

Muslim Unity: A Study of Ideas of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Allama Muhammad Iqbal

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Abstract: Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (1876 -1960) and Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), were two stars of the 20th century, who lit up the skies of religion, split the suffocating darkness, and spread the wings of mercy and knowledge over the whole world of Islam. Nursi, a scholar of the highest standing having studied not only all the traditional religious sciences but also modern science and earned the name Badiuzzaman, Wonder of the Age, in his youth as a result of his outstanding skill and knowledge, spent a life of commendable effort and self-sacrifice in the cause of Islam. Similarly, Iqbal, the poet-philosopher and one of the most distinguished and dominant figures of 20th century, who belonged to a generation that was exposed to modern education, is one of those great scholars who have left a legacy behind to be followed by other scholars.

Muslim Unity is the most important issue which concerns all Muslims, and it is not only a political issue. This Unity starts from the bonds and solidarity between two Muslims due to their brotherhood-in-faith and reaches mutual cooperation and assistance among all Muslims throughout the entire Islamic World. Nursi and Iqbal promoted Islamic Unity and tried to re-establish the concept of Islamic Ummah (community) among Muslims.

In this direction, this paper discusses the thoughts of Said Nursi and Allama Iqbal on Muslim Unity.

It is morally binding on all Muslims and thinkers to concern themselves with reviving the memories and works of the religious scholars, who are the protectors of Muslims. For they have inscribed the pride and dignity of the Ummah on the pages of history.

In this paper an attempt has been made to carry out a study on the roles undertaken by the two great scholars, Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, and discuss their views on Muslim Unity. Iqbal was born in 1877 and died in 1938,¹ while Nursi was born in 1876, and died in 1960.² Whoever studies the works and views of these two scholars about important social issues will see that although they never met and were not aware of each other's ideas, they put forward similar views on many subjects. It is really amazing that how these two thinkers and reformers who lived at the same time but in different places discussed the same subjects and stated the same ideas.

Nursi and Iqbal were two stars of the 20th century, who lit up the skies of religion, split the suffocating darkness, and spread the wings of mercy and knowledge over the whole world of Islam. They were outstanding scholars who held up a light both to the period in which they lived, and to the present, and to the future, as is to be clearly observed. Their works and ideal life stand before us today in all their freshness and dynamism. The period they lived coincided with a time of deep crisis for the whole Islamic world. The 19th century was a period of darkness for the Muslim countries and peoples, a time of division, decline, and breaking up, one result of which was the active domination of Europe. With the exception of Turkey and a small number of other Muslim countries which could be counted on the fingers, by the first quarter of the 20th century all the Muslim lands and peoples had become the colonies and captives of the imperialist powers.

Thus, two distinguished persons emerged in two places far from each other, in two different schools. On the one hand, Iqbal graduated from modern institutes and academic establishments, and on the other hand, Nursi studied in the religious schools, which taught according to the traditional methods. But the two of them were as though present in the same abode. Both scholars had a particular distinguishing characteristic. Iqbal had chosen the path of learning and study under the influence of Sir Thomas Arnold, while Nursi had undertaken his struggle in consequence of the mark left on his heart by another incident. The British Minister for the Colonies, Gladstone, had picked up a copy of the Qur'an and declared: "So long as the Muslims have this book we cannot truly dominate them. We must either take it from them or make them lose their love of it." Having read this statement Nursi fell in wrath and declared before one and all that he will pass the rest of his life in the service of the Holy Quran and highlighting its message and he dedicated his life and whole being to proving the Qur'an's miraculousness and urging the Muslims to adhere to it once again.³ We may now begin our main subject by setting forth the ideas of these two persons on Muslim Unity.

The Muslim Unity is the most important issue which concerns all Muslims in accordance with their degrees and social positions. Because The Muslim Unity is not a political issue only but this Unity starts from

the bonds and solidarity between two Muslims due to their brotherhood-in-faith and reaches to the cooperation and mutual assistance among all Muslims throughout the entire Islamic World. Our Religion, our nation, our countries can only be protected from all kinds of dangers and enemies through the enormous Power which will be generated by the religious, social, political and economic brotherhood and solidarity of the Muslims and this will serve to the general Global Peace. That is the reason why the enemies who cannot resist against this material and spiritual Power, try to destroy the Unity and the Solidarity of the Muslim World in order to break this power into parts, using all types of trickery and plans. Therefore, we must stay cautious against the corruptive provocations of such defeatists and learn the meaning and the contents and the importance of the Muslim Unity which was commanded very seriously by our Religion and we must display eagerness to act in accordance with this Unity. The following verse of the Holy Quran is attracting our attention to the fact that great mischief and disaster will happen if mutual assistance and solidarity amongst the Muslims are not achieved:

*"The unbelievers are protectors, one of another. Unless you do this (protect each other), there would be uproar and Oppression on Earth, and great Mischief."*⁴

The Muslim unity is based on faith, the belief in the oneness of God, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the messenger of God, and the Holy Quran as the book of God. Allah says:

*"Verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood, and I am Your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me (and no other).."*⁵

*"And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you) and be not divided among yourselves..."*⁶

The unity of the Muslim ummah is a reality, proclaimed in the Holy Quran, in the above verses and numerous others like them. It is one of the key strengths of the ummah at many levels, from the cultural to the political. It is the unity of the ummah, the common understanding that all Muslims are brothers and sisters in faith that makes Muslims feel at home wherever they may go in the Muslim world.

Islam is the religion of unity and the affirmation of it. It forbids division. It calls to brotherhood and unity in times of conflict, trouble, and division. Unfortunately, the Ummah was enveloped in the clouds of degradation and backwardness. It had remained behind the times and could not advance from where it was. Moreover, they were pleased at how things were going and content at their situation. If it had not been for God's grace, they would perhaps have taken up their places among the idolaters. In this grim situation, the signs of religion were being annihilated, so too, the unbelievers and hypocrites, the enemies of the Muslim Ummah, were pursuing their activities. However, rather than directly opposing these threats and dangers, religious scholars and those who call to the way of the Sustainer of All The Worlds were summoning all the Ummah to unity and togetherness and were trying to remove the differences between them. Without doubt, the chief of those who favoured this method and style of action was Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Allama Muhammad Iqbal. They gave supreme importance to the question of unity. Nursi almost pleaded to the Muslims of the world by stating:

"O Sunnis, who are the People of Truth, and 'Alawis, whose way is love of the Prophet's Family! Quickly put an end to this meaningless, disloyal, unjust, and harmful dispute between you. Otherwise the atheistic current which is now so influential will make one of you a tool against the other, and use the one to crush the other. And after defeating the one it will destroy the tool. Since you are believers in Divine unity, it is essential to leave aside unimportant matters which necessitate division while there are a hundred fundamental sacred bonds between you which command brotherhood and unity."⁷

Another place Nursi stated:

"The greatest obligatory duty in this time is to work for Islamic Unity. The aim and objective of this unity is to vibrate such a luminous and blessed chain that connects the centres of Islam and Mosques, places of worships and milieus, which are branched out in subdivisions and thereby to awaken those who are tied to that chain and to urge and lead them towards the path of advancement with a great will and command of conscience."⁸

Similarly, Iqbal emphasizes in his poetry, that, all Muslims in the world have one Prophet, one faith, one Belief, one Ka'bah, and one Quran. He saw no reason why they should not all be united as one universal entity. As he exclaims passionately on the same subject:

"Manf-e-at ek hai is qaum ki nuqsan bhi ek
ek hi sab ka nabi deen bhi iman bhi ek
haram-e-paak bhi Allah bhi Quran bhi ek
kuchh badi baat thi hote jo Musalman bhi ek".⁹

To Iqbal the basic and important principle of Muslim Unity is *Akhuwah* (Brotherhood). Humankind, an entity of interrelationships and the Islam's guidance, is of full significance in this domain. *Akhuwah* (Brotherhood) is thus taught to make more firm equality, peace and harmony in the world. It teaches love and brotherhood among believers and is sought to realize the God's will in all spheres of life harmoniously. *Akhuwah* does not teach material dominance and pride of one over the other Muslim. In terms of faith and moral obligations the whole Muslim world is interrelated.¹⁰ This ideal of *Akhuwah* is repeatedly propounded in the writings of Iqbal both in poetry and prose.

Iqbal states in this regard in the following verse:

“This is the destiny of nature; this is the secret of Islam;
World-wide brotherhood and abundance of love;
Break the idols of colour and blood and become lost in the community;
Let neither Turanians, nor Iranians nor do Afghans remain.”¹¹

On the other hand Nursi felt an infinite sorrow and pain at the situation of the Islamic World with its division and disunity and having fallen captive to others. He spent a supreme effort to make known the ways for it to be delivered from its abasement. Doubtless, the chief of his solutions was the opposite of the division and disunity: unity, togetherness, and accord. If the chief subject in all his works, and the key idea, is "belief," "unity" follows close behind it. The idea of unity and Muslim Unity in particular is worked with great clarity in many of his works. He attached such importance to the unity of Muslims that in the newspaper article published on 27th March 1909 entitled *Sada-yi Haqiqat*, he expressed this same idea as follows:

"...There is no hypocrisy in performing the obligatory practices of Islam. The greatest obligatory duty at this time is Islamic Unity."¹²

Nursi thus recommend unity and togetherness and insistently advise against ignorance, dissension, division, and anarchy. He pointed to Muslim Unity as the goal, and did not stop at saying "The way of Unity is love' in speeches and writings, he himself strove to bring back to the straight path those who had deviated into division."¹³ He explained the vital importance of the Muslim Unity in his sermon by stating:

“Oh Brothers who are listening to these words of mine here in the Umayyad Mosque! And Oh Muslim brothers in the mosque of the World of Islam forty to fifty years later! Do not make apologies, saying, "We do not do any harm, but also we do not have the power to do anything beneficial; therefore we are excused." Such an apology is not acceptable. Your laziness, and saying, "What is it to me?", and your displaying no effort and not getting into the working spirit through Islamic Unity and true Islamic Nationhood have done much damage and injustice to yourselves.”¹⁴

On the other side we find Iqbal lamenting the discord among Muslims on the basis of language, caste, creed, nationality and colour. He believed that such division is pulling the Muslims down to the meanest level. Consequently Muslims are not able to play their role as *khair-al-ummah*, the best of community raised by God to guide mankind, to enjoy right, forbid wrong and believe in Allah. Rather, the Muslim world is known only for its inner strife and division, its unrest and self-contradictions. This is despite the fact that the Ummah counts over a billion, its territories are resource-rich, its potential in human, material and geo-political resources is the greatest. Most importantly, the Muslims have a faith -Islam -which is an integral and realistic religion. Most of the Muslim problems will be readily solved if the Muslims could build unity among themselves. Iqbal was a realist and accepted the fact that the Muslim world is divided into various territories. He, therefore, suggested that Muslim countries should assess their conditions, consider their geographical boundaries as a matter of administrative convenience, pool their resources together on the basis of love and brotherhood, and eventually form a family of republics or League of Nations. As Iqbal has clearly said in the following lines:

“For the present every Muslim nation must sink into her own deeper self, temporarily focus her vision on herself alone, until all are strong and powerful to form a living family of republics.... Islam is neither nationalism nor imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members.”¹⁵

Similarly, Nursi explains, that, Islamic Society as a whole, is a huge army which has been divided into tribes and groups. But it has a thousand and one aspects of unity. These groups Creator is one and the same, their Provider is one and the same, their Prophet is one and the same, their Qiblah is one and the same, their Book is one and the same, their country is one and the same; all are the same; a thousand things are one and the same. Thus, these many things being one and the same require brotherhood, love, and unity.¹⁶

Our main source of enlightenment and our true guide, the Holy Qur'an, strictly urges us, as Muslims, into unity, solidarity, cooperation and alliance. But in spite of that, we are split into a thousand pieces and hate each other more than we hate our enemies. It is fact that we are not united and this disunity troubles us a lot.

In the real world of today, the European Union and the United States of America are the most successful examples of large political unions. On the other hand, which similar unions among the Muslim countries can we illustrate? The League of the Arab States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation are examples of these unions. In spite of all the well-intended initiatives, it is clear that there is not yet a viable coordination, cooperation and alliance among the member states of these unions. The question is, why can the Europe and the USA establish such a viable and functional union while we are not even able to come together and talk on almost not so sensitive issues, put aside establishing a socio-political and economic union? The European countries have established such a successful and prosperous union because sociologically, politically and economically they are so close to each other that there is no serious difference between them which will prevent them to come together and unite. This identification of the European states is a product of a long historical evolution of social, political and economical development and this common history brought them to a point on which they could exchange their experiences and come closer to each other. When the states resemble to each other so much and as they cooperate they will not get damaged, on the contrary, they will get benefit out of union so why do not they form unions? At this point, the unity is crucial.

The above lines, tells the story that, it is social, political and economic integration, that bring forth the spirit of unification. In other words, the socio-political and economic integration is the unifying factor to unity. But why are not the Muslims able to come together establishing a socio-political and economic union though we have lots of common features? Generally, the Muslim countries are clearly disunited. Somehow, it is the differences in the respective thoughts, understandings and ideologies, may it be Social, political, religious and economic, etc. that make them apart. Islam forbids division and disunity, more so amongst the Muslims. By right, we have our Iman as the most hidden unifying factor.¹⁷

But presently it is very frustrating to see Muslim governments collaborating with non-Muslims to cause damage and sufferings to their fellow Muslims. In Muslim majority areas, Muslim groups are fighting against each other. In countries where they form minorities, Muslims are divided against themselves and are therefore, subjected to discrimination, humiliation, and persecution. In short, Muslims are divided along religious, political, ethnic, cultural, racial, linguistic, and sectarian lines. Muslims possess the richest resources of the world and the most fertile lands of the earth. Yet, they are the most helpless and the most dependent people on earth. The reason behind this is "Muslim disunity". The Islamic world stands divided before the large areas covered by the uniting countries. While in this state, it is like the soft underbelly and weak point of the world, open to interference and attack of every sort.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Nursi and Iqbal were great thinkers of the Muslim world. In addition, they were great religious reformers whose sole ambition was to see the Muslims unite and play a meaningful role in showing anew, humane world order. The best acknowledgment to these great scholars, activists and reformers is to make a fresh determination to do our maximum to realize their touching desire of uniting the Muslim world.

Finally, we should realize that working towards unity of the ummah is the duty of all Muslims which should be collective. It needs all our effort without any exception starting from purifying ourselves and our communities from all those problems that cause division and disunity. We should realize the dangers of disunity in our communities, because division and disunity will weaken the ummah and open the door to our enemies, which lead to the total destruction. Nursi and Iqbal reminds all Muslims that the purpose why they should be united and in harmony with each other is for the realization of the success and victory of Islam in this present world. All Muslims are people of one direction (Qiblah) and perspective, thus they should manifest this oneness of mind and heart at all times. When all Muslims, irrespective of their tribes and nations abide by this call of unity, the socio-political, religious and economic integration will prevail, then help from Allah will come, and will make the Islamic ummah victorious once again.

Allah has promised: "And those who strive in our (cause), we will certainly guide them to our paths. For verily Allah is with those who do right."¹⁸

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اشخوت کی جہانگیری بحیثیت کی فراوانی
تتار رنگ و خون کو تو ذکر ملت میں گم ہو جا
نتورانی رہے باقی۔ تہا ابرانی۔ تہا افعانی

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