

Bridal Showers, Bachelor Parties, Baby Showers, and Birthdays

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For many of us, who were raised in the East (the Middle East or Subcontinent India), it is taboo to have bridal showers, bachelor parties, and baby showers or celebrate birthdays, but enjoy Mangni, Mayoona, Mehndi, Uptan, Dholki, Mooh Dekhai, Chauthi, and Chathi (will be explained later). I remember a Muslim wedding where a lot of eyebrows were raised when the bride wanted to be led in a procession of girls carrying flowers to the stage, a typical American culture. While most of us do not question the religious validity of cultural practices of our country of origin, we frown upon the cultural practices of the West. We tend to assume that the cultural practices of our country of origin where the majority is Muslim is Islamic, but consider the cultural practices of West completely un-Islamic. Many of us do not celebrate birthdays and want to impose the same on our children. The children growing up in the West feel left out. Can we be only good Muslims when we wear Thaub, Shalwar, Qameez, Kurta, Lungi, and Lahnga and un-Islamic when we wear ties, coats, slacks and skirts? We also seem to have a double standard. While we consider it acceptable for men to wear tie, coat, and slacks, it is considered un-Islamic for women to wear slacks or skirt.

The Holy Quran says:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)

The verse tells us that, though all humans have originated from one pair, they are divided into tribes and nations. Belonging to different tribes and nations gives each group a separate identity and that is how they are distinguished. This identity, however, is not limited to genetics (race, color and physical appearance), it encompasses the whole culture. Each tribe and nation has a distinguishable culture. This culture depends upon their cultural heritage and the geography of the area. The dress of people living in a desert climate will be different from those living in a cold climate, which will be different from those living in a hot and humid region. Whereas white thaub is well suited for desert climates, coat and slacks are well suited for a colder climate. The food consumed in each region will also depend upon what can be grown in that particular climate. Whereas rice is the main staple for people living in the Far East, wheat and other grains are common staples in the Middle East.

The Quranic verse above suggests that the cultural difference defines each tribe and nation. It also implies that the cultural diversity must be respected. It does not expect that everybody will break their fast with dates, a common practice in Arabia. Each culture may find something different to break their fast with. The verse is telling us that Islam neither came to impose the Arab culture on others, nor it had any intention of destroying non-Arab culture. The practice of the Prophet^{SAW} suggests that he only modified or

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eliminated those cultural practices in Arabia which were inconsistent with Islamic values, for example:

Before the advent of Islam, burying the daughters alive was considered normal. It was banned after Islam.¹

During Hajj, the pilgrims used to praise their forefathers. It was changed to praising AllahST. The Quraysh used to stay away from Minah. They were ordered to go to Minah as other pilgrims used to do.²

It was considered normal for the son to marry his mother after the death of his father. It was prohibited.³

On the other hand the Prophet^{SAW} left intact the customs that did not violate the essence of Islam, for example:

He encouraged amusements during marriage because that was the custom of Madinah.⁴

When Makkah was liberated, the Prophet^{SAW} very much wanted to restore the Kabah to its original structure, which was a rectangular base. But considering the sensitivity of the people, he left it as it was.⁵

¹ When the female (infant) Buried alive is questioned. For what crime she was killed; (81:8-9).

² It is no crime in you if ye seek of the bounty of your Lord (during Pilgrimage). Then when ye pour down from (Mount) Arafat celebrate the praises of Allah at the Sacred Monument and celebrate His praises as He has directed you even though before this ye went astray. Then pass on at a quick pace from the place whence it is usual for the multitude so to do and ask for Allah's forgiveness. For Allah is Oft Forgiving Most Merciful. So when ye have accomplished your holy rites celebrate the praises of Allah as ye used to celebrate the praises of your fathers yea with far more heart and soul. (2:198-200)

³ And marry not women whom your fathers married except what is past: it was shameful and odious an abominable custom indeed. (4:22)

⁴ A'isha^{RA} relates that she prepared a lady for a man from the Ansar as his bride and the Prophet said, "O 'Aisha! Haven't you got any amusement (during the marriage ceremony) as the Ansar like amusement?" Bukhari 4822

⁵ 'Abdullah b. Zubair (Allaah be pleased with him) reported on the authority of his mother's sister ('A'isha) saying that Allah's Messenger (sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam) said: 'A'isha, if your people had not been recently polytheists (and new converts to Islam), I would have demolished the Ka'ba, and would have brought it to the level of the ground and would have constructed two doors, one facing the east and the other one to the west, and would have added to it six cubits of area from Hijr, for the Quraish had reduced it when they rebuilt it. (Muslim 3082)

Ibn Zubair said: I heard 'A'isha (Allaah be pleased with her) say that Allah's Prophet (sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam) had observed: If the people had Rot recently (abandoned) unbelief, find I had means enough to reconstruct it, which I had not, I would have definitely encompassed in it five cubits of area from Hijr. And I would also have constructed a door for the people to enter, and a door for their exit. (Muslim 3083)

Hadeeth with similar text are reported in Muslim 3078, 3079, 3080, 3081, 3084, 3085, and 3086.

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Following the practice of the Prophet^{SAW}, when Islam will be adopted by cultures other than Arab, only those practices will be modified or eliminated which are inconsistent with the Islamic principle or the Quranic injunctions.

The Holy Quran has termed the cultural norms as '*ma'roof*' and has recommended practicing the cultural norms (*ma'roof*) in many situations.⁶ For example paying the

⁶ O ye who believe! the law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder; the free for the free the slave for the slave the woman for the woman. But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain then grant any reasonable (*ma'roof*) demand and compensate him with handsome gratitude; this is a concession and a Mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty. (2:178)

It is prescribed when death approaches any of you if he leave any goods that he make a bequest to parents and next of kin according to reasonable (*ma'roof*) usage; this is due from the Allah-fearing. (2:180)

Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah hath created in their wombs if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable (*ma'roof*); but men have a degree (of advantage) over them and Allah is Exalted in Power Wise. (2:228)

A divorce is only permissible twice: after that the parties should either hold together on equitable (*ma'roof*) terms or separate with kindness. It is not lawful for you (men) to take back any of your gifts (from your wives) except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah. If ye (judges) do indeed fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah there is no blame on either of them if she give something for her freedom. These are the limits ordained by Allah; so do not transgress them. If any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah such persons wrong (themselves as well as others). (2:229)

When ye divorce women and they fulfill the term of their (*'Iddat*) either take them back on equitable (*ma'roof*) terms or set them free on equitable (*ma'roof*) terms; but do not take them back to injure them or to take undue advantage; if anyone does that He wrongs his own soul. Do not treat Allah's Signs as a jest but solemnly rehearse Allah's favors on you and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom for your instruction. And fear Allah and know that Allah is well acquainted with all things. (2:231)

When ye divorce women and they fulfill the term of their (*'Iddat*) do not prevent them from marrying their (former) husbands if they mutually agree on equitable (*ma'roof*) terms. This instruction is for all amongst you who believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is (the course making for) most virtue and purity amongst you and Allah knows and ye know not. (2:232)

The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable (*ma'roof*) terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child nor father on account of his child. An heir shall be chargeable in the same way if they both decide on weaning by mutual consent and after due consultation there is no blame on them. If ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring there is no blame on you provided ye pay (the mother) what ye offered on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what ye do. (2:233)

If any of you die and leave widows behind they shall wait concerning themselves four months and ten days: when they have fulfilled their term there is no blame on you if they dispose of themselves in a just and reasonable (*ma'roof*) manner. And Allah is well acquainted with what ye do. (2:234)

There is no blame on you if ye make an offer of betrothal or hold it in your hearts. Allah knows that ye cherish them in your hearts: but do not make a secret contract with them except in terms honorable (*ma'roof*) nor resolve on the tie of marriage till the term prescribed is fulfilled. And know that Allah knows what is in your hearts and take heed of Him; and know that Allah is Oft Forgiving Most Forbearing. (2:235)

There is no blame on you if ye divorce women before consummation or the fixation of their dower; but bestow on them (a suitable gift) the wealthy according to his means and the poor according to his means; a gift of a reasonable (*ma'roof*) amount is due from those who wish to do the right thing. (2:236)

Those of you who die and leave widows should bequeath for their widows a year's maintenance and residence; but if they leave (the residence) there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves provided it is reasonable (*ma'roof*) and Allah is Exalted in Power Wise. (2:240)

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For divorced women maintenance (should be provided) on a reasonable (*ma'roof*) (scale). This is a duty on the righteous. (2:241)

To those weak of understanding make not over your property which Allah hath made a means of support for you but feed and clothe them therewith and speak to them words of kindness and justice (*ma'roof*). (4:5)

Make trial of orphans until they reach the age of marriage; if then ye find sound judgment in them release their property to them; but consume it not wastefully nor in haste against their growing up. If the guardian is well-off let him claim no remuneration but if he is poor let him have for himself what is just and reasonable (*ma'roof*). When ye release their property to them take witnesses in their presence: but all-sufficient is Allah in taking account. (4:6)

But if at the time of division other relatives of orphans or poor are present feed them out of the (property) and speak to them words of kindness and justice (*ma'roof*). (4:8)

O ye who believe! ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity (*ma'roof*). If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good. (4:19)

If any of you have not the means wherewith to wed free believing women they may wed believing girls from among those whom your right hands possess: and Allah hath full knowledge about your faith. Ye are one from another: wed them with the leave of their owners and give them their dowers according to what is reasonable (*ma'roof*): they should be chaste, not lustful, nor taking paramours: when they are taken in wedlock if they fall into shame their punishment is half that for free women. This (permission) is for those among you who fear sin; but it is better for you that ye practice self-restraint: and Allah is Oft-forgiving Most Merciful. (4:25)

In most of their secret talks there is no good: but if one exhorts to a deed of charity or justice (*ma'roof*) or conciliation between men (secrecy is permissible): to him who does this seeking the good pleasure of Allah We shall soon give a reward of the highest (value). (4:114)

Were it to obey and say what is just (*ma'roof*) and when a matter is resolved on it were best for them if they were true to Allah. (47:21)

O Prophet! when believing women come to thee to take the oath of fealty to thee that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatever with Allah that they will not steal that they will not commit adultery (or fornication) that they will not kill their children that they will not utter slander intentionally forging falsehood and that they will not disobey thee in any just matter (*ma'roof*) then do thou receive their fealty and pray to Allah for the forgiveness (of their sins): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful. (60:12)

Thus when they fulfill their term appointed either take them back on equitable terms (*ma'roof*) or part with them on equitable terms; and take for witness two persons from among you endued with justice and establish the evidence (as) before Allah. Such is the admonition given to him who believes in Allah and the Last Day. And for those who fear Allah He (ever) prepares a way out (65:2)

Let the women live (in 'iddah) in the same style as ye live according to your means: annoy them not so as to restrict them. And if they carry (life in their wombs) then spend (your substance) on them until they deliver their burden: and if they suckle your (offspring) give them their recompense: and take mutual counsel together according to what is just and reasonable (*ma'roof*). And if ye find yourselves in difficulties let another woman suckle (the child) on the (father's) behalf. (65:6)

"But if they strive to make the join in worship with Me things of which thou hast no knowledge obey them not; Yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration) (*ma'roof*) and follow the way of those who turn to Me (in love): in the End the return of you all is to Me and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that ye did." (31:15)

The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves and his wives are their mothers. Blood-relations among each other have closer personal ties in the Decree of Allah than (the Brotherhood of) Believers and Muhajirs: nevertheless do ye what is just (*ma'roof*) to your closest friends: such is the writing in the Decree (of Allah). (33:6)

O Consorts of the Prophet! ye are not like any of the (other) women: if ye do fear (Allah) be not too complaisant of speech lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just (*ma'roof*). (33:32)

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compensation for murder, maintenance of children, alimony for divorced women, and etc.

According to dictionary⁷ the term '*Urf*' means custom, usage, practice, convention, tradition, habit, legal practice, and customary law. The term '*Ma'roof*' means known, well known, universally accepted, generally recognized, conventional, that which is good, beneficial, or fitting.⁸

Shah Abdul Hannan⁹ defines *Urf* as "recurring practices which are acceptable to people of sound nature. According to him, since *Urf* and its derivative '*Maruf*' both occur in the Quran, the Shariah has in principle approved custom in determination of rules regarding 'halal' and 'haram'. Fuqaha also adopted *Urf* in the determination of the rules of Shariah. The rules of Fiqh which are based on juristic opinion (*ray*) or Ijtihad have often been formulated in the light of prevailing customs.¹⁰ Since customs can change with time and place, rules based on *Urf* are liable to be changed accordingly.

Although A. Yusuf Ali has translated the term '*ma'roof*' in the cited verses as reasonable, equitable, or just, which depend upon the individual society. In any culture, certain practices are considered reasonable and others unacceptable. Certain practices which are considered acceptable in one culture may not be acceptable in other cultures. While in Indo-Pakistani culture it is unacceptable to call elders by name, it is unacceptable to call an elder in Western culture by uncle or aunt. Even in a society what is reasonable may change with time. There was a time in subcontinent India when children will only appear in front of their parents with caps on. While I was growing up this custom became obsolete. But it was common for us not to stay lying in the presence of our elders. It was unacceptable to smoke in front of elders. If someone was smoking and elders will pop up, the smoker would even put the lighted cigarette in his pocket. While it was acceptable for men to smoke cigarette, it was unacceptable for women to smoke.

When it comes to providing sustenance to wives, things also depends upon the era we live in and the affluence of the society. Some Fiqh books of the past recommend the husband providing the wife a slave. This recommendation may not only be practical in the present era, it may be illegal. In Pakistani culture it is normal for the husband to provide the wife a servant to do the house chores, but is impractical in the Western culture. Lot of the cultural norms depends upon the financial condition and affluence of the society. While it is normal to provide a car, refrigerator, dishwasher, washer and dryer in the Western society, some of these amenities may be out of reach of the husband in the third world. What was luxury in the past has become a necessity now. When I was growing up in Pakistan, automobiles and refrigerator were considered a luxury. They have now become a necessity for middle class. What is luxury now could become a necessity in future. What is necessity now could become a luxury.

⁷ Cowan, J.M. (ed.), "The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic," Spoken Language Services, Inc. 3rd Edition, 1976, p. 606.

⁸ Cowan, J.M. (ed.), "The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic," Spoken Language Services, Inc. 3rd Edition, 1976, p. 607.

⁹ Usul al-Fiqh by Shah Abdul Hannan, :http://witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/SH_Usul/urf_and_istishab.htm

¹⁰ Usul al-Fiqh by Shah Abdul Hannan, :http://witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/SH_Usul/urf_and_istishab.htm

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Criteria for the Acceptance of *Urf*:

The followings are the conditions for the acceptance of *Urf* in Shariah¹¹:

- a. It must be common and recurrent.
- b. *Urf* must be in practice at the time of transaction, i.e., past *Urf* is no basis.
- c. Custom or *Urf* must not violate clear stipulation of the Quran and the Sunnah.
- d. Custom must not contravene the terms of a valid agreement (valid according to Shariah).

Since we are mostly talking about parties and celebrations which will be influenced by the Western culture, the following are some of the constraints that would apply:

It should not be extravagant¹²;

The food, the drinks, the dress, the seating arrangement, music, and other elements of the function must be within the bounds of Islam and Quranic injunctions.

Dr. Jamal Badwai¹³ has divided *Urf* into three types - positive, neutral and negative. An example of *positive Urf* is generosity or hospitality. A *neutral Urf* is preference for particular diet of a particular place. A *negative Urf* is a tradition which goes against Islamic law and teaching. According to him, if a local custom is negative, then it must be rejected. We will use Dr. Badwai's categorization to first evaluate the wedding customs of Muslims in India and Pakistan and then evaluate the topic of our interest.

Indo-Pakistani Celebrations:

As mentioned earlier, there are many Indo-Pakistani celebrations which we of the same origin practice without any reservation. The following is a brief description of those celebrations.

Mangni/Sagai¹⁴:

Mangni is a formal ceremony to mark the engagement of the couple. It is usually a small ceremony that takes place in the presence of a few close members of would-be bride's

¹¹ Usul al-Fiqh by Shah Abdul Hannan, :http://witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/SH_Usul/urf_and_istishab.htm

¹² It is He who produces gardens with trellises and without and dates and tilth with produce of all kinds and olives and pomegranates similar (in kind) and different (in variety): eat of their fruit in their season but render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered. But waste not by excess: for Allah loves not the wasters. (6:141)

O children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: but waste not by excess for Allah loves not the wasters. (7:31)

"Evil indeed is it as an abode and as a place to rest in"; Those who when they spend are not extravagant and not niggardly but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes); (25:66-67)

¹³ Dr. Jamal Badawi, 'Islamic Teaching Course', Lecture No. G-23.

¹⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

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and groom's families. Prayer and blessings for the couple are recited and the wedding date is usually decided. This can be considered to be equivalent of *Khitbah* and could be considered a positive *Urf*.

Mayoon or Mayun¹⁵:

Mayun is a custom of the bride entering into the state of seclusion at her house eight to fifteen days before the wedding. She usually wears a simple yellow Shalwar and Qameez. She is made free of all the chores and errands during this time. Usually the bride's friends and close relatives get together and they dance and sing, often accompanied by drum music. The women put designs in henna on each others' hands. As long as the Shariah rules are not violated, Mayoon can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Mehndi/Rasm-e-Henna¹⁶:

Mehndi or the *Rasm-e-henna* ceremony is mainly of women and typically takes place one or two days prior to the main wedding day. The event is traditionally held separately for the bride and the groom. They apply Mehndi (Henna) to the bride's hands and feet, sing, dance, and bless the bride. Sadka (warding off evil) is performed on the bride i.e. donating money after circling it three times on the bride's head. The bride normally wears a green dress or yellows/oranges for mehndi and uses only light, or no, make up. The groom will typically wear a casual Shalwar and Qameez. The groom's friends and family bring along sweets and henna for the bride, and the bride's family does the same for the groom. As long as the Shariah rules are not violated, Mayoon can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Uptan¹⁷:

Uptan is a paste made from turmeric, sandalwood powder, herbs and aromatic oils, which groom's mother brings for bride. She blesses bride and applies "uptan" to the bride's hands and face. Groom's sister also does the same. "Uptan" is applied to the bride's skin each day leading up to the wedding. Similar ceremony is held for the groom, where bride's mother, sisters, cousins and friends bring "uptan" for groom and rub it on his skin. As long as the Shariah rules are not violated, Mayoon can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Dholki¹⁸:

Dholki is a popular ceremony of singing traditional wedding & popular songs accompanied by two or three percussion instruments Dolki being the main. The girl is officially treated as bride (dulhan). She wears traditional Pakistani yellow outfit. The celebration starts from Mayoon and continues till the wedding. As long as the Shariah rules are not violated, Dholki can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

¹⁵ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

¹⁶ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

¹⁷ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

¹⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

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Ghora Chekai:

During the wedding ceremony, the groom is escorted to the stage where bride's stage. His path is blocked by the brothers and male cousins of the bride and demand for money. The deal is struck after a lot of negotiation. He pays money to get an entry and the brothers and male cousins of the bride divide the money among themselves. As long as the money demanded is not outrageous and Shariah rules are not violated, Ghora Chekai can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Mooch Dikhai/Aarsi Musshaf¹⁹:

Mooch Dikhai is the ceremony of first time "showing of the face" of the bride to the groom during the wedding ceremony.. The couple is made to see each other in the mirror and the bride unveils her face that she keeps hidden till the wedding. The custom of Mooch Dikhai is also called "Aarsi Musshaf." The bride and groom share a piece of sweet fruit, such as a date and family and friends congratulate the couple and offer gifts. As long as the Shariah rules are not violated, Mooch Dikhai/Aarsi Musshaf can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Joota Chora²⁰:

During Moonh Dekhai, the sisters, friends, and female cousins of bride take this opportunity to steal the groom's shoes and demand a sum of money for shoes. He pays money to get back his shoes and girls divide the money among themselves. As long as the money demanded is not outrageous and Shariah rules are not violated, Joota Chora can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Chauthi:

Chauthi is held during the Walima (a sunnah), which is hosted by the groom's family. It is normally held on the fourth day of the wedding. The bride wears a heavily decorated dress with gold jewellery provided by the groom's family. This is also the occasion for the bride to take the first official walk in the groom's house. The grooms relative get to see the bride for the first time and offer gift or money upon seeing her. As long the Shariah rules are not violated, Chauthi can be considered a neutral *Urf*.

Chathi:

Chathi is held a week after child's birth. Relatives and friends bring gifts for the newborn child. By convention, Chathi is intended to help parents get items that they need for their baby, such as baby clothes. It may coincide with *Aqeeqah* in which a goat or two is slaughtered, the head of the baby is shaved, and silver equal to the weight of the hair or its value is distributed in charity.

Western Celebrations:

Having evaluated the kind of '*Urf*' the Indo-Pakistani celebrations we practice, we will now evaluate the Western celebrations and classify the kind of '*Urf*' they belong to.

¹⁹ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

²⁰ Wikipedia contributors, "Pakistani wedding," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pakistani_wedding&oldid=239183121 (accessed October 22, 2008).

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Bridal Shower²¹:

A bridal shower is a gift giving party given for a bride before her wedding. Showers are usually coordinated by the bridesmaids, who invite guests to offer gifts for the home of the bride and groom. The custom of the bridal shower is said to have grown out of earlier dowry practices when a poor woman's family might not have the money to provide a dowry for her. Since the objective of the party is to provide gift for the home of the bride, which is a Sunnah, it can be considered as positive *Urf*.

Bachelor Party²²:

A bachelor party (also known as a stag party or stag night or stag do) is held for a bachelor shortly before he enters marriage, to make the most of his final days of bachelorhood. It probably originated with a bachelor dinner that was traditional in ancient Sparta (5th century BC) where soldiers would toast each other on the eve of a friend's wedding. It may involve drinking alcohol, gambling, going to a strip club, hiring a stripper or escort, and in some cases more hazing-like tests and pranks at the future groom's expense. It thus becomes a rite of passage from bachelorhood to "more responsible" marital life. The party is usually arranged by a male sibling of the bachelor or to the best man. The planned activities of a bachelor party are traditionally kept secret from the groom. As long as the party is limited to the usual party and social gathering and does not involve alcohol, gambling, strippers or hazing, it could be considered a neutral *Urf*, otherwise it will become a negative *Urf*.

Baby Shower²³:

A baby shower is a party in which parents or expectant parents receive gifts for their newborn or expected child. By convention, a baby shower is intended to help parents get items that they need for their baby, such as baby clothes. It is a popular tradition in the United States and in other cultures, often influenced by American culture or media. In some countries this party is not celebrated until the baby is born. Since the objective of the baby shower is to help would be parents with the items they need, it can be considered as positive *Urf*, as long as it does not replace Aqeeqah, a Sunnah.

Birthday Parties²⁴:

A birthday party is a celebration that occurs to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the person honored. Birthday parties for children often feature entertainment, costumes, or themes. It is usually held at home or a public place and consists of a birthday cake, soft drinks, sweet, and savory foods. Adults' birthday parties often take place in bars or nightclubs where a range of alcoholic beverages are consumed. As long as the party is limited to fun and social gathering and does not involve alcohol or night clubs, it could be considered a neutral *Urf*, otherwise it will become a negative *Urf*.

²¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Bridal shower," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bridal_shower&oldid=235498409 (accessed October 24, 2008).

²² Wikipedia contributors, "Bachelor party," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bachelor_party&oldid=247382065 (accessed October 24, 2008).

²³ Wikipedia contributors, "Baby shower," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Baby_shower&oldid=247267348 (accessed October 24, 2008).

²⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Party," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Party&oldid=247096899> (accessed October 24, 2008).

Bridal Shower, Bachelor Party, Baby Shower, and Birthdays

Conclusion:

Just as Indo-Pakistani celebrations are either neutral or positive *Urf* and can turn into a negative *Urf* by incorporating non-Islamic elements, the Western celebrations can be made neutral or positive *Urf* by excluding non-Islamic elements from it. While most of us who were raised in the East enjoy our customs, we should not have any qualms when our children raised in the West adopt its customs as long they are not negative *Urf*. We may not enjoy those customs or feel comfortable about them, but that does not allow us to prohibit or discourage our children from practicing the customs that are positive or neutral *Urf*.

About the Writer:

The writer has authored "Secrets of Angels, Demons, Satan, and Jinns – Decoding their Nature through Quran and Science," and "Atom to Adam – How, When and Where in the Light of Quran, Bible and Science (A Study of Human Origin)," both published by InstantPublishers.com (<http://instantpublisher.com/>) and "Lessons from the Qur'an," published by Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>). These books are available from Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com/>) and Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>), respectively. He has also published many essays on religious issues in the Charleston Gazette, West Virginia and written quite a few Islamic satires. He is a Chemical Engineer and possesses Master of Science degrees in Chemical Engineering and Chemistry and has Professional Engineers license from the State of Texas. His e-mail address is mnajawaid@yahoo.com.