

The Early Khawaarij Sect And The Takfiri's of Today

The Khawaarij or Kharijite as written in many books, were the first group to deviate from mainstream Islam. The Prophet Mohammad warned of their appearance and explained how dangerous they will be: "they kill Muslims and leave off the enemies of Islam"¹; he also said: "if I live to see them I will kill them like the destruction of the people of Ad"². Knowing the motives and methods deployed by the takfiri extremists³ will aid future generations and the world in general.

This small treatise will involve comparative analysis - a technique which will be particularly useful when making the comparison between the extremists responsible for the political violence we witness today and the early Khawarij sect.

This treatise will discuss who they are, and a brief mention of their history, appearance, characteristics and dangers. Their pride and honour in violence against the state demonstrate similarities as well as differences between them and those contemporary takfiri extremists. The issue of haakimiyah⁴, which was the central argument of the Khawarij against Ali, will be discussed to show the similarity between them and the Takfiri extremists.

Khawarij is defined as "those who render Muslims apostates because of sin and who rebel against the Muslim leaders and the state"⁵. They are commonly known today as takfiri. Extremist is defined in Islam as 'those who go beyond the prescribed limits, in excess of the boundaries laid down by Allah'⁶.

A brief look at the Khawaarij origins

The first trial to befall the Muslims which lead to sectarianism within the Ummah was the trial during the caliphate of Uthman. This ended in his murder and division amongst the Muslims. After this period some new Muslims with a lack of knowledge of Islamic \sciences followed their desires and from them appeared the Kharijite.

The Kharijite were the first group in the history of Islam to separate from the main body of Muslims. The name Kharijite comes from the Arabic name Khawaarij its plural is 'khaarijiah' which means to 'go out', or 'those who went out', technically it means 'to form a sect'⁷. Thus the Khawaarij went out from the main body of Muslims to form a separate sect or party. They appeared after the caliphate of Uthman, though their origin can be found during the time of the Prophet Mohammad.

A hadith narrated by Ibn Sa'id: when the Prophet Mohammad was distributing some gold which was sent back to him by Ali ibn Abi Talib, a man called Abdullah ibn Dhil Khuwaysara at Tamimi came to him and exclaimed: "be just oh Messenger of Allah". This man was unhappy with the portion he was given. His description in other narrations say he was sunken eyed had a bulging forehead, thick beard, fat raised cheeks and clean shaven head. The Prophet replied: "woe to you! Who will be just if I am unjust?" Upon hearing this Umar ibn Khataab said: "permit me to strike his neck", the Prophet replied: "leave him, for I do not want the people to say Mohammad kills his companions". Then he continued to say: "verily from the progeny of this man will be a people who will leave the religion as fast as an arrow leaves the bow. Your prayers will not equal their prayers; your fasting will not equal their fasting". The

following verse was revealed regarding Dhul Khuwaysara : "and from them are men who accuse in regards to charity"⁸. There are a number of different narrations of the above hadith. It is known that the Prophet Mohammed prophesied the forth coming of this sect because Ibn Sa'id the narrator of this hadith also added: "I testify that Ali fought those people while I was with him"⁹.

The Khawaarij revolt

After Uthman was killed, Ali became the caliph though Mu'awiya refused to acknowledge this until Ali would bring to justice those who killed Uthman. Ali was unable to do this and demanded that Mu'awiya pledged his allegiance in order to unify the Muslims and prevent discord. Mu'awiya refused, thus difference appeared which ultimately resulted in war.

There were three groups in this calamity. The first was Ali the caliph in Madindy who had the support of Kufa. The second was Aeysha with Talha and az-Zubayr in Basra. The third was Mu'awiya in Shaam. A war broke out between Aeysha and Ali in which Ali was victorious and az-Zubair and Talha were killed, in a battle was known as the battle of the camel. Ali was then left with fighting Mu'awiya.

A group from amongst Ali's army insisted on taking the booty from the victory of the battle of the camel and they insisted on taking the women as slaves. Ali refused this saying we do not take booty or slaves from Muslims. They argued saying we had always fought with the Messenger of Allah and took booty and slave girls. Ali tried to make them understand that this was not permissible but they did not inwardly accept his ruling, though they followed him at that moment. This was the first discord which appeared from the Kharijite.

The battle against Mu'awiya was called the battle of Siffin. In it Ali was winning until Mu'awiya's army called for arbitration and a group of Ali's army insisted on accepting it. This group was the same group who did not accept they were not allowed the booty from the battle of the camel. They were fierce fighters on the right flank of Ali's army.

In his book called 'al Bidaya wa Nihaya', Ibn Katheer narrates the army of Mu'awiya began to loose the battle so they raised the mushaf above their heads on their spears saying, "let the Book be judged between us". The leader of Ali's right flank army led by Ashta al Nakhahi, which was the section of the battle which inflicted the worse casualties to Mu'awiya army, came to Ali. He said: "they are asking for Allah's book to arbitrate between us; let us allow the judgement of Allah to settle this dispute and stop the spilling of Muslim blood". Ali said to him: "it is for Allah's judgement I am fighting in the first place. Indeed I called them to consultation before, but they were bent on fighting, so fight them now and do not leave anyone alive. They only call for arbitration because they are loosing the battle, so fight them". The leader of the right flank and the group who came with him to Ali were known as the 'reciters' due to their constant recitation of the Qur'an. They refused to fight, and disobeyed Ali's command. Ali was forced to accept the arbitration against his will which he made clear. His right flank was his strongest and he had no choice but to accept or loose the battle.

The two sides agreed to appoint a judge who would meet and agree to a solution to end the calamity amongst them. So Mu'awiya appointed Amr ibn A'as and Ali appointed Abu Musa al Ashari. They wrote an agreement between them stating: "this is what Ali Ibn Abi Taalib chief of the believers agrees to". Then Amr ibn A'as said: If I believed he was the chief of the believers I would not have fought him so write his name and his fathers name as he is your chief not ours. Upon this Ali said: "write this is what Ali ibn Abi Taalib agrees to and omit the words chief of the believers". The scribe then wrote as he was instructed. The reciters were agitated and rejected this action of Ali arguing that being the chief of the believers is a cloak which Allah gave to Ali and he should not remove it. After the agreement had taken place, each party went back to where they came from. Mu'awiya went back to Damascus and Ali headed back to Kufa.

On the way to Kufa, Ali faced enmity from the reciters and false accusations began to spread in his army causing disunity. When they got close to Kufa, a group separated from Ali's army and left claiming Ali had done much wrong and accused him of not judging by the Book of Allah. They committed 'kharooj' (went out) from Ali's army and settled in a place called 'al-Harurah'. Thus the Kharijite sect was established. Some scholars called them al Haruriyah after the name of the place which they separated to. They totally disassociated with Ali and accused him of a number of transgressions against the shar'iah. They openly spread propaganda against him and denounced his right to be caliph. This was the first sect in Islamic history to be separate from the main body of Muslims¹⁰.

The Khawaarij killed Companions

Ubaykaan quotes a narration from Ibn Kathir's book Bidaya wa Nihaya also showing how the Khawaarij spread corruption on the earth, shed blood, obstructed the paths, and made lawful the prohibited. Among the many Muslims they killed was an illustrious companion of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Khabaab. They captured him and his wife while she was pregnant. They asked him: "who are you?" he replied: "I am Abdullah Ibn Khabaab, a companion of the Messenger of Allah and you have terrorised us without right". They said to him: "do not be afraid, narrate to us something you heard from your father", to which he replied that he heard his father say that he heard the Messenger of Allah say: there will come a tribulation (so severe) during which a person sitting will be better than one standing, the one standing better than the one walking, and the one walking better than the one running". So they led him by the hand. While he was walking with them, some of them found a pig that belonged to some of the non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. One of them killed it with his sword, so another one asked him "how could you kill it when it belongs to a non-Muslim living under Muslim rule?" the man went to that owner to put things right and he paid him for it. Later, while they were walking, a date fell from a palm tree so one of them took it and placed it in his mouth. Another said to him. "You eat it without permission or paying for it?" so he spat it out. Even with all these seemingly good deeds they still came to Abdullah Ibn Khabaab and slaughtered him. Then they went to his wife while she was saying: "I am a pregnant woman! Do you all not have any fear of Allah?" They slaughtered her and cut open her stomach exposing her unborn baby¹.

Advice given to the Khawaarij before fighting them

Imam Ahmad brings the three main claims against Ali that he sources from Majma al Fawa'id in the narration of Ibn Abbas who said:

"After they separated to al Harurah, I went to them to call them back. When I got there they welcomed me and I asked them: what is it you have against Ali which has made you separate from him and his governance?" They said:

"Firstly, he called for judgment of men in the religion of Allah, and Allah states in the Qur'an "verily judgement is for Allah alone"¹² .

Secondly, he fought and did not speak badly about the enemy nor take booty even though they had become disbelievers. The wealth of the disbelievers is permissible to take and if they were believers then the shedding of their blood is impermissible in the first place.

Thirdly, he removed his name as the chief of the believers during the writing of the agreement".

So I said, "if I am able to narrate to you from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet that which you cannot reject, will you return to his governance?" They said "yes". Then I said to them:

"As for your complaint that he called for judgment of men in the religion of Allah, Allah states: "Oh you who believe do not kill prey (hunt) whilst you are in the state of Ihraam "¹³; to his saying "Just people from amongst you will judge by it "¹⁴; and Allah, Most High, said about a man and his wife "if you fear a separation between them both then send a judge from his side and a judge from her side "¹⁵ may Allah guide you, does the judgement of men regarding their blood and their lives and fixing affairs between them have more right or the profit of rabbit is four dirham?"[He means if we can bring men to judge whether the profit on a rabbit is correct, then we can do so more importantly in affairs which concern spilling of Muslim blood and fixing of their affairs]. They said: "By Allah the spilling of blood and fixing affairs between them has more right". So I asked: "are you free from this now", they replied: "Yes".

I then asked: "as for your complaint that he fought and did not speak badly about the enemy nor take booty, will you speak badly about your mother? Or will you make halal, to do with her what you would make halal, to do with other than her? If so then you have disbelieved and if you believe she is not your mother then you have disbelieved also. Verily Allah Most High states: "the Prophet is foremost of the believers than themselves and his wives are their mothers "¹⁶ you are stuck in between two deviations so choose which one you want. Are you free from this also?" They replied: "By Allah, yes"

[And] as for your complaint he removed his name as the chief of the believers then indeed the Messenger of Allah made an agreement with the Quraish in Hudaibiyah and removed his title of Messenger of Allah for Mohammad Ibn Abdullah. Who is better the Messenger of Allah or Ali?" They replied: "the Messenger of Allah." I said "are you free from this also?" They replied: "By Allah, yes."

So twenty thousand of them returned [to us], four thousand remained and were fought by Ali and defeated in Nahrawaan.

Ali did not fight them until they began to spread mischief in the lands and spill the blood of the innocent. As mentioned above, Abdullah bin Khabab bin al Aratt passed by them while he was an

appointee of Ali in some of those lands. He had with him his wife who was pregnant. They killed him and cut open the stomach of his wife. This news reached Ali and he sent an army which met them at Nahrawaan.

After the battle was over and Ali annihilated them, he sent a party to search for the one whom the Messenger described as having a hand which was like a small breast of a woman. When this individual was found Ali exclaimed: "Allahu Akbar I have been utilised to fulfil the prophecy and you all know the hadith".¹⁷ After Ali demolished them, they lived under his caliphate in hiding. Some of them still spread their corruption in secret, until Abdur Rahman Ibn Muljam killed Ali.

The different types of Khawaarij

According to Qadhi Abu Bakr bin Alaarabi al Maaliki, the Kharijite were of two types. One type believed that Uthman and Ali and those who fought in the battle of al Jamal and al Siffin and everyone who accepted the judgement of arbitrators were disbelievers. The other type believed that whoever committed a major sin is a disbeliever, who shall reside in hell forever. Others claimed the first type are a branch of the second because the reason for them believing the rest of the Muslims were disbelievers was that they sinned by supporting Uthman and Ali. According to Abu Mansoor al Baghdadi the Kharijite split into twenty sects.

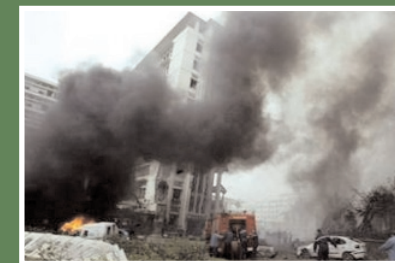
- 1 Bukhari
- 2 Bukhari
- 3 Such as present groups like Muhajiroon, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ikwaan Muslimoon and others who excommunicate Muslims from the religion.
- 4 Governance or rule
- 5 Al Khawaarij Awal firaq fil llsam by Al Aqal p28
- 6 Religious Extremism by Dr Abdul Rahman al Mutairi p67-74
- 7 Taken From Haqqatul Khawaarij by Sheikh Faisal al Jaasim
- 8 Surah Tawbah verse 58
- 9 Muslim
- 10 Al Bidaaya wa Nihaaya p283
- 11 The Khawarij by Ubaykan p49-51
- 12 Surah al Anam verse 57
- 13 Surah al Maidah verse 95
- 14 Surah al Maidah verse 95
- 15 Surah Nisa verse 35
- 16 Surah Ahzaab verse 6
- 17 A hadith in Muslim in which the Prophet prophesised the Khawarij will be killed and amongst the killed will be a man whose hand will be like a breast of a women.

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