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Lessons from South Asian Political Thought

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Lessons from South Asian Political Thought *

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India, from about the middle of the nineteenth century, had become a laboratory for testing two contrasting hypotheses. The first was that religion should be the basis of the nation and therefore inseparable from the state. The second was that religion should not be the basis of the nation, and therefore the state should be neutral towards religions. The first hypothesis underlies the political thought of such Muslim thinkers as Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903–79), and Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914–99). The second hypothesis underlies the political thought of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) and Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958). The experiments conducted to verify these hypotheses produced two major results. The first was the Partition of India along religious lines, giving rise to the formation of three sovereign states. The second was the movement of Muslim nationalism towards Islamist fundamentalism, giving rise to “the culture of jihad” (Akbar 2002: 190).¹

In the first part of this paper, I shall briefly analyze the political thought of Iqbal, Jinnah, Maududi, and Nadwi as it pertains to the relationship of religion to politics. In the second part, I shall briefly analyze the political thought of Gandhi as it pertains to the relationship of religion to politics. I shall treat Azad’s political thought as being opposed to that of Iqbal and others and as being compatible with that of Gandhi. The overall aim of this paper is to argue that under certain conditions, religion can be a solution to the problem of political violence that nationalism and fundamentalism pose, and that under certain other conditions, it can be the most powerful incentive to political violence.

Part I

The extinction of the Mughal Empire, which took place in the middle of the nineteenth century, posed serious theoretical problems for Indian Muslims. They had hitherto played the role of an imperial ruling caste. The basis of political

power was now shifting from hereditary monarchy to nation. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, signaled the beginning of this process. Claiming to represent all Indians, including Indian Muslims, its ultimate object was the attainment of self-rule in a state neutral towards all religions. The Indian Muslims now found themselves in an unaccustomed position of being just a minority in a Hindu majority political community.

Some Indian Muslim leaders felt uncertain about the validity of the modern political theory of popular self-government as applicable to them. They responded in 1906 with the formation of the Muslim League. Three basic ideas prompted this move. The first was that Indian Muslims were “a distinct community,” with vital interests that it could not share with other communities. The second was that modern popular government, were Indian Muslims to embrace it, would place them at a permanent political advantage vis-à-vis the Hindus. The third was that, according to Islamic political theory, a state based on composite nationalism could not be the right state for Indian Muslims.

Muhammad Iqbal

The thinker who first proposed a radical solution to the intellectual problems that Indian Muslims faced was Muhammad Iqbal. In his celebrated *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he sought “to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy with due regard to the philosophical traditions of Islam and the more recent developments in the various domains of human knowledge” (Iqbal 2003: v–vi). Part of that reconstruction involved a reconsideration of the political theory suitable for Indian Muslims. His 1930 Presidential address to the Muslim League called for the creation of a Muslim homeland in India. For only in a homeland, not in a pluralist political community, he hypothesized, could Muslims live their Islamic way of life to the full. India was to be “the most appropriate place,” the “laboratory,” to conduct his political experiments (Nadwi 1969: 83). “I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state.” The formation of such a state appeared to him “to be the final destiny of the Muslims at least of North-West India” (Iqbal 1962: 239). His political theory was simple enough: there is a necessary connection between the destiny of Islam in India and a Muslim homeland in India.

A few years later, he elaborated the above ideas a little further. A letter to Jinnah, written on May 28, 1937, made two additional points. The first concerned the need for law and governance (the *Sharia*), and the second, the possibility of a civil war—should Indian Muslims be denied the right to have their homeland.

After a long and careful study of Islamic Law I have come to the conclusion that if this system of Law is properly understood and applied, at last the right to subsistence is secured to everybody. But the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states. This has been my honest conviction for many years and I still believe this to be the only way to solve the problem of bread for Muslims as well as to secure a peaceful India. If such a thing is impossible in India the only other alternative is a civil war which as a matter of fact has been going on for some time in the shape of Hindu-Muslim riots.²

Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Iqbal died in 1938. The person who carried his political ideas forward was Muhammad Ali Jinnah. From a theoretical perspective, Jinnah presents a paradox. He began his illustrious career as a believer in composite Indian nationalism. However, by the 1930s he exchanged that belief for belief in the religion-based nationalism of the Muslim League. With encouragement from Iqbal and others, he dedicated the rest of his life to realize a homeland for Indian Muslims.

One of his arguments for a Muslim homeland in India was based on his conception of the clash of civilizations, *avant la lettre*. He made this point in his 1940 Presidential address to the Muslim League:

They [Islam and Hinduism] are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of your troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither intermarry nor interdine together and, indeed, they belong to two distinct civilisations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their outlooks on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Musalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and, likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to the growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state (Jinnah 1962: 353–54).

The historic “Pakistan Resolution,” passed at the 1940 meeting of the Muslim League, gave political expression to the theory of the clash of civilizations. It demanded that in those provinces where Muslims were in a majority, they should have their own state, and where they were in a minority, the non-Muslim state should protect their Islamic rights. In 1944 Jinnah took these ideas directly to Gandhi:

We maintain and hold that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation. We are a nation of hundred million, and what is more, we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions; in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law we are a nation.³

His next letter to Gandhi clarified what he meant by self-determination for Muslims. In areas where they were in the majority, they had an *inherent right* to determine that those areas should have their own state. They had the right to do this without regard to the wishes of non-Muslims living there:

It seems to me that you are labouring under some misconception of the real meaning of the word “self-determination.” ...Can you not appreciate our point of view that we claim the right of self-determination as a nation and not as a territorial unit, and that we are entitled to exercise our inherent right as a Muslim nation, which is our birth-right?...The right of self-determination which we claim postulates that we are a nation, and as such it should be the self-determination of the Mussalmans, and they alone are entitled to exercise that right.⁴

Jinnah was not averse to invoke *jihad* as a last resort, should his goal of Pakistan be frustrated. According to Humayun Mirza (2002: 151), shortly before Pakistan was granted, Jinnah was urging Iskander Mirza, then an official in the colonial government (and later the first president of Pakistan), to organize a *jihad* among the tribesmen of Waziristan. To this end, an initial sum of Rs. 20,000 was offered to Mirza, with a promise of another ten million to follow. Fortunately, the proposal for *jihad* came to nothing, as Pakistan came into being on August 15, 1947.

Once Pakistan came into existence, however, Jinnah seemed to have had second thoughts on the nature of the state the new homeland should have. He

now preferred a religiously neutral state instead of a Muslim state. He urged the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan to work towards the creation of a religiously neutral state:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan....You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State....I think we should keep in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.⁵

Critics are at loss to explain why Jinnah abandoned his clash of civilization thesis of 1940 and 1944 in favor of the harmony of civilizations thesis of 1947. Whatever the difficulty in understanding Jinnah's political mind, this much is clear: he left an ambiguous legacy concerning the nature of the state that Pakistan should have. One could detect the ambiguity already in 1941, in an exchange that he had with the secretary of the newly formed fundamentalist party, the Jamaat-i-Islami. The secretary wanted him to commit the Muslim League to an Islamic state. Jinnah "saw no incompatibility between the positions of the Muslim League and the Jama'at." He added that events were moving at a fast pace that the League did not have the time "to define the nature of the future...state." He promised, however, " 'to strive for...a separate...state'," provided the Jamaat lent its support for Pakistan. Then he made the following pregnant statement: " 'I seek to secure the land for the mosque; once that land belongs to us, then we can decide on how to build the mosque' " (Nasr 1994: 113).

Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi

Jinnah's metaphors of "land" and "mosque" say it all. Though the land was acquired in 1947, there is no final agreement on the kind of mosque that should be built on it. The thinker who had a definite idea on the kind of mosque that should be built on it was Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi. He wanted the Pakistani state to be an Islamic state. Born in 1903 in Aurangabad (in today's Maharashtra), he started as a believer in composite nationalism. For a time he worked for *Taj*, an Urdu paper supporting Indian National Congress. He even wrote a "laudatory biography" of Gandhi (which was confiscated by the police and was never published) (Nasr 1996: 16). The abolition of the institution of the Caliphate in 1924, and the subsequent collapse of the Khilafat movement in India,

deepened his anxiety about the political future of Indian Muslims. What kind of a state should they have, now that the Caliphate itself has been abolished? He became convinced of the inappropriateness of composite nationalism for Indian Muslims. Muslims had to think in terms of the entire *umma*, or community, and rethink Islamic political theory too. If Islam was to survive in India, he felt, it would need nothing less than an Islamic state. He now saw a clash of civilizations between the supporters of composite nationalism and those of Islamic fundamentalism: “‘our death is their life, and their death our life’,” became his mantra (Nasr 1994: 104).

Of Maududi’s numerous writings, *Jihad in Islam* and *Political Theory of Islam* are most relevant to the present discussion. He identified *jihad* as a key issue in Islamic revivalism. It was not war in the secular sense. In the secular sense, war is an activity between states. The object of secular wars is the securing of the national interest of the state. *Jihad* by contrast is a religious activity, a struggle in “the way of God” or “for the Cause of God” (Maududi 1976: 7). It is the highest expression of Islam as a religion (*din*).

Jihad has two aspects. First, it is the inner spiritual struggle to live as holy an Islamic life as possible. Second, it is an outer struggle against those who threaten Islam or are perceived to threaten Islam. The threat comes from various sources, comprehensively summed up under the heading “paganism” (*jahiliya*). The outer *jihad* will continue as long as there is paganism in the world.

Islam requires the earth—not just a portion, but the whole planet—not because the sovereignty over the earth should be wrested from one nation or several nations and vested in one particular nation, but because the entire mankind should benefit from the ideology and welfare programme or what would be truer to say from “Islam” which is the programme of well-being for all humanity....Islam is not merely a religious creed or compound name for a few forms of worship, but a comprehensive system which envisages to annihilate all tyrannical and evil systems in the world and enforces its own programme of reform which it deems best for the well-being of mankind (Maududi 1976: 6–7, 16–17).

To achieve the end of outer *jihad*, Islam needs, according to Maududi, a Revolutionary International Party. The Jamaat-i-Islami that he founded in 1941 was to be that party. The Quran has given such parties the title of “Hizb Allah” or Party of God. Its object is “to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead an Islamic system of state rule” (Maududi 1976: 22). The process of establishing the Islamic state will start with states that are already in existence in Muslim countries. The object of Hizb Allah is the capture of state

power. It should not rest content with establishing the Islamic state in one territory, but should seek to extend the sway of Islam throughout the world. The establishment of the universal *umma* is the object of outer *jihad*.

Maududi presents the Prophet and the first four caliphs as the best models of conducting the outer *jihad*. Thanks to them, Islam spread with lightning speed from Arabia to Egypt, Syria, Byzantium, and Iran. Capturing the state power and promulgating the *Sharia* is part of outer *jihad*. For, "it is impossible for a Muslim to succeed in his intention of observing the Islamic pattern of life under the authority of a non-Islamic system of government" (Maududi 1976: 19). In Maududi's interpretation, religion (*din*) is inseparable from *jihad* and the state. Without *jihad*, *din* does not become an active religious force. That is why he calls Islam a "religiopolitical program" (Nasr 1996: 64).

Political Theory of Islam corroborates the basic argument of *Jihad in Islam*. The object of the Islamic state is to implement the will of Allah for the whole of humanity as revealed in the Quran. Allah is the only legitimate sovereign. The caliph has only delegated administrative power derived from the whole *umma*. "The entire Muslim population runs the state in accordance with the Book of God and the practice of His Prophet" (Maududi 1980: 22). Maududi calls such a state a "theo-democracy."

Its sphere of activity is coextensive with the whole of human life. It seeks to mould every aspect of life...In such a state no one can regard any field of his affairs as personal and private. Considered from this aspect the Islamic state bears a kind of resemblance to the Fascist and Communist states (30).

It has no geographical frontiers. It has jurisdiction over all of humanity; any Muslim anywhere is entitled to its citizenship (Mujeeb 1967: 403). Crossing the frontiers of non-Islamic states for the purpose of waging a *jihad* is permitted. As for non-Muslims (*dhimmis*), the *Sharia* determines what rights they would have.

Maududi's intellectual influence on the Muslim world is widely recognized. He presents the picture of an Islam that is self-confident and aggressive. It is a divinely ordained, universally valid, revolutionary ideology, in which religion (*din*), the Islamist state, and *jihad* are inextricably related. Its plan of world-conquest arises from sources internal to Islam, from its interpretation of what Allah's will is for humanity and how it should be realized.

At the same time, it helps to place his political thought in its historical context. That context is the anxiety felt by Indian Muslims about the kind of state that they should have in the post-Mughal, the post-Caliphate, and the post-colonial world. Who is the legitimate ruler of Muslims? His response—the Islamist state—was only one of several offered. Even so, most Indian Muslims

were wary of it. They accepted either a separate state for Muslims in Pakistan or a religiously neutral state in India. That does not mean Maududi failed in his mission. He succeeded in one particular, but very important, respect. He introduced uncertainty in the minds of many Muslims about the adequacy of the states that emerged in Pakistan and India. Out of this uncertainty have arisen the lure of fundamentalism and the culture of *jihad*. This uncertainty has weakened the effectiveness of the Pakistani state to this day. Thanks to Maududi, even those Muslims who do not opt for an Islamist state are not sure of the alternative to it.

Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

When we turn to Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's political thought, we cannot help but be struck by the fact that it promotes two contrasting views. According to the first, Islam ought to wrest world leadership from the West, and according to the second, it ought to strive for peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims in post-Partition India.

He developed the first view in two of his very influential works, *Islam and the World* and *Western Civilization: Islam and Muslims*. Taken together they constitute a modern interpretation of history from the perspective of Islamic fundamentalism. Of the two, *Islam and the World* is undoubtedly the more important. Written in Arabic in 1950, it became a runaway best seller in the Muslim world.⁶ The Foreword to its second Arabic edition was written by no less a figure than Sayyid Qutb. According to Youssef Choueiri (1997: 105), Nadwi's writings constitute "a primary source" for Qutb, whose concept of *jahiliya*, or paganism, in particular, is taken from him.

Nadwi's argument may be summarized as follows. History is a struggle between forces of Allah's righteousness and those of paganism. Allah has revealed to the Prophet Muhammad how to conduct this struggle and convert the whole of humanity to Allah. In Allah's plan, the Muslims are to be "the shepherds," "the trustees," and "the moral guardians of mankind" (Nadwi 1973: 83, 179, 184). In the first few centuries of their existence, the Muslims fulfilled their mission and wrested the leadership of the world into their hands. However, from the sixteenth century onward, Muslims began to lose the leadership of the world to the West. The urgent task before the Muslims today is to take it back from the West.

The West today represents paganism in its worst form. Western concepts such as "nationalism" and "popular sovereignty" are beginning to corrupt Islamic political theory itself. The modern state should at all costs be resisted and the universal *umma* be reinstated.

Islam recognizes only two broad divisions of mankind, one comprising those who are the true servants of God and the champions of Truth, and the other comprising of those who are followers of the Devil and the champions of falsehood. Islam declares itself to be at war with all those who constitute the latter division, no matter what nationality or race they belong to, for, enmity or warfare in Islam is not governed by national or political considerations, but by the considerations of truth and righteousness (Nadwi 1973: 141–42).

In the struggle against the West, *jihad* and martyrdom should play a pivotal role. The Prophet and his companions had set the norm in this regard. In the first ten years of Islam's existence, Nadwi points out, they had set forth "more than a hundred times on *jihad*, twenty seven times in the company of the Prophet himself" (1973: 53). Their enemies marveled at the fighting spirit of the early jihadists: " 'They are horsemen by day and ascetics by night.... They are great archers and great lancers, yet they are so devoutly religious and remember God so much and so often that one can hardly hear talk about anything else in their company' " (81). Since there will always be those who embrace paganism and reject Allah's message, there will always be the need for *jihad*. " *Jihad* is, therefore, an eternal phase of human life. It may take various forms, one of which is war, which may sometimes be the highest form for it to take" (93). What the Prophet did was to transform the "senseless blood feuds" of the Arabian tribes into "jihad in the way of Allah." The violence involved in *jihad*, in Nadwi's interpretation, is an integral part of religion (*din*) itself.

The responsibility for wresting world-leadership from the West rests with all Muslims. They have therefore to reform their present corrupt condition and acquire modern knowledge, including knowledge of science, technology, and military science. Nadwi places a special responsibility on the shoulders of the Arabs. They had played a providential role in the past; they should resume it today. "The Arabs were chosen to be the companions and followers of the Holy Prophet of Islam and his great mission to ennoble life" (Nadwi 1973: 205). The Prophet is "the soul of the Arab world, the cornerstone of its prestige and the title to its glory" (199). Today the Arab world is a major economic power because of its oil wealth. What is more, it could also be where the Third World War would start. Writing in 1950, much before Islamic fundamentalism became a world phenomenon, this is a very remarkable observation to make. His exact words are as follows: "Its [the Arab world's] significance is also heightened by the possibility of its becoming a theatre of a third World War" (198).

In *Western Civilization: Islam and Muslims*, written in 1963 in the light of the successful decolonization of Muslim countries in Asia and North Africa, Nadwi updated the argument of the earlier work. Decolonization meant the withdrawal

of the West from positions of political control. It did not mean their withdrawal from positions of intellectual domination over Islam. Indeed many Muslim countries were adopting Western political theories of government. This phenomenon took the form of a clash of civilizations within Islam itself between supporters of Islamic values and those of Western values.

Almost all the Islamic countries, today, are in the grip of an acute intellectual crisis....An unrelenting battle of ideas and ideals is taking place throughout the Muslim world. It can be aptly described as a clash between the Islamic and the Western concepts of life, values and traditions (Nadwi 1969: 1).

He was particularly critical of Gamal Abdel Nasser's reforms in Egypt. One of his worst moves, in Nadwi's estimate, had been to grant *de jure* legitimacy to all religions, placing Islam on the same level as other religions. He found the following statement by Nasser completely abhorrent:

"Reverence for religious freedom must be maintained in our new existence. Eternal spiritual values born out of the various religions possess unbounded potentialities for the guidance of man, for the illumination of his life with the radiance of faith and for the promotion of love, virtue and truth" (114).

Western Civilization: Islam and Muslims underlined the fundamentalist view that *jihad* and martyrdom had an indispensable role to play in today's world. The spirit of *jihad* and martyrdom, it pointed out, was more responsible for ending colonialism in Muslim countries than was mere national consciousness or political awakening. Thus, the "passion for *Jehad* and martyrdom" was behind the success of such significant events as the battle of Suez (Nadwi 1969: 129). The secret of success in the prolonged Algerian war was "the inborn spirit of *jehad* and love for martyrdom of the Algerian Muslims" (142). It becomes "crystal clear," to him, "that when a Muslim country is locked in a life and death struggle with an enemy several times stronger, its only hope of survival lies in Islamic unity and in that spirit of *Jehad* and love for martyrdom which only a living Islamic consciousness can produce" (136). Muslim politicians knew the truth of this fact very well. That was why they appealed to it when everything else failed: "at all moments of destiny, and at every critical turn-about of history, they [the politicians] are prone to fall back upon the soul-stirring concepts of religion like the divine sublimity of *Jehad* and martyrdom in the path of faith" (141).

So much for Nadwi's first view. As for his second view, its contrast with the first is striking, to say the least. It argues that Indian Muslims should strive for peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims in post-Partition India. The implication

seems to be that Islamic fundamentalism need not always be violent and that it can operate peacefully, without the help of aggressive *jihad* and martyrdom. He developed these ideas in *Muslims in India*⁷ and in some of his shorter works.

Muslims in India is a brief survey of the contributions that Muslims had made to the development of Indian history and culture. The memories of these contributions, he suggests, can help bring Hindus and Muslims closer together. He is discrete in his analysis of the reasons that led to Partition. Without pointing the finger of blame to anyone in particular, he quietly states that “the anomalies of Indian social existence,” the “political immaturity of the people,” and the “inter-communal fears and suspicions” were the main reasons (Nadwi 1980: 120, 121). Indian Muslims can make their best contributions to India by retaining their Muslim identity, by being both “Indians” and “the custodians of a revealed religion” (1972: 2). Islam’s teaching concerning the dignity of every human being has special relevance to India. He requests non-Muslims “not [to] disown the sublime teachings of Islam merely on account of the past or present failures of the Muslims” (36).

Peaceful coexistence minimally means that there would be no *jihad* against the Indian state, nor any demand for further Partition of the country. It also means abjuration of religiously motivated violence. At the same time, it also means that the Indian Muslim community will continue to remain as a separate community based on the Quran, the *Hadith*, and the *Sharia*. Nadwi had no faith “in any sweeping spate of nationalism” (1985: 7–9). Peaceful coexistence does not require sharing in a common public philosophy with the rest of Indians.

In this respect, his critique of Gandhi’s philosophy becomes significant. In *Islam and the World*, in a very important footnote, he explains his position. The context of his critique is the Muslim theory of prophecy. Gandhi was not a prophet but only a political leader. That was why he could not effect lasting changes in India. Muhammad, by contrast, was a Prophet. He was not one of those reformers who was content with fighting a few social evils of his day and achieving temporary success. He succeeded in achieving permanent results. This was because he was more than a leader; he was a Prophet. The footnote merits full citation:

The case of Mr. Gandhi furnishes a striking example. He had set two moral objects before himself from the beginning of his public career, in the service of which he pressed all his energies and resources, and his resources, were so vast, indeed, as have been available to few men in modern times. One of these was, non-violence. He developed it as a creed and a philosophy of life, and made it the very breath of his existence. But as his approach was different from that of the prophets, he could not produce that fundamental change in

the minds of his people which is essential to the success of a moral movement. The principle of non-violence was torn to pieces in his own lifetime (during the holocaust of 1947), and, in the end, Mr. Gandhi himself fell a victim to violence. His other objective was the removal of untouchability. In it, too, he did not register any remarkable success. We can, thus, say that the methodology of the prophets is the only sure and successful way of bringing about a radical change for the better in the religious and social affairs of humanity at large (Nadwi 1973: 49n1).

The pivotal concept in the above passage is “the methodology of the prophets.” Since the prophet in context is Muhammad, it is valid to assume, I suppose, that he was referring to his methodology. That methodology of course included the use of force—that is, *jihad*. If I am right in saying this, Nadwi is criticizing Gandhi for not backing up his political and social goals with violence. He, in other words, should have been an “armed prophet,” to refer to the famous Machiavellian norm. To continue with the thought of the Florentine, only armed prophets win, while unarmed prophets lose. (We shall pursue this point further below).

PART II

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s thought on question of political violence and religion was shaped by his conceptions of nationalism, the state, religion, and civic friendship.

He was convinced that only with the aid of appropriate theory of nationalism could the problem of political violence and religion be solved satisfactorily. In India three theories of nationalism were competing with each other. There was first the Muslim theory that identified nation and religion. Only in a Muslim “homeland,” it was claimed, could Muslims flourish as Muslims. Second, there was the *hindutva* theory of nationalism, according to which only those who possessed the quality of “Hinduness” could rate as Indian nationals. This virtually corroborated Jinnah’s “two nations” theory. Then there was Gandhi’s theory of civic nationalism, according to which India was “neither ‘peoples’ nor ‘nations,’ ” but a nation (CWMG 78: 187). The basis of civic nationalism is neither religion nor ethnicity but individual Indians sharing a common history. Indians have evolved historically as a multi-religious and multi-lingual people. Into such an evolutionary process was introduced the modern idea of the individual being a bearer of political rights and responsibilities. In this view, the nation exists to protect and promote, first, the civic interests of the individual, and, second, those of subnational groups. This is Gandhi’s basic position, first articulated in 1909 in

Hind Swaraj. In his reading of Indian history, the *acharyas*, or religious philosopher-saints, were the first nation-builders. They established places of pilgrimage in the four quadrants of the country. This they did because they had a notion that India, though diverse by language and local cultures, was nevertheless one country. Even Abu Rihan Muhammad Alberuni in the eleventh century had spoken of Bharata-varsha as an *oicumene*, a civilizational unit, with a common worldview and a common moral and political philosophy.

Did the introduction of Islam “unmake the nation?,” asks *Hind Swaraj*. The reply is that it did not. The reason is that Indian civilization is an open civilization and that it has an assimilative capacity. The newcomers, whoever they might be, gradually become part of the whole. Because of this Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews had become part of the greater whole that was India.

He readily granted that prejudices against each other had existed among Hindus and Muslims in the past. However, the emerging new middle class was trying to be free of them. The Indian National Congress was the vehicle of civic nationalism. He blamed the *shastris* (Hindu scholars of learned texts) and the *mullahs* (Muslim religious teachers or leaders) for driving a political divide between Hindus and Muslims.

The two metaphors that he uses to convey his meaning of civic nationalism—the clay pot and the oceanic circle—help clarify his thought. Civic nationalism, he grants, is fragile in India and needs continuous care. It can be broken into pieces if Indians are not careful. A clay pot easily breaks with stones thrown at it. The remedy lies in baking clay pot hard enough so that it would not break.

While the metaphor of the clay pot conveys Gandhi’s sense of realism, that of the oceanic circle conveys his sense of national idealism. India is an oceanic circle—inclusive and delimiting at the same time. The term “oceanic” conveys the meanings of inclusiveness and openness. The term “circle” conveys the meaning of limit: any nation, including a civic nation, has to draw the line somewhere to distinguish itself from other nations. What is crucial to this metaphor is the center from which the circle is drawn. The individual is the center from which the oceanic circle is drawn. Any individual may draw as many circles as he or she may wish, provided the circles so drawn, do not breach the outer circumference of the oceanic circle. That is to say, in Gandhi’s political vision each individual occupies the center of the nation. The circle exists to protect him or her. There could be any number of inner circles drawn by individuals. It does not matter whether the inner circle represents religion, language, or region. The center from which they are drawn remains the same, namely, the individual. The individual can have multiple identities. The nation,

in other words, is composite, not monolithic. Neither religion nor language defines it. The individual may belong to any religious or linguistic circle he or she may wish. The oceanic circle that is India has room for all of them.

Gandhi's reasons for denying religion as the basis of nation are of course highly relevant to the present discussion. He had two basic reasons. The first was his liberal conception of nationalism, derived especially from Giuseppe Mazzini. According to this conception, the nation is a political community whose justification is the protection of the rights of the individual. India's transition from monarchy to nation implies the emergence of the rights of the individual as the key question of Indian politics.

Gandhi's second reason for denying that religion is the basis of the idea of nation is the theory of the *purusharthas* as interpreted by him. According to that reinterpretation, ideas of nation and state belong to the province of *artha*, and the idea of religion to that of *dharma*. Just as *artha* is distinct from *dharma*, so is nation from religion. This is not to say that they are opposed to each other. Despite their distinction, they are related to one another as both belong to the same system of human ends. Each *purushartha* is simultaneously different and related. In this view, difference does not spell hostility. Each *purushartha*, while it pursues its own end, recognizes the validity of the ends that the other *purusharthas* pursue. Thus, *artha* has its own rules, which in theory if not in practice are applied in harmony with the rules of *dharma*. However, the fact that *artha* and *dharma* are compatible with one another, does not make the one a substitute for the other. *Artha* is *artha*; and *dharma*, *dharma*.

We now turn to Gandhi's concept of religion. There are in fact two concepts of religion in his philosophy. The first sees religion as "idea," while the second sees it as a "social institution." The first is religion in its universal, timeless sense, and the second is religion in its historical and sociological sense. *Hind Swaraj*, for example, speaks of the religion that underlies all religions (see Parel 1997: 42). "Religion" here is religion as idea, and "religions" is religion as social institution.

What is religion as idea? Of the many descriptions that Gandhi has given of it, the following is typical:

Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself (*Young India*, May 12, 1920; CWMG 17: 406).

Religion as idea has nothing to do with violence. Religion as idea is spirituality that is transformative, purifying, and unifying. Religion as institution, by contrast, is historical and divisive—and necessarily so. It has specific beliefs, dogmas, codes, rites, symbols, and the like. It gives a strong social identity to its members. It is, to use a phrase made famous by Henri Bergson, “closed religion” as distinction from “open religion.” Conflicts arise between religions considered as closed religions. In the past, at one time or another, all closed religions had resorted to violence in dealing with one another. Gandhi wants to reduce the frequency and intensity of such violence by appealing to everyone to follow the deep spirituality that underlies all of them. The more institutional religions live by the religion that underlies them, the more peaceful they become. The more they ignore it, the more violent they become.

Two conditions are necessary to reduce the violence between religions. The first is that they should accept *de jure* legitimacy of all religions. In Gandhi’s reading of the history of institutional religions, all institutional religions were “divinely inspired” (CWMG 44: 167). The second condition is the constitutional separation of religion and the state. Put differently, the state as part of *artha* should remain neutral towards all *dharmas* or religions. Gandhi devoted his entire active life to bring into being a state in India that would be neutral towards all the religions practiced there. Civic nationalism had prepared the groundwork for the evolution of such a state.

Turning now to Gandhi’s theory of the state. According to his philosophy, the state is necessary for the proper management of violence within society and between states. This may come as a surprise to those who think that he undervalued the state or that he was even a philosophical anarchist. The fact is that, by his explicit admission, the establishment of a state—he called it parliamentary *swaraj*—according to the wishes of the Indian people was the final goal of his political activities. However, the state that he had in mind is philosophically different from the Machiavellian or the Hobbsean or the Weberian state—the state that does not recognize anything other than its interest or reason of state as its supreme norm. Gandhi’s state, I argue, belongs to the category of *artha* and, as such, recognizes *dharma* as well as *moksha* as valid goals of human activity. It has of course the monopoly of the use of violence, but, as we shall see presently, it manages that monopoly in a way consistent with his theory of nonviolence.

Gandhi’s state has to perform three functions. First, it has to guard and protect the rights of its citizens. It has to do this according to the established norms of the constitution. It may therefore be called a limited, constitutional state. Second, it is the defender of the state from external threats. To do this it has the right to self-defense by military means, a position made clear by him in his

formal statement at the Second Round Table Constitutional Conference of 1931. Because of the rising savagery of wars, however, he added a rider to the right to self-defense by military means. According to that rider, the state has the obligation to engage in serious disarmament, as well as the duty to develop the means of self-defense by civilian means. The addition of the rider does not abrogate the right to self-defense by military means. Third, the state has the duty to be neutral towards religions. This position is in some respects compatible with the modern theory of the secular state. There is, however, a philosophical difference between the Gandhian state and the modern secular state. Gandhi's secularism is grounded in his theory of the *purusharthas*, according to which the state, though neutral towards religions, is not hostile to them. It respects all religions: *sarva dharma sama bhava* is its operational norm. The modern secular state, by contrast, arose from the laic conception of the state, which did not recognize any principle that transcended human will.

The fact that the Gandhian state has the monopoly of violence raises difficulties for his theory of nonviolence. Though serious, they are not fatal to it. They can be overcome with the aid of his theory of the *purusharthas*. The latter endows the state with the right to use the minimum necessary coercive means. The right to use force is a right inherent in *artha*. At the same time the principles of the constitution, international law, and international conventions, and of course the principles of universal (*sadharana*) *dharma*, delimit the scope of the exercise of that right. Gandhi, in other words, is neither a radical pacifist nor a conscientious objector. He is a moderate realist, if the term realist can be used without its Machiavellian or Hobbsean connotations. His reflections on colonialism had taught him the hard lesson that a state that was incapable of defending itself was courting trouble; it was asking for domination by states that were stronger than itself. He was sufficiently wise to know that politics abhorred a power vacuum.

In interpreting Gandhi's theory of nonviolence, it is not enough to do it within the context of the theory of the *purusharthas*. Two additional factors also have to be taken into account. The first is what he called the "fields" of nonviolence.⁸ By fields he meant the specific communities in which nonviolence was supposed to operate. He identified four such fields—the family, the political community, the religious community, and the international community. Nonviolence operated differently in each of these fields. To apply the principles and techniques that worked in one field to another field or the other fields is to apply them inappropriately. Thus, *satyagraha* could work in political community, but it could not work in the relations between states or between religions. To think of *satyagraha* as substitute for war, as some have done, is to think without due regard to Gandhi's distinctions.

There is a second principle that needs to be considered in discussing Gandhian nonviolence. I call it “the vast majority principle.” The concept is simple enough: it is impossible to govern a state nonviolently, if the vast majority in that state is not nonviolent already. That is to say, the ethics of nonviolence cannot work where the behavior of the vast majority of the people is still shaped by a culture of violence. Gandhi writes: “I believe that a state can be administered on a non-violent basis if the vast majority of the people are non-violent” (CWMG 71: 407). Such a society, he adds, does not anticipate or provide for attacks from outside the state. On the contrary, such a society believes that nobody from outside is going to attack it. Again,

Without the vast majority of people having become non-violent, we could not attain non-violent swaraj... So long as we are not saturated with pure ahimsa we cannot possibly win swaraj through non-violence. We can come into power only when we are in a majority or, in other words, when the large majority of people are willing to abide by the law of ahimsa. When this happy state prevails, the spirit of violence will have all but vanished and internal disorder will have come under control (*Harijan*, September 1, 1940; CWMG 72: 403).

A corollary to the vast majority principle is that only if there is a circle of states that are governed nonviolently, can there be lasting peace between them. In this regard, it is worth comparing Gandhi’s vast majority principle with Immanuel Kant’s republican principle. Kant had hypothesized that if the constitutions of states were republican, peace between such states would be possible and lasting. Gandhi while agreeing with Kant would go a step further. Only if the vast majority in states were to become nonviolent, would peace between them be possible and lasting.

If the vast majority principle means anything, it is that the business of peace is the business of both the state and civil society, of the leaders and the citizens, of economic and religious institutions. The principle places the burden of responsibility for peace equally on the leaders and the people. If the people in civil society behave violently—in thought, words, and deeds—the leaders can do little to achieve peace on their own. It is now fashionable in democracies to blame the leaders for acts of violence, without realizing that the people themselves are complicit in the violence that occurs in the civil society in which they live. Gandhi’s nonviolence is addressed as much to people in civil society as it is to the state. It seeks to change popular culture as a first step towards changing the behavior of states. One can only imagine what would happen if the people in Muslim countries were to rise in revolt against the culture of *jihad*. Similarly, one

can only imagine what would happen if people in industrialized countries were to rise in revolt against the behavior of the economic institutions that perpetuate international injustice—institutions in which the people alas participate as approving and happy consumers.

This brings us to the question of civic friendship, the fourth element in Gandhi's political thought that is important to the present discussion. His appeal to civic friendship occurs in one of his very important writings, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*. Though it was addressed to the members of the Indian National Congress, its underlying principle has universal application. It is a call for the reform of civil society. The first thing necessary for such reform in India, he argued, was "communal peace," that is, peace between religious communities. And a precondition for achieving communal unity was civic friendship.

The first thing essential for achieving such unity is for every Congress-man, whatever his religion may be, to represent in his own person Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian, Jew, etc., shortly, every Hindu and non-Hindu. He has to feel his identity with every one of the millions of the inhabitants of Hindustan. In order to realize this, every Congressman will cultivate personal friendship with persons representing faiths other than his own. He should have the same regard for the other faiths as he has for his own.

In such a happy state of things there would be no disgraceful cry at the stations such as "Hindu water" and "Muslim water" or "Hindu tea" or "Muslim tea." There would be no separate rooms or pots for Hindus and non-Hindus in schools and colleges, no communal schools, colleges and hospitals. The beginning of such a revolution has to be made by Congressmen without any political motive behind the correct conduct. Political unity will be its natural fruit (Gandhi 1989: 8).

The theme of friendship has a long history in Western political philosophy. It goes back at least to Aristotle. Marcus Tullius Cicero picks it up again, and so does St. Thomas Aquinas. The rise of radical individualism and utilitarianism put civic friendship in the shade. John Ruskin revived it when he argued that "social affection" should balance self-interest as a motivating force of economic activities. Gandhi picked up Ruskin's idea and incorporated it in his philosophy of *sarvodaya* or welfare of all. Social affection in Ruskin becomes "love-force" (*prem-bal*) in Gandhi. Love is an expression of the spiritual soul. Civic friendship in turn is an expression of love. It is the soul that disposes us to recognize the other as "friend," not competitor.

Gandhi is the first among modern Indian thinkers to place an emphasis on civic friendship. Indian society traditionally delimited the social reach of its members to *jati* (caste) or *dharma* (religion). Gandhi wanted to bring about a “revolution” (the word is his) in the traditional pattern of social relations. He was embarrassed that traditional Hindus and Muslims refused to drink the same water or tea or share the same kitchen. Jinnah, as we saw, had already remarked that they neither dine together nor intermarry. The closed character of caste and religion was such that it needed a mental revolution to make a breakthrough. Civic friendship was one of the most powerful means of bringing about a radical change in civil society.

Abul Kalam Azad

The Indian Muslim thinker who came very close to Gandhi’s position on religion and the state was Abul Kalam Azad. He was also the one who challenged, on Islamic grounds, the Muslim fundamentalist position on religion and the state. Starting his career as an Islamist revivalist (*mujaddid*), he took an active part in the Khilafat movement (1919–24), a joint Hindu-Muslim venture to preserve the Caliphate. He then came directly in contact with Gandhi and his philosophy of non-cooperation. As a result, he underwent an intellectual transformation and became a firm believer in the possibility of the national unity of Hindus and Muslims. Even though prior to 1920 he had advocated violent *jihad* against the British rule, after 1920 he adopted as policy Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence. From then on, he eschewed *jihad* in all its violent forms, practicing it only as devotion to God and as the pursuit of justice and righteousness (Mujeeb 1967: 458). In 1923, at the age of 35, he became the president of the Indian National Congress. He became the president again, for an unprecedented period of seven years, from 1939 to 1946.

Azad’s political career has great pedagogical value for non-fundamentalist and non-separatist Muslims, not only in India but also all over the world. He demonstrated that it was perfectly legitimate for a believing and practicing Muslim to engage in secular politics in a pluralistic society. It was not necessary to have a Muslim homeland in order to live an Islamic life. Indeed, he became a strong advocate of civic nationalism and the constitutional separation of religion and the state.

What is remarkable about Azad’s political practice is that it is grounded in his interpretation of the Quran and the *Sharia*. The Quran according to him revealed a universal religion—*din*—which is shared by all those who believe in God. *Din* consisted in “devotion to God and balanced, righteous action” (Mujeeb 1967: 461). The Quran, in his interpretation, did not ask the followers of other religions

to accept Islam as an altogether new religion. “On the contrary, it asks them to return to the true form of their own religion” (462). That is to say, Azad saw Islam as recognizing the *de jure* legitimacy of all institutional religions. Since a spiritual bond unites all believers regardless of their institutional differences, the practice of Muslims regarding themselves as members of a metaphysically closed religion has only historical, but no doctrinal, foundation. Azad went further. While *din* was common to all and unchangeable, the *Sharia* was changeable and specific to time, place, and people. There should therefore be no doctrinal or juristic objection against Muslims forming an *ummah al-wahidah*, or body-politic, with the Hindus. He claimed that his interpretation was based on the practice of the Prophet—the settlement that he had reached with the non-Muslim tribes of Medina (463n30). In a not too subtle rebuke to Maududi and Nadwi, he wrote in *India Wins Freedom*, an autobiographical account of his political life, that they were foisting a fraudulent account of Islamic history on the Muslim community. History has “proved” he contended, “that after the first few decades or at most after the first century, Islam was not able to unite all Muslim countries into one state on the basis of Islam alone” (1959: 227).

Azad’s real contribution, as Mujeeb (1993: 397) rightly states, lies in demonstrating how the Islamic ideal of life could be lived within a pluralist nation. And in doing so he has responded convincingly to both Iqbal and Jinnah. Valid as Azad’s contributions are, he could not have made them without the *political* space that Gandhi created for observant but non-fundamentalist Muslims. For, as Mujeeb has observed very astutely, “Gandhi...was the one man who saved the Muslims jettisoned by the Muslim League” (399). That is to say, Azad’s interpretation of Islam combined with Gandhi’s political practice towards Muslims gives genuine hope to all Muslims who reject the violently fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

Lessons to be Learnt

Modern Islamic fundamentalism has its South Asian roots. There has been an alliance between the thought of Maududi, Nadwi, and Qutb.

The demand for a homeland for Muslims can easily degenerate into Islamic fundamentalism. What is lurking behind such demand is the uncertainty in the Muslim mind as to what is the legitimate form of state for Muslims in the post-Mughal, the post-Caliphate, and the post-colonial era. We see demands similar to the one made in pre-Partition India now being made in places such as Kosovo, Southern Thailand, and Southern Philippines, not to mention Kashmir and Chechnya. Such demands require the breaking up of existing multicultural societies and the creation of closed Muslim societies.

The link between religion and political violence involved in outer *jihad* is internally maintained by Islamic theology. Western social science makes a huge mistake when it fails to go beyond political and economic analysis of that link.

Peace between religions can be maintained in South Asia if all South Asians adopt Gandhi's and Azad's philosophy of the constitutional separation of religion and state, combined with sincere respect for all religions based on their *de jure* legitimacy.

Ethnic nationalism such as that maintained by the ideology of *hindutva* is as much a threat to peace between religions as is religious nationalism. Civic nationalism is the only type of nationalism that is compatible with ideology of peace between religions.

Finally, the idea of a clash of civilizations is not an invention of some ill-informed Western thinkers. Some very well informed Indian thinkers had come up with it in 1940s and 1950s. As Gandhi has argued, the ways to prevent such clashes are (i) to keep religion and state constitutionally separate and (ii) to wean theology away from violence.

Notes

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1. Akbar is referring to President Pervez Musharraf's address to the nation of January 12, 2002, in which he asked for "an end to the culture of jihad" in Pakistan.
2. Iqbal to Jinnah, May 28, 1937; in Malik (1971: 385–86).
3. Jinnah to Gandhi, September 17, 1944; in CWMG (78: 407).
4. Jinnah to Gandhi, September 21, 1944; in CWMG (78: 410–11).
5. August 11, 1947; cited in Wolpert (1984: 339, 340).
6. In 1982 its Arabic edition had gone into 11, the Urdu edition into 9, the English edition into 7, and Persian and Turkis editions each into 2 printings.
7. By 1980, this work had gone into 3 editions in Arabic, Urdu, and English.
8. I have developed these ideas in *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony* (Parel 2006: Chapter 7).

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