

The Need to Remove Hindu Cultural Elements from Muslim Society

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Abstract: *Hindu thought and ritual practices have exercised a deep and enduring influence on segments of Muslim culture and social life in South Asia. Over time, certain Muslim communities, originally governed by Islamic norms-including permissibility of polygamy-absorbed Hindu social ideals such as monogamy, giving rise to doctrinal confusion and practical inconsistencies. While Hinduism is fundamentally rooted in mythology and ritual symbolism, Islam is anchored in the uncompromising doctrine of Tawhīd, which forms the very nucleus of its worldview. The gradual intermingling of these divergent systems was further facilitated by social proximity, inter-communal interactions, and marriages between Muslims and Hindus, allowing non-Islamic rites to permeate Muslim households. Practices such as the Hindu ceremony of Ārtī, reintroduced in some Muslim communities under alternate nomenclature-such as Coconut-Thālī or Nis'ār-exemplify this phenomenon. This paper critically analyses the progressive conflation of Islamic teachings with pre-Islamic and regional cultural traditions, with particular emphasis on South Asian Muslim societies. It contends that Islam, a complete moral and legal framework grounded in divine revelation, has frequently been reduced to inherited customs practiced without comprehension or spiritual intent. The historical pattern of mass conversions-often motivated by allegiance to communal leadership rather than informed conviction-contributed to the persistence of un-Islamic rituals alongside Muslim identity. This condition has been aggravated by insufficient Shari'ah literacy and selective or opportunistic religious instruction. The study advocates a conscious revival of authentic Islamic awareness, calling for Muslims to re-enter Islam with knowledge, sincerity, and ethical responsibility, thereby disentangling faith from cultural accretions that compromise its theological integrity.*

Keywords: *Islam and Culture; Bid'ah; Shari'ah Consciousness; South Asian Muslims; Reform; Tawhīd*

1. Born Again Muslims:

How unfortunate it is that the religion of Islam has been converted by its followers to be understood by mere adherence to a litany of customs. Some of its followers have aligned Islam to their predecessor's un-Islamic traditions, performing anti-Islamic acts out of habit and without any understanding. Allow me to say that such Muslims need to enter into the fold of Islam completely or to be "Born Again Muslims" to turn them into "practicing followers". The majority of converted Muslim communities are confused between what is religion and what is culture. They take both as one and the same. This is done because the mass conversion of many communities never allowed them an opportunity to delve deeper into the teachings of Islam. The old customs, culture, and traditions were retained and practiced side-by-side with Islam. These communities at that time owed their loyalty to their leadership, and when the leadership converted to Islam, their disciples - without any consideration - accepted Islam. This blind following was the reason why these converted communities continued a number of Hindu rituals even after their conversion to Islam. Additionally, the lack of Shariah knowledge and exploitation by the preachers in the name of religion exacerbate this problem. In fact, one can still see Hindu influences in South Asian Muslim society primarily in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

2. Shunning wasteful rituals:

Many rituals practiced by the Muslims of South Asia have no concern with Islam at all. Actually, some are contrary to religious beliefs and can be classified as Bidah or Shirk. These practices are not only sinful but make a mockery of the concept of Tawhid. Many religious scholars well versed with Islam hesitate from speaking out against them since they think of it as a very sensitive area to venture into. The learned writer of 'Ethnic Culture versus Islam' writes: [1] "Consider the concept of water and oil; they do not mix. Oil stays on top and does not contaminate the water below. However, what we do not realize is that oil chokes life in the water by blocking the flow of oxygen".

Similarly, such fake customs kill the spirit of Islam. Marriage plays an important role in the life of a Muslim. In marriage, Islam discourages ostentatious displays and recommends enjoying the event in a manner which earns the blessing of Allah. Rasulullah (S) advised establishing matrimonial ties for peaceful living. He advised the coming generations to adopt simple living, and enjoy a tension free life. The exhibition of wealth has been termed by the Qur'an and Rasulullah (S) as *Isr'af* (extravagance) and *Tabzir* (wastage), a sinful act now regarded as fashionable, a status symbol and a barometer of prestige. The Qur'an discussed examples of *'isr'af* and *Tabzir* independently and says: [2]

i). "Give to the near of kin his due, and also to the needy and the wayfarer. Do not squander your wealth wastefully (*Tabzir*)."

ii). "And be not excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess (*'isr'af*)."

People try to impress others through demonstration of their wealth instead of being simple and humble. Wealth is not a matter of pride; even a prostitute can have wealth but he/she is not considered respectful. The learned writer of "Ethnic Culture versus Islam" further elaborates: [3] "Culture takes precedence over everything else and if they miss one or two obligations in Islam, like *Salaat* or *Siy'am*, it does not matter as long as that so-called *Aadat* has been safely implemented. For example, people spend hours dressing up a bride for a wedding ceremony,

irrespective of the fact that the bride has to miss her Maghrib Salaat because of this. Allowing her to perform her Maghrib Salaat would mean that the preparations would be interrupted or delayed, not to mention her makeup, which had been carefully set at a great expense of time and money, would get all messed up”.

In the wedding ceremonies of South Asia, it is a Hindu practice where the bride and bridegroom sit on a stage so that the audience can see them along with other numerous ethnic customs. It is time to repeal the Hindu customs and discourage people from following them.

3. Ceremonies or Gatherings of Shait'an:

Today an important source of an exhibition of power and prosperity are wedding ceremonies. The rituals of Hina have become a compulsory part of a wedding ceremony. Songs and dances are the basic ingredients of this function. In this ceremony boys and girls participate jointly and quite freely. Rasulullah(S) says: [4]

“I prohibit you dancing and playing the flute, drums, and Tabla.”

It has been observed several times that at a Hina ceremony, preposterous and filthy songs are also sung. At such gatherings where people from all age groups are present, such shameful acts continue without any hesitation. These songs, in turn, incline a human mind towards lust and licentiousness. Injunctions of Shariah for eschewing such bad practices were issued by Rasulullah (S). Shariah instructs specifically that one should keep aloof from this weapon of the Shait'an. The influence of forces inimical to Islam is so strong that a common person regards music as a source of inner-satisfaction, and that is why people related to this reprehensible profession utter shamelessly:

“Music is the food of the soul.”

The Qur'an however says in very clear words: [5]

“Zikar of Allah is the source of inner satisfaction”.

4. Music leading to lust is not allowed:

In short, it is sufficient to say that dance and songs are the basic components of Hindu worship while the Qur'an declares music to be forbidden: [6]

“So abstain from the pollution of the idols and abstain from false vain words”.

The Arabi word “Zoor” means falsehood and that covers music. According to Moula Abi Abdillah al-Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) “pollution of the idols” includes the game of Chess and “vain words” alludes to music. The issue of music can be understood only when we study this Ayah: [7]

“And of the people, there is he who buys a ‘vain talk’ so that he may lead others astray from the path of Allah without (real) knowledge and takes it (Wahi) for a mockery; for these shall be a disgracing punishment”.

“Laghv” connotes to anything which diverts the attention and makes a person ignorant of Allah and His commands. The learned writer of Tafsir Safi discussed: [8]

“This includes music, intoxicants, and all such diversions”.

Moula Abi Ja'far al-Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) says: [9]

“Music is among the things for which Allah has promised the Fire (of Hell).”

Then the Imam (as) recited the following Ayah: [10]

“Indeed successful are the believers those who in their Salaat are humble and those who keep themselves aloof from Vain (words and deeds)”.

The term *Laghv* - vain words and actions is explained by Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as): [11]

"All that is void of the remembrance of Allah is Laghv."

According to other authentic traditions of Imams, *Laghv* means all useless entertainment which wastes times among which music has been specifically mentioned. Also included in this term are vain games played just to pass time. Pay attention to the following Ayah: [12]

"And the servants of the Merciful Allah are those... who bear not witness to what is false, and when they pass by what is vain they pass with dignity"

5. Talim of Ahl al-Bayt (as):

According to the traditions of Ahl al-Bayt (as), the first part of the above mentioned Ayah may also be explained this way:

"Do not listen to music."

The following two traditions explain the second part. Moula Abi Abdillah al-Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) asked some of his companions: [13]

"Where are you staying?"

They replied:

"With so and so, who has singing and dancing girls."

The Imam of Ahl al-Bayt (as) said:

"You should maintain dignity."

They thought that Imam had advised them to treat that man generously. However, they were not sure, so they returned to the Imam and requested him to explain what he meant in clear terms. The Imam asked:

"Haven't you heard this Ayah: [14]

"When they pass by what is vain they pass with dignity"

The Imam meant that you should not stay with a man who has singing and dancing girls.

Rasulullah (S) clearly declared: [15]

"Allah has sent me as a mercy to the world to guide the people. And He ordered me to eradicate the playing of flute and other instruments of music, all games of vice, idol (worship) and all practices of the days of ignorance".

The issue of Musiqi is very subtle and sensitive. There are two kinds of Musiqi, one by which sensations and feelings are attracted towards spirituality and Taqwa, while the other is just its opposite. Religion does not declare Har'am the first kind of Musiqi, which includes Qir'at, Adh'an, Munaj'at, Na'at, Manqabat, Marathi, Qasaid, Salaam among others. All these are recited in rhythmic tones which incline the attention towards spirituality. Similarly, Nazam, Rajz, Qawwali, Kal'am of Sufiya, Nashiyah, Duha, Bhajan, Gin'an express superior ideas and are sung for arousing pious feelings on different occasions, which do not strike or clash with the values of Islam. Contrary to this there is another kind of Musiqi, whose words, the tune, and rhythm invite one to indulge in lustful activities. This kind of Musiqi is Har'am. Rasulullah (S) says: [16]

"Such music is a precursor or forerunner of Zina (fornication)."

Moula Abi Ja'far al-Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) informs in crystal clear terms: [17]

"Songs and music are one of those wicked acts for which Allah promised Jahannam."

The Imam (as) further says:

"If drums and cymbals are played at one's house for forty days, Allah will impose a Shait'an by the name of 'al-Qafandar'. The Shait'an will infiltrate into every cell of the person's body. With the spread of this evil, the person loses all sense of dignity and self-respect. He will then not care as to what he says or what is said about him. As a result, he becomes utterly shameless so much so that he is not concerned or affected even if his women are dishonoured."

Moula Abi Abdillah Al Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) informs: [18]

"The house in which there are songs and music becomes a place of painful misfortunes. The Dua of the inmates of that house and of those who frequently visit them are rejected by Allah and the Malaek of Rahmah leave that house".

The Imam (as) also warned:

"The playing of violin promotes the growth of hypocrisy in the heart like water assists the growth of plants."

Furthermore, Ahl al-Bayt (as) repeatedly gave Talim to their followers:

"Then even learning to sing or playing music and teaching it, or to be paid for these things or to be in any way being engrossed in these vices is Har'am."

How can then a marriage be blessed where there is dance and music? In the Hina ceremony boys and girls sing inappropriate songs while sitting in close proximity and dance together - Is this permissible?

6. The Duty of Amr bil Ma'rūf wa Nahy 'an al-Munkar:

This duty-enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong-stands as a pillar of the Sharī'ah's moral order and a defining trait of the believing community. Qur'an says: [19]

"You are the best community brought forth for mankind: you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah".

Thus, the excellence of the Ummah is not merely creedal, but ethical and active. Ma'rūf denotes all that is recognized by sound revelation and upright reason as good-faith, justice, compassion, and obedience-while Munkar encompasses what revelation condemns and reason recoils from-disbelief, injustice, and moral corruption. The duty therefore extends beyond ritual observance to social conduct, public justice, and inward rectitude. Classically, Fuqha held this Fard to be Farḍ Kifāyah: if sufficiently discharged by some, the burden lifts from others; yet it becomes Farḍ Ayn when one uniquely witnesses a wrong and possesses the capacity to address it. Its neglect invites collective moral decay, as warned in the Qur'ān [20]. Rasulullah (S) delineated its hierarchy: [21]

"Whoever among you sees a wrong, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then with his heart-and that is the weakest of faith."

This establishes proportionality: authority governs action, knowledge governs speech, and conscience governs inward repudiation. Ulama set conditions to prevent harm: sound knowledge of the ruling, reasonable expectation of benefit, and avoidance of a greater evil. The aim is iṣlāḥ (rectification), not humiliation; mercy, patience, and wisdom are integral, for Allah commands: [22]

"Call to the way of your Rabb with wisdom and good exhortation".

Ultimately, Amr bil Ma'rūf wa Nahy 'an al-Munkar safeguards the five universal objectives (maqāṣid) of the Sharī'ah-religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property-by preserving a moral

ecology in which faith can flourish and injustice is restrained. In sum, this duty is not mere censure, but a principled, compassionate guardianship of the moral good, through which the Ummah fulfills its trust before Allah and its responsibility toward humanity.

To prevent reckless spending on rituals, and to eliminate such customs and ceremonies, it is indispensable that we shun participating in useless festivals and programs. Those who advocate Hina ceremony comprising of song and dance and argue that it is a common custom of the region should know that the Qur'an condemned these evil practices. It is total hypocrisy that the one who turns his face for Salaat towards the Kabah also support these evil deeds. It is a great responsibility of the sincere followers of Islam to discourage such gatherings and refrain from participating in them. This is Jih'ad which contains the secret for the Naj'at of our society. Transplantation of the culture of Islam is required, first in the family of Ulama and then for the common people. Islamic culture refers to practices common historically to Rasulullah (S), his Ahl al-Bayt (as) and selected Asha'b (ra). Later, with the extension of the Muslim state boundaries, there came about a foreign cultural invasion which muddled and confused the Aqaid of the masses. This is why in each era Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as) and their trained scholars warned the Ummah from Munkar and invited them towards Maruf. Islamic culture refers to the practices which have developed around and as part of the religion of Islam, certainly not of "nomadic tribal Arabian peninsula". To judge the legality of any practice or otherwise in any part of the world, maxims of the Qur'an are sufficient till the day of Qiyamah, which is "Amr bil Maruf and Nahiya Anal Munkar". As for the point of celebrating other cultures divergent from Islam, bear in mind that the Umayyads adopted and tried enforcing customs and traditions from the Romans which the grandson of Rasulullah (S) opposed with all his being by waging Jiha'd at Karbala and sacrificing himself in the cause of Allah. Therefore, where learning about other cultures causes no harm, incorporating them in one's life is opposing the Talim of the Qur'an. I am concluding this discussion on an Arabic verse of the Nashiyyah written by the 51st Al Da'i al-Fatimi, Sayyiduna Taher Saifuddin (d.1965, Mumbai). He incorporated Ayah 72 of Surah al-Furq'an brilliantly in the following verse as a Tazmin: [23]

"Ayyuhal Muminuna Murru iza;
Antum Marartum Bil'laghwe Marral Kir'am'e."

O Mumineen! Don't pay attention towards Laghw;
Leave that atmosphere like air, as air never stays at any place.

Remember! Moula al-Husain ibn Ali (as) rejected the demand of Bayat of Yazid (L) and argued:
"How is it possible that I give Bayt to a person who enjoys music and dance?"

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