Chapter 32

Universe of Prophet Muhammad(PBUH): Devotionals, Sermons, and Cultivation of Piety and Morality Among the Beary Community

Razi Omer
M.A Student
Department of Sociology, University of Calicut

Abstract

Contributing to an emergent field of scholarship on the religious and cultural life of the Beary community, this paper examines informal prophetic sounds—devotionals, poems, and sermons—that play a pivotal role in shaping their religious identity. The Beary community, an ethnoreligious group primarily residing in the coastal regions of Karnataka, India, has a rich cultural tapestry that is deeply embedded with Islamic traditions concentrated on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In doing so, the paper shows how these performative aspects of devotional rituals, sermons, and religious lectures, which often invoke the life and praise of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), play a major role as instruments for cultivating and sustaining piety and morality among the community. Moreover, this paper also examines the central role of Musliyars' (holy men) in preparing and delivering content and lectures about the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to the Beary audience by exploring how these efforts are crucial in cultivating piety and ethical values within the community.

Keywords: *Prophet Muhammad, Beary Community, Devotionals, Sermons, piety and ethics.*

Introduction

The region of the Beary community of Tulunadu is one of the earliest Muslim inhabitants of India, which features a clear history of more than 950 years. Etymologically, the term Beary has a popular theory, which is that the derivation of the word Beary comes from the Arabic word Bahar, meaning sea. To indicate the person who belongs to this particular region known as Bahari means sailor or navigator. So to speak, it is said, by the late elders of this community, that the Beary community (henceforth Beary) maintained trade connections with the Arab businessman traveling to the coastal south of India, especially the Tulunadu-Malabar coastline,

where inscriptions have been found in Barkur that prove the overseas trade link between these two Indian subcontinent and Arab world. Noori, in his seminal work 'Maikala,' posited that roughly ninety years prior to Muhammad bin Qasim's invasion into Sindh—a region that was once a segment of northern India—there existed good relations between Hadrami and Persian Muslims, which played a major role in simplifying the propagation of Islam in that area in terms of both cultural and spiritual dimensions. While it is acknowledged that the introduction of religion initially emerged as a secondary implication of trade, it is crucial to recognise that this religious influence did not emanate from the central figures of Islam. Nevertheless, it has profoundly shaped the beliefs and practices of the community. In doing so, the spatial and cultural settings of this region clothed the imperative paradigm shift from being uncertain about Islamic principles to pious. For this reason, when Malik bin Deenar arrived on the coast of Malabar during the seventh century with a group of Da'ees (Islamic propagators), The locals donated their property to build mosques—such as Masjid Zeenath Baksh —in this region. This paper investigates, from a provincialised vantage point, how the community's sense of piety is shaped by the influence of the prophet's sound, including devotionals, poems, and sermons. The community, itself, is predominantly centered around or more specifically guided by the Musliyars (known in Beary as Katib usthad), who act as mentors within their respective localities. These individuals are traditionally recognized by their aesthetic choice of attire, consistently wearing a white garment known as the Qamees. The Musliyars, who hold a position of deep respect within the community, serve not merely as educators of religious doctrine and teachings, yet too as pivotal contributors of moral and ethical development to its members. This paper investigates the significant influence of Musliyars in the creation of content and the delivery of sermons centered on the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the aim of, through their efforts, cultivating piety and instilling values such as compassion, honesty, responsibilities, tolerance, and community service among the local members.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the impact of informal prophetic sounds—such as devotionals, poems, and sermons—on the religious identity and moral values of the Beary community. The study relied heavily on secondary data from a range of published sources to provide a theoretical foundation and context for the research. For this, the study included the work of Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, Samuli Schielke, and so on. Ethnographic observations were conducted

to gain an in-depth understanding of the Beary community's religious practices, where observations took place in various community settings, including mosques, households, and informal communal spaces where devotionals, poems, and sermons are regularly performed. In addition to the observation, the study also conducted interviews informally with the members of the Beary community to gather personal perspectives and experiences related to the impact of prophetic sounds and pious selves.

Given the sensitive nature of religious identity and practices, this study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process. Additionally, care was taken to represent the religious practices of the Beary community respectfully and accurately, avoiding any misrepresentation of their beliefs or customs.

Rituals as Embodied Faith

Traditionally, many scholars have not merely perceived the ontology of religion as a system of beliefs and practices but have also acknowledged it as a societal phenomenon that fosters social cohesion. As such, religion, being a societal phenomenon, is subject to dynamics and change, which leads to the continual evolution of religious rituals and customs in terms of spatial differences and diversity, particularly within the Abrahamic prophetic tradition. Every ethnographer is likely to identify a ritual when they encounter one, since rituals are understood to be symbolic activities, contrasting with the instrumental behaviors of daily life (Asad, 1993). An indispensable part of every religion, ritual is now acknowledged as a type of routine behavior that symbolizes and expresses something and, as such, corresponds differentially to individual consciousness and social organizations. That is to say, it has ceased to be a script for regulating practice yet a form of practice that is interpretable as representing some further, verbally definable, but tacit event . The Bearys regard rituals, such as the weekly Swalath Majlis dedicated to Prophet Muhammad—especially on Thursday nights—not merely as ascetic or festive activities but as integral to their collective identity. For instance, vows (Nadhr), typically involving monetary pledges, are made, particularly by the elders, like grandparents, to fulfill personal aspirations or to alleviate physical or psychological difficulties. contributing these vows to the subsequent swalath gathering, regardless of whether the desired outcome has been achieved or not. Additionally, the community engages in large-scale services of free food at the conclusion of the Swalath, where they call it sīrni which is believed to be endowed with spiritual blessings, Barakah, as an expression of gratitude. Ritual is to religion as habit is to daily life,

and it is grounded upon the similar rationale, namely that by subjecting subordinate functions to an automatic or routine process, it enables undistracted focus on more vital issues... Just as the primary business of habit is to maintain bodily equilibrium… So to speak, the principal function of routine in religion is to structure and regulate the practices essential for its continuity and sustainability as a social institution. As such, by engaging in habitual rituals of chanting the name of Prophet Muhammad from the moment reaching bed to, and still continuing until fall asleep, to waking up, they sustain and nurture a pious setting around them. Asad (1991) is also right, in my judgment, the emergence of rituals in the 1990s as symbolic behavior that is not necessarily religious is an entirely modern phenomenon. This paradigm shift is largely due to the increasingly individualistic nature of contemporary societies and the growing secularization, which leads people to call these rituals more secular than religious. The place of Durkheim's concept of homo duplex in his sociology of rituals can be critically applied, in a discernible way, to the Bearys' approach to ritual practice. For instance, when Bearys attend the congregation for the five daily prayers, they also include the Rawatib (voluntary) prayers associated with each obligatory prayer. However, if they perform these prayers individually, they often omit the Rawatib prayers, which underscores the absolute capacity of collective action. Yet Mauss endeavored to move away from this concept in "techniques of the body " In this famous essay, Mauss insisted that "the body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body" (1979). When the community engages in the formerly mentioned swalath, they often perform in the synchronized collective recitation of devotional poems that praise Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This practice is conducted under the supervision of Musliyars (holy men) and involves uniform vocal modulations and coordinated body movements, such as bending forward and backward in rhythm with the poems. Although these movements are not derived from authoritative sources, they are socially learnt, deeply ingrained, and practiced with a profound sense of piety and devotion. Children are brought to these performative rituals by their fathers, or guardians as a whole, where they observe and learn, for instance, the same modulation, from their elders. Through this process, these body techniques are transmitted from one generation to the next. Ritual is indeed directed at the appropriate performance of what is prescribed, something that Contingent on cognitive and practical disciplines but does not itself require decoding. In other words, appropriate performance grounded not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority. Umar (RA) embraced the

Hajar al-Aswad not because the stone itself is inherently sacred, yet the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) demonstrated respect towards it, and Umar (R.A.) followed this approval in terms of absolute incapacity to question and too obediently.

Mauluds in Maikala

In general, the term Maulid refers to the Prophet's birthday and, at the same time, denotes the celebration and festivities on the day of his birthday, along with literary genres composed for recitation on this occasion. However, the Bearys became familiarized this day with the term Milad in everyday vernacular. And more commonly employ the term Mawlud, the classical Arabic word, for the ritual observance of the prophet's birthday accompanied by literary or poetry genres written in honor of the prophet Muhammad. (For instance, ‘’we went to Mawlud in his house ’’.)

A typical Mawlud gathering in Maikala, much like in the Malabar region, involves a group of men (and women) seated on the floor of a house/ mosque, often arranged in a circular or semicircular formation . Throughout the gathering, incense burns in a corner of the room, and perfume is passed from hand to hand, circulating among the participants to bring the sensory elements. The Maulud is usually led by a team of Musliyars—the Katib Usthad, Sadar Usthad and Mukri Usthad —who sit before adorned pillows or decorative folded clothes used to hold the prayer manual, commonly known as Swalath Kithab, from which they recite the chosen Maulud text. The Mawlud begins with the recitation of Fatiha accompanied by a brief Dua. Following this, the Musliyars proceed to recite the Manqus Mawlud, which consists of five odes interspersed with prose narratives(better known by the Arabic term hadith). Each prose section is followed by a corresponding poem, often called a Bayt. During the recitation of the prose by one of the Musliyars, the rest of the participants remain silent, until when the names of revered Islamic figures are mentioned. For instance, when the name of Prophet Muhammad is recited, the audience collectively responds with salat, invoking blessings and greetings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him). The gathering concludes with the recitation of Surah Yaseen by the Musliyars, who also make a Dua that includes blessings for the women who prepared the food and small snacks, as well as for the households. After the Mawlud at the mosque, the blessed food and small snacks are initially gathered and served in a communal space, commonly at courtyard of mosque, where people throng at first, eventually, this crowd is organized into a straight line, often under the supervision of a senior mosque figure such as the secretary or vice president. This structured distribution not only facilitates orderly access to the food but also serves as a means of ethical formation. By following this organized

procedure, participants experience a sense of communal order, patience, respect, tolerance. which reflects the broader ethical values upheld within the mosque community.

When the month of Rabi' al-Awwal arrives, marking the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, it is regarded as the pinnacle of Mawlud celebrations in Maikala. In this month, particularly throughout its first twelve days and the twelfth day being the birthday of the prophet, Maulud narratives of recitations and chants literally submerge the devotional soundscape of Maikala villages and towns. Subsequently, the Mawlud rituals, still, continue in the households during the rest of the month. On the twelfth day, the celebration of Milad begins early in the morning, aligning with the time traditionally believed to be when the Prophet Muhammad was born. This is often considered to be in the early time just before the obligatory dawn prayer (Subhi). By all this devotional piety associated with the Mawlud, they earn, is the concept of baraka—or Barakathh in Beary, the notion of Thawab (merit or reward) and a paradise as a whole.

The Mawlud provides participants a means to forge embodied, direct connections with Prophet Muhammad and Allah. These ritual performances demonstrate significant continuity with the goals of expressing the Islamic traditional essence of piety, that is, to confer divine presence and prophetic blessings. In fact, it is the intimacy and flexibility of Mawlud spaces, that is, the way that Mauluds facilitate embodied relationships to the prophet muhammed and among participants themselves, that produces the spiritual depth than participants find lacking in the other muslim spaces they inhabit.

Sermons, Piety Movement and Morality

Much of recent research on morality, piety and subjectivity, particularly the study of saba mahmood's politics of piety, which, closely aligned with the work of Talal Asad and Charles Hirschkind, has gained great attention within the anthropology of Islam. While subjectivity, religiosity, and morality have developed as a central topic of the anthropology of Muslim societies, the issues of ambivalence and fragmentation have so far been given relatively little attention. Remarkably, Talal Asad (1993), Michael Lamberk (2000), Charles Hirschkind (2001; 2006a; 2006b), and Saba Mahmood (2005) have—with vaguely different emphases—argued for an anthropology of morality that, rather than focussing on codes, commands, and prohibitions, have concentrate on the ways in which moral personhood. and responsibility are created and practiced. Morality in this sense, is about the conscious cultivation of virtues with the aim of developing a virtues self. Aristotle in his Nichmachean ethics , develops a theory of

ethics that is based on the habituation of virtues: virtue does not exist before practice; it is developed by the power of habit that enables one to live a good life.

A key category in Mahmood's study of the piety movement is, too, habitus, however not in the sense from that popularized by Pierre Bourdieu (1984). She criticizes Bourdieu for missing the aristotelian point of habituation, the active acquisition of an ethical disposition by the means of bodily habit. For Mahmood, habitus involves the active capacity of forming and transforming the self through bodily practice. The Bearys, I observed, viewed practices like Maulid as both a way to cultivate pious dispositions and a demonstration of their will and ability to adhere to a divine plan. Instead of being merely mechanical actions, these bodily practices were understood to have the power to shape and transform their desires, emotions, and moral sensibilities. In other words, they shape their inner dispositions through the regular recitation of Maulid, where they view such habitual practice not in terms of passive or routine action but rather as a deliberate effort to cultivate pious self, aligning them more with virtues like compassion, humility, patience, and selflessness. We need to contend with Schielke (2009), who argues piety does not proceed along a unilinear way. He points out that it is an ambivalent practice that is often related to specific periods in life, especially those marked by crises. yet at least in some communities, like the Beary, where piety is cultivated consistently and intentionally through daily practices, not just in response to crisis moments. For the Bearys, piety is often a gradual, lifelong process that develops through rituals like the recitation of Maulid, prayers, chants, and other devotional acts, which are seen as constant efforts to align with divine will. It may be true that one's engagement with piety can be more in degree during a crisis; by this, we cannot assume that piety is ambivalent and comes only during the period of crisis. The women, in particular, offer food (small snacks) as a means of seeking barakah for the spiritual presence and continuity of divine grace while also providing monetary donations as a fulfillment of vows by those who pledged during times of crisis to aid in overcoming the challenges faced. made during the crisis period.

Many researchers have convincingly contended that the contemporary Islamic revival is not merely an expression of thematic fundamentalist obscurantism, but in fact very dynamic and open for a great degree of debate and diversity (Ahmed 2008; hirschkind 2006; and Osella & Osella 2008). In particular, within the Beary community, there has been a discernible shift toward both liberal and Salafist interpretations of Islam

during the late 1980s. This internal conflict—for instance In 2016, a significant clash between Sunni and Salafist factions in Montepadavu, led to varying ideological positions and practices among its members. As a result, the role of the Musliyars—scholars and educators such as Katib Usthad—has increasingly centered on re-establishing Islamic revivalism through the lens of Sunni Ash'ari. To illustrate this, on the Friday at the congregational Friday noon (jum'a) prayer, the Katib Usthad (central figure of the locality) would stand for the sermon invariably circle around the issue: remaining the believers that they must follow the commandments of almighty Allah as conveyed by prophet Muhammad. He, Katib Usthad, emphasizes the lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad to cultivate piety and morality for the Beary audience. Take, for example, the story of Ameen (a pseudonym), a man in his early twenties who, after a period of his bachelor's study, was deemed to turn into salafi religiosity influenced by his friends. However, the continual involvement of Katib Usthad's sermon and the efforts of the S.S.F (presumably a local Sunni organization) contributed, significantly, in guiding Ameen back to the Sunni tradition. Yet in the post-pandemic era, the cultivation of piety among them has been significantly facilitated through the strategic use of social media platforms. By disseminating posters that highlight the Prophet's behavior and disposition, these platforms have effectively conveyed messages of compassion, mercy, tolerance, and kindness, and so on, to the community. In doing so, this approach not only entailed a deeper understanding of these virtues but also became the accessible means for deeper reflection and moral cultivation.

Mahmood's study of the piety movement in Egypt highlights how Islamic revivalism frames women's participation in mosque rituals as an avenue for cultivating piety. This framework contrasts sharply with the practices of the Beary community, where the articulation of piety is profoundly shaped by domestic seclusion and the adoption of modest attire. For Beary women, piety is enacted through their retreat to the home, the embrace of modest dress, and a social intervention whereby, in public spaces, they are either accompanied by male protectors or other women, enveloped in comprehensive covering. This divergence underpins a distinct modality of pious embodiment, reflecting different understandings of the relationship between religious practice, gender, and social space.

Conclusion

In the complex tapestry of Islamic life, the rituals of the Beary community stand out as exemplars of the dynamic interplay between universal principles and regional customs. By way of this study, the readers/audi-

ence explore the piety movement and ethical formation within the Beary community through the lens of prophetic sounds—devotionals, poems, and sermons. The concept of ritual as embodied faith, as explored in this study, reveals that for the Beary community, practices, for example Swalath, are not merely as ascetic or festive activities rather, in a broader sense, as a symbolic action of their identity. Through this study, we emphasize regional expression of rituals and piety formation, which underscores how the local communities, like Bearys, for instance, continuously reinterpret and embody Islamic teachings within their specific socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, this study has focused on the Mauluds in Maikala, a spiritual gathering in honor of the Prophet's birthday, where this study outlined the Bearys approach towards Maulud as an avenue for spiritual renewal, community bonding, and transmission of ethical values rather than mere celebration. The study also explores the sermons related to the prophet's lifestyles which were delivered under the premises of Musliyars, along with the techniques they used in these evolving modern epochs for cultivating a pious mindset among the Beary community.

This study opens a range of avenues for future research, particularly given the novelty of examining the Beary community's rituals, piety movements, and ethical formation through the lens of prophetic poems and sermons. One potential approach is a comparative analysis between the Beary community and other regional Muslim communities, in exploring how diverse interpretations of Islamic teachings shape localized practices. Additionally, There is a potential for interdisciplinary exploration, by incorporating insights from anthropology, theology, and cultural studies to further unravel the complexities of how faith, ethics, and regional culture intersect in the Beary community.

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