The Khawarij and Their Rejection of the Sunnah

Robi Permana
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia
E-mail: robipermana1504@gmail.com

Abstract

The rejection of al-Sunnah (Inkar al-Sunnah) is a movement that has been recorded in the history of the development of Hadith. One of the factors that led to the emergence of this movement was the political differences among Muslims, which caused them to split into several sects. Among these sects, those who held views different from the majority of Sunni scholars are referred to in Hadith tradition as *al-mubtadi'* (innovators), and the Khawarij's views are one of the opinions among these sects. This paper aims to discuss the views of the Khawarij, who rejected the Sunnah after the Battle of Siffin, leading to the denial of the Sunnah that had been established. This article employs a literature survey method related to the subject matter discussed. One of the findings is that the Khawarij initially accepted the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a source of law, but after the Battle of Siffin, they rejected the Sunnah, refused arbitration (*tahkim*), and viewed the companions of the Prophet as unreliable (*dhu'afa*). They did not accept the Hadiths narrated by the companions, except for a few, with interpretations that aligned with their beliefs. This article will explain the Khawarij's response to Hadith, the aspects of Hadith they rejected, and the division of their opposition to Hadith.

Keywords: Ideology, Rejection, Group, Khawarij, Sunnah

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic law, and the Sunnah, which serves as its interpretation through the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), provided strength and unity for the early Muslim community. This unity was evident in various aspects of life, including legal, political, and social matters. During this period, there was no division among the companions of the Prophet. This unity stemmed from the fact that the sources of law were the Qur'an and the Sunnah, guiding and directing humanity towards the path of salvation in both this world and the hereafter.

إِنَّ هَـذَا الْقُرْآنَ يِهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا

"Indeed, this Qur'an guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds, that they will have a great reward." (QS. Al-Isra: 9)

The structure of the Qur'an is unique, characterized by its general or global (mujmal) nature. This requires detailed explanation (mubayyan) to clarify the meaning and intent of its verses. Allah (SWT) has assigned this task of explanation to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), through his Hadiths or Sunnah.

As Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhayli stated, "There is no Sunnah without the Qur'an, for the Qur'an cannot be fully applied without considering the Sunnah as its explanation" (Zuhayli, 1986).

With this foundational aspect in mind, the Sunnah holds a strategic position as the second source of Islamic law, following the Qur'an, and it is obligatory for all Muslims to adhere to it.

There is a clear distinction between the Hadith and the Qur'an in terms of wording, transmission, and acceptance. Regarding the Qur'an, it is believed that it was directly compiled by Allah and conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the Angel Jibril, who then passed it on to the Prophet's companions and subsequent generations. Thus, the wording of the Qur'anic verses has remained unchanged since it was first revealed, as it was both memorized and written down by the companions, and transmitted through a continuous chain of narration (*mutawatir*). As such, the authenticity of the Qur'an is *qat'iy al-wurud* (definitive in its transmission).

On the other hand, Hadiths are *zhanni al-wurud* (probabilistic in their transmission), as they are not always word-for-word the same as what the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, except in the case of *mutawatir* Hadiths. Some Hadiths are narrated in meaning rather than exact wording.

Despite the fact that the authenticity of Hadiths is generally *zhanni al-wurud* (probabilistic), except for the *mutawatir* Hadiths, this does not mean that they should be doubted. Many factors support the authenticity of Hadiths, and it is unlikely that the scholars would agree to fabricate a narration.

Throughout Islamic history, Hadiths, as the second source of law after the Qur'an, have faced challenges. Some individuals have forged Hadiths, while others have rejected the authority of the Sunnah as a source of Islamic law—either completely, partially, or in smaller parts. The group that denies the Sunnah is known as *Inkar al-Sunnah*.

Among the factors leading to the rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*) are disputes within the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), or ideological influences stemming from certain schools of thought or extreme ideologies that only accept the apparent (literal) meaning of the Qur'anic verses, believing that Hadiths are merely the sayings or actions of the Prophet (PBUH) that can be contradicted, especially since the Prophet is no longer alive.

The rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*) emerged as a response to the political and social divisions within the Muslim community after the passing of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These divisions led to the formation of various sects

and schools of thought, each interpreting the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet in their own way. In the case of the Khawarij, one of the earliest sects, their rejection of the Sunnah became a key feature of their ideology. They believed that only the Qur'an was sufficient for guidance, and they dismissed the authority of the Sunnah, especially after the events of the Battle of Siffin and the arbitration that followed.

The Khawarij's stance on rejecting the Sunnah was based on their belief that human interpretation of divine law could lead to deviation. They argued that the Sunnah, as transmitted through Hadiths, could be influenced by human bias and error. They claimed that the Qur'an alone was the pure and unaltered word of Allah, and that any human involvement in interpreting it was potentially corrupt. This view was not limited to the Khawarij; other groups, influenced by political or ideological motivations, also began to challenge the authority of the Sunnah, citing the argument that the Prophet's sayings and actions were not infallible and could be subject to revision or negation.

This ideological movement toward rejecting the Sunnah raised significant concerns among the majority of Islamic scholars, who held that the Sunnah, as the authentic explanation of the Qur'an, was indispensable for understanding and practicing the faith. Scholars like Imam Malik, Imam Abu Hanifa, and Imam al-Shafi'i emphasized that the Sunnah was an essential part of the revealed law and could not be disregarded without distorting the true message of Islam. Their argument was that the Qur'an, although complete in its guidance, required the Sunnah to explain, elaborate, and contextualize its verses, particularly those that were general or ambiguous in nature.

The issue of Sunnah rejection also brought to light deeper questions about the authority of the Prophet's companions, particularly the role of the *sahabah* (companions) in preserving and transmitting the teachings of Islam. The Khawarij, along with other sects that rejected the Sunnah, often held negative views of the companions, questioning their integrity and reliability. This view led to further fragmentation within the Muslim community, as different groups began to reinterpret the events surrounding the Prophet's life and the early history of Islam to suit their own beliefs.

It is important to note that the rejection of the Sunnah did not stem from a lack of faith in the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the messenger of Allah, but rather from a radical reinterpretation of the sources of Islamic law. While the Khawarij and other such groups acknowledged the Prophet's role in conveying the Qur'an, they denied the necessity of his Sunnah as a binding source of law. This created a rift within the Muslim community, as the majority of scholars and believers maintained that both the Qur'an and the Sunnah were essential for a complete understanding of Islam and its legal framework.

As history progressed, the rejection of the Sunnah continued to be a point of contention in Islamic thought. Some groups, influenced by various political, social, or intellectual movements, maintained their stance against the Sunnah, while the majority of the Muslim ummah continued to uphold it as a core component of their

faith. The struggle over the authority of the Sunnah became a defining issue in the development of Islamic jurisprudence and theology, shaping the course of Islamic intellectual history and the formation of Islamic sects.

In conclusion, the rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*) is a complex and multifaceted issue within Islamic history. While it arose from specific historical circumstances and ideological conflicts, its impact on the Muslim community remains significant. Understanding the reasons behind this rejection and the subsequent debates on the role of the Sunnah is crucial for gaining insight into the diversity of thought within Islam and the challenges faced by the early Muslim ummah in maintaining unity and coherence in their understanding of divine law. The ongoing discussion of this issue continues to shape contemporary Islamic discourse, highlighting the importance of both the Qur'an and the Sunnah as foundational sources of Islamic teachings and practice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method, specifically a literature review, to examine the rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*) by the Khawarij and other similar movements in early Islamic history. The literature review method is selected due to its appropriateness for exploring historical texts, religious documents, and scholarly works that address the doctrinal and ideological debates surrounding the status of the Sunnah in Islamic law and theology. By reviewing primary and secondary sources, this research aims to shed light on the various perspectives that have shaped the rejection of the Sunnah and its implications for Islamic thought.

The first phase of the research involved the identification and collection of relevant sources from classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship. These sources include primary Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an, Hadith collections, and works of early Islamic scholars, as well as secondary sources like academic journal articles, books, and monographs that analyze the historical, theological, and jurisprudential aspects of the rejection of the Sunnah. Key works on the history of the Khawarij, the development of Islamic jurisprudence, and the role of Hadith in Islamic law were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

A key component of the literature review is the analysis of historical accounts of the Khawarij, particularly their ideological development and the political context in which they emerged. The period following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), especially the events surrounding the Battle of Siffin and the subsequent arbitration, is crucial for understanding the Khawarij's rejection of the Sunnah. Therefore, primary sources, such as early Islamic historical works by authors like Ibn Abi Shaiba, al-Tabari, and Ibn Hajar, were consulted to trace the evolution of the Khawarij's beliefs and practices.

The second phase of the method involves a detailed examination of the theological and jurisprudential debates about the role of the Sunnah in Islam. This includes reviewing classical and contemporary scholarly opinions regarding the relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Important works by renowned Islamic scholars, such as Imam al-Shafi'i, Imam Malik, and Ibn Taymiyyah, are analyzed to understand their arguments for the indispensability of the Sunnah as an interpretive and legislative source in Islamic law.

In addition, the research investigates the arguments made by the Khawarij and other groups who denied the authority of the Sunnah. These groups often claimed that the Qur'an was sufficient for guiding the Muslim community, and that the Sunnah could be a source of error or division. By analyzing texts from these groups, the study explores their criticisms of the Sunnah and how they justified their positions based on political, theological, or ideological motives.

The method also includes the examination of the doctrinal differences within early Islamic sects that contributed to the rejection of the Sunnah. This involves exploring the historical context of early Islamic sectarianism, including the political struggles between the supporters of Ali ibn Abi Talib and the opposing factions, which led to the formation of the Khawarij and other groups. These sectarian divides were instrumental in shaping the theological arguments about the role of the Sunnah in Islamic practice.

A comparative approach is used to evaluate the differences between the Khawarij's stance on the Sunnah and that of the mainstream Sunni scholars. By comparing the positions of the Khawarij with those of Sunni scholars, the study highlights the theological, legal, and doctrinal distinctions that marked the division between the two groups. This comparison also helps to illuminate the broader impact of the Khawarij's rejection of the Sunnah on the development of Islamic jurisprudence and theology.

The literature review also considers the modern implications of the rejection of the Sunnah in contemporary Islamic thought. It analyzes how certain modern movements and ideologies have revived or continued the ideas of the Khawarij in their approach to Islamic law. Contemporary discussions on the relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as the authority of the Sunnah, are examined to understand how the rejection of the Sunnah continues to shape Islamic discourse in the present day.

To complement the analysis of textual sources, the research also incorporates a critical examination of the methodologies used by scholars of Hadith and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). This includes a discussion on the science of Hadith authentication and the criteria used by scholars to evaluate the reliability of narrations. Understanding how Hadiths were transmitted, recorded, and scrutinized by early Islamic scholars is essential for assessing the legitimacy of the rejection of the Sunnah by certain groups.

The method concludes with a synthesis of the findings, drawing connections between the historical rejection of the Sunnah by the Khawarij and its impact on

Islamic legal and theological frameworks. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the rejection of the Sunnah has influenced the development of Islamic thought and practice, highlighting the importance of both the Qur'an and the Sunnah as foundational sources in Islam. Through this literature-based approach, the research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the relationship between revelation and human interpretation in the Islamic tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the Rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*)

The term *Inkar al-Sunnah* consists of two words: *Inkar* and *Sunnah*. The word *Inkar* comes from the Arabic root أنكر ينكر إنكارا, which has several meanings, including: "to deny or reject, both in speech and in the heart; to be ignorant of something or unaware of it" (opposite of *al-irfan*, knowledge) and "to reject something that is not embedded in the heart" (Ibrahim Anis, 1972:526-527). For example, the Qur'an says:

مُنْكِرُونَ   لَهُ   وَهُمْ   فَعَرَفَهُمْ   عَلَيْهِ   فَدَخَلُوا

"Then they entered upon him, and he recognized them, but they did not recognize him." (QS. Yusuf [12]: 58)

And in another verse:

الْكَافِرُونَ   وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ   يَنكُرُونَهَا   ثُمَّ   اللَّهِ   نِعْمَةَ   يَعْرِفُونَ

"They recognize the favor of Allah, but then deny it, and most of them are disbelievers." (QS. An-Nahl [16]: 83)

Al-Askari distinguishes between *al-Inkar* (rejection) and *al-Juhd* (denial). *Al-Inkar* refers to rejecting something hidden and without knowledge, whereas *al-Juhd* refers to rejecting something clear and with knowledge (*Abi Hilal Al-Askari*). Thus, those who reject the Sunnah as evidence may belong to a group that lacks adequate knowledge of Hadith sciences.

From these meanings, it can be concluded that *Inkar* etymologically means the rejection and non-acceptance of something, whether outwardly or inwardly, verbally or in the heart. This rejection is often driven by ignorance or other factors, such as pride, arrogance, or firm beliefs. The term *Sunnah*, as explained earlier, refers to the actions, sayings, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that serve as a guiding source for Muslim practice.

People who reject the Sunnah as a source of religious guidance are generally considered innovators (*ahl al-bid'ah*) and followers of their desires. These individuals, such as the Khawarij, Mu'tazila, and others, reject the Sunnah because they follow their desires rather than the truth derived from reason and knowledge. They are labeled as *ahl al-bid'ah* (people of innovation) because they derive rulings and defend their beliefs based on personal desires. In contrast, *Ahl al-Sunnah* (the people of the Sunnah) defend and apply the Sunnah in accordance with authentic interpretations.

There are several simple definitions of *Inkar al-Sunnah*, which include:

1. The belief that emerged within certain Islamic circles, rejecting Hadith or the Sunnah as the second primary source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an (Tim IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 1992:428-429).
2. A belief held by a minority of Muslims who reject the legal authority of authentic Sunnah, whether practical Sunnah or the formally codified Sunnah as outlined by scholars. This rejection may apply to either all Hadiths, including *mutawatir* (mass-transmitted) and *ahad* (single-transmitted) narrations, or just some of them, without any justifiable reason (Abdul Majid Khon, 2004:58).

The second definition is more rational, encompassing various forms of rejection of the Sunnah that have appeared among certain segments of the Muslim community, especially in more recent times. The first definition, however, is less plausible, as no Muslim could truly deny the Sunnah as a foundational source of Islamic law.

From these definitions, it can be understood that *Inkar al-Sunnah* refers to a belief or opinion held by an individual or a group, rather than a movement or school of thought. This belief may accept the Sunnah in some forms, such as its role in history, culture, or tradition, but rejects it as a binding legal source. The Sunnah rejected in this context refers to the *authentic* Sunnah, whether practical (amaliyyah) or formal (the Sunnah codified by scholars), which includes the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Those who reject the Sunnah may do so in varying degrees. Some may reject the entire Sunnah—both *mutawatir* and *ahad* Hadiths—while others may reject only *ahad* Hadiths or some specific narrations. However, the rejection of the Sunnah is not generally based on strong, logical reasons. If an individual's rejection is based on sound reasoning, such as when a *mujtahid* (Islamic scholar of jurisprudence) finds a stronger evidence than the Hadith he possesses, or when a Hadith has not reached him, or if the Hadith is deemed weak (*da'if*), it would not be considered *Inkar al-Sunnah* (Abdul Muhdi, 1998:323-328). Therefore, genuine scholarly reasoning that aligns with Islamic legal principles is not regarded as rejection of the Sunnah.

History of the Rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*)

The roots of the rejection of the Sunnah (*Inkar al-Sunnah*) can actually be traced back to the emergence of the early Islamic factions mentioned earlier. However, at that time, these groups were not identified specifically as movements of *Inkar al-Sunnah*, as this was not the primary characteristic of their deviance. Yet, these very factions were the forerunners of the movements that would later specifically reject the Sunnah, and many of them exhibited elements of Sunnah rejection, though not entirely, but partially. The Khawarij, for instance, emphasized the return to the Qur'an alone and even demanded that people follow the Qur'an. However, they deviated from the Sunnah and the mainstream Muslim community, specifically rejecting the practices followed by the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) (*Majmu' Fatawa Ibn Taymiyyah*, XIII/208).

The Khawarij: Pioneers of the Rejection of the Sunnah

The term *Khawarij* is the plural of *kharij*, which comes from the root word "kharaja," meaning "to exit" or "to leave." The Khawarij were those who "walked out" of allegiance to the legitimate leader, or Imam, and demonstrated their rejection by forming their own exclusive group. In Islamic jurisprudence, the Khawarij are often referred to as *al-Baghi* or "the rebels." The Khawarij originally emerged from the ranks of Ali bin Abi Talib's supporters, but they disagreed with Ali's decision to engage in arbitration (*tahkim*) to settle the dispute with Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan. The Khawarij believed that only the Qur'an should serve as a guide, and they rejected any compromise, including arbitration, as an attempt to resolve political conflicts.

The Khawarij were initially a political faction, but over time they became deeply involved in theological debates. Their primary disagreement with Ali arose when he agreed to arbitration following the battle of Siffin between Ali's army and Mu'awiyah's forces. This conflict had begun when Ali, the legitimate caliph, sought to replace the governors appointed by Caliph Uthman. Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria, refused to comply, leading to a confrontation between the two. After a battle in which Ali's forces were victorious, Mu'awiyah sought peace through arbitration, which was agreed upon by both parties. However, the Khawarij rejected the arbitration process, viewing it as an unacceptable compromise. They believed that no one but God had the right to rule, and thus, they considered both Ali and Mu'awiyah as deviants.

The arbitration led to the appointment of negotiators—Amr ibn al-As for Mu'awiyah and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari for Ali. However, the negotiations were not productive, and ultimately, both sides declared their opposition to the arbitration decision. The Khawarij viewed this as a betrayal, and they declared that both Ali and Mu'awiyah had fallen into error. This theological stance marked the beginning of the Khawarij's rejection of the Sunnah and their firm belief in a literal, uncompromising interpretation of the Qur'an, which led them to label anyone who disagreed with their view, including prominent figures like Ali and Mu'awiyah, as kafir (disbelievers).

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The Khawarij's Ideology and Development

The Khawarij's ideological foundation was based on the belief that only God had the authority to rule, and they rejected the legitimacy of any human-based arbitration or compromise. This position was reinforced by their interpretation of the Qur'anic verse in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:44), which states: **"And whoever does not rule by what Allah has revealed—then it is they who are the disbelievers."** From this verse, the Khawarij concluded that Ali, Mu'awiyah, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, and Amr ibn al-As were all disbelievers for participating in arbitration, which they believed was contrary to God's law. Consequently, the Khawarij viewed all those who participated in the arbitration process as apostates.

Over time, the Khawarij's radical stance expanded to include broader theological and social views. They began to consider anyone who committed a major sin as an apostate, and their movement became more militant and uncompromising. The Khawarij's extreme interpretation of Islam led them to reject both the leadership of Ali and the traditional practices of the mainstream Muslim community, thereby setting the stage for internal conflict and division within Islam.

The Khawarij's Role in the Splitting of Islam

The emergence of the Khawarij contributed significantly to the fragmentation of the early Muslim community. Their rejection of arbitration and their uncompromising stance on the Qur'an as the sole authority created a rift among the supporters of Ali. Some of Ali's followers supported him despite the arbitration, while others criticized him for agreeing to it. The conflict eventually led to the formation of multiple factions, with some viewing Ali as a legitimate leader and others considering him to have deviated from the true path of Islam.

The Khawarij, driven by their extreme ideology, took up arms against Ali and his supporters. They became known for their radicalism, violence, and refusal to compromise on religious matters. This militant stance made them one of the most dangerous factions within the early Islamic community. The Khawarij's uncompromising nature and their tendency to declare others as kafir (disbelievers) created an environment of intense political and theological instability within the Muslim world.

The Khawarij's End and Legacy

The Khawarij's violent and radical approach eventually led to their downfall. They were defeated by Ali's forces in the battle of Nahrawan in 658 CE, and their movement splintered into smaller factions. However, their legacy lived on in the

form of later radical movements that also rejected the Sunnah and emphasized a strict, literal interpretation of the Qur'an. The Khawarij's rejection of the Sunnah and their radical ideology would continue to influence various Islamic movements throughout history.

Their movement is often cited as an early example of how the rejection of the Sunnah and the uncompromising application of religious principles can lead to division and violence within the Muslim community. The Khawarij's refusal to accept any interpretation of Islam other than their own created a model for future extremist groups who would also reject mainstream Islamic traditions and teachings.

The Khawarij represent one of the earliest examples of the rejection of the Sunnah, a stance that has continued to manifest itself in various forms throughout Islamic history. Their emergence during the time of Ali bin Abi Talib and their uncompromising ideology set the stage for the theological and political fragmentation that would later affect the Muslim world. The Khawarij's radicalism and their rejection of the Sunnah as a guiding principle for the Muslim community highlight the dangers of extremism and the importance of upholding the Sunnah as a core source of Islamic law and guidance.

The Khawarij's denial of the Sunnah

1. Tahkim (Arbitration)

The Khawarij's rejection of *tahkim* (arbitration) is one of the primary manifestations of their deviance from the Sunnah. During the conflict between Ali bin Abi Talib and Mu'awiyah, both parties agreed to arbitration as a means of resolving their dispute. However, the Khawarij, who were initially part of Ali's army, vehemently rejected the notion of arbitration. They believed that no human being, other than Allah, had the right to decide matters of governance or settle disputes, and thus, they saw the arbitration as a violation of divine sovereignty. In their view, the decision to resort to arbitration undermined the authority of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This refusal to accept arbitration as a valid method of dispute resolution reflects their rigid interpretation of the Islamic legal system, where only divine commands are deemed acceptable.

The Khawarij's stance on *tahkim* not only deviated from the Sunnah but also led them to reject any form of compromise within the Islamic community. They believed that both Ali and Mu'awiyah were wrong for accepting arbitration, and consequently, they labeled them as deviants. This extreme position effectively alienated them from the broader Muslim community, leading to their separation and the formation of their own faction. The Khawarij's rejection of arbitration highlights their radical interpretation of Islam, where any form of negotiation or compromise is seen as a betrayal of God's laws and a deviation from the established practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

2. Deviation from the Legitimate Imam

The Khawarij's rejection of the legitimate imam (leader) further exemplifies their departure from the Sunnah. They initially aligned themselves with Ali, the rightful caliph, but their refusal to accept the arbitration process created a rift between them and Ali's followers. For the Khawarij, the refusal to adhere to God's law through the Qur'an and the Sunnah justified their rejection of Ali's leadership. They believed that any leader who did not rule solely according to divine commands—without compromise—was unworthy of leadership. Thus, their rejection of Ali as the rightful leader of the Muslim community ultimately led them to rebel against him and declare him an apostate.

By rejecting Ali, the Khawarij not only distanced themselves from the rightful caliph but also undermined the principle of leadership in Islam. The Sunnah, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the early caliphs, upheld the concept of a legitimate leader, who must be obeyed as long as they do not command disobedience to God's laws. The Khawarij, however, believed that any deviation from their strict interpretation of Islamic law was grounds for declaring a leader illegitimate. This rigid stance further fragmented the Muslim community, leading to a dangerous precedent of rejecting leaders who did not meet their ideological purity standards.

3. Ghuluw (Exaggeration or Extremism)

The Khawarij were notorious for their ghuluw (extremism) in their interpretation of Islam. They took the concept of purity to an extreme, believing that anyone who did not adhere to their strict interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah was a disbeliever. This led them to adopt an all-or-nothing approach, where moderation and balance, essential aspects of Islamic teachings, were discarded in favor of rigid and uncompromising beliefs. The Khawarij were quick to declare other Muslims as corrupt or apostates for minor deviations from their views, thus creating a climate of fear and division within the Muslim community.

Their ghuluw also led them to take extreme actions, including violence against those they deemed as enemies of Islam. They justified these acts of violence by claiming that they were purging the community of those who had strayed from what they believed was the true path of Islam. This form of extremism not only contradicted the Sunnah's emphasis on mercy and justice but also created a dangerous precedent for subsequent radical movements. The Khawarij's aggressive approach to enforcing their interpretation of Islam revealed their lack of tolerance for differences, and it highlighted the destructive potential of religious extremism when divorced from the broader principles of Islamic ethics.

4. Literalist Interpretation of the Qur'an

The Khawarij were known for their *zhohiri* (literalist) approach to the Qur'an, which meant they interpreted the Qur'anic text strictly by its apparent meaning, without considering the context or relying on the explanations provided by the Sunnah. This literalist stance led them to misunderstand and misapply many verses, as they ignored the rich tradition of hadith that provided deeper insights into the meanings of the Qur'anic verses. For example, they would interpret verses about divine sovereignty or justice in ways that suited their narrow understanding, without recognizing the Prophet's (PBUH) guidance and clarifications on these matters.

This rigid, surface-level interpretation of the Qur'an by the Khawarij led them to make erroneous theological conclusions and unjustly label other Muslims as disbelievers. Their refusal to consider the hadith or the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) resulted in a distorted view of Islam, which lacked the nuance and depth provided by the Sunnah. By disregarding the Prophet's teachings, they not only contradicted the Sunnah but also disregarded the scholarly consensus on the interpretation of the Qur'an, which has always emphasized the importance of understanding the text in light of prophetic guidance.

5. Viewing Other Muslims as Kafir (Disbelievers)

One of the most harmful aspects of the Khawarij's ideology was their tendency to declare other Muslims as kafir (disbelievers) for perceived theological or political deviations. They viewed anyone who did not adhere to their strict interpretation of Islam as an apostate, including major figures like Ali and Mu'awiyah. This tendency to label fellow Muslims as disbelievers based on disagreements over issues of governance or theological interpretation was a serious violation of the Sunnah, which promotes tolerance and unity within the Muslim ummah. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned against such extreme behavior, emphasizing that only God has the right to judge someone's faith.

By declaring other Muslims as kafir, the Khawarij created division and discord within the Muslim community. This extreme practice, known as *takfir*, not only went against the Sunnah but also led to violence, as it justified the killing of those labeled as non-believers. The Khawarij's use of *takfir* became a dangerous tool for justifying acts of violence against those who did not share their rigid views. This radical ideology of *takfir* would later influence many extremist movements in Islamic history, leading to the fragmentation of the ummah and the justification of unjust violence against fellow Muslims.

6. Murder

The Khawarij's extreme ideology eventually led them to adopt violent tactics, including the killing of those they considered to be deviants. They believed that those who did not follow their interpretation of Islam, including prominent figures like Ali, were deserving of death. This justification for violence was rooted in their rigid understanding of Islamic law and their refusal to compromise on their beliefs. The Khawarij were notorious for their willingness to use force to impose their views on others, and their acts of violence, including the assassination of Ali, demonstrated the dangerous consequences of their extreme beliefs.

The killing of Ali, the rightful caliph, by a member of the Khawarij is perhaps the most infamous act committed by this group. They believed that Ali's acceptance of arbitration made him an apostate, and thus, they saw his assassination as a religious duty. This act of violence, which went against the teachings of the Sunnah, caused further instability within the Muslim community and set a tragic precedent for future extremists who would similarly justify violence in the name of Islam. The Khawarij's resort to violence not only violated the Sunnah's teachings on peace and justice but also created a legacy of radicalism and division that would continue to plague the Muslim world for centuries.

The Khawarij tended to return all matters solely to the Qur'an and even demanded that people follow the Qur'an alone. However, they abandoned the Sunnah and the larger community (i.e., their understanding did not align with that of the Muslim community as guided by the Companions). (See Majmu' Fatawa Ibn Taymiyah XIII/208).

CONCLUSION

The movement of **Inkar al-Sunnah** in Islamic history, particularly with the Khawarij group, represents a rejection of the Sunnah as a source of law equal to the Qur'an. Although initially rooted in political disagreements—particularly during the time of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib—this rejection evolved into a theological and religious stance. The Khawarij, as one of the first groups to deny the authority of the Sunnah, adhered strictly to a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, disregarding the explanations provided by Prophet Muhammad (saw) through his Hadith.

The Khawarij rejected the concept of **Tahkim** (arbitration) used to settle the conflict between Ali and Mu'awiyah. They viewed arbitration as a deviation from the law of Allah, considering it a human decision that was unacceptable, and consequently labeled those involved in the arbitration as kafir. Furthermore, they

also rejected the authority of legitimate Islamic leaders such as Caliph Ali, arguing that only the law of Allah should prevail, without human intervention. This belief led them to **ghuluw** (extremism), a rigid and uncompromising stance that made them unwilling to tolerate any deviation from their own understanding of Islam.

Additionally, the Khawarij often considered fellow Muslims who did not fully adhere to their views as **kafir**. They would readily declare them unbelievers over differences in matters of fiqh or leadership. This takfir attitude justified their **killing** of anyone they perceived as an enemy of their faith, including even members of the Prophet's Companions whom they deemed deviants from their ideological framework.

Overall, the Khawarij movement serves as an example of extremism in early Islamic history, standing in stark contrast to the moderation and wasatiyyah taught by Prophet Muhammad (saw). Their insistence on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, without reference to a broader understanding through the Sunnah, led them to become a sect that was isolated and fragmented, eventually resulting in their internal destruction. Therefore, understanding the history of this group is crucial for recognizing the dangers of extremist interpretations, which can disrupt the unity of the Muslim community and threaten social stability within broader society.

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