

# Religion as Nation: The Muslims of India and the Debates on *qaum*, *millat*, and *umma* in the 1930s

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to contribute to the current debates about the role of religion in the political process, and its importance for the creation and cohesion of different national communities' identities. It will analyse the discussions occurred around the concepts, and conceptions, of Nation, National Community (*qaum*), Religious Community (*millat*), and the Community of Believers (*umma*), exploring the different, and sometimes opposing, ideas and political doctrines in the 1930s in the context of India's struggle for the independence and creation of a new (Nation-)State. The focus will be on Muslim Indian thinkers and politicians such as Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957), Abu al-Kalam Azad (1888-1958) and Sayyid Abu'l 'Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), as well as political and religious organizations such as the All-India Muslim League, the All-India National Congress, the Jamia'at-i 'Ulama-i Islam and the Jamia'at-i 'Ulama-i Hind.

**Keywords:** Religious Nationalism, National Religion, Nation, Community

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## 1. Introduction

"The effects which the word (*qaum*) 'motherland', (*watan*) 'country', have on the rest of the world is produced on the Muslims by the words 'God' or 'Islam'. You can stir the hearts of thousands in Europe simply with one word, 'nation', but in the case of Muslims the only comparable word for this purpose is 'God' or 'Islam'." (Maulana Azad, *Al-Hilal [The Crescent]*, Calcutta, 1912, Oct. 15 – quoted in Kausar [21], 2008, p. 1).

Nationalism, as Zeenath Kausar [21] argues (Kausar, 2008, pp. 31-35), is an ambiguous, vague and confused term. The main reason for the lack of clarity in the definition of Nationalism is the fact that each political group with its own political motives and interests perceives the ideology of Nationalism through its own perspective. This not only creates confusion but causes a sort of obscurity over the aims and objectives of the particular group [1-4, 6-8].<sup>1</sup>

The other reasons which contribute to the confusion of the term are the languages and the derivatives of the word "nation". English usage of the term differs from the French and the French usage differs from the German and so forth. The different meanings of "nation" have caused corresponding differences in the meaning attached to its derivatives, such as "national", "nationalism", "nationalist", and "nationality" [12-16, 19, 23].<sup>2</sup>

who, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tried to describe, understand, and sometimes shape the phenomenon; and, finally, the third type which dwells on the works by the authors of the secondary type. For this paper, the following have been used for purposes of methodology and epistemology: Al-Ahsan, 1992; Anderson, 1991; Berger and Lorenz, 2008; Brubaker, 2012 and 2015; Chand, 1968; Devji, 2011 and 2013; Eley and Suny, 1996; Goodwin, 1995; Gordon, 2017; Gupta, 2009 and 2017; Haupt and Langewiesche, 2004; Hobsbawm, 1990; Llobera, 1994; Miller, 2008; Shah, 1999; Smith, 2003 and 2009; Stepanians, 1979; and Wessel, 2006.

2 As we will see, one of the main issues was, and is, how to translate a concept (in this case "nation"), which was born in a particular cultural setting, into other languages, particularly when there are several options, each one having different meanings according to different cultural frameworks. For example, in Turkey and Iran the word used for "nation", in the West European sense, is *millet/millat*, which originally meant a (religious) community, but in Turkish we also have *ulus*. In Greece, the word for "nation" is *ethnos*, but in English, and other Western European languages, *ethnicity* is related to a biological idea. In this paper, we will consider "nation" on the same footing as *samaj*, *qaum* ("social collectivity"), *jati*

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1 The literature on Nationalism is vast and we can identify, at least, three types: the primary one, which includes, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Ernest Renan (1823-1892), or Hans Kohn (1891-1971); the secondary, which includes the works by social scientists

In what refers to Muslim societies, the prevalent approach in the study of Islam is to consider its “Middle Eastern” character as central, but the Muslims in the pre-Partition India constituted the largest body of Muslims in the world, and the vast political and intellectual influence exerted by South Asian Muslims on the wider Muslim world is often neglected. Many of the most important political, intellectual and spiritual developments within Islam have had their origins, or have flourished, in South Asia, and Muslims from the region have played important roles in the global history of Islam, including the role of Islam in the colonial period, resistance to colonial rule, and intellectual responses to, and dialogue with, Western thought. Pakistan was specifically created to provide a homeland for South Asia’s Muslim population and its trials and tribulations since 1947 have been carefully watched by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Muslims constitute India’s largest minority, with an often uneasy relationship to the majority, and one third of all Muslims in the world live in South Asia (more than five hundred million people, distributed between Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, with more Muslims in South Asia than in any other region in the world or than in the Arab world combined).

This paper aims to contribute to the current debates about the role of religion in the political process, and its importance for the creation and cohesion of different national communities’ identities [26, 37, 39-41]. It will analyse the discussions occurred around the concepts, and conceptions, of Nation, National Community (*qaum*), Religious Community (*millat*), and the Community of Believers (*umma*), exploring the different, and sometimes opposing, ideas and political doctrines in the 1930s in the context of India’s struggle for the independence and creation of a new (Nation-)State. The focus will be on Muslim Indian thinkers and politicians such as Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957), Abu al-Kalam Azad (1888-1958) and Sayyid Abu’l ‘Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), as well as political and religious organizations such as the All-India Muslim League, the All-India National Congress, the Jamia’at-i ‘Ulama-i Islam and the Jamia’at-i ‘Ulama-i Hind. The main concern here is with ideas put forward by different thinkers, not with ideas which are “Islamic” or considered as such, since this would detract us from a study of the debates amongst various Muslim thinkers and the attempts by them to reinterpret and, in the process, shape Islam. While the study of texts is important, far more significant are the political dynamics and historical contexts in which a given discourse ascends, gains acceptance, or loses salience, with a focus on the political

dynamics that shaped the ideas associated with Islam in India in the 1930s.

The relationship that this paper aims to investigate has been studied within the Western context (e.g. the Protestant Reformation’s contribution to the development of nationalism), but a comprehensive study along this path that focuses on the Islamic world, and its different ethnic, linguistic and religious components, has yet to be explored and, therefore, this paper will try to contribute to that. Several are the questions raised such as how did and does religion contribute to structuring the ideal of nation and modern state within this regional context; how did the modern ideal of nation and nationalism trigger a process of redefining and adapting religion to its parameters; how did and does this relationship contribute to the definition, structuring and development of the concept of majority and minority within different socio-political and religious fields; within a contemporary international system based on the ideal of the modern nation-state, did and does the continuous dialectical relationship between religion and nationalism, and more widely between politics and religion, contribute to the development of processes of nationalizing religion or of religious nationalism within the so called Islamic world?

More than answering to all of the questions above, the paper will try to describe the debates on the question of what is a “nation”, refusing to consider nationalism as intrinsically secular or to support the idea that it emerged from the decline of religion. Since both nationalism and religion can designate and indicate a whole set of different experiences and dynamics, the paper does not employ these concepts *per se*, but seeks to contextualize them in order to comprehend and define the efficacy and benefit of understanding this relationship in terms of nationalizing religion and religious nationalism. In particular, the paper looks at the relationship between nationalism and religion from the viewpoint of the latter. Not survival or revival of religion, but constant and gradual change and development according to the progress of modern and contemporary socio-political systems. At the same time, although embracing their theoretical implications and analytical contributions, the paper aims to overcome the idea of considering religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena, or to commit to this relationship, interpreting religion as a cause or explanation of the rise of nationalism. Similarly, although understanding the historical routes of this relationship that saw religion and nationalism frequently intertwining and overlapping, the paper focuses on the peculiar path of interaction between religion and nationalism in order to understand and point out if their contemporary confrontation has given birth to distinctive political subjects that can be described as the nationalization of religion or religious nationalism. Although without negating the intrinsic universalistic and supra-national frameworks of religion, the imposition of the logic of the modern nation-state triggered and still sustains the development of redefining and repositioning religious institutions and movements according to this schema, giving birth to a process of “nationalizing”

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(*zat* in Urdu, which can be translated as “collective self” or “caste”), “tribe”, etc. – these are different words in different languages for the same thing: the (sense of) belonging to a community. Words are not static or neutral – for example, before the British census in India, *qaum* was used to designate *zat* (empirical caste); with British colonial classifications (ethnographic, anthropological, sociological), *qaum* became the marker of religious community. On the other hand, and depending on where one is standing, the European Union can be considered as an aggregation of tribes, each one with its own totem (the flag), tribal songs (national anthems), and chiefs (heads of state or government).

religion and/or of religious nationalism (Haupt and Langewiesche [17], 2004; Wessel [42], 2006; and Brubaker [5], 2012).

## 2. Indian Muslims, Nationalism, and the Debates on What Is a “Nation”

In 1937, the Jamia’at-i ‘Ulama-i Hind, a Muslim organization founded in 1919 and led by Hussain Ahmad Madani, also head of the Dar ul-Ulum Deoband, was split with a faction which was supportive of the Muslim League’s demands of a territorial state for the Muslims of India, the future Pakistan, a faction which originated the Jamia’at-i ‘Ulama-i Islam, led by Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (1886-1949).

In the following year, Madani [24] wrote “Islam and United/Composite Nationalism [Islam awr mutahhadih qaumiyat]” (Madani, 2005), where he depicted a multicomunal Indian state that would be compatible with his vision of Islam. Using various verses from the Qur’an, Madani, with his book, aimed at opposing the divisive policy of Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League, dealing mainly with two aspects: the meaning of the term *qaum* and how it was distinct from the term *millat*, and the crucial distinction between those two words and their “true” meanings in the Qur’an and the Hadiths. By proposing “united/composite nationalism”, the book strongly argued that, despite cultural, linguistic and religious differences, the people of India were but one nation, and, according to the author, any effort to divide Indians on the basis of religion, caste, culture, ethnicity and language was a manoeuvre of the ruling power.

The aforementioned book was the consequence of a debate which had begun some years before and that would continue, one could say, until today, not only in India<sup>3</sup> or in Islamic contexts, but also in the West. One only needs to pay attention to recent debates on the Judaeo-Christian roots of Europe or the integration/assimilation of immigrants with different religious backgrounds, or even the very idea of what it means to be a European [10].<sup>4</sup>

As Dhulipala [9] asserts, secular conceptions of territory were intertwined with theological conceptions of utopian space by the ‘*ulama* to theorize Pakistan as an Islamic State under God’s law that would renew Islam and revive Muslims for the new era, a move that proved critical in bridging the gap between politics of the Muslim League elite and aspirations of the Muslim masses. Generally identified in the existing historiography as opponents of Pakistan, prominent Deobandi ‘*ulama* led by Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (founder of the Jamia’at-i ‘Ulama-i Islam and later acclaimed as Pakistan’s *Shaikhul Islam*) declared that Pakistan would recreate the Islamic utopia first fashioned by the Prophet in Medina, inaugurating an equal brotherhood of Islam by breaking down barriers of race, class, sect, language and region among Muslims and establishing an example worthy

of emulation by the global *umma*. Usmani further prophesized that just as Medina had provided the base for Islam’s victorious spread in Arabia and the wide world beyond, Pakistan would become the instrument for the *umma*’s unification and propel its triumphal rise on the global stage as a great power, besides paving the way for Islam’s return as the ruling power in the subcontinent. These ideas meshed with the Pan-Islamist ambitions of the Muslim League leadership and also helped resolve the contradiction between the ideal of Islamic nationhood whose category of belonging is the global *umma*, and the territorial state that revives the divisive category of national belonging for Muslims. The run up to the Partition witnessed osmosis of ideas between the ‘*ulama* and the Muslim League leadership. Thus, while the ‘*ulama* borrowed the Muslim League’s vocabulary of the modern state to project Pakistan as a powerful entity that would make its mark on the global stage, the Muslim League leadership hailed Pakistan as the new laboratory where definitive solutions to all the problems of the modern world would be found within Islam, thus inaugurating a new rhetoric that would find echo in other parts of the Islamic world (Dhulipala, 2015, pp. 5-6).

These ideas about Pakistan as a powerful 20<sup>th</sup> century Islamic state were bitterly but unsuccessfully attacked by opponents. Most prominent were a section of the Deobandi ‘*ulama* aligned with the Indian National Congress led by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, who himself first utilized the metaphor of Medina to conceptualize a common nationhood of Hindus and Muslims in an undivided India. This *Muttahida Qaumiyyat* (composite nationalism/nationality) of Hindus, Muslims and other Indian communities, he argued, had an auspicious precedent in the common nationality forged by Muslims and Jews during the Prophet’s era under the Covenant of Medina. Insisting that Muslims could form a common nationality with Hindus just as they had done so with the Jews at Medina under the Prophet, Madani summarily dismissed the Muslim League’s Islamic vision of Pakistan and derided the ability and intentions of its non-observant leaders in bringing about its realization. He and his associates also contested the Muslim League’s assessments regarding Pakistan’s viability in terms of its economy, security, social and political stability, its place in the international community of nations, and warned of its disastrous ramifications for Indian Muslims in general and United Provinces’ Muslims in particular.

According to Dhulipala [9], Madani was a respected ‘*alim* who had spent over a decade of his life as a renowned teacher of Hadith in the holy city of Medina. He articulated the metaphor of Medina at a time when the Muslim League began a protracted public campaign that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations [25].<sup>5</sup> His views were pounced upon by ‘*ulama* allied to the Muslim League such as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1863-1943), a learned scholar of great repute, who vehemently opposed the United/Composite Nationalism, holding that Nationalism was contradictory to Islam and

3 For example, the controversy surrounding the National Register of Citizens.

4 For more on this see Dumbra, 2014.

5 For further details on Madani see Metcalf, 2009.

criticising all the justifications put in favour of nationalism by some of the *'ulama* of Deoband. Later, Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, Thanawi's disciple, would fashion the vision of Pakistan as the new Medina against Madani's vision. The bitter contest over Pakistan led to a major split in the Jamia'at-i 'Ulama-i Hind, the premier organization of the Indian *'ulama* (Dhulipala, 2015, pp. 5-6, 106-110).<sup>6</sup>

One can argue that that debate had started in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the opinions were many and opposing: for example, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), in the beginning, believed that Hindus and Muslims were only religious denominations, thus advocating that, in order to achieve independence, Hindus and Muslims should be united and integrated. However, after seeing the Hindu movement and the revivalist tendencies in the Hindu leadership, he changed his views completely, realising that Hindus and Muslims were two separate *aqaam* (communities) and therefore could not be integrated. Hence he opposed the participation of the Muslims in the Indian National Congress which he held as a communal organization of Hindus [22, 29, 33].<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari (1880-1936) was one of the few Muslims who advocated Nationalism and Secularism. According to him, no contradiction existed between Islam and Indian nationalism, holding the view that a broad and enlightened nationalism was capable of playing a vital and constructive role in the history of modern India. Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944) also attempted at the reconciliation of Islam and Indian nationalism, and his perception of nationalism was different from many others and it was also different from other Muslim leaders, including Hussain Ahmad Madani. He thought that India was only a distinct geographical entity and not a nation. Therefore Maulana Sindhi believed that India was composed of different nationalities and should remain independent and autonomous within the structure of political unity. Maulana Mohammad Ali (1878-1931) strongly attacked Secularism and secular nationalism. To Mohammad Ali, nationalism implied independence of the country – as well as freedom for communities from the fear of domination by one another – and continuity and preservation of what was best in Muslim culture. Maulana Ahmad Riza Khan of Bareilly (1856-1921) [34, 35]<sup>8</sup> was another Muslim who strongly attacked the theory of Nationalism. He opposed all the rulings of some of

the Muslim leaders that nationalism and Islam were not contradictory to each other, issuing a long rejoinder questioning the legal and religious sanctions of the theory of nationalism.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, there was another question: what is a *qaum*? In 1875, Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914) published his *Musaddas Maddo Jazr-e-Islam* [*The Rise and Fall of Islam*], which became a popular success. The poem explores the reasons for the rise and fall of Islam in general, and Indian Islam in particular. Even though the poem does not invoke the nation in the Western or in the traditional sense of European nationalism, it may be termed as a proto-nationalistic poem since it addresses a specifically Muslim audience. Hali, in the preface to the first edition, provides the following reasons for writing the poem [Masood Ashraf Raja's translation, Raja, 2010]:

“The nation is in a state of devastation; *Shurfaa*<sup>10</sup> have been wiped out; knowledge is dead; and religion lives only in name. Poverty haunts every house and character has deteriorated. The clouds of prejudice are spread over the whole nation and everyone is shackled with the chains of tradition. All necks are laden with the burden of ignorance and blind obedience. The nobles, who can benefit the nation, are unaware and carefree; *'ulama*, who have the power to reform the nation, are unaware of the needs and intricacies of current times. In such circumstances one must do what one can, for as everyone is in the same boat, preserving the boat is akin to self-preservation.” [28]

According to Raja [30], the Urdu word used by Hali for the nation is *qaum*, which is derived from the Arabic *qaumiah*. Here, it specifically means the Muslims of India whom Hali sees as one nation, the nation of Islam. Hali's contemporaries also used the term *qaum* to signify Indian Muslims. It is important to note that at this stage of Muslim political consciousness, the term *qaum* is sometimes used interchangeably with the larger concept of *umma*, the pan-Islamic signifier of Muslim Identity. Hali uses the same Urdu term – *qaum* – in describing the Hindus. The poem, as included in the second edition of 1881, comprises three parts: the rise of Islam (past); the fall of Islam (present); and the hope for a future. It is important to note that Hali uses the specific term *qaum* for nation instead of the more universal Muslim concept of *umma* which is used by him only within its pan-Islamic usage, while narrating the accomplishments of the global Muslim community; it is only in the Indian context that Hali uses the specific term *qaum* for the Muslims of India. But this dual usage also creates a seamless connection between the global Muslim past and its specific Indian Muslim version. In Hali's attempt, then, the Muslims of India can only be mobilised to change their state by first putting them in touch with the larger ideological concept of *umma*, i.e., the larger history of Islam, for only then can they visualise how far they have fallen from the zenith of Muslim

6 For a detailed analysis on Shabbir Ahmad Usmani see Dhulipala, 2015, pp. 353-388.

7 For more details on Sayyid Ahmad Khan see Saikia and Rahman, 2019, especially Pritchett on pp. 159-174, who deals precisely with his concept of *qaum*; and Lelyveld, 2020.

8 For further details on Ahmad Riza Khan and his movement see Sanyal, 1996 and 1998. During the 1930s, when the Ahl-e Sunnat *'ulama* were divided on whether or not they should support the idea of a separate Muslim homeland and of Partition, Mustafa Riza, son of Ahmad Riza Khan, supported the stand taken by the Barkatiyya Sayyids (against that of Na'im ud-Din Muradabadi (1887-1948) and his organization, the All-India Sunni Conference, formed in 1925). Like them, he argued against the creation of a separate Muslim state on the grounds that it would lead to the abandonment by the departing *muhajirs* (émigrés) of their shrines, mosques, and other buildings (Sanyal, 1998, footnote 37).

9 For further information on the variety of positions see Kausar, 2008, pp. 46-49.

10 Plural of *sharif* (which can be loosely translated as *noble*) – for further details see Lelyveld, 2020, and Pernau, 2013.

accomplishments (Raja, 2010, pp. 14-15).<sup>11</sup> Thus, Hali's *qaum*, the Muslims of India, even though a smaller group than the larger universal of the *umma*, remains a general group as opposed to its more ideologically specific counterpart, the *umma*. Hali, however, uses the term *qaum* to denote all the Muslims of India in their particularity but attempts to awaken them with references to the larger but ideologically more specific identity of the Muslim *umma*. The Muslim idea of the nation – *qaum* – is, therefore, inherently linked with the larger ideological concept of the *umma*: this link is so important that for Hali to awaken his *qaum*, the history of the *umma* must first be retrieved and juxtaposed with the state of the Muslim nation of India. Hence, Hali cannot just invoke the nation in its territorial sense; the nation must come into being as part of a larger and more glorious Muslim historical community of *umma*. Resultantly, the idea of Muslim nationhood cannot only be linked to space; it must also be articulated within its temporal structures (Raja, 2010, pp. 56-60).

Like Hali, Shibli Nu'mani (1857-1914) [27]<sup>12</sup> also wrote a *Musaddas* titled *Spectacles of Loss: A Qaumi Musaddas*, which was recited by him at a public meeting organised by the Sir Sayyid Theatre at Aligarh in 1894. The poem moves from the Muslim Indian particular to the past Muslim universal – the *umma* – and then falls back to the particularities of Indian Muslims. The use of the term *qaumi* in the title is also instructive, for it is a specific address to the Muslim *qaum* (nation) of India. After invoking the theatrical nature of the event itself, Nu'mani addresses his immediate audience:

Alas, the *qaum* is in such dire straits  
Like a near-death patient  
Without a doctor or a care-giver  
Imbued with all signs of a sudden demise  
And as the *qaum* gets ready to die, you  
Are still not satiated with the love of the spectacle.

While Nu'mani's audience is specifically the Indian Muslims, his sources of historical retrieval are global and rely on the history of the Muslim *umma*. He links his audience, *i.e.*, the Indian Muslims, to the pan-Islamic world of the past, present, and future (Raja, 2010, pp. 97-98).

One of the most important thinkers to dwell on Nationalism was Muhammad Iqbal, who opposed purely western territorial nationalism and only supported the idea of an Indian Muslim nation-state as a tactical measure. Overall, Iqbal's idea of Muslim identity was trans-historical and trans-national; he saw the Western concept of the nation-state as a divisive force against the Islamic concept of a larger Muslim *umma*. For him, the true centre of the Islamic world was the Hijaz – Mecca – and the entire history of Muslim accomplishments a common Muslim heritage. He expressed this in one of his early poems, *Tarana-e-Milli* (*A National Song*). A poem for schoolchildren, the very first lines places the reader beyond the boundaries of a nation-state and

connects with a trans-national heritage:

Ours is China and Arabia, ours is Hindustan  
We are Muslims and the whole world is our country  
Our hearts contain the gift of *Tauhid*  
It is not easy to wipe us out, we were  
Raised under the shade of swords  
And the crescent dagger is our national symbol<sup>13</sup>

The poem was a reworking of an earlier poem, also a *tarana* that he had written for Indian children, titled *Hindustani Bachoon Ka Geet* (*A Song for Indian Children*).<sup>14</sup> The poem is focused on Hindustan and contains a more composite form of nationalism. Iqbal's later poems lose this kind of composite nationalistic theme and focus primarily on the global Muslim identity. The main reason for this is Iqbal's philosophical interest in the universal nature of Islam and his distrust of the local politics of the Indian National Congress, especially since he had become an active member of the All-India Muslim League after the 1920s (Raja, 2010, pp. 120-121) [36].<sup>15</sup>

Another thinker who not only condemned Nationalism but also regarded it un-Islamic and hence harmful to the Muslim community, and to the whole of human race, was Azad who declared: "Hindus can, like other nations, revive their self-awareness and national consciousness on the basis of secular nationalism, but it is indeed not possible for Muslims. Their nationality is not inspired by the racial or geographical exclusivity; it transcends all man-made barriers – Europe may be inspired by the concepts of 'nation' and homeland, Muslims can seek inspiration for self-awareness only from God and Islam" (quoted in Kausar [21], 2008, pp. 49-50). After the war of 1914-1918, there was a gradual and continuous change in Azad's ideological views of Islam, which culminated in his full acceptance and also appreciation of secularism and nationalism. The fundamental elements of Azad's concept of nationalism in this period were independence of the country and the cultural and political fusion and integration between Hindu and Muslim communities. Hence, to Azad, every Indian Muslim was a member of the Indian Nation and could not, by virtue of the common bond of religion, separate himself from the larger Indian society and claim the status of independent nationhood. He even proclaimed that it was obligatory on the Indian Muslim, in accordance with the spirit of *Shariah*, that the Muslims should get united with the Hindus in an affectionate bond of love with all sincerity and become one nation. In other words, he expressed that all the differences of religion, culture, and mode of living should be subordinated in the interest of Indian nationality. Azad in this manner advocated Composite/United Nationhood and opposed vehemently the diction that the Muslim community could not ever be diluted or integrated

13 For an English transliteration and translation see [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/taranahs/milli\\_text.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/taranahs/milli_text.html).

14 For an English transliteration and translation see [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/taranahs/hindi\\_text.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/taranahs/hindi_text.html).

15 For further details on Muhammad Iqbal's Political Philosophy see Sevea, 2012.

11 For more details on the intricacies of *qaum* and *umma* see Al-Ahsan, 1992.

12 For more on Shibli Nu'mani see Murad, 1996.

with the ideology and culture of the Hindu community. He asserted that the cultural elements of both the communities had been fused together through the ages and consequently a “common culture” of both the Hindu and Muslim communities had been evolved (Kausar, 2008, pp. 55-59).

Azad pinpointed a few verses of the Qur’an to justify the integration of the Hindu and Muslim communities for a common political goal. Based on the Qur’anic verse (60: 8 and 9), Azad divided non-Muslims into two categories. He held that the first category of the non-Muslims deserved cooperation, whereas any sort of friendly link with the second category of non-Muslims was forbidden. Therefore he believed that since the Hindus neither fought with the Muslims nor expelled them, they could be grouped under the first category; but the British who had invaded and suppressed them belonged to the second category. He thus concluded from it that the Hindu and Muslim communities should be integrated in the Islamic spirit to form a single nation (Kausar, 2008, pp. 75-76).

Besides the Qur’an, Azad also interpreted a treaty, the Treaty of Medina, between the Prophet Muhammad and the non-Muslims in the similar way and tried to strengthen his justification of the integration of Hindu and Muslim communities into a single nation. Applying the content of the treaty, Azad implied that the integration of the Hindu and Muslim communities into a nation was sanctified since the Prophet himself had constituted the Muslims and the Jews into one *umma* (nation). Other than Azad, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani also based his justification of the United Nationhood on the same treaty. The word used by the Prophet in the treaty was “*umma*”. The Arabic usage of it stood for a body of people whether of different places, times, religions, or even two different nations that unite together. There is no equivalent word in the English language to denote the term *umma* which is based on Arabic terminology. Still, what can be conceived from the use of the word *umma* by the Prophet was that he intended and constituted the Muslims of Mecca and Medina with the Jewish tribes into a communion, say into an alliance. In it, both the Muslim community and the Jewish tribes were authorised to live as separate communities on the basis of their separate religions and cultures. The allies were united into an alliance to fight against their enemies jointly on their own expenditures if the enemies attacked them. Hence, Maulana Mawdudi, who was against Composite/United Nationalism, held that it could be termed as a “military Alliance” in the modern political usage, rather than calling it a “United Nationhood” of today (Kausar, 2008, pp. 79-80).

In Madani’s [24] reading, *qaum* is any group of people, usually a group of men, excluding women; *millah* (Urdu *millat*) means religious community; while *umma* (Urdu *ummat*) connotes religious community of a (monotheist) prophet (Madani, 2005, pp. 56–77, 80–90). The point of Madani’s semantic analysis is that *qaum* as the most general category in the semantics of “nation” can consist of any number of *millahs* and *ummas*. Furthermore, Madani also makes references to the Treaty of Medina and likens it to an

earlier form of composite nationalism (Madani, 2005, p. 113). Given that God in the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad in the Treaty have employed *qaum* in reference to communities that include Muslims and non-Muslims, cooperation with non-Muslims for common causes becomes legitimate in national affairs (Madani, 2005, pp. 66–87). As Rehman [32] asserts, while the structural demands of Indian nationalism were more than appealing to many Muslims like Azad and Madani, the implications of nationalism as an ideology and its practical implications were too obnoxious for some to adopt in totality. Composite nationalists were therefore opposed by the counterargument advanced by Muhammad Iqbal and Sayyid Mawdudi (Rehman, 2018, pp. 7-9).

Madani’s articulation of composite nationalism offered Iqbal a notable target given Madani’s status and importance. In a newspaper article entitled “Statement on Islam and Nationalism in Reply to a Statement of Mualana Husain Ahmad”, published in the *Ehsan* on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1938, Iqbal begins by appraising Madani’s semantics of nation and nationality.<sup>16</sup> Agreeing with Madani’s analysis of *qaum* as any group in general, Iqbal underscores the givenness or involuntarism inherent in the idea of *qaum*. *Millat* (Arabic, *millah*), on the other hand, necessarily “stands for religion, a law and a program,” “a particular way of life,” which makes it a matter of choice; one can convert from one *millat* to another. For Iqbal, *millat* and *ummat* are nearly synonymous in meaning as they are used interchangeably in the Qur’an. Accordingly, “*millat* or *ummat* embraces nations but cannot be merged in them”. Owing to this fact, for Iqbal, there can be multiple *qaums* in the world, but only two *ummats/millats*: Muslims (or monotheists in general) and non-Muslims. Iqbal thus concludes, over against composite nationalism, that the basis of a Muslim *qaum* (nation) cannot be other than their *millat* (religion). This is the quintessential and the defining statement in favour of a religious nationalism in Islam. Whereas Azad and Madani’s composite nationalism reconciled secular nationalism and theology, Iqbal rejects secular nationalism totally, but lays down the groundwork for another form of modern Muslim nationalism (Rehman, 2018, p. 13) [20, 31].<sup>17</sup>

Weighing in on the South Asian Muslim debate on nationalism, Mawdudi too, like Iqbal, attacked Madani’s articulation of composite nationalism. Like Iqbal, Mawdudi too highlights Madani’s conflation of the Arabic *qaum* as used in the Qur’an with the modern understanding of nation. Mawdudi also notes that the term *qaum* and its English equivalent “nation” both have their origins in *jahiliyyah* (age of ignorance), and rejects Madani and Azad’s equation between the Treaty of Medina and modern composite nationalism. The Treaty did not establish a national state inclusive of Muslims and Jews upon the principle of majority rule, a joint legislature, or a common

16 For an English translation see <http://www.koranselskab.dk/profiler/iqbal/nationalism.htm>.

17 For further details about this debate, which was full of misunderstandings and sometimes verging on the offensive, see Hussain, 2018; and Rasheed and Ahmad, 2019.



judicial system. At best, the Treaty can be considered a “military alliance” between the Jews and the Muslims for the common defence of the city of Medina. Hence, Madani’s conflation of the Qur’anic and modern terminology is, according to Mawdudi, a manifestation of loose thinking that does not stand up to rigorous scrutiny. In sum, the main feature of Iqbal and Mawdudi’s critique of composite nationalism revolves around two points: (a) the distinctly modern nature of the terms nation, nationality, and nationalism, which bear no real semantic parity with the Qur’anic usage; and (b) the spiritual dynamics of nationalism that lead to devastating spiritual consequences for Islam if the idea were to be adopted by Muslims as an ideological basis for polity (Rehman, 2018, p. 17).

### 3. Conclusion

As Eickelman and Piscatori [11] (1996, pp. 28-30) assert, Muslims and non-Muslims alike tend to take at face value the ideological claim by some Muslims that the key elements of Islamic tradition are fixed. Indeed, the idea of tradition is profoundly conditioned by the central role played by both founding texts and Prophetic example. Just as Muslims consider the Qur’an, the direct word of God, to be immutable, the *hadith* (sayings) and actions of the Prophet Muhammad are regarded as a template for action in the present. All traditions are created, however, through shared practice, and they can be profoundly and consciously modified and manipulated under the guise of a return to a more legitimate earlier practice. Of even more significance, changed economic and political conditions can profoundly alter the meaning and significance of ideas, movements, social and personal identities, and institutional arrangements, without the proponents of these ideas being fully aware of the nature of the change.

Politics is intimately connected with the process of symbolic production. But, because symbols are general and ambiguous rather than specific, they simultaneously provide a link with the past and room for change. The sense of history and the past is never politically neutral. Edward Shils [38] (1981, p. 185) distinguishes between the pasts of occurred events and the “much more plastic” perceived past. Actually, because the line between occurred and perceived pasts depends upon the construction, dissemination, and acceptance of authoritative historical narratives, the past of occurred events exists mostly as a pool of resources which can be drawn upon in traditional and modern settings to sanction present practice. In effect, the line between occurred and perceived events is inherently blurred because the process of creating tradition is both conscious and explicit, and unconscious and implicit. As Eric Hobsbawm [18] asserts (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 5), the invention of tradition occurs in all times and places, but we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys older social patterns or produces new ones to which they were not applicable. And the 1930s were indeed a decade of rapid transformations in India, with

several Muslim thinkers, politicians, and leaders, with or without formal religious training, with or without secular(ist) leanings, in favour or against (territorial) nationalism, traditionally educated or not, trying to shape Islam, particularly the Muslim community.

However, what “Islam” and the “Muslim community” meant, that was in the eye of the beholder: for some, like Madani or Azad, Muslims were a *millat*, and Hindus were another one but both formed a *qaum*, and even a *umma*; for others, the Muslims of India were a *qaum* which belonged to the worldwide Muslim Nation, the *umma*; and for others, like Iqbal or Mawdudi, Muslims were a *qaum* different from the Hindu *qaum*, and as a *millat* Muslims were a different *qaum* from other *millats/qaum*. In the process, heterogeneity of different perceptions of the Islamic tradition was created but in the Indian public space of the 1930s that pluralism was reduced to simple and seemingly understandable markers of “Indian” or “Muslim”, with different actors of public discourse employing different rhetoric which formatted and essentialized Islam, resulting in a politicization of the Muslim identity.

In the end, Pakistan became a reality and if Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah became known as the *Baba-i-Qaum* (Father of the Nation), his sister Fatima Jinnah (1893-1967) became known as the *Māder-e Millat* (Mother of the Nation): amongst several options, the winning equivalence, if there were any winners at all, was between *qaum* and *millat*.

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