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Ideological Orientation of Muslim Urban Leadership in Colonial India

Abstract

Individuals represent societies. Their actions and reactions produce social forces which sometimes produce desired results yet sometimes yield effects which are not intended by the individuals. The Muslim political leaders of British India emerged and shaped by the challenges of their times. The ideals and values of Islam determined their actions. They tried to reconcile divergent ideologies with their faith. It is desirable to study the dynamics of their ideals and actions. It is also interesting to examine that why did a certain group succeeded in winning support of the Muslim masses over the other while adhering to the same ideals. This paper will particularly focus the ideology of nationalism that was debated and interpreted by various groups of Muslims quite differently.

Key words: Muslim Nationalism, Nationalist Muslims, Ataullah Shah Bokhari, Zafar Ali Khan, Maulana Azad, Maulana Madani, Maulana Maududi, Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Hind, Jama'at-i-Islami, Majlis-i-Ahrar, Itihad-i-Millat, All India Muslim League, Khaksars, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Individuals represent their societies along with their actions and reactions that produce social forces which often yield desired results. Yet sometimes they come across effects which are not intended by the individuals. The Muslim urban leaders of Colonial India emerged and shaped by the challenges of their times. The ideals and values of Islam determined their actions. They tried to reconcile divergent ideologies based on their faith. It is desirable to study the dynamics of their ideals and actions. It is also interesting to note that why did a certain group succeeded in winning support of the Muslim masses over the other while adhering to the same ideals.

Individuals and societies are inseparable. Every human being is influenced by the society in which he is born. The environment determines the nature of his thought and actions. As Marx elaborated "History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights".¹ Carr analysed the relation of individuals with their societies in the following words: "the facts of history are indeed ...not about actions of individuals performed in isolation, and not about the motives, real or imaginary from which individuals suppose themselves to have acted. They are the facts about the relations of individuals to one another in

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society”.² He further elaborated that actions of individuals produce social forces which are often not intended by them.³

Thus, while studying individuals in history, it is imperative to study them in context of their society and time. Their ideals determine their actions. Only this can lead to true analysis and understanding of their conscious and unconscious motives and actions. In the ensuing pages, an analysis of the socio-political landscape of the contemporary India will be undertaken so that in this background the ideological orientation of Muslim political urban leadership and its contribution can be understood. Particularly, the Muslim leaders’ opinion on the issue of nationalism will be focused.

There is a tendency among the Muslims of majority as well as minority areas to be organized on the basis of faith that provides principles of political organization and an example of an Islamic state. This is not surprising as their faith provides strong ideological content.⁴ The Muslim political leaders were generally influenced by the preferences of Muslim society, competition from an increasingly assertive Hindu revivalism and by molding influence of the imperial system of political control and the framework it created for the political action.⁵

The values and institutions of a persisting cultural group will suggest what appeals and symbols will be effective and what will not be and may also provide traditional avenues for the mobilization and organization of the group in new directions.⁶ Skinner proposes that men in pursuing their interests are limited by the range of their concepts available to legitimize their actions and that this range of concepts is in turn limited by the prevailing morality of society.⁷ The elites and the masses understand and pursue their interests within the framework of ideas they possess for understanding the world. These ideas act as a motivating force in a mysterious dialectic between ideas and reality. Sometimes ideas are used to legitimize actions, yet sometimes ideas are prime force in directing the deeds of men.⁸ Muslim elite professes particular ideas in order to suggest their impact on political action. Ideas are a motivating force for them. The tendency of the Muslims to organize on the basis of their faith in politics is based on the idea of community. “This sense of community is fostered by the key rituals acknowledging one book, with minor differences follow one law, pray same way preferably communally, ...giving alms to support community, fasting, and performing Hajj ...they experience the reality of the community as never before.”⁹ The Muslim community has distinctive features of love for Arabic script, concept of non-Muslims as infidels and dhimmis, sense of preeminence being the followers of Islam that is historically final amongst religions.” This is the important fact in assessing the Muslim responses to the challenges of history or in understanding their relationships with men of other faiths. The Muslims’ successful assertion of political power over a large part of the world for the first hundred years and the concept of indivisibility of Church and State encouraged the Muslims to feel that ideals of Islam could be realized only with political power.¹⁰

Muslims ruled the subcontinent for centuries. With the weakening of the center’s control coupled with the economic and administrative situation in the eighteenth century India parceled out the Mughal Empire into independent chieftainships.¹¹ The British, who entered in the subcontinent as traders began to

fortify their factories that were built for trading purposes later on turned into forts.¹² The British consolidated their power with the decline of Mughal Empire. The British took over one state after another in India. Ultimately, the British abolished Mughal Empire by deposing the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar after the failure of War of Independence 1857 and became the new rulers of the sub-continent. The war proved a catastrophe for the Muslims and their national life was jeopardized. Muslims had to suffer more than the Hindu Community after 1857. Numerous Muslim families and individuals were wiped out and those who escaped faced total destruction, victimization and oblivion.¹³ The Hindus skillfully managed to escape the blame of the aborted revolt and the British wrath fell on the Muslims. For Hindus, it was the change of masters so they reconciled easily and comfortably and cooperated with the British in implementing the policies. On the other hand, for Muslims it was the decline of their position from masters to subjects. Besides, the British distrust them as former rulers who were in distress and considered new masters as usurpers. So Muslims were suffering dual dilemma. Naturally, reconciling with the new situation was challenging.

This situation presented serious challenges to the Muslim community. The Muslim community responded to the contemporary situation with two divergent solutions based on divergent analysis of the challenge. This response highlighted the two broad divisions; modernists and traditionalists. The modernists were led by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali. Their main objectives were to establish cordial relations between the Muslims and the British and to educate the Muslims in modern education and science to meet the socio-economic challenges.¹⁴ The traditionalists were led by *ulema*, prominent among them were Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, (188-1958) Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, (1879-1958) Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, (1903-1979) Ataullah Shah Bokhari (1892-1961) and Zafar Ali Khan (1873-1956) and their parties namely *Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Hind*, *Jama'at-i-Islami*, *Majlis-i-Ahrar*, *Itehad-i-Millat* etc. The modernists suggested new avenues to combat contemporary challenges and find path of progress and prosperity for their community. The traditionalists believed that the cause of all the miseries of their community was their departure from their religious ideals.¹⁵ Therefore, they insisted on returning to that and revival of traditional values and religious orientation. As Mushirul Hassan put it that "Muslims were told to look to their own glorious Islamic past for their inspiration, identity, and unity." Besides, "they emphasized the belief that the socio-moral revival of Islamic society required political action, an activism epitomized by *Jihad*, the exertion to realize God's will through moral self-discipline and when necessary, military combat or warfare".¹⁶ Both these themes and their followers struggled side by side for the common objective to recover and revitalize their community.¹⁷

Initially, the *Ulema* went into seclusion after the War of Independence in 1857 and diverted their attention to establish educational institutions/seminaries for example at Deoband in 1867. *Ulema* were alienated from the new political set up and turned into open hostility towards the British. Later on, these leaders supported the freedom struggle for India. Unlike Sir Syed Ahmad Khan *Ulema* mobilised Indian Muslims to participate in politics and for that matter encouraged them to cooperate and support Indian National Congress advocating "Federation

of Faiths”.¹⁸ Khilafat Movement (1918-1924) for the protection of institution of Khilafat in Turkey provided a platform and became a landmark that brought ulema into active politics. They strategized and opted organized political discourse to highlight their cause, freedom from Imperialism. Consequently, *Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Hind* was established in Delhi during *Khilafat* Conference on November 22, 1919.¹⁹

The latter half of the nineteenth century offered a new challenge in the form of representative institutions introduced by Lord Ripon (1827-1909) viceroy of India. The development alarmed the Muslim community as democratic institutions meant permanent subordination of Muslim minority to Hindu majority in India due to numerical superiority of the Hindus. Consequently, with the advent of twentieth century, these groups established separate parties to advocate and propagate their ideologies and press the government for their demands. The British realized the genuine demands of the Muslims and awarded separate electorates in the Government of India Act 1909. As well as the demand for the rights of Muslim community took momentum, the divisions within the Muslim community intensified.

The Indian leaders propagated this ideology of Indian nationalism, from the platform of the Indian National Congress. With an assertion that “India was one country, despite the existence of hundreds of separate states on the subcontinent, and that the Indians constituted one nation, despite all racial, religious, and cultural differences”, the main current of the Indian nationalism assumed “the separation of religion and politics. There was no conflict between India’s religious pluralism and the goal of independence with political unity”.²⁰ The Indian nationalists needed this ideology in the nineteenth century to prove the “principle that any people who constituted a nation were thereby entitled to self-government. If India was to gain its freedom from British rule, it was therefore necessary to assert that it was indeed a nation”.²¹

The territorial and secular concept of nationalism divided the Muslim intellectuals and political leadership. There were three principal positions among the Indian Muslims over this issue of nationalism. The ‘Nationalist Muslims’ who supported the Indian nationalism comprised Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957), the president of the JUI, and Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988). Second, those who rejected Indian nationalism and proclaimed Muslim nationalism asserted that Muslims were a separate nation, included, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, (1876-1948) and third, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979) Ameer of Jama’at-i-Islami and Ahrar leadership who perceived the situation from an international position and rejected both the Indian and the Muslim nationalisms.

The ‘Nationalist Muslims’ propounded that the Hindus and the Muslims formed one nation and should jointly struggle against the British imperialism. Accepting the principle of territorial nationalism, Maulana Madani observed, that since 1885 the Indian National Congress had been struggling for the political liberation of India on the basis of Indian nationality which was rooted in territorial nationalism, and the common front had been detrimental to the British imperial interest.²² Therefore, the Muslims should work side by side with the Hindus to

achieve their first objective, which was expulsion of the British. Unlike Iqbal and Maududi, the JUI leaders maintained that the Indian Muslims owed dual loyalty to Islam and to the country of their birth. For them, there was no incompatibility between nationalism and the ideals of Islam, as Maulana Madani maintained that Indian Muslims and Hindus were both members of one nation and they should work for the common cause, i.e., freedom of India. He declared, "even if united nationality based on common homeland is really a worst and cursed step, Muslims ought to have utilised this curse weapon to root out the British rule in India just as Europe has rooted out the Islamic empires and Turkish Caliphate".²³

Due to the influence of Afghani's pan-Islamic ideology, Indian Ulama considered "Islam as a means of unification for resisting the domination of the West". According to Mushirul Hassan ulama found no contradiction between Indian nationalism and Pan-Islamism as they believed that independence of India is linked with the independence of the other countries from the yoke of imperialism.²⁴ A leading theologian of Islam and a contemporary of Maulana Madani and Iqbal, Maulana Azad denounced British imperialism and considered it a religious duty of the Muslims to struggle for Indian Independence. Azad's concept of nationalism had two dimensions. One was freedom of India from British rule, and the other was unity of Indians regardless of their religious differences.²⁵ He elaborated that "as a Muslim I have a special interest in Islamic religion and cultures and I cannot tolerate any interference with them. But ... I have other ... realities and conditions of my life.... The spirit of Islam does not come in the way of these sentiments; it guides and helps me forward. I am proud of being an Indian I am a part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality...."²⁶ Referring to history, he pointed out that "thousand years of our joint life has moulded us into a common nationality. Nature does her fashioning through her hidden processes in the course of centuries. The cast has now been moulded and destiny has set her seal upon it. Whether we like it or not, we have become an Indian nation, united and indivisible."²⁷

Maulana Azad erected an Islamic theoretical basis for the evolution of a joint Hindu-Muslim nation in India by referring to the Quranic verses and the *Mithaq-i-Madinah* (Agreement of Madinah). It was an alliance for the common defence against the hostile Quraish tribe, which declared that the Believers (the Muslims) and the Jews were 'one people'. Maulana Azad translated the Arabic phrase as 'one nation' and interpreted it as a historical precedent for the formation of a common nationality by the Hindus and the Muslims. He devised his ideology during the days of the Khilafat Movement that '...friendship and co-operation could make the Muslims and the Hindus into an *Ummah al-Wahidah*' (one nation).²⁸

The nationalist Muslim parties like the Ahrar rejected those Muslim leaders and groups whose ideology was based on Muslim political separatism and who advocated the concept of territorial nationalism. The Ahrars were primarily urban in composition and represented urban lower and middle class.²⁹ Chaudhry Afzal Haq elaborated Ahrar's policy line in his address to a gathering that Ahrar proposes territorial nationalism linked with internationalism. Indian Muslims' movement for Khilafat is the best example of this philosophy that both India and the Muslim world should achieve freedom simultaneously. He did not agree with

the slogan of Indian National Congress that “first Indian, later Muslim”. They also opposed the two nation theory. He was of the view that both the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League misguiding the Muslims. One group teaches them territorial nationalism and the other alarming them of numerical superiority of the Hindus. Ahrar is a moderate party and sick of the extremism of both parties. However, Ahrar believed that Hindus and Muslims are two major component of composite Indian nationalism and could share the corporate responsibility of governing India.³⁰ Majllis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat led by Zafar Ali Khan was an off shoot of Ahrar who were opposed to Ahrar’s pro-Congress attitude.³¹ Maulana Zafar Ali Khan merged his party with the AIML after the elections of 1937. He popularized the cause of a separate state with his poetry and newspaper Zamindar.³²

The Khudai Khidmagars in the NWFP (now, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) was another group of nationalist Muslims. This Movement affiliated itself with the Congress in August 1931. elaborating the reasons for this affiliation, Abdul Ghaffar Khan argued, “the Congress is a national not a Hindu body; it is a *jirga* (council of elders) composed of Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, Parsees and Muslims. The Congress as a body is working against the British. The British nation is the enemy of the Congress and of the Pathans. I have therefore joined it and made common cause with the Congress to get rid of the British”.³³

A strenuous effort was made to unite the entire Nationalist Muslims on one common platform after the Lahore Resolution of 1940. An Azad Muslim Conference was organized and its first session was held at Delhi in April 1940 under the Presidency of Mr Allah Bakhsh, a Sindhi leader. The Conference was attended by representatives of practically all the Muslim groups except the League and the Khaksars. The following resolution of the Conference explains the stance of the nationalist Muslims:

India will have geography and political boundaries of individual whole and as such is the common homeland of the entire citizen, irrespective of race and religion, who are joint owners of its resources. All nook and corner of the country are hearths and homes of Muslims who cherished ... their religion and culture which are dearer to them than their lives. From the national point of view, every Muslim is an Indian; the common rights of all residents of the country and their responsibilities in every walk of life and in every sphere of human activity are the same. The Indian Muslims by virtue of these rights and responsibilities are unquestionably Indian nationals and every part of the country is entitled to equal privileges with that of every Indian national in every sphere of government, economic and other national activities and in public services. For that very reason, Muslims own equal responsibilities with other Indians for striving and making sacrifices to achieve the country’s independence. This is a self-evident proposition, the truth of which no right thinking Muslim will question... The conference declares unequivocally and with all emphasis at its command that goal of Indian Muslims is complete independence along with protection of their religion and communal rights and that they are anxious to attain this goal as early as possible.... The conference unreservedly and strongly repudiates the baseless charge ... against the Indian Muslims by the agents of British Imperialism and others that they are an obstacle in the path of Indian freedom and emphatically

declares that the Muslims are fully alive to their responsibilities and consider it inconsistent with their tradition and derogatory to their honour to lag behind others in the struggle for independence.³⁴

On the other hand, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938), and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, represented the Muslim Nationalists' point of view. Both put forward the concept of cultural nationalism, contrary to territorial nationalism. Political nationalism is an objective phenomenon, describing a people as a nation by the fact that they inhabit a common territory. Cultural nationalism, by contrast, is a subjective phenomenon, wherein a people feel inwardly that sharing values of language, race and religion, affirm that they constitute a nation.³⁵ Iqbal was the most prominent Muslim intellectual, poet and philosopher who rejected territorial nationalism with a missionary zeal and zest. He believed that the rise of nationalism and its growing popularity among the Muslim masses was the biggest threat to Islam that it had confronted since the earliest days of Islam.³⁶ For Iqbal, one's religion and culture were definitely more important than the love for one's own country. He argued that patriotism was a worthy sentiment and should be respected but what "really matters is a man's faith, his culture, his historical tradition.... These are the things ... worth living for and dying for, and not the piece of earth with which the spirit of man happens to be temporarily associated".³⁷

Iqbal engaged in a serious controversy on the concept of nationalism with Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, an eminent religious scholar and prominent leader of the Jamiat-i-Ulama' Hind. In a statement Maulana Madani had said, 'Nations are made by territory'. Iqbal refuted and contended that the feeling of belonging to the same territory was not enough to create the spirit of nationalism. The loyalties to religion and to the land of their habitation pull the Muslim in opposite directions. In his judgement, Muslims could not treat their religion as a private affair, confined to individuals. Islam is not only a religion but also a complete social order. For a Muslim, his religion must govern his politics. The two cannot be separated. Iqbal cautioned Indian Muslims that nationalism was loaded with serious threats to their religion and their culture. He warned "if Muslims have fallen into the error that religion and nationalism can go hand in hand as a political concept then ... this course will ultimately lead to irreligiosity. If this does not happen, Islam will be reduced to ethical ideals with indifference to its social order as an inevitable consequence".³⁸

Mohammad Ali Jinnah extending Iqbal's concept of nationalism, comprehensively elaborated the two-nation theory, affirming that the Hindus and Muslims constituted two different nations and had nothing in common. He declared that:

The problem in India is not inter-communal, but manifestly international, and it must be treated as such... the only course opens to us all is to allow the major nations separate homelands by dividing India into 'autonomous national states'... [Islam and Hinduism] are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are in fact different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality... The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs and literatures. They neither inter-marry nor dine together and indeed they belong to two different

civilizations, which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. . . They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the one is a foe of the other and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap... Muslims are a nation according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homeland, their territory and their state...we wish our people to develop to the fullest our spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political life in a way that we think best and in consonance with our own ideal and according to the genius of our people.³⁹

Jinnah warned that “notwithstanding a thousand years of close contact, nationalities, which are as divergent today as ever, cannot at any time be expected to transform themselves into one nation merely by means of subjecting them to a democratic constitution and holding them forcibly together by unnatural and artificial methods of British parliamentary statutes”.⁴⁰

Maulana Maududi represents the third point of view. He believed “Islam and nationalism are incompatible. The progress of one means the decay of the other. Nationalism ...is antithetic to the very idea of Islam”. He said, the “ultimate goal of Islam is a world state in which the claims of racial and national prejudices would be dismantled and all mankind incorporated in a cultural and political system, with equal rights and equal opportunities for all”.⁴¹ Nationalism is “contradictory to Islam, because it divides man from man on the basis of nationality. Nationalism encourages cultural, economic, political and legal differentiation between national and non-national to secure the maximum advantage for his nation and ‘protect with tenacity the historical traditions and traditional prejudices and breeds in him the sentiment of national pride’. A nationalist’s “ultimate goal would be a nation-state rather than a world state” and his world ideology “would necessarily take the form of imperialism or world domination, because members of other nationalities cannot participate in his state as equals; they may do so only as slaves or subjects”.⁴²

Maulana Maududi explained further that there are two kinds of nationalities—political and cultural. The first was present in India because the country was governed by one political system. The foreign government held the people together by common social and economic laws. Such a concept of nationality could exist even without any homogeneity of thought, religion, language and traditions. But this form of nationality in itself is not sufficient to generate nationalism. On the other hand, cultural nationality is essential for the formation of one nation. He pointed out that “Islam is not against ‘nations’ conceived in cultural terms” and, “these sub-identities are natural and it is against Islam to destroy them”. It never existed in India and was possible only if there were complete unanimity on fundamental and basic problems of life. It was “found only among those who mentally, morally, culturally and socially have become one people, one organic whole”.⁴³

Maulana Maududi mentioned two ways to bring about one common nation in India. Either the major nation may conquer and absorb the minor nation or a new culture may be evolved by the fusion of different cultures. The first is ruled out “because the advocates of Indian nationalism cannot make it their cherished goal”. The second “evolves through centuries in natural order”.⁴⁴ To

resolve these cultural conflicts, Maulana Maududi suggests: “the permanent status and individuality of every nation should be recognized; every one of them should be allowed autonomous and sovereign control over its national subjects and the different nations should agree upon a joint action only in so far as the common interests of the country are concerned”.⁴⁵ Maulana Maududi’s systematic and scholarly critique on nationalism unexpectedly reinforced and strengthened the case for Pakistan. Maududi’s theory of nationalism ultimately benefited the All India Muslim League and Jinnah.

The community’s ideal of a separate state was the prime objective of the modernists yet large number of ulama supported the league. In the words of Robinson, “indeed we may well learn, when more work is done and our understanding of the period is less shrouded by the mists of propaganda, that the balance of opinion amongst the learned men of Islam favored the Muslim League and Pakistan”⁴⁶. Two concerns of Hindu domination and restoration of the glory of Islam directed these leaders. Muslims must have power to protect their way of life even if the Pan-Islamic ideal of the umma might be compromised in the process.

Reviewing the ideological position of Muslim political leaders exhibit the fact that all Muslim leadership was concerned with the status of Islam and Muslim community in India. They had a strong sense of belonging to a community based on Islamic faith. The difference among them were “religiousness” and “religious-minded”.⁴⁷ They were seeking solutions for the challenges the Muslim community were facing in united India. The ulama proved conservative and reactionaries who sought solution in reverting to the glorious past. The modern educated elite were rather pragmatic who looked towards the future of their community in India. With the dawn of democratic institutions, they knew that the Muslims will be a perpetual minority. They know the value of power to preserve Islam and Muslim community in India. The Muslim masses also realized this fact and wholeheartedly struggled for a separate country for the Muslims. Even the Muslims who knew they will not be included in proposed Pakistan, supported Pakistan movement. They sought salvation in the areas where Muslims were in majority and can manage to establish a Muslim state to preserve Islamic values and Muslim community. Thus in the final analysis, the religio-political ideals of Islam were decisive motivating factor for the Muslim leadership and the masses for their assertion as a distinct nation leading to a separate state in South Asia.

Notes & Reference

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