



**The Prophetic Sunnah Between Revelation and Ijtihād: A Contextual Reassessment for Contemporary Islamic Legal Thought**

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**Abstract:** The Prophetic Sunnah occupies a central position in Islamic jurisprudence as a source of divine guidance and ethical instruction. This study critically examines the dual nature of the Sunnah, exploring whether it is entirely divinely revealed or if it includes elements of the Prophet Muhammad’s independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). Employing a qualitative, library-based approach grounded in *usul al-fiqh*, the research analyzes key Hadiths through historical and functional lenses. It distinguishes between the Prophet’s legislative actions (*Sunnah tashrī’iyyah*) and those shaped by his socio-political roles (*Sunnah ghayr tashrī’iyyah*), demonstrating how contextual interpretation reveals the adaptive dimensions of prophetic practice. The methodology integrates textual analysis, juristic classification, and contextual reading of Hadith, enabling a clearer understanding of how the Prophet’s roles—as messenger, leader, judge, and individual— influence the legal authority of his sayings and actions. Findings highlight that while certain Prophetic acts were divinely mandated and universally binding, others were contingent on specific historical contexts and were open to divine correction or refinement. This study argues that contextual interpretation of Hadith, coupled with the differentiation between universal and particular Sunnah, strengthens the responsiveness of Islamic law in contemporary pluralistic societies. By aligning legal rulings with the overarching objectives of Sharia (*maqāṣid al-sharī’ah*), such as justice, welfare, and public interest, scholars can ensure the relevance and vitality of Islamic legal thought in addressing modern challenges. Ultimately, this approach preserves the integrity of the Sunnah while promoting a jurisprudence that is both rooted and reform-oriented.

**Keywords:** *Prophetic Sunnah, Ijtihād Nabawī, Islamic Jurisprudence, Tashrī’ and Non-Tashrī’*

**INTRODUCTION**

The Prophetic Sunnah, comprising the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, serves as a fundamental pillar of Islamic



legal thought. Recognized as the second most authoritative source of Islamic law after the Qur'an, the Sunnah provides interpretative and explanatory functions to divine injunctions and establishes legal precedents for the Muslim community (Siregar, 2018). It not only offers legal rulings but also models ethical conduct and spiritual guidance for Muslims. The process of Hadith transmission and authentication was carefully systematized by early Muslim scholars to preserve the credibility and integrity of prophetic traditions, thereby ensuring their continued relevance and function as a normative framework within the Islamic legal system (Alwi et al., 2023). As Islamic law has evolved over centuries, the interpretation and application of Hadith have also adapted to diverse historical, political, and cultural settings, revealing the dynamic nature of Islamic jurisprudence (Amrulloh, 2017).

Over time, the Muslim community has exhibited varying approaches in understanding and applying Hadith. One prominent issue in Hadith interpretation lies in the dichotomy between its universality and temporality. Scholars have long debated whether certain prophetic traditions are universally binding or if they are context-bound, intended for specific temporal and societal conditions. Contemporary scholars like Alwi et al. (2023) underscore the importance of a balanced approach, combining textual fidelity with contextual sensitivity. While classical scholars such as those represented in the Sunni legal tradition generally viewed authentic Hadith as universally applicable across all generations (Rizapoor et al., 2024), modern scholars—like Syuhudi Ismail and Amrulloh (2017)—argue for a nuanced hermeneutic that recognizes the historical and local specificity of many traditions. This shift highlights the need to reconcile traditional understandings with the realities of modern Muslim societies, where sociocultural transformations demand reinterpretation of religious texts.

This divergence in Hadith interpretation is further compounded by the theological complexity of the Prophet's dual role as both a recipient of divine revelation and a human leader embedded in a specific historical context. The Qur'an itself presents the Prophet not only as a messenger but also as an ordinary human being (Q.S. al-Kahf: 110). This duality is significant because it influences whether a particular Hadith is considered divine instruction (*wahy*) or personal *ijtihād*. Historically, scholars such as Abu Zahwu and al-Qarḍāwī have discussed the possibility that the Prophet exercised reasoned judgment in areas where no explicit revelation was present, with divine confirmation or correction following as necessary. The distinction between divine and rational prophetic action raises critical questions about the scope and authority of the Sunnah in Islamic legal discourse.

Further complicating the discussion is the classification of Hadith based on the Prophet's varying functions. The Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam* performed multiple roles: as a religious teacher, a family man, a judge, a head of state, and a military commander. Each of these roles carried distinct implications for his sayings and actions. For instance, decisions made in his capacity as a military leader, such as choosing a battlefield or rationing supplies, might not carry the same normative weight as religious injunctions issued in his capacity as the Messenger of God. Recognizing these contextual differences is essential in evaluating the extent to which particular Hadith should be applied as legal mandates in contemporary settings.

This interpretive complexity has led to two major approaches within the Muslim community. The first is the textualist perspective, which holds that all authentic Hadith are universally applicable and must be followed literally regardless of historical context. Proponents of this view argue that the prophetic model is timeless and inherently relevant to every aspect of human life (Firdaus & Ni'mah, 2022). In contrast, the contextualist perspective

stresses the importance of situating Hadith within the historical and sociopolitical circumstances of their origin. According to contextualists, the Prophet's statements and actions should be interpreted in light of the customs, values, and conditions prevailing at the time, thereby allowing for differentiated applications across various contexts (Ainurrofiq, 2019).

Scholars advocating contextual interpretation emphasize that failing to consider the Prophet's multifaceted role can lead to misapplication of Hadith, particularly in areas such as governance, economics, and gender dynamics. For example, a saying of the Prophet regarding agricultural practices may reflect empirical observation rather than religious instruction, and thus, should not be regarded as universally binding. Similarly, prophetic behaviors shaped by Arab cultural norms should be distinguished from legally prescriptive actions. This perspective supports the idea that Hadith interpretation must engage with both the textual content and the broader sociocultural framework in which it was produced (Dawam et al., 2023; Amrulloh, 2017).

The theoretical discourse between textualists and contextualists reflects broader debates within Islamic legal philosophy concerning the function of revelation, the authority of prophetic practice, and the adaptability of Islamic law. Textualists argue that diminishing the legal authority of Hadith undermines the integrity of the Sunnah as a source of Islamic law. Conversely, contextualists warn against a rigid literalism that ignores historical contingencies and may hinder the development of responsive and humane jurisprudence. This dichotomy reveals the ongoing challenge of applying ancient textual traditions to modern ethical and legal dilemmas.

In light of these debates, the current study seeks to explore whether the Prophetic Sunnah should be understood as entirely divinely revealed or if it also includes elements of prophetic *ijtihād*. This investigation is crucial for developing a more nuanced approach to Hadith interpretation and its legal implications. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to systematically categorize the Prophet's actions according to his different social and political roles, and to assess the legal weight of Hadith accordingly. By revisiting classical theories and integrating contemporary perspectives, this study contributes to the refinement of Islamic jurisprudential methodology and enhances our understanding of the dynamic relationship between revelation, human agency, and legal authority in Islam.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative, library-based research methodology rooted in Islamic legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*). It investigates the legal status of Hadith by analyzing their content in relation to the various functional roles of the Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*. The primary sources include classical Hadith compilations and foundational jurisprudential texts, selected based on the authenticity of their *isnād* (chain of narration), coherence of their *matn* (content), and relevance to legal, political, and ethical contexts. Textual analysis is employed to examine how particular Hadith may be linked to the Prophet's actions as a divine messenger, judge, statesman, or private individual. The classification of Hadith into *tashrī'iyyah* (legally prescriptive) and *non-tashrī'iyyah* (non-legislative or contextual) guides the evaluation of their normative authority. In addition, interpretative tools from *usul al-fiqh* such as *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), *ta'līl* (causal reasoning), and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (higher objectives of Sharia) are employed to contextualize Hadith within evolving socio-political realities. The methodology reflects scholarly efforts—such as those of Ali Mustafa Yaqub and Soufi—to avoid blind adherence (*taqlīd*) and promote contextualized

understanding of prophetic traditions. It also engages with contemporary critiques that highlight insufficient exploration of how the Prophet's varied roles should inform modern legal interpretation (Dadah et al., 2023; Beka, 2022; Iqbal & Rahman, 2020; Soufi, 2021; Ilesbekov et al., 2024). By bridging classical legal theory and present-day challenges, this methodological approach aims to provide a nuanced framework for assessing the function and authority of Hadith in both historical and contemporary Islamic legal thought.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Scholarly Debate on the Prophet's Ijtihād**

The question of whether the Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam* engaged in ijtihad—independent juristic reasoning—has long been a topic of debate among Islamic scholars. The discourse centers on whether the Prophet's actions were solely dictated by divine revelation or if he, in certain instances, employed his reasoning in responding to the evolving needs of his community. Scholars who support the view that the Prophet exercised ijtihad argue that his role extended beyond passive transmission of revelation. They contend that as both a spiritual leader and a statesman, the Prophet demonstrated a dynamic engagement with the realities around him, applying divine guidance to practical situations through human reasoning. Oweidat (2019) emphasizes that ijtihad is not only a jurisprudential mechanism but also a spiritual and intellectual tool deeply embedded in the Islamic tradition, enabling the community to continuously interpret religious sources in ways that remain socially and ethically relevant.

This perspective is reinforced by observations of the Prophet's behavior in contexts of governance and judiciary decision-making. Kamaluddin and Citaningati (2023) highlight that in his role as a judge and leader, the Prophet often made decisions that were informed by the specific conditions of his time—decisions which did not always emerge from explicit textual directives, but rather from a comprehensive understanding of justice and communal welfare. For example, in military strategy and statecraft, his decisions adapted to the socio-political environment, illustrating a level of personal reasoning that complemented the divine message. This reasoning, though constrained by the ethical parameters of revelation, nonetheless indicates a form of ijtihad rooted in contextual discernment and practical wisdom.

On the other side of the spectrum, some scholars express deep reservations about attributing ijtihad to the Prophet. Their main concern lies in the possibility of undermining the supreme authority of divine revelation. According to this view, all of the Prophet's words and actions are to be seen as direct extensions of God's will, inseparable from revelation and therefore not subject to independent reasoning or interpretation. Anwar and Yusoff (2022) articulate this position by asserting that portraying the Prophet as an autonomous legal thinker risks introducing human fallibility into what should be an infallible transmission of divine law. They argue that the sanctity of prophetic authority rests in its absolute alignment with divine instruction, and thus, no differentiation should be made between what is revealed and what is reasoned by the Prophet.

A central textual reference in this debate is Surah al-Najm (53:3–4): *"Nor does he speak from his own inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed."* This verse has traditionally been invoked by scholars to underscore the argument that the Prophet's entire communicative function was divinely orchestrated. As Mansir (2021) notes, this interpretation suggests that any attempt to separate prophetic action from divine command represents a theological rupture, as it places human reasoning on par with revelation. However, this view is not

unanimously held. Some exegetes offer a more interpretive reading of the verse, positing that it affirms the authenticity of the Prophet's mission without necessarily precluding his use of reason. According to this interpretation, the verse emphasizes the reliability of the Prophet's guidance as divinely approved, not necessarily that every moment of speech or action was dictated word-for-word by divine command.

Oweidat (2019) and others take this line of reasoning further, arguing that while the source of prophetic authority is divine, the application of that authority often required the Prophet to exercise reason, especially in matters not explicitly covered by revelation. In this view, the Prophet functioned as both a receiver of divine law and an interpreter of its principles within diverse human contexts. This dual capacity is essential to understanding the fluidity and adaptability of early Islamic legal thought. Rather than contradicting revelation, the Prophet's reasoning enhanced its implementation, providing Muslims with a model of how to harmonize unchanging divine values with ever-changing human circumstances.

The scholarly debate over the Prophet's *ijtihad* reflects a broader tension between two epistemological orientations in Islamic thought: one that centers on textual absolutism and another that emphasizes interpretive flexibility within divine boundaries. Recognizing this dynamic is crucial for contemporary Islamic jurisprudence, as it informs how Muslim scholars today navigate the complex interplay between sacred texts and modern societal challenges. Whether one affirms or denies the Prophet's engagement in *ijtihad*, the discourse itself underscores the richness of Islamic legal theory and the enduring relevance of Prophetic practice in shaping ethical and legal norms.

### Interpreting the Prophet's Roles and Legal Authority

The multifaceted roles of Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*—as a messenger, judge, military commander, family head, and political leader—constitute a critical analytical axis in interpreting the legal authority of his actions. Within Islamic legal theory, scholars have long acknowledged that not all of the Prophet's statements or behaviors are of equal legislative weight. A central distinction is drawn between his actions as a *Rasul* (divine messenger), which are considered part of the *tashrī'* (legislative revelation), and his actions as a socio-political leader, which may reflect personal judgment or administrative strategy contextual to the time and place. This legal-theoretical distinction is vital in understanding which Hadiths carry universal normative force and which require contextual interpretation (Sulaeman, 2020).

From a jurisprudential standpoint, the Prophet's legislative actions—such as clarifying Qur'anic verses or issuing ethical injunctions—are divinely sanctioned and binding on all Muslims. These actions form the backbone of Sharia and are seen as direct manifestations of divine will. Sulaeman (2020) emphasizes that these *tashrī'īyyah* actions must be treated as religious obligations, as they represent divine instruction. On the other hand, the Prophet's decisions as a statesman—like the prohibition of domestic donkey meat during the Battle of Khaibar—are seen as context-bound judgments responding to specific needs or circumstances, rather than as immutable religious laws. These actions, while still authoritative and ethically grounded, are not necessarily applicable in all times and places.

The implications of this classification are illustrated by prophetic actions that later received divine clarification or correction. A notable example is found in the Hadith literature on divorce (*ṭalāq*), where the Prophet initially allowed certain practices which were subsequently refined through later Qur'anic revelation. Such instances demonstrate that while

the Prophet used the best reasoning available to him, his decisions were always subject to divine oversight and correction. This does not undermine his authority but rather reinforces the idea that prophetic *ijtihād* operates within the parameters of revelation—never outside or in contradiction to it. As Kamaluddin and Citaningati (2023) note, these dynamics exemplify the Prophet's ethical governance, his responsiveness to communal realities, and his capacity to implement divine principles through human discretion.

Further supporting this understanding is the interpretation of Surah al-Najm (53:3–4), which asserts, *“Nor does he speak from his own inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed.”* While often cited to affirm the Prophet's infallibility in transmitting revelation, scholars such as Sulaeman (2020) argue that this verse does not exclude the possibility of contextual judgment in socio-political matters. Rather, it suggests that even the Prophet's discretionary actions remain under divine regulation, whether affirmed or adjusted. This balance between reason and revelation underpins a crucial methodological principle in Islamic legal hermeneutics: not all Sunnah are of the same category, and understanding the Prophet's *niyyah* (intent) and *wazīfah* (function) at the moment of action is essential for accurate legal derivation.

The role-based analysis of the Prophet's conduct is also corroborated by early companions themselves. As illustrated in the Battle of Badr, when al-Ḥabbāb ibn al-Mundhir questioned the Prophet's choice of encampment, asking whether it was divine instruction or strategic reasoning, the Prophet clarified it was based on his own judgment—thus accepting and implementing al-Ḥabbāb's alternative suggestion. This critical moment illustrates how the Prophet's companions were aware of the distinction between divinely mandated and discretionary decisions and acted accordingly.

This awareness has significant jurisprudential consequences. It urges jurists and scholars not to generalize all Hadiths as universally binding but instead to scrutinize their underlying context, function, and legal intent. It enables differentiation between rulings that are permanent expressions of divine will and those that reflect the Prophet's human experience as a leader navigating specific social and political landscapes. In this way, Islamic legal scholarship balances reverence for the Prophet with intellectual responsibility, maintaining the sanctity of revelation while acknowledging the dynamic mechanisms through which it was enacted.

Ultimately, the legal authority of the Prophet's actions must be interpreted through the lens of role differentiation, functional context, and the interdependence between revelation and reasoning. This integrated perspective enriches the jurisprudential discourse and ensures that Islamic law remains faithful to its ethical roots while remaining responsive to new realities. It is this careful harmonization of human interpretation and divine command that defines the enduring vitality of the Sunnah in Islamic legal thought.

### **Contextualization of Hadith in Historical Settings**

The contextual interpretation of Hadith plays a pivotal role in Islamic legal theory, particularly in discerning whether a prophetic statement carries universal legislative authority or is bound to its historical context. This distinction stems from the multifaceted roles of the Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*, who functioned not only as a divine messenger (*rasul*) but also as a political leader, judge, military commander, and head of a household. Scholars such as Sulaeman (2020) emphasize that actions of the Prophet as a *rasul* are legislative (*tashrī'iyyah*) and thus carry normative, binding legal weight. These are regarded as direct expressions of divine command. In contrast, his actions in political or social capacities

are often pragmatic responses to situational needs and reflect the Prophet's personal *ijtihad* guided by ethical principles, but not necessarily by direct revelation (Kamaluddin & Citaningati, 2023).

One of the most illustrative examples of this contextualization is the Prophet's prohibition against consuming domestic donkey meat during the Battle of Khaibar. The Hadith records:

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ مُقَاتِلٍ، أَخْبَرَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عُمَرَ، عَنْ نَافِعٍ، عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «نَهَى يَوْمَ خَيْبَرَ عَنْ لُحُومِ الْحُمُرِ الْأَهْلِيَّةِ»

Narrated Ibn 'Umar: The Messenger of Allah *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam* forbade the consumption of domesticated donkey meat on the day of Khaibar. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 1400 H, Juz 3, Hadis No. 4217)

This prohibition, according to many jurists, does not necessarily imply a universal ruling on the meat's permissibility but rather reflects a specific wartime judgment, possibly for reasons of hygiene, rationing, or morale. This contextual reading becomes significant when placed against a broader principle articulated in another Hadith:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "الْحَلَالُ بَيْنَ، وَالْحَرَامُ بَيْنَ، وَبَيْنَهُمَا أُمُورٌ مُشْتَبِهَاتٌ..."

The lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear, and between them are doubtful matters... (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 1400 H, Juz 1, Hadis No. 52)

In this light, the ruling against consuming donkey meat may be viewed as part of the *shubuhāt*—ambiguous matters that require careful contextual and juristic evaluation. Supporting this, the Qur'an states:

قُلْ لَا أَجِدُ فِي مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَى طَاعِمٍ يَطْعَمُهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَكُونَ مَيْتَةً أَوْ دَمًا مَسْفُوحًا أَوْ لَحْمَ خِنزِيرٍ...

Say, "I do not find within that which was revealed to me anything forbidden to one who would eat it unless it be a dead animal or blood spilled out or the flesh of swine..." (Q.S. al-An'ām: 145)

The absence of donkey meat in this list further reinforces the view of scholars like Ibn 'Abbās, who held that such meat was not inherently haram. Therefore, the prophetic prohibition at Khaibar is better understood as a discretionary command issued under specific circumstances rather than as a universal legislative ruling.

This interpretive method is consistent with the behavior of the Prophet's companions. A prominent case is that of the Battle of Badr, in which al-Ḥabbāb ibn al-Mundhir questioned the Prophet's strategic decision about where to station the army. He asked if the chosen site was based on divine revelation or personal judgment. Upon learning that it was based on the Prophet's own reasoning, al-Ḥabbāb proposed a tactically superior location, which the Prophet accepted. This moment underscores the awareness among companions that not all decisions made by the Prophet were divinely mandated. It also affirms that even in the Prophet's presence, human reasoning and situational expertise were acknowledged and valued.

Further, the Hadiths concerning divorce (*talāq*) provide additional evidence of Prophetic decisions that were later subject to divine correction. Sulaeman (2020) notes that some rulings initially permitted by the Prophet were subsequently refined or overridden by Qur'anic revelation. This dynamic indicates that although the Prophet exercised reasoned judgment, it always operated under divine oversight and remained open to modification by subsequent revelation.

This interpretive balance is crystallized in the often-cited verse:

وَمَا يَنْطَلِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ﴿٣﴾ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ ﴿٤﴾

Nor does he speak from [his own] desire. It is not but a revelation revealed.  
(Q.S. al-Najm: 3–4)

While this verse is frequently invoked to argue that every Prophetic utterance is divinely inspired, scholars such as Sulaeman (2020) interpret it as affirming the overall divine nature of the Prophet's mission without negating his use of reason, especially in areas where revelation was silent or indeterminate. The Prophet's implementation of divine guidance through contextually grounded decisions reflects a form of *ijtihad nabawi*—Prophetic reasoning within the boundaries of divine intent.

Contextualization of Hadith is not an attempt to dilute prophetic authority, but rather a means of honoring its nuanced complexity. It allows jurists to distinguish between time-bound, situational instructions and those that constitute universal religious mandates. This process preserves the vitality and adaptability of the Sunnah, aligning timeless divine principles with the evolving realities of Muslim societies. The recognition of this dual nature—between revelation and reasoning, between the eternal and the situational—lies at the heart of Islamic legal thought and its capacity to respond to change while remaining anchored in tradition.

### Classification of Sunnah: Tashrī' and Non-Tashrī'

The classification of Sunnah into *tashrī' iyyah* (legislative) and *ghayr tashrī' iyyah* (non-legislative) categories provides a crucial framework for understanding the normative weight of prophetic traditions in Islamic law. This categorization has grown increasingly significant in contemporary Islamic legal discourse, particularly within the context of modern reforms and pluralistic societies. The distinction enables scholars and jurists to preserve the integrity of the Sunnah while applying it in ways that remain contextually appropriate and socially relevant. It also aligns with a core principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*—the higher objectives of Islamic law—which aims to secure human welfare and promote justice across time and space.

*Tashrī' iyyah Sunnah* refers to Prophetic sayings and actions that are divinely guided and intended to legislate—actions that establish binding legal rulings and serve as primary sources of Islamic law. These include explanations of Qur'anic injunctions, new legal rulings not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, and actions that the Prophet performed in his capacity as a messenger of God. For example, when the Prophet *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam* clarified fasting obligations during Ramadan or prescribed rules of inheritance, these became essential components of Islamic legal structure. These rulings are considered universally applicable regardless of changing circumstances.

In contrast, *non-tashrī' iyyah Sunnah* refers to actions of the Prophet that were either personal, cultural, or context-specific. These actions often reflect the customs of 7th-century Arabia or his own preferences and habits, and are not necessarily meant as binding examples. For instance, his choices in dress, diet, or agricultural advice, such as the incident where he suggested that farmers not cross-pollinate date palms, which later proved ineffective, illustrates this category. In the narration, when informed that yields had declined, the Prophet responded:

أَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِأُمُورِ دُنْيَاكُمْ



You are more knowledgeable about the affairs of your worldly life.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Juz 12, Hadis No. 2363)

This Hadith establishes the principle that not all Prophetic advice was meant to be followed as divine command, particularly in non-religious matters. Thus, the Prophet’s experiential or pragmatic practices are seen more as personal judgments rather than legislative mandates.

This differentiation supports the broader project of contextualizing Hadith, especially when dealing with the application of Sunnah in contemporary Muslim societies. As noted by Alwi et al. (2021) and Samsudin & Hamjah (2015), contextual interpretation allows Islamic jurisprudence to remain responsive to diverse socio-cultural environments. It ensures that Muslims can adhere to universal ethical teachings while not being constrained by context-bound practices that may no longer serve the intended purpose. This becomes particularly relevant in pluralistic societies, where cultural diversity demands legal adaptability grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī’ah*, such as the protection of life, intellect, religion, lineage, and wealth.

Kasdi (2019) further emphasizes that universal Sunnah establishes enduring ethical and legal norms, whereas particular Sunnah reflects historically contingent decisions that should be understood in their proper context. This nuanced reading empowers jurists to derive legislative principles from specific Hadiths while recognizing their limitations. By doing so, the law avoids becoming rigid or obsolete in addressing new realities. For instance, Prophetic policies regarding taxation or military conscription were adapted to the needs of the nascent Muslim community and may not be directly transplantable to modern nation-states without reinterpretation.

This theoretical distinction has direct practical implications. Contemporary jurists and legal reformers often invoke this framework when addressing issues in economic regulation, healthcare, family law, or environmental ethics. Applying *maqāṣid*-based reasoning to Hadith interpretation, they identify the spirit behind the Prophetic practice and assess its relevance to current societal needs. As Ali & Kishwar (2017) note, focusing on the objectives of Sharia fosters a more inclusive legal discourse, encouraging jurisprudential adaptability without compromising foundational doctrines.

Moreover, this interpretive model encourages a participatory legal culture where Muslim communities engage critically with their legal heritage. It provides the tools to differentiate between religious obligation and cultural legacy, between immutable principle and mutable practice. This distinction is not only theologically grounded but also sociologically necessary to ensure that Islamic law evolves organically with its adherents.

The classification of Sunnah into *tashrī’iyyah* and *non-tashrī’iyyah* is indispensable in constructing a dynamic and context-sensitive Islamic legal framework. It allows for continuity with tradition while fostering renewal in practice. By anchoring legal reasoning in both the historical context of the Prophet’s life and the ethical purposes of Sharia, Islamic jurisprudence becomes better equipped to address the complex realities of contemporary Muslim societies.

### Theological and Legal Implications in Contemporary Jurisprudence

The contextual interpretation of Hadith has become increasingly essential in shaping contemporary Islamic jurisprudence, especially in societies marked by pluralism and rapid social transformation. As Muslim communities navigate complex legal and ethical landscapes, scholars are revisiting the Sunnah with renewed attention to historical setting, functional roles, and socio-political dynamics. This approach does not seek to undermine the authority of

prophetic traditions but rather to situate them appropriately within the lived realities of modern Muslims. By acknowledging that Hadith were often responses to specific circumstances, contemporary jurists employ contextual methodologies such as historical analysis, socio-linguistic interpretation, and comparative jurisprudence to derive principles that align with present-day challenges (Husain et al., 2024).

A central theological implication of this approach is the affirmation that Islamic law, while rooted in divine revelation, also embodies a dynamic interpretive tradition capable of responding to temporal conditions. The Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*’s actions and rulings are understood not only as expressions of immutable law but also as exemplars of ethical reasoning within context. This perspective allows scholars to distinguish between the universal ethos of Islam and context-specific applications of prophetic guidance. As Husain et al. (2024) note, legal pluralism in modern societies necessitates thoughtful engagement between Islamic and secular legal systems. Rigid literalism in interpreting Hadith may hinder this process, while contextual interpretation fosters coexistence, dialogue, and justice across religious and cultural divides.

Theologically, this distinction affirms that the Sunnah encompasses both timeless values and historical decisions. Differentiating between *Sunnah tashrī‘iyyah* (legislative Sunnah) and *Sunnah ghayr tashrī‘iyyah* (non-legislative or particular Sunnah) has practical implications for preserving the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*). Universal Sunnah continues to provide guidance on ethical conduct, spirituality, and public morality, while particular Sunnah allows room for adaptation and legal development. This distinction equips jurists to formulate laws that uphold essential Shariah goals—such as the protection of life, intellect, religion, lineage, and property—while remaining sensitive to the socio-legal needs of contemporary Muslim societies.

A practical example of this principle can be seen in the prophetic prohibition of consuming domestic donkey meat during the military expedition to Khaibar. Scholars have generally interpreted this not as a universal legal ban but as a pragmatic directive issued within a specific wartime context. Such an interpretation illustrates how some Hadiths functioned as administrative responses rather than enduring legal injunctions. By recognizing such instances, jurists today can extract broader ethical lessons—such as concerns for public health, community welfare, or sustainable resource management—without imposing outdated legal restrictions on modern societies.

These theological and legal distinctions empower Islamic law to engage critically and constructively with contemporary realities. Contextual interpretation facilitates a dynamic hermeneutic process, enabling laws to evolve while maintaining their connection to foundational Islamic teachings. It bridges tradition and reform by anchoring contemporary rulings in classical sources yet interpreting them through the lens of modern human experience. The result is a jurisprudence that is both faithful and flexible—capable of articulating justice in plural societies without sacrificing religious integrity.

The integration of contextual interpretation and the distinction between universal and particular Sunnah offers a robust framework for contemporary Islamic legal thought. It fosters legal inclusivity, ethical responsiveness, and theological coherence in an age where Muslims must navigate competing legal and moral systems. Far from weakening Islamic law, this approach revitalizes its relevance and authority by ensuring that the timeless message of Islam continues to inform human flourishing across diverse and evolving contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the complex theological and jurisprudential question regarding the nature of the Prophetic Sunnah—whether it is purely divine revelation (*wahy*) or, in part, the result of the Prophet Muhammad *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*’s independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). Through a close reading of classical and contemporary scholarly discourse, the research reveals that both dimensions coexist in the Prophetic tradition. While certain Sunnah texts are unquestionably legislative and divinely mandated, others are better understood as the Prophet’s adaptive responses to the socio-political and cultural realities of his time.

The Prophet’s multifaceted roles—as a divine messenger, community leader, military strategist, judge, and family man—necessitate a nuanced framework for interpreting Hadith. This study has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between *Sunnah tashrī‘iyyah* (legally binding Sunnah) and *Sunnah ghayr tashrī‘iyyah* (contextual or non-legislative Sunnah), in order to properly assess their normative status in Islamic law. Examples such as the prohibition of donkey meat during the Battle of Khaibar or the Prophet’s strategic choices in warfare illustrate how certain prophetic rulings were context-bound rather than universally prescriptive.

Theological engagement with verses such as Surah al-Najm (53:3–4) affirms the divine origin of prophetic speech while allowing interpretive space for Prophetic discretion, especially in domains not explicitly regulated by revelation. The actions of the Prophet’s companions—such as their questioning of strategic decisions or their discernment in distinguishing divine instruction from personal advice—further validate this differentiated approach.

From a legal perspective, this interpretive model offers a constructive response to the demands of contemporary Muslim societies. Contextual interpretation, supported by frameworks such as *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, facilitates legal flexibility without compromising religious integrity. It empowers scholars to engage critically with the Prophetic tradition, ensuring its relevance in diverse and evolving contexts, including pluralistic environments with complex legal and cultural landscapes.

The Sunnah must be approached with both reverence and critical discernment. Recognizing the diversity of the Prophet’s roles and the variety of functions his words and actions served allows Islamic jurisprudence to remain anchored in its foundational principles while also embracing contextual adaptability. This synthesis not only upholds the spirit of the Sharia but also ensures its continuous vitality and justice across generations. The present study contributes to this ongoing effort by clarifying interpretive boundaries and promoting an approach that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to change.

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