

All-India Muslim League

First Session

Karachi, December 29-30, 1907.

The First Session of the All-India Muslim League opened on December 29, 1907, and was attended by delegates from different parts of the country; Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy on his entrance to the conference mondop was received with enthusiastic cheers.

Mr. Dehlavi, Karachi Secretary of the League, opened the proceedings by welcome the delegates. He said that when he was first asked to accept the post of Local Secretary in Karachi, he hesitated to do so because he did not know whether the line of action he had to take in Sind would be consonant with the line of action which the League had in view now. He was in a position to say that it had the same spirit which their old thinkers and elders wished it to be. In benighted Sind political methods were calm; in fact they were devoid of agitation. The Muslim League was a new institution in India, but he thought if it carried on work in that quiet and calm manner which was characteristic of the political methods in Sind, it would grow into a most powerful and effective political force.

Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk then moved that Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy be elected President. Nawab Ali Choudhri and Mian Muhammad Shah Din respectively seconded and supported the proposition.

Mr. Shah Din said that Sir Adamjee held a very high position in the estimation both of the Government and the public. It was estimated that his public charities amounted to no less than Rs.50 lakhs. Only in the previous year he had made a donation of Rs.1, 10,000 for the establishment of a science college at Aligarh. In view of his high virtues, his disinterested philanthropy and his public spirit there was no Mohammedan in India who stood higher in public estimation than Sir Adamjee, and therefore, it was fit and proper that they should select him to preside over their deliberations.

At the request of the President, his son, Mr. Mohamedbhai, read his Presidential address, which was listened to with keen interest and punctuated with frequent applause.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS OF SIR ADAMJEE

Gentlemen, I thank you most heartily for the great honour you have done me in selecting me to preside over your deliberations at this second gathering of the All-India Muslim League. I can only say that this is one of the proudest moments of my life and that the memory of the honour you have done me will never fade my mind.

I need hardly tell you that this is only the second occasion on which this League has met. Its first public appearance was in December last year at Dacca when that great son of our patriotic community, Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk, occupied the Presidential chair. The success of that first effort was all that we could naturally expect. Its proceedings were reported throughout the British Empire, and in the great London Press there were inspiring comments and criticisms which not only indicated that the movement had the widest sympathy of all well-wishers of the Mohammedans, but has imposed upon us the duty of developing this organization to its fullest possible extent.

If any doubt has ever existed, and I know of none, that the Mohammedans of India would fail in their duty to themselves, the gathering here to-day, the leaders of our people, the

men in whom we put our trust and who are writing a memorable page in our history indicates in no uncertain way that the message has gone to the heart of the people, and we have at length awakened to the stern necessity of guarding our interests and advancing our cause. I have said that the first public evidence of our consolidation was given at Dacca, but the initiation of this movement goes a little further back. I know nothing which has been more productive of concrete results for the benefit of ourselves than that great and memorable national deputation which in October 1906, went to Simla and laid before H.E. Lord Minto the Petition embodying our national sentiments and aspirations. It will always be a matter of keen regret to me that circumstances denied me the honour and happiness of proceeding to Simla with the deputation, but I have some slight satisfaction in the fact that my own kith and kin, my son Ebrahim, together with Maulvi Rafi-ud-din Ahmed, represented this part of India.

The splendid courtesy with which that deputation was received by H.E. the Viceroy, inspired the Mohammedans throughout India with complete confidence. His speech in reply to our memorial was a statesmanlike utterance and the very words of it are engraven indelibly on our memory. It breathed confidence, and whilst it committed neither His Excellency nor his Government to any particular line of action, we knew that the great interests of Mohammedans would never be lightly set aside or suffer neglect. Concrete evidence of that fact has already been given in the schemes suggested by the Government of India for the improvement of the representation of the people on the Legislative Council, which regulates the affairs of India.

As I desired to say, the initiation of the League dates from that visit. You know as well as I do that the deputation was headed by His Highness the Aga Khan. That leader of our community is still young in years, but I only speak what we all have in our minds when I say we have hopes of his rendering us still higher services in the future. With him was the lamented late Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the Honorary Secretary of the deputation, to whom I must refer again. The first practical work was the formation of the plans for the organization of this League. It first met at Dacca in the east and was pronounced a success. It has met again here at Karachi in the west, the greatest city Sindh, the centre of Islam, and as I look round me to-day, I can only express my surprise that a young movement has so quickly found the heart of our people and touched us with one common object, the advancement of our historic people. What the future has in store for the League I dare not prognosticate; but if the same spirit which animates us to-day guides its destinies, it will not be long before our rulers, and Mohammedans the world over, will look to the proceedings of this League for knowledge of our aspirations and the correct measure of our advancement along the paths we are destined to proceed. I appeal to every Mohammedan in India to realize this important fact, to do all in his power to add to the strength of the league, to understand its aims and objects, and to render it that practical support without which it can do nothing. We have ventured to draw the attention of the whole of India upon us; we have elected to give evidence to our rulers that we are a community imbued with high ambitions, and we have thus imposed upon ourselves a task from which we dare not shrink. We have taken a step forward; to go back would be to drop into oblivion and stamp ourselves as unworthy of the place we demand in the British Empire. I cannot dwell on this aspect of our duty too long or with too much earnestness. What is our first duty to this end? It is to be united in ourselves, to be of one mind and one purpose. We must of all things discard sectional jealousies and personal

animosities; two evils which are capable of cankering the heart of the sublimest purpose. We must look to the good of the community as a whole; work shoulder to shoulder as true children of Islam. We are putting in the foundations of a mighty structure. Let us do good work.

My duty to-day, gentlemen, is to direct your energies to the consideration of those highly important subjects on which you will be called upon to express an opinion. They are momentous in all consideration, and whilst I have no intention of impressing upon you any particular views of my own, I ask you to proceed with moderation and with a due recognition of the responsibility placed upon you. It is scarcely necessary for me to say that I have but a poor knowledge of the paths of political controversy. I am no scholar nor a man of many words. My sphere of action in this life has been cast in an entirely different direction. Since the time when nature made it possible for me to turn my hand to toil, I have laboured, and I must admit I still have much affection for the man who uses his energies in that direction. But I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not despise those who labour in others fields. There is work for us all. Circumstances have compelled me to direct my energies into the paths of industrialism and no higher duty could be placed upon an individual. I believe in the dignity of labour as the great Prophet did. The history of our people, the history of our heroes and those who have carried the flag of Islam over the world has been one of strenuous and ceaseless effort. What we may have lacked in recent times in purely literary accomplishments, no one can charge the Mohammedan with not doing his fair share of the world's work. In India he has shown his special aptitude in industrialism, and I believe it is along these lines that he can best exert his influence and carve for himself a high position in Empire. I love to see the development of Mohammedan enterprise, for it is a true measure of the energy and spirit of the people and we can never be without hope so long as we can maintain the reputation we have already earned. The history of the British people has shown that industrialism leads the way and on that foundation they built the great superstructure of the arts. We above all others cannot afford to neglect higher education, for our people must take their part in the responsibilities of Government and the advancement of all such movements as require the energies of trained intelligence. It gave me particular satisfaction two years ago; at the time of the memorable visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and his beloved consort, to show that I was capable appreciating work in another sphere, by in some slight measure, assisting to found the Science School in connection with the Aligarh College. It will be your duty, gentlemen, to turn your attention to highly important matters arising out of the proposed reforms in connection with the Indian Legislative Councils. I have no wish to impress upon you any ideas of my own, or to anticipate the decisions at which you may ultimately arrive, for myself, I must say that I received the news of the decision of Government, to reply to popular agitation by a considerable expansion of the principle of the Legislative Council, with every satisfaction. And this was enhanced by the fact that the Government has seen its way to recognize our prayer in the memorial addressed to H.E.Lord Minto, and safeguard the interests of the Mohammedans by providing class representation. As you are aware, the proposed reforms provide that there shall be a minimum of four Mohammedan representatives in the Imperial Council. Whether that number is adequate or not will be for you to say, but we must be grateful to the Viceroy and the Government of India for the recognition of those claims we specifically set out in our memorial. It indicates that the Government is prepared to listen to the popular voice,

and if this attitude is carried still further and influences the Government in its nomination of suitable men to represent us we shall have little to complain of. We must as far as possible preclude the monopolization of these appointments by those who have only personal ends to serve and encourage and stimulate our rising young men to exert their talents and energies for the good of their community. In the provincial councils, the same provisions for Mohammedan representation are made and if we can only infuse into provincial governments the spirit which has animated the Government of India and the Secretary of State in dealing with our just and moderate claims, our labours will be considerably lightened. It is necessary for us to remember the wisdom expressed by Lord Minto to the deputation which waited on him at Simla. He said, "I agree with you gentlemen, that the initial rungs in the ladder of self-government are to be found in the municipal and district boards, and that it is in that direction that we must look for gradual political education of the people." I am in full accord with those words and it is in this direction that our real labour must commence. When we learn to control our parochial surroundings we can lay claim to adding our influence to imperial policy.

Another point in the memorial was the matter of the adequate employment of Mohammedans in the higher branches of the public service. We were told in the past that we lacked competence. That reproach can no longer be fairly brought against us in these days. We have in our midst educated Mohammedans who have fitted themselves for all responsible positions in the administration, and certainly our traditions show that we have always been faithful to any administrative trust reposed in us. It will be part of your duties, gentlemen, to discuss this matter, and I trust you will be able to add such weight to your words that the Government will adequately respond to your legitimate claims.

Our loyalty to the Government has never yet been impeached, and I trust in never will. But when a vast community sets itself to work to bring about its regeneration its methods must be precise and open to no misconstruction. We recognize the difficulties of the Government in adjusting conflicting claims, but we must be as fear less as we are honest in our criticisms, whoever and whatever they may affect. So far as I know, the Government of India is the last to complain of criticism so long as it is fair, moderate and upright.

As you know the third object of our League is to prevent as far as possible, the rise of hostile feelings between the different communities in India. With that object I am in complete sympathy, for it passes my understanding why the Mohammedans should in the advancement of their own interests injure those of any other people. We contribute to the common good by improving our own surroundings. It is no part of the purpose of this League to oppose the progress of other communities or to be aggressive towards them in any direction whatever. We respect all who work for the common good of the country. I mentioned in opening my address the name of the late Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk. His death as such a time was a great blow to our community. Never were his services more needed than at the present time. He worked strenuously for the success of the deputation to Simla and it is some slight satisfaction to know that he saw at least the first fruits of his labours. His work was universally approved, for he had but one single object, and that the steady progress of his people. We have need of many such patriots and I cannot do better than ask our young men to study his life and works and let them be an example to follow.

The late Nawab has been succeeded as Secretary of the Aligarh College by Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk Bahadur. The wisdom of that appointment is fully indicated in the fact that it was unanimous. I know of no one more capable of wearing the mantle of the late Secretary

than his present successor. His past labours have all been for the good of his people and Mohammedans may congratulate themselves that the Nawab has consented to take up the work at Aligarh.

I have but lightly touched upon those subjects with which you will be called upon to deal. I can offer you but small guidance in your deliberations, but my heart and soul is with you, and I pray with all the earnestness of an old man that God will direct your energies and lead you into the paths of righteousness and wisdom.

On the conclusion of the address, Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk thanked Sir Adamjee on behalf of the whole Mohammedan community of India for accepting the invitation to preside at the conference.

Mr. Ali Imran, in an eloquent speech, moved a vote of thanks to the President. He appealed to his co-religionists not to neglect their political interests, and not ignore the efforts of Government who were ready to meet them halfway. Once the Mohammedans made common cause, and other communities would find that the Mohammedans were able to unite, they would respect them and co-operate with them.

Haji Mussa Khan seconded the resolution which was carried by acclamation. There cheers were then called for Sir Adamjee by Moulvi Rafi-ud-din and were heartily given. The Session adjourned till the next days.

It was resolved to form a committee to prepare the draft of rules and regulations of the All-India Muslim League. It included those members who were elected in accordance with Resolution No.2 of the Dacca proceedings of December 30, 1906, to form a committee to prepare the draft of rules and regulations of the League, and who were also present at the Karachi Session. It included those members who had formed part of the Simla Deputation, but could not be elected members of the committee in pursuance of Resolution No.2, due to their absence from the Dacca Session, being in Government service or due to any other cause. It was unanimously resolved that other persons who had come from distant places and were specially interested in this work, should be deemed delegates of their provinces. In addition to these three more members were unanimously co-opted, raising the total strength of the Committee to 26. It was further decided that the election of office-bearers should take place in March 1908 in a meeting of the All-India Muslim League at Aligarh.

The Session also considered the question of affiliation of the Provincial Branch in the Punjab, where two Leagues were established. One was formed by Mian Fazl-i-Hussain in February 1906, the other by Main Shafi on December 4, 1907. Besides Main Shafi and Mian Fazl-i-Hussain, Raja Ghulam Hussain, Mr. Mohamed Ali and Mr. (later Sir) Ali Imam participated in the discussion. Eventually Mian Fazl-i-Hussain withdrew his claim, and it was decided to merge the two bodies into one with Mian (later Justice) Shah Din as President, Mian Shafi, General Secretary, and Mian Fazl-i-Hussain as Joint Secretary.

(Source: 'Foundations of Pakistan', Vol-1, By S.Sharifuddin Pirzada))