Muslims themselves. By holding onto *sahih* and *hasan* hadiths, at the very least we try to revive the teachings of Islam as it was revealed 1400 years ago.

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