

A PAKISTANI EID

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[Assignment: Describe a ritual, a festival, or an activity which holds a special place in your culture.] Note: This essay was written in the special section for international students.

(1) Festivals and cultural occasions make up an important part of any community. In Pakistan, too, there are some festivals which are anxiously awaited by the people. Out of these, I would like to talk about the *Eid*. *Eid* has both a religious and a social dimension. There are mainly two *Eids*: *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Azha*. *Eid-ul-Fitr* is celebrated to mark the end of the Holy month of Ramazan, the month of fasting, which teaches us tolerance and makes us realize the hunger of the poor. I shall be talking about *Eid-ul-Fitr*. This day of the *Eid* is very remarkable because on this day all the loved ones come from different parts of the world to get together, to reunite the family and to share the happiness and joys of *Eid* with other members of their family. In fact, the centrality of *Eid* can be seen in the fact that its celebration brings together various aspects of Pakistan's society. Thus, three parts of the day of *Eid* are celebrated in three different fashions. One part of *Eid* reflects the religious, Islamic dimension of our culture. Another part reflects the continuing Westernization of the middle class, and the third part reveals the emphasis on close knit community characteristic of the traditional Pakistani culture.

(2) The morning begins with everyone waking up to mother's call. We then get dressed in new *Kurta Shalwar* (traditional dress) and offer prayers. The oldest male member of the family then gives *Nazar* (prayers) over some food to bless the souls of those who have died in the family and in general all the people who have died. Then the family eats this food which is usually a sweet dish. After this, the male members go to the mosque to offer *Eid* prayers. At the mosque you can see multitudes of people clad in crisp new clothes. As soon as the *Namaz* (prayer) is over, special prayers are offered for a better future and the prosperity of Muslims. Then everyone embraces each other and the phrase *Eid Mubarak*, meaning Happy Eid, can be heard from all sides. This is the Islamic or purely religious aspect of the day.

(3) After the people have reached home, the children quickly dress up in Western style clothes and head for the party. The party is held in a community club and is organized and financed by all the members of the community. The party is a welcome to lots of fun and play. With the whole place decorated with buntings and colorful balloons and full of loud music, *Eid* now is transformed into a colorful, vibrant celebration. Different groups form all over the party because people of the same age congregate together. The teens seem to be enjoying it the most, but probably because I am in my teens I feel that we are having the best time. Probably all the age groups feel the same way. All seem to be at the peak of their happiness. The fun is doubled when one course after another of traditional dishes like *chapli kebabs*, *samosas*, sweets, sandwiches, etc. are served with cold drinks. Filled with happiness, all the people eat, talk, and laugh a lot. By this time, people start to get a little tired because of the heavy

snacks and they depart for home after formally saying goodbye to friends. Children, as usual, never get tired of anything and go to a friend's house as a group to watch a movie. Thus, this second part of the day gives a Western flavor to our *Eid* which is completely different from the first, purely Islamic, celebration of the *Eid*.

(4) These days people seem to be shifting to a way of spending their *Eid* evening in neither a purely Islamic nor a Western manner, but in a way that conforms to traditional Pakistani culture. In the evening, family and friends get together and so do other people of the community to affirm those social relationships which are the heart of the traditional way of living. The children specially like this part of the day; in fact, they anxiously wait for it because, as a custom, all the elders on the day of the *Eid* have to give some money to those younger than themselves. So this is an opportunity for the children to raise their bank balance. I can remember waiting and praying for more and more guests to come so that great amounts of money could be gathered. Truly speaking, the doorbell used to run an electric pulse through my body and make me run towards the door. By the time it gets dark, the families who had been receiving guests all evening now go out to visit other friends who were unable to come. Once again, the children never stay behind because this gives them another opportunity to raise money. Thus they visit one friend after another and return late at night. The day does not end here--especially for the children. As soon as they are home, they call each other, waiting for other friends to return home as well. When all of them are home, these youngsters once again get together and start the contest. There is just one winner in this contest: that boy or girl who has collected the most *Eidy* (money). The winner and friends go to an ice cream parlor or a cold drink shop and the person who has won has to eat an ice cream or soft drink bought by each member of the group. The friends don't let this winner get away easily but will even wait for him or her to get hungry or thirsty again so as to consume treats from every single member of the group. Perhaps, it is to teach the winner a lesson not to gather the most money next time!

(5) One of the most important events of our calendar, *Eid* is, in a sense, a microcosm of Pakistani's society and culture.