

Shia, But Shia of which Imam (leader)?

The meaning of Shia:

“Shia” means a group of followers, members of a group, as per Holy Quran, Surah Maryam verse 69:

ثُمَّ لَنَنْزِعَنَّ مِنْ كُلِّ شِيعَةٍ أَيُّهُمْ أَشَدُّ عَلَى الرَّحْمَنِ عِتِيًّا ﴿٦٩﴾

Then from every group We shall draw whichever of them was more defiant to the All-beneficent. [1](#)

هَذَا مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ

This one from among his **followers. [2](#)**

As per the two ayahs quoted above a Shia could be a follower or a member of a group.

The Holy Quran, Surah Isra verse 71 says:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمامِهِمْ

The day we shall summon every group of people with their imam. [3](#)

As per the ayah, the destiny of the followers depends on their imam and being a Shia does not mean anything, unless we know the Shia of whom.

If one is a Shia (follower) of a wrong leader (Imam) then this leader may invite his Shias towards the fire.

Holy Quran, Surah Qasas verse 41, says:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَيْمَةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ ۗ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

We made them leaders who invite to the Fire and on the day of Resurrection they will not receive any help. [4](#)

The fate of the followers (shias) of imams of this kind is not going to be good.

But if one is a Shia (follower) of a rightful leader (Imam) then this leader will lead them towards the truth.

Holy Quran, Surah Sajdah verse 24, says:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أَيْمَةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا ۗ وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

And amongst them We appointed imams who guide by Our command when they had been patient and had convictions in Our signs. [5](#)

Certainly, the true followers (Shias) of these Imams will be very successful on the day of resurrection. Thus, being a Shia does not mean anything, unless we know the Shia (follower) of whom.

Sects within Shi'as

The Shia and Sunni schools of thought form the major sects within the Islamic nation. Similar to the Sunni sect, the Shia sect also has sub-sects within itself. In this book, we will be talking just about the sects within the Shia sect.

The Ithna Ashari Shias (The Twelvers)

The Twelvers are the largest part of the Shia community. They get their name from their acceptance of twelve divinely appointed successors of the Holy Prophet (sawa). They believe that Imam Ali (as) was the first divinely appointed Holy Imam, who succeeded the Holy Prophet (sawa). All of the Holy Imams that the Twelvers follow were martyred, except the last Holy Imam, Imam Al Mahdi (atfs)[6](#), who is believed to be in occultation. All of the Holy Imams are from the progeny of the Holy Prophet (sawa); they are the sons of Fatima (sa)[7](#) and Ali (as), and there is no doubt or dispute about it.

The beliefs of the Ithna Ashari Shias have been discussed in many books & only the lives of the 2 imams, which are not followed by the other sub sects, will be discussed in detail later in this book.

Zaidis

The Zaidis do not believe in the 5th Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, because he did not revolt against the corrupt government. They follow Zayd ibn Ali Zainul Abideen as their Imam because he staged a

revolution against the corrupt rulers of Bani Umayyah. They do not believe in a direct lineage – instead, any descendant of Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (as) who stages a revolution against a corrupt government is considered as an Imam. The Zaidis do not believe that the Imams are divinely appointed. They also do not believe in the infallibility of the Imams, nor do they believe that the Imams receive divine guidance. The Zaidis are mainly found in Yemen.

Alawis

Alawis loved the Ahlul Bayt⁸ (as) to the extent that after seeing the impeccable qualities of the Ahlul Bayt (as) they started exaggerating the status of the Imams. Alawites are also called Nusayris, Nusairis, Namiriya or Ansariyya. They are also known as the exaggerators. Within Alawites they have various sects. There are over one million Alawis that live in Syria and Lebanon. The Ithna Ashari Imams have condemned the exaggerators.

The Ismailis

The Ismailis are a branch of Islam that is the second largest part of the Shia community after the Twelvers. They get their name from their acceptance of Ismail Ibn Jafar (as) as the divinely appointed spiritual successor to Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as).

The Ismailis dispute the succession of the seventh Imam – they say that Ismail ibn Jafar actually succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as), whereas the Ithna Ashari Shias believe that Musa al-Kadhim (as) succeeded Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as). Ismail died before his father. However, some of the Ismailis claim that Ismail had not died, but rather, had gone into Ghaibat (occultation). Some of the Ismailis accepted his death and therefore claim that his eldest son, Muhammad Ibn Ismail, was now Imam.

There are several offshoots of Ismailis; the most popular ones among them are the Aga Khanis, the Dawoodi Bohras, and the Druze.

The Druze

After the Fatimid Empire was established in 909 AD by Ubaydallah al-Mahdi Billah, he claimed the Ismaili Imamate. The sixth caliph of the Fatimid Empire, al-Hakim bi-Amrillah, ascended the throne when he was only eleven years old and was feared for his eccentricity and insanity. The Fatimid Empire was known for its religious tolerance, but under the reign of al-Hakim, a lot of persecution was seen. In 1021 AD (441 AH), al-Hakim had gone on his mule but never returned and only his mule returned and it was soaked in blood. This led to the birth of the sect of the Druze, who did not accept the successor of al-Hakim and believed that al-Hakim was an incarnation of God and was the Mahdi, who would one day return and bring justice to the world.

The Nizaris

The second but major split among the Ismailis occurred following the death of the Fatimid Caliph, al-Mustansir Billah in 487 AH (1094 AD). After he passed away, the older son Nizar and the younger son fought for the empire. Nizar was defeated and was jailed. His son, however, escaped. A group of people started believing him to be the Imam, and the Imamate of the Nizaris continues to their present, Imam Aga Khan IV. The term Ismailis is referred to the Nizari community, who are followers of the Aga Khan and they are the largest group among the Ismailis.

The Agha Khanis or the Nizaris consider Imam Ali (as) as the first Imam and Imam Husayn (as) as the second Imam and do not consider Imam Hasan (as) as an Imam.⁹

The Mustalis

Al-Mustali was the younger son of al-Mustansir Billah, whom he succeeded in defeating Nizar. The followers of the Mustali line are also known as Taiyyebi, named after their 21st Imam, Imam al-Taiyyeb who they believe has gone into hiding. The Taiyyebi's further split into different sects, such as Dawoodi Bohras, Sulaymani Bohras, Alavi Bohras and Hebtiah Bohras etc...

The Bohras consider Imam Ali (as) as the Wasi of the Prophet (sawa); hence Imam Hasan (as) is the first Imam for the Bohras.¹⁰

^{1.} Surah Maryam (19) Ayah 69

^{2.} Surah Qasas (28), Ayah 15

^{3.} Surah Isra (17), Ayah 71

^{4.} Surah Qasas (28), Ayah 41

^{5.} Surah Sajdah (32), Ayah 24

^{6.} Ajjal Allahu Tala Farajahu Shareef (May Allah hasten his reappearance)

^{7.} Salamullah Alaiha (Peace be upon her)

^{8.} The family of the Prophet (sawa), Imam Ali, Lady Fatema, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn (as) and the nine Imams that succeeded Imam Husayn (as)

^{9.} Daftary, Farhad, Ismailis their history and doctrines, p. 551

^{10.} ibid, p. 551

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