Analytical Argument

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Shiite and Sunni have always differed in their opinions regarding faith and Islamic history. These differences have resulted in wars and rivalries between people of the same religion and faith. The early differences were created based on successions while later on, it became more of a cultural, territorial and identity based disputes. Although the difference in the creed mainly fueled these issues further. The scope of this paper will discuss the early historic backgrounds and causes of the split in opinion, the development and interactions between Umayyad, Abbasid, Safavid, Ottoman Empires. How the divisions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims either caused or fueled these issues. We will discuss how and why Sunni and Shia Islam develop and interact and influence the Arab. Ottoman and Persian empires to 1700?

***Historical Background***

The Shiites are a minority today in the Muslim world, making up between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of the Muslim population certainly fewer than 250 million, all told. The Shiites are mostly situated in the areas like Iran and southern Iraq. But there are noteworthy groups in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan as well. Over the large part of the history, Shiites and Sunnis have mostly lived peacefully. They both agree on the basic principles of Islam and also share the same book. The differences usually lie in the historic, ethnic and political beliefs. The difference was originated after the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on his succession. As Muhammad not only left behind religion but also a state in the middle of Arab. One group who was the majority chose Abu Bakr his companion while the other suggested Ali who was the son-in-law and cousin of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (“BBC - Religions - Islam,” n.d.). Muslims who came to believe that Abu Bakr should be the next leader is called Sunni's while those who chose Ali are known as Shia's. Ali later became the fourth caliphate of Islam and during his time he moved the capital from Medina to Kufa in Iraq. The struggle with companions continued as a war with Muawiya was also fought on due to the same reason. After the death of Ali, Muawiya became the next caliph and he moved the capital of the state to Damascus and from then on, the politically chosen style of leadership was converted to the monarchy and the kingdom started to know as the Umayyad Caliphate.

***Development and interactions with Arab empires:***

Development in the Umayyad Dynasty

The differences were therein also in the rule of Muawiya as well and it intensified when he was succeeded by his son Yazid. This hereditary succession was opposed hugely by Husain ibn Ali the younger son of Ali, which resulted in a revolt i.e. the battle of Karbala and His death along with his family (Cooper, 1983). This is probably the turning point in the relations of Shia Sunni relations. The relation at that time was still political and was named in any shape or form as religious. But the separation of different groups was there. In the next two decades of Islam spread to south Asia through an Umayyad young general. The Umayyad dynasty rulers were the descendants of a group of people who opposed Ali during his ruling time and are known as Sunni's leaders in Muslim history. Their first opposition came in the form of Hashimiya Movement. They were from the Hashim clan who were the opposite of Umayyad.

Abbasid Caliphate

During the Abbasid revolution, the descendants and supporters of the family branch of Ali overthrew Umayyad Dynasty in 750 CE (Finer and Finer, 1997). They developed what people see as the first Shiite dynasty. The Abbasid's mostly relied on the Persians for their government. They started accustomed to Persian culture and traditions. During this time Baghdad was the capital of both Islam and the centre of invention and science (Canfield, 2002). The Abbasid Caliphate was different others dynasties at that time because it did not have the exact limitations and borders as Islam. Where the Umayyad dynasty was comprised mostly of Arabs the Abbasids recruited people from different ethnicities and backgrounds. The rivalry was so much intense that Umayyad princess was massacred and the graves and shrines of most Umayyad rulers were desecrated except Umar the second. There were multiple different dynasties and governments that were present at that time. Though initial efforts were made to add non-Arabs and Persians but later they were almost alienated. The majority of Sunni rulers and traders felt resentment towards them. The political power was decreased due to the rise of Seljuq Turks and another Shia dynasty the Buyids in Iran. The empire became just a ceremonial religious functional. Later the Baghdad fell into the hands of Mongols in 1206 and destroyed Baghdad, which marked the end of Golden age of Islam (Glassé, 2008).

***Development in Persian Safavid Dynasty***

The Safavid dynasty was one of the major dynasties in which the official religion was Shia Islam. All other forms of religions were suppressed in this dynasty(“BBC - Religions - Islam,” n.d.). The empire strength was due to its geographical location on different trade routes. They were also considered as the hub of art and culture at that time. The dynasty was founded by a Persian nationalist and however, they were a religious group, to begin with. The dynasty declared its official religion as Shi'sm which was very new to the people in Iran. Under the Safavid dynasty, people were forcefully converted into Shi'sm. Most of the Sunni people who refused were forced to leave or were killed. They brought different Shia religious scholars from different countries and made them a tool for their government. Most of the golden shrines we see today in Iran and neighbouring countries were made in Safavid dynasty. They allotted funds to build religious schools and shrines. In the Safavid dynasty mostly Sunni Muslims were mistreated and those Shia Muslims or any other religious people who differ their views were also persecuted. Different Sufi groups were banned or alienated. They also reduced the importance of pilgrimage to Mecca and replaced it with visiting Shiite shrines (“BBC - Religions - Islam,” n.d.). The empire was predominantly a theocracy under the direct control of the ruler known as Shah. Their good treatment of Shia Muslims meant that most people enthusiastically embraced the new faith. Because Shi'sm was a state religion they celebrated and paid respect to Shiite festivals and events, like Ashura (death of Hussain, younger son of Ali). The major educational institutes and systems that we see nowadays in Iran are due to the philosophy and theology that was formed in the Safavid Empire. With the spreading of Mughal empire in India, clashes with Ottoman empire and the emergence of Russians caused a lot of difficulties for them and that was predominantly the decline of Safavid Dynasty (Floor and Clawson, 2000). The major threat to them was the Sunni state of Ottoman empire but their fall starting from the 17th century the Shah's of Safavid empire became complacent and as a result of the power gradually passed on to the Shiite Ulama. The ulama eventually overthrew the shah and claimed the government for themselves which resulted in the world first Islamic Republic. The Ulama claimed that only those who have divine knowledge of religion can rule an Islamic country.

***Development in Turkic Ottoman Empire:***

The Ottoman Empire was an Empire between southeast Europe, western parts of Asia and some parts of Africa between 14th and 20th century (Scott, 2015). They were a bridge between the western and eastern world for six decades. The official religion of the state was Sunni Islam. There were many other communities and religions living in the state as well but they were treated with respect and dignity as per the laws of Islam. In the early stages of the empire, it was a Christian majority with a Muslim minority ruling over them. Their ancestors believed in different religions and school of thoughts but the Turks later on gradually converted to Islam. The Ottomans brought Islam with them to Anatolia and followed Maturidi and Hanafi creed of the Sunni Islam (Gündüz et al., 2005). The sultan predominantly ruled over two distinct domains in the form of social affairs and religious hierarchy. The religious matters were under the control of Sunni Muslim ulama and they controlled the judicial system and educational system. They were powerful enough to change any reform that was against the teachings of Sunni Islam. Sunni ulama also had a greater influence over the government in general and their authority was vital for the governance of the system. But in the Sultan had the final say in every matter, since the sultan claimed the title of Caliph and declared himself the leader of Muslims in the entire world, However, about a century after the establishment the empire major incidents occur with Shia Muslims as the king at that time called them the fifth column for their rivals Safavid empire. During that time the empire further spread in the Middle East and claimed themselves as the real heirs of Islamic Caliphate. The Sunni Shia disturbances of the past meant that the rivalry continued with the Safavid Empire. Their claim for the Islamic state continued until the end of the empire and the formation of a new world turkey.

***Safavid - Ottoman Rivalry (Shia Sunni Rivalry)***

The rivalry and the wars occurred between these empires were over certain territories however the Shia-Sunni factor added fuel to the fire. As the ottomans very Sunni and Safavid were Shia of the Qazilbash dialect. The Safavid’s were also Turkic in their ethnicity and spoke Turkish language as well. The Ottomans never really thought of themselves as Sunni’s until the Safavid came forward as a Shia state. For almost a century both of these empires fought many wars over the control of Mesopotamia (Finkel, 2007). The wars took the shape of ideological warfare. The Safavid’s were mostly famous for their art and culture as compared to the Ottomans who were famous for their military power. That is why the ottomans conquered Iraq and also took Baghdad from Safavid control. There came a time when most of the territories that were previously under the control of the Safavid Empire were now taken by the Ottoman Empire, even the former capital of the Empire Tabriz. Iraq was a city of importance and value due to its strategic location and Islamic history in the Abbasid caliphate. Since the Abbasid caliphate hasn’t declared the states as either Shia or Sunni Islam that means that whoever took the city had the claim to officially declared themselves as the true caliphate who inherited the previous empire. While the Ottoman Empire was busy with their fights and expansion towards the European soil, the Safavid's saw this an opportunity and attacked Iraq. Safavid armies attacked the city of Baghdad and slaughtered Sunni population. The shah of Safavid Empire approved this because he wanted to see Baghdad as a loyal Shiite city. Sunni's considered them as their opponents because they believed that the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire is their only true leader and caliph of Islam (“Past Religious Conflict Still Haunts Middle East,” 2017). This war reflected a greater conflict within the Islamic world. The Shah of Safavid Empire didn’t saw it as a massacre of the fellow Muslim community, he viewed it as a killing of his political opponents who didn’t accept him as their rightful leader of the Islam. With the treaty of Zuhab, the long continued war between the Ottomans and the Safavid's came to an end. As a result of the treaty, Bagdad and Mesopotamia in Iraq permanently came under the control of Ottomans.

***Conclusion***

Since the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the problem of the succession continued on the terms of political basis and later converted into beliefs and difference in knowledge. In the Arab empire of early Islamic caliphates of Umayyad and Abbasid dynasty major problem was that of succession and death of the son of Ali i.e. Hussain. These conflicts later intensified based on a way of ruling and government structures. However, the later Muslim empires like the Safavid dynasty and Ottoman Empire basis of conflicts between them were territories and religious beliefs. One government was a particularly comprised of Sunni people leading them while the other one was led by the leadership of Shiite leaders i.e. The Ottoman and Safavid empires. Both differed in their beliefs and represented themselves as the true leaders of Islam. But here the wars, like any other war were fought for territories and establishment of their governments rather for the benefit of Islam.

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