

Aga Khan III

SELECTED SPEECHES AND WRITINGS OF
SIR SULTAN MUHAMMAD SHAH

Edited, Annotated and Introduced
by

K. K. AZIZ

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your... an essential link between the two groups of Indian political thought, and your labours in this direction have been generally appreciated. I feel that the spirit which actuated and guided your deliberations and actions at the Conference is worthy of emulation. (Applause.)

"This is neither the time nor the place to discuss political matters, but I may take this opportunity of making a passing reference to a matter which during the last two years and more has been agitating the public mind in Burma. I refer to the future constitutional status of Burma which is now engaging the attention of the Joint Select Committee and His Majesty's Government. As Your Highness is doubtless aware, many financial and economic considerations are involved in the question and the Indian community, in view of their large stake in the land, are deeply concerned in the decision that may ultimately be taken on this momentous issue. We as business-men feel that the decision must be such as would ensure the economic prosperity of Burma and the welfare of her people. It is obvious that under the present day world conditions, the existing position in relation to matters pertaining to Burma's economic life or her financial equilibrium cannot be disturbed without great detriment to her interests. I hope, therefore, that these primary considerations, viz., economic and financial, will weigh with the authorities in arriving at a final decision with regard to the future constitutional status of Burma.

"Whatever the ultimate decision may be, I hope nothing will be done which would adversely affect the rights of Indians which they have so long enjoyed, such as, the freedom of entry and the right of carrying on their business and professions undisturbed. In view of the important part played by the Indian community in the commercial and economic life of Burma, it would be most unfair to put them at any disadvantage in relation to any other community residing in the province. I have no doubt, however, that Indian commerce in Burma with its usual elasticity will adjust itself to the altered circumstances - whatever they are - and while striving to protect its legitimate interests, will not fail to keep in view the best interests of Burma as a whole.

"Your Highness, it is unfortunate that in a far off place like Rangoon it is very rarely that we get the benefit of the presence of leading Indian politicians like you, and our Chamber, therefore, feels it a great honour to receive you this afternoon. We are glad that the visit of Your Highness has been well-timed, as I feel that, whatever advice you may be good enough to give us at this momentous time in the political history of Burma, will prove of immense value to us. I once more welcome Your Highness and wish you, on behalf of our Chamber a long and prosperous life in the service of our motherland. (Applause.)

"Before I resume my seat, gentlemen, I thank you all on behalf of the Chamber for responding to its invitation and for contributing to the success of this function by your presence". (Loud Applause.)

A CALL TO THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A Message

London: 14 March 1934

The world of Islam at a turning point - example of the Prophet - raise the position of Muslims - learn secrets of social and intellectual power - the Japanese example - conquest of nature - spiritual debt to the Holy Prophet.

The world of Islam to-day is at a turning point of its history. The middle-ages are over and either Islam must now go forward or be added to the other might-have-beens of History.

The Moslems must now awake, and taking their example from the glorious life and the marvellous teachings of the Holy Prophet build their spiritual and religious faith on Muhammad and work for the development in science, knowledge, and political, and social advance along the lines of the most progressive races of mankind.

Formalism and verbal interpretation of the teaching of the great Arabian are in absolute contradiction with the whole history of the Prophet. We must accept his Divine Message as the channel of our union with the Absolute and the Infinite, and once our spiritual faith is firmly established, fearlessly go forward by self-sacrifice, by courage, and by application to raise the scientific, the economic, the political, and social position of the Moslems to a place of equality with Christian Europe and America.

Our social customs, our daily work, our constant efforts must be tuned up, must be brought into line with the highest form of possible civilisation. At its greatest period Islam was at the head of science, was at the head of knowledge, was in the advanced line of political, philosophic, and literary thought.

To-day we are in our middle-ages. We must get out of it, and begin our new era with strength and will power for the coming development of our people.

The Moslem world can to-day be divided into two general parts. (1) One consists of the vast Moslem population living under European and other non-Moslem rulers. (2) The second part consists of the independent Moslem states of Arabia, of Persia, of Afghanistan, of Egypt, of Turkey.

Now where we are under foreign rule we can, immediately by imitating as the Japanese have done, but also by keeping our own spiritual and our highest intellectual character intact, just as the Japanese have done, learn directly from the races that rule us those secrets of social and intellectual power which have made Europe so strong and, so progressive.

Where we are in an independent position we can promote intensive culture, intensive education of the youth, intensive imitation if you like, but always, as in the case of Japan, keeping our highest moral and emotional and spiritual self in our own historical development [*sic*]. With that we can go forward and carry out reforms, carry out political and economic development, carry out, above all, scientific culture which will place us on the same level as the European races.

In cases like India, in countries like Java, like Morocco, and like North Africa, we can immediately learn from our European fellow-subjects, or rulers if you prefer so to call them, those secrets of power over nature, of scientific and economic, and industrial development, which has made Europe so powerful.

Along these lines, my fellow Moslems, I implore you, I beg of you, to work for the advancement of the whole world of Islam, but never forget our spiritual debt to our Holy Prophet.

With these words I hope that progress will become from now onwards thorough and regular.

Source: *Star of India*, Calcutta, 15 March 1934.

On 15 August 1934, the *Star of India* again published this message, but with minor differences. I have not been able to discover why the message was reprinted after an interval of five months. I reproduce here (for the record) the second text:

"The world of Islam to-day is at a turning point of its history. The Middle-Ages are over and either Islam must now go forward or be added to the other might-have-beens of history.

"The Muslims must now awake and taking their example from the glorious life and the marvellous teachings of the Holy Prophet, build their spiritual and religious faith on Mohammed and work for the development in Science,

Knowledge and Politics, and social advancement along the lines of the most progressive races of mankind.

"We must accept his Divine Message as the channel of our union with the Absolute and the Infinite, and once our spiritual faith is firmly established fearlessly go forward by self-sacrifice, by courage, and by application to raise the scientific, economic, the political, and social position of the Muslims to a place of equality with Christian Europe and America.

"Our social customs, our daily work, our constant efforts must be tuned up, must be brought into line with the highest form of possible civilisation. At its greatest period Islam was at the head of science, was at the head of knowledge, was in the advance line of political, philosophical and literary thought.

"To-day we are in our Middle-Ages. We must get out of it, and begin our new era with strength and with will-power for the coming development of our people.

"The Muslim world can to-day be divided into two general parts: One consists of the vast Muslim population living under European, and other non-Muslim rulers and the other consists of independent Muslim states of Arabia, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Turkey.

"Now where we are under foreign rule we can immediately, by imitating as the Japanese have done, as also by keeping our own spiritual and our highest intellectual character intact, just as the Japanese have done, learn directly from the races that rule us those secrets of social and intellectual powers which have made Europe so strong and so progressive.

"Where we are in an independent position, intensive culture, intensive education of the youth, intensive imitation if you like, should be our programme, but always, as in the case of Japan, keeping the highest moral, emotional and spiritual development in view. With that we can go forward and carry out reforms, carry out political and economic development, carry out, above all, a scientific culture which will place us on the same level as the European race.

"In cases like India, in countries like Java, Morocco and North Africa we can immediately learn from our European fellow-subjects, or rulers, if you prefer so to call them, those secrets of power over nature, of scientific and economic and industrial development, which has made Europe so powerful.

"Along these lines, my fellow Muslims, I implore you, I beg of you, to work for the advancement of the whole world of Islam, but never forget our spiritual debt to our Holy Prophet."