

A FEW ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES: THEIR CELEBRATION AND THE MUSLIM PEOPLE OF DHUBRI DISTRICT

Abstract

Generally, the doctrines, precepts and practices of Islam are universal. But often, the beliefs and practices of the Muslims are found to be vary from place to place depending on the circumstances in which the people of the respective place were converted to Islam resulting in considerable difference regarding socio-cultural activities i.e. customs, beliefs and practices of the Muslims residing in different parts of India as well as in that of Assam. This paper aims at describing some of the very important Islamic religious festivals, ceremonies and customs followed and observed by the Muslim people of Dhubri district of Assam.

Objectives: A few objectives of writing this paper are given below :-

1. To describe analytically how geographic dimensions had greatly influenced the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the Muslim people of Dhubri District.
2. To find out how tradition has tremendous impact on the people of Muslim community in Dhubri district.
3. To trace some of the rational criteria of Islam religion of the Muslim people of the whole world in general and that of Dhubri district in particular.

Methodology: The methodology used here is rational, empirical and analytical.

Keywords: intrusion, muharram, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-uz-Zuha , Ashura, Shia, Sunni, Zakat, Fitr, salat etc.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Islam being a kind of “intrusion” into India as well as in Assam had arrived in the midst of an established civilization and culture, gradually assimilating and integrating with the numerous indigenous population of it. In the same way, in Dhubri district of Assam too, the local Muslim inhabitants celebrate the various Muslim religious festivals and ceremonies in the following ways :

II. THE CELEBRATION OF MUHARRAM

Out of the three Muslim festivals namely- Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-uz-Zuha and Muharram, in Muharram, the Muslims act as a community. Muharram being the Muslim month of mourning, is the first month in Islamic calendar. The month of Muharram is considered the second most holy month after Ramadan. Muslims all over the world along with the Muslims of Dhubri district begin the Islamic New Year with the month of Muharram. The tenth day of Muharram is known as the Day of Ashura. Ashura is the day when Imam Hussein Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad was killed in 680 AD, during the battle of Karbala (in present day Iraq) by soldiers of Caliph Yazid. Imam Hussein Ali was believed to be the third Imam of the Shia community. Since then onwards, it becomes a tradition that the Muslim community mourns the death of Imam Hussein Ali and his relatives in the Muharram festival.

The Shia section observes a fast to mourn the death of Imam Hussein, and his family members and also to honour the sacrifice made in the Battle of Karbala. However, Shia Muslims abstain from attending and celebrating all joyous events during this period. On the tenth day of Muharram, many Shia participate in procession and self-flagellation. They use sharp objects such as knives or chains having sharp blades attached to them and also other weapons in act of self-flagellation chanting “Ya Hussein” loudly. The Sunni Muslims on the otherhand, observe this day with a peaceful fast from sunrise to sunset to remember the sacrifices of Imam Hussein attending special prayers in mosques.

Just like the Muslims of all over the world, almost all the Muslims of Dhubri district celebrate the Muharram festival with mixed feeling of gaiety and mourning and also observing roza (fasting) remembering the tragedy of Karbala. Thus, Muharram actually is a festival of mourning rather than entertainment as in other festivals. Many local Muslims are found to visit different darghas situated in and around the locality, offer sinni, candles, incense sticks etc. The demonstration of lathi khel and torowal khel are also held in some of the areas and people from different localities come to participate there. Besides observing these various rites and rituals, the Muslim people arranges the recitation of verses from the Quran by a maulavi before distributing the sinni. In some places, public feasts are also held with sinni and sarbat in the mosques. This festival is also made remarkable by conducting recitation of the Quran, and singing Muslim devotional songs like Jari, Zikir and Ghazal.

III. THE CELEBRATION OF EID-UL-FITR

Eid-ul-Fitr, also called the “Festival of Breaking the Fast”, is a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims world wide that marks the end of the month-long dawn-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan. This religious Eid is the only day in the month of Shawwal during which Muslims are not permitted to fast.

Eid is observed at the end of the Ramadan festival. Eid means joy or pleasure and Fitr means breaking of the fasting or alms. Thus, Eid-ul-Fitr means the festival of breaking of the fasting or the festival of giving alms. It is the festival of rejoicing after the long time fasting of thirty days of Ramadan.

It is widely believed that Prophet Muhammad got the first revelation of the Holy Quran during the holy month of Ramadan. Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated to pay respect to Allah for providing strength and endurance during the month-long fasting rituals. On this occasion, the Muslims have their bath early in the morning as soon as possible, as it is believed that those who have their bath late on this day, there is possibility that they may be attacked by various kinds of diseases very soon. Just after they have their bath Muslim men and boys have their breakfast and wearing new clothes they move towards mosques or idgah to perform namaj (special prayer) of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Muslims across the globe celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr by taking parts in prayers. After performing namaj, friends embrace with each other and strangers shake each others' hands wishing them good health on this occasion and exchanging greetings by saying "Eid Mubarak", means "have a blessed Eid", and also distributing sweets. Children receive gifts and money from elders which is called Eidi. The day is completed with a widespread food menu containing a variety of dishes including – Biryani, Kurma, Kebab, Polao and sweet dishes like kheer, sewai etc. As one of the five pillars of Islam, Zakat or giving alms to the poor is also practiced on this Eid. Thus, Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, a period of fasting, kindness and good deeds.

In this festival, new clothes are bought for each and every one of the family members. New clothes is distributed among the poor from Zakat and clothes are also presented to the relatives and friends in this festival. The Muslims watch the new moon (Idar Chand) in the sky in the late afternoon of the day proceeding Eid-ul-Fitr. It is believed that if the new moon is watched by them then the next day will be celebrated by them as the day of Eid-ul-Fitr otherwise not. Thus, sometimes it is celebrated either at the end of twenty-nine days (29) fasting, where as at some other times it is celebrated only after the completion of thirty (30) days fasting depending on the watching of new moon. Young girls wear mehendi (henna) on their palms in the holy night of Eid-ul-Fitr.

It is believed in Islam that good deeds done specially in this month are rewarded ten (10) times in Islam. As for example, any Muslim who donates some amount of money to the needy and poor during this month will get back just the ten times bigger amount of money than the previously denoted money, in return, and hence the thirty day (30) fasting period of Ramadan brings peace, harmony and prosperity to all those who believe and devote themselves to the religious cause.

The Muslims of Dhubri district also celebrate the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr with great joy and pleasure. They also obey the custom of giving Zakat. Zakat means "that which purifies", also Zakat-al-mal means "Zakat on wealth". It is a form of alms-giving treated in Islam as a religious obligation in tax, that is next after prayer (salat or namaj) in importance in Islam.

Out of the five Pillars of Islam, Zakat is a religious duty for all Muslims who meet the necessary criteria of wealth and it is a mandatory charitable contribution, often considered to be a tax. Zakat is based on the value of all of one's possessions. In quantity it is 2.5% (or 1/40) of a Muslim's total savings and wealth per year including jewellery (especially gold) in case of a lady's possession, if the lady is very rich having her own jewellery and also being the owner of a huge amount of wealth.

Thus, the process of Zakat-al-Fitr is also followed and celebrated by the Muslims of Dhubri district. It is a charity taken for the poor a few days before the end of fasting in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. The Arabic word Fitr means the same as Iftar, breaking a fast. However, Zakat-al-Fitr is smaller in amount than Zakat-al-Mal. Thus, both the process of Zakat and Fitr is well-celebrated by the Muslims of Dhubri district before the end of the month of Ramadan (month of Fasting).

IV. THE CELEBRATION OF EID-UZ-ZUHA OR EID-UL-QURBAN

All the world Muslim celebrates Eid-uz-Zuha that follows soon after Eid-ul-Fitr. The day of Eid-uz-Zuha actually revolves around Allah who appears in Ibrahim's dream to ask him to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, as a sign of his faith and loyalty to Himself. So, the festival of Eid-uz-Zuha celebrates a story about a prophet called Ibrahim. According to the Islamic tradition and Muslim belief, Ibrahim had been told by Allah (God) one night in a dream that he must sacrifice his most lovable and adorable thing in the world in the name of Allah to prove his (Ibrahim's) faith and loyalty to Allah. As Ishmael, Ibrahim's son was the most lovable and adorable one for him (Ibrahim) and so accordingly Ibrahim was also ready to do the sacrifice without any hesitation only for the sake of Allah, the Great Almighty. Meanwhile, when Ibrahim decided to do so, the devil or evil spirit tried to convince him to disobey Allah and His command, but Ibrahim refused to do so. Then he threw pebbles at the devil so that the devil leaves the place immediately. Thus, Ibrahim tries to prove his loyalty and dedication and devotion to Allah and as a result, when Ibrahim was about to sacrifice his son, suddenly found that Allah had replaced Ishmael with a lamb and thus his son was rescued. Therefore, every year, Muslims celebrate Eid-uz-Zuha to remember Ibrahim's loyalty and obedience to Allah. Thus, Eid-uz-Zuha is also known as the "Festival of Sacrifice".

The Muslims of Dhubri district also observe and celebrate the festival of Eid-uz-Zuha on the tenth day of the Zilhaj, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. In the festival of Eid-uz-Zuha, also known as Eid-ul-Qurban or Bakrid, rich Muslims who can afford sacrifice cows or goats per head after performing the prayer (salat or namaz) of Eid-uz-Zuha in the name of God (Allah). Also there is the custom that seven persons can jointly sacrifice a cow, a camel or a buffalo.

On this day, Muslim people take special care for washing clothes, wiping of houses, cleaning the courtyard and also the whole compound, wearing of new clothes etc. They also abstain from any major work on this special day, decorate mosque and Idgah, decorate the roads, prepare sewai, sinni etc. Not only so, they also invite friends and relatives to each other's houses. Thus, this festival mostly signifies the (sacrifices) qurbani of a cow or a goat. However, the rites of the sacrifice are performed just after the prayer of Eid-uz-Zuha is completed either besides the mosque or idgah or at the premises of their houses. Those who

are not able to offer qurbani, they are also listed to get a share of meat from their own Zamat”.

V. FINDINGS

- It is found that the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the Muslim people of Dhubri District are greatly influenced by the geographical aspects to some extent.
- It is also found that tradition has played a tremendous role on the people of Muslim community of Dhubri district that has been rightly expressed throughout the paper.
- 3.This paper also traces some of the rational criteria or features of the Islam religion that are universal to both - the Muslim people of the whole world in general and that of Dhubri district in particular.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thus, the native Muslims of Dhubri district celebrates the various Muslim religious festivals and ceremonies with various local elements incorporated into them as discussed above throughout the different ways. The Muslims of Dhubri district celebrate the Islamic New Year with the month of Muharram. Just like the Muslims of all over the world, almost all the Muslims of Dhubri district celebrate the Muharram festival with mixed feeling of gaiety and mourning and also observing roza (fasting) remembering the tragedy of Karbala. These Muslims also celebrate the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr with great joy and pleasure. They also obey the custom of giving Zakat and Fitr. The Muslims of Dhubri district also observe and celebrate the festival of Eid-uz-Zuha on the specified day following and obeying the custom and rite of Qurbani just like the other world Muslims.They also believe in the story of Muslim belief on which the tradition and rite of Qurbani is based on. Thus, the above mentioned are the various religious ceremonies,festivals and customs celebrated and observed by the Muslim community of Dhubri district. Not only so,it is also found that a few more religious ceremonies like- the custom of Roja khola(feast of breaking of the fasting) in the holy month of Ramadan,the celebration of thirty(30)days of fasting in the sacred month of Ramadan, Shab-e-Barat, Shab-e-Qadr, the rite of Hajj etc. and also a few more social ceremonies like Akika ceremony and Sunnat ceremony (the rite of Circumcision) etc. are also followed and observed by the Muslims of this specified place.

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