

The Divine Culture and Tradition from the Islamic Perspective A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT

Every individual belongs to a community and the community may adopt and recognize a unique way of doing their activities - known as culture- that are acceptable by its members. This way of life may or may not be in the favor of everyone but yet the society understands and judges things to be good or bad by its established doctrines practiced by the elderly people. The habit of doing something as it is being done by the elders among people could be a parameter of man's natural aptitude to know and do what is right or wrong. But Allah (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) God has designed for every generation a specific way of life to fulfil the fundamentals of human relationship with his Creator (Allah), his fellow human being, his environment and all other existing creations in the heaven and the earth. Allah says:

وَلِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَ مِنْهَا جَاءَ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِنَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ﴿٥٨﴾

... "to each among you we have prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation, but that (He) may test you in what He has given you; so compete in good deeds..." (Quran 5:48).

Keywords: Divine, Islam, Culture, Tradition, Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

The way designed by Allah for human beings to live on earth is referred to as the guided and the straight path.

قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَيْتُنِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ۖ دِينًا قِيمًا مِّلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۚ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٦١﴾

“Say (O Muhammad, SAW) “Truly, my lord has guided me to a straight path, a right religion, the religion of Ibrahim ‘Hanif’ (true Islamic monotheism) and he was not of ‘Mushrikun’” (Qur’an 6:161).

This path may be contrary to what human beings have established for themselves on earth before knowing about the divine revelation. For this reason, Allah (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) had sent many prophets and messengers to differentiate between the human designed way of life and the divine way of life.

With the existence of the four Islamic juristic schools of thought and the freedom to choose whichever among them, many Muslims are attributing their practices to the strange views among the opinions attributed to either the Imams or their followers. Because of these, some are attributing innovations and un-Islamic culture and traditions, and un-Islamic statutory laws to some of the notable/renowned scholars of the famous Islamic schools of jurisprudence among the communities of the people of Sunnah.

What one will want to know is whether the shari’a has impacted the culture and traditions or the reverse for all the continents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Custom and Tradition

Tradition is considered to be “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation”. In theology, Tradition is “a doctrine believed to have divine authority though not in the scriptures” (languages.oup.com) like traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Custom is lexically described as “a way of behaving or a belief that has been established for a long time” or “something you usually do” (dictionary.cambridge). “a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place, or time” (languages.oup.com).

In the Islamic perspective, the terms "عرف و عادة" are commonly discussed to be words of similar meaning but technically different in some occasions.

Hamaada (2014), summarized his definition of Al-Urf Arabic translated to be “every word or action observed, which is naturally settled and accepted in the sound and positive minds and intellects of the majority of the individuals of a community which does not go against the Islamic fundamental

principles and legislations.” (pg. 5). Abu ‘Umrah (2017) in his master’s thesis added to the definition in which he states that “it is every word or action observed or do not observed...” (pg. 10).

The Arabic word “Al-A’ada” is generally used to mean the repetition of action or word until it becomes an accepted rule or parameter of a community. Al-‘Aada can also literally denote the continuation of something or a habitual action (Abu Zaid 1435H, pg. 86). In the above context, one can interpret “Urf” to mean custom and ‘A’ada’ to be tradition.

In the context of Islamic legislation and regulation; Al-‘Aada is defined as the repetition of something without the interference or relation with mental or mind thought” (Arab. Trans., Abu Zaid 1435H, Pg. 86).

Customs and Traditions as Mentioned in the Quran

Messengers and Prophets of Allah were primarily sent to their people to inform them about the worshipping of one God (Allah) and to refine their characters towards each other. Before the coming of prophets and messengers, their people were settled in mind and body to continue the practices of their forefathers. The majority always look at the Messengers of Allah as reformers or revolutionaries and rebels to the customs and traditions of their people. The majority of their people hardly believe in their message and only few follow their (Messengers and Prophets of Allah) doctrines. The acceptance of the people to live with customs and traditions to regulate their political, economic, social and even spiritual affairs took preference over all sorts of information and revelations which were contrary to their customs and traditions. In some occasions the people argue that their ancestors also did what Allah commands. (Quran 7: Aaraf: 28, Qura’n 5: Maeda: 104). Probably, this is a wisdom for Allah to reveal the Qura’n in bits for a period of about twenty-three years. Steps were taken to reform and eliminate the bad customs and traditions of the Arabs.

Mother Aisha, wife of the prophet (saw), said about the revelation of the Qur’an that:

..”إنما نزل أول ما نزل منه سورة من المفصل، فيها ذكر الجنة والنار، حتى إذا ثاب الناس إلى الإسلام نزل الحلال والحرام ولو نزل: لا تنزوا، لقالوا: لا ندع الزنا أبداً ولو نزل أول شيء: لا تشربوا الخمر؛ لقالوا: لا ندع الخمر أبداً لقد نزل بمكة على محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم وإني لجارية ألعب:”بَلِ السَّاعَةُ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَ السَّاعَةُ أَذْهَى وَ أَمْرٌ“ ، وما نزلت سورة البقرة والنساء إلا وأنا عنده...” رواه البخاري في فضائل القرآن، باب: تأليف

القرآن 1910/4

“...the first thing that was revealed thereof was a surah from Al-Mufasssal, and in it was mentioned Paradise and fire. When the people embraced Islam, the verses regarding legal and illegal things were revealed. If the first thing to be revealed was: ‘Do not drink alcoholic

drinks' people would have said, 'we will never leave alcoholic drinks' and if it had been revealed, 'do not commit illegal sexual intercourse, they would have said, 'we will never give up illegal sexual intercourse. While I was young girl of playing age, the following verse was revealed to Muhammad (SAW) in Mecca 'Nay! But the hour is their appointed time (for their full recompense) and the hour will be more grievous and more bitter'. Sura Al Baqara and Sura An-Nisaa were revealed while I was with him..." (Saaid.org, Hadithportal.com.)

However there were customs and traditions which the shari'ah accepted or did not comment on, while others were refined and amended by the shari'ah to perfect the relationship of the people with their Creator (Allah), their fellow human being and all other creatures on earth. Example of such are; slavery, marrying more than one wife, dowry for parents etc.

Types of Customs and Tradition

There are different ways in which scholars have discussed the types of customs and traditions. In this research we will discuss good and bad customs and traditions in relation to the Islamic perspective. Shari'ah itself has its own customs and traditions which are known to be the legislations of Allah.

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ ۚ

"And verily we have sent among every ummah (community, nation) a messenger and prophet (proclaiming) worship Allah (Alone) and avoid Taghut..." (Qur'an 16, An Nahl: 36).

Good customs: are generally those traditions observed which do not directly or indirectly go against any fundamental principle of Islam or the clear interpretation of the revelations of Allah, Qur'an and Sunnah. Bad customs are the direct opposite of good customs; these are traditions adopted and recognized by people which directly or indirectly contradict the texts of the divine revelations or their aims of legislation. (Al Mashnawee, 1440H).

The common and general use of the words custom and tradition cannot be applicable here except we differentiate them with the adjective; 'Islamic' and 'other'. The parameter to determine a correct or good custom for the Muslim is the correct interpretation of the divine texts (Qur'an and Sunnah).

Both Islamic and other customs can be classified into categories like; words and actions, general and special, good and bad etc. depending on; era and place, academic and scientific researches, influence of other modern scientific and technological discoveries, etc.

METHODOLOGY

In the midst of many culture and traditional practices observe by different people in different places around the world, there is a common tradition which is not strange due to its source. How Muslims all over the world use the Islamic tradition legislated by Allah to fit their culture.

To analyze these, the Qur'an, the Hadith and the fundamentals of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence of the community of the Sunnah will be used as parameters to arrive at the conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

ISLAM AND CULTURE

Islam

The word Islam has its origin from Arabic language. It is used in different languages to refer to the same thing. For this reason, it is well known among people all over the world. Depending on the category of people who usually use it to describe its teachings and doctrines, the understanding varies from either individual or group of people in different places. But those who chose to learn it from its real source got to understand Islam as a divine way of life prescribed for human beings and devils (Jinn) living on earth.

Technical meaning referring to religion, Islam is used to describe a distinct divine way of life taught by the prophet Muhammad (SAW). In the Qur'an, it is sometimes referred to as "Ad-Deen" (الدين). Generally the word 'Deen' without the definite article 'Al, Ad' in Arabic is used in the Quran to denote a system which people accept to live by for life (Quran 109, Quran: 3: 73). But Allah has made it clear that, Islam is the divine way of life among other ways. There is no success in choosing another way of life besides the Islamic way. That divine way is 'Ad-Deen' of all the prophets and messengers of Allah (Quran 3, Al 'Imran: 83-85).

The prophets and messengers were sent to their people to inform them about the worshiping of one and only God (Allah), and to stay away from worshiping any other thing else besides Allah ((Quran 16: 36). Besides the guidance to the belief and worshipping of one God, there were different customs and traditions of their people which were against the beliefs and doctrines of the divine way of life. To weed out these bad customs and traditions existing among people was among the main responsibilities of the Prophets and Messengers of Allah,(Quran 7: 59-97).

Islamic tradition is well known among people around the world today even if not recognized or practiced. In the midst of many other customs and traditions, and the numerous efforts made to eliminate Islamic traditions among others, Islam still has a semblance words and cultural practices on many traditions in many places. The concern is how much of Islamic tradition is present in the spiritual and social activities of the people in their places.

Culture

Storey (2018), highlighted Raymond Williams' suggestions on the definition of culture. "Williams suggests three broad definitions. First, culture can be used to refer to 'a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development. A second use of the word 'culture' might be to suggest 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group' The third meaning - culture as signifying practices - would allow us to speak of soap opera, pop music, and comics as examples of culture" (pg. 1-2).

People who lived in the country, present day Sierra Leone had a way of life before the advent of Islam from Futa Jallon immigrants. The African Traditional Religion (ATR) is consider to be a religious way of life which should neither be overcome by Islam nor Christianity, (Conteh 2008). Because Islam was the first to reach Sierra Leone before Christianity in the 16th century, some of the traditionalists adopted Islam and became Muslims.

Impact of the Divine Culture and Tradition

Since the revelation of the Qur'an started, the prophet hood of Mohammad (SAW) as a messenger of Allah (swt) became conspicuous among his people, the clash in their culture and traditions in both the rituals and socio-economic practices have always been a major challenge for the correct Islamic doctrines, especially those culture and traditions which are contrary to the fundamentals of Islam.

Before the start of the Qur'anic revelation in Mecca, there were communities of people living with each other. Their satisfactions were in the ways in which they found each other. It is the system in which their ancestors had lived, and their rules and regulations were based on the arrangements they left behind.

For some people, they enjoy the traditions and culture as the best ways designed by their forefathers while others accept them just because they are the only ways the society go by. If notable and respectable elderly people among the communities, including previous and current Imams and Islamic scholars of their times accept, observe and participate in these traditions, what and who can describe them as un-Islamic and/or unacceptable? The situation sometimes become more challenging when scholars of recent generation make observations to amend some of these types of practices. The response to them and their efforts to correct these issues is very similar to the response of similar category of people who existed in different generations, as said by Allah in the Qur'an.

وَ إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ قَالُوا حَسْبُنَا مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْ لَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

“And when it is said to them: come to what Allah has revealed and unto the messenger, they say, “enough for us in that which we found our fathers following”, even though their fathers had no knowledge whatsoever nor guidance” (Qur'an 5, Al Ma'idah: 104)

Sometime they even qualify their actions as better than what the contemporary scholars may want to discuss and clarify with authentic references from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

وَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهَا آبَاءَنَا وَ اللَّهُ أَمَرَنَا بِهَا قُلْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

“And when they commit a Faishah (evil deed) they say: we found our fathers doing it and Allah has commanded it on us. Say: Nay! Allah never commands Faishah. Do you say of Allah what you know not? (Qur'an 7, Al A'raf: 28)

The majority of the Meccan people were idol worshippers just like the Medina people were alcoholics. To change them from these acts of worshipping and intoxication meant to change them from believing in the idols as God Almighty and stop their habit in alcohol. Therefore, this took the prophet Muhammad (SAW) a great deal of patience and perseverance to get some among the population to understand.

Today the divine culture and tradition has overcome the other culture and traditions of Makkah and Madinah and their environs. Also, this divine culture and tradition is gradually making a major impact in the culture and traditions of other nations in other continents.

CONCLUSION

Islam is a unique and divine way of life legislated by the Originator and Creator of all living and non-living things, including their places of existence. Creator of mankind and its place of existence is the best to legislate the way of life of mankind. It is in this manner of legislation and interpretation of His laws that he sent Prophets and Messengers that people should obey and follow. This is what is referred to as divine religion, divine way of life and Islamic way of life.

The prophets and messengers were sent to their people to inform them about the worshipping of one and only God (Allah), and to stay away from worshipping any other thing else besides Allah ((Quran 16: 36). Besides the guidance to the belief and worshipping of one God, there were different customs and traditions of their people which were against the beliefs and doctrines of the divine way of life. To weed out these bad customs and traditions existing among people was among the main responsibilities of the Prophets and Messengers of Allah,(Quran 7: 59-97).

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