

Religious Festivals of Lahore

Abstract

Lahore has been a cultural city for centuries where numbers of activities such as political, religious, economic, social and cultural continue to take place on the regular basis and one such activity is the festivals in Lahore. The festivals in Lahore are taking place almost every day whose followers celebrate the festivals with great zeal. Therefore, this study focuses the forms and rituals of the religious festivals, diversity and response of the people to these festivals.

Terrorist incident of September 11, 2011' radically changed the life of a common man in Pakistan. A place with the most exciting ancient traditions faced the blowback to be the frontline. The life and the settings at social level radically have undergone a transformation. Punjab, the soil of five waters, historically has been a centre for all the activities with their focus on spiritualism especially in Lahore city. After 9/11 this land witnessed the most crucial challenge of security which severely damaged its spiritual identity. A land, once famous for its festivities, gone by a span of terror when authorities discourage spiritual gatherings. In such a backdrop, this article is an effort to revive and review the details of various religious gatherings, Lahore was once famous to host. It will give first an account of the festivals and will further analyze its cultural and civilization significance. This is a conscious effort to save the indigenous cultural traditions in the backdrop of emerging security challenges in post 9/11 Lahore.

Lahore, the heart of Pakistan, despite of its rich social, cultural and political heritage has been overlooked by the historians. The ignorance of the charms of such a beautiful and historically important city is sad. In fact the 'Festivals' in Lahore attract thousands of followers almost every day to the city to celebrate the various occasions which add the beauty and grandeur of the city. The culture and civilization of this city has impacted its citizens. Therefore, the Lahorites are considered to be peace-loving people because they enjoy these activities by showing their great regards and veneration.

Lahore has been a cultural city for centuries where numbers of activities such as religious, social and cultural continue to take place on the regular basis and one such activity is the festivals in Lahore. The festivals in Lahore are taking place almost every day whose followers celebrate the religious festivals with great zeal.

In the contemporary world to spend a peaceful in any part of the world especially in Pakistan has become difficult because of continuous fear, terror and anxiety in the society. It has become, indeed, a strange world infested by numerous religious and sectarian organizations.

In the festivals and social customs people reflect their temperaments, habits, religious beliefs and values on which society lays the greatest emphasis. These serve as a means of expressing sorrows or happiness and are considered a reliable measure of the depth and maturity of a culture. Festivals mostly have their roots in religious rites or owe their origin to customs, including folkways which run back to centuries, in matters of dress, however, weather and geographical

factors, besides religion determine the choice of wearing apparel. The same hold true for Lahori society where one notices the influence of religion in festivals, customs and rises of the people.

In the homes of Lahore religious rituals and festivals are observed with unusual enthusiasm. The zeal and enthusiasm with which Lahore families celebrate religious festivals is a refreshing spectacle. And festival is a unique combination of wholesome pleasures for throughout the course of jubiliations the spiritual and the secular cores of the festival receive a balanced emphasis. The main festivals, which are celebrated in the homes of Lahore with enthusiastic rejoicings are Ashura, Eid-Milad Al-Nab. Eid-Ul-Fitar, Eid-Ul-Adha. Shab-L-Barat, Holi, Dewali, Christmas and Easter. A graceful combination of simplicity and grandeur is invariably the predominate note in all such festivities.

ashura

Ashura is one of the holy festivals observed by Muslims all over the world on the 10th of first month of the Islamic Calender i.e. Muharram. *Ashura* is a major festival grieving the demise of when Imam Hussaina.s, Son of Hazrat Ali a.s and grandchild of Hazrat Muhammad ((PBUH)), on the tenth day of Muharram, 61st Islamic Year, which was 10th of October, 680, in Karbala Al – Muqaddasah in Iraq.¹

Introduction to Ashura

In Arabic Ashura means the tenth one, consequently the name of that commemoration, can literally be translated to mean “The Tenth Day”. While a number of Islamic scholars present numerous briefs upon such a call of the day.

Ashura was observed for the first time by Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) in the year 622 AD, i.e. after Hijrah (Hegira) as a day of fasting. Unlike the fast of Ramadan that Muslims observed today, this fast was to be observed from sunset to sunset, comparable to the Day of Atonement, also known as *Yom Kippur*, observed by the Jews all over the world. However, when the relationship between Jews of *Medina* and Muslims were strained, Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) officially named Ramadan as the month of fasting for his *Ummah*, which left *Ashura* as a day of voluntary observance of fast instead of an obligatory one. This custom is maintained to this day by the Sunnites.²

According to Hazrat Ibn Abbas, the Holy companion of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), said that when the Holy Prophet (PBUH), moved to Medina, he discovered that the Jews living in Medina fasted on the 10th of Muharram. The Jews inexplicably believed that on this day, Holy Prophet Musa a.s (Moses), parted the Red Sea and crossed it along with his followers, while the cruel Pharaoh was drowned in the waters of the River Nile. Concluding that Muslims were closer to Moses than the Jews, he (PBUH) directed the Muslims to fast on *Ashura*.³

Hazrat Aisha r.a narrated:

At the time Holy Prophet (PBUH) arrived in Medina, he observed fast on the Ashura and asked the believer to fast on it. And when fasting during the month Ramadan was made obligatory on the Muslims; the obligation regarding fasting was confined to Ramadan alone and the obligation of fasting on the day of

*Ashurawas forsaken. A person is permitted to fast on that day, as per his own will; and as per his own will, he can abandon fasting as well.*⁴

History of Ashura

The day is known for the mourning of the martyrdom of Imam Husain a.s offspring of Hazrat Ali a.s, the grandson of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), with 72 other who belonged to the family and the circle of friends, during the battle of Karbala in the 61st Islamic Year (which makes 680 AD). Yazid had alleged power and wished the Bay'ah (fidelity) of Imam Husain a.s. He publicly defied teachings of Islam and was amending the Sunnah of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) to serve his own purposes. The practice of paying tribute to Imam Husain a.s commenced after the battle of Karbala.

According to the reports of Tabari;

Hazrat Zainaba.s proclaimed as she walked by the body of Imam Hussaina.s, her brother, “*O Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH)! O Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH)! May you be blessed by the angels of the heaven. Here lies my brother, Hazrat Hussain (AS), on open ground, clothes stained with blood and his limbs brutally torn off his body. O Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH)! Your daughters are held captives and your children slayed, and the dust of the east wind blows over them.*” *By the Lord! She made everyone, friend or enemy, shed tears.*⁵

Not only did Hazrat Zainaba.s made the people of Damascus and Kufa weep, but ever since then, all the descendents of Imam Hussaina.s weep on the eve of his martyrdom. The custom is also observed by the Shia Muslims. When Baghdad was conquered by ‘Imad al-Daula, he announced this day i.e. *Ashura* as an official holiday and designated it as a day of mourning in the remembrance of Imam Husain a.s, which overtime, became a custom of the Muslims of the East.

Ashura in Lahore

The day of *Ashura* hold great importance in the community of Shia Muslims, who refer to Imam Husain a.s as *Ahl-e-Bayt* as the grandson of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the third Imam as well as the successor to the teachings of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). They do not listen to music and lament on the passing of Imam Hussaina.s. Not only do they look at this as a time of self reflection, but they also observe it as a day of mourning and refrain from all such activities that may be considered pleasurable by any standards.

The Shia Muslims do not plan weddings or similar joyous activities for the entire month. They mourn and listen to *Mersia* – poems describing the agonizing events that transpired. They also listen to sermons about how Imam Husain a.s, along with the various members of his family, received martyrdom. The purpose behind it all is to make them feel the agony and the suffering *Ahl-e-Bayt* went through in order to keep Islam and the teaching of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) alive. The martyrdom of Imam Husain a.s has long been seen as a symbol of one's struggle against tyranny, oppression and injustice. Shia Muslim's also believe that the battle that took place on the grounds of Karbala is a representation of the constant war between “good” and “evil”. Even in the area that now is called the Middle East, This battle was also fought to keep the religion of Islam untarnished from all forms of corruption.

The Shia Muslims also do not eat or drink anything as a tribute to Imam Husain a.s. This is an exclusive type of fast known as *Fakah*. Furthermore, a number of events linked with Ashura take place in *Hussainia and Imambargah, congregative halls where rituals like* flagellation, traditionally called *zanjeermatamor zanjeerzanitake* place. Such rituals, that usually involve a chain, called *zanjeer*, are not a part of any traditional religious customs, but they are done in remembrance of Imam Husain a.s and his family members who lost their lives in the plains of Karbala.

According to a newspaper reporter that observed the *Ashura* procession that took place in the year 2005 reported that:

Yom-a-Ashura this year took place quite peacefully beneath the dome of security in the city of Lahore. The main procession of *Ashura* began from the Mochi Gate of Nisar Haveli. This procession contained a number of *Alam, Tazzea* and *Zulgina* that was arranged by a number of *Imambargahs*. On the eve of the 9th of Murarram, the procession passed the famed NisarHavali, having already travelled the length of its traditional route. Following the *Fajr* prayers the morning of the 10th of Muharram, the *Zulgina* procession began from Jamia Mosque Shia *Kashmiran* and by the *Maghrib* prayers, concluded at Karbala Gama Shah. During this time, more than 30 small processions from various parts of the city met up with the main procession. 200majalis or more are held all over the city, with an abundant amount of people gathering at the LalPul, Sant Nagar, Kirshan Nagar, AllamaIqbal Town, NillaGumbad, Shahdrha and the Walled City. *Shame-Grabian* was copiously held at Karbala Gama Shah, with zeal and zest. Religious scholars talk about the great sacrifice of Imam Husain a.s and the effort to keep the teachings of Islam alive.

The police, with the help from the Pakistan Army, kept a close watch on the procession in Lahore. In order to protect the people joining the procession, they were screened with metal detectors and the route the procession was supposed to take was blocked to normal traffic. Large search lights and video cameras were mounted along the route the procession was supposed to take, with a number of paramedics and doctors present on sight to help those in need of their services. A number of foreigners served as bystanders to the entire procession, with a number of camera crews filming the entire event.⁶

Imam Hussain's a.s horse *Zuljinai*s also represented in *Ashura* ceremonies. As soon as the moon that signals the beginning of Muharram rises, the city of Lahore is enveloped in an aura of grief. All the radio channels as well as TV stations stop airing music and the programmes being broadcasted take on a solemn tenor. The Muslims of Lahore, whether they follow the Shia school of thought or Sunni school of thought, do cease to observe any joyous activities as it is a month of mourning for all the Muslims across the globe, until the end of the month. During the first ten days of the month, a number of *majaalis* and memorial meetings are conducted all over the city in *Imambarghas* and homes of people that are financially able to organize them to honour the sacrifice of the beloved grandson of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in Karbala. During such memorial assemblies, rhymes are sung without the use of any music in the honour of the life and the sacrifice of Imam Husain a.s. *Zakirs*, sacred vicars, who know well what came to transpire on that fateful day and how the misfortunate occurrence came to

be, recite the story in such a way that all in attendance leave the service with tear-filled eyes and heavy hearts. The ultimate sacrifice of Imam Husain a.s, which all Muslims have honoured with the title of the Prince of Martyrs, along with his intimates and cohorts, is remembered with an incredible amount of ardour and passion that it all is enough to tell all in attendance the glorious end to the life of the beloved grandson.

Throughout the month, *sabeels*, also known as water provision corners are installed all over the city. Every single one of such dispersion points are decorated with great love and care and if Muharram happens to occur during the summer months, iced water and cold milk is offered to the people passing by the *sabeels*. During winter, fragrant and warm green tea are offered by people organizing the *sabeels*. In certain situations, the grievors are speckled with rose water on their heads and are showered with rose petals by people standing on their balconies or are standing on the sidelines, watching the grievors go. The *sabeels* that take place at Bhaati Gate and MochiGate, are a site to behold. People from all corners of the city visit these *sabeels* exclusively. A few of the *sabeels* even go as far as to recreate the plains of Karbala where the beloved friends and family members of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) received martyrdom. The name of HazratZaynaba.s taken with great admiration, her courage and valour being praised for standing up in the court of Yazeed and speaking the truth without fear of the consequences.

EID-E-MILAAD-UN-NABI

The 12th day of the 3rd month of the Islamic Calender i.e. Rabi-ul-Awal has been designated as the birthday of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) is known as *Eid-E-Milaad-un-Nabiby* the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).⁷

This festival is also known as *BarhWafat* that is literally translated as the twelfth day. It commemorates not only the birth but also the death. The word *Miladis* derived from the Arabic word “*wiladut*” that is used to refer birth. This makes the word *Milad* mean the time and place of birth. The birth of the Last Messenger of Allah, The Holy Prophet (PBUH) is of huge significance in Islam since the Holy Quran proclaims;

“Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah, you have been sent a beautiful example (Uswa-al-Hassanah).”⁸

History of the celebration

The 3rd month of the Islamic Calender i.e. *Rabi ulAwal* is one of the most significant month in the Islamic Calender since it signifies the birth of Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H).⁹

The majority of Muslims recognized the *mawlid*, held in the year 1207 AD, as the first *mawlid* festival ever observed. This festival was organized near Mosul, in Irbil by the brother-in-law of the *Sultan* Saladin of Egypt named Mazaffar-ad-Din Gokhberi. The celebrations of the *mawlid* festival took the Muslim world by storm because the contemporary aura of the festival made Islam a personal experience for the Muslims.¹⁰

Terms used for the birth of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH):

- Mawlid an-Nabi (pl. al-Mawalid) - The Birth of the Prophet (Arabic)
- Mawlud Sharif - The Blessed Birth (Urdu)
- Mevlid Serif - The Blessed Birth (Turkish)
- Milad an-Nabi - The Birth of the Prophet (Arabic / Urdu)
- Eid al-Mawlid an-Nabawi - Festival of the birth of the Prophet (Arabic)
- Zadrud-e Payambar-e 'Azam / Milad-e Nabi-ye Akram - The birth of the great/blessed Prophet (Persian)
- Maulidul-Rasul - The Birth of the Messenger of Allah (Bahasa Malaysia / Malay)
- Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi - Festival of the birth of the Prophet (Urdu)
- Yawm an-Nabi - The Day of the Prophet (Arabic)
- Mawlid En-Nabaoui - Algerian (North Africa)¹¹

Eid-E-Milaad-Un-Nabi Celebrations in Lahore

Barah Waft or *Eid-E-Milaad-Un-Nabi* isn't particularly celebrated in a grand manner because the birth as well as death anniversary of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) occurs on the same day i.e. the 12th *rabi'ul-awwal*. Therefore, Muslims commemorate this day with a number of spiritual events. The city is decorated days before in anticipation of the event. On the morning of the *Eid*, Muslims all over the city participate in communal prayers. They put on their best clothes and wish one another with *Eid Mubarak* (Blessed Holiday), exchange hugs with family members and friends and even visit them.

After such get-togethers, Muslims mostly head towards the feasts and parties organized by families and friends or go over to the local parks to enjoy a number of carnivals and festivals held on this day. Malls, bazaars and restaurants see a surge in shoppers and visitors on this day more so than any other holy festivals, apart from the two *Eids*. A "Sandal Rite" ceremony is performed using the symbolic footprints of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) engraved in stone. An imitation of the famed *burraq*— the winged horse that took the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to heavenly dwelling is placed right beside the stone and daubed in scented powders or Sandal wood paste. The house of casket where the engraved stone and the *burqa* imitations are housed is decorated quite elaborately.

On this occasion, men of knowledge and various religious scholars deliver sermons that uniquely focus on the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the teachings he left behind for his *Ummah* to follow in order to live a good life, a life of righteousness as it is stated in the Holy Quran. Therefore, this festival also allows Muslims to reflect back on the life they have lived and look into their deeds and strive to become a better version of themselves, a version that can stand tall in the front of the Creator on that day of judgement. On this occasion, people also get a chance to recount the *Seerat* of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and present The Last Messenger of ALLAH (PBUH) with praises, attributes and the unique gift of *Durood -o- salam*. *Naats*, glorifying the grace and the life of the Holy Prophet are recited in commemoration of the events. Other activities that are usually a part of these events include construction of commemorative tombs, Many other

activities are practiced on the twelfth of *rabi'ul-awwal*, like holding processions and lightening up roads, building and sidewalks.¹²

Yet, the critics believe that instead of going all out on decoration, Muslims should commemorate the event by firstly, following the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to make the fellow Muslims aware of his *Seerah*. They should use this day as a medium to safeguard this within the hearts of all Muslims and teach them to live their life the way Holy Prophet (PBUH) taught us and to believe in their hearts that they are following the most glorious example of an ideal human that the universe has ever seen. To stand for what the true essence of Holy Prophet's birth meant and that is to teach the world and its occupants what it means to be human and all of that cannot be achieved by simply decorating the roads and building with twinkle lights and all sorts of trinkets. As the holy Prophet (PBUH) followers, we should put all our efforts into forwarding what he taught us and bring the ones who have gone astray to the path of forgiveness once again.¹³

Pakistan Times has exclusively reported an article on how this auspicious day is observed by the Muslims of Pakistan. Muslims all over the world and in Pakistan celebrate this day by rekindling their faith in glory of ALLAH Almighty and pledging anew on amity, peace, affinity and brotherhood in favour of all mankind. This day, that is the day the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) was brought into the world is a day which all Muslims celebrate with passion, dedication and zest. In Pakistan, just like the rest of the world, a public holiday is observed both in the public and the private sector. The national flag graces the tops of building and national monuments all over the country.

All national building and shopping centres along with some of the main public places where the people frequent on events such as these are illuminating with lights to celebrate the *Eid-e-Milaad-un-Nabi*. Exclusive festive programs and TV shows are broadcasted on 11 and 12 *rabi'ul-awwal* which also includes touch bearing processions in all the major cities. People organize *NaatKhwani* gathering all over the country, some in public places like auditoriums and amphitheatres while others are organized in private dwellings. Even institutes taking care of the handicapped and disabled is also looked after. Sweets were distributed in all schools, colleges, orphanages, widow and destitute homes, disabled and handicapped person homes and among prisoners. Print media in Pakistan, including the first ever independent E-newspaper operated in Pakistan while news channels printed and broadcasted special features on signifying the importance of this day for Muslims.

Eid-e-Milaad-un-Nabi like every other event that takes place in the city of Lahore, is celebrated with zeal and zest by Muslims. The day begins with a 21-gun salute in the city, following which, devotee Muslims head towards the major mosques in the city to offer the morning prayers to keep Pakistan strong and give it the power in needs to liberate all of its occupied territories from oppression. Once the prayers are done, various processions are organized and carried out by various religious organizations to commemorate the birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the reason behind the creation of the world. These processions are filled with the chants of *Darood-o-Salaam* while *Naat-khawaan*'s recite a number of *Naats* to honour the life and glory of Holy Prophet (PBUH). All these processions

come to a stop at the famous Data Darbar where the members of the procession offer special prayers in accordance with the occasion. The first procession to ever take place took off from the Railway station under the authority of Milad Committee Lahore.

The procession made its way via the traditional routes it usually takes and finally comes to an end when it gets to Data Darbar. Other procession also initiate from the Akbari Gate of the Masjid Jamia Hanafia Mohallah Kashmirian later in the evening that also comes to a stop after arriving at the Data Darbar.

Various religious scholars are present here on this auspicious occasion and they address the people gathered there, telling them to faithfully follow the way of life that is taught to us by the Holy Prophet (PBUH). They also stress the fact that one can solve all the worldly ailments by simply following the Holy Prophet's teachings and the teaching of the Holy Quran.¹⁴

SHAB-E-MIRAJ

In Arabic, the words *Al-Miraj* stands for "The Ascent". In Islam, the word *Al-Mirajis* used to describe the night journey taken by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) who, under the guidance of the archangel *Gabriel*, travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem. Once there, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) met the prophets that came before him, which included Adam, Jesus and Moses. Then from Jerusalem, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) ascended to heaven, where he was honoured to witness the glory of ALLAH Almighty. It was there that he was also shown hell.¹⁵ This journey falls on the 27th day of Rajab and is named *Laylat al-Miraj* or the Night of the Ascension.

History of the Event

According to the legend, while Holy Prophet (PBUH) slept in the Holy Kabah in Mecca, he was visited by the archangel *Gabriel*, who took him to a journey, a journey that first took him to Jerusalem and then to the high heavens, where he was prepared by Archangels *Micheal* and *Gabriel* for his meeting with the Creator of the Universe. There, they also opened up his chest to purify his heart removing all the traces of doubt, error, paganism and idolatry, filling it with strong belief and wisdom of the ages. He made this journey in a split second on a special winged creature in the form of a horse called *Buraq*, accompanied by the archangel *Gabriel*.¹⁶

When the Holy Prophet (PBUH) first arrived in the heaven, with the archangel by his side, he first saw all the seven levels of heaven with his own eyes before reaching the throne of ALLAH Almighty. On the where there, he made the acquaintance of a number of prophets that came before him including Adam, John (Yahya), Jesus (Isa), Joseph (Yusuf), Idris, Aaron (Harun), Moses (Musa), and Abraham (Ibrahim) a.s and saw the glory of heaven and the misery of hell. Hazrat Musa a.s is the only one amongst all the inhabitants of heaven that is speaks to the visitors. He informed the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that he is the only one that holds higher regard in the eyes of GOD than he himself. He also mentioned how the number of followers the Holy Prophet (PBUH) has greatly outnumbered the ones he had. He was also the one who pleaded with the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to get the assigned number of *salat* reduced from the commanded 50 times to five times as this obligation could become quite hard for his followers.¹⁷

The *Miraj* has also been a debatable topic among Muslims. Some believe that it was all a dream while others hypothesize that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had the proverbial out of body experience, where his body remained on the earth while his soul ascended high heavens. For this reason a number of similarities had been drawn by the Muslims between the Ascension and the procession of one's soul on the day of judgement. The sufis go as far as to describe the entire the event as a soul's flight into the realm of the mystic.¹⁸

While the neurotic people of *Medina* speculated the factual nature of the entire event, some believers went to the close companion of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), Hazrat Abu Bakr.a and to inform him that his companion was being absurd (Heaven Forbids) and is claiming that he travelled to Jerusalem and Ascended the high heavens in a single night. In response to this, Hazrat Abu Bakr.a simply said;

If the Holy Prophet (PBUH) claimed that, then he is speaking the truth. I believe that he is the bearer of news from the heaven and an angel helped him descend from heaven. He says he went to Jerusalem and came back in one night. Abu Bakr.a in reply, tells them;

“If he said that, then he is truthful. I believe him concerning the news of the heavens that an angel descends to him from the heavens.”

Celebration in Lahore

In Lahore the entire event was celebrated by offering *Nawafil* (Optional *Salah*) in the way of the Almighty and light up the whole city with great zeal and zest. Fire crackers are deployed by children in streets while exclusive ceremonies take place at schools to commemorate this day. On this day, children often accompany adults to the mosque, where the story of the Night of Ascension is narrated for their knowledge and awe. Following the story session, treats of all sorts are served, with prayers going deep into the 27th night of Rajab. Some Muslims even fast on this day, even though no authentic source has reported such a practice in tradition or *Shariah*.¹⁹

SHAB-E-BARAT

Also called as the “Night of Power”, this sacred night is believed to be the one in which the Creator of the entire universe decides the fate and the destiny of every living thing living of this earth and beyond.²⁰

Shab-E-Baratis celebrated all over the Muslim world with eagerness and splendour. Since the deeds of the man are accounted for in this night and his destiny is written, it is considered an important night of the year where a sinner can luck out with prayers and turn his life around. This festival usually takes place on the 15th of the eighth month of the Islamic Calendar i.e. Shaban which happens to be exactly 15 days before the beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

This day is a day of atonement for Muslims all over the world. Not only do they faithfully repent for all their sins but they also pray to the Lord in preparation of the Holy Month of Ramadan. In Arabic, the festival is called *LailatulBaraat* which literally means “a night of liberation”, while in Persian, the word *Shab* literally means “night” while the word *Baraat* means “the night of

commission". It is also believed to be a night where pains and sufferings are relieved by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) who visits each and every house.

Significance of the day

According to a very authentic and reliably sourced *ahadith*, it has been reported that Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) almost fasted the entire month of Shaban and followed directly into the month of Ramadan with his fasts. He also left some verbal instructions for his Ummah to follow. One of such instructions did reported by HazratAnas.r.a, saying that once the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was inquired, "*After the fasts of Ramadan, what fast is most commendable in the eyes of Allah Almighty?*" Upon this he replied, "*Fasting in the month of Shaban to honour the fasts of Ramadan.*"²¹

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to fast during the month of Shaban frequently which lead to HazratUsamaibnZaid telling the Messenger of ALLAH;

*"Holy Prophet (PBUH), I have never seen you fast as much as I have seen you do it during the month of Shaban."*²²

In response to which, the Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) replied;

*"Shaban is a month that falls between Rajab and Ramadan and is the one which is most neglected by the Muslim. It is a month the deeds of mankind are presented to their Lord. Therefore, when my deeds are to be presented before ALLAH Almighty, I wish to be in a state of fasting."*²³

History of the day

Shaban is a month which contains a night that has been called as *Laylatul-baraah* in the *Sha-riah*. *Laylatul-baraah* literally means "the night of freedom from hell fire" and signifies and night in which Allah Almighty showered his faithful believers a chance to capture His grace and attention. This night is observed on the eve of 14th of Shaban. Based on this night, Hazrat Ayesha r.a has reported that;

"One night, in the month of Shaban, I witnessed the Holy Prophet (PBUH) offering the Tahajjud prayer. He offered a very long Sajdah during the prayer, so long that I feared he had passed away. When I saw this, I rose from my bed and kneeled by him and moved his hand to determine if he is alive. The thumb moved and I returned to my place whereupon I heard him saying loudly, 'I seek refuge of your pleasure from your annoyance', 'seek refuge of your forgiveness from your punishment,' and 'I seek your refuge from yourself. I cannot praise you as fully as you deserve'. You are just the way you have defined yourself."

Thereafter, one he had finished his salah, he turned to me and said; *"Ayesha, do you believe that the Prophet of Allah (PBUH) has betrayed you?"* and I said, *"No, Holy Prophet (PBUH), I thought your soul has parted your body because your sajdah was so long."* Whereupon he told me, *"This is the 15th night of Shaban and in this night Allah Almighty looks upon his believers with mercy and forgive the one who repents for his sins. Except for the ones that hold malice in their hearts and He does not pardon them until they free themselves from such malice."*

According to another ahadith, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said;

*“In a night occurring in the middle of the month of Shaban, Allah Almighty himself descends from the high heavens and forgives a large number of people, more people than all hair on the sheep that the tribe of Kalb owns.”*²⁴

Celebration in Lahore

Muslims believe that in the night of *Shab-E-Barat*, Allah Almighty writes the fate and destinies of every living being on earth, therefore, they light up the night sky with adornments, candles and twinkle lights and make it as sparkling as they want their fate to be. On this night, firework displays are also set up in various parts of the city of Lahore that light up the night sky in glorious Technicolor.

Sweets and condiments of all sorts are prepared, especially the delicious *sawaiyyan* or the vermicelli on this night and these sweets are sent to friends and family members to mark the night and also in remembrance of those loved ones that have passed away. Flowers are placed on the graves of the deceased and charity is also given to the poor and the needy in an effort to please ALLAH Almighty and repent for one's sins. *Fatiha* is recited and along with Durood o Salam in the honour of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. The Muslims also stay awake through the night, reciting the Holy Quran and offering *Salah* to ask ALLAH Almighty for forgiveness. Some Muslims pray and repent in the privacy of their own homes, while others go to the mosques to mediate and offer *nawafal* and even fast during the day.

Even though there is no notable mention of *Shab-E-Barat* in the Holy Quran, *SuraDukhan* mentions a *LailaMubaraka*, which, according to a number of religious scholar is used to refer to the Night of Power i.e. *Shab-E-Barat*.

RAMADAN

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar, the month of abstinence and the month in which the Holy Quran was first sent to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) for the guidance of the entire mankind for the years to come.²⁵

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims all over the world abstain for evil deeds as well as evil thought. From dawn to dusk, every single day of the month, they do not eat food or drink anything and even abstain for all sorts of sexual intercourse. The beginning of the month of Ramadan, as well as the end and the lateral beginning of the month of *Shawaal*, the tenth month of the Islamic Calendar, is announced when one mature individual of sane mind testifies in front of the authority that the new moon has been sighted. At the end of the month of Ramadan and the first three days of the month of Shawal, the end of fast is commemorated with the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr*, which is one half of the two major religious holidays for Muslims everywhere.²⁶

As soon as a Muslim reaches puberty and is mentally and physically mature and able to uphold a fast, they are obligated to fast in the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, people who are sick, women who are pregnant or nursing young ones as well as the people who are travelling are exempt from fasting. But, once they are able, they must make up for the days they weren't able to fast. The

same goes for the women who are bleeding after childbirth or menstruating. The elderly and incurably sick need not fast, but the Holy Quran and *ahadith* advises them to feed at least one poor person for everyday of fasting that they were not able to keep.

Significance of the Month

According to the Holy Quran, ALLAH Almighty asks the believers to observe fast in the month of Ramadan so they may be able to “cultivate piety”. It is also a way to promote spiritual discipline and self-discipline, which may help believers in overcoming faults like greed and selfishness. The month of Ramadan is also quite revered by the Muslims as they believe it to be the month in which the Holy Quran was first revealed to the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

In Arabic, the word “Ramadan” literally means “scorcher”. Since the Arabic calendar, like the Islamic calendar was based on the revolution of the moon i.e. Lunar, every lunar month only has about 29 or 30 days and since a year of 12 lunar months usually fell short compared to the 365 days of Solar year, the pre-Islamic Arabic calendar added an extra month every two to three years in order to keep the balance. After the establishment of the Islamic Calendar, this practice was abolished and a lunar year constituted of 12 months and 354 days. This is why the Ramadan occurs about 11 days earlier every single year.²⁷

Celebration of Festival in Lahore

The beginning and the end of the Holy month of Ramadan is marked by the appearance of the new crescent moon. Based on the appearance of the moon, Ramadan begins on a different day even in the different parts of the same country. For this reason a *Roeet-e-Hilal-Committee*, responsible for the sighting of the moon is established. Various sub-committees are also formed in different provinces.

Based on the Holy Quran, a fast should be observed at the beginning of each morning, when the white thread of morning light can be distinguished from the black thread of dawn and ends at sunset, with the *Maghrib Salah*.²⁸

Saheris a meal designated for Muslims to have shortly before dawn during the month of fast, in preparation for the day long fast. At sunset, fast is broken with the evening prayer in a meal called *iftar*. *Iftaris* said to be a light meal that is taken before Muslims are to go off towards the *Marghrib* Prayer. During the month of Ramadan, providing *iftar* to the sick and the poor is considered a commendable job. Also, while many Muslims prefer going to the local mosques to break their fast in the company of family and friends, many Muslims like to throw *iftar* party for their friends, families and loved ones. Many restaurants also offer *iftar* packages throughout the month as well.

I. TARAWEEH PRAYER

Ramadan is that one month in the entire year when the Muslim *Ummahis* encouraged to worship Allah Almighty more than they did before and give charity in the way. Special optional nightly prayers known as *taraweeh* are performed every single night throughout Ramadan. These prayers maybe performed at the mosque or in a place of gathering in large quantities or one can pray them individually as well in the privacy of their own homes. Over the month, the Holy Quran is recited on a daily basis as a part of the nightly prayers. *Taraweehis*

conducted in almost every mosque in the city but large prayer gathering are seen at Badshahi mosque and Data Durbar mosque.

II. I'tikaf

Muslims recite the Holy Quran in the month of Ramadan more than they do any other month of the year. This recitation holds a lot of significance especially in the last ten days of the Holy Month, when many believers observe *I'tikaf*. *I'tikaf* is that point of the month when Muslims retreat to a local mosque in complete seclusion and draw closer to ALLAH Almighty with the ferocity of their prayers, as the practice of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) indicates. Believers remain there all day and all night long, with their relatives providing them with clothes and food twice a day. They recite the Holy Quran there with reverence and pray some *wazaief*. Major *I'takaf* centres in the city are Data Durbar mosque, Badshahi mosque and Minhaj-ul-Quarn institute.

III. Laylat al-Qadr

The night of Power, also known as the special *Laylat al-Qadr* takes place in the last ten, odd nights in the month of Ramadan to commemorate the night of the revelation of the Holy Quran. Since no one, other than ALLAH Almighty and his Holy Prophet (PBUH), knows the exact date of the revelation, Muslims are asked to look for the night amongst the last ten, odd numbered nights of the month. Still, the Sunni Muslims believe this night to fall on the 27th night of the month, the Shia Muslims, observe it on the 23th night of the month.

The Holy Quran describes the night as a night "better than a thousand months". It is a night when the angels are believed to descend from high heavens by the leave of ALLAH Almighty and an aura of peace envelops the world until dawn. Most Muslims spend a large part of this night in supplication and recitation of The Holy Quran.²⁹

Eid al-Fitr (Feast of Fast-Breaking), commemorates the end of Ramadan and is one of the two biggest religious festivals observed by Muslims all over the world. It begins by the sighting of the Shawal Moon and lasts for three days. People observing *I'tikaf* return from their seclusion and are wished and congratulated by their relatives.

EID-AL-FITAR

Eid-al-Fitar, The first of the two most significant festivals of Islam, is celebrated at the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan and is commemorated during the first 3 days of the 10th month of the Islamic Calender, Shawal.

Introduction to the Festival

The word "*Eid*" originates from the Arabic language and is said to mean "celebration" or "festivity", while the word "*Fitr*" means "to break the fast". The word "*Fitr*" can also be used to stand for "nature", and derived *fitrah* which symbolizes the breaking of the fast.

Eid ulFitris the most significant festival of the year for the Muslims which they celebrate for the achievement of fasting the entire month of Ramadan. It is a symbol of salvation, peace, equality, companionship, brotherhood and harmony. Muslims not only celebrate this joyous occasion due to fasting the

previous month but also thank their Creator for the blessings He bestowed upon them the previous month.

ALLAH Almighty himself ordered the Muslims through the Holy Quran to enjoy this occasion:

“Say, in the grace of ALLAH and in His mercy, that they should celebrate.”

Eid ulFitrit itself is an occasion that shows the equality of an Islamic Society at its very best, and the Holy Prophet (PBUH) proved this by his activities on *Eid ulFitrit*. It has been said that he always wore his best dress on this day to celebrate the occasion, but it wasn't an expensive dress, rather anyone could buy it. It has been reported that Hazrat Umar r.a once bought an expensive dress to present to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to wear it on this occasion. Rather than accepting the gift, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) politely returned it saying that it did not suit a believer to wear a costly dress. Due to this very reason, all of the Holy Prophet's companions wore simple dresses on this occasion.

When it comes to celebrating this festival, Islam has a rather unique approach. While in other religions, celebrations of all sorts include acts that show one's happiness through the means of rejoicing, partying, playing, singing and dancing.

It became the Holy Prophet's habit not to sleep the night before *Eid ulFitrit* as this night has been called the Night of Reward in a *Hadith*. It means that this night is a Holy night on which ALLAH Almighty showers his blessings on the month of *Ramadan*, hence each and every prayer on this night are accepted by Allah Almighty. Therefore, it is highly recommended for Muslims to perform *nafl* in this night.

It is quoted in *ibn-n-majah* that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) once said:

Whoever stands up (In worship) in the nights preceding the two Eids waiting for rewards from his Creator, his heart will not die when the other hearts will die.

Islam, like every other thing in life, has provided clear instructions on how to spend the days of *Eid*. It is obligatory for the rich in the Islamic Society to start their day by paying *Sadaqat-ul-fitr* so that, the poor in the society, for once, can forget about the worries of earning their livelihood and enjoy the blessings of the occasion.

After paying *Sadaqat-ul-fitr*, Muslims proceed to an open place (usually a big mosque) to offer the *Eid* prayer, consisting of two *rakats*, the *Eid* prayer helps people receive the divine blessings before they start celebrating the joyous occasion. Afterwards, it is strictly forbidden that Muslims indulge themselves in any act that violates the limits suggested by ALLAH Almighty.³⁰

Eid Celebrations in Lahore

It is a big day for the Muslims of the subcontinent when Pakistan came into being. It was an even bigger day for the people when they were able to freely rejoice on the occasion of *Eid*. On this day, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah marked the ceremony with a speech saying:

This is our first Eid directly following in the prefiguring of free independent Sovereign Pakistan having been established. This day of jubilation throughout the Muslim world so aptly comes immediately in the wake of our national state being established, and consequently, it is a matter of special significance and happiness to us all. I wish on this favourable day a very happy Eid to all Muslims wherever they may be throughout the world an Eid that will escort in, I hope, a new era of prosperity and will mark the onward march of resurgence of Islamic culture and ideals. I fervently pray that God Almighty make us all well-intentioned of our past and hoary history and give us strength to make Pakistan really a great nation amongst all the nations of the world. No uncertainty we have attained Pakistan, but that is only yet the beginning of an end. Great errands have come to us, and equally great should be our determination and endeavour to release them, and the fulfilment thereof will mandate of us efforts and sacrifices in the cause no less for construction and building of our nation than what was requisite for the achievement of the cherished goal of Pakistan. The time for real hard work has now arrived, and I have no doubt in my mind that the Muslim genius will put its shoulder to the wheel and surmount all obstacles in our way on the road, which may appear arduous.

Let us not, on this juncture, forget those of our brethren and sisters who have sacrificed their all, so that Pakistan may be created and we may live. We passionately pray that their souls may rest in peace and we shall never be unable to summon up the memory of those who are no more and those who have agonized. For many, Eid will be not an juncture of such great joy and rejoicing as in Pakistan. Those of our brethren who are minorities in Hindustan may rest guaranteed that we shall never abandonment or forget them. Our hearts go out to them, and we shall contemplate no effort too great to help them and protect their well-being for I recognize that it is the Muslim marginal provinces in this sub-continent who were the pioneers and carried the banner aloft for the attainment of our cherished goal of Pakistan. I shall never disremember their support, nor I hope the mainstream provinces in Pakistan will fail to appreciate that they were the pioneers in the frontline of our historic and heroic struggle for the achievement of Pakistan, which today is an consummate fact. Pakistan Zindabad.³¹

On the last day of Ramadan (Either 29th or 30th of Ramadan) Muslims recite *Takbir*:

ALLAH is the Greatest, ALLAH is the Greatest, ALLAH is the Greatest, There is no deity but ALLAH, ALLAH is the Greatest, ALLAH is the Greatest and to Allah goes all praise.

The *Takbir* is recited when the moon of *Shawal* is sighted in the sky, which symbolizes the last day of Ramadan and also starts the celebrations of the new moon of *Shawal*, the 9th month according to the Islamic Lunar Calendar succeeding the 9th month, *Ramadan*.

The night before *Eidis* called *Chand Raat*. In Lahore, people make a run for the shopping malls and markets, to do some last minute shopping; it is usually this occasion that fills the markets way more than any other occasion the entire year. It is a tradition among women, especially young girls, to paint their hands with henna and also wearing colourful bangles.³²

The most important activity on *Eid* day is offering prayers in the morning which usually take place in a big mosque or an open space out of town. This prayer is way shorter than the other prayers of the day and is succeeded by the *Khutba*. Muslims embrace each other in the spirit of brotherhood and unity, thus providing an example of harmony that is unmatched.

Eid Al-Fitr Prayer offered at Badshahi Mosque, Lahore

After the initial prayers on the *Eid* day, the festivities start. The celebrations usually include gatherings with friends and family. It is also a tradition among the Muslim Community to give charity to the poor and the destitute, so that they could also join the other in the celebrations of *Eid*. The cities are decorated beautifully during *Eid-ul-Fitr*, people put on their favourite dresses and meet their neighbours and friends, embracing each other and wishing them a blessed holiday.

It is also seen that children are persuaded to meet and greet the elders; in exchange they expect to get a small amount of cash, called *Eidi* from the elders.³³ One of the signature dishes for *Eid-ul-Fitr* is *sivayyan*, a dish made of toasted vermicelli noodles. Some of the usual festivities on *Eid-ul-Fitr* are to attend parties, gatherings, carnivals, parades and meetings with friends and family. In the major cities, restaurants, markets and malls experience the highest attendance of the entire year and are crowded with families celebrating the day of *Eid*.

Eid is a second name for happiness. *Eid al Fitr*, the first *Eid* of the year is regarded as a day to thank the ALLAH Almighty for all He has blessed us with and to rejoice. In Islam, it is regarded as unholy thing to observe fast on the first day of *Eid*. It is a day when people meet each other and forget the grudges they hold against others and forgive all their mistakes. *Eid* greetings are exchanged amongst Muslims, regardless of caste, creed or social status. It is one of the most significant Islamic celebrations and is celebrated with happiness and goodwill.

EID-AL-ADHA

Eid-ul-Adha, also spelled as *Eid al-Qurban* or *Eid al-Kabir*, is the second of the two of the greatest festivals for Muslims in the entire year. It marks the start of the *haji*, which takes place at Mina, situated in Makkah in Saudi Arabia, although it celebrated by Muslims all over the world.³⁴

Eid-ul-Adha has varying names across the world, In Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, it is called *Eid- el-Kbir*. *TfaskaTamoqqart* in *Jerba*; and *Tabaski* or *Tobaski* in the majority of Africa; *BabbarSallah* in West Africa and Nigeria; *Ciidwayneey* in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. In Pakistan and India it is referred to as *Bakra Eid*, where a goat is the preferred animal to sacrifice. In Bangladesh it is described either as *Eid-ul-Azha* or *Qurbani*. South Africans call it *Bakri Eid*. While the Indonesians call it *Eid-ul-Adha*.³⁵

Philosophy of the Celebration

Eid-ul-Adha celebrates the courage of Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael for the will of Allah Almighty. When Ishmael explained to his father what he had seen in his dream, his father and even Ishmael himself, agreed to be sacrificed to please Allah Almighty. But when Abraham was about to

sacrifice his son, Allah Almighty replaced Ishmael with a goat. Due to this reason, Muslims find it pleasing to sacrifice an animal on the occasion of *Eid al-Adha*.³⁶

Other religions also make it mandatory for a person to sacrifice an animal but it is often in the name of some idol. However, in Islam, the sacrifice of an animal is treated as a form of worship and a way of pleasing Allah Almighty.

Holy Prophet (PBUH) has named the sacrifice of an animal a form of worship only during the first 3 days of *Zulhijjah*, i.e. the 10th, 11th and the 12th of this month. *Qurbani* is a symbol of obedience which proves the fact that we, Muslims, are a slave of Allah, and we will do anything, whether in our best interests or not, if it pleases Allah Almighty.³⁷

The following activities are said to be performed by our Holy Prophet at the start of the *Eid* day:

- To wake up early in the morning.
- To clean one's teeth with a brush or *aMiswaak*.
- To have a bath.
- To put on one's finest clothes.
- To use perfume.
- To eat a sweet food before the *Eid* prayer.
- To recite the *Takbir* in the soft voice while going to perform the *Eid* prayer.

All Muslims who can afford to buy a sheep or any other animal are ordered to do so and afterwards it is recommended that they distribute the meat among the poor and the needy, so that they can also join in on the festive celebrations of *Eid-ul-adha*. Sacrifice of an animal can only be performed after the *Eid* prayer which takes place on the 10th Islamic month *Zulhijjah*. However in some towns and villages, where there is no *Eid* prayer can sacrifice the animal anytime after the break of dawn on the 10th of *Zulhijjah*.

The following animals are allowed to be slaughtered on *Eid* day to offer a *Qurbani*:

1. Goat, either female or male, of at least one year of age.
2. Sheep, either female or male, of at least six months of age.
3. Ox buffalo or Cow, of at least two years of age.
4. Camel, female or male, of at least five years of age.³⁸

Eid Celebrations in Lahore

In Lahore, or any other part of Pakistan, the night before *Eid* is known as the *Chant Raat*. On this night, families visit shopping malls and bazaars for the final *Eid* Shopping. Women and young girls decorate one another's hands with "henna", a brownish stain and wear tinkling bangles on their wrists.³⁹

One of the most important practices in Islam take place on the first day of *Eid al-Adha*, day begins with offering of communal prayers after the *Fajr* prayer by the Muslims in an open place outside the city or in a special *EidGah*

constructed for this purpose. The prayer is usually short which is followed by a *khutba*. Following the prayers, Muslims greet their fellow Muslim brothers *Eid* and wish them to have a good day and everybody, men, women and children get dressed in their finest clothes.

Muslims who can afford animals, sacrifice domestic animals (which are usually sheep, but, at rare occasions, are also camels, goats, and cows) to symbolize Abraham's sacrifice. The animal has to be of a certain age and has to be of a certain quality standard, and has to be unharmed in any way; otherwise the sacrifice is not accepted. At the moment of sacrifice, Allah Almighty's name is recited along with some supplications. The Holy Quran has mentioned that most of the animal's meat should go to the poor people of the community so that they can also take part in the feast on *Eid-ul-Adha*. The meat left is cooked for the gathering of family and friends in one's house.

This practice of giving charity in the Muslim community is truly exhibited during *Eid ul-Adha* when every able bodied and financially stable Muslim makes sure that no piece of sacrificial meat is left that has not been distributed amongst the poor and the needy. They visit their families and their parents and meet the people they haven't been able to get in touch with before.

Eid-ul-Adha is celebrated joyfully all over the world. Muslims start their day by offering the Eid Prayers. Special prayers are offered to plead for Allah's help in occupied Islamic estates like Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan Television Corporation have also made special programmes for this occasion that are aired on national television all over Pakistan. The newspapers will also add articles and blogs regarding the festivities of this occasion. Most of the people tend to sacrifice an animal right after the Eid prayers to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham. They not only eat the animal's meat themselves but they also distribute it among other people that are usually neighbours, relatives and the destitute.⁴⁰

CHRISTMAS

The term Christmas refers to the birth of Jesus. The English term Christmas is fairly recent origin. Other than that, it is a family holiday that is celebrated by Christians and non-Christians, making it one of the most celebrated occasions worldwide.⁴¹

According to the Gospel, as described in the Matthew (see Matthew 1:18-2:12) and Luke (see Luke 1:26-56), Christmas is based on a story that describes the scenario behind the birth of Jesus Christ. Initially, Roman Catholics were said to be the first people to celebrate Christmas, which was then known as the Feast of the Nativity in the early 336 AD. The word Christmas later became a part of the English Language in 1050, where, in Old English, it is reported to mean "festival of Christ", which its shortened form X-max came to be around the 13th century. The "X" in X-max is derived from the Greek word "Chi" which is an abbreviation of *Khristosi*.e. Christ. It is also a representation of the cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified.

The date of Christmas and its Controversies

There have been some disagreements on the date of birth of Jesus. The New Testament provides no clear dates on this regard. December 25th was declared the birth of Jesus by Julius Africans in 221 and later it was accepted that

this is the date of birth of Jesus. One of the most believed explanations regarding to the event seems to hail from the Summer Solstice celebrated by the Roman Empire as a way to commemorate the birth of the unconquered sun. December 25th is seen as a representation of the resurrection of the sun and the end of the winter, which is symbolically seen to represent the birth of the Christ.⁴²

Most of the members of the followers of Protestantism and Roman Catholic Church celebrate Christmas on December 25th, and many have been reported to celebrate it on the evening of December 24th also. Members of most Orthodox Churches celebrate this holiday on December 25th. Some Orthodox Christians in Ukraine, the Holy Land (the historic region of Palestine), Russia, and elsewhere celebrate Christmas on January 7th because they tend to follow the Julian calendar. Members of the Armenian Church are said to celebrate Christmas on January 6th, following the tradition of celebrating both the baptism and birth of Christ on the same day.⁴³

History of the Celebration

While Christmas is the most widely celebrated event in the religion, it has not been able to gain the customs and traditions that Easter and the Good Friday has going for them ever since the 9th century. Initially, the Roman Catholic celebrated Christmas by arranging the very first Christmas mass at midnight. On the other hand, Protestant churches have held a Christmas candlelight services in its place on Christmas' eve. An exclusive service of carols and lessons mixed with Christmas carols is also observed along with the recitation of the scripture. The service that was initially adopted by the University of Cambridge, England and instated by E.W. Benson has become quite popular.⁴⁴

Christmas in Lahore

The Lahore Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus with usual passion. They beautifully decorate their churches and home with Christmas trees. They usually offer their midnight prayers in their Churches. Some churches also organize cultural festivals and shows which last throughout the first week of January.⁴⁵

Members of the Christians community are said to prepare for Christmas by buying Christmas cards while shopping for various Christmas items this year. The rate of selling Christmas cards has experienced a steep drop because people prefer to wish each other Christmas by texting or by E-mail rather than buying Christmas cards.⁴⁶

Various church services are held on Christmas Eve and Christmas day. Churches are nicely very crowded on Christmas, having very well decorated Christmas trees along with different ornaments. Several people, who never visit church on Sunday, come to church on this occasion. Families pay special attention to food on this day and numerous sweet dishes are made that families get together and celebrate this memorable occasion.⁴⁷

EASTER

Easter is said to be first celebrates in the 2nd century, even though the commemoration of Jesus's Resurrection had occurred earlier. Easter basically commemorates the resurrection of Jesus that happened on the third day after his

Crucifixion. Easter holds the position of an important holiday for the Christians because it represents him defeating death.

The date of Easter and its Controversies

Easter is generally celebrated on a Sunday; it is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. The earliest possible date of Easter for Western Churches is March 22th and the latest date is April 25th. Eastern Christianity usually celebrates Easter on a Sunday somewhere between April 4th and May 8th, a week or more after the Western Easter. In some years, the East and the Western Easter tend to overlap.⁴⁸

Easter customs

Easter has accumulated a great number of customs over the past few centuries, most of which have nothing to do with Jesus' resurrection but celebrated nonetheless. The custom that involves the Easter lamb, unlike others, makes the designation used for Jesus in the scripture that states "*behold the lamb of GOD which takes away the sins of the world*" quite alright because of its like to purging of the sins.. Furthermore, the lamb's role as an animal intended for sacrifice links it to its role in antiquity when Christians placed sacrificed lamb meat on the altar of the church in order to first bless it and later consumed it on Easter. But since the 12th century, this custom has been dropped and in its place the custom dealing with feasting on blessed cheeses, ham, eggs and bread has been adopted for the occasion.⁴⁹

The tradition of painting eggs on Easter was first seen in the 13th century. The Churches forbade Christians to eat eggs during the Holy Week; however, since the chickens continued to lay eggs during the week, people started painting the eggs and identified them as "Holy Eggs". The egg itself symbolized the Resurrection. The egg is a symbol of new life emerging from the eggshell just as Jesus rose from his tomb.

The tradition of involving rabbits with Easter first started in the 17th century in the protestant areas of Europe. The rabbit was said to lay the eggs and decorate them as well. Although this did not become common till the 19th century, other countries like Switzerland and Westphalia used the cuckoo and fox respectively.⁵⁰

Easter celebration in Lahore

Christians in Lahore usually celebrated Easter on Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus. Christians around the world commemorate the Holy festival to mark the end of Lent. Large churches like Cathedral Church-I on The Mall, Saint Andrew Church at Empress Road, *Nolakha* Church and Don Basco Church are packed to the roof with Christians celebrating the sunrise services provided by these churches. The Christians imprisoned in the District Jail in *Shadman* and the Central Jail in Kotlakhpat often visited by fellow Christian brothers so they can also join in on the celebrations. Christians are said to believe that Jesus was crucified on Good Friday and he was resurrected on Easter Sunday. Easter commemorates the belief that Jesus died for the sins that humanity committed and the fact that Christians will be reborn. Easter is celebrated following the 40 day time period known as Lent. The Holy week is said to be the concluding week of Lent, whose starting day is called Palm Sunday. The

Christians also celebrate the first day by special traditions which include receiving a stroke with ash on their foreheads. The ash symbolizes the humility that the Christians will face. Easter can be celebrated on any Sunday, falling between March 22th and April 25th, however it is on the first day after the first full moon following spring. There are many symbols linked with Easter, some of which are the Easter Lilies, Cross, a lamb that associates Jesus' death to the lamb that was sacrificed on the very first Passover. Just like Christmas, Easter has a number of traditions, which include Easter Eggs, Easter bonnets, Easter brunch, Easter baskets, and Easter Parades.⁵¹

Good Friday

Good Friday is the day that is said to be the day that Jesus was crucified. From the very start of Christianity, Christians spent this day as a day of grief, sorrow and fasting, a trait that is explained by the German word "Karfreitag" meaning "Sorrowful Friday".⁵²

The name of the event, "Good Friday" is believed to be the corrupt form of the phrase "God's Friday". Since ancient times, this has been believed to be a day that is dedicated to purging of one's sins, prayer and fasting.⁵³

Based on the Jewish calendar, the death of Jesus was on 15 Nisan, which according to the Western Calendar falls on the 7th of April. Christians however do not commemorate to this one fixed date, as an alternative, they follow the date of the Jewish calendar, which obeys the Jewish Lunisolar Calendar instead of the Gregorian solar calendar. While this assumption has faced several problems, Good Friday and Easter are celebrated according to the Jewish calendar. Hence, Good Friday is commemorated somewhere between March 20 to April 23, while Easter is celebrated two days after Good Friday. In Roman Catholic Churches, the rituals for Good Friday are made up of three parts: prayers and reading, which also comprises of the reading of Passion, according to St. John; the worship of the cross and a spiritual union (formerly termed as the Mass of the Presanctified) which includes the pre consecrated hosts by the priest and the loyal.

From 16th century and onwards, the Good Friday services took place in the morning, however in 1995 Pope Pius XII declared that it should be held in the afternoon or the evening. As a result the afternoon traditions such as the Tree Ore which included prayers, sermons and meditation were abandoned in the Roman Catholic Churches.⁵⁴

Celebration in Lahore

Christians celebrate Good Friday to remember the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Protestants are said to celebrate the day by holding special services in the afternoon between 12 pm and 3 pm, during which a series of readings and songs take place. The 17th century Peruvian Jesuits began this specific tradition, hence resulting in the modern Protestants taking up Catholic practices.⁵⁵

HOLI

Holi is the Hindu spring festival that is celebrated on the full moon of *Phalguna* that falls somewhere between February and March. This festival belongs to ancient origin and has several traits of a saturnalia. In the streets, the celebration often experience vulgar language and inappropriate behaviour. This festival is

mainly celebrated by the followers of Krishna; general playfulness is said to be in the replication of Krishna's play with gopis. The Hindus celebrate this occasion by throwing coloured powder, and on this one day, the common limits of caste, sex, status, and age are completely abandoned. The *Dolayatra* takes place on this day, and images of the GOD sited on decorated platforms and swung along with the special songs.

Celebration of Holi in Lahore

Hindus all over Pakistan celebrate Holi by throwing coloured powder on each other, singing songs and praying for the welfare of Pakistan and its minorities. One time in Lahore, Holi was celebrated at the well-known *KarishnaMandir* on Ravi Road. Several politically known individuals were in attendance with the presence of extreme security. The festivity started with the *Puja Paat*. After that came the Holi and a show of spectacular colours. They also light small fires followed by the distribution of *Parsad* and then end the ceremony with prayers. All Pakistan Balmik Association Secretary Dr. Munawar Chand said that special prayers were being said in all Temples for the well-being of Pakistan.⁵⁶

In the middle of drums, dances, colors and bright lights, the festival was celebrated on Saturday at the Krishna Temple. It is usually celebrated in the later part of February or the start of March. Based on the Hindu calendar, it falls on the full moon. It is also referred to as the Festival of Colours. Sikhs, Muslims, Christians and Hindus celebrated this event together. Apart from all the singing and dancing, there was also a time when the Hindus pray to their lord Krishna. Lamps were shining brightly and then to conclude the event, Prasad was distributed among the participants. A few Hindu students have said: *On the day of Holi, we pray so that our country flourishes. On Holi, we pray for the welfare of Pakistan and that involves all Pakistani citizens inspire of their religion, cast, colour or creed and we should play our role to make the lives of people better. Holi is a symbol of sharing not only our happiness but sorrows as well. We should fully take part in the festivals of other religions as well so that we can promote unity, peace and love between the people.* Pakistan Anglo Asian Friendship Society secretary Dr Manohar Chand once said: *Holi is itself a message of joy and delight. The lord Krishna played the flute of love and ordered us to follow a similar path of unity and harmony.*⁵⁷

DIWALI

Diwali is one of the most important festivals among the Hindu community. It usually lasts for five days and starts at the 12th day of the dark half of the lunar month Ashvina to the 2nd day of the light half of Kartika. The origin of the name comes from the Sanskrit term dipavali (row of lights) which are lit on the night of the new moon to propose the presence of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. In the Bengal region, Kali is worshipped, and on the north India, the festival is said to celebrate the re-emergence of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman to Ayodhya where Rama's era of justice would begin.⁵⁸

In this festival, stoneware lamps filled with oil are lighted and placed along the edges of houses and temples. This occasion is celebrated by grand feasts, exchanging gifts, decorating houses, setting off beautiful fireworks and wearing ones best clothes. Gambling is common during this festival to commemorate the

games of dice that Lord Shiva and Parvati used to play on Mount Kailasa. To honor the ritual of Lakshmi, the female player always achieves victory.

Celebration of Diwali in Lahore

On the last day of Diwali, was ended by an event on Friday in Krishna Mandir on Ravi Road which became the go to spot for Hindus around the province. The temple had been decorated beautifully for this occasion with the customary motifs to welcome the goddess Lakshami. Other than the motifs, the temple was decorated to show the arrival of the goddess that the hindus had been longing for. The festival concluded by fireworks and then the distribution of Prasad. People from different religions like Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism attended the grand event. Representatives of several religions gave speeches about the Hindi community and their devotion to help Pakistan strive for the better.⁵⁹

BABA GURU NANAK BIRTH DAY

He is the Indian teacher who was the first guru or teacher of the Sikhs, a group of people that followed Sikhism, a combination of the teachings of the Hindus and the Muslims. He put forward his teachings in the form of religious hymns, some of which managed to survive to the date. Among the Sikh community, he holds the position of their beloved founder and as the master of Punjabi hymnody.⁶⁰

Baba Guru Nanak was born on the 15th of April in 1469, in a place called RaiBhoi di Talvandi (now called Nankana, Sahib, Pakistan), situated near Lahore, and died in 1539 at Kartarpur Punjab. This event is named as Gurupurb.

Celebration in Lahore

The birth of Baba Guru Nanak was celebrated in Lahore for the better part of three days. The followers reached Lahore from special trains and were warmly welcomed by the officers of the city. While talking to journalists, they said that better understanding between the people of India and Pakistan are needed critically for the welfare of both countries. The Sikhs thought that more gates on the LOC (Line of Control) should be opened so that the Kashmiris could see their own flesh and blood. The government was spending a large amount of money to construct more and more residential area for the Yatrees. The Yatrees greatly appreciated the services from the government and publicly displayed their appreciation.⁶¹

BAISKHI

Baisakhi is the first month according to the Sikh Calendar. It takes place at the same time as the harvest season in Punjab. Baisakhi is important for the Sikhs because it celebrated the day that the Sikhs assembled in the presence of their guru.⁶²

Celebration in Lahore

Almost 2,500 Sikhs came to Lahore by special trains arranged by Pakistan Government especially for this occasion. Baisakhi originally started as a gathering of Sikhs all over the world which was arranged by Gobind Singh, the 10th guru of the Sikhs in which around 25,000 Sikhs participated. During the meeting, it was declared that the Sikh religion has been completed and Sikhs were not allowed to worship any other guru. On the same day, it was announced that

every male Sikh would add Singh to their name while the females would add the supplement Kaur to their names. Guru Nanak was the first Guru, and also holds the achievement of being the founder of the Sikh Religion. He was born in a city called Nankana Sahib in the 2nd half of the 15th century. The Baisakhi festival is celebrated around the same time as the ripening of crops in Punjab.⁶³

Conclusion

Lahore is also one of those cities which have preserved their cultural identity for centuries. Lahore fell under the rule of various rulers and each contributed to its cultural diversity. Lahories have always been fond of celebrating their festivals with a unique zeal and zest. Lahore is called the city of festivals for various religious festivals are celebrated here.

The age-old tradition of celebrating festivals is still prevalent in the city of Lahore which shows no downward trend. Over the centuries, the cultural life of Lahore has undergone many changes but it still keeps its original dignity. Despite widespread modernization, Lahories still cherish their traditional ways of celebrating life.

Here in Pakistan, religious aspect of life is emphasized. Religious festivals dominate the cultural life of Lahore. People commemorate the *shahadat* of Imam Hussaina.s with great solemnity. They mourn and appear gloomy in the month of Muharram-ul-Haram. 12 Rabi-u-awwal affords people an occasion of great jubilation. They celebrate the birth anniversary of their beloved Prophet Hazrat Muhammad P.B.U.H with great joy and happiness. Streets are decorated, sweets are distributed and groups of people march roads hymning their Prophet (PBUH). Despite the occurrence of many changes in everyday life, people's zeal to celebrate their festivals has not waned much. Lahore offers a free and inclusive culture that discriminates against none. People celebrate their festivals without being conscious of their sect, ethnicity or religious affiliations. These festivals are great leveler of superficial differences.

Though the population of Lahore is dominantly Muslim, its non-Muslim minorities also contribute to the cultural life of Lahore. They freely celebrate their festivals and enrich the culture of Lahore. These festivals serve us many useful purposes. They are the instrument of promoting social cohesion. That's why Lahore is not known for any kind of religious fanaticism and sectarianism. Non-Muslim minorities are joined by their Muslim neighbors on their joyful events like Easter, Christmas,*Holi*, *Divali*, *Besakhi*, and *Dosehra*.

Festivals are the integral part of culture; their importance cannot be falsified and denied. There are many factors that pose a threat to the cultural life of Lahore. The notable among them are the thriving materialistic and individualistic values. When individualism is emphasized, the civic bonds among people tend to decline and, as a consequence, the social life of a society suffers. Political instability also casts adverse impacts on a culture. There exist few disgruntled groups which in the name of religion or morality try to distort the culture of Lahore by creating unnecessary mischief. The worsening law and order situation is the greatest threat to the culture of Lahore. People fear for their life and they appear reluctant to congregate on any event. But the saddest of all factors is the

rising inflation which disables people to make ends meet. Financial constraints inhibit people to participate in their cherished festivals and this sorry state of affairs in the long run will be very harmful to the culture of Lahore.

These are the factors that require the special attention of the government. Lahore's culture is recognized all over the world and it becomes necessary to save and promote its original contents. Government must adopt pro-cultural policies making for a conducive environment to the free growth of Lahore's culture. The media can be extremely helpful in improving the cultural awareness among people and consolidating their cultural identity in this age of globalization dominated by Western ethos. In summation, Lahore has a unique cultural identity incorporating the characteristics of different civilizations that lived and perished here.

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