

Badias Within the Larger Framework of Muslim Society

To the Badias Islam is the only source and means of their life. They are guided by the rules professed by the founder of Islam--Muhammad (PBUH). They believe that human civilisation continues in the direction the god or allah wishes to direct it. All the activities they perform are controlled by the single god or allah. He (god) has created man and according His will every man does his or her duties. No difference is basically there among men. Whatever the differences apparently seen are created by men only. These man- made differences last in the society the people do not understand Islam properly.

In this study of a Muslim group following: pertinent questions are to be answered: 1) what is Islam or who are the Muslims?

2) Whether all the followers of Islam do practice islamic rules?

3) ~~Is it~~ Does the Badias fit into the frame work of muslim society?

Various scholars have worked on the spirit of Islam. Islam is considered to be derived a three lettered word SLM which means peace, submission and obedience. For the establishment of peace, submission to the god (allah) and obedience His laws are necessary . This is the essence of islamic religion. "Islam advocates for peace and quest for the right way of life"(Mandal, 1994:28).

Followers of the Islam are known as Muslims. The Muslims are to believe in (a) oneness of god and (b) brotherhood among all the believers. According to Islam god (allah) is the only creator of the universe and His glory can not be shared with any one else. It negates any sort of intermediary between man and god. Islamic religion preaches direct and immediate relationship between man and god. No institutionalised role of priests or clergies is admitted in the religion of Islam or in its holy book Quoran. A common man, if he possesses that quality can conduct congregational prayer is really very significant part of Islam.

Equality of man is an important principle of Islam. In religious, in the sight of god, every person is equal to other one. Islam provides a room for insurrection (Yawmul Qiyana) in order to regulate human behaviour. Independence and dignity of man are admitted in the Islamic world view.

There are five fundamental pillars which are to be followed by a Muslim ---

- 1) Kalema --- professing the faith that allah is the only god and Muhammad is His last prophet.
- 2) Namaj --- performance of prayers.
- 3) Roja --- fasting in the month of Ramjan.
- 4) Zakat--- payment of compulsory alms.
- 5) Haz --- prilgrimage to holy Mecca.

But all these are not mandatory for every member of Muslim community. First three are obligatory whereas last two are optional. Islamisation is occurred

only through formal declaration of accepting the first one of the above rules in presence of witness.

Islamic view of society

A society is an agglomeration of human beings. In Islam it is termed as umma. Umma a society in which a number of individuals come together in harmony with an interaction of advancing and moving towards their common goal. Here, possession of a common faith and goal of all the individuals in the society is emphasized.

Material life of the people is not ignored by Islam. Economy is considered as the infrastructure of the umma. It is believed that "whoever has no worldly life has no spiritual life". The prophet Muhammad also has had his family life. He has prescribed the rules of inheritance of property and various other things. These prescriptions are enumerated in the hadith.

In the Islamic view of social life collectivity of the people, at least in terms of faith has been emphasized. Equality of status is acknowledged in Islam. No difference between high and low of pure and impure is maintained in umma. Relationship of the individuals in society is based on co-operation, sympathy, sacrifice and above all, Muslim brotherhood.

Whatever may be the tradition of Islam the followers do not always adhere to it, specially after the death of Muhammad in the 632 A.D. Variations between

the text and the context i.e. deviations from the Islamic rules is noticed in the actual behaviour of the Muslims (Mandal, 1994).

History of the spread of Islam in various countries depicts the dynamic aspects of Muslim society. Ideologically Muslim society possess non-hierarchical world view with mono theistic ideology of god (allah); worshipping in one language (Arabic) and following a common code of conduct. Islam encouraged to fight against the idolatory belief and exploitative nature of the earlier social system existed before Muhammad (Wolf, 1955). Before the rise of Islam the social organisation of Mecca was based upon kinship structure. Incipient form of classes existed by the name of merchants and dependents or slaves. Patron-client relationship between various kin groups; real or fictional, was transformed into an exploitative relation between the merchant and their personnels including middleman, debtors and wage earners. Number of agricultural proletariat had also increased in the outskirts of Mecca. Prophet Muhammad raised his voice in favour of toiling masses and opposed the practices of idolatory, sorcery, gambling and drinking habit. He was an employee to Khadeja and later married her. He pleaded for a high status of woman. Ultimately the prophet became the preacher of Islam and the ruler of Arab.

After the death of Muhammad his lieutenants known as Khalifas took over the management of this state and religion. Abu Bakar—father-in-law of the prophet, the first elected khalifa (632-634 A.D.) for several battles for the spread of Islam in several countries of West Asia like Mesopotemia and Syria. The

second khalifa--Omar (634--644 A.D.) extended the institution of khalifat upto Tripoly in the east and Afganistan in the west. Omar was succeeded by Osman (644--656 A.D.). Lastly Ali, son-in-law as well as cousin of the prophet Muhammad, was accepted democratically as a khalifa. But Ali advocated hereditary succession of the head of the institution of Khalifat. The supporters of earlier khalifas did not agree with Ali's advocacy. Ali wanted to confine the selection of khalifa within the quresh group only. The quresh group had a noble paydegree among the tribes of Arabia. Father of the prophet, Abdullah belong to this group though His mother was a member of Zuhara clan of the same tribes. Differences of opinion on the issue of leadership of khalifat ultimately weakend the strength of the institution and the resultant outcome was the emergence of Shia--Sunni controversy among the Muslims.

Followers of the early three khalifas are commonly known as Sunnis whereas those of Ali are the Shias. This set sentiment was actually gaining momentum after the death of Omar, the second khalifa. In the period of Osman and Ali rivalries between Banu Hasim and Banu Ummya clans had already been there. Muhammad belonged to the clan. After Ali's death Umayyads took hold of the leadership. First umayyad leader Muawiya (661--680 A.D.) brought about changes in administrative and political organisation of Islam. A drastic step was taken by him to shift the government from religious to secular force. He brought the end of republican khalifat and founded the monarchy rule. So the egalitarian and democratic politico-economic structure of Islam have been changed to

feudal- authoritarian type. Politics and religion stood apart during and after Umayyad dynasty. Divergence of the domains of political and religious elite aggravated the situation. After Ummayyads came Abbasids in power (750--1258 A.D.). Pre-islamic cultural characteristics have been incorporated in the Islamic tradition because of its enormous expansion within a short period of 300 years.

By the end of 10th century Persia and Turkistan came under the control of Islamic power and Khalifas' political autonomy was demolished. Indian territories were also experienced the attacks of the Turk rulers--Muhammad of Ghazni (Ansary, 1960; Siddiqui, 1974 and Singh, 1973). Before conversion Persian society was stratified into a hierarchical system. Syria followed philosophy of Christian mysticism before coming into the contact of Islam. This element of Greek culture is supposed to be the emergence of Sufism in Islam. In India also the tradition of Islam had to adjust with the great tradition of Hinduism and little tradition of the particular areas.

Islam took the stride in Bengal through trade and missionary activities. Later, of course, political domination by the Muslim imperialism was admitted. Unlike the northern and western parts of India penetration of Islam was started in the rural areas of Bengal (Roy, 1968 and Sarkar, 1972). Muslim saints or the Sufis established their khanquahs (the place for meditation) in the rural areas of Bengal. They showed their mysticism and spiritual power to the rural toiling masses. In thirteenth and fourteenth centuries activities of sufis influenced the

Bengali people tremendously. These sufis belonged to different schools of thought viz. Chistia, The Qadaria, Mujaddaria, Nakshbandia etc. Expansion of Islam in Bengal was also occurred through mass conversion and establishment of marriage alliance by the Muslim rulers. Mass conversion took place from lower cast of the Hindu society. Conversion from higher caste people was held for obtaining material benefit and political power. Whatever the reasons behind the conversion, the converted Muslims of Bengal continued the practice of local customs and participated in the Hindu festivals. Dual identity of Bengali and Muslims is conspicuous in their culture (Fruzzetti, 1984).

Egalitarianism of Islam has also a bolt due to emergence of various groups and subgroups in Muslim society. The first sectarian division, as already referred, is noticed among the followers of the khalifas in the form of Shia-Sunni dichotomy.

Depending upon the Muslim body of laws (sharia) the code of conduct for muslim individuals was prepared. These laws were again classified into 1) obligatory, 2) prescriptive, 3) permissible, 4) disapproved and 5) tabooed. Interpretations of these rules of sharia laid to various theological divisions in both Shia and Sunni sects. Theological divisions of Sunnis are Hanafi, Safei, Maleki and Hambeli. These names have been given after four theologians. Hanafis are again subdivided into Barelvi and Deobandi. The shias have ithiria-ashari, the Zaidi, Ismalia and Ishadi schools of thought. It is believed that

traditional Islamic law is not a uniform legal code. In order to make concrete legal provision jurisprudence (the science of law or the principles upon which the laws are based) on the shariah is necessitated. Generally spiritualism is not accepted by the Muslims but complete rejection of it is also impossible for some people. The spiritualists are known as Sufis, Pirs or Murshids. They have various orders of their spiritual practices which are called Silsila.

Status differentiation has been made among the Muslims of India. Ethnicity of the people has also been considered in categorisation of the Muslims. According to status three groups are discernible--Ashraf, Ajlaf and Arzal or Ardhal. Ashraf upper class which includes descendants of foreign Muslims as well as converted muslims from higher cast Hindus. This category is again subdivided into Saiyyads, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans. Sects from Arab, Shaiad from Persia, Mughals from Persian Gulf and Pathan from Afganistan or North-Western frontiers. Ajlaf or the middle class includes various functional groups majority of whom are the converts of functional caste groups of Hindu society viz. ~~W~~^Wavers, Barbar's, Tailors, Cotton Cardars and Oil Pressers etc. Arzal or Ardhal category includes the converted muslims from lowest rank of Hindu caste ~~h~~^eierarchy. Some of these groups are Halalkar, Lalbegi, Afdal and Bediyya (Levy, 1957).

In the line of status differentiation, census of India 1911. categorized the Muslim communities of Bengal into Sharif or Ashraf or Rais (who have either

noble birth, chief or leader of the community), Ajlaf/Atraf (wretches or mean people), Raizal/Razil (worthless people), Arzal (lowest), Kamina/Sitar (mean base) or Chhoto ~~fat~~ (Gait, 1911).

Broadly the Bengali Muslims of 19th century can be classified into two status groups--Ashraf or Sharif and Atraf or Azlaf. Landed gentry and the people having noble ancestry belong to the Ashraf category while the peasants and toiling masses are included in Azlaf category (Wali, ^{non-dated} ~~and others~~).

The Badias in the studied area emphasized that they are Ahl-e-Hadit. They do not belong to any majhab. They strictly follow Quoran and Hadit. Practices of kalma, namaj, roja, jakat and haj is there. No doubt about the religion of Islam among the Badias. They have no hesitation or oscilation in following great tradition of Islam. Their muslim identity is unquestionable. Theologically they belong to la-majahibi group which is a division of Sunni sect. It is also reported that the Badias of present Bangladesh and some parts of Malda belong to Hanafi Majhab (Hoque, 1986). Marriage between ^{Badia men and} ~~a~~ woman of Deobandi group of Hanafi majhab is observed in Malda district. In the sectarian division it can be safely inferred that the Badias belong to Sunni sect. Non-participation in Muharam also indicates their ~~f~~ detachment with Shia sect of Muslims.

No attachment with Pir or Silsila is noticed among the Badias. This clearly indicates that Islamisation of the Badias is not done by the influence of Sufism. Pre-islamic beliefs and practices like Milad, Tatcha, Tazia, Saba-barat are also absent in the list of their socio-religious ceremonies. These lead to the doubt on their claim of Pathan origin. Their ancestor relationship with the Afgan military force may be fictitious.

Habits of drinking and gambling are strictly forbidden in Badia society. Awareness and faith on traditional Islamic culture bring them closure to the Safei majhab and even the Ahl-e-Hadit is considered as a sect like Shia and Sunni (Mandal, 1994).

Extra Islamic beliefs and practices like wearing of tabij (amulates), hanging of broom stick on the gate of Atur Ghar (the room in which new born baby and his/her mother stay), fear and avoidance of inauspicious things exist there in Badia society. These beliefs and practices (some times refer to as superstitions) show their inclination towards little tradition of the areas where they are presently staying.

Traditional occupation of castration is a kind of functional aspect of caste society of the Hindus which ultimately leads the Badias to find a place in the Azlaf category of status division of the Muslims. Receiving the service of Dais and Hajjams also corroborate the belief that they believe in ascribed status. So it

would not be erroneous to think that, like many other Muslim groups, the Badias had also come from the lowest rung of Hindu caste society.

The Badias have a limited social interaction with other Muslim communities of their localities. In the field situation it is observed that they are looked down upon by the other Muslim brethren but Badias call the local Muslims as Miya Bhai. The Badias themselves are aware of their lower status and, therefore, they keep themselves secluded. Distance is maintained in performing Namaj with other Muslims. Connubial relationship of the Badias with other Muslims is limited.

Observation

Badias do belong to the Ahl-e-Hadith group of Muslims and strictly follow the principles of Quran and Hadith. They are said to be the descendants of the army personnel of Pathan ruler --- Sher Shah. Intermixing of blood is difficult to ignore. In the local social hierarchy they are placed at a lower position. The Badias of Darjiling district do not have any hesitation to show respect to the local Muslims. They offer a high status to the local Muslims of Barelvi group of Sunni sect. They address the local Muslims as Miya Bhai. The local Muslims, on the other hand, look down upon the Badias. Local Muslims are hesitant to interact with the Badias even at the time of performing Namaj. The Badias have, therefore, founded separate mosque in their settlements. Separate gorosthan (burial ground) is also used by the Badias.