

## **Khawārij and the Sunnah of the Prophet: Genealogy of Inkār al-Sunnah in the Early History of Islam**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the Khawārij sect and the Sunnah of the Prophet. The discussion focuses on the genealogy of the Inkār al-Sunnah movement during the early period of Islamic history. Using a literature review method, this article finds that, as an early Islamic sect, the Khawārij were not only a physical rebellion movement but also transformed into an intellectual movement. This article concludes that one of the intellectual products of the Khawārij sect is the dictum "lā ḥukma illā li al-Lāh" ("There is no judgment except for Allah"). Implicit in this phrase is their emphasis on the Qur'an as the primary religious perspective, while having a minor view towards the Sunnah of the Prophet. Therefore, some scholars have referred to the Khawārij as holding an Inkār al-Sunnah perspective. They were labeled Qur'āniyyūn because they viewed religious discourse in a black-and-white manner. The following discussion provides a historical-analytical exploration of the genealogy of the Khawārij sect and their religious views.

**Keywords:** Khawārij, Inkār al-Sunnah, lā ḥukma illā li al-Lāh, Qur'āniyyūn

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the history of Hadith discourse, at least two main themes have always been the focus of study and have never ceased to attract the attention of scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim. First, the status of the authority of Hadith; second, the authenticity of Hadith. The first issue, though considered resolved by the majority of the ummah, following al-Shafi'i (d. 204 AH/767 CE), who successfully established the ontological status of Hadith as a source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an (Amrulloh, 2015), remains a topic of discourse and study for some

groups (Darmalaksana et al., 2017). The second theme appears to be an area of study that never runs dry, as most Hadith discourse, both past and present, revolves around this issue, with expansions here and there.

Although the ontological status of Hadith was considered resolved by al-Shafi'i (d. 204 AH/767 CE), in the discourse of 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth, the term *Inkār al-Sunnah* (Tangngareng, 2016) is found, a pejorative and discursive term indicating that the ontological status of the Hadith has never been fully resolved and has faced challenges since its early period, continuing into the modern era. This discussion represents a bibliographic historical exploration (literature study) and analysis of one of the early Islamic sects, the Khawārij, as an intellectual entity in relation to the Hadith of the Prophet.

Several previous studies on the Khawārij and the Sunnah of the Prophet have been conducted. Some of them have been published in books, while others appear in journal articles. A'zamī (1980: 26-27) and Anam (2002: 90-91) mentioned that the Khawārij rejected Hadith from certain companions, particularly after the event of taḥkīm. However, reports from 'Alī, 'Uthmān, 'Āishah, Abū Hurayrah, Anas b. Mālik, and others were still accepted by the moderate Khawārij. Other studies with similar conclusions have been conducted by Isnaeni (2011), Zarkasih (2012), Ma'ali (2014), Shaliadi (2015), Siroj (2015), and Zakaria (2017).

## **METHOD**

The method used in writing this article is a literature survey. Since the discussion of the Khawārij's thought originates from theological or kalām discussions, several references in this field were chosen for reference, then interconnected with each other. To form a narrative from the perspective of Hadith, these references were linked to sources of Hadith references, making the discussion a conceptual construction about the relationship between the Khawārij and *Inkār al-Sunnah*.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The History of the Emergence of Khawārij**

After the death of the Prophet (11 AH/632 CE), movements and sects emerged that were not present during the Prophet's time. Among them were a group of hypocrites who left Islam (*murtad*) during the time of Abū Bakr (d. 13 AH/634 CE). They were fought by the Prophet's companion, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. During the leadership of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (d. 35 AH/656 CE), *fitnah* (trial) and extraordinary events surfaced, and in every Islamic caliphate period, such occurrences were common. Particularly during the leadership of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE), several sects, factions, and schools of thought emerged, such as *Shī'ah* and Khawārij (Rubini, 2018).

These two sects arose based on their political stance toward the caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE). Those who supported and claimed that only the caliphate of 'Alī was legitimate, and that only 'Alī had the right to hold the caliphate, were called Shī'ah. In contrast, those who held the view that 'Alī was not entitled to be caliph, and who rebelled and were discontent under his leadership, were called the Khawārij sect (Al-Nashshār, Alī Sāmī, 1997: 229).

According to some scholars, the term Khawārij refers to certain characteristics and definitions. According to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'ārī (d. 324 AH/936 CE), the Khawārij were a group of people who turned away from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE). They were called Khawārij because they broke away from 'Alī when he made an important decision in his leadership career (Mohamed Bin Ali, 2016).

Thus, they were people who left 'Alī's camp after he accepted arbitration (taḥkīm) in the Ṣiffīn War between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60 AH/680 CE). Besides Khawārij, other names given to them include Ḥarūriyyah, Ṣarrāḥ, Māriqah, and Muḥakkimah. They accepted these names, except for the term Māriqah, meaning "those who deviate from religion," like an arrow leaving its bow, as mentioned in the following Hadith:

"A group will emerge in this nation – and he did not say from it – whose prayers you would regard as insignificant compared to yours, who recite the Qur'an but it does not go beyond their throats, they will depart from the religion as an arrow leaves the bow, and the archer will look at his arrow, at its tip, and its shaft, and will be in doubt whether any blood had attached to it." (Bukhari & Khan, 1994: 6933)

Imam Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalūsī al-Zahiri (d. 456 AH/1064 CE) argued that the term "khawārij" refers to anyone who resembles those who left and rebelled against 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE) and holds beliefs similar to theirs. According to Ḥazm's own words, anyone who resembles the Khawārij in terms of rejecting arbitration (taḥkīm), declaring major sinners as infidels, advocating rebellion against a defective leader (jūr), believing that major sinners are eternally in hell, and permitting leadership (imāmah) from outside the Quraysh tribe, would be considered a Khawārij. If a Muslim differs on these issues, the person would not be called a Khawārij. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH/1153 CE) argued that the Khawārij are any group or individual who rebels against a leader (imam) who has been unanimously agreed upon as the legitimate leader. Such a person would be regarded as a Khawārij.

According to some scholars, the origins of the Khawārij can be traced back to the time of the Prophet. This claim is based on an incident involving Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah, who rejected the distribution of war spoils by the Prophet during one of the battles. The incident of Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah (d. 38 AH/658 CE) narrated

by the companion Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. 74 AH/693 CE) mentions that when the Prophet was distributing war spoils, a man named Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah al-Tamīmī came forward and said, "Be just, O Messenger of Allah." The Prophet replied, "Woe to him, who will be just if I am not just?" 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 AH/644 CE) said, "Allow me to kill him," but the Prophet replied, "Leave him; he has followers, one of whom will pray and fast, but he will deviate far from the religion like an arrow from its bow..." (Bukhari & Khan, 1994: 6933).

Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah (d. 38 AH/658 CE) is considered the first Khawārij in Islamic history. What is lamentable about this figure is that he was confident in the correctness of his view, and if he had paused for a moment to reflect deeply, he would have realized that no one could act with absolute justice except the Prophet himself (Darmalaksana et al., 2017). Here's the translation of the text into English:

Unfortunately, the followers of Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah were, at the same time, the people responsible for the killing of 'Alī. This view is held by Ibn Hazm (Ibrāhīm Nuṣayr & Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayrah, 1996: 270) and Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH/1153 CE) (Aḥmad Faḥmī Muḥammad, 2007: 155). Other scholars argue that the emergence of the Khawārij began during the rebellion against 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. They were the ones who killed 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (d. 35/656 CE). Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH/1373 CE) refers to those involved in this event as Khawārij (Islam Story, 2008).

Although traces of physical violence were left by the Khawārij, they also left an intellectual or theological legacy in early Islamic history. The bloody event of the assassination of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE) and other events show that the Khawārij had a perennial agenda. This physical rebellion movement eventually required a discursive-theoretical legitimacy, especially theological, and shortly after initiating several physical rebellions, they began to metamorphose into a theological movement.

As mentioned by Fazlur Rahman, the first three centuries of Islam are considered the formative centuries of Islam (Hasbillah, 2013: 127), a time when the singular religious authority held by the Prophet collapsed with his death. Therefore, the early Muslim community was uncertain, to say the least, as the only legacy of the Prophet that was preserved was the Qur'an. As for the Hadith or the Prophet's Sunnah, it had not been well documented at that time, nor had it received as much attention from the early Muslim community as the Qur'an did.

The decision of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to accept arbitration with Mu'āwiyah, even though 'Alī was on the verge of winning the Battle of Ṣiffīn, caused some of his supporters to turn against him, from loyal supporters to rebels and opponents. Even worse, 'Alī's own life was taken by Ibn Muljam, a member of the Khawārij. From the perspective of the Khawārij, 'Alī's decision was wrong because he did not rule by

Allah's law, and as such, they considered him a kafir (disbeliever). The labels of kafir, fāsiq (immoral), and others caused the Khawārij to become a radical and dangerous religious group in early Islamic history. They based everything directly on the Qur'an, without using the Prophet's Sunnah, for instance. For this reason, they were called Qur'āniyyūn, meaning they only relied on the Qur'an as a guide in religious life (Abd al-Razzāq 'Afīfī, 1425: 8).

Sunni historical sources mention that the emergence of the Khawārij sect was due to the first civil war (fitnah) from 35-40 AH in early Islamic society, specifically in the context of the conflict between the fourth caliph, the assassination of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE), and Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60 AH/680 CE), the governor of Syria and a close relative of the previous caliph, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, who was killed. After 'Alī assumed the fourth caliphate, Mu'āwiyah refused to pledge allegiance (bai'ah). They eventually met in the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 657.

Sunni literature states that 'Alī almost won the battle against Mu'āwiyah, but under the advice of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, the representative of Mu'āwiyah, and Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. 42 AH/672 CE), the representative of 'Alī, arbitration was held by raising swords with the Qur'an on them. This arbitration between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah is understood as the beginning of the Khawārij, as they protested the decision in religious terms, stating that there is no law except the law of Allah (Hagemann, 2015: 10).

### **The Khawārij and the Doctrine of *lā ḥukma illā li al-Lāh***

The Qur'an says: "If two parties of believers fight each other, then make peace between them. But if one of them transgresses against the other, then fight the one that transgresses until it returns to the command of Allah" (al-Hujurat [49:9]). For puritanical thinkers, this command from Allah is clear and unambiguous. Human reasoning, with all its imperfections and personal interests, distorts it. For such people, the world is black and white, while for 'Alī, as a leader of a new and growing community, the world must be filled with various nuances and negotiated.

The Khawārij's theology of politics is marked by their refusal to interpret Allah's command through human mediation. The Qur'an cannot be understood through institutional mediation. Even the caliphate, which was held by one of the most prominent Islamic scholars of the time, 'Alī, did not have an official institutional mechanism for how the Qur'an should be interpreted. From the Khawārij's perspective, the Qur'an speaks for itself, and it does so in a very direct and authoritative manner.

This traditional absolutism claims that true religious authority lies exclusively in the eternal ideals of God and cannot be found in human views. Therefore, human

reasoning has no jurisdiction over Allah's law, and interpreting His law is equivalent to violating it. This was the Khawārij view of the Qur'an. 'Alī's action of sending an envoy, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. 42 AH/672 CE), for arbitration, led them to break away from 'Alī. They became known as Khawārij, which means "those who exit." They held that position because, in their view, Allah spoke clearly, and anyone who rejected His command was guilty of bid'ah (innovation).

As noted earlier, the Khawārij initially read the Qur'an and Hadith literally and rejected alternative approaches to tradition. For instance, because racism and tribalism are explicitly forbidden in Islam, all Muslims are equal in the eyes of Allah. The Khawārij embraced this ideal and rejected the Arab custom of elevating certain tribes (or even Arabs in general) above others. They insisted that any Muslim could be a caliph, as long as he was pious and fully subjected to the law of Allah. They also took the Islamic obligation toward Ahl al-Kitāb (People of the Book) very seriously, treating Christians and Jews generously. It was only other Muslims who were subjected to their puritanical views. The Khawārij raided cities and territories, causing Muslims to become victims of persecution. Those who disagreed with them were swiftly executed (McCloud et al., 2013: 82-108).

The main principle of Khawārij belief is the absolute authority of their version of the Qur'an. Any Muslim who steps outside of this authority is no longer protected by Islamic law. Of the three main branches of the Khawārij: Azāriqah, Sufriyyah, and Ibādiyyah, only Ibādiyyah has survived to the modern era. Ibādiyyah represents the more moderate version of the Khawārij (Mamouri, 2016). These Muslims are found mainly in Oman and Zanzibar (Gaiser, 2014) and, to a lesser extent, in Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya (Ghazal, 2010).

As a religious sect, the Khawārij operated within the dictum of *lā ḥukma illā li al-Lāh*. This phrase first appeared when the Khawārij expressed it in response to 'Alī's decision to accept arbitration. They believed that by doing so, 'Alī was not ruling by Allah's law, and hence the phrase emerged. Upon hearing this, 'Alī responded by stating the phrase *ḥaqq yurādu bihā al-bāṭil* (Ghazzal, 2011). Based on this, in the modern era, movements that rely solely on the Qur'an as a reference for religious matters are also termed Qur'āniyyūn.

### **The Khawārij and the Sunnah of the Prophet**

In Sunni tradition, the companions (sahabah) played a crucial role in transmitting the teachings of Islam from the Prophet to the next generation. Without the generation of Sahabah, the ideal teachings originating from the Prophet would never have reached the next generation. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the context of hadith transmission, the companions received extraordinary protection from subsequent generations, such as the dictum that all companions were deemed just (Ismail, 1995: 34). This exceptional reverence for the companions

was not without motive. It was a religious motive, to uphold the banner of Sunnism in later generations. This contrasts with the Shi'ah sect, for example, who do not place high trust in the companions.

Instead of placing the companions in a prestigious position, they popularized the idea that only the imams were ma'sūm (infallible), and they only respected a few companions, a stance that differs from mainstream Sunni beliefs. The Khawārij, much like the Shī'ī, held a specific critique of the companions and viewed them as unworthy of their position.

Instead of placing the companions in a respected position, they popularized the idea that the imams are ma'sūm (infallible), and only a few companions were revered by them, which contrasts with the mainstream Sunni view. The Khawārij, often associated with the Shi'ah, share similarities in their approach to the companions of the Prophet. Al-Ka'bī, in Jabali, summarizes the main teachings of the Khawārij as follows: first, they declared 'Alī and 'Uthmān as unbelievers, as well as the two parties involved in arbitration, participants in the Battle of Jamal, and those who agreed to the arbitration. They also considered those who commit major sins to be unbelievers and emphasized the obligation to oppose unjust rulers (Al-Baghdādī, 1988: 72).

These *takfīr* views dismantle the foundation of the Prophet's Sunnah or Hadith. This is because the authority of the Prophet's companions, who were supposed to carry on and preserve the ideal teachings of prophethood, is nullified and degraded by the doctrine of *takfīr*. The two parties involved in the arbitration represented the majority of the Prophet's companions. Mu'āwiyah, as the governor of Sham and a relative of 'Uthmān, had a large following among the companions, as did 'Alī, whose supporters from Kufa were loyal in fighting against Mu'āwiyah. This also applied to participants in the Battle of Jamal, including great companions like Ṭalḥah, 'Āishah, Zubayr, and others. The minority view of the Khawārij towards the Prophet's companions emerged after the event of *taḥkīm* (arbitration) between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah (A'zamī, 1980; Anam, 2002; Isnaeni, 2011; Zarkasih, 2012; Ma'ali, 2014; Ikrom Shaliadi, 2015; Siroj, 2015; Zakaria, 2017). For this reason, they criticized the 'justice' of the companions. Some viewed the companions as wicked, while the majority of Khawārij declared the companions as unbelievers, and some even considered them as polytheists who should be fought, captured, and not receive *jizyah* (Al-Baghdādī, 1988: 73).

Jabali recorded a list of companions who sided with Mu'āwiyah and 'Alī in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, both those who narrated hadith and those who did not. According to Zain, Jabali researched 1,649 companions of the Prophet. Specifically for the Ṣiffīn tragedy, Jabali listed 185 companions who directly participated in the event, noting their affiliations: 128 were pro-'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE), and 16

of them died in the battle. Meanwhile, Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60 AH/680 CE) was supported by 35 companions (Jabali, 2003).

In Khawārij jurisprudence, they rejected the stoning penalty for a married adulterer, arguing that it is not found in the Qur'an. They enforced the punishment for theft but ignored the caution in the Sunnah and consensus regarding the minimum requirement for theft punishment, including the rule on amputating the thief's hand. Some among them permitted marrying a granddaughter through a son, arguing that the Qur'an does not define this relationship as maḥram, along with other deviant opinions in both the domain of Uṣūl al-Dīn and shari'a law. This was due to their rejection of the Prophet's Sunnah and their belief that religious laws should only be derived from the Qur'an, as mentioned earlier. According to al-Baghdādī, the Khawārij rejected the authority of consensus (ijmā') and the Sunnah of the Prophet, claiming that shari'a law should be derived solely from the Qur'an (Al-Khayrabādī, Muḥammad Abū Layth, 2006).

The minority views of the Khawārij on the Prophet's Sunnah stem from their skepticism towards the companions involved in the fitnah (tribulations). Their denial of the Sunnah is rooted in their disbelief in the companions who were involved in the fitnah. The companions were seen as unable to inherit the prophetic tradition, and as a solution, they turned to the Qur'an as the sole source for their religious teachings, thus earning them the label Qur'āniyyūn. According to al-Barāk, a person is only considered a Khawārij for two reasons: first, to declare someone an unbeliever for committing a sin, and second, to deny the authority and practice of the Prophet's Sunnah (Abdullah bin Ali Basfar, 2007).

In Hasbillah's account, approximately ten companions from the generation of the Prophet's companions were strongly suspected of supporting the Khawārij movement. They are: (1) Zayd b. Ḥiṣn al-Ṭā'i, (2) Hurqus b. Zuhayr al-Sa'dī al-Tamīmī, (3) 'Abdullāh b. Wahb al-Rasibī al-Azdī, (4) Syajarah b. Abī Awfā al-Salamī, (5) 'Abdullāh b. Syajarah al-Salamī, (6) Shurayḥ b. Awfā b. Dhabghah al-'Absī, (7) Nāfi', (8) 'Umayr b. al-Ḥārith, (9) Haram b. 'Amr al-Anṣārī, (10) al-Khirrit b. Rashīd al-Samī al-Najī, (11) Mazīdah b. Jābir al-'Abdī al-Asrī (Hasbillah, 2013: 168-75).

In biographical books, the aforementioned figures are strongly suspected of being supporters of the Khawārij of Nahrawān. Some of them are believed to be companions of the Prophet, while others are debated regarding their status as companions.

From the generation of the Tabi'īn, 26 hadith narrators from the Khawārij are listed, whose narrations are found in Sunni hadith literature. They are: (1) 'Ikrimah, (2) Jābir b. Zayd, (3) Dāwūd b. al-Ḥusayn, (4) 'Imrān b. Dawār Abu al-Awwām, (5) Walīd b. Kathīr, (6) Abu al-Ḥasan al-A'raj, (7) Ṣadaqah b. Yasār, (8)



Thawr b. Zayd al-Dīlī, (9) Ismā'il b. Sumay' al-Ḥanafī, (10) Farwah b. Nawfal al-Ashja'i, (11) Abū al-Ḥasan al-A'raj, (12) Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā, (13) 'Imrān b. Ḥaṭṭhān, (14) Naṣr b. Āṣim al-Laythī, (15) Hājib b. 'Umar Abu Khaysaynah, (16) Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Suhān, (17) Juray b. Kulayb al-Sadūsī, (18) Hayyān al-A'raj, (19) Abu Nūḥ Ṣāliḥ b. Nūḥ al-Dahhān, (20) Rābi' b. Ḥabīb, (21) Abū Amr al-Baṣrī, (22) Subayl b. Azrah bin 'Umayr al-Duba'i, (23) Ṣāliḥ b. Dirhām al-Bahulī, (24) Shabath b. Rib'i, (25) Najdah b. 'Āmir, (26) Nāfi' b. Azraq, (27) 'Abdullāh b. Kawwā' al-Yasykurī, and (28) al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhidī (Hasbillah, 2013: 181-82).

Some unique aspects of this data include the fact that the Khawārij condemned the companions involved in the taḥkīm between 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān as unbelievers, yet they accepted narrations from Ibn 'Abbās, who supported 'Alī during the Battle of Ṣiffīn and even served as a negotiator during the taḥkīm. 'Ikrimah, the main student of Ibn 'Abbās, was acknowledged by Sunni scholars as one of the most profound in tafsir among Ibn 'Abbās' students. Additionally, Khalīl bin Aḥmad al-Farāhidī, an expert in language and hadith, accepted narrations from those he declared as unbelievers, and Sunni hadith scholars likewise accepted his narrations.

## CONCLUSION

What can be inferred from the above description is that Khawārij as an early sect in the history of Islam was born in the milieu of the religious authority of early Islam. At that time, the main source of religion was the Qur'an. The Sunnah of the Prophet or the hadith of the Prophet has not yet become a massive discourse as the main teaching of Islam after the Qur'an. Thus, it is understood that Khawārij's attitude has a minor view of the Sunnah of the Prophet. The basis of their rejection of the Sunnah of the Prophet was their disbelief in the credibility of the Companions who were involved in taḥkīm; the unavailability of religious authority channels during the time of al-khulafā' al-rāsyidūn. The void is a gap for them to consider that the only religious authority is the use of the main source of Islam, the Qur'an. Their version of the Qur'an has resulted in them being seen as scripturalist, radical, rigid and even ahistorical. They do not completely reject the hadith and Sunnah of the Prophet. The proof is that they also continue to narrate the hadith of the Prophet.

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