

## THE IMPACT OF *HAJJ* ON THE SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH

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Millions of Muslims from around the world including Bangladesh pour perform *Hajj* every year. Being the largest gathering of the Muslims, the *Hajj* has immense socio-economic and cultural impact on the Muslim society. It develops a unique symbol of unity, equality, universality, coexistence, indiscrimination, peace and tolerance among the individuals, communities and nations belonging to different races, castes, colors, and languages, which create differences in everyday life of human society. The attitude of the *Hajjīs* of Bangladesh towards women is more liberal than others as gender interaction is a natural part of *Hajj*, while it is uncommon in the country. The positive teachings of *Hajj* produced several reform movements in Bengal such as the *Farā'īdī* movement of *Hajji Shariatullah*. *Hajj* works as a social platform of getting together for Bangladeshi people at Makkah and Madinah. It has developed the private tour operating industry in Bangladesh to facilitate the *Hajjīs*. Transaction of billions of dollars takes place during *Hajj*, while many commodities are exchanged informally. The *Hajjīs* enjoy a very special dignity and status in the society of Bangladesh. *Hajj* creates an opportunity for inter-cultural amalgamation combining various elements of different cultures. It increases knowledge of the *Hajjīs* both experimental and theoretical through various means. Bangladeshi *Hajjīs* consider *Hajj* as the preparation for death; and thus try to remain isolated from the worldly activities and observe the religious duties strictly. *Hajj* not only moulds the *Hajjīs* into sincere and practicing Muslims, but also the society at large with their honesty and piety. Thus, *Hajj* brings immense impact on the society, economy, education, religiosity and culture of Bangladesh. The objective of this study is to identify diverse impact of *Hajj* on different aspects of the society of

Bangladesh. The methodology used in this study is composed of critical review of literature, analysis of relevant data and information from various secondary sources and interview with the experts and individuals concerned. It also includes various perspectives of the society with a view to better understanding the influence of *Hajj* on the *Hajjīs*, non-*Hajjīs* and the society at large.

**Key Words:** *Hajj*, Society, Economy, Culture, Impact, Bangladesh

## Introduction

The *Hajj* or Pilgrimage to Makkah is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam. It is promised to have the best and unique reward. So, *Hajj-i-Baitullah* (Pilgrimage to the House of Allah) has become a spiritual longing of every Muslim. From the early history of Islam, the Muslims from far and near began coming to Makkah every year to perform *Hajj*. With the increase of global population and the expansion of Islam in different territories of the world over the centuries, the number of *Hajjīs* increased accordingly. Now, Millions of Muslims from around the world pour into Makkah every year to perform *Hajj*. The number of *Hajjīs* has increased by approximately 2,824% up, during the last 92 years, from just 58,584 in 1920 to 1,712,962 (1.713 million) in 2012.<sup>1</sup> In recent decades, nearly one hundred thousand Muslims go to perform *Hajj* from Bangladesh every year.

Being the largest gathering of the world Muslim to take place on a regular basis every year,<sup>2</sup> *Hajj* has got immense socio-economic and cultural impact on every Muslim society irrespective of their geographical, national and country affiliation. As the Holy Qur'ān states: لِيَشْكُرُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ وَيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ “They may witness benefits (provided) for them and celebrate the Name of Allah.”<sup>3</sup> The word منافع benefits' widely includes all the socio-economic and cultural virtues in every society of the world. As a result of unity of opinion and unanimity arising from believing in one Allah (SWT) and being the followers of one Guide Book-the Holy Qur'ān and one Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), all Muslims stand in a single rank facing the *Qiblah*<sup>4</sup> and go round a center with a single aim. It, thus, develops a unique symbol of unity, universality, indiscrimination and social coexistence by creating mutual understanding among the nations.

The *Hajj* not only moulds the millions of pilgrims who perform *Hajj*, but also greater number of their friends and relatives who share experience of *Hajj* through them. The religio-cultural and socio-economic impact of *Hajj* is determined not only by the fact that it is one of pillars of Islam, but by a range of particularistic factors which include local values, the pilgrim's subsequent attitude and conduct, and the web of relationships in which they are embedded. No doubt, the society of Bangladesh has widely been influenced by the institution of *Hajj* in different ways and perspectives. The present study finds that *Hajj* brings immense and diverse impact on the society, economy, education and culture of Bangladesh, most importantly the spirituality of the *Hajjīs* as well as of the society at large.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The methodology used in this study is composed of review of available literature, analysis of relevant data and information and interview with the expert and individuals concerned. The literature on *Hajj* in Islam and its history in Bengal is read to understand the Islamic view towards *Hajj*, its significance and its historical relationship with the society of Bengal. Relevant data and information have been collected from different secondary sources including previous publications, journals, reports of several governmental and non-governmental organizations, research papers, periodicals, website of various institutions etc. To achieve the objective of the study, a good number of interviews have been taken from individuals of several categories such as *Hajjī* (included male, female, highly educated, uneducated, political leader etc), *Muallim* who teaches the *Hajjīs* during *Hajj*, travel agents who are involved in *Hajj* travelling, and such other concerned. The desire of this approach is to find concrete data together with practical experience to obtain the objective of the research.

### ***Hajj* and its Significance in Islam**

*Hajj* literally means “to set out for a place”,<sup>5</sup> “to go or proceed straight away to visit a holy place.”<sup>6</sup> From Islamic perspective, *Hajj* implies to set out for Makkah to observe the specific rituals during the

specified months. Oxford dictionary defines *Hajj* as “the greater Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah, which takes place in the last month of the year and which all Muslims are expected to make at least once during their lifetime if they can afford to do so.”<sup>7</sup> The months of *Hajj* are the last three months of *Hijri* calendar. These are: *Shawwal*, *Dhul-Qi’dah* and *Dhul-Hijjah*. Following the divine instruction, the Prophet Ibrahim (ﷺ) first performed *Hajj* making *Ka’bah* its center<sup>8</sup> and later Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) made it mandatory following the Qur’ānic instruction.

It is considered one of the fundamental religious duties of Islam. *Hajj* is obligatory for every able-bodied adult Muslim man or woman who can financially afford the trip once in a life time. The Holy Qur’ān says: “And proclaim the pilgrimage among men: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways; that they may witness the benefits (provided) for them.”<sup>9</sup> “Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allah, those who can afford a journey;”<sup>10</sup> The Prophet (ﷺ) said: “*Hajj* is mandated once, so whoever does it more (than that), then it is supererogatory.”<sup>11</sup> “He who performs *Hajj* seeking Allah’s pleasure and avoids all lewdness and sins (there in) will return after *Hajj* free from all sins, just as he was on the day his mother gave birth to him.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Advent of Islam in Bengal and *Hajj***

Arabia and Indian subcontinent including Bengal had a very long and flourishing trade contact. K.A. Nizami remarked, “India’s relations with the Arab world go back to hoary past. Long before the rise of Islam, there was brisk commercial contact between India and Arabia and the Arab traders carried Indian goods to the European markets by way of Egypt and Syria.”<sup>13</sup> Islam had begun to enter into Bengal through the hand of Arab Muslim traders long before its political presence at the beginning of 13th century.<sup>14</sup> The then socio-political condition, particularly strict caste system in Hindu society and corrupt of Buddhism, had created the perspective for the rapid expansion of Islamic faith. The teaching of social equality, justice and simplicity in Islam impressed the lower classes of Hindus and Buddhists and they gradually became converted and flocked into the fold of Islam.<sup>15</sup> M. N. Roy described as follows:

“After the downfall of Buddhism, the country found itself in a

worse state of economic ruin, political oppression, intellectual anarchy and spiritual chaos. Practically, the entire society was involved in that tragic process of decay and decomposition. That is why not only the oppressed masses readily rallied under the banner of Islam which offered them social equality if not political equality; even the upper classes offered their services to the foreign aggressor out of selfish motives. That shows that, while the masses were in a state of despair, the upper classes were thoroughly demoralised....In any case, it is clear that at the time of Mohammedan conquest, there lived in India multitudes of people who had little reason to be faithful to Hindu laws and the traditions of Brahmins orthodoxy, and were ready to forsake that heritage for the more equitable laws of Islam which offered them protection against the tyranny of triumphant Hindu reaction.”<sup>16</sup>

With the expansion of Islam in Bengal, the tendency of pilgrimage to Makkah by the Muslims to perform *Hajj* as a fundamental religious duty also gradually developed. Thus, the history of *Hajj* from Bangladesh is as old as the advent of Islam. The Muslims of Bengal had travelled Makkah for *Hajj* during the time of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) on sailing ships from Chittagong port.<sup>17</sup> “Nur Qutb-ul-Alam, for example, performed *Hajj* several times in the 15th century. With an intention to perform *Hajj*, Mughul prince Shāh Shujā‘ left Dhaka with the members of his family to go to Makkah via Arakan. *Hājji* Muhammad Mahsin performed “*Hajj* in the 18th century. *Hajji* Shariatullah also visited Makkah with the same purpose. During the British period, the Muslims of Bengal went to *Hajj* by ship via Mumbai.”<sup>18</sup> Until the 18th century, *Hājjis* from Bengal as well as India had the option of travelling to Makkah either by overland caravans or by sailing ships. Most of them preferred to go by the sea routes, primarily through the Red Sea, and occasionally through the Persian Gulf and rarely through the land routes. During Mughul rule, several ships undertook the voyage, providing free passage and provisions for the pilgrims. There were three ships called the *Rahīmi*, the *Karīmi* and the *Salāri* for the cost-free transportation for the pilgrims. The contemporary traveller *John Fryer Keane* (*Hājji* Mohammed Amin) mentioned that these pilgrim ships weighed between 1400 to 1600 tons and often carried 1700 pilgrims each. They

used various Deccan ports on the east and west coasts for *Hajj* sailing such as port of Surat in Gujarat, which was described as *Bab-ul-Makkah* or the *Bandar-e-Mubarak* (blessed port). They used to send regular charity to Makkah and appoint *Amīr-i-Hajj* for the pilgrimage. During 984-989 (A.H.) (1576-1582) the Akbar's Amīr-i-Hajj carried more than Rs 600,000 in money and goods to be distributed to the people of Makkah and Madinah as charity, along with thousands of *khil'ats* (robes of honour) and expensive gifts for the *Sharīfs* of Makkah. In 1659, *Badshah Awrangazib* sent presents worth Rs 660,000 to the *Sharīf* of Makkah. During the British rule, *Hajj* continued to get regular attention. The famous tourist agency Thomas Cook and Son was appointed in 1885 as the official travel agent of *Hajj* with the responsibility of streamlining the pilgrimage trade. In 1927, a 10-member *Hajj* Committee was constituted headed by D. Healy, Esq., which provided services to the pilgrims. During the World War II, when the number of *Hājjīs* reduced, the Saudi government used to appoint *Muṭawwifīn* or *Mu'allims* (guides for *Hajj* pilgrims) since 1941 so that they could canvass for pilgrims.<sup>19</sup> During Pakistan period (1947-1971), the trend was still continued. Now a days, more than one hundred thousand Muslims go to perform *Hajj* every year from Bangladesh, the 4th largest Muslim country<sup>20</sup> in terms of population containing 8.4% of global Muslim population.<sup>21</sup> The number of *Hājjīs* from Bangladesh in 2015 was 1,01,758,<sup>22</sup> 1,13,868 in 2016,<sup>23</sup> and 1,27,198 in 2018.<sup>24</sup>

### **Impact of *Hajj* on the Society of Bangladesh**

No doubt, *Hajj* has diverse impact on every Muslim society as well as of Bangladesh. 'Although it comes fifth, *Hajj* is very special in its impact. It involves an unforgettable journey which adds to its mystique and appeal. No one acquires a title for praying or fasting, but after taking that journey to the heart of Islam.'<sup>25</sup> In material life of the *Hājjīs*, there are the benefits associated with social interaction which furthers trade and increases knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Thus, diverse aspects of the society have been influenced by *Hajj* in different ways at different levels ranging from international to individual.

### Social Impact of *Hajj*

Bangladesh is the 4th largest Muslim country<sup>27</sup> in terms of population containing 8.4% of global Muslim population.<sup>28</sup> 89.7% of its total population is Muslim, while the Hindu constitutes 9.2%, Buddhist 0.7%, Christian 0.3%, Animist and believers in tribal faiths is 0.1%.<sup>29</sup> Every year thousands of Muslims from Bangladesh make pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah for *Hajj* and return home with new religious spirit, fresh Islamic teaching and most importantly pure Islamic 'Aqīdah. The spirit of *Hajj* everyday leaves diverse impact, passive or active on the individuals, family and society of Bangladesh.

### Impact of *Hajj* in the Anti-Colonial and Reform Movements

The positive teachings of *Hajj* produced several revolutionary movements in the history of Bengal such as the *Farā'idī* movement led by Ḥājji Shariatullah and the *Tarīqah-i-Muhammadiyah* movement led by Meer Nisar Ali Titumir. Both of them started the reform movement after their return from *Hajj*. Ḥājji Shariatullah (1781-1840) of present Shariatpur district,<sup>30</sup> made a pilgrimage to Makkah in 1799 to perform *Hajj*, which privileged him with the opportunity of receiving education at Makkah. It prepared him for the great role to be played by him in his later life. Ḥājji Shariatullah stayed there for 20 years and studied religious doctrines under Shaikh Tahir Sombal. Returning home in 1818, he found the Muslims of Bengal involving in many superstitious practices which appeared to him grossly un-Islamic. For historical perspectives, the Muslims of Bengal had been following many indigenous customs, rituals and ceremonies which were far from Islamic principles. These were infiltrated from the contemporary Hindu society into Muslim society because of their close contact and huge number of conversion from Hinduism into Islam.<sup>31</sup> People here used to ascribe superhuman powers to the *Ṣūfīs* and *Pīrs* such as giving life to the dead, being present at several places at a time and foretelling the future. Because of these, people considered the shrine of a *Pīr* as a place of pilgrimage. They offered fruits, flowers etc. at their tombs, illuminated them at night and thus the culture of worshipping the *Pīrs* and *Ṣūfīs* widely spread in the Muslim society of Bengal.<sup>32</sup> *Ta'ziah* Observing the 'Āshūrah procession in a clumsy way, participation in the

Hindu festivals of *Durga Puja*, *Rathayatra* and so forth are also mentionable in this context.<sup>33</sup> The Muslims of Bengal, thus, steeped themselves in the superstitious practices. Inflamed with a burning desire to reform the Muslim society, Ḥājji Shariatullah tirelessly addressed the social gatherings for preaching the pure doctrine of Islam indoors and outdoors, in village after village, district after district, which ultimately developed into an Islamic reform movement. The objective of the movement was to purify the Muslim society from the superstitious '*Aqīdah* and practices and induce the Muslims to follow the true teachings of Islam. The movement popularly came to be known as the *Farā'īdī* Movement. The term *Farā'īdī* was taken from the Arabic root-word *Farḍ* meaning obligatory duties enjoined by Islam. The movement emphasized on the five fundamentals of Islam, strict observation of *Tawḥīd* (pure monotheism) and condemned all deviations from the original doctrines as *Shirk* (idolatry) and *Bid'at* (sinful innovation). Numerous rites and ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death were declared *ḥarām* (forbidden) such as *Chuttee*, *Puttee*, *Chhillah*, *Shabgasht* procession, *Fātiḥah*, *Milād*, '*Urs*, worshipping the *Pīrs*, *Ta'ziah* etc. Ḥājji Shariatullah stressed on justice, social equality, and the universal brotherhood of Muslims.<sup>34</sup>

The *Farā'īdī* movement spread with extraordinary rapidity in different districts of Bengal, particularly where the Muslim peasantries were oppressed by both the Hindu *Zamīndārs* and the European indigo-planters. The *Zamīndārs* used to impose different kinds of illegal taxes such as tax for Hindu festivals as the *Kali Puja*, *Durga Puja* etc. Ḥājji Shariatullah directed his disciples not to pay the illegal taxes and thus there was a contentious relation created between the *Farā'īdīs* and the Hindu *Zamīndārs*. Through continuous involvement with the Hindu *Zamīndārs* and the European indigo-planters, this religious reform movement gradually transformed into a socio-economic revolt. Faced with such an effective Islamic revivalist movement, the *Zamīndārs* and the indigo-planters persecuted the *Farā'īdīs* ruthlessly through officially condoned acts of violence and terror. Ḥājji Shariatullah had also to face severe opposition from the conservative local '*Ulama* who had scant knowledge of the original Islamic practices and thus they wanted to preserve the existing traditional order. But the *Farā'īdī* movement won rapid popularity. On the death of Ḥājji Shariatullah, his only son

Muhsinuddin Ahmad Dudu Miyan who returned from Makkah in 1837, after performing *Hajj* and completing education, took charge of the movement in 1840.<sup>35</sup> Under his leadership, the *Farā'idi* movement turned into a strong and powerful agitation against British colonialism. Bengal Police estimated that Dudu Miyan had about 80,000 followers, while Alexander Forbes calculated it at 300,000.<sup>36</sup> During the 1857 Sepoy mutiny, Dudu Miyan was arrested and after his release he passed away in 1862. The number of followers of *Farā'idi* movement continued to grow steadily during Dudu Miyan's son Noa Miyan's time. But after the death of Noa Miyan in 1884, the movement seemed to have gradually lost its spirit and influence.<sup>37</sup> The lack of strong leadership and the vigorous attacks of the *Zamīndārs* and the opposition from the rigidly conservative 'Ulamā brought the gradual decline of the movement. *Hājjī* Shariatullah and Dudu Miyan have been characterized as Islamic revivalists, social reformers and peasant leaders in the history of Bengal.<sup>38</sup> For more than fifty years, the movement dominated the history of that territory, striving to create a genuine Islamic order among the Muslims. The movement turned into one of the most prominent anti-colonial and socio-religious reform movement in Bengal in the 19th century. The *Farā'idi* movement strongly evidenced the power of *Hajj* in creating the original spirit of Islam in the mind of the *Hājjīs* and also showed that how revolutionarily it could impact the society of a country like Bangladesh.

The similar movement is *Ṭarīqah-i-Muḥammadiyah* [the way advocated by Muḥammad(ﷺ)] Movement in Bengal led by Meer Nisar Ali Titumir (1782-1831) of 24 Pargana district of present-day West Bengal. This movement was originally founded by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (1786-1831) of Rai Bareli of Uttar Pradesh of India in the early 19th century which got momentum in Bengal by the efforts of Titumir.

Titumir went to Makkah for *Hajj* in 1822, where he came in close contact with great Islamic reformer Sayyid Ahmad, the exponent of *Ṭarīqah-i-Muḥammadiyah* movement. He was motivated by the concept of the movement. Returning home in 1827, Titumir started preaching the idea of *Ṭarīqah-i-Muḥammadiyah* among the local Muslims. He advised them to purify their activities from practicing *Shirk* and *Bid'āt*, and inspired them to follow the true Islamic way of life as advocated by the Prophet (ﷺ). His movement initially aimed at socio-religious reform, elimination of the superstitious practices from the Muslim society such as

worshipping the saint, erecting shrines etc. The perspectives and objectives of both the *Farā'īdi* and *Ṭarīqah-i-Muḥammadiyah* movement were almost similar. However, one difference was that Titumir from the beginning emphasized on the idea of *Jihād* in Islam and got involved in conflict with the oppressive *Zamīndārs*, while Shariatullah followed the policy of avoiding conflict. Titumir got a very devoted and organized group of Muslim peasants who had been oppressed by the local Hindu *Zamīndārs*. Soon, he and his followers got involved in conflict with several Hindu *Zamīndārs* because of their sectarian attitude towards the Muslim peasants and the imposition of illegal taxes. Titumir formed a *Mujāhid* force and trained them with indigenous arms. The increasing strength of Titumir alarmed the *Zamīndārs* and Englishmen. Subsequently, several expeditions were sent against Titumir, but they were beaten back and suffered severe defeat.<sup>39</sup> Titumir built a strong bamboo fort at Narkelbaria in October 1831 and recruited *Mujāhids* (fighters). Having completed his military preparation, Titumir declared himself *Badshah* (king) and urged upon the people to participate in *jihād* against the British. He established his control over the districts of 24 Pargana, Nadia and Faridpur. Several *Zamīndārs* had to pay tax to Titumir instead of the British. In reaction, William Bentinck sent a regular army against Titumir under Lieutenant Colonel Stewart consisting of 100 cavalry, 300 native infantry and artillery with two cannons. The *Mujāhids* with traditional arms failed to resist the English army equipped with modern arms. Titumir along with many of his followers was martyred in the battle field on 19 November 1831, with which the movement got an end.<sup>40</sup> Titumir's movement began as a socio-religious reform movement. But the then socio-political circumstances compelled it to be characterized as agrarian one against the British colonial authority. No doubt, the teachings of *Hajj* and the consequent realizations highly influenced Titumir for such a purification movement which later on turned into an anti-colonial revolutionary movement.

### **Social Perception towards *Hajj* in Bangladesh**

Besides apparent impact, *Hajj* also leaves several virtual and passive impacts on the personal, familial as well as social life of Bangladeshi Muslims. In Bangladesh, the people generally think to perform *Hajj* at the late age or late middle age. Several types of thinking characterize this

realization regarding *Hajj*. It is believed that pilgrimage to Makkah is the last significant act of a Muslim and a preparation to death. So, one should go to *Hajj* after completing all the worldly responsibilities, as a beginning of his journey towards the next world. A pilgrim should leave for *Hajj* only when all other debts have been discharged and all family matters and social obligations have been settled. Similarly, old scores should be resolved, money should be set aside for the care of the family, and all children should be married prior to his departure for Makkah. It is also sincerely believed that the money spent for *Hajj* should not be borrowed from others but should be from the savings accumulated from *Halāl* (valid as per Islamic teachings) employment, so that in the event of a pilgrim's death there will be no outstanding financial or material debts. In this sense, after fulfilling all worldly responsibilities, the pilgrim departs for Makkah with a clear conscience, and there he/she will be completely purified from all worldly indulgences. With such a realization of end journey and preparation to die or return home, many pilgrims bring with them the wearing of *Ihrām* (two plain white sheets of cloth), so that they can use these as their shroud. In order to make their life worthwhile, the pilgrims desire to die either in Makkah while performing *Hajj*, or after returning home as a *Hājjī*. Thus, *Hajj* is understood among the Muslims of Bangladesh as signaling the end to the material existence. After returning home, the *Hājjīs* earnestly try to remain isolated from the worldly activities so that they would not get involved in sins or indulgences again. This may cause harm to his purified life through *Hajj*. The spirit of performing *Hajj* in the early age is almost absent among the average Muslims in the society of Bangladesh and even among the *‘Ulamā* too. In recent years, the trend is getting changed steadily and many young educated people are performing *Hajj* and the number is gradually increasing.

There is a tendency of performing *Hajj* more than once among the economically solvent Muslims and particularly the *‘Ulama*. For example, *Shah Meer Muhammad Akhtar* of Chittagong visited Saudi Arabia 29 times to perform *Hajj* and *‘Umrah*,<sup>41</sup> *Shah Maulana Mohammad Abdul Jabbar* visited Makkah and Madinah 33 times,<sup>42</sup> *Maulana Hafez Ahmad* performed *Hajj* six times.<sup>43</sup> They usually encourage others to perform *Hajj* and guide them from their own experience.<sup>44</sup> *Dr. Abdul Quader*, a professor of Chittagong University, who performed *Hajj* 11 times, said

in an interview with the author that there are two reasons behind performing *Hajj* more than once, one is love for *Ka'bah* and another is the sense of purification. No Muslim can deny the attraction of the holy *Ka'bah*, especially one who visited it once. The *Mua'llim*, who acts as a guide for a group of *Hājjī* usually performs *Hajj* several times. Moreover, some *Hājjīs* undertake *Hajj al-Badal* or proxy *Hajj* on behalf of others. They perform *Hajj* several times on behalf of their parents, relatives or others who could not perform *Hajj* for several reasons such as ill-health etc., or they passed away without performing *Hajj*. It is believed that this *Hajj* by proxy certainly earns the prime rewards (*ṭhawāb*) for the person in whose account it is performed, while it also confers rewards upon him who undertakes it. In this kind of cases, experienced *Hājjīs* are chosen with priority.

### **Social Status of a *Hājjī* in Bangladesh**

In the society of Bangladesh, an aspirant *Hājjī* is spontaneously invited by his/her relatives and neighbours immediately after his/her decision to perform *Hajj*. Hosting the would-be *Hājjī* at least for one meal is considered as a very pious job as he/she is hosting the guest of Allah (SWT). Many people usually accompany him/her to the airport or departure place and also welcome him/her after arrival at the station. Everyone feels proud who could shake hands or hug the *Hājjīs*.

After performing *Hajj*, the *Hājjīs* enjoy a very special dignity. Historical accounts on *Hajj* also suggest that *Hajj* confers social prestige and legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> One who performed *Hajj* is addressed as *Hājjī*, which is a very respectable title for anyone in the community. The *Hājjīs* are generally addressed as '*Hājjī ṣāḥīb*' (the honorable pilgrim), and their names are written with the dignified title '*Al-Ḥājj*'. This title indicates that the person performed *Hajj* and thus he/she would be given due respect. Sometime, the real name of a person is overlapped under the title '*Hājjī Ṣāḥīb*'. The *Hājjīs* are believed as purified personalities and accepted slaves (*Maqbūl Bandha*) to the Almighty Allah as Allah (SWT) accepted them specially to be His guests. Not only the Muslims, but even the non-Muslims also show respect to them as purified ones. In a meeting or public gathering, the *Hājjīs* are given special place of honor. Thus, *Hajj* improves the social status of a Muslim after performing *Hajj*. This

change becomes remarkable both in the manner in which the *Hājjīs* behave with others as well as by the honor which others extend to them. Everyone behaves quietly and respectfully with the *Hājjīs* in their company, avoiding topics of conversation or styles of expression which could be considered discourteous. The *Hājjīs* are given priority for the socially honored positions, for example the chairmanship/member ship in the governing committee of a school, college, *Madrasah* or Mosque, as well as in different local governmental/non-governmental bodies. Another person could also be selected, but only after expressing unwillingness by the concerned *Hājjī*. The opinion or advice of a *Hājjī* is honored by all. The businesses or social services run by a *Hājjī* are considered to be more reliable than those of others with the belief that they could not cheat or harm the clients; rather they would be more honest in their dealings. Such changes of status open up new areas of influence for the *Hājjīs*, such as in adjudicating disputes, the settling of marriage negotiations, leading prayers in the mosque etc.

### **Impact of *Hajj* on Everyday Life**

*Hajj* brings significant changes in the daily life of the *Hājjīs* in Bangladesh. *Hājjīs* are expected to be more religious and honest in their daily activities. After performing *Hajj*, a *Hājjī* usually tries to observe all the religious duties strictly not only in his/her personal life but also in the family and social life. For example, the women who didn't observe *Purdah* (Islamic dress code for a woman) before *Hajj*, she rarely ignores *Purdah* after *Hajj*. Similarly, a Muslim who was in the habit of taking bribe, involving in interest-based transactions, or such kind of unfair and illegal means before *Hajj*, he/she usually tries to avoid such kind of activities after *Hajj*. They fear that it may damage his/her purification which is attained through *Hajj*. One who did not wear beard previously, would hardly remove beard after *Hajj*. The *Hājjī* regularly prays five times a day, and avoids cheating or stealing or disturbing anyone. Even the *Hājjī* abandons morally dubious and frivolous pursuits and bad habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, different types of games such as *Ludū* (the board game), *Daba* (chess) etc. It is believed that a *Hājjī* can never tell a lie; rather he/she always tries to speak the truth. A *Hājjī* makes a demonstrable effort to change his behavior in line with the

desire which society associates with *Hajj*. This positive change at individual level of a *Hājjī*, undoubtedly impacts the society, as the individuals are the basic units of a society. The *Hājjī* encourages the members of his/her family and others to follow religious principles of Islam. In some cases in rural Bangladesh, it has been found that some *Hājjīs* would not go out of home for 40 days as a beginning of his purified life. A *Hājjī* not only protects himself by leaving usury-bribe or such kinds of unfair means, but also saves many others from involving in these corrupt practices. However, it is important to stress here that people's expectation of a *Hājjī's* behavior is positively very high. It is expected that the life of a *Hājjī* clearly be a model of spirituality and religiosity through prayer coupled with his/her concern for others, his/her judicial participation in social affairs and his/her behavior with those whom he comes into contact. A *Hājjī* rarely gets involved in social corrupt practices in Bangladesh. If a *Hājjī* is observed getting involved in corrupt practices, it is generally believed by the mass people that he/she couldn't perform *Hajj* perfectly and thus, it was not acceptable to the Almighty Allah (SWT).

*Hajj* offers Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* a novel opportunity to interact with the members of the opposite gender in a religious setting, and to observe cross-gender interactions among Muslims from different nations. In Bangladesh, interaction between men and women who are strangers is very uncommon. Women rarely go to the mosque and when they do, they typically pray in a separate area from men. But gender interaction is a natural part of *Hajj*. Men pray alongside women during the *Hājj*. Thus, *Hājjīs'* views towards women and their rights in the society are more positive. They also express greater concern about women's quality of life and discrimination against them in Bangladesh relative to other countries. Here, the *Hājjīs* are more likely to support girls' education and female participation in the professional workforce than the non-*Hājjīs*.

*Hajj* changes the philosophy of life of a *Hājjī*. The *Hājjī* is spiritually transformed, which leaves a long-lasting impact on the family as well as the whole society. The transformative properties of *Hajj* enable the *Hājjīs* to pursue a more spiritual life. This purified life style of *Hājjīs* creates the sense of honor in the mind of others towards them as well as influences others to perform *Hajj*. Thus, *Hajj* brings a positive and

remarkable change in the life and society of the Muslims of Bangladesh as a force of Islamization.

Sometimes, the image of *Hajj* has exceptionally been manipulated by some secular or even communist political leaders who practically do not believe in the spirituality of *Hajj*. They perform *Hajj* with the intention of using the image of *Hajj* to earn social respect, confidence of the mass people and manifesting them as religious personality to gain their ambitious leadership. So, it may be said that everyone does not perform *Hajj* with pure *Niyah* (motive). In short, if a *Hājji* maintains the spirit of *Hajj*, then he/she is a true *Hājji*; if he/she does not maintain the spirit of *Hajj*, then he/she is a worse person. It means in the society of Bangladesh, the social and spiritual value of *Hajj* depends not only on Divine judgment but also on public opinion.

### **Cross-National and Universal Impact of *Hajj***

From the socio-global point of view, thousands of people go to perform *Hajj* from various parts of the country (Bangladesh) as well as from all over the world having differences of races, colors, nations, cultures and speaking different languages. They mix across the lines of ethnicity, nationality, sect, and gender that divide them in everyday life. Even Bangladesh has more than 41 regional languages<sup>46</sup> whereas the world has thousands of languages. Although the *Hajj* rituals last five days, many *Hājjis* stay longer. Most of the *Hājjis* from Bangladesh spend around 40 days worshipping in the cities of Makkah and Madinah. Each ritual component of *Hajj* is performed simultaneously with well over two million participants from across the globe. All the people, despite their diverse demographic attributes, wear the same unstitched clothes known as *Ihrām*,<sup>47</sup> come together at one place, affirm a common identity by performing common rituals and exhibit unity, equality and discipline. This substantial mixing across national, sectarian, and gender lines emphasizes equality and universality. It negates the sense of discrimination and difference among human being on the basis of wealth, race, creed, language, and region. As a participant in a global platform with thousands of people of differences, *Hajj* increases the desire for universal brotherhood, peace and tolerance in the mind of the *Hājjis* towards others, both Muslims and non-Muslims. *Hajj* helps to integrate the Muslim

world, leading to a strengthening of global Islamic beliefs and a sense of unity and equality with others who are ordinarily separated in everyday life by sect, ethnicity, nationality, or gender, but are brought together by means of *Hajj*. These feelings of unity and equality extend across all artificial lines. This reflection has been observed among the *Hājjīs* of Bangladesh in several social affairs. For example, the *Hājji* is usually being asked to mediate in disputes among different groups or individuals, resolve family quarrels, offer advice, attend marriage negotiations, lead the social activities etc. In many social conflict resolutions, it is found that the decisions of *Hājjīs* are mostly more positive and tolerant than the opinions of non-*Hājjīs*. This evidence suggests that the *Hajj* increases tolerance and positive views in the mind of *Hājjīs*. The *Hājjīs*, thus, play an important role in creating peaceful co-existence among different socio-religious groups in the society.

*Hājjīs* gain experience-based knowledge of the diversity of Islamic beliefs and practices, gender roles within Islam, and more broadly, the world beyond Bangladesh. *Hājjīs* are also exposed to a degree of religious diversity within the recognized schools of thought, in a religiously sanctioned context in which all are accepted. *Hājjīs* update their beliefs most positively about nationalities as they are likely to interact with frequently. Since followers of different schools of Islam pray together in a congregation at Makkah, this often leads to mixing of religious practices and diversities.

### **Impact of *Hajj* as Social Platform**

There are about five million Bangladeshi migrants working in Saudi Arabia. The *Hājjīs*, whose relatives are living in Saudi Arabia, take the time of *Hajj* as an opportunity of their meeting with them. Even many Bangladeshi people, who live in different countries, particularly of the Middle-East, use the occasion of *Hajj* as an opportunity to meet the ‘*Ulama*, *Shaikhs* or family-members and relatives who come from Bangladesh. Thus, *Hajj* works as a social platform of getting together for Bangladeshi people at Makkah and Madinah. The ‘*Ulamā* and *Shaikhs* also use this opportunity to meet their disciples and visit different historical and spiritual places of Saudi Arabia and the Middle-East.<sup>48</sup> Not only at Makkah, but also several *Hajj* agencies of Bangladesh back at home

regularly arrange *Hājjī* Reunion programs. For example, *Hajj-i-Baitullah Hajj Kafelah*, a leading *Hajj* agency in Chittagong headed by *Giasuddin Talukdar*, a professor of Chittagong University, regularly arranges *Hājjī* Reunion program every year. This program brings the opportunity for *Hājjīs* of different localities to meet together, review their experience and share ideas. Such programs create spiritual reawakening among the *Hājjīs* and remind them about their glorious times spent in Makkah and encourage them to keep the promise that they had made during *Hajj* with Allah (SWT). Thus, the spirit of *Hājjīs* renewed and it leads to live a purified life whole the year through.

### **Economic Impact of *Hajj***

The earliest Arab-Bengal relation was mainly based on commercial activities. After the advent of Islam, early Arab Muslim traders had established trading contact with the costal lands of Bengal. Some indirect references in the writings of Arab Geographers (such as *Silsilat-ut-Tawārikh* by Sulaiman, *Kitab al-Masālik wal-Mamālik* by Ibn Khurradadbeh, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān* by yāqūt, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq* by Al-Idīsi) strongly record a flourishing trade contact between Arab and Bengal.<sup>49</sup> This early contact is evidently supported by archeological discoveries such as coin discovered at the ancient Buddhist site of *Paharpur* in *Rajshahi* district dated on 788 A.C,<sup>50</sup> and at the ruins of *Mainamoti* in *Comilla* district.<sup>51</sup> This trade contact led to the emergence and expansion of Islam in Bengal. Being one of the five fundamentals of Islam, *Hajj* attracted the Muslims of Bengal and their descendants to perform it and visit the holy sites of Makkah and Madinah. So, it is believed that the Muslim merchants of Bengal who went to Arabia for trade, naturally they performed *Hajj*. At the same time, the person who went to Makkah for *Hajj*, also had some trading concerns. They carried several local items to Arabia when they travelled to Arabia for *Hajj* and brought Arabian items with them when they returned home. Thus, from the beginning *Hajj* has economic implications. No doubt, there are diversified economic impacts of *Hajj* on the society of Bangladesh.

*Hajj* has lots of impact on the private tour operators of Bangladesh

to facilitate *Hājjīs* of the country. The operators offer all kinds of support to the *Hājjīs* within the country as well as in Saudi Arabia. It includes visa processing, arranging air ticket, bus travel, accommodation, food and all kinds of logistic support in Saudi Arabia. In 2018, 1,27,198 *Hājjīs* performed *Hajj* from Bangladesh. The expense for package one was 397929 BDT and for package two was 331359 BDT. It may be estimated that the average cost was around 365000 BDT and the estimated total cost was  $(365000 \times 127198 = 46427.27 \text{ million BDT} = \text{USD}559.36 \text{ million})$ . Most of the money is spent for air travel and accommodation in Saudi Arabia. As *Hajj* involves huge number of activities, a good number of private tour operators have developed schemes to undertake the *Hajj* activities. It generates profit also for the *Hajj* agencies. There are, presently, about 1000 private *Hajj* agencies in the country working in the field.<sup>52</sup> The pilgrims of Bangladesh can travel only by two airlines i.e. *Biman* Bangladesh Airlines and Saudi Arabia Airlines. Around *Hajj* activities, transaction of billions of dollars takes place commercially and thus, *Hajj* has become an important concern in the economy of Bangladesh.

The *Hājjīs* travelling from Bangladesh traditionally take different types of essential items along with them, such as cloths, essential medicine, etc. to use during their stay in Saudi Arabia. Sometimes, they take several Bangladeshi popular food or gift items for their relatives or friends living in Saudi Arabia. Simultaneously, they bring many popular Arabian items for Bangladeshi family members and friends when they return from *Hajj*. These include Arabian dates, drinking water of *Zamzam*, perfume, prayer-rug, cap etc. It is traditional in Bangladesh that the Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* after their return entertain their visitors with the water of *Zamzam* and the Arabian dates. Sometimes, they use to offer gifts of prayer-rug, perfume, cap etc. among the closest friends and relatives. Few *Hājjīs*, particularly women members, bring with them Arabian gold mainly for their own use or for their sons' or daughters' wedding. Thus, many commodities are exchanged informally between Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh through the hands of the *Hājjīs*. Though it has economic values, in most of the cases these have rarely been conducted for commercial purposes.

About three million Bangladeshi migrants work in Saudi Arabia

legally,<sup>53</sup> while the number of illegal migrants is unofficially estimated to be around two millions. They are involved in different types of business in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinahh, particularly during *Hajj*. The commodities include garment items, Arabian dates, food items, prayer-rug, cap, perfume, *Miswāk* (teeth cleaning twig made from the *Salvadora persica* tree known as Arak in Arabic) play items for kids etc. The *Hājjīs* buy these items for their relatives and friends at the home. It is assumed that the Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* spend around 1000\$ during their stay at Saudi Arabia for buying such types of gift items. Thus, huge amount of commodities are exchanged between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia during *Hajj*. Though thousands of dollars are spent by the Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* on the occasion of *Hajj*, simultaneously thousands of dollars also returned to the country because of this business run by the Bangladeshi traders in Saudi Arabia.

### Cultural Impact

*Hajj*, being practiced every year by thousands of multi-lingual and multi-cultural Muslims together, has undoubtedly been resulting in cross-cultural interaction. It combines together various elements of different cultures particularly of Arabia. *Hajj* brings the unique opportunity of interaction among the Muslims of different nations, sects and culture. It represents the largest annual confession of faith on earth where Muslims meet one another and discuss their common affairs and issues which promote their general welfare. It also represents the greatest annual peace conference, while peace constitutes the dominant theme of the whole *Hajj* season.<sup>54</sup> *Hajj* brings diverse cultural impact on the society of Bangladesh.

For example, in the society of Bangladesh, after returning home from *Hajj*, the *Hājjīs* usually begin to wear Arabian *Jubbah*<sup>55</sup> in preference to western fashions. They also use head-covering *Keffiyeh* or *Shemaghs*<sup>56</sup> at least occasionally such as during the time of performing weekly *Jumuah* prayer in the mosque. Thus, Arabian dress culture becomes dress culture of *Hājjīs* in Bangladesh. It has been considered as a symbol of dignity identifying a *Hājjī*. Several Arabian and Islamic cultures which have randomly been practiced among the Arabian people such as hospitality to the guests, charity to the needy people, giving gifts,

helping the disable etc. influence the minds of *Hājjiīs*. The Bangladeshi *Hājjiīs* after their return try to follow these practices in their everyday life. The beards of the *Hājjiīs* are carefully groomed and trimmed. Traditionally, the *Hājjiīs* in Bangladeshi society are unquestionably respected by everybody irrespective of socio-religious or political groups. They usually use the honorific title ‘*Hājji* or *Al-Hājji*’ before their name.

The society of Bangladesh tends to associate *Hajj* with men rather than women, since very few women perform *Hajj* comparing to men. A female pilgrim would become a local celebrity in the village area. The female pilgrims rarely use the title ‘*Al-Hājji*’ or ‘*Hājjiya*’. It also varies based on age. It is believed that age brings seniority, and etiquette demands that young defer the old. Consequently, young person who performed *Hajj* would not be given equal status and respect associated in general with having performed *Hajj*. It is, thus, socially problematic for a young pilgrim to claim the status of *Hājji* and it is observed among the young *Hājjiīs* in Bangladeshi society that they are not used to using the title ‘*Al-Hājji*’. Even the people also usually donot address a young *Hājji* as ‘*Hājji Ṣāhib*’ or do not show equal respect towards them as to the old aged *Hājjiīs*.

In Bangladeshi society, several in-house programs are arranged in honor of the person who decides to perform *Hajj*. These programs are organized by his friends, relatives and neighbours and are generally followed by lunch or dinner. It has been believed to be an honorific act to find the opportunity of feeding the guest of Allah (SWT). Sometimes, these programs turn into family and relatives get-together. Like any other party, food is the prime course of these programs too, and of course would-be *Hājji* is the chief guest. Though, there are no official statistics or survey, it can easily be said that a would-be *Hājji* on an average attends at least 10 to 15 pre-*Hajj* and post-*Hajj* feast programs. To see off an aspirant-*Hājji* is a unique feature in the society of Bangladesh. Close friends and family-members go with intending pilgrims to the airport to see him off. Huge rush is seen in the airports on the occasion of the departure of the *Hajj* flights. In the village areas, seeing-off an intending *Hājji* is a big event. Family-members, friends, villagers, relatives and neighbours gather hours before the departure of the *Hājji*. They are bidden good-bye with tears from their residence. Then they are taken to the nearest railway or bus station in the form of a big procession. The

number of greeters gets reduced at railway or bus station, and only close family-members and friends accompany the intending *Hājjī* on their way to the airport. They stay with the intending *Hājjī* or even outside the airport until the flight takes off. Upon their return, the same practice is repeated. They are received by their close family-members, and friends at the airport, and later on the same railway or bus station, the same huge crowds are there to welcome the *Hājjī*.

Sometimes, the families and friends who missed the chance of inviting the would-be *Hājjī* before their *Hajj*, arrange such programs after their return from *Hajj*. *Hājjīs* briefly share their *Hajj* experiences with the friends and relatives and influence them to perform *Hajj* and visit the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah in the post-*Hajj* programs. The *Hājjīs* entertain the visitors generally with the drinking water of *Zamzam* and Arabian dates. These are believed to be symbols of *Barakah* (blessing). Sometimes, the number of visitors becomes too many that the water of *Zamzam* that was brought by the *Hājjī* doesn't reach all the recipients. In those cases, few drops of *Zamzam* water is being mixed with the regular drinking water and then distributed among the visitors. Everybody including the children and the aged are very eager to drink a little water from that with due respect to the holy water.<sup>57</sup> Many of them eat or drink it with the hope of being cured of their illnesses. The *Hājjīs* entertain close relatives, friends or dignified guests with some special gifts that are brought from the holy city of Makkah. The special gifts include Prayer-rug, Arabian perfume (*Attar*), prayer-cap, Arabian *Jubbah*, beads (*Tasbīh*), *Miswak* (Teeth-cleaning twig made from the *Salvadora persica* tree). Distribution of gifts of *Makkah* by a *Hājjī* has been the most attractive feature of post-*Hajj* programs.

Many *Hājjīs* in Bangladesh bring with them the cloths of *Ihrām* (two plain white sheets of cloth) which they wore in Makkah during *Hajj*, with the spirit of preparation for eternal journey, intending to use these as their shroud. Or they bring different sets of cloths being washed with the water of *Zamzam* to use as their shroud. They also try to bring a part of the *Ghilāf* (covering cloth) of *Ka'bah* to use it with their shroud. Sometimes, they bring mud of the grave of *Jannatul Baqī* (a famous graveyard of the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)) to use it in their graves. It is believed that this wearing and mud may cause safety from the dangers in the graves after their departure from the worldly life.

With the influence of globalization and modern westernized cultural trend in the society of Bangladesh, these particular cultures around *Hajj* and its social impressions are gradually declining. Now, many people, particularly young people of the country, do not show additional respect towards *Hajji* only on account of being a *Hajji*; rather they observe the reality and their practical life. They think that sometimes it is possible to become a *Hajji* with the usual symbols but without any inner transformation. Anyone can wear the right clothes, trim his beard, and call himself a *Hajji*, but this does not suffice for his complete piety. Now, people make judgments about the practical honesty and piety not with the symbols only. The person using the symbols without practical honesty is treated as a ‘*Hajji* in-name only’. Thus, *Hajj* being practiced among the Muslims of Bengal for centuries, has been exerting socio-cultural impacts on the various strata of the society.

### **Educational Impact**

*Hajj* increases knowledge of the *Hajjis* both experimental and theoretical through various means. Primarily, whenever a person desires to perform *Hajj*, he/she simultaneously tries to learn the ways of performing *Hajj* correctly. The intending *Hajji* learns it either by way of studying the books written on *Hajj* or from a learned person (‘*Alim*). This learning, sometimes, includes many other religious aspects. He/she also tries to gather experience from the persons who already performed *Hajj*. On the occasion of *Hajj*, a good number of small booklets containing the rules of *Hajj* are published in Bangladesh by the Islamic scholars or the *Hajj* agencies. Sometimes, these books are distributed free of cost by the wealthy persons as a gift to the intending *Hajjis*, or they buy it from the market. The *Hajj* agencies in Bangladesh also distribute the *Hajj* guidelines among the intending *Hajjis* and arrange pre-*Hajj* training programs so that they can perform *Hajj* perfectly. The main objective of such training programs is to guide, and train the intending *Hajjis* as to how to perform the *Hajj* correctly. They also teach the intending *Hajjis* the techniques to avoid the rush during *Hajj*. Bangladesh government also arranges *Hajj* training program for the intending *Hajjis*. These programs begin with recitation from the Holy Qur’ān followed by *Na‘at* (songs of praise for Prophet (ﷺ)). The speakers include mainly

Islamic scholars ('Ulamā) and experienced *Hājjīs*. They deliver speech about their *Hajj* experiences, important features of *Hajj*, the rules, regulations and duties of *Hajj*, the ways to perform *Hajj* perfectly, locations of important places in the *Haramain*, legal requirements in the country, laws of Saudi government which must be followed by a *Hājjī* during *Hajj* and other sensitivities of the land, which need to be respected. With the help of projector and other devices, the trainers inform the intended *Hājjīs* about procedure and mandatory requirements of *Hajj*. These training sessions usually last longer than any other session of a pre-*Hajj* program as the intending *Hājjīs* are interested to know as much as they can about their scheduled journey. Food is served at the end of the training sessions.

After the training program, the intending *Hājjīs* devote themselves into studying and learning *Hajj* rituals in details until they perform *Hajj*. During their stay at the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, the Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* gather knowledge from different types of lectures and practices of global Muslims particularly of Arabia. Several Arabian scholars arrange religious discussion programs in the *Masjid- al-Harām* compound, where Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* participate and acquire knowledge about several important Islamic issues and practices. These lectures mainly focus on the importance of having pure '*Aqīdah* (faith). Bangladeshi *Hājjīs*, who have been experiencing of several *bid'at* (sinful innovative practices) in the society of Bangladesh, because of historical perspectives, receive exclusive knowledge of pure '*Aqīdah*. Thus, they can realize by comparison that many practices that they had performed earlier were originally not supported by Islam. This realization reflects on their practical life after *Hajj*. But, one disadvantage of these lectures, as has been marked by *Professor Dr. B.M. Mofizur Rahman*, who has performed *Hajj* several times,<sup>58</sup> is that these are conducted in Arabic language, while majority of Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* does not understand them and obviously they cannot get full benefit. Though there are some lectures with Bangla translation arranged by the *Hajj* agencies or some Bangladeshi associations in Saudi Arabia, major lectures have no translation facilities into any other languages. He also remarked that as many verses of the Holy Qur'ān and *Hadīth* of the Prophet (ﷺ) hung on the walls of *Masjid al-Harām* in Arabic, most of the non-Arab people cannot understand the meaning of these verses and Prophetic traditions. If these

lectures could be broad casted translating into other major languages and the wall posters could be hung incorporating translations, it would be better understood by the world Muslim community including Bangladeshi *Hājjīs*. Many organizations like *Rabeta al-Alam al-Islami* arrange many Islamic programs during *Hajj* season, where lectures are given by world-famous Islamic scholars, from which the *Hājjīs* enrich their knowledge about Islam and world Muslim communities of different countries. *Hajj* conference also takes place every year. The *Hajj* agencies of Bangladesh also arrange many educative programs which include important lectures by Bangladeshi or Bangla-speaking Islamic scholars. Many Bangladeshi students studying in different universities of Saudi Arabia arrange different types of educative and instructive programs for the Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* specially emphasizing on those issues which are closely related to the society of Bangladesh. By participating in these variant programs, the *Hājjīs* of Bangladesh enrich themselves with important knowledge of Islam, understand the diversity of global Muslim community, exchange their views, and come into close contact with the famous Islamic scholars of different countries. Thus, one kind of enhancement of knowledge and exchange of views has widely been taken place among the *Hājjīs* of Bangladesh.

Many Arabian *Shaikhs* voluntarily arrange a good number of intellectual discourses in different venues and mosques during *Hajj*, where Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* also participate. *Professor Dr. A.K.M. Shahed*,<sup>59</sup> who performed *Hajj* in 2013, remarked that he participated in these type of several programs and *Shaikhs* also gifted him some books written on Islam. He got huge benefits from these discussions and remarked that these were very thoughtful, effective and these mainly focused on pure Islamic '*Aqīdah*. Sometimes, Bangladeshi students studying there promptly translate the lectures of *Shaikhs* into Bangla for the better understanding and easy communication. He suggests for multi-lingual translations for greater benefit of the *Hājjīs* coming from different language backgrounds. Many Bangladeshi '*Ulamā* go to perform *Hajj* every year. They also attend different discussion meetings and cultural programs where they deliver valuable speech mainly arranged by the Bangladeshi migrants in Saudi Arabia in honor of Bangladeshi *Hājjīs*. *Professor Dr. B.M. Mofizur Rahman*,<sup>60</sup> a renowned Islamic scholar of Chittagong, who performed *Hajj* threetimes, participated in two such programs in 2015 and in six

programs in 2014 in the presence of hundreds of Bangladeshi migrants and *Hājjīs*. Professor Dr. A.K.M. Abdul Quader,<sup>61</sup> who performed *Hajj* more than five times and every year he participated in several programs and also delivered speech. He estimated that Bangladeshi migrants arrange more than 100 such religio-cultural programs in Makkah during *Hajj*. Many Bangladeshi Islamic scholars, who live in different European and other countries, also deliver speeches before the Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* during *Hajj* in these kinds of programs. Thus, it may be said that Bangladeshi *Hājjīs* get a very rare opportunity to listen to the speeches from world famous Islamic scholars during *Hajj*. Undoubtedly, it contributes to increase their knowledge about Islam in general and *Hajj* in particular. It makes them conscious, acquaintances them with diversity of Islam and enlightens them with global thinking.

Many educated people of Bangladesh who go to perform *Hajj*, take the opportunity to bring many books from Saudi Arabia particularly the religious and historical books. The '*Ulamā* and the people who understand Arabic language usually bring the books for personal use as well as for libraries of their institutions. H.M. Aatur Rahman Nadwi,<sup>62</sup> who performed *Hajj* second time in 2015, brought sixty kilograms of books during his departure from Makkah, Dr. Masudur Rahman,<sup>63</sup> also couriered about 100 kilograms of book from Makkah when he visited that sacred city. They brought the books particularly on *Tafsīr*, *Ḥadīth*, *Fiqh* and Arabic language. Professor Dr. A.K.M. Abdul Quader also observed that during several lectures arranged by Arabian *Shaikhs*, he and many other participants were presented with many books. Thus, many Arabic books on Islam are brought to Bangladesh by the *Hājjīs* every year. So, *Hajj* not only enhances the knowledge, perception and experience of the *Hājjīs*, but also opens the opportunity of learning Islam from original source for the non-*Hājjīs* of Bangladesh.

### Religio-Spiritual Impact

*Hajj* is a phenomenon of the spiritual journey of the Muslim devotees and the stages of their servitude to the Almighty Allah. The essence of *Hajj* is the journey towards the Almighty Allah (SWT) and the external acts of *Hajj*, devoid of presence of the heart, are not considered as worship. Thus, *Hajj*, as a religious obligation and spiritual act, undoubtedly

leaves immense religious and spiritual impact not only on the mind of the *Hājjīs* and non-*Hājjīs* of Bangladesh, but also the entire Muslim society of the country. Following the tradition of the society of Bangladesh, all worldly obligations of a *Hājjī* have almost been discharged before performing *Hajj*. Subsequently, a *Hājjī* after his/her return devotes his full time to pursue a better advanced spiritual life. However, it does not mean withdrawing from the world completely. Rather, it simply means that they can now do more spiritual activities. The *Hājjīs* of Bangladesh use this care-free time in observing non-obligatory prayers either in their houses or in the mosques. It is sincerely believed that a *Hājjī* after completing *Hajj* will receive special *Rahmat* (mercy) from the Almighty Allah (SWT) and his worldly problems would be solved easily.<sup>64</sup> Spiritually, the *Hajj* works as a way of transition and transformation for the *Hājjīs* from a materialistic life to a very spiritualistic one. A *Hājjī*, who performed *Hajj* correctly, is believed to have returned from Makkah free from all sins ‘as clean as a new born baby’. Images of birth are felt and seen in the returning *Hājjīs* and their feelings. Almost all the *Hājjīs* emphasize on the necessity of being exonerated by the Almighty Allah (SWT) from the accumulated sins of their life. In this sense, a Bangladeshi *Hājjī* sees the *Hajj* as a rite which marks the transition from a sinless life to a blessed death. Closely connected to this concept of spiritual rebirth, purification is highly expected from the returning *Hājjīs* as a moral transformation. Everyone in Bangladeshi society expects those who have been to Makkah for *Hajj* to come back spiritually rejuvenated, displaying a new enthusiasm for the spiritual life. The *Hājjīs* often describe their *Hajj* experience in terms of changed spiritual states. Again and again *Hājjīs* tell about how they felt themselves transformed by means of *Hajj* as recounted by *Dr. Helaluddin Noman*<sup>65</sup> who performed *Hajj* in 2015. To quote him here:

“When I went to Makkah for *Hajj*, I was happy and felt very blessed to see the Holy Ka‘bah. After my return, I felt very keen to see the house of Allah (SWT) again and again. This feeling could not be expressed exactly in words. It is an eternal and spiritual love.”

*Mrs. Razia Begum*,<sup>66</sup> who performed *Hajj* in 2013, described her feelings as:

“I cried when I was returning from the holy mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) and Baitullah. I felt as if I lost my parents or my sons and daughters. It is an attraction forever. Still I cry whenever I see these holy places on the TV screens. Every moment I feel to be there, I feel as if I left my ever known places. It changed my whole thinking. After every prayer, I pray to Almighty Allah (SWT) to be able to go there again. I remember every time the days I spent over there. Before *Hajj* I prayed towards *Ka'bah* and during *Hajj* I saw the *Ka'bah*. And after returning home, whenever I stand for prayer that lively *Ka'bah* has appeared in front of my eyes. It is an indescribable feeling.”

*Hajj* undoubtedly brings a tremendous change in the philosophy and attitude of *Hājjīs* towards life and livelihood. As *Dr. Helaluddin Noman* described that he can never think to do something inconsistent with the Islamic *Sharī'ah* though in minor issues. *Hajj* made him stronger than before to be dependent on the Almighty Allah (SWT) in every aspect of life. *Hajj* creates a happy mood and cheerful attitude in the mind of *Hājjīs* and thus, *Hājjīs* feel better in everyday affairs of their daily life. These psychological transformation and spiritual change are manifested in the daily activities, realm of prayer and other kinds of religious activity of the *Hājjīs* in Bangladeshi society. *Md. Abu Shama*,<sup>67</sup> who performed *Hajj* in 2013, illustrated it well when saying:

“When I went to Makkah for *Hajj* and saw everything with my eyes, touched with my hands, prayed at the premises of the *Ka'bah*, I am thinking very differently. My heart says, stay here forever and never leave it.”

Because of historical perspectives and lack of awareness on the part of the Bengali Muslims, many socio-cultural practices infiltrated from Hinduism and Buddhism into the Muslim society. Many superstitious practices are prevailing in the society of Bangladesh such as worshipping the *Pīrs/Awliās*, decorating their graves/shrines, constructing prayer houses on the graves of *Pīrs/Awliās*, seeking their help, believing in their spiritual power after death, offering food and flowers in the names of *Pīrs/Awliās*, using amulets etc. When a person who had practiced these

infiltrated alien cultures or any *Bid'at* previously, and goes to Makkah for *Hajj*, he observes there a very pure practice of Islam which is entirely free from such kind of *Shirk* and *Bid'at*. Every Muslim in the society of Bangladesh unquestionably believes in the purity of Islamic practices at Makkah and Madinah. This practical experience creates a permanent change in the devotional practices of a *Hājjī*. Thus, the *Hājjīs* who had the habit of such kind of *Shirk* and *Bid'at* practices, they sincerely abandon these after performing *Hajj*. The superstitious beliefs for decades have permanently been vanished as a result of performing *Hajj* once. It is undoubtedly considered as a revolutionary change in the religious affairs of the Muslim society of Bangladesh. Many people who were worshippers of graves of the saints previously, after *Hajj* their minds turn towards pure *Tawhīd*, as Professor Dr. A.K.M. Shahed remarked.<sup>68</sup> He gave examples of several individuals of his own village, whom he observed to be changed radically in their beliefs and practices after *Hajj*. Remembering his father's *Hajj* history in 1983, Dr. A.K.M. Shahed recalled that before his father's journey to Makkah, he concluded all kinds of economic transactions with the people from the belief that it might be his last journey. It was believed an eternal journey and preparation for next life. It leaves spiritual impact positively not only on the life of the *Hājjīs*, but also on his/her family members and the society to a greater extent. *Hajj* can change the philosophy of life of a *Hājjī* by changing individual's inner state, beliefs, preferences, and subsequently he could spiritually be transformed by performing *Hajj*. Thus, *Hajj* brings a remarkable change in the life and society of Bangladeshi Muslims.

*Hajj* inspires *Hājjīs* to be a better Muslim in both faith and practice than before. It encourages them to participate regularly in practices which they unambiguously identify as Islamic. In this sense, it is seen as part of a process of Islamization among them. *Hājjīs* are more likely to undertake obligatory and supererogatory (*nawāfil*/optional) prayers such as *Ṣalāt-ut-Tahajjud*, *Qur'ān* recitation regularly etc. They become regular attendants in the mosques to perform five times prayers, observe obligatory and non-obligatory fasting and follow Islamic principles strictly in the daily affairs of their individual, family and social life. The female *Hājjīs* are never seen to ignore *Purdah*. The male *Hājjīs* rarely shave their beard as it goes against the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ). They try to avoid all kinds of unfair, unethical and un-Islamic means in their

everyday activities. Even, the *Hājjī* for sakes morally unsound habits such as smoking etc. They rarely do cheat, tell a lie or break a promise with others in their social affairs. The *Hājjīs* inspire their fellow brethren and family-members to follow Islamic religious principles in their lives. Thus, in the society of Bangladesh, life of a *Hājjī* has ever been a model of spirituality and Islamic religiosity. Most probably majority of the *Hājjīs* do some religious commitment by self during *Hajj* which they observe in their post-*Hajj* life. It increases their devotion to religious practice, honesty in social affairs and induces them to be more tolerant and kind towards the different social groups. It inspires them to keep pure belief consistent with the Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. *Hājjīs* in the society of Bangladesh usually become more tolerant to the people from different religious groups, sects, and to the member of the opposite gender. *Hajj* increases experience-based knowledge about global diversity of gender, color, region with in the Muslim *Ummah* and most importantly, diversity of opinion within Islam. This knowledge leads them to interact broadly with other groups. Thus, *Hajj*, as an Islamic religious obligation, inculcates Islamic religiosity and inner spirituality of the *Hājjīs* of Bangladesh. These are often reflected through their practical dealings in all through the rest of their life after *Hajj*. They become more meticulous in their religious observances, more honest in their social affairs, more trustworthy in their interactive attitudes, more reliable in their family commitments, more confident in themselves, and most importantly, every moment they remain ever ready to meet their beloved Lord Allah (SWT) with a purified life and honestheart bedecked with the jewels of absolute surrender to His will.

### Conclusion

*Hajj* is the most complete and comprehensive form of worship in Islam and submission before the Almighty Allah (SWT). It disciplines the human being, teaches *Tawhīd*, purifies his soul, creates unity with other fellow-believers without arrogance, prepares the mind for death, ushers in a feeling of humbleness, and strengthens the faith of a true believer in Him. *Hajj* has an enormous impact on the life of the Muslims of Bangladesh in all respect as the social and religious sentiments run side by side. *Hajj* not only transforms individual life of the *Hājjīs* but also

collective beliefs and practices of the entire society that spread universal Islamic values. Every year thousands of Bangladeshi Muslims; male and female, perform *Hajj*. This huge number of *Hājjīs*, with their practical learning and diverse experience from *Hajj*, are exerting positive influence on different aspects of the society. It is the most vivid manifestation of believing in and practicing *Tawhīd* (belief in a single Deity of Allah) and universal brotherhood. The *Hājjīs* practice true Islam with pure '*Aqīdah* (beliefs) during *Hajj*, which contribute to the spread of pure Islamic faith and practice among the Muslims of Bangladesh who have been practicing many social rites having relation to *Shirk* (polytheism) and *Bid'at* (sinful innovation) because of historical, and socio-cultural interaction with the non-Muslim religious groups. The *Hājjīs* work for social peace and wider tolerance towards different social groups irrespective of gender, sect religion, based on Islamic teaching of justice and equality. *Hajj* offers the most evident and effective lesson of equality and universality for mankind. It induces a shift from localized beliefs and practice towards global Islamic practice. *Hajj* increases tolerance and peaceful inclinations and leads to more favorable attitudes toward others, particularly, the women. It eradicates such vices as racism, murder, casteism, regionalism, nationalism etc. and permanently annihilates polytheism from the minds of the Muslims who gather around the Holy *Ka'bah* to submit themselves before the will of Almighty Allah (SWT). *Hajj* also helps spreading some Arabian culture into the Muslim society of Bangladesh. The *Hājjīs* in the society of Bangladesh enjoy a position of special respect.<sup>69</sup> It also contributes to the spread of Islamic knowledge primarily at individual level of the *Hājjīs* and at the collective level to an appreciable extent. Several commodities are exchanged unofficially between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia during *Hajj*, which facilitates the trading concerns with the prospect of a rise to a very remarkable level. Spiritually, *Hajj* represents the essence and spirit of Islam, complete devotion towards the Almighty Allah (SWT), self-sacrifice, equality, and in discrimination on the basis of color, race, caste, wealth or power. It not only moulds the *Hājjīs* into more sincere Muslims, but also the society at large by their honesty and piety. *Hajj* is a coveted preparation for the next life and it leads to a spiritual reawakening and improves social status. It creates the unity of thoughts and acts by performing divine injunctions and consolidating the pillars of social justice. The Bangladeshi Muslim's keen attraction to

the Holy *Ka'bah* and the great assembly of the Muslim *Ummah* during *Hajj* in a single place, evidently, create mutual understanding, unity in thinking and tendency of tolerance towards others. The most important factor of understanding is the equitable teachings of Islam that bridge the gaps, bring hearts together, create a link between the east and the west, black and white, the Arabs and the non-Arabs, feel sympathy for one another. Above all in the context of the society of Bangladesh, it may confidently be said that *Hajj* transforms a *Hājjī* to be a better Muslim in belief and practice, a better social member in dealings with the people, a better personality in feelings towards others.

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