
An Evaluation of the Gnostic-Hermeneutical Conception of the Term “Fiqh” in the Exegetical Thought of Mulla Muḥsin Fayḍh Kāshānī

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The term *fiqh* is among the most significant concepts in Islamic intellectual tradition and, in contemporary usage, predominantly refers to the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence and the derivation of legal rulings. However, a closer examination of Qur’anic and hadith literature, as well as the works of Muslim scholars, indicates that in the early Islamic periods the term possessed a considerably broader semantic scope, encompassing profound understanding, religious insight, and the cognition of divine realities. Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍh Kāshānī is among the scholars, who emphasizes this expansive meaning in his exegetical and hadith-based works. He maintains that many occurrences of *fiqh* and its derivatives in the Qur’an and hadith refer to theological knowledge, the awareness of divine truths, and an esoteric understanding (*fiqh al-bāṭin*), rather than merely practical legal cognition. The present study aims to elucidate Fayḍh Kāshānī’s conception of *fiqh* and to evaluate the extent to which his gnostic-hermeneutical interpretation corresponds with historical, Qur’anic, hadith, and *Nahj al-Balāgha* evidence. The objective is to determine the degree of compatibility between his interpretations and those of the earliest Islamic sources.

Materials and Methods

This research adopts a descriptive–analytical method based on library research. First, Fayḍh Kāshānī’s view on the concept of *fiqh* was extracted from his major works, particularly *al-Ṣāfi*, *al-Wāfi*, and *al-Nukhbah fī al-Ḥikmah al-‘Amaliyyah wa al-Aḥkām al-Shar‘iyyah*, and analyzed. Subsequently, several domains of evidence were examined in order to evaluate his perspective. In this regard, the historical usage of the term *fiqh* in the early Islamic period and its semantic evolution were first investigated to determine whether its application to jurisprudence was original or part of later terminological development. Then, Qur’anic verses containing derivatives of the root *f-q-h* were analyzed in terms of their semantic implications. Third, the occurrence of the term in *Nahj al-Balāgha* and the sayings of Imām ‘Alī (peace be upon him) were studied to clarify its usage in one of the most important Islamic texts. Fourth, a collection of relevant narrations involving *fiqh*, *tafaqquh*, and *faqīh* was examined and classified into three categories: general narrations, narrations containing the phrase *tafaqquh fī al-dīn*, and narrations describing the qualities of the *faqīh*. Finally, the collected data were compared with Fayḍh Kāshānī’s view, and the

degree of convergence or divergence was assessed. The analytical framework focused on identifying the dominant meaning of *fiqh* in Qur'anic and hadith usage as well as evaluating its relation to the later technical jurisprudential meaning.

Research Findings

The findings indicated that the term *fiqh*, according to Fayḍ Kāshānī, in a significant portion of Qur'anic verses and narrations did not denote jurisprudential knowledge in its technical sense. Rather, it referred to the deep comprehension of divine teachings, the recognition of theological truths, and religious insight. As Fayḍ Kāshānī argued, the later dominance of the technical meaning of *fiqh* as legal jurisprudence was the result of subsequent developments in Islamic sciences and should not be retroactively imposed on all Qur'anic and hadith usages. Historical analysis of the concept showed that in the earliest Islamic period, *fiqh* was predominantly used to denote profound understanding and religious cognition and only gradually acquired its specialized legal meaning. This supported Fayḍ Kāshānī's interpretation of its original semantic scope. Examination of Qur'anic verses further demonstrated that derivatives of *fiqh* were frequently associated with understanding divine truths, perceiving the divine message, and attaining insight into matters of the belief. In particular, although the conventional jurisprudential interpretation of the verse of *nafr* was possible, textual indications suggested that *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* could also signify comprehensive understanding of religion and the capacity to warn and guide others. The analysis of *Nahj al-Balāgha* revealed a strong alignment with Fayḍ Kāshānī's view. In most instances, *fiqh* was employed to denote profound understanding, spiritual insight, and wisdom rather than technical jurisprudence. Considering the cultural and historical context of the era of Imām 'Alī (peace be upon him), this usage indicated that the term had not yet been restricted to legal specialization. Hadith analysis yielded similar results. In many narrations, *tafaqquh* was used without qualification, and contextual evidence suggested that it referred to the deep awareness of religious knowledge. In narrations containing the expression *tafaqquh fī al-dīn*, it was contrasted with ignorance and deprivation from guidance, thereby indicating a broad conception of religious understanding. Moreover, narrations describing the *faqīh* attributed qualities such as asceticism, fear of God, insight, awareness of the soul's defects, orientation toward the hereafter, reflection upon the Qur'an, and adherence to the Prophetic tradition. These characteristics demonstrated that the *faqīh* in hadith literature was not merely a legal expert but a possessor of comprehensive spiritual and theological knowledge. Overall, the evidence suggested that Fayḍ Kāshānī's interpretation of *fiqh* as "al-fiqh al-akbar" or "esoteric fiqh" was not only compatible with Qur'anic and hadith evidence but also more consistent with the early usage of the term.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the term *fiqh* and its derivatives, according to Fayḍ Kāshānī, in a significant portion of Qur'anic verses and narrations have referred to deep religious cognition, the awareness of divine truths, and esoteric understanding rather than being restricted to jurisprudential knowledge. Historical, Qur'anic, hadith-based, and *Nahj al-Balāgha* evidence have further indicated that this interpretation is substantially consistent with early Islamic usage. Accordingly, Fayḍ Kāshānī's view may be regarded as an interpretation aligned with a major strand of the early Islamic intellectual heritage. However, this does not negate the importance of technical

jurisprudential *fiqh*, but rather it indicates that a deeper layer of religious understanding, alongside legal knowledge, is also embedded within the conceptual scope of *fiqh* in foundational Islamic texts. Therefore, in Fayḍ Kāshānī's conception, *fiqh* is a comprehensive concept encompassing jurisprudential knowledge alongside theological cognition, spiritual insight, and the understanding of divine realities.

Keywords: Fayz Kashani, Fiqh, knowledge of the inner, Sharia, philosophy.