

Abul Kalam Azad's thought of inclusive theology and education for religious pluralism

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Abstract

This article sheds light on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's ideas of inclusive theology in his phenomenal work, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, especially his commentary on *surah al-fatihah*. It is also aimed to describe its significance as education for religious pluralism in India in particular and in global world in general. Azad's inclusive theology can be analyzed from his understanding on the concept of God, religion and unity of religion. This study mainly uses hermeneutical and philosophico-theological approach because inclusivism can be dealt with in philosophy, especially philosophy of religion. The finding is that God as the "cherisher" and "flourisher" (*rabb*) transcends all fragmentations and divisions of humanity in race, color, and religion. The path of universal God (*rabb al-'alāmīn*) is "the right path" (*sirāt al-mustaqīm*) which belongs to no particular religion. For Azad, all religions in origin contain the truth and are pervaded with the same spirit the existing and variations in religions do not affect the essentials of religion. The outward path (*shari'a, minhāj*) may vary according to the circumstances. The difference between one religion and another are not differences in *dīn*, the basic provision, but in the manner of giving effect to it.

Keywords: unity of religion, Azad, inclusive theology, *minhāj*

INTRODUCTION

Maulana Abul Kalam was one of the fervent advocates of nationalism, secularism, religious pluralism among the Indian Islamic scholars and thinkers. He was one of the most prominent Muslim leaders to support Hindu-Muslim unity, opposing the partition of India on communal lines. Following India's independence, he became the first Minister of Education, government of India. He is commonly remembered as Maulana Azad; he had adopted *Azad* (free) as his pen name (Agrawal, 2008).

Azad was a unique Islamic personality which had a great patriotism and passion for communal harmony. However, it is highly regrettable that his services to the country have almost been forgotten. He has devoted the first volume of his *tafsir*, 'Tarjuman al-Qur'an' to what he calls *wahdat al-din* i.e. unity of religion. Maulana had deep conviction, as we find from his *tafsir* about unity of all religions and he has shown achievements of his scholarship on expanding this concept in his *tafsir* and that is why his pronouncement about Hindu-Muslim unity was not mere political rhetoric, much less opportunism, but a deep religious conviction (Asghar, 2011).

By virtuousness of his commentary, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Azad has gained the reputation of being one of the leading Muslim theologians on Indian sub-continent during the past two centuries. His thesis in this commentary can be briefly outlined as follows: there is only one true religion; all religions are one in origin; therefore all religions are originally

the true religion. Religions are insofar as they deviate from this true religion. The Qur'an has come as a final revelation to confirm truth of all previously-revealed religions and to summon men who have deviated from truth to return to this original truth of their religions.

Muslim scholars considered his *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* is his *opus magnum* on theology and by far his most important theological legacy. It would seem his *tafsir* reflects most clearly comprehensive ideas of Azad's theology. Therefore, it is interesting to shed light his inclusive theology in deeper, wider, and more scholarly investigation and to describe his contribution on education for religious pluralism.

METHODS

This study mainly uses hermeneutical and philosophico-theological approach because inclusivism can be interacted within philosophy, especially philosophy of religion, as well as in theology so the method used in this study is analytic. It will analyze logic of ideas and thought proposed by figure under discussion and elucidate the meaning of his concepts. There are two kinds of sources used in this study: primary and secondary. The primary source is Azad's *tafsir*, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* written in Urdu while secondary sources include all writings that deal exclusively with Azad's thought in general and with his ideas of inclusive theology in particular.

DISCUSSION

Biography of Maulana Azad

Maulana Azad was born during the month of Dzulhijja in 1305 or sometime between August 5 and September, 1888 (Malsiani, 1976). Azad was a descendent of a lineage of learned Muslim scholars, or *maulanas*. His mother was an Arab and the daughter of Sheikh Mohammad Zaher Watri and his father, Maulana Khairuddin, was a Bengali Muslim of Afghan origins. Azad had a traditional education from his father, who brought him up under strict observation and appointed tutors to teach him at home. His whole schooling was, therefore, done at home. It was at sixteen that he completed the traditional course in religious studies (Azad, 1988).

In 900, Azad came in contact with the writings of Syed Ahmad Khan (Malihabadi, 1958: 231). The rationalism of Sir Syed, his total rejection of traditionalism and his subjection of religious truths to the scrutiny of pure reason took Azad by storm, as a result of which his faith in traditional belief and practices was completely shaken. He was greatly influenced by Sir Syed's rejection of tradition on the authority of reason and by his new rational approach towards religion (Malihabadi, 1958: 360). In 1908 Azad has gone abroad and visited Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Turkey where he met Muhammad Abdūh, Saeed Pasha and other revolutionary activists of the Arab world. All these contacts metamorphosed him into a nationalist revolutionary (Tara Chand, 1965).

Azad's pluralistic tendency started from a broader notion of Islamic mysticism well-imbedded in the established sufi Islamic traditions. His

deep faith in the religious pluralism and brotherhood of mankind was in reality based on the popular sufi doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being). Azad tried to find the answers to general philosophical questions in religion, believing that neither science nor philosophy could provide them. When he joined the arena of political struggle, he explored in religion guidance for dealing with concrete political problems of the day (Stepanyants: 201).

Azad's theological ideas have been reflected clearly in his famous *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. Islam and Qur'an got a new interpretation in his hands. His superb idea in this respect has been fairly reflected in the interpretation of *sūrah al-fātihah* which he called *Umm al-Qur'ān* or the core of Qur'ān. His division of the whole *sūrah* into seven parts with a proper title, according to the significance of the verse, calls for his profound scholarship. As to the second part called *rubūbiyāt* or Divine providence, Nizāmī believes that 'his discussion of the *rubūbiyāt* is extremely fascinating and forms the basis of his approach to religion (Nizāmī, 1989: 14).

Inclusive Theology in Maulana Azad's Thought

Concept of God

Maulana Azad points out that the belief in the existence of God, was never the achievement of the human mind, so that one might care to trace its development upward. It is ingrained in the human nature. The Quranic contention is that the very first vision which man had of God was of God's oneness or Unity, the vision of an unseen almighty being who must have

created all that he could see or feel about and around him, and that this vision slowly underwent a change marking a sort of retrogression and giving rise to the concept of multiplicity or polytheism (Azad, 1958: 1). According to Azad, men were originally derived from one religion only and then they fell to variance. He based his opinion on Qur'anic verses:

Men were at first of one religion only Then they fell to variance.
(QS.10: 19)

Mankind were of one religion, and God sent prophets as comforters and warners and He sent down with them the word of Truth that it might decide the disputes of men. (QS. 2: 213)

The differences which have marked the course of religion, points out Maulana Azad, have mostly been in respect of the attributes of God, and not in respect of the existence of God. The Quranic concept of the Unity of God is definite, and has both a positive and a negative side to it. The positive side is that God is one and one only. The negative side is that there is none like Him. And when there is none like Him, it follows that whatever attributes that might be assigned to God cannot be assigned at the same time to any other. The former postulate is called uniqueness in essence, and the latter, uniqueness in attributes. Prior to the emergence of Qur'anic concept, stress was laid more on the uniqueness of God in His essence than on His uniqueness in attributes. It is why we find in every earlier religion the belief in the Unity of God expressing itself in or subsisting side by side with image and hero worship (Azad, 1958: 8).

According to Azad, it is as natural for man to anthropomorphize divine attributes as to have an unshakable faith in God's existence. Whenever man tries "to visualize a thing unseen or unfelt, he inevitably conjures up its qualities and feelings of which he is aware in his own mundane life . . . whenever man attempted to carve out an image of God, he gave to Him his own shape" (Azad, 1965: 105). Consequently, only Qur'an shows the middle way between the transcendentalism of the Upanisads which leads, in the final analysis, to rejection of all divine attributes and of anthropomorphism (Azad, 1965: 127). Though Qur'an recognizes individual divine attributes (God is living, all-powerful, creating, merciful, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing, etc.), none of them is similar to human attributes. When there is none like unto Him, it follows that whatever attributes that might be assigned to Him cannot be assigned at the same time to any other (Azad, 1965: 136).

Azad contends that prior to Qur'an man's limited intellect had risen only high enough to reject the worship of idols and espouse the worship of the unseen God. No concept of attributes was free from the veil of anthropomorphism so that men could view the attributes as they are. We find in the Old Testament very fine attributes applied to God along with the qualities and passions intensely human. Even Christ when he desired to speak of the universal mercy of God was obliged to employ the similitude of relationship subsisting between father and son (Singh: 208). The Qur'an, however, removes all veils of anthropomorphism and presents a purely transcendental concept of God. A radically new department is

made by the Qur'an. All the veils of anthropomorphic similitudes are lifted and transcendentalism glows in perfection (QS.42: 11; QS.6: 103; QS.112: 1-4). The contrast is especially glaring when one read the Old Testament and Qur'anic accounts of the same incident (Azad, 1965: 157).

If a veil is over the face of truth

It is the sin of our eye which worships the picture (Azad, 1965: 160).

Azad recognizes that all religions prior to Qur'an proclaimed the unity of God's essence. However, in neglecting the proclamation of its converse, that there is none like him, they revealed their incompetence to grasp a belief in the unity of attributes. Because of this failure, essentially a failure of human ability to comprehend the intricacies of the unity of attributes prior to the Quranic dispensation, men made the gods in their own image, glorified their spiritual leaders, and tacitly divided themselves into exclusive groups. The Qur'an, however, presents an inimitable and inflexible concept of the unity of attributes which finds no parallel in previous concepts. It blocks all paths of idolatry; it summons men to worship, to supplicate and to trust in God alone; its basic confession proclaims the servitude of the prophet and with him, all creation; and it offers a common and simple concept of God and his attributes to all men regardless of external distinctions (Azad, 1965: 172).

It should be noted here the important point from Azad's idea of God is for Azad, God as the "cherisher" and "flourisher" (*rabb*) transcends all fragmentations and divisions of humanity in race, color, and religion.

The path of universal God (*rabb al-'alāmīn*) is “the right path” (*sirāt al-mustaqīm*) which belongs to no particular religion.

Concept of Religion (al-din) and Unity of Religion

Azad forms his entire approach to religion on Qur'an. He suggests and maintains the traditional Muslim doctrine of the inspiration of Qur'an, records that Muhammad received Qur'an within a period of twenty-three years, seems to accept the finality of the text of Qur'an as it stands, the unity of each *surah*, the total unity of Qur'an, and to maintain little sympathy for any form of higher or lower criticism, Muslim or otherwise, regarding the text of Qur'an (Azad, 1965: 12). His comprehensive description of religion and of men's diversion from the true religion is found primarily in his extended exegesis on *Surat al-Fâtihah*, the mother of Qur'an, which he regards to be the essence of true religion (Azad, 1965: 26).

According to Azad, the basic foundation of Quranic calls upon which all other Quranic doctrine depend on, and apart from which its whole structure collapses, is the universal guidance of revelation called *al-din*, that is, the true religion for mankind (Azad, 1965: 180-181). It is also called *al-Islam*, because Islam means to acknowledge and to obey (Azad, 1965: 180, 208, 214). Azad first discusses this critical concept of *din* in some detail in his explanation of *maliki yaum ad-din* (Azad, 1965: 114-122).

After briefly surveying its significance in Arabic and several cognate languages, he derives from *al-din* the basic meaning of "requit and

recompense" in the sense that reward is the lawful recompense of works, not an imposition which God lays upon man according to his arbitrary wrath or pleasure. In his works, he states:

In any case, the term *al-dīn* in Arabic bears the meaning of requital or recompense, whether of good or evil action. The phrase *Malik-i-Yawmiddin* bears the meaning of He who is the dispenser of Justice on the Day of Requital (Azad, vol.1, 1965: 89).

In this context, several aspects of the subject present themselves for consideration. The Qur'an uses the term *al-dīn* generally in the sense of requital. It is so styled because the Qur'an attempts to point out that requital or justice is the inevitable result of one's own action and not arbitrarily imposed, as was the idea prevailing when the Qur'an was delivered. The old belief had been inspired by the absolutism or despotism of rulers, and a similitude entertained in respect of God suggesting that even as the absolute monarchs of those days, God could dispense reward or punishment as His whim suggested. It was why people in those days propitiated the deity by various forms of sacrifice. The idea was to humor Him up and keep His temper at the normal (Azad, 1965: 89-90).

Among the Jews and the Christians, the concept of Deity had, no doubt, been raised a little higher. But the essential character of the earlier common belief still clung to them. The Jews believed that God was, even like the deities of others, an absolute dictator. If He was pleased with them, He would style Himself as the God of Israel; if displeased, He would wreak His vengeance and cause their ruination. The concept of the

Christians was no better. They believed that because of the original sin of Adam, his entire progeny or mankind had become an object of divine displeasure and that consequently Christ had to atone for this original sin through his own crucifixion and effect the redemption of man (Azad, 1965: 90).

But Qur'an places the concept of reward or punishment on a different footing. It does not regard the treatment meted out to man reward or punishment as something different from the operation of the law of causation that is at work in the universe. On the other hand, it regards it as but an aspect of it. Everything has a quality of its own and produces a result appropriate to it or expresses itself in a form germane to it. The same phenomenon is manifest in the realm of human thought and action. Every thought, feeling or action has its inevitable reaction. That is its requital, its recompense, its reward or punishment. The result of a good action is good and that is 'reward'. Similarly, the result of an evil action is evil and that is punishment. The one is designated heaven, and the other hell. The comforts of heaven are for those who do good, whereas the trials of hell are for those who do evil (Azad, 1965: 90).

In supporting his opinion, Azad bases on some verses of Qur'an such as QS. 59: 20 that "the inmates of the fire and the inmates of paradise are not to be held equal. The inmates of paradise only shall be the blissful" and QS. 45: 21-22 that "Deem they whose earnings are only evil, that We will deal with them as with those who believe and work righteousness, so that their lives and deaths shall be alike, do they judge.

In all truth hath God created the heavens and the earth that he may reward every one as he shall have wrought, and they shall not be wronged” (Azad, 1965: 91).

It should be noted that Qur'an having drawn attention to God's attributes of *rububiyat* and *rahmat* (mercy) does not straightway proceed to speak of the opposite attributes of terror and majesty. On the other hand, it speaks of God as the Master of the Day of Recompense, thereby drawing attention to the attribute implicit in the twin attributes of *rububiyat* and *rahmat*, viz. the attribute of justice. Sheer terror for its own sake has no place in the scheme of divine attributes. It is all justice, productive in one of its aspects of awe or fear operating for the good of man (Azad, 1965: 93).

It must be clear by now that the *rububiyat* and *rahmat* of God or the divine attributes of Providence and mercy at work in nature produce certain results. But these results are not produced under the stress of terror but by the force of justice and propriety. Human thought could not catch this reality and has often blundered in consequence. It assigned all unpleasant happenings of life to divine displeasure, by conjuring up attributes of terror and oppression for God, although had it struggled to probe the reality, it would have realized that what is attributed to divine displeasure was in fact the demand of mercy itself. If the law of requital were not in operation in the life of the universe or were not the process of perfection to require the elimination of all that clogs the path of

perfection, there would have been no sense of balance or justice (Azad, 1965: 93).

For Azad, justice or '*adl* in Arabic means to 'to make even'. A court of justice is intended to soften down angularities of contending parties appearing before it. '*Adl* or justice is used also in the sense of 'scales' whereby the two sides are made to show equal weight or to measure out justice. Justice introduces balance in life, and makes one thing agree with another, and produces unity. It is really the basis on which the scheme of the universe rests. Every planet and every star is at work in space in balanced or just or right relation with one another. It is this principle which binds together a society. Even a little slackening of this principle in the physical world of matter will result in disorder (Azad, 1965: 93-94). The law of justice maintains order and beauty in creation, and serves to eliminate deficiencies therein according to its own nature, not because of an arbitrary divine displeasure. Thus it complements the qualities of *rubūbiyat* and *rahmat*, and operates for the good of man according to the demand of mercy, and regulates the balanced relationship between the heavenly spheres to preserve the universe from chaos.

With regards to deviation of religion, Azad recognizes that variations in religions do exist (Azad, 1965: 186-191). These variations he divides into two categories: *first*, variations which are in fact not characteristic of the religions themselves, but which the erring devotees of religions have fabricated by deviating from the true teaching of religion within their religions. *Second*, variations which actually are present in the

religions as ordinances and rites, of which form of worship is an example. Such variations do not affect the religion (*din*) of all religions as they were originally manifested.

In relation to the second category, Azad states that there are two types of teaching in Qur'an: the first, which constitutes the essence or the spirit of Qur'an and which is therefore of primary importance, is *din*; the second, which constitutes externals and which is therefore of secondary importance, is *shari'a* or *minhaj* and *nusk*:

Shar'a and *Minhāj* could not have been from the very nature of things uniformly the same for one and all. It was therefore inevitable that they should be different for different countries and different times. The difference of this type are not really differences in the basis of religion. They are so only in things subsidiary to it (Azad, 1965: 161)

In fact, such variations are necessary. They accord with the variations of environment in which men of various climes and ages have lived and with the variations in the stages of men's development in history as Azad states:

For every age and country God has ordained a special form (of worship) which suitably conformed to man's situation and need.....Had God willed, he would have made a unified nation and community of all mankind, and no variation of thought or practice would have appeared; but we know that God did not so wish. His wisdom demanded that various states of thought and practice be created...(Azad, 1965: 189).

It is this truth which Qur'an aims to emphasize whenever it states: Had God so wished, He would have made you all of but one pattern. The

statement takes cognizance of the differences in disposition of different sections of mankind living in different countries, resulting in differences in manners, customs and ways of living. But differences of this character are incidental to the nature of man and should not form the criteria of truth and untruth, and result in mutual dislikes and hostilities. Only the basis of religion should not be disturbed, viz., devotion to one God and righteous living (Azad, 1965: 161).

In short, since *dīn* pervades all religions, the variations which exist in the various religions by virtue of *shari'a* and *minhaj* should not evoke strife among the devotees of these religions. *Din* is what has been given to all prophets everywhere and this is Islam. *Shari'a* or *Minhaj* used by Azad to refer to the path of Islam varies with time and conditions, although it is an absolutely necessary and desirable part of all religions but more importantly, these differences should not be a trigger of conflict among follower of religions (Rippin, 2005: 234).

Further, we would like to discuss about Azad's inclusive ideas. It is a theology that tends to positively look at the differences and encourages to search common ground and universal values to achieve a better life for human being (Nugroho, 2016: 100). Azad's inclusive theology actually can be seen in his belief of tolerance and unity of religion. He believes that all religions in origin contain the truth and are pervaded with the same spirit, and since the existing variations in religions do not affect the essentials of religion, the Qur'an enjoins tolerance towards the followers of other faiths

and forbids forceful and coercive techniques in summoning others to its religion (Azad, 1965: 190-191).

On several occasions Qur'an even praises adherents of other religions who, because of their firm faith and righteous deeds, have preserved the true spirit of their religion. It encourages others who have deviated to return to their own religion (Azad, 1965: 205-206). For as God is one, so God in Qur'an invites scattered mankind into the unity of religion to become as a united brotherhood, as "one family of the Lord of the universe," and as a people who hate sin yet not the sinner (Azad, 1965: 185). In this unity of religion and holy relationship with God, men can discover the corrective for all human divisiveness and the true source of their salvation, contentment, and happiness (Azad, 1965: 184-185).

Like Gandhi, Azad regarded Hindu-Muslim unity as necessary for the national reconstruction of India. In his famous address to Agra session of the *Khilafat Conference* on 25 August 1921, he assumed Hindu-Muslim unity as a moral imperative for the future of India (Khan, 1992: 208-209). Azad understood the idea of Islam in relation with the two concepts of peace and non-violence and with the necessity of interfaith dialogue and coexistence among different religions. The concepts of non-violence and peace were logically connected in Azad's mind to his conception of religious pluralism. Azad's main distinction between the spirit of religion (*din*) and its outward expressions (*shari'a*) provided him a theoretical justification for his idea of oneness of God, the concept of unity of humanity and universal peace in the world. The foundation of

Azad's religious pluralism was that the divine has many aspects, but human and divine are united in an expression of love (Johanbegloo, 2018). In his exegesis on *Surat al-Fatihah*, Azad stressed core of his ideas on what he called as the "God of universal compassion or universal humanity: that the mind which the *Surat al-Fatiha* depicts is a type of mind which reflects the beauty and the mercy of the God or universal humanity, the mind which the Qur'an aims to build (Azad, 1965: 194).

Azad's entire argument was to present Muslims with fact that the fundamental teaching of the Qur'an is mercy and forgiveness (*rahmat*). So it followed for him that these attributes of God should also be inculcated in humans. It is interesting to see up to what point. Azad's *tafsir* (interpretation) of Qur'an stays close to text, while at the same time being inspired by the Sufi perception of God through *kashf* or personal revelation (Johanbegloo, 2016). Azad's faith in the essential unity of humanity and in the oneness of all religions stemmed essentially from the Sufi concept of "the unity of existence" (*wahdat al-wujud*). Truth, for Azad, was one and the same everywhere. The mistake was to equate particular forms of Truth with Truth itself. Read from this angle, Azad's most important book, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, illustrates Azad's firm belief in tolerance and dialogue. In that book, Azad's idea of religious pluralism is expressed powerfully by the concept of oneness of faiths (*wahdat al-din*). For Azad, God as the "cherisher" and "nourisher" (*Rabb*) transcends all divisions of humanity by race, colour, and religion. It follows that the path of universal God (*rabb al-alamin*) is "the right path" (*sirat al-mustaqim*),

which belongs to no particular religion. In another of his celebrated works, *Ghubar-i-Khatir*, Azad drew a parallel between the sufi concept of “unity of existence” and the idea of pantheism as formulated in the Upanishads. If, at root, all religions reflected the same message. Then for Azad, there is no space for Hindu or Muslim communalism (Johanbegloo, 2016).

True religion is universal for Azad, echoing a stance of modern Indian pluralism and of opposition to the India-Pakistan split. To recognize this unity is to recognize the unity of humanity. Antagonism between religions has emerged only because people have come to think that they have a monopoly on truth within their own faith: in fact, all religions sham in the truth. All religious people should return to the true form of their own religion: this is what Qur’an instructs. All should submit to God and lead a life of right action according to their own religion. This religious spirit of cooperation reflects Azad’s ideals concerning the Indian political situation. All Muslims should return to the Qur’an and the *Sunna* and purify their religious tradition from all foreign additions. Care must be taken not to over-emphasize the importance of ritual and law of any faith, for this is what has produced conflict between religions in the past (Rippin, 2005: 234).

Azad’s Inclusive Theology and Education for Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is in general perhaps the greatest challenge in the global world today. People now live in pluralist societies in which diverse

religions and opponents of all religion push for influence. Behind all this lies the fear that a claim to truth, by implying that others are mistaken, leads to the kind of intolerance that was shown in the inquisition, or indeed is still shown by extremist forms of religion in various parts of the world.

India is in particular a multi-cultural and a diverse nation with a flourishing history of pluralism that has been thriving for thousands of years. Among the many faiths represented here are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism. As the world's largest democracy, India presents a unique opportunity to understand a long and multifaceted heritage of religious diversity. In case of India, one of the very influential figures in building religious pluralism education is Maulana Azad who selectively cites Qur'an itself to derive from it the doctrine of religious pluralism and tolerance. Muslim scholars counted him among the most gifted of exponents of *wahdat al-din*, the Islamic equivalent of "Sarva Deva Samabhavaha" or the essential oneness of all religions and his unfinished *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* is remarkable exposition of Qur'an as a means of education for religious pluralism, inter-communal harmony and coexistence (Tharoor, 2011: 28).

According to Azad, Islam teaches tolerance on all levels: individual, group and state. It should be a political and legal requirement. Tolerance is the responsibility that endorses human rights, coexistence, and the rule of law. The concept of *rububiyah* as elaborated by Azad has stance on the unity of humankind too. Allah sustains everyone, even misguided ones.

One should not discriminate between human beings on basis of one's belief. It is against the divine function of *rububiyah*. The *sufis* go even further; they maintain that even one who does not believe in God should not be discriminated against.

In Azad's view, all religions are in their own sphere perfectly true; all teachers sent by God are true teachers since the last law always abrogates previous laws (Jurji, 1969: 185). At the level of Qur'anic interpretation, Azad begins with concept of universal guidance of God. Divine revelation given to everyone without distinction inculcates universal religion, which is *al-din* or *al-Islam*, one religion that is appropriate to nature and function of all humanity. He said, Muslim are to maintain a twofold relation with members of other religions. On the one hand, it is their duty to remind them of their essential truth and, as it were, to call them back to their first love (Miller, 1991: 255). In his works, Azad says:

The first doctrinal principle of the Quran is to recognize the founders of all religions and endorse their teaching, which at the basis is one and the same, and to conform to the way shown them; as the Quran says: Each one believeth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers. We make no distinction between any of His messengers (Azad, 1965: 171).

Through Gandhi, Azad took a lesson that communal harmony played an important role in the future of India. He believed that despite religious, ethnic and linguistic differences, India was one nation. Azad argued that two-nation theory offered no solution of the problem of one another's minorities, but only lead to retribution and reprisals by

introducing a system of mutual hostage (Azad, 1988). Miller stated that Azad represents a bridge figure between theological extension and constructive reflection. This prominent leader and thinker educated and taught two things for Indian Muslims that directly reflect on the issue of religious pluralism. He secured the concept of nationalism as a firm frame of reference for pluralistic living, and he provided fresh Qur'anic interpretations for inter-religious understanding (Coward, 1987: 254).

He said both Hinduism and Christianity are subject to critique, because they have deviated from the original truth. For example, Christianity added monotheistic polytheism and in Hinduism the beauty of the Indian mind and all its great achievements have been cluttered by superstition and image worship (Azad, 1965: 121, 141). Thus Islam requests them “to return to their own religion by first discarding all Communalism the aberrations that they have heaped thereon, and strictly adhere to the original faiths” (Azad, 1965: 174). Since the inner congruence of spirit of these faiths is the same as spirit of Islam, he asked the Muslims to maintain a warm and cordial relation with the people of other faiths. The outward path (*shari'a*, *minhaj*) may vary according to circumstances. The differences which exist between one religion and another are not differences in *din*, the basic provision, but in manner of giving effect to it (Asghar Engineer, 1995: 304). Hence, Azad asked the Muslims to concentrate on this basic provision and respond positively for inter-religious relations because inner spirit in all religions that is same, is a common principle for religious pluralism (Panicker, 2006).

Initiated by Azad, this became for many the conscious Indian Muslim dream. A firm hope and conviction developed that the common love of nation would be the power that would make religious pluralism work. This is Azad's real contribution for the awareness and education for Indian people at that time when the problem of separation and disintegration arose.

CONCLUSION

Maulana Azad's ideas of inclusive theology can be analyzed in his commentary, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* that there is only one true religion; all religions are one in origin; so all religions are originally the true religion. Azad argued that God as the cherisher and flourisher (*rabb*) exceed all disintegration and divisions of humanity in race, color, and religion. The path of universal God (*rabb al-'alāmīn*) is the straight path which belongs to no particular religion. This idea is undoubtedly very important for teaching and educating people on religious pluralism. Moreover, with Islamic terrorism threatening and tearing the global world apart by their radical Islamic Ideology, Azad's thought and the way he learnt and understood Islam can serve as a counter-narrative to challenge such evil ideologies. His message of tolerance, interfaith harmony and dialogue and coexistence is still alive and must be propagated among the Muslim society in particular, to reform and change the extremist mindset and should be disseminated among other religions to create peace and harmony in the world today.

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