Chapter Four

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Chapter Four

Customs and Tradition of Indian Muslims

The customs and traditions of Indian Muslims are varied and fascinating. Some are rooted in their religion, some in Indian (say local) culture itself while some others have been carried through the ages by many of the Muslim rulers, traders, Sufis who came to the subcontinent from many parts of the old world. Many of them were followed by the Aryans from West Asia.

The customs and traditions that crystallized in the beginning of Islamic rule in India are, more or less, unchanged and to expected to remain unchanged in the centuries ahead. Though, some new changes have taken place during last fifty years or after independence with the advent of new Islamic movements and with the huge differences of Indian Muslims into the sects and groups. It goes without saying that in a vast area like India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh) many local customs were integrated with the basic forms of religious life; on the lower level, superstitions, magic, and various unorthodox trends can be observed in India and in other parts of the Muslim world, and the reformers in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries never caused attacking them.

Muslim society in India is still characterised by joint families and respect for women and elders and love and care for children. Old parents and elderly dependants are taken care of by the families of their sons or daughters or relatives as their good wishes and prayers are deeply valued as propitious for receiving God's kindness. Muslims greet their elders in the Islamic way with Assalamu Alaikum with the right hand raised to touch the forehead (as Hindus with Namashkar accompanied by folded palms).
In spite of overwhelming religious influences and rapid expansion of education and modern amenities, people in rural and tribal communities still retain an unconscious faith in animism. A sprawling banyan tree is forever a matter of awe and people will always avoid going under it at night as there might be jins, ghosts or other evils spirits lying in wait in the darkness of its foliages for a victim. Belief in jins and spirits is quite widespread.

Beggars are widely patronised as they are often regarded as saints in disguise. Beggars coming to the door of a house of any community are seldom refused alms. People in distress or in sickness usually go to a place of worship to pray or to a beggar or a holy man to give alms for blessing. They do the same when a child is born and at every point of his/her crossing an important stage in life such as an examination, a competitive test, journey abroad for study, or employment or getting married. The birth of a male child is regarded as a matter of good fortune as he will be an earning member of the family; a female child is often treated as a liability. People frequently make mannat or a vow to make a particular sacrifice, or offer a gift to a deity or at a holy place on fulfillment of a prayer. Mannats at times mean offering feasts to poor people, orphans and relatives. At times of extreme drought affecting farming, Muslims offer special prayers at about midday in a big congregation to ask Allah for rain. Muslims and Christians bury their dead, while Hindus cremate them. Muslims observe a Qulkhwani on the third day (It is widely called Teeja) and a chehtum on the 40th day of the death of a relation while Hindus hold a

\[Qur\text{'an, however, talks of } jins \text{ and Satans}\]

\[it \text{ is proved with Islamic tradition (Hadith)}\]
Shraddha with the sons of the deceased shaving off their heads in mourning. In all cases offering sweets and feasts is a regular custom.\(^3\)

**Customs Related to Newborn**

The birth of a child is celebrated with distribution of sweets among relatives and friends. The call to prayer (*A’aza’an*) is whispered into the newborn child’s left ear and the profession of faith (*Takbeer*) in his right ear. Some honey is also put in his mouth and a proper name is selected.

The naming ceremony is observed with a feast and invitees bring gifts for the child. Everybody, however, should bear the name of Muhammad or one of its derivations (Ahmad, Mustafa, etc.). Sometimes names are given by way of oracle: the first letter of any page of the Qurán that is opened at random furnishing the letter by which the name should begin. At some parts of India astrological considerations are made according to the name of the star that rule the hour, or the day of birth. The child who takes birth by the intercession of a saint is called by names like Ghulam Bakhsh or ‘the slave of so and so’ likes Ghulam Ghaus and Ghulam Moinuddin etc. in later days parents might express the year of the birth by a fitting name like *Gulaam-e- Aal-e- Muhammad* which denotes to the year 1194/1780. Even my own name given by parents denote to the Hijri year of my birth (*Muhammad Jalis Akhtar = 1396*) when the letters of the name are converted into numbers as per the *Abjadi* formula.

The sons of Sayyids often put the word Shah after their first name, or Mir or even Sayyid itself. The name of a child, to some extent, is determined also by the clan or class in which he is born, for the Muslims in India are usually —

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\(^3\) There has been a prolong debate on Teso, Da’watt and Choléswar between Bareli and non-Bareli Deobandi, Ahl-e-Hadith etc Ulama. Bareliws approve them while others reject and term them as *Bida asl*. 
rightly or wrongly – divided into four categories. Among them the *Sayyids* as the Prophet’s descendants play the most important role. They form the uppermost level among the *Ashraaf*, the noble families who claim foreign ancestry and are contrasted to the *Ajlaaf*, the low indigenous orders. (Refer Chapter Three for the detailed study of caste system in Indian Muslims)

*Sayyids* often indicate their descent by designations such as Husaini, Kazimi, Rizvi or by the birthplace of their ancestor who migrated to India, like Gilani, Kirmani, Bukhari. The *Sayyids* have to undergo special restrictions in accepting gifts, and *Sayyid* women keep still more restricted purda than other ladies so that some even do not allow pregnant women from outside to come close out of fear that a ‘man’ may contaminate her.

The largest group of the Indian Muslims is the Sheikh, who are supposed to be the descendants of *Quraishite* families, or some of them belong to any one of three caliphs of the four Guided Caliphs (*Khulfa-e-Rasheedeen*). Descendants of Abu Bakr Siddique are called Siddiqui, those of Omar Farooque are Farooqui while Usman’s descendants are called Usmani. This is what the most of the Sheikhs claim, just like *Ansaris* who don’t hesitate to link themselves with the *Ansars* (those who helped Prophet Muhammad in *Madinah* after he migrated from *Makkah*). But the matter of fact is that most of them comprise of the Hindu converts. Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal comes from a converted Kashmiri Brahmin family. Even most of the *Sayyids* of India are converted from the upper caste of Hindu.

Families of Persian and Turkish origin were categorized as Moghul and often called Mirza, while those who entered India with any of the Afghan tribes are the Pathan. The word *Khan* is placed after their proper names.
Most of the Indian families, particularly, after independence have gone through a drastic change in terms of naming their children. Now, they have started not taking care of their castes, clans and classes. They just find a name which sounds attractive. Some of them put their father’s name at the end of their names as surnames. Farhan Akhtar, for example, son of Javed Akhtar. Being Farsi as the court language during the Muslim rule of India, most of the Muslim families adopted Persian names which is still continued. Some Muslims of India, ignorantly, adopted some names which belong to the Iranian Parsi such as Jamshed.

On the sixth day of the birth, Chatti is usually celebrated. This is the day of first bath of the mother and the child when new clothes are distributed. Similar festivities are held on the twentieth and especially on the fortieth day with much rejoice.

When the newborn reaches to seven days of his/her age or a multiple of seven, 14, 21, up to 35, the hair is shaved for the first time and its weight in silver is given as alms. The ‘aqiqa offering at this occasion consists usually of goats – two for a boy, one for a girl. In some areas one has khir chatai when the child is about five months old and gets its first food, generally some milk-rice, besides mother’s milk. The weaning is also celebrated, usually at the age of two, which is the legally prescribed length of breastfeeding.

When the child reaches the age of four years, four months and four days the ceremony of Bismillah (بسم الله) is held during which the maulana used to write the basmala (بسم الله) with sandal paste and the child is supposed to lick it. Bismilla Khwani is often done with teaching or reading of the beginning of
Sura 96, "Read, in the name of thy Lord...". Sweetmeats are distributed, and in the case of little girls, the sidelocks are braided for the first time.

Circumcision (*khutna*) takes place usually between the age of seven and twelve; since this act is taken as a sign that the boy now really becomes part of the Muslim community. It is common among Muslims and an occasion for celebration and feasting. It is commonly called *musulmani* in some parts of India. In some areas, generally where followers of Sufi customs are populated, the boy is led in a procession to a saint's shrine (*mazaar*) at this occasion. The operation was usually performed by the barber (*hajjaim*), whose wife often acted as a midwife. Now, this type of minor surgical operations is limited to remote village areas. In towns and cities, people take their child to a doctor who performs this operation. Advance Muslims even do not bother to hold age-old rituals.

In some parts of India, such as West Bengal, a new-born is always given a black spot on its forehead as protection against someone's evil eye. Often a Taweez, a tiny copper case containing a religious verse, or a holy man's words of blessings, is tied round the neck of the child for its protection. These may be superstitions coming down from old tribal cultures but people in general still cling to their beliefs in many such superstitions and go to religious and non-religious soothsayers and ascetic persons claiming, most often hypocritically, supernatural powers to get rid of evil or cure an illness by uttering charms and incantations. An empty pitcher, a broomstick, an odd

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4 This Muslim custom is a direct impact of Hindu culture.
5 Putting a Taweez round the neck has been contentious issue among Indian Muslim scholars. Bareli Ulama generally term it as legal while others call it *Bida' ah* (a new thing in Islam)
number of salik birds, a crow cawing, a black cat crossing the way, or a dead body appearing in sight would be deemed inauspicious for a journey.⁶

Marriage

According to the core Shariah law, marriage should take place immediately after the girl’s first menstruation. But Islamic marriage laws are not followed in both India and Pakistan where the age limit of sixteen, now eighteen, is fixed. Many families prefer marriage in kin groups, particularly cross-cousins. For cousin marriage is regarded as contributing to a more successful adjustment of the bride to the conservation of economic resources, and cooperation between the relatives. (Jacobson, D., ‘The Veil of Virtue’, pp. 181) In ethnical groups or the so-called ‘castes’ marriage outside the group is also in vogue. Some Muslim communities, the Kashmir for example in the Punjab, still prefer to marry among themselves, and in some of the lower classes the custom of first-cousin-marriage is continued with all rigidity that a girl may have to wait until her future husband, who may be ten years junior to her, has reached puberty. At times, one reverts to exchange marriages, so that for the daughter that is ‘given away’ a daughter-in-law from the bridegroom’s family comes into the house; therefore large numbers of sons, otherwise coveted by the families, are not welcome, because then the brides become too expensive. (Egar, Zekiye, 1960: pp. 91) In the upper class joint families, too, marriages outside the family are also in vogue.

The question of kufu (equality) plays an important role in the arrangement of marriages. In the sayyid families and in the ruling classes a girl would rather be

⁶ All these are believed to be the impact of Hindu culture.
kept at home for years than be married to a non-sayyid husband. Only slowly are these rigid structures breaking up, with female education progressing.

In cases when no interfamily marriage is arranged, the mashata or the barber's wife always becomes well informed about possible matches and act as mediator if necessary. The preparations for the wedding take a long time and are accompanied by complicated customs; but the central part on which the two parties have to agree is the mehr, the sum which the husband has to pay to his wife and whose amount is stipulated in the nikahnama. Although this contract, which is a must is every marriage, could secure the wife's rights she usually was, and still is, not aware of the rights she, or her representative, can stipulate in the marriage contract. Marriages were, and still are, very expensive, and not only the Lucknow writer Sharar complained a century ago of the 'aqd-e-nikah 'the extravagance of which causes hundreds of families to become financially ruined'. (Sharar, Lucknow, 1975: pp. 205) Pakistan has tried in 1978 to interfere with the exaggerated luxury such as illuminations and sumptuous dinners for hundreds of guests. In India, though, the expenditures in luxuries are in fashion but Qadis and Ulema have always preached to minimize this with no implementation. However, for the women in traditional Muslim society, the arrangement and celebration of weddings was considered an entertainment in life. Hence, they have had silent protests against the modern, forced austerity.

Wedding customs vary from region to region. The exposition of the dowry is an important part of the festivity almost everywhere, What began as gifts of land to a woman as her inheritance in an essentially agricultural economy today has degenerated into gifts of gold, clothes, consumer durables and large
sacks of cash, which has sometimes entailed the impoverishment and heavy indebtedness of poor families.

The piercing of the bride’s nose for the nose-ring is held. The procession of the bridegroom (nau shah ‘new king’) is called in parts of the country. Grooms first go to some saint’s tomb where a Fatiha is recited. Rituals like the henna night, the ceremonal bathing of the bride, and the cutting of the bridal dress by seven happily married women, belong more to folklore than to religion.

The dowry is often used by the receiving families for business purposes, family member’s education, or the dowry to be given for the husband’s sister. The transaction of dowry often does not end with the actual wedding ceremony as the family is expected to continue to give gifts. In the course of time dowry has become a widespread evil and it has now assumed menacing proportions. Surprisingly it has spread to other communities, such as Muslims, which were traditionally non-dowry taking communities. With the increasing greed for the easy inflow of money on account of a bride the chilling stories of bride burning started coming to light. With a view to eradicate the rampant social evil of dowry from the Indian society, Parliament in 1961 passed the Dowry Prohibition Act which applies not merely to Hindus but all people, Muslims, Christians, Parsees and Jews. It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

As in most Islamic countries the bridegroom in India is supposed to see his bride’s face for the first time in a mirror while she is reading the Qurán, a ceremony called in Urdu mushaf arsi. With the passage of time, bride and groom have started meeting each other before marriage. They now have telephonic talks in order know each other. This is, however, limited to the
educated or advanced families. Many folksongs in Bengali and Sindhi tell of the homesickness of the young bride - who was in most cases a mere child - who is now separated from her loving family and lives under the rule of her in-laws. (Vreede-de Steurs, Cora, 1968: pp. 25)

That was certainly not always easy, and the situation of the young wife improved only after she had born a son; usually, at least in the lower classes. Husband and wife would address each other then not by their proper names but as 'Father of Ahmad... Mother of 'Alibakhsh...' etc. This trend is also changing particularly in urban India. They have now started following other communities and started calling wives and husbands by their names.

Most communities in rural India prefer to arrange marriages during cooler and drier months as there is abundance of food and communication is easier for the bridal parties to travel. In urban areas, weddings take place throughout the year, except during the holy month of Ramdhan (for Muslims), and during the period of abstinence after the death of a near relative in the family of either party.

Most marriages are still arranged by parents or close relatives, often with the help of a professional matchmaker who maintains an up-to-date list of prospective grooms and brides with complete accounts of their family trees and histories. He belongs to a breed that possesses the ability to mix facts with fiction in the right chemical proportion to make the impossible happen - all for a very modest reward. Matchmakers unite hearts but most people believe they do so in fulfillment of the union predetermined in heaven. Essential features of these marriages are feasts arranged by both parties for a large number of guests, who bring gifts for the bride and the groom. Depending on the
resources of the parents of the groom and the bride, guests may number from 100 to 1000 or more.

The menu at the Muslim feast is always a reminder of the Mughal emperor's food – beef kebab, chicken roast, mutton rezala, mutton/chicken biryani, burhani of spiced yoghurt, salad and zarda/payesh as sweet. Hindu feasts consist of plain rice, a vegetable dish, a fish curry, a curry of the meat of an uncastraded goat and sweetened yoghurt. In some parts of India Muslim wedding feasts may go on for days as just an imitation of Hindu culture.

The wedding ceremony is preceded by several other rituals including mangni (engagement) to signify conclusion of negotiations and mehendi at both ends to put turmeric paste on the bodies of the groom and the bride, apparently for their skins to glow brighter. Gifts are invariably exchanged on these occasions. Payment of dowry or bride money is common to both Hindu and Muslim communities.

All Muslim and Hindu marriages take place at the bride's house in the presence of elders and relatives of both parties. A Nikah Khwan, Qadhi or Maulvi (marriage registrar) conducts the ceremonies of a Muslim marriage, recording in writing all conditions of the contract after obtaining consent of the bride through a vakil and two witnesses. The contract usually allows either party to divorce under certain conditions.

Polygamy

Polygamy was practiced in upper-class families who can afford equal material care for the wives. And to a very small extent it still continues. In traditional religious families, some 'saintly' pirs even dispensing with the limit of four
wives at one time. The women in some traditional families set foot into their husband’s house. And still in modern times the Prophetic tradition – “If it were permissible to prostrate before anyone but God, I would say that wives should prostrate themselves before their husbands” – is also referred to in order to keep the wives bounded at home and follow husbands’ orders anytime in any situations. Husbands usually ruled them behind the curtain, and power struggle among the wives of a wealthy or influential husband is an integral part of * purdah * life. There has been, however, a prolonged debate between traditional Muslim Maulvis and enlightened Muslim scholars as well as Muslim and non-Muslims feminist groups on the issue. New age modern educated Muslim scholars clearly say that polygamy and and * purdah * systems have been misused by the Muslim patriarchy. Traditional Muslim * ulema * , however, easily forget to refer Prophet Muhammad’s wife Khadijah who was a businesswoman and Ayesha who is considered as the first Muslim woman scholar. A plenty number of * hadiths * have been narrated by her. Learned people at that time used to turn to her in order to an intellectual solution of any issue. * Ulema * also forget the saying of Prophet that the best of husbands are those who are best to their wives. (Peace TV, aired on Dec 22, 2009, at 7:53 PM)

The remarriage of widows was largely frowned upon as a result of Hindu influences. In predominantly rural or tribal areas, such as Kashmir, or among the Meos, the levirate (Marriage with a brother’s widow) is practiced if necessary, and modern advocates of polygamy like to cite the instance of levirate marriage to keep the widow and orphans in the family, even though the husband’s brother should already be married.

Purdah

Purdah is practiced particularly in traditional and well-to-do middle class homes. There are, in fact, groups which have Islamized the veil and seclusion of women is considered a step towards true Islam. Earlier it was considered a status symbol among Muslims as well as a true Islamic tenet. In this modern era educated upper-class girls in the cities have taken it off.

The conditions of the confined women in wealthier, or so called religious, families in the rural or tribal areas are often terrible, while the village women on the whole do not keep purdah because they have to work in the fields. That gives them also the opportunity of meeting other men, and in a society with strictly enforced marriage customs, runaway or elopement cases happen more frequently than the outsider would expect.

A purdah-observing woman should be seen even after her death only by the closest relatives and is buried, in some areas, one foot deeper than a man. By burying the dead and not, like the Hindus, cremating them. The Muslims 'take possession of country's earth', as an Indian Muslim once remarked; and in spite of the restrictions for a modest burial the most beautiful buildings in the Subcontinent are the mausoleums of worldly and spiritual rulers.

Customs related to death of an Indian Muslim

A bit in detail study regarding death in Islam will be followed. In India, on the third day after the death (suyum), people come to offer condolences, read the Qurán and give the merit of this act to the soul of the deceased. In some

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1 There are, of course, particular rites and customs connected with the visit of graveyards. Bida'uni, i.e., III transl. 95, tells: 'If a question from the Ftmaz be recited over a tomb, and a statement of the shares of inheritance be made, all the people lying buried there are, by virtue of that portion of the law, forgiven their sins.
regions all food is thrown out when a death occurs, and relatives and friends send food for three days; then the normal daily routine begins again. During the fatiha ceremonies of the third and the fortieth days, food is distributed to the poor but one imagines that the deceased family member is the real guest. In some areas every Thursday a fatiha for the ancestors is held. Although, daughters are entitled to a share in the inheritance they were generally made to forego their claims; that remained a custom at least in Sunni circles. Since Shia law of succession is more generous towards daughters. Some families who had only female offspring adopted the Shia for practical reasons.

**Basic Beliefs of Muslims**

Islam is based upon five "pillars" that represent the bedrock upon which all else is based. The first pillar, which makes one a Muslim, is called the shahadah, meaning, "testimony" or "witnessing." It is fulfilled by declaring to two witnesses the foundational creed of Islam: "Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah wa anna Muhammadan rasulullah." This means, "I witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad is God's messenger." The first part of the testimony is a belief that God is unique with no partners. Thus, nothing in creation can be associated with God, as creation has no real substantiation without the sustaining power of God. Indeed, creation is not God nor does it have any eternal qualities of the divine that are worthy of worship. Rather, creation is a theater of divine manifestations. Creation is seen as a place where analogies of the divine reveal themselves. The intellect of a person is the vehicle given by God to discern this truth about creation as indicated by several verses in the Qurán.
The second part of the declaration, Muhammad is the messenger of God, acknowledges the means through which this understanding of God has come. All prophets are special human beings capable of refracting divine light, acting like prisms that allow others to see it. The intensity of direct divine light is something only a prophet can bear. Muslims believe that the revelation given to Muhammad is like refracted green light, which lies in the middle of the light spectrum. Muslims consider Islam to be the most balanced of the prophetic dispensations, the "middle way." The Prophet Muhammad's life is considered to be moderate and exemplary for both men and women. He abhorred extremes saying, "Beware of extremism in your religion." After the Qurán, the Prophet's practice, or Sunnah, is the second most important authority in Islam.

The second pillar of Islam is prayer. While people may supplicate anytime they wish to do so, there is a specific prayer every adult Muslim, female and male, is obliged to perform five times a day. The times are determined by the perceived movement of the sun as a way of reminding people of the temporal nature of the world. Thus, each day is considered to be a microcosm of one's own life: the dawn prayer as one's coming into the world, the midday prayer as the end of youth, the afternoon prayer as old age, the sunset prayer as death, and the evening prayer as the beginning of the descent into the darkness of the grave and returning to the dawn prayer as the awakening and resurrection of the dead. After the testimony of faith, prayer is considered the most important pillar.

The third pillar of Islam is paying zakah, an obligatory alms given once every lunar year from the standing capital of every responsible adult. It is not an income tax, as income tax is prohibited in Islamic law, but rather a capital tax on wealth that has been stagnate for at least a year. It is one-fortieth of a
person's liquid assets. According to the Qurán, zakah is distributed among eight categories of people, the two most important recipients being the poor and the needy.

The fourth pillar is fasting the entire lunar month of Ramadan, and it begins with the sighting of the new crescent for that month. Fasting entails abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations from dawn to sunset and is obligatory on adults healthy enough to do so.

The fifth pillar is the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims believe Mecca to be the site of the first house of worship built by the Prophet Adam and his wife Eve and then restored millennia later by the Prophet Abraham and his son, the Prophet Ishmael. At the end of his mission, the Prophet Muhammad restored its monotheistic purpose by destroying the 365 idols in it that the Arabs had been worshiping prior to Islam. The rituals performed in the pilgrimage follow the footsteps of Abraham and his second wife Hagar. The Hajj culminates on a vast desert plain where approximately 3 million pilgrims from almost every country on Earth gather every year and prepare for standing before God on the Day of Judgment.

**Customs and Practices of Muslims**

Due to the broad cultural diversity in the Muslim world, Islam is a quilt of many colors rather than a monolithic faith etched in stone. The majority of Muslims have never considered Islam to be "straight and narrow" but rather "straight and broad." The word in Arabic for the sacred law of Islam, shariah, literally means "the broad path to water." The shariah, rather than being a rigid and inflexible law, is governed by a fluid and elastic set of principles, and
Muslim legal theorists consider it rationally comprehensible and thus capable of being altered when the rationale is absent or the circumstances warrant.

Most Muslim cultures manifest their own characteristics. For instance, the Islam of Indonesia, while essentially the same in its skeletal form, is quite different culturally from the Islam of Senegal. Muslims are required to wear modest clothes, and women are required to cover their hair and entire body except for the hands and face when in the presence of unrelated males. However, the bright colors of the women of Nigeria contrast sharply with the moribund black of the Arabian Peninsula—both are considered acceptable. Food and merrymaking also differ greatly, and Muslims, like other peoples, have diverse ways of enjoying themselves and appreciating the milestones of life such as weddings, births, graduations, and religious holidays. Religious music and chanting are widespread in the Muslim world, and Qurán reciters with beautiful voices have statuses in some Muslim countries.

Living and Dying in Islam

The German philosopher Goethe wrote, "If Islam means submission to the will of God, then in Islam we all live and die." This succinctly summarizes the goal of Muslims: To live and die in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Qurán and practiced by the Prophet. Muslims attempt to adjust their view of the world with the lens of the Qurán. The will of God is expressed in the Qurán through both expectations and examples. The expectations are usually descriptions of how a believer should live his or her life, and various stories in the Qurán provide positive and negative examples. The epitome of a positive exemplar is Moses, whose story is dealt with in great detail in the Qurán. Struggle is at the root of life on earth, a spiritual survival of the fittest. The
fittest are those closest to God; they are those who are "steadfast in prayer and spend out of what We have provided for them" (Qurán 2:3; Ali 1999, pp. 17). The negative prototype is embodied in Pharaoh, who elevates himself above God's law and makes his own law the only source of guidance. Moses is given the Promised Land for his perseverance and steadfastness, and Pharaoh is destroyed by his own hubris and rebellion against the divine will. The story of Moses is an example of submission (Islam), and Pharaoh's is of rebellion and infidelity (kufr). Between these two lies the struggle of humanity.

Life is meant to be an arena whereby one struggles with good and evil. The Qurán teaches that good and evil exist in the heart of every individual as well as in the society. The individual struggle is to act righteously in accordance with the Qurán and prophetic example, and to shun one's own evil and its impulses. The collective struggle is to work with others to make the world a more righteous place. In Arabic, this inward and outward struggle is called jihad. While it can mean a militant struggle against those who attack the Muslim lands, it also signifies a person's struggle with the lower tendencies of the soul, the gravitational pull of self-destructive forces that lead to alienation from God and a state of spiritual disequilibrium. Because humans inevitably fall short morally and succumb to these destructive tendencies from time to time, a means of reestablishing spiritual balance is given, called tauba or atonement. This is done by experiencing a genuine sense of remorse for one's transgressions and a removal of the unhealthy effects of that state by turning to God and seeking divine grace through prayer, charity, and a sincere resolution not to return to the destructive patterns of the past.

While life is seen as a spiritual test and journey, it is also seen as being filled with blessings from God to be enjoyed: "Eat and drink, but waste not by
excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters. Say: 'Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance?' (Qurán, p. 352). Thus, in Islam, marriage is highly recommended and celibacy is frowned upon. The Muslim savants of the past identified sexual relations between a wife and her husband as a foretaste of eternal bliss with God in the afterlife. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged marriage and stated, "There is no monasticism in Islam." In Islam, children are highly esteemed and seen as one of God's greatest blessings to humanity. The Prophet stated that humans were born innocent and later corrupted by their societies. Thus, parents are held responsible for maintaining that state of innocence and raising them with a sense of love and awe of the divine. Motherhood is highly regarded in the Qurán and the prophetic tradition. The Prophet said, "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers." In most Muslim societies, adult women are still predominantly mothers and housewives during their productive years.

**Death and Its Relevance to Muslims**

Death is a question of ultimate concern for every human being, and Islam has a very vivid portrayal of the stages of death and the afterlife. Death is likened to sleep in Islam; interestingly, sleep in Arabic is called "the little brother of death." The Prophet spoke often of death, and the Qurán is filled with warnings of the dangers of ignoring one's mortality and of not preparing for death before it is too late. In one poignant passage, the Qurán reads:

"And spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you before death should come to any of you and he should say, "O my Lord! Why didst Thou not give me respite for a little while? I should
then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of
good." But to no soul will Allah grant respite when the time appointed (for it)
has come; and Allah is well-acquainted with (all) that ye do. (Qurán, pp. 1473–
1474)

Hence, the world is seen as an opportunity to cultivate for the hereafter, and
time is seen as capital that human beings either invest wisely or squander, only
to find themselves bankrupt in the next life. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,
"One of you says, 'My wealth! My wealth!' Indeed, have any of you anything
other than your food that you eat and consume, your clothes that you wear out,
and your wealth that you give in charity which thus increases in return in the
next world?"

The idea of mentioning death and reflecting on death is very important in a
Muslim's daily life, and attending any Muslim's funeral, whether known or not,
is highly encouraged; for such attendance, one is rewarded greatly by God.
Muhammad advised, "Make much mention of the destroyer of delights," which
is death. He also said, "Introduce into your gatherings some mention of death
to keep things in perspective." This is not seen as a morbid exercise, and
Muslims surprisingly accept death, resigned to what is called "one's appointed
time" (ajal). Like the telomere in biology that dictates how many times a cell
may regenerate before dying, an individual's appointed term, according to
Islam, is inescapable and fated. When a Muslim survives a near-death
experience, such as a serious car accident, an operation, or an illness, he or she
will often remark, "My appointed time did not come yet."
Life after Death

Once a Muslim dies, the people left behind must prepare the body by washing, perfuming, and shrouding it. The funeral prayer is then performed, and the deceased is buried in a graveyard without a coffin, simply laid in the earth and covered. A person, usually a relative, informs the deceased of what is happening, as Muslims believe that the deceased can hear and understand what is being said. Muslims believe the dead person is not always aware of the transition, and so the one giving instructions informs the deceased that he or she has died, is being laid in the grave, and that two angels known as Munkar and Nakir will soon come into the grave to ask three questions. To the first question, "Who is your Lord?," the deceased is instructed to reply, "Allah." In answer to the second question, "Who is your Prophet?," the deceased should say, "Muhammad," and the correct response to the third question, "What is your religion?" is "Islam." If the individual passes this first phase of the afterlife, the experience of the grave is pleasant, and he or she is given glimpses of the pleasures of paradise. If however, the deceased does not pass this phase, then the grave is the first stage of chastisement.

After this, the soul sleeps and does not awake until a blast from an angel at God's command. According to Islamic tradition, this blast signals the end of the world and kills any remaining souls on the earth. It is followed by a second blast that causes all of the souls to be resurrected. At this point, humanity is raised up and assembled on a plain. The Qurán states, "On that day We shall leave them to surge like waves on one another; the trumpet will be blown, and We shall collect them all together" (Qurán, p. 735). From there, humanity will beg each of the prophets to intercede for them and hasten the Day of Judgment because the waiting is so terrible, but the prophets will refuse. Finally, all of
humanity goes to the Prophet Muhammad. He will agree to intercede for them and ask that the Judgment commence. This intercession is granted to him alone. Then, each soul is judged based upon its beliefs and actions, which are weighed in the scales of divine justice. At this point, the two guardian angels assigned to all people throughout their adult lives will testify for or against them. According to the Qur'an, the limbs of each person will testify, and the earth herself is resurrected and bears witness against those who caused her harm. Next, a person will be given a book either in the right or left hand. For those given a book in the right hand, they pass the Judgment and are given the grace of God. For those given a book in their left hand, they fail the Judgment and are condemned to hell. However, at this point, prophets and other righteous people are allowed to intercede for their relatives, followers, or friends among the condemned, and their intercession is accepted.

Once the Day of Judgment is over, humanity proceeds to a bridge known as the sirat, which crosses over hell. The saved cross it safely to the other side and are greeted by their respective prophets. The Muslims who make it safely across are greeted by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who will take them to a great pool and give them a drink that will quench their thirst forever. The condemned fall into hell. The Qur'an states that some will only spend a brief time there, while others, the unrepenting and idolatrous ingrates, are condemned forever. Muslims see death as a transition to the other side. Islam is seen as the vehicle that will take one safely there. It is only in paradise that the believer finds ultimate peace and happiness.
Religious rituals

As every moment of human life is, or was, imbedded in some religious ritual, the Muslims of India participate wholeheartedly in the general festivities of Islam. During the month of Ramadan the fast is strictly kept, and after the evening prayer many pious recite the *tarawih* prayers (20+9=29 *rakaat* as per the Hanfî school and 8+9=17 *rakaat* among non-Hanfî or Wahabis). The Lailat-ul-Qadr, when the Qur'ân was revealed for the first time (usually said to correspond to 27th Ramadan) was particularly celebrated. People believe that the whole vegetable world is bowing in adoration, and the Sufis hope to see the heavenly light during this night. Therefore, recitation of the Qur'ân as well as the use of frankincense⁹ in mosques or homes is common. The last Friday in Ramadan likewise was distinguished by intense worship, and some people used to retire to the mosque during the whole sacred month. This act is called I'tikaf. The Shia had the additional festival of the Night of 'Ali on the 20th or 21st of Ramadan, when a little tomb is taken around the houses and food was prepared in 'Ali's name.¹⁰

Ramadan is a month of great solemnity with Muslim adults observing fast from pre-dawn to sunset. The fast is ended with *iftar* of *sharbat*, some fried items, and fruits. It is a month of austerity and teaches people to be kind to the poor, exercise self-restraint and inculcate the spirit of sacrifice. The rich are required to pay *zakat*, a tax designed for poverty alleviation in the society.

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⁹ Frankincense, also called olibanum (Arabic language: علبان, lubban), is an aromatic resin obtained from trees of the genus Boswellia (Wikipedia).

¹⁰ The Hazrat Ali Day was observed in Pakistan in the course of re-Islamization, as Dawn International mentions on Sept. 2, 1978: 'In a message on Yom-i-Ali Gen. Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq urged the Muslims of Pakistan to resolve to follow in the footsteps of Hazrat Ali and not to spare any sacrifice for the glory of Islam. The CMLA said the name of Hazrat Ali symbolizes bravery, piety and knowledge and so long as this world remained the relationship between Hazrat Ali and Islam would also continue to exist and his life would continue to guide the future generations. He said it was the duty of the Islamic World and the Muslims of Pakistan to spread the knowledge about Hazrat Ali.'
Popular celebration of Two Eids

**Eid-ul-Fitr:** A very significant festival for Muslims, who constitute about 15 percent of the country’s population, is *Eid-ul-Fitr*. It comes at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and on this day designated as gazetted holiday. Festivities start with donation of *fitra*, the value in money of a certain amount of rice or wheat per head per family, given to the poor. Then all men and boys, attired in new clothes like everyone else in the family, attend mid-morning Eid prayers at *idgahs* or mosques. Prayers over, they embrace each other wishing *eid mubarak* irrespective of their positions in society in the spirit of Islamic brotherhood. They come back to savour delicious sweet dishes prepared at home. More elaborate dishes are served at lunch and relatives and friends are very welcome to join in. The afternoon is for visiting close relatives and friends attired in new clothes. The occasion is of great religious importance. These days radio and television put out special programmes and newspapers and periodicals bring out supplements to mark it.

The *Eid-ul-Fitr* is celebrated, as elsewhere, after the new moon has been seen – usually from the top of a minaret – by two trustworthy witnesses. That leads sometimes to confusion in India, while in some areas of the country the date is now previously established according to scientific methods. The Morning Prayer, led by the Imam is performed in the Eidgah. New clothes are also distributed. Special sweets are cooked, among which sewiyan, sweet vermicelli, is still a must. The custom of exchanging Eidi presents is common.

**Eid-ul-Azha and Hajj:** *Eid-ul-Azha*, another important Muslim festival falls on the 10th of the Arabic month of *Dhu ’l-hijja*, synchronizing with *Hajj* in Mecca.
The Eid-ul-Azha, also called Baqar Eid (in India), is duly celebrated. The meat of the sacrificial animals is divided in three portions, one for charity, one for friends, and one for the family. The animal hide was given away, preferably to charitable institutions. The slaughtering of animals and particularly of cows on the Eid was one of the main causes for communalist tensions, and not infrequently led to riots. On the 18th of Dhu 'l-Hijja the Shia celebrate the Eid ul-Ghadir in remembrance of the Prophet's sermon at the Ghadir Khum, during the last Dhu 'l-Hijja of his life, in which he designated Ali as Commander of the Faithful.

Eid-ul-Azha synchronizes with Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, another central event in Muslim life held in every Dhu 'l-Hijja. It is still a moving sight to watch the pilgrims who take leave from home being garlanded by their families and friends. In earlier times the pilgrimage over land or on the very uncertain sea route was most adventurous. After the 16th century the sea route from Gujarat was protected by the British East India Company, and nowadays special air services are arranged for the tens of thousands of pilgrims who go every year from India to Mecca. Formerly, pilgrimage was often a way to escape a tyrannical ruler or was imposed upon a discredited nobleman in order to get rid of him. As a place for emigration Mecca was sought after during the Middle Ages and gained this status even more during the 19th century, when large parts of Muslim India were under 'infidel' rule, Mecca was always a resort for scholars, and many Indian religious leaders spent a year or two there and in Medina to study hadith and tafsir, thus religious reform movements like that of

11 The Moghul rulers usually slaughtered a camel at the Idgah.
12 For the pilgrimage, permission of the family is necessary. It used to be, who wanted to perform the pilgrimage, was told by his superior, 'Abdunabi, to ask his mother who, however, refused to grant her permission, Mumtahab II, transl. 258 text.
Shah Waliullah, or the expansion of certain mystical doctrines over the eastern parts of the Islamic world, originated in the Holy City.

_Hajj_ is compulsory for those Muslims who are able physically and financially to travel to Mecca. Over two million Muslims from all over the world perform _Hajj_ every year. Here in the country people go to _idghahs_ and mosques for mid-morning prayers and come back to sacrifice cows and goats, mandatorily distributing a major portion of the meat among the poor and poor relatives as mentioned above. Pilgrims to Mecca perform this _Qurbaani_ in Mecca only and the meat is exported to the needy Muslim populations across the world.

**Shab-e-Qadr, Shab-e-Barat, Shab-e-Meraj**

_Shab-e-Qadr_ is a night of special blessings and is observed in India as elsewhere in Muslim world on the twenty seventh of Ramadan with a whole night of prayers for Allah's blessings, as mentioned above under Ramdan's festivals. _Shab-e-Barat_ is a night of fortune that falls on the fifteenth of the month of _Sha'aban_ of the Arabic calendar. Most Muslims spend the night in prayers for Allah's mercy. Housewives prepare sweet dishes and flat bread for distribution among the poor. And in _Rajab_ , the seventh month of the Arabic and Islamic calendar, people often would give the zakat, the alms tax, for 'by giving it properly man's property becomes pure (pak)'. Some of the pious and learned would observe the _Shab-e-Meraj_, the night of Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven; but that is not common among the masses. Some people would offer rice in the name of Jalal Surkh Bukhari on every Thursday in Rajab.

'Shab-e-Barat' is observed with due solemnity and religious fervor in different parts of the world. Especially in the Indian subcontinent, the night is observed
as an age old celebration. Although the references as to observance of ‘Shab-e-Barat’ in the Holy Hadith are regarded as weak injunctions, nevertheless, the night draws a large number of devotees to salat, fasting, ziarat, feeding the poor, sweets distribution and more!

Much more important than these festivals in the popular calendar is this night, when the lives and fortunes of the mortals for the coming year are registered in Heaven. The Shia remember Imam Mahdi’s birthday on this date. The Shab-e-Barat is mentioned in an inscription in Kathiawar in the twelfth century as an Amir Khusrau’s Khazaan al-futuh; it was celebrated with much merrymaking. Among the pious, the Koran is recited, and the durud, blessings over the Prophet, are repeated during this night. Some people would keep a vigil and cook food in the name of deceased relatives to send it to friends. During the night itself – being a full moon – people would light fireworks; in some places they would make little figures of elephants or horses, light wicks in them, put fruit and food in front of them, and recite the fatiha in the name of the Prophet or, among Shiites, of ‘Ali and Fatima over them. Firecrackers and illumination were disliked by ulema theologians since they were reminiscent of the diwali celebrations of the Hindus, and the custom prevailing among the Meo in the neighbourhood of Delhi to ‘worship’ the flagstaff of Salar Mas’ud during this night is of course viewed with abhorrence by the ulema.

What is Shab-e-Barat?

In Arabic, ‘Bara’at’ means forgiveness and pardon. The night of 15th of Sha’ban (the night between 14th and 15th) is known as Shab-e-Bara’at, the night of pardon from sins. It is interesting to note that this night is usually not celebrated in any other Muslim land. ‘Shab-e-Barat’, also known as ‘Laylatul
Barat' or 'Laylatul Nusf-min-Shaban', is a traditional Islamic day of festival and worship in South Asia. According to the ascetic Muslims, this is the day of divine benediction. Offering prayers and fasting in this particular day is said to have greater acceptance from God.

Some people believe that the spirits (arwah) of the deceased visit their relatives during this night. Skies light up on the night of Shab-e-Barat as the festival is celebrated at night. Houses and streets are also illuminated by candles and strands of electric bulbs to provide a joyful ambiance to the festival.

Colourful fireworks keep dazzling the skies as Muslims stay awake on the night of Shab-e-Barat. This is owing to a belief that God writes the destiny of all living beings for the coming years in heaven during the night. Houses are usually lit up to welcome the departed souls of all Muslims who are let free to roam on Earth on that day.

Sweets, especially the delicious halwa and savaiyyan or the vermicelli is prepared and sent to friends and also to relatives in remembrance of those who died during the year. Some also perform acts of charity by distributing goodies to the poor and needy in the name of their deceased ancestors. Flowers are also placed on graves of the deceased family members.

Fatiha or the blessings are recited over the meal in the name of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The Qurán is also read to mark the day. Muslims hold a belief that if someone prays to Allah through the night and seeks forgiveness for all the sins he had committed, he could be forgiven. Therefore, the entire night of prayer is devoted in pleading for forgiveness for the past year and for good fortune in the coming year.
It may be noted that there is no mention of Shab-e-Barat in the Qurán. However, Sura Dukhan does mentions about Laila Mubaraka, which, according to some of the learned scholars of the Qurán and the Hadith, is Shab-e-Barat. The view regarding the origin of Shab-e-Barat is given as follows:

Imam Tirmizi has recorded the following Holy Hadith:

“Narrated Hazrat Ayesha that one night (she awoke and) she did not find Prophet (in his bed). She went out (to search for him) and found him in Baqi’ (the graveyard in Madinah)... The Prophet said: In the night of 15th of Sha’ban, Allah descends to the lowest of skies and grants pardon to the people more than the number of hair of the goats of Kal’b tribe.”

Hence, Shab-e-Barat has come into being today. Many people go to masjids (mosques) for prayers and meditation. Others fast during the day and render nafal, the optional namaz at night. But, it has created endless differences among Indian Muslims on its legality as per Shariah as studied in the Chapter Three.

**Eid-e-Miladunnabi**

*Eid-e-Miladunnabi* is observed on the twelfth of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the day Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 AD in Mecca to become Islam’s last prophet. Contrary to the custom in most other countries, the Rabi-ul-Awwal 12 was originally celebrated in India as *Barah Wafat*, the Prophet’s death, and people would spend it in reciting texts concerning Prophet Muhammad’s excellence. In former days, they would decorate the *Qadam-e-Rasul* (the Prophet’s footprint), which is kept in a box or the effigy of Buraq, the mount that carried the Prophet during his ascension. As time passed, however, the day
is interpreted as the Prophet's birthday as was the case in other countries from the Middle Ages. Thus the whole month of Rabi ul-Awwal gained a joyful aspect. Shayesta Ikramullah has well described the mawlid celebrations as they were customary in the homes of upper-class Bengalis; with incense burning and attar of roses sprinkled over the ladies, who found also many other opportunities to hold a milad gathering at any auspicious occasion. (Ikramullah, Shayesteh, 1963: pp. 25) People would cook milk rice or other food in the name of the Prophet, to distribute it to the poor; and nowadays in Pakistan many meetings are held during Rabi ul-Awwal in which the Prophet is extolled to the faithful as a model.

A large number of Muslims do not believe in celebrating birthdays of death anniversaries because there is no historical evidence that such was the practice of the Prophet. However, similarly large numbers of Muslims do commemorate the birth anniversary of the Prophet on 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal of the Islamic lunar calendar year. For Muslims, this date marks the most important event in the history of the mankind because the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is regarded as the Chief of the Prophet, to whom the Holy Qurán was revealed. The extent of the festivities, on this occasion, is restricted because of the fact that the same marks the death anniversary of the Holy Prophet as well. (For detailed study on the differences, please refer Chapter Three)

On this occasion public meetings are held in the mosques where religious leaders and scholars make speeches on different aspects of the life of the Prophet. The stories of the Prophet’s birth, childhood, youth and adult life, his character, teachings, sufferings, and forgiveness of even his most bitter enemies, his fortitude in the face of general opposition, leadership in battles, bravery, wisdom, preaching and his final triumph through Allah’s mercy over
the hearts of people are narrated in detail. Salutations and songs in his praise are recited. In some countries, streets, mosques and buildings are decorated with colorful bunting and pennants and well illuminated at night. Affluent Muslims generously donate to charity. Feasts are arranged and food is served to guests and the poor.

**Muharram**

Muharram is not a festival in the celebratory sense as it mourns the Karbala tragedy when Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was martyred in the 61st year of the Arabic calendar corresponding to 680 AD. It is observed on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim calendar. During Muharram, *taziyas* (bamboo and paper replicas of the martyr's tomb) processions as well as green alams (standards of Hazrat Imam Hussain's army) made of silver, copper and brass, are carried through city streets, accompanied by young men beating their breasts in collective sorrow. On the tenth day, known as *Yaum-Al-Ashura*, the processions carrying the *taziyas* and alams terminate in open spaces where the *taziyas* are buried. Juice or *sherbat* is freely distributed to everyone. People generally wear black clothes on the *Yaum-Al-Ashura*.

Muharram is observed as mourning largely in the Indian sub-continent, mainly by members of the *Shia* community of Muslims. In other parts of the Islamic world, with the exception of Iran, observing the tenth day of Muharram or the *Yaum-Al-Ashura* as a mourning day is considered as undesirable because *Muharram* is considered as one of the four blessed months chosen by Allah, long before the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.
Eid dinner being served

Source: www.samahni-valley.com/Culture.htm
People enjoy more than just the two feasts that have Koranic sanction. The popular poetical genre of barahmasa, poems about the peculiarities of the twelve months, is often used to point to the various religious aspects of each of the lunar months. And the great traditionalist of seventeenth century Delhi, 'Abdulhaqq, has composed a book which deals with Prophetic traditions concerning each month. First and foremost, the celebrations of Muharram occupy an important place in popular piety and are not restricted in older times to only the Shia but are also commemorated by the Sunnites. Sermon meetings are held during the first ten days of Muharram. A special dish (rice and syrup in the Punjab) is cooked even in some Sunni houses on the tenth (‘ashura) and already Amir Khusrau speaks of devotional books about the Maqtaal Husain which were read during Muharram. In Shia circles special gatherings (majlis) are called to remember the events of Husain’s coming to Kerbela day by day. They were, however, not held in the mosque but in large imambaras, which became a special feature of Shia Islam. Miniature tombs, called in the Deccan tabut, otherwise ta’ziya, were prepared on a bamboo framework and covered with more or less precious material; they could reach a height of up to twenty feet. The ta’ziya stay under a canopy till the tenth, and Muharram fires were lighted everywhere; huge standards with crests such as the ‘hand of Fatima’ (which also symbolizes the panj tan, i.e. Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain) or other religious symbols are carried. A white horse, representing Duldul, is led around with empty saddle. The popular beating of breasts and backs with chains is now forbidden in some areas. On the tenth the ordinary ta’ziyas are buried in a place called Kerbela, while the expensive ones are

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13 Good descriptions of Muharram in Jafir/Heredia, Islam in India, Mrs. Meer Hasan, Observations; and Sharar, Lucknow. In 1942, the 1300th anniversary of Husain’s martyrdom was celebrated in a large number of India cities — his idealism, courage and loyalty to truth presented as model — Hoffster, Shia of India, p. 64; Dawn International, December 1978, celebrated Husain’s martyrdom as pointing to the final victory of good over evil.
renovated. In some cases the mourning goes on as in real death cases till the fortieth day (Safar 20 – second month of Islamic calendar). Women break their glass bangles and wear black clothes – S.H. Manto's short story *Kali shalwar* tells of a prostitute who desperately needed a black *shalwar* for Muharram.

In some provinces the Muharram procession has changed into almost a kind of carnival and Hindus participate freely in the happenings, be it the buffoonery, or the 'worship' of the 'alam, 'flag', by some low castes in Bihar. The tears shed in Muharram are sometimes collected because they are regarded as a cure and a help against the punishment of the tomb. The atmosphere is always highly charged with emotion so that outbreak of riots is not unusual during the first ten days of Muharram; and, although the Sunnis share the admiration and love of the Prophet's family, the Muslim reformers unceasingly preached against the 'mixture of pageantry with the deeply expressed and public exposure of grief'. (Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, 1973: pp. 54)

Major Islamic events have happened on *Yaum-Al-Ashura*, the tenth day of Muharram. It is believed that on this day Adam was created and entered the Paradise, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was born, Prophet Isa (Jesus) was raised to the heavens and the people of Prophet Moosa (Moses) obtained freedom from the tyranny of Firaun (Pharaoh).

**Customs and Traditions in other Islamic months**

The month next to *Moharram*, Safar, is usually considered to be unlucky. For the Shia, the *chihilum*, the forty days' mourning ends on the tenth of Safar. In some regions no important work was undertaken during first thirteen days, because the Prophet had fallen ill in those days. Therefore many people spend

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14 For a picture see S.C. Welch, Room for Wonder, New York 1978, Nr. 69.
much in charity. The last Wednesday in Safar (akhri charshamba) is devoted to rejoicing because the Prophet felt better on that day, and some people used to write seven salam with saffron or rosewater on a leaf, wash it off and drink the water as a panacea.

The month next to Rabi-ul Awwal (the month of Eid-e-Milad), comes Rabi' uth-thani. On 11th of this month, a special Fatiha is performed. Those connected with the Qadiriyya order celebrate the memorial of 'Abdul-Qadir Gilani, the Pir-e-Dastgir, Miranji, or Mahbub-e-Subhani who, as tradition says, had ninety-nine names. In some folk tradition the whole month is often called gyarahwin, ‘eleventh’ because it is sanctified by this memorial day. Although the order was introduced in the Subcontinent later than the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya. In Ludhiana ‘Abdul-Qadir Gilani’s toothpick is said to have taken root’ and to have grown into a tree near which an annual fair is held. In Srinagar, a memorial shrine for him exists, and numerous big trees in Sind are devoted to his name. In some cases people take out a large green flag with the impression of an outstretched hand made with sandalwood paste; or they put little flags and eleven lamps on the house to secure it from misfortune in times of plague. The large flag or a commemorative plaque of green paper might also be perambulated. Much popular poetry has been written in the regional languages in ‘Abdulqadir’s honour. In fact the first known manqabat, ‘poem in praise of a Pir or Wali’, in Sindi, is directed to Pir Piran Badhshah, and its author, Jaman Charan (d. 1738), enumerates a long list of places where the power of the saint is operative. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 121) And a Balochi tale about the Prophet’s ascension to heaven explains why the Pir-e-dastgir had claimed, “My foot is on the neck of every saint’: When Gabriel had

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15 T.W. Arnold, ‘Saints, Muhammadan, in India’, ERE XI p. 69. In the Junaidi dargah in Gulberg, a tree that grew out of Gesudama’s toothpick, musvak, overshadows the courtyard, and the pious visitor is given a twig for the sake of blessing.
to leave the Prophet alone before entering into God’s presence, 'Abdulqadir offered his shoulder so that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) could step on it and reach the Highest Presence, and he blessed the saint by putting every saint’s neck under his feet. (Longworth Dames, M., 1970: pp. 134) – It seems that the importance of the eleventh day is reflected in the Panjabi custom of distributing charity on the eleventh of every month. (Egar, Zekiye, 1960: pp. 69)

And finally, the month of Dhu'l-qa'da is considered unlucky in some communities. No marriages are celebrated at that time. While in Shia circles this and the following month are generally the time for marriages since in Muharram wedding celebrations is improper. In the upper classes, especially among the Moghuls, the Persian New Year (nauruz) is popular.

**Diverse Traditions of Indian Muslim at a Glance**

Tradition is strong in every detail of life: one believed in lucky and unlucky days. Wednesday is often regarded as inauspicious so that pious people visited tombs of saints every Wednesday to dispel possible evil influences. There are, of course, many other ways to avert evil: the proper recitation of the Divine Names according to their numerical value and their meaning is part of the Sufi heritage, and the most elaborate discussion of this aspect of Islam is found in Muhammad Ghauth Gwaliori’s Jawahir-e-khamsa, a book to which Jafar Sharif refers several times in his discussion of magical and mystical practices. Other, less complicated collections of relevant rules are widely used.
As in other Islamic countries, great importance is ascribed to dreams, which could determine man’s decisions to a large extent. They could warn him against impending danger, guide him to a saint, living or dead, solve juridical problems, or interfere with political decisions. For the firm belief in dreams can be supported by Prophetic traditions, and their interpretation is one of the duties of the spiritual preceptors, who would understand from their disciples or visitors’ dreams the stage they had reached in their pilgrimage towards God.

To take omen from the Koran, from Rumi’s Mathnawi, or most frequently from the Diwan of Hafiz (as Humayun did in 1554 before his return to India) is common practice.

Special precautions have to be taken when travelling: one might tie a copper coin and a metal ring in a cloth, which is worn at the right upper arm, called ‘imam zamin ka rupia’, ‘the rupee for the protecting Imam’. After the happy arrival it is taken off, a faitha recited and sweets distributed. The most important one being that prepared in the name of ‘Abdulhaqq of Rudauli, the Chishti-Sabiri saint of the 15th century; but the widely travelled Bu’Ali Qalandar and the Bihar saint Sharafuddin Maneri are also among those to whom one vowed sweets before a journey. (Jafar/Herclots, 1972: pp. 255)

Besides, it is common to prepare food over which the name of God, a saint or the Prophet is spoken along with fatiha and then distributed to friends or as alms that is usually done in connection with a vow (mannaat). Some days are singled out for food in the name of particular saints. Shiites might do the same in the name of ‘Abbas ‘Ali or Ja’far as-Sadiq, and one know even a sanctification in the names of the Ashab al-Kahf, the Seven Sleepers, with a

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16 Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaya travelled to Ajmer because he was urged by a dream (Times of India, Bombay, Oct. 9, 1962, quoted in E. G. von Grunebaum, ‘Dream in Classical Islam’, in Abid Husain Presentation, Delhi 1974, pp. 54).
special plate for the faithful dog (Sura 18/17) aside. (Jafar/Herclots, 1972: pp. 137) If a wish is fulfilled, one would light candles or, in some regions, set afloat small boats.

Should a child be ailing one would blow over it, or blow over a glass of water after the maghrib prayer in the mosque, as is known from Iran and Turkey as well. After recovering from an ailment a ceremonial bath is usually taken, at least by upper-class people, a custom that induced many poets to write congratulatory poems or chronograms for the ‘bath of health’ of their respective patrons.

Daily life is enriched by maulud, or mauled, gatherings. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 124) Maulud are poems which deal with any aspect of the Prophet’s life, not only with his birth, as the name indicates, and which are recited in various styles by one or several singers. Aside from the performance on the Prophet’s birthday they are sung on Fridays, on the Shab-e-Barat, during Ramadan nights, etc., and in some regions became part and parcel of every important event, from circumcisions to weddings and funeral services. How widespread this form is can be understood from the fact that a Sira Puraanam, a poem dealing with the Prophet’s life, by the 18th century poet Omar Pulavar belongs to the finest products of Muslim Tamil literature (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 124) at the same time a special form of Sindhi maulud was developed to be used in sama-sessions. In ladies’ gatherings, women would recite maulud, and there are instances when an outstanding woman was allowed – though reluctantly! – to sing even in an assembly of men. Thus the children grow up in an atmosphere where rhymed stories about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his family are repeated at every occasion. The tenderhearted ‘grandfather Prophet’ who played with his ill-starred grandsons
Hasan and Husain is as present in these songs (called munaqiba) as was 'Ali, the hero of early Islam. Even lullabies alluded in simple words to the wonderful stories of the beloved Prophet, and more than one poet promised the pious that a regular recitation of his na‘at, praise poem, at certain days would definitely lead them to a vision of the Prophet. The recitation of al-Busiri’s Qasida-e-Burda in praise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), during which various blessings for him are invoked, is still common in the Deccan.

How deeply this religious atmosphere affected all levels of the population is understood from the innumerable riddles which, from complicated Persian verse-riddles to conundrums in the regional languages, presupposed an amazing knowledge of Islam, combined with wit and intelligence. To solve them is one of the favourite pastimes of both princes and illiterate villagers.

For the Shia, the majlis in commemoration of Husain’s martyrdom is more important than the mauled, and various professions developed to give the gatherings a lasting effect – the reciters of hadith told movingly about Kerbela; the waqi-a-khwans narrated anecdotes, and eloquent marthiya-khwans recited long poems about the death and suffering of the Imams, while sozkhwans, groups of three accomplished musicians, sang in heart-rending tunes about the tragedy of Kerbela – a custom not favoured by the orthodox theologians.

And as a child’s first completion of the Koran is a reason for celebration. Thus a scholar might invite his friends, on each occasion on which he completed the perusal of the Sahihain or the Mishkat, amusing his guests with sweetmeats and other delicacies.17

17 ibid Badr ‘uni, Munakhab III, trnd. 215, text 154. The khamm el-Bukhan was celebrated, in late Mamluk Egypt, during Ramadan with a big reception in the Citadel.
Stories of Islamic origin are told and retold – the impressive pictures painted under Akbar for the tellers of the Hamzanama, the story of the Prophet’s heroic uncle, show how popular these tales are in all strata of society. And not only Hamza, but also Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, a son of ‘Ali by a wife other than Fatima (according to Ibn Khallikan ‘a blackish slave-girl from Sind’), who plays a prominent role in early Islamic sectarian discussions, became the hero of stories that are told in Urdu and the regional languages of Indo-Pakistan. Even more surprising is the fact that the Arabic tale of Tamim-e-Dari reached India rather early and formed an important part of the folk tradition. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 125) (Tamim’s tomb is shown in Mylapur south of Madras); they were retold in Multani verse as well. Such stories do not belong exclusively to the higher layers of Indo-Muslim culture. On the contrary, in the villages, singers would come to sing long tales about the heroes of past glorious ages (parallel to the Hindu bards who recited scenes from the Mahabharata and other religio-legendary texts). (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 124) And last but not least, the religious singers – be they bhakta in the Hindu tradition or wandering Sufis in the Islamic environment – assured the villagers that religion after all is a matter of heart and life and told them the mysteries of faith and love in images taken from their daily life. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 125

Shrines and saints in India

Those who visit to India is always amazed when they discover the innumerable shrines (saints’ tombs) and places of pilgrimage. Some authors have rightly remarked that there seems to exist there a certain mystical relation between the people and the saints. Folk poetry helped to infuse the stories of the saints and their miracles into the lowest layers of life, so that the great spiritual heroes of
Islam – like ‘Mansur’ Hallaj or Maulana Rumi – are, so to speak, ever-present. Typical is the story of Diwan Gidumal, the Hindu minister of the Kalhora, who offered the invading Ahmad Shah Abdali (1749) a little bag which, as he said, ‘contains the most precious thing Sind has to offer: dust from the tombs of sayyids and saints’.

Quite a few places in the Subcontinent can boast of relics, such as a hair from the Prophet’s beard; one such hair is in Delhi next to the Great Mosque, one in Kichhocha Sharif, one in Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh). Even more important is the qadam-e-rasul, the Prophet’s footprint in stone, examples of which pious pilgrims brought from Mecca or Medina and around which remarkable architectural structures were built. The qadam rasul mosques in Bengal bear witness of this veneration. One may see here a typical Indian relic, for to touch the foot is an act of humility, and long before Islam India had known the Buddha’s footprint and the ‘feet of Vishnu’.18 – The Qadiri dargah in Uch preserves a hair of the Prophet along with ‘Abdulqadir’s turban and other relics. In Lucknow the horseshoe of Husain’s horse, which was lost in the battle of Kerbela, is preserved, while in Chunar the gowns of Hasan and Hussain are shown.

Indo-Muslim hagiography19 comprises every imaginable tract that is known from saints’ legends all over the world; if it is even more colourful than religious tales in general it is due to Hindu influence.

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18 A line reproduction of the ‘Feet of Vishnu’ with explanation by Mark Zebrowski in S. C. Welch, A Flower from every Meadow Nr. II.
19 Hagiography - refers literally to writings on the subject of such holy people, and specifically to the biographies of ecclesiastical and secular leaders. The term hagiology, the study of hagiography, is also current in English, though less common. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hagiography)
The presence of a saint or sayyid is considered to be most important for a prosperous life, and already Nizamuddin Auliya's mother sent her son to the graves of martyred saints to pray for her recovery.

The tombs of saints, even more than the mosques, reflect the character of both the builder and the saint: the small tomb of Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri resembles a beautiful white pearl in the vast landscape of red sandstone buildings; and the windows of Muhammad Ghauth Gwaliori's grey marble tomb seem to translate into visible forms the collections of the stars which he knew so well. The delicate marble pavilion that houses Nizamuddin Auliya's tomb in Delhi is surrounded by the graves of his admirers, such as his friend, the poet Amir Khusrau, the historian Barani, the mystically minded princess Jahanara, and the last classical poet of Urdu, Mirza Ghalib, who rests at a little distance. Often only a couple of coloured, preferably red, flags point to the place where a saint or sayyid is buried, or small heaps of stones indicate a burial place which may grow in the course of time into a veritable place of worship. The radiant green dome over the modern sanctuary of Warith 'Ali Shah in Dewa Sharif (UP), where the visitor can sleep in the modest dervish cells, contrasts with the monumental buildings of Gulbarga.

Musical sessions are held in several khanqahs on Thursday nights. The enraptured dance of the malangs in Sehwan still goes on as does the sweet music at Bhit Shah. Near many Chishti tombs, such as Nizamuddin in Delhi, musicians are permanently involved in singing or playing religious songs, and during a journey in the United Provinces in 1975 we had no difficulty in finding some qawwali groups who enjoyed singing for us, the traditional hymns in praise of God and the Prophet or of the saint in whose khanqah we were sitting. In other places, like Pakpattan, music has lately been prohibited,
Madrasa class rooms
and the old porch where the musicians used to sit is converted into a place for
the recitation of the Koran – one of the numerous attempts to purge saints'
tombs from ‘un-Islamic’ accretions.

Unique culture of mazar can be seen in neighboring countries also. Some
sanctuaries have strange aspects: the visitor to Karachi knows the pond of
Mangho Pir, where crocodiles are fed by the people. The number of these
animals is now diminishing; during the last century some young Englishmen
were still able to walk on their backs from one end of the pond to the other. All
the crocodiles, headed by Mor Sahib, ‘Mr. Peacock’, are descendants of the
alligator that was produced when an angry saint of the 13th century cast a
flower into the pond and cursed it. Real peacocks gather in the courtyard of a
small sanctuary in Kallakahar (Salt Range) dedicated to two of ‘Abdulqadir
Gilani’s grandsons who were slain here by the Hindus in 566/1170-1, as the
inscription claims. – Near the tomb of Jalaluddin in Sylhet beautiful fish are
kept; most repelling, however, is a pond in Chittagong (Bangladesh), which is
dedicated to the memory of Bayezid Bistami, the great Persian mystic of the 9th
century. Here, big whitish soft shell turtles swim in the greenish water and are
fed by the pious who wash their babies and their rice in the same water.
However, to tie a piece of cloth at Bayezid’s sanctuary is considered to be very
effective.

At some shrines, particularly those of the Qadiriyya, women are not allowed
inside but have to stay on the threshold. In most places, however, they may
enter and touch the railing around the tomb to invoke the blessings of the saint
by reciting a fatiha and then mentioning their special wish. The Western
female visitor to Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore is now decently wrapped into a
long skirt to cover her legs. There are also shrines of women saints where men
are not admitted; I remember Bibi Pakdaman in Multan who is buried in a simple little building; the female keepers of her tomb were not less greedy than the beggars at other saints’ tombs. Female saints are found mainly in the Sind-Balochistan area and in the Punjab; some are supposed to have been swallowed by the earth when persecuted (thus the Pakdamanan in Lahore, the Haft Afifa in Thatta, or Bibi Nahzan in Kalat); they appear, as the names tell, often in groups of seven. Other woman saints have miraculous powers like Mai Sapuran who could cure the bites of mad dogs. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 127-129)

A visit to a tomb, mazar, is called ziyarat, a word that came also to denote the place itself. People will recite a fatiha and sometimes the last three suras before making a personal request. One often ties pieces of cloth at the window net or on a nearby tree to remind the saint of one’s wish, as is done in other countries as well. Some visitors will not only touch the railing around the tomb but kiss it, or kiss the threshold. To sweep a saint’s tomb is a meritorious act, often performed in fulfilling a vow. It is also customary to strew a handful of rose petals or some chains of flowers over the coffin (the major shrines are surrounded by vendors of these items), and an honoured guest of the sajjada nashin may be granted some of the dried-up flowers to swallow them for the sake of blessing. One can also offer silken or satin covers or pieces of cloth which are put over the coffin and then, after sometime, taken away to be presented to some high-ranking visitor – the green, silver-embroidered covers exude a sweet fragrance. Smaller pieces of cloth that have been in touch with the tomb are often given to girls to secure the saint’s blessings. The visitor may also receive some sweetmeat. Many khanqahs have special dishes for which
they are famous. One can light candles at the tombs, preferably on Thursdays, and a poet may praise his saint claiming that he is so powerful that.

Gabriel is a moth for the candle of his tomb! (Qani’, Mir Ali Shir, 1967: pp. 26)

To Salar Mas’ud a flag is offered. In famous places, valuable silver doors, railings or crystal lamps have been received as offering from kings and celebrities, Indian and non-Indian. Korans, too, were often dedicated to a saint. Bada’uni presented the shrine of his master with a fine copy which he himself had written, hoping to remove by his offering ‘the infidelity of former books’ which he had translated from the Sanskrit. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 130)

The shrines are visited in case of need, or just for a moment of spiritual intimacy with the deceased saint who is supposed to be always alive and active. In India, Mu’inuddin Chishti’s mausoleum in Ajmer is an outstanding example of this veneration. Muhammad Tughluq and Sher Shah Suri were among its visitors. Akbar went several times on foot to Ajmer, while his son Jahangir wrote about the ‘urs, the memorial celebrations:

I gave to faqirs and attendants money with my own hands, altogether there were 6,000 rupees in cash, hundred robes, seventy rosaries of pearl, coral and amber, etc.20

He also dedicated one of the huge cauldrons to the sanctuary where he had been born. Dara Shikoh was in Ajmer, and his brother Aurangzeb followed

20 Turuk-i-Jhangiri, transl. Rogers and H. Beveridge, pp. 256, s.n.; ibid. pp. 269. His grand-daughter Jannarn, too, visited Ajmer after recovering from her burns.
him, shortly after having gained victory of Dara. Inscriptions at the dome praise the saint with enthusiastic words:

O you whose door is the prayer-direction of those who have attained certainty;

On whose door sun and moon rub their foreheads!

All the servants at your door are Ridwan [the doorkeeper of Paradise],

For your resting place is equal in purity to the highest Paradise... (Tirmizi, S. A. 1., 1968: pp. 30)

That was written in 1579, and nearly a century later another pious donor described in his verse.

The wall of the resting-place of the Falcon whose sitting-place is the Divine Throne,

And under whose wings lies the egg of Muslimdom... ...(Tirmizi, S. A. 1., 1968: pp. 53)

To offer something at Hazrat Mu‘inuddin’s tomb, or to have it repaired, embellished or enlarged could form the contents of a vow in times of dangers or ailment, and pilgrimages, even under difficult conditions (such as measuring the way with one’s body), were vowed not only by Muslims but also by Hindus. Even after partition a special train brings pilgrims from Pakistan on the otherwise closed railway line Hyderabad-Ajmer-Bombay so that they can attend the ‘urs, which is celebrated on Rajab, 6. Some shrines are noted for
special powers: the dust of Burhanuddin Mahmud’s tomb is given to children for intellectual enlightenment.

The woodcutters in the Sunderbans, Bengal, were devoted to Mubarak Ghazi whose faqirs live in the villages and marked the borders inside which wood could be cut. Boatsmen and woodcutters, Hindus and Muslims, used to offer him some rice and bananas before entering the jungle where the saint was supposed to ride a tiger.

Many shrines are visited by childless women, for instance Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri. Some are good for healing barren cows; others for cough or for leprosy (Shah Sufaid in Jhelum district). The small old sanctuary of Shah Mina (d. 1470) in Lucknow is mainly visited by petitioners, and quite a few places are connected with the cure of mental diseases. Makhdum Faqih (14th century) who is buried in Bombay close to the sea-shore, was specialized in hysterical patients. Ahmad Qattal (d. 1631) from among the Ucch saints was called upon in the first spring month (Cheth, March-April) to drive out evil spirits from women. In Moradabad a similar saint – a former muezzin of the Great Mosque – is visited mainly by Hindus who suffer from mental illness. The most famous of these places is probably Kicchauccha east of Faizabad, Ashraf Jahangir Simnani’s khanqah in a djinn-infested forest. Here, mentally deranged people gather; women downstairs, men upstairs in the actual sanctuary. They are sometimes quite cruelly treated and can be watched beating their heads against the walls and the floors so that the visitor feels he is in a truly haunted place.

But not only Sufi saints are implored for help. In Shia circles the faithful revert to the hidden mahdi, as Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali tells:
People who have a particular object in view which they cannot attain by any human stratagem or contrivance, write petitions to imam mahdi on Fridays and... commit them to water with much reverence; that is repeated every succeeding Friday." (Ali, Mrs. Meer Hasan, 1973: pp. 1136)

The saints, living or dead, are credited with numerous miracles (karamaat) besides those experienced by faithful visitors at their tombs. Some of these miracles are in reality only overstressed acts of piety, such as extraordinary long periods of fasting, or the chilla ma`kusa, to hang oneself by the feet to recite prayers and invocations - a feat that is still today sometimes performed by dervishes who may use the hatrack of a Pakistani train to hang from. To sit in the midst of summer in front of a fire while meditating (an act that produces heat in itself) is a form of asceticism inherited from Yogi Practices. A miracle that is frequently attested not only in India is that old, weak, or bedridden saints gained the strength to perform their ritual prayers regularly, as soon as the adhan was heard, or that they were able to participate in the whirling mystical dance. The longevity of the Sufis which is attested in these stories is, in itself, almost a miracle.

A saint might reach the state of ecstasy during his ablutions for prayer, and a miracle which have not been found anywhere outside India is that some saints (in Sind, the Punjab, and South India) were seen during the dhikr when their limbs got separated from their body, each limb performing its own dhikr. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 132)

There are lot of differences and controversies regarding the miracles and truthfulness of the Sufi saints. Wahabis come first to differ the Sufi ideology.
(It has been analysed in a bit detail in Chapter Three) Famous researcher on Indo-Paki culture writes:

"Many miracles are connected with the propagation of Islam – was not Mu‘inuddin Chishti told by the Prophet himself to go to India? The numerous tombs of shahids (martyrs), and the stories of their fight against Hindus, robbers, or demons, give witness of the heroic role of some Indian saints in olden times. – Conversions happened in various ways – a single glance of the saint, or a look at his radiant face might suffice to bring about a change in faith. And what of the Hindu physician in 14th century Sind who was converted by merely looking at a saint’s vial? Pir Badr (d. 1440 in Bihar) whose great-grandfather was a disciple of Jalal Bukhari, kept his chillah in Chittagong where he reached ‘floating on a rock’ and converted many Hindu sailors, while in the Salt Range several saints produced sweet water and thus attracted the Hindu population." (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 133)

Often the formula is used: "Whatever he would say, it would definitely happen! For saints could bring events from the ‘alam al-mithal into this world. Hence they could cure the sick and make the deaf hear by whispering the profession of faith or the call to prayer into their cars. Many well-known folk patterns are applied to them, such as granting three sons to a hundred-year-old couple and taking them away when the couple proved ungrateful. Wanderlegenden known from other parts of the Muslim world are frequently found; that is especially true for legends connected with animals although here the Hindu and Buddhist heritage is also preserved. We sympathize with the South Indian saint whose domestic lion lied peacefully together with another Sufi’s
Shrine of famous Sufi saint Kawaka Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, India
Film actress Katrina Kaif in Ajmer Sharif Shrine

Eid-ul-Zuha – one of the popular two Eids
The feeling of unity with the whole nature led some Sufis, like Hamiduddin Nagori, to vegetarianism; but this trend is found in early Western Sufi history too. Among the animals cats play a special role, although the story of the blessed cat in Ashraf Jahangir’s khanqah, who could distinguish between faithful and infidels, and sacrificed her life for the Sufi community, is also found in earlier Persian sources. But quite a few Indian Sufis are shown in miniature portraits with a peaceful looking cat beside them. As much as common people relied upon miracles, many a pious person would agree with the Sindhi Pir Murad (ca. 1500), ‘It is an innovation (bid’a) to revive a dead body, but it is the sunna of the masters to revive the hearts!’ (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 133)

As often as people visit shrines in general to participate in the saint’s spiritual blessing, yet the most important event during the year is the ‘urs, ‘wedding’, i.e., the anniversary of the saint’s death, the day when his soul was united with the Divine Beloved. Tens of thousands assemble at the big shrines and in some cases the celebrations are truly international. At certain places, special rites add to the general blessings obtained by the visit. Thus, during the ‘urs in Pakpattan the pilgrim had to squeeze under the narrow bihishti darwaza (the ‘Door of Paradise) to enter the sanctuary; that secures his future entrance to Paradise. Of course, the result is in incredible thronging of people. Therefore lately people have to queue up in front of the small door, which makes the rite less exhausting. At the ‘urs of Qadirwali Sahib in Tanjore (9. Jumada al-

22 Nowadays invitations for the ‘urs of a saint are announce in newspapers. Example: ‘Urs Mubarak of Hazrat Khwaja Mu’inuddin Chishti (Rehmatullahia) will be celebrated at Dargah Ajmer Sahir from Nov, to (date). Reputed Qawwal Haji Chalum Farid Sabri and other leading qawwals will participate. All are cordially invited to attend in large numbers and be blessed. Space donated by Rusli S. Patel.’
akhira) pots with milk rice were smashed on the sea shore, and people rushed to get a drop of the liquid. In many places a regular fair, mela, is held during the ‘urs, where not only sellers of flowers, garlands and souvenirs (cheap rosaries, glass bangles, etc.) as well as photographers gather but also less reputable events take place. Thus, the ‘urs in Sehwan is noted for its wild and partly immoral atmosphere (after all, pre-Islamic traditions connected with the Shiva linga remained alive under the surface). Some shrines keep regular dancing girls (Loh Langar Shah in Bangalore), Nurpur.

A continuation of cults is typical not only for Indo-Pakistani Islam. Rather, it is found almost everywhere. However, in India the participation of members of the two great religions in the same places of worship is more conspicuous than elsewhere. Especially in the eastern and western border zones of the Subcontinent such a blending of religious forms seems to be not unusual: There are a number of Muslim shrines which Hindus used to visit; the very fact that the first, and some of the best, studies in India about Sufism haven been written by Hindus shows the cultural cross relations as much as the adherence of Hindus to Muslim pirs.

An interesting mixture of legends has been found in the shrines of saints in India. The most famous saint in this category is probably Ghazi Mian or Salar Mas’ud, whose tomb is in Bahraich, UP.23 According to Barrani, he was a nephew of Mahmud of Ghazna, started military operations when he was sixteen, and was killed in 1033 at the age of nineteen. The site of his tomb is said to have been a temple of the Sun. His tomb was looked after by the

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23 The legends concerning Mas’ud Salar were collected in Jahangir’s time in Abdur Rahman Chisti’s Muṣṭaṣṣ-Salṭa, Sober mystics always rejected his cult, as Bada’uni, Munakhab, transl. 46, text 27, tells of Shaikh ul-Hiday of Khairabad who was asked about Salar Mas’ud and simply replied “He was an Afghan who met his death by martyrdom”. A recent study is Kerrin Grafin Schwerin, "Religionsverehrung im indischen Islam", ZDMG 126, 1976.
Muslims that lived in this area even before the Ghorid conquest. A proper mausoleum was erected by Nasiruddin around 1250. Amir Khusrau mentions his cult, and the two major Tughluq sultans, Muhammad and Feroz Shah, visited his tomb. Since, according to legend the young hero was slain during his nuptials. The 'urs has acquired a specific character. The celebration of his marriage with Zuhra Bibi of Rudauli, who died unmarried and is buried close to his shrine. Special vows are made here, like 'Zuhra Bibi's dowry'. Sikandar Lodo prohibited the celebrations (which are held in Jeth = May-June) because of the immoral practices. He also stopped the custom of taking out spears in Mas'ud's name; but this custom continued among the Meo, as celebrations in his honour were held all over India. Formerly people would make little horses from wheat flour boiled in syrup when they were cured from diseased legs thanks to his intercession. In former times Salar Mas'ud's 'urs attracted up to a hundred thousand people, and Shah Waliullah – like many 'sober' mystics – regarded it as an outrageously pagan custom. The graves of Salar Mas'ud's companions in various places are also visited by Muslim and Hindu devotees. Incidentally, the faith in the powers of martyrs – even those who had recently been slain in battle – was so great that a sober scholar like Bada'uni defended the belief that they are capable of begetting children after their death! (Bada'uni, l.c. III transl. 146, text 95)

Another unusual saint is Zinda Shah Madar, allegedly a converted Jew from Aleppo who was instructed in esoteric sciences by the Imam Mahdi in Najaf. He expelled a demon from the place where he is now buried, i.e. Makanpur near Cawnpore, and Hindus take him for an incarnation of Lakshmana, Rama's

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24 Paganism is a blanket term used to refer to various non Judeo-Christian or non Abrahamic religions. One group maintains paganism as a term that includes all non-Abrahamic religions. Another holds that paganism should refer solely to polytheistic religions
brother. He is said to have lied in 1050. The Madari dervishes who belong to his place wear black clothes and lead a celibate life. They are credited with healing people who have been bitten by snakes and stung by scorpions but often degenerated into mere jugglers\(^5\) who went around with domestic tigers, or monkeys or performed firewalking in the saint's name, calling Dam Madar!, a formula that was also thought to account for the saint's longevity (400 years!). Women are excluded from the Madar shrine, where even the pious Bada'uni 'was captured in the net of desire and lust', but received 'chastiment for that sin even in this world'.\(^6\)

The Madaris are only one of the groups of wandering dervishes who were frequently found in medieval and sometimes in modern India. The Rifa'iyya partly deteriorated during the Middle Ages into an association of miracle-mongering faqirs who could take out their eyes, swallow live snakes, wound themselves and heal all wounds with spittle. – One subgroup of the so-called be shar' dervishes, 'those who do not honour the divine law', are the malang, a word that designates 'any unattached religious beggar who drinks and smokes, wears nothing save a loin cloth, and keeps fire always near to him';\(^7\) in Pakistan, the expression is usually applied to the malangs of Sehwan. – A similar group is the Jalaliyya who is supposed to stem from Makhdum-e-jahaniyan of Ucch. They wear a necklace of fine wool, a small loin cloth and glass armlets. They, too, are beggars in the bazaar, shave their heads, moustaches and eyebrows, and leave only a scalp lock on the right side. In this respect they are similar to the qalandar who wandered through the country as early as in the 13th century and often disturbed the more sober saints of the two

\(^5\) Juggling is a skill involving moving objects for entertainment or sport. The most recognizable form of juggling is toss juggling.

\(^6\) Ibid. II, transl. 141, text 137.

\(^7\) JalalHercus, Islam in India, p. 290 ff.
major orders. One of their saints, Najmuddin, is buried in Mandu and, like some other qalandars, is credited with an incredibly long life. The main centre of the qalandars used to be Bu ‘Ali’s shrine at Panipat. He has also a sanctuary at Karnal.

Another strange saint whose followers are counted among the be shar dervishes is Musa Suhagi, a follower of Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari, who lived in the late 15th century in Gujarat (Sharif, Jafar, 1972: pp. 290) He concealed his spiritual dignity by living among eunuchs who were dancers by profession, and dressed in women’s clothes to show that he was devoted to God as a wife to her husband – an idea that is often expressed in popular mystical poetry in Indian Islam.

Giant saints, naugaza (‘nine yards long’), used to be respected in the country. Their names or stories being unknown; and the visitor who asks in a Bengali village the age of some martyrs’ tombs may get the answer: “Very very old – many thousand years old, as our holy Prophet!” What matters is their Baraka, not their historicity.

The confluence of Muslim and Hindu religious ideas and forms of asceticism or worship in the outward attitude of many of the be shar dervishes also becomes clear from new combinations of spiritual ‘helpers’ such as the Panj Piriya, a group of five saints whose cult is quite common in the fluvial plains of Indo-Pakistan. They are famous in Sonargaon in Bengal, where they, along with Pir Badr, dominate the waters, as they are well known in the Punjab. One of the Panj Piriya is Khwaja Khizr, the prototype of saintliness, immortal guide (Zinda Pir), and patron of travelers and seafarers. In India he is connected

It has been estimated that there are at least a million eunuchs in India. They are known as hijra, and make their livings as beggars. (www.bmc.com/ritual/970101/hijra.html, accessed on 30/12/2009)
primarily with travel on rivers and on sea, and in various places little boats with lamps are sent on the river to honour him or to implore his help. The dhobis (washermen) of Delhi celebrated his anniversary by sending off little grass boats on the Jumna. Murshidabad in Bengal is known for the Festival of the Raft on the last Thursday of the lunar year, when pretty paper rafts with prows in peacock shape are sent off on the Ganges. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 137)

The reverence (or a kind of worship) of saints is still a living part of popular Islam in India. Numerous people are serving at the shrines in one way or the other, but due to the loss of the awqaf, the pious foundations, in India some of the once so glorious dargahs are decaying. In Pakistan they are under the supervision of the Awqaf Department that is supposed to look after repairs and upkeep; but when a dargah is still in the possession of the family they have to contribute much of their own income to the maintenance, and the noble duty of feeding thousands of visitors during the days of the ‘urs may tax the finances of the sajjadanishin very heavily. One still sees in the villages that the visit of a Pir to whom the villagers have sworn allegiance is a great and wonderful event. Everyone rushes to touch his feet, he is well fed, and the remnants of his table are given to the poor, while he, after counseling and blessing the people, will continue his way, heavily laden with gifts from his poorer, faithful followers.

Conclusion

Customs and traditions of the Muslim of India, as we studied, are extremely cosmic. Some are rooted to the religion on which the entire community is united and there are no differences such as two popular Eids, Khutna, Aqeeqa etc. Many sects of Indian Muslim, at the same time, have wide differences on
some religious rooted customs (as was studied in Chapter Three) such as *Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi* and *Shab-e-Baraat* etc. Customs of Sunnis and Shias are also very much different. Wide ranges of customs are related to Sufism, which have been denounced by the *Wahabi* school of thought. Some costumes of Sufi saint have also been denounced by the Sunni non-Wahabi scholars such as Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and likeminded Islamic scholars. We need not, therefore, be surprised that reformist Muslims, including Iqbal, wanted to do away with ‘*Pirism*’, which appeared to them as one of the reasons for the poverty and backwardness of the people; and the most powerful short stories of contemporary Indian writers attack the amassment of wealth at the shrines, contrasting it with the poverty of the masses. (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980: pp. 138) For was not *faqr*, ‘poverty’, the ideal of the Prophet and his true followers? And could not Islam boast of being a religion without an influential ‘priestly’ caste? That is certainly true, and yet the faith in the *Pir* and the visit to shrines may still offer the poor and the suffering some spiritual consolation which enriches their lives in a mysterious way. Commercialisation of shrines has also been criticised by the new age Islamic scholars. As for the customs and traditions of the Muslims of India and the changes taken place during last fifty years will be put across in the final ‘Conclusion’.