

COSMOPOLITAN AND DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH ASIA: A STUDY OF ABUL KALAM AZAD AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST

Syed Hanif Rasool*

Abstract

During the first half of the twentieth century, the socio-political scenario of South Asia in general and that of the Indian subcontinent in particular was marked by two distinct trends among the Muslim community: 1) Muslim nationalism and 2) composite nationalism commonly known as Indian nationalism. Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) is commonly regarded as both a major ideologue and a frontline proponent of the composite nationalism. This paper attempts to explore Azad's significant role as a cosmopolitan communicator in the multi-ethnic and socially diverse South Asia. The paper reads some of the most important works and addresses of Maulana Azad in light of broad notions of Martin Buber's dialogic ethics and Pearce and Cronen's cosmopolitan communication, arguing that Azad's social constructionist stance is the result of substantial elements of syncretism and eclecticism in his works. Keeping in view the prevailing religious fanaticism and socio-cultural intolerance in South Asia, the study of Azad's syncretic, eclectic, and anti-communal thoughts is need of the hour. It is aspired that Azad's dialogic and cosmopolitan communication patterns establish a counter discourse to tackle the ongoing ethnic and religious intolerance in South Asia.

Key Words: Pearce and Cronen's cosmopolitan communication, Martin Buber's Dialogic Ethics, composite nationalism, South Asia, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, social constructionist, syncretism and eclecticism

* Assistan Professor, Department of English, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak, Pakistan

Introduction

While giving a talk at a seminar being organized in memory of the first death anniversary of Maulana Azad (1888-1958), Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) identified the need and necessity for the establishment of a universal *modus vivendi* to bring all the world religions on a universal mode which would allow their followers to peacefully co-exist and flourish and grow freely in their own faith without harming the others' faiths. Toynbee regards religion as a source of 'the prime motivation in history' and it has most often revealed its implications and teachings "in terms of images which have universal meaning and which reappear in the course of history" (Migval, 1966, p. 87). Toynbee argues that the multifarious and multidimensional progress in the fields of science and technology have finally created a suitable setting for the emergence of a universal religious thinking and cause (Migval, 1966, p. 87).

Toynbee during his frequent visits to India was engaged in such discussions with Maulana Azad. Maulana Azad is at one with Toynbee and says that it is the spirit of religion that awakens the best in man and that guides man towards peace and salvation. Religion according to Azad must unify the humans and as it regards God as *Rabbul Alamin*, the lord of all creation, it is overwhelmed with unfathomable yearning after one God, it is 'a force to integrate human society rather than to disintegrate it', and it is both progressive in its essence because it stands by the oppressed and the wretched of the earth and it resists against oppression and tyranny to fulfill its basic role of servicing the humanity (Nizami, 1990, p. 69).

Azad was born in Mecca (Arabia) in 1888 to an orthodox Sunni Bareilvi scholar and *peer* (mystic) of Delhi origin and an Arab mother. He grew up as a prodigy in Calcutta, which then

was the capital of British India. ‘Azad’s father always assumed that anything new was likely to be nasty’ and he ‘disapproved of wasting time over the study of nonreligious’ education at any school, whereas he arranged for his son the tutelage in orthodox religious texts and Arabic and Persian classics at home (Datta, 1990, p.14). Contrary to his father’s aspiration, Azad develops a self-motivated autodidactic genius, and becomes a voracious reader intrigued by the secular viewpoints of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and the modern Western thoughts. With the help of Bible, Azad learns English from a friend, sets to study both the religious texts of other Muslim sects and the contemporary nonreligious text of science and philosophy, thereby freeing himself from the fetters of his parental religious orthodoxy. It is because of Azad’s diverse background and his constant engagement with various philosophical and intellectual thoughts that he carves for himself an eclectic path reflective of the broad notion of unity in diversity and plurality of influences that shape him as a scholar, literatus, sage, statesman, socio-political ideologue whose substantive influences on the civilizational, cultural, and political aspects of modern South Asian history can hardly be undermined (Datta, 1990, p.16-22).

In the early 1920s, Azad rises to prominence with his exceptional grasp of the diction and oratory to stimulate the South Asian Muslim intelligentsia with his pragmatic philosophical and revolutionary stance. Through his progressive and enlightened journalistic writings mainly critical of both the stagnant Muslim masses of South Asia and the British Raj, Azad takes the Muslim intelligentsia by storm, launching his audacious paper, *Al-Hilal* in 1912. Azad considers two essential aims to achieve: first, to rejuvenate and regenerate the divided Muslim community of India through the eclectic message of the Koran reflective of the pure spirit of Islam and second, to build a counter narrative against the ‘Loyal Muhammadans’ of the

Aligarh, diffusing their strategies of subservience to the British, political passivity, and the surging theorization of communalism in India. Then *Al-Hilal* was seen as ‘soul-stirring appeal’ of an inspired scholar ‘who knew how to touch the deeper chords of the Muslim community to do its duty’ (Datta, 1990, 82). Perturbed about the audacity of the paper, the British government forfeited the paper’s security and demanded a fresh security of Rs. 10,000 on 17 November, 1914, but reiterating the same mission Azad launches another paper, *Al-Balagh* on 12 November 1915, which continues till 13 March 1916 when the government externed him from Calcutta. Thus he becomes a political detenu and his journals are banned by the Raj due to their strong subversive role. During the Ranchi internment, the solitary Azad ‘with his introspective nature’ finds a good opportunity to use ‘his creative faculties’, taking upon ‘his cherished dream of *Tarjuman al Quran*’, reimagining the inclusive and eclectic notion of religion, seeing in ‘an intuitive flash’ his future destiny, envisaging ‘the signs of a new goal’ (Datta, 1990, p. 93-102). This period proves to be the most productive in his literary and scholastic genius. Released from Ranchi on 27 December, 1919, Azad finds ‘a new world and a new age in India’ and resolves to the most cherished passions: the freedom of India from the British rule and the composite nationalism.

The religious and philosophical thoughts of Maulana Azad revolve around the notions of God, Man, and Universe, which Azad sees in unison as a whole. Expounding eloquently in his monumental commentary of the first Surah of the Qur’an, Azad elucidates his eclectic argument by inviting the reader’s attention to the Quranic concept of God as the supreme Cherisher, Nourisher and Sustainer of the Universe, whose grace and bounty is all-inclusive (Latif, 1958, p. 2-18). Grounding on this discourse, Azad lays the foundation of his eclecticism and

syncretism and to him, religion, 'according to the Quranic' is 'not a name of any groupism' and people are the family of God (Latif, 1958, p. 98).

Thus Azad's syncretism in diverse South Asia can be read in the emerging concept of cosmopolitan communication, a style of communication that W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon E. Cronen (1980) deduced from their works on several patterns of communication for about three decades. According to Pearce this model of communication can be applied to the individuals who could be better called as cosmopolitan communicators demonstrating as social constructionists seeing themselves as active and integral participants in a "pluralistic world" (Griffin, 2012, p. 79). Such individuals interact and coordinate with the people and communities of different and diverse cultural, ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds. They do not have any hindrance in dealing with the people who hold 'different values and express discrepant beliefs' (Griffin, 2012, p. 79-80).

The aforementioned cosmopolitan communicators assume the multiplicity of truth and therefore do not change the thoughts and beliefs of the others. Further elaborating the concept, Pearce uses the term 'dialogue' for 'the optimum form of interaction' (Griffin, 2012, p. 79-80) likewise Martin Buber, a Jewish Philosopher, maintains that in the dialogic communication there remains a tension between being on our own perspective and being 'profoundly open to the other' views (Griffin, 2012, p 79). To Buber 'dialogue' is synonymous to 'ethical communication', creating 'a mutuality in communication' that constructs 'the *Between* through which we help each other to be more human' (Griffin, 2012, p. 79). Contrasting the two kinds of relationships I-It versus I-Thou, Buber maintains that in the former 'we treat the other person as a thing to be used, an object to be manipulated' created by 'monologue', lacking 'mutuality',

whereas in the latter, ‘we regard our partner as the very one we are’ seeing ‘the other as created in the image of God and resolve to treat him or her as a valued end rather than a means to our own end’ (Griffin, 2012, p. 79).

Grounding on the aforementioned theoretical framework, this article argues that there are substantive reasons to revisit Azad as an eclectic cosmopolitan communicator, using the dialogic and ethical patterns of interaction with the peoples of divergent creeds. Azad’s liberated mind is fascinated by India’s diverse socio-cultural credos, shaping his eclectic and syncretic notions that have deeply influenced his political, religious and intellectual life and that have overwhelmed his multidimensional roles as a statesman, philosopher, scholar, and literati.

Literature Review

Baljon Jr. (1952) in his article, “A Modern Tafsir” foregrounds Azad’s universalism and consideration for other religious notions and his resolution to look for the possibilities of a universal religious harmony in the Quran. Baljon maintains that ‘moderation and broad mindedness are the significant features of this *tafsir*’ and that Azad has proved to be tolerant to ‘all sorts of trends of thought and faith, but everything in moderation’, and that the *tafsir* is equally loaded with ‘[m]ystical allusions’, and “reverence for religious laws’, ‘but legalism is fiercely condemned’ (p. 107).

Asghar All Engineer (1998) in his review of Hameed’s book on Azad, published in *Economic and Political Weekly* as “Azad: Paragon of Syncretism” highlights the author’s attempt to foreground Azad’s syncretism and notion of the unity of religion (p. 2665).

Shakeb Jamal (2013) in his research article on Maulana Azad's works maintains that Azad's pluralistic ideas are deeply rooted in the 'broader notion of Islamic mysticism well-imbedded in the established Sufi Islamic traditions of *wahdatul wujud* (unity of being) and his inspiration from India's forgotten Muslim mystic "Sarmad Shaheed who was executed by Emperor Aurangzeb for being charged with heresy' (p. 2).

Balraj Puri (1996) in his article, "Azad and Iqbal: A Comparative Study" discussing the radically different ideas about the role of Islam in the subcontinent by the two greatest Islamic thinkers of the 20th century, emphasizes Azad's broad humanistic approach to the communal conflict in the British India. To Balraj, Azad bases 'his concept of composite Indian nationalism' on 'a theological analogy of Prophet Mohammad's accord with non-Muslim communities at Medina' and on 'the doctrine of 'wahdat-e-adyan' (unity of religions) which he deduced from the Quran' (p.593).

Ayesha Jalal (1989) in her review of Henderson Douglas's book on Azad highlights the most engaging parallel in the recent historiography of Modern India, focusing on the polarized roles of Azad and Jinnah on Partition of India. Estimating the divergent ideas of both the leaders in question, Jalal regards the sherwani-clad Azad a personality in total contrast to Jinnah in his Savile Row double-breasted suits, emphasizing the notion that appearances are usually deceptive. Jalal maintains that the former's life testifies 'deep religious convictions and advocacy of a composite Indian nationalism', whereas the latter's secular persona and 'espousal of a specifically Muslim demand for a Pakistan hint at rich complexities [defy] austere explanation' (p.1159).

Discussion

Arguably, among the Muslim community, Azad can be regarded as the first audacious communicator of eclectic thoughts in India during the first half of the twentieth century amidst the prevalent frenzy of separatism, communalism and narrow religiosity that threatened the cultural integration of South Asia. Azad's faith in the unity in diversity is not the result of any political expediency. It emerges predominantly from his deep contemplation on the essence and spirit of the Quran, assimilating further with his sharp perception of the world history and his keen interest in the diverse socio-cultural ethos of South Asia. He strongly believes in the power of knowledge and culture, expounding that knowledge is above all prejudices and biases and is the most common heritage of mankind. Delivering the Convocation address to Patna University on 21 December 1947, Azad underlines that one can seal all worldly belongings with geographical and national limits, but one cannot seal knowledge, learning and civilization, because they are always 'outside the pale of boundaries' and narrow regional limits, and are 'free from stains of race, colour, or factions' therefore, always 'above nationalities' and irrespective of the fact that they 'originated in any part of the world but they are now common heritage of mankind and are the joint property of all countries and nations' (Guha, 1956, p. 20).

Maulana Azad further contends that 'narrow-mindedness' is the greatest hindrance in the way to achievements and progress of a people, whereas a broad outlook cultivates spirit of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Reiterating the dangers of narrow-mindedness morphing in several shapes and appearing in several guises in almost every field of thought and action, Azad underscores how both religious bigotry 'in the form of blind faith' deceives us 'in the name of orthodoxy' in politics and in knowledge and culture betrays us in the name of nationalism

(Guha 1956, p.20). Azad affirms his commitment to the cause of harmony and tolerance, declaring that ‘there is no room for narrow-mindedness in this modern age’, suggesting that we can ‘find a secure place in the comity of nations only if we are international-minded and tolerant (Guha, 1956, p. 20).

Pondering at the socio-cultural history of South Asia, Azad argues that India’s eclectic and syncretic traditions have prevailed in the region for thousands of years. He adds that when the rest of the world was engaged in warfare and bloodsheds on the differences of thought and action, the people in India, bearing different beliefs remained steadfast to the essence of cooperation and tolerance and it was in this region that every kind of faith, every kind of culture, and every mode of living that had entered India flourished, sustained, grew and prospered (Guha, 1956, p. 20).

Azad’s conviction about the universal brotherhood, tolerance and inter-faith amity is a reflection of his deep sense of history. His oeuvre frequently resonates the eclectic notions projected by South Asia’s great minds and sages. On the heterogeneity of Indian philosophical tradition, Azad argues that Indian mind has been inclusive since the dawn of history and it has always accepted every kind of thought, therefore, new groups of various people and cultures came to find their best abodes here and they have enjoyed the tolerant social life in India. Azad asserts that the broad Indian mind remained open to all creeds and religion, and it was here that the both the main schools of Vedantism and agnosticism flourished peacefully co-existed (Guha, 1956, p.21-23). Dwelling on the eclectic tradition of India, Azad observes.

Today the world is wonderstruck at the vast all-comprehensive nature of Indian philosophy. There is no school of philosophical thought which is not found here. What we actually do not find is the clash of opinions or

the breaking of heads merely because of the differences of opinion . . . If liberality of thought and toleration are most precious heritage of ancient Indian civilization, shall we not prove worthy inheritors of this great heritage? (Guha, 1956, p. 21-22).

Though his sobering influence on the mainstream Indian nationalist intelligentsia, always a strong aspect of his personality, Azad urges his countrymen to shun the narrow-mindedness in every walk of life, reassuring them to shape the mental mould that should be 'all-inclusive' and that has been a strong feature of South Asia, one of the most diverse regions of the world throughout the ages (Guha, 1956, p. 21). Reflecting on Azad's eclecticism, Dr. Zakir Husain, India's former President, regards Azad's comprehensive understanding and interpretation of religion as his greatest contribution to the world of creed. Zakir Hussain states that Maulana Azad's greatest service was to teach people of every religion that there are two aspects of religion. One separates and the other creates hatred. The former is the false aspect, whereas the later is 'the true spirit of religion', bridging people together, creating understanding, inculcating tolerance, promoting humanity, encouraging spirit of sacrifice and belief in unity in diversity (Jamal, 2013, p. 9).

The combination of mind and character has always been quite rare in the history of great people. Maulana Azad's life is such a rare example of the triumph of mind and character over circumstances. The fact that a man who has never been to any school, college, university or any place of learning throughout his life as a student, yet inspires generations of scholars, literati, politicians, statesmen, and theologians, is a testimony of his greatness. Azad has 'an innate enlightenment that would not be contained by tradition or fashion', and he is more interested in 'the destiny of man than in the personal glory of a scholastic or theological eminence' (Husain, 1986, p. 11-12).

Researchers on Azad acknowledge the fact that he appears in the public as a daring and enlightened humanist with his journal *Al-Hilal* in 1912. *Al-Hilal* set progressive trends in the socio-political life of the Muslims of South Asia. Azad controverts the views of both the politically stagnant Muslim intelligentsia that was devoutly following the British Raj and the medieval religious Muslim orthodoxy that characterized narrow religiosity and fanaticism. *Al-Hilal*, within a brief span of its life, 'brought about turmoil in the thinking of Indian Muslims and it had fed the fire of nationalism in a lasting measure' (Husain, 1986, p. 12).

The publications of both *Al-Hilal* (1912) and when it was banned by the British government then *Al-Balagh* (1914) can arguably be seen as landmark events in the history of the subversive and progressive literature in South Asia. Azad radically criticizes the Muslim masses on their blind acceptance of the colonial rule and their communal approach. Azad is among the very few Indian leaders who had a deep insight into the ethos of unity in diversity and humanism.

From 1910 to 1920 Azad gyrates his deep religious passion and fervour towards his two most cherished ideals (*adarshes*); non-communal and united India, religious and political enlightenment of the Muslims. From now onwards he dedicates every single moment of his life to the cause of non-communal national struggle and to promoting rational and pragmatic approaches among his co-religionists. The principals of religious eclecticism and political syncretism remain most cherished throughout his life. These aspects of Azad make him the most furtive and authentic paragon of South Asia's composite ethos of Indo-Muslim civilization.

The genesis of Azad's eclecticism can be traced as early as 1910 when he writes a remarkable essay about the martyrdom of the Muslim divine Sarmad Shaheed (1590-1661). Quite apart from its literary grandeur and excellence, the essay epitomizes Azad's inclusivity, humanism, and secular political and religious ideas. This essay opens the vistas to the understanding of Azad's mind, beliefs and character. Scholars, by and large, have overlooked the aforementioned thematic worth of the essay. On every stage of Azad's political and religious endeavors, the halo of this remarkable essay remains lucid and Azad cherishes it dear throughout his life.

Readers and researchers on the political and religious endeavors of Azad can hardly overlook the overtones of eclecticism and humanism that Azad saw in the characters of both Sarmad Shaheed and Dara Shikoh. Azad sketches Sarmad's portrait by highlighting 'the finest values of Islam' in this great humanist whose liberal spirit is 'imbued with universalist outlook' that transcended the differences of caste creed and religion and that makes 'no distinction between temple and mosque' (Datta, 1990, p. 28). Sarmad according to Azad is an enlightened man, selfless, humble, decent' and courageous enough to counter the narrow religiosity and fanaticism of Mughal emperor and his religious courtiers. In the vanguard of this essay one can easily trace the eclectic character of Azad and his religious and political manifesto promoting broad humanistic understanding irrespective of caste, creed, and language among the diverse communities of South Asia.

Azad explores deeper meanings in lives and martyrdoms of the two eclectic *dervishes* who coloured the pages of Mughal history with their sublime blood: Sarmad Shaheed in the guise of a *faqeer* and his admirer Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) in the guise of a scholar prince. Azad in his peculiar suggestive style remarks

that the communal setting of India would have been altogether different, had this scholar prince succeeded Shah Jahan (1592-1666) as the emperor of India. Critiquing the tyranny of Emperor Aurangzeb's reign, Azad laments over 'historical veracity' of the time that the pen which documented history of 'the Mughal period was always held by Prince Dara Shikoh's enemies' and that behind 'the screen of political manoeuvres, the real picture has become blurred' (Hameed, 2010, p. 29-30). Azad asserts:

From his early years Dara displayed the attributes of a *Dervish*. He always kept company with philosophers and Sufis. His writings indicate that the author was a man of excellent taste. The overwhelming proof of his taste is that in pursuing his goal he lost the distinction between the temple and the mosque. The humility with which he met the Muslim divines was matched by the devotion with which he bowed his head before the Hindu saints and sadhus (Hameed, 2010, p. 29-30).

Azad elaborates the purity of Dara's eclecticism and tolerance. Capturing this aspect Dara's character, Azad highlights the significance of unity in diversity, assimilation and integration among the diverse faiths and the fact that Dara condemns and rejects the attitudes of narrow religiosity, fanaticism, and blind adherence to the obscure traditions of his time. Azad invites us to go into the 'exalted state of mind' and then see 'if one can still distinguish between *Kufr* and Islam' (Hameed, 30). He adds that the narrow religiosity and the lack of true complementary essence of religion mislead the voyageur of the ultimate Truth. 'The moth should seek the flame, if it is desirous of the lamp which is lit only in the mosque; its desire for self-immolation is not complete' (Hameed, 2010, p. 30).

Azad further expounds the communicative and interactive encounters between the devotional traditions of the Hindu Bhakti and the Muslim Sufi traditions in South Asia which are often

disregarded by both the Muslim and Hindu historiographers and scholars. This concurrence of the diverse thoughts and faiths remains the most prominent essence of the South Asian mysticism and Sarmad Shaheed epitomizes its essence in his *Rubaiyat*.

His home is confined
Not only to the temple and mosque.
The earth and the sky are equally His abode.
The entire universe
Is in love with His story
But the wise one
Loves only Him.
(Hameed, 2010, p. 51)

Azad regards such interfaith interactions as an ultimate and inevitable consequence of the process of social and cultural integration in South Asia. This interactive and friendly cultural and religious legacy overwhelms his mind and character throughout his life. On every forum he refutes and rebuts the narrow approaches of the communalists and he invites the Indians to mutual settlement and peaceful co-existence. Presiding over a Special Session of Congress on 15 December 1923, Azad underscores the communal harmony and peaceful co-existence in the Subcontinent that without this foundation of communal unity, the tryst with freedom and the 'country's social life and progress will remain a dream and without communal understanding and harmony we cannot create the most important values of humanism (Hameed, 2010, p. 145). Epitomizing the aforementioned his mission of eclecticism and communal harmony in the diverse India, a mission that remained most cherished to him throughout his life, while addressing to a public gathering, Azad unequivocally declares.

Today, if an angel were to descend from the heaven and declare from the top of the Qutub Minar, that India will

get Swaraj [freedom] within twenty-four hours, provided she relinquishes Hindu-Muslim unity, I will relinquish Swaraj rather than give up Hindu-Muslim unity. Delay in the attainment of Swaraj will be a loss to India, but if our unity is lost, it will be a loss for entire mankind (Hameed, 2010, p. 145).

Azad's frequent reflection on authenticity of the composite culture of South Asia affirms his role of a cosmo-communicator. Delivering his Presidential address in the 53rd Session of Indian National Congress at Ramgarh in 1940, Azad declares with his proverbial audacity that he is 'a Muslim and profoundly conscious of the fact that' he has 'inherited Islam's glorious traditions of the last thirteen hundred years' and he is 'not prepared to lose even a small part of that legacy' and that the 'history and teachings of Islam, its arts and letters, its civilization and culture, are all part of his 'wealth' and it is his 'duty to cherish and guard them' and as 'a Muslim' he has 'a special identity within the field of religion and culture' that he 'cannot tolerate any undue interference with it', but 'with all these feelings', he has 'another equally deep realization, born out of his 'life's experience, which is strengthened and not hindered by the spirit of Islam' that he is 'equally proud of the fact' that he is 'an Indian, an essential part of the indivisible unity of Indian nationhood, a vital factor in its total make-up without which this noble edifice will remain incomplete' (Hameed, 2010, p. 161).

Dwelling on the history of South Asia, Azad highlights India's unique integration and cultural diversity, expounding the role of communication in the process of co-existence. Contending that the confluence of various faiths is an inevitable end and a natural law, Azad propounds the idea of incredibly inclusive India. He adduces that it was indeed India's momentous destiny that its soil 'should become the destination of many different

caravans of races, cultures and religions' and even before the history's morning, these manifold groups voyaged along India and such odysseys has continued since, whereas India's enormous and generous land hailed them all and nestled them on her bosom, the last of these pilgrims were the Muslims following their predecessors' tracks, resulting in the tryst 'of two different currents of culture' flowing 'along their separate courses' for a time, 'but Nature's immutable law brought them together into a confluence' and the blending 'was a notable historic event' (Hameed, 2010, p. 161) Azad proclaims that the Muslims had brought their 'treasures' with them 'to this land which was rich with its own great cultural heritage', presenting 'her with something she needed urgently, the most precious gifts in Islam's treasury, the message of democracy, human equality and brotherhood' (Hameed,2010, p. 161)

Illustrating the humanitarian and cosmopolitan traits of religion, Azad remains firm and resolute in his thought and action throughout his life. We have numerous references from his works like *Tazkira*, *Tarjuman-ul-Quran*, *Ghubar-i-Khatir* and his speeches and addresses in various capacities as a scholar, statesman and the Union minister of Independent India. The ecumenism of *Tarjuman* suggests the Quran as an eclectic message to the humanity. Approaching the Quranic text with an open, receptive and meditative mind, Azad breaks out the shackles of what Sri Aurobindo (1875-1950) calls, 'ecclesiastical tyranny', unfolding the meaning that text of the Quran enshrines. Religion, to Azad, is a ladder not a fence, a scaffolding not a prison. Referring to the Quranic admonition warning the humans against dividing 'themselves into exclusive religious groups in the name of God, Azad maintains that the belief in God 'if entertained in sincerity, must, in the field of action, express itself in the Unity of man' (Latif, 1958, p. 98).

The essential mission of the Quran was to unite the humans in 'a common bond' and to pave 'the way to a wider

unity of mankind' (Latif,1958, p. 99). The divine Truth is not exclusive to any race, people, or community. It does not bear any 'national stamp' and similarly the 'Truth of God wherever found and in whatever form is man's treasure and man is heir to it' (Latif, 1958, p. 98-100).

Mushirul Haq views Azad's *Turjuman al Quran* as 'the most profound statement on how diverse religio-cultural traditions could co-exist in a composite plural society' (2014, p. 121). In *Tarjuman*, Azad brings to the fore, 'transcendental oneness of all faiths and the theology of multi-religious cooperation' and these concepts were quite novel in the religious and secular setting of South Asia (Haq, 2014, p. 121). The same pluralism and eclecticism are reflected in the later writings and speeches of Azad, authenticating him as a paragon of cultural and ethnic unity in South Asia. Affirming Azad's syncretism, Nehru describes him as man who has always been above the conflicts and biases and has seen the vital unity behind all India's diversity and has realized that 'only in this unity can there be hope for India as a whole and for those great and varied currents of life which course through her veins' (Haq, 2014, p. 126).

As a product of a cultural milieu blending Arab, Turkish, Persian and Indo-Muslim traditions of South Asia, Azad's humanistic mind offers a working socio-cultural panacea for the communal issues of the region. India was fortunate, in the words of the eminent Persian scholar Saeed Naficy, that it had a visionary, an erudite scholar, a resplendent intellectual Azad as her first Minister of Education. Azad was rightly fit into the role of cosmopolitan communicator in Modern India (Nizami, 1990, p. 85).

Relationship remains imperative for Azad. His ethical, liberal, and humanitarian efforts contributed to promoting the amiable relationship among the people of different faiths.

Replicating Buber's notion dialogic relationship, Azad's concept of relationship echoes what Rumi has epitomized in his verse.

Tu Baraye vasl Kardan amdi

Na Baraya fasl kardan amdi

Tr. You have come to unite people but not to divide them
(Quoted in Datta, 1990, p. 195)

Appreciating the humans as family of God created in His image, Azad resolves to treat humanity as valued ends rather than means. Azad's concept of relationship brings mankind closer to God, disregarding the monopolies of this or that religions. Reiterating the patterns of dialogic and ethical communication, Azad stands firm on his own ground and at the same time he remains open to the peoples of other religions and nations, creating mutuality and the *Between* through which he discovers the ethical aspects of his relationship in the diverse South Asia. Indicative of the aforementioned notion of cosmopolitan and dialogic communication, built on the concept of I-Thou, Azad resonates Buber's metaphor of the *Between*; 'on the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of the *Between*' (1958, p. 204).

Conclusion

To sum up, few Muslim intellectuals have been so self-consciously modern and relevant in their ideas as Azad; fewer still have shared his intense, seemingly paradoxical preoccupation with the personal and collective past continuously connecting them to the contemporary progress in modern thoughts. Born of a traditional orthodox parents bearing censorious attitude towards modern education, nothing in his immediate ancestry offers the remotest hint that he would live to become a most emancipated Muslim thinker of his day, a

statesman of universal outlook, and a scholar of comparative civilization, whose thought and action are free from any trace theological narrowness and political and cultural biases.

Throughout his public life Azad remains committed to creating this *Between* among the obviously conflicting communities in India. Azad is in *the realm of the between*, coordinating with other diverse communities of India without trying to change them, promoting a better understanding of people, and gradually creating a social world through dialogue and communication. Azad values participation and coordination among the diverse people of India, urging, particularly, the Muslims of South Asia to be tolerant and amiable to the people of other faiths. It was through this ethical imperative that Azad transcended all religious and political affiliations and emerged as a social constructionist in pluralistic South Asia.

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