

## MUSLIM RESPONSES TO MODERN EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper contextualizes the Darul Ulum (as Deoband was known) established in 1867 and the Madrasatul Ulum (as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College, later the Aligarh Muslim University, was initially known) established in 1877. These educational ventures were also counterpointed by the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama founded in 1898 and the Jamia Millia Islamia which came into existence in 1920.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Modernity, Education, Syed Ahmad Khan, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Alam Khundmiri.

### I

In the wake of the 1857 rebellion and the severe and systematic colonial repression that targeted all potentially subversive communities in the north of the Indian sub-continent, a 52-year-old “royalist” traveled to London to find out what was wrong with the world. Syed Ahmad Khan belonged to a well-to-do aristocratic family and might have thought of himself as belonging to an international fraternity that shared progressive ideas of government. But the colonial intervention had already substituted Urdu for Persian in 1835, a move touted as having rendered a nation of “Muslims” illiterate. The flip side of this would be that it must have made another nation, in all the senses, literate. New centers of power—along diverse ideas of a nascent-nationalism that happily married at convenience and lived a turbulent life, working with such imponderables as the secular, the communal, the feudal, the capitalistic, the social, the cultural, the political, the public, the private and the like, adopting strategies of antagonism and collaboration as and when required—were springing up. The London visit gave Syed Ahmad Khan a rude shock and a new calling.

Syed Ahmad Khan left the Indian subcontinent in 1869 with the hope that he would be able to “prepare a refutation of British attacks on the history of Islam by using the wide range of sources available to his adversaries” (Lelyveld, 1996:3). He was not planning to come back. But going over *The People of India*, a publication of the India Office (see, Watson) and reading the English descriptions through his sons’ translations, Syed Ahmad Khan was shocked to find “photographs of nearly naked men or people in unfamiliar dress” (Lelyveld, 1996:6) featured as representative of Indians, Hindus,

Muslims, etc. The third volume describes an Aligarh District landholder as having “features [that] are peculiarly Mahomedan, of the centralasian type; and while they vouch for the purity of his descent, exemplify in a strong manner the obstinacy, sensuality, ignorance, and bigotry of his class. It is hardly possible, perhaps, to conceive features more essentially repulsive” (cited by Lelyveld, 1996:6). Syed Ahmad Khan’s exposure to the other’s representation had a telling effect: he decided to come back and live among the “natives.” He started various English-medium schools, much to the chagrin of ardent and hardened nationalists, whether of religious or secular credentials. He also established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875, which in 1920 became the Aligarh Muslim University.

If what shocked Syed Ahmad Khan was that he could be represented, enumerated, as belonging to peoples with whom he had nothing in common by the same people with whom he thought he had many things in common, the Sachar Committee Report<sup>1</sup> has recently provided us with another kind of shock. I only draw attention to findings related to education: less than 4 percent Muslims graduate from school; contrary to right-wing propaganda, only 4 percent go to Madrasas, principally because in most areas of high Muslim concentration even primary state schools do not exist for miles; where they do exist, Muslims invariably prefer to send their wards to them, even when the dropout rate of Muslim children is much higher compared to other community wards due to “poverty” as these children are pressed into work by their indigent parents.

## II

Whereas caste was the main node of a possible alliance among various Hindu communities, the Muslim elite, in the wake of the revolt of 1857 and the first all-India census in 1881 that tabulated 19.7 percent of the Muslim population as participating in Hindu religious festivals and ceremonies,<sup>2</sup> concentrated on the common denominator of Islam in order to construct a “corporate identity.”<sup>3</sup> If Indian nationalism gave birth to national communalism as well as Hindu or Muslim communal nationalism, the common denominator of community made it even more impossible for “Nationalist Muslims”<sup>4</sup> to work within the secular modern nationalist frame. This is all the more significant if we take into account the fact that Muslims, by virtue of their pre- or post-national spill over, could be read as an always-already community, whereas the issue of caste was constantly a problem within the Hindu notion of a community. This presumed always-already-ness of the Muslim peoples has given strength to the notion that Muslim academies (Maulanas and Allamas) were a decisive factor in reinforcing communalism, if not fanaticism, among

Muslims. However, as against the common practice of analyzing them as hotbeds of Islamic separatism of varying degrees, my attempt is to re-frame these academies so that their troubled history—an integral part of the pan-Indian anti-colonial social mobilization and of various reform initiatives that were taking place all over the Indian subcontinent—would become accessible for critical analyses.

Recent studies draw attention to the presence, at least by late 1880s, of an already awakened modern consciousness among the peoples of various regions within the subcontinent. These studies have initiated a re-assessment of Gandhi's role in the nationalist movement as one directed towards harnessing and appropriating the masses for a nationalist struggle against colonialism even as the people struggled against various oppressive practices locally. Whereas the peoples' moves were characterized by the urgent agenda of social reform as imperative for political emancipation, Gandhi worked with the ideal of political liberation (loaded with religious symbols and rhetoric) as a means for the establishment of a community free of all modern evils.<sup>5</sup> Contrasting it with the following succinctly brings out the different pull of the Gandhian notion of politics:

As early as 1889 when the Prince of Wales visited Poona, Jotiba Phule had one message to convey to the Queen—the need for education of the lower castes. He made the first generation school children of the Mahar and Mali castes recite: “Tell Grandma we are a happy nation, but 19 crores are without education. Before the turn of the century, Sri Narayana Guru advised his followers: Educate that you may be free and organize that you may be strong.” A couple of decades later, Dr. Ambedkar thundered: “Educate, Organize and Agitate.” (Aloysius, 1998:197)

The Gandhian strategy is best exemplified by the massive movement he triggered off in 1919 combining such disparate issues as cow protection, Khilafat, Non-cooperation and untouchability on a single platform. With a single stroke Gandhi tried to offer cow protection to the elite caste/class, support for an Islamic symbol that was at worst confusing and at best threatened a post-national spillover and removal of untouchability as well as capture of the leadership of Congress at Nagpur in 1920. In contrast, Jinnah became the “sole spokesman” of Muslims much later. Countering the tendency of traditional nationalist historiography that trace the source and spread of Islamic separatism to colonial policies and elite Muslim manipulations, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal argue that it was primarily Gandhi's support of the Khilafat that weaned power away from the Muslim League and possibly set off a two-nation policy. After the fall of Khilafat, the Muslims did not have any significant platform and some Muslim politicians from minority provinces

turned to Jinnah. Deploring Gandhi's mix of religion and politics, Jinnah had already left Congress. After being shouted down at the Nagpur Congress session in 1920, he seemingly bid farewell to politics, significantly on account of his disenchantment with the Congress position on the Nehru Report of 1928. It is in this context that we find Jinnah, by 1934, at the helm of the Muslim League (Bose and Jalal, 1999:171).

Against the grain of the standard practice of reducing Islam in India to pan-Islamic separatism, and then tracing the beginnings of a teleological narrative of this mode, I argue that pan-Islamic interests can be read in terms other than that of separatism. Even after the collapse of the Khilafat agitation,<sup>6</sup> which lost wind when the Turkish National Assembly at Ankara announced on 21 November 1922 that the Khilafat and the Sultanate were two different offices not necessarily vested in one person, there was hardly any serious thought of a different nation. An examination of the relationship between Islam and modernity in the Indian subcontinent as exemplified by the initiatives of two of the four main centres of Islamic thought and culture, the DarulUlumDeoband and the Aligarh Muslim University, would substantiate such an argument<sup>7</sup> as these institutions were also driven by a felt need for socio-cultural reforms. However, for such an argument to emerge, it is necessary to set up a framework in which these institutions can be situated in frames other than those of Islamic separatism. Given the complex of Hindu and Muslim political negotiations, deadlocks and resolutions, the idea of a separate nation can perhaps be understood as evolving across, rather than because, of these educational institutions. However, these educational and reform initiatives have consistently been placed within a narrative of separatism, inherent or accidentally incurred, that had such disastrous consequences for the subcontinent. Whether it is Peter Hardy, Rafiuddin Ahmed, Bipan Chandra, MushirulHasan (1991), Francis Robinson (1993), B.R. Nanda or Bimal Prasad, to cite a few examples, we find religion framed as pre-modern impinging on and finally overwhelming modern politics of nationalism. In keeping with the logic of readiness to chart a continuous pre-historic past, except for the Islamic rupture, the pre-1947 Islamic past is also being systematically cast as part and parcel of Muslim separatism in India and thereby a part of the history of Pakistan, and not of the Indian subcontinent.

However, most of these historians also agree that the period between 1833 and 1864 marked the trough of economic depression among the Muslim communities, though Indian historiography has not been much bothered by statements that can be culled out from various sources to establish the existence of harmony or of discord between Hindu and Muslim communities. For example, Alberuni who had accompanied the invading Mahmud of Ghazni,

invoking a rhetoric of “us” and “them,” notes that “they [Hindus] differ from us [Muslims] in everything which other nations have in common,” be it language, religion, manners or usage so much that they “frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil’s breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper.”<sup>8</sup> In the context of the rapid decline of the Mughal dynasty after the death of Aurangzeb (in 1707), Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) spearheaded a movement among Muslims—much before the somewhat parallel initiative of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)—a partly revivalist initiative directed towards resurrecting and energizing the Muslims of India (see, Rizvi:1980). He sought to do so by making them aware of the message of Islam and by trying to purge Islam from all its accidental accretions in the Indian subcontinent. However, he also sought for himself an Arabic lineage and “wrote to one Muslim ruler or nobleman after another imploring them to muster courage and start a *jihad* for the restoration of Muslim rule in India” (Prasad, 1999:74). Shah Waliullah’s attitude towards people of other faiths, one of absolute scorn (Prasad, 1999:75), should be read in the context of the rising Maratha power and the economic degeneration of the Muslim community. After the battle of Plassey (in 1757), whereby the British took over from the Mughal dynasty, Muslims were systematically kept out of the revenue, judicial and military departments of the new state apparatus. Motivated by a desire to stop the economic as well as intellectual degradation of Muslims, Shah Waliullah established a *madrasah* and translated the Quran into Persian, the language of the state apparatus then, going against the precept that it has to be read in Arabic alone, so that Muslims in India could read and understand it for themselves. After his death, his son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824), vigorously upheld Shah Waliullah’s ideals. Angered at the institutional neglect of Muslims, in 1803 Abdul Aziz declared India “the country of the enemy” (*DarulHarb*), thereby giving legal/religious sanction to Muslims to either migrate or fight the British. In the fatwa, Abdul Aziz outlines the reasons:

In this city (Delhi) the *Imam-ul-Muslimin* wields no authority. The real power rests with Christian officers. There is no check on them; and the promulgation of the Commands of *Kufr* means that in administration and justice, in matter of law and order, in the domain of trade, finance and collection of revenue—everywhere the *Kuffar* (infidels) are in power. Yes, there are certain Islamic rituals, e.g. Friday and Id prayers, *adhan* and cow slaughter, with which they brook no interference; but the very root of these rituals is of no value to them. They demolish mosques without the least hesitation and no Muslim or any *dhimmi* can enter into the city or its suburbs but with their permission. It is in their own interests if they do not object to the travelers and

traders to visit the city. On the other hand, distinguished persons like Shuja-ul-Mulk and Vilayati Begum cannot dare visit the city without their permission. From here (Delhi) to Calcutta the Christians are in complete control. There is no doubt that in principalities like Hyderabad, Rampur, Lucknow etc. they have left the administration in the hands of the local authorities, but it is because they have accepted their lordship and have submitted to their authority.<sup>9</sup>

One of his disciples, Shah Ahmed Barelvi (1786-1831) led the Wahhabi movement, a religious reform initiative with socio-political implications. This movement fed into the 1857 rebellion in which both the Hindu and Muslim communities participated.<sup>10</sup> The suppression of the revolt only led to an even more drastic repression of Muslims. Following Bourdieu,<sup>11</sup> it is not difficult to see what a Muslim leader's agenda would have been in the post-1857 period: an acute realization of the increasing contradictions in the Muslim social world whereby what was held as social capital became untranslatable or convertible to economic capital and whereby the Muslim cultural capital lost its value in terms of exchange, called for institutionalized ventures to recharge and re-circulate the various forms of capital in the Muslim socius. Two prominent Muslims of this time, Maulana Qasim Nanautavi (1832-1880) and Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), both disciples of Maulana Mamluk Ali of the Waliullahi school of thought, reacted differently during and after the 1857 rebellion, thereby starting, respectively, the *DarulUlum* (as Deoband was known) in 1867 and the *Madrasatul Ulum* (as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College, later the Aligarh Muslim University, was initially known) in 1877.<sup>12</sup>

Darul Ulum of Deoband “emphasized the diffusion of scripturalist practices and the cultivation of an inner spiritual life” (Metcalf, 1990: 278). Barbara Metcalf<sup>13</sup> notes that, when confronted with social changes with far reaching implications, the leaders of this movement adopted “a strategy of turning within, eschewing for the time all concern with the organization of state and relations with other communities . . . [in order to] preserve the religious heritage . . . and to disseminate instruction in authentic religious practice and belief” (1982:11). Their turn away from politics was to foster the “dominant activities [of] education and propaganda” (1982:352), but, warns Barbara Metcalf, “this overriding meaning given to the movement is crucial if one is not to be misled into seeing ‘modernity’ where the participants would see Islam” (1982:360). However, her concession that some of the “unique characteristics of Islamic movements,” in that they are shaped “by new means of communication, Western domination and resulting forms of economic change, and by mass participation in political activities” (1982:360) may reduce some of the seeming differences between her and my framing of

these Islamic movements. The basic similarity in our positions is also brought out when she writes: “Yet the Islamic quality of the movements is central, not only because it gives them meaning, but because it has a life of its own, apart from any abstract model of ‘modernity’ that regards such symbols as only vaneer” (1982: 360). In a frame that looks at religion, especially Islam, not as antithetical to modernity and acknowledges modernity as having other trajectories, Islamic initiatives, even the strictly religious Deoband movement, can be seen as engaging with modernity without foregoing the religious aspect.

The Aligarh movement and the Deoband school of thought embodied two different, and even antagonistic, alternatives available for Muslims vis-à-vis nationalist politics. The Aligarh movement, which was instrumental in shaping Mohamed Ali, was formatted by the religious and reformist zeal of Syed Ahmad Khan, the loyalist-turned-nationalist. David Lelyveld writes of a shocked Syed Ahmad Khan who came back from London determined to refashion the Indian Muslim. (Lelyveld, 1996:3-6). It would help us to remember here that the opposition to Syed Ahmad Khan “came neither from opponents of modern education nor from people discontented with British rule . . . [but from] people who had come to terms with British rule without the kind of modifications of religious belief that Sayyid Ahmad proposed” (Metcalf, 1982: 324-25). The Aligarh movement held on to a position that Dalits have articulated more forcefully later; it was interested in educational initiatives and institutionalization of a modern subjectivity, even if it meant allying with the British, before political emancipation could be thought of. On the other hand, the Deoband movement, comprising the poor strata of society and guided by more orthodox religious leaders, followed the Congress initiative for a full-fledged anti-colonial move. Blind to the fact that “religion was inextricably mixed up with politics” (Hasan, 1999: 51), and especially so in Gandhi’s Congress, it is Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement which is severely chastised by nationalists for introducing western ideals and the seeds of separatism. The urgency felt by Syed Ahmad Khan for socio-cultural reforms is exemplified by the following statement:

Now, suppose that the British are not in India and that one of the nations of India has conquered the other, whether the Hindus the Muhammedans or the Muhammedans the Hindus. At once some other nation of Europe, such as the French, the Germans, the Portugese or the Russians, will attack India. . . .

Everyone will agree that their governments are far worse . . . than the British Government. It is, therefore, necessary that for the peace of India and for the progress of everything in India the English Government should remain for many years—in fact forever. (196-197)

He should also be seen in the light of his, at times idealistic, conception of a secular, free India where Hindus and Muslims share representative power in the government. He also felt that Muslims were not ready for such a power-sharing, and hence, opposed the Congress thrust for immediate political freedom and supported an Anglo-Islamic alliance, in order to safeguard the Muslims of the subcontinent. Later, he was to talk of his life's work as a bitter failure; Lelyveld notes: "The fathers of Aligarh's first generation sought change and acted to bring it about, but the changes they got were different from what they had in mind" (103). Nonetheless, Aligarh was to become a political symbol because of the social and cultural changes taking place around it and also because of it.

B.R. Nanda, guided by his desire to absolve the Congress by blaming the British, reads Syed Ahmad Khan's ideas as coinciding with W.W. Hunter's recommendations to neutralize discontent leading to resistance by Muslims. Hunter had "suggested that the Government should do, through English education, to the Muslims what it had done to the Hindus, and bring the Muslims also into the 'present state of easy tolerance,' which was characteristic of the majority community" (Nanda, 145). Hunter envisaged a new breed of Muslims, "no longer learned in their own narrow learning, nor imbued wholly with the bitter doctrines of their Mediaeval Law, but tintured with the sober and genial knowledge of the West," with "sufficient acquaintance with their religious code to command the respect of their own community," who could be English-trained so that they could "secure an entry into the lucrative walks of life" (Hunter, 1871:182). In his eagerness to trace the seeds of separatism in the Anglo-Islamic alliance, Nanda turns a blind eye to the major thrust of Hunter's statement that the Muslims were economically as well as socially backward when compared to Hindus. What should be stressed is that Syed Ahmad Khan had a different agenda, that of regenerating a community by enabling it to mediate modernity. This is brought out by the fact that his pamphlet *Strictures on the Present State of Education in India* stresses the inadequacy of the education offered by the British to Indians. It must be remembered that Jotirao Phule (1827-1890), who was conferred the title "Mahatma" in 1888, had made a representation to Hunter's Commission stating that the majority of "Hindus" and "Muslims" have been categorically kept out of education (Joshi, 1996:34-41). Syed Ahmad Khan notes: "The sum total of all that has been effected by the English Colleges, has been to qualify an insignificant number, as letter-writers, copyists, signalmen, and railway ticket collectors" (cited, Lelyveld, 1996:107). Moreover, as Lelyveld points out, there is a significant area in which he differs from Hunter's position; he did not think that Muslims were bound by their religion



to oppose the British (Lelyveld, 1996:112). This was a crucial part of Syed Ahmad Khan's programme, since a perception that Muslims were bound to fight by their religion would have been detrimental to his programme of educational initiatives.

In this context, it is of interest that Syed Alam Khundmiri articulates a different critique of Islam and of the initiative of Syed Ahmad Khan. According to him, the problem for Islam, especially in India, is to enable itself to move towards an understanding of the need to fill the gap between absolute reason and historical reason. Given the plethora of legal and juridical codifications of the proper Islamic way of life, which draw on a ten percent of verses in the Quran, he argues that various Islamic communities are called upon to supplement the absolute reason, as embodied in the Quran, with their own particular historical reason. He sees the situation of Muslims in India as challenging in that they have to play the role of a minority in a state that calls itself secular, whereby politics have been separated from religion. Hence, in an aporetic move, he argues against his own understanding of "the intimate relation of politics and religion in early Islam" (46) and advocates a "[s]eparation of politics and religion and minimalization of religion in public life [as] the only sensible solutions for a multi-religious society like India" (104).<sup>14</sup> I would place such contradictions, as was the case with Mohamed Ali, as inherent in the critical-subject position articulating a critique on different levels. Nonetheless, Khundmiri also points to the sad fact that in India, secularism is yet to be the mode of life that informs all its institutions (225) and "[d]esacralization becomes one of the inevitable consequences of the march of modernity or secularization" (230). Hence, Syed Ahmad Khan's ideals cannot be read as motivated by his vested class interests, as M. Mujeeb seems to do when he bemoans that a "selfish and parasitical" North Indian Muslim community became the "residuary legatees of all cultural values" for Indian Muslims.<sup>15</sup> Considering these facts, the majority of Indians, Hindus and Muslims alike, were hardly made part of the elite domain of Indian nationalist thought, and thus Syed Ahmad Khan may be seen as embodying an earlier form of the Indian secular nation-hood, as imagined later by Jinnah and Nehru. But it was the DarulUlum of Deoband that interested the Congress. The phenomenon of Gandhi presents a picture where the secular elite nationalists (Hindu and Muslim alike) were caught on the wrong foot by the mass mobilization unleashed by Gandhi. Gandhi's initiative transformed the scene of nationalist politics once and forever. However, it is not scrutinized for pan-Indian or pan-Hinduistic trends as against, say, the pan-Islamic separatism of a Syed Ahmad Khan or a Mohamed Ali (1878-1931). Khundmiri comments:

It is a significant fact, which is often ignored, that—though the Muslim intellectuals, led by Syed Ahmed Khan, did not agree with their Hindu counterparts so far as politics was concerned—there was complete theoretical agreement between them so far as the dominant ideas of rationalism and a scientific criticism of the past were concerned. . . .

The situation, however, changed with the coming over of the nationalists on the Indian scene. The Hindu liberals were replaced by extremists like Tilak, B.P. Pal, and Aurobindo, and the Muslim liberals by the young obscurantist Abul Kalam Azad. Rationalism was replaced by religious authority, and the “present” was reduced into the past. (233)

We must remember here that Ambedkar (1891-1956) had to give up, for the sake of national unity and to save the life of a fasting Mahatma, his thrust for separate electorates for the scheduled castes and other underprivileged in the historic Poona pact. Writing out his thoughts of Pakistan in 1941, we find Ambedkar being almost pensive about the “common destiny” (54) of Muslims in India and remarks: “So obvious is this destiny that it is somewhat surprising that the Muslims should have taken so long to own it up . . . [though] some of them knew this to be the ultimate destiny of the Muslims as early as 1923” (50). Reading the idea of Pakistan as a “pre-appointed destiny” (56) which was working within the Muslims unknown to them, Ambedkar notes that the dominion status and the adult franchise scheme of the Nehru report which touted “the principle of one-man-one-vote and one-vote-one-value and that, however much the benefit is curtailed by weightage of Muslims, the result cannot fail to be a government of the Hindus, by the Hindus and therefore for the Hindus” (56). Any attempt to force a unity will only lead to a complete frustration of India’s destiny, he writes, wondering whether “integral India is an ideal worth fighting for” (57). Noting that the Muslims should have talked of a nation from the very beginning, though the “distinction between a community and a nation is rather thin,” instead of “mistakenly calling itself a community even when it has in it the elements of a nation” because they were not “possessed of a national consciousness although in every sense of the term they are a nation” (53). Recalling Mohamed Ali’s 1923 Presidential address where he had noted that “[u]nless some new force other than the misleading unity of opposition unites this vast continent of India, it will remain a geographical misnomer” (59), Ambedkar argues that the Hindus and Muslims have met but never merged:

Only during the Khilafat agitation did the waters of the two channels leave their appointed course and flow as one stream in one channel. It was believed that nothing would separate the waters which God was pleased to join. But that hope was belied. It was found that there was something in the composition of the two waters which would compel

their separation. Within a few years of their confluence but as soon as the substance of the Khilafat cause vanished—the water from the one stream reacted violently to the presence of the other, as one does to a foreign substance entering one’s body. Each began to show a tendency to throw out and separate the other. The result was that when the waters did separate they did with such impatient velocity and determined violence—if one can use such language in speaking of water—against each other that thereafter they began flowing in channels far deeper and far distant from each other than those existing before. (55)

Ambedkar is severe in his criticism of the mass mobilization programme launched by Gandhi and the Congress, for it “was intended to produce political unity between Hindu and Muslim masses by ignoring or circumventing the leaders of the Muslims,” essentially similar to “the plan of the British conservative Party to buy Labour with ‘Tory Gold’” (59). Though it may produce unity, such unity would be suppressing an opposition by unfair and despicable means, like false propaganda, by misrepresentation and would only end up by disarming the community. Ruminating on the common destiny of the Muslims, Ambedkar, wistfully, compares them to the Dalits:

A people who, notwithstanding their differences, accept a common destiny for themselves as well as their opponents, are a community. A people who are not only different from the rest but who refuse to accept for themselves the same destiny which others do, are a nation. It is this difference in the acceptance and non-acceptance of a common destiny which alone can explain why the Untouchables, the Christians and the Parsis are in relation to the Hindus only communities and why the Muslims are a nation. (54)

Hastily pointing out that there “cannot be any radical difference between a minor nation and a minor community, where both are prepared to live under one single constitution” (54), Ambedkar notes that if the differences are not addressed, but only suppressed, then “India will be an anaemic and sickly state, ineffective, a living corpse, dead though not buried” (57). In hindsight, we can point out that India did not die, it successfully united itself by constructing the Muslim as “something other than the other,” that holds the nation together and haunts it at the same time. This haunting it to hold it together inevitably points to the unfinished nature of the nation-formation so that we are required to blatantly chant our patriotism so as to deflect attention from its own “spectral truth” in the face of the other’s “material truth” (Derrida, 1998:87).

We are again and again brought to face the possibility that “spectrality” of Islam is constructed in order to blunt Dalit critique of Brahminical Hinduism. Ambedkar’s statement that “[a] caste has no feeling that is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot” (52) makes one wonder

about the bogey of the Muslim, a bogus Indian, serving the nation by haunting it. Hence, from the minoritarian/Dalit angles force one to rethink Gandhi's opposition to separate electorates for the "lower" castes. Beverley Nichols notes:

Gandhi fiercely opposed this scheme. "Give the untouchables separate electorates," he cried, "and you only perpetuate their status for all time." It was a queer argument, and those who were not bemused by the Mahatma's charm considered it a phoney one. They suspected that Gandhi was a little afraid that 60 million untouchables might join up with the 100 million Muslims—(as they nearly did)—and challenge the dictatorship of the 180 million orthodox Hindus. (39)

In marked contrast to the valourization of a pan-Hindu identity, pan-Islamism of the Aligarh or the Deoband variety is labeled separatist in a very easy manner. The success and failure of Gandhi's ad-venture is absolutely tied to his vision of an Indian modern nation, a *Hind-swaraj*. Gandhi's intrusion or intervention into the nationalist scene sparked off more problems than solutions: an upper-caste and western educated Gandhi "returning" to the people with a South African exposure to racism and abjuring his clothes in order to serve the "people of India" with strategic alliances with Muslims captures the complexity of the issue. He thought of Muslims as another community and easily walked into alliances with the Ali brothers who duplicated Gandhi's initiative among the Muslim communities. Hence, pan-Islamism must be seen as parallel to the pan-Hindu initiative of Gandhi and the Congress, and both are culpable, if that is the right word, for the creation of two nation-states. In this context, it is actually the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama that embodied a post-national pan-Islamic position. Combining the Deoband's religious initiative and the Aligarh's modernizing trends, they advocated a return to Arabic and critiqued the Arab nation-states for their adherence to the nationalist ideology of the West. They intended to re-charge the world of Islam by writing the Indian experience into it (Zaman, 1998:59-81). Unlike the Deoband, the Aligarh and the Jamia Millia ventures, the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama's stress is more on the Arab-Islamic heritage than on the Indian experience of Islam.

In Khundmiri's perspective, Syed Ahmad Khan set out to enable Muslims of India to engage with modernity, even if it required a "depoliticiz[ation of] the Indian Muslims" (267). What is also relevant is that he understood the danger of falling into the trap of a mentality that looked backwards to a golden age of Mughal power. As Khundmiri remarks: "The conflict between the two outlooks of two Indian communities is, really speaking, a conflict between two past-oriented outlooks. It is a fact that most sensitive minds among Hindus and Muslims adopt an apologetic attitude

towards their respective traditions” (279). This happened among Muslims, in Khundmiri’s words, because

a community whose existence is being questioned by a powerful section of the majority can hardly be expected to take a bold jump into the unknown future. The suspicions of this articulate section of the majority are not merely based on ignorance; there are reasonable grounds to believe that a totalitarian-fascist trend is the source of an antipathy towards Indian Muslims. To think in terms of cultural revival is itself irrational and unscientific, but when the majority talks about it, it becomes a greater threat to the growth of democratic institutions. (281)

As a corollary of this threat, Islam in the modern context became dominated by elitist, conservative, anti-democratic and authoritarian thought (271) which tried to shake itself off lived historical accretions, like folk-religious practices (50), which was also the mark of its history in India. According to Khundmiri, instead of advocating a pan-Islamic exclusivity or separatism, Syed Ahmad Khan in his “passion to bring science and religion closer landed him[self] in a deistic position [whereby] in the ultimate analysis God was almost banished from his religious consciousness” (78). Khundmiri goes on to identify the cause for this in Syed Ahmad Khan’s perception of myth as contrary to contemporary science. This could have been an extreme reaction to the philosophical stagnation in contemporary Islamic thought, which started imitating its own past. What is required is for Islam to move “forward in time and . . . forc[e] a re-entry on the stage of history” (101). Khundmiri is able to identify the problem with Syed Ahmad Khan’s initiative as a negation of historically developed religious practices. However, written in the heyday of the Nehruvian promise, Khundmiri is not able to grant such historically developed practices a political edge. In Mohamed Ali’s words,

Syed Ahmad Khan had no less aversion to the schools and colleges of a religiously neutral government and he attributed the backwardness of his co-religionists in Western education to their sound instinct and the cherished traditions of their past which could not tolerate such a thing as a complete divorce between secular and religious education. (Hasan, 1999: 62)

Also, when Khundmiri talks about Syed Ahmad Khan’s depoliticization of Muslims, he is reading politics in a limited manner. That is the reason he cannot look at Syed Ahmad Khan’s move towards a depoliticization of Indian Muslims as being political. Reading the existentialist movement as the consequence of a clash between the theocentric and the anthropocentric attitudes, Khundmiri notes: “The ‘dead God’ still haunts the imagination of the secularized humanity of the twentieth century and in a certain sense this idea seems to determine the quality of human existence” (288). Hence, we

can see that Khundmiri's position is that religion and politics have to be read as always-already connected, given the Christian ethos of the western modern. The cry for their separation is usually raised against minoritarian communities in a majoritarian world. Arguing against the easy equation arrived at between the majoritarian and minoritarian "communalism," Jalal comments that "such an overarching and loaded term as communalism ends up essentializing the very religiously informed identities, politics and conflicts it purportedly aims at explaining and combating" (78). She warns against an "academic communalism" in that our debates acknowledge communalism as at best the pejorative other of nationalism or at worst a borrowing from the colonialist project of essentializing Indian society and history. Stressing the need for charting out a new typology that sidesteps the facile and rigid distinctions between liberals and traditionalists or between modernists and anti-modernists or between communalists or secular nationalists, she points out that a "decidedly elitist discourse," especially that of the exponents of the Muslim-minority provinces, has been usually taken "as not only reflective of Indian Muslims but also their 'communal consciousness'" (80). And the elision of religious difference, she argues, with an essentialized homogeneous Muslim community is explained, as in the work of Farzana Shaikh, in terms of "the legitimizing ideals of Islamic solidarity and the necessary subordination of the individual will to the *ijma* or consensus of the community" (Jalal, 80). Jalal notes how Altaf Hussain Hali or his mentor, Syed Ahmad Khan or Muhamed Ali had no conception of their Muslimness as being at odds with their Indianness. She shows how the Deoband orthodoxy, which she describes as more culturally exclusive and "harbouring anti-colonial and Islamic universalist sentiments, immersed themselves in religious strictures at traditional educational institutions" (82) and, later on, the more religiously inclined young Abul Kalam Azad ended up siding with an inclusionary and "secular" Indian nationalism. Such a move, in Khundmiri's words, was premised on "a mystification of the past rather than a preparation for building a new future" and the "seeds of the glorification of the past were contained in the movement for independence itself" (277). According to Jalal, in the face of increasing Hindu revivalist ventures, especially on cow slaughter and a Hindi with a Devanagari script, "the interests of the 'majority' religious community could be subsumed under the umbrella of the emerging Indian 'nation,' those of the largest religious 'minority' remained marooned in the idea of the 'community'" (85). Jalal comments that almost all analyses of the Montford reforms underplay "the extent to which the provincial dynamic in electoral and representative activities countered the process of 'communalizing' Muslim politics at the all-India level. . . . The convergence of Muslim and Punjabi or

Muslim and Bengali did not mean exchanging provincial interest for a common religious identity” (89). She adds that the dismal performance of the League in the 1937 elections substantiates the view that there was not any primary cohesion among Muslims of India at the national level; it was rather “the perceived threat from the singular and uncompromising ‘nationalism’ of the Congress to provincial autonomy and class interests which gave the discourse and politics of the Indian Muslims as a subcontinental category a fresh lease of life” (90). Moreover, the demand for Bangladesh in the Islamic nation-state of Pakistan has to be read as disproving claims of a pan-Islamic cohesion at the subcontinental level. Also, as Jalal notes: “More successful in deluding itself than large segments of society comfortably positioned to simultaneously live out multiple layers of identity, the inefficacy of the Pakistani state’s Islamic card is a powerful indictment of the argument that the religious factor in ‘Muslim consciousness’ outweighs all other considerations” (99).

### III

These days there seem to be a fair level of consensus on the problematic. Let me try to put it in a simple form. There is an agreement that modernity and secularism are historical projects that originated in Europe. These cannot be readily adopted by other nations. In fact, the given nation form itself can be seen as being underwritten by a secular-modern ethos. Secularism in its western form was more of a negotiated understanding between the Church and the State in Europe. These nations did undergo a modernization at the political, civil-social and cultural dimensions. The history of secularism in India is largely different in that it was the nation-state that adopted secularism (it can be said that in the case of Europe, it was the Church that adopted secularism in that it agreed that life need not be always governed by religious norms). Secularism in India was not a separation between the public and the private, but was rather a watchdog who was supposed to ensure equal respect for all religions. Hence, public and private are not water-tight compartments or neat categories for us nor do Indian lives acknowledge a separation between the secular and the sacred. There is considerable spill over or cross over between them. If we understand that we need to start rethinking our situation, the first step is to develop adequate tools that are context-specific. That is to say, we start from the perspective that there are no given universals and that even the categories, like “religion,” needs to be urgently re-examined. This can only happen over a period of time and the first area to focus would be education. With regard to Islam, education is understood in two different ways. The first focuses on developing Islamic disciplines with regard to modern requirements. The second would focus on imparting education in classical Islamic thought, rather than in traditional

Islam. The idea then would be to promote independent and individual thinking, *ijtihad*, among Muslims, visualizing education not as knowledge but as critical thinking.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A seven-member “Prime Ministers’ High Level Committee” headed by Rajinder Sachar (see, Sachar), a retired chief justice of the Delhi high court, set up by the government of India, on 9 March 2005, to inquire into the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims in India, who make for roughly 14% of India’s population of 1.1 billion, submitted its report on 30 November 2006. Though the Committee and the Report has been criticized, the issues raised by the report itself are chilling. Some important findings: less than 4% Muslims graduate from school; contrary to right-wing propaganda, only 4% go to Madrasas, principally because in most areas of high Muslim concentration even primary state schools do not exist for miles; where they do exist, Muslims invariably prefer to send their wards to them, even when the dropout rate of Muslim children is much higher compared to other community wards due to “poverty” as these children are pressed into work by their indigent parents; the Muslim share in government employment is 4.9% (against a population of 14%); in a state like West Bengal ruled by the Left Front, their representation in state Public Sector Undertakings is exactly zero percent!; among India’s Security Agencies (viz., CRPF, CISF, BSF, SSB &c.) Muslim representation is 3.2%; just 2.7% are in place among District Judges; in towns that range in population between 50,000 and 2 lakhs, Muslim per capita expenditure is less than that of India’s Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes! This is also the case in areas across West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh; not more than 3% Muslims are able to get subsidized loans, and only 1.9% benefit from the Antyodaya Anna Yojana Scheme (programme to prevent starvation among the extremely poor); only 2.1% Muslim farmers own tractors, and just 1% own hand pumps for irrigation; there is a “substantial demand from the community for fertility regulation and for modern contraceptives”; over 20 million couples already use contraceptives; “Muslim population growth has slowed down as fertility has declined substantially”; if Muslims do outnumber majority Hindus in any statistics, it is predictably as a proportion of the prison population. In Maharashtra, for instance, Muslims make up 10.6% of the population but 32.4% of them are either convicted or facing trial; wherever Muslims are spoken to they complain of suffering the twin calumnies of being dubbed “anti-national” and of being “appeased”; both accusations never allow them to feel equal citizens of India. The Report also puts on record the little-recognized reality of caste hierarchies that have always existed among subcontinental Muslims. Thus, the Ashrafs, Ajlafs, Arzals, respectively correspond to the Hindu Swarns, Other Backward Castes, and Schedule



Castes respectively. Although, untouchability of the kind that afflicts the Hindu social order does not exist among Muslims, and although there is no bar to collective prayer in mosques, the reluctance to inter-dine and inter-marry is often only a concealed reality. The website also draws our attention to “three of the many path-breaking recommendations that the Sachar Report makes”: the report recommends that 15% of all government funds be allocated to Muslim welfare and development under all Central government schemes; it recommends the constitution of an “Equal Opportunities Commission” to look into the grievances of deprived groups and for the elimination of anomalies with respect to reserved constituencies under the delimitation scheme; and, though it does not recommend “reservations” for the Muslim community per se, it suggests that those among them who approximate in terms of social and occupational status the scheduled and backward classes among Hindus be classified as Most Backward Castes and proffered the same benefits that relevant articles of the Constitution make available to counterparts among Hindus.

- <sup>2</sup> Some people gave their religion as Mussulman Hindus or Hindu Mussulmans, and others could not “name” the language they spoke; for the role of Muslims in the official colonial analysis of Indian society (see, Lelyveld, 1996:9-34). However, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal point out that the “powerful revisionist school of South Asian historiography” goes overboard in their suggestion that Indian social tradition was largely a nineteenth century British colonial invention. The Muslims were not “an artifact of British colonial imagination,” rather “Muslim social identities in different parts of the subcontinent were being formed by patterns of social and economic relations linked to the fact of British colonial rule without being wholly shaped by it” (Bose and Jalal, 1999:167).
- <sup>3</sup> MushirulHasan, perceiving nation as pre-given, rather than a result of actual processes, argues that such a move “backfired—in so far as it aided the cause of ‘Muslim nationalism,’” (Hasan, 1995: 2997).
- <sup>4</sup> Nehru’s following statement in his *Autobiography* brings out the contradictory pulls of such a position: “The collapse and elimination of Nationalist Muslims as a group—as individuals they are, of course, still important leaders of the Congress—forms a pitiful story. It took many years, and the last chapter has only been written this year (1934). In 1923 and subsequent years they were a strong group, and they took up an aggressive attitude against the Muslim communalists. Indeed, on several occasions, Gandhiji was prepared to agree to some of the latter’s demands, much as he disliked them, but his own colleagues, the Muslim Nationalist leaders, prevented this and were bitter in their opposition” (139).
- <sup>5</sup> Taking a fresh look at his often contradictory roles of saint and politician, G. Aloysius writes: “Gandhi himself seems to carry [the] seed of contradiction within his person: his seeming poverty was built on Birla’s plenty, his life of Brahmacharya was based on obsessive sex experiments. His project of

the recovery of the human body from medical tyranny was conducted while he was under continuous care of allopathic physicians; his posture of humility was coupled with the claim for exclusive access to truth; he preached a politics of powerlessness and non-possession that did not brook rivals in leadership. His sensitivity to the spiritual equality of all men was coupled with an insistence on Varnashrama Dharma as the social ideal,” (Aloysius, 1998:176). Aloysius cites Sarojini Naidu’s comment: “If only Babu knew how much it cost, to keep him simple” (Spear, 302).

- <sup>6</sup> It must be remembered that it was the mass mobilization campaign of this time that pulled the masses in an unprecedented manner towards redefining themselves within the Hindu and Muslim Indian frame.
- <sup>7</sup> For an interesting study on the debates between these two educational institutions, the DarulUlumNadwatulUlama and the Ahl-e SunnatJamaat, see, UshaSanyal (1996). Though there were plenty of smaller organizations, like the MajlisMuidul Islam that was constituted in 1921, I will only report on the DarulUlumNadwatulUlama and the JamiaMilliaIslamia. The DarulUlumNadwatulUlama founded in 1898 articulated a middle position, defining itself against the radical Aligarh spouting western ideas and the more conservative Deoband. For details of this institution, see, Malik (221-238). The JamiaMilliaIslamia came into existence in 1920 and was a breakaway group of the Aligarh University caused by the decision of some of the Muslim political leaders during the Non-cooperation movement not to receive any government aid. As Mohamed Ali, a founder-member, remarked: “I never conceived of the Jamia’s growth and permanence at all. . . . Our real objective is Aligarh which some day we shall conquer“ (cited by Hasan, 1999, fn. 84, 31, from Noorani, 25).
- <sup>8</sup> Cited by Prasad, 79, from Sachua, 19-20.
- <sup>9</sup> Cited by Hashmi,20-21, from Aziz,17.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter Hardy notes that “the mutineers at Meerut, Muslim and Hindu alike, rode to Delhi, as if by instinct, to restore Bahadur Shah to the empire of India,” in *The Muslims of British India* (34). Such a joint anti-imperialist move was to happen once again, during the Khilafat movement.
- <sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu has classified the “three fundamental guises” of capital in the social world: of economic capital—which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; of cultural capital—which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and of social capital—made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (47). Of these, the cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state—”in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”; in the objectified state—”in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) which are the trace or realization of theories

or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.”; and in the institutionalized state—“a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as . . . in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee” (47), see, Bourdieu, 46-58.

- <sup>12</sup> The school that became the college was started in 1875.
- <sup>13</sup> Barbara Metcalf places the Deoband movement within other Islamic initiatives which defy our pigeonholes. Her attempt is to consider such movements in their own terms and to identify some of the patterns such as a real belief in Islam. Among the features, she identifies one as that the participants who are “troubled by the world they live in and seeking explanations for their situation, invariably interpret problems as religious, for Islam is a religion that takes all life in its purview” (5). She attributes this to the suddenness of a political vacuum, like the disappearance of the Mughal empire and the weakening of the Ottoman empire (Metcalf, 1982: 3-7).
- <sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, he remarks that the “neat division of human life into the religious and the secular involves a contradiction” (297).
- <sup>15</sup> Cited by Nanda, 73, from Mujeeb, 507.

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