Textual and Non-Textual Islamic Legal Maxims

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Introduction

Islamic legal maxims have been utilized for justifying juristic rulings in diverse issues throughout the centuries of Islamic scholarship. That's why, the wording of Islamic legal maxims must have been extracted from different sources of Islamic law, like the primary sources including the Book of Allah, Traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), consensus of opinion (Sayings of the Companions, Sayings of the Successors and Sayings of the Successors of the Successors) and analogical deduction as well as the secondary sources like *maslaha mursalah* or *istislah* (public interest), *istishab* (presumption of continuity). However, they were commonly developed and refined by the jurists with the course of time. A legal maxim binds the jurist to decree a judgment only when it is strongly supported by a ruling of the Holy *Qur'an* or *Hadith*. A legal maxim facilitates a jurist to exercise *ijtihad* and reach some legal decision (*hukm*) and opinion (*fatwa*). From the perspective of primary and secondary sources, Islamic legal maxims can be graded into 2 categories; textual and non-textual.²

1. The Textual Legal Maxims of Islamic Law

Following are the textual legal maxims of Islamic law consisting primary sources of derivation which are as follows: Sometimes the *Qur'anic* verses and Prophetic Traditions themselves are utilized as Islamic legal maxims due to being in the form of specific and exclusive jurisprudential principles and manifesting exact juristic abstractions while sometimes the *Qur'anic* verses and Prophetic Traditions manifest only general jurisprudential rulings so the jurists formulate the legal maxims by deriving laws from them.³

a. The *Qur'anic* Verses and Prophetic Traditions Used as Islamic Legal Maxims

The Noble Qur'an

Following is the verse from the Noble *Qur'an* which, at the same time, is a legal maxim as well:

"And that man can have nothing but what he does".4

The Sunnah: For the legal maxim:

"Harm must be eliminated".5

The derivation source is the Prophetic Tradition as under:

"There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm". And this Prophetic Tradition itself is another legal maxim.

b. Islamic Legal Maxims Derived From the *Qur'anic* Verses and Prophetic Traditions

The Noble Qur'an

Like any other discipline of Islamic law, the very first and primary source for deduction of Islamic legal maxims is the Noble Qur'an. According to M. Rashid Ahmad Khan:

"In the diverse legal systems of the world, there are a plenty of legal maxims which are in harmony with one another for the reason that they are constituted on the rules of natural justice. Islam is the religion of nature so it acknowledges all those legal maxims which are based on the rules of natural justice. Several laws have been derived from numerous Qur'anic injunctions for the formulation of different legal maxims".

Some examples of the Islamic legal maxims derived from the *Qur'anic* injunctions are given below:

For the legal maxim:

The derivation sources are the following *Qur'anic* verses:

"Allah intends for you ease and He does not want to make things difficult for you".9

For the legal maxim:

"Necessity permits the prohibited".

The derivation source is the following *Qur'anic* verse:

"He has forbidden you only the dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for other than Allah. But if one is forced by necessity without willful disobedience or transgressing due limits, then there is no sin on him. Truly, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful". 10

The Sunnah

Like other disciplines of Islamic law, the second fundamental and the most authentic source for deduction of Islamic legal maxims is *Sunnah* after the Holy *Qur'an*. Some examples of the Islamic legal maxims derived by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are as under: For the legal maxim:

"Matters are determined according to intentions".

The derivation source is the Prophetic Tradition as under:

"Indeed, actions are to be judged by the motives behind them." 11

Similarly, for the legal maxim:

"Hudood punishments are to be warded off if doubts persist".

The derivation source is the Prophetic Tradition as follows: Narrated by Hazrat Ayesha (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

"Avert the legal penalties from the Muslims as much as possible, if he has a way out then leave him to his way, for if the Imam makes a mistake in forgiving it would be better than making mistake in punishment". 12

2. The Non-Textual Legal Maxims of Islamic Law

Following are the non-textual legal maxims of Islamic law consisting primary as well as secondary sources of derivation which are as follows:

1. Consensus of Opinion (*Ijma'*)

After the Holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, the third most significant and authoritative primary source for the derivation of Islamic legal maxims is the consensus of opinion (unanimous opinions of the Companions, Sayings of the Successors and Sayings of the Successors of the Successors in different eras). An example of the Islamic legal maxims based on consensus of opinion is as under: For the legal maxim:

"(A ruling of) one ijtihad is not negated by another similar ijtihad".

The derivation source is a statement of the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) and consensus of the Companions has also performed upon it that if a later judge or jurist decrees a ruling of *ijtihad* different from the judgment through *ijtihad* (in the absence of an explicit text from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*) held by the earlier judge or jurist of the same rank in the same issue and that *ijtihad* would be of same level, then the earlier judgment will not stand annulled because of the later one without a grave deficiency or violation of the injunctions of *Shari'ah*. In this regard, it has been said that the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) used to decide similar legal cases based always on different *ijtihadaat*. ¹³

2. The Analogy (Qiyas)

To judge or measure a thing on the basis of equality is called analogy (qiyas). When a case (far') for which provision does not exist in the injunctions of Shari'ah, is linked with another case (asal) for which provision exists in Shari'ah injunctions on the basis of common cause (illah) and thus a rule (hukm) is derived, is called the procedure of qiyas. After the Noble Qur'an, the Sunnah and the consensus of opinion, the analogy is the most comprehensive primary source for the development of Islamic legal maxims as it involves the

jurisprudential issues which possess a common cause for the derivation of legal ruling. ¹⁴ An example of the Islamic legal maxim derived by the analogy has been mentioned here:

"When it is forbidden to make use of a thing, it is also forbidden to possess it".

The jurists, through analogy, opine that it is prohibited to possess certain things like wine, pork, plates made from gold or silver and the identical items just like many explicit texts from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* have injunctions regarding the prohibition of the consumption of these things. The common cause between two cases is, whether someone consumes any of these things or just acquires them, a harmful thing is involved in each case. That's why, the new legal ruling is that the above mentioned things and the like are forbidden.¹⁵

3. Public Interest (Maslaha Mursalah or Istislah)

Maslaha means "public interest" and istislah means "to seek the best public interest". The process of formulating laws in a society by considering public interest that have neither been modulated by the Lawgiver nor by His Messenger (peace be upon him) is called maslaha mursalah or istislah. When the general legal ruling are established in the absence of particular textual authority by taking the public interest into consideration, the Islamic legal maxims are developed with the help of this fifth most significant source of Islamic law. An example of the Islamic legal maxim derived by the analogy has been mentioned here:

"What leads to unlawful actions is also unlawful".

The wisdom behind this legal maxim formulated by the jurists is that even originally permitted deeds can be regarded as prohibited sometimes if they lead towards some sort of harmful and prohibited consequences. For instance, selling grapes is allowed without any objection but to sell the grapes intentionally in spite of the awareness that the buyer is a wine-maker, is prohibited. Likewise, renting property or house is permitted, however, renting it with the purpose of converting it into a whorehouse is forbidden. ¹⁶

4. Istidlaal

Lexically, istidlaal means "asking for an evidence". ¹⁷ In the field of Islamic legal maxims, istidlaal means "to provide proof or evidence that has not been not directly extracted from an original text e.g. the Qur'anic verse or Prophetic Tradition or from consensus or analogy".

For example a legal maxim is:

الأصل براة الذمة

"The initial presumption is freedom from all liability".

This legal maxim has not been extracted from a particular *Qur'anic* verse or *Hadith*, however it is a general ruling of Islam that initially a person is free from any liability, responsibility and blame.¹⁸

3. Legal status of the Islamic legal Maxims (Al-Qawa'id Al-Fiqhiyyah) for the Declaration of Legal Verdicts

The primary and secondary sources of Islamic law did not provide each and every detail for every new legal issue. This highlights the need for an organized and standard approach to the contemporary cases where, rather than finding out a direct *Qur'anic* commandment or Prophetic Tradition, the legal maxims based on *Shari'ah* injunctions could be utilized to cover the particulars of the cases and to issue judgment. The Islamic legal maxims are neither law themselves nor they are a foundation for any permanent legal ruling, however, argumentation on the basis of a legal maxim or its application to contemporary cases is absolutely valid. An argument based on a legal maxim will be called an argument metaphorically because that is not based on an actual source of Islamic law. Such argument would have the status of a derivative, by knowing whose general value, its details or sub-details and similarly, the details or sub-details of the relevant legal maxim would be easy to know. According to Dr. Mustafa Ahmad al-Zarqa:

"The Islamic legal maxims that help a jurist to create deep jurisprudential enlightenment in him, are not the explicit legal texts (nusus) which can serve as a foundation for making judicial decisions." ¹⁹

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