Chapter – IV

AZAD’S THEORY OF RELIGIOUS UNIVERSALISM

Azad’s Vision and Mission

Maulana Abu al-Kalam Azad was one of the outstanding exponents of Muslim modernism in twentieth century India. He fought relentlessly against backwardness, narrow-mindedness, superstitions and fanaticism and paved the way for a modern approach to Islam. He stood for inter-religious brotherhood, pluralism and tolerance. The significance of his catholic vision and humanist mission can hardly be over-emphasised in the contemporary world. The history of modern Indian thought cannot be complete without an adequate reference to Maulana Azad and his contribution. Azad is remembered as a prominent leader of Indian Freedom Movement. In fact, in the galaxy of modern Indian leaders, Azad is an outshining example of both religious catholicity and political sagacity.

Azad’s early political career was governed by the religious teachings of Islam. But he was not a blind follower of the tradition. Azad declared, “I am a Musalman, and by virtue of being Musalman this has become my religious duty to fight for the rights of man”.

Through his powerful writings, Azad created a stir in the Muslim consciousness and convinced Indian Muslims to recognize the enormity of
their erroneous understanding of Islam. His aim was to make Muslims conscious of their duty towards their motherland and join the forces of nationalist struggle for liberation of India.

Along with Gandhiji and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Azad came forward as a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. He said in his inimitable words:

"Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. Our language, our poetry, our culture, our art, our dress, our manner and customs and innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour".

He had firm faith in Muslims of India sharing a common heritage with Hindus.

"As a Muslim, I for one am not prepared for a moment to give up my right to treat the whole of India as my domain and to share in the shaping of its political and economic life. To me it seems a sure sign of cowardice to give up what is my patrimony and content myself with a mere fragment of it".

Azad's nationalism found expression in the statement which he made before the court in 1921. He said that an awakened nation aspires to attain what it considers its birthright, and the dominant authority would not budge an inch from its position of unquestioned opposition. It might be retorted that the later party, even like its opponents, is not open to any blame inasmuch as it is merely putting up a fight for its own survival and it is quite an incidental matter that its existence happens to be inimical to perpetuation of justice. However, historians will judge the matter and surely their
judgment would be in favour of freedom fighters of India, who are putting up an indefatagile fight for justice and freedom.

Expressing his firm faith in the non-violent methods, Azad said:

"In this war of liberty and justice I have adopted the path of non-violent non-cooperation. Opposed to us stands an authority armed with the complete equipment for oppression, excess and bloodshed. But we place our reliance and trust, next to God, upon our own limitless power of sacrifice and unshakable fortitude".4

"It is my definite conviction that India cannot attain success by means of arms, nor is it advisable for it to adopt that course. India can only triumph through non-violent agitation, and India's triumph will be a memorable example of the victory of moral force".5

Azad attached great importance to communal harmony and to him Hindu-Muslim unity was essential for bringing freedom. While addressing a provincial assembly of the Khilafat Movement at Agra on 25th October, 1921, he referred to "Hindu-Muslim cooperation as the covenant of the Prophet Mohammad, entered between the Muslims and other residents of Medinah for the purpose of establishing a working alliance for common defence".6 Azad used the key phrase 'Ummat-i-Wahida' (single nation) for a 'joint Hindu-Muslim Nation'. Maulana Azad was essentially a religious man but he was rational, liberal and modern in his thinking and scientific and historical in his outlook.

Religion and Islam

Maulana Azad was essentially a religious man but he was rational and modern in his thinking. He extensively wrote on the nature of religious consciousness. He tried to demonstrate that Islam which was presented to
Arabs was, in essence, a rational and universal religion acceptable to all communities of the world.

With his scientific and historical outlook, Azad wrote his famous commentary on the Qur'an known as Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an. One of the distinctive features of this commentary was to show that Islam emphasized not so much on dogma and law but on the spiritual elevation of whole humanity. All religions teach the same universal truth for the welfare of mankind. Eternal truth of all religions is something common to all. The object of religion is well being of mankind, but the condition of mankind varies from age to age and country to country. Essence of religion lies in the worship of one God and right conduct. All religions teach brotherhood of people so do not divide yourself, worship Him only.

Azad interpreted religion as service of humanity. He believed in the essential unity of purpose of all religions which was self realization of man.

He quoted the Arabic saying, "Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu" which meant “He who knows himself knows God”. This he compared with Gita which says: “Here today behold the whole universe, moving and unmoving and whatever else thou desirest to see, O Gudakesa (Arjuna), are unified in my body”.

As a great scholar of Islam, Azad presents the real meaning of religion. In Tarjuman-al-Qur’an, he tried to work out his conception of Din or religion. For Azad one of the crucial functions of religion was to unite mankind by exhorting it to transcend the divisions of history, culture, race,
language and colour. The primary purpose of religion is that the entire mankind serve but one God and live together in mutual love and affection.

In the light of the Qur’anic teachings, Azad pointed out that devotion to God and righteous living constitute the essence of religion. The Qur’an, according to Azad, underlines the essential elements of religion in one of the verses of *Sura al-Baqrah*. The verse reads as follows:

"Righteousness is not that you turn your faces (in prayer) towards the east or the west; but righteousness is this, that one believeth in God, in the last day, in the angels, in the Books and in the prophets, and for the love of God giveth of his wealth to his kindred and to the orphans and to the needy and to the way-farer, and to those who ask and to effect the freedom of the slave, and observeth prayer and payeth the poor-one and is of those who are faithful to their engagements when they have engaged in them, and endureth with fortitude poverty, distress, and moments of peril – these are they who are true in their faith and these are they who are truly righteous".  

In the commentary, Azad repeatedly emphasizes that the real intention of religion is to assert the oneness of God and the unity of mankind. In his own words:

"The unity of man is the primary aim of religion, the message which every prophet delivered was that mankind were in reality one people and the one community, and there was but one God for all of them, and on that account they should serve Him together and live as members of but one family. Such was the message which every religion delivered. But curiously the followers of each religion disregarded the message, so much so that every country, every community and every race resolved itself into a separate group and raised groupism to the position of religion". 
The real religion was thus devotion to God and righteous living. It was not an exercise in group formation. Whatever the race or community or country one belonged to, if only one believed in God and did righteous deeds, one was the true follower of the *Din* (religion) of God. All the prophets of *Allah* preached the unity of all religions and the cardinal values of universal brotherhood.

Azad tried to reconcile religion with reason. His religious insight helped him formulate his view on unity and integration. He believed that the root of all religions is one. Religious teachings have two parts, one is the eternal essence and another is external form. The eternal is called faith by the Qur’an that is the source of religion and external is called the rules of conduct or the shariah.

Azad claims that “The religion of the worlds differ not in the principle that is eternal truth, but the rules of conduct, ways of worship etc. This difference was inevitable, because the object of religion is the well being of mankind and as the conditions of the mankind changed with the age and country, therefore, every religion is different in its outward form. This outward form reflects the spirit of the age and country in which it was taught, and it suited the age and country”. 11

Azad believed in the unity of religions and in the unity of mankind. This means that in the multifarious diversity of mankind there is a hidden unity.
For Azad, a religion was essentially a source of moral inspiration and spiritual edification. All religious beliefs and values were meant to be life integrating rather than dividing the global society and civilization. Religion is committed to the betterment and amelioration of human society.

“For him religion was a force to integrate human society rather than to disintegrate it. It stood for service of humanity, not for creating tensions and divisions. He firmly believed that India cannot do without some sort of religious education because the mould of Indian mind is basically religious. He illustrated both in his thought and in his action that the religious spirit was basically humanitarian, cosmopolitan and stood for welfare of all mankind”.

For Azad, religion has been one and same everywhere. The message of all prophets was same. They preached belief in one supreme God and exhorted human beings to live righteously. The prophets of all times have emphasized oneness of God.

The message which all the prophets delivered was that mankind should follow one way, the way of God, Al-Din, and should not differ from each other in respect of that way. So the Qur’an says, “To you (the Prophet of Islam) hath he prescribed the faith which He commended unto Noah, and which we have revealed to thee, and which we commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus saying, observe this faith, and be not divided into sects therein”.

The purpose of the religion was unity of mankind rather than sowing discord amongst people. God has created us as human beings and
welded us into one single human community. It is man who divided himself into so-called racial groups or sects. All such distinctions are man-made and cannot be ascribed to the universal mercy and justice of God.

Maulana Azad had an integrated and balanced approach towards understanding and articulation of religion. He was a traditionalist as well as a modernist. For him there is no conflict in modernity and tradition. He made a critical survey of all trends of thought, past and present. He came to the conclusion that human thought was a continuous process of stimuli and responses. This process cannot be bifurcated into past and present or modernity and tradition. In view of the same, Azad developed a critical and analytical approach and appropriated a high degree of methodological clarity during the early years of his intellectual struggle.

Azad was deeply impacted by Sir Syed’s rationalist approach to Islam. He was fascinated by Sir Syed’s hermeneutical reconciliation between religion and science. However, very soon, Azad’s approach to religion took a different turn. He came to realize that religion and science are essentially incommensurable and any grounding of religious faith on scientific lines would be utterly confusing and misleading. There was no point in trying to work out a reconciliation between religious beliefs and scientific theories.
Scientific theories are an ongoing process and it would be ridiculous to go on attempting such a reconciliation every now and then. Azad’s appropriation of Islam was essentially existentialist rather than scientific or scholastic. Azad was clearly conscious that science cannot meet the requirements of the human soul although it may lead to great material advancement. Philosophical theology was also an inadequate basis for appropriating religion. Azad brought out his approach to religion in the following lines:

“Philosophy will open the door of doubt but would never be able to close it. Science will provide proof but will not be able to give faith. But religion gives us faith, though not the proof. Here to live in this world one does not need only proved or established realities but faith also. We cannot rely only on things which we can prove. There are things we can not prove but have to believe in them.”14

Azad’s basic orientation to Islam and religion in general stemmed from his understanding and interpretation of the Qur’an. Especially, his universalistic interpretation of religion originated from, or at least, was authenticated and reinforced by his masterly analysis of the first Surah of the Qur’an, i.e. Surah-al-Fatihah. While working out a full volume of his commentary Tarjuman al-Qur’an on seven verses of the Surah, Azad brings out one of the most cogent interpretations of religion or Din. The Surah, according to Azad, brings out the most universal conception of God apart from His Universal Providence, Universal Mercy, Universal Justice and Universal Guidance to man. The Lord or God to be celebrated according to this Surah is not a racial or communitarian or sectarian God, but Lord of all...
the worlds; the Lord who is the source of sustenance, mercy, justice, and guidance to the entire mankind. The believer and the devotee in this *Surah* is exhorted to seek guidance from His Lord with a view to showing him the straight path, the path of those with whom Lord has always been pleased and not the path of those who have incurred divine wrath. For Azad this straight path sought by the devotee from His Lord is the path trodden by all the righteous people across space and time. This path again is not communitarian, sectarian, racial or denominational. It is the straight path leading to universal benevolence, mercy and justice for the entire cosmos.

In the light of numerous Qur'anic injunctions, Azad underlined that religion or *Din* did not consist in organisation of groups and formation of sects. It is not *Din* or real religion to be a member of Jewish, Christian or Muslim community. Belief in one single Supreme God and righteous living, which are the real criteria of true religion, were relegated to the backstage by the followers of different religions. The Qur'an does not accept these man-made limits or encirclements. A person who is sincere in his beliefs and actions is qualified to attain salvation. According to the Qur'an, religious exclusivism is an undesirable state of mind. Jews, Christian and other communities or sects were deeply characterized by this attitude of exclusivity. All religious groups claimed exclusive rights on eschatological salvation. For Azad this exclusivistic mindset was more a function of individual and social psychology than that of any religious ideology. Azad quoted the following Qur'anic verse with a view to substantiating his point of view:
Moreover the Jews say, “The Christians lean on naught”. “On naught lean the Jews”, say the Christians. Yet both read the scripture. So with like words say they who have no knowledge (of the scripture). But on the day of requittal, God shall judge between them as to that in which they differ”.

In the light of above Qur’anic verse, the significance of Azad’s hermeneutical response becomes clear. The fundamental contention of Azad is that the Qur’an is a confirmatory Book. It confirms all the previous prophets and messages. This is the universal vision of religion. The Jews, Christians and other religious groups lost this original vision. Therefore, the Qur’an reminded mankind of the universal vision of religion. The Qur’an has not come to add another religious group to the already existing scores of groups. The Qur’an merely exhorts mankind to be ever-cognizant about the universal vision of religion over which no religious group as such has any exclusive rights. According to the Qur’an, this vision is the vision of Abraham:

“The Jews say: “Be a Jew”. The Christians say: “Be a Christian. You will be on the right course” Say: Nay, (We follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not one of polytheists”.

According to Azad, one of the central purposes of the Qur’an is to restore this Abrahamic vision. On the basis of this vision, the Qur’an wants to unite the people of the book and by implication the entire mankind. The basic purpose of religion is spiritual transformation of man. What is called Shari’ah or law is instrumentally important for accomplishing such a
spiritual transformation. For Azad, Shari’ah or law is significant in its own way. However, the eternal and universal vision of religion or Din has priority over legal injunctions or practices of worship and rituals etc.

The greatest feature of the latest religion i.e. Islam does not consist in any special structure of Shariah but in its proclamation of the fundamental truth that God is one and mankind is one community. The Qur'an accepts all the scriptures. It specifically instructs its believers not to make any distinction between various prophets. This religious pluralism is, in fact, a revolutionary breakthrough in the annals of human history.

Azad’s religious catholicity and pluralistic outlook make him a modern mind of high order. His belief in the essential unity of all religions has great ethical and political implications. All people who sincerely believe in one single Supreme God and act righteously, are entitled to salvation. In view of this religious horizontalism, Azad did not opt for Hindu-Muslim separatism during the decades of his participation in the Indian Freedom Struggle. He did not deem religion to be the basis of nationality. However, he did not succeed in persuading his co-religionists to fall in line with his ideology of Indian nationalism. Nevertheless, despite overwhelming pressures, he stood for Hindu-Muslim unity. All the horrors of Partition left him unshaken in his commitment to humanist and modernist beliefs and values. His approach transcended the barriers of caste, creed and colour. The imperatives of contemporary world society seem to be vindicating the religious modernism of Azad.
Monotheism and Universalism

According to Azad, the Qur’anic argument is that all human beings are equal because this human form is given to all by God. It is the true element which firmly joints us in a community. But, because of ignorance, people divided themselves in the name of race, community, customs, nation, religion, culture etc. On such bases human beings distanced and kept themselves isolated from each other. In this situation, except God there is nothing which can bring all human beings together again and remove ignorance and discrimination. Azad thus said in his *Tarjuman al-Qur’an*

“The Qur’an says that there is, and that is the thought of one common God for one and all. However numerous the groups into which you have divided yourselves, you cannot divide God into as many pieces. The One God of all ever remains one, and is one. You have all to bow at His threshold. Despite your internal differences, you are all linked into but one chain. Whatever your so-called race, your homeland, your nationality, and whatever your circumstances in life or sphere of activity, if only you all resolve to serve but one God, all these differences will lose their sting. Your hearts will be united. You will begin to feel that the entire globe is your home and that all mankind is but one people, and that you all form but a single family – ‘Ayal Allah, the ‘family of God”.

According to Azad, it is clear that the distinctions are man-made. In the eyes of God all human beings are one. Regardless of their community or nation, if all human beings resolve their internal differences and serve to the God, all differences will be banished. We will all feel that entire world is our home and entire humanity is same. Once the hearts are united the existence of differences will completely vanish from this world.
Azad says that Qur'an does not allow any sectarianism in religion. It always opposed the prejudices of groups. It always tried to bring all mankind in one way of life, the way to God or the way of truth. *Din* of God is not new invention. *Din* existed throughout the time. The way to God is that to which all prophets invited all human beings. According to Azad,

"There is nothing in the Qur'an on which so great a stress is laid as on this view of life. It is repeatedly made clear that it does not favour any exclusive group religion. On the other hand, it asserts that it has come to put an end to all groupism and bring all mankind to one path of life, the path of truth, which knows no newness, but by its very nature has had to remain the same throughout the course of time, the path to which all prophets have invited mankind".  

Azad says that religion has been one and same everywhere. The message of all prophets was same. They preached belief in one supreme God and advised human beings to live righteously. The prophets of all times have emphasized oneness of God. He quotes the following verses of Qur'an to prove his point:

"To you (the Prophet of Islam) hath he prescribed the faith which He commended unto Noah, and which we have revealed to thee, and which we commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: "Observe this faith, and be not divided into sects therein".  

Azad says that the above verse of Qur'an says that the aim of the Islam is to convey the message of God to all mankind through prophets (messengers of God). Qur'an says:
“Verily we have revealed to thee as we revealed to Noah and the prophets after Him, and as revealed to Abraham, and Ismail, Issac and Jacob and tribes, and Jesus, and Job and Jonah, Aaron and Solomon; and to David gave we Psalms.”  

“Of some apostles we have told thee before: of other apostles we have not told thee.”

“O ye apostles: Truly this your religion is the one religion, and I am your lord.”

Azad says that in Islam the basic principle of Qur’an is to recognize all prophets. All the prophets taught the same way, and all paths are shown by them are one and same. According to him,

“The first doctrinal principle of the Qur’an is to recognize the founders of all religions and endorse their teaching which at the basis was but one and the same, and to conform to the way shown by them.”

Azad says that God has created us as human beings and firmly joined us into one single human community. It is man who divided himself into so-called racial groups or sects. All such distinctions are man-made.

“The Qur’an calls upon everyone who cares to follow the way laid down by God to accept without discrimination all the prophets and all the scriptures revealed to them and the basic truth which they all contain, and to accept it wherever found in whatever language it is expressed”.

Azad says that Qur’an disapproves of the tendency of regarding one prophet as superior to other, or accepting one prophet and rejecting another. He says that Qur’an is the message of God to men through the prophets who appeared from time to time. So no one is superior over others.

“We make no difference between them in above verse recurs in several other places in the Qur’an just to mark its disapproval of the tendency of regarding one prophet as
superior to another, or of accepting one prophet and
rejecting another, as the bearer of truth”.25

Further Azad says that,

“When the Qur’an states that Al-Islam or the path of
acquiescence, or obedience or of conformance to the way of
God is the only religion favoured of God and was the
religion which every prophets preached, every other way or
religion is bound to be groupism of some sort and not the
universal way of God”.

Azad supports this with the help of following Qur’anic verse:

“And whoso seeketh as religion other than the way of
surrender (Al-Islam), it will not be accepted, and he will be
a loser in hereafter (in consequence)”.27

Hence, according to Azad, the religion of two people, the Jews and
Christians, was the same, and the Old Testament was the common heritage
of both. Their division into two groups led to mutual conflict and hatred.
One condemned the other and denied salvation to it.

According to Azad, Islam proclaimed the unity of all religions. He
further says that the difference in legal codes, ceremonials, rituals, practices
and the form of worship observed in different religions should not make us
oblivious to the unity of all religions. The difference of legal norms, rituals,
practices and the form of worship do not eliminate their essential oneness.
Various religions differ in methods, norms and criteria. These differences
are not difference in Din. Azad quotes the following verse of Qur’an in this
regard:
“To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you all of one pattern, but He would test you by what He hath given to each. Be emulous, then, in good deeds”.28

Azad says the *Hidayat* (guidance) is for everyone. It is not for any particular community or region or race. According to him,

“The Jew claimed that revelation was exclusive to them and that to no one else was vouchsafed this privilege. They thought that no one else possessed the truth and that, therefore, none else was favoured by God”.29

Azad quotes the following verse of Qur’an in this context:

“Others of the people of the book say: “And believe in those only who follow your religion” (But you) say: “True guidance is guidance from God” – that to others may be imparted the like of what hath been imparted to you will they wrangle that with you in the presence of that Lord? Say: “Plenteous gift are in the hands of God. He imparteth them unto whom He will, and God is bounteous wise”.30

He says that the way of God has been one and same everywhere. It cannot differ from itself in any circumstance. It has addressed itself to humanity with one and the same message.

“According to Azad, *Al-Huda*, is the universal guidance of Divine Revelation vouchsafed to one and all from the beginning without distinction. It (Qur’an) says that even as instincts, sense and reason are provided to man without distinction of race or colour or circumstances, the directive force of divine guidance is meant to afford guidance to every one without distinction of race or colour or circumstances, and has to be distinguished from all other forms of so called guidances which have become exclusive preserves of particular communities and have divided mankind into a variety of religious groups. It gives to this universal guidance of Revelation the name of Al-Din, or the religion, or the way of life
appropriate to nature and the function of man, or Islam”.

Azad says the history has forgotten this important lesson of Qur’an that the aim of religion is to unite the mankind and not divide it. Every prophet or founder of religion tries to unite mankind. Azad believes

“that there has been no founder of religion who has not emphasized the observance of a single religion by all mankind and has not discouraged differences therein. The aim of everyone of them was to gather those who stood divided. It was never meant to keep them isolated from each other. The primary purpose was to see that all mankind served but one God and lived together in mutual love and affection”.

“And truly this your religion is one religion; and I am your Lord”.

According to Azad, Islam addresses the entire humanity. It is not for any one particular race or community but for all. He says:

“The way of God has been one and the same everywhere. It cannot differ from itself in any circumstance. It has therefore addressed itself to humanity in one and the same fashion. The Qur’an says that the way of the prophets or of those who delivered the divine message, whatever the time or clime they belonged to, was therefore one and the same, and that one and all preached but one and the same universal law of goodness in life. And what then is this law? It is the law of “belief and righteous living, of belief in one supreme Lord of the universe and of righteous living in accordance with that belief”. Any religion other than this or conflicting with it is not religion in the strict sense of the term”.

As Qur’an says:

“And to every people have we sent an apostle
Saying: Serve God and turn away from
Taghut (Forces for mischief and disorder)”.
“No apostle have we sent before thee to whom we did not reveal: “Verily there is no God beside Me: Therefore serve Me”.

Azad says that the message of God was delivered by many prophets but message was one and same. It was not for a particular community or people. It is for entire humanity. The message of God has universal application. It is for humanity rather than for any special place or nation. According to him,

“The message of these prophets was one and the same and was not meant for any particular clime or country or people. It had a universal application for mankind as a whole wherever they lived. The Qur’an states that there is no corner of the world occupied by man where this universal message was not delivered”.

He quotes the following verses of Qur’an:

“Nor hath there been a people unvisited by a warner”.  
“Assuredly, Thou (O Prophet) art a warner. And every people hath had it guide”. 
“And every people hath had its apostle. And when their apostle came, a rightful decision took place between them and they were not wronged”.

Deviation, Distortion and Return

According to Azad, no teaching can acquire the reputation of greatness, so long as the personality of the teacher does not itself display the quality of greatness. But there are limits to greatness of personality. It is the herd that may have stumbled, because they could not draw the boundary line for it. The result was that the founder of a religion or of a school of philosophy was hailed sometimes as an Avatar, sometimes as the son of
God, and sometimes as the partner of God, and where this was not possible, he was, at any rate, offered the honour and devotion usually offered to God. The Jews for instance, although they did not take to image worship, they did erect statues over the remains of their prophets and endowed them with a holiness such as was associated with places of worship. There was absolutely no room for image worship in the teaching of Buddha. In fact, his last testament which has reached us was: “see that you do not worship my ashes. If you do, the path of salvation will be closed for you”. But what his followers have actually done is all before us. They not only erected places of worship over Buddha’s ashes and relics but, as the means for propagation of his religion, they spread images of him throughout the world. The fact is that a larger number of images of Buddha exist today in the world than of any other personality or deity. Likewise, as we know, the real teaching of Christianity concentrated on the unity of God; but within one hundred years of its advent, Christ himself was raised to the position of God.

Azad emphasizes that the religion revealed by God was but one for all mankind, and that therefore every deviation from this was a clear aberration. According to him, the basic teaching of the Qur’an is that Islam or *Al-Deen-al Islam* is the name of that fundamental spirit of religion which had gradually been engulfed by forces of history and where reality had been dimmed in the mist of human superstition and man’s habit of myth making.

Azad says that “all religions as originally delivered are true” but this point has been forgotten by the followers of all religions. Each one claims
that religions of others are false. This element of falsehood in religion comes from the human mind because humanity divided himself into separate groups in the name of language, nation and community. Azad emphasized that

"the real religion was direct worship of one God, without any mediating agency, and that this was the main teaching of all prophets, and that every belief and practice which conflicted with it was therefore a deviation from it and indeed a denial of it".\textsuperscript{41}

The Qur’an thus says:

"And they say none but Jews or Christians shall enter Paradise"; This is their wish. Say: “Give your proofs if ye speak the truth”. But they who set their face with resignation Godward, and do what is right - their reward is with their Lord; no fear shall come on them, neither shall they grieve".\textsuperscript{42}

Azad believed in essential unity of religions. He always speaks in the light of Qur’anic teachings. He tried to unite all human beings on the basis of common principle that is unity of God. In other words, we can say that Azad reanimates the message of the Prophet Mohammad himself.

“Azad’s faith in the essential unity of religions is but the product of that intellectual lethargy which cannot appreciate real difference. He speaks in the Qur’anic language and invites all mankind to unite on the basis of that common principle without which a higher religion is inconceivable i.e. the unity of God. In other words, Azad revives the real message of the prophet Mohammad himself. But at this place there is a parting of ways between him and so-called revivalists. The revivalist tries to revive not only the message but also makes a hopeless attempt to revive the institutions which were once linked up with the message or the particular expressions of the
message at a historical time and which lose the validity
with the passage of time." 43

Azad gave the example of Prophet Jacob who was given \textit{Din} of
God. He was born several centuries before Jesus. So it is clear that \textit{Din} of
God was not the preserve of any group like Judaism or Christianity. \textit{Din} of
God existed before the contrivance of any religious group. Qur'an says
that the way of worship to God and righteous living is the message of
original \textit{Din}.

"The Prophet Jacob from his death bed enjoined on his
children that they should remain attached to the \textit{Din} of
God that he had himself followed. What was the \textit{Din}
that he meant here? It was certainly not Judaism or
Christianity or any groupism, for they all arose after him
in the name of Moses and Jesus who were born several
centuries after Jacob. So it must be clear to you that
there prevailed long before the rise of your newly
devised groupisms, a path of salvation much higher than
yours, the \textit{Din} meant for all mankind, says the Qur'an,
the way of devotion to God and of righteous living." 44

In this regard, Azad quoted this Qur'anic verse :

"Or were you witnesses when death visited Jacob, when
he said to his son: "What will you serve after me?" They
said: "We shall serve thy God and the God of thy
fathers, Abraham and Ismail and Isaac, one God only,
and to Him do we submit". 45

But the advice was set aside and mankind divided itself into rival
groups, each obsessed with the thought that it was superior to every other.

Azad says that Qur'an does not negate the faith of others but
removes the superiority over others' faiths. Qur'an emphasizes the unity of
human being and brotherhood which is based on the unity of God. Qur'an
believes in the unity of religion. That means it rejects every form of groupism which gives emphasis on one’s own religion as the only true one. According to him,

"Qur’an does not cancel the validity of the earlier faiths but only removes the voils of racial and group prejudices and emphasizes the unity and brotherhood of man based on the unity of God. The Qur’an was opposed to groupism or sectarianism. It proclaimed the unity of religion. If this was conceded to, it would have knocked the bottom out of every form of groupism which emphasized that truth lay with one’s own group and with no other".46

Again Azad said that the Qur’an also says that there is no need of any institution or any mediator for true devotion to God. But the followers ignored this true spirit of religion and developed different institutions in the name of devotion to God. In this way, they harmed the real essence of religion that is direct devotion to God. The mankind, in other words, deviated from original Din.

"The Qur’an asserted that religion lay in direct devotion to God without any intermediary agency. But the followers of the other faiths had in one form or another developed the institution of idolatry in the name of devotion to God. They did profess that true devotion to God was direct, needing no mediating agency, but they would not give up the practice which they had inherited from their forbears and to which they were deeply attached".47

That is why, the Qur’an repeatedly calls upon all those who have responded to its message not to divide themselves into sects or return to the darkness from which the Qur’an had taken them out. It points out that it has brought those who were fighting each other to path of devotion to God and
has welded them into a brotherhood. It has lined up in a single file those who once hated each other – the Jews, the Christians, the Magians, and Sabaeans, who are all now recognize together the founders of the faiths which they severally professed.

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of God, and do not separate. And remember God’s favour unto you: how ye were enemies and He united your hearts so that ye become as brothers by His grace; and (how) ye were upon the brink of an abyss of fire, and He did save you from it. Thus God maketh clear His revelations unto you, that haply ye may be guided”.

“And be ye not as those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them. For such, there is an awful doom”.

“And he commandeth you, (saying): “This is My straight path; so follow it”. Follow not other ways, lest ye be parted from His way. This path He ordained for you, that ye may ward off (evil)”.

Azad says that Jews believe that hell fire would not touch them if their people were to go into hell. He believed that purgatory of hell is necessary as a way to purify the people from sin.

“The Jews went so far as even to think that hell fire would never touch them. They thought that even if any one from among them was thrown into hell, it would be done not by way of punishment but only to clean the stain of his sin, before he is received in the heaven. The Qur’an refers to this attitude over and over again, and asks the Jews to state how they did know that every member of their group was exempt from meeting in the life hereafter the consequences of his action in this, or where from had they got their title to salvation”.

Azad says that Qur’an declares that those who do good work with good intention, God rewards them and those who do evil deed God will
punish them. So the reward and punishment will be given by God on the basis of man’s own actions and this reward and punishment is not only for Muslim or any particular race. It is for all.

“The Qur’an announces that he who does good, good is his reward: and he who does evil, evil is his reward. Poison brings death whether the person taking it is a Jew or a non-Jew; and milk promotes health whosoever takes it. Likewise, in the sphere of inward life, every action produces a like effect, this law of life does not alter for any particular race or person, says the Qur’an”.

Islam has made faith and deed the sole means of salvation, and not affiliation to any particular group.

Unity and Plurality of Religions

According to Azad, Qur’an makes it clear that a man can attain salvation through righteous living. Salvation cannot be attained by performing ceremonies or rituals. A man is not purified by water. There is only one way to purify the self - by the true worship and doing good action. In other words, we can say that through righteous living and devoting himself to service to mankind, man can attain salvation. Azad says:

“The Qur’an ... points out that salvation cannot be gained by performing a mere ritual and that on the other hand salvation comes through righteous living. One must be baptized not by mere water but by the touch of God or by putting on the ‘colour of God’ over his thought and action”.

Similarly, the same idea is repeated over and over again in the second chapter of the Qur’an. Din, the way of God, is the law of action fixed
for man. Man but receives what he earns. That is the law, the *Din*, the path of salvation. One does not gain salvation on the strength merely of belonging to an illustrious or ancient race or tribe or claiming a number of prophets as born among one's people.

“They were a people who have passed away, and for them is what they earned, and for you what you earn”.54

Salvation attained through worship to God and righteous living is the reward of God to man. Salvation is not fixed for any religious group or community. It also does not come through certain customs and ceremonies. The followers of the religions could not understand this principle and deviated from original truth. The truth is that God opened the door of salvation for every human being.

“The Qur’anic assertion was that salvation was the result of devotion to God and righteous living and did not rest on any racial or group affiliation or on the observance of any custom, ritual or ceremonial. The acceptance of this principle would have opened the door of salvation for every human being and this the followers of the faiths of that time would not concede” 55

Azad says the purpose of the *Din* as divinely specified was to set mankind on the path of devotion to God and of righteous living. He says that every human thought or action possesses a certain peculiarity and must produce like result. A good result proceeds from a good thought or a good deed, and an evil results from an evil thought or an evil deed. But mankind disregarded this fact of life. They divided themselves into races,
communities, countries, and came to observe customs and manners of diverse character. The result was that man did not lay stress on faith and action as the basis of salvation as much as one's group interest that differed from the interests of another group. That came to be the test of truth in religion and the determining factor for salvation. Exclusivism came then into vogue everywhere denying salvation to all except those who belonged to one's own group. In fact, hatred of another religion replaced devotion to God and righteous living.

*Din* is not fixed for any group. It is for all mankind, for all those who believe in God and do good deeds, whether he is a Christian or Jew or of any other community. But Jews and Christians invented a code of conduct exclusive to themselves. The Jews draw a line that is called Judaism and those who come in this circle are believed to be suitable for salvation. The same is the case with Christianity.

"*Din* or the real religion was thus devotion to God and righteous living. It was not a name for any group formation. Whatever the race or community or country one belonged to, if only he believed in God and did righteous deeds, he was a follower of the *Din* of God, and salvation was his reward. But he was the Jews and Christians devised a code of conduct exclusive to themselves. The Jews drew a circle around them and called it Judaism, and come to hold that he who was within that circle was fitted for salvation, and he who was outside of it was doomed. Likewise, the Christian drew a circle round them and called it Christianity and observed a like attitude in respect of themselves and others. The concept of faith and righteous living was thus relegated to the background. One might be an
ardent devotee to God and practise intensely righteous living, but if he happened to be outside of the circle of Judaism or of Christianity, no Jew or Christian would regard him as the ‘rightly guided’. On the other hand, one might indeed be a wicked person, salvation was his, if only he was regarded as a regular member of their group. With them the path of belief in God and righteous living was not the path of true guidance or Hidayat”.

Further, Azad says:

“The Qur’an here addresses very straight questions to the Jews and Christians. Your group formation cannot be traced beyond the Torah and the Evangel, the Old and the New Testaments, and group formation are based on them only. If such is the fact of history, were there or were there not before them any people who followed any revealed path of guidance? If there were any what was the way they followed? What was the way which the succession of your own patriarchs and prophets lived up to? What was the religion or the way which Abrahm himself bequeathed or passed to his own son and grandsons?”

Qur’an asks the question very intensively to the Jews and Christians why your group formations are limited and why they cannot go beyond the Old and the New Testament. If it is a true fact of history of your religion, what happened before the advent of your religion; whether or not people followed any path of guidance or Hidayat? The question arises what was the way people followed? And what was the way that was followed by Abrahm himself and followed by his son and grandson. The answer of this question is obviously that the Din of God existed when God created world.

“At the time of the advent of the Qur’an, the religious consciousness of the different peoples of the world had not overstepped the group stage. Even as mankind was divided on the economic and social basis, into races, tribes and families, so was it divided on the religious
basis as well, each religious group claiming that its own religious variation was the true religion and that salvation was only for those who professed it”.

Azad says that the conflict between different religions existed earlier too but it had not crossed beyond the group stage. People were divided on the economic, social, national and tribal lines. The main cause of the isolation of people of world was that each one claimed his own religion was the only true religion that had exclusive potential to provide salvation. It is clear that they drew a circle around themselves keeping out those who go outside of it. Such outsiders could not get attain salvation. According to Azad,

“The criterion of truth was the character of the ceremonial and of the customs and manners which the followers of a religion observed, such as the form of worship, the ceremonial attendant on sacrifices, the type of food permitted or prohibited, and the outward mode of dress and manner of living”.

Since the outer form of living with each religious group was different from that of every other, the followers of each group decried, on that account, the religion of every other as false. But the Qur’an came forward to re-present to the world at large the universal truth sponsored by every religion.

It was stated that all religions were divinely revealed and upheld but one truth enjoining belief in One True God and righteous living in consonance with that belief. But it also made it clear that their followers had deviated from that truth and needed to be brought back to it. It therefore set its face against every form of sectarianism that had arisen in consequence.
It advanced the view that even as the laws of Nature regulated and sustained the machinery of the universe, even so there was a spiritual law of life which regulated and governed the life of man, and that this law was one and the same for every one. The greatest error into which mankind had fallen was to forget and disregard this spiritual law of life and to divide mankind into rival camps.

The primary aim of religion was to keep mankind united and never to promote disunity. The greatest tragedy of man was that he turned an instrument of unity into a weapon of disunity.

"The Qur'an came to distinguish religion from its outward observance. The former it called Din and the latter Shar'a and Minhaj. Din was but one and the same everywhere and at all times and was vouchsafed to one and all without discrimination. It respect of the outward observance of Din, there was variation and this was inevitable. It varied from time to time and from people to people, as seemed pertinent to every situation. Variations of this nature could not alter the character of Din or the basis of religion. That was the truth which the Qur'an aimed to emphasize. Its complaint was that din had been neglected and the variation in Shar'a and Minhaj or the outward form of observance idealized and made the basis of mutual differences among mankind." 60

Qur'an announced in very clear terms that its call was but to proclaim that all religions were true and that their followers had disregarded the truth which they embodied. Should they return to this forgotten truth, the task of the Qur'an was fulfilled. The act will be regarded as indeed the acceptance of the Qur'an. The truth common to all of them was but what it calls Al-Din or Al-Islam.
Religious differences have given rise to mutual hatred and hostility. How are we to eradicate this evil? The way out is not just to admit the contention of every group that their religion is true. That by itself will not end the strife, for the contention in each case is not merely that one's own religion is true but that every other religion is false. Therefore if every contention is to be admitted, the result will be that we shall have to submit that every religion is both true and false, and that will be an untenable position. If that were done, we shall have to scrape off all religions. If at all there is to be a way out, it is the way the Qur'an suggests, and it is simply this. Regard all religions as originally delivered as true. Point out that the basis common to them all, viz., the *Din*, has been neglected paving the way to the rise of group religions. It is now for the followers of each group to retrace their steps and return to the original basic teaching of each religion, the *Din* common to all. If that were done, says the Qur'an, all disputes will be set at rest, and every one will begin to see that the way of each religion is but one and the same viz., the one *Din* or way meant for all mankind, and to which the Qur'an gives the name of Al-Islam or the way of peace, translated literally, or of devotion to God and righteous living.

All links of human unity have been snapped by man himself. The entire mankind was but one people; but it has divided itself into several races. It was but one community, but it has converted itself into numerous communities. All had but one home, but they have carved out for themselves
countless homes. All belonged to but one order, but they have divided themselves into diverse classes – rich and poor, high and low, and so on. In such a situation, what link may be forged to set aside these distinctions and bring all mankind together once again? The Qur’an says that such a link is possible to forge and that is a return to devotion to one God. That is the only way to restore the forsaken sense of humanity to mankind and revive the idea that for all of us there is but one Providence, and that we should all in unity bow our heads at His threshold only, and develop a feeling of unity and solidarity such as shall overcome and dispel from our midst all differences that have arisen in the course of history.

From this it is clear that all those forces which cause divisions among mankind are not on straight path: they are factors for disintegration. The path that lies away from these, the Sirat al-Mustaqim or the straight path, is the only path which aims to bring together the dispersed humanity and restore unity to them.

In short, the follower of the Qur’an is one who trades the straight path, the path not chalked out for any particular group or race or community, but the universal path of God’s truth which has found expression everywhere and at all times and which transcends all geographical and national boundaries.
Concept of God in Different Religions

When the Qur'an was delivered, there were five national groups into which mankind divided himself. The Chinese, the Indian, the Magian, the Judaic and the Christian. The Qur'an addresses the last two directly while its appeal to other organized and unorganized religions is only indirect. The basic message of the Qur'an is that Allah sent His messengers to different parts and to different people of world to teach them about the worship of one single Supreme God. Even the older tribal pagan societies were not unaware of this simple message of monotheism.

According to Azad, all the semitic and non-semitic tribes in West Asia, Africa, Assyrians, Sumerians etc. believed in oneness of God.

"...a study of Semitic groups of languages – Hebrew, Syriac, Aramic, Chaldean, Himyarita and Arabic – discloses that a special style of word formation and of sound had been in vogue among the Semitic peoples to denote the Supreme Being. The alphabets A, L and H combined in varied forms constitute the term by which this supreme Being was to be styled. The Chaldean and Syriac term ‘Ilahia’, the Hebrew ‘Ilaha’ and the Arabic ‘Ilah’ are of this category. It is the Ilah in Arabic which assumed the form Allah and was applied exclusively to the creator of the Universe”.

Among the non-semitic organized religions, Hinduism is most ancient and has had a very complicated history vis-à-vis its concept of God. Broadly, it has two parts: one is its philosophy of absolute unity of God and other is religion that is so manifestly polytheistic.
According to Azad, "Hindu philosophy presents such deep and intricate problem of spiritual contemplation and raises the human mind to such great heights that we scarcely find parallel for it in the religious ideology of ancient peoples. But the religion as practiced gave to human ingenuity a free hand to create an endless variety of demigods, so much so, that every stone becomes a god, and every tree claimed godhead, and every object turned into an object of worship".62

So the philosophy of Hinduism has great heights while the religion has very low depths of mind. Azad emphasized the concept of Unity of God as found in Rigveda.

"The idea of one God was silently gathering strength, so much so, that the number of demi-gods began gradually to dwindle down. These were assigned to three different spheres – earth, air and sky. This arrangement later on gave rise to the concept of a god of gods, the concept known as Henotheism. This concept, in its turn, assumed a more definite form, the form of an all-pervasive being called sometimes Varuna, sometimes Indra, and sometimes Agni. Finally the idea of a Supreme Creator of all the universe emerges under the name of Prajapati, or Visvakarman".63

Azad says that in the early slokas of Rig Veda we find the concept of nature-worship but the concept of one God is also rising side by side. The monotheistic idea is particularly evident in the slokas of 10th Mandala of Rigveda. There we can see it clearly that the concept of polytheism was changed into monotheism. At last, it gets fully recognized in its formula of "Ekam Sat", which means that One God alone is the reality and the truth. The creator is one though we notice multiplicity in His existence because of the multiplicity of nature.
Azad draws attention to the pantheistic concept of Ultimate Reality in Hinduism. In this belief, the God cannot be defined or be known except in the form of neti-neti (not this, not this). In other words, description is possible only through the negative attributes of God. The God cannot be defined through positive attributes. That means while it is possible to speak of what God is not, it is not possible to speak about what God is.

But though this is general position of Hinduism in Upanisads, there is also found attribution of positive qualities to Brahman in the form of Iswara. Azad says:

“It was only when the Upanisads gave Brahma the form of Iswara and thus made the Absolute put on the veil of finitude, it becomes possible to attribute to Him qualities as reason or fancy suggested. It was in this way that the pantheistic concept of God furnished a personality endowed with attributes (Saguna)”.

Azad says that in this aspect of Hinduism, God is one and without parallel. None is like Him. He is Creator. He is the Protector. He is the Destroyer. He is above all the limitation of space and time. He is eternal.

“He is Light, Perfection, Beauty, the Absolute, Pure, the Almighty, the Most Merciful and the Most Loving, and the object of true love and affection”.

Apart from mainstream Hinduism, Buddhism, too, had a very peculiar approach towards God. For while it is generally believed that Buddha did not believe in God, it is also well known that he did not deny God’s existence either. Many therefore point out that the silence of Buddha does not mean the negation by him of God. According to Azad, actually Buddha wanted to negate the attributes of God. Negation of attributes of God means
that human beings are helpless to define or understand God. Azad interprets Buddha’s silence about God in another way also. He says that Buddha’s silence about the God was because of wide practice of idol worship by the people in the country. Lastly, it is also a fact that the followers of Buddha made the sage himself into a God whom they worship as devotedly as any other religious believer.

“It is generally believed that Buddhism does not inculcate a belief in God. But strange as it may appear, its very followers, in due course, installed Buddha himself in the position of God, and devised a system of devotion to his image so intensive that we scarcely find for it a parallel in the annals of image worship”.

Azad says that Buddha rejected the worship of images. He emphasized that man cannot attain salvation through worshipping gods. Salvation can be gained only through knowledge or good action. The rejection of attributes and images of God by Buddha is the rejection of Brahmanic religion.

Coming to Semitic religions, Azad says that the attributes of God Jews emphasized were His power and majesty.

“The Judaic concept of God vacillated between the anthropomorphic and the transcendental. The element of terror was dominant in Him, as also that of vengeance. The repeated personification of God giving an entirely human touch to His form of address, the intensity of anger and revengefulness displayed by Him, and His primitive behaviour are the most common attributes with which He is endowed in the old Testament”.

In Judaism, further, the relation between God and man are like the relation between husband and wife. The husband could ignore certain
mistakes of his wife and would forgive her, but if she loves any other person she cannot be forgiven. Same is the position of God in Judaism with regard to His chosen community i.e. the Jews. Azad says:

“He regarded the family of Israel as His favourite wife. Since the entire race was given this honoured position, any infidelity on her part was naturally very galling to Him. It was up to Him to deal out condign punishment whenever she showed signs of unfaithfulness. In fact, one of the Ten Commandments runs: “thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image or a likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under earth”.”

“Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I am the Lord, thy God. I am a jealous God visiting the inequity of the father upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”.

As against Judaism, Christianity laid emphasis on love and compassion as the chief attributes of God. In this religion, God appeared like a father full of love for His children. Love, mercy and forgiveness are the message of Christianity.

According to Azad, “Christianity, with its message of love of God and man on the one hand and the concepts of trinity, atonement and image worship on the other, presented the spectacle of a form of monotheistic polytheism.”

In contrast to Judaism and Christianity where God was conceived in human form, Azad says that Qur’anic concept of transcendental God is more rational and refined. Before the advent of Qur’an, man had not risen to be uncomfortable with divine anthropomorphism. In Judaism the attributes of God are intensely human. Christianity also emphasizes the universal mercy
of God being in the nature of relationship of father with his son. But when we look at the Qur’anic concept, we find it to be entirely free from any anthropomorphic distortion. Here Azad quotes the following Qur’anic verse:

“Nought is there like Him”.  
“No vision taketh Him in, 
but He taketh in all vision”.  
“Say : he is God, the One only: 
God, on whom all depend: 
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; 
And there is none like Him”.

According to Azad, “when the Qur’an was delivered, the element of terror predominated in the Judaic concept of God. The Magian concept presented the forces of light and darknesses as two distinct entities to be equally venerated. Christianity no doubt emphasized love and kindness, but the significance of recompense for action was relegated to the background. Likewise, the followers of Buddhism, too, laid stress on love and kindness, but justice did not receive proper recognition”.

It could therefore be said that among the various religions of the world only Islam restores the true balance between mercy and justice of God.

“The Qur’an afforded a concept of mercy and beauty which, on the one hand, allowed no room for terror and, on the other hand, gave adequate recognition to the law of requital in human action. It rested recompense on justice”.

Qur’an expressed it in following words:

“Say : Call upon God (Allah) or call upon the God of Mercy (Al Rahman) by whichever ye will invoke Him: he hath most excellent and most beautiful names”.  

Azad says that the Qur’anic concept of God is perfect and definite. If God is unique in His essence, He must be unique in his attributes, too.

Azad agrees that compared to many other religions, Jews and Christians had a higher concept of the Supreme Being or God. But it is also a fact that the Jews believed that God was like the gods of other religions. He was an absolute dictator. If He was happy, He would confer blessing on Israel. But if He was angry, He would punish them and bring ruination upon them. The Christian belief was also very crude. Through the doctrine of original sin the entire humanity became sinner because of the sin of Adam. It was to atone for this original sin that Jesus allowed himself to be hanged on the cross.

“Among the Jews and the Christians, the concept of Deity had, no doubt, been raised a little higher. But the essential character of the earlier common belief still clung to them. The Jews believed the God was, even like the deities of others, an absolute dictator. If He was pleased with them, He would style Himself as the God of Israel; if displeased, He would wreak His vengeance and because of their ruination. The concept of the Christians was no better. They believed that because of the original sin of Adam, his entire progeny or mankind had become an object of divine displeasure and that consequently Christ had to atone for this original sin through his own crucifixion and effect the redemption of man”.

Azad says that the Qur’an takes up this problem of reward and punishment in a different light. Every action has reward or punishment. The result of the good action is rewarded. It means the reward of good action is the favour of God. In the same manner the result of bad action is punishment which means the disfavour of God. There is nothing irrational or absolute about the reward and punishment. Qur’an says that reward designates haven.
This means the comforts of heaven are for those who do good action. The punishment designates hell, which means those who do evil action will go to the hell for those actions.

Every thought, feeling or action has its inevitable reaction. Qur'an says that everything in the phenomenal world or in the inner life of man produces a result which is peculiar to it. For example, the nature of fire is to burn and the nature of water is to produce coolness. In the same manner, every type of human action produces a result peculiar to it. The Qur'an calls it recompense, requittal, or justice.

“Deem they whose earnings are only evil, that we will deal with them as with those who believe and work righteousness, so that their lives and deaths shall be alike... In all truth hath God created the heavens and the earth, that he may reward every one as he shall have wrought, and they shall not be wronged”.

Azad says that it is significant that word ‘reward’ used for the good action and punishment for evil action is called in Qur’an as Kasb or “earnings”. Man earns his reward by doing good action or earns punishment by doing evil action.

“God will not burden any soul beyond its power. It shall enjoy the good acquired, and shall bear the evil to acquire which it hath laboured”.

Azad further says that all religions invite mankind to do good action and keep away from evil. Consequently, good action provides happiness and salvation to man.

“He who doth right – it is for himself; and he who doth evil – it is for himself: and thy Lord will not deal unfairly with His servant”.
Qur'anic eschatology therefore strikes a balance in the attributes of God. It emphasizes both the mercy of God (*rahmat*) as well as the justice God (*a'dl*). Justice or *adl* is an Arabic word that means 'to make even'. It is also used in the sense of 'scale' which measure both parties as equal. Justice introduces balance in life. According to Azad, this principle brings equality and beauty in the affairs of everyday life.

"The principle of justice introduces therein the element of balance or beauty by eliminating every ugliness lurking therein. For, if one should look deeply into this aspect of life, it will be realized that it is the force of justice that is responsible for whatever order or beauty there is in life".81

**Concept of Jihad**

The most controversial issue in any discussion of Islam is its conception of jihad. It is generally interpreted as holy war. In Islamic tradition jihad does not mean holy war. It is wrongly associated with the idea of holy war against the unbelievers.

The word jihad in Arabic is used with a wider meaning in Qur'an and Hadith. It is derived from the root 'jhd' which means 'to strive' or 'to exert oneself'. Jihad is then to exert in the way of doing what is good and avoiding what is evil. As Qur'an says,

"To those who perform Jihad for us, we shall certainly guide them in our ways, and God surely is with the doers of good". 82

Azad gave the wider ethical meaning of jihad to make a forceful case for fighting injustice. According to Azad, an ethical concept of life entailed
love, service and respect for humanity, irrespective of any religion or racial differences.

Qur’an enjoined Muslims to practice *amr bil ma’ruf wa nahi anal munkur*, i.e. commanding the good and prohibiting the wrong. Jihad, then, for Azad meant,

“Commanding the good was impossible without prohibiting the wrong whose other name was *jihad if sabil allah* (jihad in the way of God)”.

Muslims are described as the best community in Qur’an because they were expected to destroy instability and injustice. They would be replaced by another more deserving community if they failed to act against the forces of disequilibrium. Muslim were enjoined to follow the middle path to establish a just and virtuous society.

“Give full measure when ye measure and weigh with a balance that is straight: that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination”.

This duty had been compromised by the confusion caused by two apparently contradictory verses of Qur’an.

“Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, they are the ones to attain felicity”.

This verse suggests that the duty is limited to a select group. But Azad takes this verse of Qur’an as incumbent on all.

“Ye are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah. If only the people of the Book had faith it were best for their among them; are some who have faith but most of them are perverted transgressors.”
Seeing no contradiction in the two verses, Azad rejected that only particular people or only the ulema can preach the good and prohibit wrong.

According to Azad, “this was a ‘dangerous error’ which had cost Muslims dearly. The obligation to preach the good and prohibit wrong was the duty of the entire community and required exertions (jihad) in understanding the Qur’anic message. By restricting it to a small group, Muslims had lost the universal vision of Islam. He attributed the primary cause for the decline of all religions to the assumption of godly authority by the religious leaders. Islam had tried avoiding any rulers who rule on the people and making the preaching of good and prohibiting of wrong binding upon all believing Muslims.

A religiously inspired ethics could not rest on belief (i’tiqad) alone but demanded proof in right actions spreading good and removing wrong. This was the essence of jihad because non-peaceful actions are needed for the sake of peace.

The concept of jihad meant that when deviation from the prescribed path assumed the form of war, the devotees of truth and keepers of tawhid (unity of creation) should also have the sword in their hands. This was jihad against external enemy. Azad identified three kinds of jihad.

1. Verbal proclamation commanding good and prohibiting wrong.
2. Giving property and goods for the cause.
3. The actual waging of war and fighting (qital).
Azad refused to restrict jihad to a spiritual struggle but disagreed with those advocated the indiscriminate killing of infidels. The idea of Muslims to murder all non-Muslims was against the letter and spirit of Qur’an.

Azad says that Islam only sanctioned the right to fight those who oppressed the weak.

“In a treatise on the Islamic conception of war, Azad amplified the difference between temporal warfare and jihad. The Qur’an referred to the human bestiality and bloodletting on display in the killing fields of Europe as harb, fitna, qital and jidal. Unlike wars in which human beings were mercilessly slaughtered and subjugated, the purpose of jihad was to establish peace, tranquility, and freedom. A means to stopping bloodshed and restoring the dignity of man, jihad was the exact opposite of war as qital, harb, or fitna. This was why the Qur’an used harb to refer to the political wars fought by the prophet against those who broke treatises or by taking compound interest acted like highway robbers. These temporal wars had nothing to do with jihad. A warrior taken by his own success cease to be a jihadi as there is no room for self-praise or arrogance in jihad fi sabil allah. The worldly conqueror wreaks havoc in the places he conquers while the true jihadi is moderate in his treatment of the vanquished and thinks only of winning God’s favor”.  

In Khilafat Conference at Agra 25th August, 1921 Azad said,

“Islam prohibited Muslims from killing their co-religionists. They were also forbidden to forge friendship with those who were killing and oppressing Muslims. The Qur’an distinguishes between two kinds of Muslims, those who fight and oppress Muslims and those who donot. Muslims were bound by their faith to fight the aggressor with all the means at their disposal and befriend those who did not fight them. It followed the Muslims should fight for the removal of the illegitimate British government in India by uniting with their countrymen”.
Azad says that the Qur’anic text has dispelled the dark clouds that had been made to hover around it and highlighted its great utility. In the Qur’anic text four aspects of it have been presented:

"Judge, therefore, aright between men and yield not to any inclination of thy own, lest it cause thee to turn aside from the way of God".  

"They but follow their fancies and indulge in their guesses".

"What thinkest thou of him who hath chosen to worship his own desires?"

"And (those who) have refrained themselves from lust (in every form)"

Thus the jihad is against the evil self. A Muslim has to resist all temptations and eradicate the evil that is in him; then alone he can move onwards in his spiritual journey.

The second phase is jihad fillah. This consists of drawing nearer to God, to love Him and to understand His ways.

"(Remember), whoso strive for Us, will We surely guide them in our Ways".

"And strive strenuously in the cause of God in a manner worthy of striving for Him".

The third phase is jihad bil-mal and the fourth phase is jihad bin-nafs.

Usually both of them go together in the Qur’anic text.

"The true believers are they who believe in God and His apostle, and thereafter falter not in their belief, and who strive with their wealth and their persons in the way of God. Such are the sincere!"

"Have faith in God and His Apostle and strive in the cause of God with your wealth and your own lives. This will be well for you if only you realize it".
Azad says that jihad is a spiritual discipline of a very high order. It is incompatible with aggression or injustice to anybody irrespective of caste and creed.

"Remember, that for the Hindus the struggle for the country's Independence is a part of patriotism. But for you it is a religious duty and a part of the crusade for Allah. He has designated you Mujahids or crusaders; the scope of Jehad or crusade includes every effort made for truth and justice".  

Jihad means to break the shackles of human oppression and bondage.

"Do not be afraid of anyone, except God, if you are a Momin".

According to Azad,

"Islam does not sanction any form of government unless it is based on freedom (azadi) and democracy (jamhooriyat). Islam has been revealed to mankind to restore the lost freedom of the human race. It has established the supremacy of haq (truth) and denied the right to any except Allah to hold sway over the human race. It has introduced the concept of equality among human beings and forbidden any differentiation on the basis of race, colour, nationality".

Azad says that Islam stood for peace. There is no absolute sanction for violence in Islam:

"There is a sanction for organized act of war if it is waged to establish justice. The foundations of non-violence were firmly grounded in the Islamic shariat".

Islam never preached to suppress one's co-religionist. Addressing the Khilafat Conference he said,

"If I recognize any work as my life work, it is this... If the Muslims of India would like to perform their best religious and Islamic duties... then they must recognise that it is obligatory for the Muslims to be together with their Hindu brethren and it is my belief that the Muslims
in India cannot perform their best duties until in conformity with the injunctions of Islam, in all honesty, they establish unity and cooperation with the Hindus”.

Views on Nationalism

Azad’s conception of nationalism is based on the idea of a community sharing a territory, history and the culture. As a political concept it refers to a collective consciousness and a notion of social order. It recognizes one group of people from another and makes it possible for a large number of them to unite to lead their lives and undertake their collective responsibilities.

The collective consciousness has three stages – (i) nationalism, (ii) patriotism, (iii) humanism or universalism. In the first nationalist stage man realizes that the boundaries of human association and areas that he had created were not actual and natural. They are only man-made. Although true relationship is only one and the entire earth is man’s native land, nationalism was a higher stage in the development of human relation and joint feelings. It is higher than the bond of family relations, and the feelings for the people of the same village and city. Nationalism of Azad composed of three major parts: swaraj, communal harmony and non-violence.

Azad, under the influence of liberalism, was not basically anti-British. He admitted that in the whole history of the country, there had been no government which developed so much regard and respect for the liberties of the people, without distinctions of their caste, creed and community. Yet he would support of the native rule as against the rule of a foreign power.
Azad says that Swaraj would not mean change of rulers but it would provide an opportunity to establish justice, liberty and equality for one and all in the country. Justice and slavery could not live together. Aim of Swaraj is “every kind of faith, every kind of culture, every mode of living was to be allowed to flourish and find its own salvation”.  

Azad’s feeling of nationalism and opposition to British rule was deeply rooted in his faith in Islam. In his book Qaul-e-Faisal, he thus wrote:

“Islam does not sanction any form of government unless it is based on freedom (azadi) and democracy (jamhuriyat). Islam has been revealed to mankind to restore the lost freedom of the human race. It has established the supremacy of and denied the right to anyone except Allah to hold sway over human race. It has introduced the concept of equality among human beings and forbidden any differentiation on the basis of race, colour or nationality”.

The second element of Azad’s nationalism is communal harmony.

According to Azad, communal harmony means active participation of all the communities in the freedom struggle. It also means the unity of people which should come through religion. Azad holds that the religious interest of every community should be well safeguarded. Love and tolerance are the basic elements of harmony. Every religion declared the truths of human brotherhood and opposed communal and racial prejudices.

Azad believed in composite nationalism. He did not encourage the brand of politics which was based on religion. Because in India there are so many religions. This multiplicity of religion would divide the people on artificial lines. He says Swaraj is not possible without communal harmony. He held that everything should be subordinated to the national unity.
Azad’s nationalism was essentially for the well being of both Hindus and Muslims. He did not want the partition of country. He believed in unity of Hindus and Muslims.

Azad used the key phrase “Umma-i-Wahida” for joint Hindu-Muslim nation. He interpreted *Umma-i-Wahida* as one nation. He holds that inspite of religious, racial and other differences India is one nation. The composite nation for Azad was not an idea. His aim was the creation of a permanent nation, which binds people irrespective of caste, colour, creed and religion. Azad believed in united nationalism with complete harmony among all human beings.

Non-violence is the third element of Azad’s nationalism. He holds that the message of Islam is peace for all mankind. It does not support war. Jihad does not imply war but patience. Its aim is to end injustice. Jihad is to command what is good and avoid what is evil?

Azad says that non-violence provided an effective strategy for the struggle for freedom, a struggle by the people of all classes. It contributed towards the enrichment of Indian nationalism.

Nationalism of Azad was not only based on the interest of the people but a wider knowledge of human affairs. He says nationalism was never chauvinistic or irrational. It was democratic and progressive. It was not dogma but rooted in patriotism.

Azad says that internationalism is not possible without nationalism. Nationalism is meant for the benefit and service of humanity as a whole.
For Azad, the spirit of nationalism implied the unity of religion as based on the unity of God and the unity of whole humanity. It means that in the multifarious diversity of mankind is hidden its unity. His ideas of the unity of religion was the basis of national integration.

Islam's destination was humanism and its goal was perfection of humanity in its evolutionary progression. Islam did not recognize the artificial affiliations of race, country, nation, colour and language. It called man to the one and only relationship of the natural bonds of brotherhood among humans. According to Azad,

"for mankind, scattered all over the world, it was necessary to be divided, it was inevitable that there be some means of introduction to make one group distinct from another. All these units were simply means of introduction; he is an African, he is an Arab, he is an Aryan, he is Mongolian. This way the groups were recognized. But there were no distinctions in this classification, nor was it a real division. There was only one real distinction, the distinction made by one's deeds and endeavours".104

Azad says that the entire mankind essentially belongs to one race and one family. In fact, there is no difference of race for all race is one race, no difference of place because God creates the whole world for all human beings. Azad quotes many Qur'anic verses which declare the unity of mankind. The verses of Qur'an reveal that the origin of all human beings is one. The differences are the result of turning away from the path of righteousness and from divine worship.

The importance of unity and brotherhood in Islam is proved by the fact that the prophet said:
"God, our Lord and the Lord of the Universe; I confess that only you are the Lord of Universe; I confess that Mohammad (peace be upon him) is no more than your slave and your messenger. God, our Lord and the Lord of the Universe; I confess that all your people are brothers, and whatever differences they may have created among themselves, you have created them as one human race".\(^{105}\)

According to Azad, there are four obstacles in the way of universal human brotherhood. They are race, country, colour and language. Humanity has historically divided into these units. Islam denies all four categories which divided humanity.

"Islam not only denies all four, it makes a clear and categorical declaration against them, leaving no room for doubts and vacillations. About 'race' it clearly states that all belongs to the same race. About 'country', it says, whether an Arabi (Arab) or an Ajmi (Persian), al inhabit the same God-created land. About 'language' and 'colour' it proclaims that they are the signs of God's wisdom and power. The climate of one place begets one colour, that of another, a different one. Different languages are spoken in different places. These dissimilarities, however, are not the basis of distinction and differences among mankind".\(^{106}\)

Moreover, Islam developed a system of conduct. It cannot coexist with distinctions of race and nation. Daily rules of conduct and prayer include items which are practical demonstration of unity. Namaz, zakat (obligatory payment of a portion of the income to the poor), Roza (fasting), Haj (pilgrimage to Mecca) are all for the generation of moral upliftment and unity. The same spirit works behind them all. Islam is the total system meant for the implementation of human brotherhood.

"The call of Islam was a call to 'humanism' and human brotherhood'; hence its bias against all prejudices that resulted from racial and national distinction".\(^{107}\)