QUAID-I AZAM AND ISLAMIC CULTURE

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"Culture" is apparently a simple word. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it as "trained and refined state of understanding and manners and tastes". Thus one who can enjoy and appreciate the best and the finest things in life is said to be a man of culture. But this word has gathered a great deal of mass with the passage of time. Its original meaning has been considerably broadened. It is now usual to speak of the cultural characteristics of racial and national groups. Interpreted in this why the culture of a people comprehends the entire complex of its hopes and fears, opinions and assumptions, views on life and living and its public and private morals that find expression in laws, precedents and customs. Essentially, it is the soul and spirit of a people and includes all that they pride and preserve as distinctive marks of self-identification. Not all sections of a society are equally culture conscious. Some would guard their cultural frontiers in the spirit of a crusade. Less sensitive sections of society may not go that far. But few are entirely indifferent to the fate of their culture. This is a veritable frame of reference for what they do and what they desist from doing. A living culture is necessarily dynamic. It responds to fresh ideas and novel situations. Politically and economically virile groups leave an indelible cultural impact on weaker and less stable groups. "Cultural infiltration" and "cultural aggression" are not altogether modern concepts. But no culture would admit or absorb all extraneous influences.

The Muslims entered the south Asian subcontinent as far back as the early years of the eighth century. Their scanty numbers grew by the triple process of immigration,, conversion and procreation. The distinction between the converts and immigrants and their descendants was never firmly drawn. As a matter of an ingrained habit the people of the areas included in the Pakistan of today have tended to look westwards. They have always esteemed their spiritual affiliations with the wilier world of Islam. What is popularly known as the Indian Muslim culture represents the interaction of the Muslim faith on local populations and indigenous creeds. Within this culture there are numerous variations and differences which are local and accidental, by no means fundamental. They have all flourished under the

overall umbrella of "Muslim civilisation".

Muslim culture is founded on traditional Muslim learning. The characteristic and centuries-old school system was broadly similar in all Muslim lands, imparting instruction in identical disciplines with the help of the self-same texts. The vast and varied Muslim scholarly community was ever mobile and truly cosmopolitan. Educational exchange is not exactly a post-war innovation. It was inherent in the Muslim social system. Students moved from country to country in quest of knowledge (and its professors) in their chosen fields. Arabic and Persian served as educational media. Either one or the other was widely understood throughout the Muslim world. So that it was the typical Muslim scholarship combined with the established Muslim legal system and well-known institutions like the mosque and the annual pilgrimage that forged and cemented the bonds of cultural unity among the Muslim peoples living in different climes and longitudes. The Muslim elite in the subcontinent, like their peers abroad, were, thus, sure of their intellectual foundations and spiritual moorings.

The establishment of British rule in the middle of the nineteenth century created no end of problems for the conquered Muslims. The subject races were overwhelmed by the undoubted superiority of the rulers in the arts of war and peace. The Muslim response to the new order was initially undecided. Of Western education the community was particularly distrustful. Rejecting it as godless learning, it kept the growing generation away from the new schools. This negative attitude persisted for decades. The spiritual crisis was accompanied by a sort of economic serfdom that aggravated Muslim afflictions. With his characteristic insight, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1818-1898) grasped the implications of the desperate situation and applied himself to remedial action. In an attempt to wean his people away from their old ways, he fought their sterile attitude to the culture of the ruling classes. His mission was obstructed by orthodoxy and obscurantism. But his viewpoint prevailed towards the end of his long and strenuous life. If Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the founder of the modern "Indian Muslim nationalism," Iqbal (1877-1938) was its most consistent and influential philosopher. Jinnah (1876-1948) built on the foundations laid by both. It was left to him to transform the concept of Muslim nationhood into a political reality.

Nationalism is essentially, a Western concept. It was practically unknown in the land before the establishment of British political and administrative institutions. At any rate, it made little appeal to the Muslims.

At the hands of its non-Muslim exponents, the gospel of nationalism was almost unconsciously woven into the texture of existing social and cultural disparities. The product was not one (territorial) Indian nationalism, but two ideological nationalisms, Hindu and Muslim. Their integration was ruled out from the very start. In spite of its constant exposure to numerous and conflicting systems of ideas, and extensive but selective borrowings from exotic sources, Muslim culture has remained fundamentally Muslim. As it happened, the Indian National Congress (founded 1885) and the All-India Muslim League (founded 1906) became the symbols of these nascent nationalisms.

Jinnah entered politics in 1906. The *India Review* of Madras welcomed the new recruit to Congress ranks deploring the calculated Muslim apathy towards this organisation. Jinnah's rise on the political horizon was phenomenal. To be a Muslim Gokhale was his reported aspiration, yet he shaped unlike any other leader, Hindu or Muslim. The politics of a subjugated people can be highly emotional and the declarations of its leaders are often marked by lack of precision and realism. Jinnah avoided both. Of restrained speech, he was a pragmatic constitutionalist without mental reservations. He expounded no philosophies and floated no legends about himself. A politician with the temper of a states-man, he mixed with few. His integrity and incorruptibility won him the deserved measure of applause and recognition from his countrymen. But the understanding of a man and admiration for him may not always go together. Jinnah was not adequately understood either by his associates in the Congress or by the common run of leaders of the Muslim community from which he sprang. He was apparently somewhat distant from the Muslims, because his community, on the whole, had no enthusiasm for the politics of a Congressite Muslim. It was in the year 1920 when the Congress became an affair of mob demonstrations, exuberant emotional-ism and studied lawbreaking that Jinnah walked out of it. The new weapons of agitational politics were repugnant to his orderly nature. This was precisely the moment when the Muslims entered the Congress in large numbers even though this new-fangled relationship was uneasy and shortlived.

Jinnah's contacts with orthodox Muslim leaders were neither frequent nor intimate. He was openly critical of their unconcealed and courtly leanings towards the alien bureaucracy. His Hindu colleagues misjudged him for different reasons. They took for granted his much-gossipped about ignorance

of Islam and doubted his sense of belonging to the Muslim community. This was taking a wrong measure of the man. Rather late in life he told his sister that, while yet in his teens, he had decided to join the Lincoln's Inn for barristerial studies only because that institution displayed the name of the Prophet among the great lawgivers of the world.

Jinnah's concern for the affairs of his community was deep and sustained, not spectacular. Even from the Congress platform he had pleaded for appropriate waqf legislation to repair the damage done by a Privy Council decision (1894) in a well-known case it had decided under the Muslim law. When he rose from his seat in the legislature (11 March 1911) to introduce the validating bill, he explained the confusion and consternation that the judicial verdict had caused among the Muslims and went on to say:

"The feeling in the country on this point is very… strong… The question… has been agitating the Muslim community. I had the opportunity of consulting leading Mussalmans in the country… the Muslim League, which represents a great volume of Mussalman opinion in this country… passed a resolution… that the Government should undertake this legislation. ... I decided that the only way . . . in which (this question) can be solved . . . was to bring a bill in the council. . . . The decision of the Privy Council is not in accordance with the true principles of Mussalman law.... It has been breaking up Muslim families. ... Wakfs have been hunted down.... The bill is only intended to reproduce the Muslim law. . . . I have quite easily obtained two French translations of books which appear to deal with the whole subject and to indicate how the institution is regarded in Turkey . . . and Egypt. . . . I may draw . . . attention of the council to the words of a great Russian professor who approves of the system...."

This utterance cannot be brushed aside as irrelevant to the understanding of the man. It provides a significant clue to J innah's thinking and loyalties at the beginning of his career as a legislator. He was not only fully alive to the social and economic problems of the Muslim community, but was actually doing what-ever he could to help their solution. In spite of his Congress connections he could accurately guage the strength of the Muslim sentiment on social and political questions. This is borne out by his many-sided interest in contemporary issues of Muslim politics. Thus he supported the popular Muslim demand for raising the Aligarh College to the

status of a university, and disfavoured the vast powers of interference that the Government proposed to assume with respect to its organisational affairs. Upholding the Congress demand for self-government he did not join the chorus for "colonial" form of self-rule in India. He would not condone the culpability of high public officials whose high-handedness and cynical disregard for the strong Muslim sentiment had led to the demolition of a part of a mosque building (1913) that obstructed the progress of a municipal road-building project at Cawnpore.

Jinnah joined the Muslim League in 1913. The event has been briefly described by poetess Sarojani Naidu in a passage of lofty and spirited prose. Her remarks have been quoted and requoted till they stand established beyond question. Jinnah's decision was the outcome of clear thinking and considered judgment. It is not improbable that the lively imagination of the poetess has over-painted the picture. This new chapter in Jinnah's career could not have commenced with a show of disdain for the League. The Naidu version is plainly inconsistent with the character of the man as represented by the poetess herself. What may have actually brought Jinnah into the League was an appreciation of its re-presentative character and its sounder position on an important issue of public policy to be noticed in a moment. Addressing the Imperial Legislative Council on 11 March 1911, he had described the League as representing "a great volume of Mussalman opinion". At the end of the next year, i.e. 31 December 1912, he had commended the Muslim League resolution on "suitable self-government" as a distinct improvement on the unrealistic Congress preference for "colonial form of government". The simultaneous membership of both Congress and League, on Jinnah's part, might have looked like a piece of constitutional incongruity. This may have been demanded by the stituation. The tiny Muslim minority in the Congress was commonly reputed to be insensitive to the dictates of Muslim interests. But Jinnah was differently constituted. Muslim good meant to him as much as common weal; however, he interpreted both independently; the impression that he viewed the fortunes of his community with the detachment of an outsider is unfounded.

Jinnah used his new position with telling effect to bring about clearer understanding between the League and the Congress. The Lucknow Pact (1916), as it has been called, was a compromise measure with all the unattractive features of a give-and-take deal. Looking back over the years, its specific provisions appear to be far less important than the spirit that led to

the success of direct negotiations between the major communities. The agreement was based on the assumption that the Congress was entitled to speak for the Hindus and that the League alone was the guardian of Muslim interests. It amounted to an unqualified recognition of the League claim to determine Muslim priorities in the milieu of India's body politic. This reading of the concord was unilaterally repudiated by the Hindu leadership after 1924. The Muslim gain, however, was no less strategic than it was psychological and enduring.

It was in response to a compelling viceregal apeal that all political activity was suspended at the beginning of World War I. But this vacuum proved ephemeral. The ineptitude and insolence of foreign bureaucracy, that construed all independent expression of opinion as sedition, ended the truce. The revival of political life was signalised by the formation of the Home Rule League (1917) which enrolled politicians of all persuasions. Jinnah was one of its formost leaders and this historic juncture represented the meridian of his "nationalist" politics. An indefati gable peacemaker between the two major communities he was extolled as the "Ambassador of Hindy-Muslim Unity". But the "nationalist" in him was far from the way he administered the most personal affair in life. His wedding took place in 1918. Belonging to an aristocratic and conservative Parsi family, the bride was converted to Islam before the marriage ritual. A civil union in this case might have passed off without notice or comment when the evanescent zest for inter-communal unity was still strong. But Jinnah chose to adhere to the Muslim matrimonial dictates. Apparently, he had no mind to figure as "a Muslim with a difference". Nevertheless, he was opposed to obscurantism in every form. Liberalism in politics had given him an unbiased outlook on social questions. Thus he had little respect for the time-honoured institution of *purdah* and was a valiant advocate of women's emancipation.

A closer study of the politics of the 'twenties is essential to a clear understanding of all that happened to the subcontinent in the late 'thirties and after, leading to the break-up of 1947. The political atmosphere of the period was brimming with tensions and uncertainties. The situation had all the appearance of a civil war that ruled out a level-headed discussion of public and political controversies. The far-reaching significance of Jinnah's unostentatious re-emergence in politics (1924), after a brief spell of retirement, was far from apparent to the contemporaries. Indian independence still remained his first objective, but this, he thought, could not

come about without a durable Hindu-Muslim compact for the protection of the political and cultural rights of the Muslim minority in the British Indian empire. A Bill of Rights, in his judgment, could offer no dependable guarantees for peaceful co-existence. An act of British withdrawal from the subcontinent, which could not be foreseen at the moment, would not necessarily mean freedom for the Muslims. It might bring graver disabilities leading them into no-man's-land.

The Muslim dilemma, was, by now, abundantly clear. They were confronted with a choice between conflicting loyalties. Allegiance to the community might put a heavy strain on their obligations to the country. On the whole, the Muslims were not wanting in patriotism. But group integrity meant a great deal more to then. Current public debate centred round cultural issues and distribution of political power. As a matter of fact, the two were inseparably mixed up. Themes as diverse as the playing of music before places of worship, the slaughter on festive occasions of a certain species of animals and the quantum of representation for the various denominational groups in elective bodies were discussed at length in the futile "unity" conferences summoned by one party or the other under the pressure of circumstances.

To begin with, Jinnah was of opinion that a federal democratic constitution vesting residuary powers in the federating units — some of them with sizeable Muslim majorities — could be relied upon to afford political and cultural security to the community. But the disillusionment came at the end of 1928 when the majority representatives, assembled in a convention at Calcutta, summarily refused to listen to his moderate compromise proposals presented in the form of amendments to the document popularly know as the *Nehru Report*. This hostile posture exhausted his patience and he cried out that the "parting of ways" had come. This was no exaggeration. These words would continue to ring like a prophecy to later generations. The immediate issue was political, but the wheels of politics were being driven by forces generated by irreconcilable religious and political divisions. Almost exactly three months later, Jinnah formulated his "Fourteen Points" which may have been maturing in his mind since the Calcutta ferment. This was a set of propositions severally and collectively emanating from the various Muslim parties furnishing a rational basis for another approach to intercommunal consensus. These "Points" appear to lay down constitutional fundamentals. Their basic purpose is to preserve and protect

Muslim identity. This can be easily shown by the following: Point 7: "Full reli-gious liberty, that is, liberty of belief, worship, observances, association and education, should be granted to all communities." (A majority will have its way in all such matters anyhow. Coming from a minority it locates the spot where the shoe pinches.) Point 12: "The constitution should embody adequate safeguards for the protection of Muslim religion, culture and personal law, and promotion of Muslim education, language . . . Muslim charitable institutions, and for their due share in grants-in-aid given by the state and by self-governing bodies." Point 8 was more comprehensive but less specific. It empowered three-fourths majority of membership of any community in an elective body to withhold measures it judged "injurious" to its own interests. The recognisable purpose of the constitutional provisions was to secure cultural ends.

The political climate was not helpful. The majority representatives dismissed the "Fourteen Points" as a bunch of extravagant, even wild, claims. The criticism was unfair. Jinnah had broken no fresh ground. He was only acting as the spokesman of the general will. After this fresh disappointment, the protection of communal way of life became integral to every scheme advanced on behalf of the Muslims to secure an equitable deal in a free India. At the Round Table Conferences held in London (1930 and 1931) Jinnah was a fervent advocate of Indian independence; he was equally emphatic that this would remain a mere dream in the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Hindu members of the Conference assumed that a constitutional framework could be completed be-fore attending to the problem of minority rights. Jinnah strongly questioned the justice of this approach. "I tell my friends here .. . that there is . . . a grave apprehension in the minds of Muslim delegates . . . that if you go on participating in the structure right up to the roof, and when everything is complete, this constant assurance that . . . the Communal question must be settled .. . may recede into the background to such an extent that we might have a finding, . . . against us ex-parte almost." The majority representatives rejected this order of priorities, insisting on "acquisition before distribution". These divergent premises ruled out the likelihood of a settlement.

In these and subsequent discussions, Jinnah proved an unyielding opponent of the Federal part of the constitutional scheme improvised by the British government of the day as it lacked every attribute of a workable and worthwhile union. At the same time, Iqbal had independently concluded that

the new constitution (popularly known as the Act of 1935) would placate the Hindus and ultimately strike at the roots of Muslim solidarity, in spite of an imposing array of "safeguards" for the minorities with which it was loaded.

The provincial part of the constitution, which had given a measure of autonomy to the federal units, was less controversial and easier to operate. It was put on trial in 1937. Held earlier in the year, the elections to the newly constituted provincial legislatures gave a landslide victory to the Indian National Congress. When called upon to assume office the Congress parliamentarians adopted a coercive demeanour towards the British governors demanding a hand in running their governments. The constitutional guarantees for the minorities proved ineffective confirming the endemic Muslim apprehensions about the future, and bringing out, at the same time, the close interdependence between political power and cultural survival. Elected Muslirn representatives were excluded from power on grounds that would sound convincing in a mature parliamentary democracy like that of Britain, but were hardly valid under Indian conditions. Muslim culture was the first target of majority assault. The operation suppression was occasionally veiled. More often it was direct and frontal. A well-known song from a noted work of Bengali fiction was decreed the national anthem. The Muslims took a strong exception to the decision as its author was an unabashed revivalist whose primary object was to whip up Hindu feeling of hostility and contempt against the Muslims. An educational scheme directly leading to the Hinduisation of society was enforced in the face of a vocal and vigorous Muslim opposition. Branded as an alien import, Urdu, the language of Indian Muslims, was dislodged from its position as the *lingua franca* of northern India. These and other discriminatory measures came in quick succession. Muslim dissent was either ignored or overruled as "vexacious" and "frivolous". This left the Muslim minority in the larger part of India exposed with no hope of redress or redemption. With cultural (and eventually all-round) annihilation staring them in the face, the Muslims hastened to close their ranks as the only condition of their continued group existence. The circumstances that pulled Jinnah out of retirement and placed him at the helm were unprecedented in the annals of British rule in the subcontinent.

From this point (1937) began the duel between the two major political parties, the Congress and the League, and their leaders, that ended in the departure of the British and the division of the subcontinent. The compelling

and exceptional circumstances of the situation turned the constitutionalist and parliamentarian Jinnah into a mass leader almost overnight. He became the idol of the Muslims for his "courage and candour and fidelity to fundamentals". In him they discovered their natural leader, nay, their saviour. Cheerfully he submitted to restraints and responsibilities inherent in this role. He adopted the traditional Indian Muslim dress and began to address mass meetings in the Urdu language over which his mastery was far from complete. In spite of his halting speech he was heard with feelings of profound deference. This phase of his politics brought him into close touch with poet and seer, Iqbal: while the latter had unbounded admiration for Jinnah's strength of convictions and upright dealings, the two had lately found themselves in the opposing wings of the divided Muslim League. From his death-bed the philosopher made a spontaneous response to the leader's call and agreed to fill a provincial party office under him. On 21 June 1937, he wrote to Jinnah that "the only way to a peaceful India is a redistribution of the country on the lines of racial, religious and linguistic affinities". In an earlier communication dated 28 May 1937, he had stressed "that the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states". Jawaharlal Nehru had sharply denied the existence of minorities and derided the symbols of their culture. Iqbal's reaction to these postulates was summarised in another letter, dated 20 March 1937: "It is absolutely necessary to tell the world both inside and outside India that the economic problem is not the only problem in the country. From the Muslim point of view the cultural problem is of much greater consequence to most Muslims." Jinnah must have applied his precise and penetrating mind to this thesis in the light of his long experience and the dismal facts of the rapidly worsening political scene. Quite a few of Jinnah's public utterances during this period bear an unmistakable imprint of the philosopher's thinking and viewpoint. Towards the end of 1938, he finally realised that the social and cultural barriers separating the two major communities would not collapse under the levelling pressure exerted by a common "democratic" constitution. He told the Muslim League gathering at Patna (December 1938) that "I have no hesitation in saying that it is . . . Gandhi . . . who is turning the Congress into an instrument for the revival of Hinduism . . . and he is utilizing the Congress to further this object." In this very context he had observed a few moments earlier that "the Congress is determined, absolutely determined, to crush all other communities and

cultures in this country". Throughout the next year he was speaking in the same strain. After the passage of the Lahore Resolution (23 March 1940) his language was firmer and uncompounded. Talking to an American journalist on 1 July 1942, he elaborated, once more, the thesis of his Lahore speech stating: "The difference between the Hindus and Muslims is deep-rooted and ineradicable. We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportion, legal laws and moral cedes, customs and calender, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions. in short we have our distinctive outlook on life." These were the grounds on which he continued to justify the demand for a Muslim homeland. The spiritual contentment of the people was of greater moment to him than material affluence achievable under unwanted domination. When a press correspondent tried to cast doubts on the economic viability of the proposed state of Pakistaa. he replied that he was not at all worried about the alleged poverty of the land and indigence of its people ; it was a matter of gratitude that Pakistanis would enjoy the blessings of freedom and keep up their self-respect. Moreover, in his way of thinking, the creation of Pakistan was not an end in itself; it would come into existence as a state with a mission. In his message issued to the Frontier Muslim Students' Federation he indicated the sense of direction: "Pakistan not only means freedom and independence, but the Muslim ideology, which has to be preserved, which has come to us as a precious gift and treasure and which, we hope, others will share with us."

Ultimately it is the genius of the people that would furnish the motive force behind the system envisaged by him and this had to be saved at all costs. "The vital contest in which we are engaged," he told a gathering of the Punjab Muslim Students' Federation on 2 March 1941, "is not only for material gain but also for the very existence of the soul of the Muslim nation. Hence I have said often that it is . . . not a matter of bargaining. . . . If we lose in the struggle all is lost. Let our motto be, as the .. . proverb says: Money is lost nothing is lost ; courage is lost much is lost ; honour is lost most is lost ; soul is lost all is lost."

To sum up: spiritual and cultural homogeneity was an over-emphasised ingredient of nationalism as it developed on this sub-continent. Both Hindu and Muslim nationalisms were primarily culture-based and retained this character throughout. The developments that followed the partition of Bengal (1905) gave a deep religious complexion to Hindu nationalism.

Gandhi went further. Confessing that every fibre of his being was Hindu, he brought such concepts as "inner voice" and "inward light" into politics that bordered on the elusive and the irrational. The initially liberal and constitutional Muslim nationalism crumbled before the onslaught of the Khilafat movement with its pan-Islamist propensities. The relations between the Hindu and Muslim national-isms were relaxed for a while, but the two were ranged in an unrelenting state of confrontation after 1922. The political and cultural discords of the day represented the two sides of same coin. Gandhi himself had declared in 1925 that the problem of cow-protection was as important as the issue of Indian independence.

There is ample evidence to show that the Quaid-i Azam acted as an independent spokesman of the Muslim community from the very beginning of his public career. though his innate aloofness and elitist attitudes created the legend that he was remote from his community. This is an excessive simplification. On important questions he followed the community line. In spite of his personal disapproval of separate representation, he did not press his views because his trust in joint electorate was not shared by the generality of Muslims. Similarly, in releasing the resolution on the Four-teen Points he was careful to point out that the draft represented not his personal views but the measure of communal agreement. The fact that he never set himself up against the Muslim community would partly explain the spontaneity with which his leader-ship was accepted and acclaimed. His motto "Unity, Faith and Discipline" commanded instinctive assent as it appeared to hark hack to the ways of early Islam. It is true that he did not speak the language of the culturalists of today. But whereas his later politics was plainly culture-inspired, his earlier politics was discernibly culture-oriented.