

Research paper on sunnis and shiites education essay



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Research Paper on Sunnis and Shiites

In the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed, and for some years afterwards, Islam was a united faith. But by the 650's AD, Islam had split into two main sects which fought bitterly with each other. These two sects were called the Shiites and the Sunnis Both Sunnis and Shiites still exist today and they are still fighting.

The Shiite sect began in the 650's, when ' Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, became Caliph. Many Arabs supported another candidate, the Umayyad Mu'awiya, who did become Caliph when ' Ali was murdered in 661 AD. The losing side, the supporters of " Ali", became known as the Shiites, which means " the supporters of " Ali." Because they did not have any political power anymore, these Shiites began to look for religious power. The Shiites also began to gather support from anybody else in the Islamic Empire who felt left out or neglected by the Caliph Mu'awiya and the Sunnis. Many of the Mawali, non-Arab people who had converted to Islam, became Shiites, though many Arabs were Shiites as well. Shiism was a revolt against the Arab upper, not against Arabs in general.

The most important religious idea of Shiism was that their religious leader was like the Jewish or Christian Messiah, and was going to come save them from evil. Many candidates were proposed from among the descendants and relatives of ' Ali and Fatima, but at first they all failed to get power.

When the Abbasids got into power in 750 AD, however, they were Shiites, and for the next several hundred years Shiites controlled the Islamic Empire. Even when the Fatimids took over Egypt and North Africa, they were Shiites

too. However, when the Ghaznavids and then the Seljuks and Ayyubids took over from 950 onwards, they were Sunnis, and from that time on the majority and rulers of the Islamic Empire have generally been Sunnis, except in the center of West Asia (modern Iran and Iraq), where Shiites are the majority.

Before the invasion of Iraq, there were so many news reports that mentioned the Sunnis and the Shias. There were reports that Saddam was a Sunni, but not a religious man. There were reports that the Shias were the majority, but they had been oppressed ever since the British gave control of Iraq to the Sunnis in 1921. There was speculation that upon liberation the Shias might seek their revenge against the Sunnis, who had kept them down for so long. What the news reports didn't bother to tell us is what is a Sunni? What is a Shia? Sure, they're both Muslims, but what's the difference between them?

Like Christians, Muslims are divided into various sects. Among Christians, there are Catholics and Protestants; there are Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians. Similarly, among Muslims, there are Sunnis and Shias; there are Ismailis, Yazidis, and Zaydis. Like Christians, Muslims are united by their common beliefs, but divided by certain details. The major division among Muslims is between the Shias and the Sunnis. The division began right after the death of Muhammad ibn Abdillah, the founder of Islam. Right away, the question had to be addressed: who would be Muhammad's successor: the caliph? Who would lead the Muslim community: the ummah? Muhammad had managed to unite disparate tribes under the banner of Islam, and a caliph would be needed to rule over them and maintain the faith. Who should it be? How should the caliph be selected?

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There is plenty in both the theology of Islam and the behavior of Muslims which outsiders can legitimately criticize or disagree with. Any serious, sustained critique, however, must be based on what Muslims actually believe and this in turn requires understanding just how diverse Islam is. Comments from both Muslims and critics can give the impression that Islam is a single, united, monolithic religion but this is false. There's more to Islam than most seem to realize, even among atheists.

There may not be quite as much diversity in Islam as in Christianity, but as with Christianity in the West there is a division between two significant players. In Western Christianity, the division is between Protestantism and Catholicism. In Islam, the major division is between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Most critics recognize that it would make no sense to criticize Protestants by complaining about the pope, but not all realize that similar mistakes can be made with Islam as well.

Most statements about Islam apply to Sunni Islam, which represents the vast majority of Muslims. Although the differences between Sunni Islam and the various Shi'ite sects started out as political, the distinction between the two groups has gradually become more and more theological as well. Shia Muslims continue to hold the same fundamental beliefs of other Muslims, with the principle addition being that they also believe in an imamate, which is the distinctive institution of Shia Islam. The doctrine of the imamate was not fully developed until the 10th century and other dogmas developed still later.

Sunni Muslims view the caliph as a temporal leader only and consider an imam to be a prayer leader, but for the Shia the historic caliphs were merely de facto rulers while the rightful and true leadership continued to be passed along through a sort of apostolic succession of Muhammad's descendants, the Imams (when capitalized, Imam refers to the Shia descendant of the House of Ali). The conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam can thus be said to be fundamentally about the nature of religious authority: is it conferred and transmitted through rational, legal institutions or does it include a charismatic, mystical element?

In principle, Sunni Muslims relationship with God is direct and is not mediated by anything like a priest or rabbi. Some religious figures may exercise a great deal of political or social power, but committees of socially important believers in each community are generally responsible for the management of the mosque and its land. The real ecclesiastical power lies with the four orthodox schools of legal thought because they define the boundaries of Islamic law, theology, and belief.

The Maliki school is centered around Medina and Malik's law book is the earliest known Muslim legal text. The Hanifi school is located in Iraq and stresses the use of individual opinion in rendering legal judgments. Shafii was a member of Muhammad's Quraysh tribe and was a distant relative of his. Shafii studied under Malik in Medina, but ended up following his own path, creating rules of analogy for the purpose of reaching legal opinions on matters which were not covered in direct statements made by Muhammad.

Hanbal's legal school is centered in Baghdad and became prominent in Saudi Arabia because it is the only school accepted by the Wahhabi Muslims. It <https://assignbuster.com/research-paper-on-sunnis-and-shiites-education-essay/>

places the primary emphasis on the Hadith as the source of law and rejects later innovations made by other schools, scholars, and religious figures.

Unlike the Sunnis, Shia Muslims have from the start regarded inherited, mystical elements as fundamental to the nature of religious authority. The term Shia is a shortened form of Shiat Ali, which means “ the party of Ali.” At the time of Ali’s death in 661, that is probably all it was: a party or tendency of people who supported Ali’s claims to the caliphate. Ali was Muhammad’s first cousin, in some ways Muhammad’s adoptive brother, the husband of his favorite daughter (Fatima), and father of his favorite grandsons. Moreover, Ali was regarded as more authentically representative of what Muhammad stood for and fought for, especially in contrast to the wealthy and worldly Umayyads.

After Ali died, his role was believed to have passed to his two sons, Hassan and Husain, who were also Muhammad’s grandsons. Despite this, they did not take over the caliphate that position went to Mu’awiya, who founded the Umayyad dynasty. After this time, the descendants of Ali became a principle focus of dissent and opposition to the Umayyads. Many came to believe that the Umayyads and following Islamic rulers were corrupt and had fallen away from the path set by Muhammad. Those who believed that justice and good government would only replace tyranny and corruption when the rightful heirs of Muhammad took control came to be known as the Shiites.

Differences in religious authority create significant differences in how a religion works. Rationalized, legalistic religions require certain types of critical arguments while charismatic, mystical religions require different

critical arguments. Legalistic systems are vulnerable at their textual foundations; charismatic religions are vulnerable at their mystical claims. If you want to critique Islam, then, you need to know which Islam you are critiquing and where it is most vulnerable.