

Text of The Inaugural Address of

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**at the Inter-Colonial Muslim Conference (IMO)
of Muslim Communities of The Caribbean**

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In the Name of Allaah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

Honourable Chairman of the Reception Committee, Honoured
Delegates and respected Brothers!

It is my most pleasant duty to first of all thank Almighty Allaah for having blessed us with this opportunity of demonstrating the Islamic bond of unity and of assembling here, united under the banner of our Leader, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him), to take stock of our past and to plan for our future. I must further thank Him for having inclined your hearts towards my humble self and for having favoured me with the opportunity of serving you.

Dear Friends!

I have passed almost forty-three years of my life in religious and national service out of which nearly thirty years were spent in rendering Islamic service to populations and countries outside the Pakistan

- Bharat sub-continent of India. In my native country, my friends often complain that, although I obtained my knowledge and my inspiration, for Islamic work from the spiritual environment and the scholars and spiritual personalities of my country, I have fixed up the field of my activity in foreign lands. Their complaint, based as it is on love, stands by itself, while I feel on the basis of my thirty years experience that my decision is right.

It is a matter of thankfulness to Allaah that in Pakistan and Bharat there are numerous Ulema who are capable of serving Islam in those countries. But, outside, there are populations after populations which have starved for long periods of time for Islamic workers. The Ulema of the Islamic world could not help those populations because of not being conversant with their language. Those who entered the field at the cost of great sacrifice and in the teeth of difficulties, could not cover the entire field because of lack of proper and comprehensive organisation. In the meantime persons who were inspired by ulterior motives thought it fit to utilise the opportunity for dismembering the Muslim faith in the name of Islam. As their sole mission was to create confusion among the Muslims to break their solidarity of faith, and to create their own Church for establishing the claims to Prophethood and Messiahship of a certain person after the Last Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him), all their work performed ostensibly in the name of Islam, made the matters worse for Islam and Muslims.

In those days when I was acquiring modern education and got the first opportunity of studying the policies of the colonial Governments deeply, I first became anxious of the future of those who had left their country under the indenture system, to serve the interests of colonisation and capitalism in distant lands. I knew that when, in their own mother-country, imperialism had transformed their condition into that of veritable slavery, in what plight they must have been thrown as indentured labourers in foreign lands. I gave much thought in those days to the problem, why, when the so-called "labourers" were recruited, care was taken that no educated person and no religious scholars should be included among the recruits. The fear grew in me that,

although in India the combined force of the Government and a high-class missionary organization failed in dislodging the Muslim faith, yet those who were living thousands and thousands of miles away from their homes without any proper religious guides and without any centres of religious learning could not be expected to face the anti-Islamic forces in the same meritorious way. I was afraid that what was only apparent slavery in India might take the form of real and permanent spiritual slavery for those cut off from the World of Islam.

My Friends !

These were the thoughts and considerations which pulled me out of India and fixed up my field of activity in foreign lands. Since then I had the occasion of visiting various countries of the world. For the purpose of the present occasion, however, Burma, Ceylon, Mauritius, South Africa, the islands of the Pacific, Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana and Dutch Guiana are before me.

In connection with the Muslims of these countries, allow me first of all to offer felicitation to the noble souls of those great saints and Ulema of India who infused that religious spirit and that spiritual inspiration into these people and kindled that light of faith in their hearts which was able to withstand the mightiest storms of anti-Islamic forces.

We all know that those Muslims who were brought from West Africa to the American countries, were confronted with the same difficulties which the Indian Muslims had to face, but, very unfortunately, unlike their Indian Muslim brothers, they proved incapable of fighting the battle of faith. They lost their ancestral treasure, the true religion of Islam, side by side with their physical freedom, and today they do not even remember that for centuries their ancestors had been Muslims.

In view of all this, I fail to find words to thank, Almighty Allah that

the Muslims who came from the areas of Pakistan and Bharat have, by His Grace, on the whole, faced magnanimously and overcome bravely the ravages of time and the storms of antagonistic religious forces. It is due to those simple-minded Muslims who came to these parts, who were devoid of worldly pomp and power, but carried the invaluable treasure of faith in their hearts, that the cry of "*Allaahu-Akbar*" resounds in these parts of the world today and the message of "*La-illaha-illal-lah, Muhammad-ur-Rasulullah*" is alive.

But, my Friends! allow me to say that only thus far we can feel happy and congratulate ourselves. Working under numerous handicaps and confronted with insuperable difficulties, what the Muslims in these parts have been able to achieve is confined principally to two merits, namely,

1. The name of Islam is alive among the Muslims as a Community
2. Certain fundamental Islamic practices are alive among certain sections of the community. Further than this, all is misery and disaster and the situation is so critical as to call for the deepest anxiety.

Some of you might be surprised at my remark, feeling that Muslims are leading the same normal lives as other communities. But if you try to see below the surface, you will find that the Islamic aspect of the lives of Muslim communities is wounded, in fact, deeply wounded. Let me clarify what I mean by this:-

1. One section of Muslims has fallen a prey to total perversion of mentality. Scores of people from this section have thought that they cannot get the same honour by calling themselves Muslims as when they show affinity with the Christians, because Christianity is the religion of the people in power. In this connection, everyone of you must be aware of those cases where persons born of Muslim parents did not only change their Islamic names but also changed the name of their religion. Speaking in the light of the science of psychology, this mentality grows up

and develops gradually. Today there are certain well-to-do Muslim families where, even when the children are given Islamic names at the time of birth, they are called by Christian names. This is the first stage of the disease known as the inferiority complex.

2. Every student of Islam is aware that the Islamic religion does not consist merely of rites and ceremonies, but that it provides a complete system of living. And this system is actually an organic unity wherein every part is to be put into action for obtaining successful results. Islam is a self-contained and all-encompassing and well-coordinated cultural whole, in which even the minutest part has an importance of its own and cannot be left out without courting grave risks.

For instance, take the matter of dress. Islam has fixed up for men and women both certain rules for covering the body. To cover certain fixed minimum portions of the body is the initial point of modesty in the moral code of Islam. The violation of those rules might appear to you today to be something very trivial, but it is this preliminary violation which opens the door to greater moral evils. The substitution of the Islamic ideal of covering the body by the fashion of half-nakedness results, in the first place, in outright inferiority-complex. Secondly, the adoption of half-nakedness and the display of physical beauty creates the atmosphere of sexual attraction, and though in some cases it might result in the creation of legal marriage relationship, in most cases it leads to immoral relations and irresponsible for the birth of illegitimate children. The parties who actually suffer by this are the women-folk and those innocent children who are considered "unwanted" from the very birth. The Government does not punish such crimes unless the element of "compulsion" is there; but it also does not provide for the un-wanted children.

My community has rapidly lost the ancestral treasure of Islamic modesty and decorum in the midst of this storm of half-nakedness and un-restrained inter-mingling of sexes, and conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that different sorts of immoral frivolities, including full-fledged public contests of the display of womanly beauty

are now being blessed by those who declare that their sole mission is to establish the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (peace be with him). A tragedy indeed.

3. In the matter of Islamic Personal Law, the condition is even more tragic. The facts are that:-
 - a) Islam is a perfect system of law, and every Muslim, by his very existence, is entitled to the freedom of the observance of the Islamic personal law;
 - b) The famous Declaration of Queen Victoria has guaranteed to every Muslim living in any part of the British Empire, freedom, not only in the matter of worship, but also in the observance of the Islamic personal law;
 - c) When the Indian Muslims were recruited in India and brought to these parts, they were given the assurance that they will have the same facilities in Islamic matters which they enjoyed in India.
 - d) But on their arrival here, they were obliged to subject themselves to the law of the land, which means, in the field of marriage, that if a Muslim woman is married to a Muslim husband purely by Islamic rites, she is not a legitimate wife, her offsprings are not legitimate offsprings, and those offsprings are not entitled to that parental inheritance which Islam fixes up for them.

Today if you mention to any Muslims about this ugly and insulting situation, he attaches to it no importance because of his ignorance of Islam and the implications of the issue. He is unable to see what this attack on the Islamic religion means. Even when you can stir him to action in this behalf, being accustomed to human slavery, he looks to human guidance, and tries either to substitute another man-made law himself or to request the Government to frame a so-called "Muslim" law for him. Thus man-made laws acquire the title of Islamic Laws.

In Trinidad, there is a law of marriage and divorce for the Muslims which gives the power of pronouncing divorce to a Divorce Officer and has other un-Islamic aspects, and this law has been considered as Islamic. In British Guiana I discussed the matter with His Excellency the Governor and the Muslim leaders and I came to know that it is still under consideration namely how far Muslims should be permitted to observe the Islamic personal Law.

Now, so far as the Holy Qur'aan is concerned, it has declared in very clear terms that those who do not abide by the revealed Laws are transgressors, sinners and infidels. It says: The Holy Prophet (peace be with him!) has told us:

"Whoever among you sees anything against the Divine Law, he should endeavour to change it with his hand; if he is not capable of it, with his tongue; if he is not capable of it also, (at least detest it in) his heart. And this last attitude is the expression of the weakest faith."

Hence, it is the duty of you all to try your utmost to get at least the correct Islamic Personal Law enforced.

My Friends !

The Britishers ruled over India for nearly two hundred years. But did the Indian Muslims ever allow the British Government to frame the laws of marriage or divorce or inheritances for them? Only once, did the Government try to amend the Islamic Law on the point of the age limit of marriage in connection with the Shariah Act, but the storm of agitation and opposition which arose immediately is known to all students of Indian Muslim history.

It is, therefore, a pertinent question to ask; What were those laws under which the ancestors of the Indian Muslim emigrants to colonies lived in India, and what are those laws under which the Muslim are leading an Islamic honourable existence in Malaya, Singapore, East Africa, West Africa, etc?

I am sure the Government is aware that in all the matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, endowment, will, etc., the perfect law of Islam is in force in those countries and is upheld by the Muslim subjects as well as the non - Muslim governments.

Detailed books on the Anglo - Muhammadan Law by Amir Ali, Yusuf Ali and Mulla are in existence and are included in the courses of all students of law. While even these published books in English are present, have we any right to frame any laws ourselves and to call them Islamic or can the Government have any objection to the introduction of correct Islamic laws? Who is to be blamed for the present state of affairs? I think it is the Muslims themselves who have slept over these issues or mishandled them and did not make the requisite powerful approach to the Government.

In this connection, the problem of Waqf(or, endowments) also calls for serious and earnest consideration. In the Islamic Shariah (Law), it has special importance. According to Islam, a thing which has been once endowed in the name of God, becomes " God's property" for all time and can no longer admit of human transactions of sale and purchase.

Now, because the Islamic Law of Endowments is not in force, our mosques, though they are endowed by the donors with that intention, are not recognised as such by the Government. Consequently, in certain cases, those who are appointed as trustees of the mosques, assume powers of control over the mosques as if they are their personal property, and thus the mosques no longer remain inviolable endowments. I think this is the state of affairs all over Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana and Dutch Guiana. And when this is the condition in relation to the mosques, it can be clearly understood that endowments for other religions and national works cannot be created unless the Government enforces the Islamic Law of Endowment. That means that basically our whole endeavour in the field of communal uplift must remain in abeyance unless that law is enforced.

My Friends !

Have you ever thought how weak are the foundations of our national existence in these parts? The primary and the most important requirement is education, because intellectual enlightenment forms the very soul of a civilized community. Now, education has two aspects : secular and religious. Let us consider our condition from both aspects. Because of their progress in secular education, other communities have advanced far ahead of us, while we have not yet even made the proper attempt, Can any one tell me whether in the countries represented in this Conference, Muslims possess even a single College, and if not a college, at least a High School, and if not a High School, at last an Upper primary school, or even a primary School which we might point out with pride as a model for others. During all my travels in these parts, I came across only one primary School which is run by the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association. But, because of lack of funds, even that school is in such a condition that some of the classes have to be held under the trees because there are not enough rooms in the school building. The Government is ready to help in the establishment of schools, but my people are in a state of deep sleep and do not seem to possess any idea of the ultimate fatal consequences of this neglect. We have no schools, and consequently when our children somehow manage to cross over primary Education, they face difficulties in the next stages. Possibilities of admission in secondary schools are limited and sometimes even conditional. I do not know how far they are true, but I have received reports that in some institutions Muslim students were denied admission on the ground of being Muslims.

Certainly, it was the duty of the Government to provide special facilities for the Muslims in view of their educational backwardness. In India we saw that the British Government took special measures for combating the educational drawbacks of the populations known as Depressed Classes. Special schools were opened for them, scholarships were given and facilities for higher education were instituted. The result is that today among those very people there are men like Dr. Ambedkar who is a minister in the Government of Bharat, and Mr. J.M. Mandal, who graces the chair of Pakistan's Law and Labour Ministry.

It is necessary that we should draw the attention of the Government to the problem of Muslim education, obtain special facilities for removing the educational backwardness of our community and demand special scholarships, etc.

Now, my Friends, when such is our plight in the field of secular education, where the Government also assists, the condition of religious education can be better imagined than described. Here our achievement is absolutely zero. We do not possess even one institution which might be called a real theological primary School, not to speak of the College or the High school of Theology. If in the field of secular education there have been a few well-to-do Muslims who sent their children to England and America for obtaining the doctor's or the barrister's degree, no wealthy Muslim ever thought of sending even one intelligent capable young man to India or Pakistan or Egypt, or Syria for acquiring theological education and for qualifying to lead the spiritually-starving Muslim populations of these countries.

Excuse me if my words sound harsh. But allow me to say that your condition is like that of a person who, though he is immensely thirsty, is not ready to move and is lying in expectation for someone who might come and drop some water in his mouth. This world, my friends, is a world of struggle, - a world of means and ends. Hence, can there be any sense in this inactivity and neglect?

It is now more than one hundred years that you had been in these countries. But all these years your only idea has been that some Alim may come to you at his own expense and of his own accord, to quench your thirst of Islamic knowledge. You never took the trouble of thinking how the Ulema of the Islamic world can know about your condition? Then, how great are the difficulties which they must face in coming to the distant lands. They first acquire your adopted language, because, excepting the Muslims of British Guiana, all others have totally boycotted Urdu, so much so that if the Government itself plans to provide for your education in Urdu or in Islamic theology, there are no teachers among you. No less a person than Trinidad's Director of Education complained to me that there are neither teach-

ers who can teach Islamic theology or Urdu, nor is there any syllabus of Islamic theology, nor any person who might formulate that syllabus.

My Friends!

The evil consequences of your neglect are before your eyes today. Even such persons who might be able to read even the words of the Qur'aan correctly are difficult to find. And the situation is so ugly that even those who pose to be the supreme authority on Islam, according to the reports that have reached my ears, distort the words of the Qur'aan beyond recognition while leading their followers in prayers as for instance, they read "jahooka" for "zahooqa" as if when the English word "but" is pronounced "bat" or "shut.", it will continue to mean the same.

In short, the rising generations are virtually devoid of religious education. It is only the few elderly people that have already run the race of time, who are carrying on the work of guiding the people on preliminary religious matters. How far even this will continue, can be estimated. In the Hadith we are told that "the death of the scholar is the death of the world" Therefore, when you do not possess a single expert of Islamic knowledge your Islamic communities must be considered to be bodies without soul. That is the reason why, at some places, people are falling a prey to the propaganda of the new claimant to Messiahship, while at other places they are leaving their perfect and true and rational religion of Islam for considerations of a few coins, or a handsome wife, or a few days honour.

My Friends,

I am giving you the last-hour signal. Your religious condition is very critical. The House of Islam is burning, while you are sleeping on soft beds. Owing to the lack of religious education your culture, your civilisation and your social greatness, all have departed from you. Now, only the name of Islam remains. And if your neglect remains the same, even that may not be there after some time. For God's sake,

1 awake and stand up as true soldiers for the service and glory of Islam.

1 My Friends!

1 I know that most of those Muslims who came to these parts came in
1 a state of economic distress, and hence a majority of them are still in
1 a state of virtual poverty. During my visits to these countries I have
1 not only gone to the palaces of the wealthy, but also to cottages of the
1 poor. I have seen those who get hardly a square meal for the day or
1 enough clothing to cover their bodies. I have known those parents
1 who cannot educate their children only because they cannot afford
1 the financial burden of education. I have known those widows and
1 those orphans who have none, except God, to give support.

1 In British Guiana, Pandit Ramsaroop Maraj, has opened, under the
1 auspices of the Hindu Religious Society, Two big Poor-Homes i.e
1 homes for the poor, where even the Muslims are looked after. But the
1 Muslim community possesses no such thing. They have an orphan-
1 age, about which the Delegates from that country can speak more
1 authoritatively. The point which I wish to drive home here is that a
1 community can never be considered great, simply because a few of
1 its members are wealthy. The majority of Muslims in these countries
1 are suffering from poverty, and we must remember the Holy Prophet's
1 (peace be with him) warning when he said : "Poverty leads to infi-
1 delity."

With these remarks I may now summarize the problems of the Mus-
lim communities with whom we are concerned at present.

They are: -

1. The Islamic laws of marriage, divorce, inheritance, will and endowment are not in force.
2. There are practically no primary and secondary schools of secular education.
3. There is no scheme of scholarships whereby deserving but poor

students could be helped in pursuing their education.

4. For the religious education, there are neither books nor teachers.
5. There are neither Ulema for comprehensive religious guidance of the people, nor are there any funds whereby local students may be sent abroad for theological training, or trained scholars may be invited from abroad for work in these countries.
6. There is no weekly or daily newspaper which might perform the service of safe-guarding and fighting for the rights of the Muslim community and for guiding it in its multifarious problems.

Our condition is that of absolute poverty. We depend for everything upon the goodwill and charity of others. Can we call such life really a life? Rather, it is worse than death.

My Friends!

It is never late to mend. There is still time and opportunity to set your house in order. The flood-gates of irreligion and immorality have been thrown wide open against you. Modesty and piety have virtually departed. The demons of immorality - the cinema, the wine-shop, the gambling-den, the brothel house - are taking the field and poisoning the atmosphere all around you. My own people are being attracted towards all those infamies, while the mosques of God complain against our criminal neglect of duty.

Ignorance of Islam is rampant. Whatever stability of belief and action was handed down by the past generations is being subjected to most dastardly attacks and every effort is being made to bring about disintegration. Those who support things and deeds which are outright immoral from the Islamic point of view are being advertised as the Imams and Mujtahids of Islam.

Mutual love and cooperation are becoming things of the past. Selfishness and personal domination are taking their place. Our groups are small everywhere, but everywhere they appear to be divided into fractions and parties.

Now, tell me my Friends, can any community prosper and progress under such circumstances? If not, then is it not necessary that every one of us should strain every nerve to remedy the situation? We have assembled here to take stock of the situation, to fix up the diseases from which our communities in these countries are suffering, to prescribe the remedy and to plan a concerted action. We have to perform this great task. But for this the first condition, is that we should forsake all our weaknesses of the past and join together in the spirit of true Islamic brotherly cooperation. Once that is done, there is no cause for despair. The Holy Qur'aan says: "*Do not despair of Allaah's Mercy.*" If we have true faith in Almighty Allaah and a true determination, we must succeed in overcoming the greatest obstacles. As the Holy Qur'aan tells us: "*Be not depressed nor grieve, for you will prevail if you are (true) Believers*". (4:159).

END