

The Genesis of Shi'ism in Islam

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Abstract:

Like other major religions of the world, sectarian division took place in Islam too. The major cause of this sectarian division was political in its nature rather than religious. Immediately after the demise of the Holy Prophet (SAW), believers were divided over the question of succession to the Prophet (SAW) which later on culminated in the shape of two sectarian factions i.e. Sunni and Shi'ah. The present paper will give a complete account of the genesis of Islamic sects including the events that directly intensified shi'ism in Islam.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) died on 8th June, 632 after an illness of fifteen days. It was a critical juncture because Muslims were confronted with the problem of the leadership of Islamic State. In such a critical situation, different groups claimed their right to lead the Muslims. A small group of people remarked that leadership must function in the family of the Prophet (SAW) and that is why in later days they backed 'Ali for that purpose and were known as *Shi'ān-e-'Ali*, which means the party of 'Ali. Majority of the people put forwarded the name of Abū Bakr for succession subjected to the will of the ordinary Muslims. The assumption was that because the Holy Prophet (SAW) left no clear instructions regarding his successor, so the matter should be decided through general will of the people. They got the title of *ahl al-sunnah wa'l-jama'ah* which literally means the group of people who believe in the *sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (SAW).¹

Abū Bakr As a Caliph:

Soon after the demise of the Holy Prophet (SAW), *Ansārs*² gathered in *Saqīfa banī Sā'idah*³ to choose among themselves as the successor of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Someone brought the news to 'Umar who communicated it to Abū Bakr. Both the companions took their way to the meeting hall. On their

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way, they met Abū ‘Ubaydah al Jarrah and took him along. When they reached there, they saw Sa’d bin ‘Ubadah covered in a blanket due to illness. The *Ansār* gathered told Abū Bakr about their decision to elect ‘Ubadah as the successor of the Holy Prophet (SAW). They justified the claim of *Ansārs* to *Khilafat* on the basis of their services for Islam after the Holy Prophet (SAW) emigrated to Medīnah from Makkah. Abū Bakr expressed appreciation of the services to *Ansārs* for Islam and the Prophet (SAW). But he narrated the tradition which emphasised for the leadership of the *Quraysh* tribe. He maintained that *Quraysh* as a tribe was more respectable throughout Arabia. He said that it was not the matter of leadership of ‘Medīnah state’ but the Islamic state. In addition, he maintained that during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (SAW), they were the helpers of the Prophet (SAW). They should again be the helpers and leave the matter of leadership to *Quraysh*. At this Hubāb bin Manāzar, one of the *Ansār* leaders, proposed a compromise that there be two chiefs, one chosen from the *Muhajirīn*⁴ and another from the *Ansārs*. ‘Umar at once rejected this proposal by saying that two sovereigns could not live within one state. Then Abū Bakr stepped forward, pointed towards ‘Umar and Abū ‘Ubadah by saying, “Here are the two companions of the Prophet (SAW). Choose anyone of them as a chief”. But they both rejected it and raised the hand of Abū Bakr and took the oath of allegiance to Abū Bakr. Thus he was chosen as *Khalīfah*⁵ of the Prophet (SAW) of God.⁶

The leader of *Aus* tribe, Bashīr bin Sa’d also swore allegiance to Abū Bakr. The *Khazraj* tribe also followed suit so that the *Aus* might not take precedence over them. After that people in groups after one another stepped forward and accepted Abū Bakr as successor of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

On 9th June, 632AD, his *Khilafat* was confirmed by people in a gathering. On this occasion he delivered a comprehensive speech and emphasised that he be obeyed, if he obeyed Allah and His Prophet (SAW) and not vice versa.⁷

The Question of ‘Alī’s Homage:

Tarīkh-e-Ibni Kathīr gives three different views regarding ‘Alī’s acceptance of Abū Bakr as *Khalīfah*. According to one view, he accepted Abū Bakr’s new position on the very day he was proclaimed *Khalīfah*. According to another view, he never took oath of allegiance at all. Yet according to other view, ‘Alī accepted Abū Bakr’s *Khilafat* after the death of his (‘Alī’s) wife, Fātima. She had died six months later after the death of the Holy Prophet (SAW), her father. Hazrat Fātima demanded the lands of *Fadak* and *Khyber* as her patrimony. Abū Bakr refused to do so on the basis of this tradition. ‘What we leave has no heir but it is for charity.’⁸

Fātima resented this and never met Abū Bakr as long as she lived after that. ‘Alī did not give his allegiance to Abū Bakr during her life. After her death, ‘Alī accepted Abū Bakr’s *Khilafat*.⁹

Shi'ahs' and Sunnīs' Claim for Caliphate:

Shi'ah justifies claim of Ali as first and rightful *Khalīfah* due to his dual relationship with the Prophet (SAW) as his first cousin and son-in-law. Secondly, they believe that the Holy Prophet (SAW) had designated Ali as his successor. They cite the proclamation of the Holy Prophet (SAW) which he made in 632 AD. After his last sermon on the Mount of Arafāt, While the Holy Prophet (SAW) was returning to Medīnah when he stayed at a place called *Ghadīr al-Khumm*.¹⁰ It was at this place that the Holy Prophet (SAW) made the following proclamation. The proclamation has been reported in different versions, the most popular being, 'for whom I was the *Mawlā* (master) should hence have Ali as his master.'¹¹

Thirdly, they criticise the principle of free-will of people for choosing the successor of God's messenger, reasoning that the will of the people may go wrong. Only the person who has enough knowledge of Qur'ān and *Hadīth* can lead Muslims in the right direction. That knowledge was available to those who were near and dear to the Prophet (SAW)—especially, Ali and through him to his eleven male descendants.¹²

On the other hand, the Sunnīs' contention in considering Abū Bakr as a legitimate successor consists of the following arguments. Firstly, he was a distinguished member of the community in the sense that he was the close companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW); he was older than other contenders for caliphate; he was with the Holy Prophet (SAW) during his migration from Makkah to Medīnah, an event of such importance as to deserve mention in the Qur'ān (9:40); he had given his daughter Aisha in marriage to the Holy Prophet (SAW) and acted as his chief adviser.¹³ In addition, it was Abū Bakr who officiated as Imām¹⁴ during the Prophet's (SAW) illness. Also, the Sunnīs criticise the interpretation and understanding of the term *Mawlā* in the Prophet's (SAW) proclamation. The word *Mawlā* can be taken to mean a ruler or it can be simply mean a friend. Due to different interpretation, they consider it to be too vague for any hard and fast conclusion to be evolved from it.

Thirdly, they regard succession as elective rather than hereditary. They defend the principle of free-will of the people for election of the caliph and that it is Islamic and not a foreign concept. The Arabs used to choose their chieftains by exercising their free-will. They were against the law of primogeniture. In case of the Holy Prophet's succession, the matter was quite easy. Because he had not made any will regarding his succession. Moreover, there was neither written constitution nor any provision, which could guide Muslims for succession. In such a vague situation the principle of free-will of the people was genuine response to the situation.¹⁵ A reputed tradition also adds support to principle of the free-will.

'My community cannot agree on error.' (Ibn-i- Mājah)¹⁶

Some Important Aspects of Shi'aism and Sunnism:

There also exist a contradiction between *Shi'aism* and *Sunnism* regarding the qualifications and functions of the Holy Prophet (SAW). *Sunnism* considers the successor of the Prophet (SAW) to be his *Khalifah* who is to be the guardian of *Shari'ah*. On the other hand *Shi'aism* entitles such successor as *Imam* possessing prophetic powers of 'esoteric interpretation of the revelation and the inheritance to the Prophet's esoteric teachings.'¹⁷

Moreover, they maintain that *Imam* as infallible with regard to character, making him unique from others for truth and purity. Conversely, the *Sunnīs* reject such qualification and termed them secondary. The primary thing is that 'he must be free, adult, sane and possessed the capacity to attend to the ordinary affairs of the state.'¹⁸

Both *Shi'aism* and *Sunnism* have been further split into various sub-sects. The dominant sub-sects of *Shi'aism* are *Isnā Ashariyyah* (those who believe in twelve *Imams*), *Ismā'ilism* (those who believe in seven *Imams*) and *Zaidism* (those who believe in five *Imams*). However, majority of *Shi'ahs* are *Isnā Ashariyyah*. The broad sub-sects of *Sunnism* are *Hanfi* (founded by Numan ibn Thabit Abu Hanifa), *Shāfi* (founded by Muhammad ibn Idrish ash Shafii), *Hambalī* (founded by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal), and *Mālikī* (founded by Abdallah Malik ibn Anas).¹⁹

An important aspect of *Sunnism* is that 'all *Sunnīs* accept first four Caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī as true vicegerents (*Khalīfas*) of the Prophet (SAW) who fulfilled this function in its fullness so that they are called the rightly-guided Caliphs (*Al-Khulafa Al-Rashidūn*)'. *Sunnī* jurists do not accept *Umayyad* and *Abbasid* caliphate as righteous caliphs because in these periods the Islamic caliphate was not the embodiment of the whole *Ummah* (Community of Muslims) but was transformed into Arab kingdom.²⁰ *Sunnism* accepts the authority of rulers even if they are oppressive. However, *Shi'aism* shows resistance against corrupt and oppressive rulers. That is the reason that the latter 'kept on challenging the legitimacy of different caliphates for most part of the Muslims' history.'²¹

HISTORICAL EVENTS LED TO RELIGIOUS SCHISM:

Following are some of the events which led to religious shi'ism among Muslims.

'Uthmān as a Caliph:

After the demise of 'Umar, 'Uthmān was chosen as a third caliph by a board of six electors consisting of 'Alī, 'Uthmān, Abdur Rehmān bin Auf, Zubayr, Sa'd bin 'Abī Waqās and Talha. The great age of 'Uthmān, his services to Islam, his mild and gentle nature and his close relationship with the Holy Prophet (SAW), being the husband of two daughters of the last messenger of Allah hence titled, '*Dhul-Nurayn*'²² were the qualities which went in favour of 'Uthmān. However, 'Uthmān possessed neither the shrewdness of Abū Bakr nor the intellectual vigour of 'Umar. According to Amir 'Alī, his decent and gentle nature had made him an easy tool in the hands of his kinsmen in the later part of his reign.²³

The Martyrdom of 'Uthmān:

The policies of 'Uthmān in the later part of his reign created restlessness among people in various parts of the Islamic State. As a result riots broke out in Kūfa, Basra and Egypt demanding for the removal of 'Uthmān from caliphate. The rioters also tried to include 'Alī, Talha and Zubayr in their evil designs but they all refused to do so. The rebels besieged the house of 'Uthmān to fulfil their

nefarious design of killing the caliph. The siege lasted for forty days. They cut off the supply of food and even water to his house. Besides, 'Uthmān, there were Talha, Zubayr, Merwān and Ali's two sons, Hasan and Hussain inside the house. These men served as guards of the Caliph. In one of the encounter with the rioters, Hasan and Merwān were wounded. The situation deteriorated more and more. Mu'awiya the Governor of Syria, asked 'Uthmān to leave Medīnah for Makkah and to take protection under him. Other governors gave similar suggestions.²⁴

As days of pilgrimage came near, the rioters' anxiety increased. Because the rioters knew that in a few days pilgrims would be back from the pilgrimage and thus help for the caliph from the provinces might also arrive. So, they decided to kill the caliph-'Uthmān without delay. Since there was guard at the main gate, a party of rioters jumped over the back wall into the house. The party was led by Muhammad bin Abū Bakr. 'Uthmān was reciting the Holy Qur'ān, when the son of Abū Bakr held the caliph's beard and pulled it. Another man hit the caliph on his head with an axe. The third person struck him with a sword. Naila, the faithful wife of the caliph, had her fingers cut off in trying to shield her husband. Then all the rioters collectively fell upon the aged caliph. One of them Amr bin Hamp cut off his head. Thus the third caliph was martyred on 18th *Dhul Hajja*, 17th June, 656AD. After this they looted the public treasury. The rioters did not allow anybody to bury the dead body of the caliph. Thus the body lay unburied for three days. At last at the request of Ali, the rioters allowed to bury the dead body. Such was the merciless and inhuman death of the third caliph, 'Uthmān.²⁵

Ali as a Caliph:

After the assassination of 'Uthmān, the capital was in the grip of terror and lawlessness. For six days there was no caliph to lead the Islamic state. To normalise conditions, the rebels wanted to choose a caliph of their own choice before the arrival of the Muslims to Medīnah from pilgrimage. However, there was no unanimity among the rebels on the new caliph. The Egyptian rebels favoured Ali, the Kūfans, Zubayr and the Basrans, Talha. Since the Egyptians were in majority, therefore, 'Ali was chosen as a new caliph on 24th *Dhul Hijjah*, 35 AH /23rd June, 656AD.²⁶

Ali as a caliph led to religious shi'ism among the Muslims because it was not a universally-accepted decision. Following reasons can be given in this regard. Firstly, he was chosen by rebels who were disqualified as voters. Secondly, the rebels employed force or threat of force to compel the people to agree on 'Ali. Talha and Zubayr can be best quoted in this regard. Thirdly, 'Aisha, the daughter of Abū Bakr, who was the last and the youngest wife of the Holy Prophet (SAW), was by now an old woman and accepted by all as the Mother of the Muslims, also joined hands with the pro-'Uthmān party. Fourthly, it created suspicion in the minds of the people that 'Ali was involved in the assassination of

‘Uthmān, although he was not involved in this evil matter at all. Fifthly, ‘Ali was not chosen by *Majlis-e-Shūra* (assembly for consultation). Sixthly, several *Ansarite* companions, like Hassan bin Thābit, Kab bin Malik, Zayd bin Thābit and Numān bin Bashīr, did not accept ‘Ali as caliph. Seventhly, several *Qurayshites*, like ‘Abdullah bin Amar, Sa’d bin Abi Waqās etc also did not accept ‘Ali. Lastly, the *Umayyad* clan did not agree on ‘Ali. They fled to Makkah or Syria immediately after the death of ‘Uthmān. At that time Syria was under the governorship of Mu‘awiya, the son of Abū Safiyān.²⁷

Controversy Over the Revenge of ‘Uthmān:

The assassination of ‘Uthmān created restlessness among *Qurayshites* and they wanted to avenge his murder as soon as possible. However, ‘Ali did not take prompt action against the assassins due to certain reasons. He insisted on waiting till facts were revealed against those who had jumped into the house of ‘Uthmān. However, this did not silence his critics. They revolted against the caliph on the ground that he was not punishing the murderers and not defending the honour and dignity of Islam. The administrative issue became a political issue. The first to lead the revolt were Talha, Zubayr and Aisha.²⁸

Dismissal of ‘Uthmān’s Governors:

After taking over as a caliph, ‘Ali immediately started the dismissal of the ‘Uthmān’s governors contrary to the forbidding by his companions. The companions advised him to make the governors first accept him as caliph and then dismiss them later. However, he did not agree with the proposal. He dispatched his own nominees to replace them. ‘Uthmān bin Hanīf was sent to Basra to replace ‘Abdullah bin Amir, Amarah bin Shahāb to replace ‘Abdullah bin Mūsa al-Asharī, Qays bin Sa’d to Egypt to replace ‘Abdullah bin Sarh, and Suhayl bin Hanīf to Syria to replace Mu‘awiya. This was greatly resented by the pro-‘Uthmān people in these provinces.²⁹

First Civil War:

When ‘Ali took over as a caliph, Zubayr and Talha accepted him unwillingly. They were not pleased with him. They expected that the caliph would bestow upon them the governorships of Basara and Kūfa but ‘Ali did not do so.³⁰ At this they left Medīnah and reached Makkah where they joined with the pro-‘Uthmān party of Aisha. Both, Zubayr and Talha raised the standard of revolt there to get the caliphate on the pretext of not revenging ‘Uthmān’s death. They attacked Basra and defeated ‘Uthmān bin Hanīf, ‘Ali’s governor for Basra. When ‘Ali came to know about this development, he postponed his march against Mu‘awiya and set out for Basra at the head of 20,000 men. When the two armies faced each other, ‘Ali met Talha and Zubayr in order to solve the dispute through negotiations. They decided to reach a compromise and make peace the next morning. Those who had murdered ‘Uthmān did not like this development. They knew that if such a compromise was made, they would be punished for

their misdeed by the army of Talha and Zubayr. They met secretly and conspired to destroy all chances of peace between the parties.³¹

The conspirators attacked the army camp of Talha and Zubayr in darkness of the night. Talha and Zubayr considered that they were attacked by the main army of Ali; thus misunderstanding developed between both the parties, which led to fight between them. It was the first battle in which Muslims fought Muslims rather than infidels. The fighting was long and bitter because both parties were equally brave and resolute. Both Talha and Zubayr died in the battlefield. When Zubayr withdrew from the battlefield, he was pursued and killed by a conspirator; Zubayr was killed when he was prostrating in prayer. Talha died in Basra of the wound inflicted by an arrow in the battlefield. Aisha, who was riding on a camel, supervised the rebellious army. It came to be known as the Battle of the Camel which took place in 656 AD. Knowing the fact that the enemy would not stop fighting as long as Aisha's camel remained in their midst, Ali ordered one of his men to cut down its legs. The animal fell down with a loud cry, but Aisha landed safely. No sooner did the camel fall, the fighting ceased. Aisha was taken prisoner. She was treated with courtesy and consideration and taken to Medīnah with every mark of respect.³²

Second Civil War:

After the victory of Basra, Ali turned his attention towards Mu'awiya. He sent his messenger to Mu'awiya to submit peacefully. However, he refused to accept Ali as a caliph for the reason that Ali was not bringing the murderers of 'Uthmān to justice. At last Ali marched against Mu'awiya at the head of 65,000 soldiers, they met Mu'awiya's army in the plain of Siffin in Syria. The process of negotiation continued for three months without any fruitful results. Squishes were stopped during the month of *Muharram*. The war started on 26th July 657 and lasted for three days. On the third day when situation was in favour of Ali,³³ Amr Ibn al As, the leader of Mu'awiya's army suggested that the matter should be solved by Qur'ān. Ali accepted that offer due to pressure from thousands of fanatics in his army strength. It was decided that the court of arbitration would decide the matter consisting of two arbiters one from each side. Mu'awiya put forward the name of Amr ibn al 'Ās while Ali gave the name of Abū Mūsa al-Asharī, a neutral in 'Uthmān's murder aftermath and the oldest surviving companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Arbitration was arranged. Amr had laid a trap for Abū Mūsa. Amr led Abū Mūsa to believe that Ali should be removed from the caliphate and Mu'awiya from governorship respectively and another person should be nominated for the leadership of the Islamic empire, as it was necessary for the well-being of Muslims. The trick succeeded. Abū Mūsa ascended the pulpit and announced the disposition of Ali. Then Amr ascended the pulpit and pronounced that Abū Mūsa had accepted the disposition of Ali, and had appointed Mu'awiya in his place. However, Ali refused to accept the decision as valid.

When Ali's army was on its way to Kūfa, the fanatics refused to accept the arbitration of men in place of the arbitration of God. By this they meant that the question of Ali's choice as a caliph had been decided in accordance with the principles of Qur'ān and, therefore his decision as caliph could not be again decided by any human being. Thus, they demanded that there should be no court of arbitration even though the agreement of arbitration was accepted on their insistence. When Ali's army reached Harura, a village near Kūfa, twelve thousands of them separated themselves from the main army and refused to return to Kūfa, unless the agreement of arbitration was cancelled. For this act of separation, they came to be known as *Khawārij*, or separatists or Haruriyya or Harurites. This event led to further division of Muslims.³⁴

Martyrdom of Ali:

Kharijīs were a constant threat for both Ali and Mu'awiya. *Kharijīs* considered Abū Bakr, 'Umar and the first few years of 'Uthmān very good because they had established a socio-political system of equality, fraternity, impartiality and social justice. They considered the rule of both Ali and Mu'awiya as un-Godly. They, therefore, wanted to get rid of them. For this purpose, they conspired and prepared a plan of killing Ali, Mu'awiya and Amr bin al-As. They succeeded in murdering Ali on 27th January, 661. However, they failed in killing the other two persons.³⁵

Resentment over the Nomination of Yazīd:

After the demise of Ali, his eldest son Hasan was nominated as the fifth caliph at Kūfa in January, 661. Hasan made peace with Mu'awiya on few conditions. Among these conditions, one was that Mu'awiya would choose Hasan's younger brother, Hussain as a caliph after his death. The conditions were agreed upon and Mu'awiya became the undisputed caliph of the whole of Muslim Empire in July, 661. He made Damascus his capital. However in 676, Mu'awiya nominated his son Yazīd as his successor. The people of Medīna and Makkah resented this, as there was no such precedent in the decision of the rightly-guided caliphs. Moreover, the decision of a caliph was a privilege of the people of Medīnah, which they were not willing to give up. On the other hand, Mu'awiya said that the circumstances had changed. Medīnah was no longer the capital of Islam. Since Damascus had become the capital, therefore, the caliph of Damascus should decide what was best for the empire. Furthermore, he maintained that there was the danger of a civil war in case of not nominating Yazīd as successor. Lastly, he wanted to maintain the caliphate in his own family. Thus the caliphate was transformed into a kingship. Caliphate was no longer an elected and republican institution but a hereditary one. Hereditary nomination became a precedent for all the successors of Mu'awiya, *Umayyad* as well as *Abbaside*. The principle of election was still there but only in appearance. The Makkani people and Medīnites were not happy at this nomination.³⁶

The Incident of Kerbalā:

After the death of Mu'awiya, Yazīd took over as the sixth caliph. On his deathbed, Mu'awiya warned Yazīd to be aware of the sons of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, Ali and Zubayr. They were serious threat to Yazīd's power. That is why when Yazīd became the caliph, he wrote to the governor of Medīnah to ask them to announce allegiance to the new caliph. The son of 'Umar complied with the governor's demand, but Hussain and Ibn Zubayr left Medīnah for Makkah in order to avoid it.³⁷

At that time 'Ubaydullah, son of Ziyad, ruled Kūfa. People of Kūfa hated him because he was a tyrant. They, therefore, invited Hussain through series of letters to come and rid them of cruel ruler ship. Hussain sent his cousin, Muslim bin Aqīl to Kūfa to report on the situation. Muslim wrote to him that all Kūfans are ready to support him with 40,000 troops and asked him to reach Kūfa as soon as possible. When he was on his way to Kūfa from Makkah, he heard the news of the murder of Muslim by 'Ubaydullah's men. When caravan of Hussain consisting of some 72 people approached Kūfa, 'Ubaydullah sent a force of 1000 men under the leadership of Hur Ibn-e-Yazīd to halt the progress of Hussain and on no account let him proceed till further orders. Acting upon order of 'Ubaydullah, Hur forced Hussain to encamp in an open plain, called Kerbalā.³⁸

After few days, 'Ubaydullah sent more troops under the leadership of Amr-bin-Sa'd. Amr came forward with his army. Hussain too rearranged his troops. Hussain placed three alternatives in front of Amr. Firstly, to allow him to go back to Makkah. Secondly, that he should be allowed to talk to Yazīd personally. Thirdly, to allow him to go to Khurāsān to fight the enemies of Islam on the frontiers of the Empire. Amr consulted 'Ubaydullah who demanded nothing except unconditional surrender. It was due to this reason that war began between the troops of 'Ubaydullah and Hussain. In war, all relatives of Hussain were martyred one by one. Now Hussain was standing alone in the battlefield. He was jointly attacked by the enemies and was killed in the battlefield. His female relatives and children were sent to Yazīd at Damascus. Yazīd received them with honour and sent them to Medīnah after few days.³⁹ The people of Medīnah received them with great lamentation.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

There are two main sects in Islam, *Sunni* and *Shi'ah*. *Sunni* Islam is the largest denomination. The division between *Shi'ahs* and *Sunnis* dates back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and the question of who was to take

over the leadership of the Islamic state. A small group of the Muslims maintained that the leadership must stay in the family of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and they backed Ali for it. They got the name of *Shi'ān-e-Ali* or Party of Ali. A large group of the Muslims maintained that the matter should be decided through general will of the people. They were called as *Sunnīs* and they proposed the name of Abū Bakr for it. The forthcoming years witnessed various controversial events in Islamic history. These events included; the martyrdom of 'Uthmān, controversy over the revenge of 'Uthmān, dismissal of 'Uthmān's Governors, first and second civil war, martyrdom of 'Ali, resentment over the nomination of Yazīd and the martyrdom of Hussain. All these events directly added to the reinforcement of sectarian identity between *Sunnīs* and *Shi'ahs*.

A comparative study of *Sunni* and *Shi'ah* sects is as under.

| | <u>SUNNI</u> | <u>SHI'AH</u> |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Meaning | Tradition or well-trodden path | Party of Ali |
| Total %age of Muslims | 85-90% | 10-15% |
| Geographical location | Majority in all Muslim countries except Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, & Azerbaijan. Minority spread across the world. | Majority in Iran (90%), Iraq (63%), Bahrain (70%), Azerbaijan (67%), Yemen (36%), Lebanon (36%). Minority spreads across the world. |
| Origin | After the demise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on 8 th June, 632. | After the demise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on 8 th June, 632. |
| Main Issue of controversy | The issue of Succession to the Holy Prophet (SAW). | The issue of Succession to the Holy Prophet (SAW). |
| Successor | The Holy Prophet (SAW) did not designate his successor. | The Holy Prophet (SAW) had designated his successor. |

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|---|---|---|
| | The successor should be in the tribe of Quraish. | The successor should be in the family of the Holy Prophet (SAW). |
| | The successor should be elected by general will of the people who is qualified and capable. | Succession is hereditary. |
| | Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and Ali are the rightful successors to the Holy Prophet (SAW). | Ali was the first rightful successor of the Holy Prophet (SAW). They do not accept first three Caliphs. Ali was the first of 12 legitimate <i>Imāms</i> . Eleven <i>Imāms</i> are Hassan, Hussain, Zain al-‘Ābidīn, Muhammad Bāqir, Ja‘far Sādiq, Mūsa Kāzim, ‘Ali Rida, Muhammad Taqī, ‘Ali Naqī, Hassan ‘Askari, Mahdi. |
| | <i>Sunni</i> uses the word <i>Khalīfah</i> for the head of Islamic state. | <i>Shi‘ah</i> uses the word <i>Imām</i> for the head of Islamic state. |
| Superiority of the first successor | Abū Bakr was the father of the Prophet’s favoured wife, Ayesha. He was the close companion of the Prophet. He was with the Holy Prophet (SAW) during his migration from Makkah to Medīnah, an event of such importance as to deserve mention in the Qur’ān (9:40). He was officiated as <i>Imām</i> during the Prophet’s (SAW) illness. | Ali was the first cousin and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet (SAW). |
| Sub-Sects | Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafii, Maliki, Ahle-hadith, Barelvi. | Isnā Asharīyyah (believe in twelve Imams), Ismā‘īlism (believe in seven Imams), Zaidism (believe in five Imams). |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Al Mahdi | He will come in the future | He is already on earth, is currently the "hidden imam" who works through <i>mujtahids</i> to interpret Qur'an; and will return at the end of time. |
| Current leader | Imams | Mujtahids |
| Identity of Imams | Human leaders | Infallible manifestations of God and perfect interpreters of the Qur'an. |
| Temporary Marriage (Mut'ah) | Practiced in the Prophet's time, but now rejected. | Still practiced. |
| Place of worship | Masjid (Mosque) | Masjid (Mosque), Imam Bargah, |
| Main Books of Narration (Hadith) | Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Jami al-Tirmidhi, Sunan Abu Dawood, Sunan ibn Majah, Sunan Nisai. | Al-Kafi, Man la yastahdhuru al-Faqiyah, Tehdheeb, Istibsar. |
| Holy Cities | Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem | Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Najaf, Karbala. |
| Major Holidays | Eid-ul-Adha, Eid-ul-Fitr | Eid-ul-Adha, Eid-ul-Fitr, Ashura. |

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- ¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), pp. 147-149.
- ² Literally it means helpers. It refers to those *Medīnites* who had helped the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his companions who had migrated from Makkah to Medinah.
- ³ Literally means the roof of the son of Sā'idah. It refers to that assembly hall in Medīnah where people used to gather for discussing important matters. It was in this hall that Hazrat Abū Bakr was chosen caliph of the Muslims after the demise of the Holy Prophet (SAW).
- ⁴ Literally means emigrants. It refers to those Makkī people who had migrated with the Holy Prophet (SAW) to Medīnah when directed by God to do so.
- ⁵ Literally means successor. In Islamic terminology it refers to the leader of the Muslim community who is responsible for implementing the will of God on earth. This term is used by the *Sunnīs* for the successor of the Holy Prophet (SAW).
- ⁶ Allama Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarīr-ul- Tebrī, *Tarīkh-e- Tebrī*, vol. I & II (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1987), pp. 526-535.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 535-537.
- ⁸ Allama Hāfiz Abū al-Fidā Imad-ud-Dīn Ibn-i-Kathīr Damashqī, *Tarīkh-e-Ibn-i-Kathīr*, vol.V & VI (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1989), pp. 434.435.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 435.
- ¹⁰ A pond formed by a spring in a valley between Medīnah and Makkah. According to *Shi'ahs* it was at this place that the Holy Prophet (SAW) declared Hazrat 'Ali as his successor.
- ¹¹ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1986), pp. 4-6.
- ¹² Prof. M.M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. I, (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 2007), pp. 335-336.
- ¹³ Hamid, pp. 4-6.
- ¹⁴ Literally means leader. Among the *Sunnīs* it refers to the person who leads the congregation in a mosque. For the *Shi'ahs* it refers to the divinely appointed person who guides the Muslim community, both spiritually and politically, after the demise of the Holy Prophet (SAW). But *Imām* does not bring a new *Sharī'ah* (Law). He just interprets *Sharī'ah* in the light of new realities and circumstances. First *Imām* was 'Ali. *Isnā Asharīyyah* believes in twelve Imams and in the disappearance of the twelfth one, *Mahdī* (the guid). It is believed by the *Shi'ahs*, the twelfth Imam will appear again and establish justice on earth.
- ¹⁵ Atta Mohy-ud-Din, *Abū Bakr* (Karachi: Ferozsons, n.d.), pp.11-14.
- ¹⁶ *Urdu Dā-e-rah Ma'arif-e-Islamiyya*, vol.15 (Punjab: University of Punjab, 1975), "Firqah," p. 307.
- ¹⁷ Nasr, p. 150.
- ¹⁸ Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang* (Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2000), pp. 10-11.

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- ¹⁹ Urdu, pp. 298,307.
- ²⁰ Nasr, p. 152.
- ²¹ Mukhtar, p. 11.
- ²² Literally means two lights. This title has been given to the third caliph, 'Uthmān. He had married two daughters of the Holy Prophet (SAW).
- ²³ Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Karachi: Elite Publishers Ltd, 1988), p. 241.
- ²⁴ Begam Naz, *'Usmān the Third Caliph* (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1992), pp. 49-50.
- ²⁵ Prof. Fazal Ahmad, *'Othmān the Third Caliph of Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1966), pp. 78-79, 81.
- ²⁶ Dr. Amir Hasan Siddiqi, *Heroes of Islam* (Karachi: Jamiyatul Falah, 1969), p. 54.
- ²⁷ Begum Naz, *Ali the Lion of Allah* (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1992), pp. 37-38.
- ²⁸ Ibid., pp. 39-41.
- ²⁹ Dr. Abdur Rauf, *Illustrated History of Islam* (Karachi: Ferozsons Publishers, 1993), p. 47.
- ³⁰ Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1989), p. 296.
- ³¹ Syed Amir Ali, *Rūhi Islam*, trans. Muhammad Hadi Hussain (Lahore: Idara Saqafat Islamia, 1972), p. 453.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Amir, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 244.
- ³⁴ Amir, *Rūhi Islam*, pp. 454.455.
- ³⁵ Hāfīz Jalāl-ud-Dīn 'Abdur Rehmān bin Abū Bakr al- Seuti, *Tarīkhul Khulafā* (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1983), p. 178.
- ³⁶ Amir, *The Spirit of Islam*, pp. 245-247.
- ³⁷ Ibid., pp. 246-248.
- ³⁸ Begum Naz, *Imām Hussain and the Tragedy of Kerbalā* (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1992), pp. 39, 40.
- ³⁹ Shi'ahs disagree with this view and maintain that Yazīd insulted and humiliated Hussain's relatives.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 79-83.