

## AN EXAMINATION OF ISLAMIC CONCEPT ON BIRTHDAY AND FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS IN ISLAM

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### ABSTRACT

*It seems that the Muslim world of today is not conscious about the Islamic conceptual and theoretical framework on birthday celebration and festivities. This negative trend tends to make adverse effects on Islamic cultural values. This paper therefore, is an attempt to examine the Islamic point of view with regard to birthday and other celebrations. Efforts are made to explain Islamic orientations and guidance on how Muslims ought to conduct their affairs in these occasions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Qur'an explicitly declares the origination of life from Allah. He Himself is An Eternal Being whose existence is infinite Q25:58

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْحَيِّ الَّذِي لَا يَمُوتُ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِهِ وَكَفَى بِهِ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا

and put Your trust (O Muhammad ) In the ever living one who dies not, and glorify his Praises, and Sufficient is He as the All-Knower of the sins of his slaves;

Man's existence on earth, though temporal is not without purpose. That is why Qur'an stresses that legions of Prophet and Messengers are sent to mankind. Their mission is guidance of mankind towards Allah's pleasure. Muhammad, the seal of the Prophets was given a comprehensive guidance which is all-embracing, irrespective of tribo-ethnic or socio-cultural diversity.

As it has been confirmed in the Qur'an that nothing in the aspect of human life is left unaddressed.

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَّمٌ أُمَّتَالِكُمْ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ

there is not a moving (living) creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing In the Book, Then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered.

Islam gives concern of the matter of celebration which are part and parcel of social life. Unfortunately, numerous Muslims of the present day are not conscious of the Islamic guidance. This leads them to observe celebrations in a way not dissimilar to that of unbelievers or people of the Book. Hence, we consider it important to examine the Islam concept of life for proper understanding of the rationale behind celebrations and festivities.

### **The Concept of life in Islam**

Qur'an states that man's being in this world is caused by Allah, the Giver and Creator of life. Life is dear and cherish able asset. Therefore, man must not commit any act of suicide because only Allah has the right to take it back. The life of man in the world is not in vain, but for the purpose of observing divine obligations. This explains why man is endowed with unique qualities and great abilities, to enable him enjoy the good taste of life according divine guidance. Life is a transient journey and serves an introduction to the eternal life hereafter. The purpose of life is to put man on trial in relation to divine commandment. Life to be considered a chance provided for man to make best use of it while he can, because there is no delay in his time-to leaves the world when the term expires. The best use of life is to live according to injunctions of Allah, and Islam has laid down comprehensive rules and regulations on it.

The Islamic concept of the life is different from the world of jewry. The Qur'an describes their insatiable desire for longevity, even more than the unbelievers. Nonetheless, they consider themselves the only chosen servants of God, but the Qur'an believes the: challenging them to dare death. This attitude is similar to that of the Christian who regards death as reward of the sin. The Qur'an however, explains that whoever is given long life will suffer ageism. <sup>(4)</sup> The Shakespeare's poem on seven stages of man ending in old age, with lose of physical pleasure correspond this Qur'anic declaration.

### **The concept of Birthday and festivals in Islam**

It is neither stated in the Qur'an or Sunnah that Islam permits celebration of birthday. Neither the Prophet nor the companions celebrated it, though several narrations account that the Prophet used to fast on Mondays in commemoration of his birthday. Based on this, Shittu maintains that birthday celebration of the Prophet is a detestable innovation believed to have

been originated by King Muzaffar Abu Sa'id in Egypt, six hundred years after the death of Prophet, with purpose to provide Muslims with and equivalent to Christmas

He debunks the views of the supporters of *Mawlid* who opine that it is good for the purpose that it positively adds more beauty to the celebration, due to merits of feeding the poor, expression of joy among others. He further asserts that the love of the Prophet is best reflected not by celebrating his birthday, but strict adherence to his teachings, offering *Salat* and *Salam* privately to him and engaging in various form of Jihad.

Ash-Sha'rawi's position is seemly seen to be different from that of Shittu. He however describes the attitude of merriment in numerous festive occasions as mere display of physical pleasure by the Muslims of the present day. He states:

فلن يفرح الإسلام، ولن تبقية تلك الصحوات الموقوتة أو الهبات التي يوحى بها يوم  
يؤرخ لحادثة في كل لحظة من لحظات حدث يجب أن نلتفت إليه حتى تستديم علاقتنا  
بمن شرح الإسلام ، وتستديم حياتنا في كل حركة منها على توجيهات الإسلام ، وإذا  
نظرنا إلى الحفوات التي استقبلت مناسبات الإسلام في كل دولة وفي كل أمة .... لو  
جدنا أنها حفوات العاشق وتنتهي حين تذكر.

The momentary commemoration or exchanged gifts to mark the occasion of festivity cannot give the real joy to Islam. Every event (of life) is worthy to be taken with consideration, till our relation with Allah is long-lasting And we have to constantly maintain every moment of movement on Islamic orientation If we observe numerous commemorations of occasions in Islam in every government and community we could notice that they are based on passion within the moment which the event is commemorated

We understand from submission of Sha'rawi that he does not object to *Mawlid* and other occasions, but they call for reflections. Ibn Jibreen states however, that festivals are fixed, like acts of worship. And it is reported in the Hadith that during the day of ignorance, the people of Madinah used to celebrates two festivals, then Allah replaced them with two lawful festivals (i.e *Idul Adha and Fitr*) He adds that nothing is mentioned in the law of Islam about birthday therefore it is even detestable to congratulate or encourage someone on such things. Ibn Uthaymin adds that *Isra'i* and *Miraj* celebrations is detestable. And there was no confirmation that the Prophet was born on 12<sup>th</sup> of Rabiul Awwal nor his ascension took place on 27<sup>th</sup> of Rajab

It is obvious from the submission of Ibn Jibreen and Ibn Uthaymin that the Muslims are required to confine themselves to the established teachings of Islam. For the fact that these occasions of festivities are seen to be addressed in Islam, there is no justification for

subsequent generations to introduce some kind of festivals, not existing during Prophetic era and that of the companions.

### Islamic Orientations on Birthday and Festivals Celebrations in Islam

Islam does not disapprove commemoration of one's birthday. Probably, this is because it is an important occasion in one's life. Qur'an accounts that Prophet Isa (A.S) prayed for himself on the cradle in relation to the day he was born, the day of his death and resurrection

وَأَسَلْتُ عَلَى يَوْمِ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمِ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمِ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا

And Salam (peace) be upon Me the Day I was born, and the Day I die, and the Day I shall be raised alive!"

The same applies to divine blessing upon Prophet Yahya

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُبْعَثُ حَيًّا

and Salamun (peace) be on Him the Day He was born, the Day He dies, and the Day He will be raised up to life (again)!

Hence, it could be understood from this Qur'anic passages that the Muslims attitude to the commemoration of the day of birth should be trio- dimensional reflections That is, a deep reflection of his accountability. It is only through this kind of reflection, rather than celebration, that Muslims would be able to understand the Islamic concept of life. The reflection would gear him to intensify in devotional acts of worship More importantly every, minute and second in a Muslim life is an occasion worthy to be spent in earning Allah's pleasure.

Furthermore, Muslims need to engage in various acts of worship such as fasting, done by the Prophet, recitation of the Qur'an, charitable acts and deeds among others. This according to our view accounts for no celebration or merriment extravagantly. It does not call for organizing parties, musical dance and others.

Commemoration of birthday calls for self-accountability. The Muslims need to examine and explore their extent of carrying out Allah's injunctions on devotion to All obedience and kindness to parents and relatives, keeping of family ties, benevolent attitudes to the less-privileged, contribution to the development of Islam, imbibing of Islamic character and cultural values, sympathy with Muslim brothers all over the world He needs to redress his laxity in religious obligations and make determination for positive improvement.

Similarly, lunar calendar is recognized in Islam Therefore, a Muslim commemorating his birthday needs to know the exact date of his birth based on Islamic Hijrah calendar. The solar or other calendar systems are not line with Islamic injunction.

More so, the Muslims are to be wary of following the traditions of non-Muslims. The Prophet was reported to have warned the Muslims thus;

لا تقوم الساعة حتى تأخذ القرون قبلها (شبرا بشبر وذراعا بذراع ) فقيل يا رسول الله كفارس والروم ؟ فقال ومن من الناس إلا أولئك؟

The Hour will not be established till my followers copy the Deeds of the previous nations and follow them very closely, Span by span, cubit by cubit (i.e inch by inch). It was said; Oh Allah's Messenger "Do you mean by those (nations) the Persians and Byzantines? The Prophet said: who can it be Other than they<sup>(12)</sup>

Sha'rawi's opinion corresponds with the Prophetic statement above on his view about western celebration of Mother's Day. He states:

عيد الأم اختر- عه الغرب فقلدناهم تقليدا أعمى ولم نفكر في الأسباب التي جعلت الغرب يقر عيد الأم أما عندنا فعيد - لأم في كل لحظة لحظات لحظات الحياة ، فالإسلام أعطانا التكاتف وعلى قدر حاجة الأبوين رتب الإسلام الحقوق: أمك أمك أمك ثم أبوك

Mother's Day was invented by the west, and we (Muslims) imitate them blindly without thinking about the factor that prompts the west to it. As for us (Muslims), mother's day is in every second in seconds of life. Islam has conferred on us mutual obligation. It defines the right of both parents based 'on the level of their need of attention, stating mother thrice before mentioning the father<sup>(13)</sup>

Ash- sha'rawi's observation could be understood to be applicable to celebration of workers' day, teacher's day, labor's day and other days. Some modern Islamic movements have made serious attempts to enlighten the Muslims regarding such occasion. This is seen in the educational and social goals of *Al-Ikhwanaul Muslimun*

The Islamic orientation mentioned above is also relevant to the two I'd festivals the Qur'an states that these festivals are instituted so that Muslims would magnify the praise of Allah for the favor of divine guidance. That is why Muslims are obligated to say Takbir while going and coming from praying ground, and to extend generosity to indigent Muslim as a form of appreciation to Allah and devotion. This does not amount to wild celebration through carnival, musical dance and wasting of time resources on sensual pleasures.

## CONCLUSION

It could be observed from the discussion that many Muslims nowadays observe occasions in such a way that are far distant from Islamic guidance. Ignorance of Islam injunctions and concepts are causative factors to this indulgence in one part, and obstinacy the other. Al-Huda states “we Muslims take pleasure in belonging to Islam and are proud of it. Yet unfortunately, we do not know its most important injunctions and neglect its major issues”

Nonetheless, such Muslims that hold to celebrations not approved by Islam are not to be treated as being out of Islamic fold. Rather, they need to be more enlightened. The present day Muslims are encouraged to jealously emulate and guard the golden treasure of Islam heritage, as enshrined in the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet with pride, and without the feeling of inferiority or retrogression in the face of alien customs and traditions.

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