

# [A brief history of shia muslims](https://assignbuster.com/a-brief-history-of-shia-muslims/)

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It is a fact that Muslims all over the world are divided in two large groups -Shias and Sunnis. They have strong differences in political and religious views.

Though they share the same Quran and Hadith but their interpretation of Islam has very few things in common (Lucas, 2008). That is why they have been at logger-heads throughout Islamic History. Both claim to be the righteous one and regard another one as strayed away from the right path.

Shia literally means group or comrade. And Shias were originally those people who were with Hazrat Ali and were normally called as Shia-e-Ali, i. e., comrades of Ali or his companions. Later on ‘ Ali’ was dropped and they are now only called Shias.

It is interesting to know their history. How they came to existence is a good point to start from. When the Prophet (pbuh) passed away the question of his successor rose and each group among Muslims claimed his right to form the government.

Ansars (Muslims of Medina) and Mohajireen (Muslims of Mecca who had migrated to Medina) were strong claimers but the matter was sorted out amicably when somebody from the righteous companions narrated one Hadith in favor of Mohajireen (Lucas, 2008). As a result Hazrat Abu-Bakr was made the Caliph.

When he was on his death bed, he appointed Hazrat Umar as his successor and he ruled for ten years without any dissent. When he was fatally wounded and people lost their hope of his recovery, they asked him to appoint his successor following the toe of his predecessor. Initially, he declined but when they insisted too much he suggested six names including the names of Hazrat Usman and Hazrat Ali.

Majority of Muslims preferred Hazrat Usman to Hazrat Ali and ultimately he was made the Caliph. He ruled for twelve years but in the last phase of his tenure, he was accused of nepotism.

Actually, there was a Jew named Abdullah Ben Saba. He had a long grudge against Muslims due to several reasons. He could not tolerate it that Muslims prospered and developed in such a short p of time. It was beyond his patience that Islam had been spreading so rapidly.

But he was shrewd enough to realize the fact that he was incapable of fighting Muslims who were the most powerful in the world then. So he put upon himself the guise of a Muslim and came to Iraq among Muslims who had just converted to Islam and were quite unaware of the fact that Islam abolishes every claim on the ground of birth, caste, race and kinship. It doesn’t buy the argument that a ruler’s son should be made the ruler when his father dies though he may be bereft of the qualities of a ruler.

These ideas were not known to these new comers in the fold of Islam. They were familiar with the ways of their old monarchs who followed the general rule of hierarchy in which the son automatically occupied the throne of his father when he passed away. In the absence of a son the close relative was crowned.

Therefore when Abdullah Ben Saba came to them and said that very grave injustice has been done to Hazrat Ali as his caliphate has been usurped by others, they were easily convinced. They thought it their bound duty to stand for Hazrat Ali and provide him with his due right.

Abdullah Ben Saba had hatched a very dangerous conspiracy. He never touched the Muslims of Mecca or Medina as he was fully aware that they will easily find out him as a bloody conspirator and will reject his wrong ideas. So he chose the soil of Egypt and Iraq for the propagation of his hierarchal ideas. Muslims of these places were new converts and were therefore easily deceived.

In a nutshell, Abdullah Ben Saba spread his snare with too much care. He managed to spread rumors against Hazrat Usman. He got people write letters from Iraq to Egypt and Egypt to Iraq and from different parts of the Islamic Empire to Medina spreading the rumors that the Muslims of those places were suffering from different problems due to the inefficient rule of Hazrat Usman.

People were aghast with these news. They strongly suspected that Hazrat Usman was not dealing with problems properly. A committee was formed which looked into the alleged problems. It found all the charges baseless and pointed that there were a few mischievous people in those province who wrote all these letters aiming at disrupting the rule and order of the Islamic Empire.

But being very lenient Hazrat Usman let all these miscreants scot free and did nothing against them. Ultimately, they felt encouraged and came marching to Medina with the sole intention to assassinate Hazrat Usman.

Hazrat Usman tried to clear their doubts with arguments and they lost their ground logically and were forced to return as they had no legitimate cause to rebel against Hazrat Usman.

But they assembled again outside Medina and produced a fake letter of Usman in which it was stated that they should be punished by the governors of their provinces after their returning. Claiming this false charge they surrounded Hazrat Usman’s house and slain him brutally. After the assassination of Hazrat Usman, people were at the mercy of these rebels.

The entire empire felt itself in the grip of anarchy. Hazrat Ali saw all these and was too much worried about the affairs of the community. He was approached by the same rebels to take the rein of the caliphate. He hesitated as he was fully aware that though those people insisted on their allegiance to him but they were basically against the very soul of Islam.

They were introducing such a version of Islam which had nothing to do with the Islam he knew. But he was also requested by those sincere and age-old companions of the Holy Prophet who had selected his three predecessors. Therefore keeping the welfare of Islam above any consideration he accepted theresponsibilityof caliphate and was made the fourth rightful Caliph.

Events which unfolded afterwards paved the way for the tow major division of Muslims which seems destined to remain unbridgeable till the last Day of Judgment. So it is clear that this difference of views was political in nature.

But the early Muslims were so much religious that nothing could claim their attention except that which had some religious ground (Esposito, 2005). They were so much religiously charged that only religion could satisfy them. In this manner they were easily cheated by conspirators like Abdullah Ben Saba and his companions.

It is noteworthy that there were a few sincere Muslims too who were of the opinion that Hazrat Ali had been the most deserving candidate of Islamic caliphate after the death of the Holy Prophet due to his relation and station in Islam.

He was an important member of the household of the Prophet and was one of those few people who had embraced Islam in the very beginning. There were other grounds also which are not accepted by all sects of Islam such as his being protected from the possibility of committing any mistake, etc.

Thus Shias came into existence and flourished. Later on they developed their ideology systematically. Now their ideas are very sophisticated and particularly their notions of ‘ imamat’ are very complex. They hold the view that only those people who are completely protected from any potential sin deserve to be made Caliphs or Imams.

Thus they believe that there are twelve Imams such as Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Hassan, Hazrat Hussein, etc. It is also noteworthy that all the Shias are not of the same view nor they follow only one ideology.  There are fissures and cleavages among them too and they are ripped apart in their ideology. But as a matter of fact they did not undergo any divisions during the imamate of the first three Imams: Ali, Hassan, and Hussein.

But after the martyrdom of Hussein, the majority of the Shias accepted the imamate of Ali Ben Hussein al-Sajjad, while a minority known as the Kisaniyah believed that the third son of Ali, Muhammad bin Hanafiyah, was the fourth Imam as well as the promised Mehdi, and that he had gone into occultation in the Radwa mountains and one day would reappear.

After the death of Imam al-Sajjad the majority of the Shias accepted his son, Muhammad al-Baqir as Imam while a minority followed Zayd al-Shahid, another son of Imam al-Sajjad, and became known as Zaydis.

Following Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, the Shias accepted his son Ja'far al-Sadiq as Imam and after the death of Imam Ja'far the majority followed his son Imam Musa al-Kazim as the seventh Imam. However, one group followed the older son of the sixth Imam, Ismail, who had died while his father was still alive, and when this latter group separated from the majority of Shias it became known as Ismailia.

Others accepted either 'Abdullah al-Fatah or Muhammad, both sons of the sixth Imam.

Finally, another party stopped with the sixth Imam himself and considered him as the last Imam. In the same way, after the martyrdom of Imam Musa al-Kazim the majority followed his son, Ali al-Rida, as the eighth Imam. However, some stopped with the seventh Imam and became known as the Waqifiyah.