

THE FINANCIAL DIMENSION OF INTER LEAGUE RELATIONSHIP

The Financial Problem

The relations between All India Muslim League and the London Muslim League began in an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding though tinged with formality. Ameer Ali conducted correspondence on important matters only and left the rest to Ibni Ahmad and Zahur Ahmad. On 8 May 1908, Ibni Ahmad sent to Haji Muhammad Musa Khan, officiating honorary secretary of the All India Muslim League, a copy of the proceedings of the inaugural meeting for publication in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and the Urdu papers. He promised to send the presidential address along with the relevant press cuttings from the *Times* and the *Daily Graphic*, and requested that the address be translated into Urdu and released to the press.¹ Since the London Branch had started functioning on a regular basis, he pleaded for the remittance of funds, already pledged directly to Syed Ameer Ali's address. In a separate letter Hasan Bilgrami endorsed this demand.² Perhaps Musa Khan did not get Ibni Ahmad's letter in time, and wrote to Ameer Ali explaining that since his London address was not known to him, he had instructed the Bank of Bengal and Agra to remit, £100 to Nawab Imad-ul-Mulk, Husain Bilgrami, member of the India Council.³ Ameer Ali was asked to receive the money and "spend it for the benefit of the British Committee of the All India Muslim League".⁴ In this manner the remittance was delayed, and in his letter of 28 May, Ameer Ali again urged expeditious action.

In view of the political situation I request you to be good enough to remit without delay this year's subsidy in order to enable this Association to begin work at once and deal with pressing questions.⁵

The remittance was received sometimes in second week of June, and Ameer Ali formally acknowledged its receipt.⁶ It may be noted that the

subsidy sanctioned by the All India Muslim League in its resolution of 18 March took almost three months to be available to the London Branch. Not uncommon, such delays continued to hamper the highly practicable programmes of London Muslim League.

On 15 May 1908, Zahur Ahmad in a lengthy letter to Musa Khan explained that the inaugural meeting had afforded them the opportunity of contact with many M.P.s and eminent Englishmen who later sent letters of support and sympathy for the London Branch. These letters would be published later on a suitable occasion. Before this meeting, "the All India Muslim League was not known to any person" in the U.K.⁷ Our effort was to enlist the sympathies of one hundred M.P.s both from Liberal and Conservative parties to be represented through their honorary vice-presidents in the London Muslim League. It should be appreciated that London Muslim League was pitted against the vastly influential and immensely more resourceful lobby of the Indian National Congress.⁸ In a meeting of the Committee of Management held on 14 May, attended by Syed Ameer Ali and Major Hasan Bilgrami, it was decided to hire an office building near the Parliament so as to invite frequent visits from the M.P.s who should be provided with all the necessary information about Muslim position and thus enabling them to ask questions in the Parliament.⁹ It was also decided to request Syed Ameer Ali and Husain Bilgrami to prepare a pamphlet setting forth the condition and demands of the Muslims of India. The London Muslim League would publish it for free distribution among the M.P.s, prominent Englishmen and the press.¹⁰ He suggested that the AIML should also publish a monthly magazine. He requested for the names and addresses of the members of the Central and Provincial Muslim Leagues so that the London Muslim League could establish contact with them as well. Interestingly, he asked for the permanent address of the AIML office for the purpose of regular correspondence. Finally he requested that his letter be placed before the Central Standing Committee and read out to Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk.¹¹

In reply, Musa Khan acclaimed the achievement of the London Muslim League within such a short period,¹² while the absence of political organization had placed the Muslims at a serious disadvantage in the past. In a rather pontifical note he urged the London Muslim League to continue their mission with sincerity and fortitude and as soon as the present unsound condition of AIML improved, the claims of London Muslim League would be gladly accommodated.¹³

Ameer Ali was obliged to reiterate the rationale of the London Muslim League and also spelt out a highly beneficial programme:

He argued.

The work before the Branch is of a most responsible and serious character. I have ventured to mention to several our leading notables in India, the policy of the Indian Government keeps always in view what passes in Parliament here. In order therefore, to obtain due recognition of our interests by the Indian Government it is essential that we should endeavour to obtain the support, so far as possible, of English public opinion in the furtherance of our objects.

Our Hindu compatriots have secured the sympathy and active support of an influential section of people in England. Our efforts must take the same direction. We must recognise that with the prejudice against Mohammadans, springing from misunderstanding, it is difficult to rely upon the support of any particular party. We must try to get assistance from all sides, Conservatives and Liberals alike. We must also endeavour to enlist, if possible, the sympathy of the electorate, and try to enlighten it on the subject of the great Mohammadan minority which hitherto has been considered of no importance.¹⁴

In order to achieve these objectives, he proposed to organize lectures in London and provincial towns preferably by qualified Muslims if available, or "to secure the services of English sympathisers".¹⁵ Since dinners were "too expensive and too formal", he desired to invite members of Parliament from both the parties should be invited in political breakfasts and bring them "in direct relation with Muslims".¹⁶ In addition, London Muslim League would maintain an office, hire halls for meetings, provide for lectures, travelling expenses, and bear the cost of breakfasts, publications of lectures and leaflets. "For all this we require money".¹⁷ He wrote:

The members, here, as your committee knows can provide very little towards the prosecution of these objects. The bulk of them are students although they have most generously come forward at this stage to enable the London Branch to start its work.¹⁸

It should be realised that without a positive financial commitment from the AIML it would be "useless for me to continue to preside over the London Branch".¹⁹ This was no veiled threat but an anguished cry. To exert greater pressure he took the Bengali notables in confidence on this point. Since the AIML was already aware, he assumed, the London Branch "would not be left unsupported from India. . . I doubt whether we can, at the most economical scale, do with less than £200 a year".²⁰ In this context, he observed that the South Africa British Association "representing only a population of nine thousand"²¹ received a subsidy

of £200 and had rented an office for £45 while London Muslim League hoped to rent an office for £32 inclusive of electricity charges etc. Drawing a comparison with the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, he pointed out that it was spending more than £1000 a year. If the reports were to be believed the amount was much larger. It was paying £300 to the editor of its special organ in London. He requested that his letter along with the "memorandum on several important matters" be placed before the Standing Committee of the AIML. His last paragraph reflected his frustration at the apathy of Indian Muslims.

It would be a matter of regret if the 62 million of Mohammadans in India should not be able to raise sufficient funds for representing their interests in England.²²

On 20 May, Musa Khan sent to Ameer Ali, a draft for £100 for "the support and maintenance of the London Branch in the prosecution of its work".²³ This draft was duly acknowledged and deposited in the bank account of the London Branch. But this amount was too meagre for the political programme being undertaken by the London Muslim League.²⁴ Commenting on Ameer Ali's confidential letter demanding a subsidy of £200, Musa Khan conceded that "Ameer Ali's demands are very legitimate. Nothing short of it can raise the status of the London Branch and make it an influential political body".²⁵ He regretted, that since AIML would be left with Rs. 1700 by the end of the month, it could not do more for the London Branch.²⁶ The problem remained unsolved. Zahur Ahmad complained that they did not have sufficient funds even to buy some Muslim newspapers and had appealed to them for complimentary copies.²⁷ He sought help of the parent League in this matter. AIML was not insensitive to the political goals and utter financial inadequacy of LML vis-a-vis the British Committee of the Indian National Congress and other London based societies. Musa Khan circulated Ameer Ali's letter to members of the standing committee of AIML and endorsed his views.

Everyman understands that without social gathering [sic] and without spending money in that direction no good can come out specially in England. I am personally aware of the expenses of the National Congress or other political body [sic] which are trying in England for their amelioration or success.²⁸

Though AIML was under financial strain it was considered expedient that the question of subsidy should be finally settled in the annual session of AIML at Amritsar. Conveying this decision to Ameer Ali, Musa Khan

hoped, "since you will be yourself present and will have the chance of impressing our people the necessity of spending lump sum of money for the success",²⁹ of LML it would be easier to take a favourable decision in this matter. However, Musa Khan endeavoured to raise donations for the LML and received a sympathetic letter from the Nawab of Dacca, and forwarded its copy to Ameer Ali.³⁰

In the meantime, Ameer Ali was busy organizing an exhibition of Muslim art in London, which was later inaugurated by Lord Lansdown who also made a mention of Muslim loyalty in eloquent words. Ameer Ali's speech evoked a favourable response.³¹ Encouraged by this venture, LML planned to invite for breakfast twenty to thirty M.P.s and English gentlemen interested in Muslim and Indian affairs. Since LML could not meet the expenses from its own resources it asked for financial assistance from AIML.³² Finally it was proposed to hold a breakfast meeting in Westminster Palace Hotel on 16 November and the members were required to pay four shillings each.³³ In a Committee meeting on 14 November they discussed the "best method for starting lectures in furtherance of the work of the League".³⁴

In the meantime, Hasan Bilgrami was carrying on an insidious campaign against the London Muslim League, and under his influence Musa Khan somewhat cooled off towards LML. Consequently the proposal for a political breakfast evoked little enthusiasm in AIML circles. Hasan Bilgrami for no tangible reason declined to attend the breakfast except if invited by Ameer Ali.³⁵ After all the breakfast was not Ameer Ali's private function. It seems Bilgrami was blatantly obstructive in order to pick up a fight. But Ameer Ali prevailed upon him to attend. Ibni Ahmad had already taken up this issue with Musa Khan and had exposed Hasan Bilgrami's dubious role in LML. Now he posed a more fundamental question to Musa Khan:

I am awaiting reply to my last letter. The future of London Branch hinges on it, especially when you have indicated in your last letter that it was not serving any useful purpose. But if you still desire that it should continue working, then I do hope earnest effort would be made to give it substantial annual subsidy and acknowledge it as a branch.³⁶

Despite all odds, London Muslim League's breakfast meeting on 16 November 1908 was a big success and was well reported in *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Daily Graphic*.³⁷ The English newspapers of India received report of the meeting from F. H.

Brown a sympathiser of LML.³⁸ Ibni Ahmad asked Musa Khan to get the report translated into Urdu and send it to Urdu papers.³⁹ He hoped that the next meeting would be still more successful, but nothing could be done "without money".⁴⁰ Encouraged by their success, LML planned a formal dinner to launch Muslim Parliamentary Committee.⁴¹ Furthermore they chalked out a programme of guest speakers in order to present Muslim viewpoint before various clubs in London. For implementing their programme a special subsidy of at least thirty pounds was required.⁴² In reply, as usual, Musa Khan waxed eloquent in praise of Ameer Ali, "the bright jewel of our Community",⁴³ whose writings should be read in the Amritsar session of AIML. He had already requested Ameer Ali for his writings. Regarding the additional funds, he assured that AIML was "trying to collect money"⁴⁴ for the proposed dinner of LML.

As the LML initiative was circumscribed by a chronic financial inadequacy, it gave rise to a nagging feeling of under-achievement to Ameer Ali and his colleagues, while the AIML got the uneasy feeling of being joined with an over zealous and restive body, eager to give lead rather than to follow. Though the parent body could tighten purse strings to assert its authority, the emotional atmosphere thus generated was likely to be less conducive to harmonious personal equation among the leaders.

NOTES

1. Ibni Ahmad to Haji Musa Khan, 8 May 1908, *MLR*, Vol. 23.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Haji Musa Khan to Ameer Ali, 20 May 1908. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Ameer Ali to the Honorary Secretary of the Central Standing Committee of All India Muslim League, 28 May 1908. *Ibid.*
6. Ameer Ali to Musa Khan, 14 June 1908, and 18 June 1908. *Ibid.*
7. Zahur Ahmad to Musa Khan, 15 May 1908. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.* See also Appendix I.
12. Musa Khan to Zahur Ahmad, 8 June 1908, *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ameer Ali to Musa Khan, 14 June 1908, *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*
23. Ameer Ali to the Honorary Secretary AIML, 18 June 1908, *MLR*, *Ibid.*
24. Zahur Ahmad to Musa Khan, 3 July 1908, *Ibid.*
25. Musa Khan to Ibni Ahmad, 27 July 1908, *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. Zahur Ahmad to Musa Khan, n.d. (circa August 1908), *Ibid.*
28. Musa Khan to Ameer Ali, 12 August, 1908, *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. Musa Khan to Zahur Ahmad, 17 September, 1908, *MLR*, Vol. 24.
31. Zahur Ahmad to Musa Khan, 23 October, 1908, *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Ibni Ahmad to Secretary AIML, 29 October 1908, *Ibid.*
34. Ibni Ahmad, 'Agenda for Meeting of AIML, London Branch', 26 October 1908, *Ibid.*
35. Major Syed Hasan Bilgrami to Ibni Ahmad, 7 November 1908, *Ibid.* This letter forms an enclosure of Ibni Ahmad's letter of 13 November 1908, cited *infra*.
36. Ibni Ahmad to Musa Khan, 13 November 1908, *Ibid.*
37. Zahur Ahmad to Musa Khan, 20 November 1908, *Ibid.*
38. Ibni Ahmad to Musa Khan, 20 November 1908, *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. Zahur Ahmad to Musa Khan, 20 November 1908, *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Musa Khan to Ibni Ahmad, 10 December 1908, *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*