



## RAYDA JACOB'S THE MECCA DIARIES: A STUDY IN PEACE AND TOLERANCE

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper, the influence of Haj as expressed in the Haj travelogues is discussed. The aspect of Haj travelogues as narratives teaching tolerance and peace is highlighted. Understanding the impact of Haj on pilgrims through their narratives is attained. Haj travelogues reveal equality and harmony among ethnic groups and Islamic sects and increased belief in peace, and in equality and harmony among adherents of different religions. The selected Haj travelogue by Rayda Jacob's The Mecca Diaries is re-read from the perspective of humanistic approach, as this is the dire need of today's global community especially when the mention of Islam or Muslims brings to mind the picture of terrorism or terrorists and how Islamophobia is propagated credits to western ideologies and their media.*

*This paper is divided into two sections. In the first section Understanding Haj, as the heading suggests, the rites, requirements, objectives and guidelines are discussed for complete comprehension of the pilgrimage. Further on its historical, social, religious importance is explained.*

*In the second section, Pilgrimage Narratives, Haj travelogue as a genre of travel literature is studied and its importance as narratives teaching tolerance and giving peace education with respect to Rayda Jacob's The Mecca Diaries written in 2005 is discussed. The excerpts are selected from her narrative which justifies this aspect of Haj travelogues.*

**Keywords:** Haj Pilgrimage, Haj travelogues, Spirituality, Peace, Tolerance, Understanding, Empathy, Religion, Social Interaction, Identity, Beliefs.

### **Understanding the Haj**

The Haj pilgrimage is mandatory on all Muslims, ordained by the *Quran*, the *Hadith*, the concurrence of Muslim scholars, and the continued practice ever since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Haj as a religious practice goes back some four thousand years when Prophet Ibrahim and Ismail built the Kabaa in Mecca. The rites and rituals are fixed and have been handed down through the ages, and all Muslim pilgrims must fulfill the required acts. In this way the Haj connects Muslims historically through the generations, as well as geographically to other Muslims around the world at any particular time. It is one of the most important unifying elements in the Muslim community (*umma*), and it is a journey that marks a huge change in the spiritual and social life of the pilgrims.

In the *surah* entitled *The Pilgrimage* there are prophecies about the permanence of this house of God *Kabaa* and the command to perform the Haj is given in the below mentioned lines, "And when We assigned for Abraham the place of the House, saying 'Do not associate anything with me, and purify my house for those who go around it and for those who stand and bow and prostrate themselves in worship. And proclaim the pilgrimage among humankind: They will come to you on foot and on every camel made lean by traveling deep,



distant ravines...” (Quran 22:26) Prophet Mohamed (pbuh) restated this understanding from Allah by commanding Muslims to perform the Haj, “O people, Allah has made Haj obligatory for you; so perform Haj” (Sahih Muslim, Book 15, Hadith 461).

Every year more than two million pilgrims travel from all over the world to gather in Mecca to perform the Haj on eight of Dhu al-Hijjah and the rituals continue for five days till the twelfth of Dhu al-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

In many authentic hadiths, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) preached that the reward of Haj is paradise and that all previous sins will be forgiven (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 11, Hadith 4 and 5; Sahih Muslim, Book 15, Hadith 493). This huge reward and other benefits of pilgrimage constitute the major motivation for many Muslims to perform the Haj and follow its guidelines which include toleration and empathy towards others. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “All things of a Muslim are sacred for his brother in faith: his blood, his wealth and his honor” (Sahih Muslim, Book 45, Hadith 40).

In the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah an essential aspect of Haj is the ethical requirements of the pilgrims. They must be observant and committed to the ethical values of Islam and must avoid any destructive qualities and sinful behavior such as obscenity, malice and arguing. Allah commands: “...whosoever decides to perform Haj there shall be no sexual relations, nor misconduct, nor quarrelling during the Haj...and take a provision but the best provision is At-Taqwa. So fear Me, O men of understanding!” (Quran, 2:197).

Taqwa (piety and God-fearing) is the highest objective of the Haj. It is the essence of all acts of worship in Islam is associated with good character. In the context of Haj, it connotes righteousness and correct conduct during the Haj.

The first ritual of Haj is the donning of the *ihram*. The *ihram*, worn by men, is a white seamless garment made up of two pieces of cloth or toweling; one covers the body from waist to ankle and the other is thrown over the shoulder. Women generally wear a simple white dress and a head covering, but not a veil. Men's heads must be uncovered.

This *ihram* is a symbol of purity and of the renunciation of evil and mundane matters. It also indicates the equality of all people in the eyes of God. When the pilgrim wears his white apparel, he or she enters into a state of purity that prohibits quarreling, committing violence to man or animal and having conjugal relations, he cannot shave, cut his nails or wear any jewelry, and he will keep his unsown garment on till he/she completes the pilgrimage.

Pettigrew and Troppopine are of the opinion that theories of social interaction suggest that exposure to other groups may promote empathy or antipathy towards each other depending on the nature of the interaction. (Pettigrew and Tropp: 2006). During the Haj the pilgrims attain the spiritual enhancement and ethical values are instilled or revived. Pilgrims understand the value of brotherhood and solidarity by meeting and living with their fellow Muslims from different countries, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Pilgrims learn about each



others' lives, problems, challenges, and success stories and this facilitates the establishment of good relationship between them. Pilgrims also learn or revive the value of equality and gender equality by the rituals they are all required to perform and also by the similar dress code *ihram* they are all obliged to wear regardless of their gender, ethnicity, age, and social, economic or political status. This increased unity within the Islamic world is definitely not accompanied by antipathy toward non-Muslims.

Pilgrims are also reminded to uphold good values such as patience, discipline, respect, and tolerance as they perform the prescribed rituals together in specific time and space without quarrelling or indecency but by being dignified, kind and tolerant of one another. Mecca and particularly the area immediately surrounding the Kabaa becomes very crowded during the days of the Haj and there is both physical contact and encroachment upon one's personal space with some pilgrims being provoked to respond violently either verbally or physically. As in her Haj travelogue, Jacobs opines, "To cater for three millions pilgrims during Haj are no joke. To organize the sanitation at Mina, Muzdalifah and Arafah, as well as the water trucks, the hospital services, the cleaning of the *haram*-to manage the monstrous task of directing traffic and keeping control of hordes of people all there for the same purpose, at the same time it all takes a lot of doing. We've been warned beforehand that there will be a lot of waiting around. (Jacobs 26).

In the opinion of Aronson and Patnoe, while group interactions in competitive settings can exacerbate conflict, interactions that reward cooperation can improve relations among groups. (Aronson and Patnoe, 1997; Johnson and Johnson, 1983). Rayda observes in her travelogue, which justifies their point, "Racing into the mosque displays bad manners and disrespects for such a holy place. Raising one's voice and idle talk are also unacceptable. (Jacobs 35). She further on observes, "We are now unable to scratch ourselves, swat an insect or behave in a disorderly way. We are in *ihram* because once we enter Mecca we will perform our *umrah*, which is a part of Haj". (Jacobs 53).

The Haj provides the real test of those values that constitute good character, patience, self-control, humility, brotherhood, and tolerance. Rayda observes in her travelogue, "The honesty of the vendors is refreshing. On more than one occasion we make a mistake with the *rials* as the notes all look the same and you have to turn them over to distinguish a five from ten or a twenty. At least twice, a shop owner hands us back money. They will bargain but they won't take that doesn't belong to them". (Jacobs 79). She concludes, "The point is, there is no paperwork done. He didn't ask for a hotel name or number. He trusted her with a 200 *rial* outfit. He knew that she knew that her Haj would be no good if she ran off with it". (Jacobs 79).

The social psychology literature suggests that the interactions during the Haj among pilgrims from different countries and backgrounds i.e. global exposure lead to positive/negative feelings toward one another, depending on whether the interaction is cooperative or competitive. Rayda in her travelogue recollect her mentor Imam Abdullah talks about preparing them for the days of *Arafah*. "People, in five days we're going to be there. It's not



going to be easy. You're not going to be sleeping in Posturepedics, and under thick blankets. You're going to be in tent, you'll be sleeping in a tent, and you'll be sleeping on a mat .You can buy a mattress: they'll be selling them there. And don't bring blankets. If it's the *taqdir* of Allah that you must get cold, you'll get cold. Also, the Saudis will provide the food. In Cape Town, when they say breakfast is at seven, it's at seven. On *Arafah* and Mina, if they say it's at eight, it might come at two in afternoon. Just have *sabar* (patience). There'll be millions of people on Arafah; they have to see to everyone. This isn't going to be five-star treatment, but inshallah, we'll have a five-star Haj". (Jacobs 97).

Empirically, Hajjis show more positive views, greater tolerance and are more peacefully inclined towards other nationalities and social groups. Rayda in her travelogue observes, "Here you see the water trucks come every day to give water to hotel, when all traffic is going one way towards mina, and no one is allowed to go other way, the water trucks also won't be allowed in, and there won't be water. So don't stand under the shower and waste time. Use water sparingly, and get out. Don't let little children by themselves into the shower. Have an adult go in and wash them. If we don't do this, there won't be water for everyone". (Jacobs 111).

## Pilgrimage Narratives

Pilgrimage narratives have an important place in the genre of travel literature of the world. Every religion has its resource of pilgrimage narratives; Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jewish and other religions. Religions spread and religious teachings were explained through these narratives. Individuals who have been deeply moved by their pilgrimages and have the talent and the resources have recorded them in narratives, stories, songs, and poems. Their affecting personal accounts make it possible for others to experience the pilgrimage through their narratives. Likewise there is a vast resource of Haj narratives present in the archives and libraries and online of the Haj narratives in languages as diverse as the nationalities performing the Haj. Each person experiences communal and personal feelings at the same time while performing Haj.

Rayda Jacob's *The Mecca Diaries* is in the format of a diary is an absorbing personal account of her 2005 Haj pilgrimage. She records preparation and departure for Haj; her stay in Medina and journey to the city of Mecca; her experience of the five days of Haj; and, finally, her return to South Africa. It is illustrated throughout with photographs taken by her. Her attempts to write about the life changing experience of Haj for Muslims and non-Muslims alike in a journal like travelogue is very sincere and rewarding.

Rayda Jacob's Haj travelogue has the quality of brevity; still attention is paid to minute details. She very carefully guards her statements and avoids giving carefree verdict of the observer. She very skillfully avoids the tendency to criticize. "I manage to get up to the front, and make two *rak'ahs* .While my head is on the ground, someone tries to clamber over me, and I get a toe in the head. I pay no attention". (Jacobs 38). She adopts a neutral position in her narrative.



It is a very straightforward travelogue with the glimpses of sketches on people, places, pastimes and customs prevailing among the pilgrims. She writes, "I have forged new friendships, and have been together with these women young and old for a concentrated period of time. I am discovering them in a way I have never before without their men and I am getting wonderful insights, it's an enjoyable passage of time". (Jacobs 142).

She avoided condemning the authorities or fellow pilgrims or the management in her travelogue because she felt it was not in keeping with the spirit of the pilgrimage and any criticism was equivalent to profanity of the pilgrimage. She recollects her mentor's words, "Remember, people, Mecca is crowded. You will be jostled on all sides, especially during the last days of hajj when Mecca is full .You can't lose your cool. If you are in ihram, and someone accidentally knocks into you during *tawaaf* and you give him a dirty look or grumble, you have violated your hajj and must pay a *dumm*. A *dumm* is the equivalent of one sheep; usually R700. The sheep are slaughtered and given to the poor". (Jacobs 14).

She handles lightly the inconveniences or hardships occurred during the pilgrimage because she believes every step taken at the Kabaa means that a sin is blotted, and that thereafter the person will be highly exalted. She observes, "It isn't long before there's grumpiness in the camps. But we remind ourselves why we're here: we can't afford to get upset with each other". (Jacobs 63). She further on in her travelogue observe, "This is hajj: this is what all the lessons were about. There are 3 million hujaj counting the Saudis. What makes it difficult is that all of them have to perform the same rituals at the same time, at the same places". (Jacobs 137).

Haj does inspire in her a new spirituality, a new humanness, a new understanding of morality and of the greatness of human spirit. She returned to find that the change would continue as the faithful move forward in life like her being punctual in offering prayers five times without fail. She observes, "Nevertheless, I have a different perspective and appreciation now. My prayers at home take only about ten minutes. I have come to Mecca for no other reason than to appreciate how easy I've had it and how much easier it should be now upon my return, I have already learnt something. But then hajj is all about lessons. You only hope that when you get home, you remember". (Jacobs 92).

As pilgrims return to their homes, they carry with themselves the feeling of mutual respect and toleration and peace loving period and equality experienced during the pilgrimage. They return with a better understanding of diversities in the global scenario. Wolfe opines that numerous pilgrim accounts suggest that the Hajj inspires feelings of unity with the worldwide Muslim community (Wolfe, 1997). The Haj increases tolerance, which seems to apply not just within the Islamic world but also beyond it.

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