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SUNNI MAZHABS**

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# UNDERSTANDING THE METHODOLOGIES OF THE FOUR SUNNI MAZHABS

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the methodologies used by the four main schools of Sunni Islam, Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi'i and Hanbali, in formulating and issuing sharia law. Although all schools adhere to the same basic sources, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah, differences in approach, historical background and principles of ijtihad have created various methodologies that are valid and accepted within the framework of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah. This study uses a qualitative method based on content analysis and literature review of classical and contemporary works in the field of fiqh and usul fiqh. The focus of the study includes the sources of law recognized by each school, methods of legal inference such as qiyas, istihsan, maslahah and 'urf, as well as a comparison between the respective methodological approaches. This study also analyses how these inherited methodologies are applied in contemporary contexts to resolve various current issues such as ethics, Islamic finance and modern technology. The results of the study show that each school has a methodological framework that is structured, flexible and able to interact with the times without compromising the principles of sharia. Understanding this methodology not only strengthens the discourse of comparative jurisprudence but also helps contemporary Muslim society to choose legal views in a more informed and responsible manner.

**Keywords:** *Sunni Mazhab, fiqh methodology, istinbat hukum, comparative mazhab, contemporary law*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the Islamic tradition, the development of Islamic law (fiqh) is the result of the diligent efforts of scholars in understanding and interpreting the divine revelation based on various structured scientific methods. Fiqh is not just a legal discipline but is a manifestation of understanding the reality of life guided by divine principles through the Qur'an and Sunnah. The process of *istinbat* or the extraction of law from these sources requires a solid methodology, centered on knowledge, accuracy, and awareness of the *maqasid syariah*, which are the main objectives of Islamic law such as justice, benefit, and protection of the five basic things religion, life, reason, lineage, and property.

The four main schools of thought among Sunni, namely Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi'i, and Hanbali, emerged as distinct schools of fiqh thought because of the collective efforts of scholars in the early era of Islam, around the 2nd and 3rd centuries Hijrah. Although all these schools share the same basic source, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah, they have different approaches and methods in understanding, interpreting, and applying the scriptures. These differences arise from geographical factors, social environment, life experiences, and exposure to various new questions that require realistic fatwa and solutions.

For example, the Hanafi school founded by Imam Abu Hanifah (699-767 H) in Kufa, Iraq, presents a rational approach by giving ample space to the use of reason such as *qiyas* and *istihsan*. This is because he lived in an environment far from the center of revelation (Madinah) and was exposed to many new questions resulting from the interaction of various cultures. The Maliki school, founded by Imam Malik ibn Anas (711-795 H) in Medina, strongly emphasizes the practices of the people of Madinah (*amal ahl al-Madinah*) as a source of law because he considered the practices of the people of Medina to reflect the living sunnah. The Shafi 'i school, founded by Imam al-Shafi 'i (767-820 H), is famous for its efforts to systematize the knowledge of *usul fiqh* through works such as *al-Risalah*, which emphasizes principles based on scripture with a strict hierarchical structure of arguments. Meanwhile, the Hanbali school, founded by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855 H), is very strict in adhering to the apparent text and rejects the use of *ra'yu* or rational opinion unless there is an urgent need.

These schools are not merely the personal ideas of their founders but are the result of continued development by their students and later scholars through codification and expansion. They represent a collective *ijtihad* that reflects the depth of Islamic scholarship. Understanding their methodologies is essential to grasp the dynamics of fiqh and to help modern Muslims evaluate differing legal views in today's context.