

What would Azad have said to the Angel now?

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Stepping into the world of Abul Kalam Azad (or India's Maulana, as the Centenary volume brought out by ICCR so affectionately calls him) is like walking into a magical bazaar, for everywhere one looks one can see possibilities. No sooner does one follow a certain lead when one finds oneself distracted by another, and yet another, till one is hopelessly lost and looking for a path out, like Adela Quested in the caves in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. What I shall try to do therefore is offer some broad reflections on issues that have troubled, and continue to trouble, me. Time and again I return to questions such as how should a person, regarded great in his time, be placed in history especially in the light of subsequent events? Does a position which was on the wrong side of history at a certain time become one on the right side at a later date? Does the internal dynamic of contemporary politics determine what and when we shall learn from history? Has the age of political leaders, who transcended their social location to speak for the whole polity, passed into history as competitive democracy has become the only game in town? These are some questions that have engaged me and, therefore, with all the caveats that I can draw upon, I shall try to address some of them in this article by exploring some episodes in the Maulana's life.

In disturbed times nations and societies look for heroes in their past. We look for men and women who stood, often at considerable odds, for important principles and values so that the future world would be much better than the present, wracked as it is by conflict, violence, hatred and oppression. In such disturbed times we search for a person whose life represents the values that we would want our future to embody. According to Karl Jaspers, after World War II, Germany found in Max Weber the anguished soul that they so needed to heal the wounds of the holocaust. Today we in India keep returning to Gandhi. This year we are celebrating a 100 years of *Hind Swaraj*. That is why many of us in India are

rediscovering the Bhakti saints and the Sufi pirs. We are willing to be selective in what we use from them so that we can enlist these lives in our own cause and have them speak on our behalf.

When I first began my recent engagement with Maulana Azad I too searched for the secular nationalist, the Islamic scholar who found no contradiction between nationalism and Islam, the leader who offered a vision of India in which plurality, and the co-existence of communities, would be its constitutive principles. The 'nationalist Muslim' came to be an inelegant phrase to describe India's Maulana.¹ As part of this search, at a recent seminar on 'Non-Violence' at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, I concluded my presentation by finding in Azad this gem of a quote from *Al-Hilal*, the magazine he founded, where he states, "If an angel was to descend from the high heavens and proclaim from the heights of the Qutab Minar, 'Discard Hindu-Muslim unity and within 24 hours *Swaraj* is yours,' I will refuse *Swaraj*, but will not budge an inch from my stand. The refusal of *Swaraj* will affect only India while the end of our unity will be the loss of the entire human world"². For the Maulana to take an unambiguous stand when confronted with a choice between national independence and communal unity, and to choose the latter at a time when the movement for freedom had become an obsession, was not just bold but also indicative of a period in our recent history when leaders saw themselves as crafting a new imagination about the idea of India, as leading a people into a future whose contours had still to be delineated. For the Maulana the unity of all the communities of India was paramount. Forging and sustaining such unity was valuable not just for India but for the whole world. The world could learn from India. This is the Maulana Azad that the nationalist project wants us to remember.

In addition to recognizing this persona of Azad I would also want to find in his life some answers that speak to

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our difficult times. What would have Azad felt as he surveyed the India of 2008 when community politics has become the core of our democracy, when communal violence has become the significant, if not the dominant, element of community relationships, when the state is casual in the discharge of its responsibility to protect life and property, when national political leaders prefer to remain silent as 'the other' is demonised, and victimized, and the stereotypes become the basis for public truths, when 'teach them a lesson' is both an increasingly common slogan and also a practice wherever we go, be it Mumbai, or Kandhamal, or Guwahati, or Mangalore, or Jammu, or Ahmedabad, and when the community ghetto becomes the new social space of our urban geography? What would have Azad said to the angel now?

Investigating this takes me to the steps of the Viceregal lodge, now the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, to a photograph taken in 1946 that I feel I must describe. The Maulana is descending the steps, fez on his head, shawl across his shoulders, a bag in his right hand with his left folded across his chest. His face is somewhat indecisive and is turned slightly to his right. His eyes, hidden by dark glasses, cannot be seen and seem to conceal perhaps the agony in his soul. He is walking out of the Lodge after the failure of the two Simla conferences. Partition it appears has become inevitable. He looks sad and beaten. Is he thinking of Jinnah's insult when the latter refused to shake his hand at the start of the meeting?³ Is he feeling burdened by the failure of the talks, by the fear of what it would mean for his Muslim community, by the anxiety of whether the idea of India that he had been carefully building is actually fundamentally flawed? There is a sense of defeat in the photograph. The Maulana seems like a man staring at the broken pieces of a dream. Not so Badshah Khan. He is also in the photograph and can be seen a step behind. He seems bemused but not burdened.

In the years since that conference much too much has happened and neither Jinnah's Pakistan nor Azad's India have lived up to the promise at their birth. Jinnah's Pakistan remains haunted by its two-nation theory for, hardly 24 years after its formation, a new nation Bangladesh was born from within it. It now faces a ferocious insurgency from the Pashtuns. Bangladesh too is still being destabilised by an identity struggle between the eclecticism of the Bengali identity, the orthodoxy of the Islamic identity, and the state centricity of the Bangladeshi identity.⁴ India too is being wracked by the politics of identity.

In what follows I shall travel with Azad through some of the issues that trouble contemporary India, issues such

as the communal problem particularly with reference to Muslim insecurity in India. I shall look at political outcomes, especially with respect to identity politics, of the expansion of democracy in India; at the complex issue of making political choices in fluid times or in other words the dialectical tension between the principled position and the pragmatic decision; and finally, deriving from all three, at the matter of leadership in politics. In many ways his personal biography mirrors the biography of the nation, and of the times. I want to journey with it but only as minimal exegesis. I may read too much into Azad but that I believe is permissible today particularly since our concerns were his concerns and juxtaposing the two may give us some illumination in these dark times.

Azad, as we all well know, was a fierce opponent of the two nation theory advocated by Jinnah and his Muslim League. There are at least three different arguments he offers for this opposition. The first is the cultural argument where he, in very moving prose, writes about the long and slow emergence of the composite culture that has been watered by different groups through India's history and that therefore belongs to all.

It was India's historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil, and that many a caravan should find rest here. Even before the dawn of history, these caravans trekked into India and wave after wave of newcomers followed. This vast and fertile land gave welcome to all and took them to her bosom. One of the last of these caravans, following the footsteps of its predecessors, was that of the followers of Islam. This came here and settled here for good. This led to a meeting of the culture-currents of two different races. Like Ganga and Jumna, they flowed for a while through separate courses, but nature's immutable law brought them together and joined them in *Sangam*. This fusion was a notable event in history. Since then, destiny, in her own hidden way began to fashion a new India in place of the old. We brought our treasures with us, and India too was full of the riches of her own precious heritage. We gave our wealth to her and she unlocked the doors of her own treasures to us. ... 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 endeavour. There is indeed no aspect of our life which has escaped this stamp.... This joint wealth is the heritage of our common nationality and we do not want to leave it and go back to the times when this joint life had not begun.⁵

The passion behind these words is stirring and the fact that they were delivered from the podium as Congress President in 1940 underscores Azad's conviction that he must convince his larger audience, of both Hindus and Muslims, that the two nation theory is erroneous when seen from a cultural perspective.

The religious argument too is delivered with the stamp of authority. Coming from a man who was a forceful exponent of the Khilafat movement in India, who once considered offering himself for the doctrinal office (which was never created) of *Iman-l-Hind*,⁶ who toured the world in a pan Islamic fervour and in his *Al-Hilal* days campaigned for it in his writings, and who wrote what is regarded as a major treatise on the Holy Quran in his *Tarjuman al-Quran*, his views must be seriously considered. In what can be extracted as the religious argument from his various writings, Azad put forward the principles for 'abolishing the distinctions of religion and community in order to consolidate the entire people into one nation.'⁷ As Ali Ashraf observes in his discussion of Azad's achievement:

Thus the *Tarjuman al-Quran* was certainly the great moment of triumph for Azad. It will be hard to find anything comparable in the vast literature of Quranic exegesis through the ages - comparable in its universal humanism, in the spiritual heights attained in its concept of God as The Merciful nourisher of all that exists, and finally, in projecting Islam - as indeed all religions - as essentially one great message of peace and human brotherhood, cutting across religious groupings and social identities based on religion.⁸

To understand the theological underpinnings of this argument, of the compatibility between being a good Muslim and a good Indian, one would need a certain training that I do not have. But I can empathize with him when he fervently states that 'the spirit of Islam ... guides and helps me forward. I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice and without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete... I can never surrender this claim.'⁹ Being a leading scholar of both the theology and history of Islam these statements of Azad should be seen as flowing from a deep belief that one can live both identities, the religious and nationalist, without contradiction, that, in fact, they are dependent on each other, that Islam's home is as much in India as it is elsewhere and that India's identity is as much Islamic as it is Hindu. He acknowledges that the history of the spread of Islam has shown that the idea of a pan-Islamic identity, that transcends and supplants the nation, is unworkable and that in time the nation will assert itself necessarily fragmenting the one pan-Islamic community into several national communities. History will give to the Muslims several homes and India is one of them.

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 decades or at most after the first century, Islam was not able to unite all Muslim countries on the basis of Islam alone.¹⁰

These are stirring words. One can see in their tone and tenor a deep belief in the idea of India being a home for Muslims and that the idea of two nations who cannot live together is based on both an error in theological argument and a wrong reading of Islamic history. Tragically, in the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocent Bengalis, history proved him right when Bangladesh was born. Jinnah's obduracy, as is the case of all such obduracy in history, proved to be very costly in innocent lives.

The two arguments, the cultural and the religious, are well known and it is only in my desire to give a certain fullness that I have repeated them here. It is the third argument, however, that bears some telling because I believe it has received little attention. This is what I will call the demographic argument of a plural polity. There are three elements in this argument (i) the issue of numbers i.e., large numbers are a good guarantee of safety and a reduction of these numbers results in an increase in insecurity, (ii) institutional devices especially designed to protect minorities are important in a democratic polity, and (iii) the nature of these protections must be decided by the minorities themselves and not by the majority, i.e, it is not based on the sufferance of the majority but on the rights of the minority. These arguments show that Azad is not just acutely aware of the importance of countervailing processes in a polity, of the threat of insecurity that minorities face, of the centrality of institutions in the new plural political community,¹¹ but also of the need to go beyond policy and reassure the people of the soundness of the future on offer. In his message to Indian Muslims he wrote:

The Muslims of India should not think for a moment that the Muslims in the Congress are blind to the genuine doubts and grievances of the Muslims. Indeed, perhaps they realize the situation better than anyone else. The point, however, is what should be the correct approach to remove these doubts and grievances? The difference between the Nationalist Muslims and the Muslim League is not one of ultimate aim which after all is the well-being and honourable existence of Indian Muslims in a free India, but of methods to be used to achieve the desired end. And if we so desire we can easily remove even this difference over our respective methods. What is needed is a broad vision, large heartedness and sincerity of purpose.¹²

His argument against the Muslim League is based on the firm belief (not strategic or idiosyncratic or competitive as is sometimes the case) that only in a united India of plural communities would minorities be safe and the 'communal suspicion' (his words) that so pervades the

air of his time becomes a thing of the past. The story of Independent India has, unfortunately, not borne this out as 'communal suspicion' seems to have grown and communal conflict seems to have become routine and widespread. Perhaps some of the explanations of why we continue to have this more intensified communal condition can be found in Azad's reasoning. Let me present, what I have labelled the demographic argument, by quoting from Azad's Presidential address:

We have considered the problem of the minorities of India. But are the Muslims such a minority as to have the least doubt or fear about their future? A small minority may legitimately have fears and apprehensions, but can Muslims allow themselves to be disturbed by them?

... The Muslims of India number between eighty and ninety millions. The same type of social or racial divisions which affect other communities, do not divide them. The powerful bonds of Islamic brotherhood and equality have protected them to a large extent from the weakness that flows from social divisions. It is true that they number only one-fourth of the total population; but behind the question is not one of population ratio, but of the large numbers and the strength behind them. Can such a vast mass of humanity have any legitimate reasons for apprehension that in a free and democratic India, it might be unable to protect its rights and interests?¹³

'Small minority', 'large numbers', 'vast mass of humanity', a language which shows that Azad has both a sense of realism, that small minorities can legitimately feel insecure and run the risk of experiencing majority tyranny, and a sense of confidence that this is not an anxiety that the Muslims of India need have since they are large enough to protect themselves and also since they do not have the weaknesses of social and racial divisions that other communities have. They have, in addition, the 'powerful bonds of Islamic brotherhood and equality'. With such assets they have no reason to fear being a minority (the Muslim League argument) because the demographic map of India, where they are in a majority in five provinces and a minority in seven, is a sufficient guarantee of security. This demographic argument was a powerful line of reasoning against the two nation theory but unfortunately Jinnah was able to not just persuade the Colonial regime to partition the country but also to instil a sense of insecurity in the Muslim masses. The partition of the country seems to have rendered this argument obsolete. Muslims are now insecure minorities everywhere and what Azad feared has come to pass. From 25 percent they have now become 12 percent of the population and are in a majority in only 1 state of the 28 states of the Indian union. When the demographics are unable to provide adequate protection (Gujarat being a

grim confirmation) then the second and third line of defence needs to be given more attention. Azad stated that:

- (i) 'Whatever constitution is adopted in 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. The majority should not decide this. Therefore the decision in this respect must depend upon the consent of the minorities and not on a majority vote.'¹⁴

India's constitutional edifice has some protections for minorities. But are these enough? Has independent India self-consciously taken measures to assuage the anxieties of the minorities that make up its *Sangam*. I fear not. In the last two decades with the rise of a communal politics of aggressive Hindutva the tectonic plates of the Indian polity seem to have shifted to the right, seem to have unwittingly accepted, if not endorsed, the project of cultural nationalism. The recent violence against the Christian minority in Kandhamal in Orissa, the horrific communal carnage against the Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, the insanity against the Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, makes one wonder why the lessons of history, as can be gleaned from the increasingly available partition testimonies, have taught us so little.¹⁵ One wonders when will Azad's arguments, which were then on the wrong side of history, become arguments on the right side of history? Listen to his words.

You remember that I called you and you cut off my tongue, that I took up my pen, and you lopped off my hand, that I wanted to walk and move, and you trimmed my feet, that I wanted to turn over, and you broke my back. Even at the height of the past seven years' misguided politics which has ended, leaving a bitter taste in the mouth, I alerted you at every sign of danger, and you not only ignored my call, but revived the old traditions of denial and neglect with which people used to face the call of truth.¹⁶

We did not listen to Azad then but are we listening to him now? Are we facing 'the call of truth' today? The occasion of this lecture will allow me to illustrate with broad brush strokes how I see the path of evolution that Azad's 'free and democratic India' has taken. Let me therefore now move the discussion from the exegesis of Azad's thought to an audit of Indian democracy.

I believe it is fair to say that, in the last sixty years, there has been an expansion and deepening of the democratic process in India. The party system has become more plural as it has changed from being a one-dominant

party system to becoming a coalition characterised multi-party system as a result of which more groups have acquired voice and begun to make claims on politics. This evolution of the party system has been driven by an electoral politics which has become more competitive. Different groups and individuals – also criminals and local fixers - have entered the fray since they see the electoral route as the main way to access the resources of the state. The institutional landscape has grown with an expansion of the developmental state and also an increase in the sites of representation particularly with the introduction of the third tier of government, the panchayats and nagarpalikas. Courts have become more interventionist with judicial activism often being resorted to to deliver justice. These details are well known and can be found in the extensive literature in political science.

What I just wish to examine here is what I will call Azad's article of faith which holds that in a free and democratic India the Muslim minority has no reason to be 'apprehensive'. This does not seem to have been borne out by sixty years of democracy. If anything the expansion of competitive politics only seems to have made the 'communal suspicion' worse, to have heightened the insecurity of the minorities, both Muslim and Christian. If we look across the country the number of cases of communal clashes and worse, communal riots, seems to have increased. The ability of the state to punish the guilty, a necessary condition of any democracy, is distressingly feeble. Several vetoes seem to be present in the process of punishing the guilty. Deconstructing the elements of these vetoes gives one cause for anxiety since they show not just interference by political leaders, (the triumph of pragmatic over principled politics), but also the unwillingness of the state to be impartial, as a result of a fading belief in the imperative of a constitutional order, (the triumph of prejudice over duty), and, most alarmingly, the concealed, perhaps subterranean, feeling that 'they, the victims, brought this upon themselves' (the action-reaction syndrome that seems to have been accepted as the natural order.) Perpetrators are hence not deterred from adopting a politics that gives them communal dividends. They in fact emerge as local leaders, consolidating vote banks through an identity politics that demonises the Muslim or Christian other, that pushes the minority into the ghetto – whether it be geographical, social, or economic. These local leaders, spurred on by hate filled rhetoric, acquire the social power to define the different dimensions of citizenship, the commonsense of what is permissible and what proscribed in the public sphere. The minority, increasingly traumatised by the experience of the many clashes, withdraws into a private sphere as the *Sangam* diminishes

and the rivers begin to flow separately again.

To see the existence of these leaders as the result of the politics of vote banks is to see only half the story. There is also a cultural process that is underway. The anthropology of the violence of communal riots exposes the extent to which two, and more, cultural nations are emerging from the embers of hate. Azad's eloquent observation that '... 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 endeavour,' one fears is beginning to ring less true. And, disturbingly, the reasons for this lie in the processes of 'free and democratic India.' There are many factors, both at the micro and macro levels, that can be listed, from the ideology of aggressive Hindutva which wants to place all minorities on the sufferance of the majority, to the weakness of the state institutions in implementing their constitutional mandate a weakness made more debilitating by a changing mindset (how can the large para-military establishment stand mute witness to the atrocities committed – the most recent of a nun being raped), to the demographic decline of the Muslims from 25 to 12 percent of the population and hence a less effective countervailing force, to most upsettingly the failure of political leadership. God's workshop seems to have thrown away Azad's cast. They don't seem to make them like that anymore.

I know I run the risk of being criticised for what could be seen as an ahistorical romanticism, of supporting a simple minded heroes theory of history, but my response to that has to be through searching for counterfactuals. Show me a chief minister, or cabinet minister, or prime minister who has gone into the thick of the riots, to stop them. Show me a chief minister, or cabinet minister, or prime minister who has responded to such communal carnage with a firmness of purpose by which they recover the moral high ground that is so crucial for defining the shape of a political culture. There are none. What we see instead is a moral flabbiness, not just indecisiveness but an increasing disposition among the political leadership to see all political positions as the result of a strategic calculus and not sometimes ones which call for the taking of a principled position. Everything is strategy: how can I gain from this, how can I reduce my losses, how can I minimize the other's benefits, how can I prevent the other from getting an advantage? This has become the defining character of politics in India. All politics seems to have become a game of strategy.

While one can accept that much of politics is about winning positional advantage one must also accept that there are moments when one must go against the tide.

The evolution of the political culture requires such inputs from men and women, especially those in important positions of power, who will state firmly and publicly, that something is wrong and must not be done and who will use all the power at their disposal, especially the moral force, to make that statement. Lest I be seen as some naive romantic who, in spite of spending 30 years in the study of politics, doesn't understand politics, let me make my case by an illustration from the life of Azad.¹⁷

At the first Simla conference in June 1945 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not 'included among those who were originally invited, because it was thought that Gandhiji would agree to represent the Congress, and apparently also because of the risk (by including Azad) of offending Jinnah. But Gandhiji's reaction on receipt of the invitation was to point out that he represented no institution and that the function of representing the Congress belonged to the Congress President, or whomsoever the latter nominated. Accordingly an invitation was sent to Azad, who informed the Viceroy that the invitation would be placed before the Working Committee on 21 June and that a reply would be sent thereafter.'¹⁸

Did Gandhi worry about the 'risk of offending Jinnah', so vital a consideration in the crucial talks to avert partition? Was this a blunder, and would the outcome have been different if Azad had instead been compromised? Would the institution of the Congress have suffered if the office of the President had been disregarded and Gandhiji had instead accepted to represent the Congress? Would internal organization procedures have been diminished if Azad had not insisted on placing the invitation letter before the Congress Working Committee and accepted the invitation immediately on receipt?

In such a small episode lie so many interesting issues of principle and procedure, of political positioning, of strategic calculus and of the outcomes that follow from such strategic politics. I fear that many of the outcomes that we have to live with today are the result of a mindset and a political practice that has come to dominate out political life - especially in this era of coalition politics and in this era when the heroes of public life are in non-party political processes and not in party politics - where the 'risk of offending Jinnah' becomes predominant. Our institutions have become feeble because the representative process has been bypassed, with the politics of the street replacing the politics of the elected assembly, where a rowdy can hold the polity to ransom and where those holding constitutional office respond with a strategic calculus of gains and losses. At the 'risk of offending Jinnah' they do very little and allow the

monster of 'communal suspicion' to grow. Our political leaders seem to have lost touch with their inner voice. As a Visiting Professor Suniti Kumar Pathak said, during a discussion on his lecture on Buddhism on 7th November 2008 at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 'with due apologies for my strong statement, the state of our politics in India today is because our politicians are not cleansed from within'.

Which brings me to the final concern of this lecture, the dialectical tension between the principled position and the demands of pragmatic politics. I have, in what has been stated so far, already offered some reflections on this issue. I want to add to them since I believe we are at a stage when exploring this relationship is important for restoring our trust in democracy in India. There are three aspects to this relationship. The first is the need to maintain a balance between the principled and the pragmatic in our political life. Conceding too much to one disturbs this balance and opens the door to political pathologies. If we navigate our political lives only by the beacon of unanchored principle then we run the risk of being out of step with the times, of being either unrealistic or naive. If we are guided by pragmatics alone - the winnability factor, or power at all costs, or the suspension of rules for temporary gain - then the charge of opportunism is a charge that sticks. While the pragmatic is, in a sense, the grease that runs the everyday world of politics there are moments in this world of politics when such pragmatism must be trumped by principle, by the invocation of a moral rule that disallows accommodation and adjustment. The trumping by principle of a political adjustment (remember Gandhiji's last fast against the Nehru government) is important for the power play that currently defines politics to be reminded of its limits, of the boundaries beyond which it cannot go.

The second aspect is the importance of the principled position not just for the reason of trumping the pragmatic but also for its value in giving to political culture the framework that guides choices and regulates behaviour, that sets the terms by which the game shall be played. Political agents need to be socialised into this behaviour because this socialisation will ensure that they play by the rules, the operating norms of the polity. One incident in the recently concluded Presidential elections in the US brings out this respect for the rules very clearly, the speeches of Obama and McCain after the results came in. This may seem a small incident but if one analyses the tone and tenor of the speeches one sees that both candidates stressed their endorsement of the process, were gracious in their acceptance during their concession speeches, and most importantly rose above the partisanship that had characterised the electoral process.

By speaking differently from their pre-result speeches, by appreciating the achievements of the other ('the great significance of the win for the African-American community' says McCain, and 'a great patriot and leader' says Obama), the two contestants rose above party positions and strove to unite the country behind the result, after what had been a bruising campaign. In this small event, and I am sure the semiotics of the two speeches will bear out my argument that the two candidates had modified their political behaviour to accept the norms of conduct that kicked in after the results; of being gracious, of rising above partisanship, of statesmanship rather than one-upmanship, of uniting the whole country for the future. We see in this semiotics the robustness of the political culture of US democracy. Play hard ball, as they would say, but stay within bounds of decency. In India we are only partly there, fifty-fifty. If we had internalised the norms of a democratic politics then much of the excesses that mark our politics, such as the demonising of the other, would have been avoided. Why does one get the feeling that the Congress of the national movement had internalised these norms?

The third aspect of the dialectics between the principled position and the demands of pragmatic politics is the safety that principles bring to politics because in their absence the polity slips into a Darwanian nightmare. In a telling account of state formation in Africa *When Things Fell Apart*, Robert H. Bates paints a grim picture of how political elites take control of state institutions, of how they distribute important offices such as the Central Bank, the various heads of the security forces, the judiciary, etc., among family and cronies. He shows how clientelism and patronage have come to define the working of the state, of how the state has become predatory. This is what we fear and what we must avoid. A quick survey of state politics suggests that we are at the cusp. And that is why we have to think hard about the relationship between the principled position and the demands of pragmatic politics because it is only such a culture of reflexivity that would protect us from the excesses of partisanship, that would in the current context of rising 'communal suspicion', assure the minorities.

If the 'angel' were to come down from the high heavens and ask Azad to make his choice between *swaraj* and religious unity, I suspect he would make the same decision as he did more than 70 years ago and for the same reasons. *Swaraj* affects only India but religious unity would affect the whole world. And at a time when

religious bigotry is rising in India, and in the world, the words of Azad appear ever so prophetic and redemptive.

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NOTES

1. Mushirul Hasan (ed) 'Introduction,' *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992). p7.
2. P.N.Chopra, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Unfulfilled Dreams* (Interprint, 1990), p.30.
3. V.N.Datta, *Maulana Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p. 224.
4. Riaz, Ali. "'God Willing": The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh', *Contemporary Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23 (1), 2003, pp 301-320; Murshid, Tazeem.M. 'State, Nation, Identity: The Quest for Legitimacy in Bangladesh', *South Asia*, vol XX, no 2, 1977, pp. 1-34.
5. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, 'Presidential Address' 53rd session of the Congress, Ramgarh, March 19-20, 1940. Reprinted in P.N.Chopra, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Unfulfilled Dreams*, Appendix III, p149
6. Aijaz Ahmed, 'Azad's Careers: Roads Taken and Not Taken', in *Lineages of the Present: Political Essays* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1996), p. 144.
7. Ali Ashraf, 'Appraisal of Azad's Religio-Political Trajectory', in Mushirul Hasan (ed) *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad*, p.116.
8. *Ibid.*, p.116.
9. Azad, 'Presidential Address', pp. 148-149.
10. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman), p.248.
11. Azad argued for a federal system with such a division of powers that the provinces would be quite powerful with respect to the centre.
12. *The Hindustan Times*, 4 July, 1945.
13. Azad, 'Presidential Address', pp.146-147.
14. Azad, 'Presidential Address', p145.
15. See the work of Urvashi Butalia.
16. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *Maulana's Speech at Jama Masjid after Independence in 1948*, in P.N.Chopra, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Unfulfilled Dreams*, Appendix VII, p.164.
17. I am grateful to Gangeya Mukherjee for bringing this episode to my notice.
18. V.P.Menon, *The Transfer of Power In India*, (London: Longmans Green and Company Ltd, 1957, rpt, Delhi Orient Longman Ltd, 1968), p. 186.