

Misconceptions of Bidah in Muslim Society

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the phenomenon of misconceptions of bid'ah (innovation) arising in the Muslim society since, the time of al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun (the four righteous Caliphs) until the present. The qualitative method of content analysis on the debates of Muslim scholars in their works and literatures. Most traditional and modern Muslim scholars have mutually agreed that the Prophet (PBUH) considered the practice of bidahas heresy. However, there are some deeds such as performing Tarawih congregational prayers are categorized as bidah hasanah (good innovation) that was happening during the period of Saidina Umar (RA). Such contradiction became the cause of debates and confusion not only among Muslim society but also has been debated among Muslim scholars since long time ago. Some classical scholars such as Imam Shatibi, Imam Shafii, Imam Izzal-Din bin Abd al-Salam got understanding about the term and concept of bidah through the process of ijtihad (personal reasoning) and this has brought various interpretations. Confusion and disagreement on the issue lasted until today when several prominent scholars such as Muhammad al-Ghazali, al-Qaradawi and al-Zuhayli also expressed different views regarding this concept through their works. In Malay archipelago, most scholars then to discuss about bid'ah in the context of customs associated with daily religious rituals such as the practice of tahlil, talqin, recitation of surah Yasin on Friday night and so forth which are contributing to the distortion and deviation of faith, deviant teaching as well as the stagnation of civilizational process. The findings show that there is still confusion and disagreement among Muslim scholars and community about the concept of bidah that consequently, give a big impact on Islamic civilization as a whole.

Key words: Heresy, Islamic faith, bidah, innovation in Islam, Islamic doctrine

INTRODUCTION

The issue of bid'ah and sunnah has been debated a long time ago until at the present days. This continuous debate triggered some conflict, consequently has hindered the Ummah from the civilizational progress. This phenomenon will be proven when the Muslims obsessed with innovative worship, and neglected their main responsibility to develop the world based on devotion in Allah (Haj, 2002).

The Prophet (PBUH) emphasized that the effect of bid'ah is misguidance that is manifested in the distortion of faith. Hence, the previous prominent scholars namely Imam al-Shafii (150H-204H), Malik (164H-241H), al-Shatibi (790 H), Imam Izz al-Din bin Abd al-Salam (577H-660H) and to name a few have tried to explain the real meaning of the concept of bid'ah in Islam as mentioned in their magnificent works such as al-Tisam, Qawa'id al-Ahkam

(Salam, 1999) and many other works.

In facing the rapid progress of the world civilization with the diversity of concepts and methods regarding taqarrub ila Allah (drawing close to Allah), led the contemporary mu'tabar (reliable) scholars have to give their opinions and ijtihad (personal reasoning) regarding the issue of bid'ah that have been argued by Muslims. As a consequence, a few contemporary scholars such as al-Qaradawi, al-Ghazali and al-Zuhayli came to explain about the basic issues that could threaten the purity of the Islamic doctrine. All this, to ensure that Muslims in the era of post-modernism can practise their religious practices in line with the pre-requisites of Syarak (Islamic law).

In the meantime, the current phenomenon indicates that amongst the contemporary scholars are tend to give detailed explanation regarding the issues of adat (local customary practices) which are perceived as ibadat

(religious rituals). This extensive discussion and debate has made the main focus of bid'ah leading to heresy is less discussed to be associated with bid'ah. As a result, most Muslims regard the issue of bid'ah is trivial matter. This is because, the scope of discussion is centered on the initial seeds of bidah rather than its impact as heresy, idolatry and superstition (Adam *et al.*, 2015).

Literature review: There is a lot of discussions related to bid'ah, however, almost are about the issues of adat that become routine in a Muslim daily life. Those customary rituals continuously practised among the members of Muslim society that is seen as acts of ibadat. This has caused confusion in understanding and consequently has developed public perception towards Islamic teachings. Syukri (2008) examines the issues of adat and ibadat as bidah. He has identified ten examples of bidahs follows:

- Shaving hair for new born babies
- Raising both hands when making du'a after the obligatory prayers
- Reciting surah Yasin at every Friday nights
- Wedding ceremony and bridal plain flour
- Practising innovation during the day of Ashura
- Providing feast of deceased person
- Celebrating Miladul-Nabi (the Prophet's birthday)
- Shaking hands after the obligatory prayers
- Reciting wird congregationally after Fajr and Maghrib prayers
- Reading surah Yasin and performing recommendable prayer of Nisf Sha'ban (The mid of the eight month in the Muslim calendar)

Such study shows the concern of religious scholars to examine the practices of innovations from the customary aspects which become routine and eventually as a regular form of religious rituals the Muslim society.

In another study, Basri (1997), identifies several factors that led to the phenomenon of bid'ah has taken place in a Muslim society. Among the factors mentioned are discussion on the issue of religion without fundamental knowledge of Islam. As a consequence, the emergence of ambiguity in distinguishing between bid'ah and *masalih al-mursalah* (public interests).

His opinion is in agreement with the perspective of Qaradawi (1992) on bid'ah. He has outlined several contributing factors of eliminating Sunnah (prophetic traditions) that could nurture innovation. Among those factors is the emergence of religious extremists who are deviating from the teachings of the Sunnah. Normally, this group is excessive in worship or

create new elements in their worship. As a result, the originality of worship become faded and eroded.

Some literatures show the major debate about bidah still centered on the scope of the customs and worship. However, there is also writing that mentions about the classification of bidah into three aspects. Ghazali (1999) has divide bidah into three aspects namely adat, ibadat and aqidah. Similarly, Qaradawi (1995) has categorized it into aspect of *mughallazah* (the heaviest) like heresy in the Shiite faith. But this aspect of faith is less concern to be examined by Muslims today, because it is viewed as separated from the issue of bidah.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

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.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to explore the history of bid'ah, the issue in deviation of Islamic faith and law became the main focus of the prophet in the society of Jahiliyyah (ignorance). Apart from his saying "every innovation is heresy", there are some events explaining his determination to reject the distortion of Islamic law. For an instance, a group of three men visited the houses of the wives of the Prophet asking about the ritual worship of the Prophet (PBUH) and when they were informed about that, they felt that their ritual 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 perform 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, the Prophet (PBUH), came to them by saying that, "are you the same people who said so-and-so? By Allah, Indeed I am the most pious and submissive to Allah amongst; yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep and I also marry women. So, whoever dislikes my Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) is not from me (not one of my followers)".

The above Prophetic saying indicates that there were among companions who attempted to deviate in the

matters of Islamic laws without their consciousness. However, their intentions was forbidden by the Prophet (PBUH). This scenario indicates that the matter of innovation are very easily spread if not being prevented and prohibited.

The issue of bid'ah hasanah arised due to the action of Umar al-Khattab who mentioned that the act of congregational tarawih prayer is the best of bid'ah. Subsequently, the issue of bid'ah became not so rigid. In this issue, the scholars have different points of view. For an instance, Imam Shafi'i gave his ijtihad (personal reasoning) that there are two forms of bidah, namely mamdudah (praiseworthy) and mazmumah (blameworthy). Some other scholars such as al-Shatibi states the matter of bidah is only about the matters of haram (prohibited) and makruh (disapproved). Therefore, any elements of goodness is not considered as bidah.

The root of current problem is the failure of the Malay community to understand the significance in concept of bid'ah. Hence, there is an issue arised whether the certain deeds practiced is regarded as bid'ah hasanah or dalalah. This matter arised because there is a group of Salafiyah which is conservative reform claim that all acts of bid'ah is dalalah or heretical that based on the Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH):

Indeed, every newly-invented matter is an innovation and every innovation is misguidance

In understanding this Hadith, there are scholars of Salafi (predecessor) group such as Abd al-Aziz who claims that celebration of Mawlid al-Rasul is regarded as heretical innovation. This group believes that all forms of innovation in aspects of aqidah, ibadah and adatar considered as bidah dalalah.

This idea has spread in the Malay community and give some implications of disputes in the ways of worship demanded by Islam. Similarly, Asri (2005) views that bid'ah hasanah (good innovation) does not exist, the term used is not accurate, as the result of misunderstanding of evaluating a practice and terminology. He rejected the argument used by certain scholars who believe in the existence of bid'ah hasanah. He noted that this term is used by certain groups to justify some practices of bid'ah among members in the society. This matter has brought confusion about the understanding of certain deeds that have been practiced among them. In the Malay society, some practises such as tahlil, talqin and recital of surah Yasin on Friday night already assimilated into their culture. Such confusion would trigger conflicts among the members of the society.

In order to make this study more reliable, qualitative method was used by interview two key informants who are local religious leaders. The main focus of the interview is

to get a clear understanding about the true concept of innovation that lead to heresy. According Dr. Zulkifly Muda, (personal communication, November 24, 2008), currently he is a Mufti (Islamic legal expert) of Terengganu, bid'ah dalalah (heretic innovation) are the practices that are considered as a part of Islamic law or new practices which are associated with Islam. As an example, the beliefs and practices held by Shiite or any other deviant teachings that exist within the Muslim community. On the other hand, another key informants, Abdul Halim Awang (personal communication, November 18, 2008), a university lecturer at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) and a Former Deputy Mufti of Terengganu, claimed that bid'ah dalalah are the practices which are deviating from the requirements of Islamic legislation such as shirk (idoltry), khurafat (superstition) and heresy. In the view of these two key informants, it is clear that Muslims in this region have misconceptions regarding the true concept of bid'ah that should be focused. Reasonably, the sensitivity of Muslims is about the issue of deviant teaching that are existing in the Muslim community and becomes more challenging. On the contrary, Muslims are tend to debate about a practice that is regarded as khilafiyah (disagreement). This will be contributing to the stagnancy of the Islamic civilization in this region (Firdaus, 2008).

CONCLUSION

In sum, the misconceptions of bid'ah among Muslims still exists. Consequently, this phenomenon led Muslims to debate the question of the form khilafiyah. While the main focus of bid'ah is misguidance without disagreement, due to the Prophet's saying on the status of bid'ah as heresy. Therefore, Muslims are supposedly to discuss the issues of bidah which are contrary to Islamic doctrine and law such as the spread of tradition and culture of Jahiliyyah (ignorance) that was nurtured through khurafat (witch-craft) and tahyul (superstition). Instead of debating the issue of tahlil and talqin that are still contain good elements, even though, never done by the Prophet. Even Muslims have forgotten that the Qur'anic mashaf referring to the physical bound volume of Qur'an is also something new innovated by the companions based on maslahah (public interest) of the Ummah. Therefore, any deeds and practices based on maslahah should be permissible and emphasized as long as compatible with maqasid syariah (objectives of Islamic law).

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