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Maulana Azad and His Idea of India: Religious Unity, Plurality and Inclusivity

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Abstract:

This article sheds light on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's ideas of inclusive theology. It is also aimed to describe its significance as education for religious pluralism in India in particular. Azad's inclusive theology can be judged from his understanding of the concept of God, religion, and unity of religion. This study mainly uses hermeneutical and philosophical-theological approaches because inclusivism can be dealt with in philosophy, especially the philosophy of religion. The findings include God as the "cherisher" and "flourisher" (Rabb) transcends all fragmentations and divisions of humanity in race, color, and religion. The path of universal God (Rabb al'alāmīn) is "the right path" (sirāt al-mustaqīm) which belongs to no particular religion. For Azad, all religions in origin contain the truth and are pervaded with the same spirit the existence and variations in religions do not affect the essentials of religion. The outward path (shari'a, minhāj) may vary according to the circumstances. The difference between one religion and another are not differences in dīn, the basic provision, but in the manner of giving effect to it. This one will be focusing much on the religious justification of maulana Azad's idea of India along with his inclusive nationalist ideas according to the above-given framework of the analysis of his phenomenal religious works.

Keywords: Religious Unity, Plurality, Inclusiveness, and Diversity.

Introduction: Maulana Azad along with his leadership qualities was one of the great exponents of religious Pluralism and integrity of diverse religious values. The root of Azad's Pluralistic tendency comes from his Sufi genesis, which means the way he groomed in his Childhood was religious Sufi tradition. Along with that Azad get into the trap of his loving doctrine of Wahdat al Wujud (Religious Unity), which was to maintain the religious Plurality?

He was not leaning only towards nationalist ethos but was a great builder of Modern India. His dedication towards the Pluralistic ethos of the Indian Independence Movement gets further reflection when he became the first education minister of Independent India. He took so much effort to incorporate the idea of synthesizing the Islamic, Indian, and Western ideas into a coherent and single pattern for the emerging nation of India. He was one of the most prominent leaders of His time who was involved in the Scholarship of Medieval thinking and classical learnings and he cut across the circumscribed views of various religions and languages. He was immensely grappled with his Islamic Scholarship that was too much indulged in maintaining the diversity of religion and community. Azad refused to accept any narrow view of thinking means he supported a kind of accommodative model in which each Culture, tradition, nationalistic Chauvinism, and religious fundamentals could be fitted. He retained a broader view of the Idea of India while giving an Islamic Insight of his religious understanding of Islam, even his excellent understanding of Islamic Scholarship must be reached in the public sphere even across the border. His works are Considerable in this regard like Tarjumanul-Quran.

By foresightedness of his commentary on, Tarjumanul al-Qur'an, Maulana has established the reputation of leading Muslim theologians on the Indian sub-continent during the past two centuries. Through his expertise in Religion, he proposed that there is only one true religion; all religions are one in origin; therefore, all religions are originally true religions. When all these religions deviate from this true religion. The Qur'an has come as a final revelation to confirm the truth of all previously-revealed religions and to summon men who have deviated from truth to return to this original truth of their religions. Raja Mohan Gandhi a great Historian of Modern India quoted a passage from the Al-Hilal in his Book "Understanding Muslim Minds" that shows the religious tolerance of Maulana Azad "Islam does not command narrow-mindedness and racial and religious prejudice. It does not make the recognition of merit and virtue, of human benevolence, mercy, and love dependent upon and subject to distinctions of religion and race" (Gandhi R, p.223). It teaches us to respect every man who is good, whatever his religion. This passage is showing Azad's vision of creating a society based on irrespective of religious influences and also explores the journey of Azad's understanding of Islam as broad-minded religion which respects each person who is good whether he belongs to any religion.

Religious Inclusivity in His Thought:

The Idea of Tawhid or Unity of God: Maulana Azad represented a Quranic view of the unity of God, He never pointed out that it was the human mind who achieved the belief in the existence of God but we can say that is why it was an upward development. That is inherited in human nature. (Azad, 1958:1) because the human mind is bounded by his senses and could not comprehend the totality of God (Rodrigues, S.p131)

Particularly When it Comes to Quranic Contention the very first vision that man had of God was of God's oneness or Unity, the vision of an unseen almighty being who must have created all that he could see or feel about and around him and that this vision slowly

underwent a change marking a sort of retrogression and giving rise to the concept of the multiplicity of polytheism. In other words, instead of evolution, a backward movement manifests itself in the history of theism. It is only in the field of attributes, however, that the theory of evolution may afford valuable help in the investigation. (Azad, 1958:1.)

In the same way, Azad differentiated the God of different religions just in the aspect of attributes of God likewise he proposed it from the Quran as Mawlana Azad puts it: Adam was created with light within, but his progeny frittered it away and let in darkness instead. This is borne out by the ancient traditions of Egypt, Greece, Chaldea, India, China, and Iran. They reveal the fact that man at first lived a life guided by Nature, indeed, the Old Testament definitely assigns to Adam a heavenly existence, it is only when he falls into error that he is deprived of it. Light comes first and darkness afterward. Such is the statement of the Qur'an: (Azad, 1958:3)

Men were at first of one religion only: Then they fell to variance. (Q. 10: 19) Mankind were of one religion, and God sent prophets as comforters and warners and He sent down with them the word of Truth that it might decide the disputes of men. (Q* 2: 213)

So mostly he differentiated God only in the aspect of attributes, not in the respect of the existence of God. So, the first set of these concepts referred to the importance of acknowledging the political as being a part of the unity constituted by different attributes of God in different spheres of life or tawhid's (Rodrigues, S. 2020. 130.... Relevance of Tawhid).

In his magnum, Opus Azad argued about the attribution of God and its Universal Character like in Tarjumanul Quran When he attributed the quality of God's Providence like (Rububiyat), Mercy (Rehmat), Justice (Adal), by throwing deep sense of understanding of God's attribute in Tarjumanul Quran Azad proved the universal attribute of God that is beneficial for all and that creates a sense of the principle of irrespective of any religion or race that outlined the Unity of God in Azad's thought. Even his thought of God's Unity is best explorable in his interpretation of Surah Al-Fatiha.

While defining God by him Azad explains that "Man's greatest error was to consider him the object of terror, not love. The very first word of surah corrects this mistake. The word hamd (Praise) is used in appreciation of good qualities, therefore it follows, and that terror cannot coexist with hamd. The word rub signifies Rububiyat (Omniscience, Omnipresence, Omnipotence of the great provider Allah), the word Rahman (the quality of bestowing all that is good) and Adalat the quality of being just and temperate) completes the picture of a power that fulfills all human needs.

The second verse Rabbulalamin (Lord of worlds) clearly explains his concern towards the universality of his religious thought and an accommodative aspect towards other community and religion, like the interpretation consists "Rububiyat of Allah, thereby expressing his concern for every individual, group, community, and country. This gives the lie to narrow mindedness which had arisen among the different races

Who had started considering themselves God's Chosen, to the extent of excluding all others?

That is how one analyzes the Idea of Unity of God in Azad's thoughts where he shows the common belief to integrate and respect each person who belongs to any religion. This injunction in Azad's thought gets appearances from the Surah that incorporated in the Islamic Scripture that is Quran.

The Idea of Wahdat-e-Din or religious Unity or Concept of Unity of Adyan: Azad's writings, underpinned by theological exposition, were addressing the situation brewing at the time freedom struggle sought an alliance between Hindus and Muslims to drive out the common enemy, the British. His religious ideas are found in Tarjumanul Quran written during 1930-36 witnessed a critical phase characterized by increasing communal rift (intensified by shuddhi and Tablighi movements), Khilafat movement the Chauri Chaura incident. It also strives to vehemently challenge the two-nation theory and non-reconcilability of Hindu-Muslim unity, through his conception of Unity of Adyan one of the major concerns of the first volume of his magnum opus.

Maulana's writings were addressing the contemporary political upheaval but were not devoid of religious philosophy. He formulated his theory of Unity of Adyan based upon Qur'anic injunctions earlier explored by Shah Waliullah, Nizamuddin Awliya, and Mazhar Jan I Janan who refer to the truth of other religions like Hinduism, particularly in the Indian context (Tanweer Fazal 2014). Along with this Qur'anic perspective Unity of Adyan is substantiated by the comparative study of different religions like, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, and even Zoroastrianism. Maulana's social understanding and political activity also played an important role in this theory.

Concept of Wahdat e Adyan in Islam: Maulana gave a systematic and coherent explanation of WeA, however, Shah Waliullah and Qazi Sana Ullah Usmani pioneered it before him. They cited Quranic verses to commonalities between Hindu and Muslim religions and highlighted the scope of reconciliation and harmony between them. Qazi Sanaullah Usmani Panipati (d. 1810) in his Tafsir-e-Mazhari commentary, states, Surah An'am (The Cattle, Chapter 6) verse 109 that the principles of Hindu religion are similar to those of Islam, but that when there are variations, it is due to Satan's deception. Shah Waliullah put the verses 52 and 53 of Surah 23 for his argument

“And, verily, this community of yours is ODe single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all; remain, then, conscious of me. But they (who claim to follow you) have torn their unity wide asunder, piece by piece, each group delighting in (but) what they themselves possess (by way of tenets)”

Maulana followed a similar approach but novelty emanates when he makes WeA the main focus of his first volume and he devotes nearly one volume out of four of his commentators for this purpose.

Maulana's conception of WeA can best be understood by the differentiation that he made in the commandments of the Quran. First is the *din*, which is the essence of the Quran is belief in the doctrine of one God, in angles, in the day of judgment, in prophets, and in revealed scriptures brought by the messengers of Allah, and secondly the *shari'a* or *Minhaj* that is the external part and the methodology of practices based on customs, traditions and cultural practices. Azad considers the latter as of less significance than the former. Azad believes that "Shari'a and *Minhaj* could not have been from the very nature of things uniformly the same for one and all. It was therefore inevitable that they should be different for different countries and different times. The differences of this type are not really differences in the basis of religion. They are so only in things subsidiary to it" (Azad, 1965: 161)

The difference between sharia is not the difference in religion but in its subsidiary things: The differences in religion make it easy to adopt and practice by people residing in every corner of the world. This inclusivity considers the wide range of needs and situations of people of different times and places. Azad posits that though widening the border of religion by providing a variety of sharia, God establishes various states of thought and practice (Azad, 1965: 189). This way diversity of thought, expression, and practices, coming out of subjective pluralism and individualism, are welcomed and celebrated. But all these differences must fall under the ambit of the essence of the *din* i.e., devotion to one God and righteous living (Azad, 1965: 161).

Through this explanation univocally discarded all the arguments based on the inevitability of Hindu-Muslim hostility. The diverse approach of religions (*shari'a*) should not be the dividing factor, as *din* is common for and transcends all religions, keeping in mind that diversity of religion is based on the different historical and socio-cultural backgrounds context conditions, and times in which it is embedded (Rippin, 2005: 234).

It was undoubtedly a unique response to the Indian situation, but it was not constrained by it. The new countries that emerged in the post-World War II period were largely multi-religious countries, and the concept of *Wahdat e Adyan* was particularly relevant to them. This conceptual exposition by maulana protects people from getting involved in religious conflict initiated by a perverted politician who highlights some differences and then exploits those differences to instigate conflict, including religious conflict, in order to achieve their political objectives. Maulana's conceptual framework to analyze the religious differences as pluralism pave way for a more resilient and peaceful world.

A religious justification of his Nationalist Inclusivity in His thought: Many Considered Maulana Azad as a secular leader, because of his support for religious pluralism. But, "through his emphasis on pluralism, he maintained the non-secular worldview to shape and participate in collective life without avoiding faith, tradition, and revelation and their embodiment in political Discourse". (Rodrigues, 2021).

The same trend he revised while proposing anti-Pakistan propaganda and reflecting his thought against the Muslim league's dream of Pakistan, and he said that "I Have Considered From Every Possible Point of View The Scheme of Pakistan as Formulated By The Muslim League'. As an Indian, I have examined its implications for the future of India as a whole. As a Muslim, I have examined its likely effects on the fortunes of Muslims of India. Considering the scheme in all its aspects I have come to the conclusion that it is harmful not only for India as a whole but for Muslims in particular. And in fact, it creates more problems than it solves. I must confess that the very term Pakistan goes against my grain. It suggests that some portions of the world are pure while others are impure. Such a division of territories into pure and impure is un-Islamic and a repudiation of the very spirit of Islam. Islam recognizes no such division and the Prophet says, 'God has made the whole world a mosque for me.'

Further, it seems that the scheme of Pakistan is a symbol of defeatism and has been built upon the analogy of the Jewish demand for a national home. It is a confession that Indian Muslims cannot hold their own in India as a whole and would be content to withdraw to a corner specially reserved for them." (Azad, 2011)

Here he does not lose his Islamic hermeneutics to justify his Nationalistic attitude while proposing a universalistic domain for all of the community through Islamic discourse of Political. (Rodrigues, 2021)

Like Islamists ideologue of Pakistan, if we count the name Mawdudi, Jinnah and Zia They all have provided the essential Islamist pitch to the idea of Pakistan, while to counter this narrative these were Maulana Azad and the Maulana Madani Stress on Universalism and Composite Nationalism that gets its root in Quranic Injunctions. (Engineer, 1996).

On Hindu Muslim Unity and Composite nationalism: After succeeding in the Mobilization of Muslims into Independence movement, Azad emphasized consolidating this Hindu-Muslim unity on the basis of the faith of Muslims as well as on the shared culture of both communities.

The 1940 Presidential address to the Indian National Congress in Rampur azad said "led to a meeting of the culture currents of two different races. Like the Ganga and Jumna, they flowed for a while through separate courses, but nature's immutable law brought them together and joined them in a sangam. This fusion was a notable event in history. ...Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievement. Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavor. ...Our languages were different, but we grew to use a common language; our manners and customs were dissimilar, but they acted and reacted on each other, and thus produced a new synthesis. ...This joint wealth is the heritage of our common nationality, and we do not want to leave it and go back to the times when this joint life had not begun. ... These thousand years of our joint life has moulded us into a common nationality. ...Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and

indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity. We must accept the logic of fact and history, and engage ourselves in the fashioning of our future destiny. ” (Azad, 1940) In contrast and contrary to the facts, the Muslim League and Hindu nationalists were arguing that culture was based on religion and that Hindu and Muslim cultures were irreconcilable.

Though in response to that Azad argued in favor of Composite Nationalism (Muttahida qaumiyat). He provided the example of the first state created by Prophet Mohammed in Medina, Where all people of Madina entered into a an agreement called as ‘Covenant of Medina. Under this Covenant, If Medina was attacked by outsiders, everyone would have to accompany the forces to defend or protect the city. However Jews and Christians are free to practice their religion.

Azad said, “I am proud of being an Indian. I am a part of the indivisible unity. I am indispensable to this noble edifice, and without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element that has gone to building India. I can never surrender this claim.” For Azad, Hindu-Muslim unity was more fundamental than independence if it was to be achieved by partitioning India. In his address to the special session of INC in 1923 Azad said, “If today an angel descending from the clouds were to declare from the top of the Qutub Minar in Delhi, ‘Discard Hind-Muslim unity and within twenty-four hours swaraj is yours,’ I would prefer to sacrifice swaraj rather than Hindu-Muslim unity, for the delay in the attainment of swaraj will be a loss to India alone, but if our unity disappears it will be a loss to the whole world of humanity.”

Azad was a great believer in the Hindu-Muslim Unity that emerges from his religious conviction conviction. He forcefully expressed this belief in a speech to a special session of the Indian National Congress in 1923:

If an angel were to descend from the clouds today and settle on Delhi's Qutab Minar and proclaim that Swaraj (Self-rule) within two hours provided that India renounces Hindu-Muslim Unity then I would renounce Swaraj and not unity, Because if Swaraj is delayed that is a loss to India. But if Unity is loss that is a lost to humanity. That is how Azad stated and defended the unity and peace of two different communities, even though he preferred Unity over the cost of Swaraj.

Conclusion: Maulana Azad stated his inclusive theology in Tarjuman al-Quran, where he highlighted the notion of one real religion; all faiths are one in origin, implying that all religions are originally the true religion. Azad went beyond the divisions and disintegration caused by race, nationality, and religion. The true way to God (rab-al'almn) is independent of any faith. It is crucial to educate and spread the concept of religious plurality. At a time when extremist Islamic ideology threatens the whole globe, Azad's thought and the way he learned and interpreted Islam might serve as a counter-narrative to such evil ideologies. His message of tolerance, discussion, interfaith harmony, and cohabitation is still alive and it must be spread throughout Muslim community in particular, as well as among the extremist mindset, to bring peace and harmony to the world today.

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