

Who are *Ahl-e-Bayt* (People of the household)?

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A. Introduction

The literal meaning of *Ahl-e-Bayt* is 'People of the House'. In Islamic context it is used to refer 'people of the house of Prophet Muhammad'. It is a very important point of discussion between Shia and Sunni. For Shia this topic is fundamental to their faith and therefore, a sensitive one. Shia don't believe that the wives of the Prophet are part of the 'House of Prophet Muhammad'. To the Shia, the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* of the Prophet (S) consists of the following individuals ONLY: Prophet Muhammad, Fatimah al-Zahra, Imam 'Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn and the nine descendants of Imam al-Husayn. It is these total fourteen individuals, who constitute *Ahl-ul-Bayt* for Shia. They ascribe no place for the wives of the prophet!!

It may sound strange but it is a FACT. Lots of differences arise and debates take place between Shia and Sunni because of the issue of *Ahl-e bayt*. For example Shia don't take narrations/ ahadith that come through the wives of Prophet Muhammad to be true. We will not discuss those things here and limit ourselves to understand who *Ahl-e-Bayt* are according to Allah.

B. What does Quran say about *Ahl-e-bayt*?

Before proceeding further it is important to emphasize that Quran is word by word from Allah. Each ayah of Quran is full of wisdom and guidance. Quran will guide us in every era till the Day of Judgment. Quran is a miraculous book and we have to derive guidance from it. When we ponder over Quran then much hidden information comes to light. When things are clear from Quran then we should not keep any contradictory opinion.

The word *Ahl-e-bayt* is used only two times in the whole Quran. Most of the people are aware about the second reference which is in *Surah Ahzab*. First time this word is present in *Surah Hud*:

First time the word *Ahl-e-bayt* is used in Quran to refer to the WIFE of Prophet:

There came our messengers to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, "Peace!" He answered, "Peace!" and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf. Quran 11:69

But when he saw their hands went not towards the (meal), he felt some mistrust of them, and conceived a fear of them. They said: "Fear not: We have been sent against the people of Lut." Quran 11:70

And his wife was standing (there), and she laughed: But we gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and

after him, of Jacob. Quran 11:71

She said: "Alas for me! Shall I bear a child, seeing I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? That would indeed be a wonderful thing!" Quran 11:72

قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ رَحِمَتُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ ۗ إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ (٧٣)

They said: "Do you wonder at Allah's decree? The grace of Allah and His blessings **on you, o you people of the house (Ahl-e-bayt)**! for He is indeed worthy of all praise, full of all glory!" Quran 11:73

Now, here *Ahl-e-bayt* is used for the WIFE of Prophet Abraham. Loosely speaking we can say this word refers to Prophet Abraham and his wife. But in any case WIFE of Prophet Abraham is part of *Ahl-e-bayt* here.

So, one thing becomes quite clear here that *Ahl-e-bayt* is used by Allah to refer to the wife of Prophet Abraham. Now, does this mean that ONLY wife of prophet should be included in this definition? To explore answer we need to refer another ayah of Quran where this word is used. It is always the principle of Quran that in order to understand complete ruling / meaning of any subject we have to refer to all Ayah of the Quran that deal with the subject.

Second time the word *Ahl-e-bayt* refers to the wives as well as male-female members of the Prophet's family:

Now, let's come to the second reference which is often quoted by our Shia brethren. This Ayah is so often quoted by Shia just as John 3:16 is quoted by Christian preachers. The Ayah which is in reference is from Quran 33:33.

1. A very important point to be noted is that almost every time our Shia brethren **present ONLY A PART OF AYAH instead of the complete Ayah**. Even Shia Quran Commentary contains this one ayah divided and explained as two different parts. Another literary crime is that they have given a name to this PARTIAL AYAH as *Ayah al-Tat'hir*.

First of all, it is NOT complete ayah. When anyone will read the whole ayah then it becomes clear that *Ahl-e-bayt* DOES include the wives of the prophet. Shia brethren always present partial ayah. The second point is that Shia have given name to some words as AYAH which is NOT Ayah but only PART of the Ayah.

Let's look at the context:

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ ۗ إِنِ اتَّقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا

O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the (other) women: if you do have taqwa (love+fear of Allah), be not too complacent of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak you a speech (that is) just. Quran 33:32

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۗ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا (٣٣)

And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, you **members of the Family**, and to make you pure and spotless. Quran 33:33

وَاذْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا

And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the Signs of Allah and His Wisdom: for Allah understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). Quran 33:34

- Ayah 32 addresses the WIVES of the house of prophet and guides them in the matter of speech.
- Ayah 33 is in continuation of the previous ayah and it starts with “WA” meaning AND. It commands them to stay in house; not move out like other women. Let’s pause as the next portion of Ayah is very important from Grammar point of view. Let’s read very carefully this ayah. In the footnotes every word is grammatically explained.

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ Stay quietly in your house – **Words are directly referring to the wives of Prophet. Words used are of feminine gender.**

وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ Addressees are same i.e. the wives of the Prophet. Word used is FEMININE gender.

وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ Addressees are still the wives of the Prophet. Word used is of FEMININE gender.

وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ Still, addressees are the wives of the Prophet; again word used is of FEMININE gender.

So, this ayah till this point is addressing to the wives of the Prophet Muhammad. Does this mean the end of the game? No. We will not do the same mistake done by our Shia brethren i.e. the mistake of quoting portion of ayah. If we do this then we can conclude that ONLY the wives of the Prophet Muhammad are *Ahl-e-bayt* and not even Hazrat Ali, Imam Hassan, Imam Hussain are *Ahl-e-bayt*.

Let’s analyze the COMPLETE ayah honestly as the next word is very important.

عَنْكُمْ IS MASCULINE gender.

In Arabic and in probably all languages of world when addressees are women only then feminine gender words are used. As we have seen how Allah has addressed the wives of the Prophet in ayah till now. When addressees are men only then masculine gender words are used. **However, when addressees are both male AND female then also masculine words are used.** All general

commands / instructions of Quran are for both male and female; hence masculine gender words have been used.

Here, till now feminine gender words are used, therefore, addressees of this ayah are women. But the word **عَنْكُمْ** used in this same ayah is masculine plural, therefore, now we understand that addressees are BOTH males AND females.

يُطَهِّرَكُمْ Another word used for referring to addressee is *yotahherakum* which is again masculine plural.

c. So, last part of this ayah is: **إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا**
Which means: **And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you (PLURAL MASCULINE), you members of the Family, and to make you (PLURAL MASCULINE) pure and spotless.**

Now, re-reading the whole ayah, we understand:

And stay quietly in your (plural feminine) houses, and make not a dazzling display (plural feminine), like that of the former Times of Ignorance (feminine proper noun); and establish (plural feminine) regular Prayer, and give (plural feminine) regular Charity; and obey (plural feminine) Allah and His Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you (plural masculine), you members of the Family, and to make you (plural masculine) pure and spotless.

Quran 33:33

As per rule of the language, masculine gender is used for addressing males ONLY or males+females. Here, since females are main addressees all the time in first portion and in later portion masculine plural is used wherein addressees are referred as AHL-E-BAYT: Hence **MALES+FEMALES are AHL-E-BAYT and the wives of the Prophet certainly are AHL-E-BAYT.**

Thus, both assumptions are wrong:

1. Claim of every Shia that the wives of Prophet Muhammad are not part of Ahl-e-bayt.
2. Claim of a few Sunni that ONLY wives of Prophet Muhammad are Ahl-e-bayt.

The hadith of Prophet Muhammad enumerates these MALES + FEMALES, as Prophet Muhammad, the wives of Prophet, Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Fatima, Hazrat Hassan and Hazrat Hussain. Rest all traditions that go against Quranic explanations as per 33:33 needs to be rejected.

d. Instructions do not end here. They continue and in Ayah 34 Allah gives further instructions to the wives of Prophet.

وَأَذْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا

And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the Signs of Allah and His Wisdom: for Allah understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). Quran 33:34

Here again:

أَذْكُرْنَ YOU (Feminine Plural) do zikr, you all remember.

مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي That is recited in

بُيُوتِكُنَّ Your (Feminine Plural) houses,

So, the instructions that start in Ayah 32 end in Ayah 34. In Ayah 33 Allah referred the ones being instructed as Ahl-e-bayt.

- Ayah 32: O! Wives of Prophet, you should do so and so
- Ayah 33: And you should do so and so. Allah wants to remove impurities from You O! Ahl-e-bayt.
- Ayah 34: And you should do so and so.
- It would be against logic to say that in Ayah 32 and 34 addressees were wives of the Prophet but in Ayah 33 they were NOT at all addressees wherein Allah referred them as *Ahl-e-bayt*.

e. Another beautiful indication is that next ayah i.e. Ayah 35 talks about –

“For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in Charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, - for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.”

One aspect of this ayah is that it is a silent witness of the fact that in previous context there were MEN and WOMEN who were being addressed.

C. What does this mean for both Shia and Sunni?

Even though Quran very clearly guides us in the matter of *Ahl-e-bayt* yet Shia believe in the contrary because there are traditions that prove their point. Some Sunni also believe those traditions to be true; though very clearly those are fabricated traditions. We will not discuss those

here now. Quran is sufficient witness on the topic of *Ahl-e-bayt* and any other thing is NOT acceptable to any believer of Quran.

Shia and Sunni owe their differences to history in the name of Islam. Quran can easily unite them provided they both are ready to reject beliefs, practices that go against Quran. But Alas!! Both Shia-Sunni are slaves of their *rawayaat* / traditions / words attributed in the name of prophet and his companions. Enemies of Islam had done enough damage centuries ago by inventing & propagating fabricated traditions in the name of Islam. Both Shia and Sunni are helpless because they are bound to their versions of traditions. Each of them can prove others wrong on the basis of traditions and *rawayaat* they possess. Those among Shia and Sunni who have guts to reject fabrications and adhere strictly to Quranic teachings are no more shia or sunni; rather they are ONLY Muslims!

D. Conclusion

1. *Ahl-e-bayt* refers to people of the household of the Prophet. For Shia *Ahl-e-bayt* are second fundamental source of Islam after Quran.
2. Shia claim that *Ahl-e-bayt* refers to Prophet Muhammad, his daughter, Siddiqa Fatima Zahra, Hazrat Ali, Imam Hassan, Imam Hussain and 9 descendants of Imam Hussain.
3. Shia do NOT include wives of Prophet Muhammad in *Ahl-e-bayt*. They are thoroughly mistaken on this understanding.
4. Quran uses word *Ahl-e-bayt* two times. At first place it is used to refer to the wife of Prophet Abraham. The second time it is used to refer to the wives of Prophet Muhammad and other members that include both males and females.
5. There are some fabricated narrations in both Shia and Sunni literature that make them believe that the wives of Prophet were not included in *Ahl-e-bayt*.

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