



Some Manifestations of Polytheism in Common Traditions in Afghan Society

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Abstract

Polytheism manifests in prevalent customs and traditions in forms that can affect sincere faith. These manifestations polytheism include superstitions, reliance on non-divine supernatural forces, and rituals that imply dependence on entities other than God. Such behaviors may lead to deviation from monotheism and negatively impact society. A scientific analysis of these phenomena is essential to identify weaknesses and propose effective solutions to strengthen monotheistic beliefs. A thorough examination of these issues can contribute to raising awareness and correcting false beliefs.

Keywords: *Afghan, Society; Manifestations; Polytheism; Customs; Prevalent*

Introduction

Polytheism (*Shirk*) as one of the most significant concepts in Islam, refers to associating partners with God in worship and belief. This phenomenon can manifest in various forms in people's daily lives and customs, appearing as prevalent traditions in many cultures and societies. These beliefs and behaviors indirectly lead to Polytheism. The manifestations of Polytheism in these customs may include belief in superstitions, reliance on non-divine supernatural forces, and performing rituals that imply dependence on entities other than God. Such behaviors not only affect individual faith but can also steer society away from monotheism. Examining and identifying these manifestations are essential for correcting beliefs and strengthening pure faith and worship. In this study, we analyze and examine some examples of the manifestations of Polytheism in prevalent customs to propose strategies for addressing these challenges and enhancing faith. Analyzing these manifestations helps us correct beliefs and strengthen sincere worship.

Research Method

The research method in this scholarly article is library-based, utilizing reliable religious sources such as the Holy Quran, the Prophetic Hadiths, and jurisprudential books to enrich the study in an analytical manner.

Shirk (polytheism) in prevalent customs and traditions manifests in various forms, which can influence religious and cultural beliefs. Here, we address some of the most significant manifestations of shirk in these customs and traditions.

Definition of Shirk (Polytheism)

Shirk in linguistic terms: Shirk in its literal sense means mingling and companionship. In Arabic, the terms "shirkah" and "musharakah" both refer to the mixing or interaction of two or more partners in a partnership (Mutually, 1425, p. 407).

Shirk in terminology: It means associating a partner with Allah, the Exalted, whether this partner is in Lordship (alRububiyyah), Divinity (alolohiyyah), or in Names and Attributes of Allah. In other words, it refers to associating a partner with Allah in Tawhid (monotheism). Thus, shirk is the opposite of Tawhid, just as disbelief (kufr) is the opposite of faith (iman). (Athari, 1423, p. 236).

Allah Almighty says: So do not associate partners with Allah while you know. (The Holy Quran, Al-Baqarah, verse. 22).

The types and manifestations of shirk in common customs are categorized as follows:

Oaths by entities other than Allah

Several examples of non-divine oaths commonly practiced in our culture include:

1. Oaths by humans: Swearing by the Prophet (peace be upon him), one of the saints of Allah, religious leaders, someone's life, one's master, parents, Hazrat Abbas, Sakhi Sahib, one's honor and dignity, the Ka'bah, the homeland, or one's ancestors.
2. Oaths by creatures: Swearing by the life of an animal or a tree.
3. Oaths by objects: Swearing by a book, the Qur'an, or a stone.
4. Oaths by places: Swearing by a house, a city, or a country.
5. Oaths by time: Swearing by a specific day, month, or year.

Swearing by any of these creations is considered shirk (associating partners with Allah) because the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated in a hadith:

“Whoever swears by anything other than Allah has committed shirk.”

This highlights that oaths should only be taken in Allah's name, as He is the sole entity worthy of reverence and absolute authority.

In a noble hadith, it is narrated:

"Sa'd bin Ubaydah reported that Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) heard a man swearing by the Ka'bah. He said, 'do not swear by the Ka'bah, for I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace

and blessings be upon him) say: Whoever swears by anything other than Allah has committed disbelief (kufr) or shirk." (Reported by Al-Bayhaqi, 1344 AH, Vol. 10, p. 51).

This hadith emphasizes the prohibition of swearing by anything other than Allah and categorizes such actions as acts of shirk or kufr, highlighting the exclusivity of Allah's right to be sworn by.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "No, by my father." The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Do not swear by your fathers. Whoever swears by anything other than Allah has indeed committed shirk." (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 117).

It is also narrated: Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) encountered Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) among a group, and Umar was swearing by his father. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) called out to them, saying: "Behold, Allah the Exalted forbids you from swearing by your fathers. Whoever wishes to swear, let him swear by Allah or remain silent." (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 5, p. 80).

Scholarly Commentary:

Qaradawi (n.d., p. 47) and other scholars have explained that the wisdom behind the prohibition of swearing by anything other than Allah lies in the fact that taking an oath implies glorifying the entity being sworn by. True glory and magnificence are exclusively reserved for Allah, the Almighty, and nothing else can equate to Him. (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 1266).

Using Rings and Threads

Belief in Tawhid (monotheism) does not contradict utilizing the means Allah has placed in creation, such as food to alleviate hunger, water to quench thirst, medicine for healing illnesses, or weapons for defense. These are natural causes that Allah has made a means to achieve objectives. For example, consulting a doctor during illness and using prescribed medications or surgery does not take a person out of the realm of Tawhid.

However, what contradicts Tawhid is the use of hidden or unlawful means to prevent harm or seek protection, such as relying on metal rings or cotton threads for warding off afflictions, as mentioned in the noble hadith:

First Hadith: Imran ibn Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated:

"I entered upon the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and there was a yellow ring on my arm. He asked, 'What is this?' I replied, 'It is for weakness.' He said, 'Remove it.' (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 240).

Second Hadith

Imran ibn Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) reported:

"He entered upon the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) wearing a brass ring around his neck. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'What is this?' He replied, 'It is for weakness.' The Prophet said, 'Would you like to be left to it? Remove it from yourself.'" (Al-Bayhaqi, 1344 AH, Vol. 9, p. 589).

Explanation

These hadiths emphasize that relying on such objects for protection or healing is an act of shirk, as it diverts reliance and trust from Allah to objects that have no power of their own. True reliance should only be placed on Allah, while lawful and rational means can be used as tools, not as sources of ultimate power or healing.

Hanging Amulets

One of the forms of polytheism (shirk) is the use of tamā'im (amulets). The term tamā'im is the plural of tamīma and refers to charms or beads that Arabs traditionally hung around the necks of their children, believing they would protect them from jinn, the evil eye, or harm. Islam invalidated this practice, teaching that only Allah can ward off evil and bring benefit. Several authentic narrations highlight this prohibition, including the following:

1. The Prohibition of Tamā'im by the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)

Mishrah ibn Hā'ān reported that he heard 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir (may Allah be pleased with him) say: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) say: 'Whoever hangs a talisman, may Allah never fulfill his need. And whoever hangs a seashell (as a charm), may Allah never grant him peace.'" (Hakim, 1411 AH, vol. 7, p. 319)

The chain of this narration is authentic. This hadith emphasizes reliance on Allah alone, rejecting superstitious methods to seek divine mercy and protection.

2. Rejection of Polytheistic Practices

'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir al-Juhani narrated: A group approached the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) for allegiance. He accepted the pledge of nine individuals but withheld from one. They asked, "O Messenger of Allah, you accepted the pledge of nine but left this one?" He replied: "He is wearing a talisman."

The man immediately removed it, and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) accepted his pledge, saying: "Whoever hangs a talisman has committed shirk." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 1420 AH, vol. 28, p. 637)

The chain of narration is strong. This hadith underscores the importance of monotheism and abandoning reliance on material or superstitious items.

3. A Practical Example by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: Qais ibn al-Sakan al-Asadi reported: Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) entered upon a woman and saw a red charm around her neck. He harshly cut it off and said: "The family of Abdullah has no need for shirk. Among the things we preserved from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is: 'Ruqyah (incantations), tamā'im (amulets), and tawlah (love spells) are forms of shirk.'" (Naysābūrī, undated, vol. 7, p. 320)

Definition of Terms:

1. Tamīma

Decorative beads or strings hung around children's necks to protect them from the evil eye, believed to bring good fortune or repel harm. (Sindi, undated, vol. 6, p. 454)

2. Wad'ah

A white object extracted from the sea, hung around children's necks to ward off the evil eye. This practice was prohibited due to its basis in superstition. (Ibn Athir, 1399 AH, vol. 5, p. 167)

3. Ruqyah

Incantations or supplications directed to idols or devils, as opposed to those permitted through Qur'anic verses or prophetic traditions.

4. Tawlah

A type of magic used to incite love between a wife and her husband.

Ruling on Qur'anic Amulets

The use of Qur'anic verses, Allah's names, or authentic supplications in amulets has been a matter of scholarly debate. Some scholars permitted it, including Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As, Abu Ja'far, and Imam Ahmad in one narration. This view is also attributed to Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), who interpreted the hadith prohibiting amulets as referring specifically to those containing shirk or forbidden supplications.

Others, including Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ibn Abbas, Hudhayfah, and their followers, disapproved of all types of amulets, even those containing Qur'anic verses. Imam Ahmad, in another narration, and many of his students also disapproved based on the following arguments:

1. The General Prohibition

The hadith prohibiting amulets applies broadly, with no exceptions for Qur'anic ones.

2. Preventing Harmful Practices (Sadd al-Dhara'i)

Permitting Qur'anic amulets might lead to the acceptance of other forms of amulets, thereby opening the door to shirk.

3. Disrespecting the Qur'an

Amulets containing Qur'anic verses might be exposed to disrespectful situations, such as being worn during acts of impurity or while relieving oneself.

4. Misusing the Qur'an

Using the Qur'an as an amulet diminishes its primary purpose of guiding people to righteousness and salvation. (Qaradawi, undated, p. 49)

Conditions for Permissibility (if Allowed)

For those who permit Qur'anic amulets, the following conditions must be met:

1. The amulet should be placed in a secure container, such as a tube or cloth pouch.
2. The written content must consist solely of Qur'anic verses or authentic supplications.
3. The amulet must not be worn during inappropriate circumstances (e.g., sexual intercourse, relieving oneself).

4. The amulet must not be used as a preemptive measure against harm (e.g., the evil eye) but only after harm has occurred. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) stated:

“Anything used after harm has occurred is not considered an amulet.” (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1420 AH, vol. 14, p. 33)

Amulets (Writing Prayers and Sorcery)

One of the practices in contradiction to Tawhid (the oneness of Allah) is the use of amulets and sorcery, which includes phrases and incantations that the ignorant Arabs used. They believed such practices would ward off evil and calamities. These practices often relied on invoking non-Arabic terms and incomprehensible words to seek the help of jinn, which Islam declared invalid. As mentioned in the Hadith: Zaynab, the wife of Abdullah, reported: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say, 'Indeed, charms, amulets, and love spells are acts of shirk (idolatry).'" She replied, "Why do you say this? By Allah, my eye used to hurt, and when a certain Jewish man performed ruqyah on me, it healed." Abdullah said, "That was the work of Shaytan; he used to prod her with his hand. When the ruqyah was performed, he stopped. All you needed to say was: 'Remove the harm, Lord of mankind. Heal, for You are the Healer. There is no healing but Yours, a healing that leaves no illness behind.'" (Bayhaqi, 1414 AH, Vol. 2, p. 43)

Conditions for Permissible Amulets and Ruqyah (Breathe and pray):

Amulets are considered prohibited (haram) if they involve reliance on anyone other than Allah, or if they are written in incomprehensible or non-Arabic phrases. Such practices could potentially involve words of disbelief or shirk. However, permissible ruqyah and prayers exist, as evidenced by authentic narrations.

1. Ruqyah in Pre-Islamic Times

Awf ibn Malik al-Ashja'i reported: "We used to perform ruqyah during the time of ignorance (Jahiliyyah). We asked the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), 'What do you think of that?' He said, 'Present your ruqyah to me. There is no harm in ruqyah as long as there is no shirk in it.'" (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 1727).

2. Praying for Healing

Uthman ibn Abi al-As reported: "I complained to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) about pain in my body since embracing Islam. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, 'Place your hand on the area of pain and say, 'In the name of Allah' three times, and then say seven times, 'I seek refuge in Allah and His power from the evil of what I feel and what I fear.'" (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 1728).

3. The Prophet's Ruqyah

Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said: "When any of his family members fell ill, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would blow over them and recite the Mu'awwidhat (the last two chapters of the Qur'an). When he suffered from the illness that led to his death, I used to recite these chapters and rub his hands over his body, seeking blessings from them." (Nisaburi, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 1723).

The Use of Amulets

Amulets written in Arabic with clear and permissible meanings, such as verses of the Qur'an or established supplications, are considered acceptable by some scholars under strict conditions:

1. The amulet should be made using Qur'anic verses, names, or attributes of Allah
2. It should be written in Arabic and comprehensible.
3. The wearer must believe that the amulet has no power on its own and that its effect depends entirely on Allah's will.

Sorcery and Forbidden Practices

The sorcery condemned in the Hadith, especially under the term "tawlah," refers to sorcery intended to create love or attraction between men and women, which is strictly prohibited. Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi explains that such practices are considered shirk as they contradict reliance on Allah alone.

Qur'anic Evidence

The Qur'an emphasizes that its verses are a source of healing and mercy for believers: "And we send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers." (Qur'an, Al-Isra, 17:82).

The prayer that is written in Arabic and its meaning is clear and evident, including selected prayers from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or anything in authentic traditions related to the importance of reciting Quranic verses and certain surahs like Al-Mu'awwidhatayn, according to some scholars, does not pose any issue. Sheikh Suyuti (may Allah have mercy on him) says: "All scholars have agreed that talismans and magic are permissible under three conditions:

1. The use of Quranic verses, the names, and attributes of Allah in the writing.
2. It must be in Arabic, comprehensible, and meaningful.
3. It must be believed that the talisman or prayer has no effect by itself; rather, its effect depends on God's decree." However, magic (sihar) mentioned in the Hadith, referred to as "Tawlah," is a form of witchcraft used to create love and affection between men and women, which is forbidden. (Al-Qaradawi, n.d., p. 51).

Magic (Sorcery)

Another form of shirk that Islam warns against is sorcery. This refers to creating a type of illusion, suspicion, or enchantment through writing, tying knots, and blowing on objects. Since seeking help from beings other than Allah, such as jinn, Satan, stars, etc., is involved in this practice, it is considered shirk. In all heavenly religions, including Islam, sorcery is regarded as one of the major sins. Islam has declared war on sorcery and sorcerers, and the Qur'an says about those who learn magic: They learned what harmed them and did not benefit them. (Holy Quran, Al-Baqara, verse 102).

And also the Holy Qur'an narrates from the language of Moses (peace be upon him).

And wherever the magician goes, he will not succeed. (Holy Quran, Taha, verse 69).

The Holy Quran also teaches us to seek refuge in Allah Almighty from the evil of magic and sorcerers. And from the evil of those 'witches casting spells by' blowing onto knots, (Holy Quran, al-Falaq, verse 4)

In this verse, the term "نَفَّاتٍ فِي الْعُقَدِ" refers to sorcerers, as they would tie knots and blow on them when intending to perform magic, hoping their wish would be fulfilled. The term "نَفَثَ" means to blow along with some saliva.

Magic is forbidden in Islam, so anyone who affirms or seeks to perform it is considered an accomplice in this sin and crime. Blowing on knots is one of the methods and characteristics of sorcerers, which is why we cite some hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding this topic:

1. Abu Huraira narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever ties a knot and blows on it, has practiced magic. And whoever practices magic has committed polytheism. And whoever attaches himself to something, will be entrusted to it." (Nasai, 1411, Vol. 10, p. 311)
2. Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever goes to a soothsayer and believes what he says has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him)." (Ibn Battal, Vol. 9, p. 440)

Thus, believing in a soothsayer is an act of disbelief. Islam does not stop at condemning the soothsayers but also includes those who visit them, ask them questions, affirm their answers, and thereby encourage, promote, and spread their corruption and misguidance. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said in this regard:

3. Safiya bint Abi Ubaid narrated from some of the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him), who reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and asks him about something, his prayers will not be accepted for forty nights." (Hamidi, 1423, Vol. 4, p. 185)

Translation: Safiya bint Abi Ubaid, from some of the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him), narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Anyone who visits a fortune-teller and asks him about something, his prayers will not be accepted for forty nights." This is because what was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) makes it clear that knowledge of the unseen is exclusive to Allah the Almighty. Since Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not knowledgeable of the unseen, it is even more certain that those who are not Muhammad (peace be upon him) do not have knowledge of the unseen.

Conclusion

Shirk is something that disables the sensitive core of the human soul, it represents darkness and obscurity within a person, and without it, there is no hope for salvation. All deviations and anti-divine movements stem from it. Just as Tawhid (the belief in the oneness of Allah) is the foundation of all correct and constructive actions, Islam and all heavenly religions are highly sensitive to the issue of shirk. The central mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and all other prophets was the matter of Tawhid and the fight against shirk. Shirk is an unforgivable sin, a sin that cannot be pardoned, and there is no greater sin than it. Shirk is the greatest oppression, larger than all other sins. Allah (the Almighty) has spoken about shirk in a shocking way, narrating from Luqman the wise, and describing it as a blazing fire that burns the tree of human deeds. The prophets are infallible and never commit shirk, but to emphasize its importance and for others to be aware, they express the dangers of shirk with such decisive tone. Paradise is forbidden for the polytheists, and their place is Hell. Oppressors have no supporters or helpers. A believer must be cautious of both types of shirk (major and minor) and protect themselves from it. Minor shirk should not be taken lightly, because over time, even minor shirk can lead to major shirk. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned people about a hidden and concealed form of shirk.

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