BOOK REVIEW

Author: Dr. Kamal Omar.
Title: Hajj and Umra.
Pages: 146.
Price: Rs. 35/-

Islam is the only religion which provides to its followers a chance to participate in the annual sacred gathering for performing Hajj every year in the month of Dhul Hajjah. The Hajj (pilgrimage) is one of the fundamental Pillars of Islam and a Muslim, who can command the necessary means is bound to undertake this sacred journey once in his life.

Hajj is identified with special kind of acts to be performed, prescribed prayers to be recited and specified functions to be done by a Muslim. Moreover, it is not a regular type of worship but carries the character of an occasional form of ‘Ibadat (worship). This is why the Muslim authors, in every part of the globe, have given more attention to the subject and have produced ever fresh material for the guidance of fresh Hajis. The book under review, “Hajj and Umra” has also been written to cater to the need of increasing number of Hajis and to provide them with a ready reference for their requirements.

The book has been divided into a preface, two parts and an appendix at the end. The learned author brings forward cogent arguments in the preface to explain the wide scope of religion and duly says:

“Religion is a system of faith and worship, a code of conduct to regulate the life of mankind, a complete way of life for humanity and also a guidance for the Hereafter.” (P. 1).

In this way he proves that religion is, obviously, needed by man at all the times from the beginnings of the creation upto the last day of life upon this earth. Religion, according to him, is obviously revealed by Almighty Allah and not made by human beings due to the simple reason that religion is comprehensive, complete and everlasting and it was conveyed for the man through a contious chain of Prophets. He observes that the fundamental and basic teachings of religion remained one and the same through the ages, although different Prophets introduced some small and minor changes in respect of Shari‘ah suitable for the changing society and the mental development of man. He proves the thesis by giving a number of examples from the daily routine of man irrespective of his religion and creed. The first part of the book deals with Hajj and the author starts with the question: What is Hajj? and he introduces the Hajj in these words. “Hajj is a 5—day world Muslim Congregation which is Organised annually on fixed dates in the closing month of the lunar year (P. 7).
These words seem to imply that the Hajj is a mere congregation of the Muslims just like festivals and fairs. This is calculated to minimise the purpose and object of this arduous and long undertaking. The author should have been careful while defining the fifth pillar of Islam.

The second part of the book is devoted to the discussion of the requirements of Umra. The author states that the first visit to Ka'ba in the prescribed way is named Umra and then he discusses the acts of Umra in detail. In the appendix he tells us the ways and means by acting upon which a Muslim can perform his Hajj and Umra. He lists a number of Arabic words at the conclusion of his book under review and gives their English equivalents. These Arabic words are related to functional Arabic for the daily use of non-Arabs. As such they will be of much use to intending pilgrims.

The author tries to explain himself in the light of the commandment of the revealed book of Allah and he quotes verses from the Holy Quran very frequently in respect of almost every problem and comments on these verses. Although by quoting the Qur'anic verses he tries to support the correctness of his views, yet it appears generally that the learned author depends upon the Quran only and does not give to Hadith the importance it deserves, while dealing with the detailed description of Hajj. It is a recognised fact, which every Muslim knows that the Holy Quran lays down the principles of every problem and the Sunnah of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) provides us with the practical form for the application of those principles. Moreover, when we speak about Hajj the need of the Sunnah becomes more important and essential than if any other issue is involved, because the Hajj is sheer imitation of the holy Prophet’s acts which he performed on the occasion. So no one can perform real and actual Hajj without following the practice of the holy Prophet. Inspite of these shortcomings, the author has tried to give a useful guide book for Hajis intending to undertake the journey to Mecca for Hajj. This book will be helpful for intending Hajis who know English and it is a welcome addition to Islamic religious literature.

(MUHAMMAD TUFAIL)