

Nationalist Muslim Opposition to the Partition of India: Madani, Azad, and Khan

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*"Muslim citizens in India have a responsibility to remove the doubts and misgiving entertained by a large section of the people about their loyalty founded largely on their past association with the demand for Pakistan and the unfortunate activities of some of them."
- Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, March 1950*

In advocating for the Partition of India, the All-India Muslim League sought to protect the Muslims of British India by giving them their own homeland. Instead, hundreds of millions of Muslims remain divided among three countries, including a significant minority population in a Hindu-majority India. While India's leaders envisioned the country as a secular, democratic republic in which all citizens would be equal under the law, Muslims faced economic and political marginalization since independence.¹ Much of the marginalization stems from enduring suspicion, particularly among Hindu Nationalists, about Indian Muslims' roles in dividing Mother India.² However, the above quote came not just from a leader of the nominally secular Indian National Congress (INC), but from independent India's first Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Two years before writing

that letter, Patel himself ordered an investigation in 1948 within India's bureaucracy to ascertain the loyalty of Muslim employees.³ To this day, Muslims are often treated as suspect citizens in India. Their loyalty is questioned on everything from sports, "Is it true that every Indian Muslim secretly cheers for the Pakistan cricket team?", to matters of identity, "Tell us what is more important to you, being an Indian, or being a Muslim?"⁴

The history of the Pakistan movement and the battle for Muslim hearts and minds is complicated. Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League and Pakistan's chief campaigner, prevaricated on the definition of Pakistan to appeal to diverse constituencies.⁵ Was Pakistan a separate country or a collection of autonomous states within India? A territorial Pakistan could never include the United Provinces and Delhi, but it was in this region that

support for the League was strongest, particularly among the middle class and the educated.⁶ Further, the prevailing, simplistic narrative of Hindu-Muslim enmity, leading to the natural creation of Pakistan as a state for Indian Muslims, belies the significant complexity of the debate that took place within the Indian Muslim community on their relation to their ancestral land and the global ummah. The same is true of post-9/11 discourse on Muslims in general.

Despite Jinnah's effective rhetoric, several Muslim leaders, representing key constituencies among India's Muslim population, stridently opposed Partition and supported a united, secular India. Some of the most prominent of these leaders include Hussain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Azad, and Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Madani was a Deobandi cleric most famous for his treatise, "Composite Nationalism and Is-

lam.”⁷ His treatise contains compelling arguments for a united India that were grounded in the Quran and shared by many clerics at the time. The fact that a devout Muslim used Quranic literature to oppose the creation of a Muslim state is striking. Maulana Azad was the youngest ever president of the INC. Khan was the leader of the Khudai Khidmatgars, an organization of Pashtuns who worked with the INC to nonviolently oppose British rule. Contradicting the conceptions of history among Pakistani and Hindu nationalists, these leaders show that Muslim support for dividing India was far from universal among key Muslim constituencies.

To give a more nuanced history of the Pakistan movement and Partition, I will analyze the ideas of each of the leaders in separate sections. For Madani, I use an English translation of “Composite Nationalism and Islam.”⁸ For Azad, I analyze an important speech given by him in his 1940 presidential address, while drawing on the insightful history given by Syeda Hameed.⁹ Finally, for Khan, I study a paper written by Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah.¹⁰

Maulana Madani – A Deobandi Cleric’s Opposition to the Partition of India

Maulana Hussein Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) was the principal of the Darul Uloom Deoband, the Islamic university where the influential Deoband movement developed in the 19th century.¹¹ He

was also one of the most important Muslim critics of Partition because he used the teachings of the Quran, of which he was a renowned expert, to deliver an effective argument against the idea of religion as a means of nationhood. His seminal “Composite Nationalism and Islam” was even a rejoinder to a poem published by Allama Iqbal, the famous Urdu poet and the “ideological father of Pakistan.”¹² More on Iqbal and his philosophy below.

“The non-Arab world still does not know the secrets of the faith.

Thus from Deoband Hussain Ahmad proves

somewhat strange singing out high on the pulpit

That millat is based on land.

What does he know of the stance of the Arab

Messenger, on whom be peace?

Bring yourself closer to Mustafa, for his alone is faith

complete.”

If you cannot approach him

You’re just an Abu Lahab!

Essentially, Iqbal mocked Madani as someone who did not know Arabic and was an Abu Lahab, an uncle of Mohammed who opposed Islam.¹³ This poem was blatantly slanderous given that Madani was an eminent expert of Quranic Arabic and a respected religious leader. It also stemmed from a misreading of a speech given by Madani.¹⁴ Thus, Madani felt compelled to respond, which he did

when he published “Composite Nationalism and Islam” in 1938, which I will break down shortly.

The main ideological difference between these two titans of modern Islamic philosophy was the conception of nationhood. Iqbal felt that modern European-style nationalism, drawn on ethnolinguistic lines, was responsible for war and imperialism. He deplored the division of Turks and Arabs along ethnic lines following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, when both groups should have realized their common bonds as Muslims.¹⁵ Iqbal felt that a united Muslim ummah in which Islam is a modern, rationalist, ethical, philosophical conception would help end these conflicts and promote a creative spirit for the betterment of the world, just as the caliphates of old were vital to the dissemination of classical knowledge to the West.¹⁶

Madani, on the other hand, saw the hand of imperialism in the division of India along religious lines and considered Iqbal’s ideas a dangerous extension of that. He noted the irony of the British exploiting nationalism to break up the Ottoman Empire while condemning it when Indians protested British rule.¹⁷ To Madani, it was vital that Muslims and non-Muslims alike work together to fight the common foe of British imperialism.

“Composite Nationalism and Islam” is divided into three sections. In the first section, Madani eluci-

dates the precise meaning of a qaum (country) as used in the Arabic of the Prophet Muhammad. Through a thorough reading of dictionaries and the Quran, Madani concludes that qaums have always included Muslims and non-Muslims who belong to the same territory or ethnicity.¹⁸ He also states that the Quran sanctions the cooperation of Muslims and non-Muslims towards the betterment of the qaum and that prophets can have relationships with non-Muslims, including polytheists.¹⁹

In the second section, Madani attacks the hypocrisy of European imperialism. He points out that when Indian handicrafts and commerce dominated Europe, “the philosophy of ‘safe and secure trade’ was propagated by Europeans and every newspaper, journal, and intellectual’s lecture sang paeans of its virtues as if it was a source of eternal bliss for mankind.”²⁰ But, “when the Indian economy and commerce were weakened by this policy and ‘made in England’ goods began to dominate the market, the philosophy of ‘free trade’ was preached to us . . . as a result, the handicraft industry of India was completely destroyed.”²¹ More specifically with regards to nationalism, he goes on to say, “When the Muslims were dominant, the West harangued the philosophy that the European map could not be changed and that the victorious nation could not annex the territory of the vanquished country. How-

ever, when the Muslim power [i.e., the Ottoman and Mughal Empires and Caliphates] was weakened . . . A new philosophy was propounded that the victors could not be denied access to their booty.”²²

This was a stunning indictment of imperial rule and, by extension, a powerful argument for Indian nationalism. Essentially, Madani is arguing that Europeans broke Muslim empires by dividing religious communities when Muslims should have used the power of nationalism and worked with their non-Muslim brethren to end British rule on the subcontinent. He later points out that the Prophet Muhammad famously allied with the Jews of Medina to vanquish their common enemy.²³ As Madani writes, “To think and argue that Islam is not a flexible religion is something that I cannot really understand . . . Islam can have a covenant with non-Muslims . . . Muslims can also live and interact with non-Muslims. They can share in their happiness and sorrows. They can drink water from the same tap and eat in the same plate.”²⁴ That the conservative cleric argued for union with non-Muslims while Anglophile Muslims argued for separation and Muslim unity seems confusing until you realize that it is the cleric who knows the Quran in and out and finds in it the fundamental message of universal solidarity.

Madani concludes by praising the Indian National Congress and its commitment to the protection of

minorities and their cultures.²⁵ As Madani writes, besides nationalism, “there is no other way to protect our religion and culture from the British onslaught.”²⁶ He points to a verse in the Quran which exhorts Muslims to fight for each other as long as they have not signed a treaty with another group. Thus, in Madani’s view, there is no contradiction between being a member of the ummah and being an Indian.²⁷ He accuses Iqbal of serving British goals by arguing against composite nationalism and preventing Muslims from joining non-Muslims in ending British imperialism.²⁸

“Composite Nationalism and Islam” is a powerful rejoinder to the Pakistan ideology. While the League advocated for a separate state for Muslims, a respected Islamic scholar argued that the entire enterprise was, at best, misguided and, at worst, blasphemous. While the Deobandis are typically associated with ultra-conservative strains of Islam.²⁹ Madani presented a very liberal, secular ideal for post-independence India. Meanwhile, the highly Westernized and “Savile Row-suit-wearing, sausage-eating, whisky-swilling” Jinnah articulated a vision for a separate Islamic state on the premise that, “There is nothing in life which links [Hindus and Muslims] together. Our names, our clothes, our foods – they are all different.”³⁰ This contrast is very striking and truly belies the idea of Pakistan being founded as a “pure”

Islamic state by devout Muslims.

When Madani wrote “Composite Nationalism and Islam,” he was confident that Muslims would be fairly represented in a united India, given the presence of five Muslim-majority provinces and the fact that a third of British India’s population was Muslim. Madani never imagined that post-Partition, all five of those provinces would be lost and the Muslim population reduced to less than ten percent of independent India.³¹ Nonetheless, Madani chose to remain in India to guide the debilitated Muslim population as the head of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, the Deobandis’ political wing. He called on India’s Muslims to serve the country and commit to a jihad-e-akbar (“great jihad”) of moral character to improve their standing in independent India.³²

Maulana Azad: An Indian and a Muslim

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) was born in Mecca, quite fittingly for an important Muslim leader, to a Bengali Muslim scholar and his Arab wife. Azad received a traditional Islamic education in Calcutta, where he studied the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence extensively, but he was influenced by the ideas of the Islamic educationist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and, without his father’s knowledge, learned English to gain a well-rounded education.³³

In Calcutta, Azad, then a teenager, published and wrote in an

Urdu newspaper, the *Al-Hilal*, “The Crescent”, wherein he espoused anti-British and anti-imperial views, giving Azad significant clout in the Muslim community.³⁴ It was also in Calcutta that Azad joined the INC.³⁵ In the 1920s, he became particularly involved in the Khilafat Movement, a movement by British Indian Muslims to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate.³⁶ Although the movement was ultimately unsuccessful because Turkey’s secular President Atatürk promptly disbanded the caliphate upon achieving Turkish independence, it was noteworthy for being an early example of Hindu-Muslim political cooperation.³⁷ It was during the Khilafat Movement that Azad and Gandhi became close friends, and Azad became a key member of the INC.³⁸ As a prominent Muslim theologian and Indian nationalist, he also served as an ambassador for Hindu-Muslim unity. With the Muslim League gaining ground in the court of Muslim opinion, often due to missteps on the part of the INC as Azad was quick to point out, the leaders of the INC decided to make Azad the President of the INC in 1940.³⁹ Given his role as the most prominent Muslim in the INC, it is important to analyze his motivations for supporting the Indian National Congress and a united, independent India.

Much like Madani, Azad believed that being Muslim and being Indian were not mutually exclusive. Rather, Azad believed that Indian

Muslims should work with Hindus on matters of national concern while maintaining ties with Muslims elsewhere.⁴⁰ Azad believed in Muslim advocacy if one’s Muslim identity was at risk of being submerged in Hinduism, such as in the matter of the Hindi-Urdu debate. Unlike the League, however, Azad retained confidence that Muslims had a strong enough position in the subcontinent that they did not need to rely on British support or autonomy for protection.⁴¹ He also recognized that the strength of Muslims, in general, derives from the fact that they “occupy every inch of the road between Khyber and Constantinople.”⁴²

Fundamentally, Azad was a Muslim leader and declared he would not hesitate to split the INC if it became inimical to Muslim interests.⁴³ According to an unpublished article written by Azad in 1938, he originally supported working with the League to fight for independence and giving them a seat at the table in the formation of provincial governments after the 1937 elections saw the League perform dismally. However, Azad blamed the League, particularly Jinnah, for not compromising with the INC, thereby preventing cooperation.⁴⁴ Azad recognized that there were Hindu majoritarian elements within the INC, but he felt that since the overall INC was non-communal, it was in Muslims’ interests to stand with this national force for indepen-

dence and not the British.⁴⁵ As Azad writes, “Even if all the Muslims of India say to the British, ‘Do not leave this country, we will help you,’ he won’t stay... When his own vessel is caught in a whirl, how can he help another’s sinking ship?”⁴⁶

These sentiments were expressed in his 1940 Presidential Address. This was an important speech given that the League had passed the Lahore Resolution some months earlier, declaring support for “Pakistan.” He accused the British, and, implicitly, the League, of using the excuse of India’s religious demography and communal situation to deny it independence. While trying not to downplay the communal situation, Azad said, “to admit its [the problem of communalism] existence, however, does not mean that it should be used as a weapon against India’s national freedom. British imperialism has always exploited it to this end.”⁴⁷ In trying to assuage the concerns of Muslims that they would be underrepresented in a fully democratic India, Azad said,

[The Congress] has always held to two principles . . . (i) Whatever constitution is adopted for India, there must be the fullest guarantee in it for the rights and interests of minorities. (ii) The minorities should judge for themselves what safeguards are necessary for the protection of their rights and interests of mi-

norities. The majority should not decide this.⁴⁸

Azad continues by arguing that Muslims are not a political minority because of their significant population across India, their domination in five provinces, as well as their relative unity compared to Hindus (who were beset by divisions along caste and regional lines). According to Azad, the idea of Muslims as a separate community from Hindus is a part of the British “divide and rule” policy to prevent a unified movement for independence.⁴⁹ Azad then appeals to his fellow Muslims to recognize their common Indianness, stating,

Like Ganga and Jumna, they [Hindus and Muslims] flowed for a while through separate courses, but nature’s immutable law brought them together and joined them in a sangam [confluence, union] . . . Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism . . . Just as a Hindu can say with pride that he is an Indian and follows Hinduism, so also we can say with equal pride that we are Indians and follow Islam.⁵⁰

Further describing the commonalities between Indian Hindus and Muslims, Azad concludes,

Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our

manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavors . . . Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity.⁵¹

Essentially, Azad is pointing out that through the course of history, Indian Muslims became Indians and enriched India culturally. In the above quote, he refers to the idea of Pakistan as a “fantasy” that would fail to break the unity of India’s peoples. However, Azad’s vision for a united, independent India began to unravel in 1942. Azad’s goal was *purna swaraj* or *mukammal azad* (complete independence, in Hindi and Urdu, respectively) by whatever means necessary. He was willing to eschew nonviolence (“a matter of policy, not creed”) and support the British war effort if it meant freedom for India.⁵² However, recognizing that the British intended to maintain control over India even after the war, Azad and his fellow Congress members refused to support the British war effort in the Second World War. While they opposed fascism, they also viewed British imperialism as equally unacceptable. Without guarantees of independence after the war, they would not support the British.⁵³

To convince Indian leaders to support the war effort, the British

government sent the Cripps Mission, led by cabinet minister Sir Stafford Cripps, to negotiate. One of the proposals was to allow the provinces to secede upon independence. Azad vehemently opposed this proposal.⁵⁴ Additionally, the Congress leaders were not convinced that the British were committed to Indian independence. These led to the INC's rejection of the proposals.⁵⁵ Cripps responded that allowing a majority government in India was "irresponsible" given the communal situation.⁵⁶ Given that such claims flew in the face of Azad's political beliefs, Azad responded by explaining the INC's stand and the understanding that the various religious groups would hash out the communal issues after independence.⁵⁷ In response, Gandhi decided to launch the Quit India Movement. Azad opposed the measure, fearing that the British would simply arrest them during wartime.⁵⁸ Sardar Patel intervened, and the INC's Working Committee passed the Quit India Resolution in 1942. As Azad predicted, the INC leaders, including Azad, were promptly arrested by the British.⁵⁹

The arrest of the INC's leaders and the resignations of the Congress-led provincial ministries allowed the League to gain grassroots support among Indian Muslims during the war. During the postwar negotiations for Indian independence, Jinnah demanded that the League alone be allowed to appoint

Muslim delegates. Azad pushed back strongly on this suggestion since the Congress was a national party, not a communal one.⁶⁰ When the League overperformed among Muslims in the 1946 elections compared to the 1937 elections, Jinnah had a stronger hand to play with the British.

Azad opposed the idea of Pakistan on ideological and theological grounds. Theologically, Azad opposed the insinuation behind the very name of Pakistan that some areas were pak ("pure" in Urdu and Persian) while others were not since the Prophet said, "God has made the whole world a mosque for me."⁶¹ In what can only be described as one of the most prescient arguments in history, Azad pointed out,

If India is divided into two states, one Hindu and one Muslim, in the Hindu part, Muslims will be scattered in small minorities all over the entire region. They will wake up one day to discover that they have become aliens and foreigners and left to the mercies of an unadulterated Hindu Raj. Their position in Pakistan, too, he writes, will be vulnerable and weak, and whatever little majority they enjoy will be offset by the economic, educational, and political lead enjoyed by the non-Muslims of those areas. Despite all this, however, even if Pakistan were to become overwhelmingly

Muslim, it would still not solve the problem of the Muslims of India.⁶²

He accused both the League and extremist Hindus of inciting communal passions around the issue, since when

[Communal Hindus] read into the formation of the League, a Pan-Islamic conspiracy which they opposed out of fear . . . this became an incentive to the followers of the League who acted upon the simple logic that if Hindus were opposed to something, it must be of benefit to the Muslims. An emotional frenzy was thus created, which made persons immune to reason.⁶³

Azad favored a formula in which the country remained united with political power significantly devolved to the provinces; this became the basis of the Cabinet Mission Plan. The plan was agreed upon, albeit reluctantly, by Jinnah and Azad. Unfortunately, Nehru made an ill-conceived statement which implied that the INC did not, in fact, accept the plan. This led Jinnah to declare that an independent Pakistan was the only solution. Azad convinced the All-India Congress Committee to pass a resolution affirming its commitment to the Cabinet Mission Plan, but Jinnah no longer trusted the INC.⁶⁴ After this, Jinnah declared a Direct-Action Day in Calcutta, leading to bloody sectarian rioting in Bengal, which

spread across the plains of North India. The violence forced a reluctant Congress to accede to Partition.⁶⁵

Azad, ever the oracle, campaigned furiously against Partition, arguing,

Partition would not solve the communal problem, it could only make it a permanent feature of Indian polity. Creating two states based on communal hatred would create a self-fulfilling prophecy. It was Jinnah who had raised the slogan of two nations, and to allow the country to be partitioned would be to accept Jinnah's logic.⁶⁶

Despite his pleas, the die was cast. Partition was agreed upon, and the rest is history. However, as Azad pointed out, "the acceptance of [Partition] was 'only in a resolution of the Working Committee of the Congress and on the register of the Muslim League. The people of India had not accepted Partition. . . the Hindus and Sikhs' were to a man opposed to partition' plus there was a large section of the Muslim community which did not support it either."⁶⁷

Azad stayed behind in India, mindful of the fact that despite Partition, millions of Muslims remained in India as suspect citizens in the eyes of resentful Hindus. He served as India's Education Minister until a few weeks before his death in 1956. His birthday is still celebrated in India as National Education Day.

Till his death, he never believed that religion was a legitimate foundation for nationhood, writing,

It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas which are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different. It is true that Islam sought to establish a society which transcends racial, linguistic, economic, and political frontiers. History has, however, proved that after the first few decades or at most after the first century, Islam was not able to unite all the Muslim countries on the basis of Islam alone.⁶⁸

I would argue that within the INC leadership, Azad was arguably the most committed to a united, independent India. While dedicated to the same cause as Azad, Nehru was also concerned about economic development, which necessarily required a strong central government. When Jinnah's obduracy meant that a centralized Indian union would not be possible, Nehru reluctantly agreed to Partition the country to preserve that centralized power (Khan 2017, 85).⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Gandhi was so focused on pursuing nonviolent strategies that he even told Azad that he was willing to sacrifice Indian independence on the altar of nonviolence.⁷⁰ Azad was first and foremost committed to Indian independence and the foundation of a secular, united nation. If cen-

tralization and nonviolence got in the way, that did not matter to Azad. Who knows? If Azad had been the true leader of the INC, India might not have been partitioned at all.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan – The "Frontier Gandhi"

Abdul Ghaffar "Bacha" Khan (1890-1988) was simultaneously one of the most important leaders in modern Pashtun history and one of the most important leaders in modern Indian history. Khan was born in a village in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) of British India, today the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The NWFP was around ninety-three percent Muslim and fifty-six percent Pashtun.⁷¹ It was also one of the least developed regions in British India: there was little industry, urbanization, or Western education, and it was oft-neglected by its British overlords.⁷² While the British introduced piecemeal reforms in the rest of India to ease the country into self-government, these reforms never applied to the NWFP, which was governed by "special ordinances" from time to time.⁷³ Due to these factors, the Muslim elites who dominated urban Muslim public opinion in Bengal, the United Provinces, and Punjab, many of whom would also be the most forceful advocates for Pakistan, held little sway in the very rural NWFP.⁷⁴

It was in this milieu that a group of educated Pashtuns formed the Anjuman-i-Islah-ul-Afaghana

(the Association for the Advancement of the Afghan Peoples.⁷⁵ The Anjuman promoted the education of Pashtuns, the eradication of social evils in Pashtun society, the advancement of Pashto language and literature, and the fostering of a “real love” for Islam.⁷⁶ The Anjuman believed that British rule was the root cause of the illiteracy and relative backwardness of the Pashtuns and steadily gained a following in the rural areas.⁷⁷ From this upwelling of Pashtun nationalism, two new organizations were formed. One was the Zalmu Jirga, a youth league aimed at the literate but open to everyone regardless of caste and creed. The second was the Khudai Khidmatgars (Divine Servants), aimed at the elderly and the illiterate.⁷⁸ The movements advanced multiple causes to appeal to diverse constituencies: freedom from British economic imperialism for the peasants, political reform and independence for India for the ulema, who largely opposed British influence and cultural imperialism, and the promotion of Pashtun culture for the intelligentsia.⁷⁹

These days Khan is renowned for his work as the leader of the Khidmatgars. While he enforced military-style discipline among members, he was scrupulous in his advocacy of nonviolence.⁸⁰ Khan’s adherence to nonviolence stemmed from his identity as both a reformer and a devout Muslim. The reformer in Khan pursued nonviolence as a means of advocating against the

Pashtun practice of blood feuds. The Muslim in Khan found inspiration in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, who countered oppression with nonviolence. For his use of nonviolence, Khan is popularly known as the “Frontier Gandhi,” and the Khudai Khidmatgars became extremely popular in the NWFP to the extent that the British authorities tried to paint their members as Bolsheviks, a charge strongly denied by the Khidmatgars.

When the INC decided to pursue Indian independence in 1929, the Khudai Khidmatgar rallied behind it. While the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 is solemnly remembered as a turning point in the Indian independence movement, few remember the brutal oppression meted out to the Khidmatgars by the British. In 1930, a peaceful congregation of Khidmatgars and INC members in Peshawar was disrupted by British soldiers, who massacred more than 200 civilians.⁸¹ The Qissa Khwani Bazaar Massacre unified the Khidmatgars and the INC against British rule. It was also the beginning of a close friendship between Khan and other INC leaders, including Gandhi.⁸²

Similar to Madani, Khan saw no Quranic injunctions against Muslims allying with non-Muslims for the betterment of one’s country. Indeed, like Madani, he found justification for such alliances in the alliance between Muhammad and the Jews of Medina.⁸³ Due to the

Khidmatgars’ grassroots appeal, the League barely had a presence in the NWFP. Many Pashtuns viewed the League as guarding the interests of the elite.⁸⁴ For this reason, the INC dominated the 1937 election of the NWFP and gained enough seats to form a ministry in this Muslim-majority province. This was a rather humiliating defeat for the League.

Thus, in the following years, the League worked aggressively to build support in the NWFP through the Pakistan movement and claims of “Islam in danger.” These appeals mostly fell on unreceptive ears. Pashtun leaders feared Punjabi domination if Pakistan were created.⁸⁵ Additionally, the fact that ninety-three percent of the NWFP was Muslim, as opposed to Punjab and Bengal, which had significant non-Muslim populations, blunted the impact of cries of “Islam in danger.”⁸⁶ In the 1946 election, even though the INC faced an electoral drubbing in Muslim constituencies and Muslim-majority provinces, it still managed to maintain power in the NWFP.⁸⁷ The League began campaigning vigorously against the elected government in the NWFP. Khan and many Pashtuns continued to strongly oppose the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. His INC colleagues, however, reluctantly agreed to the demand for Pakistan and called for a referendum to be held in the Congress-controlled NWFP. The referendum only included the choice to join either

India or Pakistan. Gandhi, knowing what this would mean for the NWFP, strongly opposed the referendum. When Khan learned of the referendum and the plan to Partition India, he famously lamented, "We [Pashtuns] have stood by you and had undergone great sacrifices for attaining freedom, but you have thrown us to the wolves."⁸⁸ Khan viewed the entire proposal as betraying Pashtun interests. The fact that the referendum had no option for an independent Pashtunistan irked Khan:

We shall not agree to hold a referendum because we had decisively won the elections on the issue of Hindustan versus Pakistan and proclaimed the [Pashtun] view on it to the world. Now, as India has disowned us, why should we have a referendum on Hindustan and Pakistan? Let it be on [Pashtunistan] or Pakistan.⁸⁹

As shown above, the Khidmatgars wanted an independent Pashtun state, to be combined with Pashtun-majority Afghanistan. Their conception of this state included Islam-inspired democracy and human rights. They refused to cooperate with the League on the matter and viewed the entire referendum as a farce. The Khidmatgars' boycotting of the referendum consequently meant that the province would "vote" to join Pakistan.⁹⁰ When Pakistan became independent on August 14, 1947, the Khidmatgars

refused to join the flag-hoisting ceremony.⁹¹ Jinnah used this as an excuse to dismiss the Congress ministry, a significant blow to democracy and Pashtun autonomy in the minds of the Khidmatgars (Shah 2000, 814).⁹² This would not be the last conflict between the Khidmatgars and the central government. Khan continued to advocate for Pashtun rights and autonomy, leading the government to jail him several times. These calls for autonomy and the Khidmatgars prior opposition to Partition and thus Pakistan led to the movement being labeled as secessionist and was banned in 1955, effectively destroying the movement and its memory in Pakistan's public conscience.

While Khan is often praised as an Indian nationalist, his ultimate goal was the advancement of the Pashtuns. Like Madani and Azad, Khan believed that Islam allowed him to ally with other non-Muslims to eradicate imperialism from the subcontinent. It was only when Partition became an inevitability that Khan advocated for an independent Pashtunistan. His consistent opposition to Pakistan was a significant blow to the idea that Islam could unite the otherwise disparate ethnic groups under one nation, which is why the Pakistani government suppressed the movement and eliminated it from the public conscience. That said, utterances of the Khidmatgar spirit can be seen in the modern-day Pashtun Taha-

fuz Movement (PTM). Since 2018, Pashtuns have been nonviolently protesting the Pakistani military's human rights abuses in the Pashtun areas and, like the Khidmatgars, have also been met with repression.⁹³ Despite attempts to efface their memory, the Khidmatgars' nonviolent and reformist ethos lives on in Pashtunistan.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the simplistic narrative of the Two-Nation Theory that Hindus and Muslims are two separate peoples, Madani, Azad, and Khan's anti-Partition advocacy undermines claims of transnational Muslim unity and solidarity among Indian Muslims and with the global ummah. These leaders demonstrate that the Pakistan movement was not truly religious. Nobody can deny the spirituality and Quranic expertise of these three leaders, who nonetheless opposed the creation of a state for Muslims. Indeed, they frequently found Quranic justification for their nationalism and opposition to Partition. They also dismissed leaders who called for Muslim autonomy as entrapped by "the magicians (read politicians) of Britain."⁹⁴ These leaders were rooted in their Indianness, but this did not conflict with their pride in being Muslim. As they saw it, the two were not mutually exclusive. Outside the Muslim community, Hindu nationalists such as Savarkar have claimed for decades that Muslims cannot be trusted because they do not view India as their holy

lands. However, Madani puts this notion to rest by pointing out that Muslims did view India as sacred, not least because Adam descended from paradise to Sri Lanka.⁹⁵ Much like Hindus, Muslims are bound to an India of pilgrimage sites, saints, and holy men.⁹⁶ In more recent times, claims have been made of an impending 'clash of civilizations,' particularly between the West and the Islamic world. Since 9/11, Muslim minorities have been collectively viewed as a potential fifth column. The anti-Partition advocacy of these Muslim leaders dispels the notion of a united and monolithic Muslim front and of a collective loy-

alty to the ummah that subverts the nation-state.

While I have covered some of the most important Muslim leaders who opposed Partition, future research should compare these leaders' views and motivations to that of others like Khizr Tiwana of the Unionist Party in Punjab. In India, efforts should be made to further highlight the roles of leaders like Madani, Azad, and Khan in school textbooks to prevent people from jumping to an incorrect conclusion of exclusive Muslim culpability for Partition. In conjunction with this, more efforts should also be made to highlight the culpability of Hindu

nationalist elements in alienating Muslim public opinion during this time. While INC members were being jailed for their role in the Quit India Movement, the Hindu Mahasabha entered into a coalition with the League in Sindh and Punjab, even after the League explicitly called for the secession of Muslim-majority provinces, since Hindu nationalists at the time agreed with the League's Two-Nation Theory that Hindus and Muslims are fundamentally different.⁹⁷ Madani, Azad, and Khan show that Muslims did not split India and create Pakistan; communalists did.

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Taken in the desert, Wadi Rum, outside of Aqaba, Jordan. Wadi Rum was also the filming location of popular movies Dune (2021) and Star Wars: Episode VI (1983). The desert has pigments of red and orange. The cliffs make for a beautiful view of the valley.

Photo by Lauren Richards, First-Year Political Science and Peace War and Defense Double Major





(Above) Alhambra Palace - The Alhambra is a palace and fortress located in Granada, Andalusia, Spain. It is largely based on Moorish culture and architectural styles.

Photo by Brooke Chow, Second-Year Public Policy and Business Double Major and Minor in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics

(Left) Photo by Isabelle Kaufman, Fourth-Year History Major and Spanish Minor