

Identifications versus Identities: The Indian Muslim Religious Identity Syndrome

*Anwar Moazzam**

This working paper does not intend to attempt at theoretical constructions of identities, as such; I would argue that it is more meaningful to examine the “functioning of identities” in Indian societies. From the point of view of functionality, identities are not universal; they are contextual. This is truer about religious identities. As such, application of theories developed in the Western societies and cultures may not help in the understanding of Asian/Indian identities which have their own distinct history and geography of values. Indian context is totally different from the Western world due to its bewildering pluralities of religions, languages, regional cultures, social customs, festivals, etc. Again, what makes India unique in terms of socio-religious structure is its caste system. Therefore, India has to use its own conceptual tools for identifying Indian social, religious and cultural identities in order to develop theories and strategies for the resolution of existing and the potential conflicts among them. Much work has already been done in this field. This paper is a tentative analysis of various dimensions of the issue of religious identity of Muslims in India in the context of Indian cultural and social realities.

Identities are constructed of certain features drawn from various divisions based on religion (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist), ideology (atheist, Communist), caste (Brahmin, Dalit), language (various linguistic groups), culture (UP culture, South-Indian culture, Mughal culture, Andhra culture), ethnicity (Dravidian, Aryan, tribal) and so on. Groups with such identities may also be called socio-religious groups (SRGs) (borrowing Sachar Committee term for Muslim sub-identities). All these identities are common to all SRGs. For instance, a Muslim/Hindu may also carry ethnic, linguistic, cultural identities along with his/her religious identity. Before studying Muslim religious identity let us look at the broader Indian

* *Former Professor of Islamic Studies at Osmania University, Hyderabad, India*

identity landscape. But, let us start with the question; is there any one single “Indian identity”?

Amratya Sen does not believe that Indian identity is based on Hindu identity on the basis of i) long periods of domination of Buddhism, Jainism, ii) plurality of religious and philosophical traditions and iii) the plurality of other than Hindu (the heterodox schools like Carvakya) within, what is called, Hindu system. Sen also refers to Tagore and Gandhi who accepted the presence of religious identities other than the Hindu religious identity. “Both emphasised the fact that the Indian identity could not favour any particular group over others within India.”¹

Here are certain major and visible Indian identities:

Indian Identities

Indian identities are numerous. They may be clustered under the following major categories:

- A) Social, anthropological, cultural
 - i) Gender
 - ii) Culture,--- with different cultural features of different regions and different linguistic state
 - iii) Language: Groups speaking different languages--
 - iv) Ethnicity, race Aryan, Dravidian, Arab, Central Asian, Tribal
 - v) Ideology- non-religious ideas (Marxism, etc.), political, etc.
- B) Religious Identities: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Christian, Jain, Lingayat, etc.
- C) Caste Identities

While identities A) type are given and external to the person/group, the identities of B) and C) belong to and are part of the person/ group.

Muslim Religious Identities:

Before studying the Muslim identities, it is to be noted that religious identities as declared either by the person or the group may not be absolutely authentic, that is, structured on the fundamental beliefs. Such declarations are, mostly, arbitrary.

Look at the following declarations:

1. I am a Muslim/Hindu.

2. I am a practicing Muslim/Hindu?
3. I am a Muslim/Hindu by birth. I do not offer prayers regularly, but I consider myself as a Muslim/Hindu.
4. I am an atheist but, culturally, I am a Muslim/Hindu.
5. I am a Hindu. I regularly visit the dargahs and believe in the spiritual powers of the Muslim saints.
6. A conversation between Mani Shankar Aiyar and Arun Shourie
 “Mani Shankar Aiyar: Would you describe your personal religious faith as Buddhist?
 Arun Shourie: By practice Buddhist; by culture, Hindu.
 MSA: Your ideological beliefs, would you say, are Hindu in origin but the rites that you follow are Buddhist?
 AS: The rites that I follow are Hindu, in the sense that I would go to the temple, celebrate raksh bandhan or idolatry. But, in the sense of a religious ideology, or a body of ideas, I would be close to the ideas of the Buddha---his explanation suffering and the way to mitigate it. I have derived great sustenance from it.”²
7. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan
 “I am a Pakistani for the last 40 years, a Muslim for the last 1400 years and a Pathan for the last 5000 years.”³

All these declarations are, mostly, arbitrary. This is irrespective of their being practising or non-practicing Muslims. Theologically speaking, non-practicing or partially-practicing Muslims are not Muslims. However, for more than one thousand years, the Muslim international community (the *Ummah*) has been divided into various sects, schools of *tafsir* (exegesis), *Hadith* (Prophet’s Traditions), *Kalaam* (Islamic scholasticism), various sects, schools of Islamic laws and Sufi *silsilahs* (orders), that are not always in agreement with each other on the core fundamental beliefs of a *true Muslim*. In course of time, all these divisions have become too rigid to allow any possibility of developing a consensus on the minimum beliefs and practices essential for a person to be a Muslim. There are various sets of minimum essential beliefs and practices according to various sects, schools of thought, etc., producing different and some time conflicting definitions of true Muslim identity. Second, various scholars, *mutakallimin*, *muhaddisin*, *mufasssirin*, in the history of Muslims, the Muslim mind, at the deeper theological and philosophical levels, have remained engaged with a more complex question (faced by every religion at some or the other stage in its history), that is, what is the nature of

relationship between belief (*'aqidah*) and action (*'amal*). Are the belief and action two unconnected entities? Can a belief exist sans its realization in action? Is belief or act sufficient for being truly religious? Suppose there is a Muslim, who considers himself as a Muslim and runs an organization for helping the poor and the needy, but he neither knows the necessary details of the fundamental Islamic beliefs nor does he offer prayers regularly. Is he a true Muslim or not? This and several similar questions may be raised with all religions without satisfactory answers. Third, in the post-Qur'anic era, various conflicting interpretations of these beliefs have been made by different schools of thought which, in course of time, were added to the core teachings of the Qur'an. This has resulted in the emergence of a host of Muslim sects/ sub-identities based on the conflicting sectarian versions of essential Islamic beliefs throughout the world. That is, Muslim sects are structured, not on different fundamental beliefs of the Qur'an, but on man-made interpretations of those beliefs. The Muslim identity continues to serve as an umbrella-term for all conflicting sub-identities. The question is how this uniformity in conflicting diversities could be maintained? It is difficult to offer any one explanation. One explanation could be the availability of certain provisions in the Qur'an for tolerance of minor digressions from the core area of faith. The Qur'an offers a set of eternal concepts (beliefs) and essential practices (*salat, zakat, saum, Hajj*), the negligence of which is sinful act and attracts displeasure of *Allah* and punishment in life-after. However, *Allah* is also Merciful and His Mercy (*Rahmat*) is available to all sinners if they seek forgiveness of sinful acts and pledge that they would never commit them again. Therefore, as long as a Muslim continues to believe in the fundamental beliefs of *Tauhid* (Unity of God), *Risaalat* (prophet-hood of Muhammad) and *Saza*(punishment) and *Jaza* (reward), his other (minor) sins/errors do not divest him of his Islamic identity. The verbal/ non-performing self-declaration of one's Islamic identity gets a self-satisfying justification from the *Rahmat* (Mercy) of *Allah*. There are some other invisible social, psychological and historical factors which appear to play a great role in protecting the over all Islamic identity. Muslims of different religious sub- identities carry their basic Muslim identity because i) they are born in a Muslim family, ii) they are brought up in an ambience of, what may be called, Muslim culture and, iii) because of the ever present consciousness of being a part of a long glorious socio-religious history gives them a great psychological comfort and a sense of belonging.

Here are some of the major religious sub-identities among Indian Muslims.

Muslim Religious sub-identities

- i- Sects
 - i.i Sunni
 - i.ii Shi'ah: Twelvers, Seveners, etc.
- ii- Maslaks (sub-sect- schools of thought)
 - ii.i Salafi/ghair muqallid/ahl-i Hadith
 - ii.ii Muqallid
 - ii.iii The Deobandis
 - ii.iv The Barelvis, etc.
- iii- Sufi silsilahs
 - iii.i Qadiriyyah
 - iii.ii Chishtiyah
 - iii.iii Naqshbandiyah
 - iii.iv Shattariyyah, etc.
- iv- Fiqhi (Islamic legal) affiliations
 - iv.i Sunni laws
 - iv.i.i Hanafi
 - iv.i.ii Maliki
 - iv.i.iii Shafi'i
 - iv.i.iv Hanbali
 - iv.ii Shi'ah laws
 - iv.ii.i Jafri—Twelvers, Alawi, etc.
 - iv.ii.ii Zadiyyah
 - iv.ii.iii Ismailis—Nizari, Must'ali—Bohras (Da'udi, Sulemani), etc.
- v- Ethnic Identities
 - v.i Sayyid
 - v.ii Shaikh
 - v.iii Mughal
 - v.iv Pathan

According to Sachar Committee report, present day Muslim society in India is divided in to following major groups:

1. Ashraaf
 - 1.i who trace their origins to foreign lands, such as, Arabia, Persia, Turkistan or Afghanistan— Shaikh, Mughal, Pathan
 - 1.ii the upper caste Hindu converts to Islam

2. Ajlaaf
 - 2.i middle caste converts whose occupations are clean—Julaahaas (weavers), carpenters, artisans, painters, graziers, tanners, milkmen, etc.
 - 2.ii converts from the erstwhile untouchable castes—Bhangi (scavengers), Mehtar (sweeper), Chamaar (tanners), Domes and so on
 3. Arzal: very low castes such as Halaal- khor, Laal Begi, Abdaal, etc.
- Vi. Linguistic Identities: Muslims speaking different languages in different linguistic regions. Urdu is the mother –tongue of about 60% of Indian Muslims mostly living in north India
- Vii. Cultural identities: Culture of the Muslims in India is the culture of region to which they belong.

Multiplicity of Identities:

This multiplicity of religious identities is not peculiar to Muslims only; all religious systems are similarly divided in to various sects. The multiplicity and overlapping among the Indian and Muslim identities leave no room for developing a meaningful discourse on the theory of religious identity. However, it does help in understanding the nature, scope of and inter-relationship within the identities and of their *functionality* in Indian societies.

Looked at from this point of view, it would be found that any religious identity of a person or group does not exist or function in isolation from other identities of that person or group. For instance, in the vast cultural expanse of India, the Indian Muslim, along with his/her main religious/Islamic identity also carries his/ her overlapping, multiple ethnic, linguistic, cultural and ideological identities. A Keralite Muslim belongs to Kerala cultural and social milieu shaped by Malayalam language and literature. He is, in this context, different from a UP or a Bangali Muslim. Such non-religious identities may change with migration of the person/group from one social, linguistic or cultural area to another area.

Muslim Religious Identity:

Religious Identity of a person/group is too complex a concept to be defined in specific terms. It is multiple and changeable. As shown above, Muslims are divided in to various religious sects like the *Sunnis*, the

Shi'ahs, the *Khojas*, the *Bohras*, the *Salafi*, and in *maslaks* (sub-divisions within sects) like the *Deobandis*, the *Barelvis*, the *Muqallid* (followers of Islamic laws besides the Qur'an and the Traditions) *Ghair-Muqallid* (who follow only the Quran and the Hadith and not necessarily the schools of law), etc. Some consider each other as not true Muslims; the extremist among them even going to the extent of declaring each other as *Kaafirs* (non-Muslims). One of the main reasons of emergence of religious sectarian identities is the absence of any consensus among the followers of different groups on the "minimum fundamental beliefs essential for being described as the follower that religion". (For instance, Justice Munir Report on the 1954 Qadiyani disturbances in Pakistan found in its investigations that no two 'Ulama agreed on the definition of a Muslim.) In fact, if we go by the fundamental beliefs of different sectarian denominations, almost every Muslim sect stands as heretic or even as *Kaafir* according to some or the other Muslim sect. As pointed above, the sectarian disagreement has not led to any decisive split among the Muslims, as such. All the sects and sub-sects (*firaq*) continue to be within the umbrella denomination of Muslims. The second feature of these sub-identities is that they are not theologically and socially static in nature (like castes) and a person of any sect may shift his/her allegiance to any other sectarian identity within the main 'Muslim identity'. For instance, a *Shi'ah*, *Sunni*, *Hanafi*, *Qadiri* can change his or her allegiance to any other sect, school of jurisprudence or *Sufi* order and still may maintain his or her 'Muslim identity'.

Functioning of identities:

In India, debate on religious identity revolves around a movement (Hindutva) for politico-religious supremacy by a section of the majority (the Sangh Parivar) over the religious minorities (the Muslims, Christians, Budhists, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, etc.) The Indian secular democracy is in a state of ideological and political war with the Hindutva forces demanding the conversion of Indian secular democracy in to a Hindu Rashtra. This constitutes what has come to stay as the typically Indian syndrome of 'communalism'. Communalism has adopted as a political device the projection of Muslim religious identity as an existential threat to Hindu culture/Hindutva. Other, and much larger, typically Indian scenario of Indian identities is casteism. But, first, communalisation of Muslim identity.

In the context of normal conditions, the identities are dormant/ in-active and communities are not conscious of their religious identities as they function in different social gatherings, cultural functions, in a market or in a theatre. However, when normal conditions are changed because of some actions or campaign against Muslim religious identity by some external agency like the Sangh Parivar or by some government action (like, arrest of innocent Muslims for alleged terrorist acts), the Muslims are made conscious of their having a religious identity which is a kind of threat to the majority community's religious, political and cultural interests. This imposed religious identity, in its turn, activates it in to a responsive mode. It may take various forms of responses –chiefly political--leading to a sustained state of existential tension. I would call this process of projecting a religious identity as a threat to another religious identity as act of '*identification*'.

Identifications by identifiers external to Muslim religious identity:

I propose that it is not the "*identities*", as such, but the "*Identifications*", governed by the various interests /motives of the *identifier* (person/group/organisation, etc.), that are responsible for creating tensions within the Muslim community and disturbing, damaging and destroying communal peace and happiness in society, as a whole.

Examples of identifications:

A) Identification of Islam by the Christian West as anti-democracy and a militant ideology Motive: to justify negative actions against Muslim nations not supporting them

B) A conversation between Mani Shankar Aiyar and Arun Shourie:

MSA: So, does that mean being a Muslim makes it more difficult to be an Indian than being a Hindu makes it to be an Indian?

AS: Adhering to Islam in purity would make it impossible to live in a multicultural, multi-religious society and still abide by the tenets (of Islam). But for a Hindu.....

MSA: So you are saying you have to be a bad Muslim in order to be able to live like a good Indian?

AS: Er ... I think that's putting it in strong words, but certainly he would have to depart from the edicts of Islam as enshrined in the Koran and the Hadith.

MSA: The obverse of that is if you're faithful to the edicts of Islam as enshrined in the Koran and the shariat, you would have difficulty in being a good Indian.

AS: I think so.”⁴

C) Murli Manohar Joshi:

“All Indian Muslims are Mohammadiya Hindus,; all Indian Christians are Christian Hindus.”⁵

In order to have a proper understanding of this identity discourse, it would help if its functioning is traced in the colonial period. In India, transformation of the co-existent, natural and inactive religious identities of the medieval period in to communal religious identities was planned as a policy and implemented by the British colonial strategy of divide and rule from the 17th century , onwards. It is this conversion of religious identity in to communal commodity which is essential to the present discussion. British policy of highlighting the difference in religious identities among Muslims and the Hindus in order to keep the two communities disunited in the freedom struggle. But, all identities were merged in to one single Indian identity during the Freedom Struggle. After Independence, the RSS/Hindutva forces accelerated their pre-Independence-Hindu Rashtra agenda by projecting Partition as an unholy act against Akhand Bharat and, launched a campaign of re-packaging the two-nation theory of Muslim League in to separate adversarial religious identities of Hindus and non-Hindus. M.S. Golwalkar, the RSS Sarsanghchalak, has declared this in no uncertain terms in 1966. He said:

“At the outset we must bear in mind that so far as 'nation' is concerned, all those, who fall outside the five-fold limits (geographical, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic) can have no place in the national life unless they abandon their differences and adopt the religion, culture and language of the Nation and completely merge themselves in the National Race...There are only two ways open for the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the National Race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the National race may allow them to do so, and to quit the country at the sweet will of the National Race...the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold to reverence (the) Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of (the) glorification of the Hindu race and culture, that is, of the Hindu nation, and must lose their separate existence to merge in the

Hindu race or may stay in the country wholly subordinated in the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizens' rights.”⁶

So, the RSS believes only in one single identity---the Hindu identity and flatly denies any 'identity'---Islamic, Muslim or Indian---to the Muslims in India. Needless to point out, this position is quite opposite to the concept of Indian peoples and religious minorities as enshrined in the Indian Constitution and all democratic norms. Indian identity;

These developments, Amratya Sen comments, “ have the effect of forcefully challenging, in several ways, the broad and absorbing idea of Indian identity that emerged in the days of independence movement and that helped to define the concept of Indian nation.--- homogeneous concept of Indian identity emerged during the independence movement as a kind of national consensus....The general idea of a spacious and assimilative Indian identity, which Gandhi and Tagore shared , was interspersed with somewhat different emphases by the two, and there were other differences in the characterisation of Indian identity by other theorists and intellectual leaders of the independence movement.”⁷ Amratya Sen refers to the idea of inclusionary form of the idea of Indian identity advocated by Tagore and Gandhi.⁸

This analysis makes it amply clear that in order to safeguard and strengthen Indian secular democracy we have to revisit the panorama of Indian heritage of integrating identities denying any space for interventions by the external *identifications*. It appears that there are no firm grounds for defining *Indian identity* or religious identities and it has also shown that the '*Islamic identity*' also seems to be something different from the '*Muslim identity*'. Is there any other theory of *Indian identity/identities* demanding consideration?

I am not sure if I am correct in suggesting that, due to near absence of Indian literature, arts and architecture as source-material for the studies of Indian history and culture done in India or abroad, have constructed an unsatisfactory and incomplete, if not distorted, narrative of the evolution of Indian cultural personality throughout the ages. In the discourse on *religious identities*, for instance, a study of Urdu creative literature, particularly, the poetry, would surprise the investigator by the

phenomenon of quite a new *Indian identity* that defies all identity-construction formulae—religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, etc. Pre-colonial history is not exclusively the history of rajas, rashtras, shahinshas, courts, palaces, nobles, armies, wars, conquests and defeats, but of peoples, festivals, customs, philosophical systems, Bhagti and Sufi thought, literature, studies made in comparative literature, arts, architecture—that is, of Indian culture. These studies have most often portrayed religious identities in mutually adversarial positions which are vastly misleading.

During the medieval period, the *religious identities* remained as ‘natural’ and ‘dormant’ identities and not in any condition of mutual tension. There were battles among kings and states but there were no clashes between *religious identities*, as such. There is no evidence of invoking religious teachings or using religious symbolism by any religious community for the purpose of domination over the other. Contrarily, the native Indian spirituality devised a unique system of integrating values of love (*ishq*), *bhagti* (devotion to and love for God—enshrined in *Sufism* and *Bhagti*, drawn from the spiritual content of different religious identities. This transformed different *religious identities* in to sources of values of universal peace. Since, for both Sufism and Bhagti, there is no intermediary between God and man and as there is only the path of love that leads to God, it leaves no space for any social division in society. The fundamental concept which shaped this system in both religious traditions is the concept of Unity of Being/ *wahdat al-wujud*.

Bhagti movement emerged around 10th and 11th centuries. The *Bhagti* (devotion) believed in One God and achieving *moksh* through devotion to God. All human beings are equal before God. One can reach God through love/*Bhagti*. The *Bhagti* movement covered all regions of the country. Ramananda, Ramajuja, Sant Gianeshwar, from the South, Chatainya from Bangal, Kabir and Guru Nanak from the North were some the major figures. Similarly, there are several Sufis belonging to different orders that carried a similar humanistic message in various parts of the country, like, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Khwaja Banda Nawaz, and Nizamuddin Aulia. The unique contribution of the Indian *Bhagats* and the *Sufis*, as said earlier, was that they transformed different *religious identities* in to spiritual partners in the Indian cultural identity. The integrating role of

mysticism in India is well documented and does not need further elaboration.

Equally significant contributions were made in the field of literature, particularly in Urdu language, produced during the last more than four hundred years where religions and religious identities are just sub-texts of creative human urges. The fact that Urdu literature has no space for religious identities has not yet been fully noticed and appreciated. Sufism, again, played main role in shaping Urdu literature, particularly Urdu poetry, as a powerful source of universal love and human conscience free from all ideological (including religious) bonds. Here, two relevant points are mentioned. Firstly, all the best contributions in Urdu poetry have an under current of Sufi surrealistic loneliness. Second, perhaps, as a corollary to the first, it is in open revolt against all authorities—of kings, feudal lords, men of wealth and the elite establishments of social norms and, specially, the institution of religious authorities. The poets either reject or ridicule these symbols of individual coercion. The Urdu poets just reject or ignore all theological prescriptions, instructions, prohibitions and the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, sin, paradise and hell; they are the citizens of a world where there are no religions and religious identities. Their language, vocabulary, idioms, symbols, metaphors, etc. denote meanings and implications totally different and often quite opposite to those in Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Some such converted symbols are as follows:

Ma'ekadah (pub)=this world, the world beyond

Saaqi (one who serves wine)=God as the Creator of the phenomenal world

Ma'e, Baadah, sharaab (wine)-= mystic intoxicant

Zaahid (a rigid observer of religious practices)= is ridiculed for his narrow mindedness

Kaafir (heretic)=Beloved

Kufr (rejection of the message of Islam)=refusal of given commands/ attitude of freedom/ beloved's rejection of lover's expression of love

But, Sanam (idol)= Beloved

Conceptually, in the Urdu classical stream of ghazal, there are no exclusive places of worship of various religious communities. Haram, masjid (Ka'bah, mosque), *Dair, mandir* (temple), Kalisa (church) are all abodes of the same God.

Ghalib (d.1869) confesses that it is not possible to engage in discourse on the vision of God except in the idiom of wine and cup!

*Har chand ho mushaahidah-i Haq ki guftgu
Banti nahin hae baadah-o-saaghar kahe baghair*

Now, here are some of the couplets of Ghalib which offer a fascinating narration of the non-religious character of religious identities residing in Indian culture:

*wafaadaari ba-shart-i ustwaari asl-i imaan hae
mare but-khaane men to Ka'be men gaaro Barahman ko*
The basis of real faith is firm allegiance (to Faith)
(Therefore) If a Brahmin dies in the temple, bury him in Ka'bah

*nahin kuch subhah-o-zunmar ke phande men giraa'i
wafaadari men sheikh-o-Barhaman ki aazma'esh hae*
There is no binding force in the Hindu rosary or Muslim rosary
The test of the Shaikh and the Brahman lies in their allegiance to their faiths

*pakre jaate haen farishton ke likhe par Ghalib
aadmi koi hamara dam-i tahrir bhi tha?!*
(On the Day of Judgment) we are being caught on the reports prepared by the angels; it is injustice
Was there any man from our side present at the time of recording (of our sins) by the angels?

*ham ko ma'lum hae jannat ki haqiqat, lekin
dil ke bahlaane ko Ghalib yeh khayaal achcha hae!*
We know the reality of paradise (there is no such thing), but,
Ghalib!, this concept is good for keeping us in good spirits (giving us a false hope of going to paradise if we perform good actions)
*waa'iz na tum piyo na kisi ko pila sako
kya baat hae tumhaari sharaab-i tuhur ki*
Preacher! Neither you can drink it yourself nor you can offer it to any one else Undoubtedly, your sacred wine (to be offered to the virtuous in paradise) is unique!

*go waan nahin, pa waan se nikaale hue to haen
Ka'be se in buton ko bhi nisbat hae door ki*

Although they (the idols) are not there, (in the Ka'bah), now, but, for sure, they are the ones exiled from there

So, these idols also have a distant relationship with the Ka'bah!

*bandagi men bhi woh aazadah-o-khud- been haen ke ham
ulte phir aa'e dar-i Ka'bah agar waa na hua*

Even though under the state of God's servitude, we are so independent and self-conceited that,

we turned back if the door of Ka'bah was not opened for us

The best specimen of ghazal's identity-less culture is the poetry of Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810) which reflects beautifully the irony underlying the tragic tension between human and religious identities. In fact, Mir's poetic insight has revealed how the Hindus and the Muslims have to construct a human architecture providing enough space for all religious identities.

*Ham na kahte the ke mat dair-o- haram ki raah chal
Ab yeh jhagra hashr tak Sheikh-o-Brahman men raha*

Did we not warn you not to take the path of mosque and temple?

Now, this dispute between the Shaikh and Brahman would continue for ever

*Mat ranj kar kisi ko ke apne tu i'tiqaad
Dil dhaa'e kar jo Ka'bah banaaya to tya hu'a*

Do not hurt any one with your (religious) belief

How futile it is if you build Ka'bah by destroying some one's heart!

Does this extra-religious/spiritual/humanist image of religious sensitivities and religious identities available in Urdu literature reflect the authentic Indian cultural identity? In fact, if explored further, we would find that this approach is none other than what is called 'Indian secularism'. Does this idea have any place in the present political scenario? Unfortunately, no. During the last 65 years Indian political culture has changed into a culture of political/ electoral identities. In this changing political culture, the caste-, religious, linguistic and regional and cultural identities are being nurtured as constituencies of electoral gains encouraging exclusivism. There are distinct possibilities of this process paving the way for promotion of sub-nationalistic sentiments in various linguistic regions. So far, instead of *religious identities*, *religious identifications* have been pushed in to the political main stream in order to divert attention from the main challenges of

casteism. On the other hand, the coalition culture is paving grounds for the emergence of the oldest and the most oppressed lower castes on the identity chess-board setting their own rules of power-politics-- in which *religious identities* may take a back seat or, may be, they would like to share the inclusive *Indian identity* with the Dalits. In that scenario of *identities without identifications*, Mani Shankar Aiyar might prove correct in suggesting that only secularism could be central to our identity as a people.⁹

If this sounds some what idealistic, then Edward Said's realism may be helpful, in this regard. " The construction of identity---for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction ---involves establishing opposites and as a "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. Each age and society re-creates its "Others". Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of "other" is a much worked over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies....In short, the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society, and is therefore anything but mere academic wool-gathering."¹⁰

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Abstract:

The article examines the Indian identities which have their own distinct history and geographical values and theories developed in the Western societies and cultures don't help in the understanding of Asian and Indian identities. The article primarily focuses social landscape of India but it cites some of the very relevant examples of Urdu poetry. The article writer goes on to say that the best specimen of ghazal's identity-less culture is the poetry of Mir Taqi Mir. On the other hand, the article writer points out that during the last 65 years Indian culture has changed into a culture of political / electoral identities. The article explains the identities clustered under these major categories such as gender, culture, language, ethnicity and ideology. The article briefs Muslims religious identities and their sub-identities.

Keywords: Indian Muslim identities, functioning of identities, formation of identities, Urdu language, Urdu literature, Sufism, free from all ideological bonds, universal love.