

Heretical Innovations from the Perspective of Traditional Muslim Scholars

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Abstract

The term of innovation or heresy (*bid'ah*) was used by the Prophet Muhammad in describing the practices which are contradicted with the true 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 examines several particular events such as extremism in worshipping God and congregational prayer during fasting month that occurred during the times of Prophet Muhammad and the companions that were regarded as the beginning of heretical innovations in the history of Muslim society. These events had provided extensive discussion and remarkable debate 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. The writing of this article uses content analysis approach that refers to several authentic references from both classical and modern literatures. It is found that differentiation of 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 (p.b.u.h). Literally, this term means 'to innovate or start something'. For an 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*, *بيدع*, *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

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provide a new thing, a really the new one that has not been made before. In order to understand the true concept of innovation, the Muslim scholars tried to unravel the meaning of the word *bid'ah* from its technical meaning. This is due to the difference in the meanings and interpretations of the term *bid'ah* according their own understanding.

Literature Review

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

The Seed of Heresy in the Period of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

Seedlings deviation of actual demands of Islamic law has emerged in the time of Prophet (SAW). This fact is based on a hadith in which a group of three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet asking how the Prophet worshipped (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 (SAW) 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 saying illustrates that there were some Prophet Muhammad's companions who attempted to deviate in the matters of worship. However, their efforts had been forbidden by the Prophet (p.b.u.h). This incident shows that the irregularities or deviations in worship are very easily spread if not prevented as soon as possible.

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. In addition of that, he also said that such action is the best heresy.

In the meantime, there was 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 incidents mentioned before, there are evidence that show some companions accepted heresy in worship matters and at the same time, there are some of them who believe that introducing and acting upon a 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 *khilafiyyah* problematic (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 Age of Caliphs Rashidin

The most serious Muslim disunity in the history of Islam is the appointment of 'Ali bin Abi Talib as the fourth caliph of Muslims and at the same time, one of the prophet companions' Mu'awiah bin Abi Sufyan did not allegiance him. This conflict becomes the most terrible bloodshed in the history of Islam. After the death of Ali, there was a Jewish *munafiq* named Abdullah bin Saba'. He created many false traditions of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to raising the dignity of Ali than the other companions. He also pioneered the school of al-Wasayah. 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 teachings which called as *bid'ah mughallazah*. These aberrant teachings could lead ummah into blasphemy and these are the heresy in tauhidic aspects.

Meanwhile at the age of the Umayyad caliphate, there are a man named Ma'bad al-Juhani (80H) which talks about the concept of *al-Qadr* by denying the existence of the names of God. This concept has been tried to be developed by his pupil, Jahm bin Safwan (131H). After that came the school of Mu'tazilah who have spearheaded by Wasil bin 'Ata' (80-131H), this sect has claimed that the Quran is a creature like any other creature and not eternity one. This view is contrary to the belief of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah, who said the Quran was qadim (eternity).

At the time of Imam Ghazali (1058M-1111M), the two school of thought has emerged they are the school of Ifrad (the extremist in faith issues) and the school of Tafriid (look down-trivial in faith). In order to save the crisis of the faith among Muslims, he has authored 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. That's why the Muslims from past to present called him as *Hujjatul Islam*.

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

analyzes several academic writings from some relevant journals and paper work. In addition, this study also used qualitative method through the procedure or interviews with several key informants. This method is very significant to make the research reliable, particularly in exploring the reality based on observation and in the current context phenomenon.

Finding and Discussion

Legal Dispute Against The Term Heresy

In discussing the term of heresy, scholars have differed views on this matter. In summary, there are 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 is Imam Malik (164 H - 241H), al - Shatibi (790 H) and Ibn Taymiyyah (728H). They stick to the word Kullu in the hadith of the Prophet (SAW):

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 is very clear. This shows that all practices that are not based on Islamic law is heresy. Whether the practice is customary, worship or faith context. The scholar of this view believe that there is no such good or bad heresy. The expressions of heresy itself has described the disadvantages of such practice.

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

i. *Bid'ah Jahiliyyah* (ignorant)

Heretics who deviate from the Islamic faith. This illegal heresy bring such practices pagan society.

ii. *Bid'ah Munafiqah* (hypocrisy)

This heresy is calculated astray, this is because this group is a group that is condemned by God. They pretend to Islam, but in fact 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 but considered committing immoral, 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 fast.

iv- *Bid'ah Makruhah* (condemnable)

Heresy prohibited practices, such as the view of Imam Malik condemned the practice of fasting makrooh for 6 days in Shawwal. Although there are many authentic hadith about it, but Imam Malik ijtihaad that fasting is considered makruh for fear that Muslims view such practices is mandatory. In the meantime, the practice of fasting is not a member of the Medina (the inhabitants 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

But there are also among scholars categorize heresy to two conditions, namely, *bid'ah hasanah* and *bid'ah dhalalah*. Among the scholars of the view is Al-Izzu bin Abdul Salam (577 H-660H) and Imam Nawawi (631 H-676 H) and Ibn Jawzi (510H-597H).

In his submission, 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 is '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'ah wajibah* (compulsory), *bid'ah muharramah* (sinful), *bid'ah mandubah* (recommended), *bid'ah makruhah* (condemnable) and *bid'ah jaizah* (neither forbidden nor recommended). Here are the example for each type of heresy:

i. *bid'ah wajibah* (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 *qawaid fiqh* stating:

"وما لا يتم الواجب إلا به فهو واجب"

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

ii. *bid'ah muharramah* (prohibited)

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

iii. *bid'ah mandubah* (recommendable)

Build the school and the building for the public usefulness, 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'ah mandubah* (recommended).

iv. *bid'ah makruhah* (condemnable)

Decorate mosques and sculpt the writing of the Holy Quran. This act categorized as *bid'ah makruhah* (condemnable) because the main goal in building a mosque is for worship rather than to showcase the fine carving. Therefore, it is counted as diverted from its main goal.

v. *bid'ah jaizah* (permissible).

Shaking hands after praying and enjoying meals or drinks. Also considered as *bid'ah jaizah* (neither forbidden nor recommended) is luxurious in clothes.

The arguments often used by Islamic 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 stated before, there was a dispute in the context of terminology only. According to the first view, a good practice is cannot be associated with the term heresy. While the second has detailed the views on the legal status which is depends on the form of the practice. If the practice deviated from Islamic teachings, it still considered as *bid'ah muharramah* (prohibited) or *bid'ah makruhah* (condemnable). And if the practice contained goodness, it is consider as *bid'ah wajibah* (compulsory), *bid'ah mandubah* (recommended) or *bid'ah jaizah* (permissible).

Therefore, Muslims should not be preoccupied with trivial matters which is a customary practice that often be disputed in a society. When it called as customary practice, 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, is should be continued as long as not strayed from Islam. But, when there are traditional practices that deviate from Islam, it must be avoided by Muslims.

What is worrying is our preoccupation in disputing issue makes us neglecting with the real focus on heresy. When the Prophet P.b.u.h mentioned about the ruling related with sinful deeds, these practices must be something serious because of its impact is misguidance. Therefore, Muslims should focus clearly in the practices which are categorized as *bid'ah muharrah* (sinful) that are deviating from the Islamic law and doctrine. 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 that asked by the enemies of Islam to illustrate that Islam is a heresy that came after the pagan age.. Al-Qaradawi replied emphatically that Islam is a monotheistic religion that comes from God, as any form of religion or tradition that emerged during pagan times as a form of heretical innovation in the Islamic doctrine.

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