

Eid-ul-Fitr: Origin and celebration

SYED ASHRAF ALI

EID-UL-FITR is comparatively a new festival and not as old as Eid-ul-Azha. Whereas Eid-ul-Azha, commemorating the glorious sacrifices of the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them) goes back to the days of yore in the eighteenth century before Christ, Eid-ul-Fitr is a comparatively new festival and originated in the 7th century AD. In fact, Eid-ul-Fitr is the most modern and youngest Major Festival amongst the celestial religions.

Eid-ul-Fitr was not known to the Muslims till the Holy Hijrat to the then Yathrib (now Medina) in 622 AD. After his Hijrat to Medina, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) found the people there regularly celebrating two festivals of Persian origin -- the *Mihirjan* and the *Nauruz* on the nights of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively. The way these two festivals were celebrated in then Arabia and Persia were not only highly objectionable but also not compatible with the norms and practices in Islam.

Nauruz and *Mihirjan* festivals celebrated by the people of Arabia prior to the holy Prophet's (peace be upon him) hijrat to Medina were mere Arabic versions of the two great festivals of the Zoroastrians namely, *Nauruz* and *Mihirjan* respectively. Both *Nauruz*, the Festival of the New Year, and *Mihirjan*, the Feast of Mithra, used to last six days, the number perhaps being based on the six Persian *gahanbars*. The first day of the new

year was called *Nauruz-i-Amma* (of the people) or *Kucak* ('little') and the sixth day was *Nauruz-i-Hasa* ('noble') or *Buzurg* ('great').

It was the custom of the *Kisra* (Persian Kings) that the King opened the *Nauruz* festival and then proclaimed to all that he would hold a session for them, and bestow benefits upon them. On the second day the session was for men of high rank, and for the members of the great families. On the third day the session was for his warriors, and for the highest *Marbadh* (Priests), on the fourth day it was for his family, his relations and domestics, and on the fifth it was for his children and clients.... when the sixth day came, and he had done justice to all of them, he celebrated *Nauruz* for himself and conversed only with special friends and those who were admitted into his privacy. As in the case of *Nauruz*, the first day of *Mihirjan* was known as *Mihirjan-i-Amma* and the last *Mihirjan-i-Hasa*. As stated earlier, this festival like *Nauruz* also lasted six days. But at one period it spread over thirty days, the first five being, according to Al-Biruni, 'feast days for the princes, the second for nobility, the third for the servants of the princes, the fourth for their clients, the fifth for the people and the sixth for the herdsmen. Thus instead of each of the six *gahanbars* being represented by only one day of the festival, it was at one time honoured both at *Nauruz* and at *Mihirjan* by a period of five days.

Both *Nauruz* and *Mihirjan* were originally New Year festivals. The Avesta year originally began about the time of the autumnal equinox

The word Eid in Arabic means "joy" and Fitr stands for "break of Fast" and symbolises "Return to Normalcy" Eid-ul-Fitr stands for the joy of breaking of fast or the joy of returning to normalcy. It reaches mankind every year as a Divine Boon, with a promise of joy and happiness, culminating as it does the month-long period of Siyam and Taqwa, fasting and self-restraint, Tarawwi and I'tikaf, prayers and penance.

and during the closing years of the reign of Darius I (522-486), it was changed to conform with the regular Babylonian year, thus commencing about the Vernal Equinox.

The Arabs used to celebrate *Nauruz* and *Mihirjan* on the night of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively almost exactly in the same way as the Persians celebrated *Nauruz* and *Mihirjan*. To both these two occasions were of great honour and significance. It is well illustrated by the following saying of Salman al Farsi as cited by Al-Biruni: "In Persian times we used to say that God has created an ornament for his slaves, of rubies on *Nauruz*, of emeralds on *Mihirjan*. Therefore, these two festivals excel and other days in the same way as these two jewels excel all other jewels."

The general scheme of celebration of *Nauruz* and *Mihirjan* not only laid emphasis on the artificial differences between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, which was not at all compatible with the concept of equality in Islam, but it normally led people to drunken orgies, frequently ending in brawls and bloodshed. Even the *Kiyani*, the women practicing immoral dancing and singing, whose immorality was proverbial, used to command wide respect during celebration of

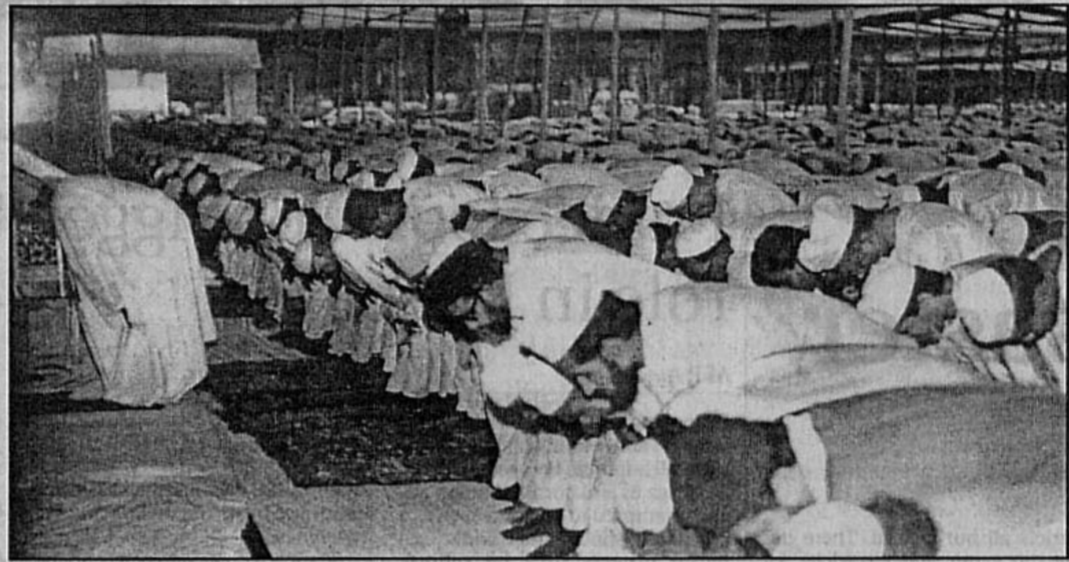
these festivals, and even the great chieftains used to pay public court to them during these festivals.

The holy Prophet (pbuh) was literally shocked and surprised and reported to have observed: "Allah has given you two days better than these days of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha." The age-old practice of celebration of *Nauruz* and *Mihirjan* festivals were very rightly stopped and the Muslims

started celebrating the two auspicious Eid-days in right earnest -- days in the mornings of which are the Muslims supposed to say a two-rakat special congregational prayer. And, as in all other prayers in Islam, there is no discrimination of race and nationality, no difference between black and white, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, slave and master, haves and have-nots in this thanks-giving congregational

prayer of Eid-ul-Fitr.

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The traditional Eid jamaat

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restraint, *Tarawwi* and *I'tikaf*, prayers and penance.

Eid-ul-Fitr, the day of rejoicing and offering heart-felt gratitude to Allah through *Sadqa-i-Fitr* and the two-rakat congregational prayer in the morning, is indeed a great and auspicious occasion. It is so auspicious that even women, who are always equal participants in the hardship, austerities and pleasures of Ramadan, have been told by the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to go out and say the Eid prayers in the *Eidgah*. Even the nights of Eids have special importance in the eyes of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "He who passes the nights of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha through prayers will never waver or be afraid on the Day of Judgement, while others will tremble or quiver on that Fateful Day."

Eid-ul-Fitr is really an exceptional occasion -- something totally different from an ordinary festival. The month-long fasting of *Ramadan* teaches a Muslim how to practice *Taqwa* or self-restraint in the most scientific way. Sex and food and drinks are prohibited for every able-bodied Muslim from dawn to dusk during this holy month, but these are permitted not only throughout the remaining eleven months but also from dusk to small hours in the night even during the month of *Ramadan* -- a scientific scheme which is quite reasonable and bearable. This hitherto unknown system not only makes hardship of self-restraint bearable but also pleasant, and the temporary renunciation makes the fulfilment of the basic desires even

more pleasant. Naturally, therefore, at the end of month-long arduous *Siyam* and *Tarawwi*, *Taqwa* and *I'tikaf*, Eid-ul-Fitr reaches us a pleasant climax and teaches us that Islam is no static system of worship.

None can afford to ignore or fight shy of this auspicious day -- a unique Prize giving Ceremony in which the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious Allah, in His infinite Mercy, Himself distributes the prizes to the winners who have successfully practiced not merely fasting but *Al-Siyam* in true sense through prayers and penance, self-restraint and abstinence from vices in the right kiln of Islam. According to a *Qudsi Hadith*, Benign Providence Himself declares: "Every man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from tenfold to seven hundred times. But Fasting belongs to me and I repay."

No Eid, however, can be successful if it is spent only through fun and frolic, pleasure and gaiety, joy and happiness. There can be no Eid for a Muslim if his neighbours remain unfed and unclothed. No orphan, no helpless person, no hapless soul on this day of a cold star can remain unfed, unhonoured and unsung on this auspicious occasion. Each and every hungry mouth has to be fed, every nude has to be clothed, every neglected and despised person has to be looked after in right earnest. The very joy of *Eid* will be marred if the poor neighbours still remain uncared for, if the poverty-stricken near and dear ones still groan in misery and helplessness.

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Let the have-nots smile

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

IN Ayat 183 of Sura (Chapter) Al-Baqara (the Cow) of the Holy Quran Almighty Allah says, "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may (learn) self-restraint". So, in pursuance of the aforesaid Ayat the Muslims in Bangladesh along with all other Muslims of the world observed "Siam" (Fasting) from dawn to dusk every day during the holy month of Ramadan, and also performed other important concomitant rigid duties including offering of 20 "rakats" of special "Tarabih" prayers during night time. And here comes the Eid. Eid-ul-Fitr is one of the two greatest Muslim festivals. After a month-long fasting, the fasters are naturally inclined to think of diversion and entertainment. They think of merry-making and joyous atmosphere on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. By the word "Eid" we mean happiness, and there is no other occasion which can match the bonanza and excitement of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Our holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not against harmless merry-making, mirth and entertainment on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. He opined that since other communities (as it was vogue in Persia) celebrated their New Year Day ("Nowroz") there was no harm if the Muslims celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr immediately after observing "Siam" (Fasting) for 30 days during the holy month of Ramadan. But the pertinent question is while thinking of merry-making and mirth, and while thinking of delicious dishes and gastronomic delight and new dresses, and exchange of suitable gifts on the occasion of ensuing Eid-ul-Fitr, do we ever think for a moment that there are indigent and needy people in every locality or area of the country who can hardly afford two square meals a day? That there are elderly women and widows who are putting in back-breaking labour every day from morning till evening (without enjoying any weekly holiday) in order to keep their body and soul together? No, we don't. The wealthy traders and tycoons, the moneyed people and the rich hailing from the upper strata of the society owe a duty to those unfortunate and helpless have-nots of our society.

I am not aware of the cost of a "Lehenga" suit (Salwar, Kamiz and Dopatta) at present. But according to a newspaper report published years before, i.e. in 2002 it was Taka one lakh, and such a huge amount of money was spent by a moneyed person for his beloved daughter. Now, at the age end of the year 2004, cost of a 3-piece "Lehenga" suit must be at least Taka one and a half lakh and there must be plenty of rich and well-to-do persons in our society who can easily afford to buy that on the occasion of this Eid-ul-Fitr. In this context my humble opinion is that if a rich/well-to-do person can spend so much for one of his children, then he is certainly capable of spending at least Taka 6 lakh for his whole family!

Why the Eid we celebrate every year immediately after the holy month of Ramadan is known as "Eid-

ul-Fitr"? This is because of "Fitra". Fitra is a paltry amount of money (cost of about over 1.5 kg of wheat) which each eligible member of every Muslim family (including a newborn child) is required to spend for the benefit of the poor and indigent person on Eid-day. And as Fitra is given on the occasion so this is called "Eid-ul-Fitr". Perhaps no festival, other than this Muslim religious festival, is so directly connected to such a noble cause.

Let us now refer to Ayat (Verse) 7 of Sura (Chapter) Maun (or Neighbourly Needs) of the holy Quran. In this Ayat Benign Allah has taken a serious view of certain classes of

supply of neighbourly needs only on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. It should be a continuous process for bridging the wide gap between the haves and have-nots.

It will not be irrelevant also to refer to another very important Quranic Ayat, that is, Ayat 7 of Sura Hadid (Iron). In this Ayat, Merciful Allah says:

"Believe in Allah and His Messenger

and spend of that whereof He has made you trustees, and such of you as believe and spend (right)

Their's will be a great reward."

In the said Ayat of the holy Quran



Let the have-nots also buy

PHOTO: STAR

people, who "refuse to supply neighbourly needs." And as indicated in a foregoing paragraph, in almost all the areas/localities of the country there are rich and moneyed persons besides a large number of poor and helpless people who are ill-fed and ill-clad, who are orphans and widows and badly need help from the moneyed and well-to-do persons. In such a locality or neighbourhood if a rich person, as stated above, buys a gorgeous 3-piece "Lehenga" suit costing Tk 1,25,000/00 say, then according to the dictates of the Holy Quran as clearly indicated in Ayat 7 of Sura Maun he should spend at least Tk 1,000/00 if not more, with a view to supplying neighbourly needs of the poor indigent neighbours to bring smile to their melancholy faces at least on this day of the greatest religious Muslim festival. Merciful Allah does not, however, says in the aforesaid Quranic Ayat that they should be extremely careful for

Almighty Allah has cautioned the rich and wealthy persons. The money and wealth they have accumulated do not actually belong to them, they are merely trustees or custodians of this money and wealth on behalf of their Creator Merciful Allah. They must spend them rightly as enjoined by Him in the said Ayat. The poor and the helpless people have a share in them.

Let them smile at least on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr. According to a famous saying of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) he is not a true Muslim who enjoys his daily meals to his heart's fill every day keeping his neighbours unfed. The poorest of the poor, the beggar who begs from door to door is also the vicegerent of Almighty Allah. He must not be ignored and disregarded.

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The day of self-searching and self-realisation

PROF ABUL KALAM ELIAS

THE holy month of Ramadan had made its august presence amongst us and has now taken leave of us, the Muslims. Every Muttaqi -- devoted and devout Muslim male or female -- suffers from an intense pang of separation and heaves a deep sigh. His or her mind is often filled up with regret and remorse. His or her outpourings and yearnings of heart makes him or her to think over how much harvest of bumper crops (of *Taqwa*, beneficence and munificence) he or she has been able to reap during this season of bounty and beneficence.

The very term *fitr* comes from *fitra* (charity) or *fitrat* (nature). As a matter of fact, Islam is a religion that is in conformity with nature and urges beneficence. It is said that once on the very day of Eid-ul-Fitr while every body was occupied with merry-making, fun and festivities, Hazar Omar (R) was not visible anywhere outside. After investigation he was found shedding tears in seclusion and silence, at home, for the reason that he was not pretty sure whether his prayer and fasting during Ramadan had been accepted by Almighty Allah *Sobhanahutala*. This event should act as an eye-opener to us all who claim to be Muslims.

Let us take a stock of our attainments during the holy month of Ramadan. Have we been able to come off through the ordeal of this sacred month with flying colours?

Ramadan fasting is meant for the training to be utilised during the rest of the year. It is also the month of jihad (waging war against evil force) in the history of Muslim ummah. Ramadan is the month of *Rahamat* (mercy), *Magferat* (forgiveness) and *Najat* (Salvation). It is the month of *Fazilat* (benefits), *Barkat* (abundance), *Mahabbat* (love and fellow feeling).

This holy month brings in bounty and beneficence, blessings and benediction for the Momin (true Muslim). Ramadan is the month of munificence and mercy. It is through the fasting that various health-hazards and ailments are healed and cured. Toxic-waste and toxic acid of entrails of human body is eliminated by fasting. Thus Ramadan is congenial to human health and longevity.

Ramadan is the month of *Sadqa* (making gift and charity). Because, as body is purified by prayer and fasting, so also riches are purified by *Sadqa*. The term *Sadqa* or beneficence appears with many meanings in the Quran-ul-Karim. It is one of the great pillars of the message and a clear way to social righteousness. It may signify truthfulness, goodness and right-doing in the broadest sense as well as obedience to God. Doing good to others is Islam.

By beneficence is meant acting rightly by offering comfort to the poor, to the less fortunate, and to those of our brethren in the community who have fallen on evil days in the search for a decent living owing to such factors as natural handicaps, orphanhood, illness, misfortune or

ignorance among other causes. Muslim annals abound in examples of beneficence to the less fortunate and to strangers, and that kindness which was the pride of private homes, tribes, and nations was but an expression of the Muslim spirit of beneficence and right-doing.

Ramadan is the holy month in which the holy Quran was revealed at night of *Lailatul Qadar* (better than thousand nights). It is a luckless Muslim who failed to avail himself of such golden opportunity of getting remission of his sins during the last part of every night and during *Etekat* (meditation) in the last week of Ramadan. Ramadan is the month of self-restraint (self-purification), month of patience and penitence, tolerance and endurance. It is the month of attaining *Taqwa* (God-fearingness, sincerity, sensitivity, piety and purity). It is the month of self-improvement, self-rectification and self-realisation.

But how many of us availed ourselves of this opportunity. Let us ask ourselves, the Muslim fasters, have we kept fast of every limb, i.e. tongue, eyes, ears, mouth, hands and legs? Have we protected our limbs against evil design of Satan? Have we turned a new leaf at the end of Ramadan? Have we been imbued with the ideals of sympathy, fellow feelings, unity, solidarity, fraternity and universal brotherhood of Islam?

It is incumbent on us, every Muslim men and women, on the festive day of Eid-ul-Fitr to take a stock of our achievements and failings by self-searching and self-criticism. After frantic self-searching, it needs no telling, we will be disillusioned by the fact that most of us have failed miserably to keep up the spirit of this holy month.

The reason is not far to seek. Many of us did not repose our trust in the Almighty Allah. Many of us are rendering lip-service to Islam. We stand on ceremonies and celebrations, feast and festivities, unhealthy competition, fancy dress and costume, pomp and pageantry. We indulge in carnival pleasure and superfluous luxuries, at the cost of have-nots, slum-dwellers, and left-over eaters.

We do not know how to seek benediction and blessings from the Almighty. Where is that *jabba* (ecstatic delight) of Iman and tenacious adherence to ideals and tenets of Islam? Now we have become fatalists and while away our time in frivolity.

Ramadan brings a rhythm and harmony in the Muslim World. This is the symbol of cosmopolitanism and internationalism. The month of Ramadan produces an excitement in otherwise dull and prosaic life of the people. Let us make self-assessment today how far we have advanced in respect of *Taqwa*, human, moral and spiritual values. How many of us extended helping hands to the indigent and poorer section of the society? How many of us have gained nearness to God by being bountiful to the needy and the distressed?

"O men! verily Allah is pure. He

accepteth not unless it be pure -- Hadith. How many of us had attained purity of heart? Many of us make a parade of their piety by outward show and display. But we must bear in mind: The holy Prophet said: "Verily, Allah does not look at your appearance and properties but He looketh at your hearts and deeds. Because, words, without heart to heaven never go." -- Hadith

What pains most is the pious fraud -- a deception practised with never a good end in view. I have seen very many religious humbugs in our society. At long last I quote from the writings of Sheikh Sadi, the famous Persian Poet, who said, "Religion does not consist in *Sizda* (prostration), or *Tasbi* (country the rosary) at the mosque, but Islam lies embedded in 'Khidmate Khalk' (service to humanity). He who serves mankind,



Eid shopping by the well-to-do

serves God." This is the essence of Islam.

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