

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS & PERSONAL INTERESTS

Bakhtiar*

What we finally do is all what matters. Before deciding to choose between a glass of Pepsi or a cup of tea, between Kala Bagh dam and rental power projects all of us go through a process of decision-making. Sometimes it is simple, short and quick, sometimes complex, lengthy and delayed. Sometimes we are mindful of it, both as an individual and as a body; and sometimes we hardly know of it. What are the over-riding clauses to take a final decision before we act? The hypothesis of this study says that these are the customs, traditions and our petty and immediate interests. The contrary could be the rules, the principles, logically concluded options, universal values or His commandments. It could be an absolute or any set of principles equally applicable to all parties and in similar situations and at all times. It is intended to present a comparison between the possibilities of unending growth through free and open thinking guided by Him verses perpetuation of slavery of customs and traditions. Some of these are spread over centuries while some appear again and again; only the form, names and places change.

These (customs, traditions, means of subservience of superiority of man. Laat and Manaat were the names of gods, of people of Makka, placed inside *Kaaba*) false gods, tin gods, and stone gods appear, reappear, and keep revitalizing their hold on man. They have struck back, even if defeated temporarily; despite the fact man as a creation is far older and senior. Wish man could learn to bow (had understood and kept his allegiance) to one God. Then it could have saved him from bowing or worshiping these (false) thousand gods. (*Translation by Bakhtiar*)

* Col (Retd) Bakhtiar, visiting faculty member, APCOM Rawalpindi

It is to show to the self boasting mankind how captive he is of his prejudices, and what it would be to know or *sal* (Arabic) to meet the primordial truth as compared to the relative and reactive truth.

The case studies; the mainstay of this Paper, should highlight how much right and wrong we were, every time a prudent decision was made. How shifting and unreliable has been the reference line. What have been the degree of slavery and the level of being subjective? Area under focus is the overshadowing factor of prevailing customs and traditions and myopic indulgence in petty and skin deep interests. It is aimed to point out the degree of blindness we enjoy while competing and enjoying the prospects of winning a race, even if it is on the road to hell. The comparative study of in-fashion and exhibited behavior based on reaction, resulting into series of stupidities may force a smile on some faces. A smile garnished with salt and pepper.

This study may help in discovering how preposterous and earnest, man has been in circling around the same point after traveling for centuries. He still goes out and kills the fellow man, totally unknown, innocent and stranger like *homo-errectus*. [1] It was this creature about whom angels expressed their apprehension to Almighty, who was planning to send His vicegerent to earth. A suspicion to be part of another ethnic group, sect or race is good enough a reason to kill or get killed. Ask Palestinians (Gaza), Uzbek (Kirghizstan) Ahmadis of Lahore or Mr. Derek Bird (2010) of London. Did He want me to lead my personal and collective life like this? We will be forced to look in to His recorded, saved and preserved message of guidance for His best creation. Man is supposedly the best of creatures, according to the Creator. [2] Ironically hundreds are busy remembering it by heart, but a few to follow it or act upon, that too rarely. The followers of

Bible (only), gave this universe weapon of mass destruction, killing innocent unarmed 240,000 souls, just on two days. It gave series of unjust wars, spread over last two millennium. Total war(s) of Carthage has been a land mark, for all times.[3] It was 146 BC. How can one forget the massacre of Palestinians in various camps (Shatila, Sabra etc) of occupied land at the hands of Israelis. All for the sake of customs, traditions, group or ethnic enmities or royal interests.

Will this study make the diehard followers of customs and traditions more introvert? I am afraid it may. But I must not make wrong decisions for wrong reasons. Why must I wish to live on, for the sake of eating and breathing alone, when I know for sure, it is for a short period, and today may be the last day. I must proceed to think, ponder, review and rethink to improve faith, convictions and beliefs. And these in turn MUST assist and guide in generating more and newer options and choices. The persistent and relentless search for truth should improve all the time, the chosen option. And an option thus selected should lead to act. Act to deliver, to yield and to enhance the benefits. Benevolence is the end product. And what is benevolence? Right is benevolence. And who decides what is right?

This brief study is based on a series of cases. These are big and small, historic and scientific, social and personal, specific to a culture or people and universal, but none is a fiction or conjecture. All are true. In pursuit of deduction and inference I could have gone wrong but the foundation is true. I give you the same right. Let us both enjoy this right of being wrong, and why not. It is worth it in pursuit of truth and benevolence. Otherwise the shackles, the cages, the handcuffs and the shames of customs and traditions and our animal interests will make a mouse out of me, you

and all of us. However, I neither support nor agree to what Mark Twain wrote in favor of anaconda over man.

Cases

Case No.1. Father of modern sciences, Aristotle writes in his book, *De Anima*[4]; life descends from heavens along with the rain. When it falls on ground (soil) it sprouts in the form of grass leaves and when it falls on water it shows in the form of tadpoles. That is how the tradition of keeping god up in the skies merged with his observations. Today you know how right or wrong he was. Let us see if we have moved any further. He was 384-322 BC. All but two had come and given His teachings to the mankind.

Case No.2. No less than for fifteen hundred years, earth was considered to be flat. It was supposed to have sharp edges over which boats sailing too far into sea, would tip over and fall. Earth was static while sun used to go round and round the earth. Women were considered to have less number of teeth, than men. Later two faiths, dogmas and beliefs were maintained for about a thousand years.

Case No. 3. Triangle of Polynesia, encompasses a huge area in the Pacific. Each leg of this triangle is about 3,000 kms. The area falls between Americas, Australia and Asia. There are thousands of small and big islands in Polynesia. The people follow a belief that soul rests in ocean and is gifted by the ocean, to women taking bath. And if soul finds the host (body of woman) at peace and happy it shows in the form of a baby. So that is how babies are born in Polynesia. The birth control is also easy. Women stop taking bath in ocean. It is their custom and tradition and continues from centuries.

Case No.4. America is an occupation force in Afghanistan, at our western borders. Not only here but in about another sixty plus places in the world as well. So, USA is busy killing innocent, unarmed civilians in Afghanistan (General Mac Chrystal, June 2010). It is busy doing so since 1775.[5] It has the support of another dozen countries along with India and Pakistan. The government of Pakistan calls itself a frontline state and an ally of USA. When we look towards the east, India is an occupation force in Kashmir. It is killing innocent, unarmed civilians and all those who ask for freedom. If we have a principle stand, we should be an ally of India in its fight against Kashmiri terrorists. Why should we not follow a set of rules, abiding our actions on both western and eastern border alike? Ah! But for the traditions and the interests.

Case No.5. In the last week of February 2010, two factions of Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, fought furiously in Jhang. Jhang is a historic and sizeable city of central Punjab. The occasion was *eid-milad-un-nabi*. This battle caused loss of life and property. Things set to fire included private cars, police vans and houses, copies of translations, transliterations and explanation of Holy Quran as well. The Holy Quran of course as an unopened, unread, and least understood and followed book, is the most precious possession of both factions.

Let us check on some important facts, from history. Did last Prophet ever celebrate or commemorate birthdays of any of the prophets passed before him? Answer is No.[6] Did the closest of disciples, who actually loved Muhammad, (*draood o slam*), more than their lives; celebrated his birthday? Answer is No.[7] Have the dates of births and deaths been important in Islam (Quran)? Answer is No. The fact is that the title and the ceremony

called *eid-milad-un-nabi* took three hundred years to surface, after the departure of last Prophet, (Dr. Tufail Hashmi, 2009).

We are only an easy prey of customs traditions and personal interests. To pick up a rival, set up rivalry and win; sometimes is far more precious and dear than anything else.[8]

Case No. 6. Army Rules and Regulations (ARR) and Army Rules and Instructions (ARI) are two books of law; describing and guarding the rules and instructions of day to day soldiering. ARI 249 lay down, how a soldier would salute when in mufti. While in uniform, and without headgear, the rules are different. Uniform would include regular, ceremonial, service dress, fatigue, combat, sports and mess-kits. When in uniform and without headgear, a soldier is supposed to come to attention. A position in which one would join heels and locks the arms on the sides, without any gap from the body.

During the service and even after retirement, irrespective of the rank, to exhibit submission and loyalty, juniors keep coming to attention in mufti, civvies and all outfits not part of uniform. It is to exhibit submission and loyalty to the seniors; disregarding the rules.

That is how practices emerging out of personal interests sprout and keep getting reinforced to form a custom.

Case No. 7. Upon Muhammad, *darood o slam*; Allah the Almighty closed down the system of commissioning of chosen people, called prophets. They were primarily meant for two purposes. One, to convey the happy tidings and two, to warn the people of wrong doings, Quran: 2: 213, 4:165, 5:67, 5:92, 6:48, 88:21-22.[9] Many good, practicing Muslims are those who, try

to follow the last of Prophet in letter and spirit. Concluding from my observations of the culture prevailing in Pakistan, I have to ask some questions from such followers of the Prophet; specifically and Muslims at large. Here are the four questions.

a. There is no dispute Prophet never paid Zakat in his life. For he never had *nisab*. *Nisab* is the minimum holding upon which Zakat becomes mandatory. Have the diehard followers of *Sunnah* tried to reduce their holding below *nisab* to follow the practice of Prophet? Any one?

b. Prophet married a lady fifteen years senior to him, when he was twenty-five. And she had been married thrice before and was twice a widow.[10] Prophet next married a lady even senior in age; Hazrat Sauda. She was also a widow[11], another undisputed fact. Do the diehard followers of *Sunnah* and its preachers follow the practice of marrying widows and ladies senior to their own age? Any one?

c. Prophet's homes never had kitchen fire running more than three consecutive days. This remained the practice through out his life, whether it was month of Ramazan or otherwise.[12] Do the diehard followers of *Sunnah* try to keep the kitchen burners shut, number of dishes reduced to minimum at each meal, and eating reduced to minimum, following his footsteps, especially in Ramazan?

Ah! But our slavery to customs, traditions and petty personal interests, including the lip service of following the *Sunnah*.

d. Last Prophet, whose follow ship is claimed with lot of zeal and fervor, and none before him; needed a *fiqah* or a school of *fiqah*. Sunni literally

means follower of the ways and doings, of Muhammad, *darood o salam*.
Two queries are: -

i. Prophet never called him Sunni? Going by 2: 285, 3: 84-85 and some more injunctions of Quran, we (Muslim) can not differentiate amongst the prophets. Did any of them call him Sunni? How come I am one?

ii. Islamic jurisprudence, making of (man-made) laws in the light of Quran, then Sunnah and then *Ijtehaad* (derived consensus) has its roots in Muhammad's (SAW) commissioning of Hazrat Maaz bin Jabal (RA) as governor (Qazi) of Yemen.[13] How come it is mandatory to be divided in my faith, and be part of either of the *fiqah* (man-made) laws? While the opposite is a MUST in the light of the teachings of Holy Quran. I shall not divide the *Deen* of Allah, Quran 6: 159. And those who do it, Quran 4: 150-152.

When it is matter of my customs, traditions and prevailing wisdom, even Quran does not help me. My ego sinks me in the shell of shame. O' gosh how could I be so stupid and for that long! How come *mulana* ...and scientist of fame....,also follows that!, he must be right. Please see Case Number 2.

Case No.8. Two of my seniors, closets of my relations went for Hajj, in 1980. They moved from Lahore to Karachi by train to board the plane for Jeddah. When they landed back from Jeddah, after Hajj, they faced problem in getting their berths reserved. So they promptly bribed a *Qooli*, offering berths, from Karachi to Lahore.

Hajj should have brought about some change. However, a great deal depends on how do we view Hajj? Is it meant for here or here- after? But for the traditional Islam and our petty personal interests.

Case No.9. All private banks of Pakistan were nationalized in 1974. This implied commencement of all types of union activities, along with other ramifications. This phase ended in 1998. The union office holders would force their way upon bank managers and higher management for following three types of activities. The information and figures below are of Habib Bank.

a. The number of absentee workers varied between 20 to 33 %, in each branch. Absentee workers would draw monthly pay, enjoy all other perks and facilities but would not come to office.

b. Cash van, the vehicle used for carrying cash, to and from; would be under the use of union office bearers, and used for union tasks. Managers and staff at branches would helplessly wait for the cash van to be spared by union's usurpers.

c. On the last day of each month, vouchers for overtime would be signed by the bank managers, for all the absentee workers. This was done under duress of union office holders, repeated once every month.

Case No. 10. One brother was narrating to the younger one a *Hadith e Mubarak* (Sayings of Last Prophet). The teaching being quoted was what to do when a *nikkah* takes place. Prophet said when one is married to another, fire a fire-cracker. People would ask what happened. Then tell them so and so, who is son of so and so, has been married to so and so, the

daughter of so and so. Thus the need of public promulgation was highlighted on the occasion of *nikkah*.

A few years down the line, same brother who was narrating the *Hadith*, married his daughter. He did not disclose the occurrence of *nikkah*, for good one year; not only from the same younger brother, but from all, comprising friends and relatives.

Hadith be *hadith*, practices of the prophet be very sacred, but alas our petty interests!

Case No.11. This is a unique case as compared to the ones mentioned above. This is a comparison of the two symbolic or iconic representations. Each statement or generalization embodies a philosophy. One is representing an absolute truth, eternal value, universally applicable rule, and the second an embodiment of animal self; or the animal needs, and the need to run and get it. These read as follows:

No.1.: Translation: Bread (food), clothing and shelter.

No.2.: Translation: Best amongst mankind is the one who is best for the mankind.

Which one out of above two has led your life? Which one out of these is a beacon of light for you? One should be true to oneself. What do I hear, 'I do as the Romans do'. Well if there is a life hereafter, you will not be adjudged along with the rest of the Romans. You will be in the dock all by yourself

Conclusion

To err and make mistake is a valuable attribute of human beings. Not to challenge conventional wisdom, a phrase frequently used by General Asad Durrani; is a measure of cowardice. It is a withdrawal from the elevation the Creator bestowed on man. Standing operating procedures are customs of another type. They can help run (existing systems) and fly (existing aircrafts) efficiently but impede creating new ones.

The subject may become controversial, drawing many dissenting views. I would welcome all. I welcome each prudent soul to set up principled criteria before bowing to a faith or choice; and decide afresh. Ibrahim (*darood o slam*), could question the Almighty, O' Allah I want to know you? Who are you? So did Newton and Madame Curie; questioned and found new answers.

Customs and traditions are a groove. These are readymade snake-holes, to crawl in and live, safely. Holes and grooves protect from new knowledge, new challenges and therefore, from new solutions. When these get combined with petty personal, ethnic and group interests; the out come is deadly. Sometimes in letter and spirit. Should I quote here the custom of *Satti!* The holy tradition would demand from a widow to be burnt along with the body of husband. Thus an heir (a female) was burnt to death, lest she takes away anything of her husband back to her family, name, love or property. Thank god it is not being practiced anymore.

End Notes

[1] Sultan B. M., *Mawara*, (U) , Chapter 2, Islamabad, 2006,

- [2] Quran 95: 4.
[3] Carthage, The *MacMillan Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., p 243.
[4] Averroes' *De Caelo* Ibn Rushd's Cosmology in his Commentaries on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*
[5] http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War
[6] Mubarakpuri S. R., *Al Raheeq al Makhtoom*, 1976.
[7] ibid
[8] History of serial killers. USA lead the world with 126 while Pakistan is last with one (Javed Iqbal); the serial killer.
[9] Bakhtiar Hakeem, (U), *Islam Quran aur Ham*, 2006, pp 238-244.
[10] Dr. Hafiz Haqqani M., *Azwaj e Mutahraat*, (U), Karachi, 1998, pp 56, 70.
[11] ibid, p 76.
[12] Mubarakpuri S. R., Op cit., p 642.
[13] Sunnan abu Dawood kitab al aqzia, Jameh Tirmizi kitab al ahkaam, Sahih Bukhari kitab alz-zakat, hadith no.1308.

References

Bakhtiar Hakeem, (*articles*), www.thinkersforumpakistan.org

Durant W. (1952) *The Pleasure of Philosophy*, New York.

Twain M., (1939) 'Damned Human Race', published in *Letters from Earth*, Houston, Texas, 1939.

Sultan, B. M. and Hakeem B., ***The Challenge of Reality***, Islamabad, 2010.

Sultan, B.M (2006) *Mawara* (U), Islamabad

Mubarakpuri (1076) *Al Raheeq al Makhtoom*, (U), Banaras

Hakeem B. (2006) , *Islam Quran aur Ham*, (U), Rawalpindi,

The Dialogue, Volume II, Number 4, Oct-Dec 2007.

The Mac Millan(1986) *Encyclopedia*, new edition, London

Congressional Research Service Report RL 30172, 'Extra Territorial and Major Domestic Deployments'.

Bhatti Mulana (1973), ***Baray Saghir Pak o Hind mein Elam e Fiqah***, Lahore

Hafiz H Mian.(1998) , ***Azwaj e Mutahraat*** (U), Karachi