

## **Sunnis and Shias: Why do they fight?**

**Video transcript for 'In the UK', with Samira Ahmed**

**After the Second World War, people from around the British Empire were encouraged to come to Britain to help rebuild the country.**

**More than 3.5million soldiers from the Asian subcontinent fought for Britain in the two World Wars, with tens of thousands killed in action.**

**Sunni and Shia Muslims fought and died side by side fighting for the British in these conflicts.**

**Many of these immigrants were from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.**

**Life in the UK was very different to life on the sub-continent, and Asian families would often move near to people from the same area to create a feeling of familiarity and community.**

**Initially Sunnis, Shias and people from all branches of Islam lived and socialised together, as they were a migrant community.**

**Their shared experience, as outsiders adapting to an alien culture, united them. Sunnis and Shias shared the same prayer spaces and would regard themselves as part of the same community.**

**As Muslim communities have become part of the fabric of life in the UK, they have started to become more distinctly defined as either Sunni or Shia. This is down to a number of factors.**

**A growing confidence of being Muslim in Britain has in turn fuelled an awareness within the Sunni and Shia communities of their own distinct identities and heritage.**

**The Shia community has expanded with migrants arriving from East Africa, enabling them to develop their own community services, including mosques and schools.**

**Muslims in the UK have also been influenced by events in the Middle East and Asia, where tensions between Sunni and Shia have increased. These tensions became more pronounced upon the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran by Shia clerics in 1979 and the subsequent war with Iraq after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran a year later.**

**But in the main Sunni and Shia communities in the UK retain excellent relations with each other – with problems restricted to only a few extremists. So are they really so different?**