

Importance of Social Etiquette in Islam: An Approach in the Context of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānavī’s Illustrations

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ABSTRACT

Social etiquette is highly essential for the solidarity among the members of a society. The need of its observance is felt and advocated in all the ages of history. And in this modern age, its need and importance is felt most intensely. Islamic scholars have contributed extensively in this field, not only through their writings but also through their practical demonstrations. They have strongly emphasized on the importance of the teachings of social etiquette, ethics and beautiful social conduct. They have also explained each and every aspect of social etiquette in the context of their respective times, and based their explanations on the spirit and purposes of Islamic *Sharī‘ah*.

Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānavī is one of the most prominent Sufī and Jurist who devoted considerable attention towards the rectification of morals and social behavior. In fact, he wrote extensively on this subject, and trained his students, disciples and associates to live a disciplined and civilized life in which every member should feel it his own responsibility to render help to others, to speak politely and in a civilized manner, avoid doing anything that could inflict harm to the life, honor or property of others.

In the light of the writings and speeches of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānavī, the present paper attempts at explaining the importance and value of social etiquette in Islam. Furthermore, the paper attempts to look and understand the methodology of Maulānā Thānavī in deducing the principles and details of good social behavior from the primary sources of Islamic *Sharī‘ah*. The study of the writings of Maulānā Thānavī lets us know his outlook on the social etiquette in the context of Islamic *Sharī‘ah*, and how he defines the essence of the good moral character in the light of the spirit of Islam.

Keywords: Social etiquette, ethics, behavior, morals, manners, Thānavī, *Ādāb al-Mu‘āshirah*, *Husn al-Mu‘āshirah*.

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1. Introduction

The need of social etiquette is felt in every age, and it is rightly considered as the basis of individual as well as social life. It is the reason that the best minds in all the ages – ancient and modern – remained constantly concerned with it, and wrote a lot on this subject in philosophical as well as religious terms. All of them have vehemently emphasized on the importance of its adoption and observance of its teachings.

In Islam, social etiquette has the most importance as it emphasizes on the universal brotherhood, and cordiality in the communities and societies. Islam has greatly emphasized on the adoption of the best social behavior and manners. It can be evaluated by the fact that the two primary sources of Islam, i.e., Qur'ān and Sunnah, are replete with the teachings of *Ḥusn al-Mu'āshirah* (best social behavior). Moreover, among the excellences of Islam is that when it declares a thing good and recommended, it also motives in terms of adopting it and also paves way to follow and practice it.

Islamic scholars have written extensively on the subject of social etiquette and ethics in all the times in most lucid manner. There are many scholars who have written extensively on this subject – from among the ancients and moderns. Ibn Miskāwaih, Ibn Sīna, Imām Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiah and others wrote extensively on this subject. And in present times Muḥammad Al-Ghāzali wrote *Khuluq al-Muslim* (Muslim's character), Maulānā Yusuf Islāhi wrote *Ādāb-i-Zindaghi*, *Ḥusn-i-Mu'āshirat*, etc. In fact the basic principles related to any aspect of life are present in the primary texts of Islam, i.e., Qur'ān and Hadith. And the main contribution of these scholars is that they explain, expand and elaborate each and every principle providing every detail in the context of their relative times so as to bring them very nigh to the understanding of their contemporary people enabling them to adopt and practice these teachings and injunctions. And if the scholar is also a Sufi – spiritual instructor – he, besides writing on these etiquettes and manners, insist most vehemently upon adopting and practicing these ways. He also imparts the knowledge of etiquette and manners through his practical demonstrations as well. He allows none out of the group of his pupils and disciples to demonstrate any kind of leniency and negligence in following these ways.

Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī is a very prominent figure mainly in the context of Indian subcontinent and also worldwide. He is equally famous for his prolific writing – covering all aspects of Islamic learning, as well as mystical / Sufi

traditions and practices. Thousands of students received education from him and thousands of disciples received mystical instructions from him. He was master in *Sharī'ah* as well as *Tarīqah*. According to his biographers – which is also evident from his works – his most interesting fields of learning were: Qur'ānic Sciences, Tasawwuf and Akhlāq, and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). On Akhlāq and Social manners (*Ḥusn-i-Mu'āshirat*) he has to his credit many books and large number of lectures and table talks (which are also available in written form now). He has, in most strongly terms, insisted on adopting *Ḥusn-i-Mu'āshirat* and has consistently imparted the need and value of social etiquettes to his pupils and disciples. He used to say that the essence of good social behavior is that no one's life, honor or property should be harmed by any of your word or deed.

He used to train and prepare his disciples in matters of social etiquette in practical terms, and if anybody showed any leniency or negligence he used to reprimand them in most strong terms. He used to say that the harm of being negligent in social behavior extends to others. That is why he used to say: I do not pay as much attention to *dhikr* (remembrance) and spiritual practices as I do to the rectification of character and etiquette. The reason for this is that the latter is connected to others [while *dhikr* is connected to the self only].

Here we are going to discuss about the importance of social ethics in Islam as explained by Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī in his writings and what his biographers have recorded about his methodology in imparting these teachings in his disciples and training them to live a civilized life. Moreover, we will be presenting some examples of social etiquettes he used to insist upon and which he has explained in his writings. These examples can be considered as rare and of crucial importance especially in the present age for the establishment of a better society where every individual is a source of comfort and solace to others.

2. Importance and Value of Social Etiquette in Islam in the Context of the Writings of Maulānā Ashraf Ali Thānavī

2.1 Importance of Social Etiquette and the Need for its Rectification

Social Etiquette (*Ādāb al-Mu'āshirah*) is an extremely essential department / branch from among the many departments / branches of *Dīn* (religion of Islam). Unfortunately, not only do the masses but even a majority of the elite do not consider it to be a part of *Dīn*. Maulānā Ashraf Ali Thānavī – besides paying attention to the other departments of *Dīn* – paid special attention to this department and focused on it with much detail in a manner which is probably unprecedented

for several centuries. He said on one occasion: “I may not be a *Mujaddid-e-Millah* (revivalist of the Muslim community) but I am certainly a *Mujaddid-e-Mu‘āshirah* (one who revives and rectifies society).”¹ Maulānā Thānavī was so particular about the rectification of society that he spent night and day in reprimanding people in this regard without the slightest fear of any criticism from anyone. He didn’t bother in the least about the accusations of the feeble-minded. Since Maulānā Thānavī, based on his natural temperament and the demands of the *Sharī‘ah*, himself was very particular about his own excellent etiquette, therefore he could not tolerate any misconduct and misbehavior on the part of his associates, so he used to give verbal and practical instructions on every misdemeanor with a very fine comb. Moreover, he wrote a number of books on this subject, e.g., *Ādāb al-Mu‘āshirah* (Social Etiquette), *Hayat al-Muslimīn*, *Islāh al-Rusūm*, *Aghlāt al-Awwām*, etc., and delivered hundreds of lectures and public speeches which are also available in written form today.

Maulānā Thānavī used to say: “I do not pay as much attention to *dhikr* (remembrance) and spiritual practices as I do to the rectification of character and etiquette. The reason for this is that the latter is connected to others [while *dhikr* is connected to the self only].”²

Whenever he saw some ill-mannerliness, misconduct, indiscipline on the part of the people, he often used to say: “Alas! It is so sad that etiquette and manners have completely disappeared from the world.”³

He used to say: “Nowadays, various subjects and sciences are taught everywhere but there is extreme dearth of the teaching of character (morals and ethics).”⁴

He used to say: “Every task – no matter how small – is in extreme need of order and arrangement, otherwise slight mismanagement and negligence in such matters may cause many damages.”⁵

Maulānā Thānavī used to say: “The Sultanate (empire / kingdom) which went out of the hands of the Muslims, went out solely because of mismanagement and negligence. A kingdom can run with unbelief (*kufr*) but it can never run with mismanagement.”⁶

He used to express a lot of remorse when he saw the mismanagement and disorder among the Muslims and their activities. He quite often said: “Their misdeeds have caused Sultanate to be taken away from them.”⁷

Once he said: “Nowadays people consider *wazā’if* and *awrād* as the basis of *Dīn* (Islam) and leave aside the injunctions related to social etiquette. This type of notion is totally illusion and error. Reformation of social etiquette (*Ādāb al-Mu’āshirah*) is imperative since it is an essential branch of the *Dīn*. Just as Prayer (*Ṣalāh*) and Fast (*Ṣawm*) are compulsory, so, too, is social etiquette incumbent.⁸

The need for proper observance of social etiquette is of the greatest importance. Since observance of *Ḥusn al-Mu’āshirah* (beautiful conduct with others) ensures the protection of the hearts of the people (and provide comfort to them). It is quite obvious that the status of the heart is higher than that of other things (like material wealth and property). Moreover, in the rectification of social etiquette (*Ādāb al-Mu’āshirah*) there is the protection of honor and reputation of others. After the protection of *Īmān* (belief), safeguarding honor and reputation is of the greatest importance. Man is prepared to sacrifice everything in the endeavor to safeguard his honor.⁹

2.2 The Harm of the Ignorance as Regards Social Etiquette

Maulānā Thānavī describes the harm of the ignorance in matters of social etiquette in these words: “In my opinion the biggest cause of the lack of mutual love and unity – which is strongly emphasized by the *Sharī’ah*, and of which the good minds of the present times are very much concerned – is the currency of bad social etiquette. Because the fact is that due to evil social etiquette / behavior there appears ill-feeling, animosity and anguish among the people. The ill-feeling and animosity prevent the development of goodwill and friendliness, both of which are of pivotal importance for mutual love and affection among the members of society.”¹⁰

Islamic teachings related to *Ādāb al-Mu’āshirah* (social etiquette) inculcate humility in man. Without humility, the sympathy and unity is impossible. If there is no humility, there will be no sympathy and unity among the people in a society.

He says that Islamic *Sharī’ah* strongly emphasizes the need of practicing good social etiquette. And the notion that good social etiquette has nothing to do with *Dīn* (*Sharī’ah* of Islam) is refuted by the Qur’ān, *Ahādīth* and statements of the wise sages. In fact, the Qur’ān and the *Ahādīth* are not only replete with ethical and moral teachings but they insist on adopting the best social behavior.¹¹

2.3 Social Etiquette in the Qur'ān

A few *āyāt* (verses) are quoted, here, to serve as example along with the explanation of the etiquettes contained therein:

Allāh says in the Holy Qur'ān: “O believers! When you are asked to make room in the assemblies, then make room. Allāh will give you ample room. When you are asked to get up, then get up.” {*Sūrah al-Mujādalah* (58): 11}.

Look at the consideration one has to give to one's fellow companions, especially in a gathering or an assembly.

At another place in the Holy Qur'ān, Allāh says: “O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you in order that ye may heed (what is seemly). If ye find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to you: if ye are asked to go back, go back: that makes for greater purity for yourselves: and Allah knows well all that ye do.” {*Sūrah al-Nūr* (24): 27-28}.

These *āyāt* (verses) exhort consideration for others, here, e.g., for the inmates of the houses.¹²

2.4 Social Etiquette in the *Ahādīth*

A few *Ahādīth* are quoted here to serve as example along with the explanation of the etiquettes contained therein:

Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.A.^W.S) said that when sitting together to eat, a person should not take several dates at once unless he takes permission from those who are eating with him.¹³

Look! A matter which is extremely insignificant is prohibited solely because it is unmannerly and because it would be detested by others.

Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.A.^W.S) said: “A person who eats garlic or onions should remain aloof [from an assembly].”

A person is prohibited from entering the assemblies because it would cause a slight disturbance and discomfort to others.

The holy Prophet (S.A.A.^W.S) said: “It is not permissible for a guest to stay over for so long that he imposes on the host.”

This *Ḥadīth* prohibits us from imposing on others and limiting their freedom.

Allah's Messenger (S.A.A.^{W.S}) said that when eating with others, a person should not stop eating even if he has eaten to his fill until the others stop because they may feel shy and stop eating merely because he has stopped while they are still hungry.

This proves that one should not do anything which would cause embarrassment to others.

It is related in a *Ḥadīth* that Jābir (*Raḍ.A*) came to the house of the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) and knocked on the door. Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) asked: "Who is it?" He replied: "It is me." The Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) said in a tone of disapproval: "It is me, it is me."

This shows that we must speak clearly so that others can understand what we are saying. To speak in vague terms which makes it difficult for others to understand entails causing them confusion.

Anas bin Malik (*Raḍ.A*) said: "Allah's Messenger (S.A.A.^{W.S}) was the most beloved to the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions of the Prophet), yet no one stood up when they saw him because they knew that he disapproved of it."

This means that any special way of showing respect to a person or serving him in a way which is against his temperament should not be done even if one wants to do it. The wish of the other must be given preference. Some people insist on extending certain services to the elders which causes pain to the latter.

The Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) said that it is not permissible to sit in-between two people (who wittingly sat next to each other) without their permission.

We learn from this that we must not do anything which would agitate others.

There is a *Ḥadīth* in which it is stated that when the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) needed to sneeze, he would cover his mouth with his hand or garment in order to stifle the sound.

This means that we must show so much of consideration to those sitting near us that even a loud sound must not frighten or alarm them.

Jābir (*Raḍ.A*) narrates: When we used to attend the assembly of the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}), a person would sit wherever he found a place.

In other words, a person who enters later must not cut through to go to the front. This proves the etiquette of an assembly.

‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās (*Raḍ.A*), Anas bin Mālik (*Raḍ.A*), and Sa‘īd Ibn al-Musayyib (*Raḥ.A*) state that when visiting a sick person, one should not sit too near the patient. The visitor must sit for a short while and leave.

Look at the fine consideration which a person has to bear in mind so that he does not cause the slightest burden to the other. Sometimes, a patient needs to change his position and posture, stretch out his legs or finds it difficult to engage in a conversation. However, those whose sitting nearby brings comfort to the patient are excluded from this prohibition.

Mother of the believers, ‘Ā’ishah (*Raḍ.A*) narrates: “The Prophet (*S.A.A.^{W.S}*) got up very silently from our bed on the night of *Barā’ah*, put on his shoes silently, opened the door silently, went out without a sound and shut the door noiselessly.”

Look at the consideration shown to a sleeping person. Look at how all these actions were performed noiselessly so that the sleeping person is neither disturbed nor awakened suddenly which could cause any alarm to the sleeping person.

Miqdād Ibn Aswad (*Raḍ.A*) relates a lengthy story wherein he states: “We were the guests of the Prophet (*S.A.A.^{W.S}*) and sleeping over at his place. We used to sleep after *‘ishā’* (the night prayer). The Prophet (*S.A.A.^{W.S}*) came in (and since it was possible for the guest to be either awake or asleep) he would offer *salām* (greetings) in a tone which would be heard by the one who was awake but would not disturb the one who was asleep.”

The same consideration as learnt from the previous *Ḥadīth* is learnt from this incident.

The books of jurisprudence clearly state that *salām* should not be offered to a person who is eating or drinking, conducting a lesson, engaged in *dhikr* and so on. We learn from this that the *Sharī‘ah* disapproves of disturbing a person who is occupied in a necessary task because it would cause his heart to be diverted. Similarly, the jurists state that a person suffering from halitosis should not be permitted in the *masjid*.¹⁴

After looking at the above-quoted examples, taken from the Qur’ān and the *Ahādīth*, collectively, it becomes absolutely clear that the *Sharī‘ah* emphasizes that

no action or condition of a person must cause the slightest discomfort or harm, burden or heaviness, constriction or restriction, bother or agitation, dislike or displeasure, confusion or worry, or disquiet and anxiety to other person or people. Thus, it is essentially imperative to put an end to all causes of disturbance and discomfort.¹⁵

In fact, the very obligation that no harm or discomfort should reach any person is the basis of good character and mannerism with the people. This is described in a very comprehensive statement of the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) when he said: المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه و يده [A (perfect) Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands other Muslims are safe].¹⁶ In another version instead of the words “other Muslims” the words mentioned are “other people”.¹⁷

2.5 Precedence of Good Social Etiquette over the other Departments of *Dīn* (Islam):

There are five constitutional branches / departments of Islam, and they are arranged in the following order: *'Aqā'id* (beliefs), *'Ibādāt* (worships), *Mu'āmalāt* (mutual transactions and contracts), *Akhlāq* (moral character), and *Ādāb al-Mu'āshirah* (social etiquette). Although the department of *Ādāb al-Mu'āshirah* (social etiquette) is posterior to the departments of beliefs (*'Aqā'id*) and compulsory acts of worship (*'Ibādāt*), shortcomings as regards beliefs and acts of worship are detrimental to one's own self while shortcomings as regards social etiquette cause harm to others. And it is more serious to cause harm to others than to one's own self. Thus, on this basis, social etiquette takes precedence over beliefs and acts of worship. To explain this aspect of social etiquette even the holy Qur'ān, at some places, mentions good social etiquette prior to acts of devotion (i.e., worships / *'Ibādāt*) and beliefs (*'Aqā'id*).¹⁸

Precedence of social etiquette over obligatory acts (*farā'id*) is only in certain aspects, but in all aspects over optional acts of worship (*nawāfil*). A *Ḥadīth* states that someone spoke of two women in the presence of the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}). One of them used to engage in excessive *Ṣalāh* and fasting (this refers to optional *Ṣalāh* and fasting because excessiveness can only be in optional acts), but she used to inconvenience and vex her neighbors. The second woman did not perform too many *Ṣalāh* (prayers) and fasts (she sufficed with the obligatory acts) but did not offend her neighbors in any way. The Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) said that the first is destined to the Hell-fire while the second is destined for Paradise.¹⁹

Although social etiquette does not take precedence over transactions and dealings (*Mu'āmalāt*) as regards the above aspect – because shortcomings in this regard certainly harm others – it [social etiquette] is more important than transactions and dealings on the basis of another aspect. That is, even though the masses may not consider them to be so, the elite consider transactions and dealings to be part of *Dīn*²⁰; while social etiquette are only considered to be part of *Dīn* by the super elite and not so by most of the elite. Some of them may consider social etiquette to be part of *Dīn* but do not believe it to be as important as transactions and dealings. This is why they display less practical importance to it. As for the rectification of internal character (*Akhlāq*), it falls in the same ruling as compulsory acts of worship. The aspect of precedence of social etiquette over acts of worship as mentioned above is applicable here as well.²¹

To sum up, the precedence and importance of social etiquette over all other departments of *Dīn* – whether partially or totally – has been established. Despite this, the majority of the masses and some of the elite do not pay any practical attention to it. It is now proved that *Ādāb al-Mu'āshirah* is an inseparable part of *Dīn* (religion of Islam), rather it's most important part. Every Muslim is, therefore, required to strongly adhere to all the branches of *Dīn* which guarantee peace and tranquility of both the worlds. In fact, Islamic *Sharī'ah* aims to eliminate frustration. In every condition, the *Sharī'ah* endeavors that man is at peace. Whether it be in sorrow or in happiness, it is the aim of the *Sharī'ah* that one should be in the state of peace, and not in the state of frustration. The *Sharī'ah* teaches the way of lightening grief and sorrow. Its teachings regarding peace augment the factors of peace and paves the way to adopt them. If the principles given by Islamic *Sharī'ah* are properly adopted and its teachings properly followed, no one will remain in a state of frustration and discomfort, and – Allāh willing – the joys of Paradise will be experienced even in this very world. As the saying goes:

کے رابائے کارے نباشد	بہشت آں جبکہ آزارے نباشد
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[That place is a Paradise where no harm is caused to another and where no person has a motive with another].²²

2.6 Three Stages of Imparting the Teachings of Social Etiquette

In matters of the rectification of social etiquette, Maulānā Thānavī used to give verbal instructions, and if anybody showed any negligence in maintaining proper discipline or demonstrated any misconduct or misbehavior then he used to reprimand such people sternly – whether they were outsiders or his own associates

– correcting them and teaching them the proper social behavior. Moreover, quoting an important saying: “العلم صيد و الكتابة قيده” (knowledge is a prey, and writing it down is its trap)²³, he says that he felt dire need to write on the subject.²⁴ That is why wrote many books on the subject as mentioned above.

In the adoption of this threefold methodology, Maulānā Thānavī took light from the practices of the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}), Ṣaḥābah (*Rad.A*) and pious ancestors (*aslāf*). He says: “Allah’s Messenger (S.A.A.^{W.S}) did not restrict himself to highlighting this by his words and actions alone. Rather, when he saw any inattention in this regard in his attendants and companions, he imposed on them to observe the correct etiquette and also taught them practically by delegating tasks and duties to them. A Sahābī (companion) brought him a gift and entered without offering *salām* and without seeking permission to enter. The Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) instructed him to go outside, come back, say the *salām* and say: ‘I am here.’”²⁵ Moreover, every action and every word of the Prophet (S.A.A.^{W.S}) and the Ṣaḥābah (*Rad.A*) is recoded in the books of *Ḥadīth* and *Sīrah*.

3. Some Important Examples of Social Etiquette as Explained by Maulānā Thānavī

3.1 Etiquette of Serving and Attending to a Person

Don’t insist on rendering a service which would cause inconvenience to the served person: There are certain services which a person does not like to be done to him. You should, therefore, not insist on rendering a service which inconveniences the person. The services which he doesn’t want others to do for him can be known through his clear prohibitions or can be gauged through indications.²⁶

Inform your master of the completion of the task entrusted to you by him: Upon accomplishing a duty which your master [obeyed / served] has asked you to do. Because, in most cases, he will be waiting in expectation of your response and will remain uneasy until he is informed.²⁷

3.2 Etiquette of Sitting near a Person

Sit not very close nor very far: If you have to sit next to a person do not sit so close to him as to cause him anxiety and inconvenience, nor so far that it becomes difficult to conduct the conversation with ease.²⁸

Sitting near a person who is occupied in his work: Maulānā Thānavī says: “I have learnt from experience that by sitting unnecessarily near a person who is busy

in his work causes his heart to become occupied and bewildered. This is more so when a person sits near him and looks at him repeatedly. Be extremely cautious in this regard.”²⁹

3.3 Some Etiquettes of Host and Guest

Inform the host if you do not intend eating: If you go as a guest and do not wish to eat – whether because you have already eaten, you are fasting or for any other reason – then inform your host immediately on arrival. Let it not happen that the host makes arrangements and bears fatigue in making them, and then when it is the time to eat, you tell him that you will not be eating. In this way, all his arrangements and food would go to waste. This will cause much grief to the host who has labored much to make hospitable arrangements for the guest. Therefore, it is necessary to take care of this *adab* (manner and behavior).³⁰

Do not accept an invitation without the permission of the host: If you are staying with a person as his guest you must not accept an invitation from someone else without obtaining permission from your host.³¹

Inform the host before leaving: If a guest needs to go anywhere, he must inform his host first so that the host is not inconvenienced into having to search for him at the time of meals or at other times.³²

A guest must inform of his dietary requirements: It is the duty of a guest to inform his host of his dietary requirements on his arrival. For example, if he has less chilies in his food or he abstains from certain foods and so on. Some people put on airs only when the food is laid out on the table.³³

Addressing the attendant of the host: A guest said to the attendant of the host: “Get me water.” Maulānā Thānavī said: “One should never adopt an authoritarian tone, it is most unmannerly. One should rather say: ‘Can I have some water please?’”³⁴

Do not ask for anything from your host: When you go as a guest to any place, do not ask for anything (necessities are excluded). Sometimes the thing which you ask for maybe very insignificant but the host may not have it at that time and will not be able to fulfil your request. This would cause unnecessary embarrassment to the host.³⁵

A guest must leave a little food: When a guest has eaten to his fill, he must certainly leave some food on the table (by letting remain some of it in the serving

utensils) so that the hosts do not assume that the food was insufficient and the guest had not eaten to his fill. This would cause them embarrassment.³⁶

Do not insist on a person to eat: Do not insist on a guest to eat. It is unbecoming.³⁷

Do not carry away a dish for refilling: If there is a need for curry on the table, do not take away the dish – in which there is still some curry – from before the guest for refilling. Bring another dish instead. And when you send food to the guest, ensure that it is covered (e.g., with a lid, etc.).³⁸

Seeing off the guest: When the guest is departing, the host should see him off the door. This is *Sunnah* (Practice of the Prophets).³⁹

3.4 Etiquette to be maintained in gatherings / assemblies

Shaking hands with everyone in an assembly: When some people arrive in an assembly, they shake hands separately with each person irrespective of whether they know the person or not. This wastes a lot of time and the entire assembly gets occupied in this. It is better to just go and shake hands with the person whom you came to meet. However, if you know the others as well, there is no harm in shaking hands with them.⁴⁰

Saying *salām* to a busy person: Saying *salām* to a person who is engrossed in a conversation or in some other work can disturb him and distract him from his work; it is not proper to say *salām* to him at that time. Neither should he be compelled to shake hands. In this situation it is uncultured and causes distress and frustration to others.⁴¹

Interfering in the conversation of an assembly: If a certain conversation is taking place in an assembly, a newcomer should not enter into it by offering *salām* in order to draw attention to himself. He should not become an interference and interrupter in the conversation going on. Instead, he must enter silently with his gaze lowered and sit down. He may then offer *salām*, etc. once he finds the opportunity.⁴²

Do not spit in the presence of others: Neither spit nor blow your nose if others are seated near you. If you have to do either of this, go to one side away from them and do it.⁴³

Etiquette of taking leave: It is not permissible to leave a gathering which was organized to discuss certain issues without taking the consent of the chairman of the assembly.⁴⁴

3.5 Etiquette of Speaking and Listening

Speak clearly and audibly: Some people are in the habit of speaking a few words audibly and others silently. Consequently, the entire statement is not heard or it is heard incompletely. In both cases, it is possible that the addressee may misunderstand or be confused. Both could cause ill-feeling. Every part of whatever you have to say must be said absolutely clearly.⁴⁵

Listening to what is said: Listen attentively to what is said. If you are in doubt about anything, ask the speaker immediately. Do not act on your own assumption without having understood what was said.⁴⁶

Do not make a statement without verifying it: Do not consider something to be definite merely on your assumption. If it is only an assumption, express its uncertain nature to others. When you are conveying something to other people ascertain the facts first and then inform others. Otherwise you will be creating many confusions and inconveniences to the people if proper verification is not made before passing on things to others.

Give reply immediately when somebody calls you: When somebody calls you, reply verbally immediately (before proceeding towards him) so that the caller knows that you have heard him. Your adopting this type of attitude will definitely save him from being troubled to call you again. Because when a person replies to a call, the caller learns that his call was heard. But if no reply is given, the caller is inconvenienced and has to call out a second or a third time.

Interjecting a person's speech: Until such time that one talk / topic is completed do not introduce another. While someone is talking on a particular topic do not interrupt with another subject. Maulānā Thānavī relates his own experience and says: "I was involved in *ta 'līm* (teaching those present) and had not finished my point as yet when a student (*dhākir*) began relating his dream to me. I said: 'What is this? I have not completed my point as yet and you are starting a new subject! O intelligent fellow! A statement has a beginning and an end. Do not speak in-between. A man of planning, intelligence and understanding does not speak in-between. By interjecting what I was teaching, it means that it was your objective to relate your dream to me and the teaching (*ta 'līm*) was just a waste of time according to you. It is as though all my teaching is gone to waste. Never repeat such mistakes again."⁴⁷

Do not speak of nauseating things: When eating, do not speak of things which would cause disgust to those who are seated over there. The disposition of some people is so delicate that they cannot tolerate to hear the mention of nauseating and disgusting things at the dining table.⁴⁸

Do not cause despair to a sick person: Do not speak before a sick person or to his family in a manner which would cause him or them to lose hope and break their heart unnecessarily. Instead, speak of things which would raise their spirits. For example say: “Allāh willing, all pain and affliction will be removed.”⁴⁹

Do not spread sad news without verifying it: If you hear about a person’s grief, worry or illness, do not convey it to others – especially to his relatives – until you confirm the truth of the news.⁵⁰

Speaking in the presence of children: Do not speak shameful things in the presence of children.⁵¹

Moderate speech: Be moderate in speech. One should not expand the discussion so long that people become tired and perplexed nor should he / she contract it to such an extent that the aim and object of the discussion is not understood.⁵² Be to the point. Do not beat about the bush when speaking.

Speak respectfully to others: Do not insult anyone. Do not call anyone with an insulting tone calling them by names like: O *Fāsiq* (a wicked person), O *Kāfir* (disbeliever), O *Mal’ūn* (accursed), O enemy of Allah, O dishonest, etc. If that person is not like that, then these appellations will return to the speaker. In the same way cursing others by saying: May Allah perish him, May Allah destroy him, May Allah’s wrath be upon him, May Allah send him to the hell is not permissible whether said regarding men, animal or even any non-living thing.⁵³

Respect for the seniors: Juniors should not call their seniors by their names. They should adopt a name or title of respect and honor.

Listening to the incident already known to you: When somebody is about to relate an incident to you, then even if you are aware of it do not silence him by saying that you know about it. It is commendable to listen to his talk with the intention of pleasing him.

Etiquette of listening to the answer: On obtaining the answer for your question, do not maintain silence as to confuse the responder. If you understood the answer, make manifest it in some way. If you didn’t understand, then ask for further clarification.⁵⁴

Do not whisper unnecessarily: When there is a company of three people, two out of these three should not speak by whispering to each other, nor should they ask the third one to leave, nor should they speak in a language which is not understood by the third person. This causes distress and anxiety to him. Moreover, if there are two persons speaking to each other, a third one should not interrupt their talk, nor should he present his views unless asked to do so.

3.6 Etiquette of Presenting and Receiving Gifts

A gift must be given solely out of love: Certain temperaments are most burdened at accepting gifts from people who have certain needs to be fulfilled by the person. For example, you request him to make *du‘ā* (supplication) for you, ask him for *ta‘wīdh*, request him to intercede on your behalf, request him to accept you as a *murīd* (disciple) and so on. You must be very careful in this regard. A gift must be given solely out of love, it must not be give out of any motive. Do not present the gift at the time when you express your need to him or else it will seem as if you gave the gift because you wanted your need to be fulfilled. Similarly, when presenting a gift do not cause the person to think that you gave it because you have a need to be fulfilled.⁵⁵

Abstain from offending a person who presents a gift: If you receive a gift, it is not proper to give it in charity immediately, in the presence of the giver. In this way the giver will be grieved. You may give it after some time when the giver is not able to learn of it.⁵⁶

Take care of the amount of the gift: If you are giving a gift to the person who is in journey, take care that it should not be that much which could cause difficulty and trouble to carry.⁵⁷ And even when you are traveling and want to take some gift to present to someone, do not take that much which could create difficulty for you to carry.⁵⁸

Give gifts in private: When you want to give a gift to someone, give it in privacy, don't publicize it. However, the receiver (*muhdā ilaih*) has a choice to make it public, but it is improper to advertise with pride the great value or abundance of the gifts received.⁵⁹

Know the choice of others: If the gift is in kind (i.e., not cash) then endeavor to know the likes and preferences of the one to whom you intend to make gifts. And accordingly present to him something which he prefers.

Gift from minors: It is not permissible to accept gifts from mentally deranged persons as well as from minor children.⁶⁰

Refusing a gift: A gift should not be refused on half of its slight value or small quantity.

3.7 Etiquette of using Things and Taking Care of Them

Using items belonging to other people: Do not use an item which belongs to someone else without the latter's permission. Using it without the latter's permission is impermissible in the *Shari'ah*. Secondly, it causes many inconveniences to others.⁶¹

Do not give an item by throwing it: If you have to give an item to a person in his hand, do not throw it from a distance. Go personally and give it in his hand.⁶²

Returning an item to its place: If an item is used by several people, the person who uses it last must return it to the place from where it was taken. It is most important to do this.⁶³

3.8 Etiquette of meeting one another (*mulāqāt*)

Receive with cheerful mood: When someone comes to you receive him with a pleasant and cheerful mood so as to please and honor him.⁶⁴

Get up or move slightly: When someone comes to meet you – and if you are sitting – get up or move slightly. This is extremely wonderful attitude, and in it there is respect for the visitor.⁶⁵

Introduce yourself immediately: When one goes to somebody to meet him, the visitor should introduce himself at the first available opportunity without waiting in expectation of being asked to introduce. He should also, at the time of meeting, state the purpose of his visit. On the other hand, the host should provide for the visitor opportunity to introduce himself and give him time for it and should leave off his activity at that time.⁶⁶

Enquiring about visiting hours: When a person goes to meet a person for the first time, he must enquire about the visiting times and other necessary points from those who are residing there [and are aware of his schedules]. Only then must he go to meet the person.

3.9 Some Etiquette Seniors must bear in mind in their treatment with the juniors:

Abstain from fastidiousness: Seniors must not be too fastidious and fussy whereby they become angry over trivial matters. Undoubtedly, just as others are unmannerly towards you, you too will commit certain misdemeanors if you were to live with your seniors. Bear this in mind and overlook. Explain to the juniors in a kind and affectionate manner one or two times. If this does not help, you may express your anger with the intention of their rectification. The following *Ḥadīth* ought to be borne in mind: “A believer who mixes with people and bears their offences patiently is better than the one who does not mix with people and does not bear their offences.”⁶⁷

Strike a balance between severity and softness: If you have to express your displeasure to a person or this happens incidentally, then at some other time do something which would make him happy. If you have really wronged him, you must apologize for your transgression without hesitation and obtain his pardon. Do not consider this to be below your dignity. You and he will be equals on the day of Resurrection.⁶⁸

Appoint some civilized person as mediator when you find your temperament changing: If you find your temperament changing in the course of conversing with a person who is very unmannerly, then do not converse with him directly. Call someone who is aware of temperaments and is rational, and converse with the person through him. You must do this so that the change in your temperament does not fall on that person, and his unmannerly behavior does not have an effect on you.⁶⁹

Do not make anyone your special confidant: Do not make any particular attendant or associate so close to you that others start snubbing him or he snubs others. Also, if he relates stories about people, you must stop him. If not, people will fear him and you will start having bad thoughts about people. Similarly, if he conveys a message on behalf of anyone or intercedes in favor of anyone, you must prohibit him severely. If not, people will start considering him to be an intermediary, they will start flattering him and giving him gifts or he himself will start making requests to them. In short, all people must have direct contact with you, do not appoint anyone as your intermediary. Yes, you may specify one or two people to attend to you that is another matter. In the same way, do not leave the responsibility of seeing to guests to anyone. You must personally see to them.

Although you will have to bear more fatigue, it will be to the people's advantage and their ease. Anyway, seniors are there to bear fatigue and burdens. A poet rightly said:

آں روز کہ مہ شدی نمی دانستی	کا نکشت نمائے عالمے خواہد شد
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[You do not know, the day when you become the moon, the fingers of the entire world will point towards you.]⁷⁰

3.10 Miscellaneous Etiquette

Do not look at the letters of others: You should neither read a letter which is not addressed to you nor look at a person writing a letter when you know he is writing to someone other than yourself.⁷¹

Do not look at the documents of others: Similarly, if documents are left lying in front of a person, do not pick them up to read them. The person may have intended keeping the documents of another person confidential from you but had left them on his desk.⁷²

Do not dirty your clothes: Do not allow a foul smell to develop on your body and clothes. If you do not have a set of fresh clothes which you can change into, wash the clothes which you are wearing.⁷³

Be careful when throwing pits and seeds: Do not throw pits and seeds over a person [you could strike him with them].

Avoid discussing intricate issues at the dining table: Do not start discussing any intricate topic while eating. The talk should be light, otherwise the pleasure of the food will be destroyed. While eating, the major part of one's attention should be directed to the food.⁷⁴

The etiquette of intercession: The way adopted to intercede on behalf of another should not in any way curtail the liberty of the one before whom the intercession is made. Nowadays, intercession has not remained pure intercession, it has become compulsion. Direct or indirect pressure is applied. Man takes advantage of his prominence or rank to compel another person to submit to his request. This is not intercession. Such an intercession is not permissible.⁷⁵

In the company of elders: If you are with your elders, do not do anything independently of them without their permission.

Inform seniors of the completion of a task: If a senior asks you to carry out a task, make sure you inform him of its completion once you have carried it out. Seniors generally wait to be informed and remain uneasy until they are informed.

Avoid futile activities as they border on sin: Maulānā Thānavī used to say: “I take an oath and say: If a person were to ponder over his futile activities he will realize that they certainly take him towards sin. For example, I have personally experienced this: A person comes to me and asks me unnecessary questions. These questions weigh heavily on me, and it is a sin to place a burden on a Muslim’s heart. Even if the questioner is sincere, I feel burdened and think to myself: ‘What right does this person have to inquire about my personal actions?’ In short, a futile activity certainly borders on sin. A futile activity may be lawful in the beginning, but its end is certainly a sin.”⁷⁶

Asking for an item: Do not ask for anything from a person regarding whom you have ascertained with certainty that he will not be able to refuse although it is most dear to him. Do not ask him for it even if you are borrowing it or taking it as a loan. However, if you are certain that he will not feel burdened or will freely refuse if he feels burdened, then there is no harm in asking.

The same applies to asking someone to carry out a task for you, making a request to him or asking him to intercede on your behalf. Nowadays people are quite careless in these matters.

The prohibition of staring at a person repeatedly: Staring at the movements of a person (e.g., to one’s teacher or spiritual guide) to the extent that he himself perceives that somebody is staring at him, is most inappropriate because the person who is being stared at becomes self-conscious, there is a difference in his freedom and it weighs on his heart. If a person really has a desire to look at him, he must look in such a way that the person stared at does not perceive that someone is staring at him or paying particular attention to him.

Etiquette of giving or taking of a gift in the gathering: Some people are naturally shy to take an item while in a gathering and they find it burdensome. Alternatively, if they are asked for something in the presence of others, they are ashamed to refuse or to excuse themselves. In the first case, the heart may desire to take the item, and in the second case the heart may not want to give an item. Such people should neither be given in an assembly nor should anything be asked of them in an assembly.⁷⁷

4. The Essence of the Good Character

The gist of all the above etiquette is that you must not place any burden, distress or constriction on another person through your words, actions or conditions. This is the essence of good character. If you bear this rule in mind, you will not require too many details. And this type of temperament will develop only when you think to yourself before every action or word whether it (action or word) is going to cause any harm to others or not. Doing so will let you err very little. After a few days the temperament will automatically be set right and you will not even have to think before saying or doing anything because it will become like second nature to you.

5. Conclusion

The contents of this paper discusses the universality and comprehensiveness of the teachings of Islam, in general, and its teachings related to social dealings and social behavior, in particular. The paper, especially, discusses the teachings of Islam related to social dealings, social behavior and social manners especially in the context of the writings and speeches of Maulānā Ashraf Ali Thānavī. The paper proves, beyond doubt, that the primary sources of Islam, i.e., the Qur'ān and the Sunnah contain broad principles related to each and every aspect of human life including numerous principles upon which the Islamic social setup is based. The scholars of Islam delve deep into the primary texts and discover all these principles. They, on account of their upright nature, tremendous aptitude and divinely insight gain the understanding of true spirit of the religion and explain all the branches (*Furū'āt*) that could be deduced from these general principles. They also settle new issues keeping the basic principles, the spirit of the religion (*Dīn*) and the purposes of laws of Islamic Sharī'ah (*Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*) in view.

Maulānā Ashraf Ali Thānavī being a renovator (*Mujaddid*), spiritual master, and *Hakim al-Ummah* sensed the degradation of masses of his times in matters of their religious as well as worldly affairs. Therefore, he spent his whole life in the work of ameliorating the Muslim Ummah. He pondered over and made reforms in all aspects of human life through his writings, speeches, and training.

In this paper we tried to evaluate the extreme keenness of Maulānā Thānavī in reforming the social etiquette; his explanation of its importance in the context of the Islamic *Sharī'ah*. Maulānā Thānavī's greatness also lies in the fact that when he discusses the issues he usually takes up all the aspects into consideration and that too with the economy of words. He also explains the wisdom behind every issue at hand which satisfies the minds of the readers, and, on the other hand,

motivates them to adopt and follow it. The examples cited at the end clearly show how much expert and experienced was he in matters of social etiquette and how he trained his pupils, disciples and the visitors to live the best civilized social life. Since he was great spiritual instructor, multitudes of people used to attend and stay in his *Khānqāh* due to which he came to know the temperament of many people. Based on his deep insight in matters of religious as well as social issues his sight reached to such intricate issues which usually miss the sight of other scholars.

This paper proved – in plain and straight forward terms – that the teachings of Islamic *Sharī'ah*, and the instructions of Islam are aimed at putting an end to all causes of disturbance and discomfort. They are aimed at providing peaceful and cordial atmosphere to each and every one so that people living in the societies can have paradise-like pleasure in this world and also earn good reward for the Hereafter.

References and End Notes

- ¹ Majdhūb, Khawājah ‘Azīz al-Ḥasan, *Ashraf al-Sawāniḥ* (4 vols.), Maktabah Thānavī, Deoband-247554, Saharanpur (U.P.), India, Ed. 2009. Vol. 3, p. 45.
- ² Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 77.
- ³ Thānavī, Maulānā Ashraf Ali, *Ādāb al-Mu‘āshirat*, Dar al-Kitāb, Deoband (U.P.), India. P. 95.
- ⁴ Ibid. P. 95.
- ⁵ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 76.
- ⁶ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 76.
- ⁷ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 77.
- ⁸ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 13 & 36.
- ⁹ Ibid. P. 32.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. P. 20 & 33.
- ¹¹ Ibid. P. 24.
- ¹² Ibid. Pp. 20-21.
- ¹³ Ibid. Pp. 21-25. **Note:** All these *Ahādīth* are taken from various authentic books of *Ḥadīth* like, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, *Bayhaqi*, *Sunan al-Nasayi*, etc. as referenced by the author himself.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. Pp. 21-25. **Note:** All these *Ahādīth* are taken from various authentic books of *Ḥadīth* like, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, *Bayhaqi*, *Sunan al-Nasayi*, etc. as referenced by the author himself.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. P. 25.
- ¹⁶ Ibid. Pp. 25-26.
- ¹⁷ *Sunan al-Nasayi*, Hadith No. 4998.
- ¹⁸ See for example, *Sūrah al-Furqān*, chapter no. 25, *āyah* no. 63-68 where the holy Qur’ān says: “The servants of the Merciful are they who walk humbly on the earth. When the ignorant ones address them, they reply: “Peace!” Who spend their night before their Sustainer; prostrating and standing. [The servants of the Merciful are they] who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor niggardly; but are on a middle way between the two [extremes]. Who invoke no other sovereign with Allāh.” In these *āyāt* (verses) beautiful social conduct is mentioned before mentioning the *Salah*, Fear of God, *Tauhid* and moderation in spending.
- ¹⁹ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 27.
- ²⁰ Another reason may be that in matters of transactions and contracts other party would be ready to demand his rights if wronged, but in case of social etiquette one will not ask others to behave him in a proper manner, to respect him or to talk to him in a civilized and polite manner, out of the sense of shyness and honor.
- ²¹ Thānavī, op. cit. Pp. 26-27.
- ²² Ibid. P. 28 & 37.
- ²³ It means that the power of the written word exceeds that of the spoken one.
- ²⁴ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 51.
- ²⁵ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 25 (with reference to *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* and *Sunan Abi Dāwūd*).
- ²⁶ Ibid. P. 124.
- ²⁷ Ibid. P. 124.
- ²⁸ Ibid. P. 62
- ²⁹ Ibid. P. 62, 63
- ³⁰ Ibid. P. 105.
- ³¹ Ibid. P. 105.
- ³² Ibid. P. 105.
- ³³ Ibid. P. 106.

- ³⁴Ibid. P. 106.
- ³⁵ Ibid. P. 108.
- ³⁶ Ibid. P. 108. **Note:** Another wisdom lying under practicing this *adab* (manner) is this, that sometimes the host brings the whole food to the guest, because of many reasons, and there remains very less or nothing for him or his family members in the kitchen. In this way, they can eat out of what has been sent back by the guest.
- ³⁷ Ibid. P. 117.
- ³⁸ Ibid. P. 117.
- ³⁹ Ibid. P. 117-8.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 47, 52
- ⁴¹ Ibid. Pp. 46-7, & 59
- ⁴² Ibid. Pp. 38-9.
- ⁴³ Ibid. P. 64
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 120.
- ⁴⁵ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 55.
- ⁴⁶ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 94.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 78-9.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 79.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 79.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 80.
- ⁵¹ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 73.
- ⁵² Thānavī, Maulānā Ashraf Ali, *Ta'lim al-Dīn*, Farid Book Depot (Pvt.) Ltd., Delhi -06, India. P. 99.
- ⁵³ Ibid. P. 100.
- ⁵⁴ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 84.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 135.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 134.
- ⁵⁷ The actual purpose of making a gift to someone is to strengthen the bond of affection and giving comfort to the receiver. Therefore, such ways which inconvenience the one to whom the gift is intended, should not be adopted. [Thānavī, Maulānā Ashraf Ali, *Ādāb al-Mu'āshirat*, Dar al-Kitab, Deoband (U.P.), India. P. 139].
- ⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 134.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. P. 138.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 144.
- ⁶¹ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 59.
- ⁶² Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 73.
- ⁶³ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 53.
- ⁶⁴ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 103.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 103.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 104.
- ⁶⁷ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 74.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 75.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 75.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 75.
- ⁷¹ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 54.
- ⁷² Thānavī, op. cit. P. 103.
- ⁷³ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 72.
- ⁷⁴ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 109, 115.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. P. 149. **Note:** Intercession is, in fact, a branch of advice / suggestion which can be put forward but cannot be imposed anyone. If he accepts it, it is his choice and if he rejects it, it is his right.
- ⁷⁶ Majdhūb, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 77.
- ⁷⁷ Thānavī, op. cit. P. 22.