

A Hindu's Guide to Halal Products

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Of late, halal branding of products has acquired notoriety in India. Non-Muslims, in particular Hindus are annoyed that they are forced to purchase the Halal branded items which they do not want to purchase. They find that the scope of branding products "Halal" has enormously expanded and that they feel they are paying for halal branding. It is an indirect and unwelcome tax burden being imposed on them.

Halal and Zataka

Tradition of consuming meat in the Middle-East has been to consume blood-free meat. Both Jews and Muslims follow this injunction. The Christians do not have any hard and fast choice. Jews call the meat as Kosher. In order to make the meat blood-free, Muslims give a deep cut on throat of an animal and it is let to bleed to death. As it gasps for breath; it writhes in pain and dies. Jews give a deep cut on neck and let the animal bleed to death. Both these methods are cruel. The animal lover NGOs have time to time raised voice against these ways of killing animals. Some European countries have banned these types of killings. Hindus follow the Zataka way. An animal is killed in a single stroke. It dies instantly. It is a least painful way of killing an animal for meat.

Widening scope of halal

Earlier only the meat products were 'Halal' branded. These were purchased by the Muslim population at the local retail meat shops or at home, they killed an animal in halal way. Halal products were made available to the Muslim customers on demand during air travel. As the Muslim customer number swelled over the time, the catering companies started supplying halal products to one and all. It virtually went unnoticed by the non-Muslim passengers, the Hindus in particular. With the growth of Mall culture, the packed halal meat products slowly got introduced in the regular marketing and in due course non-halal products went out. At the same time, even the local Hindu butchers stopped producing the "Zataka" meat. As it happens these days, the Hindu butchers get the animals butchered by the Muslim butchers and then process it for sale on retail basis to individual customers. The Muslim butchers kill the animal only by the Halal mode that too on

payment. As I have surveyed and verified, in Maharashtra and other southern states, only the halal meat is sold in the retail markets.

Then followed another trend. Slowly the halal branded product network expanded. It is obligatory for the exporting companies to get halal certification. There is private body “Halal India” formed by the Muslim organizations which is authorised to send their agents for halal certification. It can be done by a Muslim only, especially the religious preachers. A non-Muslim is not allowed to certify. It has resulted in additional employment generation among the preacher class.

Over the years many other food items like noodles, biscuits and bakery products, cold drinks and well as non-food items like tooth pastes, hair oils, talcum powder, lipsticks started getting halal branded. The list of halal branded items is long and can be accessed on the internet. This has given rise to resentment among the Hindu population and resistance to halal branding appear to be taking firm roots. Hindus have become aware and I observe that so many Hindus not to buy halal branded products. Of late the Hindu consumers in Karnataka have initiated movement to boycott the halal branded products. In the State of UP, there is official ban on the sale of Halal products. It is necessary here for the Hindus to understand the pros and cons of making a particular product halal branded and why so many halal products sold in the market actually should not come under the halal branding regime. The halal branded products are being unduly imposed on them out of general ignorance. If they are made aware of the scope of halal branding, they would be able to question the purpose of halal branding by the manufacturers.

Holy Koran on halal

In the Holy Koran (HQ) there are verses giving specific injunctions on halal items. Those which do not fall under the halal category and called haram, are unacceptable for consumption from the religious point of view. The specific passages from the HQ dealing with halal and haram items are discussed below. For authentic translation and comments, two books are referred;

1. The Holy Quran with the original text, translation and extensive explanatory footnotes published by “The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques”, King Fahd Complex in Saudi Arabia in H. 1413 (AD 1992), referred as THQ hereafter.
2. The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Editor-in-Chief and three other scholars. Published by Harper Collins, USA in 2015. This book gives English Translation of the HQ text and

copious notes. At the end of the book, there are chapters dealing with different aspects related to Koranic studies. It is a well-researched book and adopts modern methods of critical textual studies. It is referred as TSQ hereafter.

THQ 2.168: “O ye people! Eat of what is on the earth, lawful and good. And do not follow the footsteps of Satan for he is to you an avowed enemy.”

An explanatory note in THQ number 169: ‘All well-regulated societies lay down reasonable limitations. These become incumbent on all loyal members of any given society, and show what is “lawful” in that society. But if the limitations are reasonable, as they should be, the “lawful” will coincide more and more with what is good’.

“The general principle then would be: what is lawful and what is good.” In the original text, “lawful” items are indicated by ‘halal’ and good items by ‘*Taiyib*’. Examples of not acceptable i.e. ‘haram’ foods are also given in the note. These are practices of eating congealed blood and eating it fried which was part of the pre-Islamic tradition. It is apparent that by convention, halal and haram product classification was limited to the meat and meat related preparations only.

It further implies that all other items naturally grown by the grace of Allah, i.e. food grains, vegetables, fruits, edible seeds and even water come under the category of inherently good i.e. ‘*Taiyib*’ and these can be consumed after processing, thus grinding, cutting, cooking, etc. do not turn these into haram. This aspect is further elaborated in HQ 2.172 and 2.173.

THQ 2.172: “O ye believers! Eat of the good things that we have provided for you. And be grateful to Allah, if it is Him ye worship.”

Here too the original word for good things is ‘*Taiyib*’. It implies the edible items which are grown or are present in the nature. These are halal and fit for consumption. For example, common salt being present in nature, on drying becomes automatically ‘*Taiyib*’.

THQ 2.173: “He hath only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine. And that on which any other name hath been invoked besides that of Allah. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, - then is he guiltless. For Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.”

THQ note 173 explains: “Dead meat: *maitat*: carrion: animal that dies of itself: the original Arabic a slightly wider meaning given to it in *Fiqh* (Religious law): anything that dies of itself and is not expressly killed for food with the *Takbīr* (prayer) duly pronounced on it. But there are exceptions e.g. fish and locusts are lawful, though they have not been made specially *halāl* with the *Takbīr*.”

It implies that for every animal killed for consumption, the butcher has to invoke name of Allah, then only it becomes halal. If not uttered, it becomes haram. Another very important implication is food offered in the name of any other god also becomes haram. We observe that Muslims deny any food or edible item of *Prasād* offered to the Hindu gods. The denial stems from this injunction. The same is the case with Christians, especially the neo-converted. It is observed by ladies that a maid who accepted *Prasād* with great reverence a few days ago, suddenly starts denying it. Because lately she has been converted to either of these faiths.

As regards the swine flesh, pork, THQ note 174 explains it: “So would swine’s flesh where the swine live on offal. Where swine are fed artificially on clean food, the objections remain: (1) that they are filthy animals in other respects, and the flesh of filthy animals taken as food affects the eater; (2) that swine’s flesh has more fat than muscle building material; and (3) that is more liable to diseases than other kinds of meat; e.g. trichinosis, characterised by hair-like worms in the muscular tissue.” However, we find that swine meat, pork, is widely consumed in the West. The modern methods of processing and cooking render it free from germs etc. and becomes clean to be fit for consumption.

As regards animals fit for consumption, THQ 5.1: “O ye who believe! Fulfil (all) obligations. Lawful unto you (for food) are all beasts of cattle with the exceptions named. But animals of the chase are forbidden while ye are in the sacred precincts or in the state of pilgrimage.”

TSQ (page 272) explains about acceptable animals as the ‘grazing’ animals in particular. The words used are *bahīmat al-an’ām* which implies the grazing animals like camels, cows and sheep and also the hunted animals like deer. The flesh of a swine is forbidden as these are not considered to be “grazing” animals.

There is a long note in THQ numbered 682 on ‘obligations’ mentioned in the beginning. To me that foot note is irrelevant. The real obligation in the case of animal to be slaughtered for food is to utter prayers just at the time of killing the animal. If a prayer is not uttered, the meat becomes haram. Surprisingly this

obligation is not mentioned in the long note. As per the note numbered 684, the pilgrims are prevented from hunting on the way to haj pilgrimage, especially when a pilgrim is wearing '*ihram*' the special garb of white cloths. However, sacrifice of thousands of animals like camel are regularly performed at Haj.

As regards the forbidden meat, HQ 5.3 gives details.

THQ 5.3: "Forbidden for you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than Allah, that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which has been partly eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form) that which is sacrificed on stone altars; (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety."

In this injunction, meat of a dead animal is forbidden; insistence is on killing the animal fresh and then only to consume its meat. If one goes literally by this injunction, packed and frozen meat stored for days, available in Market becomes unacceptable i.e. haram. However, the modern lifestyle has imposed it on us. The way out is to take it granted that it is processed in good hygienic conditions and is clean, i.e. 'Taiyib'. With this assumption, the Muslim population consumes packed meat available on shelf.

Let us review the situation in mechanised abattoir where many animals and that too in hundreds are killed at the same time. Usually a trained Mullah is supposed to be deployed by the halal certifying agencies to ensure the meat being prepared in halal manner. The obligation to utter prayer for every animal is difficult to follow. In fact, many a times those Mullahs are inadequately trained to certify. This fact got highlighted in a report submitted to the Australian government in December 2015 when fact finding committee was formed to investigate the halal certification. The report also expressed that halal certification in many cases could be sham and scam. The things are no different in many other countries. The reality is that halal certification is a good source of money for these certifying agencies and that they are not held accountable for the money they receive.

THQ 5.4: "They ask thee what is lawful to them (as food). Say: Lawful unto you are (all) things good and pure: and what ye have taught the beasts and birds of prey, training them to hunt in the manner directed to you by Allah: Eat what they

catch for you, but pronounce the name of Allah over it: and fear Allah; for Allah is swift in taking account.”

This injunction introduces another aspect of hunting practice. The hawks, hounds and other animals are trained for chase. They hunt for their masters but do not eat meat of the hunted animal. It becomes obligatory according to note 698, “to pronounce the name of Allah over the quarry; this is interpreted to mean that the *Takbīr* should be pronounced when the hawk or dog, etc., is released to a quarry.” While hunting with arrows, before shooting an arrow, it becomes obligatory that *Takbīr* should be pronounced.

THQ 5.5: “This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them....”

The rest of the stanza deals with marrying chaste women among the People of the Book. Here People of the Book refers to people who follow the Old and the New Testaments, i.e. Jews and Christians.

It is to be noted that all types of pure foods include the naturally grown edible items as mentioned earlier. The ways of preparing food differ with societies. It is irrespective of mode of cooking and processing edible items these are acceptable as halal for the followers of Islam. It implies that mode of preparation does not defile the food preparation for the items naturally available. The edible items are ground, powdered, soaked in water, cooked, fermented, added with spices. All these modes of preparations do not defile the food. It remains halal. When Islam spread in many countries, the local converts continued with their traditional modes of food preparations. These were acceptable to the Muslim *ummā* worldwide as halal foods.

THQ 6.99 and 6.141 list many fruits such as clusters of dates, gardens of grapes, olives and pomegranates as bounty bestowed by Allah. These are all halal and fit for consumption. Allah sent down water from the sky to bring forth the shoot of every plant. It is the sign of divine power which is mentioned many times in the HQ text.

Important for the Hindus

There are two verses which forbid from branding halal and pure items as haram.

THQ 5.87: “O ye who believe! Make not unlawful the good things which Allah hath made lawful to you, but commit no excess: for Allah loveth not those given to excess”.

THQ 5.88: “Eat to the things which Allah hath provided for you, lawful and good; but fear Allah, in whom you believe.”

The above two verses are very important for non-Muslims and Hindus in particular, who do not desire to be taxed for the food and many other non-food items certified as Halal. In the above two verses. THQ in a footnote 791 connects 5. 87 with asceticism which is forbidden in Islam, and monasticism has no approval in Islam. Asceticism implies abstaining from enjoying sexual pleasures. Does the verse imply that sexual pleasure is provided by Allah for the human beings as a good thing? Asceticism abhors enjoying sexual pleasures. However, reviewing the way the lawful and good things are referred in the earlier verses, these two verses refer not to sexual, corporal pleasures but the material items grown naturally for the humankind to enjoy. Comment in THQ is irrelevant in this context. This is explicitly confirmed by reference to eating in HQ 5.88.

TSQ relates these two verses with food items (pg. 321). “Earlier in this *sūrah* and elsewhere, the Quran clearly delineates lawful and unlawful foods; (verse numbers quoted). These stipulations are presented in a way that suggests that the limits on what can be consumed are rather few, and that in fact Muslims have a wide range of lawful foods available to them they can eat and enjoy freely as enjoined in v.88. In this vain, the Quran is critical of those who would forbid lawful things arbitrarily and without Divine warrant.” It clearly implies that the pure and processed natural things cannot be branded as halal.

Of late, the Muslims in India are demanding many natural products to be halal branded. The items like grain floors, vegetables, milk items, vegetable oils are to carry halal branding. Even bottled water is demanded with halal branding. All these items earlier were used by them without any branding, just two decades ago. How were these things consumed without any problem? The reason for halal branding of these item lies elsewhere.

The present author views halal branding of these items on global the perspective. In the last decade Arab Spring movement miserably failed. It failed to establish any type of Caliphate as propagated by then ISIS, a terrorist and inhuman organization. ISIS was decimated but resulted in displacement of millions of Arabs from their homeland to the European countries. No Islamic unity or *ummā* worked

in their favour. They were left to the mercy of the European countries who with short sight welcomed those refugees with open arms. In many cases they proved to be potential terrorists, lazy and sponging on doles.

Failure on the part of Islamic *ummā* to unite under Caliphate, freedom these refugees enjoyed in the West as compared to the dictatorial regimes they had back home, the Islamic *ummā* has developed inferiority complex at the civilizational level. They have started ascertaining their presence apparently in an innocuous manner by insisting on the halal branding which is not at all justified in the products other than the meat items. By demanding grain flour like products with halal brand, they are denying purity of the naturally grown products which are grown on the earth with the grace of Allah. As per the verses 5.87-88, by doing so they are committing blasphemy, for which they will have to face consequences in the hereafter.

In India, things are no way different. There was a large majority of Muslims who desired ISIS to succeed and subsequently participate in Gazva-a-Hind struggle with the backing of ISIS. Those with great enthusiasm to participate in the establishment of Caliphate under ISIS went there sometimes openly and most of the time stealthily. There they did not experience comradery as part of the wider *ummā* they imagined. They returned disillusioned by the horrible behaviour of Arab ISIS members and discrimination they faced there. The Uighurs Muslims in Northwest China are experiencing persecution and inhuman treatment at the hands of the Chinese authorities. They are experiencing failure of support by *ummā* the way powerful Arab and Islamic states like Malaysia, Indonesia ignored them and preferred to look the other way. It was then followed the election results in 2014 where the Muslim vote did not matter to establish full majority under BJP in parliament. It was repeated in the elections of 2019. That led to growth of feeling of utter disgust among the Indian Muslim community. As a reaction they started to assert their presence by demanding the halal branded products. The manufacturing companies are succumbing to their pressure.

What if Hindus start ascertaining their demand for non-halal products? It is desired that the edible products should be clean and in pure form. The mechanical product handling in the mass production establishments is more clean i.e. 'Taiyib' than the manual handing. The packed item like grain flour are hygienically packed. These should be better acceptable to the Muslim population. But their adamant

attitude out of civilizational failure prevents them withdrawing from the isolation syndrome.

There is economic aspect associated with halal certification. The certification has to be done by a Mullah. With growing product range being forced under the halal certification, it generates assured income for millions of these religious preachers who otherwise are paid paltry sums by the mosque administration and respective state governments. The duty on certification add to their income source. It is sort of easy money. Who pays for it? The non-Muslims, the Hindus in particular in India. If this trend is allowed to grow, it will engulf all the aspects of life in India. So Hindus will have to assert on purchasing the non-halal marked products. The Hindus should at every stage question necessity of the halal branding of products and stop purchasing those. They should also encourage Hindu butchers to restart zatka practice.

About the author: - Dr. Pramod Pathak is M. Tech. (Chemical Engineering) from I.I.T. Mumbai and Ph. D. from Mumbai University. He is author and journalist. Over the years he has specialized in the Islamic studies. He has published two books and several articles on Islam, one of which was awarded the state level, 'Granthalaya Bharati' award.