Chapter -VI

Religion

6.1. Anthropology of religion

The anthropological approach to the study of religion involves the scientific and not the humanistic concept of culture. The basic feature of the scientific approach to the study of religion are four a fold; universality, empiricism, comparison, and objectivity. Universality: it implies that the anthropological approach encompasses all known religions and religious phenomena and that it does not exclude any on the basis of “taste”, “decency”, or similar unscientific considerations. Ethical and moral standards differ from culture to culture, and it is the scientific task of anthropologists to study them as they actually exist, and make sense out of them with reference to the context. Empiricism: The study of religion in contemporary anthropology is empirical because it is family rooted in field research. The main body of data used for analysis is gathered by anthropologists through direct contact with the carriers of the various cultures and traditions. Not only is this method more reliable than one dependent upon reports from untrained observers, but it also affords the field-worker an opportunity to examine religion in the total cultural context. Comparison: Through the systematic comparison of similar religious phenomena, anthropologists seek to achieve a greater or lesser amount of generalization. These comparisons may also reveal historical relationships and evolutionary sequences or may serve as a basis of typology building.

The anthropological study of religion demands that the investigator remains impartial and unbiased. As an anthropologist, he is not concerned with the possible truth or falsehood of particular religious beliefs as such but with their existence and the significance which the people attach to these beliefs, rituals, etc. These four principles, combined with the holistic approach and the application of the concept of culture, constitute the basis of anthropological methodology. Anthropologists use the basic field work method not only in their studies of specific groups of people, but also in many instances where they turn their attention to one specific phenomenon, be it language, kinship, social organization or religion. An anthropological study of religion will thus give insights not only into the nature of religion itself, but into many other cultural institutions, into human behavior (Das, 1984).
Study of religions from a socio-cultural perspective is considered as one of the important areas in the anthropological studies in the world. Among the scientists of social sciences, anthropologists are pioneers and famous researchers in the history of social studies on religions and sects in the world. They have practically studied, analyzed, interpreted and explained religious cultures and traditions by going and staying in the primitive human societies, ethnic groups and villages in the world and by participating in and observing their daily lives. Basically, the method of anthropologists in the field study of religions is about practical aspects of religions in the societies and daily lives of people and the use of religion as it has been popularized in the accepted culture, behavior as well as thoughts of ordinary people in the societies. Researchers of religions usually have evaluated their findings with the recorded principles and religious teachings in the formal religious texts of societies and the teaching approaches of religious leaders in these societies. Hence, they have studied the religious gap between theory and practice. Most of the religious studies and appearance of scientific theories about religions and sects of people and about tribes in the world started through publication and spread of studies carried out by a number of anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists in late 19th and early 20th centuries. Pioneers of these researches were individuals like Max Muller (1823-1900), Edward Tyler (1832-1917), James Frazer (1854-1941), Lucian Love-Brawl (1857-1939), Max Weber (1864-1920), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Robert Mart (1866-1943). These scientists had new and unique perspectives and theories about different types of primitive religions and sects and about concepts of behaviors and religious thoughts in the societies of different countries in the world. These ideas became the foundation of further studies for another group of scientists in social sciences especially anthropologists of the world in the 20th century, scientists like Redcliff Brown (1881-1955), Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), Carl Gustav Yung (1875-1961) Paul Rodin (1883-1959), Edward Ounce Pritchard (1902-1974), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and many others. Clifford Geertez, one of the pioneers of symbolic anthropology in the U.S in 1960s, considered the realm of culture as a symbolic system and religion as part of it. In his very famous and important essay titled “Religion as a Cultural System” (1966), he doesn’t see religion as a small comprehensive system and as a part in a social totality, but he sees it as a means through which people give meaning to the world (Eriksen & Nielsen,
According to Geertez, cultural system “is a model of meanings that is transferred in the course of history and gets visualized through symbols.” In other words, culture “is a system of concepts inherited by human beings and is explained through symbols” and religion is a part of culture “that is concerned with holy symbols and their functions”. Therefore, this religion integrates people’s mentality with their ideology i.e. “images that they have from the reality of objects” with “their thoughts about order of things”. Geertez regards “mentality” and “ideology” of people as separate from each other and believes the distinguished holy signs that form the religious culture are influential in reflection of the images that people have about the world and in relating them to the ideologies of people. Generally, according to this anthropologist, it is the holy signs which make the mentality of people appear logical. As a result, symbols can substitute objects and represent or explain them (Hamilton, 1995).

Here, in order to clarify things more, I mention some examples. In some cultures, especially in the culture of Iranian Shia people, the symbol of palm signifies power, light, brightness, sunlight or the palm of sun. Right hand palm also symbolizes power; open palm towards the sky is holy and open palm signifies the force of life. Shias install the sign of palm on flag, Alam, blade of the dome and on many other religious objects. In the semiotic culture of Shias, the symbol of palm represents different things such as five principles of religion, five members of Prophet (PBUH)’s family, hand of Hazrat Abbas (PBUH), hand of Hazrat Fatima (PBUH) and sometimes, it symbolizes all of them (Blokbashi, 2004).

6.2. Continuum of ritual behavior

All human activity, whether verbal or non-verbal is behavior, so myth and prayer and chanting and singing are as “behavioral” as any physical action. In fact, they are physical actions, usually performed in social settings for an audience with a part of the human body (the mouth or voice), usually as part of a concert with other gestures, actions, and objects. Western religion, especially Protestantism, has tended to privilege words and ideas (“beliefs”) over behavior, but this is not universal among religions. Malinowski reminded us that religion “is a mode of action as well as a
system of belief (Malinowski, 2004), and viewing it as action and specifically social action sheds a different light on religion.

When we think of religious behavior, we think of ritual, that fascinating, colorful and symbolic activity that expresses religious beliefs and directs toward religious beings or forces. Ritual is usually multipartite and multimedia. It is often a protracted performance of multiple “scenes” which may take hours or days to complete. Victor Turner wrote that a ritual “is segmented into ‘phases’ or ‘stages’ and into subunits such as ‘episodes,’ ‘actions,’ and ‘gestures.’ To each of these units and subunits corresponds a specific arrangement of symbols, of symbolic activities and objects” (Gill, 1981). Accordingly, a ritual typically includes many genres of action, from language to dance to stillness and silence to plastic arts (masks, body painting, sacred objects of various kinds) and food and any number of other elements. Finally, we will notice and explore the fact that ritual as communication and social action is not unique to religion in fact, much of human life is “ritualized” nor even to humans. It is quite clear that social species, including humans, can and often do communicate or interact ritually. Ultimately, ritual interaction may not be “communication” in the normal sense that is, the transmission of information so much as performance intended to establish, maintain, influence or break relationships, including relations with the nonhuman and superhuman. Humans may interact ritually with the superhuman precisely because ritual is how humans interact (Eller, 2007).

Culture is thus almost equated with religion, and Islam is seen as a motivational system that determines the social activities of all Muslims (Patai, 1952). Although religion undoubtedly has an important influence on people’s lives and their sense of identity, many other beliefs, concepts, motivations and activities influence their social life, besides those of religion (Morris, 2006).

6.3. Religion in India

India is a country incredible for its diversity, biological and cultural. It is the natural resources that attracted to the subcontinent of many streams of people at different times, from different directions; bringing together a great diversity of human genes and human cultures (El-Zein, 1977).
India is a diverse mix of different religions and religious sects, most of them are derived from Hindu, Islam and Buddhism. About 82.00 percent of the people of India are following Hindu rituals and about 13.4 percent are Muslims. India also has more than 2.3 percent Christian and 1.9 percent Sikh. Although India was the birthplace of Buddhism, the Buddhist population in India is currently estimated at only about 0.8 percent. In addition Jainism faith and 0.8 percent followers of Zoroastrianism, Jewish, Baha'i and other faiths is 0.4 percent. However, India is largest community of Iranian Baha'i and Zoroastrian religious sect Ahmadieh and around the world. Most of the Muslims in Delhi, West Bengal and northwest areas of the population have been living in Kashmir. Thus, India's largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan in the world (I. Ahmad & Fruzzetti, 1981).

It started with the Arab conquest of the Sindh in the beginning of the eighth century. Singh elaborates as follows, ‘The Arabs had trade ties with India even before the advent of Islam and the first wave of Muslim conquerors originated with the Arabs. They gave Islam a foothold in India but did not press with expansion. They treated the Indian culture with utmost consideration and their invasions were not barbarous. The real history of Islam in India begins with the Turki Afghans’ invasions. It was only when Turki Afghan rulers had established their political authority in North India that Islam began to make its impact on Indian society. The development of Islam in India was a process of evolution rather than of imposition (Y. Singh, 1973).

The most powerful Muslim rule in India was that of the Moghuls. Babar founded the Moghul dynasty in 1526. It was a very significant period in Indian history. Muslim rule had a significant impact on all aspects of Indian life and thought. Of all the Moghul kings, Akbar the Great did the most to synthesize the various sub cultures prevalent in the sub continent. He married a Hindu Princess and started a new religion, Deen e Ilahi, which of course did not gain popularity.

Moin Shakir writes that due to various reasons like, expansion of Islamic empire, contact with different cultures, accumulation of wealth and new requirements of administration, the Islamic society did not remain the ideal one that it was in the Prophet’s time. So, at the time of the advent of Muslims in India, Islam was no longer
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in its original form Monarchy had become the order of the day. Splendour and pomp were gathering around the person on the throne. Purchasing and selling of slaves had revived after the Rashidin Caliphs. The decree of prohibition of wine was only on paper. The freedom and the independence of woman had become a myth. The spiritual notion of equality in Islam ceased to have political and economic reality. The Muslim tradition in India was dominated by the prevailing social system: the presence of hierarchy and class-consciousness, superstitious and unrealistic modes of thought and absence of democracy and consciousness of rights. The Muslims were deeply religious but Islam had departed from the Arabian type. As most of the Muslims were converts from the Hindu fold, they shared with the Hindus the same passion and love for the soil. They had many things in common with the Hindus (Shakir, 1970).

There are many books written about the Muslim rule in India, which provide the details of different dynasties. Here we are more concerned with the synthesis that took place between the rulers and the ruled during this period. Singhal writes in detail about the influence of Islam on Indian society and vice versa. He writes, ‘the impact of Muslim rule was greater on urban life than rural. Influenced by the royal court, the urban population attained a high degree of sophistication in language and literature, art and crafts, manners, dress, diet, luxuries and refinement. In the Indian villages where practically the entire Muslim population was descended from Hindu converts, the traditional Hindu outlook and social forms were retained (Y. Singh, 1973).

A common Indian culture could however not be evolved unless and until Islam in turn was also influenced by Hindu culture. Thus, we see that there have been numerous Hindu influences on the Muslim community in India. Hindu caste system affected Muslims in such a way that Indian Muslims developed a more or less similar caste system among themselves, although there is no concept of caste in Islam. Islam stresses equality of all humans. Many other customs and institutions not in following Islamic teaching were also adopted by Indian Muslims, under the influence of native culture, which was an integral part of the life of new converts to Islam (Shakir, 1970).

Religions and the percentage of their followers: Hindus 81.3 percent, Muslims 14 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.9 percent, other religions 2.5 percent Islam: Islamic sects: Sunnis (Hanafi), Ahle Hadith, Brahmavis, Diwbandis, Qadianis,
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Wahabis, Isna Ashari Shias, Bahres, Khwajas (Agha Khanis). Muslim-settled areas: Jammu and Kashmir, Calcutta, Lucknow, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Aligarh, Kerala, Mubarakpur, etc. and the population of Shias in India is reported to be 30 million. Of course, there is no exact statistics. Local Shias: in the past centuries, many Shias have migrated to this country, like Iranians; but we can say that most Shias are local, although some of them are from immigrant ancestors. Immigrant Shias: Yazdi, Iranian Baluch, Shirazi and Tabrizi, etc. Immigrant Shias are settled in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Pune. Important Shia-settled regions are Jammu and Kashmir, Calcutta, Lucknow, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mysore, Alipur, etc. Common differences: Asna Ashari, Bahre, Khwaja, Agha Khani; of course, the most statistics belong to Asna Ashari Shias. Important places: Fatiman (attributed to Hazin Lahiji), Husseinias and Takyias where religious ceremonies during held, Imam Baras, Astanas, Ashorakhanas, etc. Important mosques: Jamia Mosque of Shohada in Belgaum, Maghal, Chatarpal, Dal Git, Jamia Mosque of Lakhnu Shias, Jamia Mosque of Delhi Shias, Asif Nagar Mosque in Hyderabad, Asgari Mosque in Bangalore and Jaffaria Mosque in Mysore, etc. Religious ceremonies: mourning for Imams especially for Imam Hussein (PBUH); in the mourning ceremonies for Imam Hussein, rituals like cutting oneself is very popular in which there is a lot of bloodshed. Generally, the main specialty of Shias in India is total reliance on mourning ceremonies during Muharram. Other ceremonies are Eid Ghadeer, Eid Qurban, etc. Parties and groups related to Shias: Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, Legislation Association of Shias, Shia Association, Shia Anjuman, Association of Scholars and Preachers, All India Shia Conference. Institutes and centers related to Shias: Tanzim-ul-Makaatib (with 937 religious education centers), Imam Khomeini Memorial Committee, Emdadul-Abbsi Committee, Abulfazl Abbas Office, Imam Hussein Institute, Mishari-us-Sharaye Madrasa, Imam Reza Religious School, Imam Hussein Religious School, Imam Khomeini Religious School, Bab-ul-Ilm Jamia, Maarif Uloom Islamia (Dar-ul-Javad), Sultan-ul-Madaaris, Javadia Madrasa, Shia College, Imania Madrasa, Madrasat-ul-Waezeen, Jamiat-uz-Zahra and Tawheed-ul-Muslimeen. Living conditions of Muslims: economically most Shias are not in good conditions; nevertheless, few are in upper classes and few in middle class. Cultural situation of Shias: their cultural situation is not good, and regarding religious information also they are in very poor conditions. Among Muslims, Shias are a
minority; and Muslims as a total are minority in India; therefore, Shias in India are a minority in the minority. Politically, Shias do not have any specific positions in India but because of the balance of power in India, the votes of Shias in the public elections in India are very important. Muslims, who officially form approximately 15 percent and non-officially, almost 20 percent of India’s over-billion population, are considered as a separate society in India. They have their own specific social laws for managing issues like marriage, divorce and heritage. According to some reports, Muslims have kept themselves totally away from the social changes and mostly because of lack of motivation and the possibility of discrimination against them, they have limited themselves into free jobs like those of businessmen, tailors, shopkeepers, mechanics, etc. so much so that their presence in all social fields like in military, medical engineering and management, etc. is far less than their ratio of the total population. Although, A. P. J. Abdul-Kalam, father of India’s missile program and Azim Premji, owner of Wipro Computer Corporation, etc. are the richest Muslim individuals in India, but scientific performance of Muslims is inappropriate. This is because of the disconnection between their institutes and educational centers with the main flow of development in the Indian society. Mostly, they graduate such students in India whose knowledge does not adjust to the present conditions in India and in the world. The situation of Muslims in Aligarh -which was one of the important education centers once upon a time- is getting worse day-by-day so much so that most of them are living in slum areas nowadays, and the rate of literacy is gradually dropping among them. According to the latest census of the Indian government, approximately 63 percent of this country’s population is literate; but in the society of Muslims, this ratio is only 24.17 percent. According to the studies of Friends of Education Association, among the 426 high members of all ministries, only 9 members are Muslims. The situation of Muslims in the election parties is not appropriate either, so much so that in spite of the population of almost 20.00 percent in Uttar Pradesh, 17.4 percent in Bihar, 14.00 percent in Madhya Pradesh, 65 percent in Jammu and Kashmir, 14.2 percent in Karnataka, 11 percent in Himachal Pradesh, 15.8 percent in Gujarat, 12.00 percent in West Bengal and approximately 9.00 percent to 10.00 percent in other states, they do not receive much attention and function as a bank of votes for the political parties. There are different reasons for educational, scientific, economic and social backwardness of Muslims in India. Some of the experts in social issues of
India believe that because of the abuses of their freedom made by the religious and political leaders for fulfilling their personal interests, Muslims of this country are in a state of non-official discrimination. According to these experts, Hindus and Muslims stay far from each other and this has led to the appearance of a section of politicians who act as a connections between the societies of Muslims with the rest of the Indian society. Few Muslim children go to schools and a great number of them drop out of schools and turn towards small free jobs. This inappropriate educational situation is the main root of Muslims’ problems in India. There is a huge gap between Muslims who are receiving modern education and their brothers in the religious schools and in Urdu Madrasas; and this gap gets wider day by day. Ms. Maghbool Niked Mehdi, one of the social activists believes that laziness and lack of motivation among Muslims in India is one of the main reasons for backwardness of the society of Muslims in this country. She states: “Unfortunately Muslims lack the needed motivation to reach high levels and most of them prefer to continue their fathers’ jobs.” Some experts also believe that Partition of the Subcontinent of India in 1947 is the important reason for backwardness of Muslims in this country. According to these experts, most of the educated and wealthy Muslims migrated to Pakistan after Partition and the remaining Muslims in India were mostly poor and illiterate, and this situation has remained the same as it was. Political affairs of India also show that the recent success of the Allied Democratic Party of Assam in the recent election of Parliament in this state was a glimmer of hope for Muslims of other states in India. In addition, the recent formation of People’s Democratic Party under the leadership of a Shias cleric called Kalbe Javad is regarded as another proof for this claim. These experts believe that although formation of People’s Democratic Party could be for the benefit of the national Bharatiya Janata party BJP in the coming election of Uttar Pradesh parliament, this party can play a great role in awakening Muslims and creating motivation in them (Research, 2009).

The present population of Shias in the world and in India: according to the statistics of the UN and some other organizations, in 1999, the world population has exceeded 6 billion. Almost 20.00 percent of the world population i.e. approximately 1.5 billion is Muslim. Population distribution of Muslims in the world in the half of 1998 AD was as follows: Africa 315 million, Asia 812 million, Europe 31,401,000,
etc. the number of countries in which Muslims are living is 208; almost 85 percent of the world Muslim population lives out of the Arab World. Most Muslims are settled in the eastern Asia especially in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. Indonesia is the most populated Islamic country. It has a population of approximately 200 million. After Indonesia, India with 180 million, Pakistan with 161 million and Bangladesh with 130 million populations are the biggest Muslim countries. Iran, regarding the number of Muslims, is the seventh country in the world. 89 percent of its population is Shia and 9 percent is Sunni. 2.00 percent belongs to followers of other religions like Zoroastrian, Judaism and Christianity. According to the international statistics collected in different ways, the world population of Shias in 2009 is 220 million (Britannica, 2009).

In the Britannica Encyclopedia (2002), it is stated that “Shiism is the major religion of Muslims in Iran, Iraq and perhaps Yemen; and this religion has lots of followers in Syria, Lebanon, eastern Africa, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, there is no exact statistics about the number of Muslims generally, and the number of Shias particularly and what we mentioned is according to the popular sources. There are contradictory statistics to these data as well. According to some sources, Shias form 4 percent of Muslims. India: the whole population is more than 1 billion out of which 9.00 percent is Sunni Muslim and 3.00 percent is Shia Muslim and the remaining are followers of other religions.

Figure 6.1: Chart of Muslims in India
India, with 200 million Muslims equal to 14 percent of the world's Shias, is the second most populated country of Muslims after Indonesia. Islam is considered as the second religion in India. After the India-Pakistan Partition, most of the Indian Muslim doctors and educated individuals migrated to Pakistan; because of this, most of the Muslims who live in India at the moment are considered as villagers. Still, majority of Muslims live their lives on agriculture and regarding the fact that the job opportunities in the top government offices are very limited for Muslims, large groups of middle-class Muslims in India have dropped out of schools or never went to schools and have tried to enter the working markets without education. They have selected jobs which do not need much of education. In Mysore, because there are not many agricultural lands, most people enter the job market.

6.4. Muslim

A Muslim, also spelled Moslem is an adherent of Islam, a monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the Qur'an which Muslims consider the verbatim word of God as revealed to prophet Muhammad and with lesser authority than the Qur'an, the teachings and practices of Muhammad as recorded in traditional accounts, called hadith. "Muslim" is an Arabic word meaning "one who submits to God".
Muslims believe that God (referred to with the name Allāh) is eternal, transcendent, absolutely one (the doctrine of tawhid or strict or simple monotheism), and incomparable; that he is self-sustaining, who begets not nor was begotten. Muslim beliefs regarding God are summed up in chapter 112 of the Qur'an, al-Ikhlas, "the chapter of purity". Muslims also believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a primordial faith that was revealed at many times and places before, including through the prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Muslims maintain that previous messages and revelations have been partially changed or corrupted over time but consider the Qur'an to be both unaltered and the final revelation from God's Final Testament.

Most Muslims accept as a Muslim anyone who has publicly pronounced the Shahadah (declaration of faith) which states, "I testify that there is no god except for the God, and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." They also believe that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets and the final prophet. Their basic religious practices are enumerated in the Five Pillars of Islam, which, in addition to Shahadah, consist of daily prayers (salat), fasting during Ramadan (sawm), almsgiving (zakat), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) at least once in a lifetime (Esposito, 2003).

The majority of Muslims are Sunni, being over 75–90 percent of all Muslims. The second largest sect, Shia, makes up 10–20 percent. The most populous Muslim-majority country is Indonesia home to 12.7 percent of the world's Muslims followed by Pakistan (11.00 percent), Bangladesh (9.2 percent), and Egypt (4.9 percent). Sizable minorities are also found in India, China, Russia, Ethiopia, Americas, Australia and parts of Europe. With about 1.8 billion followers or 26 percent of earth's population, Islam is the second-largest and one of the fastest-growing religions in the world ("Muslim Wedding," 2010).

6.5. Islam

Islam, is a monotheistic and Abrahamic religion articulated by the Qur'an, a book considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God (Allāh) and by the teachings and normative example (called the Sunnah and composed of Hadith) of Muhammad, considered by them to be the last prophet of God. An adherent of Islam is called a Muslim. Muslims believe that God is one and incomparable and the
purpose of existence is to love and serve God. Muslims also believe that Islam is the
close complete and universal version of a primordial faith that was revealed at many times
and places before, including through Abraham, Moses and Jesus, whom they consider
prophets. They maintain that the previous messages and revelations have been
partially misinterpreted or altered over time, but consider the Arabic Qur'an to be both
the unaltered and the final revelation of God. Religious concepts and practices include
the five pillars of Islam, which are basic concepts and obligatory acts of worship and
following Islamic law, which touches on virtually every aspect of life and society,
providing guidance on multifarious topics from banking and welfare, to warfare and
the environment (Esposito, 2003).

6.6. Shia

The Shia represent the second largest denomination of Islam. Adherents of
Shia Islam are called Shias."Shia" is the short form of the historic phrase Shia Ali,
meaning "followers", "faction", or "party" of Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin Ali,
whom the Shia believe to be Muhammad's successor in the Caliphate. Shia Islam is
based on the Quran and the message of the Islamic prophet Muhammad attested in
Shia hadith, and certain books deemed sacred to Shia (Nahjal-Balagha). In contrast to
other types, the Shias believe that only God has the right to choose a representative to
safeguard Islam, the Quran and sharia. Thus, the Shias look to Ali, Muhammad's son-
in-law, whom they revere and consider divinely appointed, as the rightful successor to
Muhammad and the first imam. The Shia extended this belief to Muhammad's family,
the Ahl al-Bayt ("the People of the House"), and certain individuals among his
descendants, known as imams, who they believe possess special spiritual and political
authority over the community, infallibility, and other traits. Although there were many
Shia branches throughout history, modern Shia Islam has been divided into three main
branches, namely the Ithna ashariyya (Twelvers), the Ismailis (Seveners) and
the Zaidis ("Fivers) (Easwarkhanth, Dubey, Ramakodi Meganathan, Noor, & Haque,
2009).

6.7. Muslim, Islam and Shia

Who is a Muslim? The term “Muslim” as it appears in the dictionary,
according to the Arabic language, is someone who submits to God’s will. According
to the theological definition, a Muslim is one who accepts the Unity of one God and accepts that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is his final messenger and accepts the Laws brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). A Muslim is a person that submits or surrenders to God, performs good deeds, follows the religion of Islam and holds the Qur’an as his/her central book of guidance. A Muslim models his/her life on the actions of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) as Muslims agree he was the best example of a human being, excelling in both worldly and spiritual matters (Bilgrami, 1992).

What is Islam? Islam means ‘submission’ or ‘surrendering’ to God. It is a monotheistic religion, meaning it is a religion that believes in One God as preached by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) and all the preceding Prophets. The Qur’an is the central book in Islam, which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) in Arabia during the period between 610 – 632 A.D (Lovegrove, 1926).

Who is a Shia? Islam and Muslim: Islam means Submission to the will of Allaah (swt). Muslim is the one who submits his will to Allaah (swt). Shia: Allaah is the Only God. Muhammad (sawaws) is the seal of Prophethood (Last Prophet of Allaah). After Muhammad (sawaws) Shias believe in 12 Imams who are the progeny of Muhammad (sawaws). Shias 12 Imams; Allaah (swt), The Most High, appointed Twelve distinguished Holy Personalities, one after the other as successors of The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sawaws), starting with the First Holy Infallible Imam Ali Ibin Abe Taalib (as). The 12 Imams are as follows: 1. Imam Ali Al Murtuza (as) 2. Imam Hassan Al Mujtaba (as) 3. Imam Hussain Ash Shaheede Karbala (as) 4. Imam Zain ul Aabideen Al Sajjad (as) 5. Imam Muhammed Al Baaqir (as) 6. Imam Ja'far As Saadiq (as) 7. Imam Musa Al Kaazim (as) 8. Imam Ali Al Reza (as) 9. Imam Muhammed Al Jawaad (as) 10. Imam Ali Al Hadi (as) 11. Imam Hassan Al Askari (as) 12. Imam Muhammad Mehdi Al Muntazar (as), still living and awaiting Allaah’s Divine Command of his Second Coming (Hasnain & Husain, 1988).
6.8. Shia and Sunni split

Disagreement broke out over who would succeed Muhammad (sawaws) as leader of the Muslim community. While the Sunnis followed the companions of Muhammad, the Shias followed Ali who was appointed as the Khalifa by Muhammad (sawaws) himself at Ghadeer, saying “Man Kuntu Maula hu Fa Haaza Ali Maula” which means "Of whomsoever I'm his master, this Ali is his master" Imam Ahmad has recorded this tradition related by Bara' ibn 'Azb in his Musnad, vol.4, p. 281. Hazrath Umar congratulating Ali (A.S.) said, "O Ali from today you are my master and the master of every Muslim men and women (Hasnain & Husain, 1988).

6.9. Festivals

In the beginning, only two festivals were there in accordance with sharia law, the Eid-ul-fitr after the fasting of Ramzan and Eid-ul-Adha, concurring with pilgrim’s journey to Mecca. More festivals are celebrated to remember events (especially religious) which are believed to be significant. For Muslims, each and every religious festival has its own particular meaning. In fact, at the end of different manners of worship, Islam has established a kind of festival. The festival following the daily
supplications of the week is Jama-Tul-Mubarak (friday), the one coming after a month of fast is called Eid-ul-Fitr, while the festival coming after the observance of Haj is known as Eid-ul-Adha.

6.9.1. Eid-ul-fitr

Eid-ul-fitr is a Muslim festival that symbolizes the end of Ramazan. The Muslims blessed month of fast. Eid is an Arabic language word implying “festivity”, while Fitr stands for “to break the fast” (also means “nature”, from the word “fitrah”) and so marks the ending, and is affirmed by the sighting of the new moon. Muslims give alms to the poor and wear their finest clothes. Eid-ul-Adha that lasts four days and is called “The bigger Eid”.

On the day of the festivity, a normal Muslim family arouses wakes up very early, does the first everyday supplication, and is expected to eat a bit, representing the end of Ramazan. They then go to special Congregationalist supplications held in Masjid, large open areas and arenas. The prayer is generally brusque and is followed by a discourse. Worshippers greet and embrace each other with hugs in a spirit of peace and love after the congregational prayer. After the special prayers, festivals and merriment are commonly observed with visits to the homes of relatives and friends to thank God for all blessings. Eid-ul-fitr is a joyous occasion with important religious significance, celebrating the achievement of enhancement piety. It is a day of pardon, ethical victory, peace of faithful, companionship, fraternity and integrity. Muslims celebrate not only the end of fast but also thank god for the self discipline and strength that Muslims believe almighty gave them it is a time to charity and partaking and many Muslims dress in festival attire.

As the day depends upon the sighting of the moon, the sighting can just be possible barely after sunset. Many Muslims ascertain with local mosques or other fellows of the community to see if official parties such as enlightened scholars. Though many Muslims believe that Quran says that the sighting of the moon ascertains the start of Eid, this is written in additional books, basic greetings during this festival are the Arabic language greeting i.e. Eid Mubarak, (Blessed Eid) Happy Eid. Additionally, a lot of states have their unique greetings based on local dialect and customs. Muslims are encouraged to dress in their finest clothes and to attend a
special Eid prayer that is executed in meetings at masjids or open areas like arenas, public square etc. When Muslims finish their fast on the last day (twenty-ninth or thirtieth), they recite Takbir

“Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Allahu Akbar
La ilaha illa Allah
Allahu akbar, Allahu Akbar
Wa - li=-illahi al-Hamd”

Which, when translated, comes to: God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest. There is no divinity but God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest and to God goes all praise.

The Takbir is said after verification that the moon of Shawwal has been seen on the eve of the last day of Ramazan. It keeps going until the start of the Eid prayer. Before the Eid prayer starts every Muslim, if feasible (man, woman or child), must give Zakat al-fitr alms to poor in the month of Ramazan. It corresponds to about two kilogram of a staple (foodstuff like wheat, barley, etc) or its cash equivalent and is commonly collected at the masjid. This is distributed to needy local Muslims prior to the start of the Eid prayer. It can be given at any time during the month of Ramazan and is often given early, so that the recipient can utilize it for Eid purchases. This is distinct from Zakat based on wealth, which must be paid as a worthy charity. The Eid supplication (salah) is accompanied by the Khutba (sermon) then a prayer (dua) asking for pardon, clemency and help for the worries of Muslims across the world. The Khutba also teaches Muslims as to the rites of Eid, such as the Zakat (if they’ve not already given it). It is then usual to embrace the persons sitting on either side of oneself. People will also visit their relations, acquaintances and friends.

After the prayers, a few people will go to the cemeteries (Ziyarat Al-qubur). Muslims spend the day giving thanks to the Almighty for all their benedictions, in addition to as merely having fun and delighting themselves. Children are generally given confectioneries or money. Women (especially relatives) are commonly given special presents by their loved ones. Eid is also the time for rapprochments. Feuds or quarrels, especially between family members, are often settled in Eid. Eid-ul-fitr
marks the end of the fast of Ramazan. Ramazan is the sacred month par excellence. This has to do with the communal aspects of the fast, which expresses many of the basic values of the Islamic religion. Fast is considered by some researchers to glorify important differentiations, extolling the power of the sacred domain, while admitting the mastery of the physical domain.

The Muslim custom also connects events with the social occasion. For instance, on Eid-ul-fitr, the Angel Gabriel came down with white apparels for each one of Prophet Muhammad’s grandsons. At the end of the sacred calendar month of Ramazan, in which the Muslims are asked to observe fast from dawn to dusk and do additional prayers and observe spiritual values rigidly, the Muslims celebrate the sighting of the new moon (beginning of the new Islamic month). In Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, the night before Eid is called Chand Raat, or night of the moon. People visit markets and malls, with their families and children, for eleventh hour Eid shopping. Women, especially young girls, often paint each others’ hands with traditional “henna” and wear bright bangles. The popular way of greeting in South Asia during festivity of this festival is to say Eid Mubarak to others. Children are encouraged to congratulate the elders. In substitution of this, they also expect to get some cash money, called Eidi, from the seniors.

On the day break of Eid-ul-fitr, after taking a fresh bath, every Muslim is encouraged to wear fresh clothes, if they can afford. As an alternative, they may wear neat clean clothes. Men and boys go to masjid or open fields called Eidgah for special Eid prayers, thanking God for enabling a Muslim to observe the holy month meaningfully. The Muslims are ordained to pay Zakat –ul–Fitr (special charity money) or Fitra to the poor and needy before the Eid prayer, so that they can also join others to celebrate the Eid. After the prayers, the meetings conducted dispelled and the Muslims meet and greet each other including family members, children, seniors, acquaintances and neighbors. Some Muslims especially go to cemeteries to avow for the redemption of the deceased soul. Usually, children visit senior relations and neighbours to pay regards and greetings.

Among the special dishes in India, Pakistan and Fiji in Sivayyan, there is a dish of delicate, cooked vermicelli noodles. In Bangladesh, Sivayyan is called shemai,
and is an intrinsic item of Eid dishes. After meeting the acquaintances and relations, many people go for parties, banquets, special fairs and celebrations in the parks (with picnics, pyrotechnics, etc). In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, many markets, malls and eating places see huge crowds and high attendance during this principal Muslim festival. A lot of people also use this chance to give out Zakat, the Islamic compulsory money tax on one’s riches to the impoverished. In this way, the Muslims observe their Eid-ul-Fitr in a joyous mood by thanking the Almighty and bringing their families, acquaintances and the hapless and impoverished people closer in a democratic fashion.

6.9.2. Eid-ul-adha

Eid-ul-Adha or the festival of Sacrifice is a religious festival observed by Muslims worldwide as a remembrance of God’s pardon of Abraham from his vow to forfeit his son, as ordered by Allah. (Islamic custom names Ishmael as the son who was to be scarified, whereas the Judeo Christian custom names Issac.) It’s among the two Eid festivals observed by Muslims, whose foundation comes from the Quran. Like Eid el-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha begins with a brusque supplication followed by a discourse (Khutba). Eid-ul-Adha each year falls on the 10th day of the calendar month of Dhul Hijja of the lunar Muslim calendar. The celebrations last for two to three days or more depending on the state. Eid-ul-Adha occurs the day afterward the pilgrims conducting Haj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia by Muslims from all over the world, descend from Mount Arafat.

It happens to be about 70 days after the end of the month of Ramzan. Eid-ul-Adha (Adha Eid) has other favourite names across the Muslim world, such as Eid el-Kibir (the ‘Big’ Eid) in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, Tfaska Tamoqqart in the Berber language of Jerba; Tabaski or Tobaski in West Africa; Babbar Sallah in Nigeria; Ciidwayneey in Somalia and Somali–speaking areas of Kenya and Ethiopia. In India and Pakistan, it’s also called Badi Eid (Big Eid). In Kashmir, where Kashmiri is expressed, it is called Baed Eid, the Keralites who speak Malayalam say Waliya Perunnal, Both words also mean “Bid Eid”. Men, women, and youngsters are required to dress in their best clothing to perform Eid prayer in any Masjid. Muslims who can afford to do so sacrifice their best domesticated as a symbol
of Abraham’s sacrifice. The sacrificed animals, called “Udhiya” also well known as “Qurbani”, have to fulfill certain age and quality standards or else the animal is believed to be an unaccepted sacrifice. Generally, these must be at minimum a year old. At the time of sacrifice, Allah’s name is recited along with the offering statement and a supplication as Muhammad said. According to the Quran, the meat is divided into three shares, one share for the poor, one share for the relatives and neighbours, and the last to keep to oneself.

A large portion of the meat must be given to poor and hungry people so they can all join in the feast which is held on Eid-ul-Adha. The remaining is cooked for the family celebration meal in which relatives and friends are invited to share. The normal generous practices of the Muslim religion are presented during Eid-ul-Adha by the combined effort to see that no deprived Muslim is left without sacrificial food during these days. Eid-ul-Adha is a solid assertion of what the Muslim community ethical code means in exercise. People in these days are expected to visit their relatives, beginning with their parents, and then their families and acquaintances.

Giving out meat among multitude is believed to be an all-important part of the festival during this time period, as well as intoning Takibir out loud before the Eid prayer on the first day and after prayers throughout the four days of Eid. While Eid-ul-Adha is always on the same day of the Islamic calendar, the date on the Gregorian calendar varies from year to year since the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar and the Gregorian calendar is a solar calendar. The Lunar calendar is approximately eleven day shorter than the solar calendar. Every year Eid-ul-Adha (like other Muslims’ holidays falls on one of two opposite Gregorian dates in a different part of the world, due to the fact that boundary of crescent shaped visibleness is dissimilar from the dateline.

6.9.3. Ramazan

Ramazan is a Muslim spiritual ceremony that happens during the 9th month of the Muslim calendar, considered to be the month in which the Quran started to be imparted. It is the Muslim calendar month of fast, in which Muslims do not eat or drink anything from break of the day till end of it. Fast is meant to instruct the person’s patience and humility. Ramazan is a time to fast for the sake of God, to offer
even more supplication than the ordinary ones and beg for pardon of the sinfulnesses for your past year and ask for counseling in the futurity. It is the time to abstain from everyday evils and try to purge oneself through temperateness and respectable deeds. The name “Ramazan” is the name of the 9th month; the word itself descended from an Arabic language word for acute heat, sunbaked earth, and dearth of food. It is believed to be the most revered and sanctified month of the Muslim year. Supplications, Saum (fast), giving, and self-accountability are particularly accentuated at this time; religious observances associated with Ramazan are kept throughout the month. Laylat al-Qadr, which falls during an odd night in the last ten days of Ramazan (and so it can be either the night of day twenty one, twenty-three, twenty-five, twenty-seven, or the twenty-nine of Ramazan) marks the revealing of the 1st verses of the Quran and is believed to be the most blessed night of the year. Ramazan ends with the festival Eid-ul-fitr, on which banquets are held. During the month following Ramazan called Shawwal, Muslims are encouraged to fast for an additional six days.

The most outstanding event of this month is the fast (Saum) followed by law-abiding Muslims. Each day during the month of Ramazan, Muslims round the world arise before break of day to eat the Suhoor meal (the predawning meal) and execute their fajr prayer. They interrupt their fast when the fourth prayer of the day, Maghrib (end of day), is due. During Ramazan, Muslims are expected to put more effort into abiding by the commandments of Islam and to avoid abhorrent and ungodly sights and voices. Sexual practices during fasting hours are also prohibited.

Preeness of both thought and action is important. The fast is destined to be a demanding act of deep private worship in which Muslims seek an advanced level of intimacy to God Almighty. The act of fasting is said to redirect the heart away from worldly activities, its purpose being to cleanse the inner soul and free it from harm. Properly observing the fast is supposed to induce a comfortable feeling of peace and calm. It also allows Muslims to practice self-control, sacrifice, and understanding of those who are less privileged, intended to make Muslims more benevolent. Muslims can eat after the sun has set. Pregnant women, the senior, the sick, travelers and youngsters who have not achieved pubescence are all excused from fasting as want of food and liquid in this position could be damaging to health.
Besides fast, Muslims are encouraged to read the entire Quran. Sunni Muslims tend to execute the reading of the entire Quran by means of particular prayer, called Taraweeh. Taraweeh is held in the Masjids every night of the month, during which a whole section of the Quran (Juz, which is 1/30 of the Quran) is recited, so that by the end of the month the entire Quran has been completed. Tarwih is an Arabic phrase referring to those extra prayers. This prayer is performed after Salah of Isha, but before three Rakats of Witr. Shia Muslims do not practice Taraweeh, as they believe the second Caliph, Umar -ibn al-Khattab, introduced it into Islam.

Muslims also pay Zakat during the month. For those who qualify to pay Zakat, as per the Islamic Nisab (that is those whose wealth exceeds their necessities), of the leftover of their wealth earned in that Islamic calendar year. Although Zakat can be paid any time of the year, it has to be calculated on a year to year basis, and many Muslims use Ramazan as the month for calculation and disbursement. Ramazan is also a time when Muslims are to slow down from worldly affairs and concentrate on self regeneration, religious purifying and enlightenment, building a link between Almighty and themselves by supplication, prayer, giving, good efforts, forgivingness and assisting other people.

As it is a festival of charity and partaking, Muslims cook extraordinary foods and purchase gifts for their family and acquaintances and for charity to the hapless and impoverished who can’t afford it; this can involve purchasing fresh clothes, shoes and additional items of want. There is also a social aspect involved the preparing of special foods and inviting people for the Iftar meal. In many Muslim and non-Muslim countries with large Islamic populations, shops one close down in the evening to enable masses to execute supplications and eat the Iftar meal (the meal to end the fast). These shops then re-open and stay open for a good part of the night.

Muslims can be seen shopping, eating and spending time with their friends and family during the evening hours. Laylat- al-Qadr (Shab-e-Qadr), literally the “Night of Decrees” or “Night of Measures”, is the day of remembrance of two very important dates in Islam that occurred in the month of Ramazan. Muslims believe that it was the night of the Laylat -al-Qadr that the Quran’s first verse was revealed. God only knows the exact night of the Laylat al-Qadr. It has been assured to Prophet Muhammad one night, but on his way out to deliver the news he was disturbed by two
Muslims’ argument and this resulted in him forgetting the exact date of the night. The date was not disclosed only to promote Muslims to pray and work hard on the last 10 days and not only that single night. That is why Muhammad (PBUH) suggested that it was on one of the last ten nights of Ramazan.

The Islamic festival of Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of the fasting period of Ramazan and the first day of the following month, after additional new moon has been sighted. The Eid falls after twenty-nine or thirty days of fasting, as per the lunar sighting. Eid-ul-Fitr means the Festival of breaking off the Fast; an exceptional festivity is made. Food is given to the hapless, everybody puts on their best, preferably new clothes, and communal prayers are held in the early morning, followed by feasting and visiting relatives and friends. The prayer is two Rakaahs only, and it is an optional prayer as opposed to the compulsory five daily prayers. According to one current school of thought, it is suggested that North American Muslims arrange their work schedule for Eid by requesting the two most likely days of Eid as vacations or merely as the days of staying away from work.

This allows for additional family time, and is related to the Christian tradition of taking Christmas Day and Christmas Eve off as holidays. This also allows for time off to celebrate the Eid prayer at a mosque and with family. The fasting always ends after twenty-nineth of thirty days of fast, and thus the request would be for the twenty-nineth and thirtieth day after the beginning of the fasting. Muslims are encouraged to fast six days in Shawwal, the month following Ramazan that begins after Eid-ul-fitr; these days need not be sequential. According to Hadith, one who fasts the calendar month of Ramazan and six days during Shawwal will be honoured as if he fasted the whole year.

6.9.4. Muharram

Muharram is the calendar month with which all Muslims commence their lunar Hijrah Calendar. It’s among the four blessed months about which the Holy Quran enunciates, “The number of the months according to Allah is twelve (named) in the Book of Allah on the day 'He' made heavens and the earth. Among these twelve months there are four blessed”. These 4 months, according to the bonafide customs, are Dhul-Quadah, Dhul- Hijjah, Muharram and Rajab. All the observations of the
Holy Quran are unvaried on this point, because the Holy Prophet, Sall-Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam, in his discourse on the occasion of his last Haj, announced: “One year comprises of twelve months, of which four are blessed months. Three of them are in chronological sequence: Dhul-Qadah, Dhul-Hijjah, Muharram, and the fourth in Rajab”.

**Figure 6.4: Muharram in Mysore, 2012**

The particular quotation of these four months does not signify that any other month has no holiness, because the month of Ramazan is confessedly the most sacred month in the year. However, these four months were specially termed as blessed months for the bare grounds that even the gentiles of Mecca accepted their holiness. In fact, every month, out of the twelve, is originally equal to the other, and there is no inherent sanctity that may be attributed to one of them in comparison to the other months.

When Allah Almighty chooses a particular time for his special blessings, the same acquires sanctity out of his grace. Thus, the holiness of these four months was accepted right from the era of Sayyidina Abraham, Alayhi Salam. Since the gentiles of Mecca assigned themselves to Sayyidina Abraham, Alayhi, Salam, they abided by the holiness of these four months and in spite of their frequent tribal battles, they held it illegitimate to battle in these months. In the Islamic law of Noble Prophet, Sall – Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam the holiness of these months was upheld and the Holy
Quran referred to them as the “blessed months”. Although the fasting in the month of Muharram is not compulsory, yet one who fasts in these days out of his own will is eligible to a great honour by Allah Almighty. The Hadith quoted above means that the fasts of the month of Muharram are most rewarding ones among the Nafîl or intentional fasts. The Hadith doesn’t mean that the award promised for fasts of Muharram can be achieved only by fast for the whole month. On the contrary, each fast during this month has merit. Therefore, one should avail of this opportunity as much as he can. Although Muharram is a sanctified month as a whole, yet the 10th day of Muharram is the most sacred among all its days. The day is named Ashurah.

According to the Holy Companion Ibn Abbas, Radi–Allahu anhu, when The Holy prophet, Sall- Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam, when migrated to Medina found that the Jews of Medina used to fast on the 10th of Muharram. They said that it was the day on which the Holy Prophet Musa (Moses) Alayhis Sallam, and his follower passed over the Red Sea miraculously and the Pharaoh was submerged in its waters. On hearing this from the Jews, the Holy Prophet, Sall-Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam, said, “We’re more closely associated to Musa Alayhi Salam, than you”, and told the Muslims to fast on the day of Ashura.

It’s also described in a number of trustworthy customs that in the first place, fast on the day of Ashura was compulsory for the Muslims. It was later that the fasts of Ramazan were made compulsory and the fast on the day of Ashura was made nonobligatory. Sayyidina Aisha, Radi Allahu anha, has said: “when the Holy Prophet, Sall-Allahyu Alayhi wa Sallam, came to Medina, he fasted on the day of Ashura and guided the people o fast. However, when the fasts of Ramazan were made compulsory, the responsibility of fasting was limited to Ramazan and the compulsory nature of the fast of Ashura was abandoned. Whoever so desires should fast on it and any other who so likes can avoid fasting on it”.

However, the Holy Prophet Sall-Allahu Alayhi was Sallam used to fast on the day of Ashura even after the fast in Ramazan was made obligatory. Abdullah ibn Musa Radi – Allahu Anhu, reports that the Holy prophet Sall-Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam, preferred the fast of Ashura on the fast of other days and preferred the fasts of
Ramadhaan on the fast of Ashura. In short, it is established through a number of authentic Ahadith that fast on the day of Ashura is Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, Sall-Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam, and makes one entitled to a great reward. According to another Hadith, it is more recommended that the fast of Ashura should either be preceded or followed by another fast.

It means that one should fast two days, the 9th and 10th of Muharram or the 10th and 11th. The Reason of this additional fast as mentioned by the Holy Prophet Sall –Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam, is that the Jews used to fast on the day of Ashura alone, and the Holy Prophet Sall-Allahu Alayhi was sallam, wanted to distinguished the Muslim way of fasting from that of Jews. Consequently, he advised the Muslims to add a different fast to that of Ashura. Some customs intend other characteristics of the day of Ashura. Concurring to these customs, one should be kinder to his family by providing more food to them on this day as compared to other days. These customs are not very reliable according to the science of Hadith. However, there are some fables and misconceptions with regard to Ashura that have managed to find their way into the minds of the ignorant, but they have no support of authentic Islamic sources, some very common of them are these: This is the day on which Adam, Alayhi salam, was created. This is the day when Abraham, alayhi salam, was born. This is the day, when Allah accepted the repentance of Sayyidina Adam, Alayhi Salam. This is the day when Qiyaamah (doomsday) will take place. Whoever takes bath on the day of Ashura will never get ill. Some other people attribute the sanctity of Ashura to the martyrdom of Sayyidina Husain, Radi-Allahu anhu, during his battle with the Syrian army. No doubt, the martyrdom of Sayyidina Husain, Radi – Allahu anhu is among the most tragical episodes of our history. Yet, the holiness of Ashura can’t be assigned to this event for the simple reason that the holiness of Ashura was laid down during the days of the Holy Prophet, much earlier than the birth of Sayyidna Husain, Radi-Allahu anhu.

6.9.5. Eid-e-milad-ul-nabi

The festival of Eid-e-Milad-ul-nabi is also popularly known as Barah Wafat the 12th. The day memorializes the birth and as well as the death of Prophet Muhammad. Bara Wafat falls on the twelfth day of the third month Rabi-ul-Awwal in
September-October. Here, Barah or twelve stands for the twelve days of the prophet’s illness. The festivities of birthday are low-keyed, as the day happens to be the death anniversary of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The day is marked by holding spiritual sermons, reading the Holy book of Quran and giving alms to the poor. Prophet Muhammad was born in 571 AD, On April 12^{th}, in Mecca in Arabia. Circa 610 AD, Prophet is said to have gained revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel that he was His messenger. In 622 AD, Muhammad (PBUH) along with his followers went to Medina. This migration from Mecca to Medina is known as Hijrah and marks the commencement of the Muslim era. By 630 AD, Islam came to be admitted as a religion and Muhammad (PBUH) as ruler by a large number of masses. Nevertheless, in 632 AD, Muhammad (PBUH) conducted the pilgrimage to Mecca, preached his parting discourse and expired before long after.

Figure 6.5: Eid-e-milad-ul-nabi Mysore, 2011

Barah Wafat doesn’t ask any kind of expansive festivities as the birth day and death anniversary of Prophet Muhammad coincidentally fall on the same day. Hence, Muslims spend this period in religious activities. Special prayers meetings and sermons on Quran are also organized in mosques to mark the day of Milad. Learned men and scholars focus their sermons on the life teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and inspire people to follow the path of good life as shown in Quran. Hence, the festival gives a chance to people to introspect their deeds and think of ways of being a better person. Besides, in some places, hymns are sung and elegies or
marsiyas are cited in memory of the last days of the Prophet. Devout Muslims also do acts of charity and alms are distributed to the poor and the needy. Afterwards, citizenry invite acquaintance and relations for a banquet. In some mosques, however, a ‘sandal rite’ ceremony is performed over the symbolic footmarks of the Prophet etched in a stone. A stone impersonation of Buraq the horse on which prophet Muhammad is said to have rose to his celestial home is placed near the footmarks and embrocated with sandal paste or fragrant powder. Likewise the house and jewel casket bearing this are intricately adorned (Akhter, 2009).

6.9.6. Shab-e-Barat

Muslims celebrate the festival of Shab-e-Barat with éclat and exuberance all over the world. Because, Muslims think that on the night of Shab-e-Barat almighty composes the fortunes of all humans for the approaching year by taking into account the feasts committed by them in the previous day. The festival is celebrated either on the 13\textsuperscript{th} or on the 14\textsuperscript{th} day of Shaban, the 8\textsuperscript{th} month of the Muslim year. This happens to be fifteen days before the beginning of Ramazan. Shab-e-Barat means the night of forgiveness or Day of Atonement. People pray to God both in preparation for Ramazan and for the forgiveness of the sins committed by them. The festival is also known as Boraks Night. In Persian language, ‘Shab’ means ‘night’ and ‘Barat’ means ‘the night of commission or assignment’. In Arabic, nevertheless, the day is called Lailatul Baraat, meaning the night of emancipation. Some although see Shab-e-Barat as the night of good luck and a common legend says that on this night, the Prophet travels to each house and allays the ails of agony of humanity.

The night of Shab-E-Barat is the memorization of Muhammad’s (PBUH) entrance into the city of Mecca. Nevertheless, Shia Muslims affiliate this night with the birth of their final Imam. Skies light up on the night of Shab-e-Barat as the festival is celebrated in the night. Candles and strands of electric bulbs to provide a joyful ambiance to the festival also illuminate houses and streets. Colourful fire works keep dazzling the skies as the Muslims stay awake on the night of Shab-e-Barat. This is due to a belief that God writes the destinies of all living beings for the coming year in heavns during the night. Sweets specially the delicious savaiyyan or the vermicelli is prepared and sent to friends and also to the relatives in their remembrance of those
who have died during the year. Some also execute acts of giving by dispersing treats to the hapless and impoverished in the name of their expired ancestors. Flowers are also offered to the tombs of the departed family members.

Fatihah or the benedictions are said over the meal in the name of the Prophet, his daughter, Fatimah, and her husband, Ali. The sacred Book of Quran is also read to mark the day. Muslims hold a notion that if a person prays to Allah throughout the night and seek pardon for all the sinnings, he has committed, he could be forgiven. Therefore, the entire night of prayer is devoted to asking for forgiveness for the past year and for good fortune in the year to come. Some people also go to Masjids for supplications and meditation (Moraqebe). While some Muslims fast during the day and deliver Nafal, the non-bligatory Namaz at night. It might be noted that there is no reference of Shab-e-Barat in the holy book of Quran. However, Sura Dukhan does cite about Laila Mubaraka, which, according to the knowledgeable scholars of the Quran and the Hadith, is Shab-e-Barat.

6.9.7. The Purdah system among the Shia Muslims

Muslims lay emphasis on guarding women through veil or Purdah. It is a custom that according to it, a woman has to cover her beauty or attractive body parts. This covering device has been called by different names – in Turkey it is called Charshaf, Chaddur in the Near East and Iran, Aba in Iraq and Burka in India. Islam Prescribes that every woman should cover her body from head to foot after attaining puberty.

Regarding purdah the verses of the Quran read: “O Prophet, say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they let down over them their jilbab (over-garment); this will be more proper that they may be known, and thus they will not be molested. Say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely, Allah is aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and not to display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and they should wear their head-coverings over their bosoms and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or ...” (Maznerudin Siddiqi, 1991).
Meanwhile, Prophet Mohammed introduced the practice of *Purdah* to protect Muslim women from a world of men who consider women as just sexual objects. Today’s society is very much different and honour and dignity of well behaved women are safe, and does not need excessive means of protection.

Due to *Purdah* system, the presence of Muslim women, particularly in India, has been considerably low in social gatherings. It has also acted as an obstacle in the progress of Muslim women. Because of *Purdah*, seclusion deprives them of equal opportunity in most of spheres of human activity. On the account of purdah system, men curb women from taking part in social activities(Azim, 1997). As Youssef and Smock (1977) observed: “Although the veil becomes a symbol of respectability, the very logic of seclusion reflected negatively on the character and value of women” and continue “While the Muslim personal law has safeguarded their legal rights and independent status in the family, the custom of purdah has hampered their social progress”(Qurratulain, 1975). As a result, the Muslim women are lagging behind in the fields of education and employment. Burkha has been regarded as the major factor responsible for their backwardness (Roy, 1979).

Of course, it cannot be denied that the *Purdah* system has changed a lot. Absolute female seclusion is not to be seen today. Muslim women can be seen everywhere, any time outside the family circle. They have come out from their homes with or without the *burkha*. Younger and educated women are more flexible with regard to *burkha*. Now-a-days we can see many young Muslim women without *burkha*. Some women wear *burkha* only at the time of marriage or on the other traditional occasions or ceremonies. In some part of the country like Mysore purdah just means wearing of head scarves, and the *Purdah* in the traditional sense no more exists. It is observed that today some women are reluctant to practice *Purdah* and want to come out from the four-walls of the house. Educated women, particularly, dislike the practice of *burkha*. As Roy (1979) states, “In the male domination and seclusion symbolizing the eclipse of a Muslim woman’s identity and individuality”.

Singh writey, “that Muslim women of now-a-days do observe with *Purdah* but it is no more the same traditional type, practiced by their grandmothers and
Religion

mothers” (A. Singh, 1992). There was a belief that any transgression of Purdah meant an anti-Islamic act. This attitude is not being seen today (1992).

In this study, it was attempted to explore the attitude of the sample population towards Purdah system, so the respondents were asked these questions “Do you practice the purdah system”? “Do you like to wear Burqa?” and If ‘Yes’, “Do you remove it at your workplace”?

The result in Mysore indicate that 76.7 percent of working women practice Purdah. They express reasons such as elderly person’s emphasizing (16.7 percent), its being Islamic tradition and culture (38.9 percent) and being Muslims (44.4 percent).

Moreover, the data depict that one-third of Muslim working women do not like to wear burkha. They believe that burkha is regarded as a major factor responsible for their backwardness, and also prevent women progression in the fields of education and employment. In addition, of the total number of the Muslim working women who practice Purdah more than 87.00 percent remove their burkha at their workplace, and they referred that it is better for face-to-face interaction.

A clerk who worked in an office in Mysore said that her grandfather believed that if a woman is forced by necessity to speak to a man who is stranger, she should speak to him with violence. Otherwise he should be attracted to her and this could lead to evil!. Generally speaking, the above results and observations show that today, due to the influence of modern forces, the practice of Purdah is slowly weakening. We find the Muslim girls and women in schools and colleges, at workplaces and other places freely removing their burkha. Further, the forgoing analysis indicates that a new attitude has developed among Muslim men who are liberal towards wearing burkha.

In general, the results show in Mysore that some working women believe that today men prefer to marry working girls because they bring in regular income, even if they would not get any dowry at the time of marriage.

- It is suggested that proper policy programs be implemented to improve and increase level of awareness among Muslim men toward women’s positions and rights. These programmes should spread this belief among Muslim women that women, like men, have abilities in working activities.
The results indicate that the government needs to increase the level of awareness among Muslim communities toward suitable age of marriage.

It is essential that self-confidence be increased among Muslim women by encouraging them to improve their status without any fear and hesitation.

There is a need for the establishment of sufficient and proper baby-sitting and child-care centers as well as transportation facilities for working women at their workplaces.

It is recommended that prayer room and ladies room be provided at workplaces.

It is essential that legislations be approved to protect the interests of Muslim women, and prohibit dowry and sex discrimination.

Gender equality, which upholds the human dignity and social justice, is not a target of feminism alone; rather it is a target of every modern society. Then, the realization of gender equality demands the eradication of the problems like low individual autonomy, unemployment, illiteracy and lower level of education, few job opportunities, and limited freedom in political and social activities among Muslim women.