

Omens and their Impacts in Bangladesh: Remedy from an Islamic Management Perspective

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to formulate and develop a policy prescription for Omens in Bangladesh from Islamic management perspective. Although Omens has an overarching influence on Muslim society, but no academic work has undertaken to divulge the prevailing facts and figures of Omens in Bangladesh with validated references from the primary sources of Islam and not reinforced by well-equipped Islamic Management prescriptions which may deal with Omens' issues effectively and efficiently. This descriptive study will attempt to provide a brief review of prevailing literature of Omens with their impacts and formulate a remedial mechanism of Omens from Islamic Management perspective based on The Holy Quran, Hadith and Islamic Literature.

Kew Words: Omen, Tawhīd¹, Astrology², Ghaib³, Superstition⁴, Islamic Management⁵

01. Introduction

The whole human society is sunk in many superstitious beliefs and practices. The Muslim Ummah is not any exception in this case. Though originated in the un-Islamic societies, these superstitious beliefs and practices have taken firm roots in the Muslim society and are regarded by some to be inseparably associated with Islam. Omens, bad and good, are among such superstitious beliefs which are found to be widely practiced by people of all strata. Islam is uncompromisingly against all these superstitions as these are diametrically opposed to its unadulterated and pure monotheistic idea. Superstition involves pretending to know the unseen. Nobody except Allah knows the unseen (27:65, 7:188, 34:14). Superstitious beliefs can take the following forms: astrology, *tanjīm*; foretelling, *kahānat*, and divination, *tatayyur*. Astrology is not an empirical science and is deception. Believing in foretellers is *kufr*. Divination with arrows is forbidden (5:4). Believing and acting on omens is forbidden (27:47, 7:31, 36:18, 36:19).⁶ The people of the Indian sub-continent are comparatively more susceptible to superstitious beliefs. Being a majority Muslim country comprising approximately 90% Muslim citizens, Bangladesh is heavily beset with omens, legends, and myths. This applies for the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike. Though Islam is against all unfounded, irrational and superstitious beliefs and practices, the Muslims of this country, irrespective of their educational qualification, are conspicuously indulged in superstitions because of their close habitation with the Hinduism and/or reverts from Hinduism unconsciously or sub-consciously carried many such beliefs and practices or their traces from their earlier religion/s. Despite a growing awareness among the Muslims about these superstitions, many Muslims still know not their damaging effects to Iman, and thus easily fall preys to those. In the past, many popular puritan movements were launched/organized by the religious scholars of this locality, including the movements of Hāji Sharīatullah⁷, Shahīd Titu Mir⁸, and Syed Ahmad Shaheed⁹, to create general social awareness among the Muslims about pure Islamic 'Aqīdah, and the aberrations penetrated in it, fundamentals of Islam and un-Islamic customs and

practices infiltrated in the Muslim society. The success of these movements was somehow limited, and could not bring about desired social overhaul due to the lack of systematic action plan based on holistic management tools and techniques. Besides, almost no academic work was undertaken to uncover the origins of the superstitions prevailing in Bangladesh and their multidirectional harmful impacts on the populace with authenticated references from the primary sources of Islam and reinforced by well-rich Islamic Management prescriptions which ultimately could deal with omens' issues effectively, convince the mass Muslim people of their polluted origins, and oblige them to shun those quite consciously. To fill up this vacuum, this academic initiative is undertaken to unearth the origins of omens, demonstrate their clear opposition to monotheistic Islam, trace out manifold harmful impacts, and suggest an Islamic-Management-oriented policy to successfully deal with such cases of omens.

02. Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the present study is to examine some issues and factors related to Omens and their impacts in Bangladesh and formalize the remedial framework on the basis Islamic Management perspective e.g., The Holy Quran, Hadith and Islamic Literature. The more specific objectives of the present study are:

- To unearth the underlying facts of Omens and their impacts in Bangladesh,
- To formulate a remedial framework of Omens from Islamic Management perspective.

03. Methodology of the Study

The present study is not an empirical study; rather it is a theoretical one. This study has been conducted on the basis of reviewing prevailing literature, examining the primary sources of Islam to extract and formalize ideas for Omens. In addition to that, secondary information also has been collected from different textbooks, journals, newspapers and various web-sites. Data were also collected through personal observation. Neither any statistical method nor mathematical modeling is used in support of the discussion presented here.

04. Conceptual analysis about Omen from different perspective

Omen refers to a phenomenon that serves as a sign or warning of some future good or evil. A few other terms are interchangeably used, for example: augury, forerunner, foretold, portent, prefigurement, presage, prognostic, prognostication, sign etc.

- According to Wikipedia: An **omen** (also called **portent** or **presage**) is a phenomenon that is believed to foretell the future, often signifying the advent of change.¹⁰ Columbia Encyclopedia defines it as 'sign or augury believed to foreshadow the future'. Almost any occurrence can be interpreted as an omen. The typical omen was a natural phenomenon, such as a meteor, an eclipse, or the flight of birds. Among the Greeks and Romans the interpretation of omens was a major part of religious life and required trained priests, such as the Roman augur, to explain the meaning of the signs.¹¹ English Folklore defines it, 'Occurrences outside human control, interpreted by communal tradition as foretelling future events (e.g. seeing magpies, hearing an owl hoot)'. Some foretell something pleasant: to see a small spider on your hand means money, to find nine peas in one pod means (for a girl) a happy marriage. Others foretell misfortunes, especially death.¹²
- The Arabic word used to represent the English word Omen is '*tiyarah*' or '*tatayyur*'. Pre-Islamic Arabs used to consider the direction in which birds and animals moved to be a sign of impending good or bad fortune and would plan their lives around such signs. The practise of reading good and bad omens in bird and animal movements was referred to as *tiyarah* from the verb *Taara* which means "to take flight." For example, if an individual set out on a journey and a bird flew over him and turned to the left, he would see in it a sign of impending bad fortune, turn around and return home.¹³ Ibn Hajar says: 'Sometimes some Arabs would disturb a sitting bird to know its direction and to augur bad or good. ...They also used to regard the voice of a crow and the passing of gazelles as bad omens, but they called all them *tatayyur* because the original omen had to do with birds (*tayr*). There were also superstitions among the non-Arabs. For example: going of a child to a teacher would be regarded bad omen, and his returning from him would

be regarded good omen; carrying a heavy load by a camel is a bad omen and its carrying no load is a good omen, and so on.¹⁴ Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sālih al-‘Uthaymīn says¹⁵: 'the word *tiyarah* refers to superstition about something that is seen or heard; or it was said that it refers to superstition about anything, whether it is seen or heard, or a time or place.' This is more comprehensive as it includes things that are not seen or heard, such as superstition about certain times.

Though in Arabic two terms (i.e., *al-tatayyur* & *tiyarah*) to refer to omens, there are differences between these two. Al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām pointed out the difference saying, “*tatayyur* means feeling in one's heart that something bad is going to happen, while *tiyarah* is acting on the basis of those pessimistic feelings.”¹⁶ Moreover, while *tatayyur* and *tiyarah* are used to refer to all sorts of omens irrespective of their conceived impending results (i.e., good omens and bad omens), *Fa'l* is used for different connotation. *Fa'l* is sometimes erroneously conceived and translated as simple and unqualified 'Good Omen', whereas there is a gulf of difference between *Fa'l* and *tatayyur* or *tiyarah*. *Fa'l* is just making any positive remark about something not necessarily based upon any sign, sound or substance while *tatayyur* or *tiyarah* is making any pessimistic remark or conceiving any negative notion based purely upon any sign, augury, sound, or objects.

Omens are of two kinds: Bad Omens and Good Omens. Bad Omens are those which supposedly augur evil and good omens are those which are considered to represent the arrival of well. To consider any omen good or bad depends primarily and largely 'on its interpretation'. The same sign may be interpreted differently by different people or different cultures. For example, 'a superstition in the United States and other countries across Europe indicates that a black cat is an omen of bad luck. Comets were considered to be both good and bad omens. The best-known example is probably Halley's Comet¹⁷, which was a "bad omen" for King Harold II of England but a "good omen" for William the Conqueror^{18, 19}.

05. Origins and Manifestations of Omens in Bangladesh

There are many superstitious beliefs and practices in the forms of omens found in the society in general, and the Muslim society, in particular. These are of different categories and natures with different interpretations and consequences. Some of those relate to animate things while others relate to inanimate things. Some are based on visible objects, while others are on invisible objects. Some are natural, environmental, existential, and real, while others are artificial, imaginary, supernatural, and dreams-oriented. Some are based on sounds made by animals, especially, birds, while others are based on sounds from human beings. There is no limit to such myths among the people. Commenting on the issue, Sālih Al-Munajjid said, ‘Some regard seeing certain things as a bad omen – such as seeing an owl or a black cat; some regard hearing certain things as a bad omen – such as hearing the sound of an owl or a crow. They even regard verses in the Qur'an as omens, if it is seen in the Mushaf or heard from one who is reading! –such as a verse which speaks of warning or punishment. Some of them regard numbers as unlucky, such as 13; or they regard certain times as unlucky times, such as Wednesdays, or the month of Shawwal for those who want to get married. Some regard certain places as unlucky, such as a place in which a crime occurred, or they regard certain types of people as a bad omen, such as the lame or the blind, or the poor or needy.’²⁰

In ancient times, omens were primarily and largely decided on the basis of flight of birds, their directions, screeches, colors and kinds. According to Time Magazine, the English word used for omen is *Auspice* is also refers to birds:

The word *auspice*, meaning sign or omen, is telescoped from the Latin words *avis*, bird, and *specter*, to see. In ancient Rome the appearance and behavior of birds—whether they were eagles, vultures, owls, crows, or ravens, which direction they flew, how they ate grains of corn—determined whether public assemblies should be held, whether armies should attack, whether merchants should be bullish or bearish.²¹

The word *Shakunam*, which is also a bird's name, has been used in Veda to refer to omen. The Antique Digest ‘OldAndSold’ mentions that,

‘The Sanskrit word used for an omen at the head of this chapter is shakunam, which means primarily a bird, and comes to mean an omen from the fact that in ancient days omens were largely decided by the flight of birds. The old Hindu writings contain passages referring to portents and omens, and the passage quoted from Manu at the head of this chapter does not mean that the art or science of explaining omens is a disreputable one. All that it means is that a Sanyasi, being one who is supposed to have finished with worldly affairs, must not, for the sake of acquiring gain, ever engage in what are ordinarily considered sacred employments.’²²

The Arabic terms *tatayyur* or *tiyarah* are also primarily concerned with the flight and movements of birds and the pre-Islamic Arabs used to consider those as indicative of any imminent good or bad.²³ Al-Nawawī (r) mentioned:

Tatayyur is pessimism, and is based on something disliked, be it a word or action or something seen... They used to startle gazelles and birds to make them move; if they went to the right they would regard that as a good omen and go ahead with their journeys or other plans, but if they went to the left they would cancel their journeys and plans, and regard that as a bad omen. So it would often prevent them from doing things that were in their interests. Islam cancelled out all that and forbade it, and said that it had no effect, whether good or bad. This is what is meant by the words of the Prophet (saas): “There is no *tiyarah*,” and in another Hadīth, “*Tiyarah* is *shirk*”.²⁴

The fact remained same until today. Most of today's superstitions are somehow or other related to the flight and movements of birds. But later on, the horizon of omens was expanded incorporating under its scope and jurisdiction limitless number of items. Upon investigating the most influential culture and civilization of today's world the fact becomes obvious. Sheikh Muhammad Sālih Al-Munajjid has given a summery list of the types of superstitious belief in bad omens, ancient and modern:²⁵

Certain days or months: such as Safar and Shawwaal; certain birds: such as crows and owls; certain animals: such as snakes, black cats and monkeys, or their movements: such as the passing of gazelles; certain types of people: such as a one-eyed man or a hunchback; certain numbers, such as 13 among the Christians, 7 among the Bedouin and 10 among the Raafidis; in the latter case because they dislike the “‘asharah mubashsharah (the ten Sahaabah who were given the certain promise of Paradise) – with the exception of ‘Ali (r), hence they will say “Nine plus one” instead of “ten”; certain sounds: such as the voice of a crow or the sound of an ambulance or fire truck; frightening or disturbing dreams; colors: such as the color of blood, or yellow; when the eyelashes of the left eye tremble involuntarily, they say, “Something bad is going to happen to us”; calling a child by the name of a living person, such as the father or mother and so on; witnessing an accident or a fire in the morning; seeing one's wife's mother in the morning; when the right hand or right foot itches.

In Wikipedia, we get the following long list of auspicious and inauspicious omens:²⁶

Auspicious items: ‘Following fifty items are auspicious items & seeing them is auspicious at all the times. Curd, milk, rice, pot filled with water, ripe food, mustard, sandal, mirror, fresh green grass (*Durva*- a kind of grass), conch shell, meat, fish, soil (wet), a bright yellow pigment prepared from urine of cow (*Gorochan*), cow dung, cow, honey, idol of god, *Veena* (a musical instrument), fruit, seat of king, flower, black items used to decorate eyes (*Anjan / Kajal / Surma*), ornaments, hand weapon, beetle leaves, conveyance, palanquin (*Palki* - man carried conveyance), a covered pot or box to keep medicine or wine (*Sharavsanputi*), flag, parasol (*Chhatra*), hand fan, clothes, lotus, *Kakash* (pot), glowing fire, elephant, goats, drums, device to control elephant (*Ankush*),

tail of animal used to whisk flies (*Chaamar*), gems, gold, silver, copper, herd of tied animals or an animal whose legs are tied, medicine, drink, tree with fruit, fresh vegetables. A bad omen would be to take it up the ass.'

Inauspicious items: 'A sparkle without smoke, ash, fuel-wood-cow dug cake (*Upla*), rope, mud, device used to make powder by hammering action (*Tilkuta*), cotton, husk (*Tush*), bones, opened hair (untied hair), black item, iron, bark of a tree (*Valkal*), skin of a tree, black sesame (Til) or black pulse, stone, stool, snake, medicine, oil, raw sugar, boneless meat, empty or broken utensil, salt, dry grass, butter milk, wood, iron chain, rain & wind.'

In this Sub-Continent, hundreds of omens are found referring to many events and issues. There are omens related to journeys, snakes, lizard, crow, dog, cat, jackal, sneezing, breathing, yawning, and, most importantly, birds. According to a book in Telugu, translated from the Sanskrit, there are approximately hundred of omens with regard to any journey made by anyone:²⁷

There are no less than forty-three different things enumerated as prognosticating good and thirty-four evil, if any of them should happen just as a person sets out on a journey. For instance, it is a good omen to overhear a pleasant conversation, to hear musical instruments; to see a good blaze of fire; to meet a company of dancing girls, or a few young women, to meet an elephant, a horse, or a bullock, or even a corpse, to meet two Brahmans, or four Komaties, or a Sudra with a stick in his hand; to see in front of one an umbrella, fans, mirrors, a harp, diamonds, gold, weapons, fruit or flowers; to bear the braying of an ass from the east, south, north or north-east. It is lucky, if a crow, a parrot, a stork, a heron, or a jackal passes from the left to the right; if a brahminy kite, a hawk, an owl, an iguana, a deer, a musk-rat, a dog, or a mongoose passes from right to left; and if a lizard's cry is heard from the right, or from overhead.

It seems strange that it should be a good omen to meet a corpse, but it is the case. To dream of a corpse, of a blaze of fire, of flowers, of fruit, of having stepped into filth, or of having any filth fall on one's body is considered to be a good omen. To dream of any thing red, such as red flowers, a red cloth or blood is bad.

It is a very anxious time when a good Hindu leaves his home to start out for a journey. He will naturally look and listen carefully for some good signs. A pundit friend tells me that there is no definite distance laid down beyond which bad omens have no effect; but perhaps twenty or twenty-five yards, or even less, may be considered enough as a test. After the traveller gets out into the main street, if the house started from is in a side street, it will not matter much if anything of the nature of a bad omen happens. The setting out, therefore, is the anxious time. It is a bad sign, if any one tries to persuade the departing traveller not to go, or says he had better take some food before starting, or offers to accompany him, or enquires as to where he is going, or pulls his garment to keep him back. It is considered a bad omen when a person sets out, to meet or to see in front of him any of the following:—a woman with plaited red hair, a widow, a new pot, a whirlwind, drops of rain, a bundle of firewood, a single Brahmin, an oil-monger, a pariah, a lame man, men quarrelling, men in suffering, men with dishevelled hair, a hunchback, a leper, invalids, buttermilk, oil, empty pots, grass, bones, a bundle of dirty clothes, smoking fire or various other things which are mentioned. It is not a good sign to see an ass either to the west, the north-west, the south-west or the south-east with its head hanging down and braying; or to see a crow, a parrot, a stork, a heron, or a jackal pass from the right to the left.

If any of these bad omens appears to a pious Hindu when he is setting out on a journey, especially if the journey is an important one, he will certainly turn back

home again. On entering his house he will carefully wash his feet and then perform achamanam, which is sipping of water three times, repeating the following names of Vishnu, Keshava Svaha! hail Krishna, Narayana Svaha, hail Narayana, Madhava Svaha! hail Madhava. After this is over, and after spending some time in quiet meditation, he will again set forth. If after a succession of attempts he still meets with bad omens the journey will be deferred entirely for the day, if not altogether given up. If the traveller is a Sudra, he will not be able to repeat the words mentioned above, when performing his achamanam, as they are taken from the Vedas, and none but a twice-born must take such holy words within his lips. The Sudra will sip the water and say Govinda! Govinda! or Siva! Siva! according as he is a Vaishnava, or a Siva, a worshipper of the god Vishnu, or of the god Siva.

In Bangladesh, many omens are very dearly and faithfully held by people of all strata. Among these, some are considered good while others are considered bad. Some typical but not-exhaustive bad omens are: 'opening or closing scissors without any reason' is seriously inauspicious; 'stepping over a child' will affect his physical growth; 'cutting one's nails at night' is harmful; 'sweeping the house at night, doing laundry on Mondays, starting doing anything important on Sunday or Tuesday, and keeping any sweep in front of door' augur bad; 'itching the left hands or left eyes/eyelashes' foretells the impending danger; 'number 13' is unlucky; 'flight of a butterfly or its sitting on anyone's body' forebodes one wedding; 'sighting any lame, impaired, poor, needy, widow, or barren woman, especially while leaving home' predicts bad luck; 'encountering any accident or seeing bloodshed before one's eye after he starts out' is ill-fated; 'calling someone back after his stepping outside the threshold of the house and his looking back over his shoulders to answer the call' is undesired; 'seeing any empty pitcher, drop of comb from one's hands or head, marrying in any particular months (like Arabic Shawwāl), intimacy between the husband & wife in the wedding night, interlacing one's fingers or cracking knuckles (which could lead to problems in the marriage), losing any marriage-gift (particularly ornaments), especially by the wives, hearing the sound of any crow or owl, losing pen, bag, umbrella, and handkerchief'- all these foreshadows looming peril; 'visiting the places where any crime or accident occurred' is regarded dangerous; 'playing with water and spreading/spilling it on one another, certain positions of moon or stars' are undesirable; a black cat crossing one's path can affect his luck and the man should go back; if a lizard falls on one's head then he lives in fear of death; someone sneezing in front of someone will cause bad luck; a dog howling/whining in the middle of the night is inauspicious and tells of something terrible coming; pregnant women who travel alone at night or enter an uninhabited home may be possessed by ghosts; a new bride is judged to be fortunate or unfortunate by what occurs in her new family for a year after marriage; 'eating an egg (specially boiled) by any examinee before appearing an exam' will cause him to get a result like an egg - that is zero; it is inauspicious to travel on an *amaavasyaa* (New Moon) night cause it is believed that all demons walk on the earth in that night and collision with anyone of them could bring something dangerous; 'biting one's own tongue' means someone is abusing him; 'breaking a mirror, spilling salt, or walking beneath ladder' are seriously ominous etc.

Some examples of commonly believed superstitions of good luck are: the belief that if one's palm itches he will obtain money; that if one's sole itches he may travel; that if one's right eyelash throbs he will face happiness, itching the right hands or right eyes also augur well for a person, number 7 is lucky etc. Hiccups indicate that someone is thinking of the person.

These beliefs are focused, mainly, on immortality, hostile forces, everyday activities, rituals, animals, communities, evil eyes etc. In an article²⁸ titled 'A Scale to Measure Superstition', Md. Mahfuzul Huque and Ataharul Huq Chowdhury collected a total of 31 statements or items expressing superstition through reviewing relevant literature, consultation with extension experts, social scientists, progressive farmers and local leaders of Bangladesh with the objective of constructing a scale to measure superstition in a rural setting of Bangladesh. They conducted the survey on four villages of Tilli union under Sauria upazila of Manikgang. Those are the followings along with the intertwined conceived consequences:²⁹

1. Women must wear an ornament at nose and remove it after husband's death.
2. Birth of handicapped children is the consequence of parent's sin.
3. It is a symbol of good luck for the father, if the first issue is a daughter.
4. If anyone praises a healthy and good-looking child, he/she gets sick for having an evil eye.
5. Jaundice patients should avoid taking all kinds of protein including fish.
6. It is an ominous start if any one stumbles at the door or gets head struck with the roof while getting out of the home.
7. It is a sign of bad luck if someone takes food in a broken or fissured plate
8. It is ominous to see an empty pitcher or a black cat on way out of home
9. Devils read out a religious book when it is kept open
10. One should not open the doors at night on hearing a single call from someone outside the home
11. If a dog whines piteously at night, danger is ahead
12. One should not give or take anything from the shop on credit in early morning or at dusk
13. During the last night of the fortnight and full moon, the evil make free movements
14. Having faced sudden obstacle in the pharynx while taking food, it symbolizes that someone is remembering you
15. If a lizard makes ticking sound in the midst of a conversation, it bears truthfulness
16. In an attempt if you fail to kill a snake at daytime, it will come to bite you at night
17. Entrance of butterfly in the room is a good sign
18. Taking good food and having pastime on the first day of a new year (e.g. 1st Baishak of the Bengali Year) will make your days good throughout the year
19. If a baby continuously becomes thinner by being sick, he/she has gone under an evil eye
20. Breaking mirror bears a bad sign
21. If you want to buy lime and turmeric, you should ask for curds and hue, respectively after the dusk
22. It is an auspicious sign to see a pitcher filled with water on way out of home
23. Tamarind trees are the abodes of devils
24. Frisking of left eye is a sign of getting sick soon
25. If a pregnant women cut anything during the lunar eclipse or solar eclipse, she will deliver a deformed child
26. One's death is inevitable if a cow sneezes while he sets out from residence
27. It is ominous to see a broom on way out of home
28. If someone takes eggs on the examination day, he will have a poor performance
29. If a women takes joint banana, she will give birth of twins
30. Presence of infertile women in the wedding ceremony is inauspicious
31. If the fetus moves in mother's womb, it will be a boy, else it will be a girl

Sana³⁰ made a survey on the shrimp farmers in a Southern Bangladesh rural community in order to ascertain superstition's relationship with those shrimp farmers. He selected 60 superstitious statements on a broad national context in consultation with local leaders and extension personnel of the community concerned and highlighted their conceived consequences. An extensive and exhaustive list of superstitions prevailing in Bangladesh has been given in a book titled 'Bangladesh Superstitions and Folklore'³¹ where the superstitions were categorized under two categories i.e., Specific Superstitions and Other Superstitions and their associated beliefs were also discussed. This booklet is actually a short profile of the folklore, legends, proverbs, and superstitions of Bangladesh.

Upon close examination these superstitious beliefs are clearly found to be originated in the Hindu mythology of occult cultures, legends and folklores and then penetrated into the Muslims because of their close proximity and co-existence for hundreds of years. Many of these omens have taken their roots from ancient Hindu Scriptures including Veda. For example, according to Manu Sanghita:

"Neither by explaining omens and prodigies, nor by skill in astrology and palmistry, nor by casuistry and expositions of holy texts let him (a Sanyasi) at any time gain his support."³²

"Together with all his food let him swallow such medicinal substances as resist venom; and let him constantly wear with attention such gems as are known to repel it."³³

Mrs Banu studied the transformation took place within Bengal Islam and concluded that many Hindu customs, rites, ceremonies, festivities, legends, and folklores in different forms developed in the Muslim society due to their long association with them and as many converts from Hinduism carried those with them. She traced the origin of *pir* adherence or their *dargas* association to the Hindu worship of gods and their visit of their temples. These also include, according to Banu, the *Rakhi* system, *Diwali* ceremonies, *Sraddha* (feasts in honor of dead), *Muharram* festivities, and *Taziah* (following Ratha Jatra), Pir-Murid relationship (following Guru-Chela), the wearing of amulets, and many others.³⁴

Besides, many other of these superstitious beliefs found among the Muslims of this Sub-Continent originated in the non-Islamic Judeo-Christian settings and then penetrated into the Muslim societies. Let us look at the following omens:

- **Knock on Wood:** When someone is thankful for something and hopes that his luck will not change he says, "Knock on wood", and looks around for some wood to knock on. The origin of this belief goes back to the time when people in Europe thought that gods lived inside trees. To ask the tree-god a favor they would touch the tree. If the wish were granted they would touch the tree again to thank the god.³⁵
- **Spilling Salt:** If salt is spilled; many believe that misfortune will shortly follow, so the spilled salt is thrown over the left shoulder to counteract it. The origin of this omen lies in the ability of salt to keep things fresh. This was believed by the ancients to be due to its magical powers. Thus, spilling salt became a warning of evil. Since evil spirits were thought to live on one's left side, throwing the spilled salt over the left shoulder was supposed to satisfy the evil spirits.³⁶
- **Breaking a Mirror:** Many people believe that breaking a mirror accidentally is a sign of seven years of bad luck. Ancient people thought that their reflections in water were their souls. So if their reflections were shattered (e.g. if someone threw a pebble in the water), then their souls were also shattered. When mirrors were made this belief was transferred to them also.³⁷
- **Black cats:** The crossing of a black cat in front of one's path signals the coming of bad luck to many. This belief originated in the Middle Ages when people believed that black cats were witches pets. Witches were supposed to make magic brews by mixing the brains of black cats with parts of toads, snakes and insects. If a witch's black cat lived for seven years, without ending up in a brew, the cat was supposed to change into a witch.³⁸
- **Number 13:** In America the no. 13 is considered unlucky and thus, in many of the apartment buildings the 13th floor is called the 14th. Friday the 13th is considered particularly unlucky and many people avoid travel or special engagements on this day. And if anything bad befalls them on that day, they immediately attribute it to the day itself. This phenomena [phenomenon] is not restricted to the common people as some might mistakenly imagine. For example, the flight commander of the Apollo moonshot of 1970, which came near to disaster, explained on his return that he should have known that something was going to happen. When asked why, he replied that the flight took place on Friday the 13th, blast off was at 1300 hours (i.e., one o'clock), and the flight number was Apollo 13. The origin of this belief goes back to the evening of Jesus' last supper as told in the Bible. At the Last Supper, there were

13 people. One of the 13 was Judas, the man who supposedly betrayed Jesus. Friday the 13th is supposed to be particularly unlucky for at least two reasons. First, Friday is the day Jesus was supposed to have been crucified. And, according to medieval belief, Friday is the day when witches held their meetings.³⁹ Besides this, it is claimed that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden on a Friday, Noah's flood started on a Friday and Christ was crucified on a Friday so it is likely these days and numbers combined were given the signal of bad luck.⁴⁰

- **Walking Under a Ladder:** It is believed that walking beneath an open ladder is detrimental in the sense that 'If you walk under a ladder you supposedly break a spiritual triangle (the holy trinity) that will leave you vulnerable to the devil'. In the days before the gallows, criminals were hung from the top rung of a ladder and their spirits were believed to linger underneath. Thus, to walk beneath an open ladder, was to pass through the triangle of evil ghosts and spirits.⁴¹
- **Step on a Crack:** There is a proverb in English: "*Step on a Crack; Break your Mother's Back*". Thus stepping over a crack is taken to be cursed. Cracks and fear of stepping on them, comes from an ancient fear of letting the soul out of the square. The four corners are symbolic of balance and perfection.⁴²

06. Impacts of Omens in Bangladesh and their Management from Islamic Perspective: A Policy Prescription

In the following analysis, we will see the extent of the impacts of omens on the people of Bangladesh, especially the Muslims, and how to manage and remedy those from an Islamic Management perspective.

A. Impacts of Omens on the people of Bangladesh:

Omens have multifarious impacts in the society which cause the people of Bangladesh, Muslims and non-Muslims to suffer from many physical, psychological, social, economic, and religious problems.

As superstition is a cultural phenomenon, it must work its way into our assumptions in order to integrate into mental maps and shape our values. It creates some fictitious religious beliefs and values among the local Muslims thus corrupting their religious minds; for the following reasons:

1. For Muslims, it corrodes the foundation of *Tawhīd* (Oneness of Allah), especially that of *Tawhīd al-Ibādah* (Oneness of Allah's worship) and *Tawhīd al-Asmā wa As-Sifāt* (Oneness of Allah's Names & Attributes). Thus (i) it directs the trust to someone/something other than Allah, and (ii) it attributes to man the power to predict the coming of good or evil, and the ability to avoid Allah's destiny.
- (a) In fact, superstitions, and especially, omens are purely based on the hidden claim and assumption that future may be predicted and the Unseen may be intruded, and any impending future dangers can be averted through some prescriptions and practices. It became clear in all the above-mentioned definitions of omen where the knowledge of future has been invariably associated with it. This is why the Prophet (saas) mentioned omens along with astrology and prescribed the same penalty for both.⁴³
- (b) A fundamental requirement of *tawhīd* is that one should put his unwavering trust in Allah. Believing in omens is totally contradictory to this unblemished trust. This is why the Prophet (saas) prohibited *tiyarah* in a *Hadīth* reported by his grandson, al-Husain:

"Whoever does *tiyarah* for himself has his future prophesied or has someone bewitched, is not one of us."⁴⁴

Hāfiz Ibn al-Qayyim said:⁴⁵

Tatayyur refers to superstitions about something that is seen or heard; if a person follows it and he changes his mind about traveling or refuses to do something he had previously decided to do, then this is *shirk* and is contrary to putting one's trust in Allah. He opens the door to fear and attachment to something other than Allah. Superstition based on something seen or heard takes one away from the status expressed in the verses "*You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help*" (1:5), "*So worship Him and put your trust in Him*" (11:123) and "*in Him I trust and unto Him I repent*" (11:88). Thus his heart and faith will be corrupt, and he will be continually disturbed by these

superstitious notions and the shaytān will lead him to things that will damage his religious and worldly interests.

2. Belief in omens is a form of *Shirk*. The ruling is substantiated by the following *Hadīths*:

Reported on the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd (r) that the Prophet (saas) said: "*At-tiyarah* is *Shirk*, *at-tiyrah* is *Shirk*, *at-tiyrah* is *Shirk*." According to another report he said: *at-tiyrah* is *Shirk*. And there is none among us who is not afflicted by it, but Allah, by true dependence on Him, removes it from the heart."⁴⁶ Abdullah Ibn 'Amr bin al-'Ās narrated that the Prophet (saas) said: 'Whoever is prevented from doing something by *Tiyarah*, has committed *Shirk*.'⁴⁷

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim says: 'Whoever is prevented by *Tiyarah* from what he decided firmly to do, he eventually knocked at the door of *Shirk*, nay, he associated himself with it, desisted from putting trust in Allah, and opened for his own a door of fear and relationship with something other than Allah.'⁴⁸ Al-Manāwī says: 'The Arabs believed in the impacts of omens, and would seek to dispel their pre-destined destinies, and thus would refuge in things other than Allah for preventing them. Such was also the belief of the jāhiliyyah.'⁴⁹

3. It is considered to be a branch of prohibited category of magic. Qubaysa Ibn al-Mukhāriq (r) narrated that the Prophet (saas) said:

'*Iyāfah*, *Tiyarah*, and *Tarq* are forms of magic.'⁵⁰

Iyāfah refers to driving birds of omens away auguring prognosticating by their flights. *Tiyarah* is to take sign of bad or good omens from the names of birds, and their screeching, colors, and directions in the time of flight when driven away. And *Tarq* is to strike with pebbles and drawing in the sand.⁵¹

This is why the Prophet (saas) said, "Seventy thousand people of my Ummah will enter *Jannah* without any accountability.' They said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Who are they?' He said, 'those who do not steal, do not believe in *tiyarah* (omen), do not punish/kill someone/something with fire, and upon their Lord they rely.'⁵²

Study in journal Science⁵³ found that superstitious feelings adversely affected the investment decisions of volunteers. US researchers say mind naturally creates illusions and superstitions in the times of stress. Researchers found that volunteers whose feelings of control had been undermined formed illusory correlations and made their investment decisions on the back of it. A.N. Das and C.P. Mitchell⁵⁴ showed in their study on 13 villages as how superstitions and taboos can affect bamboo planting in Nepal. According to them, the most common superstitions and taboos are women should not plant bamboo as they will be infertile; young and unmarried male adults must not plant bamboos; planting should be carried out only by the oldest household male members of the household; the bamboos shadow is bad and inauspicious so they should not be planted in front of the home; if bamboo's shadow falls on the planter then he will die. Lauren Block & Thomas Kramer⁵⁵ studied in their paper the negative effects of superstitious beliefs on product performance expectations. It affects the socio-economic development of Bangladesh in many aspects. Due to superstitions, women are not properly educated and hence they could not contribute to the socio-economic development whereas they comprise roughly half of total population. Mrs Banu gives a sociological analysis of Islamic religious beliefs and practices in contemporary Bangladesh, and more importantly, she studies the impact of the Islamic religious beliefs on the socio-economic development and political culture in present day Bangladesh.⁵⁶ Sana, in his survey on the shrimp farmers in a Southern Bangladesh rural community, showed that how these farmers are affected by certain superstitions which cause sometimes substantial loss to their production.⁵⁷

On the societal level, superstitious beliefs work deep down within our core assumptions and can be defined as social heuristics, thus intertwined without our knowledge structure, and therefore become a factor in the assessments, judgments and decisions we make⁵⁸. They are part of the decision process. On the negative side, heuristics can become cognitive biases. Cognitive biases are errors of judgment based on misconceptions of the facts, memory errors, probability errors, motivational factors, and/or social influences. These are the basis of irrational reasoning which can lead to all sorts of mistakes in judgment⁵⁹.

Superstitious beliefs are sometimes stumbling blocks to proper health treatment. In a study comparing African Americans, Latinos and Pacific Islanders with White Americans on causal attributions of illness, the ethnic

minority groups rated supernatural beliefs as significantly more important than White Americans⁶⁰. It causes health hazards for the people of Bangladesh, especially the uneducated ones. According to UNICEF (UNICEF 1999) as many as 27 different types of superstitions have been identified in Bangladesh, which is harmful in achieving healthy and safe motherhood. These practices mostly involve restriction of mobility, consumption of adequate food and growth of the fetus. There are many more social practices, which take place during the actual time of child delivery. Some of these delivery-period practices are potentially harmful and are likely to contribute to post partum morbidity.⁶¹ In most developing countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, people lose their lives because of fake treatments offered by practitioners who have no knowledge of their field and treat patients based on their superstitions.

Some omens are psychologically more damaging than others. According to the Karl Peltzer⁶² of University of North in Sovenga, superstitious beliefs can be a cause of high incidence of fatal road accidents in South Africa. South African drivers share deep-rooted beliefs in the supernatural, thinking accidents result from witchcraft, for instance, or that medicines can prevent them, says Karl Peltzer. Jenni Wallis studied the disturbing psychological impact of superstitions on children⁶³. Both in Hindu and Muslim community in Bangladesh, some folk-beliefs are relating to widowed or childless women. These women are considered inauspicious; are forbidden to attend a wedding or touch a newborn; and their presence is believed to bring bad luck for the newlywed couple as one of them might die soon or might cause them to be fruitless (Childless). *Tabeej* (or voodoo dolls), it is believed in Bangladesh, can be used to spark fear in others and to incite hate, and these have been known to leave deep emotional and psychological scars on those who are targeted in this manner⁶⁴.

B. Islamic Management of Omens: A Policy Prescription

Yoshifumi Harada and Murray Hunter, in their paper titled 'Walking under a ladder: Superstition and ritual as a cognitive bias in management decision making'⁶⁵, pointed to the understudied role of superstition in management. According to them,

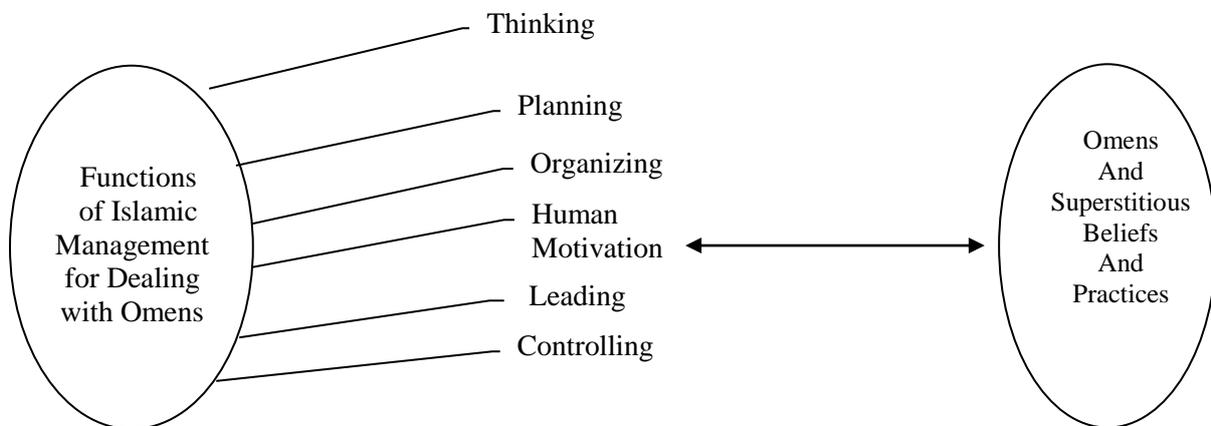
From the decision making aspect, superstition skews thinking into archetypal patterning that is reinforced by a generally accepted cultural beliefs. This is manifested by myths, stories, taboos, ceremonies, and rituals such as wearing "something oil, something borrowed, and something blue" at a wedding ceremony, or 'touching wood' in the hope of a particular outcome. With society following these rituals and other practices, fallacy is embedded into our cognitive processes, influencing our daily and strategic decision making.

Superstition is affecting the management universally around the world. It is evident through a sampling of examples below;⁶⁶

- In Japan and some parts of China the word "four" is pronounced "shi" the same as the word for death. Consequently just like number "13" in the west, the "4th", "14th", and "24th" floor, etc., are skipped in some buildings. Gifts consisting of "four" pieces are avoided probably with the fear that this could be an unlucky omen. The number "8" is considered lucky because its pronunciation is similar to the word prosperity, therefore car number plates with "8" and multiples of "8" are highly desired for good luck. Consequently, many consumers are willing to buy products at a premium because of lucky colors and 8 rather than 10 units in the packet because of superstition.
- In India and across Asia it is unlucky to get a haircut on Tuesdays. There are numerous taboos about what activities, such as moving into new premises can be done on what days.
- Throughout the Asian region fortune tellers and astrologers are commonly sort out for advice before making big decisions.
- "Fengshui", a Chinese system of heavenly geometry is commonly used in deciding building aspects and layouts where practitioners play the role of a legitimizer and comforter in strategic decision making.
- Iranian politics appears to be influenced by "divine supernatural experiences" which lead to the belief that policies and actions are "divinely sanctioned".

- It was reported that Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari has been slaughtering a black goat every-day since becoming president in an attempt to ward off "the evil eye".
- People don’t make decisions based upon their true experience. Many stock and mutual traders believe that particular superstitions have some influence on their trading. A special algorithmic trading system based on superstitions has been launched in the United States.
- Many Thai people believe they are protected by an amulet imprinted from a selected temple, including prime ministers, in a similar way some Christians may wear a Saint Christopher’s medal for a sense of protection from injury.

As in the past, the present Islamic scholarship should decidedly come forward with firm resolution to salvage the Muslims of Bangladesh in particular and the greater populace at large from this devastating omens and superstitious beliefs. As, unlike traditional management, Islamic Management aims at the total transformation of a given society towards propriety, positivity, practicality, prosperity, and divine pleasure on the basis of *maqāsid al-Sharīah*⁶⁷, the people working for the islamization of the society should formulate an Islamic-Management-structured policy to deal with omens and superstitions. This should be based on managerial functions proposed by Shaya'a Othman, Mohiuddin⁶⁸, and experts on Islamic Management i.e., Thinking, Planning, Organizing, Human Motivation, Leading and Controlling.



The diagram illustrates that there should be an all-out effort initiated by the Islamic scholars for dealing with the issues of omens and superstitions on the basis of action-plan based on this structure of the functions of Islamic Management. The scholars should scientifically and systematically think first of the harmful effects of omens, make a pragmatic comprehensive plan for dealing with superstitious issues, organize the relevant and required human and material resources for effectively dealing with these, motivate the concerned to fight and/or come out of the imaginary works of omens, lead a team dedicated for this task, and control through relentless and regular assessment of the successes of their undertakings against omens and superstitions.

In the light of the foregone, the following specific tasks should be done in this regard.

A. Muslims are to be informed of Islamic Ruling on Omen:

The Muslim scholars and Islamic intellectuals are to undertake an initiative to inform people about the Islamic ruling on Omen. This may be done by the help of electronic and printing media through arranging TV programs (discussion sessions and talk shows) or writing newspaper columns on Islamic perspective of Omens. The Muslims are to be informed about the position of Islam on Omens through, for example, the following points:

1. Not surprisingly, Islam invalidates all traces, practices, and manifestations without any compromising. Besides, it is based on the faulty assumption that the knowledge of the unseen may be accrued by anyone other than Allah. Sometimes, people believe though mistakenly that the Prophet Muhammad (saas) knew unseen and future, whereas Allah mentions in the Qur’an in unambiguous terms and with clear-cut wording

that none knows the unseen save Him. Many verses of the Qur'an (6: 59, 3: 179, 7: 187, 27: 65, 31: 34, and 72: 26-27) are indicative of this fact. The central message of all these verses is that-the keys of the unseen are with Him, he knows everything ranging from the tiniest to the biggest elements on earth, seas, and heavens, no leaf of any tree falls without His knowledge and permission, only He knows the exact date of the Hour, the when, how and where of death, birth and future activities of anyone are only known to Him...etc. His knowledge of unseen He shares with whom He wishes (72: 26-27). Even the Prophets of Allah, including the Prophet Muhammad (saas) could not know the Unseen and the future except the information which has been divulged to him by Allah. Allah recorded the statements of the Prophets in the Qur'an in the following verses:

The Prophet Muhammad declared that he did not possess the knowledge of Unseen.

'Say: "I have no power over any good or harm to myself except as Allah wills. If I had knowledge of the Unseen, I should have multiplied all that is good, and no evil should have touched me: I am but a Warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to those who have faith."' (Al-Qur'an, 7: 188)

The same has been declared by Nūh (a) (Al-Qur'an, 11: 31) and acknowledged by the Jinn (Al-Qur'an, 34: 14).

Besides, had the Prophet (saas) known the future and the Unseen on his own without Allah's permission he could have avoided the catastrophe in the battle of Uhud and Banū Thāqif, the danger and affliction in Makkah, Tāif, and Uhud. But Allah gave him and other prophets a portion of this information and knowledge as aids and authentication to their prophethood. The predictions of the Prophet (saas) about the sings of the Hour, defeat of the Persian eventually at the hands of the Romans, the Muslim victory in the battleground of Badr, the ultimate defeat and subjugation of the Romans, Persians, African and Yemenite at the Muslim hands are a few of such examples. This is further attested and substantiated by the Qur'anic declarations in 72: 26-27 and 3: 179.

2. Allah does not mention superstition in the Qur'an except with regard to the enemies of the Messengers.⁶⁹ The Qur'an recorded the statements and the attitudes of the enemies of the Prophets and Messengers towards them in the following verses:

"For us, we see an evil omen from you; if you cease not, we will surely stone you, and a painful torment will touch you from us.' They (Messengers) said: 'Your evil omens be with you! (Does it seem evil to you) because you are admonished? Nay, but you are a people *Musrifūn* (transgressing all bounds by committing all kinds of great sins and by disobeying Allah)"⁷⁰

The Qur'an, then, specifically, offers the case study of people of Mūsa (a) and Allah Sālih to whom bad omens were ascribed by their enemies from among their communities. See the Qur'anic narrations in 7: 131 and 27: 47.

3. The fallacy and falsehood of omens become crystal-clear when we cast a glance at the following few facts: Hazrat 'Āishah (R) narrated that: 'The Prophet (saas) married me in Shawwāl and consummated the marriage with me in Shawwāl. And who among you was more beloved to him than me?' The reporter of the Hadīth added that 'Āishah would arrange consummation of her women in Shawwāl.⁷¹ Ziyād Ibn Abī Maryam narrates: Sa'd Ibn Abī Waqqās was on a journey when some gazelles suddenly came near to him and went away. A man remarked out, 'O leader! Go back.' Sa'd said, 'tell me of which (part) of the gazelles you augured ill, for their horns when those approached or from their tails when those retreated?' Sa'd then said, 'Surely *tiyarah* is a branch of *Shirk*.'⁷² Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam narrates from Muzāhim: 'Once 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz set out from Madīnah when the moon was in Hyades [a group of stars in Taurus]. I observed that but did not tell him. I just said, "Look, how beautiful the moon looks tonight." 'Umar looked and saw that the moon was in Hyades, and said, "It is as if you wanted to tell me that the moon was in Hyades. O Muzāhim, we do not go out by the help of the sun or the moon; we go out by the help of Allah, al-Wāhid, al-Qahhār."⁷³

The Prophet (saas) himself negated the effects of *tiyarah* in a *Hadīth* reported by Mu'āwiyah ibn al-Hakam who asked the Prophet (saas),

"There are some among us who follow bird omens." The Prophet (saas) replied,
"It is only something you made up by yourselves, so do not let it stop you."⁷⁴

That is, do not let it stop you from doing what you want to do, since such omens are all fictitious concoctions of man's imagination which have no reality. Thus, the Prophet (saas) explained clearly that the direction in which birds fly is not a sign of anything, nor success or calamity which occurs is caused by their motion of flight or may be foretold by it, even if some events happen to coincide with pre-Islamic concepts about their motion.⁷⁵

The Companions of the Prophet (saas) also rejected all manifestations of belief in bird omens as soon as they experienced those. 'Ikrimah said, "Once we were sitting with Ibn 'Abbās and a bird flew over us screeching, a man amidst the group exclaimed, "Good! Good!" Ibn 'Abbās reprimanded him saying, "There is neither good nor evil in it."⁷⁶ Similarly, the Successors of the Prophet's Companions (Tābi'ūn) also rejected all forms of belief in omens expressed by anyone in their front. Once a crow screeched while Tāwūs was on a journey with one of his friends and his companion said, "Good!" Tāwūs replied, "What is the good in that? Do not accompany me any further."⁷⁷

Besides, none can cause any good or harm and nothing does happen without Allah's leave. The Prophet (saas) instructed his cousin, 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbās, saying:⁷⁸ "And bear in mind that if the whole of mankind gathered together in order to do something to help you, they would only be able to do something for you which Allah had already written for you. Likewise if the whole of mankind gathered together to harm you, they would only be able to do something to harm you which Allah had already written to happen to you."

B. The Imāms of the Masjids should play role:

Bangladesh is host to hundreds of thousands of masjids scattered throughout the country. Masjids are there within shouting distances. Sometimes each small locality does have more than one masjid. According to Mosque Census of 1986 conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the total number of mosque in Bangladesh is 131,641. The number will now well-exceed three hundred thousand. Most of these masjids do have regular and paid Khatīb, Imām, and Muazzins. As 89.58% of the total population⁷⁹ is Muslims and most of them attend the mosques at least for performing Friday (Jum'ah) prayer, the Khatībs and Imāms can play a significant role in generating awareness about the harmful impacts of Omens on Īmān and 'Amal and saving the general public from committing *Shirk*. It is so because the mass people commit this unknowingly.

C. Books, booklets, leaflets, and other written materials are to be circulated:

The publishers, social and philanthropist organizations, religious movements, and reformists should come forward to finance the publication and free-distribution of some books, booklets, leaflets, banners, festoons, and posters highlighting the anti-Islamic sides of these superstitions. This is widely practiced by the religious groups and organizations in the developed world where the related information is disseminated and general awareness is created easily in this way.

D. A strong social movement is to be launched:

A strong well-designed social reformist movement should be launched in this regard. Such a movement was initiated in the nineteenth century by a few outstanding reformists in the Indian Sub-Continent like Hajji Shariat Ullah, Shahid Titu Mir, and Syed Ahmad Shaheed, but that movement can not be said to have reached desired goal. Faraidi Movement was the first movement developed in Bangladesh in response to the increasing Hindu influence on Bengal Islam. Being Initiated by Haji Shariatullah and then succeeded by his son Mohammad Mohsin, more commonly known as Dudu Miyan, the movement was aimed at urging the Muslims to practice "self-correction", and to forsake forever the innovations and accretions that had trickled into Bengal Islam. The Faraidis, through many ways, denounced these superstitions, informed the Muslims of their disastrous effects, and insisted that Muslims practicing these polytheist and sinful accretions must express *tawbah* (penance) and make a fresh vow to lead a perfect Muslim life. Many other reform movements which were launched with this objective in mind were studied by Banu in details along with her analytical conclusions.⁸⁰

A new reform movement should, thus, analyze the ins and outs of the previous movement and craft its action plan as such. It may incorporate curricula in the educational institutions where the students will be taught different issues related to Omens.

E. Some misconceptions are to be clarified:

A few misconceptions concerning Omens have been generated in the society. These are sometimes based on the wrong understanding of some Hadīths or wrong interpretation of a few Islamic terminologies. An attempt has been made in the following to clear a few such misconceptions and misunderstanding.

Clarification of a few Hadīths:

There are at least two categories of Hadīths which seem apparently contradictory and hence need clarification. The following one is representative of the **first category** where the Prophet (saas) is reported to have listed women, horses (i.e., riding animals) and houses to be of objects of bad omens.⁸¹ Abdullah Ibn 'Umar (R) says that the Prophet (saas) said, 'Bad omens are in three things: women, houses, and riding animals.' According to another narration, the Prophet (saas) specifically mentioned horses in place of general riding animals. He said, 'Bad omen is in houses, women, and horses.'⁸²

This apparent contradiction may be reconciled in the following ways:

Firstly: 'Āishah (R) rejected this narration saying, "By the One who revealed the Furqān (Qur'an) to Abul Qāsim (Pet name of the Prophet), whoever relates it has lied. Allah's Messenger said that the people of ignorance used to say, 'Surely there are *tiyarah* in women, houses, and beasts of burden.' Then she recited the following verse:

'No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourselves but is inscribed in the Book of Decrees, before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allah.' (Al-Quran, 57: 22)

This is supported by what al-Tayālīsī narrated in his 'Musnad' [1537] from Muhammad Ibn Rāshid on the authority of Makhōl that 'Āishah (R) was asked: Abū Hurayrah says that the Prophet (saas) said: "Pessimism is found in three things: in a house, a woman and a horse." 'Āishah (R) said: "Abū Hurayrah did not memorize this, because when he entered, the Messenger of Allah (saas) was saying: May Allah curses the Jews; they say: 'Without doubt pessimism is in a house, a woman and a horse.' So he heard the end of the hadeeth, and he never heard the beginning of it."⁸³

Besides, Ibn Abd al-Barr narrated from some scholars that the Hadīth of this chapter was in the initial period and it was then abrogated by the 22nd verse of Sūra al-Hadīd.^{84 85}

Secondly: The Hadīth should be interpreted according to other narrations related to this chapter which are of more specific imports. This is substantiated by the reports of Muhammad Ibn Zaid and Hamzah Ibn 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar from the same reporter Abdullah Ibn 'Umar:

'If there are to be anything true out of bad omens, it would have been in horses, women, and homes.'⁸⁶ And: 'If there were to be bad omens, they would have been in horses, women and places of residence.'⁸⁷

This is further vindicated by another Hadīth where the Prophet (saas) has reportedly listed land, servant and horse to be, if they were to be, among the objects of bad omens. This time the Hadīth is narrated by Jābir (R).⁸⁸

Thus, the Prophet (saas) did not confirm the existence of bad omens. He only pointed out the areas in which it was most likely to occur, if it were to be real. These three were specified for the frequency of occurrence of misfortune associated with them. Again those were and still are the three most important things in a man's life. Consequently the Prophet (saas) prescribed certain prayers of refuge to be said when owning or entering them.⁸⁹

Thirdly: Taqī Uthmānī says, "To me the preferred interpretation of this Hadīth is: the omen confirmed in this Hadīth for the three things is not real, but figuratively implies that whenever these things do not conform to the natural disposition, they cause different dangers and constant sufferings, as the perceived omens cause sufferings for the believers in them. These three things have been specifically mentioned because the sufferings caused by those are greater in quality and quantity. For each of these things accompanied for long and people need those repeatedly every day. So if those are opposed to the natural disposition, those cause continuous hurt and linger one's sufferings until those are parted with and substituted by something better. It is supported by what has been reported by Sa'd Ibn Abū Waqqās (R) from the Prophet (saas), 'Three things are of good fortune: righteous wife, spacious place of residence, and comfortable transport.'⁹⁰ Though the chain of this report is not

strong, there is another report in Musnad Ahmad through narrators on the conditions of *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* with a more complete preceding whose wording is: 'There are three things that cause happiness and three things that create misery for the human being. A good wife, a good house, and good transport cause happiness. A bad wife, a bad house and bad transport cause his misery'.⁹¹

The following Hadīth is representative of the **second category** of Hadiths:

Anas Ibn Mālik (r) narrated that a woman came to the Prophet and said: 'Oh Messenger of Allah! We were in a house where we were many and our wealth was abundant. Then we shifted to another house where our numbers dwindled and the wealth decreased. Then the Prophet (saas) said, 'Leave it for it is reprehensible/it is cursed by Allah'.⁹²

Firstly: The command of the Prophet for the family to leave the place is not any confirmation of bad omens; it is merely releasing them of their psychological burden due to the misfortune and loneliness they suffered there earlier. There is a natural inclination in every human psyche to abandon or avoid a place where he/she experienced any misfortune, though he/she knows that the thing did not cause actually the misfortune. This is vindicated by the fact that the family expressed their desire to the prophet (saas) for leaving the place.

Secondly: Besides, the request and the subsequent permission came after the affliction of sufferings upon the family, not before which is just opposite to the phenomena of bad omens. The transition takes place when an individual tries to avoid places and things in which others had misfortune or when he tries to seek out those in others had good fortune. He begins to attribute the good and the bad fortune to the places and things themselves and in time he may even perform certain acts of worship there.⁹³

Thirdly: The Prophet (saas) ordered the family to leave the place because he understood that they had already developed an impression that the misfortune was due to the inauspiciousness of the place, and if they were to remain there any longer and any calamity befalls them then their belief would become firm and confirmed about bad omens.⁹⁴

True Meaning of Fa'l:

An exception to this general policy/stance of Islam on Omens is *Fa'l*. Literally *Fa'l* means: good omen, favorable auspice, optimistic outlook, hope, omen, auspice, sign etc.⁹⁵ Imām Qurtubī says: 'It refers to a statement heard or a thing felt whose implication is in the mind and then one perceives out of that implication the acquisition/realization of the intended meaning'.⁹⁶ Put simply, it is making any optimistic remark or having any positive feeling out of something seen, heard, felt or perceived. Let us consider the following Hadīths:

Anas reported from the Prophet (saas): "There is no contagion⁹⁷, nor *tiyarah*, but I like *fa'l*. The Companions then asked, "What then is *fa'l*?" He replied, "A good word."⁹⁸ The Prophet (saas) also said: 'There is no contagion, no omen, but I like optimism. It is good word, nice word.'⁹⁹ Abū Hurayra reported: I heard Allah's Messenger (saas) as saying: "There is no divination but the best type is the good omen. It was said to Allah's Messenger (saas): What is good omen? Thereupon he said: A good word which one of you hears."¹⁰⁰

The recognition of bad omens in things indicates bad thoughts about Allah and contains Shirk. Although the belief in good omens tends to be more positive in its approach to Allah, it still involves the *Shirk* of assigning divine powers to created things. This is why the *Sahaabah* were very surprised when the Prophet (saas) expressed a liking for *fa'l*, a good omen. The Prophet (saas), however, defined for them the limited aspect of *fa'l* which is Islamically acceptable. It is the use of optimistic terms. For example: nicknaming a sick person "*Saalim*" (well) or one who has lost something "*Waajid*" (finder). The use of these and similar terms revive hope and optimism in the unfortunate and produce feelings of well being. Believers are required to maintain optimism about Allah at all times.¹⁰¹

This was also the holy custom of the Prophet (saas). Buraydah Ibn al-Hāsib narrates: 'The Prophet (saas) did not take omens from anything, but when he sent out an agent he asked about his name. If it pleased him, he was glad about it, and his cheerfulness on that account was visible in his face. If he disliked his name, his displeasure on that account was visible in his face. When he entered a village, he asked about its name, and if it pleased him, he was glad about it, and his cheerfulness on that account was visible in his face. But if he disliked its name, his displeasure on that account was visible in his face.'¹⁰² On another occasion, hearing a word which

the Prophet (saas) liked, he said: 'We took your omen from your mouth'.¹⁰³ Imam Tirmidhī narrates from Anas (r): whenever the Prophet (saas) would go out for any necessity he would feel pleased to hear: O successful! O rightly-guided!¹⁰⁴ Qāsim Ibn Asbagh mentions: when Buraidah al-Aslāmī from Banī Sahn came with seventy riders of his family to meet the Prophet (saas) in the night, the Prophet (saas) asked him about his identity. He replied, 'Buraidah'. The Prophet (saas) then looked at Abū Bakr and said, 'Our issue became cool and right' [*barida amruna wa saluha*. It is because the word Buraidah came from *bard* which means: to become calm and cool]. Then he asked him, 'From which tribe?' He replied, 'From Aslam'. So the Prophet said to Abū Bakr, 'We became secured'. He asked him again, 'Then of which?' He replied, 'Of Banū Sahn'. The Prophet (saas) now remarked, 'Our arrow went out'.¹⁰⁵ The Prophet (saas) also made similar optimistic note on the arrival of Suhayl Ibn 'Amr for negotiation during the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. Upon Suhayl's arrival, the Prophet (saas) optimistically said, "Your circumstances have become easy for you."¹⁰⁶ There is a play on the words in Arabic: *sahala*, meaning "to become easy," is derived from the same root as the name of Suhayl.¹⁰⁷

Imām al-Khattābī says: 'The difference between *tiyarah* and *fa'l* is that *fa'l* is through a good surmise about Allah, whereas *tiyarah* is through a bad conjecture about Him. This is why it is disliked.'¹⁰⁸ Hāfiz al-Hakamī said:¹⁰⁹ "One of the conditions of *fa'l* is that it is not something that a person relies on or tries to figure out; it is just a coincidence that happens to a person without his thinking about it. It is a particularly loathsome form of *bid'ah* to try to find *fa'l* in the Qur'an [by opening it at random]. The one who takes the Verses of Allah as a joke or idle entertainment is surely doing wrong. If a person tries to figure out *fa'l* and use it to get "good luck", this is *tiyarah*, like using arrows to seek luck or a decision.

Remedy for Omen and its Expiation:

Tiyarah or *tatayyr* are devilish whispers which are instilled and made attractive in human minds. A few remedies and atonements for these pessimistic phenomena have been suggested in the Hadīth literature. The following are a few of those prescriptions:

- **Firstly: Putting one's trust in Allah:** The first and the foremost remedy and riddance of omens that when one encounters anything reprehensible or terrible one should put his *tawakkul*/trust in Allah delegating all affairs to Him and take all necessary cautions and precautions. This is supported by the Hadīth narrated by Abdullah Ibn Mas'ūd (R) that the Prophet (saas) said: "*Tiyarah* is shirk, and any one of us may think he sees an evil omen but Allah will dispel it by means of trust in Him (*tawakkul*)."¹¹⁰ It will work only when one believes that nothing, calamitous or felicitous, happens in this universe without Allah's knowledge and permission and it will eventually strengthen his status of faith. Allah declared: "No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourselves but is inscribed in the Book of Decrees (al-lawh al-mahfōz), before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allah." [Al-Qur'an, 57:22].
- **Secondly: Persistence in making prayer to Allah:** One should persist in making prayer and supplication to Allah for getting rid of the evils and imbroglions of bad omens. If and when one falls in any such situation and he is influenced by his/her belief in this superstitious scenario, he should immediately remember Allah and make unto Him the following prayer reported in the Hadīth of 'Abdullah Ibn 'Amr as an atonement for the sins of indulgence:

'Whoever lets *tiyarah* stop him from doing something is guilty of shirk.' They said, "What is the *kafārah* (expiation) for that?" He said, "to say: *Allāhumma lā khayra illā khayruka wa lā tayra illā tayruka wa lā ilāha ghayruka* (O Allah, there is no good except Your good, no birds except Yours, and there is no god beside You)."¹¹¹

Shaykh Al-'Uthaymīn said:¹¹² 'the statement "There is no good except Your good" is true, for all good comes from Allah, whether it is due to a known reason or otherwise, and the phrase "no birds except Yours" means: all birds belong to Allah, so they do not cause anything, rather they are subjugated to Allah's will. Allah says in the Qur'an:

'Do they not see the birds held (flying) in the midst of the sky? None holds them but Allah (none gave them the ability to fly but Allah). Verily, in this are clear *ayāt* for people who believe.' (Al-Qur'an, 16: 69)

The same is echoed in 67: 19 of the Qur'an.

- **Thirdly: Going ahead with one's plans without delay or change of mind:** One should go ahead with one's plan making no delay or change of mind and not being influenced or affected by it in his behavior and attitude. This is substantiated by the following report of 'Urwah Ibn 'Āmr:

'When omens were mentioned to the Prophet (saas), he said: The best type is the pessimistic remark (*Fa'l*), and it does not turn back a Muslim. If one of you sees anything he dislikes, he should say: "O Allah, no one brings good things except Thee, and no one averts evil things except Thee and there is no might and power but in Allah".'¹¹³

- **Fourthly: Not emulating the omens-believers in belief and practice:** One of the imperatives upon the non-believers in omens is not to emulate the omens-believers and to behave differently. An example of this is given by the Prophet (saas) in the Hadīth narrated by Umm Kurz (R): 'I heard the Prophet (saas) say: Let the birds stay in their roosts.'

Ibn Hibbān says that the 'commandment' in the Hadīth is for opposite implication: 'drive not the birds away from their places'. The purpose is to warn of a third thing which is the practice of the pre-Islamic Arabs of approaching a nest of birds and driving them away to know whether it is auspicious or inauspicious to continue the task they decided.¹¹⁴

07. Conclusion

Whoever is concerned with *tiyarah* it will come to him at a speed faster than the flood towards the fall. The doors of satanic insinuations will open for him in whatever he sees or hears. The Satan will unfurl for him all close and distant occasions as omens which will destroy his religiosity and make his life hard.¹¹⁵ A believer in omen is trouble-minded, hard-hearted, gloomy, ill-behaved, hallucinating in everything he sees or hears, the most fearful of men, worst of them in lifestyle, the narrowest in heart, the most sorrow-minded, excessively reserve with everything harmful or useful. How many times he deprived himself of his share, divested him from provision, and cut him off benefit.¹¹⁶

Therefore, Muslims are obliged to carefully avoid all feelings which stem from these beliefs. If they find themselves unconsciously acting on the basis of these beliefs, they should seek refuge in Allah and say the previously mentioned *Du'ā* (prayer). This area may seem quite insignificant for so much fuss to be made about it. Islam, however, puts stress on this area because it represents the seed from which Major *Shirk* may grow. The worship of idols, men, stars, etc, did not come about at one instant in time. Such practices of idolatry developed over long periods of time. Man's belief in Allah's unity was gradually eroded as the seed of Major *Shirk* took root and grew. Thus, Islam, by providing guidance in all aspects of human life, tries to root out the evil seeds before they can take root and destroy the very foundation of a Muslim's belief.¹¹⁷

References :

- ¹ It means the realizing and maintaining of Allaah's unity in all of man's actions which directly or indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that Allaah is One, without partner in His dominion and His actions (*Ruboobeeyah*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes (*Asmaa wa Sifaat*), and One without rival in His divinity and in worship (*Ulooheeyahl `Ebaadah*). These three aspects form the basis for the categories into which the science of Tawheed has been traditionally divided. The three overlap and are inseparable to such a degree that whoever omits any one aspect has failed to complete the requirements of Tawheed. See for details: Bilal Philips, Dr. Abu Ameenah, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed, (Islamic Monotheism)*, Dar-Us-Salam publishers & Distributors, Brooklyn, NY 11217, 1999, p. 1-26
- ² It represents the belief that earthly beings are influenced by heavenly bodies and future events may be forecasted by the observation of the movement of these bodies. See for details: *Tayseer al-Azeez al-Hameed*, p. 441
- ³ *Al-ghayb* (commonly, and erroneously, translated as "the Unseen") is used in the Qur'an to denote all those sectors or phases of reality which lie beyond the range of human perception and cannot, therefore, be proved or disproved by scientific observation or even adequately comprised within the accepted categories of speculative thought: as, for instance, the existence of God and of a definite purpose underlying the universe, life after death, the real nature of time, the existence of spiritual forces and their inter-action, and so forth. Only a person who is convinced that the ultimate reality comprises far more than our observable environment can attain to belief in God and, thus, to a belief

- that life has meaning and purpose. By pointing out that it is "a guidance for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond human perception", the Qur'an says, in effect, that it will - of necessity - remain a closed book to all whose minds cannot accept this fundamental premise. See Asad, Muhammad, *The Message of the Qur'an*,
- 4 Oxford Dictionary defines as "the belief that particular events happen in a way that can not be explained by reason of science, the belief that particular event brings good or bad luck". Bhusan [Bhusan, B., 1989. Dictionary of Sociology (1st Ed.) New Delhi; Anmol Publication] defined superstition as "a belief about natural phenomena that depends upon a magical or occult interpretation of events and that is widely held to be true in spite of objectively demonstrable facts to the contrary".
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- 6 <http://omarkasule-02.tripod.com/id604.html>
- 7 See for details of his life and work: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haji_Shariatullah
- 8 Titu Mir (1782-1831): a peasant leader who resisted the oppression of the local zamindars and European indigo planters on the peasantry with ultimate object of liberating the country from British domination. He was a leader of the *tariqah-i-muhammadiya* in Bengal and his movement initially aimed at socio-religious reforms, elimination of the practice of *shirk* (pantheism) and *bidat* (innovation) in the Muslim society and at inspiring the Muslims to follow Islamic principles in their day to day life. See for details: http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/T_0183.HTM
- 9 See for details of his life and work: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syed_Ahmad_Shaheed
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- 14 Al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar, *Fath-al-Bari*, vol. 10, pp.210-215
- 15 Ibn 'Uthaymīn Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sālih, *Majmō' Fatāwa*, vol. 9, p. 515- 516; *Al-Qawl al-Mufīd Sharh Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, vol. 2, p. 39-41.
- 16 Ibn Abd-Assalām, Al-Izz, *'Aon al-Ma'būd Fī Sharh Abū Dāūd*, vol. 10, p. 406
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