

# Islam and the Modern Age

Volume L11, Issue No. 4 November 2025



Zakir Husain Institute of Islamic Studies  
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

# Islam and the Modern Age

Volume L11, Issue No. 4, November 2025

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## Editorial

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*'Boredom or discontent is useful to me when I acknowledge it and see clearly my assumption that there is something else that I would rather be doing. In this way boredom can act as an invitation to freedom by opening me to new options and thoughts.'*<sup>1</sup>

We are super excited to present the Volume L11, Issue No. 4, November 2025 of the *Islam and the Modern Age*. Firstly, we thank Professor Mazhar Asif, the honorable Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia. We receive constant and conscious encouragement from him. Besides that, he also inspires us inadvertently due to his personal and professional excellence. We also thank the Registrar of Jamia Millia Islamia, Professor Md. Mahtab Alam Rizvi. His support for academic endeavors is not only unconditional but also unlimited. The Editor-in Chief, Professor Habibullah Khan is the beacon of light that keeps ethics, erudition and enthusiasm intact. The editorial team looks up to him. It is the Assistant Editor, Dr. Mohd Sayeed Anwar who puts all the pieces of the jigsaw in their right place. His editorial skills add tremendous value to the written word. I thank all the members of the editorial board and the authors for their contribution.

The articles in this issue answer some old questions and also pose a few new ones in the process. The beauty is that both, the questions and the answers have a lot to do with a lived and modern understanding of Islam. The first article about *Al-Riba*; loans, debts, usury, early/late repayments and so on, highlights that Islam takes cognizance of the multidimensional nature of economics. It presents a deep understanding of the psychology of men in financial matters. It guides not just about managing money, but more importantly about managing your behavior and ethics while managing money. Another article examines the spiritual and social value of water. The author establishes that besides being a symbol of God's mercy water represents egalitarianism because like fire and pasture it is a need by everyone; differences in status

notwithstanding. The detailing of how Islam teaches to respect of water is incredibly amazing. An analysis of the spirituality that surrounds the Zamzam is beautiful indeed. The next article highlights the Islamic concern about responsible use of natural resources and protection of biodiversity. Establishment of a spiritual connection with the natural elements can definitely help because climate change is most about human intervention in natural processes. The article about Muslim participation in non-Muslim festivals addresses a very longstanding everyday concern. It reinforces the importance of respecting differences. It is only interaction that can lead to true understanding. Islam encourages being informed and interactive. It promotes the idea of perspective; perhaps if you look again from another position, you may be able to see something good that you had missed earlier. The next article has to do with compatibility and togetherness in workplace. The anxiety and losses that incivility, hostility and mistrust cause in offices is well known. They not only reduce organization effectiveness but also personal happiness. The author's assertion that the word *insan* has its roots in the word *uns* which means friendliness/humanness is in itself enough to convey a powerful message about being the best-behaved person in professional spaces. This dynamic volume would have been incomplete without a word on gender issues. Thus, we have an article which disentangles the threads of Islamic feminism right from its ontogenesis to the current concerns. Islam stands for gender equity under all circumstances and in all senses of the word. Domestic violence is one of the most sensitive subjects as far lives of women go because when they are unsafe in their own homes their misery is immeasurable. The model *Nikahnama* that the author mentions reinforces the Islamic take on modern day marriages and the protection of women therein. The last article of the issue narrates the shift in the Pangal community's marriage practices towards Islamic practices.

Life is all about taking decisions. The tiny choices that we make every day eventually make the big picture of who we are. More than anything else this issue is about doing whatever it takes to be free of spiritual and emotional burdens. It is imperative to note right here that such burdens can often translate into long term losses in the most modern sense of the word. We can make up our mind to not only accept but also enjoy the struggle and patience that goes into being good.

I thank all the readers who have this volume in their hands and have read so far. Without them all the gems that we have collected would go unseen.

FARHAT NASREEN

NOTE

1. Cf. Hugh Prather, *Notes to Myself My Struggle to Become a Person*, Bantam Books, New York, 1990, p. 17.



## Riba and its Prohibition in the Quran: An Attempt to Understand the True Import of a Quranic term

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**Riba**, rather “the *Riba*” (*al-Riba*), is an Islāmic term about which there is much confusion, because in recent times “interest” or “profit” offered by modern financial institutions has been equated with the *Riba*. In the Subcontinent, *Sood* and *Biyaj* too are equated with *Riba* though both are different from *Riba* as will be clear from the discussion below. By using “*Al*” (the Arabic definite article), the Qurān (2:275) has limited *Riba* to certain commercial transactions, in cash or in kind, which were in vogue in Arabia at the time of the advent of Islam.

### RIBA IN THE QURAN

The ‘Riba’ is explained in the Qurān that it is a *doubled and multiplied* charge on a loan (3:130). The Quran further explains that Riba is an attempt *to devour people’s wealth by false pretense* (4:161) *which includes payment or acceptance of bribe* (2:188, 4:29).

The *āyah* prohibiting *the Riba* was among the last *āyahs* of the Quran revealed to the Prophet (saws) and he, according to Caliph ‘Umar, died before explaining it (Ibn Kathīr 1/335f).<sup>1</sup>

**Riba practiced by the Arabs:** Arabs did not know “*Riba*” transactions in which a rate of usury was fixed at the outset. Instead, one loaned an amount of money or commodity or sold goods worth a certain agreed value on the understanding that the debtor/buyer will pay/return the loan after an agreed period of time without any addition to the agreed amount. No addition was paid or demanded if the debtor paid back the due sum at the end of the agreed term. But, if he failed, the creditor allowed him a relaxation for a further agreed period on the condition that the due amount is raised, usually doubled (Ṭabarī 4/59;

Jaṣṣāṣ 2/47). Another form of raising original loan in kind was that the debtor had to pay back a one-year old camel or sheep or the like at the end of the agreed term, but to get relaxation for a further period, he was forced to agree to pay back a two-year old camel and so on. This is the *doubled and multiplied Riba* mentioned in the Quran (3:130) (Ṭabarī 3/67, 4/59; Qurṭubī 4/202). Arabs knew only this kind of *Riba* and this is *the Riba* that was abolished by the Prophet (Qurṭubī 3/356).

**When did a loan transaction become *Riba*?** A loan transaction became “*the Riba*” when the creditor/owner of the capital unilaterally raised the amount of the loan at the end of the agreed grace period due to the inability of the debtor to pay back in time (Ṭabarī 3/69; 6/17). There is no issue if the increase was agreed at the time of concluding the transaction (Ṭabarī 3/69).

This form of “*the Riba*” was practiced by some people of Quraysh and Thaḳīf tribes (Ibn Kathīr 1/336). One of the main practitioners was the Prophet’s uncle Al-‘Abbās whose earnings of *the Riba* were specifically abolished by the Prophet in his last sermon at the time of the Conquest of Makkah (Ibn Hisham 1/603; Ṭabarī 3/72) but the original loaned capital was spared and the debtor had to return it to the lender (2:279).

***Riba on loans in kind:*** The other form of the prohibited “*Riba*” is to lend certain *specified* goods *in kind* on the condition that same will be returned to the lender by increasing weight, *e.g.*, one and a half or two *ratls* for a loan of one *ratl*. The following six goods have been specified in the *ḥadīth* for this kind of prohibited transaction: (1) gold for gold, (2) silver for silver, (3) barley for barley, (4) wheat for wheat, (5) dates for dates and (6) salt for salt. *Riba* has been prohibited in *only these six items* (Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, 931). Any increase in the returnable loan of these six goods is *Riba* while an increase in other items is not *Riba* (*ibid.*, 932). But if one kind of goods is exchanged by another kind of goods like wheat for barley or silver for gold, there is no issue and no question of *Riba* arises (Qurṭubī 3/347-350). In such non-*Riba* transactions, the quantity of the goods to be returned has to be fixed at the outset and it cannot be increased later in the case of the failure of the debtor to return the loan in time. Moreover, a debtor in distress must be given grace time to return the loan (2:280).

**Reverse *Riba*:** A form of reverse *Riba*, which too is prohibited, is for a creditor to tell the debtor to pay back his loan *before the agreed time*

and deduct a sum from the loan (Jaṣṣāṣ 1/566). It is also prohibited that someone should pay a fine while returning merchandise (Ibn Kathīr 1/490).

**Bribery and gambling too are *Riba*:** Bribery is prohibited because it is devouring people's wealth by unfair means, *bāṭil* (2:188, 4:29, 4:161, and 9: 34). Gambling too is prohibited for the same reason (2:219). Trading of something known with something unknown is prohibited, like trading in unharvested seed products or unplucked fruits or agricultural produce which is still in its ears because their actual yield is unknown at the time of the transaction (Ibn Kathīr 1/335). Such transactions are now called "future trading" when a produce is sold and bought *before* the actual weight of the produce is known or even *before* a produce is ready. This is a form of gambling which is prohibited in Islam.

**Islam prohibits exploitation:** The reason for prohibition of such transactions is to prevent exploitation of people in need. On the other hand, *any* trade mutually agreed between two parties is lawful (2:275, 4:29). The Qur'ān further says, "Allāh has permitted trade and forbidden *Riba*" (2:275). Trade (*tijārah*) by mutual agreement is allowed without any restriction (4:29) and there is "no blame if one can earn one thousand dirhams using one dirham" (Ṭabarī 5/20).

**Doubtful application of the term:** The issue of "*Riba*" has been complicated in recent times by extending it to transactions which do not fall under its prohibited specifications, *viz.*, one-sided raising of the amount of the loan in the case of the failure of the debtor to repay a loan, in cash or kind, which is a clear exploitation of a debtor's adverse situation. Moreover, the application of the term of "*Riba*" on bank "interest" fails to take into account the fact that banks do not *seek or take loans* from account holders, and also because account holders enjoy no power to force banks to agree to a certain required rate, let alone raise it.

**The modern scourge of inflation:** This doubtful application of the term of "*Riba*" to certain modern transactions also does not take into account the reality of inflation in modern economies as a result of the introduction of fiat (paper) money of no intrinsic value of its own and which could be printed at will by every government in the wake of America's unilateral abolition in 1973 of the gold standard as cover for

printing paper money. Today, inflation continuously lowers the value of deposited money which is not adequately compensated by the interest paid by banks. Inflation was unknown to the old-world economies when prices were set in gold and silver and remained static for centuries. This is not the case today. The interest or profit paid by banks, which fluctuates and is entirely decided by banks, hardly compensates the depositors for the loss they suffer due to inflation over any period of time.

**Duty of jurists to come with a reasonable and practical solution:**

Our jurists and scholars and *fiqh* academies should study these issues and come up with practical solutions. The following book, though old now, should be helpful in this reappraisal: Iqbal Ahmad Khan Suhail, *What is Riba?*, ed. Zafarul-Islam Khan, repr. 2005, New Delhi, Pharos (a translation of *Riba Keya Hai?* originally published in 1936). Urdu and Arabic editions of this book are also available from Pharos.

NOTE

1. The complete Hadith narrated in Sahih Bukhari is as follows: Ibn ‘Abbās (RA) said: “The last verse that was revealed from the Qur’an was the verse concerning ribā (usury), and the Messenger of Allah – passed away before explaining it to us. So, give up ribā and whatever is doubtful.” What I saw in Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr is as follows: Tha Ayah of Riba was one of the last Ayah to be revealed and the Messenger of Allah – died before he explained it to us, so leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt. Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, Vol. 1, p. 772. Mohd Sayeed Anwar

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BILAL AHMAD KUTTY

## Spiritual and Social Role of Water in Islamic Architecture

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### ABSTRACT

Water has played a vital role in Islamic civilization, not merely as a physical necessity but also as a profound spiritual and cultural symbol. This paper explores how water was incorporated into Islamic architectural traditions, highlighting its religious significance, aesthetic application, and social functions. Drawing upon historical case studies and religious texts, the study investigates the role of water in mosques, palaces, gardens, and public utilities and argues that water, in Islamic architecture, transcends functionality to serve as a bridge between the earthly and the divine.

### INTRODUCTION

Water is a central element in Islamic thought and architecture, embodying both physical necessity and spiritual metaphor. From the Qur'an to built spaces, water represents purity, life, paradise, and divine mercy. In architectural terms, this translates into its strategic use in courtyards, fountains, ablution areas, and gardens. This paper explores how Islamic architecture uses water not only to meet environmental needs but also to fulfill religious, aesthetic, and communal purposes.

### RELIGIOUS AND SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF WATER IN ISLAM

Water occupies a profoundly significant place in Islamic theology and cosmology. Its presence in religious texts, rituals, and metaphors highlights its dual role both a sacred and practical element. Within Islamic thought, water is seen not only as a physical necessity but also as a symbol of divine mercy, purity, and paradise. This section explores

the religious meanings associated with water and how these symbolic associations influence architectural practices across the Islamic world.

#### WATER IN THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

The Qur'an, Islam's central religious text, frequently emphasizes water as a sign of God's power and mercy. One of the most cited verses on the subject is:

*And We made from water every living thing.* (Qur'an 21:30)

This verse underlines the essential, life-giving nature of water and frames it as a divine creation. Water, in this sense, becomes a sign (*ayah*)—a symbol of God's creative power and sustaining presence in the world.

Another notable reference includes:

*He sends down water from the sky and revives the earth with it after its death.* (Qur'an 30:24)

This verse emphasizes not only the agricultural utility of water but also its metaphorical association with resurrection and spiritual renewal.

In the Hadith literature (sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), water is described as a right for all beings:

*Muslims share alike in three things: water, pasture, and fire.* (Sunan Ibn Majah, 2472)

This teaching highlights water's communal aspect, reinforcing the idea that it is a divine gift meant for equitable distribution.

#### RITUAL PURIFICATION AND SACRED CLEANLINESS

Water is central to Islamic ritual life. The most prominent expression is *wudu'*—the ablution performed before each of the five daily prayers. This involves washing the hands, face, arms, and feet with water, serving as a symbolic and physical purification process. The Qur'an states:

“O you who believe! When you rise to (perform) prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows...” (Qur'an 5:6)

Beyond wudū', water is also used in ghusl (full-body purification) after certain conditions like marital relations or menstruation, further emphasizing water's role in achieving ritual purity. These practices elevate water from a mundane resource to a spiritual medium that prepares believers to stand before God, embodying both internal and external cleanliness.

#### WATER AND THE CONCEPT OF BARAKAH (BLESSING)

In Islamic mysticism and general belief, water is often associated with barakah, or divine blessing. Water from sacred sources—such as the Zamzam well in Makka—is believed to hold spiritual properties. Pilgrims during Hajj or Umrah often drink Zamzam water for healing, protection, and spiritual purification. The Prophet Muhammad (saws) is reported to have said:

*The water of Zamzam is for whatever it is drunk for.* (Ibn Majah)

This reinforces the idea that water can hold intentions and serve as a conduit of divine grace.

#### WATER AND THE IMAGERY OF PARADISE

One of the most enduring motifs of water in Islam is its role in describing Paradise (Jannah). The Qur'an frequently refers to paradise as a place with "gardens beneath which rivers flow" (e.g., Qur'an 2:25, 5:12, 47:15). These rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey are metaphors of divine reward and eternal peace. This eschatological imagery has deeply influenced Islamic architecture, especially in the design of gardens and palaces. Structures were consciously modeled to reflect this heavenly ideal, using water channels, fountains, and lush greenery to create microcosms of paradise on earth.

#### SYMBOLISM IN SUFI THOUGHT AND POETRY

In Islamic mysticism (Sufism), water is often a metaphor for divine knowledge, truth, or the presence of God. Poets like Rumi and Ibn Arabi use water as a symbol of the soul's longing for union with the

Divine. The flowing of water may represent the movement of the soul toward its source, while still water might symbolize inner contemplation and divine reflection.

For example, Rumi writes:

*You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.*

In this spiritual context, architectural features like reflective pools or quiet fountains serve as spaces for meditation, inward reflection, and remembrance of God (*dhikr*).

#### ETHICAL DIMENSIONS: CONSERVATION AND EQUITY

The spiritual significance of water in Islam extends into ethical responsibilities. Wasting water is strongly discouraged, even when it is abundantly available. The Prophet Muhammad (saws) advised against extravagance, even when performing ablution by a flowing river (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad).

Islamic teachings also emphasize the just and fair distribution of water, which historically inspired innovations in water management systems, including *Qanats*, *Sabils*, and waqf-funded fountains, showing how spiritual values translated into communal ethics and architectural forms.

The religious and symbolic dimensions of water in Islam are profound and multifaceted. Water is not merely a utility; it is a sacred substance that cleanses, connects, and communicates the divine. These meanings have profoundly shaped Islamic rituals, ethics, and architectural aesthetics. From the Qur'an to the built environment, water remains a powerful symbol of divine mercy, spiritual renewal, and communal unity in the Islamic tradition.

#### ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRATION OF WATER

The integration of water into Islamic architecture is one of its most defining and evocative features. Across time and geography—from the palaces of Al-Andalus to the gardens of Mughal India—water has played a central role in design, not only to meet environmental needs but to express theological, symbolic, and social values. The architectural use

of water is thus both practical and metaphysical, reflecting the Islamic worldview where the material and spiritual realms are intertwined.

#### FUNCTIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

One of the primary reasons for integrating water into architecture in the Islamic world was climatic necessity. Many Islamic civilizations arose in arid or semi-arid regions, where cooling mechanisms were essential. Architects and engineers developed innovative methods to harness and circulate water to moderate indoor temperatures and sustain life.

*Key functional features include:*

- *Qanats* (subterranean canals): Developed in ancient Persia and used widely in Islamic architecture, these underground channels transported water from aquifers to surface irrigation and urban centers.

*Salsabils*: Carved stone or metal panels, over which water trickled, often located in courtyards to provide visual and thermal comfort through evaporative cooling.

- *Shadirwan*: Sloped marble platforms over which water flows gently, often located near mosques or madrasas, serving both decorative and cooling purposes.
- Wind catchers and water pools: Employed in tandem to circulate cool air into interior spaces.

In these ways, water was not merely decorative but integral to sustainable living and environmental control in Islamic cities.

#### SYMBOLIC GEOMETRY AND SPATIAL HARMONY

Islamic architecture is deeply rooted in geometry and symmetry, often reflecting metaphysical concepts of divine unity and cosmic order. Water enhances these ideals through its reflective surface, which mirrors the architecture and sky, creating a sense of infinite space and spiritual tranquility.

*Fountains and pools are typically placed:*

- Along axial symmetry lines, emphasizing balance and guiding movement through the space.
- At focal points, often in the center of courtyards or gardens, symbolizing spiritual or divine centrality.
- Within geometric garden quadrants (chahar bagh), representing the four rivers of paradise as described in the Qur'an (47:15).

This symmetrical integration is evident in both secular and sacred architecture, such as the Alhambra's Court of the Lions and the Taj Mahal's charbagh.

#### WATER IN MOSQUES AND RELIGIOUS COMPLEXES

Water features in mosques serve both ritual and aesthetic purposes. The most iconic example is the ablution fountain (mida'a or wudu' area), where worshippers purify themselves before prayer. These are often constructed in mosque courtyards and are architecturally stylized to reflect sanctity.

Examples include:

- The Great Umayyad Mosque, Damascus: With its elegant ablution fountains and vast courtyard, integrating water into its sacred axis.
- Sultan Hassan Mosque, Cairo: The central courtyard with its ablution basin serves both functional and spiritual symbolism.
- Blue Mosque, Istanbul: The courtyard fountain aligns with the grandeur of the domes and arches, blending utilitarianism with visual beauty.

Water in these spaces reminds the worshipper of physical purification and spiritual readiness, reinforcing the Islamic emphasis on cleanliness and preparation for communion with the Divine.

#### WATER IN ISLAMIC GARDENS: PARADISE ON EARTH

Perhaps the most profound expression of water's spiritual symbolism is seen in Islamic garden design. The Chahar Bagh layout divides the

garden into four quadrants by water channels, inspired by Qur'anic imagery of paradise:

Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring... beneath them flow rivers. (Qur'an 13:23)

These gardens served multiple purposes:

- Recreation and reflection: As peaceful retreats for rulers and mystics alike.
- Symbolism of Jannah (Paradise): Recreating the serenity and divine beauty of the afterlife.
- Political expression: Demonstrating the ruler's control over nature, power, and divine favor.

Notable examples:

- The Alhambra, Spain: Features narrow water channels, still pools, and intricate fountains integrated into pavilions and courtyards.
- Shalimar Bagh, Lahore: A Mughal-era garden exemplifying water's grandeur in cascading terraces and flowing streams.
- Chehel Sotoun, Isfahan: Reflecting pool that doubles the façade of the pavilion, creating an illusory realm of spiritual magnificence.

## FOUNTAINS, POOLS, AND REFLECTIVE SURFACES

Water is often used aesthetically through fountains and still pools, which serve various symbolic and psychological functions:

- Still pools represent contemplation, silence, and inward reflection—key themes in Sufism and Islamic spirituality.
- Fountains symbolize the dynamic flow of divine grace and mercy.
- Sound of water offers a calming auditory environment, masking urban noise and inviting meditation.

These features are used in:

- Palatial complexes (e.g., Topkapi Palace, Istanbul)
- Madrasa courtyards (e.g., Bou Inania Madrasa, Fez)
- Public squares and waqf-funded water features

These design elements merge form and function, invoking a deeper awareness of God's bounty and the layered meanings of water in life.

#### URBAN WATER ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLIC WELFARE

Beyond palaces and mosques, Islamic societies historically developed public water infrastructure driven by religious and ethical imperatives:

- Sabils (public drinking fountains): Often constructed along pilgrimage routes or in urban centers as acts of charity.
- Hammams (public bathhouses): Facilitated ritual and social hygiene, demonstrating water's role in both health and community bonding.
- Caravanserais and khans: Included wells, cisterns, and fountains for travelers.

These civic structures reflect the Islamic value of hospitality, public welfare, and environmental stewardship. Water was thus democratized—sacred, accessible, and shared.

The integration of water into Islamic architecture is a multidimensional expression of faith, environment, aesthetics, and ethics. From courtyards to gardens, and fountains to qanats, water has been employed not just for physical survival but for cultivating a sacred atmosphere that nurtures the soul, cools the body, and connects the community. Islamic architecture thus transforms water into a living symbol—at once divine, functional, and profoundly beautiful.

#### SOCIAL AND CIVIC ROLES OF WATER ARCHITECTURE

While the spiritual and symbolic aspects of water in Islamic architecture are deeply rooted in Qur'anic theology and metaphysics, its social and civic dimensions are equally profound. Water was not only a medium for religious purification and aesthetic expression—it was also a powerful tool for public welfare, community bonding, and ethical urbanism. From sabils and hammams to caravanserais and waqf-supported water systems, water infrastructure in Islamic societies reflected a moral commitment to equity, hospitality, and civic responsibility.

### WATER AS A CHARITABLE WAQF (ENDOWMENT)

In classical Islamic societies, water was often provided to the public as a form of ongoing charity (*ṣadaqah jāriyah*) through waqf—a religious endowment dedicated to public benefit. Wealthy patrons, rulers, or common citizens would sponsor fountains, wells, cisterns, or aqueducts for the benefit of travelers, the poor, and the general population.

- Sabils (drinking fountains): These were commonly installed in public squares, market areas, and along major roads. They were often elaborately decorated to reflect the prestige and piety of the benefactor. For instance, the Sabil of Qaytbay in Jerusalem (15th century) and the Sabils of Cairo are notable examples of this philanthropic tradition.
- Waqf inscriptions: These often included religious verses or statements of intent, emphasizing that the water was a gift for *fi sabīl Allāh* (in the path of God), reinforcing the ethical and religious dimension of social service.

This model promoted not only access to water, but also sustainable civic planning, where private wealth was directed to public good without state coercion.

### PUBLIC BATHS (HAMMAMS) AND COMMUNITY HYGIENE

Islamic cities were among the earliest to integrate public hygiene infrastructure into their urban designs. Hammams, or public bath houses, were common features in cities from Morocco to Central Asia.

- Social hubs: Hammams were more than places for ritual purification; they functioned as communal gathering spaces, especially for women. They hosted pre-wedding celebrations, social rituals, and casual community interactions.
- Urban health: In times when modern sanitation was unavailable, hammams played a crucial role in maintaining public health, reducing disease transmission through regular cleansing, and providing thermal therapy.
- Architectural integration: These bathhouses were connected to aqueducts, cisterns, or qanats and featured antechambers, hot

rooms (hararah), and cold plunge pools, illustrating advanced hydraulic engineering and a concern for user comfort and well-being.

### CARAVANSERAIS AND THE HOSPITALITY OF WATER

Another key civic use of water in Islamic architecture is seen in caravanserais—road side inns for travelers and caravans. Located along trade routes, these structures were indispensable in facilitating travel, pilgrimage, and commerce.

- Provision of water: Caravanserais were built around central courtyards with fountains, wells, or cisterns, ensuring animals and travelers had access to water.
- Ethics of hospitality: Providing free water to wayfarers and animals was seen as a righteous act. The Prophet Muhammad – is reported to have said, “*In every living being, there is a reward [for giving water]*” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 2363). This ethos was institutionalized in built environments.
- Design elements: Many caravanserais, such as those on the Silk Road or Ottoman routes, feature intricate water-circulation systems, sometimes including small hammams or irrigation channels to support agriculture and trade.

### WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN ISLAMIC CITIES

The urban fabric of many Islamic cities was woven with carefully planned water systems, reflecting not only technical knowledge but also a communal ethic.

- Qanats, aqueducts, and canals: These were maintained by local guilds and often funded by waqf. In cities like Fez, Damascus, and Samarkand, multi-layered networks ensured water distribution to homes, mosques, gardens, and markets.
- Public access points: Strategic distribution of cisterns, water tanks, and drinking troughs ensured equitable access to water in both elite and modest neighborhoods.
- Water clocks and civic pride: Structures like the water clock of Al-

Jazari in Diyarbakir (12th century) were not only technological marvels but also public attractions that educated and entertained the populace, blending science, art, and civic engagement.

## WATER AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

Water's civic role also finds its foundation in Islamic legal and ethical teachings. The Qur'an explicitly states:

*We made from water every living thing...* (Qur'an 21:30)

This implies a universal entitlement to water. Classical Islamic jurists (fuqahā') debated issues like:

- Public vs. private ownership of water sources
- Rights of access to wells and streams
- Obligations of neighbors to share irrigation water

Notably, the Prophet Muhammad stated:

*People are partners in three things: water, pasture, and fire.* (Sunan Abi Dāwūd, 3477)

This hadith has been interpreted as a legal and moral principle advocating public access to natural resources, forming the basis of early environmental and water rights laws in Islamic societies.

## GENDER, ACCESS, AND SOCIAL SPACES

Water architecture in Islamic societies was also sensitive to gender dynamics. Women's access to water was critical for ritual purity, domestic tasks, and social bonding.

- Separate timings in hammams: Women often had dedicated hours or separate hammams for privacy.
- Fountains and water carriers: In many pre-modern cities, female water carriers played important economic and social roles, delivering water and maintaining local hygiene networks.
- Design of homes (riads): Inner courtyards with small fountains offered private, gender-segregated spaces where women could enjoy cooling breezes and tranquility.

This architecture fostered safe, inclusive spaces without excluding women from the spiritual and social benefits of water.

Water in Islamic architecture was never a luxury—it was a social imperative, a civic duty, and an ethical expression of divine generosity. From sabils in public squares to hammams and caravanserais, water served as a unifying force across classes, genders, and communities. Rooted in Islamic teachings on charity, justice, and stewardship, these architectural innovations created urban environments where physical necessity and moral responsibility intersected. Islamic water architecture thus stands as a testament to a civilization where the act of giving water was synonymous with giving dignity, cleanliness, and life itself.

#### SUSTAINABILITY AND WATER ETHICS IN ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

Islamic architecture embodies a deep ecological consciousness, especially in its treatment of water—a sacred, scarce, and shared resource in many parts of the Muslim world. From pre-modern to contemporary times, Islamic civilizations developed sustainable water systems rooted in theological, legal, and environmental ethics. These systems addressed not only the physical scarcity of water but also its spiritual value, communal responsibilities, and intergenerational trust. In essence, the integration of water into Islamic architecture reveals a sophisticated and enduring ethic of sustainability.

#### QUR'ANIC FOUNDATIONS OF WATER ETHICS

The Qur'an emphasizes water as both a divine gift and a universal right:

*“And We sent down water from the sky in due measure, and We lodged it in the earth — and We are certainly able to take it away.”* (Qur'an 23:18)

Such verses instill a sense of awe, accountability, and restraint in the consumption and management of water. Water is never described as a commodity for exploitation but as a trust (*amānah*) from God, demanding ethical use and equitable distribution.

## TRADITIONAL SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN ISLAMIC WATER ARCHITECTURE

Islamic architecture traditionally employed a number of eco-sensitive designs to ensure the sustainable use of water:

- **Qanats (subterranean canals):** Used in Persia, North Africa, and Andalusia, these underground aqueducts tapped into mountain water and delivered it via gravity without energy consumption. Their engineering minimized evaporation and pollution.
- **Cisterns and Rainwater Harvesting:** Structures such as the Sabil-Kuttab of Cairo and homes in Fez, Morocco, featured rainwater collection systems that reduced dependence on rivers or aqueducts.
- **Greywater Reuse:** Some historical hammams and households reused water for irrigation, an early form of what is now called closed-loop systems.
- **Shading and Passive Cooling with Water:** Courtyard pools and fountains didn't just symbolize paradise—they naturally cooled surrounding air, reducing the need for artificial ventilation.

These features show that sustainability was not an afterthought in Islamic design—it was an embedded principle.

## LEGAL AND ETHICAL WATER GOVERNANCE (FIQH AL-MĀʾ)

Islamic jurisprudence developed detailed rulings related to water, often under the domain of *Fiqh al-Biʾah* (Islamic environmental jurisprudence). The classical jurists distinguished between:

- **Running vs. standing water:** Access and use were regulated to prevent hoarding and contamination.
- **Private vs. communal water rights:** Rivers, springs, and rain were considered public goods (*mubāḥ*).
- **No harm (*lā ḍarar*):** A foundational principle in Islamic law, it prohibited actions that polluted or restricted communal water sources.

The *waqf* system, mentioned earlier, also had sustainability built in: many endowed water systems included funds for maintenance, ensuring longevity beyond the lifetime of the donor.

## PROPHETIC TEACHINGS ON WATER CONSERVATION

The Prophet Muhammad – is reported to have practiced and advocated minimal water usage, even when water was plentiful:

*Do not waste water, even if you are at a flowing river.* (Sunan Ibn Mājah, 425)

He used only a small quantity of water for ablution (wudū') and advised moderation and gratitude for water. This highlights the moral imperative of conservation, and such teachings were widely internalized in architectural and urban planning traditions.

## ETHICAL URBANISM AND EQUITABLE ACCESS

Sustainability in Islamic water architecture is also reflected in ethical urban planning:

- Sabils in low-income areas: Not just elite districts, but even poorer neighborhoods were served by water fountains, indicating egalitarian values.
- Access without discrimination: Islamic teachings urged providing water to all beings—Muslims, non-Muslims, animals, and plants alike. This universality contrasts with many medieval and even modern urban systems that limit water access based on class or caste.
- Maintenance as a moral duty: The neglect or pollution of a water source was not just a civic offense but a sin, reflecting the deeply rooted ethical nature of water stewardship in Islam.

## CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND REVIVALS

In recent years, architects, environmentalists, and planners have revisited Islamic water ethics for sustainable design inspiration:

- Eco-mosques: Projects like the Cambridge Central Mosque incorporate rainwater harvesting and green roofs, echoing traditional Islamic environmental principles.
- Desert architecture revival: In regions like the Gulf, architects are

reviving the windcatcher (*bādgīr*) and courtyard pools to reduce energy usage.

- Water diplomacy and ethics: Inspired by Islamic principles, scholars and policymakers have begun to develop transboundary water-sharing ethics, especially in water-scarce Muslim-majority regions like the Middle East and Central Asia.

These revivals demonstrate that the sustainability practices of Islamic architecture are not only historically significant but also highly applicable to contemporary environmental challenges.

Islamic architecture has long recognized water as a sacred trust, integrating sustainability not just as a technological challenge but as a spiritual and moral imperative. From legal codes and architectural innovations to prophetic teachings and urban planning, water ethics in Islam offer a holistic framework that balances human needs with environmental care. As modern societies grapple with climate change, water scarcity, and ecological imbalance, the ethical and sustainable water wisdom embedded in Islamic architecture provides a timeless model for resilience, justice, and harmony with nature.

## CONCLUSION

Water holds a central place in Islamic theology, cosmology, and daily life—an importance that is vividly manifested in Islamic architecture across centuries and geographies. Far beyond its physical necessity, water in Islam is deeply symbolic: it purifies, nourishes, beautifies, and connects individuals to the Divine. Islamic architectural traditions have elevated water into a medium of spiritual reflection, aesthetic contemplation, and social unity. Whether through the serene courtyards of mosques, the rhythmic flow of fountains in palaces, or the life-sustaining networks of *qanats* and *sabils*, water structures not only addressed environmental realities but also articulated an integrated worldview shaped by faith, ethics, and community welfare.

This paper has explored the multi-faceted role of water in Islamic architecture through several key dimensions. The religious and symbolic significance of water—as a metaphor for divine mercy, paradise, and spiritual renewal—anchors its presence in sacred spaces like mosques,

madrasas, and shrines. The architectural integration of water not only served functional roles such as cooling and ablution but also enriched the sensory and aesthetic experiences of those who interacted with these spaces. The social and civic functions of water—visible in sabils, hammams, and public fountains—demonstrate the Islamic emphasis on communal responsibility, hospitality, and inclusive access to basic resources.

Furthermore, the ethical and sustainable treatment of water in Islamic societies—rooted in Qur'anic injunctions, Prophetic practices, and legal traditions—reflects a sophisticated environmental consciousness. Islamic architecture embedded these values into its very form, fostering systems that conserved, shared, and respected water long before the advent of modern sustainability discourses. Through the waqf system, legal rulings on water rights, and conservation practices, Islamic civilization exemplified a model in which architecture was not merely about construction but about stewardship.

In a world increasingly threatened by climate change, water scarcity, and ecological degradation, the principles embedded in Islamic water architecture remain profoundly relevant. They offer a holistic paradigm—spiritual, social, and environmental—for rethinking the built environment and the human relationship with nature. Islamic architecture teaches that water is not just a utility to be managed but a blessing to be honored, a symbol to be contemplated, and a trust to be preserved for future generations.

By revisiting and revitalizing these traditions in contemporary architectural practices, especially in Muslim-majority regions facing acute environmental challenges, there lies an opportunity to reclaim a legacy of ecological harmony, ethical urbanism, and spiritual design. Ultimately, the story of water in Islamic architecture is the story of a civilization that saw the Divine in every drop—and built its cities and sanctuaries accordingly.

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DR. MD. JAHANGIR ALOM

## Environmental Stewardship in Islam: Addressing the Climate Crisis in the Modern World

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### ABSTRACT

The contemporary climate crisis poses a severe threat to humanity, necessitating a search for ethical and sustainable solutions. This paper explores how Islamic teachings provide a powerful framework for environmental stewardship through the concept of *khilafah*—the human responsibility to act as caretakers of the Earth. Rooted in the Quran and Hadith, this principle promotes respect for nature as a sign of divine creation and urges protection of the environment. Key Islamic values such as the prohibition of wastefulness (*israf*) and the encouragement of sustainable living practices underscore a faith-based approach to ecological responsibility.

The paper critically examines modern environmental degradation driven by industrialization and consumerism and advocates for a shift toward mindful, balanced living, as prescribed in Islam. It demonstrates how Islamic teachings align with contemporary environmental goals, offering practical guidance in areas such as renewable energy, water conservation, and reforestation. Moreover, it stresses the importance of community involvement and global cooperation in combating climate change. By highlighting the relevance of Islamic ethics in environmental discourse, the paper argues for integrating these values into climate policies. Ultimately, it presents Islamic environmental stewardship as a viable and moral model for achieving sustainable development and addressing the urgent challenges of the climate crisis.

*Keywords:* Islamic Environmental Ethics, Climate Change, Sustainability, Quran and Ecology, Islamic Environmentalism, Modern Challenges

## INTRODUCTION

The modern world faces an unprecedented ecological crisis characterized by global warming, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. Climate change threatens the well-being of all living beings, raising moral and ethical concerns across societies and cultures. Religious traditions, including Islam, provide moral frameworks that can help address these challenges.

Islam emphasizes a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Environmental stewardship is deeply embedded in Islamic teachings, reflecting the role of humanity as caretakers of the earth.

### 1. The Concept of *Khilafah* (Stewardship) in Islam

In Islamic theology, humans are appointed as *khalifah* (stewards) on earth:

*"It is He who has made you successors (khalifa) upon the earth..."*<sup>1</sup>

This appointment carries a divine trust, implying responsibility rather than dominion. Humans must act as caretakers, preserving the balance (*mīzān*) Allah has established in creation.

The Quran stresses the order and harmony in nature: *"And the sky He raised and set the balance (mīzān), that you do not transgress within the balance."*<sup>2</sup>

Thus, disrupting the balance of nature, such as through overconsumption or pollution, is seen as a violation of divine trust.

The concept of stewardship occupies a central place in Islamic teachings regarding the relationship between humans and the environment. In Islam, humans are not seen as absolute owners of the earth, but rather as trustees and stewards entrusted with the care, management, and protection of Allah's creation.

This role of stewardship emphasizes responsibility and accountability. Humans are tasked with maintaining the balance and harmony that Allah has set in creation. It is not a position of privilege for exploitation, but one of the trust (*amanah*) requiring justice, wisdom, and moderation.

The Quran further describes the trust given to humanity in profound terms:

*"Indeed, We offered the Trust (amanah) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; but man undertook it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant."*<sup>13</sup>

This trust involves all aspects of life, including ethical conduct toward the natural environment. The idea of stewardship requires that human activities should align with divine commands and should not lead to corruption or destruction on earth. Allah warns: *"Do not cause corruption upon the earth after its reformation."*<sup>14</sup>

**Balance** (*mīzān*) is another fundamental Qur'anic principle closely linked to *Khilafah*. Allah declares: *"And the sky He raised and set the balance (mīzān). That you do not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance."*<sup>15</sup>

Thus, stewardship demands respecting the natural balance created by Allah.

The **Sunnah** (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) also strongly emphasizes environmental stewardship. Prophet Muhammad said: *"The world is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you as His stewards over it. He sees how you acquit yourselves."* (*Sahih Muslim*)<sup>16</sup>

This Hadith reinforces the concept of human beings as caretakers whose actions are under divine observation. Furthermore, the Prophet encouraged planting trees and taking care of animals, emphasizing that such acts are not only socially beneficial but spiritually rewarding: *"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah)."*<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, the Prophet forbade wastefulness, even when resources are abundant. He instructed Muslims to avoid wasting water during ablution, even if they were near a flowing river.

Thus, *Khilafah* in Islam is a divine mandate that encompasses environmental ethics, social justice, and spiritual accountability. It calls upon every individual to act as a responsible guardian of the earth, preserving its resources for current and future generations. Recognizing the sacredness of the environment and our role as stewards invites Muslims to live in harmony with nature, fulfilling a profound religious obligation rooted in the Quran and *Sunnah*.

## 2. Amanah (Trust) and Accountability

The Islamic notion of *amanah* (trust) reinforces human responsibility. This trust includes safeguarding the Earth and its ecosystems. Environmental degradation, therefore, is not only a physical problem but a moral failing for which humanity will be held accountable in the hereafter. The Prophet Muhammad (saws) said: "*The world is sweet and green, and verily Allah is going to install you as vicegerents in it in order to see how you act*".<sup>8</sup>

The concept of **Amanah** (trust) is one of the most profound ethical principles in Islam, deeply connected with the idea of accountability (*mas'ooliyyah*). *Amanah* is not merely a legal or social responsibility but a sacred moral commitment between a person and Allah, between individuals, and towards creation at large. In Islamic teachings, every gift, duty, or position given to a human being is an *amanah*, and fulfilling it faithfully is both a religious obligation and a criterion for success in this world and the Hereafter.

This verse highlights the enormity of the trust bestowed upon humanity, a responsibility so great that even the mighty elements of creation declined it. The human acceptance of this trust indicates both potential greatness and the risk of failure due to negligence.

*Amanah* in Islam covers various dimensions:

### a) **Trust between Allah and Humans:**

Life itself, wealth, knowledge, and authority are trusts from Allah. A believer must use these blessings according to divine guidance and for righteous purposes.

### b) **Social Trusts:**

In social relations, keeping promises, safeguarding secrets, dealing honestly in trade, and fulfilling duties toward others are all manifestations of *amanah*. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized this when he said: "*When a man is entrusted with something and he betrays that trust, he is a hypocrite*".<sup>9</sup>

### c) **Leadership and Public Responsibility:**

Positions of authority are seen as a heavy trust. The Prophet warned against seeking leadership for personal gain and said: "*Leadership is a trust, and on the Day of Resurrection it will be a cause of humiliation and regret except for one who fulfils its*

*obligations and discharges its duties completely.*"<sup>10</sup>

Thus, whether in political, economic, or religious contexts, amanah demands justice, honesty, and sincere service.

**d) Accountability (*Mas'ooliyyah*)**

Accountability is the natural extension of *amanah*. Since every trust is given by Allah, humans are ultimately accountable to Him. Allah reminds: "*Then you will surely be asked that Day about pleasure.*"<sup>11</sup>

Every blessing and every role will be questioned. The Prophet Muhammad further reinforced this idea, stating: "*Every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for his flock.*"<sup>12</sup>

This famous Hadith explains that every individual holds a degree of authority and responsibility — whether as a ruler, a parent, an employee, or a student — and must answer for the trust placed upon them.

#### THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF AMANAH

In a broader sense, environmental care, protecting public resources, and safeguarding societal trust are also included in the concept of *amanah*. Destroying nature, exploiting others, or misusing communal wealth are betrayals of trust and are severely condemned in Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad also said: "*There is no faith for the one who is not trustworthy, and there is no religion for the one who does not keep his promises.*"<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Amanah is a condition of true faith (*imaan*), and without it, a person's religious commitment is incomplete.

### 3. Islamic Guidelines on Environmental Protection

Islam offers a comprehensive framework for environmental ethics, emphasizing balance, justice, and stewardship. The natural world is a sign (*ayah*) of Allah's creative power and mercy, and humans, as custodians of the earth, are entrusted with preserving its beauty, resources, and balance. Islamic teachings drawn from the Quran and the *Sunnah* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad) establish clear guidelines for environmental protection, linking ecological care to faith and accountability.

Islamic teachings offer specific environmental principles:

*Prohibition of Waste (Israaf):*

The Quran forbids wastefulness: "*Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils...*"<sup>14</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad also advised moderation even in using water for ablution: "*Do not waste water, even if you perform your ablution on the banks of an abundantly-flowing river.*"<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Islam teaches that resources must be utilized wisely, avoiding extravagance and overconsumption.

*Planting Trees and Conserving Nature:*

Planting trees and conserving greenery are highly encouraged in Islamic teachings. The Prophet Muhammad said:

"*If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah).*"<sup>16</sup>

Tree planting is seen as a continuous charity (*sadaqah jariyah*), benefitting the environment and society alike. Protecting vegetation and natural resources is a form of worship and a contribution to societal welfare.

*Animal welfare:*

Islam forbids cruelty to animals. The Prophet Muhammad (saws) narrated the story of a woman punished for mistreating a cat, highlighting the sanctity of all living beings.

Animals are part of the divine trust. Islam prohibits cruelty towards animals and mandates compassionate treatment. The Prophet Muhammad narrated the story of a woman punished for mistreating a cat and a man forgiven for giving water to a thirsty dog. These stories emphasize the importance of kindness towards all living beings. Moreover, hunting or killing animals without just cause is strictly forbidden. The Prophet said: "*Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger*

*than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment.*"<sup>17</sup>

#### *Protection of Water Resources*

Water is considered a sacred gift from Allah and must be preserved. Besides prohibiting wastefulness, Islam mandates public access to water. The Prophet Muhammad said: "*Muslims share alike in three things: water, pasture, and fire (fuel).*"<sup>18</sup>

Even during ablution (*wudu*), Muslims are advised not to waste water, even if they are by a flowing river (*SunanIbnMajah*). These teachings collectively encourage a sustainable lifestyle centered on moderation, compassion, and responsibility.

Thus, monopolizing or polluting water sources is unethical and unlawful in Islamic law.

#### *Prohibition of Corruption (Fasād) on Earth:*

The Quran strongly warns against corruption and destruction: "*And do not cause corruption upon the earth after its reformation.*"<sup>19</sup>

Modern environmental degradation — deforestation, pollution, extinction of species — can be seen as forms of *fāsād*, violating the divine balance and harming current and future generations.

### **4. Addressing the Modern Climate Crisis through Islamic Principles**

Islamic environmental ethics can play a crucial role in combating modern ecological challenges:

#### *Promoting sustainable development:*

Sustainable development, defined as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Islam offers a holistic framework that integrates environmental stewardship, economic justice, and social welfare. The Quran describes humanity as stewards on earth: "*It is He who has made you successors (khulafā') upon the earth*".<sup>20</sup>

This stewardship entails a duty to protect and manage the earth's resources responsibly. The natural world is a trust from Allah, and its misuse or destruction constitutes a betrayal of this divine responsibility.

Transgressing Islamic principles through overexploitation, pollution, or waste leads to societal and environmental harm. Thus, maintaining ecological balance is a religious imperative. The Quran also condemns wastefulness: "*Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils...*".<sup>21</sup>

This teaching encourages moderation and resource conservation, both essential for sustainable living. The Prophet Muhammad further emphasized environmental care, urging Muslims to conserve water even when abundant and to plant trees, promising ongoing rewards for such acts.

Thus, promoting sustainable development is not only a social and ecological necessity but a religious obligation in Islam, aimed at achieving harmony with the Creator and His creation.

#### *Raising Environmental Awareness:*

Environmental awareness in Islam is rooted in the understanding that the earth and its resources belong to Allah, and humans are entrusted as stewards (*khalifah*) to protect and manage these resources. Islam emphasizes the intrinsic value of the environment, and environmental consciousness is not only a moral responsibility but also a spiritual duty.

The Quran emphasizes the divine creation of nature and its signs, urging humans to reflect on the natural world: "*And it is He who created for you from the green tree, fire, and then from it you ignite.*"<sup>22</sup>

This verse illustrates how nature's resources are intertwined with human well-being, and such interconnectedness requires mindfulness in utilizing resources.

This divine balance highlights the significance of sustainable practices and maintaining ecological integrity, which is central to raising awareness about environmental protection in Islam.

This directive calls on Muslims to minimize waste, consume responsibly, and avoid extravagant lifestyles. Raising awareness about the harms of overconsumption and wasteful practices is crucial to achieving sustainable living, in alignment with Islamic teachings.

Masjids, Islamic centres, educational institutions and religious

scholars (*ulama*) can lead campaigns for environmental awareness, linking faith with action. Promoting awareness about environmental conservation through education and community involvement aligns with the Islamic notion of collective responsibility. Public awareness campaigns, sustainable practices, and ethical consumption are in line with Islam's call to protect Allah's creation.

#### ENCOURAGING GREEN TECHNOLOGIES:

Islamic governments and organizations are increasingly investing in environmentally friendly technologies, aligning development with the *Maqasid al-Shariah* (objectives of Islamic law), which includes the protection of life and the environment.

In Islam, the use of natural resources is seen as a trust (*amanah*) given to humanity by Allah. As stewards (*khalifah*) on earth, Muslims are obligated to manage these resources responsibly and sustainably. The promotion of green technologies aligns with the Islamic values of conservation and the protection of the environment.<sup>23</sup>

Green technologies, which focus on sustainability and reducing environmental harm, are in harmony with this divine balance. From renewable energy sources like solar and wind power to waste recycling and eco-friendly agricultural practices, such technologies minimize human impact on the earth and preserve its resources for future generations.

Islam also prohibits wastefulness (*israf*), encouraging moderation in Green technologies, promote efficiency and reduce waste, reflecting this Islamic principle of moderation. Encouraging the development and adoption of green technologies not only addresses environmental challenges but also fulfils the Islamic duty of environmental stewardship, ensuring a sustainable future for all of creation.

#### GLOBAL ISLAMIC DECLARATIONS:

In recent years, climate change has emerged as a global crisis, prompting various international bodies to take action. Islamic scholars and organizations, recognizing the environmental and ethical implications of this crisis, have issued several declarations urging collective action

from Muslim communities worldwide. These declarations are grounded in the Islamic teachings of stewardship and environmental protection.

One significant declaration was made at the First International Conference on Climate Change in 2007, organized by the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium (IICCS). The conference concluded with a call for Muslim leaders to prioritize environmental sustainability, align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and commit to mitigating the effects of climate change. This declaration emphasized that climate change is not only an environmental issue but a moral and religious duty.

In 2015, the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change was signed by over 60 Islamic organizations, including prominent scholars, institutions, and religious leaders. The declaration emphasized the urgent need for Muslims to tackle climate change in accordance with Islamic principles, such as preserving the balance (*mīzān*) in creation and avoiding wastefulness (*isrāf*). It called for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the promotion of sustainable practices, and the use of renewable energy sources.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, during the Paris Agreement negotiations in 2015, several Muslim-majority nations, including Indonesia, Morocco, and the UAE, highlighted the importance of integrating Islamic ethical values into global climate action. These nations stressed that the Quran and Hadith explicitly call for the protection of the earth's resources and responsible stewardship.<sup>25</sup>

These global Islamic declarations emphasize that addressing climate change is an ethical and religious obligation for Muslims. They serve as a call for all people, regardless of faith, to act in unity and with justice to protect the environment for future generations.

## CONCLUSION

Islam presents a holistic environmental ethic rooted in stewardship, balance, moderation, and compassion. Reviving and applying these teachings is crucial for Muslims in responding to the environmental crisis of the modern world. Islamic values offer not just theological guidance but practical solutions for sustainable living. Guidelines are not mere suggestions but binding duties for every Muslim. In the face

of modern ecological crises, Islamic teachings offer valuable resources for fostering an ethic of environmental responsibility.

By reviving these principles, Muslims can contribute to global efforts for sustainable development and environmental justice, fulfilling their spiritual obligation to be protectors, not destroyers, of Allah's creation.

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2. Qur'an 55:7–8, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.
3. Qur'an 33:72, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.
4. Qur'an 7:56.
5. Qur'an 55:7–9, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.
6. Sahih Muslim 2742, Book 49, Hadith 12.
7. Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 39, Hadith 513, accessed May 11, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2320>.
8. Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Hadith 99 (Hadith 2742), narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (RA).
9. *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 2, Hadith 33; *Sahih Muslim*, Book 1, Hadith 112.
10. *Sahih Muslim*, Book 33, Hadith 99 (Hadith 1825), narrated by Abu Dharr.
11. Qur'an 102:8 (Surah At-Takathur, verse 8).
12. *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 92, Hadith 422; *Sahih Muslim*, Book 20, Hadith 4741.
13. Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal 12383.
14. Qur'an 17:27, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.
15. *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 1, Hadith 425.
16. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 41, Hadith 1.
17. *Sunan an-Nasa'i*, Book 43, Hadith 86.
18. *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 16, Hadith 2473.
19. Surah Al-A'raf 7:56.
20. Qur'an, *Surah Fatir* 35:39.
21. Qur'an, *Surah Al-Isra* 17:27.
22. Qur'an, *Surah Ya-Sin* (36:80).
23. Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 25–30.
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WARIS MAZHARI

## Muslims' Participation in Non-Muslim Festivals and Functions in Medieval India: The Historical and Islamic Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

India has witnessed a rich and harmonious tradition of Hindu-Muslim relations. A significant aspect of this tradition has been the participation of Muslims in non-Muslim festivals and ceremonies. Rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, along with Sufi saints and common Muslims, actively fostered a composite culture, and one of the key expressions of this was their engagement with non-Muslim festivities. Historically, Muslim rulers in India prioritized political pragmatism and leaned towards more inclusive and humanistic interpretations of Islam, rather than adhering strictly to narrow jurisprudential positions. This paper explores these dynamics within the dual frameworks of India's cultural history and Islamic jurisprudence.

Social gatherings, including festivals, provide a valuable occasion venue for people of different faith backgrounds to interact. Such social interaction between people of different faith communities is indispensable for building a harmony in a plural society. This being the case, the issue of Islamic teachings about Muslim participation in festivals and functions organized by others assumes particular relevance. Some Muslims believe that Islam prohibits such participation. Others believe that such participation may be permissible under certain conditions. Yet others may have no reservations at all about this. What, then, does Islam have to say about the issue?

To better appreciate Islamic teachings about Muslim participation in festivals and functions of others, it is important to note that Islam insists on respect and compassion for all human beings. After finishing his prayers, the Prophet would beseech God thus: 'O God! The Sustainer of myself and of all things, I bear witness that all the slaves

of God are brothers to each other'. <sup>1</sup>To actualize this vision of universal brotherhood and solidarity, it is imperative that Muslims and people of other faiths establish close and friendly relations. They should help each other and share in each other's joys and sorrows. This is indispensable for building a harmonious society.

The Quran (60:8) commands Muslims thus:

*He [God] does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you on account of your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves the just.*

When the dead body of Abdullah Ibn Ubay, the hypocrite and staunch enemy of the Prophet (saws) had been laid in his grave, the Prophet (saws) placed his own shirt on it. According to Jabir Ibn Abdullah, the narrator of this report, the Prophet (saws) did so because Abdullah Ibn Ubay had provided the shroud for the Prophet's uncle, Abbas (RA) when he died in the battle of Uhud. <sup>2</sup>Thus, the Prophet (saws) repaid Ibn Ubay for this deed. This action clearly suggests that we must repay goodness with goodness, even if it relates to someone who is an inveterate foe, whether Muslim or someone of another faith background.

Generally speaking, in the early and classical Muslim period, non-Muslims living under Muslim rule were not pushed into separate ghettos where they would have had no social interaction with Muslims. This is quite in contrast to pre modern Europe where, for instance, Jews were confined to their own localities.<sup>3</sup> Often, after conquering new lands, Muslim rulers settled Muslims in the towns and localities where pre-existing non-Muslim communities lived. This inevitably promoted considerable interaction between Muslims and others, at the social, economic, and cultural and even religious levels.

Today, misunderstanding abounds as to Islamic teachings about relations between Muslims and others, including about whether or not it is permissible for Muslims to establish friendly social relations with people of other faiths. Not just non-Muslims but even many Muslims themselves suffer from serious misconceptions about these teachings. One major cause for this is certain views of the early Muslim jurists (*fuqaha*) and inflexible ulema about inter-community relations, which, one must stress, are not in accordance with true Islamic teachings

but which continue to be upheld by many Muslims as normative. Accordingly, they frown upon Muslims participating in religious and other social functions of other communities and from generally socializing with them. This attitude has crucial implications for relations between Muslims and others in a religiously plural society, working to severely limit and curtail them.

#### THE INDIAN CONTEXT: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

Hindus and Muslims have been living with each other in India for more than 1200 years. Islam first entered India in the southern Malabar region, through the agency of Arab traders and missionaries, who used peaceful means to spread the faith. They impressed the local Rajas with their character, for which they won their respect. Consequently, they were able to closely mix with the local populace and establish a place for themselves in their hearts.

Not long after this, Muslims established a presence in northern India, with the invasion of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim (d.715) in the early eighth century. This was followed by the invasions of Afghans and Turks from Central Asia. A large number of Muslims settled in India in their wake. Unlike in the case of the early Muslims in Malabar, this new Muslim presence was not welcomed by many local Indians. This is because these Muslims had entered India as invaders, who then became rulers of the land. Yet, despite this, gradually these Muslims established links with the local people, leading to the emergence of a broadly-shared culture:

The Muslims who came into India made it their home. They lived surrounded by the Hindu people and a state of perennial hostility with them was impossible. Mutual intercourse led to mutual understanding. Many who had changed their faith differed little from those whom they had left. Thus after the first shock of conquest was over, the Hindus and Muslims prepared to find a *via media* whereby to live as neighbors. The effort to seek a new life led to the development of a new culture which was neither exclusively Hindu nor purely Muslim. It was indeed a Muslim-Hindu culture. Not only did Hindu religion, Hindu art, Hindu literature and Hindu science absorb Muslim elements, but the

very spirit of Hindu culture and the very stuff of Hindu mind were also altered, and the Muslim reciprocated by responding to the change in every walk of life.<sup>4</sup>

This intermingling also gave rise to and was further promoted by Bhakti and Sufi traditions, both of which promoted a remarkable cultural synthesis between Hindus and Muslims.

One aspect of this shared culture was the widespread participation of Hindus and Muslims in each other's functions and religious festivals. A number of Muslim rulers participated or shared in Hindu festivals, sometimes in order to promote their political interests. There is no doubt, though, that this also helped promote closer bonds between Muslims and Hindus. Writing in the Tughlaq period, the historian *Isami* notes that Muhammad bin Tughlaq (d.1351) used to celebrate Holi with his Hindu nobles.<sup>5</sup>The 15<sup>th</sup> century Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin of Kashmir also participated in Hindu festivities.

A number of Sufis of this period are said to have celebrated Basant, the popular north Indian Hindu spring festival, with much gusto. An interesting story is told as to how this began.

The death of his nephew Maulana Taqiuddin Nuh caused the noted Sufi saint of Delhi Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325) deep distress and sorrow. It so happened that just then, a group of Hindus, singing and making merry, passed by on their way to the Kalkaji temple to offer saffron flowers there on the occasion of the Basant festival. On seeing them, Amir Khusro, a close disciple of Khwaja Nizamuddin, burst out of his sadness and, in a state of revelry, rushed to meet his master, who was at that time at his nephew's grave. On seeing Khusro and hearing the verses in Hindi and Persian that he had composed on witnessing the joyous Hindu pilgrims, Khwaja Nizamuddin smiled. And, since that day, whenever Hindus headed towards the Kalikaji temple, Sufis of Delhi would take saffron flowers in their hands and head towards the shrine of Maulana Taqiuddin Nuh, taking along with them *qawwals* and chanting mystical verses.<sup>6</sup>

This, then, is how the Muslims of Delhi began celebrating the Basant festival. Soon, it became a fifteen-day festival at numerous Sufi shrines in the city. During this period, Muslim women would wear yellow or Basanti-coloured clothes and sing Basant songs, like their Hindu sisters.

However, it should also be noted that most of Sufis who strictly adhered to the Shari'ah did not participate in Hindu festivals such as Holi, Dussehra, and Diwali.

The period of Mughal rule in India was known for its religious tolerance, and almost all Mughal Emperors (Aurangzeb (d. 1707) was one exception to this) participated in various Hindu festivals. Holi and Diwali were celebrated inside the royal palace during the reign of Akbar (d. 1605), and 'ordinary' Muslims, emulating the Emperor, also began doing so. Aurangzeb prohibited these festivals from being celebrated inside the palace, but many common Muslims continued to do so. In his memoirs, *Tuzk-e Jahangiri*, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (d. 1627), son of Akbar, wrote:

(On the occasion of the Raksha Bandhan festival) Hindu nobles would tie rakhis on my father's hand, decorated with rubies, pearls and other precious jewels. When this became too much to bear, my father instructed them to tie only a simple silk thread on his hand. In my time, the (Hindu) nobles also did the same, and then I also issued an order that they tie only a silk thread on my hand.<sup>7</sup>

Dussera and Diwali were also celebrated with much gusto in the courts of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.<sup>8</sup> According to the *Alamgir Namah*, Dussera was also celebrated even in Aurangzeb's court.<sup>9</sup> There were a number of Hindu servant-girls in the royal palace in Akbar's and Jahangir's reign. The Mughal princesses played Holi with them and while visiting Hindu Rajput princesses, they would join them in the revelry.<sup>10</sup>

Later Mughal emperors—such as Shah Alam II, Akbar Shah II, and Bahadur Shah Zafar—are reported to have celebrated various Hindu festivals alongside their Hindu and Muslim courtiers. Shah Alam II himself noted that Diwali was celebrated within the royal palace.<sup>11</sup> The late Mughal historian Munshi Fayazuddin describes the Dussera celebrations in Bahadur Shah Zafar's palace in these words:

On the day of Dussera, the Emperor assembled his court. A Neel kanth bird was made to fly before him. Then, the keeper of the royal birds brought out some falcons. The Emperor placed a falcon on his hand and then dismissed the court. In the evening, the head of the stables applied mehendi on the special horses. The Emperor inspected them and, giving the man a reward, dismissed him.<sup>12</sup>

The Tuzk-e Jahangiri also indicates that in the courts of Akbar and Jahangir, horses and elephants were richly decorated and brought before the Emperor on the occasion of Dussera, in accordance with Hindu traditions.

Like the Mughals, the Nawabs of Awadh also celebrated numerous Hindu festivals. The famous Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810) wrote two *mathnawis* on Holi, which describe very evocatively the scene of this festival being celebrated in the court of Nawab Asafud Daula (d. 1797).

#### PARTICIPATION OF COMMON MUSLIMS IN HINDU FESTIVALS

Following the practice of numerous Muslim rulers of India who patronized and participated in various Hindu festivals, many 'common' Muslims did the same. This was particularly the case with numerous recently-converted Muslim communities or such groups that had only partially or nominally converted to Islam and still maintained many of their pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. It was common for them to attend local fairs, some of which were Hindu in character. Evidence for this is plentiful in the historical records, and numerous Urdu poets, such as Nazir Akbarabadi, Zahuruddin Hatim, and Amanat Lakhnavi, even wrote poems on such festivals and fairs.<sup>13</sup>

It is obvious that some aspects of these Hindu festivals that Muslim rulers and subjects participated may not have been in accordance with the principles and rules of the Shariah, but to the extent that it was possible to legitimize this participation within the limits of the Shariah, many of the ulema did not stop Muslims from doing so. Muslim rulers who participated in such festivals may well have been aware that their actions were not in full accordance with the Shariah, but they possibly felt that that helped gain legitimacy for themselves from their Hindu subjects and facilitated peace and harmony in their domains. For some, however, it was sheer entertainment.

In describing the active participation of Muslim rulers and common Muslims in these festivals I do not mean to pass any judgment on the phenomenon. Rather, my aim has been to present an important, and not often recognized, part of the history of Hindu-Muslim relations in India in order to highlight the shared cultural traditions that the

interaction between the two communities gave birth to. I also wish to indicate how deeply the Indian Muslim rulers and their Muslim subjects were rooted in the Indian cultural milieu.

#### THE SHARIAH POSITION ON MUSLIM PARTICIPATION IN NON-MUSLIM FESTIVALS

Having discussed the participation of Muslims in non-Muslim festivals from the cultural and historical points of view and focusing on the specific case of medieval India, it is crucial to also look at the issue from the perspective of the Shariah. Islam, as we have seen in previous chapters, does not prevent Muslims from interacting closely with the non-Muslims in whose midst they live amidst. If members of a plural society are not bound closely together through strong ties of friendship, interaction and mutual assistance, such a society will soon disintegrate. At the same time, it must be stressed that Islam has its own views, beliefs, code of ethics, and social rules, which it exhorts its followers to abide by, including as regards Muslim participation in festivals of others.

The classical fuqaha tried to lay down the limits, forms and conditions regulating Muslim participation in non-Muslim festivals and other social gatherings and functions. These have been discussed at length in the books of fiqh, particularly in the sections that deal with relations with non-Muslim zimmi. The vast majority of these fuqaha were of the view that it was not permissible in the Shariah for Muslims to participate in non-Muslim festivals. They argued that it was because these festivals are religious in nature and involve aspects of polytheism, which Islam cannot compromise with. Invoking several Qur'anic verses and hadith reports, they asserted that for Muslims to participate in non-Muslim festivals is clearly forbidden.

One hadith that is quoted to back this stance relates:

It is narrated from Anas Ibn Malik that when the Prophet (saws) of Allah reached Medina, the people used to observe a festival that lasted for two days. He asked what these two days were, and his Companions replied that in the days of ignorance they used to play and make merry on those days. The Prophet (saws) then said that Allah had given two better days than these: Eid ul-Azha and Eid ul-Fitr.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, the Caliph Umar is said to have advised, 'Stay away from the festivals of the enemies of Allah.'<sup>15</sup>

Numerous other such reports are referred to and discussed in great detail in 14<sup>th</sup> century. Ibn *Taimiyah's Iqtiza al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* ('The Requirements of the Straight Path'). Ibn Taimiyah sternly forbids Muslims from participating in non-Muslim festivals, insisting that it is forbidden in Islam and a cause for provoking Divine wrath.<sup>16</sup>This remains the position of a significant section of the ulema today as well.

The fact of the matter, however, is that the fiqh perspectives that are offered in order to back the above claim are characterized by inordinate strictness, harshness and narrowness. Functions and other gatherings of people of other faiths which can be considered religious festivals, might involve somewhat, from the Islamic perspective could be considered as un-Islamic, polytheistic, aspects. But on the other hand, there are other functions that are not, in essence, religious in nature. They could be called social functions or, at best, semi-religious functions. They mark various important life-cycle events, such as marriage, birth, death, or the inauguration of a shop or a building, and various other occasions marking joy and sorrow. It may be that some un-Islamic practices are observed during these functions. However, it appears that there is nothing wrong if Muslims avoid engaging in these practices themselves and still participate in these functions. This cannot be construed as tantamount to participating in polytheistic celebrations that many of the *fuqaha* have condemned, based on their own particular interpretation of the Islamic scriptural sources.

It is necessary to properly determine the rules, limits and conditions of Muslims being allowed to participate in non-Muslim religious festivals. If on the occasion of a Hindu festival, for instance, a Muslim accepts the invitation of a Hindu friend to visit his house, participates in the joys of the festival and presents gifts to him, is this forbidden according to the Shariah, or is it permissible? This is a question that many Muslims might ask. Similarly, in a plural society, is it at all proper for a Muslim to refuse his Christian colleague's invitation to visit his home to attend a Christmas party? These issues need to be clarified keeping the need for harmonious inter-community relations in mind.

The classical *fuqaha* permitted Muslims to set up stalls and shops in places where non-Muslims celebrate their religious as well as secular social

functions. They allowed them to earn a profit from such commercial activities. This is, in a sense, a sort of participation in these festivals and functions. Indeed, it can even be said to be a form of cooperation and promotion of such festivals and functions. In this regard, the question arises if the participation of Muslims in non-Muslim fairs that are generally associated with some or other non-Muslim religious festival but whose basic purpose is to provide popular entertainment can be said to be tantamount to participating in non-Muslim religious festivals, which the fuqaha forbid. It is a well-known fact that many Muslims do participate in such gatherings, where they enjoy the entertainment that is provided therein. Some of this entertainment is clearly religious in nature or background. Can seeing such programmes be really considered to be tantamount to participating in non-Muslim religious festivals, as many ulema claim?

It is necessary to discuss these issues and evolve suitable responses keeping in mind the sensitivities of living in a plural society and the demands of collective social existence, in the light of which we can develop the necessary possibilities within the broad framework of the Shariah. The classical fuqaha, it must be noted, did indeed develop such possibilities and spaces for Muslims living in what they termed as *dar ul-harb* ('Abode of War') or *dar ul-kufr* ('Abode of Infidelity') (which, incidentally, are terms and concepts that are not mentioned in the Quran or prophetic tradition and are not at all relevant today). For instance, Ibn Taimiyah, who is noted for his extremely hostile approach to inter-community relations, writes in his book *Iqtida' al Sirat al Mustaqim*:

The prohibition on imitating non-Muslims and the commandment to distinguish oneself [externally] from them relates to the context when the deen [Islam] is already in a position of domination. When, in the beginning, the Muslims were weak, these commandments were not given. Then, when the deen received power and domination, these commandments were issued. In this way, Muslims living in dar ul-harb and dar ul-harb are not obliged to abide by the commandment to distinguish themselves externally from non-Muslims, because this might cause damage [to them]. Indeed, in some such cases it is advisable, or, sometimes even necessary, for Muslims to share in the external practices and ways of [the non-Muslims] if this is in the interests of the deen or in accordance with higher purposes.<sup>17</sup>

This comment by Ibn Taimiyah is of crucial importance. He makes a critical distinction here between the conditions of Muslims living in a state of numerical and political dominance and those of their co-religionists living as minorities, and accepts that different rules might apply to them in matters relating to adopting certain practices of non-Muslims (provided they do not contravene Islamic teachings, such as monotheism). In this way, he is able to highlight the flexibility of Shariah rules depending on changed social contexts.

Unfortunately, many of the Indian fuqaha and muftis do not appreciate this very crucial point that Ibn Taimiyah makes here. Instead, they insist that the fiqh formulations that were developed in a period of Muslim political dominance be strictly applied to a vastly different context today, including in places where Muslims are a minority. This, in my view, is not a realistic approach. To seek to blindly impose fiqh prescriptions that were developed in a medieval context of Muslim political domination on the contemporary Indian context can only create greater problems for Muslims, rather than solving them.<sup>18</sup>

In today's context of religious pluralism, especially in countries where Muslims are a minority, it is necessary to review some of the views of the classical fuqaha on such vexed issues as 'imitating' non-Muslims, (Tashabbuh *bil kuffar*) cooperating with them and participating in their functions. These issues must be seen from not the lens of the classical fiqh of Muslim domination but, rather, from within the emerging paradigm of what is called *fiqh ul-aqalliyat* or 'fiqh for [Muslim] minorities', which seeks to steer Muslim minorities away from adopting extremist positions and, while enabling them to abide by the basic principles of Islam, facilitates their adjustment to contemporary political and cultural realities and demands.

## CONCLUSION

The participation of Muslims in Hindu festivals stands as a powerful example of communal tolerance and coexistence in Indian history. This practice played a vital role in strengthening relations between the two communities. Muslim intellectual elites—and particularly the Sufis—strongly advocated the ideal of universal brotherhood and emphasized religious harmony, a message rooted in a well-known Prophetic

tradition: “All creatures are the family of God, and the most beloved to God is the one who is kindest to His family.”<sup>19</sup>

Importantly, the conduct of Muslim rulers in India often aligned with the inclusive practices of the Sufis, especially when viewed through the lens of political pragmatism, which they frequently prioritized over rigid interpretations of Sharia. Referring to the policies of various rulers during the Sultanate and Mughal periods, historian Muzaffar Alam argues that these rulers implemented measures that served both their political interests and the well-being of their subjects. In doing so, they often disregarded the conservative or sectarian rulings of contemporary jurists.<sup>20</sup>

Regrettably, such traditions of tolerance and communal harmony are now increasingly threatened by rising religious fanaticism and bigotry. In this context, it is imperative for contemporary scholars and public intellectuals to cultivate a renewed intellectual discourse grounded in the historical legacy of communal harmony and interfaith respect. This is essential not only for fostering peaceful relations between Hindus and Muslims, but also for promoting understanding among all religious communities in India.

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MAZHAR REHMAN

## From Human Resource to Khalifah: A Theological–Philosophical Framework for Re-Envisioning Workplace Congruency

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### ABSTRACT

Navigating the ethical landscape of today's diverse workplaces is a complex challenge. As industries increasingly recognize the importance of ethical business practices and harmonious workplace settings in times of marginalized religions, the need for robust theoretical frameworks that resonate with employees of diverse religious, cultural and secular backgrounds become ever more urgent. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (i) to explore and elaborate the intra-theological discussion on who a khalifah (vicegerent) of God is and whether it holds substantial meaning to an individual than the word 'caliph' associated with Islamic polity, and, (ii) to present a philosophical discourse at interdisciplinary level to reconcile divine status of man with organizational dynamics. The first part of this paper carefully dissects the theological complexities in understanding khalifah in Islamic epistemology, and, through intertextual analysis, narrows it down to the very individual. The second part of the paper highlights and elaborates the interplay between a khalifah employee and factors like selflessness, self-interest maximization, divine accountability, and workplace responsibility. Drawing on psychological researches on 'responsibility and control,' as well as philosophical ideas like 'moderate and absolute deontology,' and 'Kantian duty,' this paper argues that the khalifah concept offers a valuable perspective for promoting ethical behaviour and creating more harmonious workplaces.

*Keywords:* Khalifah, vicegerency, workplace ethics, congruency, reactive attitudes, responsibility

## INTRODUCTION

A tension exists in contemporary global society between traditional religious morality and more individualized approaches to ethics. The oft-heard phrase "spiritual but not religious" highlights this tension, revealing a desire for personal meaning that may not align with established religious doctrines. This raises important questions about the sources of moral authority and the nature of ethical decision-making in a world where diverse values coexist. While some fear a slide into moral relativism, others argue that secular ethical frameworks provide sufficient grounding for responsible behaviour. Exploring this tension is essential for navigating the ethical complexities of this modern century because marginalization of religions along with their objective dogmas and its substitution with secular and even subjective ethical theories have brought substantial effects to the societies of today and the businesses functioning in them.

The concept of moral responsibility is deeply entrenched in philosophical, religious, and ethical traditions, each providing distinct yet intersecting perspectives on the foundations of moral obligation. In Islamic theology, human being is tasked with upholding moral integrity, justice, and accountability, suggesting that a person viewed as the khalifah of God carries significant ethical implications, particularly within a work environment. To actualize theoretical concepts of ethicality into practical frameworks, this paper synthesizes knowledge from moral philosophy and the Islamic concept of *Khilāfah* (lit. vicegerency), aiming to produce literature that can facilitate a more harmonious and congruent workplace where diverse individuals collaborate—a vital yet underexplored topic.

Conventional economic theories, such as Adam Smith's 'invisible hand,' have been critiqued for prioritizing individualistic gain at the expense of collective welfare, which has led to systemic injustices<sup>1</sup>. Mainstream economic models often overlook the profound impact of moral and social factors, thereby perpetuating corruption and inequity<sup>2</sup>. This overemphasis on economic productivity has detracted from broader humanistic and ethical concerns, raising fundamental questions about capitalism's role in shaping modern societal values<sup>3</sup>.

This paper examines the khalifah psychology—a framework that

integrates Islamic moral philosophy with Western ethical theories—to explore how moral responsibility functions within both theological and socio-economic domains. A khalīfah is not only accountable to God for fulfilling the obligations of vicegerency but is also bound by ethical duties toward society. This dual moral accountability is reinforced through "reactive attitudes," which serve as mechanisms for moral correction<sup>4</sup>. The Strawsonian perspective on moral responsibility posits that individuals respond to ethical infractions with resentment, blame, or indignation, while virtuous actions elicit praise, gratitude, and respect<sup>5</sup>. Within the khalīfah paradigm, these interpersonal moral sentiments extend beyond human relations to encompass a divine moral expectation, where ethical lapses incur both spiritual and psychological consequences.

On another note, the term khalīfah has often been translated/interpreted as "Caliph," focusing on its political implications. This blurs the vast scope it encompasses, including the Islamic ethical and moral structure pertinent to the individual. To fully understand "Khalīfah" in all its meanings, one must delve into the complex traditional and theological discourses developed over centuries, with varying interpretations. This paper attempts a systematic literature review, not only of classical exegeses but also of modern perspectives that boldly address the intricacies of this term, highlighting the historical evolution of its understanding and its adaptability to contemporary issues, thus underscoring the flexibility inherent in Islamic ethical structures.

The gap between economics, moral philosophy, and religion continues to widen, prompting this paper to fill that void. First, it provides an in-depth analysis of the Qur'anic verse discussing the *Khilāfah* or vicegerency of man. Secondly, it explores certain philosophical ideas that have gained acceptance, such as deontology and the Kantian sense of duty, to present a cross-disciplinary synthesis between Islam and philosophy over the common ground of ethics and morality. Critical factors for motivation—responsibility, accountability, expectations, and reactive attitudes—will be emphasized in this exploration.

## ETHICS IN WORKPLACE

The importance of ethics and morality in the workplace has become a central theme in contemporary organizational studies, highlighting not

only how they lack and the need for their role-play, but also that the onus is only on the leaders to bring about this change. Scholars emphasize the crucial role of ethical leadership, arguing that leaders must embody a strong ethical orientation to cultivate an ethically focused organization<sup>6</sup>. These moral exemplars then shape employee behaviour, embedding ethical principles within the organizational culture<sup>7</sup>. However, true ethical transformation occurs only when individuals voluntarily adopt moral conduct. Without this intrinsic commitment, ethical standards may be superficially observed while allowing corruption and injustice to exist in parallel. Often, it is seen, that adherence to ethics is driven by external pressures, not by genuine values.

This contradiction resonates with Niccolò Machiavelli's political philosophy in *The Prince*, where he posits that rulers may pursue power through any means, potentially sacrificing ethics. While recognizing that ethical considerations are vital for societal harmony, Machiavelli warns that excessive virtue amidst moral decay can lead to political failure<sup>8</sup>. His insights apply to corporate leadership, where navigating challenges sometimes necessitates deviating from ethical norms, raising questions about the balance between principles and pragmatic decision-making.

Imam Khomeini, as interpreted by Sayyid Hasan Islami, underscores the necessity for ethical foundations in both business and politics to maintain public trust. He cites historical examples, such as Stalin and Hitler, demonstrating that leaders who fail to adhere genuinely to moral standards ultimately face public demands for accountability<sup>9</sup>.

The need for ethical conduct transcends theoretical ideals. For instance, Islamic teachings emphasize goodwill and sincerity as foundational to social relations; Prophet Muhammad's declaration that "Religion is goodwill" highlights ethics' vital role in fostering harmony<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, in contemporary capitalism, human labour is frequently treated as a mere resource, fostering exploitative practices and a dehumanizing culture. This necessitates a reevaluation of workplace ethics that recognizes individual dignity as integral to organizational success. The Arabic term for man (individual/human being) is *insān*, derived from root word *Uns*, connotes inherent values of friendliness and empathy<sup>11</sup>, which ought to guide ethical corporate practices. To the very least, in Islam, it is expected that *Insān* will show *Adab* (etiquettes and moral conduct). The Arabic word *Adab* is derived from the root word

*Ma'dubah* which means feast; and that good character and etiquettes are the nourishment for the mind just like the feast is the nourishment for the body<sup>12</sup>. Siddiqi<sup>13</sup> cites Khurshid in criticizing the concept of 'invisible hand' by Adam Smith, arguing that such economic models produce chaos rather than collective benefit. Chapra states that conventional economics neglects the influence of moral and social factors, resulting in widespread corruption and injustice<sup>14</sup>. Zaman addresses the isolation of economic issues from collective human existence, citing Maududi's observation that economic problems have become overly central to life's challenges<sup>15</sup>. Naqvi contends that capitalism's demands often detract from humanity's true purpose, which is to understand one's nature and existence<sup>16</sup>.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE TERM KHALĪFAH: IN-DEPTH

Recognizing the necessity of ethical frameworks within business and professional environments, and in pursuit of exploring how the concept of khalīfah can address this gap, it is essential to first establish a precise understanding of the term within the context of Islamic epistemology. Rooted deeply in Islamic theology, political thought, and historical discourse, khalīfah carries significant doctrinal and philosophical weight. However, its potential as an ethical paradigm applicable to contemporary business ethics remains largely underexplored.

The very first time the word khalīfah has been used in the Qur'an is in the 30<sup>th</sup> verse of its 2<sup>nd</sup> surah where man (or Adam in specific, we shall see) is made the khalīfah of God to be sent to earth in God's own wisdom. Tabari mentions the root letters of khalīfah is kh.l.f which together literally means to succeed. He also criticized a famous historian and exegete Ibn Ishaq who says that the root letters kh.l.f in the context of this verse (Qur'an 2:30) means 'to inhabit' and 'to cultivate'<sup>17</sup>. His own opinion with regards to this verse is in line with what he understands of the statements of the prominent companions of the prophet (Abdullah ibn Abbas and ibn Mas'ud), as elaborated by the classical exegete – Ṭabarī, that Adam is the khalīfah for he will show justice on earth and also those who will take his place in obeying God, that is, his successors<sup>18</sup>.

The term khalīfah in singular has been used twice in the Qur'an

and in plural it is used five times. Out of the two verses which uses this term in singular, one is denoting Prophet David in specific where the verse mentions that David is made the khalifah on earth and is told to judge between people in all truth (Quran 38:26). This verse will now be referred to as the 'David Verse' wherever it is required to be mentioned. Where this verse specifically mentions Prophet David as the khalifah, it is the other verse which has provided the content for a severe debate among theologians, exegetes, and scholars of Islam. It is the 30<sup>th</sup> verse of the 2<sup>nd</sup> surah which clearly mentions that God is going to "make" (*Jā 'ilun*) on earth a "khalifah". Though it does not talk about who the khalifah is (in this very verse), the subsequent verses mention 'Adam' as the one created by God and who would be sent as the khalifah. This verse will now be referred to as the 'khalifah verse' for it is the only verse in the Quran using this word in singular without outrightly specifying who the khalifah is.

Now, the Arabic word khalifah has three root letters – kh, l and f which together gives an immediate meaning of succession, successor, and to come after another. Al-Qāḍī elaborates on this root word of khalifah to mean either or all the five meanings that it encompasses<sup>19</sup>: -

1. To succeed someone /successor
2. To replace and take place of someone in succession one after another.
3. To outrightly replace someone or permanently replace someone for the one who was previously in authority was corrupt and not just and transgressed beyond the bounds (like the people of Noah were the successors of the people who died in the flood as they were corrupt and transgressed)
4. To inhabit the earth and to cultivate it generation after generations from previous occupants and cultivators.
5. To be rulers, governors, and kings to whom has been given the authority by God.

Exegetes and scholars have long debated the precise denotation of the term "khalifah" (successor), and while consensus exists on its literal meaning as "successor," the question of what or whom it signifies remains contentious. It is universally agreed among theologians that the term "successor" cannot imply one who directly replaces God, for

such an idea would be inconceivable and blasphemous in Islam, as man cannot substitute God in any capacity. To hold such a belief would amount to shirk, or associating partners with God. Idris elaborates on this notion, citing Ibn Taymiyyah, who firmly asserts that no being can be God's successor or vicegerent, for there is none like Him. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, anyone claiming otherwise is a *mushrik*<sup>20</sup>. He contends that such a fundamental argument could not have been overlooked by classical Islamic scholars, and thus, he focuses his analysis on two key aspects of Ibn Taymiyyah's position<sup>21</sup>.

First, he examines a narration concerning Abu Bakr Siddique, the first caliph, who, when referred to as the khalifah of God, categorically denied such a claim, stating instead that he was the khalifah of the Prophet Muhammad (saws). Idris raises doubts about the authenticity of this narration, suggesting it lacks reliable sources. Second, Idris critiques Ibn Taymiyyah's position on figures like Ibn Arabi, accusing them of introducing Greek philosophical concepts—such as the microcosm and macrocosm—into Islamic thought, which led them to draw parallels between the Creator and the created. This raises an unresolved question: if the term "khalifah" is understood as a "successor," then to whom or what does Adam, in his role as khalifah, succeed?

Some exegetes, however, interpret the term more flexibly, incorporating Israelite traditions (Judeo-Christian sources) that suggest a prior creation, namely the *jinn*, inhabited the Earth before humanity and became corrupt. According to these traditions, it was Adam who succeeded this earlier creation. Yet, not all exegetes accept the Israelite traditions, and even when they do, such acceptance is contingent upon consistency with the Qur'anic revelations and the broader Islamic theological framework. When the Qur'an diverges from these traditions, they are often dismissed. As a result, this interpretation, though plausible to some, does not present the definitive or exclusive explanation of the "khalifah" verse.

Furthermore, the verse does not merely state that God will appoint a khalifah on Earth; it continues with a dialogue wherein the angels, upon hearing of God's intention, question whether He would appoint a being who would "cause corruption and shed blood," while they themselves glorify and sanctify Him. This question from the angels may suggest their curiosity to know about this new creature being God's

khalifah, given its potential for corruption and violence, whereas, the angels, who already glorify God, might seem more fitting candidates for this role<sup>22</sup>. Defenders of the Israelite traditions might argue that humanity is to succeed a prior generation—the jinn—who had become corrupt and engaged in violence, prompting the angels' confusion at the replacement of one violent generation with another. However, this explanation is relevant only to those who accept the Israelite traditions.

For exegetes who reject these traditions, the issue remains unresolved. If Adam is the khalifah and is viewed as a "successor," the question arises: of whom or what is Adam succeeding, especially since the Qur'an does not explicitly mention any prior generations before humanity. This conundrum has led scholars to introduce a nuanced interpretation focused on power and authority.

In Islam, ultimate power belongs to God alone. He is sovereign, and no being can succeed Him. With this in mind, some scholars have proposed that the term "khalifah" should be understood not as "successor" but as "vicegerent" or "deputy" of God. In this framework, the khalifah is not a successor in the traditional sense (replacing God), but rather one to whom divine authority, power, and responsibility are delegated for governance on Earth (by God).

The concept of the khalifah is further explored in the Qur'an, where the term appears in two distinct verses, each underscoring its significance in the context of divine authority and human governance. The "khalifah verse" refers to God's appointment of a khalifah on Earth, while the "David verse" specifically identifies Prophet David as the khalifah, endowed with sovereign authority. These verses align with Allah's self-designation as "*Rab al-‘ālamīn*"<sup>23</sup> (Lord of all worlds) and "*MālikiYawm al-Dīn*"<sup>24</sup> (King of the Day of Judgment), emphasizing that ultimate sovereignty resides with God alone. Consequently, the authority to govern and rule, while inherent in God, is delegated to humanity, enabling humans to cultivate, utilize, and govern the Earth in accordance with divine will (though with the freedom to even exploit and commit evil).

While the designation of khalifah specifically attributed to David may imply a unique kingship pertinent to him, as the verse is directed solely at him, it is the first mention of khalifah (khalifah verse) that offers broader implications. The verse clearly states that a khalifah will

be appointed to Earth, and subsequent textual analysis reveals that this figure is Adam. Importantly, "Adam" in Hebrew, from where this word is derived, also embodies the broader meaning of man or humankind.

Complicating this discussion further is the Arabic term for "King," which is "*Mālik*." This term refers to a ruler over the "*Mulk*", or kingdom, and recurs extensively throughout the Qur'an. However, it is noteworthy that "*Mālik*" is primarily associated with God, who is referred to as "*Mālikal-Mulk*," indicating His absolute sovereignty over all dominions. In light of this understanding, it is fitting to characterize David as the khalīfah-King or the 'Represented King,' as he serves as an earthly authority under the overarching dominion of the one to whom all ownership ultimately belongs. This nuanced interpretation establishes a cohesive understanding of the interplay between divine authority and human governance within the framework of Islamic teachings.

Al-Qāḍī emphasises that kh l and f philologically does not mean 'to cultivate' or 'to rule' but such an idea gained a certain holding during the Umayyad era and was seen more contextually<sup>25</sup>. Now if it does mean to cultivate and/or to rule, then it necessarily implies that khalīfah should be a man and all men must be khulafā' (plural). But this idea of man being the khalīfah who is the cultivator and ruler (also in the sense that it is man who has the capacity to rule over other creatures and creation and utilize resources of the earth for his benefit) can be seen through another lens. If the primary meaning of kh l f is successor then two immediate cases arise and both are needed to be dealt with. First case: the khalīfah verse in specific does not give any name away as to who is the khalīfah but the subsequent verses clearly suggest that it is Adam. If Adam is the successor, then two-fold issues arise again. Is it Adam the prophet or Adam as reference to humanity for the literal meaning of Adam is taken to be someone made from mud or clay; or the latter meaning is included if the former is taken as obvious? The verses of the Quran suggest that Adam was created, given knowledge of things that made him superior to the angels but later fell for the incitation of Satan and eventually sent to earth. So, if Adam is seen as the prophet, then who is he the successor if Israelite traditions are ignored? If still, Adam is taken as mankind in general and that its generations will "succeed"

their predecessors, then the question remains- who is the first creation of mankind a successor or khalifah of?

Second case: Note that in the whole Qur'an there is no mention of *khalīfatullāh* or khalifah of Allah. The khalifah verse suggests that God will place/make a successor. If Israelite traditions are ignored then the safest conjecture which is made at this stage (and will now be defended below) for the sake of argument is that a creation is made in which will come generations after generations, succeeding and replacing the predecessors, for whom and from among them will be sent messengers and prophets for guidance and if they transgress after consecutive warnings, they will also be permanently replaced by others (from mankind only, and by the wrath of God this time) who then will be expected to rule with truth and justice.

The question still remains. Khalifah means successor and not solely 'potential of having successorship' (which, in the suggested conjecture, is realized only when successive generations come), then when God decided to place a khalīfah, who is he a khalifah of? Idris deals with this question and referencing the exegesis of Tabari, gives four categories regarding what khalifah means and who is this khalifah of. He mentions all the meanings that Tabri states<sup>26</sup>:

1. The khalifah is Adam as he succeeds jinn, a previous creation
2. khalīfah refers to the sons of Adam as every generation of man succeeds the previous one
3. khalifah is Adam as the vicegerent of God.
4. khalifah is Adam because he will judge between people with the ordinance of God.

The first point again rests the argument based on Israelite tradition and it is not incumbent in Islam to believe in it. The second point talks about the progeny of Adam as successor of their previous generation but it does not answer the question as to who the first khalifah is the successor of. The third point is specifically stating that the vicegerent of God is Prophet Adam. The fourth point elaborates that he is the khalīfah as he will judge in accordance to the book of God.

Deciphering the above data, it can be said that Adam is the khalifah of God and so will be his progeny for successorship cannot end at

the Prophet Adam. Otherwise, what is the point of sending many messengers, prophets and people of Adam's kind having potential and capacity to act, achieve and face consequences like any of their predecessors right up till Adam himself. Extension of this argument includes the fourth point that if Adam is the khalīfah because he will judge in accordance to the rulings of God, then this feature is at least expected to be accomplished by every man for a messenger was sent to every community<sup>27</sup> and to every nation<sup>28</sup>. Also, there is the concept of finality of prophethood in Islam and end of the coming of prophets does not mean end of justice, morality, or ethics.

Opinions of some of the most important classical exegetes are now discussed. Zamakhsharī gives two views. First, khalīfah of angels who were first the inhabitants of earth and are now succeeded by Adam and second, khalīfah is Adam, the representative of God on earth which includes his progeny as the exegete himself says that if he says Adam, it also means those who would follow him<sup>29</sup>.

Al Rāzī highlights two major opinions in his time. First is based on Israelite tradition and so Adam is the successor of the previous creation. Second, Adam is the successor of God in the sense that he would judge in accordance to the rulings of God. Here Rāzī states that the latter opinion confirms the David verse where God states that David is a khalīfah and that he should judge in truth<sup>30</sup>. It can be added here based on the reasoning presented till now, that those who act today in accordance to the law and judge in all truth between people can then be added in the sphere of *khulafā'* (pl.). This opinion is reinstated by the immediate explanation of Rāzī for the khalīfah verse where he says that it (*Khilāfah*, that is, status of vicegerency) is an honour for Adam and that this blessing is "general/common altogether on his progeny" ("*āmun 'al ājāmi'ibanī Ādam*")<sup>31</sup>.

Ibn Kathīr states in his exegesis that khalīfah here means people who succeed the previous generation before them<sup>32</sup>. This interpretation does not answer who the *khalīfah in singular* is.

Al-Maḥallī and Al-Suyūṭī elaborate that Adam is the vicegerent/deputy of God replacing his predecessors and from his progeny would come the obedient and the transgressors and justice would prevail<sup>33</sup>. How would the justice prevail once the prophets are gone? It would prevail through people who would act in accordance to their divine law of that time; acting now as vicegerents.

Qushayrī states that it is special in the case of Adam alone that when he was created, God mentioned that he is going to place a khalifah/vicegerent on Earth. This signifies a position of honour and repute. Qushayrī goes on to say that the angels asked the reason for making Adam the vicegerent, whose progeny would cause corruption and bloodshed. The reply of God in the verses following the khalifah verse gave emphasis to knowledge. That Adam had knowledge of things, angels do not know about and this knowledge made Adam superior to even those who are in continuous praise of God (angels). Qushayrī also adds in the explanation of the khalifah verse where God says to the angels "...I know what you know not" meaning that I (God) know of my mercy. If you (angels) know of the corruption and transgression of Adam and his progeny then I know of my compassion, mercy, and pardon; attributes which would not be known had there not been creatures who would falter but also repent<sup>34</sup>.

Opinions of some of the famous south Asian exegetes over the term khalifah is now presented. Mufti Muḥammad Shafī' believes that the vicegerency was given to Adam and this status which even made the angels bow to him is a matter of pride for his progeny. This status, says Shafī', was because of the knowledge that was given to Adam and upon the query of Angels that God is making a khalifah on earth who would cause corruption and blood shed, the reply of God could be understood in a manner that God gave knowledge of earth and all that it contains which lacked in the angels and this knowledge made Adam befitting for this honour<sup>35</sup>. His son, Mufti Muḥammad Taqī Uthmānī, however differs and clearly states that vicegerency is of man (human kind)<sup>36</sup>. If the successorship is confined to the prophets, then the argument would appear less convincing because if only the prophets are successors, for they will judge according to the book of God and guide people, then according to Islam, Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet. Does it imply that the world now is without a khalifah? The *Khilāfah* or vicegerency appears to be based on possession of knowledge given by God and though it was with the prophets (through divine message / books and hence they are seen as the khalifah), the knowledge is also possessed by people from the prophets (and generally through reason, research, and experience) and then throughout generations it is transmitted from true scholars of religion (specific knowledge of the religion). A narration of the prophet of Islam has been recorded

as him saying that “the scholars are the *khulafā’* of the prophets” (Al U’lamāu’*khulafāu’* al Ambiyāi’) and that the prophets do not possess Dinar and Dirham (wealth, worldly property) but knowledge<sup>37</sup>.

The reason of ascribing vicegerency only to the Prophets could be because in Islam, none of the prophets are believed to sin for what they do is through the command of God. Even if they err, it is because they are made to err so that people could know the correct solution and resolution for that mistake through the examples of the prophets. This feature, unique only to the prophets, makes them the suitable candidates for vicegerency of God whereas people sin and have the capacity to do evil. Still man is the *khalīfah* for he too has capacity to repent, introspect, improve, and choose to do that which is correct, moral, and ethical.

Three prominent figures in recent Islamic history, who swayed with determination and enthusiasm the whole debate in favour of vicegerency of Man in their explanation of the *khalīfah* verse, are Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), Syed Qutub (d.1966) and Abū al-A’lā Mawdūdī (d.1979). Their opinions over this term are given below.

Muhammad Abduh starts by first disassociating any anthropomorphic similarities of man with God (maybe because he wanted to interpret man as the vicegerent of God but without any similarity of any sort) followed by the meaning of *khalīfah* where he weighs his opinion towards the school of thought which says that the *khalīfah* is Adam and his descendants. He states that the one capable of being the vicegerent of God is man and no other creation for the reason and authority endowed to man makes every other creation subservient to him. In this manner he has infinite desires, wills, and potential for infinite actions on this earth with the permission of God and yet, he is to limit his actions in accordance to the will of God and act in accordance to the commandments and injunctions of Islam. Man has been given the capacity and potential for infinite actions but has also been endowed with legislation. The interpretation posited by Abduh ascribes a significant degree of power and authority to humanity, positioning individuals in a relatively supreme role among other creatures<sup>38</sup>. This understanding frames *Khilāfah* as a delegated responsibility, granting humans the capacity to rule, govern, manage, and utilize the resources of creation. While this authority is not absolute and does not equate to

the sovereignty of God, it provides sufficient autonomy for humans to exercise mastery over the planet.

In this context, God's omnipotent authority permits Him to act according to His will, while humans, as His deputies, are likewise afforded a measure of autonomy. However, this empowerment is accompanied by the imperative of accountability and responsibility. Consequently, knowledge is conferred upon humanity through messengers, prophets, and sacred texts, each serving as a guide for moral and ethical conduct.

This concept of *Khilāfah* implies an inherent capacity for purposeful action, grounded in a broad spectrum of available choices. While divine injunctions establish limits, these constraints apply primarily to those who choose to adhere to them. The dissemination of prophetic guidance and revelation acknowledges the potential for humanity to exceed prescribed boundaries. Thus, the role of prophets, messengers, and scriptures emphasizes their objective: to navigate humanity toward a righteous path.

Furthermore, this framework implies the existence of alternative paths that may diverge from prescribed guidelines. The rewards and warnings articulated in Islam regarding the hereafter underscore the notion of life's trials and the intrinsic importance of accountability. In this light, the responsibility placed upon humanity is commensurate with the power and authority conferred upon individuals, reinforcing the dual aspects of empowerment and obligation within the paradigm of *Khilāfah*.

Qutb elaborates on the *Khilāfah* verse to emphasise upon the vicegerency of Man on earth, who, by infinite wisdom of God, has been given the reigns to use, develop and transform all that the earth contains. He goes on to say that the law of nature and the law made to govern humans (both coming from the same God), have harmony between them and that man, in the capacity of being the khalīfah, has been given necessary knowledge, energy and skills to overcome even the formidable forces of nature to derive benefits from all that the earth has to offer<sup>39</sup>.

Mawdūdīdīd not only states that the vicegerency is of Man, but he also elaborated this concept by adding terms like principal entity (God), delegation of power and deputy. He says the Man is the khalīfah of God who has been delegated power and authority and who is expected to

use it in the capacity of a deputy and agent. This power, says Maududi, is not inherently of Man's and is also restricted and limited by the commandments of God so that its execution brings about the will of God (including justice, truth, ethics, morals, etc). Here he also says that though the angels are in continuous state of worship, yet there is something unique with man that makes him the khalifah, and that is the certain degree of authority invested in him which is lacking even in angels<sup>40</sup>.

If the authority was invested in angels or any other creation that cannot execute it unless commanded by God through his own will to commit to a particular act, then the purpose of that authority is meaningless as the agent will only be an executioner of the will of God; and would thus also lack blame and praiseworthiness. Authority given to man necessitates a certain degree of free will to be given to him. This capacity for choice—manifested through desires, needs, and impulses—when aligned with divinely sanctioned authority, engenders thoughts, intentions, and actions that are uniquely his own. This individuality forms the basis for accountability and moral responsibility, positioning human actions within the framework of divine testing and ethical evaluation.

The five verses in which khalifah has been used in plural are now mentioned below to strengthen the above argument that man has the capacity (collectively and individually) to be the khalifah of God.

1. He is the one who placed you as *Khalāifa* on earth...<sup>41</sup>
2. He is the One Who has placed you as *Khalāifa* on earth and elevated some of you in rank over others, so He may test you with what He has given you...<sup>42</sup>
3. They complained, "We have always been oppressed—before and after you came to us (with the message)." He replied, "Perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy and *yastakhlifakum* (replace the tyrants and make you all khulafa/successors) in the land to see what you will do"<sup>43</sup>."
4. We surely destroyed (other) peoples before you when they did wrong, and their messengers came to them with clear proofs but they would not believe! This is how We reward the wicked people. Then We made you *Khalāifa* (their successors) in the land to see how you would act<sup>44</sup>.

5. Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good that He *layas takhlifannahum* (will make vicegerents/successors over them/previous people) in the land, as *astakhlafanna* (God, made vicegerents) those before them ...<sup>45</sup>

In these verses under discussion, the concept of vicegerency is portrayed as being transmitted successively, with each generation inheriting the mantle of Khilāfah (the status of being a khalifah) from the preceding one. This succession signifies that Khilāfah is conferred upon human beings, implying a continuous delegation of divine authority. A notable commonality across all five verses is the recurring phrase *fil ardi* (in the land), which emphasizes that the responsibility of vicegerency is specifically assigned to humans on Earth. This reference underscores the acknowledgment of humanity's power and authority over the Earth, granting them the ability to derive benefit from all that has been created within it.

Furthermore, the verse in the fourth position explicitly reinforces the notion that power and authority are not without their concomitant responsibilities and accountability. The inclusion of responsibility and accountability implies that the actions of those entrusted with Khilāfah will be subject to divine scrutiny, ensuring that they align with the standards set by God. This scrutiny, therefore, becomes a means of testing human conduct, as the power bestowed upon humanity is not granted unconditionally. Unlike any other creation, human beings are uniquely endowed with the dual aspect of authority and moral responsibility, signifying a divine examination of their stewardship over the Earth. This dynamism establishes the exercise of Khilāfah as a profound trust, where power is inherently linked to ethical obligations and divine oversight. Upon a khalifah lies the “regulative control” (control upon self in situation of stress and temptations or the ability to have control over impulses) of following the commandments but this whole system is intertwined with “guidance control” (planned set of directions to guide behaviour) where a direction is shown and the man has the freewill to act or to not act with both “controls” capable of giving different set of outcomes.<sup>46</sup> The Khilāfah of man does not guarantee ethical behaviour but it is this ‘power of control’ upon his actions after being the recipient of power that comes from being the khalifah of God that brings out the need for moral responsibility. The

status of being the khalīfah also makes it necessary to see others as one too who share the same grandeur.

This is the unique feature probably why Thanvi in his explanation of the khalīfah verse specifies another verse of the Quran where the angels were asked to bow to Adam (2:34) and related it to the vicegerency of the forefather of mankind as a position of esteem and honour<sup>47</sup>. Khan adds that the element of authority and power is already invested in Khilāfah along with the freewill given to man<sup>48</sup>. The *khulafā'* (pl.) of God would then be those who have realized their power and free will and then (out of this freedom) have chosen to humble themselves to their lord.

#### KHALĪFAH, BUSINESS ETHICS AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

A comprehensive analysis of the khalīfah verse and the terminological framework of Khilāfah indicate that though vicegerency of Man is not the only meaning of khalīfah, it is equally possible when compared to any other meaning. Khilāfah can be understood as a multifaceted concept, wherein humanity can be regarded as the khalīfah or deputy of God. This status carries profound implications for the ethical and moral character of individuals.

When individuals recognize themselves as deputies of God, this awareness serves as a compelling impetus to cultivate upright character and engage in ethical conduct. In a professional setting, such recognition can foster alignment between personal values and workplace ethics. An employee who perceives their role as one of divine vicegerency may feel a moral obligation to adhere to the ethical precepts of Islam, subsequently contributing to a more congruent and harmonious workplace environment.

The internalization of this status is closely linked to the comprehension of Qur'anic teachings, which play a critical role in shaping identity and motivating the agent to act accordingly. Psychological research suggests that motivation is a fundamental determinant of human behaviour, influencing decision-making processes and ethical conduct<sup>49</sup>. However, a distinction must be drawn between desire and motivation. While an individual may desire workplace improvement, this desire alone does not necessarily translate into action unless it is

accompanied by motivation. Desire, unlike motivation, remains inert and non-occurring unless activated<sup>50</sup>. The khalifah consciousness serves as an activating force, transforming ethical inclinations into actionable motivation by framing ethical conduct as a duty rather than a mere aspiration.

Motivation, as conceptualized in contemporary psychology, operates at different levels. Some motivations stem from the pursuit of a larger goal, generating a general sense of energy and inspiration, while others are task-specific, wherein an individual experiences pleasure or discomfort based on their engagement in a particular action<sup>51</sup>. Within the khalifah paradigm, the overarching awareness of divine vicegerency instils a general sense of purpose, reinforcing a proactive and ethical approach to professional responsibilities. Simultaneously, it fosters task-specific motivation, wherein the individual experiences a sense of moral fulfilment when acting in alignment with divine expectations and moral discomfort when failing to do so. This dual form of motivation enhances ethical commitment, as the worker is not only inspired by a broader sense of purpose but also feels an immediate emotional response to their moral choices.

Beyond the realm of motivation, the Qur'anic discourse on reward further strengthens ethical commitment. The Qur'an, particularly through its reward verses (which talks about the rewards in this world and the next), constructs an intrinsic desire for ethical conduct by associating virtuous actions with divine compensation. The repeated emphasis on adjectives such as eternal and everlasting reinforces the notion that morally upright behaviour yields rewards beyond immediate, worldly benefits. This Qur'anic structure creates a twofold effect: first, it instils a strong desire to attain divine rewards, and second, it fosters the motivation to engage in actions that lead to their attainment. The realization of one's status as a khalifah, coupled with the promise of divine reward, thus becomes a powerful catalyst for ethical behaviour, including within the workplace. Neuropsychological research supports this dynamic, suggesting that intrinsic desires activate the reward system of the brain, thereby generating motivation<sup>52</sup>. The instrumentalist perspective in psychology posits that motivation arises when cognitive beliefs about what leads to reward interact with the brain's reward system, triggering motor functions through the brain's

ganglia that translate intention into action<sup>53</sup>. This neurological basis for motivation underscores the transformative potential of the khalifah mindset in ethical workplace conduct.

Psychologists have categorized motivation into distinct frameworks, including instrumentalism, cognitivism, sentimentalism, and personalism, all of which contribute to an individual's ethical behaviour<sup>54</sup>. A khalifah worker may be motivated by instrumentalism, where the desire to please God, attain rewards, and contribute to a cooperative work environment drives ethical actions. At times, their motivation may align with cognitivism, wherein the will to do what is right, adhere to workplace ethics, and act in accordance with divine and professional codes of conduct takes precedence over mere desire. Alternatively, motivation may stem from sentimentalism, wherein emotional responses—such as indignation at injustice or frustration with corruption—trigger moral actions. The interplay of these motivational frameworks reinforces ethical consistency within the workplace. However, while motivation is necessary for ethical action, it is not always sufficient; external barriers such as fear of authority, lack of confidence, or job security concerns may inhibit action. The khalifah mentality, by reinforcing moral responsibility and fostering internal moral reasoning, increases the probability of ethical action in challenging circumstances.

Moral reasoning, an integral aspect of the khalifah psychology, is both internal and external. Internal moral reasoning involves introspection and reflection on ethical principles, while external moral reasoning manifests in discussions, debates, collaborations and collective decision-making. A narration from the Prophet of Islam highlights the three levels of moral response: preventing wrongdoing through action, through speech (if not capable of preventing evil with action), or at the very least, recognizing it as wrong internally<sup>55</sup>. Even at its lowest level, internal moral awareness ensures that an individual remains engaged in ethical considerations rather than becoming indifferent. This emphasis on moral reasoning aligns with the Qur'anic framework, which shapes ethical consciousness through explicit injunctions, prophetic exemplification, and historical narratives of past leaders. Such moral structures, deeply ingrained through religious teachings, shape beliefs that in turn influence motivation and ethical action.

The integration of khalifah psychology within workplace ethics has far-reaching implications for organizational harmony. The ethical consciousness it fosters creates an environment where moral reasoning is actively engaged, opening avenues for discussions on ethical dilemmas and encouraging collective efforts toward workplace integrity. Ethical actions, once initiated, can create a chain reaction, wherein the moral commitment of one individual influences the ethical inclinations of others. This ripple effect enhances workplace congruency, as ethical behaviour becomes an embedded norm rather than an isolated practice. Through the internalization of khalifah, employees develop not only the motivation to act ethically but also the capacity to shape an ethical organizational culture. The khalifah mindset thus emerges as a holistic framework, encompassing not only the desire and need to act responsibly but also the qualities necessary for ethical leadership, including cooperation, patience, perseverance, and self-discipline. By reinforcing these attributes, the khalifah approach ensures that ethical considerations become an integral aspect of professional life, fostering a workplace that is both morally coherent and structurally stable.

The internalization of the *Khilāfah* status has profound implications for an employee's mental state, fostering a deep sense of responsibility and reinforcing ethical conduct. By recognizing their role as a vicegerent, the individual develops an enhanced moral will, amplifying the virtues they naturally possess and strengthening their resilience in maintaining ethical behaviour even in adverse circumstances. At its optimal state, this moral disposition enables individual to act in accordance with their virtues regardless of external conditions<sup>56</sup>. However, this optimal state cannot be uniform across individuals, as moral dispositions vary. Not all individuals possess the same degree of virtue, nor do they respond uniformly to ethical dilemmas. A naturally timid yet truthful worker may only express the truth in an environment that permits it, whereas an individual who is both courageous and truthful will be more inclined to act ethically irrespective of external pressures (remember, both the timid and the courageous are khalifah here). The khalifah status, therefore, does not impose a singular behavioural standard but rather functions as an internalized moral compass that interacts dynamically with individual traits while making it coherent with moral reasoning that aims to achieve excellence while knowing that if there are more

options for achieving excellence in a particular situation, then he is expected to choose, as Aristotle suggests, the one which is the most “*teleion*” or complete and perfect in its sense and applicability<sup>57</sup>. And if he fails in doing so, the khalifah would know that Islam does not seek perfection in action but goodwill in intention.

This psychological framework is also characterized by its flexibility, aligning with moderate deontology rather than rigid moral absolutism. While traditional deontological ethics would categorically reject any action that involves a moral flaw, moderate deontology allows for exceptions when strict rule adherence may lead to detrimental consequences<sup>58</sup>. A pertinent illustration of this principle can be found in Islamic ethics, where backbiting is generally prohibited based on Qur’anic injunctions and Prophetic teachings. From a deontological perspective, this prohibition serves to prevent harm, as backbiting fosters resentment, animosity, and division. However, exceptions exist in cases where disclosing information serves a greater ethical imperative, such as reporting financial misconduct within an organization. In this instance, the ethical obligation to uphold justice supersedes the general prohibition of backbiting, demonstrating the khalifah framework’s capacity to balance moral principles with pragmatic ethical considerations.

This perspective also reframes the concept of self-interest, distinguishing it from the conventional economic notion of personal gain and its maximization. The khalifah psychology does not negate self-interest but rather redirects it towards the pursuit of divine rewards, which ultimately translates into maximizing the well-being of others through ethical and morally guided actions. Classical economic theories have long asserted that self-interest is the primary driver of economic behaviour. Thinkers such as Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill emphasized that economic systems operate largely on self-interest, with utilitarianism often serving as a justification for actions that contribute to the greater good<sup>59</sup>. However, such theoretical assumptions have been contested. Edgeworth, in *Mathematical Psychics*, posited that while self-interest is a fundamental economic principle, it brings its flaws as individuals are “impure egoists” and “mixed utilitarian<sup>60</sup>.” Sen, here also, quotes Sidgwick’s statement that nothing other than religion can reconcile egoism with utilitarianism<sup>61</sup>. This supports the argument

that the man is egoistic and works for self-interest maximization but a khalifah (too can be egoistic) would want maximization of his interest in this world and in the next by maximizing, in his capacity, the interest of others.

The distinction between self-interest and selfishness is critical here in assessing workplace dynamics, particularly in relation to ethical decision-making. While self-interest can serve as a motivating force, its unchecked expansion into selfishness may lead to unethical behaviour, compromising organizational integrity. Graafland, referencing scholars from the public choice school, such as Gary Becker, highlights how self-interest, when unrestrained, may drive individuals to act dishonestly, engage in corruption, or disregard ethical principles if the perceived benefits outweigh the potential consequences<sup>62</sup>. This interpretation aligns with self-interest maximization theory, which asserts that as individuals increasingly prioritize personal gains, the utilitarian value of their actions for society diminishes. As self-interest intensifies, the potential for collective well-being declines, leading to workplace disharmony and a decline in ethical standards.

As discussed above, the khalifah psychology provides an ethical counterbalance to the excesses of self-interest by instilling a framework of moral self-regulation. Within this paradigm, self-interest is not rejected but is instead harmonized with ethical principles, ensuring that personal motivations remain aligned with broader moral and social obligations. Unlike conventional economic theories that depict self-interest as an amoral or purely consequentialist force, the khalifah mindset integrates spiritual and ethical considerations, fostering a moral equilibrium that prevents self-interest from devolving into selfishness. This approach ensures that individual ambition and ethical integrity coexist, promoting both personal fulfilment and collective well-being within the workplace.

It is impossible to definitively assert that a khalifah mentality inherently leads to altruism. However, it can be argued that a khalifah worker is less influenced by psychological egoism, which generally gravitates towards selfishness and pure self-interest maximization. Instead, such an individual is inclined toward the concept of “enlightened self-interest,” wherein actions benefit others—such as colleagues, leaders, seniors, acquaintances, and team members—while ultimately

serving one's own well-being<sup>63</sup>. The khalifah mentality acknowledges the divine source of this status, the inherent rewards and repercussions associated with it, and thus uphold the intentionality centered on acting for the sake of the one who granted the responsibility—namely, God.

Within this framework, enlightened self-interest is intrinsically tied to the ultimate pursuit of divine pleasure and success, which cannot be realized through unethical or harmful actions. Although workplace harmony emerges as an outcome, it is not the primary motivation; rather, it may be regarded as an ancillary aspiration, a supplication, or an expressed desire for such an environment, but not a direct causal factor for motivation. When the internalization of this status is coupled with the aspiration to seek divine approval, it fosters purposeful actions, which in turn contribute to personal happiness. This happiness, reciprocating with divine pleasure, extends beyond the individual and encompasses the well-being of others. Observationally, a khalifah worker—who integrates the welfare of others into their objectives and perceives their own fulfilment in the well-being of those around them—exemplifies characteristics of altruism. Acts of charity, generosity, benevolence, care, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and empathy, when exhibited solely for the benefit of others, become tangible manifestations of this disposition; inadvertently, yet inevitably leading to congruency in workplace.

Furthermore, acts of altruism are not merely commendable but also invoke appreciation and, in many cases, reciprocity from others. This perspective contrasts with the view held by numerous philosophers, who regard such actions as supererogatory—praiseworthy but not obligatory<sup>64</sup>. The khalifah mindset, by seeking divine pleasure through service to others (in actuality serving God through this mean), inherently fosters a positive and ethical work environment. This aligns with Aristotle's philosophy of the "chief good," which refers to the ultimate end that individuals pursue in all their actions, where every other objective is subordinated to this final goal<sup>65</sup>. However, this conceptualization of happiness does not advocate for absolute selflessness. Instead, individuals operate within a spectrum of self-interest, balancing their responsibilities toward themselves, their families, and society at large. An excess of selflessness may, in fact, result in over-dependency, thereby diminishing motivation and productivity.

As argued by Sen, economic activities—such as business, commerce, and financial transactions—would be unsustainable without the fundamental role of self-interest<sup>66</sup>. Every commercial activity, from supply chain management to workplace collaborations, inherently gives rise to competition. This competition, driven by self-interest, not only sustains economic interactions but also reinforces the very motivations that propel them forward. Therefore, within the khalifah paradigm, self-interest and altruism are not mutually exclusive; rather, they exist in a dynamic equilibrium that promotes both individual fulfilment and collective well-being; adding much needed element in the workplace considered important no more only in the east but also in the west – spirituality.<sup>67</sup>

The moral reasoning of a khalifah, while deeply rooted in the ethical and moral framework of Islam, aligns conceptually with Kantian ethics, particularly the Universal Moral Law and the Categorical Imperative. In this framework, moral reasoning is contingent upon the precedence of good intentions before action, as Islamic ethics asserts that deeds are evaluated based on the underlying intention<sup>68</sup>. A person who engages in acts of worship or righteousness for the sake of ostentation or social recognition is ultimately deprived of spiritual reward due to the impurity of intent. Similar to this principal is Kant's assertion that the highest form of goodness is a "good will," and that an action is genuinely moral only when motivated by a sense of duty rather than extrinsic benefits<sup>69</sup>. From what is understood from the prophetic narration on the importance of intention, Kant says that the "good will is good just by its willing," meaning that this value is realized when the actions are expressed in line with it<sup>70</sup>(will, in Kantian term, is the motivational force that urges for the necessary action). As discussed above, in Islam, every action is dependent upon its intention which means that first, there is a reward for good intention and second, actions are in the control of the agent but not necessarily the results and thus good actions also means rewards for the believers irrespective of the outcome. Kant echoes something similar when he says that a good will that leads to corresponding action might not bring the desired results and that many things can go wrong in it and yet no one can detract the moral worth attached to that action<sup>71</sup>. If everyone witnesses the morally imbedded actions without the desired outcomes and yet they are not able to remove the value of moral worth

of that particular action from the agent, what does it lead to? It leads to appreciation and acknowledgement which is an important constituent for harmony.

A morally upright individual need not and may not associate himself with a religious belief or religion in particular; however, in the case of the khalīfah, the moral compass is intrinsically derived from Islamic epistemology, which provides a rational and ethical foundation for conduct that is both beneficial and aligned with self-discipline and the resistance of base desires. The unrestrained indulgence of passions—whether material, intellectual, or emotional—ranges from being frivolous at best to fundamentally detrimental at worst. Such indulgence stands in stark contrast to the high moral expectations placed upon a khalīfah, whose role necessitates the regulation of inclinations in favour of rational, ethically justified action. The realization of human virtue, in this context, is dependent upon one's ability to exercise rational restraint over irrational impulses<sup>72</sup>. This rational restraint, for the khalīfah, comes also from religious dogma other than national laws or company codes, to build a sense of moral duty towards everyone.

The khalīfah's moral orientation, being reinforced by the psychological framework of divine vicegerency, fosters an ethical disposition centred on values like justice, equity, truthfulness, loyalty, and compassion. Such virtues transcend socio-cultural and religious classifications, extending ethical responsibility to all individuals, irrespective of religious affiliation or communal identity – giving congruent nuances in a pluralistic setting (including work environment). Within Islamic moral theology, this responsibility is conceptualized in two primary categories: Ḥuqūq Allāh (the rights owed to God) and Ḥuqūq al-'Ibād (the rights owed to humanity). The former relates to the accountability of man to God, recognizing that the moral station of vicegerency is divinely conferred. The latter, in contrast, concerns the ethical obligations toward fellow human beings, establishing that moral conduct is not exclusive to intra-faith interactions but applies universally. These two broad categories of rights are part of the duty upon the khalīfah. It is quite possible, agreeing with Kant, that duty (belief that it is the right thing to do and doing it for the sake of duty and not for any ulterior motive) becomes such a motivational force to perform actions having a moral worth that though there may be other reasons to perform those actions too, they

would not be performed if the sense of duty was absent<sup>73</sup>. It is primarily this sense of duty that makes a khalifah morally responsible towards everyone and not only towards God.

Moral responsibility operates within a dual-axis framework, wherein an individual is held accountable not only by negative repercussions—such as blame, resentment, or moral indignation—but also through positive reinforcement mechanisms, such as gratitude, respect, and appreciation<sup>74</sup>. The khalifah's role, therefore, entails a twofold responsibility: first, toward God, from whom the status of vicegerency is derived, and second, toward human society, as he is entrusted with upholding justice, fostering harmony, and ensuring moral accountability. In turn, recipients of such benevolence reciprocate through moral responsibility, contributing to an ethical equilibrium within social structures. In professional environments, this principle cultivates moral congruence in workplace ethics, wherein appreciation, gratitude, and mutual respect reinforce a culture of integrity. Ethical consistency, once established, fosters an environment where moral behaviour is no longer merely aspirational but normative<sup>75</sup>.

If it is normative, people will have expectations, opinions, and reservations. From a Strawsonian perspective, human morality is inherently shaped by reactive attitudes (of how others react to your actions and the kind of expectations they have from the actor), which influence interpersonal ethics<sup>76</sup>. This suggests that humans naturally exhibit moral sentiments in response to ethical conduct or breaches and such reactions can have effects on the agent, leading also towards motivation to do what is correct. Introspection too can have an effect whether the act was moral or not. Violation of ethical obligations evoke socially embedded moral emotions, thereby reinforcing the necessity of ethical conduct<sup>77</sup>. This thought can be given a metaphysical touch by taking knowledge from Quranic texts that there is an expectation of God from khalifah too including reactive attitude – both positive and negative. Other than with reward verses, the Quran explicitly warns that when individuals fail in their moral duty, they are replaced by more righteous successors (above mentioned five *khulafā'* (pl.) verses too indicate towards this)—a doctrine that reinforces the high degree of accountability inherent in vicegerency. The internalization of this responsibility intensifies the moral consciousness of the agent.

Should the khalifah deviate from the ethical standards expected by both God (and society), emotions such as guilt, moral regret, indignation, resentment, and self-reproach serve as mechanisms for self-correction. When transposed onto professional ethics, this framework establishes a workplace ethos wherein employees self-regulate through a heightened moral conscience, thereby reducing the reliance on external punitive measures and instead fostering intrinsic moral motivation. It is worth noting here that good actions done for the sake of people or to stand up to their expectations is not reward worthy in Islam where the actions are to be performed for the sake of God. This is similar to what is discussed above where Kant believes that actions as expressions of moral duty, performed with ulterior motive, is amoral in nature.

The khalifah status of every employee, when applied within business domains, does not necessitate an egalitarian distribution of roles but instead acknowledges differentiated competencies and hierarchical structures. Adam Smith, in his seminal economic theory, postulated that the division of labour arises as a natural consequence of human propensity for exchange<sup>78</sup>, then so does skills and qualification. This principle, when contextualized within the khalifah paradigm, emphasises that workplace stratification should not undermine ethical imperatives. Moral values in action are not derived from hierarchical status but from adherence to ethical conduct. Khalifah status of employees does not disintegrate hierarchy in business but acknowledges different skill set of every employee and encourages him to work ethically in his domain knowing that the responsibility and accountability factor is the same as the status of vicegerency is alike.

While the stratification of labour (worker, employee) may delineate distinct roles and responsibilities, the ethical framework of Khilāfah ensures that moral obligations remain universally applicable across professional hierarchies. Unlike conventional corporate models, which often reinforce hierarchical distinctions in dignity and worth, the khalifah approach emphasizes that the intrinsic honour of an individual is not reliant upon rank but upon ethical integrity. The division of labour, therefore, does not translate into a fragmentation of moral responsibility; ethical duties remain equally binding upon all individuals, from leadership to labourers.

The principle of cooperation, rather than reliance upon the

benevolence of others, is essential for economic and workplace ethics as one does not expect “dinner from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker...but from their regard to their own interest<sup>79</sup>.” but the khalifah framework, in this regard, fosters an ethos wherein employees engage in reciprocal ethical accountability, ensuring that individual aspirations are harmonized with collective well-being. *And so, if we cannot expect our dinner from the benevolence of others, we can still expect better measure and quality in our meat, beer, and bread.*

This khalifah ideology and psychology is reminiscent to spirituality much talked about today. The contemporary corporate world increasingly acknowledges the significance of spiritual values in workplace ethics, recognizing that professional environments thrive when employees internalize ethical commitments beyond mere regulatory compliance<sup>80</sup>.

Through this holistic perspective, the khalifah mentality reconciles economic pragmatism with ethical idealism, ensuring that the pursuit of professional success does not occur at the expense of moral responsibility. This integrative model not only preserves ethical integrity within professional spaces but also enhances productivity by fostering an environment of trust, moral accountability, and collective responsibility effectuating congruency and harmony in a pluralistic work environment.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the critical need for a more integrated approach to workplace ethics by introducing the khalifah concept as a framework applicable to every employee, regardless of hierarchical position. The khalifah designation transcends cultural and national boundaries, mirroring the universality of religious principles and ethical codes. This paper has demonstrated not only the significance of the khalifah status but also the inherent responsibilities and accountabilities it entails, both to God and to creation. Within the specific context of the work environment, the khalifah concept promotes adherence to company laws, codes, and protocols, including established hierarchies, while simultaneously upholding the fundamental equality of respect and dignity inherent in this status. This concept is particularly salient

in pluralistic work environments encompassing Muslim employees, managers, leaders, workers, and labourers, and offers considerable value to organizations operating within or interacting with Muslim nations globally. For global companies with supply chain partners, joint ventures, or target audiences in Muslim-majority countries, acknowledging and implementing the khalifah concept can foster appreciation, enhance reputation, and improve employee morale. As demonstrated, this framework contributes to a more harmonious, congruent, and inclusive work environment that embraces diversity. From an academic perspective, this paper highlights the adaptability of the khalifah term, demonstrating its applicability to individual employees within a business setting. Furthermore, it establishes the potential for synergy between Islamic ethics and Western ethical theories and moral philosophy, suggesting that self-interest maximization can be reconciled with broader ethical considerations, mitigating greed and other vices. By promoting a more holistic approach, the khalifah concept encourages the fulfilment of individual needs, the needs of others, religious duties, and organizational objectives. Finally, this paper underscores the need for empirical research on this topic and provides a robust foundation for such investigations, highlighting their urgency and immediate relevance.

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DR. TARANNUM SIDDIQUI

## Exploring Islamic Feminism: Perspectives on the Impact of Muslim Women in India

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### ABSTRACT

Feminism offers a new perspective on society, eliminating outdated theories about why things are the way they are and examining them from the viewpoint that women are not inferior. This paper aims a conceptual discussion of Islamic feminism, its theoretical significance, and how it differs from other feminisms and feminist movements. A nascent 'Islamic feminist' movement in India is dedicated to the goal of achieving gender equity under Muslim Personal Law. However, a clear distinction should be made between Islamic feminism as a discursive movement and the distinct local, national, or transnational social and political movements. The intellectual strand of Islamic feminism, specifically, is the justification of Islamic law and theology. Usually, the Islamists maintain that feminism is contradictory. That is, for them, feminism is against the teaching of Islam.

While Islamic feminism aims to establish women's rights within the framework of Islam by reinterpreting its holy texts, Islamic feminist discourse can be viewed as an approach that challenges the traditions contributing to gender inequality in Islamic countries while emphasizing that Islam is fundamentally an equality-based religion rooted in the Quran. Muslim women around the world are asserting their rights within the framework of Islam. This paper also examines how Islamic feminism operates in India and its impact on Muslim personal law and women's rights in the Muslim world.

*Keywords:* Feminism, Islamic Feminism, Law, Quran, Women.

## INTRODUCTION

Feminism is basically a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, cultural, and social legal rights for women. This includes looking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A feminist advocates or supports the rights and equality of women. Feminism gives a new point-of-view on our society, when reducing old theory about why things are the way they are, and looking at it from the perspective that women are not inferior and men are not the mean. Islamic feminist discourse can be regarded as an approach that struggles with the tradition that produces gender inequality in Islamic countries and places emphasis on Islam being an equality-grounded religion based on the Quran. Muslim feminists underline that the Quran should be reinterpreted in terms of a sensitive approach to women in the direction of a general global perspective by taking the culture and conditions of the society. They have been trying to prove that Islam in its original form is a religion based on equality between women and men, but this Islamic men-dominated society has been deliberately veiled by the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings.

## ISLAM AND FEMINISM

Muslims today number approximately 2 billion and live on every continent in the world in conditions of enormous political, social, and cultural crisis and religious diversity. Naturally, women will have different types of concerns depending on where they live and in what conditions they are.

At the same time, however, it is clear that despite the diversity of Muslim cultures and societies, women in many societies have to endure similar forms of sexual inequality and discrimination.<sup>1</sup> The sectarian differences in the belief and practice of Islam, particularly among the Shiites and the Sunnis, introduce a level of complexity that has to be taken into account. Moreover, geographically and historically, Islam was and is practiced around the globe in diverse cultural settings.<sup>2</sup> Today in Muslim societies, like Iran, Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco, women have been able to act as judges and, more recently, as a result of the persistence of Muslim women's feminist activist struggle.<sup>3</sup>

The term “feminism” first came up in France during the late nineteenth century, criticizing male dominance and making claims. Muslim countries like Egypt did not accept this as something to be Western; rather, they made it their own and have been the founders of it. The word "feminism" means "Nasawiyah" in Arabic. Islamic feminism is a feminist discourse and the practice articulated within an Islamic model. Islamic feminism basically develops its understanding and mandate from the Quran, inquires about rights and justice for women and for men in the totality of their existence, and is not limited to the Western feminist perspective.

However, the other does not call this Islamic feminism but describes it as a women-centered rereading of the Quran and other religious texts by Islamic scholars and activists.

#### UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIC FEMINISM

Today, the new debate on Islam and modernity is by refusing the above approaches and insisting on a genuine Islamic framework for social organization.

'Islam is the solution' has become the rallying call for Islamists and encapsulates the extent to which Islam is viewed as a comprehensive system of thought, values, and guidelines to govern a contemporary state. In relation to women's rights, Muslim scholars exhibit a similar diversity of opinion as above. Islamic feminists tend to draw from the intellectual foundation of Islamism and relate to a particular view of Islam as the source of knowledge on contemporary issues, including women's issues. Needless to say, not all Muslim women identify with this perspective.

According to the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi, her intellectual trajectory can be traced from an early advocacy of the secular reconstruction of Muslim societies to a later position that increasingly resembles Islamic reformism. Muslim feminist theories have come out in response to this malaise. The Islamic feminist aim is “to establish women’s rights within the Islamic framework by reinterpreting Islam’s holy sources.” In contrast, secular feminists challenge the particularistic nature of the Islamic framework and advocate the application of a set of standard universal rights for Muslim and non-Muslim women.

The African-American scholar and famous Islamic feminist Amina Wadud criticizes customary understandings as they reflect the point of view of men and perspectives related to women in their own period of time, with their injustice. According to Wadud, if problems are determined by considering the realities of the past, if analyses are made in other fields of social life, and if these problems are tried to be solved in the light of eternal verities in some way, it is also very natural to show an approach to the issue of women.

Islamic feminism, broadly speaking, is a form of feminism concerned with the role of women in Islam. It aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of sex or gender, in public and private life. Islamic feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. One of the leading figures in Islamic feminism is Margot Badran, a historian who specializes in Islamic feminism and has authored many essays and books interpreting Islam from a feminist perspective.

According to Badran, Islamic feminism is a feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and philosophy from the Quran, seeking right and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. The discourse (Islamic feminism) explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Qur'anic notion of equality of all *Insan* (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life. It rejects the notion of a public/private dichotomy (by the way, inexistent in early Islamic jurisprudence, or *fiqh*), conceptualizing a holistic *Umma* in which Qur'anic ideals are operative in all space. Therefore, Islamic feminism aims to recover the notion of gender equality from the Qur'anic revelation introduced into the 7<sup>th</sup> century (C.E.) patriarchal Arabian society.

The equality of the Holy Quran, from which gender equality cannot be separated, did not sit well with the patriarchal culture into which Islam was first introduced and spread. To a large extent, patriarchal thought, institutions, and behaviors largely remain resistant over time to the revolutionary Qur'anic notion of gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

Islamic Feminism: According to Zainab Alwani, 'is an idea of awareness advocating that men and women have equal rights based

on re-reading the Quran, re-examining the religious texts, and telling people to practice'<sup>5</sup>.

According to Arshad Hiba, Islamic feminism and the role of UNESCO-Islamic feminism divided three types of feminist movements in Islam. The first theory, Islamic feminism, is their opinion of Islam and its teachings; they pursue the full equality of women and men. The theory of Muslim feminists' faith in Islam and feminism uses arguments outside Islam, such as an international human rights agreement, to counter gender inequality and Islamist feminists advocates a political Islam, the notion that the Quran can mandate an Islamic government; they advocate women's rights in the public domain but do not challenge gender inequality in the personal, private domain.<sup>6</sup>

Another Islamic Feminist writer Malk Hafni Nasif says, 'Critical tensions also emerged within feminist discourse; of the two divergent voices of feminism in Egypt and in the Arab Middle East for most of the century and the second remained an alternative, marginal voice until the last decades of the century, generally not even recognized as a voice of feminism. The dominant voice of feminism, which affiliated itself with the westernizing, secularizing voice, wary of and eventually even opposed to western ways, searched for a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within a native, vernacular, Islamic discourse- frequently in terms of a general social, cultural, and religious renovation. The renovation was understood to be regenerative for the entire society, not just for women, hence the rights of women were not the sole nor even any longer the primary object of reform, but one among several'<sup>7</sup>.

Most dominant and popular among the movements today is the Islamic feminist movement. Islamic feminism, one must take into account the meaning of the two words that make up this term: In recent times, Islamic feminism has emerged as a challenge to patriarchy in Muslim societies. Islamic feminism challenges the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts and aims to promote gender equality by asserting that Islam inherently supports women's rights. Leading figures in Islamic feminism include activists, scholars, and writers who reinterpret religious texts to advocate for equality. These Islamic feminists primarily address issues such as family law, access to education,

employment rights, and the fight against violence toward women as key components of their agenda.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM

The patriarchal interpretation of religious texts in the pre-modern era has significantly impacted Muslim communities in the modern period, especially regarding the status of women in Islam. The impact includes domestic seclusion, gender segregation, and limited educational access. While Muslim women have recognized the issues stemming from patriarchal interpretations of religious texts, it is also important to highlight that men have played significant roles in the fight for women's emancipation. Fatema Mernissi highlights the contributions of Imām al-Zarkashi, who recognized 'Ayesha's (RA) role in the development of ḥadith.

Islamic feminism emerged primarily as a discourse rather than as a social movement during the last quarter of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, when it became increasingly prominent (Badran 2002). The factors that have contributed to the rise of Islamic feminism include the growth of conservative movements, particularly Islamist movements, and a sense of disillusionment with secular authoritarian regimes.

Thus, Islamic feminism can be regarded as a new approach to the gender egalitarian interpretation of Islamic religious texts, frequently known as a discourse concentrating on women-sensitive rereading of religious sources, especially the Quran.

The two most famous global women's liberation movements were that of the Prophetic women's liberation movement in the seventh century and that of the Western feminist movement of the eighteenth century. During the early days of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, reforms in women rights affected marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Before Islam, Women were not provided such legal status in Arab cultures and the West. The Western feminism movement and the Muslim women liberation movement were different in their nature and outcomes from the Western feminism movement. The causes of the feminist movement in Europe were mostly rooted in opposing the religious scripture and the unjust social practices against women. Islamic feminism is being

produced by Muslim women from both majority and minority communities in Africa and Asia, as well as from immigrant and convert communities in the West. The classic Islamic feminism is the classic Islamic methodologies of *Ijtihad* and *Tafsir*. *Tafsir* means interpretation of the Quran, and *Ijtihad* is a technical term of Islamic law that describes the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah.<sup>8</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, different feminist movements reflected the cultural contexts in which they arose, and Muslim feminists have adapted their own issues of working within the Islamic framework, allowing women to counter gender domination and expectations as a part of their faith. Like Egypt reformer, Abduh's (1849-1908) thought later concentrated on social issues and changing Islamic society. The first Arabic feminist manual on the role of women in Muslim society was by the early twentieth-century Tunisian author and reformist al-Tahir al-Haddad.<sup>9</sup> Haddad in his book "Our Women in the Sharia and Society," has explained misconceptions in the areas such as the veil, polygamy, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Al-Haddad rightly highlights the point that the interpretations of the classical Islamic scholars were inextricably linked with the traditions and conditions of their time, which do not correspond to those of the present.

The first female author, Zaynab Fawwaz, talked about Gender equality in 1846-1914. She supported the rights of women through her newspaper articles and poems, with her views collected in *al-Rasa il al Zaynabiyya* (the Zaynab letters). She was the first writer on women rights through fiction.<sup>10</sup>

Some often mentioned figures in this context who have focused their attention on rereading the Qurān are Amina Wadud, Rifaat Hasan, Fatima Naseer, Aziza al-Hibri, and Shaheen Sardar Ali. Wadud, an African-American theologian, has been known as a main figure in the rereading of the Qurān (see Badran 2001: 50; see Wadud 2006). Two seminal treatises considered to be foundational texts of Islamic feminism are Wadud's *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* and Pakistani-American scholar Barlas 'Believing Women: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran.

Islamic feminists have written extensively on gender-just understandings of Islam, saying equality for Muslim women using

Qur'anic arguments. This is the main problem that the educated and non-educated, Muslim women are not aware of all the rights that the Muslim women have in the Quran, but that which the Muslim men's authority has largely subverted in the name of Islam; she had a rough deal. In Egypt, which has been in the forefront of feminism in the Muslim world, the fight for women rights dovetailed with the rise of secular nationalism and social justice. A global movement called Musawwah—meaning “equality” —began to make the case that women can fight for justice and equality from within Islamic tradition. For many Muslim women, this came as a revelation. Musawwah was spearheaded by twelve women, from countries as diverse as Egypt, Gambia, Turkey, and Pakistan, who spent two years laying out the movement's guiding principles. Musawwah operates on the belief that Islam is not inherently biased toward men: patriarchy within Muslim countries, it is a result of the way male interpreters have read Islamic texts.<sup>11</sup> Musawwah empowers women to shape the interpretations, norms, and laws that affect their lives, and then push for legal reform in their respective countries. Muslim women associated this new ideology with regimes that had oppressed their people.<sup>12</sup>

Feminism, as a new consciousness of gender and women's subordination, first emerged among the upper and middle classes within the unevenly gendered spaces of modernity at different times across various countries in the Middle East.<sup>13</sup>

#### IS ISLAMIC FEMINISM SO CONTRADICTIONARY?

Islamists often argue that feminism is inherently contradictory—that it opposes the teachings of Islam. For them, feminism is a Western phenomenon, embraced by women who are westernized but wish to remain within the fold of Islam. Consequently, they tend to dismiss or ignore this movement. This stance is relatively recent, shaped by the strong influence of conservative Islam and its legal and social norms, which traditionally assign women a subservient position to men.

Islamic feminist discourse differs significantly from Western feminist perspectives. Muslim women often prioritize their religious identity, whereas Western feminists frequently view religion as a source of patriarchal oppression. While Western feminists have leveled severe

criticisms against the family as an institution, Muslim feminists have largely defended it, recognizing the family as a central and respected component of society. Furthermore, Muslim feminists generally do not focus on issues such as sexual freedom or abortion—topics that Western feminists frequently engage with in discussions of the female body.

From an Islamic perspective, when women's rights are properly understood, there is no justification for discrimination between men and women. Islam does not undervalue either gender; rather, it regards men and women as complementary elements, each contributing to a unified whole. In this sense, both genders achieve harmony and social unity by coming together.

#### WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM ON MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA?

The Islamic feminist movement in India is focused on achieving gender equity within the framework of Muslim Personal Laws. Proponents argue that the Qur'an grants women political, economic, and social rights, suggesting that, in theory, Islamic feminism serves as an approach to empower Muslim women.

Amid controversies surrounding legal reform, a significant development in recent years has been the emergence of Muslim women's activism aimed at promoting women's rights, rather than concentrating solely on altering personal laws to enhance those rights. Muslim women in India face considerable challenges both as citizens and as members of the country's largest minority. Their disadvantaged socio-economic status reflects limited social opportunities, which, although not unique to Muslim women, is further intensified by their marginal position within the broader context of social disadvantage experienced by most Indian women.

Muslim women encounter multiple obstacles in areas such as education, employment, and access to welfare programs. Their overall status highlights deficiencies in three essential dimensions: knowledge (measured by literacy levels and average years of schooling), economic power (work participation and income), and autonomy (reflected in decision-making abilities and physical mobility). These deficits collectively define the low status of women within this community.<sup>14</sup>

Muslim women's rights activists assert their right to read the Qur'an for themselves and interpret it in a woman-friendly way. They argue that the Qur'an clearly states that there is no clergy. Therefore, the 'ulama' have no inherent authority to tell them what the Qur'an says. Their role, according to these activists, is to encourage women to read the Qur'an, not to dictate its meaning to them. Women are thus empowered to engage with the text directly and to derive guidance that reflects their own perspectives and circumstances.

The Muslim women's movement in India openly supports the need for reform of Muslim Personal Laws in the country. This movement has been reinforced by the rise of awareness-raising campaigns, which aim to inform Muslim women about the rights that are guaranteed to them in the Qur'an. These campaigns are intended to generate interest in debates regarding the reform of Muslim Personal Law and to encourage women to take an active role in asserting their rights. Historically, women's organizations from Gujarat, Mumbai, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka have taken the lead in this movement, establishing a strong foundation for activism. Notable organizations include Hukook-e-Niswan, Minority Women in Madhya Pradesh, Tehreek, and the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, among several others. These organizations have played a crucial role in mobilizing women, raising awareness, and challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law that limit women's rights.

At a global level, Muslim women are increasingly claiming their rights from within the framework of Islam. From Pakistan to Nigeria, women are raising their voices to advocate for the reinterpretation, or *ijtihad*, of Islamic law (Shariah) with the goal of reducing the gap between the rights of men and women in Islamic societies. This global trend highlights a growing consciousness among Muslim women about their religious, social, and legal entitlements. Many scholars argue that the first feminist in Islam was the Prophet Muhammad (saws) himself. During his prophethood, he instituted a number of radical reforms that transformed the treatment, status, and role of women in society. These reforms included granting women legal rights, protecting them from social injustices, and emphasizing their importance within the family and community. By highlighting the Prophet's reforms, modern Muslim feminists emphasize that advocating for women's rights is fully

compatible with Islamic principles, and that feminist engagement with Islam can serve as a legitimate and empowering path for social change.

## FROM SHAH BANO TO SHAYIRA BANO- LESSONS LEARNT

### *Shah Bano Case*

In 1985, the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano case ultimately led to the enactment of the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986**.

In the Shah Bano case, after forty-three years of marriage, Shah Bano's husband, Mohammed Ahmed Khan, a wealthy and prominent lawyer, asked his wife to leave their matrimonial home. At the time, Shah Bano was in her sixties and was compelled to leave along with her five children. In response to this situation, Shah Bano filed for maintenance under Section 125 of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Section 125 of the CrPC explicitly states that if "any person, having insufficient means, neglects or refuses to maintain...his wife...a Magistrate of the first class...may order such a person to make a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his wife as the Magistrate sees fit." This provision is designed to ensure that all women who are unable to support themselves receive financial assistance, irrespective of their religious identity.

The Supreme Court's judgment elicited a wide range of reactions. Several leaders within the Muslim community expressed concerns, arguing that the decision could interfere with the interpretation and application of Muslim Personal Law. Many feared that it represented an intrusion into religious matters and might alter traditional understandings of women's roles within the community. The debate underscored a broader tension between secular law and personal religious laws in India.

Shah Bano had approached the court under the CrPC, a uniform law applicable to all citizens, rather than under uncodified personal laws, which are often interpreted in ways that may disadvantage women. In response to the opposition voiced by certain Muslim leaders, the INC-led government enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 (hereafter referred to as the Muslim

Women's Act). This legislation effectively curtailed the judiciary's authority to apply secular law over personal law in cases of maintenance for divorced Muslim women, by establishing a separate legal framework specifically for them.

Shah Bano was not only a Muslim but also a Muslim woman, and her case symbolized larger questions about the position of women within the community. The response from conservative religious authorities reflected concern that the judgment could reshape the social and legal status of Muslim women, who were widely perceived as custodians of Islamic values and culture. From their perspective, the judgment seemed to challenge traditional norms that they considered integral to the preservation of their religious and social identity. On the other hand, the Supreme Court emphasized Shah Bano's status as an Indian citizen, deserving of equal rights and protections under the law, irrespective of her religion. This difference in perspective highlighted the complex interplay between individual rights, gender justice, and community identity in a multicultural society.

A subsequent legal development, the Latifi verdict, represented another step forward in the pursuit of gender equality. This judgment provided a predominantly social, rather than strictly religious, basis for maintenance provisions, signaling a gradual shift toward broader recognition of women's rights. Nevertheless, challenges persist. Discrimination on the basis of religion has not entirely disappeared, and in particular, Muslim women remain excluded from certain maintenance provisions under the CrPC. This ongoing disparity underscores the continuing struggle to reconcile religious personal laws with principles of gender justice and equal citizenship in India.

#### MODEL NIKAHNAMA

A Mumbai-based group comprising lawyers, academics, and NGO leaders has been engaged since the early 1990s in drafting a Model Nikahnama, which was eventually published in 2005. This document was designed to clearly articulate and formalize various rights and options available within marriage. Muslim intellectuals, lawyers, activists, and *ulema* actively participated in the debates surrounding the introduction of the Model Nikahnama, as well as in discussions advocating the banning of *triple talaq*.<sup>15</sup>

One of the main sticking points in the discussions was whether to include a provision on *talaq- tafwiz*. The four-page *Nikahnama*, published as a single booklet in both Hindi and Urdu, outlines seventeen points that the couple is expected to keep in mind. It not only prohibits practices such as dowry and domestic violence but also sets out the terms under which religious norms prescribe the bridegroom's responsibilities toward his wife.

The approved version of the *Nikahnama*, released in 2005, reflected several compromises. Mandatory clauses relating to *triple talaq* were removed and replaced with a simple caution against the practice. At the same time, clauses concerning *mehr* in kind, the prohibition of dowry, and the rejection of domestic violence were retained.<sup>16</sup> However, the document also introduced new elements in the form of a conservative code of conduct for women, including provisions suggesting that women should not leave the home without the permission of their husbands.

### *Shayra Bano Case (Triple Talaq)*

The Shah Bano case was raised nearly thirty years ago, and recently, once again, a similar controversy has emerged in the form of the Shayara Bano case. In this case, crucial issues such as divorce, *halala*, and polygamy have been brought to the forefront. The central question raised is whether such forms of divorce are illegal and unconstitutional, and whether they violate fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Indian Constitution. Even after more than seventy years of India's independence, Muslims continue to confront such challenges, whether in the context of the Shah Bano case or the more recent Shayara Bano matter.

A significant and persistent question that arises in this context is how legal and religious matters gradually assume a political character. Some groups openly support such interventions, while others strongly oppose them. This division raises further questions: why do such issues receive widespread public attention, and why are they repeatedly projected as major controversies? Often, instead of focusing on resolving the core issues, debates tend to shift toward political alignments. Religious leaders and public figures are sometimes seen expressing support for different political parties—whether the Congress, the BJP, or the

Samajwadi Party—without arriving at a clear solution to the problems faced by affected women. This situation has led many to ask why clearer guidance is not consistently offered in the light of the Qur'an, and why religious interpretations addressing these matters are not communicated more effectively to the wider public.

In India, matters such as marriage, divorce, maintenance, and inheritance among Muslims are governed by Shariat law, commonly referred to as Muslim Personal Law. The legal basis for the application of Muslim Personal Law is provided by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, which continues to regulate these personal matters within the Muslim community.

The practice of *talaq* pronounced three times, commonly known as *triple talaq*, has long been a deeply contentious issue within the Muslim community. It has generated repeated controversies, extensive debate, and diverse interpretations over the years. Conflicting opinions are frequently expressed, and in recent times, these debates have intensified as legal interventions and public scrutiny have increased. The persistence of this issue highlights the continuing tension between religious interpretations, constitutional values, and the demand for gender justice within the framework of a modern democratic state.

## CONCLUSION

In Muslim-majority countries, a widely held belief persists that women's activism—particularly feminist movements, including Islamic feminism—serves as a conduit for foreign Western ideas that are perceived to be incompatible with Islamic values. As a result, despite originating as a transnational and progressive initiative, this movement has not significantly enhanced the recognition of women's rights and privileges within many Muslim societies, nor has it been able to fully overcome suspicions regarding its ideological orientation.

In the Indian context, one of the most serious challenges faced by Muslims is related to Qur'anic literacy and comprehension. The Qur'an is predominantly read in Arabic, whereas the primary languages of Indian Muslims are Hindi, Urdu, or other regional languages. Consequently, a large section of the Muslim population has historically remained unable to grasp the meanings and implications of Qur'anic

texts. For a long period, only a very small number of individuals—both men and women—engaged with the Qur'an through translations, and their numbers remained negligible. However, this situation began to change gradually after the 1950s, when both Muslim men and women increasingly started reading the Qur'an in their own languages and attempting to understand its message in a meaningful way. This shift led to a greater awareness among Indian Muslim women of the rights explicitly granted to them in the Qur'an.

The impact of this growing consciousness became visible during the 1990s, most notably with the resurgence of debates following the Shah Bano case in 1986 and later with the formulation of the Model Nikahnama in 2005. These developments highlighted the urgent need for reform within Muslim personal law. Indian Muslim reformists and various Muslim organizations bear a significant responsibility to reform the Shariat Application Act of 1937 and to make it accessible, intelligible, and relevant to ordinary Muslims. Today, at least twenty-two Islamic countries have abolished the practice of triple talaq. In countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, substantial reforms have been introduced in Sharia-based family laws. Even neighboring countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh have abolished or restricted the practice of triple talaq, either explicitly or implicitly. In India, however, the issue of triple talaq has remained a subject of intense debate within the Muslim community for nearly an entire era, reflecting both resistance to and the necessity of legal and theological reform.

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DR. MD. CHINGIZ KHAN

## Negotiating Tradition and Faith: The Shift in Pangal Community's Marriage Practices from Localism to Islam in Manipur

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### ABSTRACT

Manipur is home to a range of indigenous (*yelhoumee*) communities, notably the Meiteis/Meeteis and the Pangals (Manipuri Muslims). This paper examines the marriage practices of the Pangal community from the time of their settlement in the region. It critically analyzes the degree of regional and local cultural influence on their marital system and explores a discernible shift from indigenous customs toward Islamic norms during the later decades of the nineteenth century. This transformation raises important questions: What factors contributed to this change? Can it be understood as part of a broader process of Islamization in the state? The paper seeks to objectively assess these developments in Pangal marriage practices in light of evolving interpretations and applications of Islamic principles.

*Keywords:* Pangals, Meiteis, Marriage, Localism and Islam.

### INTRODUCTION

Manipur, a northeastern Indian state with diverse indigenous communities (*yelhoumee*) such as the Meiteis/Meeteis, also includes the Pangal (Manipuri Muslim) community. This article explores the historical processes behind the establishment of this community during the medieval period. It assesses the pivotal relevance of Sufi saints, trade networks, and the establishment of dargahs and shrines in the expansion of Islam in pre-colonial Manipur. Furthermore, it investigates the core ideological forces- such as the message of Sufi mysticism and the social

inclusivity of these networks- that drove the spread of Islamic influence in the region. This article is by and large depended on primary sources such as *Nongsamei Puya*, *Pangal Thorakpa*, *The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*, *Kachari Buranji*, etc. Before delving into the marriage practices of the Pangals and their local elements, it is essential to understand the origin of Muslim settlement in Manipur, which this article provides.

#### THE ORIGIN OF MANIPUR'S PANGAL COMMUNITY

The origin of Manipur's Pangal<sup>1</sup> community remains uncertain due to limited historical records. Scholars gave references like *Nongsamei Puya* and *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*, though their authenticity is debated. These sources suggest Pangals migrated from Sylhet in 1606 AD during King Khagemba's reign, with the *Cheitharon Kumpapa* documenting their sixteenth-century integration.<sup>2</sup> In the seventeenth century, Turko-Afghan campaigns and Sylheti migration brought indirect Mughal influence to Manipur, with Islamization tied to warfare and settlement. Early chronicles note minimal Mughal presence before then.<sup>3</sup> The 1606 Battle of Toubul, involving Cachari-Muslim forces, remains a key historical event deserving further study.

#### THE FIRST MILITARY INVASION OF DIMASHA (CACHAR)

In 1604 AD, during King Khagemba's reign (1597-1652 AD), the Dimasa kingdom launched its first invasion of Manipur following the *Sanongba Higaiwa* dispute, meaning *false instigation*. The conflict arose when Chingsomba<sup>4</sup> borrowed his brother Sanongba's boat for a traditional *hiyangtannaba* (boat race<sup>5</sup>) at Leishangkhong, damaging it in a collision. When Sanongba<sup>6</sup> demanded the return of the original boat, tensions escalated. King Khagemba's mediation failed, leading Sanongba, Queen Dowager Luwang Changpombi, and followers like Shoraisam Tangkhompa, Oinam Pukchao, and Thokchom Muba to seek refuge in Cachar.<sup>7</sup> So, they secretly discussed the issue and urged Cachari King Pratapnarayan<sup>8</sup> (Yasanarayan) to invade Manipur and restore Sanongba to power.<sup>9</sup>

Pratapnarayan ordered generals Yakharek and Bhimbhal to lead the

invasion. The Cachari forces crossed Manipur's western hills, encamping at Lamsang in Imphal West. They initially defeated Manipuri forces at the Luwangli River and advanced to Khurai near the capital. However, under King Khagemba's orders, the Manipuris launched a powerful counterattack, ultimately repelling the invaders.<sup>10</sup> Yakharek surrendered, vowing never to attack again. Many Cachari soldiers were captured<sup>11</sup>, while Sanongba and Luwang Changpombi returned to Cachar. However, retreating Cachari forces falsely reported Yakharek and Bhimbals's betrayal<sup>12</sup>, causing distress among the captured women and children in Manipur.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE SECOND MILITARY INVASION OF CACHARI-MUSLIM FORCES

The second invasion of Manipur by joint Cachari-Muslim forces occurred in 1606 AD, following the Cachari defeat in 1604 AD. Determined to retaliate, King Pratapnarayan sought support from Prasena, a Muslim mercenary leader from Taraf, Bengal.<sup>14</sup> Prasena enlisted Nawab Muhammad, who sent 7,000<sup>15</sup> soldiers under the commander-in-chief Muhammad Sani, accompanied by leaders like Shah Kusum and Sheikh Juned. This alliance launched a large-scale attack on Manipur.<sup>16</sup> After intense battles, King Khagemba and *Qazi* Muhammad Sani reached an agreement with three conditions, allowing Muslims to settle in Manipur permanently while waiving tribute demands, including gold, marking a pivotal moment in history.<sup>17</sup>

The first condition was that Islam should not be looked down upon and Muslims should not be humiliated and treated with respect. The *qazi* should be given a free hand. The second condition was that Muslims should be allowed to live by the rules and regulations of Sharia. Muslims and their descendants should never be expelled from Manipur. If any unavoidable circumstances demanded an expulsion from Manipur, then the shares entitled to the mother of the Muslims should be granted. The third condition was that the Manipuri women who have already performed- *nikah* -should be granted property rights. One transcript which embodied such legal treatises was confined at the court and another copy remained with the *qazi*.<sup>18</sup>

The origin of the Pangal community in Manipur before the

seventeenth century remains debated. John Parratt suggested the *Aribam* family arrived during King Naophangba's reign (590-680 AD)<sup>19</sup>, while *Nongsamei Puya* (co-edited by Janab Khan) claimed some Muslims supported Manipuri forces in the 1606 AD<sup>20</sup> battle against the joint Cachari-Muslim forces. According to the *Muslim Panchayat Lilong Report* (1932), Sadir Para Koireng and Kutuwan Khan were the progenitors of the *Aribam* clan (*Sagei*).<sup>21</sup> Some *maichous* (Meitei scholars) believed the *Aribam* clan formed in Naophangba's era.<sup>22</sup> The Pangals excelled in salt production, akin to their Bengal co-religionists.<sup>23</sup> Historical texts, including the *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, note their sixteenth-century settlement.<sup>24</sup> Maulana Rahimudin's *Musalman-i-Manipuri* mentions three gunsmiths- Seikh Ruba, Gora Khan, and Ashiq Shah- forming the *Aribam* clan under King Mungyamba (1562-1597 AD).<sup>25</sup> However, claims of a Muslim presence in Manipur as early as the seventh century lack historical evidence, and scholars have dismissed these narratives as speculative.

Some historians consider 1606 a key moment in the expansion of Islam in Manipur. Richard M. Eaton's theories on Islamization are partly relevant, highlighting the crucial role of migration in the process. Salam Irene noted that Muslims made up only 8.4% of Manipur's population in 2011. Large-scale Muslim migration to Manipur began in the seventeenth century, as documented in sources like *Nongsamei Puya*, *Pangal Thorakpa*, *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, and *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*. King Khagemba settled three brothers of Syed Auriya, a spiritual guide from Taraf<sup>26</sup> (modern Bangladesh), at Nongmaizing Ching<sup>27</sup> for worship and settlement.<sup>28</sup> Later, during King Khunjaoba's reign (1652-1666 AD), seven Muslims from Takhel (Tripura), including Isak Alimullah and his family, settled at Apong Inghkol.<sup>29</sup> Under King Paikhomba (1666-1697 AD), 37 Muslim travelers, including figures like Sunarphool, Miliya Sheikh, and Phuleicha Sandulla Sheikh, were permitted to settle in Manipur in 1679 AD.<sup>30</sup>

During King Paikhomba's reign, Muslim travelers presented valuable gifts and were rewarded with land, wives, and servants<sup>31</sup>, though the reasons for such privileges are unclear. Four Mughal princes- Poton Khan, Min Khan, Lukaman Khan, and Tilen Khan-arrived with ten leaders and settled in Manipur, their motives unknown. Paikhomba, along with two Mughal princes, visited the *Mangal Khutsham-Shang*<sup>32</sup>,

reflecting Mughal influence. Some scholars linked them to Shah Shuja<sup>33</sup>, but there is no solid evidence.

In 1676 AD, Manipuri Pangals Chuki Meihaiba, Huipuba, and *Singga*<sup>34</sup>Khongba visited Tripura, highlighting their role in Manipur's diplomacy.<sup>35</sup> In April 1795, seven Muslim mendicants, led by Kashoudin from Cachar, arrived, marking a key moment for Islam in Manipur.<sup>36</sup> Small migrations, including Sayyids and Pathans from Gujarat, occurred for trade.<sup>37</sup> During Burmese invasions in the eighteenth century, Muslims immigrated, notably Maimu, Pukchao, and Tonba from Sylhet. King Bhagyachandra allowed Tonba to serve Wakil Haridas Gosai, involved in the 1762 Anglo-Manipuri Alliance.<sup>38</sup> The Muslim population in Manipur grew gradually, with no clear demographic records. Historians debate Islam's spread by the sword. Rafayattullah linked the 1606 Battle of Toubul to the joint Cachari-Muslim forces. That year's boat race between Princes Sanongba and Chingsomba led to the Muslim settlements during King Khagemba's reign.

The patronage theory explains Islamization in India. Unlike elsewhere, Muslims were never rulers, so non-religious favoritism was irrelevant. Salam Irene noted that Manipuri kings granted immigrant Muslims local wives, land, clans (*yumnaks*), and servants. W. Ibohal stated that Muslims received family titles based on occupations.<sup>39</sup> Historically, they lacked social aspirations, yet King Khagemba's liberal policies toward them remain unclear. These may have stemmed from the 1606 agreement with Qazi Muhammad Sani, concerns over invasions, or recognition of their skills and bravery. As per Eaton's patronage theory, the king provided resources to Sylheti Muslim settlers, ensuring territorial stability.<sup>40</sup>

The theory of Islam as a religion of social liberation, critiquing the caste system, does not apply to Manipur, where no caste system existed when Islam arrived. Irene noted the Meiteis hadn't adopted Hinduism then. Gangmumei Kamei<sup>41</sup> pointed out Vaishnavism became the state religion under King Pamheiba. Eaton's remaining theories, including military invasions and migration, are more relevant to Manipur's Islamization.

The Barak Valley, comprising the present-day districts of Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi, has a distinct geographical and cultural identity, being separated from mainland Assam's Brahmaputra Valley.

This region, now a predominantly Bengali-speaking area, has a long history of Muslim settlement. Historical evidences witness that the Muslim community began establishing itself in the western part of Badarpur as early as the first half of the fourteenth century even prior to 1745 and before the Kachari kingdom shifted its capital to the plains.<sup>42</sup> Upendra Guha, in his work 'Kacharer Itribritta,' mentions that during the Kachari reign, many distinguished court figures were Muslims.<sup>43</sup> A significant and continuous wave of migration occurred from the eighteenth century onwards, originating from the neighbouring districts of East Bengal. This influx became particularly intensive during the British Colonial period. Over time, these migrant communities successfully assimilated and integrated with the indigenous population, adopting the local Bengali language as their own.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond migration, the spread of Islam in the broader Assam region was profoundly influenced by the work of Sufi saints. Sufi saints such as Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrezi, Shah Ismail Ghazi, Shaykh Badruddin Badr-I Alam and Shah Jalal of Sylhet played crucial roles in the Islamization of Bengal and its adjoining areas.<sup>45</sup> In the Brahmaputra Valley, this process was well underway by the seventeenth century. A particularly notable figure was Shah Milan, popularly known as Azan Faqir, who arrived during the reign of the Ahom king Pratap Singha (1635-36). Despite his high social status as a Syed, he adopted the humble title of 'Faqir'. Azan Faqir's unique contribution was his use of the native Assamese language for composing devotional songs known as *zikirs* and *zaris*.<sup>46</sup> Through this culturally resonant approach, he effectively communicated Islamic teachings, facilitating the conversion and expansion of Islam among the local population of the region. However, the historical record concerning the role of Sufi saints in the expansion of Islam in pre-colonial Manipur is fragmentary. The *Cheitharon Kumpapa* provides a rare glimpse by saying that "One Pangan mendicant also arrived. He was allowed to stay in Aawang Keithen in Kangpokpi".<sup>47</sup>

#### THE MARRIAGE TRADITIONS OF MANIPUR'S PANGAL COMMUNITY

The marriage (*luhongba*) tradition prevalent among the Manipuri Muslims was influenced by the local marriage system based on exogamy.<sup>48</sup> They followed the practice of not marrying either a close

relative or a clan member, although these did not constitute prohibited categories. The only peculiar thing was cross-cousins marriage is not a widespread phenomenon among the Muslim community of Manipur.<sup>49</sup> However, they stressed on solemnizing marriage the Muslim way by performing *nikah* after consulting and bringing an agreement of both the parties. A major purpose of marriage was procreation and *nikah* was the only way to ensure the legitimacy of the children produced by Muslim parents.<sup>50</sup>

A traditional marriage was usually performed in one of the four forms namely, *hainaba* (engagement), *chenba* (elopement),<sup>51</sup> *chenbaphaba* (capture), *loukhatpa*<sup>52</sup> (recognition of elopement), in this order. Marriage was a civil contract and not a religious sacrament. There could be no marriage without consent. It could be dissolved with the consent of both the parties or by law.<sup>53</sup> Marriage without consent was considered void and a marriage with consent under compulsion was also invalid.<sup>54</sup> Islamic law or *sharia* was always used in marriage ceremony of Manipuri Muslim though there were local elements in the way they performed. Some local marriage traditions executed by Muslims in Manipur are explained below.

### *Sagei KuwaYenba*

It is one of the traditional functions before the marriage ceremony of the Manipuri Muslims, is the distribution of green betel-nuts and leaves to each of the *sagei* relatives of the girl staying in that locality which is executed in a certain day by the groom's father. The father of the boy engages a person for this purpose and sends him along with betel-nuts and leaves for distribution of the *sagei* relatives of the girl. The information about the agreement between the girl's and boy's parents towards engagement of the girl is communicated in this medium.

### *Kuwa Khaiba*

*KuwaKhaiba* (cutting of betel-nuts into four equal pieces), is also one of the conventions before the marriage ceremony which was followed after the *sageikwayenba* on a date and agreed to between the parents of the boy and the girl. Some selected friends and relatives of both parties

are invited for this function. It is usually done for formal declaration of the agreement between the boy's and girl's parents towards engagement of the girl.

### *Panuka Puba*

*Panuka Puba*, a compound word of *pan* and *kwa* (betel leaves and nuts), is performed after *kwakhaiba* on a date and fixed for it, which is compeer of the *heijapot* (*heijing pot*) *puba* of the Meiteis. In this case, friends and relatives of both sides are also invited. The parents of the boy arrange betel-leaves and nuts in pieces (in packet known as *putla*), sweetmeats and fruits of any kind of the season in large amount and bring to the house of the girl, which are scattered to the invited guests. Such function is performed in the afternoon. In this function, a special share of these items is reserved and given to the girl and her friends. Otherwise, the boy's father would have to pay a fair amount of money to the bride. This function comes to an end with a prayer. After this function, the date of marriage is fixed. These three traditional functions were transmitted and performed from generation to generation in the Manipuri Muslims society since the early period by borrowing from the local community. There was no written document of these three practices prevalent in the Manipuri Muslims society but orally transmitted. Now, with the passage of time, such practices were left.<sup>55</sup>

The tradition of payment of bride money (*mibr*) by the groom was present.<sup>56</sup> This tradition was not present in the Manipuri society. At the time of marriage, they performed some traditional dances such as *thabalchongba*,<sup>57</sup> *maibijagoi*,<sup>58</sup> and *khullangesei*.<sup>59</sup> Some scholars claimed that not only the Muslims used the traditional music but they also introduced *ghazals*, *Qasida*, *masnawi* written in Urdu, which were sung during the wedding.<sup>60</sup> There was no ceiling on the *awonpot* (dowry) and parents gave the bride with what was deemed essential to start a happily married life.<sup>61</sup> According to Salam Irene, a charming and meaningful custom prevalent among the Manipuri Muslims was the presentation of a copy of the Qur'an by the father to the bride on her wedding day which was a symbolic gesture of great appreciation.<sup>62</sup> They also performed *Wari-Leeba* (story-telling)<sup>63</sup> drawn from the local community.

Many local practices related to the marriage ceremonies of the Pangal

community in Manipur, which were discussed earlier, have gradually been abandoned in recent times. This change has taken place primarily due to the continuous and gradual process of Islamization based on the Shariat model, which has been evolving in the state since the latter part of the nineteenth century and continues up to the present day. However, this process of Islamization does not mean that it has hindered or disrupted the socio-cultural relationship between the Pangals and other communities, particularly the local Meitei community, except for one “unfortunate” episodic event that occurred on May 3, 1993, which emerged due to a misunderstanding between the two communities over the issue of the sale of small arms. What needs to be pointed out here is that, despite moving forward with the Islamization process in the state, the Pangals have continued to maintain cordial and harmonious social relations with other communities. In the earlier phase, the cultural life of the Pangals was deeply embedded with various local elements and indigenous segments, and during the initial period of their settlement in Manipur, Islam was practiced largely in a nominal sense, often described as a form of “namesake Islam.”

## CONCLUSION

It can be safely concluded that scholarly opinions remain divided, with competing claims and counterclaims, regarding the settlement of the Pangal people in Manipur before and during the seventeenth century. Furthermore, although historians such as Ira M. Lapidus and Richard M. Eaton have identified Sufi saints as the primary agents of Islamization in many Southeast Asian regions, their documented role in pre-colonial Northeast India—particularly in the context of Manipur—appears to be limited and less clearly established. The marriage practices of Muslims in Manipur during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as in the later part of the nineteenth century, were more or less similar to those of the local communities. This indicates that during their early phase of settlement, Muslims in Manipur assimilated and adopted a significant number of Meitei customs and traditions into their socio-cultural life, as is evident from the marriage practices discussed above. However, it must also be pointed out that such practices, often regarded

as 'un-Islamic', were gradually transformed and realigned towards more traditional Islamic norms. This shift occurred through the calculated and sustained efforts of Maulvis or Maulanas, the activities of the Tableeghi Jamaat, and the growing influence of Islamic education imparted through Madrasas and Maktabs.

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## NOTES

1. Historical sources like *The Cheitharon Kumpapa* (the royal chronicle of Manipur), Khairuddin Choudhury's *The Manipuri Mohammedan*, and R.K. Jhalajit Singh's *A Short History of Manipur* suggest that the term "Pangal" likely originated from "Bangal", meaning men from East Bengal. Due to a linguistic feature common in the Tibeto-Burman languages, Manipuris in the seventeenth century often pronounced "b" as "p", thus transforming "Bangal" into "Pangal" which is a common linguistic feature among speakers of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages based on George Abraham Grierson's path-breaking work, ed. and compiled, *Linguistic Survey of India (Tibeto-Burman Family and Specimens of the Kuki-Chin and Burma Groups)*, Vol. III, Part III, Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Calcutta, 1903, pp. 20-54. In medieval times, any person from East Bengal, regardless of religion, was called "Pangal". Among Manipuri Muslims were Pathans, Sheikhs, Syeds, and Mughals. Another origin story appears in *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*, where King Khagemba, recognizing Muhammad Sani's bravery in the 1606 Toubul battle, titled him "Panganba" (meaning "strong man") and referred to his Muslim troops as "Pangal". Since then, "Pangal" has denoted Muslims in Manipur and signifies "strength" in Manipuri. For details, see Mazhar Asif and Md. Chingiz Khan, "Tracing the Historical Roots of Muslims' Settlement and Migration in Northeast India: A Case Study of Assam and Manipur", *History and Sociology of South Asia*, Vol. 19, Issue 2, 2025, pp. 263-280.
2. Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 1, Routledge Publication, London, 2005, pp. 56-57, 62.
3. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. O. Bhogeshwor Singh and M. A. Janab Khan Manipur Stationary and Printing Industries, Imphal, 1973, pp. 1-2.
4. The prince Chingsomba was the real younger brother of king Khagemba from the same mother.
5. Boat race, an annual festive event involving Manipur's kings and nobles, occasionally led to tragedies like drownings. Despite this, the tradition continues to thrive in Manipuri society today. See Gangmumei Kabui,

- History of Manipur: Pre-colonial Period*, Vol. I, National Publishing House, Delhi, p. 207.
6. The prince Sanongba was the younger brother of king Khagemba's step-mother Luwang Changpombi.
  7. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 3; R. K. Sanahal Singh, *Pangal Thorakpa*, Liberty Publication Association, Imphal, 1985, p. 2.
  8. *Kachari Buranji*, ed. S. K. Bhuyan and tr. Mrinal Kumar Deka, DVS Publications, Guwahati, 2022, p. 70; N. N. Acharya, *The History of Medieval Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1984, p. 221.
  9. Asif and Khan, "Tracing the Historical Roots of Muslims' Settlement and Migration in Northeast India: A Case Study of Assam and Manipur", *History and Sociology of South Asia*, pp. 263-280.
  10. Kabui, *A History of Manipur: Pre-colonial Period*, Vol. I, p. 214.
  11. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 4; Singh, *Pangal Thorakpa*, pp. 2-3.
  12. Kabui, *A History of Manipur: Pre-colonial Period*, Vol. I, p. 214.
  13. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 6.
  14. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, Vol. II, tr. M. I. Borah, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, 1936, p. 820; Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, p. 43; *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, pp. 6-8; Singh, *Pangal Thorakpa*, pp. 3-5.
  15. In the *Nongsamei Puya* and *Pangal Thorakpa*, the number of soldiers that got engaged in the second military invasion from Taraf was 7000. But in the *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, the number of soldiers was 1000. For details, see *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 8; Singh, *Pangal Thorakpa*, pp. 3-5; Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 1, pp. 67-68.
  16. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 11; Rafayattullah, *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*, Lahore, 1929, pp. 6-8.
  17. Rafayattullah, *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*, pp. 8-12; Asif and Khan, "Tracing the Historical Roots of Muslims' Settlement and Migration in Northeast India: A Case Study of Assam and Manipur", *History and Sociology of South Asia*, pp. 263-280.
  18. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9; *Ibid.*, pp. 263-280.
  19. *Notes of the Meitei Beliefs and Customs*, ed. John Parrat, (Vice President, Manipur State Darbar), Manipur State Archives, Government of Manipur, Imphal, 1998, p. 83. The dating of King Naophangba's reign, recorded as 428-518 AD in the royal chronicle, remains debated, problematic, and inconclusive.
  20. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 5.

21. Salam Irene, *The Muslims of Manipur*, Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p. 32.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
24. Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 1, pp. 44-65.
25. Irene, *Muslims of Manipur*, pp. 32-33.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-63.
27. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 59.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-68; Singh, *Pangal Thorakpa*, pp. 40-43.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-72.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-83; Singh, *Pangal Thorakpa*, pp. 43-44.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
33. MA Janab Khan, *Manipuri Muslim*, Imphal, 1972, pp. 45-52; W. Yumjao Singh, *Manipur Itihas*, State Press, Imphal, 1947, pp. 30-31.
34. The term *Singka* or *Singga*, a non-Meitei word, refers to a portable musical instrument. These groups, primarily Muslims, appear to have functioned as a miniature circus troupe, as documented in Manipur's royal chronicle.
35. Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 1, p. 92.
36. Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 2, p. 46; Abdul Hakim Shah Khullakpam, *The Manipur Governance to the Meetei-Pangal (Manipuri Muslim)*, Pearl Publication, Imphal, 2008, pp. 57-58.
37. Quazi Hamid Ali, *The Manipuri Muslim*, Silchar, Assam, 1979, p. 12.
38. Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 2, p. 173; Francis Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, ed. S. K. Bhuyan, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, 1987, pp. 80-81.
39. Wahengbam Ibohal Singh, *The History of Manipur: An Early Period*, Manipur Commercial Co., Imphal, 1986, p. 608.
40. Rafayattullah, *Yaddasht Kursi-Nama*, p. 9.
41. Kabui, *History of Manipur: Pre-colonial Period*, Vol. I, p. 252; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, *A Short History of Manipur*, O. K. Store, Imphal, 1992, p. 134.
42. Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, p. 43; Dr. K.M. Baharul Islam, 'Role of Muslims of Barak Valley in the Independence Movement: Outer Circle of the Nationalistic Discourse in Assam', in *Assam and the role of Muslims in the Independence Movement*, Center for Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, Seminar, 25 March 2010.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43; M. Kar, 'Muslim Immigration to Assam,' *Social Scientist*, vol. 8, no. 7 (Feb., 1980), pp. 67-75.
45. F. A. Qadri, 'Sufis and the process of Islamization in the Pre-Colonial North-East India', *Society and Economy in North-East India*, ed. F. A. Qadri, Vol. 2, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 346-358; F. A. Qadri, 'Legends, Hagiographies, and Sufism in North-East India during the pre-Colonial period,' *Popular Literature and Pre-modern Societies in South Asia*, ed. Surinder Singh and I. D. Gaur, Pearson Publication, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 281-294.
46. Ms Rahena Saikia, 'Sufism and Azan Fakir of Assam,' translated by Smt. Jolly Saikia from the Assamese version, *Religion and Spirituality*, Vol. 2, no. 1-A, 2008.
47. Parratt, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Vol. 3, p. 44.
48. Irene, *The Muslims of Manipur*, pp. 66-74.
49. The marriage system of the Panga; ommunity in Manipur is contradictory to the marriage system of South India as it was heavily influenced by the Meitei community marriage system. Moreover, cross-cousin marriage among the same clan was considered as taboo which is prevalent and maintained not only the Muslim community but the Meitei community also. For details, see in M. Chaki-Sircar, *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, pp. 58, 65, 204; Irene, *The Muslims of Manipur*, p. 68; Sabu Sethu Pillai Padmadas and P. Sadasivan Nair 'Consanguineous unions and their effect on reproductive outcomes: The case of India', *Genus*, 58 (2), 2002, pp. 113-119.
50. K. Hossain, 'In Search of Equality: Marriage Related Laws for Muslim Women in Bangladesh', in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5 (1), 2003, pp. 96-113.
51. The term *nupichenba* means elopement in Manipuri and this practice, prevalent in Meitei society, was adopted by Muslim couples anxious to wed. This had led Quazi Hamid Ali to conclude that the marriage system of the Manipuri Muslims is a combination of Islamic and Manipuri customs. The process of elopement was that the man took the woman to a friend's house and spent the night there. In the morning, the father of the intending groom together with his male relatives went to the women's residence and made a proposal for marriage. If it was acceptable, the *nikah* was performed on the second night after the elopement either at the residence of the bride or groom. If a negative response was received,

- the marriage was deferred till an agreement was reached. Essentially, it was a relationship of love based on the spouse's willingness to have the union and it was supposed to strengthen faith and to further the cause of Islam. For details, see in Quazi Hamid Ali's work, *The Manipuri Muslim*, p. 29.
52. The term *loukhatpa* means recognition of elopement. It is a tradition of local community which influences the Muslim community exhaustively. The process of how it functions and regulates in the local community's society is well explained in Chaki-Sircar's work, *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*, p. 75.
  53. *Nongsamei Puya*, eds. Singh and Khan, p. 104.
  54. Irene, *The Muslims of Manipur*, p. 68.
  55. For details of these three traditional functions and practices of marriage ceremony of the Pangal community in Manipur, see in A. Rahman, "The Meitei-Pangal" in Sanajaoba's edited book, *Manipur, Past and Present*, vol. 4, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 462-463; Khullakpam Kheiruddin, *Turko-Afghangee Chada Naoda*, Imphal, 1997, pp. 200-211; Mohd Shakil Ahmed, *Essays in Sociology: Muslims in Manipur*, Published by Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 96-104; Khan, *Manipuri Muslim*, pp. 34-36.
  56. Irene, *The Muslims of Manipur*, pp. 80-81.
  57. It was a form of Manipuri folk dance, meaning 'dancing in the moonlight' and is usually correlated with the festival of *Yaoshang* (Holi) in Manipur. During the early period, such folk dance was done in the moonlight accompanied by folk songs by employing the dholak or drum as the only musical instrument. Over the period of time, the dholak or drum was being displaced by modern bands and fluorescent lamps. Consistently, some traditional parents did not give permission to their daughters to walk out and meet any young men without their consent. *Thabal Chongba* is carried out in every locality on all the six days of the festival. Despite having inclusive in such festival during the medieval period by the Muslims, but they do not practice it as usual because of evolving the path of Islamization in the Manipuri Muslims society in the early period of the nineteenth century.
  58. It was a form of dance performed by *maibi* (religious functionary-female) related to *Lai Harouba* (local community's religious rituals). It is discussed in great length in Chaki-Sircar, *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*, pp. 114-183.
  59. It is a type of Manipuri folk music sung by both Muslim and Meitei communities (male and female) without having any written script and declaimed by the Muslim ladies in duet. Historically, such folk music

of Meiteis started singing by the Muslim community from the reign of Paikhomba. It symbolizes the switch of corny emotions between a boy and a girl through highly literary verses in the form of natural tunes without any musical accompaniment. It may also be regarded as an attuned rhetoric of poetic verses between a male and a female almost on the concern of fanciful motifs. *Khullang Eshei* is devised only through vocal jottings and strikingly classical words of the singers. There was no basic classical rule to sing this folk music. Basically, it is sung either during the time of physical work or marriage observance. It abandons the tedium of physical labor as well as quickens the momentum of the work. During the marriage ceremony, the Muslim ladies exclusively the girls who take in invitation card mobilize together at the residence of the bride two or three days ahead of marriage function and they entertain the days singing folk songs and dancing. They sing the canticle with dances. While continuing the song, the mother of the bride and other ladies in the gathering smirk and whimper. The bride also with tears of euphoria and melancholy sings such songs and bid farewell to her parents, relatives and friends. Such songs are highly glamorous and tuneful. The designs outlined in such songs are the remarks of their love, pangs of separation and love of nature. For details, see in Somorendro Arambam ed., *Manipur and Meitei Pangal*, Imphal, 1998, p. 5; M. Abdur Rahman and M. Kayamuddin Pukhrimayum's book, *Pangalgi Khunung Eshei*, Writers Union Manipur, Imphal, 2013.

60. Urdu *ghazal* and *qawali* became popular among the Manipuri Muslims from the reign of Maharaj Churachand (1891-1941). This was sung in the past that a day before the marriage, the friends of the bride and the groom gathered at night to sing the Manipuri folk-songs (*khunungeshei*), along with Urdu *ghazal* and *qawali*, as a form of entertainment. The Muslim folks had orally transmitted these songs through generations to generations. However, after the Second World War Manipuri Muslims started giving up such elaborate marriage traditions according to A. Rahman who said during the function of release of his co-edited book, *Pangalgi Khunung Eshei*.
61. Irene, *The Muslims of Manipur*, p. 73; Salam Irene, 'Social life of the Muslims of Manipur', *Social and Cultural Stratification in North East India*, ed. Madhu Rajput, Manak Publication Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2012, p. 105.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
63. It was in existence in the Manipuri society after the advent of Muslims in Manipur. The concept was of borrowing one which was introduced by an Assamese Brahman namely Jiu Ram Sharma in Manipur during the

reign of Maharaj Bhagyachandra. He began to narrate for the first time the Basam Skanda of Shri Mat Bhagwata, Ramayana and Mahabharata stories in 1776 AD. It influenced to the Muslims since the twentieth century as pointed out by Md Abdur Rahman. The process is somehow and somewhat different from the Meitei in the sense that Muslims usually did in connection to cultural activities while the local community, generally speaking, acted it with regard to the purely religious activity. How it was performed along with its processes by the Muslims and the local community is at great length discussed in Birendranath Datta's ed. book, *Historical and Cultural Relations between Manipur, Assam and Bengal*, Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1986, pp. 15, 43-44; Rahman and Kayamuddin's book, *Pangalgi Khunung Eshei*, p. 87.

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