

Exploring the Concept of *Maqasid al-Sunnah* to Understand the Higher Objectives of the Sunnah

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Abstract

The concept of *Maqasid al-Sunnah*, denoting the higher objectives or goals of the Sunnah, offers a profound perspective on the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in Islam. A deeper understanding of the higher objectives of the Sunnah illuminates towards a more profound connection with faith (*Aqidah*). It also encourages a greater appreciation of the Prophet's teachings and unveiling their timeless relevance and fostering a more meaningful application of these teachings in daily life. Throughout this exploration, we delve into the historical evolution of *Maqasid al-Sunnah*, recognizing its enduring presence in Islamic scholarship. We also explore the significance of this concept, highlighting the numerous benefits of its study. Furthermore, our exploration identifies the practical

implications of Maqasid al-Sunnah in addressing contemporary issues. From gender equality to environmental sustainability, political complexity, and financial ethics. It exemplifies the adaptability of Islamic thought in addressing multifaceted challenges.

Keywords: *Al Maqasid*. Al Sunnah. Concept. Islam.

Introduction

Maqasid al-Sunnah “higher objectives of the Sunnah” is a concept which means, go beyond the surface level of religious practices and rituals, delving into the profound wisdom and ultimate goals that underlie the Sunnah. It has been gained significant attention in recent years. It aims to illuminate the path towards a more profound connection with our faith, a greater appreciation of the Prophet's teachings, and a more meaningful application of these teachings in our daily lives. Throughout this exploration, we will delve into the concept of *Maqasid al-Sunnah* and its historical evolution, examine its Significant and benefits of study, and highlight its practical implications in the contemporary issues especially, in addressing modern challenges include Gender issues, Environmental issues, Political issues and financial issues.

Definition of *Maqāṣid*

The word *Maqāṣid* (مقاصد) is Arabic word, plural of *Maqsa* (مقصد) , derived from word (قصد) which means Middle or straightening the path (Ibn Manzur,1993), Another meaning justice (al-Jauhari, 1990), Allah said in the Quran: {وَعَلَى اللَّهِ قَصْدُ السَّبِيلِ وَمِنْهَا جَائِزٌ} (Surah Al-Nahal:9), Prophet Muhammad SAW said in Hadith: {القَصْدُ الْقَصْدُ تَبَلُّغُوا} (Al-Bukhari., 1997). The word *Maqasid* (مقصد) used some other meanings also, such as: goal, target, objective, aim, purpose etc.

in Islam the term *Maqāṣid* refers to the higher objectives and purposes of Islam. It encompasses the overarching principles and aims that underlie the specific legal rulings within Islam (Ibn Ashur,2006). According to a number of Islamic legal theorists it is an alternative expression to ‘*Masalih*’ people’s interests (Afridi.,2016). For example, Abdul Malik al-Juwaini, one of the earliest contributors to al-Maqasid theory as we know it today used *Maqasid* and *Masalih* interchangeably (Al-Juwaini, 1979). Also, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali elaborated on a classification of *Maqasid*, which he placed entirely under what he called ‘*Al-Masalih Al-Mursalah*’ unrestricted interests (Al-Ghazali, 1997).

According to the Afridi, *Maqasid* is best described as a ‘multi-dimensional’ structure, in which levels of necessity, scope of rulings, scope of people, and levels of universality are all valid dimensions that represent valid viewpoints and classifications (Afridi, 2016).

More recently, the notion of *Maqāṣid* intended as a framework for interpreting and applying Islam in a way that addresses the needs and challenges of changing times, while staying true to the foundational principles of Islam. It recognizes the dynamic nature of society and allows for flexibility and adaptation, within the boundaries of Islamic ethics and values.

Significant of *Maqasid* Study:

The *Maqasid* approach focuses on the objectives and goals of Islam, rather than just following legal rules. This means that when faced with conflicting opinions or interpretations, scholars should consider the Maqasid objectives and determine which approach best serves these objectives (Kamali., 2006). According to the (Al-Qaradawi, 2002) Maqasid represents a sense of balance between individual rights and societal needs, ensuring that both are protected within Islam. However, there may be times when implementing such rulings may contradict

certain aspects of the sunnah or even the Quran itself. In such cases, scholars must carefully weigh the benefits (*Maslahah*) against potential harm (*Mafsadah*) to determine if a particular ruling aligns with overall goals of Islam. Many scholars have reiterated that it is important to establish their principles and theories based on the *Maqasid* approach. However, scholars have also cautioned that one should take extreme caution when using this approach as it can be subjective and open to interpretation.

The benefits of studying *Maqasid*:

Being *Maqasid* refers to the direct objectives and purposes of Islam, its carry out a lot beneficent among researcher and Islamic scholars. Here are some of the benefits of studying *Maqasid*:

❖ Understanding the purpose of Islamic teachings:

Studying *Maqasid* helps us understand the underlying objectives of Islamic teachings and practices. This knowledge can help us better appreciate the wisdom and beauty of the Islamic faith and how it seeks to promote human well-being and social justice (Al Asmary,1999).

❖ Enhancing our understanding of Islamic law:

Islamic law (Shariah) is based on the principles of *Maqasid*. Therefore, studying *Maqasid* can help us to understand the higher objectives and purposes of Shariah, which in turn can provide us with a deeper appreciation of the moral and ethical values that underpin Islamic law (Al Dawseri, 2018).

❖ Promoting a balanced and holistic approach to Islam:

The study of *Maqasid* helps us develop a more balanced and holistic approach to Islam, by encouraging us to focus on the core objectives and purposes of Islamic teachings and practices rather than getting bogged down in the details of legal rulings and technicalities.

❖ Guiding us in ethical decision-making:

Understanding the objectives of Islamic teachings can help us make more informed and ethical decisions in our daily lives, by guiding us towards actions that promote the well-being of ourselves and others, and by avoiding actions that may cause harm or injustice.

❖ Encouraging critical thinking and reflection:

Studying *Maqasid* requires critical thinking and reflection, as we explore the deeper meanings and purposes of Islamic teachings and practices. This can help us develop a deeper understanding of our faith and can also help us develop a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to contemporary issues and challenges facing the Muslim community (Muhammad Salah, 2021).

Definition of *Maqasid al-Sunnah*:

Sunnah refers to the Prophet's teachings, actions and acceptances (Mesbah, 2022). It's considered a second primary source of *Maqasid al-Shariah* after the Quran. (Al Khademi, 2001). The Sunnah also provides practical examples and elaborations on the principles and values enshrined in the Quran. It helps to contextualize the Quranic teachings and guide Muslims in their understanding on various aspects of life, including worship, ethics, social interactions, and governance. For instance, the Quran mandates the performance of the daily prayers (Salah), but the specifics of how to perform them are detailed in the Sunnah. The Prophet's actions and instructions regarding the number of units (Rak'ahs), the recitations, and the physical postures during prayer provide practical guidance for Muslims (Mesbah.,2020).

Maqasid al-Sunnah define as an immediate and future goals and objectives of the prophetic traditions which are consistent with what was stated in the Qur'an and achieve the interests of the people in this world and in the hereafter. (Muhammad Salah, 2021). There are some alternative terms used to refer to this concept. One such term is the "Objectives of the Sunnah," which emphasizes the importance of the prophetic traditions in achieving specific goals. Another term used is the "Purposes of the Prophetic Traditions," which highlights the intention behind the actions and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. These alternative terms help to provide a deeper understanding of the significance of the prophetic traditions in Islam and their relevance to contemporary issues. Another term used to refer to Maqasid al-Sunnah is the "Goals of the Way of the Prophet." This term emphasizes the practical application of the prophetic traditions in daily life and the importance of following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (Raissouni, 2014). However, the Maqasid al-Sunnah are an integral part and a complementary partner to the Maqasid Sharia in general, the study of Maqasid al-Sunnah aims to extract the underlying objectives and principles that inform the Sunnah and apply them in contemporary contexts (Al Dawseri, 2018). According to (Tabrani, 2018) Maqasid al-Sunnah is a framework that seeks to identify and understand the higher purposes and objectives of the Sunnah. It goes beyond the literal and surface-level understanding of the objectives and purposes behind the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Evolution of the Maqasid al-Sunnah

The objectives of the Sunnah had begun with the beginning of the prophecy of the Muhammad SAW. It was transmitted in the texts of the Sunnah and included in its rulings and teachings with varying degrees of declaring them or gesturing and referring to them. Such as: Prophet SAW said: "O young people, whoever of you can afford it, let him get married, it will lower the gaze and protect one's chastity" (Al-Bukhari, 1997). The purpose of the Prophet's request to marry is to protect his chastity. In another Hadith Prophet SWA said: "Requesting permission was made for the sake of sight" (Al-Bukhari, 1997). The Prophet's urging to seek permission before entering homes is justified by looking away. However, these objectives would not have been highlighted and demonstrated at the level of writing and codification, or at the level of making it a formal science and a term with its own connotations, facts, and methods. Rather, it was information and legal decisions that were firmly in minds, and that the predecessors (Salaf) would recall in their understanding, *ijtihad*, and rulings (Al Khademi, 2001). The concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah, or the objectives of the Sunnah, has devolved over time in Islamic jurisprudence. Scholars and jurists have contributed to the development of this concept through their works and writings. The evolution of the Maqasid al-Sunnah can be traced through different periods of Islamic history, as outlined below:

Early period:

During the early period of Islamic history, Muslim scholars did not articulate the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah in a formal way, their focus was on understanding and following the guidance of the Quran and the Sunnah without necessarily articulating a specific set of objectives or goals. However, they recognized the importance of following the guidance of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). According to the (Raysuni, 2006) One of the earliest scholars to articulate the importance of understanding the underlying purposes of the Sunnah was Imam Malik, who emphasized the importance of studying the Sunnah to understand the intentions and purposes behind the teachings and

practices of the Prophet. Raysuni refers to the Maliki School as “the school of human interest and *Istislah*” the school most concerned about warding off potential evil and harm. He provides extensive documentation of the development of the Maliki School and explains that its knowledge and methods originate with the second Caliph, Umar bin al-Khattab, RA (d. 644).

Middle period:

In the middle period of Islamic history, scholars began to articulate the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah in more formal terms. One of the key figures of this period was Imam al-Ghazali who wrote extensively on the objectives of the Quran and the Sunnah. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali elaborated on a classification of Maqasid, which he placed entirely under what he called ‘unrestricted interests’ (al-Masalih

al-mursalah) He argued that the ultimate objective of the Sunnah was to help people attain closeness to Allah and to live in accordance with His will. (Al- Ghazali, 1997)

Modern period:

In the modern period, the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah has continued to evolve, and contemporary scholars have applied it to various areas of Islamic thought, such as ethics, politics, and economics. For example, Muhammad al-Ghazali applied the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah to the field of Islamic economics, arguing that the objectives of the Sunnah could be used to guide economic policies that promote social justice and human welfare. Mohammad al-Ghazali called for learning lessons from the previous 14 centuries of Islamic history, and therefore, included justice and freedom in *Maqasid* at the necessities level (Jasser Auda, 2008). Al- Ghazali’s prime contribution to the knowledge of *Maqasid* was his critique on the literalist tendencies that many of today’s scholars have. A careful look at the contributions of Mohammad al-Ghazali shows that there was underlying *Maqasid* upon which he based his opinions, such as equality and justice, upon which he had based all his famous new opinions in the area of women under the Islamic law and other areas (Afridi,2016).

Yusuf al-Qaradawi also surveyed the Quran and Hadith, concluded the following universal Maqasid: “Preserving true faith, maintaining human dignity and rights, calling people to worship Allah, purifying the soul, restoring moral values, building good families, treating women fairly, building a strong Islamic nation, and calling for a cooperative world (Al-Qaradawi, 2002).

Different between Maqasid al- shariah and Maqasid al-Sunnah

Maqasid al-Shariah and Maqasid al-Sunnah are both important concepts in Islamic jurisprudence, but they refer to different things. Maqasid al-Shariah refers to the higher objectives of Islamic law or the underlying goals and purposes that the Shariah seeks to achieve. These objectives include, but are not limited to, the preservation of life, the protection of religion, the preservation of intellect, the preservation of lineage, and the preservation of property (Afridi,2016). Scholars of Islamic law have long recognized the importance of these objectives in interpreting and applying the Shariah, as they help to ensure that the law is not applied in a way that contradicts its underlying values and principles.

On the other hand, Maqasid al-Sunnah refers to the underlying objectives or purposes of the Sunnah, which is the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as recorded in the Hadith literature. The Sunnah provides guidance on how to understand and apply the

Quran, and it also serves as a source of moral and ethical guidance for Muslims (Muhammad Salah, 2021). However, several scholars have attempted to clarify the relationship between these two concepts:

Jasser Auda argues that Maqasid al-Shari'ah represents the higher objectives of Islamic law, while Maqasid al-Sunnah represents the higher objectives of the Sunnah, which is considered a source of Islamic law. He notes that while there is overlap between the two concepts, they are not identical, and each has its own unique objectives and purposes. (Jasser Auda, 2008) Hashim Kamali also notes that while Maqasid al-Sunnah and Maqasid al-Shari'ah share common goals, they are distinct concepts. He writes that "the maqasid of the Shari'ah are broader and more general than those of the Sunnah, but the latter are a refinement and elaboration of the former". (Kamali, 2006)

Similarly, Tariq Ramadan argues that Maqasid al-Sunnah is a "refinement" or "extension" of Maqasid al-Shari'ah and represents a more specific set of objectives related to the teachings and practices of the Prophet. He notes that while Maqasid al-Shari'ah is concerned with the preservation of five key values (religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage), Maqasid al-Sunnah focuses on specific ways in which these values are realized in the life and teachings of the Prophet. (Ramadan, 2016)

Criticisms of the concept Maqasid al-Sunnah:

While the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah has gained widespread acceptance among many Islamic scholars and thinkers, it has also faced some criticisms. Some of the main criticisms of this concept are:

Lack of clarity and specificity:

Some critics argue that the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah is too vague and general, and that it lacks the specificity and rigor needed for practical application. For example, Muhammad Hashim Kamali argues that the Maqasid al-Sunnah is often defined in overly broad terms, making it difficult to apply in specific contexts. (Kamali, 2006)

Overreliance on hadith literature:

Some critics argue that the Maqasid al-Sunnah places too much emphasis on the hadith literature, and that this can lead to a narrow and dogmatic understanding of Islamic teachings. For example, Abdullah Saeed argues that the Maqasid al-Sunnah should not be viewed as a replacement for critical engagement with the Quranic text, and that it should be used in conjunction with other sources of Islamic knowledge. (Saeed, 2018)

Lack of historical perspective:

Some critics argue that the Maqasid al-Sunnah places too much emphasis on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and that it neglects the broader historical and social context in which these teachings were developed. For example, Wael Hallaq argues that the Maqasid al-Sunnah tends to ignore the historical and cultural contingencies that shaped Islamic thought and practice, and that this can lead to a narrow and ahistorical understanding of Islamic teachings. (Hallaq, 2019) Despite these criticisms, the concept of Maqasid al-Sunnah continues to be an important and influential concept in contemporary Islamic thought. Its proponents argue that it provides a framework for understanding the higher objectives of the Prophet's teachings, and that it can be used to address a wide range of contemporary challenges facing Muslim societies.

Maqasid al-Sunnah in contemporary issues:

Maqasid al-Sunnah has been applied to a wide range of contemporary issues in Islamic thought and practice. Some examples of how this concept has been used in addressing modern challenges include:

Financial issues:

In the context of financial issues, Maqasid al-Sunnah provides a framework that seeks to align economic activities with the ethical and spiritual principles of Islam. One of the primary objectives of the Sunnah is to promote social justice and equity. In financial matters, this means that wealth should be distributed in a manner that reduces poverty and inequality. Islamic finance principles such as Zakat (obligatory charity), Sadaqah (voluntary charity), and the prohibition of usury (Riba) aim to ensure that wealth circulates within the society and benefits the less fortunate (Hafandi & Helmy, 2021). (Sukma Lesmana and Md. Harashid Haron, 2019) argues that the Islamic banks should measure performance based on the maqasid Shariah in applying Islamic principles.

Gender issues:

A growing number of scholars have sought to apply Maqasid al-Sunnah in addressing gender issues in contemporary Islamic thought. For example, Mek Wok Mahmud argues that Maqasid al-Sunnah can help to provide a framework for understanding the Prophet's teachings on gender relations and can be used to for women developments. (Mek Wok, 2011). Samia Maqbool Niazi argues that the Maqasid - Al- Shariah can be Protect Women's Rights (Samia,2016).

Environmental issues:

Maqasid al-Sunnah has also been applied in addressing environmental issues within Islamic thought. For example, (Sarkawi et al.,2017) emphasizes that maqasid al Quran and Sunnah can be supported to produce utmost quality of the built environment for human life. (Labeeb Bsoul et al., 2022) argues that the Prophet's teachings on stewardship and conservation of natural resources can be understood in light of the Maqasid al-Sunnah and can be used to support environmental sustainability in Muslim societies. Prophet Muhammad placed a high value on sustainable agriculture of the land, how humans interact with animals, the preservation of natural resources, and the protection of the natural environment in general (Musa 2002, pp. 210–12). Several sayings of Prophet Muhammad call for and incentivize environmental sustainability in essence:

No Muslim plants a tree or sows a seed and then a bird, or a human, or an animal eats from it but that it is a charity for him (Ibn Kathir, 2012).

Political issues:

Maqasid al-Sunnah has been used to address political issues within contemporary Islamic thought. For example, Abdullahi An-Na'im argues that the Maqasid al-Sunnah can provide a basis for democratic governance in Muslim societies and can be used to support the development of political systems that promote justice, freedom, and human rights. (An-Na'im, 2008)

Overall, the application of Maqasid al-Sunnah to contemporary issues reflects a growing interest among Islamic scholars and thinkers in applying traditional Islamic concepts to modern challenges and contexts. This approach seeks to draw on the rich intellectual heritage

of Islamic thought, while also adapting these concepts to the needs and realities of contemporary Muslim societies.

Conclusion

Throughout our exploration, we have traced the historical evolution of Maqasid al-Sunnah, recognizing its enduring presence in Islamic scholarship. Moreover, we have explored its significance, highlighting the manifold benefits of studying and applying this concept. Maqasid al-Sunnah serves as a compass, guiding us through the complexities of modern life while remaining rooted in the timeless wisdom of the Prophet's teachings. In particular, we have observed how the principles of Maqasid al-Sunnah can address contemporary challenges. From gender issues to environmental concerns, political complexities, and financial matters. We find the higher objectives of the Sunnah not only spiritual fulfilment but also the potential for positive change in our shared humanity.

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