



HARUN NASUTION'S RATIONAL ISLAM AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ISLAMIC LAW IN INDONESIA

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Abstract. This article examines Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam and its implications for the contextualization of Islamic law in Indonesia. The study employs a qualitative library research design using intellectual history and normative legal approaches to analyze Harun Nasution's major works and relevant scholarly literature. The findings demonstrate that Rational Islam constitutes an epistemological framework that positions reason and revelation as complementary sources of knowledge while distinguishing between absolute (*qat'i*) and relative (*ẓanni*) Islamic teachings. This framework encourages the desacralization of classical *fiqh* by recognizing it as a historical product of human *ijtihād* that remains open to reinterpretation in response to changing social realities. The study further finds that Harun Nasution's thought provides an important theoretical foundation for the contextualization of Islamic law in Indonesia, as reflected in legal reforms oriented toward *maṣlaḥah*, including the Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam*), particularly through contextual legal formulations such as substitute heirs and other *ijtihād*-based legal developments. The novelty of this study lies in positioning Harun Nasution's Rational Islam not merely as a theological paradigm but as an epistemological foundation for the reform and contextualization of Islamic law in Indonesia. By revitalizing the tradition of *ijtihād* and promoting legal reasoning that is responsive to social transformation, Rational Islam contributes to the development of an adaptive Islamic legal system while remaining firmly grounded in the fundamental principles of the Shari'ah.

Keyword: Rational Islam; Harun Nasution; Islamic law contextualization; *ijtihād*; Islamic law reform.

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A. Introduction

Islamic law (*fiqh*) is epistemologically characterized by a dualistic nature it originates from transcendent divine revelation, yet its practical application results from the dialectical interaction between human reason and sociological realities. This characteristic requires Islamic law to remain dynamic, contextual, and responsive to social change (Lubis et al., 2026). The urgency of such dynamism becomes evident when considering the textual reality of the Qur'an. Among the approximately 6,236 verses of the Qur'an, only a limited number are classified as legal verses (*āyāt al-aḥkām*). Harun Nasution estimates that these comprise approximately 500 verses, representing around eight percent of the Qur'anic text, and primarily regulate matters related to faith, worship, and social relations (Nasution, 1995). Moreover, most of these legal verses are general (*mujmal*) in nature, while only a limited number provide explicit (*qaṭ'i*) legal rulings, particularly in matters of *mu'amalat*. Consequently, the Qur'an leaves considerable room for juristic reasoning (*ijtihād*) in addressing emerging legal issues (Nasution H, 1989). However, throughout Indonesia's socio-intellectual history prior to the 1970s, this intellectual space largely remained stagnant. Consequently, many Islamic educational institutions interpreted classical *fiqh* in a rigid and textual manner, treating earlier juristic formulations as fixed legal doctrines rather than as historically conditioned products of *ijtihād* that remained open to reinterpretation (Fajri et al., 2022a).

This intellectual stagnation began to be challenged when Harun Nasution initiated a project of intellectual reconstruction through his concept of "Rational Islam" during the 1970s. Drawing upon his position within the State Institutes of Islamic Studies (IAIN), Nasution introduced a radical methodological intervention by reintegrating critical and philosophical reasoning into the curriculum of Islamic studies (Shorfana, 2025). Amid the modernization agenda promoted during Indonesia's New Order regime, Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam found a favorable sociological context for its development (Bilmakruf, 2023). He argued that because the Qur'an contains relatively few explicit legal provisions, the greater part of contemporary Islamic law (*fiqh*) should be understood as a relative body of teachings produced through human reasoning within specific historical, spatial, and temporal contexts, rather than as immutable and sacred doctrines (Abbas & Aditya, 2023).

Based on this background, this study seeks to analyze Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam from the perspective of Indonesia's socio-intellectual history while examining its relevance to the contextualization of Islamic law in Indonesia. Previous studies have explored various dimensions of Harun Nasution's intellectual contributions. Paidiah et al (2026) examined the concept of rationality in Harun Nasution's thought, emphasizing its role in the modernization of Islamic thought. Likewise, Rahmadana dan Suryanta (2026) focused on Harun Nasution's rational theology, highlighting his contribution to the development of modern Islamic theological discourse. However, these studies primarily position Rational Islam within the domains of theology, Islamic intellectual history, and educational reform. Consequently, the legal implications of Harun Nasution's thought particularly its epistemological contribution to the contextualization and reform of Islamic law in Indonesia have received only limited scholarly attention.

In fact, the concept of rationality developed by Harun Nasution possesses significance not only in theological discourse but also as a potential epistemological foundation for formulating Islamic law that is responsive to social transformation. In this regard, a significant research gap remains concerning how the concept of Rational Islam may serve as an analytical framework for understanding the relationship between revelation, reason, *ijtihad*, and social realities, particularly in the effort to formulate contextual Islamic law in Indonesia. Studies examining the relevance of Harun Nasution's thought to the reform of Islamic law, including its contribution to the development of Indonesia's national Islamic legal framework, remain relatively limited compared with those emphasizing theology and the modernization of Islamic thought.

Accordingly, this article aims to examine Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam within the framework of Indonesia's socio-intellectual history, with particular emphasis on its implications for the contextualization of Islamic law. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to position Harun Nasution's thought not merely as a movement for theological reform but also as a conceptual foundation for developing a more dynamic, adaptive, and socially responsive Islamic legal system that addresses the needs of contemporary Indonesian society. Through this perspective, the article demonstrates that Harun Nasution's critique of *taqlid*, his emphasis on *ijtihad*, and his understanding of the historically conditioned nature of *fiqh* create opportunities for formulating Islamic law that remains firmly grounded in the values of divine revelation while simultaneously responding to Indonesia's evolving social and national context, as reflected in various efforts to reform Islamic law, including the Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam* KHI).

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative library research design using a normative legal and intellectual history approach to examine Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam and its implications for the contextualization of Islamic law in Indonesia. The normative legal approach is employed to analyze Harun Nasution's ideas within the framework of Islamic legal theory (*uṣul al-fiqh*), particularly regarding *ijtihad*, the distinction between *qat'i* and *zanni* legal texts, and the contextualization of Islamic law. Meanwhile, the intellectual history approach is used to understand the socio-historical context in which Nasution's ideas emerged and evolved.

The primary sources consist of Harun Nasution's major works, including *Refleksi Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* (1989), *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran* (1995), and *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya*. Secondary sources comprise recent books and peer-reviewed journal articles discussing Harun Nasution's thought, Islamic legal reform, *ijtihad*, and the contextualization of Islamic law in Indonesia. Data were collected through documentation techniques by identifying, selecting, and reviewing literature relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria prioritized sources directly discussing Rational Islam, Islamic legal epistemology, and legal reform.

The data were analyzed descriptively and interpretatively using three stages: data reduction, thematic categorization, and critical interpretation. The analysis integrates intellectual history with the principles of *uṣul al-fiqh* to examine how Harun Nasution's rationalist paradigm contributes to the reinterpretation of Islamic legal doctrines and the development of a contextual and *maslahah* oriented Islamic legal system in Indonesia.

C. Result and Discussion

1. The Intellectual and Social History of the Emergence of Rational Islam by Harun Nasution

Prior to the 1970s, Islamic thought in Indonesia was predominantly characterized by a normative and textual orientation that emphasized adherence to classical juristic authorities. The dominance of *taqlid* and the sacralization of classical *fiqh* limited the development of *ijtihad*, resulting in an Islamic legal discourse that was often unable to respond effectively to changing social realities (Fajri et al., 2022; Mubarak et al., 2024). Although this tradition successfully preserved the continuity of Islamic scholarship, it also encouraged the perception that classical juristic opinions represented immutable legal doctrines rather than historically conditioned products of human interpretation.

Within this intellectual context, Harun Nasution introduced the concept of Rational Islam as a response to the stagnation of Islamic legal thought. Influenced by his educational experiences in Egypt and Canada, as well as by the modernization agenda of Indonesia during the New Order period, Nasution sought to restore the role of reason as an essential instrument for understanding revelation. Rather than rejecting the classical tradition, he argued that *fiqh* should be understood as the product of *ijtihad*, making it open to reinterpretation in accordance with changing social conditions while remaining faithful to the fundamental principles of the Shari'ah (Nasution H, 1989).

The emergence of Rational Islam therefore represented more than an intellectual or theological movement. It constituted an epistemological response to the rigidity of Islamic legal reasoning by emphasizing the dynamic interaction between revelation, reason, and social reality. This intellectual shift laid the foundation for a more contextual approach to Islamic law, in which legal reform could be pursued without undermining the authority of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

2. The Concept of Rational Islam in Harun Nasution's Thought (Nasution H, 1989)

a. The Relationship Between Reason and Revelation

One of the central pillars of Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam is his affirmation of the harmonious relationship between reason and revelation. According to Nasution, these two sources are not inherently contradictory but are complementary in the process of understanding Islamic teachings. Revelation serves as the primary source of divine guidance and the fundamental values of Islam, whereas reason functions as the instrument through which believers understand, interpret, and actualize the messages of revelation in accordance with changing social contexts and the evolving conditions of human life (Paidiah et al., 2026). Consequently, the exercise of reason should not be regarded as a deviation from religion but rather as an integral component of Islam itself.

Nasution argues that the Qur'an accords a prominent place to the use of reason. Numerous Qur'anic verses encourage human beings to think, reflect, and draw lessons from the phenomena of both nature and human existence (Suyanta & Ulfah, 2023). This demonstrates that Islam does not advocate passive religious observance; instead, it encourages believers to develop a rational and critical understanding of their faith. In Nasution's view, one of the principal causes of the decline of Muslim civilization has been the weakening of the tradition of rational inquiry and the increasing dominance of religious attitudes characterized by unquestioning acceptance of authority without rigorous intellectual examination (Paidiah et al., 2026).

Based on this understanding, Harun Nasution positions reason as an indispensable instrument for addressing issues that are not explicitly regulated in the primary religious texts. Given that the Qur'an contains a relatively limited number of legal verses and that many of these are general in nature and *zanni* (open to multiple interpretations), the exercise of *ijtihād* through rational reasoning becomes essential for translating the fundamental principles of revelation into legal and ethical norms capable of responding to continually changing social realities (Nawir et al., 2024). Thus, in Nasution's thought, the relationship between reason and revelation is not one of competition but of integration, enabling Islamic teachings to remain relevant, dynamic, and contextually applicable across different historical periods.

From the perspective of *usul al-fiqh*, this integration of reason and revelation legitimizes the continued exercise of *ijtihād* in addressing legal issues that are not explicitly regulated in the primary sources. Consequently, reason functions not as an alternative to revelation but as an interpretive instrument for realizing the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-shari'ah*) in changing social contexts.

b. The Distinction Between Absolute and Relative Teachings

One of the most fundamental principles underlying Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam is the distinction between the absolute and the relative dimensions of Islamic teachings. This distinction is rooted in his analysis of the primary sources of Islamic law, particularly the Qur'an and the Sunnah. According to Nasution, of the approximately 6,286 verses of the Qur'an, only around 500 deal directly with matters of faith, worship, and social relations, while the vast majority address issues of theology, morality, history, and natural phenomena (Nasution H, 1989). The relatively limited number of legal verses indicates that the Qur'an was not intended to function as a comprehensive legal code governing every aspect of human life in detail. Rather, it provides fundamental principles that serve as normative guidance for human conduct. Consequently, most legal issues arising within society require the exercise of *ijtihād* to transform the values embedded in revelation into practical legal norms applicable to contemporary circumstances (Anshori, 2020).

Nasution further argues that not all Qur'anic texts possess the same degree of interpretive certainty. Some verses are classified as *qat'i al-dalalah*, meaning that they convey a single, explicit, and unequivocal meaning, leaving little room for interpretive disagreement. Such verses, however, constitute only a relatively small portion of the Qur'an. The majority belong to the category of *zanni al-dalalah*, namely verses that are open to multiple interpretations and have consequently given rise to diverse juristic opinions throughout Islamic history. A similar situation exists with respect to the Sunnah. In addition to questions concerning textual meaning (*dalalah*), prophetic traditions also differ in terms of the certainty of their transmission (*wurud*). While some traditions are classified as *qat'i al-wurud*, whose authenticity is considered certain, many others are *zanni al-wurud*, requiring further scholarly investigation and legal reasoning before they can serve as authoritative foundations for legal rulings (Nasution H, 1989). These varying degrees of certainty demonstrate that much of Islamic law is not founded exclusively upon definitive textual evidence but is instead shaped through scholarly interpretation and intellectual construction.

Based on this framework, Harun Nasution distinguishes between absolute teachings, which derive from definitive textual evidence and embody the fundamental principles of Islam, and relative teachings, which emerge from human *ijtihād* in interpreting texts that

are probabilistic (*zanni*) in nature. From the perspective of Islamic legal theory, this distinction carries profound implications because it positions the greater part of *fiqh* within a domain that remains open to critical re-evaluation and adaptation in response to societal change (Suhartati et al., 2024). Accordingly, the reform of Islamic law should not be understood as an attempt to alter divine revelation, but rather as a process of reinterpreting historically conditioned juristic formulations so that they continue to fulfill the objectives of the Shari'ah (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) while responding effectively to contemporary social needs (Rahmat et al., 2025). Through this conceptual framework, Harun Nasution provides an intellectual foundation for the contextualization of Islamic law while emphasizing that legal dynamism and change are logical consequences of Islam's distinction between immutable principles and historically contingent interpretations.

This distinction provides an important epistemological basis for Islamic legal reform. By limiting immutability to *qaṭ'i* texts while recognizing *zanni* rulings as open to reinterpretation, Harun Nasution creates a legitimate space for renewing Islamic legal doctrines without compromising the authority of divine revelation.

c. *Fiqh* as a Relative Product of Human *Ijtihād*

Harun Nasution's distinction between absolute and relative teachings leads to the conclusion that the greater part of *fiqh* developed throughout Islamic history constitutes a product of human *ijtihād* and is therefore relative rather than possessing the same authority as divine revelation. According to Nasution, although the Qur'an and the Sunnah are the primary sources of Islamic law, the process of deriving legal rulings from these sources inevitably involves human intellectual effort (*ijtihād*). This process encompasses textual interpretation, consideration of social contexts, and the application of various methods of legal reasoning (*istinbat al-ahkam*) developed by Muslim jurists. Because these activities involve human reasoning, the legal conclusions they produce cannot be regarded as absolute truths. Instead, they should be understood as scholarly interpretations that may be valid while remaining open to revision, refinement, and critical reassessment (Bagadir et al., 1988).

This perspective is reinforced by historical evidence demonstrating that Muslim jurists have long reached different legal conclusions regarding the same issues. The diversity of opinions among the founders of the various schools of Islamic law illustrates that *fiqh* fundamentally represents an interpretive enterprise shaped by differing methodologies of legal reasoning, social circumstances, and intellectual environments (Halimah & Mahmudah, 2023). If *fiqh* were entirely absolute in nature, such extensive juristic diversity would not have emerged throughout the history of Islamic legal scholarship. For this reason, Harun Nasution regarded differences among the legal schools (*madhahib*) not as weaknesses within Islamic law but as evidence of its inherent flexibility, enabling it to accommodate the diverse needs and circumstances of Muslim societies (Ibrahim, 2019).

From this perspective, Nasution implicitly criticized the tendency among some Muslims to sacralize classical *fiqh* manuals and regard them as immutable legal authorities. He distinguished Islamic teachings into two broad categories: absolute (*qaṭ'i*) teachings, which encompass divine revelation and the fundamental principles of faith and worship that are immutable, and relative (*zanni*) teachings, represented by *fiqh* as an intellectual product emerging from the interaction between revelation and social reality. The latter category, particularly in matters of *mu'amalat* (social and civil transactions)

and broader social life, remains inherently open to interpretation, development, and the reassessment of earlier juristic conclusions whenever social conditions evolve. Through this rationalist framework, Harun Nasution argued that the modernization of Islamic thought should proceed dynamically through the continuous exercise of *ijtihad*, provided that such reinterpretation remains firmly grounded in the fundamental principles and objectives of the Shari'ah (Paidiah et al., 2026).

In the context of Islamic legal theory, this perspective rejects the sacralization of classical *fiqh* and repositions it as a historical product of juristic reasoning. Consequently, contemporary legal reform should focus not on changing revelation itself but on reassessing earlier juristic interpretations in light of current social realities and the objectives of the Shari'ah.

d. The Importance of *Ijtihad* in Responding to Social Change

For Harun Nasution, *ijtihad* is not merely a supplementary instrument within Islamic law but a logical consequence of the very nature of Islamic teachings. He begins with the observation that, of the approximately 6,300 verses of the Qur'an, only around 500 address matters relating to faith, worship, and social transactions (*mu'amalat*). This relatively limited number of legal verses is clearly insufficient to regulate the ever-expanding complexity of human life. Moreover, many of these legal verses are expressed in general terms and therefore require further interpretation through human reasoning. This indicates that the Qur'an was not intended to provide detailed regulations for every aspect of human existence but rather to establish fundamental principles that must be further elaborated through intellectual endeavor (Bagadir et al., 1988). Consequently, revelation itself provides space for *ijtihad* as a legitimate mechanism for addressing issues that are not explicitly regulated in the primary religious texts.

In explaining the concept of *ijtihad*, Harun Nasution returns to its linguistic origins, noting that the term derives from the Arabic words *al-jahd* and *al-juhd*, which denote exerting one's utmost effort, striving diligently, or employing one's full intellectual capacity to achieve a particular objective. Within the framework of Islamic law, *ijtihad* refers to the comprehensive exertion of intellectual effort to derive legal rulings from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Nasution H, 1989). According to Nasution, the legitimacy of *ijtihad* has been firmly established since the earliest period of Islamic history (Apriyani et al., 2024). Its practical application can be observed in the legal decisions of the Prophet's Companions, particularly Umar ibn al-Khattab, who frequently formulated legal judgments on the basis of public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), even when these differed from earlier practices (Amir, 2023). The normative foundation of *ijtihad* is likewise reflected in the well-known ḥadith concerning Mu'adh ibn Jabal's appointment as governor of Yemen. In this narration, Mu'adh explained that he would first refer to the Qur'an, then to the Sunnah, and, if no explicit guidance could be found, he would exercise his own reasoned judgment through *ijtihad* (M Choirul & Mahmud, 2023). This tradition demonstrates that *ijtihad* occupies a central position within the hierarchy of Islamic legal sources, following the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Nasution further argues that, beyond the Qur'an and the Sunnah, *ijtihad* constitutes the third principal source of Islamic teachings. Citing the views of Ali Hasballah, he maintains that *ijtihad* has historically served as the driving force behind the dynamism of Islamic civilization. In his assessment, the remarkable achievements of the Muslim world between the eighth and thirteenth centuries cannot be separated from the flourishing tradition of *ijtihad*, which stimulated the development of diverse scientific disciplines and

intellectual innovations. Conversely, once the "gate of *ijtihād*" came to be regarded as closed from the middle of the fourth century AH onward, Islamic intellectual life gradually entered a period of stagnation that contributed to the broader decline of Muslim civilization. For this reason, Nasution insists that *ijtihād* should not be confined solely to questions of jurisprudence but should encompass the entire spectrum of Islamic intellectual inquiry. In addressing increasingly complex contemporary issues arising from advances in science, technology, and social transformation, he further advocates the practice of collective *ijtihād* through collaboration between Muslim jurists and experts from various academic disciplines. Such an approach is reflected in the fatwa-making practices of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), where legal deliberations involve specialists in economics, medicine, demography, environmental studies, and other relevant fields before authoritative rulings are issued on contemporary issues, including environmental protection, public health, family planning, and related matters (Nasution H, 1989). Accordingly, in Harun Nasution's thought, *ijtihād* is not merely a legal instrument but the primary mechanism for preserving the relevance and vitality of Islamic teachings in the face of continual social change.

Accordingly, *ijtihād* becomes the principal mechanism for ensuring that Islamic law remains responsive to developments in family law, Islamic finance, biomedical ethics, digital transactions, and other contemporary legal issues that could not have been anticipated during the formative period of classical *fiqh*.

3. The Implications of Rational Islam for the Contextualization of Islamic Law in Indonesia

a. Rational Islam as the Foundation for the Reform and Contextualization of Islamic Law

Harun Nasution regarded Islamic reform as an intellectual project encompassing all dimensions of Muslim life. It was not confined to theology, philosophy, or *taṣawwuf* but extended to Islamic law, politics, and religious institutions. In his view, reform is essentially synonymous with modernization, namely the effort to align Islamic understanding, traditions, and institutions with advances in scientific knowledge and the evolving realities of society. However, the modernization he advocated did not entail altering Islam in its entirety. Rather, Nasution distinguished between aspects of Islamic teachings that are absolute and immutable and those that are relative and therefore open to reinterpretation. Within this framework, the reform of Islamic law gains its legitimacy through the reinterpretation of juristic opinions (*ijtihād*) formulated within particular historical contexts, while preserving the immutable principles of the Shari'ah.

This perspective emerged from Nasution's critique of what he perceived as the intellectual stagnation of the Muslim community, resulting from the dominance of *taqlid* and the widespread belief that the gate of *ijtihād* had been closed. Consequently, many classical juristic formulations, particularly in the field of *fiqh*, came to be regarded as final and beyond critical re-examination. Such a perspective limited the capacity of Islamic law to adapt to social transformation and often led to the perception that societal change constituted a threat to religion itself. To address this problem, Nasution introduced the concept of Rational Islam, which positions reason as an indispensable instrument for understanding Islamic teachings. In his view, reason does not compete with revelation; rather, it functions as a means of uncovering the deeper objectives and wisdom of divine revelation, thereby ensuring that Islamic teachings remain relevant to changing social realities.

Furthermore, Rational Islam should not be understood merely as a collection of intellectual ideas but as a methodological framework (*manhaj*) for interpreting and implementing Islamic teachings in a contextual manner. This approach is characterized by several fundamental principles: employing reason to strengthen religious argumentation without undermining the authority of revelation; seeking the underlying rational wisdom behind religious teachings; adopting systematic, critical, and universal modes of reasoning; and striving to harmonize the demands of rational inquiry with the guidance of revelation (Maulidi H et al., 2026). In addition, Rational Islam recognizes that all products of human reasoning are inherently provisional and therefore remain open to evaluation, revision, and refinement. Through these characteristics, it creates broad opportunities for the continued exercise of *ijtihad* as a means of addressing emerging issues that are not explicitly regulated in the primary sources of Islamic law.

This methodological framework is further reinforced by three principal foundations within Harun Nasution's intellectual paradigm. The first is the idea of progress, namely the conviction that Islamic thought must evolve alongside scientific advancement and the changing needs of society. The second is the recognition that Islamic teachings consist of two distinct domains: the *qat'i* domain, which is absolute and immutable, and the *zanni* domain, which is relative and therefore open to interpretation. According to Nasution, these two domains are not contradictory but complementary, preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings while simultaneously enabling them to adapt to changing historical circumstances. The third foundation is the application of a rational method grounded in scientific rationality rather than subjective judgments of what merely appears reasonable. Together, these three principles provide a robust epistemological foundation for the contextualization of Islamic law, enabling it to remain firmly rooted in divine revelation while responding effectively to the dynamic social realities of contemporary Indonesia (Maulidi H et al., 2026).

b. The Relevance of Harun Nasution's Thought to the Development of Indonesian Islamic Law: The Case of the Compilation of Islamic Law

Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam bears significant relevance to the development of Islamic law in Indonesia, particularly in efforts to establish a more contextual legal framework through the *Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam KHI)* (Syarif, 2021). Although Nasution was not directly involved in the drafting of the KHI, the intellectual paradigm he developed provided an epistemological foundation for the emergence of legal formulations that extend beyond a purely textual interpretation of classical *fiqh* (Masnunah et al., 2025). By distinguishing between absolute (*qat'i*) teachings and relative (*zanni*) teachings, Nasution opened the way for the reinterpretation of Islamic law in light of evolving social conditions, cultural transformations, and the changing needs of Indonesian society (Fikria Adira Risalah, 2023). Within this framework, Islamic law is understood not as a static legal system but as a product of *ijtihad* that must continually be contextualized in order to realize the overarching objectives of the Shari'ah, namely justice and public welfare (*maṣlahah*).

Another illustration can be found in the reinterpretation of Qur'an 4:11 regarding inheritance shares between male and female heirs. Classical Islamic jurisprudence generally understands the two-to-one ratio as a fixed legal rule. However, from the perspective of Harun Nasution's Rational Islam, the verse should also be interpreted in light of its socio-historical context and its underlying objective of achieving justice. At the time of revelation, men assumed primary economic responsibility for the family, making

the prescribed distribution consistent with the prevailing social structure. Contemporary Indonesian society, however, exhibits significantly different socio-economic conditions, in which women frequently contribute equally to family welfare. Accordingly, many contemporary Muslim jurists argue that the substantive objective of the verse is the realization of justice (*adl*) rather than the preservation of its numerical formulation alone. Within this framework, contextual *ijtihād* remains legitimate as long as it upholds the essential objectives of the Shari'ah and does not contradict definitive (*qat'i*) principles (Nasution H, 1989).

A similar pattern can also be observed in the legal requirement for marriage registration under Indonesian law. Classical *fiqh* generally considers the validity of marriage to depend upon the fulfillment of its essential pillars and conditions, whereas Indonesian legislation requires official registration to guarantee legal certainty and the protection of spouses and children. This development demonstrates that contemporary Islamic law may legitimately introduce administrative legal requirements through *ijtihād* in order to realize *maṣlaḥah*. Such an approach closely reflects Harun Nasution's understanding that Islamic law should continuously respond to social transformation while preserving its normative foundations.

The relevance of Harun Nasution's thought is also reflected in various aspects of Indonesian Islamic family law, including the legal regulation of marriage and divorce registration. In classical *fiqh*, the validity of marriage generally depends upon the fulfillment of its essential pillars and legal conditions, whereas administrative registration is not regarded as a constitutive requirement. Within the framework of the modern nation-state, however, the registration of marriages and divorces has become indispensable for ensuring legal certainty and safeguarding the rights of all parties involved. Consequently, the legal requirement to obtain official marriage and divorce certificates under Indonesian law may be understood as a form of contemporary *ijtihād* oriented toward promoting the public interest (*maṣlaḥah*) (Nasution P. D, 2016). This development illustrates how Islamic law operates beyond the formalistic application of textual provisions by seeking to actualize the objectives of the Shari'ah within an evolving social context. It is precisely in this regard that Harun Nasution's intellectual contribution becomes particularly significant: he provides an epistemological framework that enables Islamic law to develop dynamically while remaining firmly anchored in the fundamental values of Islamic teachings.

c. The Contribution of Rational Islam to Addressing Contemporary Issues in Islamic Law

The rapid transformation of modern society has generated increasingly complex legal issues that are often not explicitly addressed in the classical sources of Islamic law (Faathir et al., 2026). Advances in science, technology, economics, and evolving patterns of social interaction have created an urgent need for legal frameworks capable of responding to these emerging realities (Ayu et al., 2026). Within this context, Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam offers an intellectual framework that enables Islamic law to remain relevant without compromising its normative foundations. By positioning reason as an essential instrument for understanding the objectives and substantive values of Islamic teachings, Rational Islam views Islamic law not merely as a collection of textual prescriptions but as a value-based legal system aimed at promoting the public good (*maṣlaḥah*) across changing historical contexts (Paidiah et al., 2026).

The principal contribution of Rational Islam lies in its effort to revive the tradition of *ijtihād* as the primary mechanism for responding to social transformation. Harun

Nasution argues that many of the legal challenges confronting contemporary Muslim societies cannot be adequately addressed through the mere reproduction of classical *fiqh* opinions, since these issues arise from social, economic, and technological contexts fundamentally different from those encountered by earlier Muslim jurists. Consequently, he advocates the reinterpretation of religious texts while remaining firmly grounded in the fundamental principles and objectives of the Shari'ah (Alya Hasya et al., 2025). Within this framework, *ijtihad* should not be understood as an attempt to alter Islamic teachings but rather as a legitimate process of translating Islamic values into legal norms that are responsive to the needs of contemporary society.

This approach is particularly relevant in addressing a wide range of contemporary issues in Islamic law, including Islamic family law, Islamic finance, bioethics, the protection of women's and children's rights, and legal questions arising from the rapid advancement of digital technology. Such issues require interdisciplinary engagement and cannot be resolved solely through a literal or textual interpretation of the primary religious sources. Consistent with Harun Nasution's intellectual perspective, resolving contemporary legal problems requires a constructive dialogue between revelation, reason, and social reality so that Islamic law may produce rulings that are not only normatively legitimate but also effective in promoting justice and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) (Arya Aldiyanto, 2023). Accordingly, Rational Islam contributes a dynamic legal paradigm that remains open to social and intellectual developments while preserving a balanced relationship between the authority of divine revelation and the evolving needs of modern society.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Harun Nasution's concept of Rational Islam provides an important epistemological foundation for the contextualization and reform of Islamic law in Indonesia. By distinguishing between absolute (*qat'i*) and relative (*zanni*) teachings, Nasution positions *ijtihad* as a legitimate mechanism for reinterpreting Islamic legal doctrines in response to changing social realities while remaining faithful to the fundamental objectives of the Shari'ah. This perspective moves beyond theological discourse by offering a methodological framework for contemporary Islamic legal reasoning.

The findings further indicate that the principles of Rational Islam are reflected in several developments within Indonesian Islamic law, particularly the contextual formulation of legal norms in the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), including the recognition of substitute heirs (*ahli waris pengganti*) under Article 185 and other legal reforms oriented toward justice, legal certainty, and *maṣlaḥah*. Accordingly, this study contributes theoretically by positioning Harun Nasution's thought as an epistemological basis for Islamic legal reform rather than merely as a movement of theological modernization.

This study is limited to a normative analysis of Harun Nasution's published works and their relevance to Indonesian Islamic law. It does not examine how these ideas have been implemented in judicial decisions or contemporary legal practice. Future studies are therefore encouraged to investigate the application of Harun Nasution's legal paradigm in Religious Court decisions, Islamic legal legislation, and other contemporary issues through doctrinal, comparative, or empirical legal research.

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