

The holy Hajj at Makkah.

## Significance of Hajj

IFFAT MIRZA

**H**AJJ is one of the five pillars of Islam and it is compulsory for the adult Muslims who can afford the journey to Makkah to perform it once in his or her lifetime. It consists of a number of rituals to solemnize and commemorate the activities of some of our ancestors going as far back as Adam, who enjoyed Allah's guidance and forgiveness because of their sincerity to serve Allah alone.

Hajj is like a crash-course in our life that prepares us to tackle any situation whatsoever effectively. It teaches us patience and perseverance, tolerance and forgiveness, while increasing our consciousness of Allah. After completing the Hajj a person becomes more aware of his/her purpose of life and thus becomes better equipped to take on the challenges of life.

Hajj is performed at a specific time of the year, unlike Umra, the lesser pilgrimage, that consists of some subset of Hajj rituals. Umra can be performed almost any time of the year. Hajj is ritual intensive and in some cases need physical stamina. So it is better not to procrastinate. Some want to become a faultless perfect Muslim first, before going to Hajj. But who knows, maybe Allah will allow us to take bigger strides towards Him after the Hajj! Our Prophet said "Hurry to go on your Hajj journey if it is due on you, for none among you knows what will happen to him (tomorrow)." [Ahmad]

It is said that Hajis (pilgrims) are Allah's guests because the Kabah is Allah's House and no one can go for Hajj or Umra without Allah's invitation. So if we have immediate responsibilities and we are not in a position to make the trip, then we can just pray to Allah to allow us to visit His house. We never know Allah may invite us when we are least expecting!

It is recommended to try to observe all the rites and restrictions of Hajj correctly, taking care of minute details. But that shouldn't be a deterrent to go for Hajj, because there are a number of ways to atone for a mistake. For example, by offering a sacrifice, fasting or by feeding a poor, depending on the nature and extent of the error. Our prophet said that the reward for an accepted Hajj is nothing less than Paradise. It is a good idea to go for Umra first before taking up the

journey for Hajj if it is possible. It helps a lot if we already know what to do or what to expect.

1. The main rites of Hajj are as follows:
2. Start state of Ihram with prayer from Miqat, the appointed place
3. Tawwaf or circling anti-clockwise seven times around Kabah then pray 2 rakah prayer near the Station of Abraham
4. Drink water from Zam Zam fountain
5. Walk back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times
6. Travel to the tent city of Mina on 8th of Dhul Hajj with all the belongings to conduct rest of the activities from there
7. Go to the plain of Arafat on 9th Dhul Hajj to spend some time standing there in prayer and meditation
8. From Arafat go to Muzdalifa and spend the night there and then back to Mina after Fajr prayer
9. Throwing pebbles to the pillars representing devil representing devil
10. Offering of sacrifice and so on...

The Quran confirmed that the first house of worship is in blessed Bakkah, the old name of Makkah. Allah said in sura Ali-Imran (The family of Imran):

"Most surely the first House (of worship) appointed to men is the one at Bakkah, full of blessing and of guidance for the nations. In it there are clear Signs, the spot where Abraham stood, and whoever enters it shall be secure, and pilgrimage to the House is a duty mankind owes to Allah - those who can afford the journey. As for the unbelievers, Allah can surely do without them." [Quran 3:96-97]

Kabah, the cubical structure, is the first house of worship and it is also called 'Baitullah' i.e. Allah's house. Although, Prophet Abraham and his eldest son Ismail laid the foundation of Kabah (Quran 2:127) its history goes back to Adam. The rock on which Abraham stood to build it still carries his footprint; it actually looks like solidified mud. It is preserved in a gold-and-glass casing for the posterity. This place is called Makame-Ibrahim or the station of Abraham. There are a number of places in Makkah and its vicinity where Allah grants our prayer, near Maqame-Ibrahim is one of them.

Pilgrims walk between the hillocks Safa and Marwa seven

times like Prophet Abraham's wife Hagar who ran back and forth frantically between these two hills in search of water for dehydrated baby Ismail and prayed to Allah. And Allah answered her prayer and made a spring gushing forth near her child, "God's messenger called to Hagar from heaven 'What is the matter, Hagar? Don't be afraid; God has heard the boy's cry in this plight of his. Arise, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make him a great nation.' Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." (Bible, Genesis 21:17-19)

The spring is called Zamzam and it still runs in the same place after more than 4000 years and quenches the thirst of millions of pilgrims. Even today pilgrims drink Zamzam water and pray near the spring housed in an enclosure where prayers are readily answered.

To test Prophet Abraham, Allah asked him in a dream to sacrifice for Him his beloved son Ismail. Abraham told his son about his dream and Ismail readily accepted Allah's command and asked his father to sacrifice him for Allah. On their way to Mina, the place of sacrifice as shown by the dream Satan was trying to persuade Abraham as well as Ismail not to go through with this act of total obedience. Abraham threw a stone to drive the devil away. Ismail did the same thing when the devil whispered to him too. Thus Satan's evil attempts to distract them failed. When Abraham was finally about to sacrifice his son in Mina, about six miles north of Makkah, Allah substituted Ismail with a ram and Abraham passed the great trial successfully. To commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Ismail, his dearest possession for the sake of Allah, pilgrims sacrifice an animal as part of Hajj ritual.

Casting stones at the pillars, the manifestation of Satan, located at the places where Satan tried to confuse Abraham and Ismail, is symbolic. It is the struggle against the evil power within us as well as staying clear from the external evil influence that we face.

All these places are around the Mina's tents and pilgrims come here on 8th of Dhul Hajj with their belongings and stay in the tents up until 13th Dhul hajj and from there pilgrims perform the rest of the Hajj rituals like sacrificing, stoning etc. Staying in the tent of Mina is a unique experience; something like

camping-out but it has a spiritual side too. There are separate air-conditioned tents for men and women. It is a good opportunity to mingle with Muslims of other parts of the world, and exchange views and ideas. In fact I made a number of friends during my Hajj. Some families brought little children with them too and I don't think they had any problem because of the kids. Makkah and its surroundings are associated with Adam and Eve too. Jiddah means grandmother in Arabic, named after Eve, the grandmother of mankind. Because it is said that Eve's graveyard is located somewhere around there.

Arafat is the plain where Jabal-e-Rahma or Mount of Mercy is located; it is about five miles North Zamzam water and pray near the spring housed in an enclosure where prayers are readily answered.

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Every year millions of people from all around the world converge at Makkah to perform Hajj. It is a big yearly get-together of the children of Adam and Eve. By retracing the footsteps and enacting the activities of some of our ancestors like Adam, Eve, Abraham, Hajar and Ismail, those who enjoyed Allah's favour, we pay homage to them. Thus Hajj reminds us that Islam is not a new religion; it is the continuation and culmination of Judaism and Christianity. Men wearing identical outfit consisting of two pieces of white seamless cloth remind us of the futility of vanity and emphasize the equality of humankind in the eyes of Allah.

## The symbolic sacrifice

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

**T**HERE are acts, episodes and periods of time which instantly remind past events including events of historical importance. The lunar month of Muharram reminds us the supreme sacrifice made by Hazrat Imam Huseyn (A.S.) by giving his own life for the cause of truth. So, sacrifice or "Qurbani" of unblemished, robust and healthy sacrificial animals like cows, goats, camels, rams etc by millions and millions of Muslims including more or less two million pilgrims who flock to the holy city of Mecca from all over the world every year on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha, instantly reminds us all Hazrat Ibrahim's (A.S.) determination and all his preparations for sacrificing his beloved son Hazrat Ismail (A.S.) in deference to the desire of Almighty Allah.

In this context it may not be irrelevant to state here a few words about the position of Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah (Friend of Allah) among one or two lakh twenty-four thousand Prophets (pbuh) whom Almighty has graciously been pleased to send to this world from time to time for guidance of the mankind. His position after the position of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) is unique. On several occasions Almighty Allah put Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.) to severe test and it has been found that every time he had been able to come out of these tests with flying colours. When cruel-hearted Nomrud put Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.) in a blazing fire, the fire could not do any harm to him. He was absolutely safe and secured there in the blazing fire by the mercy of Allah.

Again, when Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah was asked by Lord Creator to sacrifice his dearest thing in life in the name of Allah then he thought that this dearest thing was his beloved son Hazrat Ismail (A.S.). So when he unhesitatingly

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made all necessary preparations to sacrifice his son Hazrat Ismail (A.S.), the obedient son gladly gave his consent and lay on the ground for the purpose and when the dutiful father Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.) was about to slaughter his son, a ram was actually slaughtered, not the beloved son Hazrat Ismail (A.S.). He was standing nearby absolutely unhurt as desired by Merciful Allah. It is, therefore, evident that Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah came out of this acid test also with flying colours. Naturally Merciful Allah was highly pleased with his friend Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.).

Of the five strong pillars on which the grand edifice of Islam stands salat (namaz) is the most important pillar. It is obligatory (farz) on the part of a Muslim to offer salat five times daily and in course of offering such prayers to Almighty Allah every day a devotee must supplicate Him 17 times in all in the following manner among other supplications:

"O Allah kindly shower Your peace and blessings on Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) and his descendants, the way You showered Your peace and blessings on Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.).  
O Allah kindly shower Your affluence (barkat) on Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh)

and his descendants the way You showered Your affluence on Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.) and his descendants."

It, therefore, clearly indicates the unique position of Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah (Friend of Allah) he holds among all other Prophets (pbuh) after our dear holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh).

Now the pertinent question is why the Muslims the world over, who can afford, are required to sacrifice animals in the name of Almighty Allah on the solemn occasion of Eid-ul-Azha every year? Since the sacrifice is made in commemoration of Hazrat Ibrahim's (A.S.) supreme sacrifice of his beloved son then our sacrifice of animals is obviously symbolic. But, we must remember such sacrifice or killing of unblemished, healthy and robust animals for food should never be considered as ritual or performance of religious duty only. It is definitely a means to an end, and not an end itself. Slaughter of animals, according to Quranic teaching, should remind us to earn piety, that is, one should be God-fearing and pious in all respects. Again, sacrifice of animals should instantly remind us to sacrifice our own interest in the interest of the needy and indigent. In other words, sacrifice of animals should remind us to sacrifice not only a small portion of

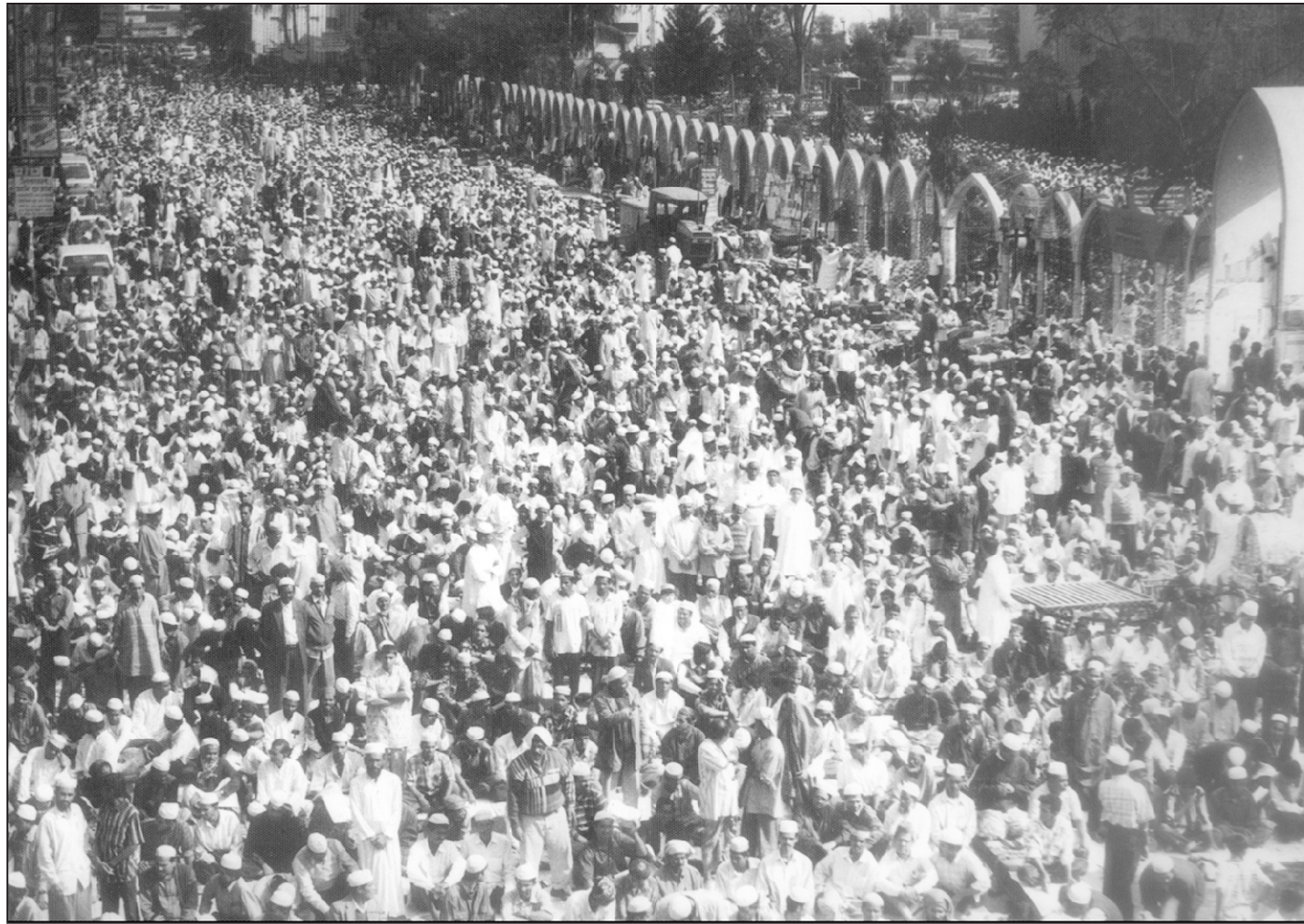
our money and wealth, it also teaches us to sacrifice a portion of our time, goods, intelligence and love with a view to bringing smiles on the melancholy faces of the helpless and unhappy persons of the society we live in.

We may now turn to the relevant Ayat of the Holy Quran and see what Almighty Allah says about sacrifice of animals by the Muslims. In Ayat 37 of Sura Hajj of the Holy Quran Allah Rabbul Alameen says:

"It is not meat  
Nor their blood that reaches God: it is your piety  
That reaches Him."

So, it is as clear as day light that Almighty Allah is not at all interested in getting any kind of food or help from His servants (bandas) for He is "Samad", that is, He is Absolute and does not have to depend on others for His needs.

On this solemn occasion of Eid-ul-Azha let all Muslims of the world learn a lesson anew that if Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah, as desired by Almighty Allah, was fully prepared to sacrifice his dearest thing in life, that is, his beloved son Hazrat Ismail (A.S.) in the name of Allah Rabbul Alameen, then the rich and all well-to-do persons should be ready to sacrifice at least a portion of their money and wealth for the welfare of the needy and the indigent and also for rehabilitation of the widows and orphans. Delicious dishes are prepared on the auspicious occasion of Eid-ul-Azha and while enjoying our gastronomic delight for three to four days let us not remain oblivious of the needs and difficulties of the have-nots. Since sacrifice of animals is symbolic one should, therefore, be ready for self-sacrifice. Let sacrifice of animals enable us to earn taqwa (piety) as clearly indicated in the aforesaid Ayat (verse) of the Holy Quran for Allah Gafur Rahman wants us to be pious in all respects.



An Eid congregation in Dhaka.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

## Masculine Eid: Half-full or half-empty?

MOHAMMAD OMAR FAROOQ

**I**T is often said that people with positive outlook generally see a glass half-full, rather than half-empty. Is it possible that some time having positive outlook may be more appropriately related to seeing the glass as half-empty? Let's see.

In my family here in the US, except myself, all other members are female: my beloved wife and two daughters. Our married life basically begun here as expatriates, somewhat untouched by the customs and cultures of our homeland. My two daughters were born and have grown up here in the USA.

When I first came to the US in 1981, as I started attending mosques here, I had a fundamental culture shock. Bhirmi khawar moto! I hope readers would forgive my dramatization. Women's coming to the mosque, allowing some exceptions, is generally not what we are exposed to, not only in our own homeland, but in much of the Muslim world. That women and mosques are two mutually-exclusive entities is not an uncommon sentiment. Or, at least, we prefer the mosques to be basically a place for us, the good old (and young too) men. If our generosity is overflowing then we might let those women attend mosques who just can't stay away, but we must make sure that nobody sees them or that they are there. A wall or screen is a must. [Note: There wasn't any at the time of the Prophet, and having such wall of separation, except

when the women request it themselves, is not Islamic.] They may have eyes (indeed, most of those eyes probably are beautiful to see through), but they must benefit from mosque participation from only hearing -- they usually can't even see the Imam. At the time of the Prophet, the women could hear and see him at the prayer.

Well, I have seen some women attending mosques, for example, in Bangladesh. I had a bigger shock after coming to the US, when I observed women coming and attending the Eid prayer as well. What a monstrosity! I came to the US before getting married. Thus, at least I did not have to struggle with the decision about dealing with my beloved, who probably happily would have sent me, one of the good old (I was young, of course) men, to the Eid prayer (a gathering of joy and festivity, too).

At first I thought it was because of the socially polluting environment of this American society. In our homeland, Eid activities (the religious aspects) are primarily for men. We all would wake up early in the morning (usually drowsy from going to bed late), take a bath, dress up and thank Allah, not being those -- you know those wretched poor! -- every Eid we had new outfits, gifts, spending money and so on, and then we the good old men (and boys -- the to-be-men) would march in joyous and atori (performed) spirit toward that place called Eidgah -- our masculine domain. Some of those poor, begging women, who know nothing

about our precious Deen (way of life; religion) would be there of course to give us opportunity to show our generosity, but other than that women stayed back home. (Ironically, it's not that they don't go out!)

Of course, they were only our beloved wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters. Young females at middle-class homes could have somewhat leisurely life the Eid day. But the adult women, basically most of the day their time is spent immersed in the joy of cooking those most delicious meals, even thoughts of those great items made with their personal touch makes me salivate. During the course of the day they might visit some of their friends or relatives or attend guests, but that's their happy share of the Eid (celebration). Therefore, what is this monstrous deviation here from and pollution of our custom?

Three years after I came to the U.S. I tied my knot with someone who stole my heart some time ago. The next Eid we were part of this monstrosity, and somehow it did not feel bad at all! Due to various other factors, into which I won't delve here, I readjusted the radar of my consciousness and conscience and started re-reading the Qur'an and the Hadith literature such as Sahih Bukhari (not the pulp literature: Maqsoodul Muminin, Shohoj Namaj Shikhkhah, Neyamul Qur'an etc.). I have read Sahih al-Bukhari before. But as I now started reading somewhat conscious about gender-related narrations with readjusted

antenna of my mind, I had to endure newer shocks. No, that the women were coming to mosques and, particularly, Eid prayer is not a monstrous deviation. They are doing the right thing as Islam inspires and instructs them to do. What we have in the predominant culture of our Muslim society, like in Bangladesh, is mostly, as in this case too, just the opposite of what Islam teaches. What does Islam teach? [emphasis is mine] Sahih Bukhari: Volume 1, Book 6, Number 321:

Narrated Aiyub: Hafsa said, "We used to forbid our young women to go out for the two 'Id prayers. A woman came and stayed at the palace of Bani Khalaf and she narrated about her sister whose husband took part in twelve holy battles along with the Prophet and her sister was with her husband in six (out of these) twelve. She (the woman's sister) said, "We used to treat the wounded, look after the patients and once I asked the Prophet, 'Is there any harm for me of us to stay at home if she doesn't have a veil (W R O N G TRANSLATION: In the Hadith the word is Jilbab meaning outer garment, including head-covering; not veil or face covering. This is translator's unwarranted bias)?' He said, 'She should cover herself with the veil (SHOULD BE "outer garment") of her companion and should participate in the good deeds and in the religious gathering of the Muslims.' When Um 'Atiya came I asked her whether she had heard it from the

Prophet. She replied, "Yes. May my father be sacrificed for him (the Prophet)! . . . I have heard the Prophet saying, 'The unmarried young virgins and the mature girl who stay often screened or the young unmarried virgins who often stay screened and the menstruating women should come out and participate in the good deeds as well as the religious gathering of the faithful believers but the menstruating women should keep away from the Musalla (praying place).' " Hafsa asked Um 'Atiya surprisingly, "Do you say the menstruating women?" She replied, "Doesn't a menstruating woman attend Arafat (Hajj) and such and such (other deeds)?" Sahih al-Bukhari: Volume 2, Book 15, Number 88:

Narrated Um 'Atiya: We used to be ORDERED to come out on the Day of Id and even bring out the virgin girls from their houses and menstruating women so that they might stand behind the men and say Takbir along with them and invoke Allah along with them and hope for the blessings of that day and for purification from sins.

Wow! I must have read these Hadiths before, as I completed a thorough reading of Sahih al-Bukhari before coming to the U.S., but how did I still get my shock here? Do our respected religious scholars not know about these? According to these Hadiths, young or old, married or virgin, menstruating or non-menstruating, having means to cover head or not, women are to attend the Eid prayers.

Now my daughters are 14 and 9. They are part of our participation in mosques and in all other religious activities. I can't even imagine going to Eid prayer alone, leaving my wife and daughters at home. It just won't be Eid!

Some might say that we have not seen any among our women family members (mother, wife, sister, daughter) unhappy due to not going to the Eid prayer. Well, there is something called acculturation (the Musalla (praying place)). "Do you say the menstruating women?" She replied, "Doesn't a menstruating woman attend Arafat (Hajj) and such and such (other deeds)?" Sahih al-Bukhari: Volume 2, Book 15, Number 88:

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(and young) men are for doing better, harder things of life. I have not seen my Dada/Nana/Abba generally doing any household chore. Of course, everyone's dada/nana/abba are different. How about yours? But is this what Islam teaches us? Let's see.

Narrated Al-Aswad: I asked Aisha (R): What did the Prophet (S) use to do at home? She replied: He used to keep himself busy serving his family and when it was the time for prayer, he would get up for prayer. [Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 8, # 65]

That our women are absent from the Eid prayer, despite the fact that Islam categorically and strongly emphasizes it, is merely an indication of perversions in the name of religion: in this case, it's Islam. This perversion and deviation have started long ago. Unfortunately, in some cases, Hadith collectors/compilers sometimes have become victims of bias, I believe not due to conscious prejudice. For example, in Sahih Muslim (English; vol. 2, #1932-1934) ALL THREE Hadith in regard to women's attending Eid prayer uses the expressions:

- The Prophet COMMANDED
- We were COMMANDED
- The Prophet COMMANDED

But the compiler of the Hadith editorialized the Chapter heading as: "PERMISSIBILITY (in Arabic Ibaaha) of going out of Id days toward the place of worship". [It's like saying "Permissibility of namaz, zakat or hajj by Muslims"! Do we say that Muslims are PERMITTED to offer

Namaz, give Zakat or perform Hajj? What the Prophet has COMMANDED has been rendered into PERMISSIBLE and then basically banishment (nirbashaon). [Note: A person having a bias in one context does not imply a general bias in any person, and thus, my comment about Hadith collectors should not be misconstrued as a general statement either.] This absence is more than just from the Eid prayer. In our predominant (seemingly) Muslim culture of Bangladesh (and it may apply to other countries as well), they are not part of anything meaningful and dynamic. I hate to say but am I wrong in saying that our Eid is a Masculine Eid?

During some of my visits to Bangladesh, when I had the opportunity to attend Eid prayers, I could say that it was half-full or half-empty. But saying it half-full might make us too comfortable with the half-full. IT MUST change. Thus, presuming that I am taking a positive approach here, I feel more appropriate to see the Eidgah as half-empty so that I never fail to miss the other half.

Facilitating women's participation in the society, within the broad guidelines of Islam as Muslims would or should, stretching from home to school to even battle-field (as well as other corridors of power, rights, status), can begin joyfully right from Eidgah!

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