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## Understanding the Differences and Meeting Points between Shia and Sunni

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the disparities between Shia and Sunni perspectives, encompassing their beliefs and concepts. The research employs a qualitative approach with a literature review and data gathering through reference materials. The data is analyzed using data reduction, presentation, and conclusions, while ensuring data validity through the triangulation method. The findings of the study reveal that Shia denotes followers of Ali bin Abi Talib, whereas Sunni adheres to al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah or Ahlus-Sunnah wal Jama'ah, commonly abbreviated as Ahlul-Sunnah. While both groups utilize the Qur'an and al-Sunnah as the foundation of their comprehension, the interpretation and comprehension differ. The disparities between Shia and Sunni solely rest on their approaches to understanding and explaining *furiyah*. Nonetheless, both groups adhere to the Al-Qur'an and Al-Hadith.

**Keywords:** Shia, Sunni, Qur'an, al-Sunnah, *furiyah*.

### Introduction

Islam is a teaching that carries a mission of peace for all of nature and, therefore, needs to be reviewed. The re-examination of the concept of *rahmatan lil'alamiin* is not intended to cast doubt on the values contained in Islamic teachings, which are clearly stated in the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. It is widely believed that the main mission of Islam is to be a carrier of mercy for all the worlds, as stated in the Qur'an: "And we did not send you Muhammad except as a bearer of mercy for all the worlds." The need for this re-examination is based on the historical reality that the development of the Muslim Ummah has always been colored by conflicts between groups that occurred within the Muslim community.

Islam never taught envy and strife to mankind, nor does it teach the nature of grudges, envy, and hatred towards human beings, even among people of different religions. Islamic teachings always call on its adherents to love one another and maintain unity and brotherhood. Islam does not discriminate between genders, tribes, schools of thought, beliefs, or countries. In the view of Islam, humans are creatures that are highly glorified by God, and every nation and people who believe are equal in glory in the sight of God.

The main factor causing the split in the Sunni and Shia groups is political issues. This political factor transforms into inter-group egoism and, subsequently, to sentimental issues of understanding of madzhab groups. The existence of differences in the problem of understanding in schools of thought, which is actually a treasure in the tradition of Islamic thought, becomes fragile and causes prolonged conflicts that result in the decline of Islam.

It is true that the tradition of mutual respect for differences of opinion among Muslims had occurred during the heyday of Islam, namely during the rise of *ijtihad* among school leaders. An example is the harmonious relationship between Imam Zaid bin Ali, an Imam of Shia Zaidiyah who studied jurisprudence and the basics of faith from Abu Hanifah, one of the priests in Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah. While Imam Abu Hanifah studied Hadith and other sciences from Imam Ja'far Sadiq. Imam Abu Hanifah once praised Imam Ja'far Sadiq with the phrase "I have never seen someone smarter than Ja'far bin Muhammad."

During the heyday of *ijtihad*, the Shia imams and Sunni fiqh scholars agreed that they were part of the big family of the Islamic religion. Therefore, everyone knows and respects each other, and no one insults each other's *ijtihad*. They do not differ in opinion on the fundamentals of religion.

The differences between them are in understanding particular laws (*al-ahkam al-far'iyah*) because of their different perspectives, especially in exploring laws (*istinbath al-hukm*) from the Qur'an, al-Sunnah and *Ijma'*, and *qiyas* used by Sunnis and reason used by Shia (*Imamiyah*). This partial difference in law should be a blessing, a potential, and a broadness for the people, not a disaster that leads to prolonged slander.

## **Research Methods**

This research is a type of library research (field research) with a qualitative approach. The data collection method used is to collect information about Sunni and Shia, collecting references. Data analysis techniques start from data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The validity of the data is checked using the triangulation method.

### **A. Definition of Shia and Sunni**

Shia, according to Arabic etymology, means one's defender and follower. Additionally, it refers to any group of people who gather on a matter. In the terminology of Shari'a, Shia refers to those who believe that Ali bin Abu Talib is the main and most entitled friend to hold the reins of leadership of the Muslims, as well as his posterity after his death. Throughout its history, Shia has experienced several divisions, as has Sunni.

Sunni is also known as al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, Ahlus-Sunnah wal Jama'ah, or more commonly abbreviated as Ahlul-Sunnah or Sunni. Ahlussunnah are those who adhere to Islam based on the authentic Qur'an and hadith with the understanding of the companions, *tabi'in*, and *tabi'ut tabi'in*. About 90% of the world's Muslims are Sunnis, while 10% follow Shia sects. Sunnah literally means tradition, and Ahl as-Sunnah refers to

people who consistently follow the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, including his oral demands, practices, and those of his noble companions.

### **B. Understanding Concept of Islamic Sharia according to Sunni and Shia**

During the time of the Prophet, there were no disagreements because any disagreements could be directly brought before the Prophet and immediately answered by him. After the Prophet died, the two sources of Islamic law seemed to be closed. If there was a difference of understanding among the people, they would ask each other. Therefore, at the time of the Companions, a source of law emerged after the Qur'an and al-Sunnah, known as Ijma' and Qiyas.

Likewise, between Sunnis and Shiites, the two streams of Islam agree to use the main source of law which is the basis of Islam. The difference between the two schools is only in the matter of interpretation of the scholars who are the references of these two schools. The Imams differed on matters of how to put into practice the teachings from the basic sources of Islam in matters of a religious branch (*furu'iyah*). The factors that cause these differences in understanding are due to the difficulty in understanding the verses of the Koran, life's problems that always grow in various forms according to the place, time and way of human thinking, and differences in understanding of what is heard from the hadiths of the Prophet.

### **C. Points of Difference Sunni Shia**

As explained above, the difference in understanding that occurs among the scholars of Islam is related to perspectives or interpretations regarding the surrounding context, such as the difficulty in understanding the verses of the Koran, life problems that always grow in various forms according to place, time and human way of thinking, and differences in understanding of what was heard from the hadiths of the Prophet. The differences in interpretation methodology result in differences in the understanding aspects of these two groups. However, in substance, Sunni and Shia adhere to primary sources, namely the Koran and al-Sunnah. Sunnis make Qiyas a source of Islamic law after the Al-Quran, al-Sunnah, and Ijma', while Shia also agree on these three sources as a source of law but do not consider Qiyas a source of law. Shia believes that Qiyas cannot be used as a source of Islamic law and instead leaves it to the authority of the imam who has the brilliance of reason in explaining the sources of Islamic law. Shia places reason in a high position, through the authority of mujtahid imams who are believed to have authoritative abilities in explaining religious law so that whatever is justified by common sense.

### **D. Meeting Point for Sunni-Shia Understanding**

From a historical perspective, Shia imams and Sunni scholars did not dispute their differences in *ijtihad*, and they respected each other's opinions. They understood that they were part of the Muslim community and lived together without sparking any division. In fact, both schools of thought share the same main sources of Islamic law, the Quran, and al-Sunnah.

Imams of the Sunni schools, such as Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i, and Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, are respected by Shia fiqh scholars. Similarly, Sunni fiqh scholars recognized the expertise of al-bait scholars, and Imam Ja'far Sadiq was considered the most brilliant fiqh scholar of his time. Imam Abu Hanifah even praised Imam Ja'far's brilliance.

Both Sunni and Shia scholars are united in bridging their differences in schools of thought and upholding the values of Islamic teachings. Three important values must be upheld in Islam: the unity of footing, the unity of values, and the unity of purpose. Islam emphasizes equality and fitrah for all mankind, and humans have equal degrees with one another. Only good deeds and morals distinguish one from another.

Efforts to find a meeting point for Sunni-Shia understanding were made in the 1940s in Egypt. Sunni and Shia leaders sat together to discuss the compatibility and contradictions of schools of thought in Islam and create harmony among Muslims. Prominent scholars, such as Shaykh Abdul Majid Salim, Shaykh Mahmud Syaltut, Dean of Al Azhar Al-Bahy and Al-Qummi Universities, produced an agreement to create a unity body for Muslims named "Darut Taqrib bainal Mazahibil Islamiyah." These scholars maintained harmonious relations with scholars from Nejef, Karbala, Iran, and Jabal Amin. They disseminated the idea of unity through a magazine called "Risaltul Islam," which contained the principles of various schools of thought and the results of council decisions regarding discussions towards the unity of the Muslim Ummah. The mission to build unity bore fruit, such as the decision on a fatwa that allows worship (yajuzu ta'abbud) with the Ja'fari school of thought.

## **Conclusion**

Sunni and Shia are defenders and followers of someone, and people who gather on a matter. According to the terminology of Shari'a, Shia refers to those who consider Ali son of AbuTalib as the main one among the great, while Sunni refers to those who always uphold Islam based on the Qur'an and authentic hadith. Differences in opinion occur among Muslims, including the differences between Sunnis and Shiites, such as differences in the use of ushuliyah rules and other istinbath sources, linguistic aspects, ijtihaad regarding the science of hadith, and differences in the method of compromising hadith. However, efforts to find meeting points have been made in the past, such as the meeting of prominent Sunni and Shia scholars in Egypt in the 1940s, which resulted in an agreement to create a unity body for Muslims named "Darut Taqrib bainal Mazahibil Islamiyah". These efforts serve to promote harmony among Muslims and bridge the differences in schools of thought.

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