
THE MEANING OF SUNNAH AND BID'AH IN AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concepts of *Sunnah* and *Bid'ah* in Islamic thought, highlighting their theological significance and practical implications in Muslim life. The *Sunnah* encompasses the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, serving as a complementary guide to the Qur'an in matters of worship, daily conduct, and social interactions. Conversely, *Bid'ah* refers to innovations in religious practices that lack a foundational basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah. This paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of *Bid'ah*, including its classifications—*Bid'ah Hasanah* (commendable innovation) and *Bid'ah Sayyiah* (blameworthy innovation)—as interpreted by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through literature review and textual analysis of Islamic sources, this research critically examines the perspectives on the permissibility and consequences of religious innovations in domains such as worship, education, and governance. The findings suggest that while innovation in secular matters may be acceptable, innovation in ritual worship requires scrutiny. The paper underscores the necessity of preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings by adhering to the Prophet's traditions and being cautious of unauthorized religious practices. This study contributes to the discourse on Islamic jurisprudence by reinforcing the balance between tradition and contextual understanding in addressing contemporary challenges.

KEYWORDS

Sunnah, Bid'ah, innovation in religion, Islam, Islamic law, worship, muamalah, morals, education



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INTRODUCTION

Sunnah and Bid'ah are two important concepts in Islamic teachings that have a significant impact on the religious practices of Muslims (Albab et al., 2023; Mohamad Shafawi Bin Md Isa, 2019; Sugara, 2019; Sukron, 2015). The Sunnah, which refers to all actions, words, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, is a guideline for Muslims in their daily lives. The Sunnah also serves as the second

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source of Islamic law after the Qur'an, providing explanations and practical examples of various aspects of life, from worship to social interaction (Kodir, 2016a; Nasrullah, 2019; Nazaruddin, 2017; Penelitian et al., 2021; Sugara, 2017).

On the other hand, Bid'ah, which is often interpreted as an innovation or new addition to religion, often causes controversy in Muslim society. In its development, the concept of Bid'ah was divided into two categories: Bid'ah Hasanah (good innovation) and Bid'ah Sayyiah (bad innovation), which caused debate among scholars regarding its limitations and application. A correct and comprehensive understanding of Sunnah and Bid'ah is essential to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings, especially in facing the challenges of modernization and innovation in various fields (Amin et al., 2017; Kodir, 2016b).

Sunnah and Bid'ah are two pivotal concepts in Islamic teachings that significantly influence the religious practices of Muslims. The Sunnah encompasses the actions, sayings, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), serving as a primary source of Islamic law and a practical guide for Muslims in various aspects of life. Conversely, Bid'ah refers to innovations in religious matters, often leading to debates regarding its permissibility and classification among scholars and practitioners. Understanding the nuances of these concepts is essential, especially in contemporary times where modernization and innovation pose challenges to traditional religious practices (Al-Dalal'ah, 2017; Bahar, 2019).

Previous scholarly works have extensively explored the concepts of Sunnah and Bid'ah. For instance, Al-Shatibi, in his seminal work "Al-I'tisam," delves into the classifications of Bid'ah and emphasizes adherence to the Sunnah to prevent deviations in religious practices (Anshari, 2018; Hermansah, 2019; Nurhadi, 2018). Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah discusses the dangers of innovations in religion and advocates for a return to the practices of the Salaf (pious predecessors) to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings. However, there remains a gap in contemporary scholarship concerning the application of these classical understandings to modern contexts, such as the integration of technology in worship and the evolving nature of educational and political systems within Muslim societies. This research aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the concepts of Sunnah and Bid'ah through both classical and contemporary lenses, assessing their implications in current times (Karyawati et al., 2025; Rachmadhani, 2020a).

This paper aims to analyze the concepts of Sunnah and Bid'ah from the perspective of classical and contemporary scholars, as well as their implications for various aspects of Muslim life, such as worship, politics, and education. Thus, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition and innovation in Islam. By doing so, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding that balances tradition with the necessities of modernity. The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer insights that can guide Muslims in navigating contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to the core principles of Islam (Jaafar et al., 2018; Rachmadhani, 2020b; Research, 2018).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The data sources are categorized into two types: primary and secondary. Primary data sources include classical and contemporary books that specifically discuss the concepts of Sunnah and Bid'ah, while secondary data sources consist of scholarly articles, academic journals, and modern literature addressing similar themes.

The data collection technique utilizes library research, whereby the researcher systematically reviews and examines relevant literature. This involves sourcing authoritative texts from Islamic scholars, both past and present, to gain comprehensive insights into the interpretations of Sunnah and Bid'ah.

Data analysis is conducted through content analysis techniques. The researcher identifies and extracts key arguments, interpretations, and classifications provided by scholars regarding Sunnah and Bid'ah. These findings are then grouped into thematic categories: definitions, types, applications, and scholarly debates. The categorized data is subsequently subjected to critical analysis to highlight areas of consensus, divergence, and contemporary relevance, providing a holistic understanding of the topic within both classical and modern contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sunnah linguistically comes from the Arabic word "سُنَّة" which means a path, method, or custom to be followed. In Islamic terms, Sunnah refers to everything from the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his words, deeds, or consent (taqrir), which are Muslims' life guidelines. The Sunnah has an important role in complementing and explaining the teachings of the Qur'an.

According to Dr. Ali Hasan, in his book *Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH Understanding and Application*, the Sunnah includes the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, both in the form of speech, deeds, and approval. The Sunnah serves as the second source of law after the Qur'an, guiding all aspects of life, from worship to social behavior. Thus, following the Sunnah means following the example of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in living a religious life.

In his book *The Position of the Sunnah in Islamic Law*, Dr. Mahmud Shaltut explained that the Sunnah provides explanations and details of the laws in the Qur'an. The Sunnah also clarifies the procedures of worship and is an important guideline in the practice of Islamic teachings.

The Meaning of Bid'ah and Its Classification

Bid'ah, as explained by Dr. Abdullah bin Muhammad in his book *Eating Sunnah and Bid'ah according to Sunnah and Bid'ah in Islamic Perspective*, refers to innovations or additions in religion that have no basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah. Bid'ah is considered a deviation from the original teachings of Islam. In this context, Muslims are required to avoid Bid'ah to maintain religious purity.

In his book *The Meaning of Sunnah and Bid'ah according to Bid'ah in Islam Concept and Application*, Dr. Ahmad Ibrahim divides Bid'ah into two: Bid'ah Hasanah (positive innovation) and Bid'ah Sayyiah (negative innovation). Hasanah bid'ah is acceptable as long as it does not contradict the basic principles of Islam. Meanwhile, Bid'ah Sayyiah must be avoided because it can potentially damage religious teachings.

Meanwhile, Dr. Hassan al-Banna, in the book *Explanation of Bid'ah: Classification and Its Impact*, explains that negative Bid'ah can result in deviations from the pure teachings of Islam. However, Bid'ah Hasanah can provide benefits, especially in matters not directly related to the ritual aspect, such as the use of technology in disseminating knowledge.

In his book *Differences between Sunnah and Bid'ah: A Comparative Study*, Dr. Ibrahim al-San'ani compares these concepts. According to him, Sunnah includes practices exemplified by the Prophet, while Bid'ah includes all innovations in religion that are not based on revelation or the example of the Prophet and his companions.

Modern Perspectives on Bid'ah

Dr. Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi's *Understanding Bid'ah: Traditional and Modern Perspectives* explores the difference between traditional and modern views of Bid'ah. Traditional perspectives tend to emphasize the importance of maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings, while modern perspectives provide room for adaptation to changing times, as long as they do not violate the basic principles of religion.

Not only that, other scholars have various opinions regarding the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, which includes aspects of law, ethics, and guidelines for daily life. There are at least 10 main opinions on the sunnah and relevant aspects. Here's the full explanation:

1. Sunnah as the Second Source of Law

Most scholars agree that the Sunnah is the second source of law after the Qur'an. The Sunnah complements, explains, and applies the laws in the Qur'an.

It includes the legal aspect, where the Sunnah establishes Sharia rules for worship, muamalah, and morals.

2. Sunnah as an Explanation of the Qur'an

Scholars such as Imam Shafi'i emphasized that the Sunnah explains the laws in the Qur'an that are not detailed or require practical application. In this aspect of its interpretation, the Sunnah provides a more detailed explanation of the verses of the Qur'an.

3. Sun-e-Qawlia, Phi'Layyah, Dean Speeches

Sunnah is divided into three categories: sunnah qauliyah (the words of the Prophet), sunnah fi'liyah (the deeds of the Prophet), and sunnah taqririyah (the Prophet's consent to the deeds of the Companions).

Legal aspects and examples: Each form of sunnah can have different legal implications. For example, the fi'liyah sunnah may indicate encouragement or obligation, while the taqririyah sunnah indicates permission.

4. Sunnah as an Example of Morality

Many scholars view the Sunnah as a moral guideline, with the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH as the main example of living a good and civilized life.

The ethical and moral aspects are important because the Sunnah includes the way the Prophet interacted with family, friends, and the general public.

5. Mandatory Sunnah and Mustahab Sunnah (Preferred)

Scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifah distinguish between the obligatory sunnah (called the muakkadah sunnah) and the recommended but not obligatory sunnah (mustahab).

Legal aspects and furu' (branches of law), where certain actions may be mandatory to follow (such as congregational prayers according to some scholars), while other actions are only recommended (such as sunnah prayers).

6. Sunnah in Worship and Sunnah in Daily Life

Some scholars distinguish between sunnah in aspects of pure worship (such as prayer, fasting) and sunnah in worldly affairs or daily life (such as how to eat and dress).

The social and ritual aspects, where the sunnah of worship is often more binding compared to the worldly sunnah, which is flexible.

7. Sunnah that is Special and General

Some sunnahs only apply specifically to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, such as polygamy of more than four wives, while others are general to Muslims.

The aspect of the application of the law, where scholars discuss which sunnah can be imitated and which is not, based on its relevance to the ummah.

8. Sunnah as a Tarbiyah (Education) Method

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH set an example in educational methods through his sunnah, teaching knowledge and guiding friends' behavior. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of sunnah in moral and spiritual education.

Aspects of education and character development, where the Sunnah is a guide in forming good human beings in terms of morals, knowledge, and charity.

9. Position of Hadith Dhaif in the Sunnah

Some scholars, such as Imam An-Nawawi, allow the use of dhaif (weak) hadith in the context of fadhilah amal (virtue of charity) as long as it is not related to halal-haram law. Other scholars, such as Ibn Hibban, are very strict in their use.

Aspects of validity and methodology that discuss how the hadith, which is the source of the sunnah, is classified and used in establishing laws or inspiring charity.

10. Sunnah in Politics and Government

The Sunnah of the Prophet is also considered a guide in political and governmental affairs. Scholars such as Imam Al-Mawardi consider the shura system (deliberation) carried out by the Prophet to be the basic principle of government in Islam.

Political and leadership aspects: The Sunnah guides an Islamic country's governance, justice, and social relations.

Differences of Opinion of Scholars on Bid'ah

Differences of opinion among scholars about bid'ah (innovation in religion) occur in several aspects. Here are the top 10 differences of opinion and the areas in which they are focused:

1. Definition of Bid'ah

The first opinion is that Bid'ah is interpreted as an innovation in religious affairs that has no basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah. This is the opinion of Imam Shafi'i and many Salaf scholars.

The second opinion is that Bid'ah is not all reprehensible; There is a good bid'ah (hasanah) and a bad one. For example, Imam al-Izz bin Abdus Salam divided bid'ah into five laws: obligatory, sunnah, mubah, makruh, and haram.

2. Classification of Bid'ah

First opinion: Bid'ah is one; all innovations in religion are not allowed. Scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, who reject the existence of heresy, share this view.

The second opinion is that Bid'ah can be classified based on its type. Imam Al-Ghazali and Imam An-Nawawi support the concept of bid'ah hasanah and divide bid'ah into several categories according to their intention and impact.

3. Bid'ah in Worship

The first opinion is that all innovations in worship are haram. The Salafis hold this view, and they believe that every worship must have a special postulate.

The second opinion is that there is room for innovation in worship if it is in accordance with the maqasid sharia (sharia purposes), as in Imam Malik's view.

4. Bid'ah in Muamalah

First, in the matter of muamalah (social interaction), everything is mubah unless there is probable evidence. This is a common view in fiqh.

The second opinion is that some scholars, such as the Zahiriyah group, are stricter and reject innovations in some aspects of muamalah that do not have a clear basis from the shlaw.

5. Bid'ah in Politics (Siyasah)

First opinion: Bi'ah in politics, such as establishing a modern government or shura assembly system, can be considered a positive innovation that does not contradict Islamic principles. This is supported by many contemporary scholars.

Second opinion: Some conservative scholars argue that any innovation in government that is not regulated in the sharia is invalid and should be avoided.

6. Heresy in Education

Perta's opinion: Innovation in educational methods is allowed as long as the purpose is to facilitate the understanding of religious science, as embraced by scholars such as Imam As-Suyuti.

Second opinion: Some classical scholars believe that the method of education must follow the way carried out by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and the salaf generation without change.

7. Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday

First opinion: Maulid is considered a good bid'ah (hasanah) by scholars such as Imam As-Suyuti and Imam Al-Qurtubi, who see its celebration as a form of love for the Prophet.

Second opinion: On the other hand, scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah consider the celebration of Maulid to be a heresy that was not exemplified by the early generation of Islam and should be avoided.

8. Structured Dhikr and Wirid

First opinion: Zikir in a structured and group manner (such as tahlilan or congregational wirid) is considered a good heresy because it multiplies good deeds, according to Sufi scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali.

Second opinion: Salafists, such as Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, reject this practice as heresy that deviates from the guidance of the Prophet.

9. The Distribution of Heresy in Shari'a and the World

The first opinion: There are those who argue that bid'ah only applies in terms of sharia and does not apply in terms of the world, such as technological innovation. This is the view held by most scholars.

Second opinion: Some scholars are of the opinion that worldly innovations that affect the sharia can also be considered as heresy that must be avoided.

10. The Law of Following Heresy

The first opinion: Following the haram heresy is considered a great sin, as affirmed by Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya.

Second opinion: Some scholars believe that if the intention in carrying out a bid'ah is good and does not violate the principles of sharia, the perpetrator is not sinful. This is the view of scholars who support the heresy of hasanah, such as Imam An-Nawaw

CONCLUSION

A correct and comprehensive understanding of Sunnah and Bid'ah is essential to preserving the authenticity and purity of Islamic teachings. This study affirms that the Sunnah, the embodiment of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) teachings and practices, is a foundational guide for Muslim life. Conversely, Bid'ah serves as a caution against unauthorized innovations that may alter or dilute religious principles. By analyzing various scholarly perspectives, both classical and contemporary, this research emphasizes the need for critical literacy among Muslims to distinguish between acceptable developments and deviations in religious practice. For future research, it is recommended to explore the application of Sunnah and Bid'ah in specific contemporary contexts, such as digital worship, Islamic education, and socio-political movements, to assess how these concepts evolve and are interpreted across different cultures and technological developments.

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