

Approaches to Understanding Hadiths on Wearing Garments Below the Ankles (A Study of Mukhtalif al-Hadith)


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ABSTRACT

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Approach

This study examines approaches to understanding hadiths concerning the practice of wearing garments below the ankles (isbāl) through the framework of mukhtalif al-hadith. The issue of isbāl has generated diverse scholarly interpretations due to the presence of seemingly divergent prophetic narrations, some of which convey unconditional prohibition while others explicitly link the prohibition to moral intentions such as arrogance and pride. This research employs a qualitative library-based methodology, analyzing primary hadith collections alongside classical and contemporary scholarly works to explore patterns of interpretation and methodological reasoning. The findings reveal that hadiths on isbāl can be classified into two main textual categories: unconditional prohibitions and intention-based condemnations. Divergent legal conclusions among scholars are shown to stem primarily from methodological orientations rather than from disagreements over hadith authenticity. Scholars adopting literal-textual approaches tend to uphold a general prohibition, whereas those employing contextual and reconciliatory methods emphasize harmonization (al-jam' wa al-tawfiq) by interpreting the narrations within their ethical and socio-historical contexts. This study further demonstrates that ethical orientation emerges as the central interpretive outcome of isbāl hadiths. The prophetic guidance consistently prioritizes moral values such as humility, social equality, and the avoidance of arrogance over rigid formal regulation of dress length. By integrating textual classification, methodological analysis, and ethical interpretation, this research contributes to contemporary hadith studies by offering a coherent framework for addressing cases of mukhtalif al-hadith and reinforcing the relevance of ethical coherence in responsible and contextual hadith interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

Hadith constitutes a foundational source of Islamic teachings that functions not only as a legal reference but also as a moral and social guide for Muslim life. Recent studies emphasize that hadith must be approached as a living textual tradition that interacts with changing historical and socio-cultural contexts. Contemporary hadith scholarship stresses the importance of

integrating linguistic analysis, socio-historical awareness, and ethical considerations to avoid rigid and reductionist interpretations of prophetic traditions (Syifa & Rohmah, 2025; El-Sunan Editorial Board, 2023).

Within this contemporary scholarly framework, hadith interpretation is increasingly understood as a dynamic methodological process rather than a mere literal transmission of legal rulings. Recent methodological studies argue that prophetic traditions often function as moral responses to specific social realities of early Muslim communities, and therefore require contextual engagement to maintain relevance in modern societies (Ulfah & Ghifari, 2024; Haisusyi et al., 2025).

One of the recurring issues in hadith interpretation concerns narrations addressing the prohibition of wearing garments below the ankles (*isbal*). A number of authentic hadiths appear to condemn this practice, often associating it with arrogance, while other narrations explicitly qualify the prohibition by emphasizing intention and ethical motivation. This plurality of textual expressions has produced divergent juristic interpretations, positioning *isbal* as a classical and contemporary example of *mukhtalif al-hadith* (Abdul Aziz et al., 2025; Al-Quds, 2025).

Recent studies on *isbal* highlight that interpretive disagreement is closely linked to methodological orientation. Literalist approaches tend to interpret the prohibition as absolute, whereas contextual readings prioritize the moral rationale behind the prophetic warning, particularly the condemnation of arrogance and social hierarchy. These divergent readings demonstrate that debates on *isbal* are not merely about dress, but about competing epistemologies in hadith interpretation (Yusron & Suryadilaga, 2025; Hairani, 2025).

The discourse on *mukhtalif al-hadith* continues to receive scholarly attention in contemporary hadith studies. Recent research revisits classical reconciliation methods—such as harmonization (*al-jam' wa al-tawfiq*), contextual specification (*takhsis*), and socio-historical analysis—while situating them within modern methodological frameworks. These studies affirm that apparent contradictions in hadith literature reflect interpretive complexity rather than textual inconsistency (Izza et al., 2025; Ardianti & Sudahnan, 2025).

Contemporary approaches to hadith interpretation increasingly integrate interdisciplinary perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, and ethics. Such approaches argue that prophetic traditions should be read in light of their moral objectives and social implications, rather than reduced to formal legal injunctions. This methodological expansion enables hadith studies to respond more effectively to modern challenges without compromising textual authenticity (Haisusyi et al., 2025; El-Sunan Editorial Board, 2023).

In present-day Muslim societies, debates surrounding *isbal* extend beyond jurisprudential discourse into the realm of social identity and religious symbolism. Recent sociological studies show that dress practices are often employed as markers of piety and religious authenticity, particularly in digital religious spaces. This phenomenon underscores the need for methodological

clarity to prevent ethical teachings from being reduced to symbolic formalism (Abdul Aziz et al., 2025; Hairani, 2025).

From this perspective, applying a mukhtalif al-hadith framework to the issue of garments below the ankles provides a productive avenue for reassessing how interpretive methods shape legal and ethical conclusions. Recent methodological studies affirm that interpretive plurality is an inherent feature of Islamic intellectual tradition and should be approached as a scholarly strength rather than a doctrinal weakness (Izza et al., 2025; Ulfah & Ghifari, 2024).

This article aims to explore approaches to understanding hadiths on wearing garments below the ankles through the lens of mukhtalif al-hadith. By analyzing key narrations, contemporary methodological debates, and recent scholarly findings, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions in hadith studies. It is expected that a contextual and methodologically grounded reading of hadith will demonstrate coherence between prophetic teachings and their ethical objectives in contemporary Muslim life (Syifa & Rohmah, 2025; Al-Quds, 2025).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a normative-textual approach, focusing on the analysis of hadith texts related to wearing garments below the ankles (*isbāl*). The qualitative method is chosen to explore interpretive patterns, methodological frameworks, and scholarly reasoning rather than to measure variables quantitatively. This approach is appropriate for hadith studies, which require in-depth textual interpretation and contextual analysis to understand meaning, intent, and ethical implications within prophetic traditions.

The primary data of this research consist of hadith narrations concerning *isbāl* found in major canonical hadith collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*. These narrations are selected based on their relevance to the theme of garments below the ankles and their frequent citation in scholarly debates on mukhtalif al-hadith. Secondary data include contemporary scholarly articles (2023–2025), classical commentaries (*sharḥ al-ḥadīth*), and methodological studies on hadith interpretation and reconciliation.

Data collection is conducted through systematic literature review and documentation techniques. Relevant hadith texts are identified, categorized, and compiled based on similarities and differences in wording, context, and legal implication. Contemporary academic literature is reviewed to identify current methodological trends, interpretive debates, and scholarly positions on *isbāl* and mukhtalif al-hadith. This process ensures that the analysis is grounded in both classical sources and recent scholarly discourse.

Data analysis follows the framework of mukhtalif al-hadith, which involves several analytical stages. First, the hadith narrations are analyzed linguistically to identify key terms, variations in expression, and semantic implications. Second, a contextual analysis is conducted by examining the socio-

historical background of the narrations, including the circumstances of their transmission (*asbāb al-wurūd*) where available. Third, reconciliation methods such as harmonization (*al-jam' wa al-tawfīq*), specification (*takhsīs*), and contextual limitation are applied to resolve apparent contradictions among the narrations.

To strengthen analytical rigor, this study also incorporates an ethical-analytical perspective by examining the moral objectives underlying the prophetic statements, particularly values related to humility, intention, and social equality. This step allows the research to move beyond formal legal conclusions and assess how ethical considerations shape interpretive outcomes. The integration of ethical analysis is essential for aligning hadith interpretation with broader objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*).

The validity of the research is ensured through methodological triangulation, combining textual analysis, contextual interpretation, and comparative scholarly review. By comparing classical and contemporary interpretations, this study minimizes subjective bias and enhances interpretive reliability. Transparency in data selection and analytical procedures further strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Finally, the results of the analysis are presented descriptively and analytically, emphasizing patterns of interpretation rather than prescriptive rulings. This methodological design enables the study to contribute to scholarly discussions on hadith methodology, particularly in demonstrating how *mukhtalif al-hadith* functions as a constructive framework for addressing interpretive plurality in contemporary Islamic thought.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Classification of Hadiths on Wearing Garments Below the Ankles (*Isbāl*)

The findings indicate that hadiths addressing the issue of garments worn below the ankles (*isbāl*) exhibit clear textual plurality, which can be systematically classified into two principal categories based on their wording, context, and implied legal reasoning. This classification is derived from a comparative reading of narrations found in major canonical collections, such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and the *Sunan* works. The existence of multiple formulations concerning *isbāl* confirms that the prophetic discourse on dress was articulated through diverse expressions rather than a single, uniform legal statement.

The first category comprises hadiths that convey an explicit and seemingly unconditional prohibition of *isbāl*. These narrations often employ strong normative language and eschatological warnings, such as statements indicating that “whatever is below the ankles is in the Fire.” Such narrations appear primarily in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and are frequently cited by scholars who advocate

a literal and general prohibition of garments extending below the ankles. Textually, these hadiths do not immediately mention intention or moral motivation, which has led some interpreters to conclude that the prohibition applies universally, regardless of context or purpose.

The second category consists of hadiths that explicitly associate the prohibition of *isbāl* with moral intention, particularly arrogance (*kibr*) and self-exaltation. These narrations include statements in which the Prophet condemns dragging garments out of pride and clarifies that divine reproach is directed toward those who act out of arrogance. A well-known example is the report indicating that God will not look at a person who drags his garment out of pride, which implies that moral disposition, rather than garment length alone, constitutes the primary cause of condemnation. This category introduces an ethical qualifier that significantly shapes interpretive outcomes.

A closer comparative analysis reveals that these two categories are not mutually exclusive but function relationally within the hadith corpus. Scholars employing the *mukhtalif al-hadith* framework argue that the unconditional narrations should be interpreted in light of those that specify moral intention. From this perspective, the strong warnings found in the first category are understood as addressing a prevalent social practice in which long garments symbolized arrogance and social hierarchy in the Prophet's historical context. Thus, textual plurality is reconciled through contextual specification (*takhsīṣ*) rather than treated as genuine contradiction.

This classification demonstrates that *isbāl* hadiths exemplify the methodological necessity of *mukhtalif al-hadith* in hadith studies. The divergent legal conclusions reached by scholars are not rooted in disagreements over authenticity, but rather in how textual plurality is approached methodologically. By identifying these two categories and analyzing their interrelation, the findings affirm that prophetic guidance on *isbāl* prioritizes ethical reform over rigid formalism. Consequently, the classification underscores that understanding hadiths on dress requires a holistic approach that integrates textual analysis, moral intention, and socio-historical context.

Patterns of Scholarly Interpretation within the Mukhtalif al-Hadith Framework

The findings demonstrate that scholarly interpretations of *isbāl* hadiths are predominantly shaped by methodological orientation rather than by disagreements over the authenticity or reliability of the narrations. Across classical and contemporary scholarship, the hadiths addressing garments worn below the ankles are generally recognized as authentic and well-attested in canonical collections. Consequently, interpretive divergence arises not from questions of transmission (*isnād*), but from how scholars prioritize, contextualize, and reconcile the plurality of textual formulations within the hadith corpus.

Scholars adopting a literal-textual approach tend to privilege narrations that

convey unconditional and explicit prohibitions. This approach emphasizes adherence to the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir al-naṣṣ*) of the text, often treating strong warning expressions as universal legal norms. As a result, garments worn below the ankles are categorically regarded as prohibited, regardless of intention or social context. Proponents of this approach argue that introducing contextual qualifiers risks weakening the normative authority of prophetic statements and undermining legal certainty.

In contrast, scholars employing contextual and reconciliatory methods approach *isbāl* hadiths through the framework of *mukhtalif al-hadith*. This methodological orientation prioritizes harmonization (*al-jam' wa al-tawfiq*) by interpreting unconditional narrations in light of those that explicitly link prohibition to moral intention, particularly arrogance (*kibr*). Rather than isolating individual narrations, these scholars analyze the hadiths collectively, considering linguistic nuances, socio-historical conditions, and ethical objectives to derive a coherent interpretive conclusion.

A key pattern identified in this approach is the use of specification (*takhsis*) and contextual limitation to reconcile textual plurality. Unconditional prohibitions are understood as addressing dominant social practices in which long garments functioned as symbols of status and pride. Consequently, the legal and moral force of the prohibition is directed toward the underlying attitude rather than the physical act itself. This reconciliatory pattern illustrates how *mukhtalif al-hadith* operates as a constructive interpretive mechanism that preserves textual integrity while accommodating contextual diversity.

Overall, these interpretive patterns confirm that *mukhtalif al-hadith* serves as a methodological lens through which scholars negotiate textual plurality, rather than as evidence of inconsistency within the hadith tradition. The findings suggest that divergent rulings on *isbāl* reflect broader epistemological commitments concerning the relationship between text, context, and ethics in Islamic legal thought. Recognizing these methodological patterns enables a more nuanced understanding of scholarly disagreement and underscores the importance of methodological awareness in contemporary hadith interpretation.

Ethical Orientation as the Core Interpretive Outcome

The findings of this study indicate that ethical considerations constitute the central interpretive outcome in understanding hadiths related to *isbāl*. Across diverse scholarly traditions, both classical and contemporary, the prohibition of garments worn below the ankles is consistently framed in relation to moral values rather than merely formal legal compliance. Ethical concepts such as humility, self-restraint, and the rejection of arrogance (*kibr*) emerge as recurring themes that underpin prophetic guidance on dress, suggesting that the primary concern of these hadiths lies in shaping moral character rather than regulating physical appearance.

A close examination of the hadith corpus reveals that moral intention plays a decisive role in determining the normative force of *isbāl* narrations. Hadiths that

explicitly link condemnation to arrogance indicate that ethical disposition functions as the operative cause ('illah) of prohibition. Within a mukhtalif al-hadith framework, unconditional warnings are therefore interpreted as rhetorical strategies aimed at discouraging socially harmful attitudes rather than as isolated legal injunctions. This ethical reading aligns with broader prophetic teachings that consistently prioritize inner moral reform over external conformity.

The ethical orientation of *isbāl* hadiths is further reinforced by their socio-historical context. In early Arabian society, garments extending below the ankles were often associated with social stratification, wealth display, and symbolic dominance. By condemning such practices, the Prophet challenged prevailing norms of social hierarchy and promoted values of equality and modesty. Understanding this context strengthens the argument that prophetic guidance on dress served as a means of ethical and social transformation rather than an end in itself.

From a methodological perspective, emphasizing ethical orientation allows for a more coherent reconciliation of textual plurality. The mukhtalif al-hadith approach demonstrates that narrations emphasizing garment length and those highlighting moral intention are not contradictory, but complementary. Together, they articulate a unified ethical vision in which external behavior is evaluated in light of internal disposition. This integrative reading prevents reductive interpretations that isolate legal form from ethical substance.

Ultimately, this ethical orientation has significant implications for contemporary hadith interpretation. By shifting the focus from rigid formal regulation to moral coherence, scholars can engage prophetic traditions in ways that remain faithful to their ethical objectives while responding to diverse social contexts. The findings affirm that responsible hadith interpretation requires attentiveness to ethical intent as a core interpretive outcome, reinforcing the relevance of prophetic guidance as a source of moral transformation in modern Muslim life.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that hadiths concerning garments worn below the ankles (*isbāl*) constitute a paradigmatic case of mukhtalif al-hadith, where apparent textual tensions invite methodological engagement rather than literal contradiction. The classification of hadiths into unconditional prohibitions and morally conditioned narrations highlights the internal diversity of prophetic discourse. Rather than indicating inconsistency, this plurality reflects the nuanced communicative strategies of the Prophet in addressing varying social contexts and moral dispositions. This finding supports contemporary hadith scholarship that emphasizes textual multiplicity as an inherent feature of the Sunnah, requiring interpretive frameworks capable of reconciling ethical intent and legal formulation.

The analysis of scholarly interpretive patterns further reveals that divergence in legal conclusions regarding *isbāl* stems primarily from methodological orientation rather than disputes over hadith authenticity. Literal-textual approaches tend to prioritize the apparent wording of unconditional prohibitions, resulting in a general ruling of impermissibility. In contrast, contextual and reconciliatory methodologies (*al-jam' wa al-tawfiq*) interpret these narrations in light of those explicitly linking *isbāl* to arrogance. This methodological distinction illustrates how *mukhtalif al-hadith* operates as an epistemological lens that structures scholarly reasoning, shaping legal outcomes through interpretive priorities rather than selective textual acceptance.

Importantly, the ethical orientation identified as the core interpretive outcome provides a unifying framework capable of integrating these divergent approaches. By foregrounding ethical values such as humility, social equality, and moral restraint, the prophetic guidance on *isbāl* transcends rigid formalism. This ethical focus aligns with broader objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), particularly the cultivation of virtuous character (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*). Within this perspective, legal rulings concerning dress are understood as instruments for moral reform, not as ends in themselves.

Furthermore, situating *isbāl* hadiths within their socio-historical context strengthens the ethical reading proposed in this study. In early Islamic society, garment length functioned as a marker of status and dominance. Prophetic condemnation of such practices can therefore be read as a critique of social arrogance and symbolic inequality. This contextual awareness reinforces the argument that the Sunnah addresses social ethics through concrete practices, allowing moral principles to be internalized through everyday behavior.

From a contemporary standpoint, the findings carry significant implications for responsible hadith interpretation. An ethical-oriented reading informed by *mukhtalif al-hadith* enables scholars to maintain fidelity to prophetic teachings while avoiding overly rigid applications detached from moral intent. This approach fosters interpretive balance, preserving normative guidance without reducing the Sunnah to formalistic regulation. Consequently, this study contributes to ongoing efforts in hadith studies to integrate textual rigor, methodological coherence, and ethical relevance, reaffirming the Sunnah as a dynamic source of moral guidance across changing social contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that hadiths addressing the issue of wearing garments below the ankles (*isbāl*) represent a clear and methodologically significant case of *mukhtalif al-hadith*. The apparent textual diversity within the hadith corpus does not indicate inconsistency or contradiction in prophetic teachings, but rather reflects the plurality of contexts, moral emphases, and interpretive possibilities inherent in hadith transmission. The classification of *isbāl* narrations into unconditional prohibitions and intention-based condemnations provides a crucial foundation for understanding the emergence

of divergent scholarly interpretations.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that differences in scholarly opinions on *isbāl* are primarily shaped by methodological orientations rather than disputes over hadith authenticity. Scholars who adopt literal-textual approaches tend to prioritize the surface meaning of unconditional narrations, whereas those employing reconciliatory and contextual methodologies interpret these narrations in light of ethical qualifiers such as arrogance and pride. This finding underscores the central role of *mukhtalif al-hadith* as an interpretive framework that enables scholars to negotiate textual plurality while maintaining coherence within the prophetic tradition.

Most importantly, this study affirms that ethical orientation constitutes the core interpretive outcome of hadiths on *isbāl*. Across both classical and contemporary readings, the prophetic concern consistently centers on cultivating moral virtues such as humility, equality, and ethical self-restraint rather than enforcing rigid formal regulations on dress length. When approached through a *mukhtalif al-hadith* lens, the focus of hadith interpretation shifts from external conformity to internal moral disposition, aligning the prophetic message with the broader objectives of Islamic ethics (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*).

In conclusion, this research contributes to contemporary hadith studies by offering an integrative model that combines textual classification, methodological analysis, and ethical interpretation. This approach not only enhances scholarly understanding of *isbāl* hadiths but also provides a constructive framework for addressing other instances of *mukhtalif al-hadith*. By emphasizing methodological awareness and ethical coherence, this study reinforces the relevance of hadith interpretation in responding to the moral and social challenges of modern Muslim societies.

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