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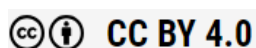
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Bid 'ah in Islamic Tradition: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract: Bida'h (innovation) is one of the main areas of inquiry in Islamic Jurisprudence. Founded in the Prophetic Hadith, a large number of scholarly discourses has been historically undertaken on the concept, types and implications of Bida'h in Islamic jurisprudence. However, the present study is a critical-comparative analysis of the concept of Bid'ah (innovation) in Islamic tradition. Through a rigorous examination of Qur'an, Hadith and classical scholarly interpretations, the research explores the theoretical foundations and juristic discussion on Bid'ah. The study highlights the historical, theological and practical dimensions of Bida'h. This study also incorporates perspectives of the Sufi scholars and the Muhaddithun on Bida'h. Furthermore, the research highlights the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity, illustrating how social evolution and the corresponding scholarly discourse has shaped contemporary understandings of Bid'ah. By evaluating the role of context and legal reasoning (Ijtihad) in determining the legitimacy of new practices, the findings underscore the complexity of religious adaptation within Islamic thought. This study contributes to ongoing academic discussions on the preservation of religious authenticity amid evolving socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Bid'ah, Islamic Tradition, Ijtihad. Modernity

Introduction: Innovation (*Bid'ah*) holds a complex and often debated position within Islamic tradition, referring to the introduction of new practices, beliefs, or interpretations that deviate from established religious norms. Scholars throughout Islamic history have engaged in rigorous discussions on the legitimacy of various forms of innovation, shaping the discourse on what constitutes acceptable change within the faith. Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) has also warned against innovation and clearly affirmed the severity of innovation in the following Hadith:

وَعَنْ جَابِرٍ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ وَخَيْرُ الْهَدْيِ هَدْيُ مُحَمَّدٍ وَشَرُّ الْأُمُورِ مُخْدَعَاتُهَا وَكُلُّ بِدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ»

*'Jabir reported Allah's messenger as saying, "To proceed: The best discourse is God's Book, the best guidance is that given by Muhammad, and the worst things are those which are novelties. Every innovation is error."'*¹.

In the light of the above, this study critically examines the concept of *Bid'ah* in the Islamic tradition. It focuses on the analysis of the Quranic verses and ahadith from which the identification, nature, legal ruling and theological implication of Bi'dah have

been derived. Further, the interpretations and explanations of Bi'dah by prominent scholars, jurists and Sufi mystics has also been undertaken in the current paper. The study explore the classical classifications of *Bid'ah* as proposed by scholars such as Imam Shatibi, Imam Nawawi, and Ibn Taymiyyah, distinguishing between *Bid'ah Hasanah* (commendable innovation) and *Bid'ah Dalalah* (blameworthy innovation). It will also assess the role of Ijtihad (juristic reasoning) in determining the permissibility of new practices, especially in light of societal transformations and technological advancements. Furthermore, the study will highlight the intersection of *Bid'ah* with Islamic legal methodology, theological purity, and cultural adaptations, providing a nuanced understanding of how Islamic jurisprudence navigates modern developments while maintaining adherence to the principles of Shariah.

The present study is significant as it contextualizes these discussions within contemporary Muslim societies, this article provides scholarly insights into the evolving nature of religious practices. The ongoing scholarly discourse on *Bid'ah* reflects the dynamic tension between tradition and adaptation in Islamic thought, emphasizing the need to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable forms of religious innovation. Moreover, the significance of the study also derives from the fact that the severity of *Bid'ah* is evident for it opens a door to distortion of the creed, religious teaching and worship in Islam, As such, this study ultimately emphasizes the delicate balance between tradition and the dynamic needs of the Muslim community.

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative, analytical approach to examine the concept of *Bid'ah* within Islamic tradition. The research is grounded in a comprehensive literature review of primary sources, including the Quran and Hadith, as well as secondary sources comprising classical and contemporary scholarly interpretations. Key texts were selected based on their historical and theological significance, with a particular focus on works by prominent Islamic jurists, theologians, Muhaddithun and Sufi scholars.

Literal and Terminological Meaning of Bid'ah: The term *Bid'ah* (بدعة) is derived from the Arabic root ب د ع which signifies the act of bringing something into existence without any prior example. This concept is evident in the Qurān, where Allah is referred to as *وَالْأَرْضِ السَّمَاوَاتِ بَدِيعُ*, meaning “the Originator of the heavens and the earth”.² In this context, *Badi* highlights Allah's unique power of creation, producing the universe without any precedent.

Linguistically, *Bid'ah* refers to anything that is newly introduced and has no prior example. Classical Arabic dictionaries, such as *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzur, define it as something innovated without a preceding model.³ In this broad linguistic sense, *Bid'ah* can encompass both worldly and religious innovations. It applies to new ideas, practices or technological advancements, whether beneficial or harmful. Thus, not all forms of *Bid'ah* is inherently negative in a linguistic sense; rather, the evaluation depends on context and purpose.⁴

In Islamic jurisprudence, however, *Bid'ah* has a more specific meaning. It refers to religious innovations that lack a foundation in the Qurān, Sunnāh or established principles of Shariah. Thus, while *Bid'ah* in its linguistic sense simply denotes novelty, its technical meaning in Islamic scholarship is more restrictive, focusing on religious innovations and their conformity to Islamic doctrine.

Qurānic Verses on Bid'ah: Being the primary source for Islamic legislations, the Qurān contains numerous verses that not only discuss the concept of Bid'ah but also condemn innovation, highlighting its detrimental effects in religious, worldly and eternal matters. While the Qurān does not explicitly use the term Bid'ah in its technical sense of "blameworthy religious innovation," several verses are consistently cited by classical and contemporary Qurānic exegetes as establishing the foundational principles used to define and condemn the concept. These verses emphasize divine legislative authority, the completeness of revelation, adherence to Prophetic guidance and the prohibition of altering religion based on desire. Understanding these verses through major tafsir works is crucial for grasping the Islamic perspective on Bid'ah.

Allah (SWT) says in the Qurān Surah Maidah, (5:3),

....الْيَوْمَ اكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

".....This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion".

Ibn Kathir interprets this perfection as precluding any need for addition: "This is one of the greatest blessings of Allah upon this Ummah, for He completed their religion for them so they have no need of any other religion or any other prophet besides their Prophet...Therefore, He perfected it for them and completed His favour upon them. Whoever claims the religion is incomplete or requires addition has rejected this verse and rendered its meaning void."⁵.

Wahiduddin Khan explains that here, the words that have been used are not that the religion has been perfected but that it has been completed. Because Allah (SWT) doesn't reveal an imperfect religion, the religion is perfect, but that it is not in any sense incomplete⁶. Maudoodi explains that this ayah declares that all the essential elements of life that comprise of a complete system of thought, practice and civilization have been completed in the religion of Islam. The principles and detailed instructions for the solution of all human problems too have been outlined. Thus, this ayah clarifies that no circumstances would one need to look for guidance to any extraneous source⁷.

Allah says in the Qurān Surah Al-Imran :

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

*"And do not be like those who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them. And they will have a great punishment."*⁸.

Qatadah explains that differences and disputes refer to the actions of the people of innovation. He states that previous communities distorted the meanings of the Torah and the Gospel, introducing innovations and following personal desires, which led to sectarianism. He warns that similarly, Muslims should avoid falling into division by engaging in such innovations. Commenting on this verse, Al-Qurtubi, explained that according to most scholars, this refers to the Jews and Christians, but others have interpreted it as referring to those who introduce innovations within the Muslim community.⁹

Following the above verse, the next verse of the same Surah states:

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكْفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ

"On the Day [some] faces will turn white and [some] faces will turn black, [to them it will be said]: 'Did you disbelieve after your belief? Then taste the punishment for what you used to reject'"¹⁰.

Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, interpreted this verse to mean that the faces of those who followed the Sunnāh will turn white and radiant, while the faces of the innovators will become dark and gloomy¹¹. Al-Qurtubi further commented that those who innovate or alter Allah's religion will be among the black-faced individuals who will be barred from reaching the Prophet's fountain and denied the privilege of drinking from it.¹²

In another verse, Allah states:

وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ تُوَلِّ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمُ سَاءَ مَا يَصِيرُوا

"And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers, We will give him what he has chosen and drive him into Hell, and it is an evil destination."¹³

Imam Ibn Kathir, may Allah have mercy on him, explained that this refers to those who choose path different from the one revealed by the Messenger ﷺ, separating themselves from the Shariah even though the truth had already been made clear to them.¹⁴

Another pivotal verse is Surah al-Hadid states:

ثُمَّ قَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم بِرُسُلِنَا وَقَفَّيْنَا بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنْجِيلَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ رَأْفَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقَّ رِعَايَتِهَا فَآتَيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ

"Then in the footsteps of these 'prophets', We sent Our messengers, and 'after them' We sent Jesus, son of Mary, and granted him the Gospel, and instilled compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. As for monasticism (rahbaniyyah), they made it up—We never ordained it for them—only seeking to please Allah, yet they did not 'even' observe it strictly. So, We rewarded those of them who were faithful. But most of them are rebellious."¹⁵

This verse directly addresses an innovation in religious practice – monasticism – introduced by some followers of Jesus (AS) with good intentions but without divine prescription. Crucially, Allah states, "We did not prescribe it for them." Imam Ibn Kathir explains that this act, though stemming from zeal, constituted an addition to the religion not decreed by Allah, leading to unintended negative consequences. He uses this as a key proof text against introducing practices not sanctioned by revelation, regardless of initial pious intent. Ibn Kathir explains this verse, stating: "This indicates blame for innovation (ibtida') in the religion what Allah did not legislate...even if the intention is good." ¹⁶ Al-Qurtubi similarly emphasizes that this verse demonstrates the prohibition of introducing new forms of worship not legislated by Allah, emphasizing the principle of *tawqifiyyah* (necessity of divine sanction for worship). Based on this verse he states: "This verse is evidence that actions, even if undertaken with good intention and seeking closeness to Allah, are not accepted unless they conform to the

prescribed law (al-shar')...So monasticism (rahbaniyyah) was an innovation they introduced...Allah did not prescribe it for them."¹⁷

Another frequently cited verse is Surah al-Shura :

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ شَرَعُوا لَهُمْ مِّنَ الدِّينِ مَا لَمْ يَأْذَنْ بِهِ اللَّهُ

"Or have they partners [of Allah] who have ordained for them a religion to which Allah has not consented?"¹⁸

This verse powerfully asserts Allah's exclusive right to legislate religious matters. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in his *Mafatih al-Ghayb* states that this verse explicitly forbids establishing religious laws based on human opinion or desire, as this constitutes associating partners with Allah in His sole prerogative of legislation (*shirk fi al-tashri'*). He writes (trans.): "This verse indicates the prohibition of legislation (*al-tashri'*) by other than Allah... Therefore, whoever legislates in the religion based on his opinion and desire (*hawahu*), such that he makes something obligatory or forbidden without a divine text (*nass*)... has indeed taken partners besides Allah in His specific right of Legislation." Any religious innovation (*Bid'ah*), therefore, fundamentally violates this divine sovereignty by introducing man-made elements into worship or belief¹⁹.

These verses, interpreted through the lens of major tafsir works, establish the core Qur'anic basis for the concept of Bid'ah: divine legislative monopoly, the perfection and sufficiency of revelation delivered through the Prophet (SAW), and the prohibition of altering religious practice based on human desire or innovation without scriptural foundation. They form the bedrock upon which the Prophetic condemnations of Bid'ah and the subsequent scholarly discourse are built. Various commentators have provided interpretations of these verses, explaining the consequences of introducing unauthorized practices into religion. These interpretations emphasize the spiritual and societal harms of innovation, warning against its deviation from divine guidance and its negative impact on both this life and the hereafter.

Bid'ah in the Light of Prophetic Traditions: The concept of bid'ah (blameworthy religious innovation) finds its most explicit and frequently cited definitions within the vast corpus of Prophetic hadith. While the Qurān establishes principles of divine legislative authority and the perfection of revelation, the hadith literature provides concrete warnings and frameworks that classical scholars meticulously analyzed to delineate acceptable practice from heretical deviation. Several key hadiths form the bedrock of the Islamic discourse on bid'ah, and their interpretations by major classical scholars reveal the nuances and complexities involved in applying these Prophetic injunctions

Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) condemned *Bid'ah* (innovation) and its proponents in numerous hadiths. The most frequently cited and arguably the most comprehensive hadith on bid'ah is narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah (RA):

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ وَخَيْرُ الْهُدَى هُدَى مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَشَرُّ الْأُمُورِ مُخَدَّنَاتُهَا وَكُلُّ بِدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ".

"The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: '...To proceed: Indeed, the best speech is the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) and the worst of matters are the newly invented ones (*muhdathatuha*), and every innovation (*bid'ah*) is misguidance (*dalalah*).'"²⁰ This hadith emphasizes that Islam is a complete religion, lacking nothing. Any individual who introduces new practices, beliefs or opinions into the religion—without any basis in the Qurān, Sunnāh, or established Islamic principles—engages in an act that is invalid and condemned. Such additions are deemed rejected and accursed. In his monumental commentary *Sharah Sahih Muslim*, Imam Nawawi states this Hadith is "one of the great principles (*jarwami' al-kalim*) of Islam" and a clear warning against innovations and newly invented matters. He emphasizes its generality: "It is a comprehensive statement leaving nothing out; it includes all types of innovations (*bida'*) and declares them all to be misguidance"²¹. This establishes the default position of severe caution against innovation in religious matters.

Closely related is the hadith establishing the principle of rejection. Prophet ﷺ further warned that the worst matters are those that people add to religion on their own, as *bid'ah* leads to misguidance, and every misguidance leads to Hell. The Hadith states:

عَنِ الْعُرَيْضِ بْنِ سَارِيَةَ قَالَ: وَعَظَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَوْعِظَةً وَجَلَّتْ مِنْهَا الْقُلُوبُ وَذَرَفَتْ مِنْهَا الْعُيُونُ فَقُلْنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ كَأَنَّهُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مُودِعٌ فَأَوْصَانَا. قَالَ: "أَوْصِيَكُمْ بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ وَالسَّمْعِ وَالطَّاعَةِ وَإِنْ عَنَدَا حَبَشِيًّا فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ يَعِشْ مِنْكُمْ بَعْدِي فَسَيَرَى اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا فَعَلَيْكُمْ بِسُنَّتِي وَسُنَّةِ الْخُلَفَاءِ الرَّاشِدِينَ الْمُهَدِّدِينَ عَصُوا عَلَيْهَا بِالتَّوَّاجِدِ وَإِلَّا كُنْتُمْ مُخَدَّاتِ الْأُمُورِ فَإِنَّ كُلَّ مُخَدَّاتٍ بِذَعَةٍ وَكُلُّ بِذَعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ".

"On the authority of al-'Irbad ibn Sariyah (RA) who said: The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) delivered an admonition that made our hearts fearful and our eyes tearful. We said: "O Messenger of Allah, it is as if this is a farewell sermon, so advise us." He said: "I counsel you to fear Allah and to hear and obey, even if an Abyssinian slave is put in charge of you. For whoever among you lives after me will see great controversy. So you must adhere to my Sunnāh and the Sunnāh of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Hold fast to it with your molar teeth. And beware of newly invented matters (*muhdathat al-umur*), for every newly invented matter is an innovation (*bid'ah*), and every innovation is misguidance (*dalalah*)."²²

In his work *Iqtida' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, Ibn Taymiyyah, explains that innovations arise when people abandon the Sunnāh of the Prophet and his Companions, seeking closeness to Allah through paths He has not legislated²³. In his seminal work *al-Itisam*, dedicated entirely to the concept of Bid'ah, Imam al-Shatibi analyzes this hadith's context emphasizing that the Prophet ﷺ specifically linked adherence to his Sunnāh and that of the Rashidun Caliphs as the antidote to such deviation. The warning is against innovating in matters of religion, not worldly affairs²⁴.

The Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) strongly warned against the introduction of religious innovations, particularly in the sacred city of Madinah. He stated:

الْمَدِينَةُ حَرَمٌ، مَا بَيْنَ غَائِرٍ إِلَى كَذَا، مَنْ أَخَذَتْ فِيهَا حَدًّا، أَوْ آوَى مُخَدِّعًا، فَعَلَيْهِ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ، لَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهُ صَرْفٌ وَلَا عَدْلٌ

Medina is a sanctuary from the 'Air Mountain to such and such a place, and whoever innovates in it an heresy or commits a sin, or gives shelter to such an innovator in it will

incur the curse of Allah, the angels, and all the people, none of his compulsory or optional good deeds of worship will be accepted.²⁵

Sarfraz Khan Safdar interprets this Hadith as highlighting the contrast between the prophetic model and religious innovations, asserting that any practice deviating from the example set by the Prophet (ﷺ) constitutes misguidance. However, he differentiates between religious and worldly innovations, arguing that while innovations contradicting the Qurān and Sunnāh are unequivocally condemned, technological and societal advancements are not inherently problematic. Furthermore, he emphasizes that Allah does not approve of misguidance, and to counter falsehood, He has sent prophets, revealed scriptures, and provided divine guidance. The Prophet (ﷺ) explicitly warned against honouring or respecting innovators, asserting that their acts of worship remain void until they abandon their innovations.²⁶

While strongly condemning blameworthy innovations, the Sunnāh also provides a principle for evaluating actions, as well as establishing the principle of rejection of Bid'ah:

"عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "مَنْ أَخَذَ فِي أَمْرٍ نَا هَذَا مَا لَيْسَ مِنْهُ فَهُوَ رَدٌّ".

'On the authority of 'Aishah (RA) who said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Whoever introduces into this matter of ours (i.e., Islam) that which is not part of it, it is rejected (radd)."²⁷

This reinforces the rejection of alien elements. However, a companion, Jarir ibn Abdullah, also reported: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Whoever initiates a good practice (*sunnatun hasanatan*) in Islam, he will have its reward and the reward of those who act upon it after him... And whoever initiates an evil practice (*sunnatun sayyi'atan*) in Islam, he will bear its sin and the sin of those who act upon it after him...'"²⁸. This seems to allow for initiating good practices. Classical scholars reconciled these seemingly disparate narrations through careful contextual and categorical analysis. They argued the condemnation in the first set of Hadith refers specifically to innovations in religious matters (*al-umur al-diniyyah*), particularly acts of worship and core beliefs. The praise for initiating a "good practice" (*sunnah hasanah*), however, pertains primarily to secular matters of social good (*al-umur al-dunyawiyyah*) or reviving neglected aspects of the established Sunnāh. Imam al-Nawawī, in his commentary on Sahih Muslim, explains: "The Prophet's saying 'whoever initiates a good practice'... refers to one who revives a Sunnāh that had been abandoned (*munkarah*), or performs an act of charity, kindness, or something similar that has a basis in the shari'ah... It does not mean innovating a ritual act of worship (*bid'ah*), for indeed, *bid'ah* is forbidden in Islam"²⁹. Imam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali emphasizes that the Sunnāh Hasanah praised by the Prophet refers to actions that are already good according to the shari'ah – either reviving a known Sunnāh or initiating a worldly good deed with religious intention that does not create a new ritual form³⁰.

Regarding religious innovations, the Prophet ﷺ warned that not only is the innovator himself responsible for his actions, but anyone who follows or supports that innovation will also share in the punishment without it being reduced for any of them. As stated by Imam Tahavi, the Prophet ﷺ also stated that six types of individuals are cursed by Allah

and all the Prophets, and among them is the one who introduces new things into the religion of Allah.³¹

When innovations emerge in society, it is the duty of scholars to rise and condemn them. According to the Prophet's teachings, if scholars fail to do so, they will be cursed by Allah, the angels, and all of humanity. In another hadith Prophet ﷺ says that showing respect or reverence to an innovator is impermissible, as it is akin to contributing to the corruption of Islam. The introduction of *bid'ah* erodes the respect for the faith and threatens the destruction of Islam by undermining the foundation of the Sunnāh. The Prophet said that when someone brings forth an innovation, they are undermining the good Sunnāh of that nation. No people who introduce an innovation can preserve the excellence of their original Sunnāh.³²

The Hadith literature provides the primary textual foundation for the Islamic condemnation of bid'ah in religious matters. The unequivocal statements linking innovation to misguidance established a powerful normative principle. Classical scholars, however, engaged in sophisticated hermeneutics to define the precise boundaries of blameworthy bid'ah. They distinguished between linguistic novelty and technical religious innovation, emphasized the necessity of a basis in the Qurān, Sunnāh, or consensus, and differentiated between introducing new forms of worship (forbidden) and organizing existing worships or initiating worldly good deeds (potentially praiseworthy)

Legal Definitions of Bid'ah: Following the elaborate study of the concept of Bid'ah in the primary sources, viz. the Qurān and Sunnāh, this section further elucidates the meaning and concept through the legal definitions of Bid'ah given by renowned jurists.

1. **Imam Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi:** Bid 'ah is a deliberately invented religious practice that mimics Shariah teachings but aims to introduce excessive behaviour in worship. It is characterized by the creation of new religious ways without legal basis in the Shariah and resembling religious teachings while actually opposing them.³³
2. **Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani:** He defines Bid 'ah as anything created without precedent, opposing the established Sunnāh. He divides Bid'ah into five categories Viz. obligatory, recommended, permissible, disliked, and forbidden.³⁴
3. **Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali:** He states that Bid 'ah is any practice introduced without a legal basis in Shariah.³⁵
4. **Ibn Taymiyyah:** He views Bid 'ah as any religious practice not prescribed by Allah or His Messenger ﷺ. Such practices deviate from true Islamic teachings.³⁶
5. **Grand Mufti of Hind, Mufti Kifayatullah,** defines *Bid 'ah* (heresy) refers to any practice or belief that lacks a foundation in Shariah, meaning it is neither established by the Qurān nor supported by the Hadith. He further elaborates that such an innovation must not have existed during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, his Companions (*Sahabah*), their successors (*Tabi'un*) or the generation that followed them (*Atba' al-Tabi'in*). Additionally, he emphasizes that *Bid'ah* is characterized by its introduction as a religious obligation or its deliberate omission as a matter of faith.³⁷
6. **Imam Muhammad Alauddin Haskafi:** He defines in the renowned jurisprudential work *Durr al-Mukhtar*, *Bid 'ah* (innovation) is defined as a belief that contradicts what is authentically established from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. However, this

opposition does not stem from deliberate defiance but rather arises from a state of doubt or uncertainty regarding the transmitted teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. Thus, *Bid'ah* encompasses beliefs or practices that diverge from the prophetic tradition, not due to intentional rejection, but due to misconceptions or misinterpretations.³⁸

The Concept of Bid'ah in Fiqh: The concept of *Bid'ah* is fundamentally linked to the introduction of unprecedented practices. The Qurān describes Allah as the sole Originator of the heavens and the earth,³⁹ emphasizing that divine creation is without any prior model. However, it is also observed that no Messenger introduces an entirely new precedent devoid of historical or theological foundation. In Arabic, individuals who devise new methods or introduce unfamiliar practices are termed *mubtadi* (innovator), and beneficial customs (*bida'āt*) that emerge without prior historical examples are similarly categorized as innovations.⁴⁰

In Islamic jurisprudence, the concept of *bid'ah* (innovation) holds significant theological and legal implications. It is generally understood as the introduction of new practices into religion that lack a basis in the Shariah. According to the science of *uṣūl al-dīn* (fundamentals of religion), human actions are classified into three categories: those that are commanded—either obligatory (*wājib*) or recommended (*mandūb*); those that are prohibited—either explicitly forbidden (*ḥarām*) or discouraged (*makrūh*); and those that are permissible (*mubāḥ*), where individuals have the freedom of choice. Every human action falls within these divisions, encompassing what must be done, what must be avoided, and what remains neutral in terms of obligation and prohibition.⁴¹

Among the actions that must be avoided, there are two distinct forms. The first category consists of actions that are intrinsically forbidden due to their direct contradiction with divine legislation. If an action falls under this classification, it is considered a sin (*ma'ṣiyah*), and its perpetrator is deemed sinful (*āṣī*). Such actions can never be classified as permissible, as permissibility and prohibition are mutually exclusive. The second category consists of actions that conflict with the apparent legislative framework of Shariah, particularly in relation to prescribed limits, conditions and specified times of worship. This is where the concept of *bid'ah* arises. In this context, *bid'ah* is defined as an invented practice in religion that seeks to imitate legally sanctioned acts of worship while exceeding the boundaries set by divine law⁴².

Scholars have debated the legitimacy of innovations, leading to different classifications. Imam Shatibi, in his work *Al-I'tisām*, asserts that all religious innovations are deviations from authentic Islamic teachings and should be rejected.⁴³ In contrast, scholars like Imam Nawawi and Ibn Hajar distinguish between commendable (*Bid'ah Hasanah*) and blameworthy (*Bid'ah Dalalah*) innovations.⁴⁴ According to this view, innovations that align with Islamic principles, such as the compilation of the Qurān or the establishment of religious institutions, are beneficial, whereas those that distort Islamic beliefs and rituals are misleading.

Scholars differ on the scope of *Bid'ah*. Some restrict the term to innovations strictly within religious practices, arguing that worldly developments—such as technological advancements, industrial growth, or the founding of new cities—do not fall under *bid'ah*. Others take a broader view, extending the definition of *bid'ah* to include habitual behaviours and customs that resemble religiously mandated acts but are not rooted in

Shariah. To be classified as *bid'ah*, a practice must fulfill the following conditions: it must be an innovation introduced into the domain of religion, distinct from secular advancements; it must lack a foundational precedent in Shariah, meaning it was not sanctioned by the divine lawgiver (Allah or the Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*)) and it must contradict the prescribed framework of Shariah by adding, modifying or altering religious obligations and rituals. It is important to distinguish *bid'ah* from disciplines that facilitate religious understanding, such as grammar, morphology, lexicography, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *uṣūl al-dīn*. While these sciences were developed over time, they do not introduce new religious obligations or rituals. Instead, they serve to enhance comprehension and application of Shariah, making them beneficial rather than innovative in the prohibited sense.⁴⁵

The concept of *bid'ah* in Islam is fundamentally linked to the preservation of religious purity and authenticity. It serves to safeguard against distortions in worship and ensures adherence to divine commandments as conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*). While innovations in worldly matters are generally permissible, religious innovations that lack a foundation in Shariah and seek to alter established religious practices are considered deviations. Therefore, distinguishing between beneficial developments and prohibited innovations is essential in maintaining the integrity of Islamic teachings and practice.

Classification of Bid'ah: Imam Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi categorizes *bid'ah* into two types: *bid'ah haqiqiyyah* (genuine innovation) and *bid'ah idhafiyyah* (additive innovation). According to al-Shatibi, *bid'ah haqiqiyyah* refers to modifications in religious practices that have explicit rulings in the Qurān or Sunnāh, such as altering the prescribed number of prayer units. He considers this form of *bid'ah* particularly severe, as it directly contradicts divine legislation. On the other hand, *bid'ah idhafiyyah* includes practices that may have some basis in religion but involve additions or alterations, such as celebrating *Mawlid* (the Prophet's birthday), performing collective recitations of Surah *Kahf* after *Asr* on Fridays, or reciting Surah *Yasin* while washing the deceased. These practices, though rooted in religious sentiment, lack explicit sanction from Shariah.⁴⁶

Another critical aspect of the discussion on *bid'ah* is its classification into categories such as good (*hasanah*) and evil (*sayyi'ah*), or its division into obligatory, recommended, prohibited, and disliked innovations. Scholars have long debated this framework, with some endorsing the legitimacy of certain innovations based on their benefits, while others reject any form of *bid'ah* outright. Although the early Muslim generations (*Salaf al-Salihīn*) were sincere in their approach to religious innovations, differences persist regarding the validity and implications of these classifications.⁴⁷

Some scholars refrained from labelling certain developments as *bid'ah* by interpreting them within an alternative framework. These developments, such as the codification of grammar, the compilation of jurisprudential rulings, the formal organization of communal *Taraweeh* prayers, and the establishment of educational institutions like *madrasahs*, were considered essential advancements rather than religious innovations. Although these practices did not directly originate from the Qurān or *Hadith*, they were regarded as part of the broader Islamic tradition, reflecting the natural progression of the Muslim community.⁴⁸

However, in later periods, both scholars and rulers misapplied the concept of "good innovation" to justify various practices, some of which were deemed misleading. This misinterpretation led to an overextension of the concept, where numerous newly introduced practices were erroneously equated with *Sunnāh*, thereby obscuring the distinction between *bid'ah* and prophetic tradition. Imam Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi strongly opposed this classification, arguing that there is no legitimate legal evidence supporting the division of *bid'ah* into good and bad. He emphasized that the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ were stringent in rejecting all innovations that lacked direct textual evidence. Numerous jurisprudential texts provide examples demonstrating this strict stance. Jurists did not categorize these practices as "good innovations"; rather, they explicitly discouraged them. For instance, shaking hands is a commendable act reflecting courtesy and good manners. However, jurists disapproved of shaking hands immediately after *Fajr* and *Asr* prayers, considering it an unwarranted addition. Similarly, embracing (*mu'anaqah*) as a gesture of brotherhood is not inherently problematic, but its performance immediately after Eid prayers was prohibited by jurists. Likewise, while providing food is generally praiseworthy, there is a consensus among scholars that it is discouraged for the family of a deceased person to host a communal meal following a death. If the classification of *bid'ah* into good (*hasanah*) and bad (*sayyi'ah*) were valid, such practices would have been accepted as good innovations rather than being prohibited.⁴⁹ In summary, scholars such as Imam al-Shatibi and Mujaddid al-Thani argue that dividing *bid'ah* into good and bad lacks a solid foundation in *Sharī'ah* and ultimately weakens the distinction between *Sunnāh* and innovation. Therefore, all new practices should be carefully examined to ensure they do not alter the fundamental tenets of Islam.⁵⁰

Identifying Bid'ah: According to the assessment of Imam Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi, the above-mentioned second category of actions that must be avoided, and that fulfill all the specified conditions serves as the criterion for identifying *bid'ah*. Prominent scholars such as Imam Al-Shatibi, Imam Malik, Imam Abu Hanifa, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani have significantly contributed to the scholarly discourse on defining and categorizing religious innovations within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence. Some commonly recognized innovations, as discussed by scholars, follow the same pattern of classification and assessment within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence.

Individual acts of worship, such as *Nafil* prayers, should not be performed collectively unless firmly established by tradition. Organizing congregations for non-mandatory prayers is deemed invalid, and specific gatherings, like *Salat al-Raghaib*,⁵¹ are prohibited due to the absence of reliable hadith. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah criticized the use of new forms of collective worship not rooted in the *Sunnāh*.⁵²

The practice of individual supplication after *Nafil* prayers is widely accepted within Islamic tradition; however, when performed collectively, it is often classified as an innovation (*Bid'ah*). Similarly, the audible recitation of phrases such as the *Kalimah Tayyibah* and *Durood* in unison has been subject to scholarly critique, with Abdullah ibn Mas'ud expressing disapproval of such practices.⁵³ In the Indian subcontinent, these traditions have evolved further, with the use of loudspeakers to amplify collective recitations and supplications, a practice that many scholars also regard as *Bid'ah*, given its deviation from the traditional manner in which religious rituals were observed. Assigning fixed times for actions without *Shariah* foundation further leads to

innovation. For instance, Ibn Rushud criticized the regular recitation of the Qurān in mosques after morning prayers as an innovation. Scholars like Imam Shatibi and Imam Malik highlighted other practices, such as collective prayers on the night of Arafah or celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's (*Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) birthday, classifying them as innovations.⁵⁴

Various Forms of *Bid‘ah*:

1. **Innovations in Worship (Ibadah):** Introducing new rituals in worship, such as congregational *Nafl* prayers or *Salat al-Raghaib*, has been criticized by scholars like Imam Al-Shatibi for blurring the distinction between obligatory and non-obligatory practices. Other examples include specifying fixed times for *Tahajjud* or other *Nafl* prayers without prophetic endorsement, introducing structured congregational supplications (*du‘a*) not practiced by the Prophet ﷺ, assigning fixed numbers to *dhikr* without authentic evidence and designating special prayers or fasts for religious occasions.
2. **Innovations in Beliefs (Aqeedah):** Adopting beliefs that lack foundational support in the Qurān or Sunnāh has been a subject of scholarly criticism. This includes theological doctrines introduced by various sects, such as exaggeration in the status of saints (*Awliya*), belief in the infallibility (*‘Ismah*) of religious figures beyond the Prophets, or attributing divine qualities to human beings. Innovations like denying established tenets of faith, misinterpreting divine attributes (*Asma’ wa Sifat*), or introducing speculative theology (*Ilm al-Kalam*) without textual evidence have also been refuted by scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah. These deviations distort the core principles of *Aqeedah* and lead to sectarian divisions within the Muslim community.
3. **Innovations in Social Practices:** Introducing new social or religious celebrations as religious obligations without clear evidence from *Shariah* has been a subject of debate among scholars. Examples include celebrating the Prophet's birthday (*Mawlid*), organizing commemorative ceremonies for saints (*Urs*), or designating specific days for religious gatherings that were not practiced by the Prophet ﷺ or his companions. Other innovations include excessive rituals in marriage, funeral processions involving non-Islamic customs and exaggerated veneration of graves or shrines. Imam Malik strongly opposed commemorations that misrepresent established religious practices, emphasizing adherence to the way of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions.
4. **Innovations in Religious Structures:** Introducing new rituals or customs related to religious practices that lack a foundation in *Shariah* is considered *bid‘ah* by scholars. Examples include reciting the *adhan* at burial sites, organizing collective recitations or supplications that were not prescribed by the Prophet ﷺ, and constructing elaborate mausoleums over graves for veneration. Practices such as lighting candles at tombs, seeking blessings from graves, and assigning specific days for collective prayers for the deceased also fall under this category. Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani and other scholars criticized such innovations, considering them distortions of authentic Islamic teachings.

Excessive emphasis on less significant practices, leading to their mistaken perception as obligatory, is another form of innovation. Scholars have advised abandoning such practices to prevent public confusion. For example:

- While Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifa discouraged fasting in Shawwal to prevent it from being mistakenly associated with Ramadan as an extension of obligatory fasting, Imam Abu Yusuf and Imam Muhammad, two prominent students of Abu Hanifa, held a different view.⁵⁵ They aligned with the majority opinion that fasting in Shawwal is recommended (mustahabb), citing the well-known Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ: "Whoever fasts Ramadan and follows it with six days of Shawwal, it is as if he has fasted for a lifetime."⁵⁶
- The Prophet ﷺ prohibited fasting one or two days before Ramadan to prevent confusion about its obligation, as stated in an authentic Hadith.⁵⁷ If someone deliberately fasts on these days without a habitual practice or valid reason, it may be considered *bid'ah* (innovation), as it introduces an unwarranted addition to worship.
- Repeating *Surah Ikhlas* excessively in a single *rak'ah* was deemed discouraged by Imam Malik, as it gave the impression of undue emphasis.⁵⁸

In modern times, certain mosque practices, like intense supplications immediately after obligatory prayers, have led attendees to believe these are integral to the prayer itself, classifying them as innovations. Similarly, adopting attire, such as specific colours or styles associated with non-Muslim groups, has been labelled as *Bid'ah* by scholars like Imam Al-Shatibi.⁵⁹ Actions attracting suspicion or confusion, especially in interfaith settings, are also considered innovations. For instance, Sunnis fasting on non-Islamic festival days or wearing distinctive attire, like some Sufi groups, diverges from traditional practices and has been criticized. Even gatherings commemorating the martyrdom of Hazrat Hussain {R.A} on *Ashura* or assigning specific prayers for occasions like Fajr and Asr have been discouraged for lacking established precedent.⁶⁰ Scholars like Imam Al-Nawawi and Ibn Taymiyyah have further emphasized that actions introducing unwarranted elements into worship or misrepresenting Islamic tradition as incomplete can lead to *Bidah*.⁶¹ This nuanced understanding ensures that Islamic teachings remain rooted in authentic practice while preventing deviations that distort the essence of the religion.

Who is Heretic and How a Heretic is recognized: Ibn al-Jawzi defines adherents of Ahl al-Sunnāh as those who faithfully follow the teachings and legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) and his successors, including the Companions, the Tābi‘īn, and later scholars who have upheld this tradition consistently. In contrast, he categorizes innovators as individuals who deviate from this established path by introducing novel practices not grounded in the foundational sources of Islamic law. Such innovations, lacking precedent in Shari'ah, are regarded as departures from the mainstream religious framework.⁶²

Ashraf Ali Thanvi outlines a fundamental criterion for identifying innovation (*bid'ah*), stating that any practice lacking textual evidence from the Qurān, Hadith, consensus (*ijmā'*) or analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) but is treated as an integral aspect of religion constitutes innovation. He critiques practices such as the observance of Eid Milad al-Nabi, 'Urs ceremonies and other rituals associated with the twelfth of Rabi'al-Awwal, arguing that since they lack validation from the primary sources of Islam, they fall under the category of *bidah*.⁶³

Thanvi further elaborates on the severity of innovation by drawing an analogy with secular law. He explains that if an individual were to introduce an additional clause to governmental legislation—regardless of its perceived benefit—it would be deemed an offense and subject to legal consequences. Similarly, any unauthorized addition to the divine legislation of Shariah is considered an unlawful innovation. The rationale behind prohibiting bid'ah is that it alters the purity of religious teachings by incorporating extraneous elements, thereby distorting the original framework of Islamic law.⁶⁴

The Sayings of Salaf and Sufi Scholars regarding Bid'ah: The concept of *bid'ah* has historically been met with strong resistance by the Companions of Prophet ﷺ and the scholars of early generations. The severity of their stance stems from the perceived danger that innovation poses to the integrity of Islamic teachings and practices. For instance, Abdullah bin Masud {R.A} emphasized the importance of following established traditions and warned against the creation of innovations. He insisted that adherence to knowledge and wisdom is obligatory, while innovation should be avoided.⁶⁵ Ibn Abbas {R.A} expressed regret that with each passing year, new innovations would be introduced, leading to the gradual erosion of the Sunnāh.⁶⁶ In today's world, where modern and novel things are often more appealing, certain misguided preachers seek to captivate audiences by recounting fabricated tales and legends rather than drawing lessons from the Qurān and Hadith. Unfortunately, people are more drawn to such sensational narratives. Gatherings where the Qurān and Sunnāh are discussed often remain unattended, while events filled with music, dancing, and Qawwalis attract large crowds. Likewise, if a storyteller embellishes false virtues in a melodious voice, the audience eagerly responds, swaying in delight and raising chants, often crossing the boundaries of reverence and faith.

This caution is echoed in the sayings of Muadh bin Jabal {R.A}, who warned that all innovations are a form of misguidance. These sentiments highlight the Salaf's commitment to preserving the purity of religious practices and their opposition to any alteration of established principles. Imam al-Zuhri narrates that he once visited Anas ibn Malik {R.A} in Damascus and found him sitting alone, weeping. When asked about the reason for his sorrow, Anas replied, "I do not recognize anything from what I once knew, except for this prayer, and even that has been altered."⁶⁷ Anas ibn Malik's grief was directed at the emergence of innovations (Bid'ah) in his time. The extent of such deviations during his era was likely minimal compared to the present day. If he were to witness the modern proliferation of innovations, he might perceive Islam as having been fundamentally altered, to the point where it resembles an entirely different religion, shaped more by newly introduced practices than by its original principles.

Imam al-Awza'i advised: "Adhere strictly to the path of the Sunnāh. Follow the footsteps of the Companions—where they halted, you should halt; where they spoke, you should speak; and whatever they refrained from, you should also refrain from. Uphold the religious path of the righteous Salaf, for ultimately, you will be united with them in the Hereafter."⁶⁸ Mujahid ibn Jabr stated, "I am unable to determine which of the two blessings from Allah is greater: the gift of being guided to Islam or the protection from falling into innovations."⁶⁹ Sufyan al-Thawri stated that innovation (Bid'ah) is more beloved to Satan than sin, as a person may repent from sin, but rarely repents from innovation. He also emphasized that no statement holds true unless it is accompanied by action, no word or action is valid unless the intention behind it is sincere, and no word,

action, or intention is truly correct unless it aligns with the Sunnāh of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.⁷⁰

In the same vein, classical Sufi authorities consistently emphasized their allegiance to the Qurān and the Sunnāh of the Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*). They viewed the foundational sources as the immutable bedrock of faith and practice. Al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, a pivotal early figure, famously asserted the necessity of grounding mystical experience in orthodox practice: "All our paths are blocked except that which follows the trace of the Messenger".⁷¹ This underscores a fundamental Sufi principle: authentic spiritual realization cannot contradict or supersede the divinely revealed law (Shariah).

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, arguably the most influential scholar who successfully synthesized Sufism with orthodox Sunni theology and jurisprudence, articulated a cautious yet pragmatic approach. In his monumental *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), he acknowledges the danger of bid'ah but also introduces a critical distinction that became widely influential, echoing earlier juristic discussions. He differentiated between bid'ah that contradicts established principles of the Qurān, Sunnāh, or consensus (ijma'), which is blameworthy (*madhmumah*), and innovation that pertains to permissible acts (*mubahat*) undertaken with pious intention for the sake of facilitating worship or communal good, which can be praiseworthy (*mahmudah*) or even recommended. He writes, "Innovations connected with customs and matters of this world are permissible... As for innovations connected with religion... if they oppose the Sunna, they are misguidance, but if they are not opposed to the Sunna... then they are good innovations (*bid'a hasana*)".⁷²

Moreover, according to the teachings of Sufi scholars, any increase in innovation leads a person further away from Allah. Abu Dardaa Khulani stated that witnessing innovation in a mosque without the ability to change it is worse than seeing a mosque burning and being unable to extinguish the fire. He also cautioned against being misled by appearances, asserting that innovation, despite its allure, ultimately leads to spiritual destruction.⁷³

Sufi scholars, like Abu Bakr Daqaq, affirmed that true spiritual knowledge cannot be separated from adherence to the Shariah. He stressed the importance of abandoning innovation and following the scholars of the early generations. Similarly, Abu Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab al-Thaqafi asserted that Allah only accepts righteous deeds rooted in the Sunnāh, while Ahmad bin Abi al-Hawari maintained that any action devoid of adherence to the Sunnāh is invalid.⁷⁴

Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani, one of the most revered Sufi figures, also expressed his sorrow at the widespread innovations of his time, which he saw as corrupting Islam. He described Islam as "roaring," crying out against transgressors, heretics, and those who falsely claimed knowledge of matters beyond their understanding.⁷⁵

Shaykh Ahmad Rumi and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (also known as Imam Rabbani) echoed these views, with Sirhindi emphasizing the severe consequences of engaging in innovations, particularly those that contradict core beliefs. For him, innovations that

reach the level of disbelief and shirk (polytheism) are especially grave, and he called for strict adherence to the pure teachings of Islam as safeguarded by early scholars and pious figures like Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani. Fudayl ibn 'Iyad stated, "No act of worship performed by an innovator (heretic) is accepted in the sight of Allah. And whoever supports an innovator should remember that they have contributed to undermining the very foundations of Islam."⁷⁶

Hasan al-Basri warned that the downfall of past communities occurred when they found the straight path burdensome, deviated from it, and abandoned the teachings of their predecessors. Instead, they began interpreting religion based on their own opinions, which led them astray and caused them to misguide others. He also advised, "Do not associate with innovators, do not engage in debates with them, and do not accept Hadith from them." Similarly, Bishr al-Hafi recounted, "When I heard death of Innovator while in the marketplace, I wished I were in a secluded place so I could prostrate in gratitude to Allah, saying, 'All praise is due to Allah, the Almighty, who has removed this corrupt innovator.' I encourage others to do the same."⁷⁷

In short, the sayings of the Salaf and Sufi scholars alike reflect a unified concern over the dangers of innovation. They warn against straying from the path of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, stressing that deviation through innovation leads to spiritual and doctrinal corruption. These perspectives, rooted in the earliest teachings of Islam, continue to influence contemporary debates on the subject of *bid'ah*.

Implications of the concept of Bid'ah: The concept of Bid'ah has profound implications in legal matters as well as Hadith studies. Both the fields use this concept to extract legal ruling or acceptability of a Hadith. Moreover, the discourse on Bid'ah became a central arena where Fiqh methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) engaged with Hadith texts to define the legitimate scope of religious practice and communal evolution within the Islamic tradition. Following elaborates the implication of Bid'ah in these primary areas of Islamic tradition.

a. Legal implication of Bid'ah: In Islamic jurisprudence, the matter of innovation (*bid'ah*) and its impact on religious practices has been discussed in detail, with particular emphasis on the legal consequences for those who follow innovators. According to the Fiqh texts, including *Fatawa-e-Alamgiri*,⁷⁸ while it is permissible to perform prayer behind an Imam who is an innovator (provided that the innovation does not amount to disbelief), it is generally discouraged. This stems from the notion that while the prayer itself remains valid; the spiritual reward is diminished compared to that which would be gained by praying behind a pious, non-innovator imam. Therefore, although congregational prayer led by such an imam fulfils the obligation, it does not carry the same merit.⁷⁹ Imam al-Shafie stated: "Whenever I see someone devoted to Hadith and Sunnah, it is as if I am witnessing one of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ." Similarly, Layth ibn Sa'd remarked: "Even if I were to see an innovator (heretic) walking on water, I would not accept him." Upon hearing this, Imam al-Shafie responded: "Layth has spoken the truth, but he could have said even more. Even if I were to see an innovator flying in the air, I would still not accept him."⁸⁰ The Grand Mufti of Pakistan, Mufti Muhammad Shafi, stated: "Be certain that any form of worship not practiced by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his Companions, regardless of how appealing or virtuous it may seem, holds no value in the sight of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ."⁸¹

b. Implication of Bid'ah in Hadith Studies: The acceptance or rejection of Hadith narrated by innovators (*ahl al-bid'ah*) has been a subject of rigorous scholarly discourse among the Hadith Scholars {*Muhaddithon*}. The primary concern of Hadith critics was to ensure the preservation of the authenticity and reliability of prophetic traditions while addressing the challenges posed by narrators who adhered to innovative beliefs.

Prominent Hadith scholars, such as Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and Hafiz Ibn Hajar, maintained that the Hadith of an innovator should be carefully scrutinized before acceptance. Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani emphasized that if an innovator's beliefs reached the level of *kufir* (disbelief) or *shirk* (polytheism), their narrations were completely rejected, as they could not be considered trustworthy transmitters of Islamic knowledge. However, if their innovation did not amount to disbelief but was a form of transgression (*fisq*), their Hadith could be accepted under strict conditions:

1. The narrator must not be an active proponent of their innovation – If the narrator was known to openly propagate or invite others to their innovation, their Hadith was rejected due to concerns that they might alter or misrepresent religious teachings to support their beliefs.
2. The Hadith must not support their innovation – If a narrator's Hadith directly aligned with their deviant ideology or was used as evidence for their innovation, it was deemed unreliable and thus rejected.
3. The narrator must be otherwise reliable (*'adl*) and precise (*dābit*) – Despite their theological shortcomings, if the narrator demonstrated strong memory, honesty, and precision in transmission, their narrations can be considered valid, provided they met the previous conditions.⁸²

This nuanced approach ensures the integrity of religious teachings while addressing the complexities of dealing with innovators within the community. It also reflects the methodological rigor of Hadith scholars in preserving the purity of Islamic knowledge, ensuring that innovations did not infiltrate the authentic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (*Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*).

Conclusion: The discourse on Bid'ah (innovation) in Islam reflects a fundamental tension between tradition and adaptation. Through an in-depth examination of Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and scholarly interpretations, this study has demonstrated that Islamic scholars have historically engaged with the concept of Bid'ah from multiple perspectives. While some scholars, such as Imam al-Shatibi and Ibn Taymiyyah, adopted a stringent approach by rejecting all religious innovations, others, including Imam Nawawi and Ibn Hajar, acknowledged a distinction between praiseworthy (*Bid'ah Hasanah*) and blameworthy (*Bid'ah Dalalah*) innovations. This categorization underscores the adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence in addressing evolving religious and social contexts. The juristic methodology employed in evaluating Bid'ah highlights the importance of textual evidence, scholarly consensus, and legal reasoning (Ijtihad) in distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable innovations. Moreover, the perspectives of early jurists and Sufi scholars reflect a common concern about the preservation of religious authenticity, emphasizing adherence to the Sunnāh while recognizing the necessity of permissible changes within the framework of Shariah. Furthermore, the study reveals that Bid'ah is not a monolithic concept, but rather a

dynamic and evolving discourse influenced by theological, social, and historical contexts. While classical scholars warned against deviations that compromise Islamic teachings, contemporary discussions suggest a more nuanced approach, recognizing that technological, institutional, and legal developments can align with Islamic principles when properly contextualized. Ultimately, the scholarly discourse on Bid'ah continues to shape contemporary Islamic thought, balancing the need for preserving religious integrity with the realities of modernity. The findings of this study emphasize that context, scholarly analysis, and adherence to foundational Islamic sources are essential in evaluating religious innovations, ensuring that Islamic tradition remains authentic yet adaptable to the needs of the Muslim community.

Notes and References:

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⁵ Ibn Kathir, Imad-du-din Abul Fida, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Dar Tayyibah, 1999, vol. 3, p. 24

⁶ Tazkirual Quran, <http://quran.com>

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⁸ Al-Quran, 3:105.

⁹ Al-Qurtubi, Abu Abdullah Mohammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr, *Al Jamiah al-Ahkam al Quran*, Urdu Translation by Peer Mohammad Karam Shah al-Azhari, Ziyal ul-Quran Publications, Karachi, Vol.2, 2012, p.700.

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¹¹ Al-Qurtubi, Op.Cite, p.701.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Al-Quran, 4:115.

¹⁴ Ibn Kathir, Imad-ud-Din Abul Fida, *Tafseer ibn Kathir*, Urdu Translation, Mohammad Junaghadi, Maktaba Quddusiyyah, Lahore, Vol.1, 2006, p.674.

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¹⁶ Ibn Kathir, Imad-ud-din Abul Fida, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Dar Tayyibah, Vol. 8, 1999, pp. 246-247.

¹⁷ Al-Qurtubi, al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, Vol. 17, 1964, p. 100.

¹⁸ Al-Quran, 42:21.

¹⁹ Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din. *Mafatih al-Ghayb (al-Tafsir al-Kabir)*. Dar al-Fikr, Vol. 27, 1981, p. 159.

²⁰ Sahih Bukhari, Book of Peacemaking, Hadith No.2697; Sahih Muslim, Book on Friday Prayer, Chapter on the Obligation of the Friday Prayer, Hadith No. 86

²¹ Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim, vol. 6, p. 154

²² Abu Dawud, Sunan, Book on the Sunnah, Chapter on Adhering to the Sunnah, Hadith 4607; al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Book on Knowledge, Chapter on Following the Sunnah and Avoiding Innovations, Hadith 2676 ; Sahih Muslim, Book of Prayer-Friday, Hadith No. 867- Tirmidhi classified it as hasan sahih

²³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtida' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, vol. 1, p. 276

²⁴ al-Shatibi, al-I'tisam, vol. 1, p. 49

²⁵ Sahih Bukhari, Virtues of Madinah, Book 29, Hadith No. 4.

²⁶ Safdar, Sarfaraz Khan, *Rah-e-Sunnah*, Makki Madani Publishers, Lahore, 2009, p.69.

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³⁴ Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Hajr, *Fath-ul-Bari Sharah Sahih al- Bukhari*, Dar al-Rayyan, Cairo, Vol.4, 1986, p.219.

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³⁷ Dehlavi, Mohammad Kifayat-ul-Ullah, *Taleem -ul-Islam*, Maktaba Bushra, Karachi, Vol.4, 2011, p.195.

³⁸ Usmani, op.cite, p.28.

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- ⁴⁰ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.14.
- ⁴¹ Shatibi, op cit, p.25.
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- ⁴⁴ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.13.
- ⁴⁵ Usmani, op.cit, p.20.
- ⁴⁶ Adynata and Rahman, Syahrul, *The Conceptology of Bid'ah: Imam Ahmad's Perspective and Its Application in the Contemporary Era*, *Ishlah: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, Vol.4{2}, 2022, p.222.
- ⁴⁷ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.20.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Shatibi, op cit, p.28.
- ⁵⁰ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.21.
- ⁵¹ Ṣalāt al-Raghā'ib is a specific *Nafl* (supererogatory) prayer that is claimed to be performed on the night of the first Friday night of Rajab (i.e., Thursday night). It is sometimes performed with a specific number of rak'at and particular intentions, along with promises of vast rewards for those who perform it.
- ⁵² Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.15.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Usmani, op.cit, p.21.
- ⁵⁵ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.16.
- ⁵⁶ Muslim ibn Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, Book of Fasting, HN.1164.
- ⁵⁷ Al-Bukhari, Mohammad bin Ismail, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Fasting, HN.1914.
- ⁵⁸ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.18.
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- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
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- ⁶² Al-Jawzi, Abul Faraj, *Talbis Iblis*, Dar as-Sunnah Publishers, Birmingham, English Translation by Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, 1987, p.45.
- ⁶³ Usmani, op.cit, p.34.
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- ⁷⁵ Usmani, op.cit, p.95.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Usmani, op.cit, p.103.
- ⁷⁸ *Fatawa-e-Alamgiri* is a classical compendium of Hanafi jurisprudence compiled in the 17th century under the patronage of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir. It was prepared by a committee of prominent scholars led by Shaykh Nizamuddin and serves as a systematic codification of Hanafi legal rulings. Recognized for its juristic precision and reliance on authoritative sources, the work played a foundational role in shaping Islamic legal practice in the Indian subcontinent and continues to be referenced in contemporary Hanafi scholarship.
- ⁷⁹ Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.28.
- ⁸⁰ Usmani, op.cit, p.105.
- ⁸¹ Usmani, Mohammad Shafi, *Sunnat wa Bidat*, Maktaba Khalil, Urdu Bazar, Lahore, 2011, p.16.
- ⁸² Rehmani, Khalid Saifullah, op.cit, p.30.