ST ANTONY'S INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Umma and the Dilemma of Muslim Belonging in Modern South Asia

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Abstract: The Islamic belief in the universal identity of Muslims, as primarily a religious one, is related to the Islamic faith in the homogenous concept of the *umma* (international or global community of Muslim believers). However, the empirical reality is that the Muslim umma is fragmented and heterogeneous not only in terms of distinct theological sects like Sunnis and Shias but also along with other variables like class, language, and gender. Therefore, the specific articulation of an imagined idea of the umma has to necessarily go through a process of political construction by the Islamists, which neutralizes the differences within the Muslim community, along caste, class, gender, and ethnolinguistic lines. In this regard, this paper will problematize the idea of umma by examining two sets of events in modern South Asia, the region with the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. Firstly, it will foreground the critique of nationalism by Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi towards both 'composite nationalism' of Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the 'Muslim nationalism' of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, highlighting an intellectual debate that occurred in a post-Khilafat Muslim context. Secondly, this paper will locate the limitations of the idea of the umma within the emergence of the Bangladeshi nation-state in a post-colonial setting, on the basis of linguistic nationalism that questioned the unity and integrity of the imagined sense of the Muslim umma in modern South Asia. Finally, the paper will briefly highlight the fractured nature of the Muslim umma by pointing out the prominent categories of caste and language among the South Asian Muslims along with the deep divisions within the Muslim theological and political leadership in contemporary South Asia.

The idea of *umma*: Conceptual and historical Issues

Islamists aim to achieve the very unity and solidarity of Muslims all over the world around the commonality and centrality of the Islamic identity of *umma* (global community of Muslim believers). The idea of umma is expressed in terms of identification with a singular and Universalist global Muslim identity. However, within the Islamic discourses, there are compelling concepts like *Mulk* (country) and *Watan* (home). Such concepts in the Islamic discourses invoke an idea of belonging that ranges from the territorial idea of the nation-state to the transnational and

internationalist appeal of the umma. Conceptually, the seventh-century Islamic idea of the umma is an antinomy to the seventeenth-century Westphalian system of the nation-state. The period of decolonisation and the emergence of newly formed Muslim majority nation-states following the abolition of the Caliphate in the early 1920s, certainly questioned the universality of the umma. The internationalist idea of the umma is based on the logic of fraternity (Muslim brethren). Similarly, the idea of the nation is also based on the logic of fraternity. In this respect, the question of where a Muslim belongs in a post-Khilafat and post-Westphalian system of nation-states is a significant one to ask.

Generally, Islamists believe in the Universalist concept of *umma*, which is conceptually a supranational or transnational union. The Islamist call for the unity of the umma is based on the belief that Muslims throughout the world should have a certain sense of solidarity among one another that cuts across the borders of the nation-state. In this respect, Islamists have justifications to oppose the concept of the nation-state. In the specific case of South Asian Islamism, Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, was opposed to the nation-state and nationalism, as shall be discussed later in this paper. After the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 by Kemalist policies, there has been little symbolic global theo-political authority among Muslims. Therefore, in a post-colonial and post-Khilafat world, the universalist idea of the Muslim umma encounters the particularist entity of new and emerging nation-states.

Recently, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam has argued that by and large, myriad Islamist movements have accepted the nation-state "as an organizational principle of the international system which re-inscribes the authority of national governments into the global order."[1] However, Talal Asad offers a caveat that, although Islamism has always "addressed itself directly to the nation-state, it should not be regarded as a form of nationalism."[2] This is because Islamic umma is not an "imagined community" equivalent of any nation-state and it "is ideologically not 'a society' onto which *state, economy, religion* can be mapped" as it is "neither limited nor sovereign", and can eventually "embrace all of humanity."[3] However, as Adib-Moghaddam suggests, in the presence of the nation-states, Islamism is certainly *not* "an emblem of the political uniformity of the *umma*."[4]

With this in mind, what should an Islamist party do today if it must operate within the geographical confines of the nation-state? Should it altogether discard the universalist concept of the umma from its ideological vocabulary? Alternatively, should it rhetorically appeal to the umma even if Islamists must operate within the particular territory of a given nation-state?

The idea of the umma, signifying all of Islam within the broadest definition of "Muslim collective identity," has its genealogical roots in the seventh century and is directly linked to Mecca as the "common node" and Arabia as the focal spatial context.[5] In this regard, the umma also frames the medium for "constructing Muslim networks" from the late sixth and early seventh-century pagan Arabia that linked Muhammad, the merchant, "to the metropolitan world of Mesopotamia and beyond."[6] The Muslim networks, until the twentieth century, privileged men over women except for the annual event of *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) as prescribed by Islamic religious tradition.[7] Scholars have argued that, from the eleventh to sixteenth centuries, several ancient Greek epistemological concerns were later transmitted to the thinkers of the European Enlightenment by the active assistance of the global context of the *umma*. This was possible because, until the sixteenth century, Islamic empires controlled large parts of the world and the Muslim intellectual elites were linked across polities, territories and networked societies in the west.[8]

According to Islamic law (*Shari'a*), the Muslim community (*al-umma al-muslima*) is supposed to rule the Islamic territory (*dār al-Islām*), and such a community, which could be in conflict with other religious communities inside or outside the Islamic territory, is certainly opposed to tribal feeling.[9] Right from its inception, Islam emerged as a reason for being, and the cementing factor between the community (*al-umma*) and the state (*al-dawla*).[10] In this respect, a scholar of Islamic studies points out that "[p]olitical boundaries were unknown to Islam except those that separated the *dār al-Islām* (abode of peace)... from the *dār al-harb* (abode of war)... In its internal aspect, it was an assemblage of individuals bound to one another by ties of religion."[11] In fact, the Islamic states in the seventh century under the Prophet Muhammad and the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali) were based purely on ideological terms rather than strictly political, territorial, or ethnic lines. This is precisely why the purpose of the Islamic government was to defend and protect the faith instead of the state.[12] Therefore, Islam as an ideological-cum-politico-religious entity tied Muslims together by bonds of faith (*deen*) within the umma, and in this regard, "the *dār al-Islām* should ideally expand without limit."[13] Such expansion was made possible by the travels of several disciples of the Prophet in Medina who helped and accommodated the followers (*muhājirūn*) and companions of the Prophet with a politico-ideological agenda of transforming the territory of *dār al-hijra* (the first Islamic city of Medina) to *dār al-Islām*.[14]

The concept of umma in the Islamic vocabulary is "transglobal" and bears the idea of a borderless nation. The Prophet Muhammad imagined a transglobal Muslim citizenship, "based on faith rather than

contemporary nation-state distinctions, or rather, on how colonizing cartographers cut up the global landscape."[15] In this respect, the original goal of the umma was to be a network, which on the one hand "was fixed in faith" but also "mobile" through all parts of the world.[16] Such a perception of umma as mobile and malleable challenges the conservative and traditional understanding of the umma as a homogenous community that "has always occluded rifts and contradictions and has been unlinked from any idea of travel and movement."[17]

In a non-Arab setting, particularly in the case of South-East Asia, Islam did not automatically unite diverse ethnic groups but instead offered some unifying principles with references to the umma and the *shari'a* that encourage supralocal orientation among the Muslim believers.[18] In such a context, the general idea of the umma had to go through the localized matrix of territory and polity, led by local *raja* (rulers).[19]

In the twentieth century, the idea of fraternal unity and solidarity of the Muslim umma was successfully contested in many instances on the basis of the nation-state and nationalism. The Eurocentric model of secular-nationalism propagated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey in the 1920s, popularly known as Kemalism, was later introduced by the westernized and modernizing political leadership (the Kemalist elites) in many parts of the Muslim world in the post-war international scenario, who regarded Islam as peripheral to the concerns of the state.[20] The Kemalist programme influenced other Muslim regimes as well, such as Reza Shah's modernization project (the Pahlavist strategy) in Iran, the Arab nationalist politics articulated in the form of Nasserism in Egypt, some of the anti-FIS groups in Algeria, and the Baathist regime of Iraq.[21]

Recently, in an insightful essay, Faisal Devji has demonstrated how the annual event of *hajj* is actually characterized with nationalist segregations instead of the so-called myth of the "Muslim unity."[22] While reading Devji's accounts, it is interesting to note that while the centrality of the *Kaaba* in the everyday Islamic religious practice of five times *namaz* (prayer) is crucial, and thus creates conditions for an imagined homogenous Muslim umma (since all Muslims have to face the *Kaaba* in order to pray five times per day), the actual religious event of *hajj* exposes the vacuous nature of solidarity and unity of the Islamic brotherhood for very minute logistical reasons.

Devji suggests that the idea of umma, in an age of globalized forms of technology and social media, is just an imagined, virtual and simulated community. It does not exist in the real world, out there. According to Devji, although "Muslim unity" as a significant theme emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries in response to the rise of European empires, calls for Muslim unity as a "defensive strategy" were specifically a feature of the 20th century "to counter the loss of Muslims' control over their own

30 political life."[23] Instead of unity, there was recognition of disunity and disagreement as an old discourse, as "the Prophet pronounced that his community would be divided into 72 sects until the end of time, with only a single crucially unspecified one bound for salvation."[24]

However, the twentieth century desire for Muslim unity remained largely theoretical until the end of the Cold War as a result of two specific set of events. The first was the global Muslim mobilizations over Salman Rushdie's allegedly blasphemous novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1989). The second set of events that directly triggered the idea of "Muslim unity" in the contemporary world was the supposedly insulting depictions of the Prophet by cartoons in sections of the European print media. Thus, the Muslim protests in response to the Rushdie Affair and the Danish cartoons in a transnational space, without any particular party or organization playing the anchor role for such a worldwide response, was actually possible due to the globalization of media.[25]

In this respect, for Devji, calls for Muslim unity are "not high-minded" but "disingenuous" with a "noble pretext for anathematising or demonising opponents."[26] In this regard, "the ideal of unity is inherently anti-political" because posturing about an illusory Muslim unity tends only to "alienate Muslims from the political world of nation-states that govern their societies."[27] From such a perspective, "Muslim militancy, too, is actually a consequence of de-politicization."[28] In fact, the "condemnations of terrorism in religious language, in the name of Islam, are losing causes" as "real problems will not be solved on theological terrain" because of the celebration and promotion of "moderate Islam," which is "another step away from the world of politics and institutions," to the "world of progress and solutions."[29] Therefore, Devji argues that the "quest for harmony" and for Muslim unity, is a "siren song" and must be resisted.[30] In agreement with Devji, the next section of this paper will explore how the articulations about Muslim unity along the lines of the Muslim umma in the 20th century South Asia were marred with theoretical and political inconsistencies.

Contradictions within the idea of Muslim *umma* in modern South Asia

In modern South Asia, the contradictions within the idea of umma were first exposed on a large scale during the partition debates in the 1930s and 1940s. Such debates in late colonial India created a context where "an old language of moral solidarity, embodied in normative concepts such as *millat* and *umma* and in the image of Islam as a networked civilization, took on new public significance."[31] In this regard, normative ideas about community played an important role in shaping Muslim politics in the

Indian subcontinent during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.[32] In this respect, Maududi's response to both the composite Indian nationalism of Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and the Muslim nationalism of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, deserves special mention. Consider the following passages by two great Muslim leaders of the Indian subcontinent.

> Pakistan was founded because the Muslims of the subcontinent wanted to build up their lives in accordance with the teachings and traditions of Islam because they wanted to demonstrate to the world that Islam provides a panacea to the many diseases which have crept into the life of humanity today.—*Liaquat Ali Khan*[33]

> It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas that are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different.—*Abul Kalam Azad*[34]

From the quotes above, two dominant versions of nationalism are expressed. The Muslim nationalism of the Muslim League is being articulated by Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, while the "composite nationalism" articulated by the Congress leader, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad falls under the banner of Indian secular nationalism. Azad was supported by the majority of the Deobandi *ulama*,[35] who, under the leadership of Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, articulated an Islamic theological ground for "composite nationalism."

The debate between Muslim nationalism and composite nationalism has often misled many historians to situate the Indian partition debates into a binary model. However, it is worth noting that, in contrast to a binary model, by late 1930s, three different Muslim positions regarding independence and nationalism had developed. More conservative religious leaders like Sayyid Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi of Lucknow's Nadwat-i-Ulama seminary, Abul A'la Maududi, and sections of India's Islamic scholars (*ulama*) argued that nationalism and Islam were antithetical ideologies. They condemned nationalism because it was simultaneously identified as a Western-bred phenomenon and as a particularism in conflict with Islamic universalism. Therefore, any form of nationalism, even Muslim nationalism, was rejected by them. A second position was articulated by Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), a major theoretician of the Caliphate (*Khilafat*) Movement and a leader of the Congress Party, eventually becoming its president. After the abolition of the caliphate, Azad's political position was favourable to a "composite nationalism," which was based upon the unity of Hindus and Muslims and their shared history and experience in the subcontinent. From the late 1930s, Azad's

commitment to Indian nationalism was consistent until the end of his life. The *Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind* leader, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani's position was similar to that of Azad. Finally, the third position was that of Muslim nationalism. The Muslim nationalist position was aptly articulated by Muhammad Iqbal, the Islamic reformer, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the politician who led the Muslim League. A growing number of communal conflicts had led to a situation where an important concern of the Muslim League leadership was that the historic divisions between the Hindu and Muslim communities would severely impact the rights of Muslims in a Hindu-dominated state. At the same time, the electoral defeat of the Muslim League in the 1937 provincial elections convinced Jinnah and the Muslim League leadership that if they were to secure mass support from the Muslim populations, a formal appeal to religion was the only time-tested method for building a national and pan-Indian Muslim movement. Islam provided a common denominator that had proven effective in uniting Muslims—modern elites, *ulama*, and the common masses, like it did in the Khilafat movement.[36]

In the partition debates, the views of Maududi—the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*—differed from both the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan and the pro-Congress Muslim *ulama*, who accepted the Indian version of nationalism.[37] Maududi and Jamaat-e-Islami opposed the Muslim League's campaign for Pakistan because it believed that Pakistan would not be an Islamic state.[38] Maududi's proposed settlement for the Hindu-Muslim problem lay in the logic of an undivided India. For him, the creation of Pakistan would substantially weaken the position of those Indian Muslims who would stay in the Muslim minority provinces.[39] Maududi differentiated between the concept of a "Muslim identity" and an "Islamic identity". A Muslim can be born into a Muslim family without following the religio-political principles of Islam, whereas a "true Muslim" is a person who bears an Islamic identity by practicing and believing Islam as a complete way of life, motivated by the goal of establishing the sovereignty of God on earth.[40] Therefore, for Maududi, "being a Muslim was not an inborn characteristic but a state attained by striving for Islamic knowledge."[41] That is to say, Maududi believed in the concept of a "puritan Muslim". Jamaat's opposition to the League's Pakistan was because Maududi turned "cultural difference into an extreme form of bigotry" by which he "execrated Jinnah and the Muslim League and practically excluded the majority of Muslims from his definition of the true community of Islam."[42]

In a pamphlet titled, *Nationalism and India*, Maududi clearly holds that "Islam and nationalism are diametrically opposed to each other."[43] According to Maududi, "Islam cannot flourish in the lap of nationalism, and nationalism too cannot find a place in the fold of Islam. The progress of

nationalism would starve Islam to death and the progress of Islam would sound the death-knell to nationalism."[44] In another instance, he says "Muslim Nationalist and 'Muslim Communist' are contradictory terms as 'Communist Fascist,' 'Socialist Capitalist,' and 'Chaste Prostitute.'"[45] Maududi even sees a fundamental contradiction between the Western dress donned by nationalists and their nationalist message. As he says,

> [W]ell known section of Indian Muslims advocates with full gusto the encouragement of Western nationalism in this country. The self-same people make strong recommendation for the adoption of Western dress by Indian Muslims. These Oriental nationalists are, indeed, a very strange creature. On the one hand they make intense and violent propaganda of their nationalism, and on the other hand they show least scrupulousness in appropriating the dress and culture of an alien people of an alien country.[46]

Writing about nationalism in the context of the Second World War (1939-45), Maududi felt that nationalism was responsible for all sorts of violence and destruction stemming from international war. In a public meeting, he said:

> Today, all of us are baffled and perplexed by the question why human life has been bereft of peace and security. Why are we being visited perpetually by various kinds of troubles and hardships? Why has the scheme of our life gone awry? We find nations falling foul of one another, country struggling against country, men tearing one another to bits like wolves. Millions of men are being killed, wounded, or uprooted by war, human habitations are being destroyed and property and business worth billions of rupees are being ruined.[47]

In another speech, Maududi depicted a divine-cum-historical analysis of the rise and fall of nations, and opted for a narrative approach in his reading of Indian history. He narrated the story from the fall of indigenous inhabitants to the rise of Aryans, to the decline of ancient civilization and the rise of Muslim rule during the medieval ages, to the decimation of Muslim rule and the ascendancy of British rule and while speaking at the dawn of partition, he also found justification for the expulsion of British.[48]

Maududi believed in a homogenous concept of nation based on Islamic faith and practice and thus according to him, there can be only two kinds of nations—Islamic and un-Islamic.[49] Maududi believed that the composite nationalism proposed by the Congress and supported by a significant section of Indian *ulama* would lead to "absorption of Muslims

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in the Hindu nation."[50] Similarly, he had been opposing the Muslim League's two-nation theory in the partition debates of the 1940s on the following grounds: (1) the terms "Muslim" and "nationalism" were contradictory, (2) The top leaders of the Muslim League did not deserve to be the leaders of Muslims since they lacked an "Islamic mentality," (3) Pakistan should not be just a Muslim majority state but an "Islamic state" where "the system of government will be based on the sovereignty of God."[51]

Maududi argued that the type of mindset that Islam sought to build could not be reconciled with a nationalist outlook; those who accepted the principles of Islam transcend the distinctions of race, country, and nationality. A nationalist, on the other hand, was obliged to place the interests of his or her own nationality ahead of all other groupings, as the nationalist's ultimate goal would be a nation-state rather than a world state.[52] As Maududi saw it, Indian Muslims were at that time divided between "nationalist Muslims" and "Muslim nationalists." While the former believed in Indian nationalism, the latter were interested only in the political and economic well-being of Indian Muslims. Maududi denounced both, charging that they had forsaken the universal principles of Islam. His scathing criticism of Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani's advocacy for the concept of composite Indian nationalism[53] popularized by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad,[54] on the one hand, and of Jinnah's demand for Pakistan, on the other, must be seen in this context. In an article published in *Tarjuman al-Quran* of February 1939, Maududi mounted a frontal attack on Madani, arguing that in advancing the concept that country (*mulk aur watan*), not religion, made the nation, he had allowed himself to be swayed by his anti-British sentiment and by his solitude for the Indian National Congress, and thus tarnished his reputation for piety and religious learning.[55] Although, the majority of the Deobandi *ulama* was in favour of the composite nationalist line of Madani and Azad, a minority among them, led by Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, was in favour of the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan.[56]

Maududi opposed the concept of Pakistan, but on different grounds. He reasoned that there was no basis in history for the belief "that once you create a Muslim national state, even if it be non-Islamic, you can subsequently transform it into an Islamic State through education, training, and reform."[57] Almost like a Marxist, he asserted that no change in the governmental structure could be made as long as the existing social structures remain unchanged.[58] In particular, Maududi questioned the Muslim League's credentials for carrying out an Islamic revolution, arguing that a lemon tree could not bear mangoes.[59] However, following Iqbal's original thoughts as foundational to the making of Pakistan, Maududi eventually moved there permanently, despite his initial

opposition to the very idea of Pakistan as a specific variant of Muslim
nationalism. By January 1948, he had departed from his earlier position
and declared that Pakistan was destined to become an Islamic State.[60]
By that time, Maududi and his staff had already left for Pathankot, the
headquarters of the Jamaat before partition, and had arrived in Lahore.
Maududi's final change in position on Pakistan was imminent. By May
1947, Maududi equated nationalism with prejudice and selfishness, but
made a distinction between 'nationalism' and 'nationality.' As he argued:

> We do not object to nationality because it is a natural fact. We are not
> against national welfare provided it does not include animosity for
> other nations. We have no objection to patriotism provided it does
> not reach the limits of national prejudice; under partiality for one's
> own nation and hate for others. We consider national freedom the
> proper thing because it is the right of every nation to manage its own
> affairs and to control its own home and the rule of one nation over
> another is not right. But it is the worship of the nation, nationalism,
> which we not only disapprove of but consider hateful. The reality
> of nationalism is that it is another name for self-worship. ... [W]hy
> should we not consider that selfish nation an execration for humanity
> which, in the comity of nations, makes its national interest its god
> and through all means, fair or foul, indulges in its worship?[61]

The contradiction in Islamic discourses of Muslim-belonging in
modern South Asia can be theoretically located in the fundamental
difference between 'nationality' and 'nationalism' made by Maududi.
Since Maududi already acknowledged that 'nationality' is a 'natural
fact', the possibility of a new political agency to articulate a different
language of politics in and around the idea of nationality was open.
In fact, in the next two decades after the partition of India, the rise of
Bengali nationalism on the basis of celebrating the unique identity of
Bengali nationality and its key difference from the Urdu-speaking people
exposed the very unity and solidarity of the Muslim *umma* that Maududi
envisioned. I shall later discuss the emergence of Bengali nationalism in
East Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s that was contradictory to the idea
of the unity of Muslim *umma* in modern South Asia.

To ground that discussion, it is helpful to examine the changing
positions of Maududi on the issue of nationalism. In 1935-36, he
held that the two major Indian communities (Hindus and Muslims)
could cooperate on common issues. But by 1938, he believed that
the fundamental differences between them (which he believed were
exploited but not created by the British), precluded unity and held that
Muslims were an independent nation. Yet, by the outbreak of the Second

World War (1939), Maududi had come to believe that Muslims were not a nation but an international revolutionary party, and that their Islamic principles should rule the world. Earlier he believed that it was obligatory for every Muslim to strive to establish an Islamic government, even through the use of *jihad* if need be. However, between 1940 and 1944, he outlined the process of creating an Islamic state, first as an elite-led project and later as a mass movement, based on education and training, yet continued to remain silent on the use of force for an Islamic revolution. He felt that a nationalistic Muslim movement or state could not serve as the first step for its creation, since the latter must be free from all traces of nationalism. In 1944, Maududi's stand regarding the Indian political situation was again ambiguous. While he declared that Muslims did not desire a national homeland since they were not a nation but a world-wide ideological group, he also held that in their capacity as a nation, their demand for political and economic independence was justified. However, in 1946 he again emphasized collective organization and effort, for Islam could not be fully realized at the individual level. Finally, by 1947, he appeared to have accepted the idea of Pakistan as a Muslim, territorial, and national state, reverting to his original view that Islam never objected to nationality and patriotism if free of prejudice and within their natural limits.[62]

In this respect, it is worth noting that Pakistan was not just a classic case of a nation-state, based on hereditary linkages between ethnicity and soil, but was instead based on an idea of belonging in the name of Islamic religion, as Faisal Devji puts it.[63] Thus, for Devji, Pakistan is a distinct political geography, ungrounded in the historic connections of lands and peoples, whose context, although similar to the settler states of the New World, is closest ideologically to the Israeli state. Therefore, the political idea behind the formation of Pakistan is that of the 'Zion' as a political form, rather than a holy land, because like Israel, the state of Pakistan was made possible by the migration of a minority population, inhabiting a vast subcontinent, who abandoned old lands in which they feared persecution to settle in a new homeland. In this regard, although one could argue that the emergence of Pakistan was a novel example for the unity of the Muslim umma on shared belonging of religion, the emergence of Bangladesh especially smashed such a political project of the unity of the *umma*.

The making of Bangladesh was set against the backdrop of a conflict between the quest for Bengali identity and Islamic identity among Bengali Muslims from the late nineteenth century.[64] This tussle between Bengali identity and Islamic identity had also shaped the political discourses of the Bengal Muslim League in the first half of the twentieth century. Influential sections of the Bengal Muslim League had a very different

imagination from that of Jinnah and in fact, lacked clarity on the consensus over the demand for Pakistan. Instead, they had aspirations for either an independent East Pakistan or an undivided, sovereign, and united Bengal.[65] In other words, calls for Islamic identity or calls for the unity of *umma* were not prominent political articulations among the Bengal Muslim League leadership when compared to the rest of the Muslim League leadership in the pre-Partition period.

In fact, more than the appeal of the umma, pre-Partition Bengal actually witnessed a "politics of Muslim identity [with] an agrarian base."[66] The Muslim peasantry "responded to the appeals of religion" and discovered a "sense of community" in religion which also "provided the basis of a 'national bond'...and became the rallying cry of a 'political organization' demanding the creation of a separate Muslim homeland."[67] Thus, the peasant mobilizations behind theo-political discourses of *Khilafat* movement in the 1920s could later become part of the Pakistan movement in the 1940s.[68] In effect, the peasant question was relatively more important and relevant for the Bengal Muslims than the questions of religious identity and the unity of umma. This was evident from the results of the 1937 provincial elections when A.K. Fazlul Huq's *Krishak Praja Party* (Agriculturalist Tenant Party) led the United Front, forming a coalition government instead of the Muslim League, in the Muslim majority province of Bengal. However, the Muslim peasants were also living under severe communal tensions. In fact, communal polarization between Hindu and Muslim communities in Bengal started growing from the first half of the twentieth century.[69] Thus, in the first half of the twentieth century, Bengali politics was organized around either a religious Islamic identity or a community identity, and in most cases, the overlapping theo-political ascription of Islamic identity and the assertive communal Muslim identity.[70] Therefore, when the Bengali Muslims were presented a choice between India and Pakistan in the 1946 elections, the overwhelming majority voted for Jinnah's Pakistan project as they felt safer with the Muslim League proposal of creating a separate homeland for Muslims.[71] This being said, the vision of significant sections of the Bengali Muslim population and that of the Urdu-speaking Muslims was very different on the issue of the primacy of Islamic religious identity as the foundational basis of the Pakistani nation-state. The formal creation of Bangladesh within less than a quarter of a century of the creation of Pakistan proved that the majority of Bengali Muslims opted for Pakistan for merely tactical reasons instead of a vision for the unity and integrity of the Muslim umma.

The decline of the Muslim League started in East Pakistan immediately after the 1947 partition, and their significance ended with the provincial elections of 1954 in East Pakistan.[72] Subsequently, the authoritarian

politico-administrative interventions of the central government in East Pakistan and the declaration of martial law in 1958 were indicative of the fact that right from the beginning, the Pakistan project that celebrated the unity and solidarity of the Muslim umma, in search of a new nation-state in South Asia, was faulty. The emergence of Bangladesh was tied up with the struggles of peasants and workers, the political and ideological debates in the Bengali language movement in the 1950s, and the calls for the regional autonomy of East Pakistan. The emergence of Bangladesh was anchored around two significant issues—class and language.[73] The series of movements in East Pakistan that eventually culminated in an independent Bangladesh were initially protest movements set against a quasi-colonial occupation by the West Pakistani elites over the territory of East Pakistan. Such a quasi-colonial occupation took the form of dominance of West Pakistani elites in business and industry, which went alongside an impending economic crisis for the peasant population in East Pakistan. It was in the context of such an agrarian crisis that two towering political leaders, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani in the 1950s and early 1960s and subsequently, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman since the mid-1960s rose to prominence. Mujib's leadership later became crucial for the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Moreover, the Indian army and Liberation activists was instrumental in creating a newly independent nation-state,[74] based on the secession of East Pakistan from its Western counterpart by primarily identifying with Bengali linguistic identity instead of Islamic religious identity.[75] The tussle between the forces of democracy and dictatorship on the one hand, and the political and ideological conflict between secular and religious political articulations in East Pakistan on the other hand, clearly exposed the fractiousness of the so-called unity and solidarity among Muslims in South Asia.

The fractured nature of *umma* in contemporary South Asia

Today, one can notice the heterogeneous nature of South Asian Muslims fragmented along linguistic, cultural, caste lines[76] and having traditional loyalties to various theological and spiritual formations like Deobandis,[77] Barelvis,[78] Tablighis,[79] and Sufis.[80] In India, the Sachar Committee Report (2006) and the Ranganath Misra Commission Report (2007-09), clearly demarcates the Muslim community along caste lines, with specific broad caste groups of *Ashrafs* (the Muslim upper castes), *Ajlafs* (other backward classes among Muslims) and *Arzals* (minutely divided lower castes among Muslims). Moreover, the political space of Muslim pressure group politics is competitive and fragmented between rival factions of Indian Muslims showing allegiance to various Muslim groups with political

overtones. Therefore, no single political formation could become a hegemonic pressure group of the Indian Muslims or form something like a "vanguard" of Indian Muslims. Moreover, no Islamist party in South Asia has been popular enough to capture political power. In India, the Muslim identitarian parties have an insignificant presence. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Islamist parties have never received more than 13 percent votes in any parliamentary election in either country.[81]

In contemporary Bangladesh, political mobilizations occur on the basis of nationalist rhetoric, challenging the political project of constructing the umma like the Shahbag protests in Dhaka did, in reference to the issue of 1971 Bangladesh war crimes. In other words, 1971 is not just a date of a historical past in modern South Asia, but it is also a definitive moment in the nationalist imaginary among significant sections of Muslims in South Asia, which has continued to inform and influence Bangladeshi politics in the last four and a half decades. In the wake of a renewal of nationalist sentiments in Bangladesh, as explicitly seen in the 2013 Shahbag protests and the ongoing proceedings of the International Crimes Tribunal over the issue of 1971 Bangladesh war crimes, Internet-based networks of the Muslim umma are challenged by parallel political mobilizations on behalf of the secularists in social media and the blogosphere. Evidently, such political mobilizations, based on the idea of the nation-state, not only resist the depoliticized calls for "Muslim unity", but also bring back the nation-state as a site of political struggle.

In an era of various particularist struggles, it is difficult for the Muslim umma alone to become the universal political actor, to represent and articulate the voice of other marginalized and oppressed sections of a given population, or to speak on behalf of the entire plebeian society. Since, the 'people' in the South Asian context is a much broader and comprehensive political category, and an inclusive collective political actor which encompasses varied plebeian and underprivileged groups, the Muslim umma itself has become a form of particularism like other socio-political actors like peasants, marginalized castes, the working class and women. Since the category of "universal" is "a highly unstable figure,"[82] the Islamist concept of umma as a universal identity for Muslims is difficult to construct because South Asian Muslims are divided by several particularist identities like language and caste. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that "a 'community' based on the loyalties of religion, language, habitat, kinship, and the like could only be ambiguous [...] because a 'community' defined by such loyalties was necessarily a self-contradictory entity. People sharing the same religion, for example, could be divided by language (or habitat) and vice versa."[83]

The history of South Asia in the last hundred years only indicates that

40   the call for the unity of the umma has been always contested by the deep political factions within the umma on the basis of class, caste, gender, language and nationality. Given such socio-political diversity among Muslims across South Asia, the contradictions of the so-called "Muslim umma" stand exposed as there is no singular notion of belonging and identification of the Muslims in South Asia.

Notes

[1] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and Them Beyond Orientalism* (London: Hurst, 2011), 166.

[2] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 199.

[3] Ibid. 197-198.

[4] Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations*, 167.

[5] Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, "Introduction," in *Muslim Networks: From Medieval Scholars to Modern Feminists*, eds. Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 2.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid. 2-3.

[8] Ibid. 15.

[9] Yanagihashi Hiroyuki, 'Solidarity in an Islamic Society: "*Asaba*, Family, and the Community," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, Yanagihashi Hiroyuki (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 51.

[10] Iik A. Mansurnoor, "Territorial Expansion and Contraction in the Malay Islamic Traditional Polity as Reflected in Contemporary Thought and Administration," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, ed. Yanagihashi Hiroyuki (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 128.

[11] Ann K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 13.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Mansurnoor, "Territorial Expansion," 128.

[14] Brannon M. Wheeler, "From *Dār al-Hijra* to *Dār al-Islām*: The Islamic Utopia," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, ed. Yanagihashi Hiroyuki (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 9-15.

[15] H. Samy Alim, "A New Research Agenda: Exploring the Transglobal Hip Hop *Umma*," in *Muslim Networks: From Medieval Scholars to Modern Feminists*, eds. Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 265.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Taieb Belghazi, "Afterword," in *Muslim Networks: From Medieval Scholars to Modern Feminists*, eds. Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 277.

[18] Mansurnoor, "Territorial Expansion," 159.

[19] Ibid. 162.

[20] S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, 1997, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2003), 78.

[21] Ibid. 69-72.

[22] Faisal Devji, "Against Muslim Unity," https://aeon.co/essays/the-idea-of-unifying-islam-is-a-recent-invention-and-a-bad-one (accessed July 14, 2016).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 2008), 167-179.

[26] Devji, "Against Muslim Unity."

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] David Gilmartin, "A Networked Civilization?" in *Muslim Networks: From Medieval Scholars to Modern Feminists*, eds. Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 59.

[32] See Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[33] Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, *Debates*, March 7, 1949, Vol. 5, 3.

[34] *India Wins Freedom: An Autobiographical Narrative* (Delhi: Longmans, 1959), 227.

[35] Islamic scholars, trained in a major Islamic seminary, *Darul Uloom* in the town of Deoband in North India.

[36] John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 89—91.

[37] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2000), 454—455.

[38] Francis Robinson, *Islam, South Asia, and the West* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 118.

[39] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 455.

[40] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad and Dr. Abdul Ghani (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1960).

[41] Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 253.

[42] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 455-456.

[43] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Nationalism and India* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1993), 13. Originally, it was written by Maududi in Urdu as *Mas'ala-e Qawmiyat* (The Problem of Nationalism, Lahore: 1939) that was later translated into English as *Nationalism and India*, first published from Delhi in 1965. It was also published as part of Maududi's *Tahrik-e Azadi-e Hind aur Musalman*, 2 Vols. (Freedom Movement in India and the Muslims, Lahore: 1964).

[44] Maududi, *Nationalism and India*, 15.

[45] Ibid. 12-13.

[46] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *The Question of Dress* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1994). This article, the English translation of '*Libas ka Masalah*' was originally written in 1929 for the journal *Ma'arif* of Azamgarh, India. In 1940, it was reprinted in the monthly journal *Tarjumanul Quran*, edited by Maududi and published from Lahore. It was subsequently included in Maududi's book *Tafheemat* (Vol. II), from where it has been translated.

[47] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *The Road to Peace and Salvation* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 2005), 12. This article is an extract from a speech delivered by Maududi in May 1940 before a gathering of different religious communities.

[48] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Nations: Rise and Fall Why?* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 2001). This is the English translation of *Bana'o aur Bigar* (Lahore: 1947), a speech delivered by Maududi at a public meeting in Dar-ul-Islam near Pathankot (East Punjab) on May 10, 1947.

[49] Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *The Sick Nations of the Modern Age* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1952).

[50] Kalim Bahadur, "The Emergence of Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh," in *Society, Polity and Economy of Bangladesh*, ed. Sukha Ranjan Chakravarty (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1994), 30.

[51] Ibid. 29—31.

[52] M.S. Agwani, *Islamic Fundamentalism in India* (Chandigarh: Twenty-First Century India Society, 1986), 59.

[53] Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Composite Nationalism and Islam* (Muttahida Qaumiyat aur Islam, 1938), trans. Mohammad Anwer Hussain and Hasan Imam, introduced by Barbara Metcalf (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2005).

[54] Pran Nath Chopra (ed.), *Maulana Azad: Selected Speeches and Statements, 1940-47* (New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1990); Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad* (Delhi: Manohar, 1982).

[55] Maududi, *Mas'ala-i-Qawmiyat* (Problem of Nationalism) *Nationalism and India*. An interesting point that emerges from this study is the ambiguity surrounding the word 'qawm'. To define its English counterpart 'nation', this is by no means an easy task. However the Urdu 'qawm' proves to be more problematic, due to its extremely loose usage, and the fact that it connotes more than one form of the word 'nation'.

[56] Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[57] Maududi, *Nationalism and India*, 14.

[58] Agwani, *Islamic Fundamentalism in India*, 60.

[59] Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), 95-100.

[60] Agwani, *Islamic Fundamentalism in India*, 60.

[61] This is an extract from a speech delivered by Maududi on May 9, 1947 under the topic called *Islami nizam aur maghribi la dini jamhuriat* (Islamic system and Western democracy), 11th printing (Lahore: April, 1969), 18-19 compiled in the book, Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Come Let Us Change This World* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1991), 54—55.

[62] Safia Amir, *Muslim Nationhood in India: Perceptions of Seven Eminent Thinkers* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2000), 270-72.

[63] Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[64] Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* [1981] 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[65] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947* [1987] Revised and enlarged ed. (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2003).

[66] Partha Chatterjee, *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

[67] Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 231—232.

[68] Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1992).

[69] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Badruddin Umar, *Banga-bhanga O Shampradayik Rajniti* [Bengal Partition and Communal Politics] (Calcutta: Chirayata, 1987).

[70] Leonard A. Gordon, "Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition," in *India's Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947* (New Delhi: Impex India, 1976).

[71] Zillur Rahman Khan, "Islam and Bengali Nationalism," in *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics*, ed. Rafiuddin Ahmed (Chittagong: South Asia Studies Group, 1985), 21.

[72] Ahmed Kamal, *State Against the Nation: The Decline of the Muslim League in Pre-independence Bangladesh, 1947-54* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2009).

[73] Badruddin Umar, *The Emergence of Bangladesh, Vol. 1: Class Struggles in East Pakistan (1947–1958)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Badruddin Umar, *The Emergence of Bangladesh, Vol. 2: Rise of Bengali Nationalism (1958–1971)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[74] Sucheta Ghosh, *The Role of India in the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1983); Salam Azad, *Contribution of India In the War of Liberation of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Bookwell, 2006).

[75] Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[76] Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1973); Imtiaz Ahmad, *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1976); Imtiaz Ahmad, *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981).

[77] Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Barbara D. Metcalf, *'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs* (Leiden: ISIM, 2002).

[78] Muhammad Haroon, *The World Importance of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi* (Stockport: Raza Academy, 1994); Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmed Riza Khan Barelvi and His movement, 1870-1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[79] Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jam'aat (1920-2000): A Cross-Country Comparative Study* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002); S. Anwarul Haq, *The Faith Movement of Maulana Mohammad Ilyas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972).

[80] Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, *Impact of Sufism on Indian Society* (New Delhi: Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1996); Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[81] For a detailed analysis of the ideological and political crisis of the Islamists in South Asia see Maidul Islam, *Limits of Islamism: Jamaat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[82] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2000, New ed. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), xiii.

[83] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 216.