

The Holy Hajj

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HAJJ is the fifth of the five *Akran* or "pillars" of Islam. Hajj means "setting out," "tending towards," "to go round." The pilgrimage to Makkah on the appointed days in the month of Zilhaj, the twelfth month in the Islamic calendar, is known as Hajj. According to Islamic law, it comprises acts like compassing the sacred territory, or going round the Ka'ba (*Tawaf*) in a particular period, staying or halting (*Wukuf*) in the plain of Arafat, running between as-Safa and al-Marwah hills, casting pebbles at Mina, etc.

The holy Quran declares that Ka'ba at Bakkah (Makkah), known as Baitullah (the House of Allah), was "the first House of Worship appointed for men." (3:98). The Prophets Abraham and Isma'il (peace be upon them) "raised the foundation of the House." (2:217). Allah instructed Abraham to "sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (there in prayer). And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways."

In accordance with divine ordinance Abraham introduced Hajj centering round the holy Ka'ba. In response to his clarion call people started gathering in Makkah to perform Hajj every year. But gradually, this centre of *Tawhid* (Oneness of Allah) was turned into a place of idolatry and 360 idols were placed therein. Many other indecent and illegal practices were also followed. For example:

- Changing the lunar months whimsically to make the prohibited (*haram*) months (2:217) lawful (*halal*) and to lengthen the duration of some years to 13 months instead of the usual twelve through the Nasi system (9:36). As a result, the Hajj in the year 9A.H. (631 A.D.) was celebrated in the month of Zilqad and not in Zilhaj;
- Pagan Arabs, excepting the Quraish, male and female alike, used to circumambulate the Ka'ba naked. Due to such reasons the Holy Prophet (pbuh) did not perform the Pilgrimage in the 9th Hegira. (Shibli Numani, *Sirat-un-Nabi*, 2:124). A caravan of 300 Muslims under the leadership of Abu Bakr was sent for Hajj that year. While it was on the way, Ali B. Abu Talib was commis-

sioned by the Holy Prophet (pbuh) as Naquib to read out to the pilgrims that (i) the performance of the Pilgrimage would after that year be forbidden to the unbelievers (except those with whom the Holy Prophet (pbuh) had made special treaties), and (ii) no one henceforth be allowed to go round the Ka'ba naked;

- In pagan times, the pilgrims used to gather in assemblies in which the praises of their ancestors were sung. It was revealed: "So when ye have accomplished your holy rites, celebrate the praises of God, as ye used to celebrate the praises of your fathers, yea, with far more heart and soul." (2:200);
- The people of Yathrib (Medina) used to worship the goddess Manat and did not go to the two hills of as-Safa and al-Marwa, although it had always been considered an integral part of the Pilgrimage in memory of the Prophet Isma'il (pbuh) and his mother Hagera (Hajar). The gross superstitious rites of the pagan Arabs caused offence to the early Muslims and they felt some hesitation in going round these places during the Pilgrimage. Allah, therefore, ordains in the holy Quran: "Safa and Marwa are among the Symbols of God, so if those who visit the House in Season or at other times, should compass them round, it is no sin in them." (2:158);
- The Quraish also used to fight shy of the *Wukuf* (the halt) at the plain of Arafat, although this too had always been an essential part of the Pilgrimage.

In 10 A.H. (632 A.D.) the Holy Prophet (SM) himself led the Hajj. This historic Hajj, held in the month of Zilhaj, is popularly known as "the Farewell Pilgrimage" (*Hajjatu'l-Wada*) and taken as the model of an ideal Hajj. The way the Hajj is to be performed was very clearly demonstrated by the Holy Prophet (pbuh) during this Pilgrimage and a number of days in the month of Zilhaj were earmarked for the

Grunebaum wrote: "The first requirement, for the pilgrim, is to understand what the Hajj means within religion as a whole. There is no access to Allah except through self-abnegation. For this reason the religions of earlier faiths withdrew from the world. When this tendency weakened, Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to revive the tradition: but, as the Prophet explained, in exchange for monasticism the Lord gave

the Muslims holy war and the Pilgrimage.

As the believer will some day meet God in a garment he does not wear in this life, the shroud, so the pilgrim goes to the House in an unusual garment -- the *Ihram*. Both are alike in that they are not sewn. On the journey the pilgrim hopes for acceptance, not in virtue of his own acts, but trusting in God's Grace and the fulfillment of His promise. The *Talbiya* is the answer to Allah's summons and should remind the faithful of the response of the people to the Trumpet on the Day of Resurrection, when they will rise from their graves and assemble in uncertainty about their ultimate fate. Upon entering the Holiday Territory, the pilgrim should both hope for safety from punishment and fear that he might be considered unworthy of the Lord's proximity -- but hope should be stronger than fear.

"In Arafat, the crowds, the shouting, the many tongues, the grouping of the nations by their leaders should remind you of the Plains of the Last Day

when the nations will assemble around their prophets, fearful and perplexed. Be humble but hopeful. When all unite their earnings, do not think Allah will disappoint them. It has been said that to stand in Arafat and not to believe that Allah has forgiven you is a very great sin. When you throw the pebbles, be motivated by obedi-



The earnestness and sincerity, profundity and single-mindedness with which a Muslim should try to circumambulate the Holy Ka'ba and perform the Sacred Pilgrimage may be aptly demonstrated through the famous "confession" of the great Sufi saint Hazar Bayazid Taifur bin Isa al-Bistami (RA): "On my first Pilgrimage I saw only the Holy Ka'ba; the second time, I saw both the Ka'ba and the Lord of the Ka'ba; and the third time, I saw the Lord alone."

performance of Hajj. From this year the ecclesiastical year was also definitely fixed as a purely lunar year of roughly 354 days, the months being calculated by the actual appearance of the moon, and the hitherto practised wrong system of adding or deducting months was abolished for good. The great theologian G.E. von

ence only; try to be as Abraham was, when the Devil appeared to him to inject doubt in his heart and induce him to rebel, and Abraham stoned the Devil at God's behest. Should you think that Abraham was faced by Satan, and you are not -- know that this very thought is given to you by Satan who wants you to think the pelting to be a meaningless play. Outwardly you are casting pebbles at the *Aqaba* but in reality you are smiting Satan by your increased obedience to Allah's Command. Realise finally that sacrifice will draw you near to Him in virtue of your obedience. Be hopeful that, for each limb of the victim, Allah will free one of your limbs from the Fire."

The world-renowned saint Hujwiri (RA) explains it in a beautiful way: "Whoever seeks his Spiritual Station must renounce familiar associations and bid farewell to pleasures and take no thought of other than of Allah; then he must stand on the Arafat of gnosis and from there set out for the *Muzdalifa* of amity, and from there send out his heart to circumambulate the Temple of Divine Purification and throw away the stones of passion and corrupt thoughts in Mina of faith, and sacrifice his lower self on the Altar of mortification and arrive at the Station of freindship."

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"When the Hajj is duly completed," says Imam Ghazzali (RA), "fear must lodge in the pilgrim's heart, for he does not know whether his Hajj has been accepted or not. But he will obtain certainty from his heart and his own actions. For, if he finds himself moving away from delusion and doing right in the light of the Law, he may be sure of acceptance. For Allah accepts only those whom He loves, and whom He loves He befriends openly and manifests in him the effects of His Love, keeping them from Satan's assaults."

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Arrest of Nafis: the Orwellian socialist syndrome in "Capitalist" America

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THE arrest of Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis, a 21-year-old Bangladeshi student, in an FBI sting operation for his alleged attempt to blow up the Federal Reserve Bank in New York has some disturbing resemblances with the typical syndromes of a socialist totalitarian government that George Orwell had shown in his anti-totalitarian novel *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. These Orwellian socialist syndromes in modern "liberal democratic and capitalist" United States of America raise more questions than answers in the war by the US against terrorism.

The arrest of Nafis that, according to the statement of the Department of Justice, was the culmination of an undercover operation during which he was closely monitored by the FBI runs astonishingly parallel to the story of Winston Smith, the revolutionary protagonist of Orwell's book *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. A hater of the totalitarian control and enforced repression characteristic of the socialist government, Mr. Smith seeks the cooperation of the Brotherhood, an organisation concocted by the government itself for catching potential rebels off guard. O'Brien, a key leader of the ruling elite, throws a constant web of surveillance for a period of seven years over the activities of Winston Smith for his questionable attitude towards the party in power. He pretends to be connected to the Brotherhood merely to trap Winston in an act of open disloyalty to the Party, inducts him into the non-existent organisation and ultimately arrests him. Barring a few points of differences, the two arrests traversed the same route of egging the victim on.

The arrest of Winston Smith in Orwell's novel ended in extreme torture, closely calculated brainwashing, meek surrender-

ing or renunciation of ideologies and a potentially ignominious death. It is still not clear what is going to happen to Nafis in the long run, and makes us ponder over the US's strategy for dealing with the growing anti-American feelings in Muslim minds.

One can cite the Nafis case as "a bad apple," as Congressman Joseph Crowley, the founder and co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Bangladesh, opined in an interview with *New York Times*, and argue that this is not part of a larger sentiment of Bangladeshis who are hard working and good people. But one can also trace the Nafis case back to the overall Muslim sentiments towards America.

Most Muslim youths at present have an ambivalent attitude towards the US. Whereas many of them dislike the Americans for the continued presence and atrocities of US troops in several Muslim countries, they also plan to build a dream future by studying in the US. This might as well be the ambivalence of the century. The influx of these types of students in the US is unstoppable. Ideally, the US administration should have checked up on all such young Muslims. But it has done the opposite by trapping one such young man.

Nafis's Bangladeshi father told the press that Nafis was more religious of his two sons but never fanatic. In the contemporary world, a devoutly religious person runs the risk of being labeled fundamentalist. This is why it is sometimes very

difficult for many to identify the borderline between religious militancy and religious piety. Any provocation or error in judgment may lead to fatal consequences. Young minds which always seek direction for future action are particularly susceptible to this. Rezwanul Haque Nafis is no exception. The FBI provided the wrong direction and channeled the religious spirit of an aspiring naïve young devout Bangladeshi Muslim man into something

The Nafis case should be given more serious thought. All perpetrators of crimes should be brought to justice. But if Nafis becomes the victim of questionable socialist techniques of opposition control, this could only worsen the situation in a globalised world in which the interests of Muslims and Christians, Americans and non-Americans, the East and the West are inevitably and unavoidably intertwined.

that is purposefully evil and sends a wrong message to the world regarding the war by the US against terrorism. The FBI source and agent acted in the same ways as a propagandist would with any person vulnerable to influences from outside. Nafis is only a victim of questionable methods of stopping potential criminal activities.

The statement of the Department of Justice that Nafis came to the US only to deal a deadly blow to the US interests does not seem plausible as the US consular section is notorious for sometimes not giving visa even for valid purposes. Furthermore, the law enforcing agencies are yet to identify any links between Nafis

and radical groups before his arrival in the US. Many questioned the funding of Nafis in the US and intimated that he might be funded by al-Qaeda. This is blatantly wrong. Nafis is one of two sons of a vice president of a private bank in Bangladesh. The father informed the journalists that he spent his life savings to send the quiet, timid boy to college in America. Evidently, he went to the US to study, not to plant a bomb.

At worst, Nafis has committed, in Orwellian terms, a "thoughtcrime" - thinking of a crime before actually committing it. The FBI is responsible for all later developments. According to the information so far divulged, Nafis had no direct connection with any al-Qaeda elements except the FBI source and the agent who claimed to be an al-Qaeda facilitator. The recent American movie, *The Innocence of Muslims*, has facilitated

such types of "thoughtcrimes" among some Muslims all over the world.

According to a CBS news report, Nafis, who is facing charges of trying to use a weapon of destruction and provide material support to al-Qaeda, could face life imprisonment if found guilty. It would certainly be a mockery of justice if Nafis is jailed for bomb plotting when he does not even have the minimum knowledge of distinguishing non-working explosives with which he was duped. The attackers of 9/11 were accomplished engineers, not a beginner like Nafis who has just reportedly started his study of cyber security.

The FBI did to Nafis what O'Brien did to

Smith in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. While it was meant to stop anti-US elements in the country, there remain valid questions regarding the nature of the sting operation that entrapped a gullible student. Smith was a 39 year old mature thoughtful party man of INGSOC in the imaginary state of Oceania. But a sophisticated socialist technique of controlling opposition had been used in dealing with a 21 year old young pious Muslim student. How devastating can it be! And it has been so for Nafis.

While everybody would appreciate appropriate methods of stemming the tide of religious fanaticism, care should be taken not to misguide the people who are yet to have the authority of their own to make their own opinion. The Nafis case should be given more serious thought. All perpetrators of crimes should be brought to justice. But if Nafis becomes the victim of questionable socialist techniques of opposition control, this could only worsen the situation in a globalised world in which the interests of Muslims and Christians, Americans and non-Americans, the East and the West are inevitably and unavoidably intertwined.

Orwell's novel was set in 1984, and was meant to criticise the then intellectuals who thought favourably of the newly evolved socialist forms of government. The novel warned them that if they continued to nurture the same feelings, the West also would turn into a similar living dystopia of Oceania. Has the West learnt anything from Orwell, or just internalised the socialist totalitarian repressive apparatuses and started practicing it at last? Are we heading towards a US dystopia: the worst human society imaginable? Where has the American Dream gone?

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