



The Rib Metaphor in Hadith: A Study of Meaning and Gendered Social Relevance

Siti Habiba^{1*}, Agus Suyadi Raharusun², Tety Kurmalasari³, Hanifah⁴

¹ Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji Tanjungpinang, Indonesia; siti.habiba@umrah.ac.id

² Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia; agussuyadi@uinsgd.ac.id

³ Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji Tanjungpinang, Indonesia; Tety Kurmalasari@umrah.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji Tanjungpinang, Indonesia; hanifah@umrah.ac.id

* Correspondence: siti.habiba@umrah.ac.id

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Abstract: This article discusses and analyzes hadiths that address the creation of women. It is stated that women were created from a curved rib. The term “curved” carries a negative connotation, such as being deceitful or dishonest, implying that women must always be guided and advised by their husbands or fathers to avoid being curved. Can it be accepted that women are seemingly born with inherent negative traits simply because they are created from a curved rib? However, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Every child is born in a state of fitrah (innate purity). In this study, the author employs a descriptive qualitative method with a focus on the literature review. The findings indicate that both men and women are born in a state of fitrah or purity, and that the rib is a crucial, functional, and perfect part of the human body created by the Most Perfect. When something is likened to something perfect, it should be seen as perfect as a creation. Not everything that is curved is necessarily bad or has a negative connotation; the rib itself was originally created with a natural curve or bend. This shape allows the rib to support and enhance life.

Keywords: Counsel; curved; ribs; women.

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas dan menganalisis hadis-hadis yang berbicara tentang penciptaan perempuan. Dikatakan bahwa perempuan diciptakan dari tulang rusuk yang bengkok. Kata “bengkok” memberikan konotasi makna yang negatif seperti curang atau tidak jujur. Sehingga kaum perempuan harus selalu dibimbing dan dinasihati oleh suami atau ayahnya. Apakah bisa diterima bahwa perempuan seolah sejak lahir sudah membawa benih-benih sifat negatif karena tercipta dari tulang rusuk yang bengkok? Padahal Nabi SAW menyatakan bahwa setiap anak yang lahir ke dunia dalam keadaan fitrah. Dalam penelitian ini penulis menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan fokus pada studi kepustakaan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perempuan dan laki-laki sama-sama terlahir dalam keadaan fitrah atau suci, tulang rusuk adalah bagian tubuh manusia yang sangat penting, fungsional dan sempurna karena diciptakan oleh Yang Maha Sempurna. Ketika sesuatu dikiaskan kepada yang sempurna, tentu sesuatu itu juga sempurna sebagai suatu ciptaan. Tidak semua yang bengkok itu tidak baik atau berkonotasi negatif, seperti halnya tulang rusuk yang dari awal penciptaannya sudah bengkok atau dengan istilah lain melengkung. Dengan bentuknya yang melengkung itulah maka tulang rusuk dapat menyempurnakan hidup dan kehidupan.

Kata Kunci: Bangkok; perempuan; tulang rusuk; wasiat.

1. Introduction

The hadith on the creation of women from a rib has become one of the most debated topics in both classical and contemporary Islamic studies. This hadith, narrated by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, describes women as being “created from a rib,” and it is often understood that the “curved” nature of women is often understood to refer to characteristics that require guidance. In classical interpretations, the connotation of “curved” in this hadith frequently carries a negative image, such as dishonesty or being morally curved. This view has influenced the social perception of women and has often become the basis for treating women as beings who need to be “straightened” or controlled. Such an understanding can imply stereotypes and judgments that women are weak or less perfect compared to men (Najah & Fitrian, 2021).

This study focuses on interpreting the term “curved” in the hadith about the creation of women from a rib. The use of the word “curved” here is not only literal but also contributes to the negative perceptions of women in various Muslim societies. How should we understand this? Does “curved” refer to a bad character, or does it simply indicate a natural difference in qualities from men? Some interpretations suggest that the word “curved” refers to an inherent and even positive trait, reflecting the uniqueness and fragility of women that require loving treatment rather than forceful correction.

The urgency of this study lies in the social and theological impact of the interpretation of the hadith about women and the rib (Hidayah, 2020). Interpreting women as “curved” can lead to gender-biased views and limit their potential in the public sphere. In modern Islamic academic studies, there is a growing desire to explore whether this interpretation of the hadith remains relevant considering the increasing demand for gender equality and the recognition of women's rights (Fakih, 1996). This study is important in providing a more just and inclusive theological foundation for women (Hannah, 2017). Moreover, this study is relevant as it offers a new perspective on the interpretation of hadith in a broader context, inspiring the renewal of religious understanding that responds to contemporary issues such as gender and human rights (K. Ali, 2019).

Furthermore, this research emphasizes the importance of a critical approach to hadith, particularly in understanding the metaphorical aspects of religious texts (Muhtadin, 2019). By doing so, the understanding of hadith does not only rely on its

literal meaning but also considers the broader context and nuances, such as symbolic interpretations that can lead to a more positive understanding of women (Aisyah, 2012). The interpretation of the hadith about the creation of women from a rib reveals a variety of deep and complex perspectives. This hadith, which is narrated by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, is often understood as an affirmation that women are created from a “curved” part of the body, which in many classical interpretations carries a negative connotation. This creates stereotypes that women have bad qualities or require continuous guidance from men (Amin, 2019). However, recent research shows that the interpretation of “curved” does not necessarily have to be viewed literally or negatively. In contrast, some modern scholars argue that the term can be understood as a symbol of the gentleness and uniqueness of women, which becomes their strength in supporting life.

Theologically, this hadith underscores the concern of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in emphasizing the importance of treating women with kindness, akin to the vital function of curved ribs in protecting the body's essential organs (Mulia, 2020). This perspective highlights that the term “curved” is not indicative of a flaw but rather a part of the beauty and perfection of Allah's creation. Socially, the interpretation of this hadith has had a significant impact on gender perspectives in Islamic communities (Daffa & Purnamasari, 2024). Biased understandings of the hadith have the potential to reinforce patriarchal norms and limit women's roles in the public sphere (Nasution, Nasyruddin, Abdullah, & Faizulamri, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to explore interpretations of this hadith that are more inclusive and equitable for women.

Contemporary studies emphasize the urgency of revisiting traditional understandings of this hadith to align with current demands for gender equality (Sandi & Nugraha, 2012). Through a critical approach to religious texts, it becomes evident that ribs, despite being physically “curved,” serve a vital function, reflecting the essential role of women in family and societal structures. Thus, this study not only contributes to a more inclusive theological understanding but also lays a foundation for progressive social change within Muslim communities (Ali, Shaheen Sardar, 2000; N. Ismail, 2015). This analysis reaffirms that women's unique characteristics, symbolized by the rib, are a source of strength and beauty, rather than a weakness.

This article offers novelty by employing a hermeneutical approach that interprets “curved” as a symbol of women's gentleness and uniqueness, correlating it with the function of ribs in protecting vital organs. Consequently, this article provides an inclusive perspective that positions women as crucial elements within families and

societies while promoting interpretations of Islamic teachings that align with the principles of gender equality (Allen, 2023).

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach to analyze the meaning of “curved” in the hadith. Primary data sources include hadith texts from renowned compilations such as those by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, as well as exegeses that elucidate the meaning of this hadith (Darmalaksana, 2020). Additionally, this study draws upon various literatures that explore the interpretation of hadith from the perspectives of gender and modern theology.

In the literature review, the authors conduct a comparative analysis of interpretations of the hadith by classical and contemporary scholars (Adam, Haddade, & Damis, 2022; Handayani & Nur Hadi, 2020). This study examines how the term “curved” has been variably understood and how these interpretations have influenced general perceptions of women’s nature and roles in Islam. The research also revisits the hadith from an anatomical perspective, considering the structure and function of ribs in the human body to redefine the term “curved” positively and constructively.

In its analysis, the study explores various interpretations and arguments both supporting and opposing the negative characterization of women based on this hadith (Kodir, 2019). Modern interpretations suggest that the term “curved” can be understood metaphorically, referring to the gentleness and uniqueness of women, rather than as a weakness or defect. This study aims to contribute to the reevaluation of hadiths that have historically been used to justify negative views of women.

The research is organized in a narrative structure that includes problem formulation, research objectives, and the theoretical and practical benefits of the findings (Dadah, 2018). It also incorporates the theoretical foundations of hadith interpretation methods and gender perspectives in Islam. The authors aspire for this study to contribute to Islamic scholarship, particularly in the realm of inclusive and gender-aware hadith interpretation, which is increasingly relevant to contemporary Muslim societies.

2. Results and Discussion

Interpretation of the Ribs Hadith

The hadith about women being created from a rib is one of the most frequently discussed in Islam, as it is considered to have profound implications for social views and attitudes towards women (Handayani & Nur Hadi, 2020; I. Ismail, 2019). In a

hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet states that women are created from a curved rib, and the most curved part is their base. The Prophet warned that if one tries to straighten it, it will break, and if left unchecked, it will remain curved. Therefore, the Prophet invited his people, especially men, to “advise each other” to treat women well.

عَنْ أَيِّ حَازِمٍ عَنْ أَيِّ هُرِيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اسْتَوْصُوا
بِالنِّسَاءِ فَإِنَّ الْمُرْأَةَ حُلِقَتْ مِنْ صِلَعٍ وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ سَيِّءٍ فِي الظِّلْلَعِ أَعْلَاهُ فَإِنْ ذَهَبَتْ تُقْيِيمُهُ كَسَرَتْهُ وَإِنْ
تَرْكُتْهُ لَمْ يَزِلْ أَعْوَجَ فَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah 's Apostle said, “Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. So, treat women nicely.” (Shahih Bukhari).

This hadith is often interpreted as a warning to treat women gently, without trying to change or suppress their nature. The meaning of “curved” in the context of this hadith is often misunderstood and has a negative connotation, as if it denotes the shortcomings of women (Kesgin, 2021). However, many scholars, both classical and contemporary, argue that the word “curved” does not simply mean a bad trait, but rather indicates the uniqueness and vulnerability of women who need loving and understanding treatment.

أَرَادَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنْ يُوصِي رِجَالَ أُمَّتِهِ مِنَ الْأَزْوَاجِ وَالْأَبْاءِ وَالإخْوَةِ وَغَيْرِهِمْ
بِالنِّسَاءِ، فَقَالَ: (اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا) أَيْ اقْبِلُوا وَصِيَّتِي فِيهَا وَاعْمَلُوا بِهَا وَارْفَقُوا بِهَا وَأَحْسِنُوا
عَشْرَتِهِنَّ، وَتَوَاصُوا فِيمَا بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْإِحْسَانِ إِلَيْهِنَّ، ثُمَّ وَضَعُ طَبِيعَةَ خَلْقَتِهِنَّ حَتَّى يَكُونَ ذَلِكَ أَدْعَى
لِلْعَمَلِ بِتِلْكَ الْوَصِيَّةِ

The Prophet (PBUH) wanted to advise his male followers, whether as husbands, fathers, brothers and others towards women, he said: “Give each other (my male Ummah) the will to do good to women.” This means accepting my will about women, carrying it out, being gentle with women, and treating them well. They also advised each other to be kind to themselves. The Prophet then explains the nature of the creation of women in such a way that it is important to carry out the will.

وَفِي حَدِيثِهِ: ”اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا“ الْمُعْنَى أَيْ: أَوْصِيَكُمْ بِالرُّفْقِ بِهِنَّ، فَاسْتَوْصُوا أَيْ: اقْبِلُوا
وَصِيَّتِي، فَعَلَى هَذَا فِي نَصْبِ ”خَيْرًا“ وَجْهَهَا: هُوَ مَفْعُولُ اسْتَوْصُوا؛ لِأَنَّ الْمُعْنَى: افْعَلُوا بِهِنَّ
خَيْرًا. وَالثَّانِي: مَعْنَاهُ اقْبِلُوا وَصِيَّتِي وَأَتَوْا فِي ذَلِكَ خَيْرًا، فَهُوَ مَنْصُوبٌ بِفَعْلِ مَحْذُوفٍ كَقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى: {وَلَا
تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً انتَهَوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ} أَيْ انتَهَوا عَنْ ذَلِكَ وَأَتَوْا خَيْرًا.

(Abu al-Baqa' Al-'Akbary, Kitab I'rab Ma Yasykulu min Alfazh al-Hadits, shamela.ws)

The hadith above is often referred to as an interpretation of the first verse of Surah An-Nisa:

يَأَيُّهَا أَكْلَمُ الْأَنْوَارِ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّنْ نَفْسٍ وَحْدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَ مِنْهَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا
وَنِسَاءً

"O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single self, and created from it a mate; and He multiplied from them many men and women." (QS. An-Nisa:1)

In relation to the first verse of Surah An-Nisa, "O humankind, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate...", this hadith emphasizes that women's origin is the same as that of men. Both genders complement each other, each possessing unique characteristics shaped by Allah. This verse underscores the unity of human origin and the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships between men and women (Rafea, Serageldin, Mijares, & Merriam, 2024).

The profound meaning of this hadith has been interpreted by scholars as an exhortation to treat women with kindness and gentleness, rather than imposing control or undue restrictions upon them (Klaina, 2024). Within the context of the hadith, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reminds husbands, fathers, brothers, and men in general to be considerate of the women around them, whether within the family or the wider community (Begum, Ismail, Yaakob, Razick, & Abdullah, 2024; Mohadi, 2023). The phrase "mutually advise one another to treat women well" signifies accepting women with all their unique qualities and supporting them without demanding changes that contradict their inherent nature.

In his work I'rab Ma Yasykulu min Alfazh al-Hadith, Abu al-Baqa' Al-'Akbary elucidates the meaning of "mutually advise" in this hadith. He identifies two interpretations: the first calls on Muslims to treat women with kindness and gentleness, while the second underscores accepting the Prophet's (PBUH) guidance to treat women respectfully. Al-'Akbary emphasizes the importance of a compassionate approach toward women, refraining from judgment based on the metaphor of the "curved rib."

Many scholars have examined this hadith through both anatomical and metaphorical lenses, highlighting that ribs, despite being crooked or curved, play a vital role in protecting essential organs such as the heart and lungs. Within the context of the hadith, comparing women to ribs underscores their indispensable role in families

and society (Daharis, 2023; Noor, 2024). Just as the curvature of the ribs enables optimal protection, women's "curved" nature represents a strength that allows them to protect and nurture without rigidity or inflexibility.

Modern perspectives on this hadith also emphasize that women possess unique emotional strengths that are not always understood from a male perspective (Rahman, 2023). Like ribs that protect vital organs, women bring empathy and tenderness to families and societies, qualities that often help balance other traits (Samiullah & Nawaz, 2023). Through this hadith, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) teaches the importance of embracing women's distinctive qualities as integral to a balanced life rather than forcing them to conform to standards defined by men (Azalan & Ghani, 2024).

Moreover, the Prophet's (PBUH) exhortation to "mutually advise one another to treat women well" reflects his awareness of the social realities that women faced. During his time, women were often marginalized and denied equal standing in many aspects of life, including education. Through this hadith, the Prophet not only called for kind treatment of women but also underscored the importance of respecting their rights and dignity. This guidance remains relevant today, as women continue to strive for equitable recognition and respect in society.

Furthermore, this hadith can be seen as a subtle critique of patriarchal norms that often demand women conform to standards set by men to be considered pious. By likening women to curved ribs, the Prophet (PBUH) seems to emphasize that women possess a natural disposition and characteristics that cannot be forcibly altered, and any attempt to "straighten" them would result in "breaking" or losing their essence.

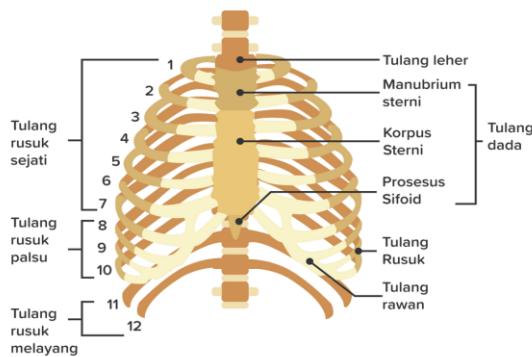
Overall, this hadith does not merely address the physical or emotional attributes of women but imparts profound lessons about the uniqueness, dignity, and protection that should be afforded to women. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sought to instil (Z. Ali, Anjum, Iqbal, & Ahmad, 2024) in his followers the understanding that justice and compassion in treating women are central tenets of Islam (Fatima, 2023). In a modern context, this hadith calls for appreciating women not as beings to be subdued or changed, but as equal partners to men, playing a significant and unique role in life.

Meanings of the Ribs

The ribs are classified into three groups based on their attachment: seven pairs of true ribs, three pairs of false ribs and two pairs of floating ribs. In the hadith, the Prophet mentions an analogy to the topmost or most curved rib. The uppermost ribs fall into

the category of true ribs. In anatomy, ribs or ribs are long bones that curve and form the rib cavity, protecting the chest (Latin: thorax), lungs, heart, liver, and other internal organs in the chest cavity (Baker & Al Janabi, 2022). In summary, ribs are long, curved bones that protect the organs of the chest.

Figure 1. Rib Bone



Source: [\[https://imgix3.ruangguru.com/assets/miscellaneous/png_amgzls_900.png\]](https://imgix3.ruangguru.com/assets/miscellaneous/png_amgzls_900.png)

In anatomy or medical science, the term curved is used for ribs, not curved, as the Indonesian translation of hadith uses the term curved ribs. The number of human ribs for both men and women is the same, totalling 12 pairs (Shari, Al-Salman, Halyial, Alahmed, & Alkamil, 2024). The ribs' function:

1. Protects vital organs found in the chest, such as the heart, lungs, liver, and spleen.
2. Maintaining space in the chest area allows the lungs to expand and contract during respiration.
3. It serves as an attachment point for tendons and muscles.
4. Shapes posture.

In Surah At-Tin:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا أَلْإِنْسُنَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَفْوِيمٍ

“Indeed, we have created humankind in the best of stature” (QS. At-Tin:4).

In another verse, Allah affirms the perfection of the human form in Surah Al-Infithar, verses 6-9: “O humankind, what has deceived you concerning your Lord, the

Most Generous, who created you, proportioned you, and balanced you? In whatever form He willed, He assembled you." (QS. Al-Infithar:6-8).

The human rib, with its curved shape, contributes to the beauty, balance, and perfection of our bodies. Human anatomy, including the curved structure of the ribs, reflects an exquisite design created by the Most Perfect. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) likened women to ribs, emphasizing their unique and beautiful curvature (Majid, 2023). In terms of aesthetics, the curvature of the ribs is beautiful and distinctive. Functionally, the ribs play a critical role in protecting vital organs within the chest, and structurally, they contribute to the upright posture and elegance of human form.

The 12 pairs of ribs are directly connected to the vertebral column, whereas their front ends are attached to the sternum via cartilage. Allah says, "So let man observe from what he was created. He was created from a fluid ejected, emerging from between the backbone and the rib cage." (QS. At-Thariq:5-7).

The spine serves as a support for the head, shoulders, and torso, enabling humans to stand upright, sit, walk, and move with flexibility. It also plays a vital role in protecting the spinal cord from injuries. The spinal cord, which is housed within the spine, is essential for producing red blood cells, platelets, and white blood cells. Without these blood cells, the human body cannot function properly. Remarkably, the spinal cord begins to form during the early stages of fetal development.

Women embody a unique combination of beauty and tenderness. During specific conditions, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing, women experience physical vulnerability as part of their innate role, divinely ordained for a noble purpose. As Allah says:

هَمَلْتَهُ أُمُّهُ وَهُنَّا عَلَىٰ وَهُنِّيَّ وَفِصْلُهُ فِي عَامِينَ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِيٰ وَلَوَالِدَيْكُ إِلَيٰ وَوَصَّيْنَا الْأَنْسَنَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ
المُصْبِرُ ١٤

"And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination." (QS. Luqman:14).

From this, it is entirely reasonable that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised men to treat women with kindness (Silfiah & Humiati, 2023). This is especially pertinent when the women are their wives or daughters. Love them as you love your ribs and protect them as you protect your ribs. This hadith reflects the Prophet's deep

compassion for and care for women. If a woman is a wife, she is entrusted to her husband by Allah; if she is a daughter, she is entrusted to her father by Allah.

Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) instructed men to treat women well and with respect. What does this treatment entail? This mirrors the Prophet's treatment of his wives and daughters with love, respect, and care. The rib, as an analogy, is a symbol of something perfect and essential for life. It would be unwise and unjust to attribute any negative character traits to women based on the rib analogy. As mentioned in the earlier verse (QS. An-Nisa:1), all humanity on earth originates from a single being: Adam (AS). Allah then created the second human, Eve (Hawa), from the same being. The word min (from) indicates that Hawa was created from a part of Adam's body.

Commenting on this, Ibn Hajar stated that Hawa was created from Adam's rib, as indicated in Surah An-Nisa and further clarified by the hadith on the rib. Hawa was derived from Adam, who was created from soil. Meanwhile, most of humanity descends from Adam and Hawa, except for Prophet Isa AS, who was born solely of Maryam.

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَٰ حَلَقَةٌ مِّنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ۝ ٥٩

"Verily, the example of Isa for Allah is like that of Adam: He created him from the ground, then He said to him, "Be!" So he became."(QS. Ali Imran:59).

Comparative Analysis of the Meanings of curved Ribs with Women

In various translations, the word curved (curved) is used as an adjective with several meanings. First, it refers to something that deviates from a straight line, such as being curved or not straight. For example, a curved piece of wood is not suitable for making a board. Second, it can mean dishonest or fraudulent. For instance, wealth obtained through dishonest means will not bring blessings (KBBI, 2007:133).

Generally, the term curved carries a negative connotation when applied to people. When associated with women, it implies dishonesty, curvedness, or fraud. In other words, a woman described as curved may be seen as immoral or to possess negative traits. However, the hadith about women being created from the rib, which is described as curved, conveys a profound lesson. As Djazimah (2011:60) explains, "Mutually advise one another to treat women well, for women were created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its uppermost section. If you try to straighten it, it will break; if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. Therefore, mutually advise one another to treat women well."

This hadith serves as a reminder for men to treat women with kindness and understanding. Through this metaphor, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) highlights that women possess qualities requiring gentleness and greater empathy (Nolan-Thomas, 2023). The core message of this hadith is not to criticize or demean women but to advise against forcing them to change their inherent nature. Accordingly, the hadith encourages men to be wise and patient in dealing with women's natural traits.

Narrated by Abu Hurairah, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor. They mutually advise one another to treat women well, for they were created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its uppermost section. If you try to straighten it, you will break it; if you leave it, it will remain curved as it is. Therefore, mutually advise one another to treat women well." (HR Bukhari, as cited in Zaitunah, 2015:297).

Anatomically, the ribs have a natural curvature that is essential for their function of protecting vital organs in the chest cavities, such as the heart and lungs. This curved shape provides structural integrity and safeguards vital organs from pressure and impact. By analogy, women are likened to protectors within the family and society, possessing inherent qualities that should not be forcibly altered by men. This anatomical perspective also highlights that the term curved does not inherently carry a negative meaning. The curvature of the rib is a perfect design, which enables it to function optimally. Similarly, women, with their distinct characteristics, play vital roles in fostering social and familial harmony. The hadith teaches that women should be understood and valued without being compelled to conform to rigid or "straightened" standards or molded to resemble men. This underscores that each gender has unique traits that complement each other.

As stated in the hadith, "Treat women well, for they were created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its uppermost section. If you try to straighten it, it will break; if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. Therefore, treat women well." (HR Bukhari and Muslim). Narrated by Abu Hurairah, this hadith instructs Muslims to treat women with kindness and respect.

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَإِذَا شَهِدَ أَمْرًا فَلْيَتَكَلَّمْ بِخَيْرٍ أَوْ لِيَسْكُنْ فَوَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ فَإِنَّ الْمُرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضَلَّعٍ وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ فِي الضَّلَّعِ أَعْلَاهُ إِنْ ذَهَبْتَ تُقِيمُهُ كَسَرْتَهُ وَإِنْ تَرَكْتَهُ لَمْ يَزِلْ أَعْوَجَ اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا

"Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) as saying:

He who believes in Allah and the Hereafter, if he witnesses any matter he should talk on good terms about it or keep quiet. Act kindly towards woman, for woman is created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its top. If you attempt to straighten it, you will break it, and if you leave it, its curvedness will remain there. So, act kindly towards women." (HR Muslim).

From this perspective, the hadith can be understood as advice to avoid making unilateral judgments about women. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised men to treat women kindly because they were created with unique characteristics. This aligns with the Qur'anic verse in Surah An-Nisa, verse 1, which states that Allah created humankind, both men and women, from a single soul. In other words, all human beings share the same inherent purity (*fitrah*) before God. Thus, the differences in characteristics between men and women should not be used to demean or judge women as being inferior.

Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Give advice to women, for they were created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is at its top. If you attempt to straighten it, you will break it, and if you leave it, it will remain curved. Therefore, give advice to women." (HR Bukhari, 4/133) (Al-Fahrizal, Tebuireng Online (Rara Zarary), August 3, 2022).

This hadith, narrated by Abu Hurairah and recorded in Sahih Bukhari and Muslim, offers significant guidance on how to treat women. The Prophet (PBUH) explained that women were created from a curved rib, with the most curved part at the top of the rib. If one tries to "straighten" this curvature forcibly, the rib will break, and if left as it is, the rib will remain curved. Through this metaphor, the Prophet emphasized the importance of treating women kindly, not through coercion or rigid control. This perspective underscores that while women may have qualities different from men, these traits do not require alteration or suppression to conform to male-defined standards of professionalism. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged men to accept and understand women's unique characteristics without attempting to change their inherent nature.

This analogy can be viewed as the Prophet's way of instructing his followers to avoid harboring negative assumptions or making unilateral judgments about female individuals. The existence of such hadiths encourages Muslims, particularly men, to appreciate women's gentleness, patience, and understanding. Prophet Muhammad reminded his followers that women possess attributes that may differ from men's but should not serve as a basis for excessive control or negative evaluation (Amatullah,

2024). Instead, women are likened to curved ribs, which serve the vital function of protecting internal organs, and whose curvature enhances their structural efficacy.

Thus, this guidance directs men to treat women in a manner aligned with their unique characteristics, as a form of respect and acknowledgment of their roles and status in life. Rather than focusing on altering women's nature, the hadith calls for honoring and valuing their contributions to family and society (Rafea et al., 2024).

Other examples that give the meaning of curved

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو كُرِيْبٍ وَمُوسَى بْنُ حِزَامٍ قَالَا حَدَّثَنَا حُسَيْنُ بْنُ عَلَيٍّ عَنْ رَائِدَةَ عَنْ مَيْسِرَةَ الْأَشْجَعِيِّ
عَنْ أَبِي حَازِمٍ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اسْتَوْصُوا
بِالنِّسَاءِ فَإِنَّ الْمُرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلَّعٍ وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ فِي الضِّلَّعِ أَعْلَاهُ فَإِنْ ذَهَبَتْ تُقِيمُهُ كَسَرَتْهُ وَإِنْ
تَرَكْتَهُ لَمْ يَزِلْ أَعْوَجَ فَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah 's Apostle said, "Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. So, treat women nicely." [Bukhari] hadith no: 3084.

اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ ، فَإِنَّ الْمُرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلَّعٍ ، وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ فِي الضِّلَّعِ أَعْلَاهُ ، فَإِنْ ذَهَبَتْ
تُقِيمُهُ كَسَرَتْهُ ، وَإِنْ تَرَكْتَهُ لَمْ يَزِلْ أَعْوَجَ ، فَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ

"Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. So, treat women nicely." (HR. Bukhari, no. 3331, and Muslim, no. 1468).

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ فَإِنَّ
الْمُرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلَّعٍ وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ فِي الضِّلَّعِ أَعْلَاهُ فَإِنْ ذَهَبَتْ تُقِيمُهُ كَسَرَتْهُ وَإِنْ تَرَكْتَهُ لَمْ يَزِلْ
أَعْوَجَ فَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah 's Apostle said, "Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. So, treat women nicely." (Sahih Bukhari, no.3366).

If it is said that a woman or every woman has an inborn defect that is the result of being created from a rib, is this acceptable? While the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that every child is born in a state of fitrah (pure)?

مَا مِنْ مَوْلُودٍ إِلَّا يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ، فَأَبْوَاهُمْ هُوَدَانِهُ أَوْ يُنَصِّرَانِهُ أَوْ يُمَحْجِسَانِهُ،

“Every child is born with a true faith of Islam (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone) but his parents convert him to Judaism, Christianity or Magainism,.” (HR Bukhari and Muslim)

There is no distinction between male and female children, as both genders are born in a state of purity. They are not born carrying sins, nor do they inherit negative character traits that would make them “curved” later in life. If it is said that women, or all women (without exception in the hadith), are likened to “curved” ribs where if straightened they would break and if left as they are, they remain curved then it is advised to treat women wisely, be patient with their imperfections, but still encourage improvement.

Returning to the rib, if one attempts to straighten a rib, it will break. Even if one tries to straighten it as gently as possible, there are only two outcomes: it will either break or remain unchanged, retaining its natural curve. Efforts to straighten a rib, regardless of how gentle, are futile because the rib must be curved by nature to fulfill its function and support life. The differences in the characteristics and traits of women, as part of their nature, differ from men. One should not measure all goodness or virtuous traits solely from a one-sided perspective (Majid, 2023). If it is understood that women have highly emotional traits (referred to as ‘iwaj), meaning they may struggle to control emotions like anger or sadness, does this mean it applies to all women, including the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and his noble companions?

How do we distinguish between a woman/wife who is emotional because of lack of knowledge, insufficient training in emotional control, or because it is an inherent trait stemming from the rib? Bones are one of the signs of Allah's greatness in the human body. “Indeed, in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for those who believe. And in the creation of yourselves and in the creatures that He has scattered on the earth, there are signs for those who are certain.” (QS. Al-Jathiya: 3-4)

One hadith likens women to curved ribs. Among the conditions of analogy (qiyas) is that the ruling applied to the branch must be the same as the ruling applied to the original case. Therefore, just as the perfection of the rib lies in its curvature, so too the perfection of women lies in their unique characteristics—feminine traits that may not always be understood by men, who may view them through a male-centric lens.

The solution is to mutually advise each other, O men, to always think positively and treat women well. There is no need to attempt to straighten the inherent traits of women, just as there is no need to straighten the natural curvature of the rib. If a woman exhibits negative traits or poor character, this is not due to the rib, but rather

due to other factors, such as lack of knowledge, insufficient education, or other causes, and this can happen not only to women but also to men.

Anything (a woman) likened to something perfect (the rib) must, in fact, also be perfect. If something imperfect is likened to something perfect, the analogy becomes invalid (qiyas ma'al fariq). The creation of women, beginning with the mother of all humans (Hawa), is one of the signs of Allah's perfect power and greatness, and their existence completes the life and the world.

Comparatively, classical and contemporary exegeses of this hadith offer two different understandings of the meaning of "curved." Classical exegesis tends to view this hadith as a warning about the emotional "weakness" of women, who require male protection. Contemporary exegesis, on the other hand, emphasizes that this hadith conveys a message of empathy, where women are valued for their inherent "curved" characteristics, which contribute to the balance within the family. Contemporary perspectives argue that women's emotional traits are not a weakness but a strength that should be understood and respected.

Some scholars suggest that this hadith does not describe an inherent trait of women but rather reflects a social condition that needs to be corrected in how women are perceived. They emphasize that "curved" is not a biologically or morally determined character but a perception that should be corrected through a more contextual and non-literal understanding of the hadith. In this analysis, the interpretation of this hadith depends on the approach and perspective used. A traditional, literal interpretation may lead to the perception that women are inherently more emotional and unstable. In contrast, contemporary and contextual interpretations view the hadith as advice on how to treat women with kindness and understanding, without demanding changes that contradict their nature. This approach aligns with the principles of gender equality, aiming to understand and respect differences without devaluing one gender.

Thus, the understanding of this hadith continues to evolve as social perspectives and the emphasis on gender equality progress. The hadith about the curved rib can serve as a reminder for men to maintain the honor and dignity of women. More inclusive and positive interpretations show that women, with all their unique qualities, play an essential role in society and family, deserving of respect and support without discrimination or devaluation. Interpretations that consider the social and cultural context not only prevent biased understandings but also promote harmony in male-female relationships.

3. Conclusion

The study concludes that the meaning of “curved” in the hadith that women are created from ribs should not be understood negatively, but rather as a description of the uniqueness and natural nature of women. Important findings in this study show that the concept of “curvedness” in the ribs is in line with functional anatomy and implies the role of women as protectors of the family and society. The scholarly contribution of this study is a more positive interpretative approach to the hadith, using an anatomical perspective to clarify that “curved” is a natural trait, not a defect. The limitation of this research lies in the data sources which are limited to the texts of hadith and tafsir without empirical studies. For further research, it is recommended to explore perspectives from gender and socio-cultural studies that can enrich the understanding of the role of women in the context of this hadith more broadly and contextually.

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