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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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# Historical Roots of Extremist and Radical Islamist Thinking

**Thameem Ushama\***

**Abstract:** This study analyses the historical evolution of contemporary Muslim controversies over the historical roots of extremism by applying qualitative content analysis to relevant Qur’anic verses, prophetic traditions and offerings from early schools of Islamic thought. The study begins by defining Arabic term *ghulūw* with regard to religious extremism and then briefly introduces manifestations of the phenomenon from the days of Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.) to Jewish and Christian enthusiasts. The paper discusses impacts of extremist thinking on early Muslims with a focus on Kharijite and Muṭazilite schools and other related sects. In addition, a discussion of the misuse of certain terms and related legal rulings addresses five matters of importance: [1] matters signified by specific appellations, errant legal rulings and consequences; [2] extremist doctrines; [3] extremist religious discourses; [4] rebuttal of errant doctrines; and [5] implications of extremist designations and rulings.

**Keywords:** extremism, Kharijite, Muṭazilite, radicalism, roots.

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini menganalisis revolusi sejarah kontroversi Islam kontemporari ke atas asal-usul sejarah ekstremisme dengan menggunakan analisis isi kandungan secara kualitatif terhadap ayat-ayat Al-Qur’an yang berkaitan, Sunnah-sunnah Nabi, dan persembahan-persembahan awal daripada sekolah-sekolah terdahulu terhadap pemikiran Islam. Kajian ini bermula dengan definisi perkataan-perkataan Arab *ghulūw* dengan mengambil perhatian terhadap pelampau agama dan seterusnya secara ringkas memperkenalkan manifestasi-manifestasi fenomena dari zaman Nabi Nuh hinggalah kepada

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penganut-penganut Yahudi dan Nasrani. Kertas kerja ini membentangkan dampak pemikiran pelampau terhadap orang Islam terdahulu dengan memfokuskan terhadap sekolah-sekolah Kharijite dan Mu'tazilite serta lain-lain puak yang berkaitan. Tambahan lagi, satu perbincangan dilakukan terhadap penyalahgunaan beberapa perkataan dan keputusan undang-undang berkaitan dengan lima perkara penting: [1] perkara yang nyata dengan keterangan khusus, ketetapan undang-undang yang salah dan akibatnya; [2] doktrin pelampau; [3] wacana agama ekstremis; [4] penolakan doktrin yang salah; dan [5] implikasi daripada pelantikan dan ketetapan ekstremis.

**Kata Kunci:** extremism Kharijite, Mu'tazilite, radikalisme, asal-usul.

### Introduction

Muslims worship Allah (S.W.T.), Who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. They bear witness that Muhammad (S.A.W.) is His Messenger. Allah (S.W.T.) blessed human beings with the *din* of Islam which is the only undistorted faith and truth. That Islam is a religion of moderation and that Muslims are truly a just and well-adjusted nation that upholds the methodology of moderation in religious understanding, comprehension, interpretation and practice, especially when compared to other sects claiming various Muslim traditions. In asserting that Islam is a religion of moderation, Allah (S.W.T.) stated: "*Thus, have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves...*" (Qur'ān, 2: 143). Hence, this «balanced and moderate» nation stands for justice with a firm commitment to establish rightly balanced ways and patterns that equate with those of the Prophet. Therefore, authentic Islam does not condone excessiveness or laxity in matters concerning human relations. The Qur'ān's declaration and the Prophet's (S.A.W.) examples are sufficiently transparent to conclude that Islam's way of life is peace loving, peacekeeping and peace-enforcing. Islam does not accept, condone or tolerate radicalism and extremism at all, to include fanatical religious thinking.

The Qur'ān declares that Islam is moderate. However, many contemporary expositions of Islam are distorted and biased. Moreover, these distortions appear not only in the Muslim world but also in the West, which portrays itself as the elected custodian and defender of human rights, religious freedom and dignity. Often, the Media magnifies an undesirable image of Muslims as horrid individuals filled

with perverted thoughts! But this is far removed from the authentic worldview of Islam's genuine devotees.

The *ummah* faces severe criticism from external groups as well as unprecedented challenges from intrinsic theologizing sectarians. Many such denominations and divisions promote excessiveness and exclusivism in creed and doctrinal discourses on the concepts of *īmān*, *tawhīd* and the names and attributes of God, etc. Hence there is disunity and they have roots in early Islamic societies. Hence, this study analyses the historical roots that once promoted religious extremism replete with radical thoughts and deeds. As it is the same ancient influences that led and still leading to confusion, dissension and perverse understanding in light of Islam's authentic message, which is based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

This paper applies qualitative content analysis to relevant Qur'ānic verses and traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.), and to the writings taken from Islam's early theological schools. This approach unerringly discloses controversies that have definitively beat a straight path to contemporary Muslim radicalism and extremism. This research also aims to help readers understand the magnanimity of our Lord and Creator's merciful guidance to all mankind.

The paper proceeds as follows: After defining the term *ghulūw*, which is an Arabic term, it explores the history of religious extremism, to include: (i) extremism and consequences during the time of Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.); (ii) extremism among the People of the Book (Jews & Christians) because extremism is both transparent and common to several religious beliefs, thoughts and legal rulings, and certainly not a singular Muslim phenomenon. The fourth section discusses extremism's effects on Muslims in matters of religion and the influences wrought by previous nations and communities. This concerns (i) extremism among Kharijites that appeared in the first century of Islam and major aspects of their belief system, including consequences among Rafidites; (ii) the relationship and development of extremism among Muslims of even earlier belief systems; and (iii) extremism among Mu'tazilites, followers of a school of Islamic theology that flourished in the cities of Basra and Baghdad during the 8th–10th centuries and relevant implications. The fifth section deals with extremism with regard to certain terms and legal rulings that concern five matters of import: [1] implication and impacts

deriving from certain terms and legal rulings; [2] commentaries from extremist sects; [3] extremist views and perspectives; [4] rebuttals of Kharijite and Mu'tazilite doctrine; and [5] consequences of extremism with respect to 'names' and 'rulings'.

### The Meaning of *Ghulūw*

In general, *ghulūw* means to violate a limit in anything and thus to transgress the law. Al-Jawharī said that *ghalā fī al-amr ghuluwwan* means 'he crossed the limit in a matter' (Al-Jawharī, 1999, 6: 448). Al-Firozābādī said, "*ghalā ghala'an*" means *highly priced*. Hence, when the term *ghalā* is used in connection with any matter it means 'to transgress the limit' (Al-Firozābādī, 2003, 1186). Ibn al-Manzūr said, "... the reality of *ghalā* is to cross the prescribed limit in everything." Thus *ghala'wtu šidq al-mar'ah* means 'I overpaid the dower' (Ibn Manzūr, 1999, 2: 279). Some are also of the view that when one transgresses any limit it is expressed as *ghulūw* in Arabic.

When the root *ghalā* is used in terms of religion it means to transgress the limit. Hence, any word deriving from the root word *ghalā* indicates transgression in a given matter. Ibn al-Fāris wrote that *ghulūw* in any object means it is higher and crosses a prescribed ratio (Ibn al-Faris, 1970, 4: 387-388). Therefore, if anyone commits *ghulūw* in any issue she/he has transgressed its prescribed limit. Thus, it becomes obvious that the term *ghulūw* harbours a sense of exaggeration and the transgression of specified limits. Hence, the authentic root of *ghulūw* carries connotations of excessiveness and the transgression of prescribed Sharī'ah limitations that for Muslims are mandatory.

As mentioned in the Qur'ān, *ghulūw* signifies "committing excess" and "exceeding or going beyond the limit." It reads: "Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth..." (Qur'ān, 4: 171).

Say: O People of the Book! Exceed not the bounds (of what is proper) in your religion, trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went astray in times gone by, who misled many, and drifted from the even way (Qur'ān, 5: 77).

The term *ghulūw* is also mentioned in Prophetic traditions. Ibn Ḥanbal narrated, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) say, "recite the

Qur'ān and do not overdo in that... do not feed yourself by the book of Allah" (Aḥmad, 2001, 3: 428). Abu Al-Aliyah narrated the following:

Ibn Abbas said: "On the morning of Al-Aqabah, while he was on his mount, the Messenger of Allah said to me: "Pick up (some pebbles) for me." So I picked up some pebbles for him that were the size of date stones or fingertips, and when I placed them in his hand he said: "Like these. And beware of going to extremes in religious matters, for those who came before you were destroyed because of going to extremes in religious matters" (Al-Nasa'i, Vol. 3, Book 24, Hadith 3059)

Hence, it is evident in both the Qur'ān and Sunnah that *ghulūw* means to transgress the acceptable and prescribed limits with regard to religious matters. *Ghulūw* refers to the "peak" of excessiveness. It is specific in terms of actually crossing a natural limit by increasing or decreasing an otherwise balanced matter. Hence, to decrease a given step for a balanced process that causes extreme diminution or "going down" on one side or the other is called *ghulūw*. In other words, one who does this shows extremism by so decreasing anything. An example of this is the attitude of Jews towards Prophet ʿIsā (Jesus) (A.S.), which clearly diminishes his status as a prophet. Likewise, those who raise the status of Jesus, cross the limit, which is what Christians do by attributing divinity to Jesus (A.S.).

Muslims firmly believe that steadfast adherence to the Qur'ān and Sunnah never lead to *ghulūw*. When the Prophet's Companions rightly grasped *Sharīʿah* and strove to judge accordingly, they never committed *ghulūw* because the Prophet had educated and trained them to worship in a balanced manner with moderation. Hence, the companions avoided extremism in their performance of ʿ*ibādah*. Their spiritual momentum derived from rightly guided knowledge and a genuine understanding of *Sharīʿah*. Together with experience, these perfected the balanced zeal that both gained and advanced knowledge as the reconstructed Arab society. Thus, they neither admitted nor permitted *ghulūw*.

Gradually, Muslims distanced themselves from genuine religious discourse with conscientious and well-informed pious scholars. Consequently, Muslims failed to hold on firmly to the Sunnah and began withdrawing from God-conscious societies and leadership. Subsequently, ignorance gained dominion and imposed its poorly

informed will on intellectual venues. Guidance by the Qur'ān and Sunnah was overshadowed by twisted ideations and opinions filled with extremism, radicalism and terror. Such Muslims are justifiably branded as extremists and radicals as their convoluted perversions of thought have become chief exports that profit the coffers of authentic Islam's enemies. The current trend is such that whosoever remains steadfast and holds firmly to the Book of Allah and the Prophet's (S.A.W.) Sunnah is regarded as a fundamentalist, which is purposely misinterpreted as extremism and/or radicalism.

Some people accuse those who hold fast to the Qur'ān and Sunnah of being extremists and radicals, when in fact the accusers are the renegades. Others, inspired by religious populism, also accuse followers of the Qur'ān and Sunnah while claiming to be rightly guided Muslims. But these groups suffer negligence, intellectual deficiencies and lack of critical insight while relegating (decreasing) the understanding of authentic Islam and its rulings. Righteousness is attained and sustained only when deeds are performed in accordance with proper religious understanding and with the application of relevant Islamic methodologies for both individual and social living. Hence, it is more appropriate to bear in mind that many who wave reformative or revivalist flags in religious thinking are actually extremists who generate false propaganda with the intention of distancing the *ummah* from the classical Islamic interpretations.

### **Extremism among the People of Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.)**

Extremism and radicalism (both forms of excessiveness) are actually quite ancient. They were certainly found in terms of piety and supposed godliness among the people of Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.) who transgressed limits to exaggerate the honour given to righteous and pious people. For this reason, Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.) was sent to correct their misunderstanding of religion. Nonetheless, they perpetuated the excess and crossed the limit with the apotheosis of religious men, raising them to the level of Allah's (S.W.T.) associates by dedicating their portraits and idols as objects of worshipful reverence. This unbecoming behaviour and praxis persisted for such a long time that the innovation appeared among ignorant Arabs just prior to the advent of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). The Qur'ān records their sentiments: "and they have said (to each other), 'Abandon not your gods, neither Wadd nor Suwa', neither Yāguth nor Ya'uq, nor



Nasr” (Qur’ān, 71: 23). Al-Bukhārī narrates, on the authority of Ibn Abbas, an interpretation of this verse as follows:

The Arabs also worshipped all the idols that were worshipped by the people of Noah. As for *Wadd*, it was worshipped by the tribe of Kalb at Daumat al-Jandal; *Suwa’* was the idol of (the tribe of) Hudhayl; *Yaghuth* was the idol of (the tribe of) Murād and later of Bani Ghutaif at al-Jurf near Saba’; *Ya’uq* was the idol of Hamdān, and *Nasr* was the idol of Himyr, a branch of Dhi al-Kala’. The names (of these idols) formerly belonged to some pious men of the people of Noah, and when they died, Satan inspired their people to place their idols at the very places where these men used to sit, and to call those idols by their names. The people did so, but the idols were not worshipped until those people (who imitated them) had died and the origin of the idols had become obscure, whereupon people began worshipping them (Al-Bukhārī, 1986, 6: 414-415).

The ḥadīth describes the extremism of idol worshipping as it pertained to the deification of men during the time of Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.). It clearly indicates that the names of those idols once belonged to pious men among the people of Prophet Nūḥ (A.S.) and that Satan inspired the evil trespass. The major point of relevance here is that, eventually, when their origins had been obscured by the passage of time, they became hideous objects of worship as a form of religious extremism.

### **Extremism among the People of the Book**

Extremism has been historically common among Christians and Jews and as mentioned in the Qur’ān’s admonishment: “Commit no excesses in your religion” (Qur’ān, 4: 171). “People of the Book” refers to Christians who transgressed the bounds of religion by regarding Jesus as God in their exaggerated reverence and love for him. This stands in stark contrast to Jews (also ‘People of the Book’), who took the opposite extreme by denying him the status of a prophet and promoting enmity towards Jesus (Maududi, 1983, 2: 406). Moreover, Jews even admit to initiating wars while claiming to be the fairest of God’s children. Their self-esteem is such that they hold the balance of humankind (non-Jews or *Goyim*) as illiterate and destined to serve them as mere slaves. Does this not reflect an obsessive manifestation of religious extremism?

Hence, Jews believe they are free to treat all non-Jews as they please. In this regard, Allah (S.W.T.) says:

Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back; others, who, if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless thou constantly stood over them demanding it, because, they say, ‘there is no call on us (to keep faith) with these ignorant (Pagans)’; but they tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it (Qur’ān, 3: 75).

Expounding on this verse, Maududi remarked:

They (the Jews) were required to be fair only in their dealings with Jews, and there was no harm in usurping the property of a non-Jew. This belief was not confined to ignorant Jewish masses but their whole religious system was so moulded as to allow differentiation between Israelites and non-Israelites in their dealings. Their moral code disallowed a certain treatment towards Israelites but allowed the same towards non-Israelites; one and the same thing was for an Israelite but the same thing was wrong for a non-Israelite (Maududi, 1971, 2: 42-43).

On the other hand, Christians claim that they are the true inheritors of the Jewish prophetic legacy via the law of Jesus. Thus, they often persisted in taking revenge on Jews who crucified Jesus, whom they consider as God and God’s son as well as Holy Ghost, which Christians believe with utmost sincerity and integrity. However, the Qur’ān says, “(Both) the Jews and the Christians say: «We are sons of Allah, and His beloved. Say: ‘Why then doth He punish you for your sins? Nay, ye are but men, of the men he hath created’” (Qur’ān, 5: 18). Hence, it becomes clear that People of the Book, especially Jews, are guilty of multi-dimensional extremist deeds in numerous fields of human affairs, including pride, arrogance and ostentation while exhorting all sorts of oppression directed against Muslims, as well as their own divisive sectarians and other religions. They exhibited haughtiness by claiming to be children of God and God’s most beloved chosen people. Consequently, they not only believe these inflated ideations but also hold forth that, in the end, they face no trial whatsoever for the oppression, suppression and hostility they direct against other people by claiming

divinely decreed immunity for crimes against heaven and earth. Is this, dear reader, not extremism?

The worst form of Jewish extremist praxis is the attribution of defects to Allah for which they also blamed Him for several problems. Indeed, with supreme arrogance they called God ‘poor’ and themselves, ‘rich’. Hence, Allah (S.W.T.) scolded them in Qur’ān, 3: 181–183).

Sayyid Quṭb explained the above passage as follows:

Confusion in Jewish concepts of the true nature of God is very common in their distorted Scriptures... The history of the Children of Israel records a terrible chain of killing one prophet after another, culminating in their attempt on the life of Jesus Christ. They even claim that they killed him, boasting of their ghastly crime... They said, ‘God is poor and we are rich’... In addition to their extremely rude attitude towards God, Jews claimed that they would not believe in Muhammad because God had charged them not to believe in any messenger until he brought them an offering and a miracle in the form of fire coming from the sky to consume it. Since Muhammad did not offer such a miracle, they would remain true to their covenant with God—so they claimed. Here is where the Qur’ān confronts them with their history. In the past, they killed the very prophets who came to them with the very miracles they asked of them, men who also gave them clear evidence of the truth (Sayyid Quṭb, n. d., 2: 269).

Quṭb thus disclosed the extent to which Jews undermine the role of God and also how they blame Him. They thus exhibit a superlative degree of arrogance and rudeness towards God. They killed several prophets and also claimed they killed Jesus. These are manifestations of extremism and radical religious thought and action. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to record that Jews constantly blame others with charges of extremism, particularly now. Such an approach to the presentation of God’s position and power nurtures dissension, violence and terror among people of other faiths and beliefs. These matters of fact naturally give rise to Jewish dominion at the expense of morality, ethics and justice universally and in all aspects of life. The phenomenon is further witnessed by Jewish efforts to establish Israel in the land of Palestine

with the aid of the British imperialists (Zionists). The enormity of Jewish disrespect for Allah (S.W.T.) is recorded in Qur'ān, 5: 64.

Maududi explained this passage as follows:

According to the Arabic idiom, 'one whose hands are chained' (tied) is an excessively parsimonious person. What the Jews meant by this was that Allah had ceased to be bounteous. When they had fallen into the lowest state of degradation for centuries and lost all hopes of their national recovery, they used to lament their lost glory and blame Allah for showing niggardliness towards them. The foolish people from among them went so far as to say, '*God has become so stingy that He has shut the doors of His treasures against us. He has now nothing left with Him for us except calamities and misfortunes.*' This attitude is not peculiar to Jews alone. The foolish people of other communities also, instead of turning to Allah, utter insolent words like these when a calamity befalls them (Maududi, 1972, 3: 56).

According to the Qur'ān, Jews were terrorists who committed copious horror, killed innumerable prophets, destroyed the earth and distorted the laws of God, etc. Their misdeeds are recorded. For instance, we reference a verse (Qur'ān, 2: 61) referring to the chaos they create.

In his commentary on this passage, Muhammad Asad wrote the following:

This passage obviously refers to a later phase of Jewish history. That Jews actually did kill some of their prophets is evidenced, for instance, in the story of John the Baptist, as well as in the more general accusation uttered, according to the Gospel, by Jesus: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee' (Matthew. 23: 37) (Asad, 1984, 13-14).

### **Extremism among Muslims**

During the time of Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.), a few instances of extremism occurred which the Prophet swiftly corrected, which is the very reason we do not generally discuss them. But in due course of time, religious-political climates transformed and invited copious debate, ultimately leading to both radical and extremist religious interpretations. The Prophet (S.A.W.) had successfully inspired and

taught his companions, training them to be fair, straightforward and moderate in all matters. Hence, his companions were enabled to correct any disorder that appeared in practical living. The succeeding pages are devoted to the discussion of Muslim sects whose understandings and interpretations of religious thought actually established the roots of contemporary Muslim extremism.

### **Kharijite, Saba'iyyah, Rafidite and Mu'tazilite Extremism**

History records that Kharijites rebelled against °Uthmān ibn °Affān, the third Caliph, and created much tumult. In the course of numerous plots, they besieged, reviled and finally assassinated him. After °Uthmān's murder, tribulation spread across the Islamic state. Confusion and horrible ramifications engulfed the *ummah*. Their excesses spawned a culture of charging other Muslims with unbelief (infidels). Their position regarding °Alī conspicuously fomented a cycle of fanaticism that played a significant role in developing false principles of belief and convoluted opinions that legalized this accusation against authentic believers. They advocated an unrealistic puritanism claiming that committing any sin was sufficient to attain the status of an infidel. Based on this groundless theory, they promptly adjudged °Uthmān, °Alī, Mu'āwiyah and other companions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) as infidels. According to Kharijite doctrine, whoever commits sin removes themselves from the boundary of Islam's community and becomes an infidel so that mere repentance became insufficient for such a person to revert to Islam. Instead, public humiliation—the Communist ploy—was required and he or she had to re-embrace Islam anew by confessing *kalimah shahādah*. Moreover, once any person was declared a disbeliever, their blood (murder) became legal because they were no longer considered Muslim.

This practice of declaring blasphemy and legalizing the blood of fellow Muslims is not new and is discussed in some detail below. Islam's first century ended by the opening of the second witnessing severe mayhem due to Kharijite fanatics. They also denied the authenticity of the Sunnah in addition to *ḥadd* punishments that were not specified in the Qur'ān. They issued a legal edict that a menstruating woman could not fast and had to fulfil her religious obligation after cessation, as was also the case with prayer. A simultaneous contractual cross-pollination between Mu'tazilite and Kharijite misguidance occurred on the matter of declaring a person infidel and also with regard to the names and

attributes of Allah (S.W.T.). They also spread the malicious delusion that the Qur'ān was a creature rather than a revelation and also denied *liqā'* with Allah (S.W.T.) in the hereafter as well as the existence of *Jannah*. These are just a few absurd examples of Kharijite deviation.

Another extremist sect, the *Saba'iyyah*, was founded by °Abd Allāh ibn Sabā', who fuelled the fire of atheism in the *ummah*. This sect was indisputably extreme in the exaggeration of honour, dignity and praise given to °Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib. °Abd Allāh ibn Muhammad ibn °Abd al-Wahhāb clearly stated that during the tenure of °Alī, extremism surfaced (Al-°Asqalānī, 1329AH, 12: 282). Some among this lot claimed and disseminated the idea that °Alī was an incarnation of God.

In terms of religion as well as belief and impact, Kharijite extremism was lighter and more tolerable than the *Saba'iyyah* approach to °Alī's deification. Kharijites fell into their dogmatic swindle out of ignorance and a poor understanding of Islam but had no intention to destroy religion as the Rafidites did. Historically, the *Saba'iyyah* cult actually initiated Muslim extremism. Ibn Sabā' entered Islam during the rule of °Uthmān and incited conspiracies among and against the Prophet's companions, especially over the deification of °Alī. Ibn Sabā' once told °Alī: *'Thou art Thou,'* which is to say, *'Thou art God.'* °Alī immediately banished him to Tsesiphon (Shahrestāni, 1984, 150). Hence, the first recorded form of extremism in Muslim societies developed in the aftermath of corrupted religious beliefs nurtured by Ibn Sabā'. Much like St. Paul—an occult student of Babylonian kabala—whose contributions allowed Greek mythology to subvert the Gospel of Jesus (Zaid, 2013). Ibn Sabā's thought had a devastating impact on the followers of Mohammad. It can, therefore, be concluded that early Muslims did not initiate extremism under normal circumstances. It did, however, arise from corrupt masterminds whose machinations and manipulations had penetrated early Islamic society in the same manner that Hindu priests had penetrated and corrupted early followers of Buddha, a man who hated idols (Zaid, 2013).

The relationship between Muslim extremism and ancient belief systems is relevant, especially knowing Ibn Sabā' was a Jew with familial involvement in the occult and whose adherents had attributed lordship to °Alī (Al-Nashhār, 1954, 1: 68). Contemporary scholars searching for roots of Muslim extremism therefore related the corruption to Jews.

Nonetheless, opinions vary and others have attributed *Saba'iyyah's* origins to Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism and pre-Islamic Arab paganism (ʿIrfān al-Fattāh, 1404 AH, 34-43; Abu Zahra, 1996, 1: 37-38). Practically speaking, what these extremists exposed is the result of a deception that was stage managed by deviant Judaism as the prime extremist cult.

It would be rightly seen that the tribulation of the Rafidites was a gateway to agnosticism and even atheism. Abu Bakr sketched both the dimensions of their hypocrisy and the degree of their irreligion. Rafidite predecessors were also polyphonic. Ibn Sabā' once opposed a man who said that ʿAlī had died. The man then offered him seventy bundles of [money] but Sabā' would not accept ʿAlī's death. He firmly believed that ʿAlī would return soon from heaven. Just as Christians claimed of Jesus, Ibn Sabā' believed that ʿAlī did not die but was alive, not only alive but also a personification of a divine element that made it impossible for him to be overcome by death (Shahrastānī, 1984, 150). Hence, ʿAlī spoke from the clouds with a voice thunder with lightening as his smile. As such, this sect also denied the matter of *Qadar* (Divine Destiny), claiming that the individual was the architect of his or her fate. Such a view emerged from a Jewish sect. They put forth views of *ḥulūl* (incarnation) and *tanāsukh* (transmigration of souls) held by Jews and Hindus (Ibn Ḥazm, 1997, 137-44). They maintained a multitude of fraudulent beliefs that attempted to devastate authentic religion while promoting doctrines that became affixed to Shīʿī extremists. So it was that Muʿtazilites, Qadarites, Ḥulūliyyah, Ittihādiyyah, Bātiniyyah and Zindīqs were thus regarded as wrongly guided radical groups.

Muʿtazilite misguidance embraces three domains. (1) They completely denied Allah's (S.W.T.) eternal attributes such as knowledge, power, will and life. For them, *tawḥīd* was everything, such that nothing else was attributable to Allah (S.W.T.). (2) They denied *Qadar*, claiming that all creatures are assigned duties and thereby formulate their own fate. Hence, Allah (S.W.T.) has nothing to do with destiny, with the former called *al-tawḥīd* and the latter called *al-ʿadl*. (3) The most dangerous doctrine related to identifying people as *believers*, *louts*, or *disbelievers* accompanied by legal rulings regarding respective dispositions in the Hereafter, whether *Jannah* or Hell (Shahrastānī, 1984, 41-42). Their principle of "warning" thus marked the grave sinner as an irredeemable dweller of hellfire forever, while an intermediate position was held in



reserve for normal sinners who are no more believers in this world and yet not infidels. These are placed somewhere “in between” and designated as *fāsiq* (Al-Ash‘arī, 1389AH, 2: 218). These principles thus enabled them to decide that if a statesman or governor committed grave sins, rebellion and war against him were thereby permissible (lawful) when possible. Consequently, Mu‘tazilites’ legalized the use of the sword against those who fell within the purview of their principles of warning.

### **Extremist Terms: Names as Designators of Spiritual Status and Related Legal Rulings**

The phenomena now under discussion were unknown to first generation of Muslims. These names or better said, designators, used in this regard (*mu’min*, *kāfir*, *fāsiq* or *munāfiq*) were meant to signify a person’s status as slave or servant of Allah (S.W.T.) in this world. Legal rulings were related to decrees by which slaves of Allah (S.W.T.) were to be judged in the hereafter regarding their everlasting disposition (*Jannah* or Hell). This section, therefore, discusses actual consequences that arose from the different extremist definitions of *īmān* and *kufr*. Whosoever engaged in such a discussion of *īmān* thereby also entertained commentary on the status of a *mu’min* as to whether or not he/she was considered a believer or was exiled from the polite company of their definition of believers. Therefore, our discussion begins with extremist terms for *īmān* and its definition as determined by different Muslim sects, which definitions then led to signifiers (names) and rulings with consequent social ramifications.

#### ***Imān as Theological Sectarians Understood It***

According to the orthodox view of *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*, *īmān* combines declaration, heartfelt belief and praxis. Obeying the dictates of *īmān* increases faith while disobedience decreases faith. This principle derives from the Qur’ān and Sunnah, and from the understanding of the Prophet’s companions. According to them, a man is, per Qur’ān, a *mu’min* unless he actually practices *kufr*-oriented deeds that deny the definitive proofs of *Sharī‘ah*. If therefore he sins, he is called *al-mu’min al-fāsiq* depending on the gravity of a sin, but he remains a Muslim. Moreover, the sinner may enter *Jannah* if Allah (S.W.T.) wills, whether by punishing or by forgiving him. Hence, he is not placed in hellfire forever and will ultimately enter Paradise. This



reasoning lies in the origin of *īmān*, which is inherent and instilled in such a man. Nonetheless, if he commits serious *bid'ah* he becomes *kāfir* and is considered a blasphemer so that all rulings implemented for disbelievers become applicable to him as well, whereupon it is also assumed that in the hereafter he will dwell in hellfire forever. However, there is actually no certainty concerning his stay in hellfire due to sealing of his repentance. Likewise, a mere declaration of *shahādah* may indeed not guarantee any man's entrance into *Jannah* except for the ten Companions whom we know were awarded such good tidings.

Although Kharijites and Mu'tazilites agreed with *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* on the definition of *īmān*, they differed as to the application of its components and thus adopted extreme views regarding legal rulings and nomenclature. Kharijites transgressed limits by declaring that a grave sinner was *kāfir* and consequently liable to murder and pillage. Moreover, they admitted that such murdered and plundered sinners were thereafter also confined to hellfire despite the earthly punishment and forfeiture. Mu'tazilites were clever enough to suspend grave sinners between two strata, being neither *mu'min* nor *kāfir* in this world. They sometimes called such acrobats *fāsiq* but with a different meaning than that held by *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Therefore, Mu'tazilites distanced *fāsiqs* from both *īmān* and *kufir* for the present but with a final 'hellfire forever' ending. Thus, Mu'tazilites differed from Kharijites on the designation for a grave sinner in the present world but agreed in terms of eternal consequences (Al-Baghdādī, 2011, 121-122). Hence, Mu'tazilites were considered effeminate Kharijites. On the other hand, the *Jahmiyyah* maintained that:

If a man has knowledge (of God) but outwardly denies him, this denial does not make him an unbeliever because it does not take away his knowledge. Hence he remains a believer. They further maintained that faith is not made up of parts, that is, it cannot be divided into belief, words and deeds. Those who have faith do not surpass one another in degrees of faith; therefore the faith of the prophets and that of the people are on the same level (Shahrastānī, 1984, 74).

The *Ghassāniyyah* maintained that "Faith consists of knowledge of God and His Prophet, together with acknowledgement of what God has revealed and what the Prophet (S.A.W.) has brought—in general,

however, and not in particular. According to them, faith increases but does not decrease” (Shahrastānī, 1984, 120).

The *Thawbāniyyah* maintained that “faith is knowledge and acceptance of God and His prophets and of everything that reason does not permit (not) to do, but whatever reason manifests as not obligatory is not part of faith” (Shahrastānī, 1984, 121; al-Baghdādī, 2010, 232). The *Ṣālihiyyah* maintained that “faith is knowledge of God in a general way, that is, to know that the universe has a creator and no more. Unbelief is simple ignorance of him. If someone said that God is ‘one of the three’, this itself is not unbelief” (Shahrastānī, 1984, 123). Accordingly, faith comprising knowledge of God, is undivided in quality and does not increase or decrease.

The *Ṣālihiyyah*, the *Thawbāniyyah* and the *Ghassāniyyah* agreed that *īmān* is the acknowledgment of Allah as God and Muhammad (S.A.W.) as His messenger without any need for public confession or practice. Hence, every person that acknowledges Allah (S.W.T.) will enter *Jannah*.

Both *Karrāmiyyah* - the upholders of corporealism and anthropomorphism, and *Najjāriyyah* - the deniers of the attributes such as knowledge, power, will, life, hearing and seeing, sects claimed that *īmān* is admitting to *tawhīd* only by word, whereby a person gains the status of a complete *mu'min* via oral admission only and will thus enter *Jannah*. Majority of scholars consider that the *Karrāmiyyah* derive from the *Murji'ah* who held that only God has the authority to judge who is a true Muslim and who is not, and that Muslims should consider all other Muslims as part of the community. The *Ashā'irah*, an early theological school of Sunni Islam based on clerical authority, argued that *īmān* is ratification by heart only and that such inner belief stands apart from verbal expression and/or external practice, which are “branches” of belief. Therefore, whosoever believes in his heart thus acknowledges the unity of God and recognizes the prophets and sincerely believes all that they have revealed (Shahrastānī, 1984, 78-80).

On this matter, al-Ṭahawī remarked that oral confession was mere embellishment and not a necessity (Al-Ḥanafī, 1408AH, 332). Abū Maṣū'ir al-Maṭurīdī agreed, as narrated by Abū Ḥanīfah. However, Abū Ḥanīfah's narration is barely authenticated, as *Fiqh al-Akbar* recorded otherwise (Al-Harawī, n. d., 124-129). Abū Ḥanīfah's views

are familiar to scholars with respect to *īmān* because they were recorded by al-Ṭaḥawī. These writings state that (i) *īmān* is confession by word and ratification by heart; (ii) that *īmān* of the people of *Jannah* neither increases nor decreases from the perspective of belief and ratification; (iii) and that believers are equal in *īmān* and *tawḥīd* but are emulators in terms of practices.

### Discussion of Extremist Views

Some consider the *Jahmiyyah* perspective the worst of the lot as well as the most irrational. Indeed, they held that Iblīs, Firʿawn and other disbelievers fell within the purview of *īmān* because they had acknowledged Allah (S.W.T.) and His existence. In substantiation of this viewpoint, they quoted the Qurʾānic verses 15: 39, 38: 82, 27: 14, and 17: 102.

Kharijites and Muʿtazilites argued the message of the verse: “If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell...” (Qurʾān, 4: 93). They inferred that a *muʿmin* murderer of a fellow *muʿmin* became an irrevocable dweller of hell, indicating also that the commission of any grave sin was sufficient cause for hellfire and thus also imputed exile of the sinning *muʿmin* from *īmān* forever.

Allah calls the murderer “the brother of the murdered” while referring to a legal ruling pertaining to *qiṣāṣ*. The Qurʾān says: “But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand” (Qurʾān, 2: 178). If the killer becomes a disbeliever due to the murder, he is no longer deemed the brother of the murdered because brotherhood is love and affection that only admits *muʿmin*.

We, therefore, note that retribution is encouraged and remission allowed as a token of dignity and honour. If a killer becomes apostate due to the killing, pardon is not permissible. In this context, two traditions are recommended: Narrated Ikrima: “Some *Zanadiqa* (atheists) were brought to `Ali and he burnt them. The news of this event, reached Ibn `Abbas who said, “If I had been in his place, I would not have burnt them, as Allah’s Messenger forbade it, saying, ‘Do not punish anybody with Allah’s punishment (fire).’ I would have killed them according to the statement of Allah’s Messenger, ‘Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him’” (Al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, Book 84, Hadith 57 ; Abū Dāʿwud, 2009, #4351) and “*The blood of a Muslim*

is permissible if one of three things occurs: an adult fornicator; killing in retaliation for unjustified murder, and leaving one's own religion and departing from his community" (Al-Bukhārī, #6484; Muslim, #1676). Scholarly consensus admits that after execution (*ḥadd*) on the conviction of murder, the criminal is washed per Islam's funerary protocol, *Ṣalāh* is also performed and he is buried in a Muslim cemetery. The offering of *ṣadaqah* on his/her behalf is also permissible. If, however, he/she had reverted to a state of apostasy, the ruling applies to him and such treatment would not be implemented.

Al-Ṭabarī and others say this verse especially applies to Muslims who see killing as legal, in which case the perpetrator is certainly a disbeliever. However, the self-evident import of the verse differs from the given explanation as the verse deals with the offence of killing whereas a murderer intentionally commits the crime. Hence, all other grave sins such as theft and slander or false accusation do not fall under the purview of this verse. Moreover, the generality of forgiveness, declared in 4: 48, bears additional evidence against the charge of apostasy because Allah (S.W.T.) says, "Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth..." (Qur'ān, 4: 48). Hence, killing is a lesser evil than associating a partner with Allah. Therefore, the sin of murder is covered by the will (mercy) of Allah (S.W.T.).

The *Karrāmiyyah* taught that *īmān* was oral acknowledgement of faith, arguing that Allah says: "Say ye: 'We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham and to Ismā'īl'" (Qur'ān, 2: 136). They argued men were literally ordered to actually utter *īmān*, meaning verbal expression; hence, *īmān* rested only on oral admission. Ibn Karram introduced stupidities without any precedent in Fiqh. Among them is his innovation that when a traveller prays it is sufficient for him to say *Allah Akbar* twice without kneeling, prostrating, standing, sitting, reciting the *Shahadah* and salutation. He also declared that it is permissible to offer prayer in dirty clothes, and on dirty ground and with a dirty body (Al-Baghdādī, 2010, 251).

The proponents of *īmān* by acknowledgement (*al-Ashā'irah* and *al-Maṭūridiyyah*) are also misled by applying the term *kufṛ* to whoever intentionally leaves his *Salah* while belittling a proven legal ruling through definitive evidence of *Sharī'ah* and *ḥadīth* that indicates

acknowledgement solely by the heart is sufficient for a man to become Muslim. Hence, it is evident the proposition that *īmān* is a combination of oral admission plus acknowledgement by the heart is also incorrect. Moreover, they contradict their own juridical opinions that have categorized issues of praxis and further prescribed many unnecessary mandatory issues by *fiqh*. If these matters are not mandatory for *īmān*, what then justifies their discussion on learning *Sharī'ah* and its implementation in practical living? Furthermore, all four *madhāhib* comprehensively discuss the matter of apostasy and precisely what types of action define apostasy.

### **Extremism in Descriptive Names and Rulings**

Kharijites reserved the term *fāsiq* for grave sinners and apostates whose blood and property were lawfully forfeit, whose wives would be divorced, and for whom no funerary rites would be performed. In their view, such people were automatically disqualified by default from receiving Allah's (S.W.T.) mercy and thus condemned to hellfire forever. Mu'tazilites agreed but adopted a different approach in terms of worldly rulings by taking an extreme position with regard to the commission of sin. As far as they were concerned, remaining within the purview of Islam was impossible because normal human beings cannot feasibly comply with *Sharī'ah* without committing sin, major and minor. This Kharijite thinking persists to this day.

In Egypt, a group led by Shukrī Muṣṭafā advocated the concept of *takfīr* and were subsequently labelled proponents of *takfīr* and *hijrah*. Indeed, their ideology influenced hyper-emotional optimists and young Muslims with limited knowledge and little wisdom. Islamic political parties soon became victim to their ideals globally. Shukrī argued as follows: (i) nowhere did Islam distinguish between a practical *kufīr* and a *kufīr* of the heart; (ii) there was no text that differentiated anyone who practically violated *Sharī'ah* from disbelievers; and (iii) the whole of the text indicated that transgression of Allah's (S.W.T.) commands automatically qualified sinners for God's punishment and everlasting hellfire.

The following extremist propositions are held by Shukrī's organization.

1. They distance themselves from an apostate Egyptian society in which the majority seemed satisfied with secularism;
2. They legalized the blood of those who oppose or disobey them because whoever disobey them became apostate;
3. They advocated that whosoever does not judge in accordance with Allah's rulings, automatically expels them from Muslim society without further qualification because only their sect is *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.
4. They condemn sinners as *kāfir* in this world and to hellfire in the hereafter.

These propositions are all illogical. One irrationally condemns a sinner while another legalizes Muslim blood of Muslims, both of which destroy peace and harmony in society by instigating fear and terror while spreading chaos and disorder. They certainly serve to stigmatize traditional Islamic tolerance while also generating fear and insecurity. It is to be regretted that these persons actually thought to perform piety by such a horrendous defence of religion. Such ignorance of *Sharī'ah* and *maqāṣid* is rarely surpassed. They also claimed they were the group of the promised Mahdi in keeping with the Prophet's (S.A.W.) prophecy.

Likewise, several ideas and thoughts propounded by Shukrī's group extended far beyond boundaries set by the Qur'ān and Sunnah. As such, they perpetrated fraud and purposely destroyed peace and harmony. Anyone resembling them in principle would not necessarily be regarded as one of them. Nevertheless, we assert that Shukrī's ideology sounds exactly like ideas put forth by Kharijites, Mu'tazilites and other extremist sects that wrought havoc on early Muslim societies.

## Conclusion

This study highlighted the archetypical forms of extremism in ancient societies that misguide the religious thinking of contemporary Muslims. This study substantiates the fact that from antiquity, forms of extremism and radicalism have persisted from the people of Noah (A.S.) to Greek infidels and from thence to People of the Book and the *ummah* of the new millennium. Unfortunately, present day Muslims, consciously and unconsciously, resort to extremist thought and actions. Surely the continuum represented by these findings and conclusions requires significant attention of scholars and sundry pedestrians.

The lexical and technical examination of the Arabic term shows that *ghulūw* in religion refers to “crossing” or “transgressing” an established limit which is a blameworthy phenomenon as per the Qur’ān and Sharī’ah. Moreover, attributing terms such as extremism, radicalism and terrorism to Islam is a form of systematic propaganda that specifically targets Islam and Muslims with distortions that purposely denigrate the religion.

From the dawn of human history men have honoured their pious fellows. With the passage of time, boundaries were crossed and origins forgotten creating a void that has been filled with continuum of false concepts. Some of these errors gravely affected the Muslim community, namely, Kharijites, Rafidites, Jahmites, Mu‘tazilites and their numerous branches. The worst form of their extremist ideations allowed for the legal murder of an ordinary sinful Muslim, which is a completely unacceptable religious innovation. Subsequent to this egregious error, Mu‘tazilites established principles such as enforced intimidation and positioning a man between two uncomfortable positions. It has also been established that adverse consequences arise when extremists attach incorrect rulings to nomenclature that engages violence-prone ideations; thus they promoted terror by misusing terms such as *fāsiq* and *kāfir*, specifically to approve bloodletting in this world and the assigning of hellfire in the next.

Extremism may have originated modestly but it spread rapidly and seriously affected religious life with a bent towards social destruction. As the most important remedy for this disease is the understanding of Sharī’ah based on authentic sources, and the correct praxis with copious doses of moderation, this study recommends the following:

1. Adhere to Qur’ānic and prophetic methodology when presenting facts and evidence in the defence of any religious matter that requires attention.
2. Uphold sincerity in religious mission and allow no vested party or organizational interest to supersede or overtake the truth.
3. When referencing early or medieval scholars and writings, do so on a relevant basis in the best interest of the contemporary *ummah*, and not on *taqlīd* in its narrowest sense.
4. When interpreting creedal, doctrinal, jurisprudential or devotional matters, scholarly differences should not be given



priority during discussions with laypersons, as this spreads turmoil and can generate controversies that lead to the fragmentation of a society.

5. Efforts must be made to maintain and activate the actual state of *īmān* for a given people according to their level of comprehension.
6. It is essential to remember that any religious presentation or exhortation should avoid conflict and sustain unity, regardless of minor or major differences.
7. The content of discourse must be carefully selected, vetted and analysed before presentation to avoid confusion and dissension. Moreover, it should be based on the intellectual and psychological level of the audience.
8. A problem-solving attitude should be kept in mind instead of a problem creating mentality. Hence, the ego and bias of the presenter should be eliminated.

Ordinary Muslims who show keen interest in learning and advancing Islamic religious knowledge through non-formal means, including talks, speeches, dialogues and debates by unqualified persons (also: Internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Blogs, etc.), must be careful to verify sources and content. Presenters and preachers of Islam have various intellectual backgrounds and academic orientations and may use inauthentic, biased or sectarian sources when presenting their message. Such persons can certainly cause dissension and turmoil. Currently, the global *ummah* is obviously affected by unhealthy trends that cause disunity and social collapse.

Several contemporary venues attended by Muslim scholars have been influenced by sectarian doctrines that derive from classical periods. Many speakers and attendees have consciously or unconsciously borrowed ideas from Kharijites, Muʿtazilites, Shiites, Jahmites, Karramites, *Ghassāniyyah*, *Šālihiyyah*, *Thawbāniyyah*, *Najjāriyyah*, and *Sabaʿiyyah*, as discussed above. As such, their contributions can only serve to seed and germinate theological diseases. Moreover, it remains unclear as to whether or not they actually comprehend the implications of their sectarian errors. What is more doleful is that many scholars are unaware of both the origin and consequences of using such controversial and polemic material for religious discourses among lay people, which misconstrues Islam and generates conflicts and controversies. Numerous



examples can be cited where ordinary people have begun to behave violently over inter-intra-religious matters. Thus, Muslim scholars are surely to blame for the emotional treatment of religious messages. Perhaps ignorant, perhaps unaware, many highlight and quote grievous errors of early religious extremists and radicals. Surely, there is nothing new under the sun.

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