

**A RE-APPRAISAL OF THE SALAFIYYAH'S DISCOURSE ON
MAWLIDU 'N- NABIYY**

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Abstract

Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy celebration is one of the most controversial issues among the Muslim scholars of various denominations. The issues around its legitimacy or otherwise have generated different reactions from the scholars, especially of *Salafiyah* enclave who usually declared the celebration as a *bid'ah* that has enabled various abnormalities into the practice of Islam, considering the origin, ways and manners of its observation. Attempt is therefore made in this paper to appraise major issues that were raised by the *Salafiyah* scholars on *Mawlid*. This is imperative because the celebration has become a dividing factor with polemics across board which needs to either be reduced if not totally eliminated. This paper adopted both analytical and historical methods. The former affords the opportunity to analyse various relevant works, while the latter avails the paper the privilege to trace related historical facts. The findings of this paper revealed that the basis for declaration of the celebration as *bid'ah* by the *Salafiyah* scholars is unrealistic as there are reliable proofs that established it in Islamic sources. Also, it is discovered that the *Salafiyah's* condemnation of the celebration is largely based on the manner of its celebration. This is what makes them to adopt the principle of throwing away the baby with the bath water. The paper concluded that *Mawlid* has credence from the Qur'an, *Sunnah* and the practices of the *Salaf*. It recommended that the celebration should be adopted by all while all abuses should be holistically addressed by scholars.

Keywords: *Mawlid, Salafiyah, Salaf, bid'ah, Commemoration, Celebration*

Introduction

Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy is the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday which usually holds on every 12th of the month of *Rabi'ul-Awwal*¹ of lunar year across the Muslim nations. There are pockets of its celebration across the lunar month, except in the month of *Ramadan* and *Dhul-Hijjah*, due to major religious events (fasting and Hajj operation) that occupied the two months. It (*Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy*) is a global event that has gained wide range of acceptance. It is estimated that about forty-seven (47) countries of the world held the celebration in high esteem in which public holiday is declared to mark it.² On this occasion, people used to gather at a place for merriment, recitation of the Glorious Qur'an, the *Sīra* of the Prophet and educating themselves on his (Prophet's) teachings among others, all in the bid to make the day a great one. *Mawlid* is also celebrated in form of conferences or workshops where lectures are given by different scholars on different spheres of the Prophet's life, in order to immortalize him and give his messages a sense of renewal.

The celebration, which has started since a long time ago, is not without some serious opposition from some scholars of different backgrounds, especially the *Salafiyyūn* in whose opinions and submissions, the celebration is nothing but a *bid'ah* (innovation) which lacks either direct or indirect credence from every Islamic source.³ It is apt to mention that *Salafiyyah* is not the only bloc with this view, the *Ahmadiyyah* is another major Muslim sect that criticises the celebration,⁴ while the *Deobandiyyah* Order appears to be the only *Şūfī* group that rejects the celebration, declaring it as a *bid'ah*.⁵

The *Salafiyyah* stops not at the mere declaration of the celebration as *bid'ah* but also intensifies efforts to get rid of the practice among Muslims altogether. To achieve this, their works are saturated with explanations and elucidations on the illegality and inadmissibility of the celebration in Islam, hence it used to be their first point of reference in any of their discourses on *bid'ah* because it is seen as a potential one which is held in high esteem by other Muslims today. In fact, *Salafiyyah* scholars like Al-Bānī and Jabata, a prominent *Salafiyyah* advocate in Ilorin, among others are unequivocal in declaring whoever aligns with the celebration as *kāfir* (infidel).⁶

This paper examines the various points of reference by the *Salafiyyah* scholars who are majorly antagonistic to the celebration, so as to determine the level of justification of their claims and the compliance of their views on the subject matter with the Islamic sources, towards

minimizing the rate of divisions among Muslims and possibly bring about some reconciliation through a reduction of the polemics that have become a recurrent decimal among scholars, each time the celebration comes around.

Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy in the Discourse of the Salafiyyah Scholars

As noted earlier, the celebration of the birth of the Prophet has attracted diverse reactions among scholars of different ages, even though this paper focuses on the *Salafiyyah* scholars who in recent times make clampdown on the celebration one of the key objectives driving their missions. Şaqar, among other *Salafiyyah* scholars, does not mince words in declaring the celebration as a *bid'ah* without any credence in Islamic sources.⁷ It has been argued and submitted by many *Salafiyyah* scholars like Ibn Bāz, Al-Uthaymīn and Al-Bānī among others that there is no evidence establishing its celebration during the period of *Salaf*. They, therefore, condemn the celebration in its entirety as, according to them, it is capable of nullifying other religious deeds of the perpetrators.⁸

The declaration of *Mawlid* as a *bid'ah* by the *Salafiyyah* scholars like Şaqar, Ibn Bāz, Al-Uthaymīn and Al-Bānī among others should not trigger the question as to which of the categories or classifications of *bid'ah* it belongs, whether good or bad. This is because to these scholars, innovation is not divisible and if at all it is, it has to be within the religious framework, all of which is detrimental to Islam and render its perpetrator as either a *kāfir* or *fāsiq*. In other words, innovation is only applicable to religious matters and its division is limited within that scope. To this end, their division of innovation is guided by its consequence on religious matter which may or may not take one out of the fold of Islam. In any case, the classification of innovation among the *Salafiyyah* scholars as it affects the *Mawlid* could be understood as reprehensible and a deviation because it comes under the religious matters.

On the basis of declaring *Mawlid* as a *bid'ah*, it is generally observed that the *Salafiyyah* scholars in their discourse on *Mawlid* did little in examining the evidence of those who used to celebrate the occasion. What is largely available in their works focuses on mechanism for deterrents and condemnations of the manners of its celebration. It is pertinent to point out here that the declaration of the celebration as innovation is not limited to the *Salafiyyah* circle alone, the other bloc of the scholars, like Ibn Hajar, as quoted by Imam Sayūti⁹ and those who organized the occasion with relish have equally submitted that it is a

bid'ah but a good one (*bid'atun ḥasanatun*). This is because they hold that it was not celebrated during the lifetime of the Prophet and the period of *Salaf*. The implication of this is that they concede that the celebration is an innovation but with indirect credence from the primary sources of Islam. Those references will later be brought to fore at the appropriate place in this paper. It could be argued that the position of those scholars is informed by their earlier subscription to the classification of *bid'ah* into good and bad.

Another point of argument which the *Salafiyyah* scholars rely on in their nullification and condemnation of *Mawlid* is the obscure nature of the actual date of birth of the Prophet which is said to be unknown or varied depending on the number of sources that one consults. Ibn Hishām for instance puts the date at 12th of Rabi' u 'l-Awwal¹⁰ while *Ar-Rahiq 'l-Makhtūm* puts it at 9th of Rabi' u 'l-Awwal.¹¹ Ibn Ishāq simply states that it is the year of elephant without a specific date.¹² Haykal, in his *Life of Muhammad*, presents various accounts on how the details of birth, covering the month and the day, even the period of the day remain a subject of controversies among the Muslim historians.¹³ It is on the basis of these discrepancies that the *Salafiyyah* scholars argued that it is erroneous for anyone to conclude and fix a date as the birth date of the Prophet.¹⁴

Adherents of the celebration are unanimous on the birth date of the Prophet as the year of elephant, 12th of Rabi' u 'l-Awwal, 570 (CE) even though many do not agree to limitation of the celebration to this date. Pir Shaqib argues that the word *Mawlid*, in Arabic language carries two broad meanings. It connotes *zarf* (adverb) of time and place. It can also connote *masdar* (verbal noun). It therefore refers to the time and place of birth of the Prophet and his actual birth which marks his coming to the universe as the mercy of Allah on humanity at large. He (Shaqib), therefore, each of these calls for celebration and should not be restricted to the date of his birth alone,¹⁵ contrary to the argument by the *Salafiyyah*.

Another major point of opposition by the *Salafiyyah* scholars is the manner of its celebration, especially in the contemporary times which they allege to have run against Islamic principles. It is known, in recent times, that the celebration has been characterized with free mixing of people of opposite sex, use of musical instruments, singing, dancing, among others, by both males and females together, all of which is prohibited in Islam, as prone to immoralities. More so, it has also been observed that the occasion is being used to gather money by the celebrants for their personal ends, but hide under the pretense that people should donate to promote Islam,

hence prior to the date of celebration, envelopes with invitation cards are distributed across the various strata of the society.¹⁶ Also, at the occasion, various money oriented programmes are staged to induce the attendees, guests and participants to spend heavily, so that a worthwhile amount can be realized at the end of the day. In fact, Yusuf identified this as a major shift from what it used to be, where the celebrants would spend their money to organize the occasion and now that it has been turned to a money making venture.¹⁷ It is equally argued by them (*Salafiyyah*) that the celebration is an imitation of the Christians who used to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on every 25th of December.¹⁸ It is therefore a thought from those who felt that there is the need for Muslims to conform with modern trends, especially having identified the Christmas celebration as a means of proselytisation so something similar with an Islamic colouration was thought of by the Muslims, hence the *Mawlid*. Details on this will be discussed later in this paper.

Also, the criticism of the *Salafiyyah* scholars on *Mawlid* encompasses the origin of the celebration itself which was alleged to have first been organized by the Fatimid Shi'ah out of their excessive love for the Prophet and the members of his household.¹⁹ It would be recalled that Shiism has been generally placed outside the fold of Islam by *Salafiyyah* scholars for their seemingly strange belief systems which essentially bordered on political and theological issues in Islam.²⁰ To the *Salafiyyah* therefore, this should not be welcomed by the Sunni Muslims.²¹ What could be noted about this is that many of the earlier scholars of *Salafiyyah* did not reject the celebration, it is in recent times that outright rejection emerged. Owaisi observes that there are many festivities like the celebration of the birthday of Imam Ali, Hassan, Husain and Fatimah among others that were introduced by the Shi'ah at the same time when they started *Mawlid*, but when they were removed from the Caliphate of Islam by Al-Ayyubid, only the *Mawlid* was allowed to remain.²² He mentions prominent classical *Salafiyyah* scholars like Ibn al-Jawzi (d.597), Ibn al-Jazari (d.660), Ibn al-Qayyim (d.751), Ibn-Kathir (d.774), al-Hafiz al-Iraqi (d.808), Ibn Nasir al-Din al-Dimashqi (d.842), Al-Sakhawi (d.902) and Ibn-Hajar al-Haytami (d.974) among others who accepted the celebration and had composed poems that are often used by the observant of the celebration after them.²³

The protagonists of the celebration have equally argued that the fasting of the Prophet on every Monday is to commemorate his own birth day.²⁴ This seems to be one of the most patronized arguments relied upon by the organizers of the *Mawlid*. This however may not hold water

considering the concept of *bid'ah* and the need to comply with the ways and manners that the Prophet celebrated himself. In other words, as it is established that the Prophet fasted every Monday to mark his own birth, whoever wishes to commemorate the birth of the Prophet must limit himself to fasting as it was observed by him.

Mixed-Feelings about the Celebration

It is pertinent to state that legality or otherwise of *Mawlid* which scholars have expressed both pro and anti-views has also submission that stands between the two sides. A cursory study of the submissions of some *Salafiyyah* scholars regarding the *Mawlid* reveals a position which stands between the two. In *Iqtidā' 'l-Sirāta 'l-Mustaqimah*, which was written to discuss various types of celebrations in Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah declares *Mawlid* as an innovation that is reward-able. He writes:

And the celebration of the birthday (of the Prophet) which some people have held in high esteem, there is in it (celebration) an immeasurable reward for their good intention and praising the messenger of Allah, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him.²⁵

Elsewhere, in the same book and as a rider to that, Ibn Taymiyyah states that:

(*Mawlid*) is just like what some people innovated to imitate the Christians in celebration of the birth of Jesus or out of love for the prophet and to exalt him. Allah will surely reward them for their love (for the Prophet), but they will not be rewarded for innovation of celebration of his birth.²⁶

The above two quotations from Ibn Taymiyyah, as contradictory as they appear, establish the fact that *Mawlid* celebration is an innovation through the imitation of the Christians, which is organised to show love and to eulogize the Prophet. They equally confirm that the act is a reward-able one, though excesses must be avoided.

It appears from the second quotation which shows Ibn Taymiyyah's note of caution about the celebration is strongly connected to imitation of the act from the Christians. His guidelines for imitation, therefore, can be understood from the same work because he dedicated a large portion of it to discussions on the act of imitating the people of other faiths, especially where it is capable of defacing Islam and distorting its true outlook. He warns against it (imitation), though with a clause that it is permissible to do that (imitation) where such will promote the interest of the

religion (Islam).²⁷ This is strengthened with the Prophet's observance and commandment of the Muslims to observe the fasting of *Ashurah*, in imitation of the Jews, when he got to Madinah.

Also, another background to this position of Ibn Taymiyyah is the *ḥadīth* which forbids excessive praise for the Prophet. The *Ḥadīth* reads:

On the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās who heard ʿUmar, may Allah be pleased with him, saying on the pulpit: He said he equally heard the Prophet, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him, saying: Do not praise me excessively as done by the Christians for (ʿIsā) the son of Maryam. I am indeed a servant of His (Allah). So, address me as His servant and messenger.²⁸

Commenting on the above *ḥadīth*, two *Salafīyyah's* admired scholars who are also renowned commentators on the *Ṣaḥīḥ 'l-Bukhārī*, Ibn Hajar and Al-ʿAyinī, submit that the excessive praise that the Prophet meant in this narration is the equation or the elevation of ʿIsā Ibn Maryam to the status of God,²⁹ hence his reference and emphasis on servant-hood. It is an established fact that neither the Sufis who used to celebrate the occasion nor any of the proponents of the celebration of the Prophet's birthday has ever been found of equating the Prophet to Allah in their praises of him.

Emerging Evidence

According to Jalālu 'd-Dīn As-Sayūṭī, Ibn Ḥajār Al-Asqalānī and other protagonists of *Mawlid* among the classical or orthodox scholars whose works the present day *Salafīyyah* advocates often cite, celebration of the Prophet's birthday is *al-bidʿat 'l-ḥasanah* (good innovation)³⁰ which is inferred from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Allah is quoted as saying:

Say: "In the Allah's bounty and in His Mercy, in that let them rejoice": That is better than the (wealth) they hoard. (Q.10:58)

While interpreting the verse, Imam Allūsī and Ibn Al-Jawzī among other *Salafīyyah* scholars submit, citing Ibn ʿAbbās, a prominent commentator among the Companions, as saying that:

On the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, may Allah, the Exalted be pleased with him, said: Indeed, bounty refers to knowledge and mercy refers to Muhammad, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him.³¹

This is further buttressed by another verse of the Qur'ān where Allah describes the Prophet as a mercy to the entire mankind. Allah says: "We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures"(Q.21:107). The implication of this is that since Allah refers to the Prophet as the mercy to the entire universe, the command to celebrate as contained in the first verse, is undoubtedly directed to him, especially his birth because it is the hallmark of Allah's mercy on humanity and not his death which is the height of sorrow to have befallen them (entire humanity).³²

Historically, as contained in *Ṣaḥīḥu 'l-Bukhārī*, the first person to celebrate the Prophet's birth was Abu-Lahab who freed his slave girl (Thuwaybah) who brought the news of the Prophet's birth to him. The *ḥadīth* reads:

‘Urwah said, Thuwaybah was the freed slave girl of Abū Lahab whom he had manumitted...When he (Abū Lahab) died, he was seen in dream by one of his relatives in a very bad state and asked him, what he has encountered, Abū Lahab said: "I have not found any rest since I left you, except that I used to get water to drink because of my manumitting of Thuwaybah"...reported by Al-Bukhārī³³

From the above narration, therefore, it is submitted by the proponents of the celebration that Abū -Lahab celebrated the Prophet's birth by setting free his slave girl who brought the good news to him and thus benefited in the life beyond due to that action of his.³⁴ Commenting on this *ḥadīth*, Ibn Hajar and Al-Imam Ayini identified the person who dreamt as Al-Abbās Ibn Abdullahi. They submitted further that the exact time of relief used to be every Monday which coincides with the birth day of the Prophet.³⁵

Expatriating on this, Ibn Nasir Al-Damasqī writes:

If this infidel (Abu-Lahab) who is condemned to everlasting hell could get relief on every Monday for showing of happiness (upon the birth) of Ahmad, then what becomes of an obedient servant who spent his entire life celebrating Ahmad (Prophet) and died as a monotheist.³⁶

In another narration by *Al-Bayhaqī*, though it is tagged as weak (*ḍa'īf*) by *Salafīyyah* scholars, how the Prophet celebrated his birth by himself is revealed. It reads:

عن أنس رضي الله عنه : أن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم عرق عن نفسه بعد النبوة...البيهقي³⁷

On the authority of Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet, may the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him, indeed, slaughtered a sacrificial animal for himself after his call to prophethood...Al-Bayhaqi

The offer of sacrificial animal is a rudiment of Islamic rites carried out in relation to a new born baby. The Prophet, since there was no legislation to that effect when he was born, decided to carry it out by himself as a mark of celebration and commemoration of his birth. Commenting on the *hadith*, As-Shamil submits that the Prophet offered the sacrifice despite his awareness of his grandfather sacrifice on the seventh day of his birth and it is known that, this type of sacrifice cannot be repeated for the second time but the Prophet did that as a mark of expression of gratitude to Allah for his existence and for making him the source of mercy to the universe. Also, it is to serve as a legacy for his followers, just as he used to seek Allah's blessings upon himself. It is therefore enjoined on Muslims to show gratitude to Allah for the Prophet's birth by gathering people for merriment of all sort.³⁸ This narration therefore lends credence to gathering of people for *Mawlid* celebration. In fact, As-Sayūti mentions that the Prophet himself gathered people for the celebration and shared the meat of the slaughtered animal to them.³⁹ This however is odd to him (As-Sayūti). In other words, the narration is not reported by another scholar, thereby making it weak.

Also, a reading through the collections of *hadith* reveals how the companions organized themselves to celebrate the Prophet during the period of *Salaf*. This is largely contrary to the general belief that nothing of such took place among the companions of the Prophet. Here are some of them. An-Nasā'i narrates:

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيِّ قَالَ قَالَ مُعَاوِيَةُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ خَرَجَ عَلَى حُلَقَةٍ يَعْنِي مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ فَقَالَ مَا أَجْلَسَكُمْ قَالُوا جَلَسْنَا نَدْعُو اللَّهَ وَنَحْمَدُهُ عَلَى مَا هَدَانَا لِدِينِهِ وَمَنْ عَلَيْنَا بِكَ قَالَ اللَّهُ مَا أَجْلَسَكُمْ إِلَّا ذَلِكَ قَالُوا اللَّهُ مَا أَجْلَسَنَا إِلَّا ذَلِكَ قَالَ أَمَا إِنِّي لَمْ أَسْتَحْلِفْكُمْ تَهْمَةً لَكُمْ وَإِنَّمَا أَنَا نَبِيٌّ جَبْرِيْلٌ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فَأَخْبِرْنِي أَلَا اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يُبَاهِي بِكُمْ الْمَلَائِكَةَ⁴⁰

Abu Sa'id Khudri reported that Mu'awiyah, may Allah be pleased with him, said: Allah's Messenger, may the peace and blessing be upon him, went to a circle or gathering of his Companions (inside his Mosque) and said: What makes you sit like this? They said: We sat to call on Allah and to thank Him

for guiding us to His religion (Islam) and for blessing us with you. Thereupon, he (the Prophet said by Allah, you sit for nothing but only this purpose? They said: yes! Whereupon he (the Messenger) said: I am not asking you to take an oath because of any allegation against you but for the fact that Jibril came to me and he informed me that Allah, the Most Exalted and Glorious, was talking to the angels about your magnificence.

This *Hadīth* is also narrated by Imam Muslim in his compilation, though with slight difference in wording if compared with that of Nasā'ī. Both are however graded as authentic by Al-Bānī.⁴¹ In *Al-Mustadrak* of Al-Hakim, this report is contained:

...I migrated to join the Messenger, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him at Madinah and I handed over to him his belongings from the expedition of Tabuk. I heard Al-Abbās Ibn Abdul-Muṭālib Saying: Oh Messenger of Allah, I wish to praise you. He (The Prophet) replied saying: "Recite, may your mouth remain fresh" ...He then composed the poem ...

"The day you [the Prophet] were born, the sun rose over the earth and the horizon was illuminated with your Light. So, we, in that radiance and that light and paths of guidance – can pierce through."⁴²

This narration is contained in many compilations of *hadīth* and Islamic history. They include Aṭ-Ṭabarānī, Ibn Kathīr and Adh-Dhahabī among others. The instances above are some of the references that the Sufis and the proponents of the celebration of *Mawlid* rely on. They are of the view that, were those situations detrimental to Islam, Prophet would have forbidden them instead of applauding them. In fact, it is recorded that the incident took place after the expedition of Tabuk while about thirty-thousand (30,000) companions were in attendance.⁴³

Concepts of Celebration and Commemoration of Events in Islam

In Islam, expression of happiness and joy on the occasion of a favour of Allah on one and commemorating such an event is welcomed. This is even commanded by Allah in the glorious Qur'an. Reading through the chapter 10:58 where Qur'an states that: *In the bounty of Allah and His mercy, in that, let them rejoice...*, one sees that Allah enjoins the faithful to express joy over His blessing. The same instruction is equally contained in chapter 93 verses 11 of the glorious book, where Allah says: *As for the favour of your Lord, report it*. Commenting on the verse, Al-

Uthaymin opines that expression of gratitude to Allah over His favour or blessing on one can be done in two main ways. The first is by word of mouth through which one expresses thankfulness to Allah as taught by the Prophet. The second one is by actions. This is to embark on activities that will be geared towards benefitting the people, using the favour of Allah to accomplish them.⁴⁴

In the same vein, Al-Qurṭubī submits that expression of gratitude and thankfulness to Allah lies in mentioning them to people and showing it in appearance. He buttresses this with the *ḥadith* of the Prophet wherein it is reported that the Prophet said whoever Allah has bestowed His blessing on, but has no trace in the person's expression and appearance is a *kāfir*.⁴⁵ He equally submits that reflection of joyous mood in the occasion of Allah's favour is beloved to Allah.

The position of the Āal As-Shaykh on the verse under examination is not different. He believes that the peak of Allah's obligation on His servants is for the servants to express gratitude to Him over His blessing on them. He posited further that the pinnacle of favour or blessings of Allah on humanity is the coming of the Prophet who brought guidance and truth to humanity, having been wallowing and swimming in the ocean of ignorance and darkness of polytheism.⁴⁶ This is what motivated the scholars, coupled with the declaration of those verses above to organize an occasion, to mark the birth of the bearer of Islam whose coming is a landmark and a turning point in the history of the human existence.

In another dimension, a critical look at the major events and festivities in Islam shows that they are between showing gratitude to Allah via celebration and immortalizing them through commemoration. In fact, many religious duties, as we have them today are between celebration and commemoration. Scholars like Imam Ṭaḥāwī and Ibn ʿĀbidīn, as quoted by Tahir ul-Qadri⁴⁷ have submitted that each of the five daily compulsory *Salawat* is to commemorate occurrences that happened to different Prophets. They explained that Adam was the first to observe *Salatul-Subhi*, having been forgiven of his sin by Allah and got its notification at the dawn time, he then observed two *rakah* to express gratitude to Allah. According to Imam Ṭaḥāwī, *Zuhr* is related to Prophet Ibrahim when he offered the sacrificial animal as a replacement of his son, while it was Uzair who first observed *Aṣr* when he was forgiven by Allah for his sin. Also, Dāwud was the first to observe *Salatul-Maghrib* when his kingship was restored, having been forgiven by God, while Prophet Muhammad was specifically given *Isha*. In other words, he was the first to observe

Ṣalāṭul-Isha'.⁴⁸ It should be stated that Ibn ʿĀbidīn also holds the same position in his *Hāshiyyah*, otherwise referred to as *Raddu 'l-Muḥtār*.⁴⁹

So, the *Ṣalawāt* were combined together, given to the Prophet and were made obligatory on the Muslims as a mark, not only to commemorate them but also for their immortalization. Also, the entire *Hajj* operations equally go in the same line of commemoration. Standing on the plain of Arafat, *ṣafa* and *marwa*, *tawaf*, *ḥaram* garment, *talbiyyah*, throwing of pebbles and slaughtering of sacrificial animals among others as legislated in Islam are to commemorate what transpired between Adam, Ḥawā', Ibrahim, Hajar and Ismail among others.

In the same light, the three major festivals in Islam are to commemorate one occasion or another. The *ʿĪd al-dha* is meant to commemorate the symbolic slaughtering of Ismail by his father, Ibrahim, while the *Salat* to be observed in the two *ʿIds* are meant to express gratitude and thankfulness to Allah.⁵⁰ *Salatu 'l-Jumʿat* is equally said to be the commemoration of the creation of Adam who was the first man to be created.⁵¹ *Ashurah* is meant to commemorate the liberation of the people of Israel from the hand of Firʿawn who enslaved them. This (*Ashurah*), as submitted above, was imitated by the Prophet himself and the Muslims are ordered to imitate them, pointing out that Muslims have right to Musa than the Isrealites.⁵²

Also, the *Hijrah* of the Prophet was one of the major events that took place during his life. It marked a major turning point in Islamic history and in the mission of the Prophet, hence the commencement of the calculation of Islamic dates with it, as instructed by Umar, the second Khalifah,⁵³ to immortalize the event by way of commemoration. Ibn Hajar, while discussing *ʿId* celebration in his *Fatiḥu 'l-Bārī*, alluded to the story of the people of *Habashah* who used to come to dance inside the mosque with their traditional musical instruments in the presence of the Prophet to celebrate his arrival to Madinah (*Hijrah*) annually.⁵⁴ He also pointed out that the day of the arrival of the Prophet to Madinah is greater to them than the *ʿĪd* days.⁵⁵ In fact, on the day of one of these events, the Prophet called Aisha to come and watch them, while she rested on the shoulder of the Prophet as contained in the report of Imam Muslim.⁵⁶ Tahir ul-Qadri argued, in the light of Ibn Hajar's submission in his *Fatiḥu 'l-Bārī* that there are three main events that coincided with 12th of Rabi'u l-Awwal. It was the day of the birth and death of the Prophet just as it was the day of his arrival to Madinah. So, the celebration goes beyond *Hijrah* alone.⁵⁷

The concepts of celebration and commemoration are so enshrined among Muslims that in recent times, the authority of Muhammad Ibn Saud University in the year 1400AH/1978 deemed it fit to celebrate and commemorate Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb. The weeklong event was tagged: *Usbūc As-Shaykh Ibn cAbdu 'l-Wahhāb*⁵⁸ (As-Shaykh Ibn cAbdu 'l-Wahhāb's Week). In his inaugural speech, Shaykh Ibn Bāz showered series of encomiums and eulogies on Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb. He gave accounts of how he (Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb) fought tooth and nail before he was able to get rid of various heresies that saturated the society and ensured the practice of pristine Islam across the Arabian Peninsula. At the occasion, the various works of Shaykh Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb were gathered and compiled in various volumes and were mandated to form a major part of the curriculum for schools in Saudi Arabia at various levels.⁵⁹

The essence of commemorating these occasions lies not only in giving thanks and expression of gratitude to Allah but also to establish spiritual and emotional connection between the Muslims and those incidents. If not for the connection, there would not be reason for the Muslims to throw pebbles at Shaytan, stand on the plain of Arafat or jostle between the *Safa* and *Marwa*. The need for spiritual connection is also the yardstick for the instructions in Islamic etiquettes to supplicate to Allah in the spirit of those occurrences. Muslims are expected to pray for increased blessing if the matter is related to goodness and forgiveness, but if otherwise, they seek refuge thereof. Added to these are the salient and enormous lessons that should be learnt from those events which if they are not commemorated, they might go into the dustbin of history and the disconnection with those incidents will be imminent.

The instances of commemoration vis-à-vis the importance of emotional and spiritual connection with those events is demonstrated by the Prophet as reported in both *Ṣaḥīḥ 'l-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* where the Prophet while passing by the well after the battle of Tabuk directed the companions not to enter into a particular town that was dwelled by the people of Thamud, stating that he was afraid that what destroyed them might affect the companions.⁶⁰ According to some reports, it was the well that the camel of the people of prophet Ṣāliḥ drank from that he prohibited the companions from drinking water from it with the same warning.⁶¹

From the above paragraphs, it is clear that celebration and commemoration of events are enshrined in Islam and *Mawlidu Nabiyy* celebration is one of them, because it is organized to give thanks to Allah for blessing the entire humanity with the Prophet and to immortalize him.

Some of the advantages of *Mawlid* as could be understood from the paragraphs above are the spiritual and emotional effects there from. Spiritually, there is reward for the celebrants and they can make *tawassul* (intercession) at that instance. Also, emotionally, the narration of the biography of the Prophet will engender and strengthen deep love for him from the Muslims, having been exposed to his life and experience.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed various issues that are related to *Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy* and its acceptability or otherwise among Muslims, having been identified as one of the causes of controversies among them. Some *Salafiyyah* scholars declare it as an innovation which is related to religion, while some did not. The former, therefore, consider it as forbidden for Muslims to indulge in it. Also, the confusions that surrounded the actual birth-date of the Prophet coupled with the manner of its celebration which most time overrun the Islamic principles and its origin are some of the reasons adduced to argue for its exclusion from Islam by those *Salafiyyah* scholars. It is only Ibn Taymiyyah who appears to have stood between its rejection and acceptability, depending on the lens with which one views it and the manner through which one observes it. In all, he declared it as a reward-able action.

On the contrary, the protagonists of the celebration among which are the Sufis are of the view that the celebration is undoubtedly an innovation but a good one that should be welcomed, especially as it can be explored to promote the interest of Islam and express exceptional love for the Prophet. They therefore downplay every argument of the *Salafiyyah* and hang on to the celebration with great relish. Evidences and proofs were brought to the fore in this paper which reflects how the celebration was captured in the various sources of Islamic history. This is further strengthened with the examination of the place of commemoration and celebration in Islam, which according to this paper, both are enshrined in Islam. As long as these proofs are explicit, cogent and some of them are even authenticated by some *Salafiyyah* scholars, their (*Salafiyyah*) declaration of *Mawlid* as a bad innovation in Islam cannot stand. This paper holds that the celebration is a way of showing love and appreciation to the Prophet, and a form of *Ma' ruf* (good deeds that promote Islam). Also, whatever constitutes innovation in Islam must not only relate to the religion but also have significant contribution to its appreciation, rather than negatively affecting its fundamental values. Therefore, *Mawlid* should be an occasion that promotes the cause of Islam, rather than the

other way round. Of course, the manner of its celebration can be addressed to iron out all the anomalies identified in this study.

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