

I.H. Azad Faruqi  
*Jamia Millia Islamia, N. Delhi*

## Islam and National Integration

Integration has been an essential feature of Islamic religion from its very beginnings. One of the two basic teachings of Islam, which the Qur'anic revelations emphasized from the earliest moment of their disclosure, was the Unity of the whole mankind as one family. The goal of the integration of human society into one homogeneous body was consistently kept in view in the later Qur'anic revelations and in the legal injunctions and commandments enjoined in the Qur'an. The sayings and practices of the holy Prophet, which were only an elaboration and explanation of the principles laid down in the Qur'an, emphasized the same ideal. It was because of this importance given by Islam to the integration of society that pre-Islamic Arabs, who were divided into hundreds of clans, always at war with each other, were united into one Muslim *Ummah* within the lifetime of the holy Prophet himself.

In the later years of Islamic history the followers of Islam spread to the countries outside Arabia, near and far, and a vast Islamic Empire which extended from Spain to China and from Caucasia to India was established. Numerous nationalities, races and cultures of Africa and Asia, and followers of various world religions were included within the fold of this great Islamic Empire. It is true that Islamic religion and Arabic language served as the core in this structure, but it is also a fact that it was through the contributions of its various divergent components and through their total integration into a whole, that the classical Islamic civilization was achieved.

At the close of the 12th century A.D. the followers of Islam entered India in large numbers. Although pockets of Muslim population had existed in Sindh and Kerala for centuries prior to this, the mass influx of the Muslims and their spread into the main lands of India can be dated only with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, from 1194 onwards. The first bearers of Muslim culture and civilization to the main land of India were mainly Turko-Iranians by race

and soldiers by profession. These were followed, after the establishment of their rule in India, by immigrants from various areas of central Asia and Iran in the wake of Mongol invasions in their homelands. The later Muslim immigrants included people from all walks of life. There were scholars, poets, religious leaders, theologians, sufis, artisans of all types, merchants and common people. Very soon an Islamic society representative of its counterparts in Islamic countries was established in India as well and Delhi began to vie with the leading centres of Islamic culture in west Asia.

The Muslim culture brought by the Turko-Iranian Muslims and the ancient Indian civilization were different from each other in almost all respects and it is not surprising that in the beginning they remained as strangers to each other. But very soon due to the exigencies of life, compulsions of human nature, socio-political and economic necessities they were forced to co-operate with each other. A process of give and take between the Muslim culture and the ancient Indian society started which enriched the national culture of India immensely.

The religion of Islam and its followers contributed towards the integration of national life in India in many ways. First of all, it was only with the coming of the Muslims that for the first time after Harsha Vardhana in the beginning of the 7th century, the large parts of India were united under one rule of Delhi Sultanate. The Muslim Empire in North India kept on extending its borders till most of India was brought under one rule. The political unification of India always remained an obsession with the Muslim rulers of Delhi, with various degrees of success, till the last great emperor of the Mughal dynasty Aurangzeb in the 18th century. The progress made towards the integration of India as one nation as well as the political, administrative and economic benefits of a single government over large parts of India can be appreciated fully only when these are viewed in the context of the handicaps under which India had suffered during its five centuries of political fragmentation before the coming of the Muslims.

Secondly, the Muslims brought with them the ideal and a living example of a completely egalitarian society to this country. At the time when Muslims established themselves in India, the caste system was being practised in its most severe form. The population of this

country was divided into watertight sections having virtually no common meeting ground between them. The millions of people belonging to the Shudra caste felt particularly segregated from the mainstream of Indian society.

The Muslim society with its practice of equality of all human beings treated the Muslims, non-Muslims and new converts on a basis of equality. In disregarding the distinctions of caste or creed in their socio-political life, the Muslim government and society paved the way for normal social intercourse for millions of Indians of different castes. The limitations of the caste-system which restricted the social life of the Indians strictly to the people of their own caste were considerably eroded when these people entered into various relationships with the Muslims who had no notion of the caste distinctions. This point has been dealt with the remarkable historical insight by Professor M. Habib in his introduction to the second volume of Elliot and Dowson. He has emphasized, with all the evidence of historical facts and force of logic, that the swift conquest of the Turkish forces and the firm establishment of the Muslim rule in India cannot be explained except in terms of the co-operation of working classes of Indian society, namely, Shudras, who were being incorporated in the urban life with all civil rights and had all the opportunities open to them in the Muslim rule.

The absence of any discrimination on the basis of one's birth and family and a strong emphasis on the equality of all mankind, which was a characteristic of Muslim faith and society, was bound to have its influence on Hindu society itself. The religion of *bhakti* which was gaining ground in India much before the coming of the Muslims developed new trends after its contact with the followers of Islam. The severe attacks on the caste-system and on the artificial barriers which separate man from man, so abundant in the teachings of medieval Indian saints like Kabir, Guru Nanak and Ravidas echo the teachings of Islam on this subject.

Thirdly, the Muslims have transplanted a culture in India which had already achieved a standard form in central Asia and Iran. The immigrant Muslims settling in different parts of the country represented a uniform pattern of Islamic culture. Their dissemination of the same values and standards to the far flung areas of India which

otherwise represented completely different patterns of local cultures promoted the cause of national integration to no mean degree.

In all departments of life—food, clothes, utensils, manners or arts, crafts, architecture, language and literature, local cultures of various parts of India all bear the stamp of the influence of the uniform Islamic culture.

These were the three major fields, the political, social and cultural, through which, I have briefly hinted, that the Muslims have contributed to the cause of national integration. Each of them, of course, can be dealt with in greater detail and more depth than this brief article permits here.