

Ethnicity and Religion

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The term 'ethnicity' is usually used to define a group of persons sharing a common cultural heritage. The latter is made by common history, environment, territory, language, customs, habits, beliefs, in short, by a common way of life. Undoubtedly, religion is an important component of any cultural heritage. In some cases it is even presented as the most crucial factor in the formation of an ethnicity and consequently of a nation. Yet, the case of Islam, for example, proves that the interconnection between sharing the same religious beliefs and ethnicity or nationhood is not one dimensioned, it could be quite diverse and even contrary to stereotyped expectations. The history of the Muslims in the past century vividly demonstrates that variety.

The community of the Prophet Muhammad's followers created in Medina after the Hijra (622) included both *muhajirun* and *ansar*. As the former were those Meccans who made the journey to Medina with the Prophet and the latter were the inhabitants of Medina who accepted the authority of Muhammad, the *umma* can be regarded as a community that surpassed the borders of the tribal system since tribal kinship was replaced by ties derived from a common sharing of religious beliefs.

Thus, from the very beginning, a 'state' in Islam was regarded primarily as a religious community. We see, therefore, that

nationalism, as an ideology which regards the nation as the highest type of community and which considers common national bonds as the foundation for a state structure, seems in contradiction with Islam. In this kind of nationalistic ideology religion is not thought of as the most important or the only firm basis of a state, and religious identity is considered a unifying factor equal in rank to that of language, territory, economics, culture, etc.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many Muslim thinkers opposed nationalism accusing it of anti-religious character. According to Muhammad Iqbal, the famous poet-philosopher of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, the exclusion of religion as the normative principle of a state system would deprive the latter of a vital moral foundation. In his view, replacement of the universal ethical system of religion by moral principles drawn from the notion of national interest as the criterion of good and evil creates relativism and in the long run leads to the justification of tyranny, violence, and exploitation of one nation by another.

Iqbal's apprehensions were not purely speculative. In a sense, they were caused by his view of the experience of the Western world. To him, as to many other Muslims, all the problems the capitalist society faced were the inevitable consequences of the lack of spirituality and absolute values, which resulted in the spread of nationalistic ideas and of the separation of church from state. "The mistaken separation of spiritual and temporal which has largely influenced European religion and political thought... resulted in a set of mutually ill-adjusted slates dominated by interests not

human but national.”¹ Like some other Muslim thinkers, Iqbal did not see in nationalism any progressive content, and he reduced it to the odious Machiavellianism which justifies any means for achievement of the end.

Muslim ideologists sometimes compare nationalism with *asabiyya* — group solidarity, loyalty towards one's tribe — which was typical of the very early period of Arab history. According to tradition, the Prophet condemned *asabiyya* by saying that “those who follow *asabiyya* do not belong to our community,” and he demanded that Muslims submit only to Allah and accept His guidance only. In the opinion of opponents of nationalism, just as *asabiyya* in the past had led to the struggle between tribes, later, nationalism, being an egoistic, immoral, and materialistic philosophy, caused wars and colonial exploitation.

The most consistent rejection of nationalism was expressed in the movement and ideology of Pan-Islamism, associated with the name of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who believed that nationalistic ideas prevented Muslims from consolidating their efforts against the common enemy — colonialism. Hence, he preached religious solidarity: “Muslims do not know any other genuine nationality than their religion.”

In the very beginning, al-Afghani's project of the alliance of Muslim countries envisaged an agreement between Afghanistan, Belujistan, Kasghar, Yarkand, Buhara, and Kokanda, with the approval of the Sultan of Turkey and with financial support from Indian Muslims. Later, while staying in Egypt (1871-79) after his

¹Speeches and Statements of Iqbal, compiled by “Shamloo” (Lahore: Al-Manar Academy, 1948), p.224.

expulsion from Turkey, al-Afghani for a time lost interest in Pan-Islamism. In Cairo a group of young patriots gathered around him and started to publish newspapers in which they criticized the regime of the khedive and the colonial policy of the British. In private as well as in public statements, including the press, Jamal al-Din agitated for opposition to foreign oppression and for the necessity for political reforms. His followers organized the so-called National Lodge on the basis of which a year later The Free National Party of Egypt emerged with its "Egypt for the Egyptians."

Accusing the khedive of collusion with foreigners and of betrayal of national interests, al-Afghani and his companions demanded the limitation of the khedive's power and the introduction of the constitutional parliamentary system. Al-Afghani's antigovernment activity resulted in his deportation from Egypt. Soon after, the defeat of the 'Arabi uprising (1881-82) proved to him the futility of attempting to overthrow the colonial regime by the efforts of one country, and consequently he returned to the idea of a political alliance of the peoples of the Islamic world. The mouthpiece of the Pan-Islamic propaganda became *Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Inseparable Link) which al-Afghani, together with Muhammad 'Abduh, started to publish in March 1884.

Pan-Islamic agitation directed the struggle against colonial rule, in particular against British oppression. In one of his articles of that period, al-Afghani wrote:

"The European States justify the attacks and humiliations inflicted by them upon the countries of the East on the pretext of the latter's backwardness. Nevertheless, the same States try to prevent by all means in their power, even by war, all attempts at reform or renaissance of the Islamic peoples. From all this arises the

necessity for the Muslim world to unite in a great defensive alliance, in order to preserve itself against annihilation; to achieve this it must acquire the technique of Western progress and learn the secrets of European power.”²

Time and again al-Afghani made new plans for an Islamic alliance, appealing to the Khedive of Egypt, the Mahdi of Sudan, the Shah of Iran, and the Sultan of Turkey. These activities gave his contemporaries as well as historians the basis for suspecting him of being an agent of various governments. In fact, al-Afghani did receive aid, including financial, from a number of monarchs who sought to use the Pan-Islamic slogans to preserve and to strengthen their own powers and prestige. But for al-Afghani, their support was only a means for achieving his main purpose — political independence of the Muslim peoples.

Jamal al-Din’s activity towards the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in Egypt and his conviction that overthrowing an unjust monarch is permissible supports the idea that monarchy as such was for him not a political ideal. In one of his articles he said: “When any Muslim country is under the sway of a tyrannical ruler, whose will is law and whose course of action is bringing disaster to the country, it is the right of the people to free themselves from such a ruler, lest the whole Islamic community become corrupted by his example.”³

However, believing that the liquidation of foreign rule was of primary importance, Jamal al-Din temporarily moved aside the solution of the problem of future political power in Muslim countries.

² M. M. Sharif, ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy: With Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963-66), II, 1487.

³ Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 61.

He hoped to use the sentiments of the believers towards the head of the Muslim community for the consolidation of the peoples of the world of Islam in their struggle against imperialism. Al-Afghani tried to find support not only from Muslim monarchs but also from the ruling cliques of Europe, exploiting the contradictions between the imperialist powers, but neither Asian monarchs nor Western governments were interested in the fulfillment of the Pan-Islamic projects. Jamal al-Din acknowledged the erroneousness of his actions when it was too late. Just before his death he wrote to an Iranian friend: "Ne valait-il pas mieux que je seme les grains de mes idees dans les terres fertiles de la pensee populaire plutôt que dans les terres arides des cours royales? Tout pousse et s'epanouit dans la premiere et tout pourrit dans la deuxieme."⁴

In India the caliphate movement awakened Muslims to the struggle against British rule (it is significant that Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress supported the Caliphatists), and slogans of the Pan-Islamists acquired anti-imperialist coloring in other countries as well.

In the 1930s, when the caliphate was abolished, it became clear that hopes to consolidate Muslim peoples into one Islamic state were unrealistic. However, the idea was not completely abandoned. While still recognizing it as an ideal, many Muslims realized the impossibility of its fulfillment under the existing social and historical conditions. As an alternative, the notion of Islamic unity in the form of an Islamic League of Nations was advanced. Muhammad Iqbal stated: "It seems to me that God is slowly

⁴ "La dernière lettre de Djamal-ed-Din envoyée de Constantinople à l'adresse d'un ami persan" in Djamal-ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani, par Homa Pakdaman (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969), p.326.

bringing home to us the truth that Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only...”⁵

To Muhammad Iqbal, as well as to some other prominent Muslim figures, such a League seemed to present a kind of a political block of Muslim countries opposed to the West. They rejected nationalism, identifying it with an ideology of imperialism, and considered that “the imperialistic designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon — the propagation of European conception of nationalism in Muslim countries to shatter the religious unity of Islam to pieces.”⁶

The Pan-Islamists constantly set off a universal spirit of the concept of Muslim brotherhood, *millat*, against the ‘regional narrowness’ of nationalism. In fact, the *millat* slogan very often served as a cover for hegemonic aspirations of the ruling circles of some countries. For instance, in the early period of the Pan-Islamic movement, Turkey claimed its dominance in the world of Islam, and later, when Pakistan was established, it was its turn to claim a special role in the future of the Muslim world. Also, hegemonic aspirations were typical for Saudi Arabia, which, considering itself to be the custodian of the purity of the Islamic faith, made a number of attempts to create the Islamic Pact under its own aegis.

The idea of the incompatibility of Islam and nationalistic ideology was widespread mainly at the early stages of the

⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951), p.159.

anticolonial movement in Muslim countries. The rise and strengthening of the Muslim bourgeoisie led to the development of nationalistic ideas and determined the gradual turn of Muslim ideologists from the complete negation of nationalism to its integration in and even identification with Islam; contrary to their former opposition to the recognition of a concept of a nation, they started to find its direct relation to the idea of a religious community.

A vivid example of the latter attitude is provided in the history of the coming into being of Pakistan, whose creation was theoretically justified by the concept of 'Muslim nationalism,' based on the conviction that in India two nations coexisted: the Hindu and the Muslim. The Muslims of India were not socially homogeneous: on the eve of the British invasion this group consisted of two main bodies — the ruling feudal aristocracy and the masses of peasants (those who in the past had been the 'untouchables'). With the establishment of the East-India Company, the Muslim aristocracy lost its political power. In addition, the British pursued a policy of weakening the economic positions of Indian Muslims and created a new class of landlords from the Hindu community, which was to become the backbone of British rule in India.

The Wahhabi movement and the uprising of 1857-59 strengthened the anti-Muslim orientation of the British administration. It was at that time — when the Indian Muslims had lost their privileges and were forced to compete with the Hindus — that the so-called Muslim problem in India appeared. In fact, the competition between Muslim feudals and Hindu nobility

⁶ Speeches and Statements of Iqbal, p.224.

who owned hereditary lands had its origin in the period before the arrival of the British, sometimes taking the form of a religious struggle and causing tension between the two religious communities. However, the ruling dynasties were in principle interested in maintaining the unity of their states. Realizing that direct opposition of the Muslim minority to the Hindu majority could result not only in a weakening but even a disintegration of the state, the Muslim rulers followed a policy of tolerance and sometimes of religious reconciliation (of which Akbar is the best example). This policy was often opposed by the Muslim feudals who had become particularly strong and vocal in the period of the crisis of the Mogul Empire, resulting in communal struggle and anti-Hindu policy of some of the rulers (for example, Aurangzeb).

Nevertheless, the use of religious differences in the political struggle was always opposed by the natural tendency of bringing Muslims and Hindus closer to each other, of synthesizing their cultures, traditions, and values.

The difficulties of the relations between the two religious communities were exploited by the colonial authorities, who were interested in maintaining and increasing tensions between the Muslims and the Hindus. Thus, though British colonialism was not the primary cause of the Hindu-Muslim conflict, it was its main catalyst.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan, reflecting the alarm of Indian Muslims concerning their future, was the first to suggest a program of 'revival' which he saw in education and moral perfection. Up to 1885, he had propagated the idea of the unity of Muslims and Hindus, and he connected the revival of the former with the development of culture and education in India as a whole. He believed that Muslims and

Hindus belonged to one people — the Indians. In his Patna speech on January 27, 1883, he said: “Please remember that Hindu and Muslim are religious terms. In fact, all the inhabitants of India, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, are, by virtue of the fact of their residence, one nation.”⁷

One year later, on January 27, 1884, at Gurdaspur, Sayyid Ahmad Khan called his compatriots to unity irrespective of their religious beliefs: “We (Hindus and Muslims) should try to become one heart and soul and act in unison. If united, we can support each other. If not, the effect of one against the other will tend to the destruction and downfall of both.”⁸

Later, Ahmad Khan’s views on the problem changed radically. With the creation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the national independent movement took an organized shape. When it became evident that the end to British rule in India was not far away, Sayyid Ahmad Khan feared that it would create “a vacuum of authority” which the Indian Muslims, being a minority, would fail to fill. Sayyid Ahmad did not formulate the idea of the two nations, but his opposition to the Indian National Congress, his rejection of its all-Indian character, his suggestion to introduce a system of election based on equal communal representation, etc., were a kind of overture to the future policy of communal separatism.

During the First World War the idea of two nations was put forward almost simultaneously by the leaders of the two religious communities. Though it was Abdul Kadir Bilgrami who addressed an open letter to Gandhi in 1920 suggesting the partition of India on

⁷ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Takriri malakat* (Lahore, 1963), pp.160-61.

⁸ Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Publications Division, 1961-72), II, 363.

the basis of the existence of the two nations, “the father” of the two-nations theory is widely considered to be Muhammad Iqbal.

It is true that this great poet, the author of the patriotic national anthem “Our India,” the poet who called for an end to religious tensions and who suggested the building of a new temple of kindness instead of a Hindu *mandir* or a Muslim *masjid*, in politics took the side of the supporters of communal separation. It was in 1909 when Iqbal first expressed openly his doubts as to the real possibility and expediency of the preservation of Indian unity: “I have myself been of the view that religious differences should disappear from this country (India), and even now act on this principle in private life. But now I think that the preservation of their separate national entities is desirable for both the Hindus and the Muslims. The vision of a common nationhood for India is a beautiful ideal, and has a poetic appeal, but looking to the present conditions and the unconscious trends of the two communities, appears incapable of fulfillment.”⁹

Some years later, the earlier doubts that the one-nation formula could not work in India took shape. In 1937, Muhammad Iqbal, then president of the Muslim League, formulated a demand for an autonomy for the regions with the Muslim majority: “We are seventy millions and far more homogeneous than any other people in India. Indeed, the Muslims of India are the only Indian people who can fitly be described as a nation in the modern sense of the word.”¹⁰

⁹ Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections*, edited by Javid Iqbal (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1961), p.XXI.

¹⁰ Iqbal: *Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, edited by Hafeez Malik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p.91.

The above two quotations contradict Iqbal's own views on the incompatibility of nationalist ideas with the universality of Muslim brotherhood. So practice came in conflict with theory. Realizing that, Iqbal tried to justify his position, pointing out that though from the point of view of Islam nationhood is not the highest form of political development, it is a certain step and even a way towards achieving the universal Muslim brotherhood.

It is still a matter of differing opinions as to what extent, if at all, Muhammad Iqbal supported the idea of a separate state. Some believe that Iqbal stood only for the autonomy of the so-called Muslim states inside the Indian federation. In the above-mentioned speech in Allahabad, Iqbal demanded self-rule for the Punjab, the Northwestern Frontier Provinces, Sind, and Belujistan, the creation of "the united Northwestern state of the Indian Muslims" to represent "the Muslim India in the frontiers of India." However, a number of authors, mainly from Pakistan, believe that in the latest years of his life Muhammad Iqbal considered the creation of an independent Muslim state to be an inevitable necessity. As he did not make official statements on the subject, reference is made to his letters to Jinnah dated May 28 and June 21, 1937. The latter says: "To my mind the new constitution [the Government of India Act 1935-M.S.] with its idea of a single Indian federation is completely hopeless. A separate federation of Muslim provinces... is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims. Why should not the Muslims of Northwest India and Bengal be considered as nations entitled to self-determination just as other nations in India and outside India are?"¹¹ According to Muhammed Jinnah, these thoughts of Iqbal

¹¹ Muhammad Iqbal, Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah: The Political Future of

together with the actual internal situation determined the conclusion which was expressed in the famous Pakistani Resolution. The resolution said that the aim of the Indian Muslims was to create an independent state on the basis that they constitute not only a religious community but also a nation. In 1944, in his letter to Gandhi, Jinnah wrote: "We are a nation. We maintain and hold that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation. We are a nation of a hundred million, and what is more we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitude and ambitions; in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law, we are a Nation."¹²

For a variety of reasons, "Islamic nationalism" became the ideology of the mass movement of Indian Muslims. The landlords and bourgeoisie sought a separate state as a way to get rid of the domination of Hindu trade and industrial capital. The middle class hoped that a new state would provide better chances for getting civil jobs. The working people had illusions about the possibility of the solution of the vital socio-economic problems by the realization of Islamic principles. The same kinds of illusions were shared by Muhammad Iqbal, who believed that "the problems of Muslim poverty" could be solved only by "the enforcement of the Law of Islam and its further development in the light of modern ideas." He

Muslim India (Lahore: Ashraf, 1956), p.24.

¹² Aziz Beg, *The Quiet Revolution: A Factual Story of Political Betrayal in Pakistan* (Karachi: Pakistan Patriotic Publications, 1959), p.34.

believed that the realization of that law could be possible only within the framework of a free Muslim state.”¹³

It is significant that not all Indian Muslims supported the idea of Islamic nationalism, one of its strongest opponents being the founder and the leader of “The Jama ‘at-i-Islami,” Abul Ala Maudoodi. In his article, “The Muslims and the Contemporary Political Struggle,” he wrote that Islam opposed any kind of nationalism, either Hindu or so-called Muslim. Formally, his view coincided with Pan-Islamic ideas. But if al-Afghani, ‘Abduh, or Iqbal criticized nationalism, they did so because they believed that it would prevent the unity of Muslim peoples in their struggle for liberation from colonialism, while Maudoodi, on the contrary, did not support the national liberation movement at all.

Maudoodi’s world outlook was strongly influenced by the mood which was dominant among the Muslim aristocracy in Hyderabad, where he had lived since 1928. There were about 200 thousand Muslims out of the 16.5 million people in the state. Being in the minority, however, they held the leading government positions in economics and politics and associated closely with the British colonial authorities. The perspective of India’s sovereignty frightened them, since it could result in transferring power from the British to the Hindu majority.

The Muslim aristocracy of Hyderabad was not happy about the prospects of the creation of a separate Muslim state either. First, if a Muslim state would be formed, it would include the provinces with the Muslim majorities, and Hyderabad was not among those. In addition, its geographical position prevented it from joining a

¹³ Iqbal, Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah, pp.17-18.

possible separate state. Second, the Muslim nationalistic leaders saw the future of the new state not in a theocracy but in a secular state of a Western type. Muslim landlords of Hyderabad were afraid that the creation of the state based on the principles of secular nationalism would damage the authority of the Shari'a and would lead to the social changes not favorable to them.

Thus, Maudoodi declared 'Muslim nationalism' to be as false as any other type of nationalism and warned that those who followed its principles would not be able to create the true Islamic state. He stated that the aim of Indian Muslims should be "the Islamic revolution," which meant educating the people in the spirit of Islam, training the true Muslim scientists, philosophers, economists, jurists, political leaders, etc. In other words, he replaced the concrete slogan of the struggle for the national liberation with an abstract idea of moral perfection that should lead in the long run to the building of "the world society based on the true principles of Islam."¹⁴

Completely different were the motives of the opponents to Islamic nationalism led by Abul Kalam Azad who represented the unity of the Indian nation. In the beginning of his political career, Azad stood for religious nationalism. His political and philosophical views of that period found full expression on the pages of *Al-Hilal* and then *Al-Balagh* (1912-16). In *Al-Hilal* Azad spoke as a Muslim nationalist who inseparably linked politics with religion. His statement to the correspondent of that publication, published in the issue of December 29, 1912, is characteristic of his views of those days: "You have suggested separation of politics from religion. But if

¹⁴Abu Ala Mawdudi, *Process of Islamic Revolution*; an address delivered at the Aligarh Muslim University (Delhi: Markazi Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, 1970), p.22.

we do this what then is left with us? We have developed our political thinking from religion... We believe that every thought which draws inspiration from any institution (including politics) other than the Qur'an is Kufr.”¹⁵

Azad did not realize then the need for the unity of Hindus and Muslims in the common struggle against colonialism. On the contrary, he advocated political separation of the two communities. “Islam,” he stated, “is such a perfect religion that its followers need not copy (imitate) Hindus in molding their party. There is no greater shame for Muslims than to beg from others for political education. Muslims must not join any political party. They were the leaders of the world. If they submit to God, the whole universe will bend to their will.”¹⁶

Azad set religious unity of the Muslims against unity of the Nation, considering that every Muslim is first of all a citizen of the World Muslim Brotherhood. Azad, more than anybody else among Indian Muslims, advocated the Pan-Islamic theory of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Unlike Muhammad Iqbal, who, though influenced by al-Afghani, never reduced the idea of Pan-Islamism to the defense of the caliphate, Azad believed that the political loyalty to the caliphate and the complete submission to it of all the Muslims of the world was the pillar of the Pan-Islamic society. According to Azad, the submission of the Muslim community to the caliph is not of a religious but of a political character, because the religious guidance in Islam is a prerogative of God and His Prophet.

¹⁵ Abdul Waheed Khan, *India Wins Freedom: The Other Side* (Karachi: Pakistan Educational Publishers, 1961), pp. 22-23.

¹⁶ Muzamin-i-Abul Kalam Azad[in Urdu] (Delhi: Hindustan Publishing House, 1944), p.25.

Not belittling Azad's enthusiasm for religious nationalism, and even to a certain degree for Islamic separatism, it should be said that it was not those ideas that brought popularity to him, but rather mainly the militant anti-colonial character of his journals. It is logical, therefore, that in 1914 Al-Hilal was banned and that the same happened to Al-Balagh, which had continued to espouse the cause of Al-Hilal. Azad himself was exiled from Calcutta.

The governments of Punjab, Delhi, U.P., and Bombay deprived him of the right to live in these provinces. From April 1916 up to the end of 1919 he was interned in Ranchi, and this became the decisive period for the reconsideration of his own views. In this he was influenced by the development of the events in India and by the violent growth of the national liberation movement in the country. The final deviation from ultra-Islamic nationalism to the position of cooperation between Muslims and Hindus in the struggle against British colonialism was promoted also by the policy of the Indian National Congress towards the caliphate.

The evolution of Azad's outlook from religious to secular nationalism was determined to a great degree by the developments in Turkey and the Arab countries, particularly the elimination by Ataturk of the institution of caliphs and the strengthening of Arab nationalism which was based on the unity of territory, language, history, and culture of Arab peoples.

The development of the liberation movement in India convinced Azad that its success depended, above all, on unity of all Indians, irrespective of their religious, language, and other differences. He believed that the so-called communal problem could and had to be solved after India got her independence. According to him the partition of the country on a religious basis

would not solve the problem; on the contrary, it would make Hindu-Muslim antagonism more acute. "Two states confronting one another," he said, "offer no solution of the problem of one another's minorities, but only lead to retribution and reprisals by introducing a system of mutual hostage." Unlike many of his compatriots, Azad understood that the root-cause of Hindu-Muslim and, in general, communal conflicts is not in religious sentiments, but in certain socio-economic reasons. "The real problems of the country," he wrote, "were economic, not communal. The differences related to classes, not to communities. Once the country became free, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs would all realize the real nature of the problems that faced them and communal differences would be resolved."¹⁷

Azad foresaw international repercussions due to partition. Therefore, he firmly opposed political independence at the cost of the unity of the Indian people and the partition of the country. "If an angel were to descend from the high heavens and proclaim from the heights of the Qutab Minar, 'Discard Hindu-Moslem unity and within 24 hours Swaraj is yours,' I will refuse the proffered Swaraj, but will not budge an inch from my stand. The refusal of Swaraj will affect only India while the end of our unity will be, the loss of the entire human world."¹⁸

Azad rejected the two-nation theory which was put forward by the leaders of the Muslim League to justify their demands for partition. The same person who, as mentioned above, had earlier

¹⁷ Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: An Autobiographical Notice* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1959), p.184.

¹⁸ Humayn Kabir, ed., *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, A Memorial Volume* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1959), p.49.

stressed the isolation of Muslims and their superiority over the followers of other religions, particularly of Hinduism, and who had called on Muslims to follow a specific “Islamic way,” now, in his later years, advocated the indissolubility of the fortunes of Indian Muslims and Hindus and of their common social and political interests determined by centuries of common life. In his presidential address at the Ramgarh session of the Indian National Congress in 1940, he stated: “Our language, our poetry, literature, society, our tastes, our dresses, our traditions and the innumerable realities of our daily life bear the zeal of a common life and a unified society... Our social intercourse for over one thousand years has blended into a united nationalism.”

Those who criticize Azad often accuse him of being inconsistent. While it is true that his philosophical and socio-political views in later life were very much different from those he held in his youth, this contradiction cannot be seen as evidence of inconsistency; it only shows the logical evolution of his views, determined by the historical conditions of the development of Indian society. Once having rejected the former convictions, Azad firmly and courageously advocated his new convictions prompted by his life’s experience, the experience of the struggle.

The history of the past century shows that even though contradictions between the concept of nationhood and the principles of Islamic teaching were evident, the Muslim religion was widely used by nationalistic ideologists, mainly because religion in Muslim countries was (as it still is) the most popular form of social consciousness, which in its turn reflected the socio-economic and cultural development of those countries where not only feudal but even tribal relations were sometimes maintained. Here, as in

medieval Europe, “the feelings of the masses were fed almost exclusively by religious food; that is why, to provoke a strong movement, it was necessary to present to the masses their own interests in religious clothes.”¹⁹ Besides, to many in the Muslim world traditional beliefs symbolized the greatness of the remote past when they were free and when they were opposed to Christianity, the religion of the hostile foreigners.

This appeal to religion no-doubt helped to unite the common anti-imperialist front. At the same time, it was a tool for the national elites in presenting their own interests as the interests of the nation as a whole. Religion in fact could be a strong political force in molding a nation. Yet it could equally be used as a political force damaging ethnical unity, disintegrating the latter because of the difference in religious believes (take an example of Lebanon) or adherence to various trends in the same religion (a case of Sunnis and Shias in Iraq).

Thus we see in the evolution of the idea of nationhood in Muslim countries that the interpretations of religious propositions do change for various reasons, including political ones.

¹⁹ Friedrich Engels, “Ludvig Feirbah i konets klasicheskoi nemetskoi filosofii,” in Karl Marx i F. Engels, Sochinenia (Moskva: gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo politicheskoi literaturi, 1961), vol. XXI, str.314.