

Muslim Fairs and Festivals of Kāśī

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India is a bunch of flowers of different religions and culture. The life of a man in this country is deeply rooted in colourful social and religious festivals. It seems quite true that the Indian calendar is an unending procession of festivals. But, as far as Kāśī, (the City of Light or the Shining City), the city of our study is concerned, the essential unity underlying in the diversity of Indian culture can be brilliantly traced over here from the fairs and festivals, joyously celebrated throughout the year. It is said that - 'All the tīrthas on earth are here in Kāśī. It is also considered as the Heart and Soul of India. Not less than 400 celebrations of both Hindus and Muslims are held in Kāśī every year.¹

As far as Muslim fairs and festivals of Kāśī are concerned, they are also not merely the occasions of congregation of men, women and children, but in fact, they reflect the sentiments of people of this multi-cultured nation. The list of the important Muslim festivals and fairs of Kāśī are follows _

Festivals

- (1) Muharram
- (2) Ramzān
- (3) Id-ul-Fitr
- (4) Id-uz-Zuha or Bakr-Id
- (5) Chehellum
- (6) Shab-e-Barāt
- (7) Barah Wafaat

Fairs

- (1) Fair of Ghāzi Miyān
- (2) Urs of Baba Chandan Shaheed
- (3) Others - (i) Urs of Baba Bahadur Shah
(ii) Urs fair of Shah Tayyab Banarasi, etc.

The brief description of the above mentioned festivals are as follows :

(1) Muharram: Muharram is the first month of the Muslim calendar and is basically a mourning festival for the Muslims, and to the Shia-community in particular. It is

celebrated in the commemoration of the great tragedy of Karbalā, at Meccā, in Saudi Arabia, in which Imām Hussain, the second son of Fātimah, Prophet Mohammad's (PUH) daughter, was brutally speared to death in the 61st year of the Hijrā.

The ten days are dedicated to the mourning and remembrance of the martyrdom of Hazrat Imām Hussain, who died on the tenth day of Muharram while fighting the army of Yazīd, when Hazrat Alī's (his father) whole family was practically annihilated.

The festival is observed in different parts of India in different ways. But particularly in Kāśī, we notice some fascinating and peculiar features, in the symbolic celebration of this sad tragedy. In Kāśī, it is observed with great passion. A large number of colourful *tāziyās* and *alams* (standards of Hazrat Imām Hussain's force) are taken out from various *Imāmbārās*, in precession all over the city. A special feature, is the precession taken out from the *Imāmbārā* situated in the house of *Bhārata-Ratna* Ustad Bismillah Khān at Dalmandi, which consists 70 to 80 *alams* and impressive and ornamented *tāziyās* that are said to be the symbol or model of the tomb of Hazrat Imām Hussain. They are made of wood, bamboo, paper copper and sometimes of silver and gold.

The tradition of *Tāziadāri* on the 10th day of Muharram is said to be introduced in 352 Hijri by the Khalifa Māzuddaulā of Baghdad.² In India, this tradition was introduced by Taimur Lang who came here in the period of Mahmood Tughlak (14th century)³.

In some regions of Bihar, *tāziyās* are called *Daaha*.⁴

When I specially met Mohd. Mehtab Khan, the eldest son of Ustad Bismillah Khan, for this paper, he focused in detail on the Muharram celebrations in Kāśī, including the *Pachaasa* (पचासा) and *Saatha* (साठा) celebrations of Muharram. From the first to the twelfth day of Muharram, a large number of people assemble in the *Imāmbārās* where *majlis* are held, both - *zanāni* and *mardāni*. On the fifth to the eighth of Muharram, the living legend Ustad Bismillah Khan plays mourning *dhun* in the procession, which moves towards Karbalā from his *Imāmbārā*. He personally told me some of the important *dhuns*, which he usually plays, like -

- (i) मारा गया तीर से बच्चा नवाब का
- (ii) मोरे भाग सुहाग में आग लगी,
तीरन की बौछार लगी।
- (iii) कहतीं थी यशीरीं (यतीम) खुले सर,
हाय हुसैन, हाय हुसैन।

The *marsiyah* (mourning verses) are also recited in honour of the Martyred, and on each stop, there are lamentations and beating of breasts by hands by the public, clothed in black, with loud cries - "Ya Hussain, Ya Hussain". Scenes depicting the battle of Karbala (place in Mecca) are also enacted by the wrestlers.

On the 6th day of Muharram, the most fascinating procession of *Duldul* (Hazrat Imam Hussain's horse of white colour) is taken out at 6 o'clock evening from the *Imāmbārā* of Kacchi Sarai under the supervision of Ladley Hasan, and terminates next day at 6'0 clock in the morning of the 7th day of Muharram. *Duldul* is made highly caparisoned with a red cloth, a silver sword, along with its seat on its back and is decorated with lots of garlands. Milk, sweets and many other eatable things are offered to him on his way by the public. At the night of the seventh day of Muharram, the procession of *Mehndī* is taken out, from the house of Lalkhan at Chauhatta. It is basically not that myrtle (Henna), but is a bunch of 70 to 80 candles lightened in the chillum, in the memory of the seventh Imam Hazrat Qasim (ASS).

On the eighth day of Muharram, '*Turbat*' procesion is taken out from Dalmandi, along with the *Duldul*. *Hāzirī* (लंगर) is arranged in the *Imāmbārās*. On the ninth day, the procesion called *Gasht-e-Alam* is taken out and terminates (ठण्डा, दफन) in the morning of the tenth of Muharram at Fātmān. On the eighth and ninth day of Muharram, the *Imambaras* are profusely decorated and brilliantly illuminated. At the midnight (12'0 clock) of the ninth of Muharram, the procesion of *Dulhā* is taken out from Shivala and the public, along with the *Dulhā* walks on burning coal. '*Vaapsi Qafila*' celebration is made on the eleventh day of Muharram. There is the *Teeja* celebration on the twelfth day of Muharram. On the *Chaleesvan*, (fortieth day), again the *Duldul* procession is taken out along with the *tāziyās*, which moves towards the Karbalā from the *Imāmbārā*. From the *Badā-Imāmbārā* at Lāt Bhairva, again the *Duldul* procesion comes out on the '*Pachaasa*' celebration of Muharram. Then the last ritual is the *Saatha* celebration on the sixtieth day of Muharram and with this, the mourning period is over in the Muslim houses.

(2) **Chehellum** : Muslims, (especially Shia) celebrates the *Chehellum* festival as the last ritual observance of Muharram, on the 14th day of *Roz-e-Ashoorā*⁵. Mostly Shias bury their *tāziās* with usual mourning on the *Chehellum* day.

(3) **Ramzān** : From the first day of the Muslim month Ramzan, the festival of *Ramzān* is celebrated by the Muslims in various parts of India, and particularly in Kāśī, basic theme is the same. This month is believed to be the holiest amongst others because

Hazrat Gibriel (ASS) descended or was sent on earth in this month by the God. Prophet Mohammad (PUH), while residing in Mecca and doing penance, is believed to have received the Holy **Quran**, especially sent by God through him.⁶ During Ramzān, the whole day Muslims rigidly observe the fast. There should be not only fasting, but there is a message of God to self-control and to keep oneself away from all sorts of evil-deeds. During the whole month, people get up early before dawn to take light refreshment, before the fast begins. There is the recitation of the Holy **Quran** in the Mosques, which is called *Taraavih*. There are *Iftār*-parties, which improves the feeling of brotherhood.

(4) Id-Ul-Fitr : This is the biggest festival of the Muslim community all over the world. It is observed on the first day of the Muslim month of *Shawwāl*. After a long thirty days of difficult fasting, this is a day of great rejoicing. People wear the best clothes and go to mosques and *Idgahs* in large number, especially for the *Id-Namaz*. On this day Hindus and Muslims embrace each other in a fraternal spirit. The equal enthusiasm can be seen in Muslim women, and children in particular. Women decorate themselves with their best jewellery and fine clothes and apply *mehndi* (myrtle) on their hands and feet. *Siwayyan*, a homemade sweet-dish, is the major attraction of this festival and is offered and sent to close friends and relatives and enjoyed by one and all.

(5) Id-Uz-Zuhā or Bakr-Id : Id-Uz-Zuha or Id-ul-Azha is celebrated with great rejoicing by the Muslims all over the country on the tenth day of the Muslim month of *Zil-Hijja*. This festival is basically observed when the Haj celebrations at Mecca are rounded off. This festival commemorates the ordeal of (Prophet) Hazrat Ibrahim (ASS), who once dreamt that he has been ordered to offer his beloved son Ismail (A.S.) in sacrifice. This was a terrible test from Allah Almighty to Ibrahim (A.S.S.). The Hazrat, who had great faith in Allah, after consulting his son Ismail and latter's ready consent, put the sword on the throat of his son and was about to cut it. Allah Almighty called Ibrahim (A.S.) to stop and prevented him from doing so, because he was just testing the obedience and submission of Ibrahim (A.S.) to his Lord. The God, after accepting his devotional prayers, directed him to sacrifice a ram (white ram)⁷.

In Kāśī, this festival is celebrated in the same way as in other parts of the country. At Beniabagh, a big market of goats, sheeps and other animals is arranged for *Qurbani*. On the morning of the festival day, the Muslim, even without taking breakfast, go for attending prayers and after returning to their respective homes, they offer sacrifice of a

goat or a ram. The $\frac{2}{3}$ rd part of the sacrificed animal is distributed among the poor, neighbours and relatives who cannot afford, so that they can also enjoy with others. This *Quarbani* is *Farz* (compulsory) for those whose annual saving is equal to 5 *tolas* (60 gms.) of gold or 52 *tolas* (app. 600 gms.) of silver⁸. Muslims, on this sacrificial day, wear the best clothes and greet each other. Relatives and friends are invited for dinner.

(6) Shab-e-Barāt : Shab-e-Barāt (the Night of Record) is celebrated on the night of the 14th of *Shaeaban* or on the 15th of the month of *Sāwan* every year, all over India.

Prophet Mohmmad (PUH) has fixed this day for fasting and prayers because on this night, God is said to make record of all the good and bad actions of men and women and dispenses their fate according to their actions. The duties of men for the ensuing year are also recorded by Him. Muslims do not sleep the whole night, offer prayers, recite the holy **Quran** and offer *Fātiyāh* for the welfare of their deceased relatives and also observe fast on the 14th and 15th day of Shabaan. Sweet dishes, including *halwa* and *roti* (bread) are specially prepared.

It has now converted into a merry-making festival, as people illuminate streets and buildings with candles and display fireworks and crackers.

(7) Bārāh Wafaat : This festival is supposed to be introduced at Mūsāl in Iraq by the Khalifa, named Umar Bin Mohammad⁹. It commemorates the birth of Prophet Mohammad (PUH) and it is also believed that he died on the same day. *Milād* are organized in the house to spread the message of Islam. Streets and buildings of Muslim areas like Dālmandi, Nai-Sarak, Madanpura, Lallapura, Badi Bazar, Peeli Kothi etc. are highly illuminated.

Fairs of Kāśī :

Fair of Ghāzi Miyān : The fair of Ghāzi Miyān holds its prominent place amongst the various Muslim fairs, which are held in Kāśī. It is annually celebrated at his shrine at Jaitpura, which is a very densely populated area, in the month of Jeṭha of Hindu calendar in a very grand level. One thing is noticeable that there is never *Urs* celebrated at his shrine, but a grand fair is organized by the people of all communities enthusiastically on that particular day. Ghāzi Miyān's melā runs for 48 hours.

This is basically a symboler shrine of Ghāzi Miyān- As we know, the main shrine of Ghāzi-Miyān or Masud Ghāzi is at Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh, who was the nephew of Sultan Mahmud of Gazni. He was a soldier, but also had saintly qualities, and therefore, in 1033 A.D., he was defeated and slain by the Rajput confederacy.

We do not get any authentic information about the origin of this Ghāzi Miyān in particular. Because when I enquired about his origin, Mumtaz Shah, the *mujāvar* (attendant) of the shrine, was also not that confident about it. In his opinion, this Ghāzi¹⁰. Miyān could be te contemporary of the Ghāzi Miyān of Bahraich (1033 A.D.).

Beside Muslims, Gazi Miyan is very popular amongst Hindus also, especially in the *Dhobi* (washer-men) community. They hold a deep belief that eveyones wish can be fulfilled over here. They offer silver hand, silver leg and many other items when their *mannat* (wish) is fulfilled. Pilgrims from far and near attend the fair at his shrine. Besides them, *qawwāls*, poets and musicians also devotedly take part in it. *Charkhi*, *jhūlā*, Meena Bazar, sweet shops are the major attractions for children and also for elders. *Sharbat*, after *fātehāh* is also distributed amongst the devotees.

Forty days before the Navrāt of Chait, on Sunday, the *Lagan* of Ghāzi Miyān is celebrated and after one month, on Friday, his *Medinī* (*Baraat*) is taken out lavishly from the house of Salāu Hāji of Jaitpura, whose residence is said to be one and a half kilometer away from the main shrine, along with musical instruments and firecrackers. One thing, which seems to be very interesting is that a *gagarī* filled with water is also brought with the *Barāt*, and is kept in the *āngan* of the shrine. Ladies perform the tradition of singing songs of *shagun* and somehow, this *gagarī* breaks or made to be broken. It seems to be *apshagun*, therefore, the marriage ceremony postpones for the next year.

Another peculiar ceremony, which is observed at his shrine, is known as *Kanurī* (sacrifice of a chicken). This ritual is conducted by both the Hindu and Muslim communities twice in a year, i.e. on the *Navrāt of Kwar* and on the *Navrāt of Chait* of Hindu calendar. The cooked chicken, after *fātehā*, is distributed among the poor.

This 48-hour fair, which starts at 4 o'clock evening on Saturday, ends on Monday evening. It is organized in a very large area, which covers - Peelikothi (near National School), Chaukaghat Pani ki Tanki, Golgadda and Nati Imli. This well managed fair, celebrated by various communities of Kāśī, is conducted with law and order and under tight security.

Urs Fair of Baba Chandan Shaheed : After the fair of Ghāzi Miyān, the *Urs* fair of Baba Chandan Shaheed is ranked second in popularity. His shrine is situated at Rajghat, near Varuṇā-Gaṅgā Sangam. He basically belongs to the Chishtia-Khāndān of Iran. He died (*shaheed*) at Sasaram (Bihar) and the rest of his body is buried here at Rajghat. According to the owner of the *Gaddi* Jalalu Baba and Majavir Shubrati, Baba

Chandan came to India about 550 years ago. He was the eldest of his five brothers, whose shrines are also in the same campus.

After two days of Shab-e-Baraat, his *Urs* is lavishly celebrated every year and believers of all communities enthusiastically take part in it. The *Urs* celebration starts from 5 o'clock morning, after the *Fazir Namāz*, till late night. On that particular day, after the morning *Namaz*, there is a *Ghusal* (bath) ceremony, in which Baba is given bath with sandal, rose-water and *kevda*. *Ziyārat* and *Fātiyāh* are also offered.

Qawwals, including the musicians, devotedly perform themselves. Offering of *chadars* are also held. Men, women and children rejoice and make merriment.

This *Urs* is conducted under tight security and is one of the best examples of religious and communal harmony in Kāśī.

Besides the Fairs of Ghāzi Miyān and Chandan Shaheed, the other notable *Urs* fairs are of -

- ♦ Baba Bahadur Shah of Sadar Bazar (Cantonment)
- ♦ Lat Sahab - Kachahari
- ♦ Shah Tayab Banarasi, Maduadih
- ♦ Baba Mastan - Lohta, etc.

The above-mentioned Muslim fairs and festivals are not merely the occasions of congregation of a particular community, but we can feel the fragrance of religious and communal harmony within.

When the message of unity, tolerance and fraternity dwells in these occasions celebrated in Kāśī, in particular, then - what other place of pilgrimage can there be?

References

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6. *Quran: Surat Al-Baqarah*, Para IInd, Ayat No. - 183-185.
7. *Quran: Surat Al-Baqarah*, 127
8. *Qissasul Anbiya*: (tr. by) Duraidd and Faiz Fatoohi, New Delhi, 1999, p. 108.
9. Shah Khan, Akbar: *History of Islam*, Part - II, New Delhi, 1999, p. 520.
10. **Ghazi** - Ghazis are those people, who fight for Islam, remain alive, have victory and then go back to their places; and **Shaheeds** are those, who are slain in the battlefield.