

Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur's

Scheme for a Muslim Confederacy

(Scheme first formulated by Sir Salimullah in November 1906 in Dhaka)

Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, who could not join the Simla Deputation because of an eye operation, took the first concrete step towards establishing a Muslim organization. In November 1906, he circulated a scheme for the formation of the Muslim All-India Confederacy. The scheme was the embryo from which the Muslim League emerged. The relevant text of Nawab Salimullah Khan's letter is as follows:

1. This day being the birthday of His Majesty our most gracious King Emperor. I think it an auspicious occasion for me to-day to place before my Mahomedan brethren my views on the project of our Muslim All-India Confederacy.
2. Owing to my inability to attend the All-India Mohammedan Deputation to His Excellency the Viceroy at Simla, I penned a few notes for the information of my brother delegates on the advisability of forming a Central Mohammedan Association for all India, which could bring into touch the aims and aspirations of our community throughout the country.
3. These notes were, I learnt, discussed at an informal meeting of those present at Simla and it was proposed, without coming to any definite resolution, that the matter should be finally settled at the All-India Mahommedan Educational Conference at Dacca during the Christmas week next December, and in the meantime the scheme, as drafted, may be submitted for discussions to all our various Mahommedan associations and societies, as well as to those pre-eminent amongst our co-religionists, for their collective and individual opinion and advice.
4. I have, therefore, in view of the discussion that took place at Simla, enlarged these notes, and now submit them to our Association, friends and co-religionists in the various parts of the country as well as to the press for favour of bonafide, honest and fearless discussion, which may lead us to a *modus operandi* for the establishment of an institution of the character I propose should be formed. I shall, therefore, feel obliged to those associations which will be sending their delegates and those

gentlemen come fully authorized to express the views of the association and provinces, so that our deliberations, as much as possible, may voice the voice of the whole Muslim community.

5. From the information I received I find the majority of those present at the informal meeting, as well as others consulted at Simla, were in favour of a central All-India association of the kind sketched out by me in my notes; but I desire that every consideration should be paid to the views of the minority, so that after full deliberation those whom we may not for the present succeed in fully getting into agreement with us, will nevertheless merge their individual differences and heartily co-operate with the majority for the common good of Islam and our community.

6. It was hinted by some that there was no necessity for any such Central Association, inasmuch as it would cripple and starve the local associations, and instead of a central association, local associations should be formed where none at present exist. But if anything, a central association of the kind I propose will be the very medium of starting, where none is in existence, and fostering a local association, or the necessity for the same being established. While a very few seem to have a fear that a central association of the kind we want would interfere with such a centre of Mohammedan life as is now bound up with the Aligarh College and Institute, one of the chief principles of its noble founder, laid down for our guidance, being to avoid all politics. But while the central association will, I trust, be the means of not only enlarging the usefulness and scope of the Aligarh College, it will be able, I hope, to find time to establish institutions in each province on lines laid down by the Aligarh College. While as regards politics, there can be no question that, unless we desire to be left back in the race for life, we must march with the times. The noble foundations of the Aligarh College were laid 25 years ago and the institute has achieved its purpose but to keep up its ability and usefulness, we have to enter into the next stage of our political life of the country and nation; and I only desire that full and earnest consideration may be given by my co-religionists to the scheme which has claimed my attention for some time, and to such other schemes as may be submitted for our consideration, to something that will advance the well-being of our community.

7. The necessity of a Central Association: To the majority of my countrymen, I believe, the necessity of a central association is fully established; the key-note of it was struck by our All-India Deputation to the Viceroy where in the address we have stated as follows: Still it cannot be denied that we Mahomedans are a distinct community with additional interests of our own, which are not shared by other communities, and these have suffered from the fact that they have not been adequately represented.

And it is hardly possible that these additional interests, peculiarly our own, can be safeguarded and protected unless there is a central authority to which the Government can look for aid and advice, and it would not be out of place to quote here the remarks of the Times of India. In its article on the Mahomedan Deputation to the Viceroy it states, "It may be hoped that one result of the unity of feelings thus aroused amongst Muslims will be that they will be able to express, from time to time, as occasion requires, the views of the community which is in many respects distinct, with, as the Memorial said, additional interests of its own which are not shared by any other community." The Times of India foreshadows what is really being felt by thoughtful

members of our community; that the authorities are getting bewildered owing to the multiplicity of Muslim associations now coming into existence, and our young men, in various parts of the country, assuming to speak on behalf of the whole Muslim community of India, and on many occasions which I need not here mention, in direct opposition and conflict to each other.

I am aware of several instances wherein untold mischief has occurred through irresponsible Mahomedan gentlemen, and associations sprung up and were created by some (who really at heart have no regard for our community) of the sole purpose of establishing their own political importance, addressing Government and the public, without anyone to question their right to do so...of course Government cannot refuse to receive any representation from any corporate body or individual, however distinguished or undistinguished they or he may be, yet such representation fails to carry weight owing to the authorities not knowing how far the views contained therein are consonant with the views of the Muslim community as a whole. And even when such views are adopted by the authorities, they fail in receiving respectful concurrence from the Muslims in general, as being the views of only some particular associations or individuals and more or less misleading, thereby causing much harm to the Muslim community as a whole. Hence if there were an All-India association of the kind I propose, Government will be able to refer to it all such representations as may be received by the authorities, to ascertain the views of the community in general before finally passing orders thereon; and there will then be no danger of any party or parties misrepresenting the facts to serve individual interests.

8. The Aims and Objects of the Association: It is absolutely necessary that aims and objects of the Association should be definitely stated; and although I am sure I shall not receive any hearty support from some of my co-religionists, yet I for one honestly believe that the time has come when, if the Association is to be a force and power for good, it must at the very outset lay down its policy and I would do so as follows:

That the sole object and purpose of the Association shall be whenever possible, to support all measures emanating from the Government and to protect the cause and advancement of the interest of our co-religionists throughout the country.

9. How this is to be done I show below:

Name: A suitable name is one of the greatest desiderata of an institution such as we contemplate, and after a careful consideration such as we contemplate, and after a careful consideration of several appellations, I think, The Mahomedan All-India Confederacy would suit us best, as the Association would be the mouthpiece of all the various Muslim institutions, social-religious and political, as well as of the leading men throughout the country, who will have allied themselves together for the one common object of protecting the interests and advancing the cause of their co-religionists. The Object or *raison d'etre*:

(a) To controvert the growing influence of the so-called Indian National Congress, which has tendency to misinterpret and subvert the British Rule in India, or which may lead to that deplorable situation, and (b) to enable our young men of education, have joined the Congress Camp, to find scope to exercise their fitness and ability for public life.

10. From the trend of the discussion of Simla there is, I believe, some disinclination to state our object and reason in this bold and blunt manner, as it will, it is contented, arouse the ire and anger of our Hindu brethren. But I think that time has come when we must no longer mind matters...we must not stand upon sentiment – it is mere sentiment that is causing such havoc and misery in the present partition of Bengal. And the question that we, the Mohammedans, must honestly discuss and decide is whether the policy now openly declared by those who are termed ‘extremists’ is one conducive to the maintenance of the British Raj; and if, as we must hold, it is not, we must then consider whether those gentlemen forming the ‘Extremist Party’ do or do not form part and parcel of the Indian National Congress, and unless the Congress is an open and public assembly, and by a resolution disassociates itself from the views of this party, we Mohammedans cannot countenance or be associated with the Congress. We are sorry, but cannot deny that the so-called Indian National Congress has become a potent voice in the counsels of the country. We must, therefore, as true and loyal subjects of the British Raj, do our utmost to controvert and thwart that influence which it has attained, when we find it working for the destruction of all that we hold dear...

There is no doubt that many of our young educated Mohammedans find themselves shoved off the line of official preferment and promotion, unless they join, or at least show sympathy with, the Congress party. All our Mohammedan newspapers are full of the cry that there is now-a-days not the same dearth of Mohammedan graduates and under-graduates as before, but they are passed over (in fact this was pointedly alluded to in the All-India address to the Viceroy) on the ground that they do not come up ‘to the Government standard of efficiency’. The Executive Committee of the Confederacy will be in constant communication with all the local associations, and will watch the career of our promising young men, who will no longer look to the Congress for their advancement in life.

(Source: late Professor Dr Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Salimullah: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, pp. 216-221).