

## ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF MILLAH AND RISE OF NATIONALISM: CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSLIM WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

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Millah, in Islamic tradition represents a people united in religion, in belief in and obedience to God. It brings the Ummah together under a shared spiritual and moral banner towards which all should be responsible and develop. When nationalism finally arose, it did so as a modern political movement advocating for the power of the state, ethnic consolidation, and secularism. Although nationalism allowed for anti-colonial movements in the Muslim world it weakened the Islamic community and diminished its strength bringing division instead of unity. It is within this context that Millah is being negotiated against nationalism and its historical developments and key issues are examined in this study. The methodological approach employed by the study is therefore hermeneutical and historical thematic to establish the following challenges to the unity of Islam: political sectarianism, cultural otherness and economic divergence. It also analyzes the decline of pan-Islamic bodies, as well as ethnic tensions. To this end, the research enunciates the strategies of reconciliation; these include the restoration of solidarity within diversity, rejuvenation of pan-Islamist organizations, and economical/educational collaboration. Thus, this study fills the theoretical and empirical gaps by encompassing ideological and functional paradigms and presenting a pragmatic approach to restore the mandate of the Ummah. The loss of the Mat looking at the results der displays the applicability of Millah today to cover current global issues.

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## INTRODUCTION

The term 'Millah' originates from the Quran in which Millah is used to mean a unified community of people who address themselves to the worship /service of the Almighty, having embraced similar values /principles befitting divine standards. It represents the spirit of the Ummah, bringing the Muslim together irrespective of color, country, language or civilization. Interestingly, whereas Millah forms a religious people and consists of a faith that can socially unite people and does not account for material or political differences. In the past this concept has served as a main factor of mobilizing diverse Muslims, starting from the GAI (Golden Age of Islam), with collective identification fostering developments in governance, knowledge and culture.

Conversely, nationalism which formed itself during the period of enlightenment was a secular movement which considered territorial claims and ethnicity far more important than ethics. It altered their loyalties and brought structures that were many a times inapplicable in the religious context. Nationalism in the Muslim world can therefore be said to have arisen during colonial and post-colonial era. The fact is that such tension between Millah and nationalism has significant consequences for the Muslim world today. Although Millah tries to create unity amongst the Muslim by bringing them together under the tenets of DarulIslam, nationalism on the other hand creates diverse pieces on the basis of ethnical origin, language and geographical location. This paper aims at examining the historical backgrounds, the nature of tensions, and implications of these paradigms in the directions of Islamic unity. It goes further to look at possible reconciliatory strategies in the creation of unity amidst modern world challenges.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***The Concept of Millah in Islamic Thought***

The term Millah is quite crucial in Islamic thought promoting unity while demanding stipulated endorsement of God's direction. Interestingly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2009): who referred to Millah as a transcendent spirituality defining ethnicity, culture, and geography. It is enforced based on the Quran and is the moral and religious conscience of the Ummah. Traditionally, Millah has been members' rallying point within the Muslim society especially during the Islamic Golden Age, when several societies harmoniously formed a common Islamic entity. It encouraged progress in fields of governance, science and trade and laid down how the unity of the Islamic world can help in attaining greater common good all around.

### ***The Emergence and Spread of Nationalism***

Nationalism began to develop, at the end of the 18th century as an idea in political that reoriented allegiance in terms of territories and ethnicity. Benedict Anderson (2020) defined nationalist as an "imagined community" which base its members on historical narrative and culture. Consequently, nationalism emerged in the Muslim world during colonization, when it offered a configuration for anti-colonial resistance. But as it was in the case pointed out by Akins (1991) nationalism worked also to break the unity of the Islamic world bringing the Ummah into segmented nation states. Decline of the Ottoman Caliphate was another instance of this change where nationalist movements in Turkey, the Arab World and South Asia replaced the Islamic Caliphate with nationalist states in the control over territory.

### ***Challenges to Islamic Unity***

The nationalism is a problem to the Islamic unity because emphasizes on secularism and territoriality. Another scholar who has reasoned against nationalism the same way that colonial powers did is Edward Said (1978) says that nationalism undermines Islamic principle and erodes the solidarity moral fabric of Ummah. Nationalist movements tend to divide populations, with prejudice given to ethnic or cultural relations rather than faith. According to John Voll (2019), nationalism has not only intensified regional conflicts among Muslims, for instance Arabs-Kurds and

within South Asia. These divisions portray the contrast between the materialistic approach that nationalism has taken and the Millah that has the spiritual and moral inclination.

### ***Pan-Islamism as a Response***

Attempts to organize a counterpoint to nationalism through pan-Islamic activism have sought to bring back the unity of the Muslim nation. Two efforts have been made known as the Khilafat Movement in South Asia and the organization of Islamic cooperation are efforts to combine nationalism with religious unity. Still, spits and hairs for them have experienced some problems., Voll (2019) and Akins (1991) argue that these movements are frequently affected by rival national interests. For instance, the OIC address global issues due to the conflict of interests of the member countries.

### ***Contemporary Perspectives***

It is pointed out that Today's scholars have concerns with how the nationalisms can balance the values of Millah within the Islamic nation states? Ismail Raji al Faruqi in his work of 1987 has sought to make case that there is a way of harmonizing these paradigms by incorporating Islamic ethics into the political and social arrangements. He notes that it is possible to enhance unity by linking national ambitions with Islam which will not undermine cultural differences. Likewise, Nasr (2009) has argued that, the lack of a renewed spiritual reference frame work, and the promotion of nationalism by the western world has had a negative effect.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Since this research seeks to analyze the tension between Millah and nationalism historically and in terms of content, the study employs qualitative research methodology. The approach aims to find out the important issues that nationalism leads to in relation to the unity of Islam and initiation of reconciliation mechanisms.

### ***Research Design***

Since this is not empirical research it will be an example of the secondary research which involves the use of historical records, academic texts and thematic analysis. Historical analysis looks at the factors that led to the development of nationalism through colonial and post-colonial studies as well as the thematic analysis that covers the political impact of nationalism on the Muslim region.

### **Data Collection**

Sources include:

- This paper explores Classical Islamic texts and interpretations to define Millah.
- Minute details of the Ottoman Sultanate's decline and the beginning of nationalist movements in Turkey, Egypt, Arab world and Indian subcontinent.
- These works will include those of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Benedict Anderson, Edward Said in order to explore a theoretical and practical perspective on the subject of nationalism.

### **Data Analysis**

To obtain quantitative data, a thematic content analysis was carried out to examine the patterns and trends of the interaction between Millah and nationalism. Different historical facts like the abolishment of Ottoman Caliphate and the partition of South Asia were analyzed to study the issue of Muslim unity.

### **Scope and Limitations**

Thus, this work is more detailed but geographically limited, with specific case studies of Turkey, the Arab world, and South Asia. On the one hand, the use of secondary sources ensures breadth and depth by presenting firsthand, scholarly observation of the movements; on the other, the technique hampers the direct incorporation of primary data from the contemporary Islamic movements.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Fragmentation of the Ummah**

The growth of nationalism has reduced the fraternity of the Ummah into what appear to be nations with separate selvages. With dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in the year 1924, the feature of political unity in Islamic world disappeared. In Turkey, Egypt and other Arab countries, nationalist movements eradicated the features of the Ummah and offered territorial and ethnicity as a base for identification. This fragmentation of the Muslim world has made a collective response on various affairs of the world impossible including the issue of Islamophobia and climate change (Karpat, n.d).

### **Erosion of Islamic Identity**

Nationalism seems to exclude Islamic values from systemic decision making and replaces them with

secular principles. In Turkey, for an example Mustafa Kemal Atatürk reform eliminated the tradition of Islam by making nationalism a priority, many Muslims felt a disconnect from their religious roots. Also in the Arab nationalist movements, Islam is placed in the second background, which also exists in the public discourse. This loss of Islamic identity has led to generation identity crises in many Muslim majority nations (Zubaida, 2004).

### **Weakening of Pan-Islamic Institutions**

The nationalism has also detrimental effects on other Islamic forums like Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Internal contradictions of members hinder the OIC to handle issues such as the Rohingya issue or when the Palestinians'. These divisions give a portrayal into how nationalism hinders the possibility of uniting Islamic fraternity on international level (Esposito, 2015).

### **Exacerbation of Ethnic Conflicts**

Muslim countries have witnessed conflicts occasioned by ethnic nationalism. The freedom fighting of Kurdish people in Turkey, Iraq and Syria and the stateless Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar show how nationalist The shining principle of Millah contradicts with Nationalist ambitions. These conflicts have tended to create schisms and encourage a climate of suspicion within the Muslim world (Gellner, 2005).

### **Limited Global Influence**

Nationalism has led to disunity thus reducing the voice of the Muslim world in international assembly. Many Muslim countries split, so there is no collective voice that would advance the goals of Muslims, for example, in terms of fair trade or climate change. Lack of a central global actor to help Muslims around the world to combat social injustices on the international stage (Darmawan, 2018)

## **DISCUSSION**

This paper seeks to explain how nationalism has impacted on the Muslim people and the global Muslim community.

It has become clear that nationalism is a formidable impediment to the unity of the Ummah and has altered the MAPIN society in the Muslim world. On the positive side, nationalism has enabled localized identities and raise resistances to colonialism on the negative side nationalism has hinder unity among

Islamic and goes contrary to Millah's principles. The impact of nationalism on political, cultural and economic aspects is the topic of this section; also presented is the way to harmonize nationalism with the Islamic principles of togetherness.

### **Political Disunity**

you have noted that through nationalism, state sovereignty and territorial integrity are given priority, therefore the Ummah is fragmented [30]. Many contemporary post-colonial Muslim majority nations including those in the Middle East and South Asia remain preoccupied with the discrete national interest rather than the communal Islamic interest. For instance, competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for supremacy in the Middle East shows how nationalist interests limit the processes of Islamic solidarity. That too is evidenced by the lack of effectiveness of the OIC type organizations and other pan-Islamic institutions to engage in conflict-solver or conflict-settlement, especially between Muslims, all due to political fragmentation (Darmawan, 2018). This disunity also means that the Muslim world as a whole cannot effectively shape the discourse on various international forums, and cannot offer collective solutions to universal problems facing the Muslim world such as Islamophobia, Climate change and issues of inequality in the global economy.

### **Cultural Alienation**

As stated above, due to its secular nature nationalism fails to link Muslim societies to their religion and culture. In Turkey for example Mustafa Kemal Atatürk nationalized reforms which reshaped a society from an Islamic oriented structure and identity to a western orientated state identity. Likewise, Egyptian Nasserism that also motivated nationalism in several Arab countries had no place for Islamic values as a sign of ethnic and territorial solidarity. They have consequently led to identity crises which are worst among the young generation since they fail to reconcile between their traditional / religious backgrounds and nationalist professed secularism (Zubaida, 2004). This cultural alienation poses a danger of diluting the socio-political culture that in the past held togetherness of Muslims' societies.

### **Economic Disparities**

Because of its influence bank and political power that economics nationalism tends to worsen various kinds of injustice within the Muslim world.

It fosters inequality within the Muslim world. Countries of the Gulf for example, such as Saudi Arabia looks at their own parochial interests while the rest of the Muslim countries in the Third World are grappling with their economic woes. For instance, members of the gulf such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are experiencing the positive social consequences of natural resource endowment while countries such as Yemen and Sudan bear the negative social consequences of, they lack the same resources. This relationship is counterproductive to the Islamic theory of cooperation and societal welfare. Furthermore, low economic integration of Muslim countries has resulted to a poor position in competing in a global market (Karpas, n.d). Applying these economic differences, it is essential to enhance cooperative work structures that correspond to the common welfare of the Ummah.

### **Pathways for Reconciliation**

To bring out the link between nationalism and Millah one must aim at respecting the patriotism and nationalism of the countries while at the same time encouraging people hood togetherness. Several strategies can help achieve this reconciliation:

#### **1. Promoting Unity out of Diversity**

Many a time, numerous principles of the Islamic faith when explained in detail prove that it is unity that is compatible with diversity. The Quran states: "O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" (Quran 49:13).

The ability to work with and respect people of other cultures but still have the same religion, in this case, Islam. This ethos should be championed by Muslim leaders and scholars to balance nation and peoplehood, creating belonging to a national fitness as well as belonging to a global Muslim community.

#### **2. Enhancing the Processes of Islamic Cooperation**

Pan-Islamic institutions, including the OIC, therefore require major reform to adapt to nationalism challenges. This includes the formulation of frameworks for international cooperation with reference to solving conflicts, sharing of resources as well as joint actions taking on the international issues. Instead of striving for national interests these institutions can improve their position and usefulness if they focus on Islamic unity.

### **3. Educational Reforms**

Millah should be imprinted in the consciousness of the young persons in Islamic education aside from their national history that has to unite the future generations to be accountable for one another. Outcomes both Islamic and secular oriented curricula need to share the Heaven and Earth to raise up balanced vision adequate to the contemporary reality.

### **4. Building Economic Alliances**

This defines economic cooperation as a necessity in order to balance the development gaps while working towards the common destiny. Projects like Islamic Development Bank or a system of trade associations among the Muslim countries may promote the concept of win-win-situation. Investment in knowledge through education, health as well as creating and improving infrastructure would also assist in the development of the less fortunate regions thus help remove more gaps within the Muslim area (Esposito, 2015).

### **5. Facilitating Politics for All**

These models of governance should provide a blend of Islamic values and National realities of different Muslim majorities' countries. These include protection of minority's interest; promotion of inter-ethnic relation; and accountability and justice. This is why it is possible for the states in the Millah society to adopt the above principles of governance by availing the principles while accommodating the differences in the society as required by Islamic shariah.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present research aimed at investigating role of ideological tension between Millah as an Islamic term and nationalism for the formation of the UMMAH in question. Historically based and through the analysis of the thematic content of the work the study sought to establish the problems caused by nationalism as well as the ways to solve them. The studies prove that nationalism has polarized the Ummah, undermined the Islamic identity, and devastated pyramid structure of the Islamic states resulting in breakup and decline in power. Indeed, the study was able to meet its objectives by consequentially offer historical study on nationalism and its effect to Islamic unity. The main features identified in it: political split, cultural estrangement, and economic inequality, and proposed specific recommendations for their resolution. These include; Integration unity in diversity, Pan-Islamic institution

reformation, and Educational and economic cooperation. Thus, seven above strategies contribute this research in filling the gap in the literature that discourses either the ideological analysis of Millah or the pragmatic demonstration of nationalism while the two are interrelated but not well-integrated. Besides, this paper contributes to the ongoing literature by underlining that national identities do not contradict the spirit of Millah. It offers a more realistic understanding of today's nation-States within its argument while also calling for a return to the ethos of the Islamic social contract.

In conclusion, this study helps once again to emphasize the importance of Millah as the unifying horizon that should be applied in the modern Muslim world. When the nationalist goals are met and the question of collective identity is resolved, the Muslim world can return to its historical function as a guide for civilization, as well as for the moral, scientific, and legal spheres.

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