

Muslim Identity in Hindu India

(Presidential Address at Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Memorial Lecture on “Muslim Identity in Hindu India” at Ghalib Institute, Aiwan –e- Ghalib Marg, on 13th May 2003 at New Delhi)

I am particularly happy that I participate along with my esteemed friend Dr. Rafiq Zakaria on a subject of national importance namely “*Muslim identity in Hindu India*”

Zakaria is a multi splendoured personality. He was a successful student of the Bombay University winning the Chancellor’s Gold Medal, and Ph.D. of the London University. He was called to the Bar from the Lincoln’s Inn. He was successful Lawyer, a successful minister in the Maharastra Government and successful parliamentarian. He represented India in United Nations General Assembly at three sessions. Above all, he is an unbiased, objective fair and a great scholar in Islamic Studies. He is one of very few who has the courage to speak his mind without fear or favour. One can see these qualities in the several volumes he has published on current political and religious subjects.

I shall cite only one example; Gandhiji was accused of appeasing Muslims and bringing into existence Pakistan. The late Shri Ramakrishnan, the Executive Secretary of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and a man of unparalleled devotion to the nation, its heritage, culture, ethos and nobility rightly chose Dr. Zakaria to undertake an unbiased assessment of the charge. Dr. Zakaria, more than fulfilled the expectation. In a scholarly volume delving deep into all records, statements, views and observations of contemporary leaders, summed up his conclusion as follows:

“Lastly the charge that Gandhi facilitated or was responsible for the partition of the country, is not only ridiculous, but it was beneath contempt.” Zakaria quotes from the last letter of Gandhiji to Mountbatten, which runs as follows: “Whatever may be said, to the contrary, it would be a blunder of the first magnitude for the British to be a party in any way whatsoever to the division of India”. He would rather have had civil war, than surrender an inch of his motherland. “Mountbatten was however adamant”.

In his later book “*The widening Divide*”, we find that though Dr. Zakaria was hurt by the demolition of the Babri Masjid, events in Kashmir, he has remained an incorrigible optimist with unshakable faith in Hindu – Muslim unity. It must be the endeavour of all the people of India to accept religious diversity as a fact of life and work out a formula for total internal peace and harmony. The ancient Indian tradition of harmony among all religious is well known. Whether in Indian History or in Indian Mythology is there a single instant of the Hindu demolishing the place of worship of another religion. In Ashoka’s edicts, the king “wishes that all religious sects should live harmoniously in all parts” Swami Vivekananda in his address to the Parliament of Religion stated “I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of Israelites who came to south India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman Tyranny”.

I am proud to belong to the religion, which sheltered and still fostering the remnant of the grand Zorastrian nation.

President Zakir Hussain while paying a tribute to the immortal Urdu and Persian poet Ghalib, quoted the following statement of Ghalib:

“I regard every son of Man – Muslim, Hindu or Christian – with affection and consider him my brother”

Adi Sankara, the scholar Saint of Hinduism at the last moment of his life called all his disciples and said

Oh! my dear ones! you are all the representatives of a new order. In fact it is not a new one. It is the old one newly discovered. This whole universe including the living is bound together by one common bond. The bond is of universal Brotherhood. You are all the children of common parents – the great God who is the father as well as the mother.”

There is a wrong impression that Islam is an intolerant religion. Let me Quote the Quran chapter 109 Al Kafiron

In the name of Allah, the gracious,
the merciful Say O ye disbelievers !
I worship not that which you worship:
Nor worship you what I worship;
And I am not going to worship that which you worship.
Nor will you worship what I worship.
For you your religion and for me my religion.

Therefore, as Md Iqbal says_“ Mazab nahi seekatha apus may byd rakna.”

If religion is not responsible for the communal rancour, bitterness and animosity, then why this hatred violence and turmoil. In my view it is we the titular sovereign, democratic socialist citizens of the Republic of India.

We do not accept the basic principle of democracy that the nation belongs to all and every citizen of India; it does not belong to majority religion, sect or faith.

In the Ramgarh Congress in March 1940, over which the most revered leader Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad presided, he echoed what I have said only more effectively than what I had done.

I quote “ It was India’s historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, and that many a caravan should find rest here... One of the last of these caravans was that of the followers of Islam. This came here and settled here for good. We brought our treasures with us, and India too was full of the riches of her own precious heritage. We gave her what she needed most, the most precious of gifts from Islam’s treasury, the message of human equality. Full eleven centuries have passed by since then. Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism.” I would add to the quotation, same for any other religion or faiths.

After long years of experience I am convinced that the British Parliamentary system is unsuited for India. The British have a homogenous society and we have a pluralistic society. It is enough if the British Government satisfies the majority of the people. In India the administration has to see that other sections of the society are not affected even though the majority is satisfied with the measure. Besides, it is not enough that we have a government by majority. Other sections should also share in administration.

In 1937, the congress swept the polls in all almost all the states. According to Westminster pattern it could form a government on its strength. Maulana Saheb pleaded that in order to win over the support of the Muslim community two members of the League Chaudry Khaliquzzaman and Mirza Ismail Khan be taken into the UP Cabinet. The idea is totally contrary to British Parliamentary system and so was not accepted. It was Maulana’s firm

conviction that had these two were taken in the cabinet, the course of Indian History would have changed.

In my "*Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture*" at Delhi. I dealt with this aspect.

A decade ago in my "*Annantasayanam Iyengar Memorial Lecture*", I stated that a party with 50.001 % majority governing the country to the complete exclusion of 49.999% percent especially when the country consists of diverse, religion, ethnic and other groups is no democracy.

I suggested that the total number of members of the council of ministers should be fixed at 10% of the strength of Lok Sabha and cabinet should be elected by a system of single transferable vote so that a party with 100 members will have 10 seats, with 10 members one seat and less than 10 members no seat. Today elections to parliamentary committees are conducted through a single transferable vote. This system will enable all major groups to be represented in the governance of the country.

I congratulate Dr. Zakaria on the scholarly paper presented today. His services for building up inter-religious, harmony should be fully utilized.