

# Allama Muhammad Iqbal's 1930 Presidential Address

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**25<sup>th</sup> Session of All India Muslim League**

***12/29/1930***

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25<sup>th</sup> Session of All India Muslim League, December 29-30, 1930 at Allahabad

(Some Important Aspects)

*... I lead no party; I follow no leader. I have given the best part of my life to careful study of Islam, its law and polity, its culture, its history and its literature. This constant contact with the spirit of Islam, as it unfolds itself in time, has, I think, given me a kind of insight into the significance as a world fact. It is in the light of this insight, whatever its value, that while assuming that the Muslims of India are determined to remain true to the spirit of Islam, I propose, not to guide you in your decision, but to attempt the humbler task of bringing clearly to your consciousness the main principle which, in my opinion, should determine the general character of these decisions.*

## Islam and Nationalism

It cannot be denied that Islam, regarded as an ethical ideal plus a certain kind of polity – by which expression I mean a social structure regulated by a legal system and animated by a specific ethical ideal – has been the chief formative factor in the life-history of the Muslims of India. It has furnished those basic emotions and loyalties which gradually unify scattered individuals and groups, and finally transform them into a well-defined people, possessing a moral consciousness of their own. Indeed it is not exaggeration to say that India is perhaps the only country in the world where Islam, as a people-building force, has worked at its best. In India, as elsewhere, the structure of Islam as a society is almost entirely due to the working of Islam as a culture inspired by a specific ethical ideal. What I mean to say is that Muslim society, with its remarkable homogeneity and inner unity, has grown to be what it is, under the pressure of the laws and institutions associated with the culture of Islam...

Islam does not bifurcate the unity of man into an irreconcilable duality of spirit and matter. In Islam, God and the universe, spirit and matter, church and state, are organic to each other. Man is not the citizen of a profane world to be renounced in the interest of a world of spirit situated elsewhere. To Islam matter is spirit realizing itself in space and time...

... In the world of Islam, we have a universal polity whose fundamentals are believed to have been revealed, but whose structure, owing to our legists' want of contact with the modern world, today stands in need of renewed power by adjustments. I do not know what will be the final fate of the national idea in the world of Islam. Whether Islam will assimilate and transform it, as it has before assimilated and transformed many ideas expressive of a different spirit, or allow a radical transformation of its own structure by the force of this idea, is hard to

predict... At the present moment, the national idea is racializing the outlook of Muslims, and this is materially counteracting the humanizing work of Islam. And the growth of racial consciousness may mean the growth of standards different and even opposed to the standards of Islam.

... Do not think that the problem I am indicating is a purely theoretical one. It is a very living and practical problem calculated to affect the very fabric of Islam as a system of life and conduct. On a proper solution of it alone depends your future as a distinct cultural unit in India. Never in our history has Islam had to stand a greater trial than the one which confronts it today. It is open to a people to modify, reinterpret or reject the foundation principles of their social structure; but it is absolutely necessary for them to see clearly what they are doing before they undertake to try a fresh experiment...

## **Unity Through Harmony of Differences**

What, then, is the problem and its implications? Is religion a private affair? Would you like to see Islam as a moral and political ideal, meeting the same fate in the world of Islam as Christianity has already met in Europe? Is it possible to retain Islam as an ethical ideal and to reject it as a polity, in favor of national polities in which the religious attitude is not permitted to play any part? This question becomes of special importance in India where the Muslims happen to be a minority.

The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created. The rejection of the one will eventually involve the rejection of the other. Therefore, the construction of a polity on national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity; is simply unthinkable to a Muslim. This is a matter which, at the present moment, directly concerns the Muslims of India. "Man," says Renan, "is enslaved neither by his race, nor by his religion, nor by the course of rivers, nor by the direction of the mountain ranges. A great aggregation of men, sane of mind and warm of heart, creates a moral consciousness which is called a nation." ...Experience, however, shows that the various caste units and religious units in India have shown no inclination to sink their respective individualities in a larger whole. Each group is intensely jealous of the collective existence. The formation of the kind of moral consciousness which constitutes the essence of a nation in Renan's sense demands a price which the peoples of India are not prepared to pay.

The unity of an Indian nation, therefore, must be sought, not in the negation, but in the mutual harmony and cooperation of the many... It is on the discovery of Indian unity in this direction that the fate of India as well as of Asia really depends. India is Asia in miniature. Part of her people have cultural affinities with nations of the East, and part with nations in the middle and west of Asia. If an effective principle of cooperation is discovered in India, it will bring peace and mutual goodwill to this ancient land which has suffered so long, more because of

her situation in historic space than because of any inherent incapacity of her people. And it will at the same time solve the entire political problem of Asia.

It is, however, painful to observe that our attempts to discover such a principle of internal harmony have so far failed. Why have they failed? Perhaps, we suspect each other's intentions, and inwardly aim at dominating each other. Perhaps, in the higher interests of mutual cooperation, we cannot afford to part with the monopolies which circumstances have placed in our hands, and conceal our egoism under the cloak of a nationalism, outwardly simulating a large-hearted patriotism, but inwardly as narrow-minded as a caste or tribe. Perhaps, we are unwilling to recognize that each group has a right to free development according to its own cultural traditions.

But whatever may be the causes of our failure, I still feel hopeful. As far as I have been able to read the Muslim mind, I have no hesitation in declaring that, if the principle that the Indian Muslim is entitled to full and free development on the lines of his own culture and tradition in his own Indian homelands is recognized as the basis of a permanent communal settlement, he will be ready to stake his all for the freedom of India. The principle is not inspired by any feeling of narrow communalism.

There are communalism and communities. A community which is inspired by a feeling of ill-will towards other communities is low and ignoble. I entertain the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious and social institutions of other communities. Nay, it is my duty, according to the teaching of the Qur'an, even to defend their places of worship if need be. Yet I love the communal group which is the source of my life and behavior; and which has formed me what I am by giving me its religion, its literature, its thought, its culture and thereby recreating its whole past, as a living operative factor, in my present consciousness. Even the authors of the Nehru Report recognize the value of this higher aspect of communalism. While discussing the separation of Sind, they say, "... Without the fullest cultural autonomy - and communalism in its better aspect is culture - it will be difficult to create a harmonious nation."

## **Muslim India within India**

Communalism in its higher aspect, then, is indispensable to the formation of a harmonious whole in a country like India. The units of Indian society are not territorial as in European countries. India is a continent of human groups belonging to different races, speaking different languages, and professing different religions. Their behavior is not at all determined by a common race consciousness. Even the Hindus do not form a homogenous group.

The principle of European democracy cannot be applied to India without recognizing the fact of communal groups. The Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India within India is, therefore, perfectly justified. The resolution of the

All-Parties Muslim Conference at Delhi is to my mind wholly inspired by this noble ideal of a harmonious whole which, instead of stifling the respective individualities of its component wholes, affords them chances of fully working out the possibilities that may be latent in them.

## **A Muslim State in the North-West**

Personally, I would go further... I would like to see the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India. The proposal was put forward before the Nehru Committee. They rejected it on the ground that, if carried into effect, it would give a very unwieldy state. This is true in so far as the area is concerned in point of population, the state contemplated by the proposal would be much smaller than some of the present Indian provinces. The exclusion of Ambala division, and perhaps of some districts where non-Muslims predominate, will make it less extensive and more Muslim in population... so that the exclusion suggested will enable this consolidated state to give a more effective protection to non-Muslim minorities within its area.

The idea need not alarm the Hindus or the British, India is the greatest Muslim country in the world. The life of Islam as cultural force in this living country very largely depends on its centralization in a specified territory... Possessing full opportunity of development within the body-politic of India, the North-West Indian Muslims will prove the best defenders of India against a foreign invasion, be that invasion one of the ideas or of the bayonets... The Muslim demand... is actuated by a genuine desire for free development, which is practically impossible under the type of unitary government contemplated by the nationalist Hindu politicians with a view to securing permanent communal dominance in the whole of India.

Nor should the Hindus fear that the creation of autonomous Muslim states will mean the introduction of a kind of religious rule in such states... I, therefore, demand the formation of a consolidated Muslim State in the best interests of India and Islam. For India, it means security and peace resulting from an internal balance of power; for Islam, an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that Arabian imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilize its laws, its education, its culture, and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times.

## **Federal Idea**

In view of India's infinite variety in climates, races, languages, creeds and social systems, the creation of autonomous states based on the unity of language, race, history, religion and identity of economic interests, is the only possible way to secure a stable constitutional structure in India. The conception of federation

underlying the **Simon Report** necessitates the abolition of the Central Legislative Assembly and makes it an Assembly of the Representatives of Federal States. It further demands a redistribution of territory on the lines which I have indicated...

Proper redistribution will make the question of joint and separate electorates automatically disappear from the constitutional controversy of India... The Hindu thinks that separate electorates are contrary to the spirit of true nationalism, because he understands the word 'nation' to mean a kind of universal amalgamation in which no communal entity ought to retain its private individuality. Such a state of things, however, does not exist. Nor is it desirable that it should exist. India is a land of racial and religious variety. Add to this the general economic inferiority of the Muslims... In such a country and in such circumstances, territorial electorates cannot secure adequate representation of all interests, and must inevitably lead to the creation of an oligarchy. The Muslims of India can have no objection to purely territorial electorates if provinces are demarcated so as to secure comparatively homogeneous communities, possessing linguistic, racial, cultural and religious unity.

... The Muslims demand federation because it is pre-eminently a solution of India's most difficult problem, i.e. the communal problem. The Royal Commissioner's view of federation....does not go beyond providing means of escape from the situation which the introduction of democracy in India has created for the British, and wholly disregards the communal problem by leaving it where it was.

... To my mind a unitary form of government is simply unthinkable in a self-governing India. What is called 'residuary powers' must be left entirely to self-governing states, the Central Federal State exercising only those powers which are expressly vested in it by the free consent of Federal States. I would never advise the Muslims of India to agree to a system, whether of British or of Indian origin, which virtually negatives the principle of true federation, or fails to recognize them as a distinct political entity.

... The [Simon] scheme appears to be aiming at a kind of understanding between Hindu India and British Imperialism - you perpetuate me in India, and in return, I give you a Hindu oligarchy to keep all other Indian communities in perpetual subjection. If, therefore, the British Indian provinces are not transformed into really autonomous states..., scheme of Indian federation will be interpreted only as a dexterous move on the part of British politicians to satisfy, without parting with any real power, all parties concerned; Muslims with the word 'federation'; Hindus with a majority in the Center; and British imperialists....with the substance of real power.

... In view....of the participation of the Princes in the Indian Federation, we must now see our demand for representation in the British Indian Assembly in a new light. The questions is not one of the Muslim share in a British Indian Assembly,

but one which relates to representation of British Indian Muslims in an All India Federal Assembly. Our demand for 33 per cent must now be taken as a demand for the same proportion in the All-India Federal Assembly, exclusive of the share allotted to the Muslim states entering the Federation.

... The discussion of the communal question in London has demonstrated, more clearly than ever, the essential disparity between the two great cultural units of India. Yet the Prime Minister of England apparently refuses to see that the problem of India is international. He is reported to have said that "his government would find it difficult to submit to parliament proposals for the maintenance of separate electorates, since joint electorates were much more in accordance with British democratic sentiment." Obviously he does not see that the model of British democracy can not be of any use in a land of many nations; and that a system of separate electorates is only a poor substitute for a territorial solution of the problem...

To base a constitution on the concept of a homogeneous India, or to apply to India principles dictated by British democratic sentiments, is unwittingly to prepare her for a civil war. As far as I can see, there will be no peace in the country until the various peoples that constitute India are given opportunities of free self-development on modern lines, without abruptly breaking with their past.

No Muslim politician should be sensitive to the taunt embodied in that propaganda word 'communalism' – expressly devised to exploit what the Prime Minister calls British democratic sentiments, and to mislead England into assuming a state of things that does not really exist in India. Great interests are at stake. We are seventy millions [according to 1921 records: 71 millions or 23.2% of India's population; 1931 records: 79 millions or 23.5% of population. Official records have consistently underestimated Muslim population. It was nearly thirty percent.], and far more homogeneous than any other people in India. Indeed, the Muslims of India are the only Indian people who can truly be described as a nation in the modern sense of the word. The Hindus, though ahead of us in almost all respects, have not yet been able to achieve the kind of homogeneity which is necessary for a nation, and which Islam has given you as a free gift. No doubt they are anxious to become a nation, but the process of becoming a nation is kind of travail, and in the case of Hindu India, involves a complete overhauling of her social structure. Nor should the Muslim leaders and politicians allow themselves to be carried away by the subtle but fallacious arguments that Turkey and Persia and other Muslim countries are progressing on national, i.e. territorial lines. The Muslims of India are differently situated.

The countries of Islam outside India are practically wholly Muslim in population. The minorities there belong, in the language of the Qur'an, to the 'People of the Book'. There are no social barriers between Muslims and 'the people of the Book'...

... If these demands are not agreed to, then a question of a very great and far-reaching importance will arise for the community. Then will arrive the moment for independent and concerted political action by the Muslims of India. If you are at all serious about your ideals and aspirations, you must be ready for such action...

Let me tell you frankly that, at the present moment, the Muslims of India are suffering from two evils. The first is the want of personalities... The community has failed to produce leaders. By leaders, I mean men who, by divine gift or experience, possess a keen perception of the spirit and destiny of Islam, along with an equally keen perception of the trend of modern history. Such men are really the driving forces of a people, but they are God's gift and cannot be made to order. The second evil from which the Muslims of India are suffering is that the community is fast losing what is called the herd instinct. This makes it possible for individuals and groups to start independent careers without contributing to the general thought and activity of the community. We are doing today in the domain of politics what we have been doing for centuries in the domain of religion... But diversity in political action, at a moment when concerted action is needed in the best interests of the very life of our people, may prove fatal... Leading Muslims of all shades of opinion will have to meet together, not to pass resolutions, but finally to decide the Muslim attitude and to show the path to tangible achievement...

... The present crisis in the history of India demands complete organization and unity of will and purpose in the Muslim community, both in your own interest as a community and in the interest of India as a whole... We have a duty towards Asia, especially Muslim Asia. And since seventy millions of Muslims in single country constitute a far more valuable asset to Islam than all the countries of Muslim Asia put together, we must look at the Indian problem, not only from the Muslim point of view, but also from the stand point of the Indian Muslim as such. Our duty towards Asia and India cannot be loyally performed without an organized will fixed on a definite purpose. In your own interest, as a political entity among other political entities of India, such an equipment is an absolute necessity...

In the near future our community may be called upon to adopt an independent line of action to cope with the present crisis. And an independent line of political action, in such a crisis, is possible only to a determined people, possessing a will focalized by a single purpose. ... Rise above sectional interests and private ambitions.... Pass from matter to spirit. Matter is diversity; spirit is light, life and unity.... one lesson I have learnt from the history of Muslims.

At critical moments in their history, it is Islam that has saved Muslims and not vice versa. If today you focus your vision on Islam and seek inspiration from the ever vitalizing idea embodied in it, you will be only reassembling your scattered forces, regaining your lost integrity, and thereby saving yourself from total destruction...