

The Perspective of Traditional Muslim Scholars on Heretical Innovations

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Abstract

The term of innovation or heresy (*bid'ah*) was used by the Prophet Muhammad in describing the practices which contradicted to Islamic teachings. The danger of its deviation from Islamic teaching was further emphasized by the companions and later became guidelines among Muslim society. This article examined several particular events such as extremism in worshipping God and congregational prayer during fasting month occurred during the times of Prophet Muhammad and his companions that regarded as the beginning of heretical innovations in the history of Muslim society. These events provided extensive discussions and remarkable debates among later Muslim scholars pertaining the permissibility or formidability of such practices which have no basis either in the Qur'an or the traditions of the Prophet. This article employed content analysis approach by referring to several authentic references from both classical and modern literatures. It was found that there were significant differences in views among Muslim scholars concerning the conformity of some Islamic practices related to faith, worship and custom which have weakened Muslim unity.

Keywords: Heretical innovation, Muslim scholars, Muslim society

Introduction

The term *bid'ah* (innovation) was popular since it was introduced by the Prophet peace be upon him (p.b.u.h). Literally, this term means 'to innovate or start something'. For instance, as mentioned by Allah in Surah *al-Ah'qaf* verse 9:

Meaning:

"I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow but that which is revealed to me by inspiration; I am but a Warner open and clear."

(Surah al-Ahqaf: 9)

The term *bid'ah* is rooted from the Arab word *بدع*, *يبدع*, *بدعا* which means to invent something new without any previous example. The word *al-badi'* also is one of Allah's beautiful name which means 'the maker', in consistent with the nature of Allah who has the attribute to provide a new thing, a really the new one that has not been made before. In order to understand the true concept of innovation, Muslim scholars tried to unravel the meaning of the word *bid'ah* from its technical meaning due to the difference in the meanings and interpretations of the term *bid'ah* according their own understandings.

Literature Review

The issues related to the deviation from the true Islamic teaching have occurred as early as the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and continues to this day. Here is a short history of the emergence of heresy.

The Seed of Heresy in the Period of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)

The seeds of deviation in the Islamic law has emerged since the time of Prophet (p.b.u.h). This fact is based on a hadith in which a group of three men came to the Prophet's house and asked his wives on how the Prophet worshipping (Allah), and when they were informed about that, they considered their worship insufficient and said, "Where are we from the Prophet as his past and future sins have been forgiven." Then one of them said, "I will offer the prayer throughout the night forever." The other said, "I will fast throughout the year and will not break my fast." The third said, "I will keep away from the women and will not marry forever." Immediately after that, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) who heard the conversation appeared and said:

Meaning:

"Are you the same people who said so-and-so? By Allah, I am more submissive to Allah and more afraid of Him than you; yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep and I also marry women. So he who does not follow my tradition in religion, is not from me (not one of my followers)." The above mentioned sayings illustrates that there were some Prophet Muhammad's companions who attempted to deviate in the matters of worshipping. However, their efforts had been prevented by the Prophet (p.b.u.h). This incident shows that the irregularities or deviations in worshipping are very easily spread if not halted at the early stages.

Heresy in the period of Righteous Caliphs

The phrase '*bid'ah*' had been mentioned by Umar (r.a). He suggested that the *tarawikh* prayers in Ramadhan performed in congregation, adding that such action is the best heresy.

In the meantime, there was also an incident of heresy which is prohibited by the companions, such as Abdullah bin Umar. This incident was narrated by Mujahid, he said: "I have come in with Abdullah bin 'Umar into the mosque. Indeed, at the time the *adzan* has

been echoed and we want to pray there, the muezzin said: " الصلاة خير من النوم " (Means: *Prayer is better than sleep*). Then, Abdullah bin Umar come out from the mosque and said: "*Let us go away from this innovator (mubtadie)*". (*Mausu'ah Fiqhiyyah*, 2008).

In the two previous incidents mentioned, the evidence that showed that some companions accepted heresy in worshipping matters and simultaneously, there are some of them who believe that introducing and acting upon *bid'ah* in religious matters is a sin and considered one of the enormities in Islam that is obligatory to immediately desist and repent from.

These show that the *khilafiyah* problems (the differences of opinion in the small issues) in the context of heresy had begun as early as the period of *Khulafa' al-Rasyidin*. This ummatic problem is continuing until present day, which leads our society into various polemics and debates.

Heresy after the Period of Khalifah al-Rashidin (The righteous Caliphs)

The most serious Muslim disunity in the history of Islam was the appointment of 'Ali bin Abi Talib as the fourth caliph of Muslims in which, one of the prophet companions' Mu'awiah bin Abi Sufyan refused to pledge allegiance to him. This conflict became the most appalling bloodshed in the history of Islam. After the death of Ali, there was a Jewish *munafiq* (hypocrite) named Abdullah bin Saba'. He created many false traditions of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to raise the dignity of Ali than the other companions. He also pioneered the school of *al-Wasayah* in which according to this school, Imam Ali is the executor (the heir) who should assume responsibility as the first Caliph (Hasan, 1964).

As a result, Muslims dispute has led to the emergence of Shia teachings which deviated from the true teachings of Islam. According to al-Qaradawi, there is an extreme Shi'ite teaching which called as *bid'ahmughallazah*. These aberrant teachings could lead the Ummah into blasphemy and these are the heresy in tawhidic aspects.

During the Umayyad caliphate, there are a man named Ma'bad al-Juhani (80H) who was talking about the concept of *al-Qadr* by denying the existence of God's names. This concept was further developed by his pupil, Jahm bin Safwan (131H). After that came the school of Mu'tazilah which was founded by Wasil bin 'Ata' (80-131H), this sect has claimed that the holy Qur'an is *ismakhlūq* or a creature like other creatures and not an eternal one that was contrary to the belief of Ahlus Sunnah waJamaah, that is promoting the holy Qur'an is *qadim* (eternity).

At the time of Imam Ghazali (1058M-1111M), the two schools of thought emerged namely the school of *Ifrad* (the extremist in faith issues) and the school of *Tafriid* (look down-trivial in faith). In order to help in solving the crisis of the faith among Muslims, he wrote a book entitled *al-Iqtisad-fi al-I'tiqād* (simplicity of faith). The appearance of the book written by Imam Ghazali has managed to save the Muslims from the biggest and danger heresy in the faith. Consequently, he was popularly known as *Hujjatul Islam* for his significant contribution in defending faith among Muslims.

Methodology

The main method of this study is content analysis. Therefore, the exploration of legacies through Arabic literatures was used to enhance the data collected. In addition, this study also analyzed several academic writings from some relevant journals and paper works. Qualitative method was also used in this study through the procedure of interviews with several key informants. This method was very significant to make the research reliable,

particularly in exploring the reality based on observation and in the current context phenomenon.

Findings and Discussions

Legal Dispute against the Term Heresy

In discussing the term of heresy, scholars have different views on this matter which could be summarized into two main views which secures up to the outbreak of discord among Muslims.

First sight:

The first view holds that all practices are not done by the Prophet is heresy. Scholars who believe in this view were Imam Malik (164 H - 241H), al - Shatibi (790 H) and Ibn Taymiyyah (728H). They stressed on the word '*Kullu'*'in the hadith of the Prophet p.b.u.h. :

Meaning: "Indeed, each new case is heresy and every heresy is misguidance"

According to this view, the expression of the Prophet Muhammad in the hadith was very clear that stressed all practices that are not based on Islamic law is heresy whether the practice is related to customary, worshipping or faith. The scholars of this view believe that there is no such good or bad heresy. The expressions of heresy itself have described the disadvantages of such practice.

In explaining this view, Imam al-Shatibi decrees heresy must revolve around permissible (*halal*) and condemnable (*makruh*) matter. He explained the categories of heresy as follows:

i. *Bid'ah Jahiliyyah* (ignorant)

Heretics who are deviating from the Islamic faith. This illegal heresy practice was brought about by pagan society.

ii. *Bid'ah Munafiqah* (hypocrisy)

This heresy is considered astray because this group is a group condemned by God. They pretended to be Muslims, but in fact were against Islam. Among the main supporters of this group at the time of the Prophet Muhammad was Abdullah bin Ubai.

iii- *Bid'ah Ma'siah*(vices)

Heresy is considered as illegal such as acts or behaviors because the practice is contrary to Islamic law. An example is the practice of fasting is standing in the hot sun to feel the pain of fasting.

iv-*Bid'ah Makruhah* (condemnable)

Heresy prohibited practices, such as the view of Imam Malik condemning the practice of fasting for 6 days in the month of *Shawal*. Although there are many authentic hadith about it, but Imam Malik made *ijtihad* that fasting is considered *makruh* because he was afraid that Muslims will regard such practices become mandatory. At the time, fasting is not a practice by people of Medina.

According to him, the division of heresy into the rulings of mandatory, recommendable and permissible is not justified because these rulings are good element in performing worship.

Second view:

On the other hand, there are others among scholars who categorize heresy into two conditions, *bid'ahhasanah* and *bid'ahdhalalah*. Scholars who share this view include Al-Izzu bin Abdul Salam (577 H-660H) and Imam Nawawi (631 H-676 H) and IbnJawzi (510H-597H). In their support, these people adhere to the fatwa of Imam Shafie (150 H-204H) in relation to the legal status of heresy, namely:

Meaning:

“Bida’ah is of two types: Bida’ah that is praiseworthy and Bida’ah that is blameworthy. What agrees with the sunnah is praiseworthy and what contradicts the sunnah is blameworthy.”

This view is also supported by the followers of Imam Al-Shafie, one of them was Izzu bin Abdul Salam. He said: "Heresy is an act or practice that does not happen in the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW). The act or practice is divided into several branches of law which is *bid'ahwajibah* (compulsory), *bid'ahmuharramah* (sinful), *bid'ahmandubah* (recommended), *bid'ahmakruhah* (condemnable) and *bid'ahjaizah* (neither forbidden nor recommended). Here are the example for each type of heresy:

i. *bid'ahwajibah* (compulsory)

Learn Arabic grammar to be able to understand the word of Allah and the Prophet (SAW). Understand Quran and al-Sunnah is an obligation to understand what is contained in it. In fact, studying grammar is able to maintain the purity of Islamic jurisprudence as one of *qawaidfiqh* stating:

"وما لا يتم الواجب إلا به فهو واجب"

Meaning: “That without which an obligation cannot be fulfilled is itself an obligation)”

ii. *bid'ahmuharramah* (prohibited)

What is understood and believed by the sects of *Qadariyah*, *Jabariyyah* and *Khawarij*. The ideologies that deviated from Islamic teachings and faith, also categorized as *bid'ahmuharramah*.

iii. *bid'ahmandubah* (commendable)

Establishing school and building for the public use, praying *Tarawih* in congregation in the mosque with an imam. With this we can say that something is beneficial to the public, is categorized as *bid'ahmandubah* (recommended).

iv. *bid'ahmakruhah* (condemnable)

Decorating mosques and sculpt the writing of the Holy Quran are categorized as *bid'ahmakruhah* (condemnable) because the main goal in building a mosque is for worshipping rather showcasing the fine carving. Therefore, it is counted as diverted from its main goal.

v. *bid'ahjaizah* (permissible).

Shaking hands after prayer, enjoying meals or drinks shaving luxurious clothing are considered as *bid'ahjaizah* (neither forbidden nor recommended).

The argument used by Muslim scholars is the view of Umar bin Al-Khattab, who had declared that *tarawih* prayer in congregation in the mosque during Ramadan is the best of heresy.

Conclusion

Based on both views and arguments discussed earlier, there was a dispute in the context of terminological understanding. According to the first view, a good practice cannot be associated with the term heresy. While the second view has detailed out the views on the legal status which depends on the form of the practice. If the practice deviated from Islamic teachings, it still considered as *bid'ahmuhammadiah* (prohibited) or *bid'ahmakruhah* (condemnable). And if the practice contained goodness, it is considered as *bid'ahwajibah* (compulsory), *bid'ahmandubah* (recommended) or *bid'ahjaizah* (permissible).

Therefore, Muslims should not be preoccupied with trivial matters which is a customary practice that often causing a dispute in a society. When it is included under as customary practice, it is certainly vulnerable to any obligations or bans. The custom is also dependent on the understanding of peoples in judging it. If there are good elements in the tradition, it should be continued as long as it does not stray from Islam. In contrary, when there are traditional practices that deviate from Islam, it must be avoided by Muslims.

What is worrying the most is our preoccupation in disputing these issues which causes us to neglect the real focus on heresy. When the Prophet P.b.u.h mentioned about the rules related to sinful deeds, these practices are indeed serious due to its misguiding impacts. Therefore, Muslims should focus clearly in the practices that are deviating from the Islamic law and doctrine which are categorized as *bid'ahmuhammadiah* (sinful). The forms of those practices such as idolatry, superstition and deviant teaching which are often viewed separately in the issue of heresy. While this argument being used by al-Qaradawi in answering the accusations thrown by the enemies of Islam to illustrate that Islam is a heresy since it came into existence after the pagan age. Al-Qaradawi replied emphatically that in truth, Islam is a monotheistic religion that comes from God, as other religions or traditions that emerged during pagan times as a form of heretical innovation in the Islamic doctrine.

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