Jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies
ISSN 2249-1503
www.punejournal.in

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4244738

Muslim Identity in India: A Time for Re-discovery?

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Keywords: Indian Muslims, Muslim identity, Muslim personal law

Cited as: Lazar, G. (1998). Muslim Identity in India: A Time for Re-discovery? . Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan 1998 Vol 1/1 45-57. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4244738

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 45-57

Muslim Identity in India
A Time for Re-discovery?

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This paper has a modest aim: to study the situation of the Muslims in India. It begins with a brief historical account of their life and destiny in the period before Independence. It goes on to examine their life and destiny in independent India and the factors that shaped their identity. It concludes by pointing out the steps they could take in order to make a significant contribution to the India of the future.

1. Historical Background

Asia was traditionally the land of the Muslim strength. It is the homeland of the Muslims whose name itself in the course of history became identified with Islam: the Arabs, the Persians, the Turks and the Malays. But Islamisation of two great peoples remained incomplete: the Chinese and the Indians. Traditionally, Asian Muslim minorities never knew the type of persecution to which their brethren were subjected in Europe.

Since the beginning of the 14th century A.D. the Osmanli Turks in West Asia and the Delhi Turko-Afghan Sultanate of the Khiljils, Tughlaks, Sayyids and Lodis in the heart of South Asia had established a powerful hegemony which gave Islam a commanding position in many lands. But, more particularly, when for about three hundred years – from the 16th to the 18th century AD – a great part of North Africa, West, Central and South Asia was dominated by the three great Muslim empires – the Sunni Ottomans of Turkey (1372-1919); the Sunni Mughals of India (1526-1858), and the Shia Safavids of Iran (1500-1722) – a sort of political Dar-ul-Islam (Land of Peace) existed in the consciousness of the people if not always in the consensus of the Ulema (Islamic scholars).

Muslim political consciousness during more than 800 years of its presence in India has passed through three major stages of historical evolution: from the politically dominant position which the Muslims had enjoyed as co-religionists of the Sultans who had ruled for 550 years (1210-1757) in the heartland of the sub-continent – the Indo-Gangetic plains – and later also in the Deccan; they were reduced to a colonial status under the British imperial authority in India for a period of about 200 years; and finally, from 1947 till today.

The Muslims were first actively discriminated against as the main enemy of the British raj for a period of about 150 years (1757-1905).[1] From around 1905 onwards, however, the British tried to use the two major com-

munities, Hindus and Muslims, against each other in pursuance of their policy of divide and rule.[2] In this latter phase, a distinct pro-Muslim bias was apparent in the British colonial policy in India, culminating in the partition of the country.[3]

The establishment of Pakistan left the Muslims of India in a weaker position. They were "a minority acutely blamed by the Hindus for the partition of the country, a minority regarded as representative of an anti-Indian, hostile, divisive, and subversive influence which had shattered the aspirations for national unity."[4] The sense of bitterness produced by partition was so great that even a person with such impeccable liberal credentials as Acharya Kripalani reportedly opposed, at the time of the first general elections, giving Muslims the right to vote.[5] At the popular level, partition in fact gave rise to the feeling that, having got a state of their own in Pakistan, Muslims had no grounds for complaining about their condition or talking of their interests in India.[6] Furthermore, the partition resulted in a reversal of status roles for the Indian Muslims. It necessarily entailed a major diminution in their power and influence, more than for any other ethnic group. For the Muslims, "partition marked the end of an era," with much of their established political leadership gone and "with no clear signposts for the future."[7] As Cantwell Smith has noted, in situations where the Muslim community's power is greatly reduced or totally destroyed, it turns from worldly to religious preoccupations, and the Ulema emerge as the custodians of its interests.[8] The politics of Indian Muslims has not changed much after Independence. The Muslims of India today are face to face with a situation more or less identical with the one they encountered after the First War of Independence in 1857. The victorious British then suspected them of having been mainly responsible for the 'revolt,' and in the flush of their victory they took full revenge. The Muslim leadership by and large was put to the gallows and eliminated. The community was left high and dry, without anybody to show them the way. All avenues of employment and economic advancement were closed to them, and the ruling power eyed them with hatred and suspicion. A mood of frustration engulfed them, and they withdrew into their shell, refusing to adjust themselves to the changing patterns.

2. Identity of Muslims in the Independent India

2.1. Social Factors

Like all socio-ethical groups, Islam has been constantly interpreted in every age and in every country where its impact was felt. Interpretation is an exercise to correlate the text with the context; the doctrine with the challenges of the times; the meaning with the situation; the thought-content with the available forms; and the abiding message with the space-time constraints. The Muslims, like the Hindus but unlike the Sikhs and the Parsis, are a fragmented community – fragmented regionally, linguistically, culturally and ethnically. Except for the bond of religion, and that too merely at the sentimental level rather than in specific

terms, if one remembers particularly the local variations of social customs, personal laws and historic myths and symbols among the Muslim communities, there is no other binding force to coalesce a so-called Muslim identity.

In India today, the Muslims are faced with a doctrinally new and socially radical situation. Speaking about the basic political challenge facing the community, Dr. Zakir Hussain, the former President of India, once said that in the past the Muslims had been either the rulers or the ruled, today in India they are co-rulers as joint sharers of national sovereignty. As an analogy it can be said that the problem before the Indian Muslims is identical to the basic problem of international living itself, namely, that of coexistence on a level of mutuality and reciprocity with other groups and sections of the people, united on the fundamental common objectives of democracy, secularism and the pursuit of socio-economic justice.

What provides novelty to the spirit of Islam in India is the fact that in no other place it had to encounter, and that too for more than a thousand years, a radically dissimilar and existentially resilient civilisation, like Hinduism, which was neither fully 'conquered' and 'assimilated' by Islam, nor 'conquered' and 'assimilated' Islam. Islam in India, then, is a typical Indian phenomenon in all its ramifications. But the orthodox mulla complains that Islam in India is not quite Islamic, and the innocent infidel holds that it is not sufficiently Indian. Predictably the one wants to Islamisize it, and the other to Indianize it.

The dominant Muslim quest in post-Independent India is to strike compatibility between their religion and the demands of nation-building. It is a quest for democratic participation and secular change. Within the framework of territorial national sovereignty, the major task is to work out a viable pattern of co-existence with other communities as co-sharers of national sovereignty. Their response to this fundamental challenge is determined not merely by the nature of contemporary Islam in India, but also by two other extraneous factors: the continuous counter-response of the Hindu society to the process of nation-building and the more powerful confrontation with the forces of secular modernity.

"Pan-Islamism is now completely dead," observes S. Abid Husain.[9] Consciousness of international Muslim identity has not adversely affected India's bilateral relations with most of the Muslim nations of the world. Subcontinental Muslim consciousness might increase the centripetal power in the region.[10] A new generation has come up, which had no hand in the creation of Pakistan. The secular character of India's basic law is beyond doubt, and secularism has now been accepted as the national creed. Each political party has been vying with the other to establish its secular credentials and in championing the cause of the minorities. But the real questions are: Do these new developments in the country really assure the Muslims that they along with the other sections of the people are called to shape the destiny of independent India? How far are the Indian Muslims conscious of their

importance as Muslims of India? As followers of a great religion and citizens of a great country, how far are their compatriots, who constitute the majority, conscious of the potential contribution the Muslims can make to enhance the greatness of the country? S. Harman pertinently asks, "Why, in spite of all legal rights, do Indian Muslims continue to be backward, miserable and estranged?"[11] If the Muslims are no more than second class citizens of this great country, can it play its destined role ? In other words, what time is it for the Muslims in Independent India? In the following analysis let us discuss the problems of their identity and autonomy, as also the interconnection of their well-being with that of secular India. We focus our discussion, first of all, on the political factors and secondly on the social factors.

2.2. The Political Factors

The political life of the Muslims in India has not changed much after Independence. As in the British days, Muslims are divided between a group affiliated to the ruling party and the other group which works on communal lines in search of protection. But Independence has brought about a vital change. Gone is the third party. The separate electorates, which were the basis for communal parties and communal politics, are also gone. But the political pattern of the Indian Muslims has not altered. There is the same politics of grievance, bargaining and recrimination.

The main complaint about the Muslims in India is that they are keeping themselves aloof from the mainstream of national life. According to many political analysts, the integrative revolution that started with the constitutional declaration of India as a secular state has failed to take full effect.[12] Like other cultural and linguistic minorities, they point out, the Muslims in contemporary India continue to face many problems as well as suffer from a variety of social and economic disabilities. And the political system has not been successful in resolving or removing them so as to facilitate their effective integration into the emerging Indian polity and society. It is necessary to enter into a discussion as to whether the problems, that the Muslims feel they are facing or their sense of disillusionment from the political system, are fictitious or real. The really important thing from the viewpoint of understanding Muslim political behaviour is that a large number of Muslims see themselves as being subject to social and economic disabilities and feel that the political system has failed to secure for them the position and privileges to which they are theoretically entitled. This feeling conditions their contemporary social and political attitudes and will shape their identity and destiny in the India of the future.

One of the main reasons for this sense of disillusionment with the existing state of affairs has been their preoccupation with politics. It is a matter of common knowledge that organised politics offers an effective avenue of grievance redressal to socially and economically under-privileged sections of society in a democratic political order. As a substantial religious minority, the

Muslims have naturally been prone to use this avenue to an increasing scale both for drawing the attention of administrators and politicians to their social and economic problems and securing advantages from the political system. Perhaps, it is this increased use of organized politics, as a mechanism for dramatizing their demands and grievances, which has often inspired the comment that organized politics is the life and blood of the Muslim ethos in India.[13]

The Muslims certainly display great interest in organized politics, but their approach towards political participation has not been the same throughout their history. It seems to have changed from time to time according to the changing political situations, their political perceptions and the success or failure of their political strategies. One can discern at least two distinct approaches to political participation amongst them since Independence. On the one hand, they have sought to participate in the political system by consolidating themselves in a communal pressure group and using their combined strength in the population as a basis for political horse-trading. The different Muslim political organizations such as the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat and the Muslim Majlis in Uttar Pradesh, the Anjuman-e-Ittihadul Muslimeen of Hyderabad, and the recently revived Muslim League in North India are essentially manifestations of this kind of approach to political participation. On the other hand, they have actively participated in 'secular' national political parties. This approach arose partly from an awareness that there was no place for separatist community-based political organizations within the changed context of post-Independence India. Partly it arose from the relatively sympathetic attitude of several political parties and their leaders towards the Muslims. This approach gave them better chances of securing social and political advantages through supporting political organizations and pressure groups. However, the experience of the Muslims over the years has led them to believe that neither of the above-mentioned approaches to organized politics is quite satisfactory from their point of view. These two approaches rested on the premise that the Muslims constituted a single homogeneous and unified community and could serve as a basis for political action or political mobilization by any particular party or group of parties. It is certainly true that the Muslims see themselves as a monolithic community and consequently consider themselves as facing a set of common social and economic problems whose solution requires their collective intervention. However, the Muslims of India do not constitute a single monolithic and unified community. They are horizontally and vertically divided into various regional and cultural groups on the one hand, and, into castes and classes, on the other.[14]

Due to this highly segmented character of their community and the presence of a number of distinct strata within it, each with its own specific problems and grievances, a third possibility for the Muslims to participate in the political system would be for each distinct strata to create a solidarity of social and economic

interests with corresponding segments in other religious communities, and to work for the solution of their common problems in a collective fashion. This approach would lead to the elimination of the communal cleavage which has characterized our political life for well over a century. Secondly, it would result in the secularization of the demands and thereby reduce the possibility of their outright rejection in a secular state. Finally, it would also enlarge the support base of their demands as all those who share the same problems would work with them.

A related issue is the myth that Indian Muslims are anti-national. Since they have no loyalties to this country, they should all go to Pakistan. The creation of Pakistan was the political outcome of a process first set in motion by the British and later raked up by several of the national leaders – both Hindu and Muslim. After Independence, the Muslims who migrated to Pakistan were generally the affluent classes as they saw no future or security in a predominantly Hindu country. Those who stayed behind were mainly poor Muslims, concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and other backward parts of the country. The affluent Muslims of Kerala, many of whom have sought temporary jobs in the Middle East, make sure that their earnings go back to their Motherland. It is the affluent NRIs – mainly Hindus – in the US and UK who crib and moan about the 'backwardness' of India and want a dozen assurances before they will send a dollar or a pound back to this country.

If the Muslims were disloyal, there would have been more Muslim spies than Hindu spies. And if they are conspicuously absent from the mainstream of Indian life, the fault is not theirs but that of the Hindu ruling class that has deliberately kept them out. Any political analyst would say that here is a community which has been deliberately kept out of the mainstream. For instance, the Minority Commission Report prepared by the late Gopal Singh demonstrates that in the Seventies, Muslims made up only two percent of the IPS, 2.86 percent of the IAS and 3.3 percent of state Class I employees. Even in private enterprises, they were grossly under-represented; Muslims accounted for only 4.08 percent of the jobs. In public sector banks, there is a conspicuous absence of Muslim directors. Such financial institutions as the State Bank of India, Bank of India, UCO Bank and Bank of Maharashtra have no Muslim directors.

Furthermore, the Muslims are among the most educationally backward communities in India. Despite the fact that the community constitutes 11.2 percent of the country's population, their children account for just 4 percent of those doing matriculation. Muslims have not benefited from government schemes, securing only 2 percent of industrial licences and 3.7 percent of financial assistance. In 1978, the Janata Party government set up a Minorities Commission. Two years later, a committee was set up to study the minorities' condition. In 1983, Mrs. Indira Gandhi unveiled a programme that promised more jobs and easier loans to the Muslims. No one bothered to find

out what this effort was achieving. S.M.H. Burney, former chairman of the Minorities Commission, says that despite a scheme, easy credit was never made available to the Muslims.[15] The Gopal Singh report of the Minority Commission was not released by the Government for six years. Surprisingly, the report noted that some employment exchanges, in fact, refused to register the Muslims. When the V.P. Singh government finally released the report, the Government could not take action on it.

The Government was, on many occasions, conspiring with the Muslim leaders who, it thought, could sway the vote. For example, when the Criminal Procedure Code was being amended in 1974 to provide maintenance for destitute women, Mrs. Gandhi specified that this need not apply to communities which already paid compensation. This was a reference to the Muslim Personal Law under which a woman, on marriage, is given the mehr as a kind of security in the event of being divorced by her husband. The mehr is usually a paltry sum, so Mrs. Gandhi's exemption from the amendment was of no help to the Muslim women. Post-Ayodhya riots brought in shocking reports from all over the country of how the police had acted in a biased fashion, lashing out at the minorities. Muslims were asking why not a single bullet was fired in Ayodhya while many Muslims fell to bullets in the Muslim-dominated areas of Bombay, Surat, Ahmedabad, Delhi and Kanpur. Many Muslims feel that this is because the police, especially the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), is largely Hindu dominated, and there are very few Muslim recruits. This common perception is borne out by official statistics. In the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Muslims account for just 5.57 percent, while their number in the Provincial Armed Constabulary is lower. Even in the much touted Rapid Action Force, which aims to be more representative of the minorities, including Muslims, the number is not more than 16 percent. Hindus still account for more than 80 percent of the force.[16] These issues have become essentially symbolic in character. They represent the Muslim community's search for self-respect, a hankering for recognition and for unmistakable evidence that the equation of power in the new polity of India does not exclude them. Lately, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have revived their campaign against the religious minorities of India. They claim that the special rights enjoyed by them in post-Independence India must be immediately scrapped. The RSS draws attention to the Muslim Personal Law and also to the Constitution (Article 370), which gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim majority state. Both the RSS and the BJP demand an end to this provision in the Statutes. "The only time they chose not to talk about them was when Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed his 13-day government in 1996."[17] Certain symbols of "appeasement" such as the banning of Salman Rushdie's book, the Prophet's birthday being declared a holiday, mean nothing to the average Muslim. As K.R. Malkani, the BJP's vice-president (1993), admitted: "All that the common Muslim has got from the Government are mere lollipops."[18] The low economic status of the Muslims and their thin

geographical spread within India rule out in their case any separatist political ambitions. Contrary to the general assumption, Muslims have not voted *en masse* for any party in any of the elections.[19] The demands that sections of Muslims are now raising are for their self-confidence, so battered in the decades after partition. It is a kind of psycho-political settling down and seeking of a place in Independent India. It is the right of minorities to protect their cultural and political identities. But the measures taken by a community for the realisation of a distinct identity invariably arouse the suspicion of the power-wielding majority which tries to undermine the equal rights of the minorities.[20] It was this universal feature of the majority-minority situation that led the United Nations, for instance, to establish as early as 1947 the sub-commission for the prevention of discrimination and the protection of the minorities.

In view of these realities the Muslims deserve an institutional set-up which addresses their particular problems. This cannot be dismissed on the assumption that it will be violative of the secular principle of the Constitution. The word 'class' used in Article 16(4) includes communities, as pointed out by K.M. Munshi during the discussion on the clause in the advisory committee. He maintained that classes are also to be interpreted as minorities or religious communities. And the Muslims need affirmative action on this score.

2.3. Sociological Dimension

Sociologically considered, the minority status of the Indian Muslims is evidently a very significant factor for discussion. Among the minority groups in India the Muslims are singled out as those who alone cling to their respective traditions and dogmas, and who are violent and intolerant. If one sets out to analyse these factors it would seem that there are at least three reasons for it.

According to Saiyed, firstly, there is the problem of stereotypes, secondly, there is the inability of the vast majority of the Indian Muslims to participate in a materially modernistic life-style, and thirdly, the Indian Muslims' opposition to any changes in their Personal Law. The issue of Personal Law is, in fact, closely linked with the Muslim urge for identity. Our discussion is an attempt to unravel these issues connected with the Muslim Personal Law.[21] No single issue affecting the Indian Muslims is surcharged with as much emotion as that of the Muslim Personal Law. The exposition offered here is neither complete nor definitive; more rigorous theoretical and empirical efforts are needed to supplement the present explanation.

Muslim Personal Law and the Muslim Identity

The Muslim Personal Law or jurisprudence technically is the "canon law" of Islam, but is generally used to mean all the commandments of Allah concerning human activities. The Muslims in India have always been strongly against allowing the rulers to interfere in what they consider to be matters of religion. During the British Rule, when at the behest of Hindu social reformers, traditional Hindu law was changed through official enactments, Muslims

did not want the British to legislate for their community even when the situation indicated the need for some legislative action. They made organized efforts to secure the protection of the Muslim Personal Law through constitutional guarantees in the Government of India Acts of 1915 and 1935.

The present Muslim Personal Law in India is the product of a long evolution.[22] In its final form it is less than fifty years old. This law is based on Hanafi law which is one of the many schools of Islamic jurisprudence. It has been observed that the rigid Muslim Personal Law has been the main reason for their social backwardness. In some respects, Indian *Ulema* (Islamic scholars) and the Muslim leaders had taken a lead in the Muslim world in initiating a process of reform. India was one of the first countries which enacted, with the consent of the community, a law in 1939 granting the right of divorce to Muslim women in certain cases. In this respect the Muslims were ahead of the Hindus in the country. It was only after Independence that the movement of reform in the Muslim Personal Law stagnated and met with the growing resistance of the community. One of the main reasons why the community resists uniformity in civil law is to protect its identity. According to many Muslims, in some areas of the Personal Law, the community faces problems of harmonisation with universal human rights as we know them today. They relate to the rights of women and the minorities, criminal justice and the limits of freedom of the individual. If we look at the traditionally established mechanism for change in Islam, we find that the principle that customs, usages and norms of social life change has been generally accepted in Muslim jurisprudence. However, the socio-cultural milieu of the Arab society of the time did leave its imprint on the surface structure of Indian soil.

During the 1400 years long odyssey of Islam, Islamic laws have been changed from time to time and from country to country. There is no particular sanctity for the Muslim Personal Law enacted by the British Indian government in 1937 and 1939. It is time that the issue of reform in the Personal Law is restored to the top of the Muslim agenda. In particular, the question of divorce, polygamy and other provisions which discriminate between the sexes need to be re-evaluated in accordance with the spirit of the Quran, the Constitution of the country, modern requirements and the enlightened interest of the community.

Social and Educational Backwardness

A major aspect of the Muslim situation in India is the community's social and educational backwardness. This has historical roots, including the development of caste-like features in the Indian Muslim society. According to informed opinion, the Muslims in India are stratified along two distinct axes. The first is the axis of caste-like groupings which are based on descent and racial origin. Historically, the Indian Muslims have been grouped into two broad categories called ashraf and ajlaf. The other is the axis of occupation or political power according to which at least four broad social strata can be identified-upper class, middle class,

lower middle class and lower class. Even though these axes are quite distinct and separate and can be said to have existed side by side, there has always been a considerable degree of congruence and overlap between them. No attempt has been made to refine this oppressive system.[23]

Modernity and Muslim Identity

The Muslim community in India is stigmatised as a drag on the rest of the country in its march towards modernity. There is a common assumption that all world religious communities other than Islam have already changed and adapted themselves to the requirements of modernisation. In the following analysis let us discuss the phenomenon of modernity in relation to the Muslim community in India.

In his book, Modernisation Of Indian Tradition, Professor Yoginder Singh[24] has compared and contrasted Sanskritisation[25] among the Hindus with Islamisation among the Muslims. Both are forms of upward mobility, whereby lower sections of society seek to improve their status. But there the comparison ends. Prof. Singh notes two differences. First, "while revolt against hierarchy through Sanskitisation implies a withdrawal from tradition – an indirect release from its psychological contours – and might eventually accelerate modernisation", Islamisation, "as a movement of revivalism of basic virtues in the Islamic tradition..., might contribute to greater conservatism by increasing the hold of the religious elites on the population." Secondly, "the movement of Sanskritisation is in no way approved by the Brahmin priests, and yet it goes on. Islamisation, on the contrary, is not only engineered by the religious elites but results in an enhancement of their hold on the Muslim masses. It is thus a traditionalising movement par excellence."[26]

According to Girilal Jain there are two interrelated tendencies. First, the determined bid by Faraizis, Wahhabis, Al-Hadithis and Tablighis to remove Hindu influences and practices from the lives of the ordinary Muslims and to block Western ideas and ideals were part of one single movement and, as such, one programme could not be separated from the other. Secondly, the presence of Hindu elements in Indian Islam alone could make its modernisation possible by way of exposure to, and acceptance of, Western values; their elimination inevitably closed Indian Islam to modernisation.[27]

Since Independence the social life and behaviour of the Muslims have undergone considerable change. In the educational field, including female education, we see tremendous progress. Muslim children, particularly those from educated families, are attending cosmopolitan and secular non-Muslim schools in increasing numbers; women have come out of the *purdah* and wherever possible are taking up jobs. Discarding the *fez*, the *sherwani* and the trimmed and flowing beard, the present-day Muslims are allowing themselves to be drawn into modern professions and business. Muslim youths today participate in a common pub-culture and share with others in the country the common hopes and frustrations of their generation.

Though the centrality of the Quran and Hadith remains undisputed, various strands of thought and cultural patterns derived from indigenous ethnicity, westernisation, orthodoxy, revivalism and vulgar consumerism, shape the identities of the Muslims in the world today. In the midst of this diversity one can easily discern a pattern of shared beliefs, attitudes and mores. One of the roots of Islam's anti-modernist stance lies in Islam's encounter with Western colonialism. In India as in other Arab countries, anti-imperialists, including the Ulema, turned to nationalism which, in turn, made them anti-West in the period of their reawakening. Twentieth century political Islam owes its existence to this search for national identity against a hegemonic West. It has gained in stridency in the Arab countries because of the failure of the fusion between nationalism and socialism. In India this political anti-Westernism became identified with intellectual, cultural anti-modernity. It is the same hegemonic aspiration of the West that makes it perceive Islam as an "evil empire" in the making.

Most of the Hindu writers while talking about modernisation draw their inspiration and information from Western sources. The best way of understanding Islam and the Muslims of India will be through Indian Muslim sources. Perhaps Mr.Girilal Jain will agree with many scholars that the Indian Muslim community is the most resilient, creative and enlightened community in the Muslim world with a valuable heritage that can show light to the entire Indian society. However, there is a lack of communication between the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims, which stalls the creative process of thought.

But there is a stagnation of thought among the Indian Muslims because of *Ulema* orthodoxy. A few Muslim scholars have pointed out that behind the conservatism of the *Ulema* lies the traditional *madrassa* (seminary) system of *Ulema* education, which is the pivotal institution for the continuation of the Islamic tradition. In India, the training imparted in most Muslim *madrassas* has remained stagnant because of its adherence to what is known as the 'Nizami syllabus', whose content and style continue to be more or less the same as was formulated at the end of the 17th century by an Indian theological scholar, Mulla Nizamuddin (1679-1748). The outmoded education is strengthened by the idealization and legitimation of poverty in the ethos of the *madrassa*. This theodicy of poverty, which is anchored in several hadiths (extra-Quranic tradition), is continuously and rigorously reinforced by the *madrassa* and its psycho-social environment. It is sad, however, that while this system may give meaning to life in one context, it renders the same life meaningless in another context, namely that of change and modernisation.

An air of liberalism is now affecting the Muslim community. The days are over when the liberals were considered kafirs. This shift in Muslim opinion may well be the most important consequence of the Babri demolition. If carried to the end, it could usher in a period of Islamic reformation in India.

3. Conclusion

The Muslims in India in order to keep their identity will have to recognize the social and economic divergences within their own community and to understand their implications for political action, to look at their problems in a broad perspective, and to undertake a realistic re-appraisal of their new status in free India. One of the misfortunes of the Muslims in recent years has been that they have had more than their normal quota of politicians but few social reformers. Yet, their most pressing need today seems to be for a social reformer who can lead them out of their present mood of despondency. In India, Islam needs a contemporaneously relevant and situationally valid interpretation. There is also an urgent need for emphasizing the humanistic, secular and accommodative aspects of Islam. Indeed this is a challenge that has not yet been taken up seriously.

Hindus and other religious groups will have to accept Muslims as an integral part of the population, to recognize that certain segments of the Muslims actually suffer from social and economic disabilities which, so long as they continue to persist, will impede the effective integration of those strata into the polity and society, and to work collectively with them, at least for those common problems which some of their members also share with them.

The Muslim community has entered a new phase of purification and consolidation with a will to discover itself. Muslims are becoming aware that they are citizens of a great country, whose future depends also on their contribution. They were among the first to develop a composite culture that broadened the boundaries of Bharat from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari and from Kabul to Chittagong, and brought home the reality of a united and great India, in which the Himalayan border states were included for the first time. In view of these realities the Muslims should form an institutional set-up that not only addresses their particular problems but also the problems of independent Bharat. In future, too, they have a great role to play in preserving the multi-religious and multi-cultural character of this great land.

Notes

1. Cf. David Wines, "Indian Muslims: Fundamental Questions," *London Times*, Birmingham: January 1985, p. 10.
2. Cf. Ahmd Khan, *The Muslims in India*, Delhi: Ahmed Pub., 1978, p. 80.
3. Cf. Basheer Khan, *The Muslim Society*, Lucknow: Latif Pub., 1976, p. 76
4. Gardner Murphy, *In the Minds of Men: The Study of Human Behaviour and Social Tensions in India*, New York: Basic Books, 1953, p. 124.
5. See K.R. Malkani's Letter in *The Times of India*, Bombay, May 21, 1979.
6. Gardner Murphy, p. 127.
7. Gopal Krishna, *Contemporary Muslim Attitudes and Their Place in Indian Society*, Delhi: CSDS, 1977, p.11.
8. W.C. Smith, "The *Ulema* in Indian Politics," *Politics and Society in India*, C.H. Phillips,

ed., London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963, cited in Gopal Krishna, "Framework of Politics," *Seminar* 106, June 1968, p. 33.

9. Abid Husain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Bombay: The Asia Publishing House, 1965, p. 7.
10. Balraj Puri, "Identity and Autonomy of Muslims in India," *Islam and the Modern Age*, Vol. X No. 2, May 1979, p. 12.
11. S. Harman, *Plight of Muslims of India*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1975, p. 56.
12. See Muhammad Asad, *The Spirit of Islam*, Ahmed Khan, *The Muslims of India* The same idea is also found in David Wines, "Indian Muslims: Fundamental Insights".
13. Ali Khan, *Muslims and Changes in India*, Patna: Trimurti Publications, 1987, p. 97.
14. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Indian Muslims: A Study of the Minority Problem in India*, Delhi: Ajanta Publicatiaons, 1985, p. 1.
15. Burney in his private circular remarks on the ambiguity of the Minority Commission's Report, see *Cultural Forum*, 1972.
16. For details see "Aligarh Riots: Study Team's Findings," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 (46) (18 November, 1978), pp. 1882-85. Also Beg Nasirulla, "Rights of Minorities Under Indian Constitution," *Mainstream* 14 (510), (21 August, 1976), pp. 11-14 provides valuable information. Further one can also consult C.P. Bambhri *et. al.* "Voting Behaviour: a Comparative Study of the Majority and Minority Communities," *Indian Journal of Political Science* 35 (11) (Oct-Dec 1974), pp. 332-339.
17. *Indian Currents*, July 14-20, 1997, p. 1.
18. *India Today*, January 31, 1993, p. 44.
19. The voting pattern of the Muslims can be seen in Asghar Ali Engineer, "Do Muslims Vote as a Block?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 (11) (12 March 1977), p. 458. Further, it is enlightening to see Habib Irfan *et. al.* "Problems of the Muslim Minority in India," *Social Scientist* 4 (11) (June 1976), pp. 67-72.
20. S.M.H. Burney speaks very openly of the drawbacks of this programme See "An Analysis of the Minority Commission", Delhi: Leaflet, Preeti Publication, 1993, p 10
21. A.R. Saiyed, "Othodoxy," *Seminar* 240 (1979), p. 24.
22. Tahir Mahmood, though a staunch Muslim, critically analyses the validity of and the need for change in the Muslim Personal Law. See *Semina* 240 (1979), p. 27.
23. Malika B. Mistry further elaborates this issue with the help of statistics taken in the city of Bangalore She concludes that the Muslims are seen backward not only in terms of education and employment but also in terms of occupational status and income. She further says that a general welfare as well as special programmes aimed at reducing socio-economic backwardness of Muslims should be undertaken See *Socio-Economic Backwardness of the Muslims in India*, Bombay: Institute of Indian Studies, Occasional Papers No. 5, Vol. 7, May, 1991.
24. Delhi: Thomson Press, 1973.
25. *Ibid*, p. 54.
26. *Ibid*, pp. 80, 201.
27. *The Times of India*, Mumbai: February 25, 1993, p.12.