

Eid-ul-Azha



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SYED ASHIRAF ALI

"It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for His guidance to you: And proclaim the Good News to all who do right." -- The Holy Quran (22:37)

FESTIVALS are a time of thanks-giving and good cheer, of decorating the house and putting on new clothes, of exchanging gifts and greeting family and friends, of preparing special meals, of drinking life to the lees. But Eid-ul-Azha is something extraordinary, something totally different from an ordinary festival.

One of the two main festivals in the Islamic calendar (the other being Eid-ul-Fitr) Eid-ul-Azha brings for the Muslim world a divine blessing, a rare opportunity not only to enjoy an auspicious day of joy and happiness but also to receive Allah's mercy and reward through sacrifice, patience and constancy.

The great festival Eid-ul-Azha, popularly known in this sub-continent as Bakrid, is celebrated by the Muslims on the tenth of Dhul-Hijja every year through sacrifices and prayers in memory of the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail (peace be upon them).

But Eid-ul-Azha does not simply commemorate the unique sacrifice of the prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them), it also testifies so eloquently to the patient way in which both father and son cheerfully offered to suffer any self-sacrifice, however painful it might be, in order to obey the command of Allah, the cherisher and sustainer of the worlds.

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sacrifice) that they might celebrate the name of God over the sustenance He gave them from animals (fit for food)" (Sura Hajj, 22:34)

Sacrifices have been made to get rid of natural disasters like typhoons and cyclones, to stop flood, to evade famine, to solicit rain, to nullify earthquakes, to extinguish volcanic eruptions, to win wars, to allay tyranny, to appease or eulogise gods and goddesses.

Human sacrifices have also been made by various nations in various forms and for various purposes since the dawn of civilization. The glorious and inimitable attempt of Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah at slaughtering his son Hazrat Ismail Zabihullah (peace be upon them) as a sacrifice in obedience to Benign Command, however stands unique in the annals of history.

Never, never indeed, on this clay of a cold star has any other father tried to slaughter his own son with his own hands, and in full senses, simply to obey God's Commands.

The glorious incident of Prophet Ibrahim's (peace be upon him) historic attempt at sacrificing his son Ismail (peace be upon him) in the name of Allah has been clearly narrated in Sura Saffat in the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran testifies: "He (Ibrahim) said, 'O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice. Now see what is thy view?' (37: 103-104). And the angel Jibrail with a ram in his arms stopped Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and replaced the son Ismail (peace be upon him) by the ram.

Both the father and the son stood the test and deserved the Divine Blessing. Naturally, therefore, Allah in His infinite Mercy, declared in the Holy Quran: "Thus indeed do we reward those who do right. For this was obviously a trial -- and we ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice. And we left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times. Peace and salutation to Ibrahim!" (37:103-109)

It should be noted that the sacrifice was demanded of both Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them). It was indeed a great trial of the will of the father and the son. By way of the trial the father had the Command conveyed to him in a vision. To make sure that it was not an idle

prophetic command, he, too, was sacrificing his son, his preparation to fulfill it literally and lastly the Divine commandment to sacrifice an animal in his stead indeed marked the abolition of the savage custom of human sacrifice.

The world today stands indebted to the righteous Patriarch and his dedicated son for their noble example in uprooting the age-old savage custom.

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It was indeed a great and momentous occasion when two men, with concerted will, "ranged themselves in the ranks" of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of Benign Providence was the supreme thing in life.

The glorious incident commenced a new era in religious history. It teaches us the very essence of our religion that the keys of life and Death, and the mysteries of everything around us, are in Allah's hands, that our honesty, determination and upright conduct are not mere matters of policy or convenience, all our life in this world must be lived as in the presence of Benign Providence, that no task or responsibility, however great or difficult a burden it may be, is greater than what we can bear.

What is more, it also testifies so eloquently to the fact that Allah does not delight in flesh or blood and no one should suppose that meat or blood is acceptable to the One True God. It was a pagan fancy that God could be appeased by blood sacrifice. But what Allah accepts, as the glorious incident indicates, are the glorious incident indicates, is the true offering of our hearts.

The Holy Quran states emphatically: "It is not their meat, nor their blood, that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him." (22:37)

The glorious incident in the valley of Mina put an end to the system of Human Sacrifice which was common among most ancient people.

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Muhammed (peace be upon them) deeply influenced the letters both in the East and in the West.

Even a towering personality like the great Homer was moved to a great extent. The legendary Greek poet emulated the glorious example of the devout father and his obedient son and used a similar episode in his world-renowned epic poem Iliad.

While sailing for Troy to rescue Helen, the Greek fleet under the overall command of Agamemnon was detained at Aulis by a terrible wind blowing in the opposite direction. Days passed, but the fleet could not proceed. A soothsayer told Agamemnon that the wind would subside only if his daughter was sacrificed to goddess Diana.

Naturally, therefore, the term Eid-ul-Azha stands for the "Joy of forenoon" or middle of the time and mid-day", and has nothing to do with sacrifice.

It is really surprising that some inadvertently all this great festival Eid-ul-Zoha.

The words Eid and Azha' in Arabic mean "joy" and "sacrifice" respectively; Eid-ul-Azha stands for the "Joy of sacrifice."

"But "Zoha" in Arabic stands for the "forenoon" or middle of the time and mid-day", and has nothing to do with sacrifice.

Naturally, therefore, the term Eid-ul-Azha will refer to the "Joy of forenoon" and can never signify or stand for the "Joy of sacrifice."

Eid-ul-Azha, promising an occasion of joy and happiness, pleasure and gaiety, provides us with a unique opportunity to receive the divine mercy and reward through sacrifice, patience and constancy.

It will really be unfortunate if we fail to rise to the occasion in true spirit and try to celebrate this historic occasion through mere fun and merrymaking and through so-called sacrifices of cattle.

Mere purchasing of a cow or a goat only a few days before the festival and slaughtering it on the tenth of Dhul-Hijja does not and cannot pay befitting homage to the sacred incident of a devoted father's glorious attempt at slaying the bone of his bone, the heart of his heart- his dearest son. What is needed on this glorious occasion is sacrifice form inside our hearts and not merely from our purses.

Allah has, in His infinite mercy, given us power over the brute creation, and permitted us to eat meat, but that too only if we pronounce His holy Name at the solemn act of taking life. Through this solemn invocation, without which we are apt to forget the sacredness of life, are we reminded that wanton cruelty is not in our thoughts and is never permitted in Islam. Nor does Islam permit extravagance in the name of religion on any occasion whether through slaughtering of cattle on Eid-ul-Azha or through any other means.

It is true that in the case of the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them) there was no question of war, it did not originate from the lips of a soothsayer, no daughter was there, no plea was necessary to convince the son, nor was there any protest from or unwillingness on the part of the son to be sacrificed.

But in spite of all these minor differences, Homer's description of the human sacrifice to appease the goddess Diana, the last minute miraculous replacement of Iphigenia by a goat by Diana, the last minute miraculous replacement of Iphigenia by a goat by

Diana, the acceptance by Diana of the intended sacrifice of Agamemnon -- all testify eloquently to the fact that Homer indeed was influenced by the historic incident at Mina.

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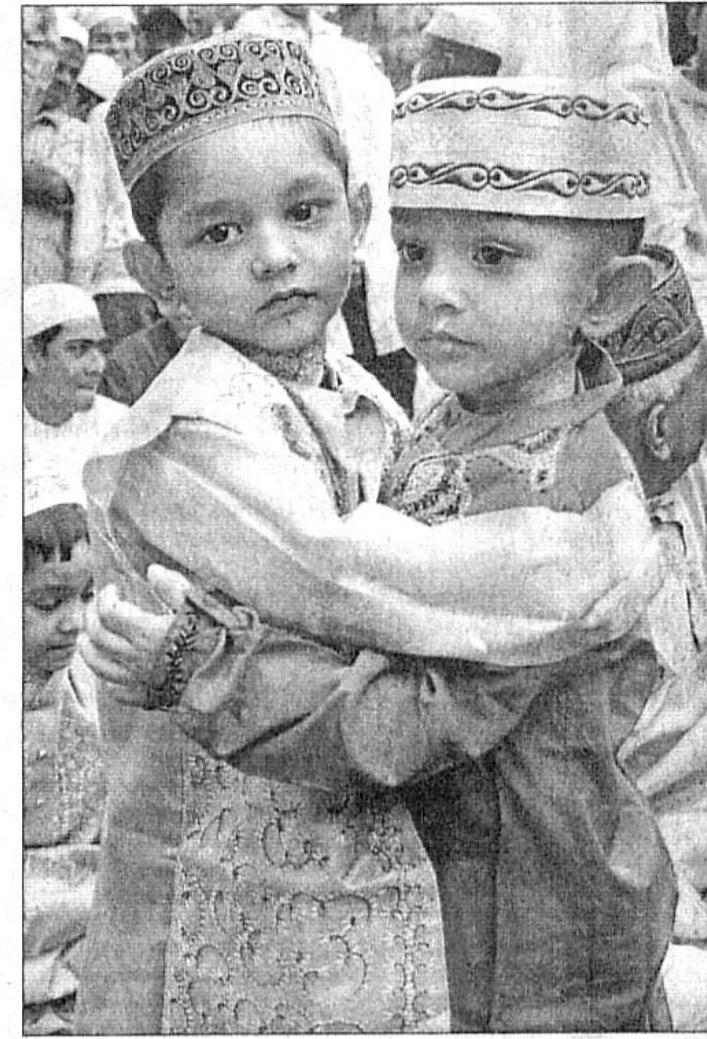
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delight in flesh or blood and it is the genuine outpourings from the hearts, firm in constancy and patient perseverance that please Benign Providence.

What is more, through the system of denying ourselves the greater part of the food derived from the sacrificed cattle for the sake of the poor brethren, our symbolic act finds practical expression in benevolence, and that exactly is the virtue sought to be taught.

Eid-ul-Azha indeed is a festival with a difference. Each and every Muslim should try his or her level best to celebrate this auspicious occasion every year in a befitting manner. What Allah expects on this sacred occasion is giving of our whole being to Him. It is by the mention of Allah's Sacred Name that a Muslim sacrifices an animal.

It is not an empty mention of a

word that the Muslims make; their very hearts should tremble at the very mention of the Holy Name. Each Muslim should bear in mind that if he sacrifices an animal over which he has full control, it is much more necessary that he should lay down his life in the way of Allah, who is not only his master but also his creator and sustainer.

Lastly, it is the righteous whom Islam requires to sacrifice, and what Islam teaches through the sacrifice of animals on Eid-ul-Azha in memory of that Great Sacrifice is the lesson of laying down of our own lives in the cause of truth and justice. It teaches us not to love life over much, seeing that we must one day part with it. It teaches us to face death with resignation.

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Health and human rights

ARIF H. KHAN

GOOD health is central to creating and sustaining the capabilities that poor people need in order to get rid of poverty. It is a key asset of the poor, which contributes to their greater economic security. Good health is not just an outcome of development; it is a way of achieving development. Amartya Sen notes: "... good health and economic prosperity tend to support each other. Healthy people can more easily earn an income, and people with a higher income can more easily seek medical care, have better nutrition, and have the freedom to live healthier lives."

In other words, sick people are more likely to become poor, and the poor are more vulnerable to disease and disability. Therefore, ill health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty.

Meaning of health rights

The right to health is not a right to be healthy. The state cannot provide people with protection against every possible cause of ill health or

disability, such as the adverse consequences of genetic diseases or the adoption of unhealthy lifestyles. Therefore, health right, indeed, is a "right to the enjoyment of a variety of facilities and conditions that are necessary for good health."

These can be divided into two basic components: those related to health care and those related to general living conditions affecting health, such as safe water, food, environment, sanitation and shelter.

These conditions also include freedom from discrimination, torture, inhuman treatment, harmful traditional practices, etc.

More specifically, the right to health can be understood as a right to an effective and integrated health system, encompassing health care and other determinants of health. So when we talk about health rights we mean that government, as the key duty bearer, must create conditions in which everyone can be as healthy as possible.

International instruments

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly

in 1947, proclaims everyone's right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services (Article 25).

Right to health has been protected in many other international and regional human rights treaties, like the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966; Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989; and International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (IWC), 1990.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors compliance with the ICESCR, adopted a General Comment on the Right to Health in 2000. According to the General Comment the right to health contains four elements -- availability (functioning public health and health care facilities, goods and services; as well as programs in sufficient quantity), accessibility (health facilities, goods and service accessible for everyone within the jurisdiction of the State party), acceptability and quality.

Accessibility has four overlapping dimensions -- non-discrimination, physical accessibility (affordability), and information accessibility.

The third element is acceptability (all health facilities, goods and services must be respectful to medical ethics and culturally appropriate, as well as sensitive to gender and life-cycle requirements).

The fourth element is quality (health facilities, goods and services must be scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality).

The right to health, like all

human rights, imposes on the state 3 types of obligations: respect; refraining from interference with the enjoyment of the right to health; protect; ensuring that third parties (non-state actors) do not violate the

enjoyment of the right to health; and fulfill; taking positive steps to realise the right to health.

Bangladesh context

The constitution of Bangladesh provides that "the state shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the improvement of public health as moving its primary duties." (Article 18). It has also provisions for peoples' right to other determinants of health.

The country adopted a National Health Policy in 2000 with fifteen aims and objectives. These objectives include: development of nutrition and public health, accessible health services for the poor and rural population, primary healthcare for the Upazila and Union Council, reduction of maternal mortality, development of reproductive health, up-gradation and modernisation of health services, introduction of family planning methods for the ultra poor, special provision for the mentally and physically handicapped population etc.

The existing regulatory framework for monitoring health service,

however, remains weak. There are 45 laws related to various aspects of health. For example, laws related to specific diseases/health situations such as Epidemic Disease Act (1897), Prevention of Malaria Ordinance (1978), Eye Surgery (Restriction) Ordinance (1960); laws related to breast milk substitute, quality of food, quality of drugs, use of narcotic, women and children's health, health of labourers, environmental pollution and so on. None of these laws deal directly with the rights of patients/clients.

Client charter of rights

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) formulated the Clients' Charter of Rights (CCR) in 1998. The charter recognises peoples' right to information about the services available from providers, right to safe and continuous services, right to choose the form of treatment and family planning methods, right to receive services on priority basis in emergency situation, right to confidentiality, right to be informed about the services received, right to be respected, express opinion and feel

at ease, right to receive clients' own copies of treatment/health related reports, and right to inform relevant authorities and get redress, if the clients' rights are hindered or compromised for any reason.

In quest of responsive health service

To ensure people's right to health in line with the above-mentioned comments of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the health service should be accountable, transparent and responsive to people's need. The formulation of CCR is only the first step in emphasising the individual's right to health.

The charter was developed without the broad participation of civil society, other government departments or other stakeholders. The result was a CCR with a narrow focus of health rights i.e. only on the health services, and without the institutional and legal mechanisms in place for it to be used as a tool by clients to demand their rights. Therefore, the MoHFW should revise the charter involving different stakeholders so that it encompasses

right to health services as well as other determinants of health.

In addition to that, the government should ask all health service providing institutes to develop their own charters highlighting their