

# Hajj in Social Perspective

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The fact that Hajj has been granted the status of being the third pillar of the secondary principles (Foroudeen) Islam is itself an indication of its importance in religion (Deen). Indeed, such stress has been laid on the performance of Hajj that no person upon whom Hajj has become compulsory should ever delay in fulfilling this obligation. The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said: "The one who was not prevented from Hajj by a definite need, or a tyrant ruler, or a severe illness and he passed away without having performed the Hajj, then he may pass away if he wishes as a Jew or, if he wishes, as a Christian" (Daaremi). Allahu Akbar! What a stern warning!

A person who delays in performing the obligatory Hajj without a valid excuse is being warned of a bad death (may Allah protect us all). Hence Rasulullah (SAW) is reported to have said: "He who intends to perform (the obligatory) Hajj should hasten in performing it"

Therefore the one who can afford to perform Hajj must never delay in doing so. The one who delays its performance without a valid reason will be sinful. Despite this great stress to perform the Hajj as soon as one can afford to undertake the journey, many people postpone it for various reasons , which are not acceptable in the light of the Shari'a.

Hajj is obligatory for Muslims who can afford it once in life. Thus the Qur'an says, and pilgrimage to the House (Baitullah in Mecca) is a duty which men owe to Allah "whoever can find a way to it". (3:97)

All Muslims, whatever sect they belong to, consider it obligatory to perform Hajj once in life. It is interesting to note that it is obligatory both on men as well as women. Women too have been performing Hajj coming from all over the world, from far and near, journeying through land and ocean. There is complete equality between men and women in all-religious obligations be it praying, fasting, giving zakat or performing Hajj. Women have not been exempted from any of these obligations.

We see during Hajj as many women as men all dressed in white, a unique sight. It is also important to note for those who oppose entry of women to mosques that here in the two most sacred mosques of Islam i.e. Baitullah and Masjidun Nabi in Medina, men and women not only pray together in these Mosques but stand shoulder to shoulder and in one line. Not only that thousands of women pray, along with men, on the roadside as even in these two largest Mosques of the world there is no sufficient space for all pilgrims to pray.

On all roads leading to Bait al-Haram in Mecca one sees thousands and thousands of men and women praying on the roads. It is quite an experience to see hundreds of thousands of Muslims from all over the world gathered there.

One sees bewildering diversity of the Muslim world in Mecca during the time of Hajj. There are Muslims practically from all countries of the world. There were Muslims from 158 countries, the Minister of Hajj told us on the day of Hajj. The diversity is indeed bewildering. There are dark black Muslims, there are Muslims with light black color, whitish color and with white skin too.

There are Muslims speaking numerous languages, European, African and Asian. Even in announcements several languages are used officially English, French, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Indonesian, Bengali and others.

And there is great sense of unity among this rich diversity. Allah creates all and hence they are all equal. The Qur'an says "We have honored the children of Adam" (17:70). This is clear and ringing declaration of dignity of human beings and this declaration was made more than fourteen hundred years ago when all sorts of discrimination were practiced.

We practice these discriminations even today despite our tremendous scientific, technological and social progress. Of course there are people belonging to different racial, ethnic, national, tribal and linguistic groups but that should not be a basis of any discrimination whatsoever.

These differences are for identification, nothing more.

The Qur'an states precisely this when it declares, "O humankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other (li ta'arafu). Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you" (49:13). And significantly enough the Qur'an describes different colors and languages as signs of Allah. It says, "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors. Surely there are signs in this for the learned" (30:22).

Thus color of the skin or ones language should not be the basis of any discrimination between human beings.

Quite to the contrary the Qur'an treats these colors and languages as "signs of Allah" which should be equally respected. Thus black color should be as respected as the white as both are creations of Allah and both are His signs. And only the most just is most pious and it is most pious who is most honored in the eyes of Allah. It is only taqwa (piety or God consciousness or being most just), which should be basis of discrimination in the eyes of Allah, noting else at all. One actually sees this during the Hajj. All are equal there whatever color or language group they belong to or whatever country they come from. They are all creatures of Allah and His

servants. It is very heartening to see a sea of humanity of all dressed in white unstitched sheet of cloth as if as innocent as just born. The white is indicative of complete innocence. One who comes for Hajj rids himself/herself of all sins and resolves not to commit sins any more. All clad in white rich or poor have same status. All clad in white is also indicative of asceticism. Today many of our sins are committed as we are in race for consuming more and more. Capitalism, in fact, survives on promoting consumerism. It is based on Epicureanism. The House of God is also a House of peace (sakinat al-qalb) and there can be no peace as long as we are outdoing each other in consumption of material goods. Qur'an of course does not approve of renunciation of the world. It encourages people to eat and drink what is halal (permissible). Thus the Qur'an says, "O you who believe, forbid not the good things which Allah has made lawful for you and exceed not the limits" (5:87). This is the right philosophy - to consume what is halal but not to exceed limits, to maintain balance. The conflict arises when some people want to commit excess and accumulate much more than others and deprive others of their just share.

To take away others' share unjustly is the basis of violent conflicts in the world. The Qur'an, therefore, advises people to spend in the way of Allah what is in excess of ones need (what Qur'an calls `afw' 2:219) and similarly it condemns accumulation of wealth when it says, "And those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in Allah's way announce to them a painful chastisement" (9:34). Thus ihram (the white unstitched cloth is a symbol of purity, of restraint in consumption, of consuming what is halalan tayyibah (permissible and pure), non accumulation and avoidance of greed.

The word ihram itself is indicative of restraint, prohibition and taboo. It is not merely wearing a plain sheet of white cloth, it amounts to refraining from all that is forbidden. While wearing ihram one cannot even kill a fly.

One has to strictly observe non-violence and this is not merely in symbolical but in substantial sense. In the state of ihram one cannot kill even a fly and even after shedding ihram one cannot kill any one unjustly and one who has performed Hajj must strictly refrain from killing anyone unjustly. Thus wearing of ihram is a matter of great responsibility. If this responsibility is discharged there will be no conflict and bloodshed in the world.

A Muslim is one who established peace (literal meaning of the word Muslim) in the world and the one who puts on ihram adds to this responsibility. Thus wearing ihram must make a Muslim just and non-violent in his/her actions. He/she must restrain himself/herself from all that is not halal. The word halal comes from hall, which means opening a knot. If we do only

what is halal all our knots will open and the life will be smooth.

It is true white is symbol of purity and innocence but it in no way is indicative of superiority over black. Lest one mistakes superiority of white over black let me stress here that main part of Hajj consists of circumambulating around Hajar al-aswad - a black stone and sa`ay i.e. running seven times between Safa and Marwa which is in commemoration of running of a black Ethiopian slave woman.

Thus a great part of Hajj consists of white clad people circumambulating around a black stone and running in commemoration of a black slave woman Hajar!

Thus white goes round the black, a black stone and a black woman.

Neither white is superior to black nor black over white; neither man is superior over woman nor woman over man in the eyes of Allah. All are His creation and hence equally honorable.

One should not miss this lesson from Hajj. The main formula of Hajj which one keeps on repeating after putting on ihram is "Allahumma labbayk, labbayk Allahumma labbayk" i.e. here I am at your service O' Allah, here I am at your service. One goes right up to Ka`ba calling this out repeatedly. May be many Hajjis do not really understand the significance of what they are repeating in Arabic.

But one who understands knows that he/she is dedicating himself/herself to Allah and one will not do anything which is violation of Allah's will. Allah desires truth and justice and He himself is embodiment of Truth and Justice. Thus a Hajji once puts on ihram remains bound by truth and justice and shall do nothing which violates the canons of truth and justice.

Falsehood and acts of injustice will be haram for him forever. He will be dedicated to the cause of truth and justice alone as he has repeatedly said after putting on ihram "I am at your service O' Allah I am at your service". Sa`ay in Hajj, which is its very important part, is indicative of dynamism of life, tireless efforts for securing what is needed to live and not to sit quietly for a miracle to happen.

Hajar who was thirsty and found no sign of water around her did not sit quietly in a corner and prayed for a miracle but ran around in search of water and found it. Thus sa`ay is symbolic of ceaseless efforts in life.

I hope the Hajjis understand the significance of these manasik (rituals) they perform. Pertaining to Safa and Marwa Dr. Ali Shari'ati, a noted Islamic scholar, makes an important point: "During Sa`y repeat a back and forth action seven times. The figure 7 is odd not even so that your Sa`y ends up in Safa and not at the point where you began! Seven times! Seven, a symbolic figure represents always, all your life to Marwa. Start at Safa which means pure love for others. Your designation is Marwa (muruwah) which means an ideal of manhood, a sense

of honor, generosity and forgiveness toward others!

Who are the others? Those who are trying with you!" - (Dr. Ali Shari'ati, Hajj, tr. Ali Behzad, p-44) Another important aspect of Hajj is to go to `Arafat where one prays whole day on 9th of Dhu al Hejja, a day before Eid al-Adhah. Arafat means knowledge; Mecca to Arafat is a journey to knowledge.

Hajj is a constant movement. All manasik (rituals) involve constant movement, be it tawaf (circumambulation), be it Sa`ay (running between Safa and Marwa) or be it moving from Mecca to Arafat, Arafat to Mash`ar, to Mina, to Mecca. Life is a constant movement, life is never static. Life is a constant struggle, is a journey to knowledge.

A Hajji in his movement from Mecca to Arafat undertakes a journey to seek knowledge, knowledge through prayer ( Rabbi zidni `ilman - O Sustainer increase me in knowledge . Knowledge is light - nur.

A Hajji prays whole day in Arafat and leaves Arafat soon after sunset - as if running from darkness, darkness of ignorance. He goes around Jabal-e-Rehmah in Arafat - the Mountain of Mercy. It was on this Mountain that the Holy Prophet (SAW) delivered his last sermon, a sermon that should be written in letters of gold. It was in this sermon that the Prophet (SAW) told Muslims not to think Arab is superior to Ajam, all have been created by Allah and all are equal; only the most righteous is most honored in the eyes of Allah, not Arab or Ajami, white or black. He also exhorted his followers from here to treat women fairly, to respect their rights, to be just to them. It was revolutionary message for the world then. Men still have to learn to be just to women.

The knowledge imparted by the Prophet (SAW) on Jabal al-Rehmah was revolutionary by any standard.

It was a charter of human rights given to humanity hundreds of years ago. Rights and freedom come from knowledge. Knowledge is the very foundation of consciousness and freedom comes from consciousness.

One goes from Arafat to Mash`ar. Mash`ar is derived from shu`ur - consciousness. Thus a Hajji travels from Arafat to Mash`ar - from knowledge to consciousness. From there the Hajji comes to Mina - a place of faith, love and sacrifice. It is in Mina that he absolves from all evil by stoning the Satan and sacrificing in the way of Allah. Stoning Satan is done in Mina and is an important part of Hajj rituals. One cannot acquire goodness without throwing away what is evil within oneself. Satan - an embodiment of evil - must be rejected, must be thrown out from within. As long as there are traces of evil within Hajj cannot be complete. Rejection thus is as important as acquisition. Life cannot be complete without rejection as it is incomplete without

acquisition.

Acquisition of knowledge is not possible without rejection of ignorance. In Mina a Hajji thus finally gets rid of all evils - small or big or of in between. Thus the Hajjis stone the great Satan, the middle one and the smaller one. All must be hit, all must be rejected. It is again in Mina that a sacrificial animal is slaughtered. Not that Allah needs our sacrifice, not that blood and flesh of animal reaches Allah. Thus the Qur'an says, "Nor their flesh, nor their blood, reaches Allah, but to Him is acceptable taqwa (righteousness, observance of duty) on your part. Thus has He made them subservient to you that you may magnify Allah for guiding you right. And give good news to those who do good (to others)" (22:37). Thus it is very clear that Allah does not need sacrifice of animal but it is the spirit of sacrifice, righteousness and observance of duty which is important. It is symbolic of the fact that one cannot get rid of evil without sacrifice.

Thus it is significant that both - stoning the Satan and sacrifice of animal - is done at Mina. One must realize that one cannot really get rid of evil without sacrifice in the way of Allah; it is not sacrifice of animal per se which matters but it is the resolve to dedicate oneself totally for the sake of Allah which is important. The word li tukabbirullah (to magnify Allah) is very seminal in the verse.

One must sacrifice in order to accept the Greatness of Allah. And it is no easy thing to do. One has to kill ones own ego, has to control ones desires, has to give up what is in excess of ones personal needs, one has to accept in its true spirit that "every one on earth passes away and there endures for ever the person of thy Lord, the Lord of glory and honor" (55:26-27). That is real sacrifice. Thus Hajj comes to an end at Mina with sacrifice of an animal and stoning of three Satans as far as the rituals are concerned. But there begins for the Hajji a new journey, a new effort to be reborn, to glorify Allah and to lead a new life, a life full of sacrifices, full of movement, full of struggle, to rid this world of all injustices, all violations of human dignity as Allah has imparted honor and dignity to all children of Adam.

Sacrifice at Mina is a beginning of sacrifices no end, to lead a life of sacrifice so that humanity may thrive in peace and dignity. All clad in white ihram of purity and innocence all through ones life. The visible ihram of white sheet of cloth may be removed at the end of Hajj but removal of this ihram is in fact beginning of wearing an invisible ihram of innocence and purity all through the life. This invisible ihram is no mere ritual, it is solid foundation of life. It is only this ihram, which will remove all strife, all conflict, all violence and bloodshed from this earth. Wearing this ihram would mean prohibiting for oneself all forms of injustices, all forms of

falsehood, all forms of violence and all forms of greed. Without wearing such permanent invisible ihram Hajj cannot be complete. Hope all the Hajjis this year will have a successful hajj .and be as far as possible from Satan and get as close as possible to Allah