Chapter One

“TWO CIRCLES OF EQUAL SIZE”: MUSLIM RESPONSE IN MODERN INDIA

All other forces having failed the Congress, after it became the government of the day, it saw a new force in the plan of mass contact. . . . It can only create exasperation, bitterness and hostility. This is precisely what the mass contact plan of the Congress did. For there can be no doubt that this mad plan for mass contact has had a great deal to do with the emergence of Pakistan.

—BR Ambedkar.¹

In this chapter, my attempt will be to trace a trajectory of the Indian Muslim’s attempts to “come to terms” with modernity through reform initiatives and, especially, educational initiatives. From the Muslim perspective, two key events (often referred to as “setbacks”) provide an opportunity to scrutinize this early impetus to engage (with) modernity. The first was the replacement of Persian as the official language in 1835 that “rendered, as it were, a whole nation illiterate” all of a sudden.² The second was the 1857 revolt and its aftermath where a community trying to adjust and cope with its changed situation was brought to face with severe repression. Nonetheless, though reeling under the loss of prestige and cultural power and accustoming itself to the suspicious gaze of the British, this community managed to start three seminal educational ventures during this time; a fourth was started in the 1920s. These educational ventures with different persuasions and preoccupations were attempts from within the community to address the new questions raised for the Muslim community at large.

¹ “Thoughts on Pakistan” (1941), in Mushirul Hasan, ed. Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) 59. All emphases in this chapter, unless otherwise mentioned, are as in the original.
² Afzal Iqbal, Life and Times of Mohamed Ali: An Analysis of the Hopes, Fears and Aspirations of Muslim India from 1778 to 1931 (Delhi: Idarah-e Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1978) 3.
Unfortunately, the leaders of the community, the traditional/organic intellectuals, could not forge an alliance with similar forces among other peoples, given the political turmoil in pre-independent Indian subcontinent. Well before the 1920s, contradictions within the nationalist ideology and their resolutions made the Congress party project itself as the sole representative party of all Indians while at the same time allying itself with Hindu revivalist movements. However, in their ardent desire for a unified nation, some of the Congress leaders valued a notion of continuing love and trust between Hindus and Muslims and spoke rhetorically about an emotional bonding between the two communities. Such rhetoric flew in the face of the Muslim League position that was guided by motives of self-preservation and its felt threat of being beleaguered within a future Hindu majority nation. The imagined fraternity upheld by the Congress, despite being caught between colonial histories of Muslims as invaders and Hindu communal nationalists, pitted against the fear and frustration of the Muslim League and, as a consequence, “nationalism” and “communalism” emerged as contradictory ideologies. However, there was a significant phase in this troubled history when these two communities did

5 Though, as Irfan Habib notes, Islam seems to have from its inception “an urban orientation”—Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perspective (New Delhi: Tulika, 1995, 1998) 144—the particular trajectory of Islam in India, the spread of which may also be read as a critique of the caste-system, seems to point to a rural/urban combine which worked in tandem. Gramsci’s notion (see, Antonio Gramsci, “Problems of History and Culture,” Selections from the Prison Notebooks (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1996) 18) of “a very extensive category of organic intellectuals—those who come into existence on the same industrial terrain as the economic group,” and a category of “traditional intellectuals” who have lost their “economic supremacy but [continues to maintain] for a long time a politico-intellectual supremacy and [are] assimilated as . . . directive . . . group by the new group in power” is useful here. The relation between the emerging Muslim political leaders, who can be deemed “organic,” and their relations with the traditional ulema during this decisive phase of nationalism in very different regional contexts is crucial. Bringing out the complex negotiations and sense of unease involved here, Mohammad Iqbal wrote: “The religious bigot considers me an infidel / And the infidel deems me to be a Muslim,” cited by Ayesha Jalal, Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1859 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) from Khalifa Abdul Hakim, Fiqr-i-Iqbal (Lahore: Bazm-i-Iqbal, 1988) 121.

4 “To the Muslim, the emotional talk of Hindus seemed hollow and merely cloaked strong Hindu interest and potential Hindu hegemony. . . . The Congress Hindu, on the other hand, saw only hostility in what by his lights appeared cold, calculating self-interest. . . . Even the wise Mahatma could not break this impasse because he too had no room in his philosophy for the impersonal,” notes Rajeev Bhargava, “History, Nation and Community: Reflections on Nationalist Historiography of India and Pakistan,” Economic and Political Weekly 35.4 (22 January 2000) 199.

5 I use this term in contradistinction to the overall Congress (overtly secularist) position of “nationalist communalism.” However, Hindu and Muslim “communalist nationalisms” are not to be equated with each other or even to be read as equivalent, given the power equations of the pre-independent subcontinent, not to say those in the independent India.
come together, politically and passionately. This phase was one of the last joint initiatives between the Hindu and Muslim leaderships known as the Khilafat movement of 1920s. The Khilafat movement is part and parcel of the Congress-League initiative of mass mobilization in its anti-colonial drive. However, the Khilafat movement also threw up new questions that exceeded the scope of the Congress-League policy. Anticipating my third chapter, I argue that the most significant event that this movement gave birth to was the Malabar Mappila rebellion of 1921, which, ironically, reflected back on the joint initiative itself and foreclosed the possibilities of such joint ventures.

In the first section of this chapter, I look at the autobiographical fragment of one of the prime movers of the Khilafat movement, Maulana Mohamed Ali. This section analyses the relation between the emerging contours of an Islamic community, reconstituting itself in relation to modernity and the nation in the context of an individual’s experience. The second section enlarges upon the above in the context of the socio-political environment. The third section lays out some of the themes of the Muslim engagement with modernity through diverse educational institutions that presaged socio-cultural reforms. In this section, I will be drawing on a body of works that exclusively deals with each of these institutions.

I

The flier of a recent seminar on autobiography points out that its intention is "to examine autobiography as a genre of discourse that has gained special significance in the background of the emergence of Dalit and women's writings, where the genre occupies a privileged position
and also of the poststructuralist theories of subjectivity and the construction of the self in language.\footnote{Seminar on Autobiography, organized by the Kendriya Sahitya Akademy (New Delhi) at Shanti Niketan, West Bengal, on 3-4 March 2000.}

But, does not autobiography have another minor instance? Or, is it that by its very constitution autobiography is not a viable opening for/from the minority position? Such a question is particularly of interest if only because of the repeated demand made on the minorities to Indianize themselves.

Before reaching Mohamed Ali's autobiographical fragment, it would be instructive to look at two definitive nationalist autobiographies. The compulsions—political at the most personal level and vice-versa—in the act of writing an autobiography are brought out by Gandhi's and Nehru's forays into the genre.\footnote{The picture is about the same when we look at memoirs written in regional languages. Since the second section of the third chapter engages with K Madhavan Nair's, KP Keshava Menon's (both Congress leaders) and MB Namboodiripad's memoirs of the 1921 Malabar rebellion, suffice it for now to point out that KP Keshava Menon introduces MB Namboodiripad's endeavour as sincere, unmediated and therefore a true description of the rebellion that is at the same time more than an autobiography since it depicts "the story of a place/nation, a historical story and a political history," my translation from introduction, \textit{Khilaphithu Smaranakal}, (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1993; first published in 1965) 6.}

Gandhi notes in his introduction that he started writing his autobiography,\footnote{MK Gandhi, \textit{An Autobiography, or the Story of my Experiments with Truth}, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927).} at the instance of some of his nearest co-workers, as early as 1920. However, the project was brought to a standstill by riots that broke out in Bombay. Soon he was imprisoned and, urged by a fellow prisoner, he recommenced work on his autobiography and was so caught up with it that he was actually sorry when he was released from the prison a year ahead, since it disrupted his autobiographical project. Soon enough, he finds another way out. Since he has no spare time, he decides to serialize his autobiography in \textit{Navajivan}. The problems Gandhi had to tackle in this venture were entirely of a new order:
A God-fearing friend had his doubts, which he shared with me on my day of silence. "What has set you on this adventure? He asked. "Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence. . . . Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just yet? (ix)

This argument had some effect on him and he justifies his autobiographical project in these terms:

But it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind, if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. I believe, or at any rate flatter myself with the belief, that a connected account of all these experiments will not be without benefit to the reader. My experiments in the political field are now known, not only in India, but to a certain extent to the "civilized" world. . . . But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself. . . .

(ix-x)

It is worth our while to note that the language of the finished English version, though translated from Gujarati, reads as if it was the original itself with such a seamless transparency of self, nation and text that the regional would indeed seem to be the national.
On the other hand, Jawaharlal Nehru⁹ wrote his autobiography, almost the whole of which he finished while in prison, in English itself, possibly with a national reader in mind. In the preface to the first edition in 1936, he states that his primary object was to occupy himself with a definite task so necessary in the long solitudes of gaol life as well as to review past events in India. Nonetheless, he is keenly aware of his addressee and remarks that if at all he thought of an audience, it would be his own countrymen and countrywomen. Moreover, “For foreign readers I would have probably written differently, or with a different emphasis” (xv). Foreign readers are advised to consider unimportant those aspects that do not interest them, though Nehru felt that everything he touched upon had a certain importance in the India of his day. Nehru goes on:

My attempt was to trace, as far as I could, my own mental development, and not to write a survey of recent Indian history. The fact that this account resembles superficially such a survey is apt to mislead the reader and lead him to attach a wider importance to it than it deserves. I must warn him, therefore, that this account is wholly one-sided and, inevitably, egotistical. . . . (xv-xvi)

While Gandhi cannot be dissuaded from writing his autobiography, Nehru is worried it would be read as a political rather than a personal document. In the case of Nehru, even as late as the preface to the 1962 edition—apart from the sense of a firm locus standi from where he can presumably address other Indians as well as other nationals—he still thinks of his work as having general interest and is glad that a cheap paperback edition has been brought out (xiii).

In this context, it is significant that Mohammad Ali Jinnah never wrote an autobiography, despite the perception that he was the sole spokesman of all Indian Muslims.¹⁰ However, there are

autobiographies by other Muslims, especially a fragment of an autobiography by Mohamed Ali, an equally prominent leader of the struggle for independence. His largely ignored autobiographical fragment is of special interest since it can help one study the logic of the minoritarian enunciation of selfhood. The internal conflict involved in minor instances of the autobiographical is succinctly brought out by Afzal Iqbal, the first person to edit Mohamed Ali's autobiographical sketch written, like Nehru's, in English in the late 1930s. Afzal Iqbal had come across the manuscript in May 1939 at the Jamia Millia Islamia. It was hitherto unpublished because M Mujeeb, as Mushirul Hasan points out in the introduction to his edition (9), who had the manuscript with him had by then become highly critical of Mohamed Ali and had not pursued its publication. The autobiographical nature of the work aroused Afzal Iqbal's interest so much that he volunteered to edit the manuscript. The title of the manuscript—"Islam: Kingdom of God"—was deemed inappropriate by Afzal Iqbal, although he acknowledges the possibility of it being apt for the finished work. Given the fragmentary nature of the text, Afzal Iqbal changed the title to My Life: A Fragment; An Autobiographical Sketch of Maulana Mohamed Ali and the volume was finally published in 1942, more than a decade after Mohamed Ali's death. Introducing the text, Afzal Iqbal comments that

[c]uriously enough Mohamed Ali had never meant to write the present book. He started with the life of the Prophet and ended with his own! Like many other good things in life, the hazel-wand of chance has given us this fragmentary account which lays bare the working of a great mind who had so much to do in shaping the destiny of India. It was by chance alone that the book !

11 One of the early autobiographies by a (westernized) Muslim, by Lutfullah written before the 1857 revolt, is, interestingly, entitled Autobiography of Lutfullah: An Indian's Perception of the West (New Delhi: International Writers' Emporium, 1985).
was written in the present form, and it is by another chance, less dramatic, but perhaps equally important, that it is now seeing the light of day, after about eighteen years since it was actually written. (vii)

Mohamed Ali's autobiographical venture while in prison is often referred to as marking his shift to a more communal position. Hence, it would be instructive to juxtapose here Nehru's observations of his experience of the prison. Asked by the publisher to update his autobiography, Nehru feels that he cannot possibly do justice to the work. Since the request is reasonable, he could not deny it, nonetheless

I have found it no easy matter to comply. We live in strange times, when life's normal course has been completely upset. But a more serious difficulty confronted me. I wrote my autobiography entirely in prison, cut off from outside activity. I suffered from various humours in prison, as every prisoner does, but gradually I developed a mood of introspection and some peace of mind. How am I to capture that mood now, how am I to fit in with that narrative? As I glance through my book again, I feel almost as if some other person had written a story of long ago. (599; emphases added)

Nehru can look back at his autobiography five years later, in 1940, and feel that, though written by someone else, it still was a story; elsewhere he calls it an "egotistical narrative of my adventures through life, such as they were" (595). On the contrary, Mohamed Ali's is another story altogether. His introspection during enforced leisure brought him jump against the fact that his life was not a story, or at least did not have a story that could be taken for granted, and his autobiographical endeavour acquires political overtones, in fact becomes a political project of minoritarian enunciation. The fragmentary nature of the text, the long delay in its publication, and the significant change of title points, in an uncanny manner, to the unfinished nature of Islam in India.
I use Mohamed Ali's autobiographical fragment to frame my discussion, in the third section of this chapter, of four pioneer Muslim educational institutions. My following analysis, it is hoped, will provide a backdrop for my discussion of these educational ventures and the different positions they made available for Muslims vis-à-vis re-interpretations of Islamic traditions in terms of modernity, the notion of community and nation they helped circulate, and the subjectivities they tried to institutionalize. Therefore, rather than attempting an in-depth analysis, I will focus on examining the implications of his shift to a (more) communal position.

At first glance, and unlike other Muslim leaders' ideas (for instance, Abul Kalam Azad's), Mohamed Ali's conception of Islam appears to have a world scale. It seems not to be limited to the recasting of a community within India, but envisages a pan-Islamism that stands up against the "White Peril" of imperialism alongside "sturdy little Japan," the wakening "sleeping giant in China" and the blacks.13 If Europe and America fear the Yellow Peril and the Black Peril, from the perspective of Asia and Africa, the White Peril is more real and alarming. The pan-Islamism, which he refers to as the "Revolt of Islam", is then a countering "force [set up] for purposes of defence, not of defiance" (55) in the face of European and American imperialism.14 From his other writings we know that the other prong of his attack on imperialism was to request Hindu Indians to stop their "quarrel with history" and forgo "the unfortunate habit of ignoring the one great reality of the Indian situation—the existence of about 70 million Muslims who had made a permanent home in this country" (Select, 66). Presenting "the communal patriot" as a critical

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14 Examining the pronouncements of Professor Margoliouth (who thought of religion as the concern of the individual) and Sir Harry Johnson (who favoured a "defecation [sic] of Islam to a pure transparency" in order to raise the Muslim to absolute intellectual and social equality with the Christian people), Mohamed Ali comments: "It
position, his request to Hindu communal patriots was to stop treating the Muslim "as a prisoner in the dock," "as an impossible factor in the scheme of India's future" (Select, 67). While it was possible for Gandhi to give confused messages about whether to owe primary allegiance to one's religion or nation, Mohamed Ali emphatically proclaims:

Where God commands I am a Muslim first, a Muslim second, a Muslim last, and nothing but a Muslim. If you ask me to enter into your empire or into your nation by leaving that synthesis, that polity, that culture, that ethics, I will not do it. My first duty is to my Maker, not to HM the King, nor to my companion Dr Moonje; my first duty is to my Maker and that is the case with Dr Moonje also. He must be a Hindu first, and I must be a Muslim first, so far as that duty is concerned. But where India is concerned, where India's freedom is concerned, where the welfare of India is concerned, I am an Indian first, an Indian second, an Indian last, and nothing but an Indian.16

I draw attention to the crucial use of the word "synthesis" in the above as pointing towards not a stagnant or static notion of subjectivity, but of an individual shaped and reshaped in a historical community. This idea of a dynamic Islam was not unique to Mohamed Ali, in fact Mohammad Iqbal also tried to come to terms with Islam in a similar way. Iqbal's experiences abroad made him aware of the double standards of the West and "returned" him from Platonic idealism, Indian nationalism and romanticism to a compelling awareness of Islam. The Islam that he

would thus seem that while one physician would kill the Muslim world slowly with the disease the other would do, the same more expeditiously with the remedy," "The Future of Islam," Select, 50.

15 A glaring example of this confusion is exemplified by the following set of statements by Gandhi: on 24 September 1921, Gandhi wrote that "The brave [Ali] brothers are staunch lovers of their country, but they are Mussulmans first and everything else afterwards. It must be so with every religiously-minded man." Four months later, after news of the magnitude of the Malabar Mappila rebellion has trickled in, on 26 January 1922, he writes: "Nationalism is greater than sectarianism. And in that sense we are Indians first and Hindus, Mussulmans, Parsis, Christians after," cited by Gyanendra Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990) 238, from The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vols. 21 & 22, respectively (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1976) 192 & 268.

16 From the speech delivered at the fourth plenary session of the Round Table Conference held at St James's Palace, London, on 19 November 1930, see, "Freedom or Death!" in Select, 465.
“discovered” through that turning away was dynamic; its creative impulse capable of directing the raw materials of history into an ethical channel. According to him, the West was inventive, not creative, and lacked a positive moral direction; the Christian theogony too determinist. He invited the world to join this ethically energizing Islam. Two key terms in his philosophy, often articulated in Bergsonian terminology (though God, for Iqbal, was outside the process of history), are *khudi* (self) and *ishq* (love) through which the self has to be expanded and fortified.

Far from being a romanticist of the past or a revivalist, Iqbal called for the creation of a new future through *ijtihad* (literally "exerting oneself").

Mohamed Ali’s shift in position, his turn, if not return, to Islam, has a long personal history. He notes how his mother had to go against his uncle in order to give him “the Godless influence of English education” and thus make a third infidel in the family after his elder brothers (My Life, 50). This family background is counterpointed with his exposure to Aligarh’s *raison d’etre* and his new acquaintance with the Quran during his internment (My Life, 61-68, 112-130). Maybe there is a sense in which this transformation can be re-interpreted. Mushirul Hasan, who follows WJ Watson’s assessment of Mohamed Ali, argues that there was a definite difference after his “enforced leisure” of internment, as evidenced by “the half-moons in his grey cap and the Khuddam-i Kabba badge” (My Life, 25). Studies of this crucial phase in the history of the subcontinent invariably conclude that during this time Mohamed Ali underwent a conversion and his outlook became coloured by the communal, whereby the term is placed in opposition to nationalism.


Jawaharlal Nehru, who was “fortunate enough to be included in [Mohamed Ali’s strong] likes,” notes that he found Mohamed Ali to be “most irrationally religious” (117). Nehru narrates the following incident as if in explanation. As the Secretary of the Congress, a position he agreed to take on only because no other person might have been “able to work as harmoniously with the new President [who was Mohamed Ali] as I could,” Nehru introduced the practice of addressing all the members of the Congress “by their names only, without any prefixes or suffixes, honorific titles and the like.” But he was not to have his way, for “Mohamed Ali sent me a frantic telegram directing me ‘as president’ to revert to our old practice and, in particular, always to address Gandhiji as Mahatma” (117). Nehru elaborates on the various discussions they used to have about God. When Mohamed Ali used to incorporate some reference to God even in Congress resolutions “either by way of expressing gratitude or some kind of prayer . . . I used to protest, and then he would shout at me for my irreligion” (118). However, Nehru’s unease with his own received modernity is brought up when he notes:

And yet, curiously enough, he would tell me that he was quite sure that I was fundamentally religious, in spite of my superficial behaviour or my declarations to the contrary. I have often wondered about how much truth there was in his statement. Perhaps it depends on what is meant by religion and religious. (118)

As a result of his unease, Nehru avoided discussing religion with Mohamed Ali, since he was indeed a “convinced believer.” Annoyed by Nehru’s silence and since he did not “possess the virtue of silence,” in 1925 or early 1926, Mohamed Ali “could not repress himself on this subject any more” and tells Nehru: “We will have it out. . . . I suppose you think that I am a fanatic. Well, I am going to show you that I am not” (119). However, Nehru remained unconvinced by

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19 *Autobiography*, 117; according to Nehru, Mohamed Ali’s dislikes were also equally strong and he also lost many a friend because of his “devastating sarcasm” because he could not keep a clever remark to himself.

20 Nehru adds in explanation: “There are so many of these in India—Mahatma, Maulana, Pandit, Shaikh, Syed, Munshi, Moulvi, and latterly Sriyut and Shri, and of course, Mr and Esquire—and they are so abundantly and often unnecessarily used that I wanted to set a good example” (117).
Mohamed Ali’s exposition—which he wound up by pointing out that Gandhi had read the Quran “carefully, and he must, therefore, have been convinced of the truth of Islam . . . [b]ut his pride of heart had kept him from declaring this” (119). Nehru continues:

After his year of presidency, Mohamad Ali gradually drifted away from the Congress, or, perhaps, as he would have put it, the Congress drifted away from him . . . the rift widened, estrangement grew. Perhaps no particular individual or individuals were to blame for this; it was an inevitable result of certain objective conditions in the country. But it was an unfortunate result, which hurt many of us. For, whatever the differences on the communal question might have been, there were very few differences on the political issue. He was devoted to the idea of Indian independence. And because of this common political outlook, it was always possible to come to some mutually satisfactory agreement with him on the communal issue. There was nothing in common, politically, between him and the reactionaries who pose as the champions of communal interests. (119-120)

Nehru notes that the “Moslem League did not represent, then or later, any considerable section of Moslem opinion. It was the Khilafat Committee of 1920 that was a powerful and far more representative body, and it was this Committee that entered upon the struggle with enthusiasm” (47). However, he also perceives that the “political and the Khilafat movement developed side by side . . . and eventually join[ed] hands with the adoption by the Congress of Gandhiji’s non-violent non-co-operation” (46), setting up, thereby an argument in which the Khilafat movement was not a political movement at all, at least not in its initial stages.

One can look back and wonder: when Mohamed Ali is saying that the position of Muslims in India is an impossible one, we have Nehru saying that he was not an impossible man, since he...
was ready to compromise on the communal issue for political reasons. What Nehru in his own
words is saying is that Mohamed Ali’s communal position was political. No wonder that Nehru
has to think the following as a just defense of his own position:

No minority should be unjustly treated. But Maulana Mohamed Ali is well aware
that minorities get on well enough as a rule. It is the great majority which
requires protection. A handful of foreigners rule India and exploit her millions.
A handful of India’s rich men exploit her vast peasantry and her workers. It is
this great majority of the exploited that demands justice and is likely to have it
sooner than many people imagine. I wish Maulana Mohamed Ali would become
a champion of this majority and demand political and economic rights for them.
But this majority does not consist of Hindus only or Moslems only or Sikhs only.
It consists of Hindus and Moslems and Sikhs and others. And if he works for this
majority, I am sure he will come to the conclusion that he need attach little
importance to the imaginary rights of individuals or groups based on adherence to
a religious creed. (cited, My Life, 36)

However, Nehru’s own experience of the “great majority” was marked by ambivalence:

I took to the crowd and the crowd took to me . . . I never lost myself in it; always
felt apart from it. From my mental perch I looked at it critically, and I never
ceased to wonder how I, who was so different in every way from those thousands
who surrounded me, different in habits, in desires, in mental and spiritual outlook,
how I managed to gain goodwill and a measure of confidence from these people.

Was it because they took me for something other than I was? (77-78)

The answer is partly visible in “a new kind of experience in Allahabad” (121) that he narrates
close on the heels of discussing his unease caused by Mohamed Ali’s remark that Nehru was also
fundamentally religious.
“Vast numbers of pilgrims [used to] turn up...[to] bathe at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna—the Triveni, it is called, as the mythical Saraswati is also supposed to join the other two” (121). But because of the turbulence of the waters, the Provincial Government issued, according to Nehru “perfectly justified,” prohibitory orders, that resulted in resistance spearheaded by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Nehru “was not all interested in this question, as I did not propose to acquire merit by bathing in the river on the auspicious days.” Nonetheless, “with no intention of bathing” (122), he too went down to the river. The authorities had erected a palisade to stop the pilgrims and the atmosphere was tense, since “Malaviyaji’s...polite ultimatum” was firmly refused by the District Magistrate. Malaviya decides to offer satyagraha and accompanied by two hundred others, he marched towards the junction of the rivers. Nehru, his interest aroused by these developments, decides, “on the spur of the moment,” to join them. On the baking sands under the burning sun and the watchful eye of the authorities, the satyagrahis, hungry and tired, sat peacefully for the whole of the morning and part of the afternoon. Impatience mounted and the authorities decided to take a hand and the cavalry was directed to disperse the group. “I did not fancy the idea of being chased by mounted troopers, and, anyhow, I was fed up with sitting there. So I suggested to those sitting near me that we might as well cross over the palisade, and I mounted it.” Others followed his example; a few stakes were pulled out, creating a passage. “Somebody gave me a national flag, and I stuck it on top of the palisade, where I continued to sit. I grew rather excited, and thoroughly enjoyed myself.” After some time, “feeling very hot after my exertions,” Nehru gets down the other side and decides “to have a dip in the Ganges” (122). After the dip, he returns and to his amazement finds a greatly agitated Malaviya and many others still sitting on the other side of the palisade.

22 Nehru, though he “is likely to get mixed up about dates,” is reasonably sure it “was the year of the Kumbh, or the Ardh-Kumbh, the great bathing mela” (121).
Under the control of some strong emotion, without a hint to anybody, Malaviya suddenly "dived in the most extraordinary way through the policemen and the horses" (123). The crowd followed, "we all dived," and the authorities refrained from interfering. Nehru concludes this section, entitled "Coconada and Mohamed Ali," of his autobiography with these words: "We half expected some proceedings to be taken against us . . . but nothing of the kind happened. Government probably did not wish to take any steps against Malaviyaji, and so the smaller fry got off too" (123). What comes out from this new kind of experience, though Nehru does not dwell on it, is the confluence of religion and politics in the subcontinent. Nehru admits as much when he notes that

Many of us . . . were too much under [Gandhi’s] influence in political and other matters to remain wholly immune even in the sphere of religion . . . . The outward ways of religion did not appeal to me, and above all I disliked the exploitation of the people by the so-called men of religion, but still I toned down towards it. I came nearer to a religious frame of mind in 1921 than at any other time since my early childhood. Even so I did not come very near. (73)

The two baths that Nehru took are of different dimensions and denote the inappropriateness of concepts like the sacred and the secular in the subcontinent. While Nehru’s first bath, a dip, may be of a personal and secular nature, the second one, a dive, is of religio-political significance.

Narratives of the initial promise that Mohamed Ali embodied and his eventual "comedown" to a communal position never pause on the predicaments of a Muslim leader in the Indian subcontinent. MN Roy’s assessment brings out the “contradictions” in Mohamed Ali’s aspirations:

Much was expected of Mohamed Ali . . . . The idol showed its clay feet in such a hurry that the admirers were staggered . . . . His pronouncements since he
came out of jail are full of mere platitudes and hopeless contradictions. No constructive programme, no positive suggestion as to the future of the movement is to be found in them. He authorizes the removal of the ban on the councils, but holds up the edict of the ulemas on the question. He professes to be a standard-bearer of pure Gandhism, but sets his face positively against civil disobedience, without which the political programme of non-cooperation becomes meaningless. He indulges in fearful threats against the government, but finds the demand for the separation from the British empire "childish and petulant." He deprecates the Hindu-Moslem feuds, but still insists on Khilafat propaganda, which contributed not a little to the success of the enemies of national freedom in creating communal dissensions.\(^{23}\)

Not fine-tuned enough to articulate a critique of nationalism itself, MN Roy dismisses Mohamed Ali much too simply and easily. Roy defines the political project of Indian nationalism and in the process the political mission of Mohamed Ali becomes invisible. However, Mohamed Ali's self-assigned task was to bring out and address the constructive role of community in the scheme of India's future. Though his exposition of Islam during his internment ended up, inevitably, as I have argued, as an autobiographical fragment, it also enabled him to place the communal question in a larger frame. Suffice it for now, to point out that Mohamed Ali himself would have argued that his communalism was more nationalist than the so-called nationalism of the major leaders of the independence movement. Such a possibility forces one to read Mohamed Ali in conjunction with the contradictions within the nationalist aspiration itself as signaled by the Gandhian norm of thought and dress.

From the perspective of the community, Mohamed Ali finds nationalism in its popular form to be too constrictive. Having grown up in a particular historical milieu, Mohamed Ali described the situation of Indian Muslims as belonging to two circles of equal size, but which are not concentric. One is India and the other is the Muslim world. . . . In one circle was the word “India”; in the other circle was Islam, with the word “Khilafat.” We as Indian Muslims came in both circles. We belong to these two circles, each of more than 300 millions, and we can leave neither. We are not nationalists but supernationalists, and I as a Muslim say that “God made man and the Devil made the nation. Nationalism divides; our religion binds.” (Select, 465)

The above points to the stress of Mohamed Ali’s critique and also implies a critique of the mapping of the concentric circle of Hindu communalism onto that of nationalism. Hence, Mohamed Ali was not mouthing contradictory pronouncements; rather he was only articulating the contradictions within the circles as well as between them. That was the strength of Mohamed Ali, who tried to re-make Islam in the historical milieu of the subcontinent, to critique Ernest Renan’s (1823-1892) modern interpretation of Christianity and the secular outlook in Europe, to fight for Indian independence as “United Faiths of India,” or a “Federation of Faiths,” as well as take a stance against the evil of nationalism which stresses “Fatherhood of God” but neglects the “Brotherhood of Man” and leads only to further conflicts and wars. Pointing out that “No religious wars, no crusades, have seen such holocausts and have been so cruel as your last war, and that was a war of nationalism, and not my Jihad” (465), he remarked that the same evil was now affecting India where Gandhi was upholding the secular national ideal and trying to

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24 Mohamed Ali identifies the root cause as the hellenistic graft which infused a new zeal and effected a transition of Christianity from its Jewish to its gentile form as embodied in the transformation of Saul to Paul, see, My Life, 139.
25 This is a position he first articulated in 1904 and re-asserted in 1923, see, “To the Nation,” Select, 255-256.
26 My Life, 154-155.
retain Hindu popularity at the same time. Nehru too shared Mohamed Ali’s unease. Nehru warned of the danger of the nationalist movement acquiring “a revivalist character,” and added that “[e]ven some of Gandhiji’s phrases sometimes jarred upon me—thus his frequent reference to Rama Raj as a golden age which was to return. But I was powerless to intervene. . . . He had an amazing knack of reaching the heart of the people” (Autobiography, 72).

Powerless, like Nehru, in the face of the easy slippage between Hindu communal nationalism and secular nationalist communalism, Mohamed Ali left for England with the desperate hope of convincing the British authorities of the inevitability of an independent India. Nehru was distressed when Mohamed Ali, by now a rebel without a cause, left for England seeking “the substance of freedom” and preferring a grave in a foreign land to a return to a slave country:

It was a misfortune that he left the country for Europe in the summer of 1928. A great effort was then made to solve the communal problem. If Mohamed Ali had been here then, it is just conceivable that matters would have shaped differently.

However, Nehru’s phrasing, as if the communal problem could be dissolved into the national, gives the lie to his dream. At the peak of nationalist fervour, Gandhi strongly opposed the logic of a separate Muslim state—he even articulated sentimental statements to the effect that he did not want his Muslim brothers to leave, his country to be split and his eldest son, who had espoused Islam, to leave. Simultaneously, Jinnah continued to bargain for more concessions for Muslims if a separate Muslim state was to be avoided. But by then Maulana Mohamed Ali had already died (on 3 January 1931) in England, refusing to come back without independence and

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was buried in Jerusalem, in the courtyard of Masjid-ul-Aqsa with a simple inscription: “Here lies al-Sayyid Muhammad Ali al-Hindi.”

Throughout his life Mohamed Ali struggled “to translate [his dream of a Federal Nation] into reality [for which] I had launched my weekly newspaper, and significantly called it the Comrade—Comrade of all and partisan of none.” In fact, the “evil of nationalism,” that strives to enlarge a community into the nation or reduce the nation to a community, to make them coterminous, is located by Mohamed Ali in the larger problematic of the secular-modern outlook. Such a conceptual move is evident in the text of Mohamed Ali’s relatively unknown address during a trial. During the famous trial of Karachi in 1921, in front of the jury appointed by the imperial secular-modern state—which, he goes on to show, effectively hides a church—Mohamed Ali spoke at length, for two days. The transcript of the trial is significant in that it brings out many of the salient characteristics of the Gandhi-Congress supported Khilafat movement. This is a particularly crucial document in the context of the popular perception of Mohamed Ali’s conversion to communalism, since it was the verdict arrived at by the jury that gave him the “leisure” to reflect on the individual, community and nation from the perspective of Islam. The immediate context of the trial was a recent resolution passed by the Khilafat Conference in Karachi that was presided over by Mohamed Ali. Along with his brother and five Khilafat co-workers (among them a Hindu religious dignitary of great eminence), Mohamed Ali was arrested and charged with conspiring to seduce Muslim troops from their allegiance to the crown. A verdict of transportation for life was the expected outcome, but, much to everybody’s surprise, the jury composed of one European, two Goan Christians and two Hindus returned a

30 Ironically, now an area of religious and territorial dispute between Israel and Palestine; Shan Muhammad, ed. Unpublished Letters of the Ali Brothers, xxi.
32 "To the Nation," in Select, 256.
unanimous verdict of not guilty. However, the jury also convicted all the accused, except the Hindu, for minor offences for a period of two years.

At the outset of the trial, Mohamed Ali asks the court to move the jury, because “I have not seen their faces yet. I want to seduce them like the troops” (207). After the jury had been moved, he observes to the jury: “there was behind that another intention, not the ultimate object, perhaps, but incidental to it . . . I wanted you to act as a screen in front of the ladies now behind you, or the Public Prosecutor may add yet another charge of seduction against me.” Amidst laughter, he points out “after all I find that as a result of my effort at seduction I have turned the Judge also towards me to-day. (Laughter)” (207). Immediately shifting to a serious vein, he notes that he is going to take as much time as he can and that too not to present a defence, for

I do not want any defence. I have no defence to offer. And there is no need of defence, for it is not we who are on trial. It is the Government itself that is on trial. It is the Judge himself who is on trial. It is the whole system of public prosecutions, the entire provisions of the law that are on trial. It is not a question of my defence. It is a very clear issue . . . Is God’s law for a British subject to be more important or the King’s law—a man’s law? . . . Gentlemen, I think not for my own sake, nor for the sake of my co-accused, but I think for you. It is a misfortune that there is not a single Muslim among you. Three of you are Christians, and two are Hindus. But that does not matter at all. I am speaking to human beings. I am speaking mostly to Indians. I do not know whether all of you are Indians, perhaps one of you is not though he too may have his domicile in India and may have come to regard India, although an Englishman, as his home, and may therefore be regarded as an Indian. I am

From “Gentlemen of the Jury!” in Select, 204-244.
therefore speaking to a majority of you at least who come from a country which is imbued with the spirit of religion. (208)

The rest of the transcript is laced with witticisms, ironic rejoinders to the court as well as pointed questions about the individual’s supposed freedom of faith in civil society. But the overall critique of modernity and the empire is raised from within the secular-modern conception using its language and logic. To illustrate his point he puts a poser to the judge and jury by asking what they would do if there became evident a conflict between the dictates of Christ and Caesar. In his autobiographical fragment this critique is elaborated through an analysis of the Biblical proverb “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and to God the things which are God’s” (My Life, 133-135). Mohamed Ali is surprised at the ease with which the story of the poser put to Christ circulates as well as the popular endorsement of His response. What, according to Mohamed Ali, Christ managed to do was to turn tables on those trying to entangle him by the “affair of the coin.” However, such a gesture was to become symptomatic of later Christianity and the secular-modern state formation that has “contributed much to weaken the sense of duty to the citizen and to deliver the world into the absolute power of existing circumstances” (My Life, 133).

Mohamed Ali concludes his comments at the trial by narrating the story of Hazrat Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law and successor, who was

enraged against a Jew who had insulted Islam and the God of Islam and the Faith of Islam, and Ali had jumped on top of him. The Jew thought he was going to be killed and in sheer desperation spat on Ali’s face . . . . and strangely enough the wrath of Ali subsided and he left the Jew and walked away. But the Jew was so astonished at this unexpected turn of events that he ran after Ali . . . and said, “That is very strange. When I said a word, you forced me down and
would have killed me, and when I spat on your face in desperation, you leave me!” And Ali answered: “You insulted God and I could have killed you, but when you spat on me I got enraged on my own account, and personal ill-will could not go well with public duty. I could be an executioner for the sake of God but not a murderer for Ali.” Gentlemen, we two [his brother, Shaukat Ali and himself] bear the revered name of Ali and I have also the name of another greater than Ali. I will not be a party to the killing of a giant for personal malice but for the sake of God I will kill all, I will not spare anyone—I will slaughter my own brother, my dear aged mother, wife, children and all for the sake of God, so help me God!” (And as he said this his voice failed him, drops of tears rolled down his cheeks and he sat down completely overcome). (Select, 243-244)

This dramatic breakdown compels one to look at the figure of a Muslim leader in the context of colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism. The pathetic spectacle provided by Mohamed Ali contrasts with the bravado of his words, and indeed, it is possible to argue that what the court witnessed was not a fanatical defiance or belligerence, but a national leader cowed down by the seemingly impossible task he is confronted with. Addressing the individual human beings of the court, whom he had earlier framed as Indian, he emphasizes that his identity as a member of the Muslim community in India is as much important to him as their religion is for them. In fact, the communal identity is of paramount importance, he will kill for it and not for himself! The court is forced to take note of the fact that the coward weeping in front of it is the courageous man each member of the court would want to be if they ever found themselves in similar circumstances. If he dares to point out to the colonial authorities that he is very much like each one of them, their doubled image in a different historical setting, to the individual members of the court as members of their various communities, he seems to be saying that like them he also
belongs to “two circles of equal size” and “can leave neither.” However, in his case the secular-modern frame of nationalism brings in a conflict that can be resolved only by rethinking nationalism itself. He spells out the dangers of trying to equate these circles of nationalism and community; they need not coincide and nor need they be concentric. Attempts to try to collapse these circles one into the other, will be marked and marred by violence, he seems to prophesy. His perspective of a new conception of a federal nationalism, and a new frame sensitive to individuals and communities within the nation, continues to be valid for a secular nation in crisis.

II

In the above section I argued that Mohamed Ali is a crucial figure who allows us to rethink questions of identity, community and the nation in that he brings out the contradictions of the nationalist ideology and its secular-modern frame and shows Islam as a point of convergence for a critique for most of the Muslims of the subcontinent in their fight against various forms of oppression. The terms in which Mohamed Ali perceived his own life is best understood by his comments on Syed Ahmad Khan. In the presidential address delivered at the Indian National Congress in 1923, Mohamed Ali relates a conversation his brother had had with an old English official while in the Public Service. The official asked Shaukat Ali who he thought was the greatest rebel in India against the British rule. We are not told what Shaukat Ali replied, but whatever the name was,

correcting my brother’s answer, that experienced official had declared that it was no other than Syed Ahmad Khan, loyalist of loyalists! When my brother protested against this astonishing judgement, he said: “Do you think young Muslims who are being taught at Aligarh almost as well as our own boys at Harrow and Winchester, who live their lives and can beat them at their own games, would obsequiously serve them when they come out as Indian Civilians
or members of such other superior services. No, Mr Shaukat Ali, the days of British rule in India are numbered, and it is your loyal Syed Ahmad Khan that is the arch-rebel to-day!"\(^{34}\)

Mohamed Ali goes on to remark that “like only too many of us, this English official, too had failed to realize the paralyzing effect of the education given in the colleges and schools established or favoured by this foreign Government” (Select, 253). Even the “arch-rebel” Syed Ahmad Khan’s ambitious programme—which he instituted after he had thought over his initial impulse to retire to Egypt in the face of post-1857 oppression (Select, 56)—as embodied by the Aligarh Muslim University did not accomplish its aim because, given the British control over it, it had only succeeded in creating people “robbed of all generous ideals and national communal ambitions . . . poor in everything save its ideals and dreams” (Select, 253). The seminaries of Deoband and the Darul Ulum encountered similar problems. It was the need for a Muslim University without government aid and control in accordance with the spirit of Non-cooperation that was the rationale of establishing yet another, the fourth, educational institution, the Jamia Millia Islamia University. The logic for the establishment of this institution was a perception that “complete divorce of religious from secular learning” (My Life, 52) is detrimental for “what politics is to the West today, religion is still to the East” (My Life, 55).

Though Mohamed Ali initially allied with and defended Gandhi’s leadership,\(^{35}\) he was to move away from Gandhi\(^{36}\) because of the latter’s endorsement of the Nehru report of 1928. Sickened

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\(^{34}\) “To the Nation,” Select, 253.

\(^{35}\) See, especially, “In Defence of Gandhi’s leadership,” in Select, 373-389. From an alliance with Gandhi whereby “[a]fter the Prophet . . . I consider it my duty to carry out the commands of Gandhiji,” Mohamed Ali was to distance himself from Gandhi and describe the latter “as a Jew, a Bania,” cited in Mushirul Hasan’s introduction, My Life, 33, from Rajmohan Gandhi, The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi (Delhi, 1995) 104, and Hasan’s Nationalist and Communal Politics in India, 1916-1928 (Delhi, 1979) 287-288, respectively.

\(^{36}\) Afzal Iqbal, in Life and Times of Mohamed Ali, draws attention to Mohamed Ali’s distress and bewilderment when Gandhi, while a guest (September-October 1924) at Mohamed Ali’s house, went on a twenty-one-day fast in response to a riot in Kohat in the North-West Frontier Province. “Mohamed Ali’s house was [Gandhi’s] office . . . Even though Gandhi never shared a meal with anyone and ate on his own, the whole household went vegetarian
by the *sangathan* and *shuddhi* initiatives, Mohamed Ali astutely observed of Hindu communal nationalism: “not one of these pseudo-nationalists would have talked so glibly of nationalism, majority rule and mixed electorates, if his own community had not been in the safe position of an overwhelming majority.”37 In a very interesting take, Mohamed Ali reverses the critique and labels Indian nationalism as “narrow communalism” which is exposed by its stance on the cow question. He accused Gandhi of having changed drastically once he had obtained the helm of Congress.

Gandhi has defeated all Muslim attempts for a compromise. He is giving free rein to the communalism of the majority. The Nehru constitution is the legalised tyranny of numbers and is the way to rift and not peace. It recognizes the rank communalism of the majority as nationalism. The safeguards proposed to limit the highhandedness of the majority are branded as communal.38

Mohamed Ali’s critique of nationalism was projected from the minoritarian perspective. The fallout of his unease can be garnered from events that marked the birth of an independent India.

It is true that a definite difference can be perceived between the politics of Muslims before 1947 and after 1947. If after 1947, and increasingly in the face of the Hindutva upsurge, Muslims have come to be thought of as a minority, in the pre-1947 era the 25 percent of Muslims of India or their professed leaders were uncomfortable with the notion of a minority. Comprising 25

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percent of the electorate, they demanded one third, that is 33 percent, representation for all minorities, which included Hindus in Muslim majority provinces. However, the Nehru report had fixed Muslim representation at 25 percent and had done away with separate electorates and weightages; a position that even Gandhi endorsed. The political implications of the Nehru report led to the Delhi manifesto of 9 March 1929 that exhorted Muslims to stay away from the Congress, which they did till Jinnah stepped in again onto the political platform. Muslim unhappiness with regard to minority status can also be interpreted as a critique of a nationalist self-definition that assumed Muslims to be "an impossible factor in the scheme of India's future." 39 Mohamed Ali 40—pointing out that this was not a position held by Muslims alone, but was also shared by non-Brahmins in Southern and Western India—categorically states that, despite "all the abhorrence we feel with regards to communal representation (359)," it is the only safeguard for groups such as these. He further characterizes the reluctance of the Hindu majority in this regard raised more questions about the easy way "communalism" was becoming definitive of the "minorities."

The notion of "minority" delineates more problems than solutions. 41 In the wake of the partition of the subcontinent, an Advisory Committee was constituted under the mandate of Cabinet Mission plan to look into the matter of minorities. Its first report that was discussed in the

38 Times of India, 5 March 1929, cited from Mushirul Hasan's introduction to My Life, 40.
40 Mohamed Ali, "Communal Representation," in Select, 355-369. In "The Last Letter" in the same volume, Mohamed Ali notes: "A community that in India alone must now be numbering 70 million in the sense of Geneva minorities, and when it is remembered that this community numbers nearly 400 millions of people throughout the world, whose ambition is to convert the rest of mankind to their way of thought and their outlook on life, and who claim and feel a unique brotherhood; to talk of it as a minority is a mere absurdity," 475.
Constituent Assembly in August 1947, as Rochana Bajpai notes, rejected some of the central components of the British system of safeguards such as separate electorates and weightage (1840). Bajpai points out that the “question of minority safeguards, as colonial policies for the accommodation of minorities were termed, had been critical at various stages of the negotiations leading up to Indian independence. The colonial state deemed a satisfactory resolution of this question to be a precondition for any advance towards self-government” (1837). It is from such a perspective that Muslim and Dalit critiques of the secular-modern nation-state and their statement that they would have preferred the British to stay on rather than have independence in a Hindu majority state can be understood. I will proceed to look at an early colonial initiative to engage with the “minority” issue in order to examine its various nodes and to point out how the “communal representation” debate of the late 1920s was suddenly transformed into an event that is the logical conclusion of nationalist history that valorized the Aryan migration and denigrated the “Islamic invasions.” Briefly, standard historical narratives play up the colonial toying with the Muslim community between Curzon’s partition of Bengal in 1905 and its revocation in 1911. To run quickly through a complex period in the history of the subcontinent, on 1 October 1906, certain Muslim leaders, what is known as the Simla deputation, headed by Aga Khan, met Lord Minto. They were assured of separate electorates and representation for Muslim minorities. The encouragement they received, triggering off resentment among the Hindus, is invariably seen as the seed of separatism. The formation of the All India Muslim League in the same year increased the Congress heartburn at the Anglo-Muslim alliance. BR Nanda has commented that whereas the “Englishman predicted that the League ‘will provide an effective answer to the

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Congress as well as afford an avenue for the publication of Mohammedan aspirations,"43 "Gokhale, who had consistently pleaded for generosity to the Muslim minority, was scandalized by th[e] blatant discrimination" (92) of the Minto-Morley reforms. Nanda also draws attention to Motilal Nehru's perception. One of "the shrewd observers of the political scene" (93), Motilal Nehru wrote to his son in 1909 that "Hindu-Muslim antagonism had grown, and our Anglo-Indian friends have distinctly scored in this matter, and no account of council reform will repair the mischief" (93) because of the Minto-Morley reforms that resulted out of the Simla deputation of October 1906. In his studied search for the cause of separatism, for which the colonial administration is solely to be blamed, BR Nanda also comments on Gokhale's change of stance, but does not bring out the significance of this shift. While an advocate of "generosity" towards Muslims (thereby also underlining their economic backwardness), Gokhale becomes irritated when the colonial administration actually institutes it. RC Dutt echoes Motilal Nehru. On 28 June 1909, Dutt wrote to Gokhale: "When the history of this cleavage will come to be written, the responsibility of those who fomented it, and the folly of those who accepted it, will be recorded . . . . our simple Muslim compatriots here have been easily gulled and separation has been decreed" (cited by Nanda, 93). It is to be remembered that during 1905-1907 the differences between the moderate faction (an example is Gokhale) and the extremist faction (headed by Tilak and Aurobindo) of Congress, which had been working together against the partition of Bengal, came to a head. After the Congress session held at Surat on 26 December 1907, where 1600 delegates came to blows over their differences, there was a steep decline in the intensity of the nationalist movement. The critical contention between the moderates and the extremists was whether to extend the swadeshi and the boycott movements from Bengal to the rest of the country. After the Congress session, most of the extremists were imprisoned

producing a political vacuum that might have prompted the Congress to rethink its strategy and even contemplate an alliance with Hindu communal nationalists. Bipan Chandra, in his *The Making of a Nation*, cites Aurobindo’s statement describing the change: “When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of Bande Matram, alive with the hope of a nation. . . . When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country” (141). This silence that had fallen on the country, has been read as the consequence of the outcome of the Simla delegation’s success. Even a rigorous historian like Sumit Sarkar allocates the responsibility “for the encouragement of communal separatism” to the Minto-Morley initiative, and thereby the British, without considering, at all, the Nehru report and its effects on other communities. Against this established historical practice, it is possible to account for this “silence” as ensuing from the differences within the Congress, particularly since there was no place for the Muslims, such as they were, in the Congress.

From a different perspective, the Simla deputation can be read as the political move that was essential for the protection of the community against the claims of a reductive nationalism. In the aftermath of the 1857 revolt, Muslim leaders were ensuring the very survival of their communities through socio-cultural reforms. It was this process of modernization that the community sought to protect. Later on, the revocation of the partition of Bengal in 1911, coming at such a time, raised the hackles of Muslim leaders against both the British and the Congress, thereby further undermining their position. The short-lived Minto-Morley reforms were replaced by the provincially biased and universally condemned Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. The joint Khilafat venture has to be seen in this context. Given such a trajectory, it is not surprising, especially after the narrativized trauma of 1947, that the Indian government became

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wary of reservation on religious grounds. Rochana Bajpai points out that the first draft of the Constitution contained political safeguards encompassing provisions for reserved seats in legislatures, quotas in government employment, reserved posts in the cabinet and the creation of administrative machinery to ensure supervision and protection of minority rights. . . . In a remarkable reversal, however, by the final draft religious minorities were excluded from the purview of all political safeguards, which came to be restricted mainly to the ‘scheduled castes’ and the ‘scheduled tribes.’ (1837)

Apart from the partition of the subcontinent, two other factors for such a reversal, Bajpai notes, could be that the “Congress no longer had to conciliate a powerful Muslim League and had few real checks in the way of pushing its agenda through,” and that both the Sikh Panthic Party and the Muslim League, the political parties of the two main religious minorities pressing for political safeguards, “were in disarray and therefore unable to present a united front in resisting the revocation of safeguards” (1837). In the context of the socio-economic backwardness among the majority of Muslims in India, the move of imagining a unity that went against the diversity of various communities in India is, perhaps, an unfortunate one.

If, in a secular India, everyone regardless of their gender, class, caste or creed has equal opportunities, why is it necessary to represent communities as minorities? A minority is not *sui generis*. Though each and every minority may be unique in its own historical location, they are still a product of the demarcation of nation/state/district/taluk boundaries as well as electoral procedures. The continued use of the term “religious minorities” in state initiatives, hence, can be read as an admission on the part of the nation-state, past its fiftieth anniversary, that its educational and socio-economic initiatives have gone awry, so much so that certain peoples
continue to be less than equal. We have national as well as regional versions of minorities and, interestingly, whereas some communities are minorities at both levels, some others are not. Given the fact that a person is not given any such educational or occupational “reservation” solely by virtue of being a Muslim or a Christian, the notion of minority deployed for Muslims and Christians overall points to the fact that it is the nation-state’s self-justificatory gesture of institutionalizing differences\textsuperscript{45} in order to explain away difference and expiate itself of blame by shifting it on to “their” difference and recalcitrance. The inverse of such a perspective, as Talal Asad points out, is “the implicit claim that members of some cultures truly belong to a particular politically defined place, but those of others (minority cultures) do not . . .” (257). Since the issue of secular-modernity is the primary focus of the second chapter, I return to Mohamed Ali’s autobiographical fragment.

Despite being a prolific writer from his student days, Mohamed Ali never took to writing in a serious way. His earlier attempts while interned, were in fact a biography of the Prophet and a multi-volume history of Islam. When asked by some of his friends to pen down an account of his life, he wrote:

You suggest to me that I should write a book during my enforced leisure, and that our people expect one from me. If that is so, I am afraid they don’t know me. Firstly, I have neither the patience, perseverance nor the temper of the researchist. Secondly, my emotions are much too strong to permit what intellect I may possess to be exerted in the writing of a book. . . . No, my friend, my brain is far too busy (and so is my heart) to allow of any leisure for such “pastimes” as authorship.

(Abdul Majid Daryabadi Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi)\textsuperscript{46}

As against his own professed lack of time and interest in writing, we know that he, apart from running a journal almost all by himself, wrote many letters.\textsuperscript{47} Hence, I read Mohamed Ali’s reluctance or recalcitrance to write about his life as raising problems about the mode of autobiography itself. The Dalit critique of the autobiographical as inimical to an oppressed self, whose emancipation lies within a nationalist “upper” caste and class norm, is also relevant in this context. Dalit theoreticians\textsuperscript{48} have drawn attention to the peculiar nature of Dalit autobiographies that starts off in a supposedly crude colloquial language and ends up in a very sophisticated print register. The “successful” autobiographies from the minority position begin in a local setting and “arrive” at the national. This transition is often achieved by a turning away from their communal identity and culture, as if they had to lose themselves in order to find themselves. In mainstream autobiographies, the local and the national are much more easily intertwined, even collapsed; the regional becomes the national and the national reflects the regional. The sophisticated language of the autobiography, if at all used, would most often quote the colloquial register. The change of register in the case of Dalit autobiographies brings out the unequal translation that the genre imposes. In a similar way, Muslim autobiographies also seem to travel from a rural religious setting to an urban secular frame. Going back to my starting

\textsuperscript{46} Cited from Mushirul Hasan, preface, My Life, 9.
\textsuperscript{47} Rais Ahmad Jafri, ed. Selections from Mohamed Ali’s Comrade (Lahore: Mohamed Ali Academy, 1965); Shan Muhammad, ed. Unpublished Letters. In this context it is interesting to recall that even somebody like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had to be constantly pressurized to write out his life, despite the fact that as early as 1916 he had written Tazkirah an autobiographical work in Urdu. In the preface to the first edition of India Wins Freedom, I\textsuperscript{umayun Kabir writes: “I approached Maulana Azad [during 1955-1956] with the request that he should write his autobiography. . . . He did not like to talk about his personal life and was at first reluctant to undertake the work. It was with great difficulty that he could be persuaded that, as one of the principal actors in the transfer of power from British to Indian hands, he owed a duty to posterity to record his reading of those memorable times. His reluctance was also partly due to his shattered health. (xi); “As I have already stated, Maulana Azad was not in the beginning very willing to undertake the preparation of this book. As the book progressed his interest grew,” India Wins Freedom, the Complete Version (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1988) xiii.
\textsuperscript{48} For example, Aniket Jawaare’s unpublished paper, “The Surpassing of Suffering: A Speculation on Certain Kinds of Dalit Autobiographies,” presented at the above-mentioned Kendriya Sahitya Akademy seminar on autobiography.
point, maybe now we can begin to perceive why his autobiographical attempt began as a biography of the Prophet and ended with his own. The contours of Indian nationalist communalism that was consolidating itself in front of his eyes and the constant equation being established between Hindu and Muslim communal nationalisms created an unease in Mohamed Ali which pressed him to explore the question of Islam. However, he soon found that the question of Islam was pertinent only as far as he was an individual in a Muslim community in the Indian subcontinent. The uneasy juxtaposition of the national and the communal creates a disjuncture in the individual's affiliation that can only be resolved by erasure of one part of the person's identity. Mohamed Ali, however, takes a bolder route. Instead of trying to become like the others in order to be counted among them and be authorized to address them, he is determined to work out the issue of difference. Hence, instead of addressing people like himself, which would be a redundant exercise since they already know what it is like, he writes for non-Muslims, as himself, that is without denying his communal identity. And, like them, he travels towards a consolidation of his self, by enumerating details of his family, his English education, his career at the Aligarh Muslim University, his exposure to nationalism and elaboration of his religious and political aspirations, very much in the dominant mode of the autobiographical and tinged by the confessional.

Whereas Gandhi gives expression to a national self-hood through his vernacular, and Nehru writes in English for people like himself, a western educated Mohamed Ali writing in English for the others presents a different picture. The double postulation of the particular and the universal,

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49 An unease that should be read in conjunction with the triple unease of Nehru: at Mohamed Ali's assertion that Nehru was fundamentally religious, at Mohamed Ali's religious inclination and at Gandhi's deployment of religious and spiritual idiom.

50 A discussion of the intricacies of the genre of autobiography is beyond the scope of this wok. Recent Dalit and Feminist theorizations have keenly engaged with the implied gender and caste of this genre.
and the translations involved in this transaction, are different for a Muslim in India. On the one hand, he is the inverse—the other, communal side—of the national. While the Indian and vernacular autobiographer addresses the universal through the national and textual affiliation, the Muslim, as with Mohamed Ali’s pan-Islamic posture, constructs a universal in order to give logic and coherence to his minor self. Why, otherwise, would Mohamed Ali start his address in this fashion:

I fear I shall have to commence my exposition of Islam with a very large slice of egotism. It has, however, been forced upon me not by what I may regard as my merits, but, on the contrary, by my lack of them. This may seem to deprive me of all my title to speak on the subject of Islam; and yet, it is just because I am a very ordinary Muslim with no pretensions whatever to the gradation of schoolmen and still more because I can claim through my ignorance itself a degree of detachment, that I think it would not be altogether unprofitable for the ordinary non-Muslim to give me a fair hearing. Experts often write for experts; but I am so to speak “the man-in-the-street,” and I write for the “the man-in-the-street.” The individual experience which I relate will make this clear, and being typical of the history of so many Muslim lives of my own generation, it will not, I trust, be altogether lacking in interest. (My Life, 47)

He seems to be addressing his story, of Islam and his self in English, to non-Muslims and what he wants from them is a fair hearing. The piece “The Misunderstanding and its Causes,” which is now an appendix to the autobiographical fragment, is the only part of the exposition of Islam that Mohamed Ali managed to write. Though he set out to write the story of Islam, he had to start from his own position within it as an Indian and within India as a Muslim.

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51 This was meant as the beginning of a second book that would critique the relation between Judaic, Christian and Islamic thought and was to lead to an exposition of Islam and the Prophet; see, My Life, ed. Afzal Iqbal, 282-363; ed. Mushirul Hasan, 215-261.
My intention has not been to present an in-depth analysis of Mohamed Ali’s autobiographical fragment. Rather, I have argued that Mohamed Ali’s strategy of representing his life offers us a clue to another way of reading this “fragmentary” life. Read as a critique of the very form of secular modernity and nationhood, what emerges is a vibrant critique of the national from the “communal” position. He contends that our “communal consciousness was ... far more secular than [religious]” (My Life, 65). In an important comment which shows the awakening of Mohamed Ali to the historical situation of Islam in the world context, he notes: “although we considered Islam to be the final message for mankind and the only true faith, ... we were shamefully ignorant of the details of its teaching and of its world-wide and centuries-old history,” especially given the education provided by “missionary and government schools and colleges where year in and year out the name of Islam was never so much as mentioned” (My Life, 65).

The situation is not very different in the secular education provided by educational institutions, where if at all Islam is invoked it is more often in a derogatory sense, all the more so after the 11 September and 13 December 2001 attacks, respectively, on World Trade Centre and the Indian Parliament. Following Samir Amin and Talal Asad, one can argue that the modern separation of religion and state was a forced necessity rather than a benevolent gesture. Foucault has read it as a ruse of disciplinary control in the pastoral mode. The concomitant logic that social life has to be governed by ethical principles is a lie in the face of lived realities whether it be in the West or the East, whereby we are forced to work with the notions of a citizenhood and a subjecthood which cannot coincide, especially in underdeveloped countries. In a postmodern postcolonial

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32 The word used is “religions” in My Life, ed. Mushirul Hasan, however, Afzal Iqbal’s earlier edition has “religious.” My Life, 31.
context, there is a pressing need to relocate ourselves in less grand, even fragmentary, narratives if we are to find a way out of our impasse.\textsuperscript{54} Given the global as well as the national backdrop of Muslims in India, there is an urgent need to come to terms with Islam in terms other than of communal separatism. The Muslim in India continues to haunt our formulations and what we perceive is not a marginalization that is the consequence of any bias in history nor an obscuring, an invisibilising, nor suppression.\textsuperscript{55} Rather what is at stake is a demonization, and the Muslim in India is made to articulate an excess/lack in his/her selfhood. If the colonial is the other of modernity, the Muslim figures as the other’s other, both as the other of European and Indian forms of secular-modernity and nationhood. She/he is forced to mediate a fragmented existence; a minor fragment in a major genre that is not yet a piece that would make the amphora whole again.\textsuperscript{56} The Muslim is in this sense a fragment of the amphora of our nationalist aspiration while also being a fragment within it. Islam is a fragment that does not fit into the whole as it is being imagined and imaged; hence its supplementarity, as something that denotes an excess as well as a lack.\textsuperscript{57} Every such fragment, as Gyanendra Pandey\textsuperscript{58} puts it, “is of central importance

\textsuperscript{53} Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” afterword in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, \textit{Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics} (Sussex: Harvester, 1982) 208-226.

\textsuperscript{54} Partha Chatterjee notes that “the root of our postcolonial misery [lies] not in our inability to think new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state. If the nation is an imagined community and if nations must also take the form of states, then our theoretical language must allow us to talk about community and state at the same time. I do not think our theoretical language allows us to do this,” \textit{The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) 11.

\textsuperscript{55} Terms used by Uma Chakravarti to frame her recovery project, \textit{Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai} (New Delhi: Kali in association with the Book Review Literary Trust, 1998) vii.


\textsuperscript{57} Following Vivek Dhareshwar, one can look at the resurgent Hindutva phenomenon as a response to excessive universalism thrust on the secular subject in contrast to the excessiveness of the Muslim and the Dalit. What is involved is a doubling of the excess identity of the Muslim/Dalit which, in the face of the facelessness of globalization, might have triggered a longing for a similar sense of identity and community that has been hitherto kept in suspension within the subject-citizen; see, “Politics and History After Sovereignty,” \textit{Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy}, eds. Rajeev Bhargava, Amiya Kumar Bagchi and R Sudarshan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) 407-411.

\textsuperscript{58} “In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today,” \textit{Representations} 37 (Winter 1992) 27-55. He goes on to add that “given the very great difficulty, if not impossibility, of translating cultures and consciousness into alien languages, a new historiography also requires a more concerted effort to recover what we continue in India to call the ‘vernacular’ (and also the dialect) in terms both of sources and of the medium of historical debate. Along with that, there is the need to recognize that the ‘vernacular’ may also be the ‘national,’ in more ways than one” (fn. 45, 55).
in challenging the state’s construction of history, in thinking other histories and marking those contested spaces through which particular unities are sought to be constituted and others broken up” (50).

The loss of a language or its instituted erasure only adds a further dimension. As early as 1912, Mohamed Ali had argued:

neither in the matter of language nor in that of script can the Muslims afford to concede more than what they have already done in adopting Urdu as their only vernacular or their second vernacular, and retaining the script that is practically common to the Islamic world. But unless we take practical steps to safeguard the language and the script, both are endangered by the narrow and exclusive “Nationalism” which is growing more and more militant everyday.59

Despite living out his life in a vernacular that was threatened and that he perceived as a necessary concession to be made in his imagined United Faiths of India or a Federation of Faiths, he chose to write out his life in English. Maybe even now for Muslims in India, writing an autobiography—where the autos or the self is somewhere, the bios or life is elsewhere and the grapheme is nowhere, in that it does not work as an intersection point for the other two—remains a fraught exercise. Maybe autobiography here requires too many unequal transactions—socio-political, cultural, national translations and aesthetic elaborations—that only a western educated, quixotically romantic and religious person like Mohamed Ali would have dared to take on.

Mohamed Ali, however, has also to be viewed against the backdrop of the educational projects instituted after the revolt of 1857. In this section, I examine the aims and aspirations of Muslims
in the subcontinent in the context of the successful establishment of 4 pioneer Muslim institutions of learning. Whereas caste was the main node of an 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, concentrated on the common denominator of Islam in order to construct a "corporate identity." 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" to work within the secular 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 in the Hindu notion of a community. This presumed always-already-ness of the Muslim peoples has given strength to the notion that Muslim academies 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

59 "The Lingua Franca of India," in Select, 43.
60 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, David Lelyveld, Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 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," Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) 167.
61 Mushirul Hasan, 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,’” "Muslim Intellectuals, Institutions, and the Post-Colonial Predicament," Economic and Political Weekly 30.47 (25 November 1995) 2997.
62 Nehru's following statement 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
reform initiatives that were taking place all over the Indian subcontinent—would become accessible for a critical analysis of nationalism and communalism.

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.63 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.”

as he disliked them, but his own colleagues, the Muslim Nationalist leaders, prevented this and were bitter in their opposition,” Autobiography, 139.

63 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,” in G Aloysius, Nationalism Without A Nation in India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 176. Aloysius cites Sarojini Naidu’s comment: “If only Bapu knew how much it cost, to keep him simple,” from Percival Spear, “Mahatma Gandhi,” Modern Asian Studies 3.4 (1969) 302.
A couple of decades later, Dr Ambedkar thundered: "Educate, Organize and Agitate."

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.

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

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Khilafat agitation,\(^{66}\) 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\(^{67}\) in the Indian subcontinent as exemplified by the initiatives of two of the four main centres of Islamic thought and culture, the Darul Ulum Deoband and the Aligarh Muslim University, would substantiate such an argument\(^{68}\) 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, Mushirul

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\(^{66}\) 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.

\(^{67}\) Since my focus is entirely different from traditional scholars, I will not be engaging with works, like Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: KPI, 1987) or Aziz Ahmad’s *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1964) and *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

\(^{68}\) For an interesting study on the debates between these two educational institutions, the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama and the Ahl-e Sunnat Jamaat, see, Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and his Movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). Though there were plenty of smaller organizations, like the Majlis Muid ul Islam that was constituted in 1921, I will only report on the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama and the Jamia Millia Islamia.


The Jamia Millia Islamia 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 Mushirul Hasan, *My Life*, fn. 84, 31, from AG Noorani, *President, Zakir Hussain: A Quest for Excellence* (Bombay, 1967) 25. See, also, Mohammad Talib, “Jamia Millia Islamia: Career of Azad Tallim,” in *Knowledge, Power and Politics*, 156-188.
Hasan, Francis Robinson, BR 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 over all been 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." 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. He sought to do so by making them aware of

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70 Cited by Bimal Prasad, 79, from Edward C Sachua, ed. Alberuni's India (Delhi, 1964) 19-20.
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" (Bimal Prasad, 74). Shah Waliullah's attitude towards people of other faiths, one of absolute scorn (Bimal Prasad, 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, going against the precept that it has to be read in the Arabic alone, into Persian, the language of the state apparatus then, 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" (Darul Harb), 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.  

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. The suppression of the revolt only led to an even more drastic repression of Muslims. Following Bourdieu, 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 Darul Ulum (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.

Darul Ulum of Deoband "emphasized the diffusion of scripturalist practices and the cultivation of an inner spiritual life." Barbara Metcalf 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" (11). Their turn away from politics was to foster the "dominant activities [of] education and propaganda" (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" (360). However, her concession that some of the "unique characteristics of Islamic movements," in that they are shaped "by new means of

78 The school that was transformed into the college was started in 1875.
80 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; see, Barbara D Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 3-7.
communication, Western domination and resulting forms of economic change, and by mass participation in political activities” (360)\(^81\) 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 veneer” (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.\(^82\) 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.”\(^83\) 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...

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\(^81\) Earlier, she had used Clifford Geertz’s term “oppositional Muslims” [from Geertz, “‘Internal Conversion’ in Contemporary Bali,” in The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 170-189] since “[t]heir religion was not traditional in the sense of being accepted without question” (12). Francis Robinson has also noted the importance of print media in Islamic movements, see, “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia,” in his Islam and Muslim History in South Asia, 66-104.

\(^82\) David Lelyveld, 3-6.

\(^83\) Barbara Metcalf, Islamic Revival, 324-325.
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" (*My Life*, 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 for ever.84

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.
BR Nanda, guided by his desire to absolve the Congress by blaming the British, reads Syed Ahmad Khan’s ideas as coinciding with WW 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.” 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 tinctured 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, 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. Syed Ahmad Khan notes: “The sum total of all that has been effected by the English Colleges, has been to qualify an insignificant

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84 Syed Ahmad Khan, *The Present State of Indian Politics* (Allahabad, 1886) 196-197.
85 BR Nanda, 75; see, also, WW Hunter, *The Indian Mussulmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen?* (London: Trubner and Co., 1871) 145.
number, as letter-writers, copyists, signal-men, and railway ticket collectors. 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. 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). 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.

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87 Strictures on the Present State of Education in India (London, 1869); cited in Lelyveld, 107.
89 Though written in the late 60s, in the height of Nehruvian ideals, Khundmiri's essays are perceptive in that he juxtaposes existentialism, Marxism and Islam in India in order to evolve a critique of their shortcomings; see, Secularism, Islam and Modernity: Selected Essays of Alam Khundmiri, ed. MT Ansari (New Delhi: Sage, 2001). All further citations are from this volume.
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.91 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 Darul Ulum 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.92 Gandhi’s initiative93 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

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90 Elsewhere, he remarks that the “neat division of human life into the religious and the secular involves a contradiction” (297).
93 Khundmiri’s dependence on the Nehruvian model comes out when he reads Gandhi as an ethical rather than a spiritual person (234-235) who strived to make the secular process irreversible in Indian life, symbolized by the charkha which was closer to Nehru’s machine (236). He adds that the significance accorded to the presence of religious elements in Gandhi’s thought should be moderated and that the charkha has to be read as a spinning wheel which inaugurated a desacralization process (234) while in the same breath he agrees that Nehru had a better appreciation of the logic of secularism than Gandhi (235). In hindsight, we are being forced to re-read Gandhi, see, for instance, Shahid Amin’s “Gandhi as Mahatma: Ghora khpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-1922,” in Subaltern Studies III, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) 1-61 and G Aloysius, Nationalism without a Nation in India. The multiple resonances of the Gandhian image are best captured by the image of a Gandhi with his bald head and cap being feared as a Mappila by some Hindus who were frightened by rumours (of 600 breasts cut off from 300 Hindu women and amassed as coconut shells and of 800 noses cut off from Hindu men by the
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, BP 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. While examining how the Social Reform party lost out to the Political Reform party, Ambedkar, who almost espoused Islam in 1935, comments that "the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of a people" (41). Writing out his thoughts of Pakistan in 1941, we find Ambedkar being almost pensive about the "common destiny" 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" 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.

Mappilas) during the 1921 Malabar rebellion; for this interesting literary representation, see, Uroob (PC Kuttikrishnan), Sundarikalum Sundaranmarmum, Malayalam (Thrisur: Current Books, 1958, 1993) 37-38.

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)

95 Thoughts of Pakistan (Bombay: Thacker and Company, 1941); I cite this text from Mushirul Hasan, ed. Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India, 47-62.
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.96 This haunting it to hold it together inevitably points to the unfinished nature of the

96 In a different context, Derrida notes about the spectral space and Freud’s relation to it: “He takes it into account so as to account for it, and he intends to account for it or prove it right only while reducing it to something other than himself, that is to say, to something other than the other” (94) and that, nevertheless, it “resists and returns,” “returns [because] it belongs” (87), thus “haunting implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house” (86) “its iterability, that is to say, its immanent divisibility, the possibility of its fission, haunted it from the origin. 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, 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. A recent example of such a tactic, as Dalit writers have pointed out, would be the raking up of the Babri Masjid issue in order to side-step the Mandal Commission’s guidelines for reservation. Such re-readings 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.97

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.98

Gandhi’s intrusion or intervention into the nationalist scene sparked off more problems than

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faithful memory of such a singularity can only be given over to the specter” (100); in Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

97 Beverley Nichols, Verdict on India (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944) 39.
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. 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

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98 Written in Gujarati as Hind Swarajya in 1909, Gandhi changed the title to Hind Swaraj in 1910; in the same year it was translated into English as Indian Home Rule, see MK Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and Other Writings, ed. Anthony J Parel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).


100 In this regard, as Gopal Guru has pointed out, “as far as the Dalits are concerned, the communitarian logic would not operate for the simple reason that the Dalits do not have any nostalgia that represents the loss of a sense of domination and power which a particular community may have enjoyed in the past. The Dalits do not have any such memory of the past. What they remember is only the history of humiliation and exploitation” (131) in “Dalits in
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.”

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.”

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. (My Life, 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,” Jalal103 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 Muhammed 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).

In this chapter, I have tried to examine the question of Islam in the subcontinent with special reference to Mohamed Ali as a representative of Muslim response to the demands of secular-modernity. Though in a nascent form, I have argued that he embodies a critical-subject position that critiques the secular institution of a singular nation formation. I will try to develop this argument, in the next chapter, by engaging with some of the contemporary writers who have grappled with the complexities involved.