

### **Religious Practices and Life Cycle Rituals**

This discussion includes rites and ceremonies practised by the Badias as a part of their culture. The great tradition of Islam as well as little tradition of the Badia where they are settle have been blended perfectly in their way of life. It is observed that life cycle rituals are performed at the household level whereas the religious practices are the joint responsibility of household and community. An religion plays a vital role in every sphere of their life.

Four distinct theological divisions are found in Islamic religion viz., Hanafi, Safei, Maleki and Hambeli. The Badias do not belong to any one of these four schools or majhabs. They have been grouped as la-majahabi and some times referred as Wahabi because of their association with the Wahabi Movement. Being the strict followers of Quoran and Hadith the Badias claimed to be a member of Ahl-e-Hadith group and they do not believe in segmentation of humanity. They try to maintain the principle of equality and justice as these are advocated by the prophet Muhammad. They do not believe in the intermediaries or pirs between the prophet and the common people. They are very particular in religious performances as prescribed in Islam. The most important religious activities of the Badias are noted below.

## Namaj

Namaj means prayer to the God or Allah. The Badias believe in single God. Prayer to the God is made at various occasions. Depending upon the occasion and time name of Namaj varies. Daily prayer is performed five times a day. These are called Fozor, Johor, Ashar, Magrib and Esha and performed in the early morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night respectively.

Monotheism and performance of Namaj are also found among the followers of Islam. But a distinction is made between the Badias and other Muslims of their locality. The Badias loudly pronounce "amin" whereas the other Muslims speak "amin" not so loudly. Nevertheless, the Badias place their hands on chest whereas other Muslims do it on the belly.

Apart from daily namaj they perform an weekly prayer called jumma namaj. It is held on jumma day or Friday. On other festivals like Eid-ul-fetar and Eid-ud-zoha they also conduct special prayers or annual prayers. On the death of any person of their community they perform funeral prayer or janaza namaj. The male members participate in the prayer outside as well as inside house where as the females perform only at home except on id days. Imam or maulabi or the religious head of the mosque or of a particular community supervised the weekly and annual as well as farewell namaj. Daily prayer is done by the individuals themselves. Annual prayer for the females on the day of Eid-ul-fetar and Eid-ud-zoha is supervised by an woman well versed with Quoran called mutlema. In Malda basti of Milangarh village mutlema Muhomuda Begum, wife of the Maulavi, conducts the annual prayers.

## **Ohju**

Ohju is a ritual purification of body. Normally it is done before prayer or namaj by the followers of Islam. In case of Badias it is observed that after urination ohju is done. Even a highly educated (M.A. and teacher of a college) person of Badia community taking a mug of water while he goes to the urinal, at least when at home.

## **Roja**

Roja or fasting is considered by the members of Badia community as an aspect of religious devotion. Attachment with the religion of Islam is tighten through the observance of roja. It is not binding to each and every member of their community. Those who can stay on fasting the whole day performed roja. Roja is observed on the month of Ramjan or the ninth month of islamic calendar.

## **Eid-ul-Fetar**

On the first day of the month of Shawal or the tenth of islamic calendar the festival of Eid-ul-Fetar is celebrated. A congregation annual prayer is organised at id-gah. Females perform the prayer or Eid namaj at the mosque. After congregation namaj the members of the community greet each other and distribute sweets (simui) and clothes. They enjoy the day in gracious mood and invite friends and relatives on dawat or ceremonial feast. Eid-ul-Fetar is observed after observing roja which continued through out the month gone by. In the month of ramjan the people who observe roja had to stay on fast during day time. In the nights they eat whatever they like. Eid-ul-Fetar actually is the celebration after overcoming the hardship of roja. On the last day of roja all the

members of Badia community of a particular village or hamlet sit together and fix up subscription. In the year 1998, the Murshidabad basti of Milangarh village the subscription per family was 2 and 1/2 kgs. of rice or wheat or the equal amount of money. The subscription went to the mosque fund from where it was equally divided into four parts. One part was meant for helping the poor people of the basti. Another part went to the Maulavi for extending religious education to the children of the community. Third part went to the beggars and fakirs coming from other areas. Remaining share went to the outside religious preachers. It is believed that these religious preachers spent the money for the welfare of maktabas and madrashas in different regions.

### **Eid-ud-zoha**

Eid-ud-zoha is celebrated on the tenth day of the last month of islamic calendar i.e. Zel-haj. It is believed that on this date Hajrat Ibrahim was asked by the god to sacrifice his dearest one. Hajrat was prepared to sacrifice his son Ismail to offer him to the god or allah. After sacrificing it was seen that Ismail was substituted by a ram. To commemorate such devotion of Hajrat the muslims observed the day with gaily as a festival of kurban. Sacrifice of goats or cows is also done on this day by the Badias. In Malda and Murshidabad Bastis of Milangarh village it is observed that eleven cows and eight goats were sacrificed on this occasion. A cow is provided jointly by seven households while a goat is sacrificed by an individual family. Altogether 85 households do take part in kurban though there are 171 households in these bastis. It does not mean that other families are deprived of the joyful event. Some portion of the sacrificed

meat were sent to the households who could not take part in kurbanī due to their poor economic conditions. It is also kept in mind of the Bādias that if a person with his ability do not take part in kurbanī they are to be boycotted socially. So, to the Bādias, the festival of Eid-ud-zoha is not only a religious event but also a social function. As a religious ceremony they read doha from koran regularly for last ten days at dawn and on the day of Eid-ud-zoha they perform a congregation namaj. Female members pray at the mosque while the males perform namaj at id-gah jointly with other members of their community. All of them have to read to rekāt from the Quoran for a sijdah or bow down on the earth four times. Lastly, the Imam and other Alems discuss various rules and regulations prescribed in Islam.

The Bādias do not celebrate Muharam but the neighbouring muslim communities organise a fare or mela as a part of the celebration of the festival on first to tenth day of first month of Islamic calendar. As the fare is held by the side of Badia settlements the Bādias attend the mela to purchase some utility goods.

The Bādias do not support any sort of functions or jalsa except religious discussion. So they do not organise any milad, even on the day of Milad-un-Nabi. No kawali or jatra/theatres, function is organised by the Bādias as these are not mentioned in the Hadit. In Malda and North Dinajpur district the Bādias take part in alkap and gambhira— *two forms of regional theatre.*

## Haj

It is done only by the affluent member of their community. Three persons went to kaba or the sacred house in Mecca. It is not restricted to all of them but only done by the persons who can afford it.

Religious calendar of the Badias is shown hereunder :

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Periodicity</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place of Performance</u>
Prayer	Fozor Namaj	Daily	Morning	Home, open area and Mosque
	Johor Namaj	Daily	Noon	Home, open area and Mosque
	Ashar Namaj	Daily	Afternoon	Home, open area and Mosque
	Magrib Namaj	Daily	Evening	Home, open area and Mosque
	Esha Namaj	Daily	Night	Home, open area and Mosque
	Jumma Namaj	Weekly	Noon	Mosque
	Eid Namaj (Eid-ul-Fitar)	Annual	Morning	Id-gaha
Purification	Eid Namaj (Eid-ud-Zoha)	Annual	Morning	Id-gaha
	Ojhu	Before performing prayer	---	---
Fasting	Roja	Annual	Day long	---
Pilgrimage	Haj	Once in a life time	---	Mecca

Practice of religion also plays a vital role on socialising the younger generation. Institutions like Maktabas and Madrashas perform a major duty to inculcate both secular and religious knowledge.

## **Socialisation**

It is the process of inculcating the norms and behaviour into the children. It is the responsibility of the household to socialise the younger members. A child is asked to utter bismilla before taking meal. A child is told about tales from life history of the prophet. He or she is used to say toba after saying filthy words. The child is also trained to repeat the same thing after his/her mother when she reads kalma. A boy is dressed up with sherwani and a cap on his head to regard himself as an ideal and perfect muslim. At the young age a boy is taken to the Mosque on jumma day so as to make him familiar with various activities like performance of ohju, namaj and distribution of simui and sharbat (food and drinks).

## **Maktab and Madrasha**

These are the institutions where knowledge on religious and secular life of the Muslims is acquired by the children. In the beginning the children acquainted with Urdu language. Then they are trained to read the holy book - Quran written in Arabic language. Techniques of sijdah (bowing down during namaj) are also learnt by the children from the Maktab situated in all the Badia settlements under study.

In Madrashes languages, mathematics and science are taught formally. The degrees such as Hafej, Kari, Alem, Fazel etc. are conferred from the Madrasha Board. In Milangarh village a Junior High Madrasha School has recently been established.

## **Life Cycle Rituals**

### **Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is an important part in a woman's life. Though no elaborate function is observed during pregnancy, it is thought the woman gets herself firm footing in her in-laws house. She can not be divorced at least until the birth of a child. Special care in the form of diet has not been offered to an expectant mother. If she has any special desire regarding food her husband tries to give that from his own. Except husband no members of her family of procreation takes any sort of special care for her. Her household chores have even been not lightened. Pregnancy is considered as a normal occurrence to a female. At the later stage of pregnancy, the woman is sent to her family of orientation. There she is taken care of by her mother or grandmother. For her safe delivery as well as physical welfare some sorts of folk medicines are applied. Tabij or amulates are also tied with her body.

### **Birth.**

Birth is a gracious event in any household. At the time of child birth the expectant mother is confined into a room and no male person is allowed to enter into that room. Elderly women assist the midwife or Dai to conduct the labour. Immediately after birth Nari (umbilical cord) is cut with bamboo strip by the Dai. The Dai belongs to Chamar or Hari caste group belonging to Hindu religion. After cutting the umbilical cord Maulavi pronounced Azan and Ekamat into the ears of the new born baby. For the male child Azan and Ekamat are spoken on the right and left ears respectively but for the female the process is just reverse.



From the day of child birth both the mother and new born baby have to pass through the period of pollution or Atur. The room in which they are kept secluded is called Aturghar or Sutikaghar. Broom sticks are hanged on the gate of the Aturghar so as to keep away the evil spirits. After six days the pollution period being over the mother and the baby can come out of the Aturghar. The period may sometime be extended upto forty days depending on the economic condition of the household. They have to offer a feast just after the pollution period. The mother and the new born baby become purified through bath with soap and cleaning the clothes. Being purified the mother is expected to cook the food which is to be distributed among the relatives. The arrangement of this feast actually decides the period of pollution.

### **Name Giving Ceremony**

This ritual is known as Asika or Aqiqa. This is performed on the 22nd day of birth. Name is then given to the new born baby by any person. According to Hadith the aqiqa is performed. It is the task of the parents or the grandparents of the child. Kurbanī or sacrifice of a goat is done on this occasion. Before sacrificing the goat is allowed to drink salted water and then Maulabi pronounces Doha loudly so that both goat and the baby can hear it. In the Aqiqa of a male child a drop of blood of the sacrificed goat is taken and put into the forehead of the baby. It signifies that child would be strong enough to perform kurbanī or zabai at adulthood. It is learnt that kurbanī of two goats is needed for the Aqiqa of a male child and one for the female child. Shaving of head hair of the child is done after kurbanī. Shaved hairs are weighed and equal quantity of silver coins

or same amount of money is given away in alms. Among the Badias shaving is done by any member of their community. All the relatives and neighbours are invited to attend this function and they are served with meals. But the poor Badias can not afford this expenditure. They just distribute to the persons who attend the ceremony without the performance of *kurban*.

### **Piercing nose and ear**

This is an exclusive ritual for girls. It becomes necessary for the girls to adorn with a nose-pin and ear-rings. So piercing of nose is done at the younger age. This is usually made by an experienced woman of their community.

### **Circumcision**

It is a ceremony exclusively for males. Circumcision is an obligatory function (*farz*) and it is done between the age of 2 and 5 years of a boy. The boy is considered as a member of muslim religion after being circumcised. This also is regarded that the prophet was born circumcised (Roy, 1984). The name of this function is *shunnat*. The act of circumcision is done by *Osta* belonging to Hajjam group of Islamic religion. On the day of circumcision some relatives and neighbours are invited to a feast. The invitees also come along with presentation according to their capacity. Pant piece, shirt piece, cash of Rs.10 or Rs. 5 and even a packet of biscuit is offered to the boy as a gift. Payment is made to the *Osta* for his work. Glass, bowl, plate of bell metal plus cloth and/or Rs.100/- is charged by the *Osta* for his service but final payment is made through bargaining.

## **Puberty Rite**

Due to physiological condition every woman after a certain age starts menstruating. Onset of menstruation is called the attainment of puberty. The mother or the elder sister of the girl at her first menstruation advise her not to touch the sacred objects like kuran because she is polluted for the period of 4-5 days. She is even told that this is the sign of her womanhood, so she should behave like an woman. She is told to start Namaj or prayer and roja (fasting) after attaining puberty excepting on the dates of pollution.

## **Marriage**

It has already pointed out that the Badias consider marriage as an essential part of their life. Sanction on sexual intercourse or co-habitation is done after attaining puberty or pre-puberty. Though marriage is only observed at lower age for the female the males are married at later age. This is an essential ceremony because the continuation of their progeny is made possible and the license of sexual co-habitation is received through this ritual.

## **Talaq**

This is an event of dissolution of marriage. It provides a person the opportunity to be free from a married life. But departing a marriage tie is not an easy event. A period of Iddat (waiting) is given for revocation of talaq. Maintenance is not demanded by the Badia women after dissolution of her marriage tie. Remarriage after divorce is allowed and practiced in their society.

## **Death**

When a death occurs in a family the relatives are informed. Members of the community takes responsibility to inform the relatives residing outside the village. Dead body is called maiet. The maiet is covered with white cloth called kafan. The maiet is wrapped up with kafan. Aroma is sprayed all over the body of the maiet. Then the dead body is carried to the burial ground or gorosthan on a cot or khatia by 4 to 5 persons. These persons may not necessarily be relatives. Others make a procession following them. The dead body is kept at the gorosthan in such a way so that it's head would be placed towards north and the face is bent towards west. For the male maiet kafan is of three pieces. A piece is used as lungi, another to place on the upper portion of the corpse as chhadar and third long piece is used for covering the whole body. For a female maiet extra two pieces of cloth become necessary which are used as kurta or blouse and keshwan or covered on hair.

According to the Badias, dead body is not a profane object. The relatives and neighbours, therefore, reads doha from <sup>Qur</sup> Koran by the side of the maiet in side the room where he/she takes last breath. Then the maiet is taken to bath or ohju. The dead body is rubbed with soap and cleaned neatly with water. Water is poured from right to left. The wet corpse then soaked with a towel. The persons present there stand in a line facing west start reading the namaj or janaza namaj.

Some of the persons present there start making the hole where the dead body will ultimately be placed. The hole is about six feet depth and technicality of it is that the middle portion is slightly depressed longitudinally the sides form

ridges. On completion of digging the hole all the persons present there start reading the namaj or janaza namaj.

Then the dead body is placed on the deepest area of the hole in a manner as it placed on the burial ground earlier. Over the ridges pieces of bamboo are placed keeping some gap over the body. Next, a mat is placed on the bamboo pieces. At last all the persons present there bid a farewell called pronouncing bismilla and put handfull of earth three times each. There is no room regarding the placement of earth first. Any one can start this process and others follow him. The hole is then leveled with soil. Females are not allowed in the funeral procession. Widow, if any, has to break her bangles on the death of her husband.

Four to five days from the day of death Maulavi, assisted by other knowledgeable persons, reads Quoran in the house where death occurred. Mourning period continues upto forty days. During this time no social celebration is performed in the house where death occurred. If anybody breach this rule he/she is heavily dealt with the paich/jamat or the council of the Badias to look after the welfare of the community.

Regarding the area for burying of a dead body it is observed that the Badias do not share it with other Muslim neighbours as they do not share the masjid or mosque. In Milangarh village a plot of vested land has been used by the Badias for the purpose of burying the corpse. The local Muslims have a separate burial ground.

## Observation

The Badias follow the instructions of Islam laid down in Qur<sup>u</sup>an and Hadith in their religious-cultural life. Extra islamic activities are very limited in their way<sup>of</sup> life. Pirs or the spiritual saints are accepted to them. They believe in equality and mankind. In practice it is observed that the Badias are of orthodox type. They do not allow the elements of little tradition to take much room in their culture. Distinctiveness in performing namaj is also noticed. For the obvious reason the local non-Badia muslims do not interact with them at large. On the other hand, the Badias also try to maintain a separate identity and reflect it through performance of various socio-religious affairs according to their own customs. To other Muslims they are la-majahibi or non-religious group but they consider themselves Ahl-e-Hadith meaning the actual followers of Qur<sup>u</sup>an and Hadith.