

THE FIRST ISMAILIA MISSION CONFERENCE

DAR-ES-SALAAM, TANGANYIKA

July, 1945

Hazrat Mowlana Imam Sultan Mohammed Shah has called a Mission Conference of Africa to discuss the religious education, to train the missionaries and the teachers and to establish an independent Ismailia Association in Africa, free from the control and influence of the Ismailia Association for India.

It was the first conference of this nature in Africa.

About a hundred delegates and observers has attended the conference which was opened by the Holy Imam on 20th of July, 1945 in the assembly hall of the Aga Khan's Boys' Secondary School in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika.

Some of the prominent members of the Jamat who attended the conference were:

Missionary Hameer Lakha	Bombay
Missionary Haji Mohammed Fazal	Bombay
Missionary Amirali Khudabaksh Talib	Bombay
Missionary Gulamhusain Juma Patel	Bombay
Missionary Kadarali B. Patel	Bombay
Diwan Ghulamhusain Naseer Jindani	Zanzibar
Varas Kassum Sunderji Samji	Dar es Salaam
Varas Abdulla Hasham Gangji	Zanzibar
Varas Fatehali Dhalla	Mombasa
Varas Hassan Kassam Lakha	Kampala
Varas Hasham Jamal	Kisumu
Varas Amershi Kanji	Zanzibar
Varas Eboo Pirbhai	Nairobi
Varas Ismail Jivraj Pirani	Dar es Salaam
Varas Kanji Nanji	Dar es Salaam
Itmadi Husainali Kassamali Javeri	Bombay
Mr. Kasamali Rajabali Paroo	Mombasa
Mr. V.M. Nazerali	Dar es Salaam
Ed. Adm.	

Mr. Bahadurali K. S Verjee	Ed. Adm.	Kampala
Mr. Ibrahim Nathoo	Ed. Adm.	Nairobi
Alijah Ibrahim Jamal		Kisumu
Mr. Dhanji Bhatia		Mombasa
Alijah Nimji Zaver Kassam		Nairobi
Alijah Ismail M. Jaffer Chhotoo		Mombasa
Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed Mohammed		Nairobi
Mr. Hasanali Virani		Moshi
Mr. Alimohammed Rehmatulla Mecklai		Bombay

Mr. A. R. Mecklai, the President of the Ismailia Association of India (formerly known as the Re-creation Club and Institute, established by Imam Sultan Mohammed Shah in 1920) was specially invited to the Conference.

The Conference lasted three days. As a result of the Conference the Ismailia Association for Africa was created and the holy Imam appointed Alijah Nimji Zaver Kassam as its President and Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed Mohammed as the Honorary Secretary.

According to a decision taken in that Conference the first Ismailia Mission Center was opened at Dar es Salaam in May 1947, to train missionaries and religion teachers. Missionary Abualy Alibahi Aziz from Bombay was ordered by the Holy Imam to take the charge of the Center as its Principal. He was specially sent to east Africa from Bombay, in July 1946 for that purpose.

The following pages contain the full text of the historic opening speech of the Holy Imam.

A.A.A

THE HOLY SPEECH

Hazrat Mowlana Dhani Salaamat Datar Imam Sultan Mohammed Shah had arrived at 9 a.m. on Friday, the 20th of July, 1945 at H.H. The Aga Khan Boys' Secondary School, Kisutu Street, Dar-Es-Salaam. He was received and garlanded by the Presidents of H.H. the Aga Khan Executive Council for Africa and H.H. the Aga Khan Supreme Council for Africa.

A recitation of the Suratul Fateha of the Holy Quran was made.
A recitation of a Holy Ginan was made.

Mowlana Hazar Imam made the following speech:

First of all, I must welcome you all, gentlemen, to this Mission Conference, and the ladies who have also come. It is a great pleasure to see you all here. I hope this is a final break from the past as it has happened in the other conferences.

The first regrettable thing about all missionaries and religious activities is that, I am sorry to say gentlemen, that a person like Dr. Ivanow of Russia knows more about the Ismaili religion and its meaning than most of our bhagats put together and many of our leading gentlemen. Again, a man like Mr. Fyzee, a Bohra gentleman, of Islamic Research Association, knows more about the Ismaili religion than most people of this faith.

I cannot go further without telling you at once that we all owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Mecklai who has done wonderful work. He has, like anybody else, weaknesses but he has done a great deal of work that will remain historical, and has made a great name for Ismailis amongst all learned circles by establishing the Islamic Research Association and by getting men like Dr. Ivanow and Mr. Fyzee to look into the ancient documents. And, I think, we cannot do better than pass a resolution of thanks and appreciation for the work done by Mr. Mecklai.

Here in Africa, today we want to start an Ismailia Association on the same lines as the Bombay Association; once for all to make professional missionaries in Africa, free from India to have a new system of recruiting missionaries, as well as honorary and volunteer missionaries.

Very little of our religion is generally known. First of all I will give you two or three examples that will show that even most of our people are ignorant of our Faith.

Number One: As rightly said by one of our missionaries, Mr. Hameer Lakha, that with regard to religion you must never reason with people who have no religion. This is perfectly true because Islam and Ismailism are built on Iman and Momin. Iman means faith and Momin means one who has faith. A momin who has true faith does not mean to be a philosopher. It means one who has got faith. If you have good luck to have faith then the religion is easy. If you have got no Iman then there is no hope. Iman is a thing that one can get only by praying for Iman. There is no other way or short cut to it.

Number Two: In 1905, Juma Bhagat, one of our great missionaries who had rendered great services to me, and other very very pious Ismailis, came to me --- that is exactly forty years ago --- and said that in the Dua the word which referred to 'Fish' should be withdrawn. I said to them: "Do you intent to drop one of the foundations of the faith? When there was nothing but fish on earth, God stood as witness and they must have no doubt to that kind of witness from above." And of course they understood and dropped it.

In Bombay, eight years ago, many of our people came to me and requested to add just one word in the Dua and then, they said everything was alright. I asked what was that one word? They said that instead of 'Ali Allah' to say 'Aliyun Waliyullah'. So I said: "You better drop the whole Dua if you want to alter that word. You are ignorant. It is your ignorance and not that 'Ali Allah' is wrong. You read my Farmans that I made in Bombay in 1905-6, interpreted by Kamaria Haji, when I explained fully that there was a fundamental difference between Christianity and Ismailism. In Christianity they believe that Jesus the man was God Almighty, and during the thirty three years of his life on earth he was the Almighty. For the Ismailis, during the sixty years of his life on earth, Ali was the prisoner of the material world, limited by it and suffering constantly. When we think of Ali, it is not the man during those sixty years but the Eternal (Ali) that came from God and returned to God directly.

Pir Hazrat Hasan who was very wealthy and had great comforts (of life) was told by a Jew that he was enjoying heaven on earth. Pir Hazrat Hasan replied that if he (the Jew) only knew the difference there was between the moment when the Angel of death would offer him (Pir Hasan) his rose and the worldly advantages which Jew saw, he would understand that Hasan suffered the limitations of hell in that life.

A SIMILE OF RIVER

There is a very important ayat in the Quran: *Inna lillahi wa inna ilehi raqjay-oon* that is, we are for God and unto Him we are returning. Shariati people do not understand this. This is the thing that must be understood. According to Ismaili religion, Allah is the ocean. Ali, during his life on earth was the river separated from the ocean of the Almighty, separated from it and running towards it overcoming all material resistances. He was running towards the origin. The haqiqati people should understand the meaning of this ayat, from haqiqati point of view. This ayat means more than all the rest of Quran.

Then of course, Pir Sadardin and other (Pirs) have put forward the doctrine that all momins are the small streams starting from the earth then joining the ocean through the river. This is the doctrine of the Ismailis. It is perfectly clear. There is nothing new. The prefect momin, after death, and Imam should not be separated. It is like a river which flows through the earth, stones, rocks and various other obstacles but reaches the ocean, carrying with it all kinds of smaller streams. Now, all these has already been made clear by Ismaili writers and thinkers, and sifted and made clear and printed in Iran. This is the doctrine which is the true heart of the Ismaili religion.

MISSION

Well, now for the mission. Unless the missionaries themselves specially the honorary missionaries who have got more wealth and opportunities, understand the meaning of these things and unless they are able to teach others, there standard will fall below the standard necessary for the proper explanation of the Ismailism. Now I have been talking so far as to the fundamentals. You will discuss in your own heart and you will understand more. Also, Jalaluddin Rumi who himself was not an Ismaili but a murid of an Ismaili (Shams Tabrez)[^], has made it very clear when he talks about the branch cut from the tree to become a tree again. These are the fundamentals which ought to be understood.

Pir Sadardin and the Ginans have done a great advantage. There is a sense of joy. Anybody who understands Ismaili religion understands that instead of crying and being sad, one should have a constant and greatest pleasure that any human being can have, the spiritual pleasure. Such joys of the spirit and the soul can not be explained to the people who do not know. Everybody must go in himself and know it. A child of seven may ask what is the pleasure of the sexual union? You can not explain it to him. The child may think it is music or a toy. You may talk as much as you like but he would not understand.

HINDU MYTHOLOGY

Some part of Hindu mythology in our teaching has a great deal of allegorical value and must be kept up. Similarly the mythology of Imam Hussein and Ali's supernatural acts should be considered and purely interpreted as allegorical.

PHYSICAL SIDE OF THE ASSOCIATION

So far I have been talking to you about the soul and the life. Now we come to the skin and the bones and the body. It means: Organization and association, and the building of a number of people who first become honorary missionaries. Secondly: they should read all that they can find, with zeal. Thirdly: communicate with India and Persia, and other Ismaili centers and get in touch with the association in Bombay for the books. Also read all the Farmans, my Farmans and the Farmans of Aga Ali Shah and Aga Hasan Ali Shah which have not been published. I have told you, explaining the fundamental difference between Christianity and Ismailism, between Jesus and Ali. The difference is

[^] Shams Tabriz was a son of our Holy Imam Alauddin Mohammed. Pir Shams was a different person.

fundamental. And now we come to as to how to build this association? The poor boys can become professional missionaries in Africa. Some Kiswahili language must be made known to these missionaries, and the message must be given to the Swahilis of sufficient intelligence who may understand. Then you see, this is the world. This is not the next world. People have to live. They cannot live on air. When they are old they must retire. A pension scheme for the professional missionaries and another scheme for the honorary missionaries should be prepared. Each one should interpret Ginans and Farmans and my speech of today according to his own idea. Then come the school children. I am bitterly opposed to the idea of having religious teaching at night. This is the sure way of making a child dislike the religion because he has been tired all the day, busy with every kind of thing at daytime and teaching at night takes away his pleasure. Religious teaching in our schools need not be long. It should be the first thing in the morning when the minds of the children are fresh and when they have no other thought. It need not be long nor repeated. For every child a very simple Dua and its meaning. Some Ginans should be taught reducing the bulk but keeping the essentials. A committee can do it. Most of the important ceremonies must be taught. A child must be taught the meaning of the Dua and to make him interested in Dasond as a regular income tax to keep the religion going. Without which it is impossible for the followers for whom the Imam is the commander of the faithful, the Khalifa of God and Mohammed on earth --- Khalifatullah and Khalifatur Rasoolullah --- to give the Imam the position of a prince on earth.

The Ismaili Brotherhood is in fact a spiritual state carried on like a worldly state. With the difference that it is based on voluntary contributions and voluntary obedience instead of any physical compulsion. All these can be taught in the morning on different days. A selection of the subjects must be made. A committee from you should be appointed. During their discussions they should say which Ginan should be for all and which is for the more advanced boys. These are the objects of this meeting to build up the body and bones and the skin in which the spirit which I have just shown you, should live and prosper and thus reproduce in children. Then you suggest the names for the various schemes after my departure, Which I have suggested to be organized. First: the Association. Second: the part to be played by the schools. How much from the Ginans and how much from the Dua and how much from the Ismaili history should be taught? What elementary knowledge is necessary for the honorary missionaries? There must be some kind of control. The lesser the control the better. How to recruit missionaries? How to build the profession for the poor boys who have inclination to become missionaries? This is the physical body in which soul can live.

If any one of you, gentleman, have any suggestion to make on these subjects, will you please make?"

Mr. Paroo pointed out the difficulties of securing proper textbooks.

HAZAR IMAM: You can take my Farmans. The important ones which deal with the spiritual matters. The worldly Farmans must be separated from the spiritual Farmans. You have already got one set that is out. Of course the Ginans are there. Of these keep separate those parts which are religious from those which are less important. Also take material from any historical work. You need not go necessarily to Ismaili books. You can get very simple and very good life of the Imams and out of that you can choose the historical ones according to your need. For Instance: The lives of Imam Islam Shah and Aga Hassanali Shah.

Mr. V. M. Nazerali: A committee has been appointed by the East Africa commission comprising of missionaries Kaderali and Amirali who are working on this syllabus.

HAZAR IMAM: Farmans should also be taken and put together from today back till 1899. You can look up Farmans.

Mr. Ibrahim Nathoo: The Farmans of 1937 have not yet been published.

Missionary Kaderali: Those Farmans have already been published in Khojki at Bombay, but cannot be bought here due to censor regulations and restrictions.

Mr. Shamsuddin: An Ismaili printing press in Africa is very important and necessary.

HAZAR IMAM: Yes. Also control of the newspaper must be decided. Printing press is absolutely necessary. In the printing press even religious matter can be produced written by missionaries. This is the business of this conference to discuss and to give me their recommendations. I will go through their recommendations and pass them accordingly. As these are very important matters the meetings should be held at night also people like Abdullah, who have other duties to perform should not attend but they should send their representatives to ventilate their views. It must be finished in three days. You must sit until midnight. How the things should be done in the schools must be left with the administrators. They will decide themselves. As long as the religious instruction is the first thing in the morning it does not matter.

Mr. Virani: The main difficulty is to obtain Ismaili teachers. We cannot get sufficient Ismaili instructors.

HAZAR IMAM: You must build up here to train them as much as possible. The real danger is that all religious authorities gradually become materialistic and forget the spiritual interpretation. If you are dependent on India you must free yourself of Indian influence except when absolutely necessary. Nasser Khusrao's philosophy is better than Masnawi. Selections of the verses should be made. A committee should be appointed for the selection of the Ginans. Press and newspaper question is important. For three days you have a handful of jobs. I see only three ladies. I would like to see some more ladies in this conference. On Sunday you must work the whole day and half of the night.

Mr. Shamsuddin: As one who has suffered most in the sphere of religious education, I must stress that in a place like Nairobi it is not possible to give religious education in the morning since most boys go to the government schools.

HAZAR IMAM: That is an important problem which you should discuss.

Mr. Ibrahim Nathoo: The government intends to make such a provision.

Some names were suggested for the selection of the chairman of the conference.

After some discussion Mowlana Hazar Imam appointed Alijah Nimji Zaver Kassam as the Chairman of the Conference and said that Alijah Nimji was coming from the town * where there was no Ismaili school for the boys. And he laughed.

Compiled from various English and Gujrati reports, by Missionary Abualy A. Aziz.
VANCOUVER.

* Nayri, Kenya.