

Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Composite Nationalism

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Shaykh ul Islam, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani was born on 19th Shawwal 1296 A.H in village Bangermau of district Unnao (Uttar Pradesh). His parents named him Chirag Muhammad. His native place was Alahdapur in Tanda tehsil of district Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh).¹ He received his early education from his father Syed Habibullah (Headmaster of a government school).² In 1309 A.H. / 1892 C.E. when Hussain Ahmad Madani attained age of 13, he joined the Deoband School for higher education. Shaykh al-Hind, Maulana Mahmud Hasan,³ Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi⁴ and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi⁵ were among his most eminent teachers.⁶ Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani has made an influential and significant contribution in religious thought of twentieth century India.⁷ He was a product of Darul-Ulum, Deoband. He was a distinguished educator, great freedom fighter, staunch proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity and a strong advocate of composite nationhood. He enjoyed equal respect among both Muslims and non-Muslims.⁸ Being a strong advocate of composite nationalism he was of the opinion that Muslims are actually the original inhabitants of India. He explains:

Among various communities residing in India, Muslims alone can legitimately claim they are the original inhabitants of the land. Among all the communities residing in India, only Muslims have firm religious faith that they are the descendents of Adam, the first human aborigine of planet Earth. It is inseparable part of their belief based upon Qur'anic verses that entire humanity on this earth has originated from Adam. Contrarily, rest of the communities in India; believe in the gradual evolution of Homo sapiens⁹.

Islamic literature gives us some evidence that Prophet Adam (A.S.) descended directly from the heaven on Indian soil. India was his first domicile and the entire human race has spread from here. Therefore, according to Islamic traditions and teachings, India is the

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original habitat of Muslims. Those who do not trace their origin from Adam cannot legitimately claim India as their original homeland.¹⁰

Madani also writes:

Unlike Hindus and Zoroastrians who completely destroy the dead body, either turning the corpse into ashes by placing upon a pyre and later throwing it into the rivers or by placing it on the Tower of Silence for birds to consume it, only Muslims bury the dead body into graves. Unlike them, even after death, a Muslim remains attached to the Soil. Their graves remain intact. And as per Muslim belief, on the Day of Judgment, it is from these graves that they would be resurrected into yet another life. Though the dead body of Muslims placed beneath the earth also gets partially destroyed, it is from the remaining particles that their new existence would come into being. Thereby, Muslims physical domiciliary to the land would remain till the dooms day.¹¹

In short, India has been the cradle of Islam since time immemorial. The country, therefore by faith, is and shall remain the original homeland of Muslims¹². Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani had presented exhaustively his views on composite nationalism and many 'ulamâ' accepted them considerably.¹³ In his presidential address, the Maulana further elaborates it as following:

We the residents of India, being Indians have something in common that remains along with the religious and cultural differences. It is like our human nature does not change just because of variance in our *visages*, differences in our personalities and traits, and differences in our color and stature. Likewise our religious and cultural differences do not become hurdle in our national partnership. From the point of view of nationality, we all are Indians. Therefore, to think of the benefit of the country and concern for its protection from any harm is the equal responsibility of Muslims as of any other nation and religious entity. It is necessary to strive adequately and jointly to achieve it. If a house catches fire and all residents of the village do not extinguish, it or if the whole village would not erect embankment during the flood, then the whole village will be

destroyed and life would become difficult for one and all. Likewise, whenever the country is in trouble it is the duty of the inhabitants of a country (whether they are Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Parsis) that they should strive hard and jointly to remove it. The duty of national partnership applies equally to all residents. Differences of religion cannot become any weakness or a hurdle. They can fulfill this duty even while remaining true to their religion. The same partnership is to be found in municipal boards, district boards, in councils and assemblies. Members of various religions fulfill their duties in these institutions and feel themselves as composite part of it. This is the meaning of 'composite nationalism' here. To read in it any other meaning than this is wrong and inappropriate.¹⁴

Thus, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni views nationalism as the phenomenon where religious and cultural differences are of no importance. Indians are Indian and every citizen is responsible for the protection and progress of their country. Difference of religion cannot become any weakness or a hurdle for them. In his book, *Composite Nationalism and Islam*, Maulana explains its bearings as:

By composite nationalism I mean here 'nationalism', the foundation of which was laid down by Prophet Mohammad (SAAS) in Madina. That is to say, the people of India as Indians, as a nation united (despite religious and cultural diversity), should become one solid nation and should wage war against the alien power that has usurped their natural rights. It is incumbent upon every Indian to fight against such a barbaric regime and throw off the shackles of slavery. It is important not to interfere in another's religion – rather all nations (communities) living in India is free to practice their religion, live by its moral values and act according to their religious traditions. While maintaining peace and tranquility, they should propagate their ideology, follow their culture, promote civilization and protect their personal law. Neither should a minority interfere in the personal affairs of other minorities or the majority, nor should the majority strive to assimilate the minority into itself.

This is what the Indian National Congress has been striving to achieve ever since its inception. In its first session in 1885, it outlined its main objectives in the following words; 'To unite the divergent and conflicting elements – that form the Indian populace and turn them into one nation.'¹⁵

However, even after this (somewhat ambiguous) declaration, it has always stated that all citizens shall be free to pursue their religion, culture, personal law, etc. The proposal discussed at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee meeting on 8th August 1931, described the fundamental rights and duties of the citizens:

Any constitutional provision or declaration that the Indian National Congress would make or through it the independent Government shall make, shall strive for the following points;

1. Every Indian citizen shall have the rights of freedom of speech and expression, total freedom of coordinated action and collaboration and right to peaceful, assembly for any purpose that is neither immoral nor against the law.
2. Every Indian citizen shall have the freedom of conscience and right to declare, follow and propagate his religion – provided it does not degenerate and cause public disorder.
3. All religious minorities shall have the constitutional right to protect of their cultures, languages and their religious rituals. Besides, the areas inhabited by linguistic minorities shall have adequate safeguard to their languages.

The working committee meeting of the Indian National Congress, held in Calcutta on 26 October 1937, reinforced and elaborated the same objectives.¹⁶

In 1921 at Karachi, Muhammad Ali Jauhar, organized a conference, in which questions were invited from the public on national issues and answers were given. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani gave answers to various questions of the people. Madani's answers aroused a national fervour. People began to look at him as a leader with a great vision for India. His nationalism was not restricted to mobilizing Muslims alone. He understood the need for collective efforts of Muslims as well as Hindus for challenging the British rule. His pluralistic credentials were recognized widely. Even Hindu

religious leaders like Shankaracharya and Jagat Guru publicly supported Madani's stand and exhorted their community to follow him.¹⁷

In December 1937, at a political meeting in Delhi, Maulana Madani made a straight forward statement, 'In the current age, nations (*aqwam*) are based on homelands (*autan*, pl. of *watn*), not religion (*madhab*).' What made this point obvious to him was that people abroad made no distinction of whether a person was, 'Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Parsi all were viewed as

'Hindustani'. He reiterated as he often had before, all Indians were viewed with contempt because of being in bondage to colonial rule. The following day, Urdu news papers *Al-Aman* and *Ahsan* (soon followed by others) had reported that Maulana Madani had said that no 'nation', but *Millat* (a term commonly linked to religious community) depended on territory¹⁸. His views were taken seriously by Dr. S. M. Iqbal, a great poet and thinker of the 20th century Muslim world, and raised many controversies among the Muslim elite in India.

In one of his poems, he strongly criticizes the stand of Madani that *Millat* (community) in Islam is constituted by nation (*watan*). Thus from Deoband, Hussain Ahmad proves somewhat strange singing out high on the pulpit That *Millat* is based on land (*watan*). What does he know of the stance of the Arab Messenger, on whom be peace? Bring yourself close to Mustafa, for his alone is faith complete If you cannot approach him You're just an Abu Lahab!¹⁹

Maulana Madani also wrote in *Muttahida Qaumiyat aur Islam* under the title of "The Reality of My Delhi Speech and Spreading of the News of Composite Nationalism" wherein he clarifies his stand about nationalism:

As Allama learnt from my replies to some of my friends' letters, I had no intention of advising any one on nationalism and I had used no such words in the statement I had issued in Delhi. I was simply talking about the great loss and sufferings that the British government has inflicted upon all Indians, especially Muslims. I also mentioned the fact that in our times the country makes a nation. And that all Indians, whether

they be Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Zoroastrian, are looked down upon everywhere abroad. Since they all belong to this country, they are regarded as one *qawm*. Their prestige and honor is no better than that of slaves; they are treated shabbily and their legitimate demands are ignored. Indians are not only discriminated abroad regarding their citizenship rights, but are also discriminated against vis-à-vis their human rights. All their protests fall on deaf ears. This is, in my view, an effect of slavery.²⁰

In this connection Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani further elaborates that “supposing this was the case (that no other word except *Millat* has been used for Muslims in the holy Qur’an), it does not mean that merely no mention is proof of its negation – especially when both the literal as well as the *Shari’ah* (religious) meaning testify to the word *Millat*. Muhammad Iqbal has himself admitted that rightly guided people are those who have entered into the fold of the religion (*Millat*) of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). He has quoted *Jennies* from the holy Qur’an, i.e., the *momin* of *Aal-i-Fira’un* (the believers among the people of Pharaoh), *momin* of *Qaum-i-Musa* (the believers among the people of Moses), the *momin* of *Qaum-i-Isa* (the believers among the people of Jesus) and the *momineen* of Prophet Muhammad (the believers of Prophet Muhammad). When *momin* (a believer of Prophet Jesus) was given the glad tidings of *Jannat* (Paradise) after his crucifixion, referring to the infidels as his *qaum* (nation), he says, ‘Would that my people know (what I know)’. The holy Qur’an describes the Prophets, who are believers by birth, the compatriots of non-believers. Thus (when I examine Allama Iqbal’s arguments), if this discrepancy is not a wonder of the time, then what is it?”

To Madani it is not comprehensible due to different reasons, that *Millat*, too, is divided and can be divided and attributed to different *aqwam*²¹. Maulana also clarifies that he had not given the definition of *millat* but of *qaum* and the two words are used in the scriptures to denote two different things. *Millat* denotes *Dîn or Shari’ah* whereas *qaum* means any group of men and women. He further illustrates his contention as following:

The word *qaum* is used for any group which has characteristic of comprehensiveness or togetherness or commonality; it may be religion, country, race, language, vocation, colour or any other material or non-material quality. For example, the Arab nation, *Ajam* nation, Egyptian nation, Pakhtoon nation, Persian speaking nation, or expression like Syed, Sheikh, cobbler, black, white, *sufi*, worldly nation etc, in Arabic language and Islamic scriptures this kind of usage is quite frequent.

Indian nation is of similar usage. Currently in foreign countries all inhabitants of India are treated as one Indian nation, no matter if they be Urdu- speaking or Bangla-speaking, black or white, Hindu or Muslim, Parsee or Sikh. The word Indian denotes each of them.

I have lived outside India for about seventeen years during which period I had occasion to interact with people of Arabia, Syria, Palestine, Africa, Egypt and Malta. Similarly, I had occasion to interact with Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians, English, French, Australian American, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Turkish and Arab people. If they did not use Arabic, Turkish, Persian or Urdu the conversation took place with the help of interpreter. I found that all of them treated all Indians as one nation. If dictionary meaning does not contradict this meaning and the common use confirms it, where is the point in misconstruing it? I do not know according to which category, absolute or genetic, can it be said that Islam prescribes human character or behaviour as the basis of nationhood, as the critics like editor of *Ahsaan* make out, according to which its usage for territorial distinction may be impermissible. Equal and brotherly treatment is a different matter altogether although the distinction can be seen in scriptures as well. Besides, I had not used it in the context of Islamic teachings or ideology.²²

Maulana Madani was in favour of composite Nationalism but at the same time, he believed in Islamic brotherhood. About Islamic brotherhood, Maulana Madani says:

Undoubtedly, as I have mentioned earlier, the Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad (SAAS) created a bond among Muslims that is superior to all bonds. In comparison, bonds such as nationalism are pale and colorless. A Muslim, whoever and wherever he is, is the brother of another Muslim and he has right over other Muslims. This bond of *rabita* (relationships) exists only among those who have accepted Islam. In the case of those who have not embraced Islam, this bond cannot be established. They could be part of composite nationalism, but only through the bonds of *nasal* (race), *rang* (color) and nationality, etc.

The question is: Can a Muslim join hands with non-Muslims and become part of the same nation and on the basis of this composite nationalism, can he enter into *siyasate mulki* and forge economic, commercial, agricultural and industrial relations with them? Is there a need of such a thing in India? It is quite apparent that waiting for all Indians to become Muslims in order to enter into such an alliance is wrong and harmful. There is no doubt that Islam combines principles of both ideological and practical reformation.

Moreover, it does not only strive for the reformation of an individual, but also strives to reform society as a whole — irrespective of privileged or under-privileged. Islam focuses on problems universally and permits all sorts of reforms. But the point is whether Islam (the Islamic principles that deal with individual as well as community life and pertain to such issues as God, relationship of God with His creatures and relationships between His creatures) permits that together with non-Muslims, a United Front can be formed on the basis of *wataniyat*, *nasal*, *rang* or language (*zabaan*), etc., to defeat the enemies of Islam and benefit Muslims in political, commercial, agricultural and industrial fields, without compromising on the basic tenets of Islam?

As far as I have studied and followed the verses of the holy Qur'an, I have understood that there is no clear cut categorization of it, i.e., at times it is obligatory, at other times it is desirable, or preferable, or permissible, or

even prohibited. Its condemnation is only on the basis that nationalism, in Western parlance today, is applied to those principles that relate to collective human life and that is altogether anti-religion, and thus would be attributed by this particular terminology. However, this meaning of nationalism is neither popular among people, nor would a true Muslim accept it, nor is there any such movement underway. Neither the Indian National Congress and its volunteers are propagating it. Therefore, racking up this issue to an emotional pitch is an exercise in futility.

It must be remembered that we form a united body every day to achieve our common goal. Not only do we participate in it, but we also often struggle to acquire its membership and spend thousands of rupees for this.

While defining such a membership as beneficial for the nation and community. We consider our participation obligatory. Town area, unified area, municipal board, district board, councils, assemblies and educational institutions and hundreds of such organizations and associations are formed with a definite purpose on the same principle of law and with the intention to serve the common interest. Interestingly, participation in such *anjuman* (association) is not prohibited.

However, and strangely enough, when the same type of association is formed for the liberty of the country from British occupation, it is declared *haram* (prohibited) against Islamic teachings, against our soul and our conscience, and even against common sense. When a nationalist outfit is formed on the basis of the principle of composite nationalism, why is it viewed as illegal? When an issue arises in councils and assemblies against a fundamental principle of Islam, it is rejected. The same will happen in a set up that is based on the principle of composite nationalism.²³

After clarifying the linguistic confusion, Maulana Madani comes to the political substance of his argument and points out the dire need to get rid of the British who have exploited Indians and rendered them destitute. For achieving this objective, he says, unity of Indians is the most effective strategy though other ways also can be

employed. That is why in its inaugural session the Congress stated its first objective as “bringing together different sections of India’s population and weld them into a united nation.”²⁴

As already stated that Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani was of the view that Muslims are the original inhabitants of India. It is the duty of every inhabitant in general and Muslims in particular to strive hard to remove trouble from India. He considers India as a single nation (*qaum*) as his opinion is that *Millat* denotes *Dîn* and *Shari’ah* and *qaum* means any group of people. About Muslim brotherhood, he believes that this relation is superior to all other bonds. Relations like nationalism becomes of little value in front of this relation. There are many other bonds like color, race and nationality through which Muslims and non-Muslims could be a part of composite nationalism like in India. It is the duty of Muslims to take part in different fields e.g., political, foreign, economic, commercial, agricultural and industrial relation of country. He is of this thought that it is wrong and harmful to wait for participation in different domains of the country until whole country will come under Muslim rule. Maulana shows his surprise that on the one side, Muslims spend thousands of rupees to acquire a membership in a united body made for achieving a common goal and consider such membership beneficial for nation and community which makes this participation obligatory. But when the same type of association is formed with an aim to set India free from foreign rule, it is declared *haram* (prohibited) and against Islamic teachings against our soul and our conscience, and even against common sense.²⁵

Though trained as a religious saint, Maulana Husain Ahmad was imbued with political vision and sagacity. He hated the British rule and wanted to get rid of it by every means possible. He had to undergo great hardships for the achievement of his objective which he faced with confidence and courage. He was always ready to cooperate with like-minded persons for the achievement of his political objective, but at the same time, he did not allow his identity as a religious leader to be lost in the labyrinth of politics.²⁶

He did not see eye to eye even the Indian National Congress on many issues, e.g., he opposed the *Wardha Scheme* on the ground that it ignored religion. His greatest service to the nation was his positive

approach to the problem of deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relationship by giving the call for a united Indian nationhood.²⁷

References and Notes

- ¹ Maulana Syed Muhammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta*, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 86.
- ² Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh-i-Hayat* Vol.II, Maktabah Diniyah, Deoband, 1999 pp17-18.
- ³ Maulana Mahmud Hasan commonly known as Shaykh al-Hind was born in 1851 C.E. He was educated at Darul Ulum Deoband and was the first student who joined this institution in 1867 C.E. Shaykh al-Hind, not only a great scholar but also politically very active was a teacher at Deoband, taught the students religious sciences and also instructed them how to work for their nation and free it from the British.
- ⁴ Maulana Ubaid Ullaha Sindhi was born in Sialkot a famous town in Punjab. His father's name was Ram Singh. The date of birth of Maulana which we got from his *Dhati Diary* is 12th Muharram 1289A.H., that is 10th March, 1872A.D., on the auspicious day, Friday, just before dawn. This extraordinary boy, named Boota Singh at his birth was a posthumous child. But he had the good fortune of being blessed with Islam. Not only that he also later played a spectacular role in Indian struggle for freedom.
- ⁵ Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (10 May 1829 – 11 August 1905) was an Indian Islamic scholar who co-founded the Deobandi Islamic movement at the Darul Uloom Deoband Madrasah, or Islamic School, of which he became principle following the death of Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi.
- ⁶ Iqbal Hasan Khan, *Maulana Mahmud Hasan, Hayaat aur Ilmi Karnama*, Aligarh Muslim University Press, Aligarh, 1973, p. 388.
- ⁷ Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Composite Nationalism and Islam*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 23.
- ⁸ Farhat Tabasum, *Deoband Ulema's Movement for the Freedom of India*, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 138.
- Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Hamara Hindustan aur Uske Fadhail*, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, New Delhi, 2001, p. 1.
- ⁹ Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Hamara Hindustan aur Uske Fadhail*, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, New Delhi, 2001, p. 1.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ¹³ Maulana Syed Mohammad Main, *The Prisoners of Malta*, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 202.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-03.

- 15 Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Composite Nationalism. op. cit.*, pp. 118-120.
- 16 Idem.
- 17 Farhat Tabasum, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
- 18 Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Composite Nationalism. op.cit.*, pp.37-38.
- 19 Allama Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, (Persian), Pakistan.
- 20 Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Composite Nationalism. op.cit.*, pp.55-56.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-85.
- 22 D. R. Goyal, *Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni: A Biographical Study*, Anamika Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., pp. 170-171.
- 23 Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Composite Nationalism. op cit.*, pp.102-105.
- 24 D. R. Goyal, *loc. cit.*
- 25 Idem.
- 26 *Naqsh-i-Hayat*, Vol.II,*op.cit.*,pp 242-47.27
- 27 Idem.