

A Voice from the Margins: An Appraisal of Ubaid-Allah Sindhi's Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party and its Constitution

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Abstract

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi is among those very few political thinkers and activists of the twentieth-century India who were initially associated with the traditional theological seminaries but their political vision was marked by liberalism and open-mindedness. He established a non-communal political party—Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party in 1924 in order to translate his political ideals into practice. The Party Constitution envisaged the idea of a unique form of confederal form of government for the country. It also presented an outline of a socio-economic order which was derived from a reconciliation of Socialist ideals with the Quran and Shah Wali-Allahi thought. However, he is among one of the least understood and often misinterpreted Muslim thinkers of India. Thus, there is a need to appreciate and reevaluate the political modernism in his thought and vision.

Key-words: Ubaid-Allah Sindhi, Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party, The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India, Confederalism, Socialism

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi (1872-1944) of Deoband School is among those very few political thinkers and activists who were trained in traditional *madrassahs* or theological seminaries, but had a thorough understanding of their contemporary political and economic ideologies, and were endowed with a deep vision and tremendous political foresight. Unlike most of his fellow *ulama* or scholars and political leaders of Deoband School, he was receptive to modernism, though in a selective manner. It is for this very reason that he has been hailed as 'the most broad-minded Muslim scholar of South Asia after Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi' by Said Ahmad Akbarabadi, an illustrious pupil of Sindhi and a renowned scholar of Islam (see introduction in Aslam, n.d., p. 10). He was not only an exponent of the religious and political thought of Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi (1703-1762), Sindhi was himself a profound thinker, an activist and a revolutionary. Amid the reactionary environment of *madrassahs* where he was trained, he was the first religious and political thinker of the twentieth century who was able to break away from traditionalism, and embraced the various aspects of modernity, including political modernity.

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Unlike his contemporary *ulama*, he believed that the political system of the Pious Caliphate could not be revived in modern times, since the Caliphate was suitable for its coeval social and political environment. Therefore, for solving the political problems of India, he suggested a modern political system.

In order to translate his political ideals in reality, Ubaid-Allah Sindhi established a political party with the name Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party in 1924, in which he envisaged the idea of a unique form of confederal form of government for the country. Nevertheless, he is among one of the least understood and often misinterpreted Muslim scholars of India. His political ideas and schemes have been evaluated and interpreted by the Muslim nationalist historians in an unsympathetic manner. In fact, the Muslim nationalist historiographical tradition tends to eulogize the efforts of only those Muslim leaders who struggled for the creation of Pakistan, while ignoring those who held political views opposed to the ideology of All India Muslim League. In the Muslim nationalist historiographical tradition, which forms a dominant discourse in the country, at least in the textbooks of history and Pakistan Studies, Sindhi's political modernism has not been adequately appreciated. Such a treatment of Sindhi's political philosophy and vision calls for a reevaluation of his political ideals.

1. Political Biography of Ubaid-Allah Sindhi: A Brief Overview

Born in a Sikh family in District Sialkot in 1872, Ubaid-Allah Sindhi (also spelled as Ubayd Allah or Ubaidullah) got converted to Islam from Sikhism by his own choice during his schooldays in Jampur, District Dera Ghazi Khan. He spent some time in the *madrassahs* of Bharchundi Sharif (three kilometers from the city of Daharki, District Ghotki, Sindh) and Dinpur Sharif (District Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab). He became a disciple of Saiyyid al-Arifin Hafiz Muhammad Siddiq of Bharchundi Sharif in District Sukkur, though later he received spiritual guidance and training from others as well. (Moizuddin, 1988, pp. 199-201). He joined the renowned theological seminary of Dar al-Ulum at Deoband (a town in northwestern UP) in 1889, and became a pupil of eminent scholars such as Mahmud Hasan (d. 1920), popularly known as Shaykh al-Hind, and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905). There he acquired profound knowledge of Arabic language, *tafsir* (exegesis of the Quran), *hadith* (traditions of the Holy Prophet, PBUH), *fiqh* (Muslim law or jurisprudence), *falsafah* (philosophy) and *mantaq* (logic). In addition, he also got acquainted with the writings of the renowned Sufi-scholar of Delhi, Shah Wali-Allah, and Muhammad Qasim Nanawtavi (d. 1880), one of the founders of the Deoband School, which had a lasting impression on his thought.

Deoband was started in 1867 as an apolitical religious institution, but later under the leadership of Mahmud Hasan, its graduates started political activism, and some of them played a very important role in Muslim politics.

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Ubaid-Allah Sindhi started his political career in 1908 when he was made the secretary of an association of Deoband graduates—Jamiat al-Ansar (Society of Helpers) in Deoband founded by Mahmud Hasan. (Minault, 1982, pp. 28-29). However, Peter Hardy is of the view that Sindhi himself founded Jamiat al-Ansar in 1910 which aimed at a greater fraternity between the alumni of Deoband and Aligarh Schools. (Hardy, 1972, p. 181). It had an apolitical character. Soon, Sindhi's views generated controversy in some circles of Deoband. As circumstances grew unfavorable for him due to his consequent opposition, he decided to leave Deoband in 1913. Mahmud Hasan sent him to Delhi where he founded another institution named Nazarat al-Ma'arif al-Quraniyya with the aim of equipping the Western-educated Muslims with religious knowledge. Its patrons were Nawab Viqar al-Mulk (1841-1917), Hakim Ajmal Khan (1864-1927) and Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari (1880-1936). Soon it became a platform for political debates. Here Sindhi was introduced to Muhammad Ali Jauhar (1878-1931) and Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) by Dr. Ansari. So it was during 1913-15 that Sindhi became politically active and came in contact with the Muslim political leaders. (Minault, 1982, p. 30).

In coming years, Sindhi developed a very close relationship with Mahmud Hasan, and that was why, in some circles of Deoband, the former came to be known as 'the brain of Shaykh al-Hind'. When during the World War I, the British Indian forces left India to fight on the Middle Eastern and European fronts, the leading scholars of Deoband deemed the time ripe for liberating India from the imperial yoke. Mahmud Hasan planned to persuade the frontier tribes to wage war against the British. For this reason, Sindhi was sent to Kabul by him in 1915 in order to muster the support of the Afghan government and urge the ruler of Afghanistan to attack India to keep the British Army occupied on the frontier. The British government, on the other hand, pressurized the Afghan government to prevent him from political activities. The attempt, nonetheless, could not become successful, and it is remembered in history as 'Silk Letter Movement' of 1916. (Qureshi, 1999, pp. 78-80; and Mian, 1975). Consequently, Sindhi got imprisoned, and remained in the fort of Badakhshan for some time.

The failure of the Silk Letter Movement forced Sindhi to lead a life of exile for more than two decades, which proved very enlightening for him as he travelled far and wide, and got acquainted with the international politics as well as his contemporary political ideologies and economic orders. He spent the next seven years (1915-22) in Afghanistan (Leghari, 1980), and later during his stay in Makkah, he recorded the experiences he had in Afghanistan in his partial biography title *Kabul Mein Sāt Sāl* (Seven Years in Kabul), (Sindhi, 1955). During these seven years, he closely worked with the Afghan government, which was under considerable influence of the British. He exchanged views with many influential people and political leaders.

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During World War I, Kabul had become the ‘Switzerland of Asia’ where the politicians of various countries had assembled, making the city a hotbed of international politics. It was here owing to his interaction with the Afghan politicians that his sentiments of Muslim brotherhood had begun to shake. He realized that the existence of *quam* (nation) in geographical or territorial context was an objective reality. He soon became aware of the fact that the Afghans and the Indian Muslims constitute two separate nations, since each of them preferred not to work with the other as subordinate (Sarwar, 1967, p. 30). Before leaving India, Sindhi had a heightened vigour for Muslim unity, but his pan-Islamic dream began to fade when he was in Kabul where he realized that the Arabs, Turks and Afghans have their own interests and specific needs (Ansari, 1986, p. 517).

Convinced of the futility of communal politics, Sindhi along with some associates of the Ghadar Movement (Faruqi, 1963, pp. 59-60) and Indo-German-Turkish Mission, formed the Provisional Government of India in Kabul in December 1915. (The Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast, popularly known as Ghadar Party, was founded in California (USA) in April 1913, and organized by a Hindu activist named Hardayal. Its spokesman was a newspaper named *Ghadar*, literally meaning treason, which began publishing in 1913. The Party had its branches all over the world, and its aim was to liberate India from the colonial yoke). Raja Mahendra Pratap (d. 1979) was made life president of the Provisional Government of India, Muhammad Barkat-Allah Bhopali (d. 1975) was appointed the Prime Minister, while Ubaid-Allah Sindhi was entrusted with the portfolio of the Home Ministry (Pratap, 1947, p. 51). This Provisional Government dealt directly with the Afghan Government, and also sent missions to the governments of Russia, Turkey and Japan to seek their help for the freedom of India, but the missions failed to achieve the desired results (Shaikh, 1986, pp. 48-62). Sindhi’s collaboration with a Hindu and the non-Muslim foreign governments bear ample testimony to his liberal and non-communal outlook in political affairs. In fact, the Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottoman Empire had also given, in the words of Faruqi, a “rude shock to Sindhi’s Islamism” (Faruqi, 1963, p. 57).

In 1919, he established a para-military organization with the name of *Jund Allah* or *Junud-i Rabbaniyya* (The Army/Armies of God; also translated as ‘Muslim Salvation Army’). (Shaikh, 1986, pp. 47-48; see organizational structure in appendix A in Mian, 1975, pp. 363-66). He mustered support of the people, including the *pirs* who were enlisted and given high ranks in the army. Eventually, he became successful in raising an army of 100,000 against the British (Ansari, 1992, p. 81). However, the Afghan ruler, Amir Habib-Allah Khan (r. 1901-1919) urged him to seek the support of the Hindus for the liberation of India from the colonial yoke. Thus Sindhi joined Indian National Congress in 1919, and established an independent Congress Committee of Kabul in 1922, and himself became its president. Later, he got it affiliated with

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the Indian National Congress in the same year in its Gaya (Bihar) session through the efforts of Dr. Ansari (Moizuddin, 1988, pp. 203-4.) Thus, it became the first branch of the Congress to work outside India.

From Kabul, he went to Moscow in 1922 and stayed there for eight months. In the opinion of Aziz Ahmad, in South Asia he was “the only political thinker of any considerable caliber to come directly in contact with Russian communism at an early stage.” (Ahmad, 1967, p. 195). During this period, he closely observed the emergence of Soviet Russia from the ruins of Tsardom. He also observed the revolutionary changes introduced by the Bolsheviks from close quarters. Moreover, he also studied the fundamental tenets of socialism. Sindhi later admitted that his study of socialism “enabled him to defend his religious movement, which was a branch of the philosophy of Shah Wali-Allah, against the onslaught of atheism and anti-religious trend of the time.” (Shaikh, 1986, p. 127). He held discussions regarding Islam, socialism, and their compatibility. He also met Chechren, the Russian Foreign Minister, and sought the assistance of Russia to oust the British from India.

From Russia Sindhi went to Turkey in 1923 and stayed there for three years. During his stay in Istanbul, he carefully observed the emergence of modern secular Turkey under the dynamic leadership of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk (1881-1938). He met a number of political leaders including Ismat Pasha, the Prime Minister of Turkey. Sindhi shaped his political ideology during his eventful stay in Istanbul. There he founded Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party in 1924. He himself became its president, whereas his close associate, Zafar Hasan Aibak was made its Secretary General. The present work is an analytical study of this political party and its Constitution.

In 1926, Sindhi left Turkey for Arabia, and spent the next thirteen years of his life there. He spent these years in Makkah, studying and interpreting the teachings of the Quran in the light of Shah Wali-Allah’s works, particularly his monumental book *Hujjat al-Allah al-Balighah*. He delivered lectures on the Quran and its exegesis, the Prophetic traditions or *ahadith*, and the teachings of Shah Wali-Allah. Moreover, he also wrote some books and articles as well (ibid., pp. 193-95). He also reviewed the history of the Muslims, particularly of India, with a critical look. Though his biographer Hajjan Shaikh claims that during these years, he remained aloof from politics, and did not take part in any political activity (ibid., p. 187), yet he formed another political party named Jamna Narbada Sind Sagar Party in 1939 (See the program of the party in Appendix I in ibid., pp. 265-71). He ultimately got convinced that Islamic renaissance could only be brought by following the teachings of the great Sufi-scholar of Delhi.

In 1939, he returned to India when the British Government permitted him to do so. In the words of Faruqi, during his sojourn abroad his ‘Islamist’ approach to

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Indian politics was transformed into 'nationalist-secularist'. He had left India as a firebrand agitator and an organizer of revolutionary activities; he came back as a thinker (ibid., p. 187). He spent the rest of his life in austerity and simplicity, propagating the teachings of Shah Wali-Allah till his death in August 1944 in Sindh. (For details see his autobiographical sketch, Sindhi, 1969, pp. 403-9; and Sarwar, 1967, pp. 23-39). Ubaid-Allah Sindhi has been hailed as *Imam-i Inqalab* or the 'Leader of Revolution' since his whole political philosophy revolves around the ideas of change and revolution. In fact, wherever he went from Kabul, he witnessed revolutionary changes which he deeply observed and analyzed with an open mind.

Outside India, the revolutionary socialist ideas in the USSR, the liberal and progressive views of Ataturk in Turkey, and the puritan revolution by Wahabis in Arabia helped him in shaping his philosophy of revolution. But above all, the Shah Wali-Allahi thought served as a beacon and guiding light for him. In short, Ubaid-Allah Sindhi's travels outside India greatly facilitated him in comprehending the changes and challenges all over the globe, and eventually reaching at a solution of the Indian problems. He came back to his country with a heightened vigour and force of argument, a deepened vision and insight and a fresh clarity of ideas. That is why, he is considered to be one of "the most interesting and romantic personalities of the group of early Indian revolutionaries." (See the views of G. S. Kalyanpur in *Bombay Chronicle*, June 22, 1941, as quoted in Hajan, 1974, pp. 117-18).

2. Establishment of Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party

In order to translate his political ideals into reality, Ubaid-Allah Sindhi founded a political party under the aegis of Congress Committee of Kabul in 1924 at Istanbul, which was known as Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party, also spelled as Swarajya Party (Aibak, n.d., p. 102). Its name may be translated as All India People's Republican Party. The Hindi term *sarvrāj* or *swarāj* has generally been translated as home-rule or self-government. Though the term was used and popularized by M K Gandhi, it referred to a 'disciplined rule from within' in Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi argued that the English terms independence and freedom do not convey the meaning enshrined in the concept of *swaraj*, which means freedom with responsibility (Hardiman, 2003, p. 26). In fact, *swaraj* is a sacred term, derived from the Vedic literature, which refers to self-rule or self-restraint. It is a multi-dimensional concept with personal, national, political, social and economic connotations. In political sense, it means self-rule, a condition or a state where people are superior to political institutions, and power or authority is decentralized in society, which is not politically dominated by any single group (Bharathi, 1995, p. 99).

As far as the Hindi or Sanskrit nomenclature of Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party is concerned, it reflects its non-communal character. As pointed out earlier,

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Sindhi's pan-Islamic ideals and the dreams of Muslim brotherhood were shattered when he travelled outside India, which led him to modify his socio-political vision. The political vision he envisaged and political party he founded promised the Indians a rule with power shared by all classes, strata and sections of society irrespective of their caste, class, colour or creed.

3. Proclamation of *The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India*

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi drafted the Party's constitution titled *The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India*, which envisaged his political and socio-economic vision. It was initially drafted in Urdu and published from Istanbul in 1924. (In the opinion of Hajan, it was published in 1922, whereas the correct date seems to be 1924, mentioned by Razvi, when the Party was founded). (Hajan, 1974, p. 121; and Razvi, 1995, p. 112). When it was sent to India, its copies were confiscated by the British Government. It was later translated in English and Turkish languages in 1926. To avoid censorship, the English and Turkish translation was somewhat modified so that it might not be called an exact translation in juridical phraseology (Shaikh, 1986, p. 181, n. 36). According to this Constitution, the aims and objectives of Sindhi's broader program, as enunciated by his associate, Zafar Hasan Aibak, a retired Captain of Turkish Army, in his autobiography titled *Ap Biti*, were as follows (Aibak, n.d., pp. 101-2):

1. Winning of complete independence for India;
2. Establishment of a confederal form of government in liberated India;
3. Safeguarding of Islam, the Muslims and other minorities living in India;
4. Formation of a government in India dominated by the working class (peasantry, labour, and intelligentsia);
5. Abolition of feudalism and capitalism from the country so that the people could not be deceived by the lures of Communism; and
6. Establishment of an Asiatic Federation to counter imperialism and colonialism.

4. Main Clauses of the Constitution

The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India presents a clear picture of the political and socio-economic ideals of Ubaid-Allah Sindhi. He rejected the idea of India as an indivisible single entity and the notion of creating a single nationhood, which was advocated by the Indian nationalists. (See the

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views of Sindhi in *The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India*, Eng. trans. Zafar Hasan Aibak, Istanbul, 1926, pp. 10-11 as quoted in Shaikh, 1986, pp. 159-60). According to him, the Indian Sub-continent was, geographically speaking, quite naturally divided into three distinct zones: north-western, eastern and southern zones. He promulgated the idea of dividing India into three such zones along linguistic and cultural lines. All three zones were thus to be declared as republics or democracies. The North-western Indian Republic was to comprise of East Punjab, West Punjab, the Frontier Province, Kashmir, Sindh, Balochistan and Gujarat. Similarly, the Eastern and Southern Indian Republics were also to form two separate republics or democratic states. These three Republics were then to join a 'Central Government of the Federated Republics of India'. (Aibak, n.d., p. 105). Thus, Sindhi's Constitution envisaged a unique form of confederalism for the country. But initially, he planned to limit the sphere of his political party to the Indo-Gangetic plains. He selected the North-western India for his program and worked on it in greater detail (Hajan, 1974, pp. 122-23). The rest of the two Republics were to be divided along cultural and linguistic lines in the same manner.

In these Republics, the electoral system was to base on universal adult franchise, i.e. all adult men and women were to be granted suffrage. But what is interesting to note is that every social strata was to elect its own representatives for the Parliament according to its population. In this way, the Parliaments or the Legislative Assemblies of the three Republics were to be dominated by peasantry, labour/manual workers and intelligentsia (those involved in mental labour), constituting the majority of the country's population. Only such a form of government based on proportional representation could, in his opinion, safeguard the interests of working classes adequately (Aibak, n.d., p. 106).

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi also laid down some cardinal economic and socio-political principles for the conduct of these Republics. These can be briefly summed up in the following (ibid., pp. 106-8):

1. All public utilities were to be nationalized, i.e. to be taken over by the state.
2. Private ownership of movable and immovable property was to be restricted and property exceeding a prescribed limit was also to be taken over by the state.
3. Wealthy and affluent persons were to be excessively taxed which could go as high as 60% of their income.

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4. All big landholdings were to be nationalized and the feudal system was to be abolished. However, in Republics having a clear Muslim majority, landlords were to be forced to renounce the ownership of their lands according to the decision taken by the second Pious Caliph, Hazrat Omar (r. 634-44), and according to another verdict by Imam Abu Hanifah (699-767), absentee landlordism or rent-farming was also to be abolished by force. These landlords would be permitted to work as agents of the government.
5. Every agriculturist family could retain that much land which it could directly cultivate by itself.
6. Usury or interest was to be completely abolished, and all old debts of workers were to be written off. Arrangements would be made for granting interest-free loans to the people in future.
7. Labour unions were to run the nationalized industries, and the workers were to be granted share from the profit.
8. Free accommodation and medical facilities were to be provided to the workers.
9. Education till middle standard was to be free and obligatory for every child.
10. International trade and commerce was to be placed in the hands of the Central Government, while the domestic commercial activities were to fall in the jurisdiction of co-operative societies. However, the merchants and traders could become members of these societies.
11. Every Republic was to declare its state religion which was necessarily to be the religion professed by its majority. But the religion should not contradict the cardinal economic and social principles of the party program mentioned above.
12. The three Republics were not to be responsible for their foreign affairs, defense and international trade and commerce which were to be controlled by the Central Government of the Federated Republics of India.
13. It also envisioned the formation of an Asiatic Federation in future to counter imperialism. Governments were to be established in

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Asia along the lines of the above-mentioned principles. Moreover, Russia was also to be included in the Federation.

Regarding the membership of the Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party, Sindhi maintained that anyone irrespective of caste, creed, colour, or gender could become member of the party. However, what was mandatory for the members was to keep down their needs and comforts of life to the standard of an average cultivator in the country. Therefore, any property exceeding one's needs was to be transferred to the party (Hajan, 1974, p. 124). In the words of Sindhi: "Under our government, capitalist system may have no possibility of revival and our party programme may not be considered a vain display, or a political weapon." (*The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India*, pp. 10-11 as quoted in Shaikh, 1986, p. 161). It shows that he believed in creating a certain level of economic equality among the people in the country, and those who had active interest in politics and wished to be party members were required to sacrifice their possessions. Moreover, it was not merely equality in economic terms which Sindhi intended to create; it was social equality as well which he idealized. For this reason, the Hindu volunteers of the Party were required to extend fraternal treatment to all Indians including the untouchables, and consider them as equals (Hajan, 1974, p. 125).

Sindhi also proposed the formation of six executive and legislative bodies: (1) The Volunteer Corps; (2) The Sarvrajia Conference; (3) The Sarvrajia Working Committee; (4) The Mahabharat Sarvrajia Congress; (5) The Mahabharat Sarvrajia Central Committee; and (6) The Panchayats (invested with all the legislative, financial and judicial powers). (Shaikh, 1986, pp. 174-75; and Hajan, 1974, pp. 125-27). Since India had a multi-religious population and the Hindus were in an over-whelming majority, he was particularly conscious of the Hindu sensitivities. Therefore, he proposed that cow slaughter should be banned in areas having mixed population of Hindus and Muslims (Hajan, 1974, p. 125) so that the people having multi-religious backgrounds could live side by side in harmony and peace.

6. Analysis of the Constitution in the Light of Sindhi's Political Vision

The impact of the writings of Shah Wali-Allah on the political vision of Ubaid-Allah Sindhi was tremendous. During the final phase of his life, he tried to philosophize his theory of nationalism in terms of a special Muslim social theory derived from the writings of Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi (Faruqi, 1963, p. 57). In his works, particularly *Hujjat al-Allah al-Balighah*, Shah Wali-Allah had enunciated some socio-economic and political principles at length. To him, the basis of capital generation should be effort and hard work, i.e. capital should not be allowed to generate further capital without being effectively utilized. He emphasized safeguarding the rights of peasantry, labour and intelligentsia. These people, according to Shah Wali-Allah, deserve prosperity and welfare.

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They should not be heavily taxed and their hours of work should also be restricted so that they could pay heed to their ethical and spiritual uplift. Wealth should not be allowed to accumulate in the hands of a section of society. Gambling should be stopped. The capitalists who unduly tax and burden the peasantry and workers should be eliminated. The peasantry and workers should be paid according to their labour, and their contract with the employers should be bilaterally agreed upon. The terms of reference and conditions should not be dictated by the employers. Luxurious life style should be eliminated, so that equality could reign supreme in the society (Mian, 1975, pp. 78-80). Regarding political structures, Shah Wali-Allah proposed the formation of an international bloc with autonomous but strong units (*ibid.*, pp. 81-82). In addition, according to him, it was the same fundamental truth which underlies all the world religions. Their religious leaders deserve esteem because they all shared some basic principles, and the ultimate goal of their social principles was the same (*ibid.*, p. 82).

After going through the details of the socio-economic principles enunciated by Shah Wali-Allah, one can conclude that Ubaid-Allah Sindhi borrowed heavily from them. In the opinion of Aziz Ahmad, much of the “basis of Sindhi’s concept of an Islamic socialist theocracy is...derived piecemeal from Wali-Allah” (Ahmad, 1967, p. 198). Sindhi elaborated the views of Shah Wali-Allah and translated them into a modern language in order to address the contemporary problems. He attempted to present a unique blend of nationalism and internationalism in his political philosophy. Moreover, it was Sindhi who first talked about an alternative system of parliamentary form of government, and envisaged a plan of the Federated Republics for India. His idea of creating a Federation of Indian Republics propounded in 1924 was an appropriate solution of the Indian problems keeping in view the contemporary political realities. At that time, the Khilafat Movement had come to a close, shattering the hope of the Hindu-Muslim unity in political arena.

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi’s real accomplishment lies in his novel alternative scheme for the composition of the Parliament or Legislative Assembly. To him, the representation in the Assembly was not to be based upon territorial electoral constituencies. The masses, on the contrary, were to be professionally represented, creating a majority of working class in the proposed Assembly. In fact, he advocated a system of proportional representation in the Legislative Assemblies so that the peasantry, labour and intelligentsia could be represented and have a say in the decision-making. However, unlike the Marxist ideology, which idealizes ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, Sindhi was ready to give proportional representation to the landlords and capitalist as well, but since they were few in numbers, the Legislative Assemblies he envisaged was to be dominated by the peasantry, labour and intelligentsia, and not the landlords and capitalists. In fact, he wanted a “permanent system of economy to be established which could save the masses (peasants,

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workers and the intelligentsia) from falling in debt and poverty and save the country also from foreign loans that could be detrimental to political independence of the country.” (Zafar Hasan, *The Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party*, Istanbul, September 25, 1924, p. 29, as quoted in Razvi, 1995, p. 113). In fact, he believed in human dignity and equality, and opposed to any form of human servitude. On one occasion, he argued that a human being could not be a servant of another; though one could help others (Moizuddin, 1988, p. 208).

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi’s idea of socialized production in nationalized lands and industries was sagaciously devised from the history of Muslim jurisprudence, though his critics maintain that it was inspired by the Communist ideology. His Constitution essentially differs in character from the Manifesto of the Communist Party. The latter envisaged the dictatorship of the proletariat excluding all other sections and classes of society from power. Sindhi’s plan, however, gave due consideration to the moneyed classes—the landlords, industrialists and capitalists who constitute only a fraction of the society. He proposed their representation in the government as well. Moreover, unlike the socialist state, the profit earned from the production units (industries, etc.) was not to be taken up by the state, but to be shared by the whole working class. In the words of Aziz Ahmad (Ahmad, 1967 pp. 200-1):

“The main difference between the communist and Islamic economic philosophies, according to Sindhi, is that while both agree that the process of the distribution of wealth should be ‘from each according to his ability’, Islam would prefer it to be ‘to each according to his need’ rather than to ‘each according to his work’. In other words Sindhi would like to see Islamic socialism on the lines of a western welfare state.”

Regarding the question of Indian nationalism, Sindhi believed that India was not a single country having one single nation as maintained by the leaders of the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha. He attacked the myth of Indian unity and maintained that India was the home of many nationalities. He considered the cultural and linguistic affinities to be the basis of a nation. Owing to these two unifying symbols, his concept of nationalism was essentially space-bound. He was mindful of the geographical realities defining the concept of a nation in the Western thought.

He believed that within the Muslim community, there were distinct groups having ethnic, cultural and linguistic differentiation. Thus, the Mahabharat Sarvrajia Party was the “first political organization which declared India a multi-national country...” (ibid., p. 114). As far as these cultural diversities were concerned, India resembled Europe where the English, French, Germans and Italians, etc. were considered different nations. He defined nation as a collectivity of men united by ties of language and culture. But India could not be divided into many petty states like the Balkan States (Sarwar,

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1967, p. 425). The only solution, according to him, was that every unit should be granted freedom and autonomy, and the centre should bind them together. He asserted the fact that nations speaking different languages are forced to create a commonality by ideological unity which is sometimes provided by religion and sometimes by an economic ideology, such as in Communism. Therefore, unity created by such a hegemonic ideological commonality cannot be termed national; rather it is international in nature (ibid., p. 426). The universality of Islam does not prevent splitting of states into national units but at the same time, every nation should consider itself a component of a wider community of human race (ibid., p. 436). Ubaid-Allah Sindhi also presented a model for an Asiatic Federation, a secular regional bloc of like-minded countries agreeing to his proposed program. In fact, countering imperialism had been one of the major goals of Sindhi's political vision. He perceived it as a common threat to many weak countries of the world. The proposed formation of the Asiatic Federation was aimed at countering the imperialistic designs of the World powers, and it also reflects his belief in a supra-nationalist ideology.

In the opinion of Aziz Ahmad, Sindhi's acceptance of composite nationalism as a political solution for the Indian problems was 'far more restricted' than other Deoband leaders (Ahmad, 1967, p. 196). Sindhi's approach was altogether different from the Indian Muslim nationalists like Abul Kalam Azad and Husain Ahmad Madani (d. 1957). To him, separate nation-states could not be formed since the Indians were ethnically and linguistically very rich and diverse. Therefore, to him, the only solution was the formation of an Indian Federation of autonomous Republics. The teachings of Islam, according to him, do not stand in contradiction to the establishment of Muslim nation-states all over the globe. Thus, he presented a blend of the communal and nationalist stances represented by the All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress respectively. His program envisaged the formation of an autonomous Muslim state in North-western India within the Indian Federation. Sindhi also professed internationalism since he wished other countries to join the regional bloc after becoming autonomous units or federated republics professing his socio-economic and political principles.

According to Ubaid-Allah Sindhi, the central government was to be secular in nature. The federating units or republics were allowed to declare their state religions, but the Centre was not to be concerned with the matters of faith. The Centre was not to interfere in the religious policies of the units, unless and until they contradict the cardinal socio-economic and political principles laid down by the Sarvrajia Party. He was a broadminded and liberal Muslim thinker who was an ardent advocate of religious tolerance and co-existence. In his writings, he appreciated the religious policy of Mughal Emperor Akbar (b. 1542-d. 1605). In Akbar's era, he says, a bloody Shia-Sunni sectarian strife was going on between the Persians and the Turks in the Middle East, which

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had even led to violent conflict and wars. Similarly, the contemporary Europe had become a war theatre where the Protestants and the Catholics were at daggers drawn, fighting in the name of Christianity. However, on the contrary, the sixteenth-century India presented a peaceful picture. The secular government of India under Akbar was not dominated by any religious group (Sarwar, 1967, pp. 436, 339-40); rather it presented a diverse religious mosaic with different communities sharing power with the ruling house. Such views of Sindhi generated a lot of controversy (Akbarabadi, 1989, pp. 176-86).

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi was a realist political thinker, and his pragmatic approach can be best illustrated by his insistence that his fellow countrymen should admit their defeat at the hands of the British, and acknowledge the fact that their way of living, cultural traditions and legal system had been undermined by the ideological onslaughts and the policies of the West. The old order, in his opinion, could not be revived in the same form. One had to work for the establishment of a new system. However, the spirit of the old order was to be captured, which was the crux of the Quran and Islam, but the new order could appear only in a new garb altogether (ibid., pp. 196-97). Thus, he held an innovative and progressive approach towards the modern day problems of compatibility of the old and the new, or the tradition and modernity. Moreover, he believed that the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions in Europe would one day inevitably culminate in the mental and spiritual progress of the West. Recognition and adoption of their material advancement by the Indians is the only course open to them for their progressive march in human history (ibid., pp. 69-70).

In the first quarter of twentieth century, Syed Ameer Ali (d. 1928) and Dr. Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) stood as the champions of intellectual modernism in India. However, it was Ubaid-Allah Sindhi, the only religious thinker associated with a theological seminary or the traditional centre of Muslim learning, who held a liberal and progressive approach towards the contemporary political, social and religious problems. Although he was brought up and trained in a reactionary environment, he was successful in manifesting a clear divergence from the traditional conservative path trodden by the South Asian *ulama*. Unmindful of the socio-political and economic onslaughts of the West, the *ulama* had focused all their energies against the British missionary activities. Sindhi exhorted the *ulama* retired in shells of their hackneyed traditions to shun their hermit-like attitude which was characterized by escapism. Sindhi urged them to courageously face the challenges of rapidly changing modes of time and respond accordingly. As a true follower of Shah Wali-Allah, he tried his utmost to bridge the yawning gulf of differences among the people and reconcile the old and the new, the conventional and the modern. W.C. Smith considers him among those liberal Muslim leaders who provoked much 'excitement and action' among the people (Smith, 1957, p. 64).

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Sindhi was a true follower of the intellectual modernism of Shah Wali-Allah. He criticized his contemporary *ulama* who insisted on reviving the Caliphate. Sindhi maintained that the political system of the Pious Caliphate could not be revived in contemporary times. The Pious Caliphate, suitable for its coeval social and political environment, could not necessarily be viable for the subsequent ages. It was only in the light of the basic principles of the Pious Caliphate that new forms of 'Quranic Governments' could be evolved in future (Sarwar, 1967, p. 55). Sindhi also believed that the decision unanimously taken by majority of a party can be termed as *Ijma* (consensus of a majority of religious scholars) which can take place at all times. However, it should be taken on the condition that the party should uphold goodness and virtue, and be working for the establishment of the Quranic rule (Sarwar, 1982, pp. 91-92).

Ubaid-Allah Sindhi's party program declared its dissociation with all pan-Islamic movements. The party clearly proclaimed its inability to recognize any international religious convention or any religio-political institution like Caliphate or *Khilafat* (Sarwar, 1972, pp. 51-52). His views on the issue can be compared to those of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who argued that the Caliphate had ended after the abdication of Imam Hasan (AS) in 660 after ruling for a period of less than six months, and the subsequent rulers of the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties were mere kings, and not Caliphs (Amir, 2000, p. 29), though they adopted high-sounding titles for themselves. Moreover, being an Islamic modernist, Sindhi did not despise the ideology of Marxism unlike his contemporary *ulama*. He considered it as a commendable effort aiming at the amelioration of humanity but he deemed Islam higher than Marxism in many degrees (Sarwar, 1972, p. 196; see details on pp. 185-307).

He was opposed to communalism and professed internationalism. For this very reason, he first wanted the Indian Muslims to resolve their differences and then wished to see all Indians belonging to diverse creeds working together hand in hand. He tried to evolve a synthesis by reconciling the two rival strands of Deoband and Aligarh, which represented traditionalism and modernism respectively. He wanted the religious sections of the Muslim community to work with the Western educated Muslims for solving their common problems. Similarly, he wished to see the Hindus and the Muslims working together in an atmosphere of harmony and peace. That was why he was not ideologically opposed to the Indian National Congress which professed non-communalism. However, he was critical of the Congress leadership and 'Gandhism', since Gandhi claimed both political and religious leadership (Sarwar, 1967, p. 420; and Faruqi, 1963, p. 7). As mentioned earlier, Sindhi was the founder president of 'Congress Committee Kabul' established in Kabul in 1922. Later, with the efforts of Dr. M. A. Ansari it got affiliated with the Indian National Congress. Thus, it became the first branch of Congress founded outside India. However, after Sindhi's return to India in

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1939, he practically withdrew from the Congress politics, albeit he retained its ordinary membership (Sindhi, 1969, pp. 407-9; and Moizuddin, 1988, p. 207). His party program also embraced the ethical principle of non-violence, which he had admittedly borrowed from the Gandhian philosophy with profound gratitude (Sindhi, 1969, p. 408), though he also promoted the doctrine of *jihad*, defining it as “[d]ynamic action aimed at a social and revolutionary end.” (Ahmad, 1967, p. 198).

Sindhi himself claimed that he was the first Indian to present the idea to dividing India in Kabul in 1916 (Aslam, n.d., pp. 60-61), but it has been asserted that Sindhi’s Party program was not taken seriously by his contemporary political leaders, particularly those of Indian National Congress. The only exception was perhaps Lala Lajpat Rai (d. 1928), one of the founders of Hindu Mahasaba, who after having inspiration from Sindhi’s plan, presented his own scheme of partition. Some of the Muslim leaders such as Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, and the Unionist leader, Sir Fazl-i-Husain (d. 1936) also appreciated Sindhi’s party program (see introduction in *ibid.*, p. 11; and Ghulam Mustafa Qasmi’s editorial of *Al-Wali*, Hyderabad, Sindh, October 1970, p. 14, as cited in Razvi, 1995, pp. 118-19). Razvi argues that Sindhi was the first political leader to clearly present the idea of dividing India into several states or zones, and all the Muslim political thinkers who came after him directly or indirectly took inspiration from his Party’s Constitution. Razvi goes on to argue that the schemes for solving the political problems of India presented by Hasrat Mohani (d. 1951) and the Cabinet Mission Plan had some features which bore resemblance with Sindhi’s Constitution of the Federated Republics of India (Razvi, 1995, pp. 120-21). The scheme of creating three zones in India presented by the Cabinet Mission in 1946 can be well compared to his idea of creating federal units in the country. The three British Cabinet members proposed the formation of an All-India Union Government consisting of a three-section federation.

As pointed out above, Ubaid-Allah Sindhi is one of the marginalized voices in South Asian political thought, as his political ideas and vision have not been adequately understood and interpreted, particularly in the Muslim nationalist historiographical tradition. He has generally failed to find a favourable mention in the writings of Muslim nationalist historians in Pakistan. For instance, according to I. H. Qureshi, he was “a total convert to the ideas of nationalism and socialism”, as his Constitution “bears the unmistakable stamp of the philosophy of Moscow communism.” (Qureshi, 1972, p. 315). Qureshi soon contradicts his own statement when he asserts that Sindhi “rejected communism”. (*Ibid.*, p. 316). As a matter of fact, to people like Sindhi, socialism was an effective tool that could be used in the nationalist struggle against the British. Like many other early Muslim socialists, he did not reject Islam in favour of socialism; in fact, he tried to bring socialism within the framework of Islam, and make the two ideologies compatible to each other

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(Ansari, 1986, p. 537; for details of other Indian Muslim socialists, see pp. 509-37). Moreover, he tried to reinterpret socialism in the light of the teachings of Shah Wali-Allah. His variant of socialism was not atheistic; it was theistic socialism.

Again, in the opinion of Qureshi, his scheme was “an outline for some kind of Utopia in the Subcontinent...” (Qureshi, 1972, p. 316). Qureshi further asserts that Sindhi was not a ‘revolutionary’, and he did not find any support from the masses as well (ibid., p. 318). He further states: “He was not taken seriously by any significant political group in the Subcontinent; he found neither acceptance, nor did he provoke any opposition...[he was] an eccentric visionary” (ibid.) According to Said Ahmad Akbarabadi (d. 1985), one of the renowned pupils of Sindhi, his ideas and efforts could not produce desired results owing to two major reasons: (i) Sindhi’s speech and writings did not match his political and religious ideals; his writings were not very coherent and well-argued; and (ii) the rigidity in his thought often led to harshness during heated discussions with his fellows, which prevented the wider dissemination of his views (cited in Moizuddin, 1988, p. 209). In the opinion of Ayesha Jalal, he remained a voice on the margins, and he himself knew that very few people understood his mission and philosophy. He remained outside the mainstream politics in India represented by the two major political parties, Indian National Congress and All India Muslim League (Jalal, 2008, p. 225). In the words of another scholar, he was

“much ahead of his time.... He ploughed a lonely furrow in the country of his birth.... He combined too much and harmonized too much. He was drawn and attracted by widely diverse movements of thought. But he seems to have had a highly integrating faculty and a deep sense of history.” (Khan, 2000, pp. 160-61).

Sindhi is often accused of intellectual oscillation by his critics. They forget that thinkers may have political ideas which evolve and develop over time, and there is nothing inherently wrong with it. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal’s political thought was, for instance, also evolutionary. He was initially a champion of Indian Nationalism, but then he became a Muslim Nationalist. In other words, he rejected territorial nationalism to embrace Muslim nationalism, which he rejected to promote pan-Islamism. Soon he was convinced of the impracticality of pan-Islamic ideals, and he started asserting that “Bolshevism plus God is almost identical with Islam”. It was only in the final phase of Iqbal’s life that his political thought was matured, when he rejected all the ‘isms’ including democracy, capitalism, fascism, nationalism and socialism. Therefore, it will be erroneous to present Iqbal as an Indian nationalist, or pan-Islamist or Communist. Similarly, Sindhi cannot be termed as a Communist or a pan-Islamist. His political thought was evolutionary, like many other political thinkers, and it should be understood as such.

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