

Conferences/Seminars**International Conference on Muslim  
Minority/Majority Relations**

New York, NY

*Rabi' al Awwal 23-25, 1410/October 24-26, 1989*

The International Conference on Muslim Minority/Majority Relations held in New York, *Rabi' al Awwal 23-25, 1410/October 24 to 26, 1989* brought to the fore some of the little known but significantly major problems faced by the Muslim minority communities in many parts of the world. The magnitude of the problem can be seen from the fact that the Muslim minorities form one-third of the world Muslim population, over 300 million out of an estimated one billion Muslims.

The three day conference was divided into different areas of concern. Over 50 papers were presented. Among the topics discussed were:

North American Arab Muslims, an Intellectual and Attitudinal Profile of the Muslim Community in North America;  
 Muslim/Non-Muslim Relations in America;  
 Economic Development of Indian Muslims, Issues and Problems;  
 The Turks in Bulgaria;  
 South Africa: The Role of a Muslim Minority in a Situation of Change;  
 The Islamic Minorities in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique;  
 Muslim/Christian Relations in Sudan;  
 Muslim Women in an Alien Society: A Case Study in West Germany;  
 Muslims in Britain: Some Recent Developments;  
 Muslim Minorities and non-Muslim Party Politics in the Netherlands;  
 Muslim Minorities in the Soviet Union, China, Australia, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Philippines, Thailand and other areas.

The first day of the conference was devoted to North America, Asia and Africa. In the session on North America, Dr. Ni'mat Barazangi highlighted the fact that the process of adjustment and integration of Muslims in America had its own challenges. On the one hand, the immigrant Muslims realize the need to maintain their religious and cultural identity, and, on the other, it is not easy, or even practical, to stay away from the mainstream of the majority culture and its impact.

Dr. Ausaf Ahmad of the Islamic Development Bank presented a paper on "Economic Development of Indian Muslims: Issues and Problems." He referred to the 1981 census of India which he said did not reveal the Muslim population, in the absence of which no sophisticated economic analysis could be done at the micro level. However, he broadly mentioned some regional concentrations of Muslims which on a percentage basis are quite interesting: Jammu and Kashmir 65%, Bengal and Kerala 20%, Uttar Pradesh 15%; in 17 other states 17% or more; together in 12 states the Muslim population works out to 52% and in 93 cities of three states 48%; in 14 states Muslims are more than 10% and in 3 cities more than 50%. And yet there are not enough Muslims in the Indian Parliament.

Touching upon the communal riots in India, Dr. Ahmad said that based on the figures given by the Home Ministry of the Government of India, a total of 7,026 communal riots took place in India. As for the economic situation, Muslims have the lowest income and lowest savings per household among all Indians.

As to the question of how to get out of this situation and live peacefully with full participation in national life, Dr. Ahmad said that although the task was difficult and complex, Indian Muslims should be in favor of economic development and pursuit of excellence, because a minority community could not afford to live as a mediocre community.

In reply to a question, Dr. Ahmad struck a hopeful note and said that the situation was not gloomy. New Muslim leadership was emerging and the Muslim community was conscious of its identity and place in the national life of the country and is eager to seek an equitable distribution of the fruits of development.

The next speaker on India was Dr. Christian W. Troll of Birmingham University, United Kingdom. His subject was "Islamically Valid Muslim Participation in the Republic of India." He said that the Indian Muslims find themselves in a unique position among people of different faiths and cultures but that their participation in the national life of the country did not conflict with the teachings of Islam.

Professor Theodore P. Wright of the State University of New York, Albany, spoke on "Majority Hindu Images: Stereotypes and Demands of the Muslim Minority in India". He maintained that the Hindu majority and Muslim minority views had become more salient during the last two decades. While Hindu fundamentalism or majority backlash is on the increase, there is more confidence in the Indian Muslim community as well. Comparing American majority and Hindu majority backlash, he said that the former is more homogeneous and its backlash is much milder than the Hindu majority backlash in India. He said that Muslims were former rulers of India but were now reduced to a group lacking power and are easily victimized because of poor

education and poverty. Professor Wright suggested the strategy of direct approach by Muslim leadership to Hindu leadership rather than through the Indian government which is a 'psuedo-secular raj' he said.

In her paper 'The Long Quest of Aligarh for a Minority Status: The Amendment Act of 1981', Madame Violette Graff of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationale, Paris, briefly went over the history and politics of the Aligarh Muslim University and the legal, constitutional and political disputes raised over the status of the University after the partition of the country. She said that the University represented the aspirations of the Muslims of India and successive attempts to question and undo its minority status distressed and antagonized Muslims and led to an uneasy relationship between the University and the Government of India. Finally, the 1981 Amendment Act recognized the fact that the AMU was established by the Muslims of India but at the same time it created some difficulties, particularly in the composition and function of the Court which is the University's policy making body.

In any case, Violette Graff said that both in style and in sentiment, AMU remains a singular symbol of Muslim life in India.

Another important Muslim minority area, Bulgaria, which has of late become the cause of great concern to Muslims all over the world, was discussed by Dr. Kemal Karpat of the University of Wisconsin in his paper "Turks in Bulgaria." He presented some distressing facts about the situation of the Turkish Muslim minority of Bulgaria and called it a "tragic story." This minority constitutes the largest Muslim population in Europe, after the Soviet Union—numbering about 900,000, although the authorities show a much lower number. Dr. Karpat said that the acts of the Bulgarian government were hard to understand and accept, such as changing of Muslim names, closure of mosques and schools, abolition of prayers, etc. Muslims were being discriminated against and pushed to menial jobs and cheap labor. All this has created in them a sense of insecurity and fear for the future. As a result, they have started migrating to Turkey in large numbers but the Bulgarian government stopped this, as it realised that a large scale exodus will hurt its policy of industrialization for which manpower was required. Therefore, instead of expelling the Muslims, it decided to Bulgarianize them and keep them for its own purposes.

I shall now move to the South African scene which was presented by Professor J. A. Naude of the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg. The title of his paper was "South Africa: The Role of a Muslim Minority in a Situation of Change." Evaluating conditions in that part of the world, Professor Naude said that Muslims can be divided into two groups according to their role in present day South Africa. One group holds the view that Islam unadulterated by cooperation with non-Muslims is the solution, and therefore Muslims should not get involved either in revolutionary or evolutionary politics since both imply cooperation with non-Muslims. The other group

accepts cooperation with non-Muslims because for the small Muslim minority this is an inescapable reality, and understanding must be reached with other world views such as commitment to the struggle for justice against apartheid.

Professor Naude was of the view that "in the end it might be wiser not to be compromised by involvement in a political movement. At the moment it may be opportune to be part of the revolutionary struggle. But there is an outside chance that South Africa will be saved from a destructive civil war by an evolutionary process of change, given the noticeable change in attitude of the Soviet Union towards revolutionary movements and the groundswell towards peaceful solutions for the problems of this southern part of the continent of Africa."

On the opening day of the Conference, at the luncheon hosted by the City University of New York, Bernard Lewis of Princeton University gave a speech on the minority/majority situation in its historical perspective.

At the banquet given by the Muslim community of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut in honor of the attending scholars on the second day of the Conference, the renowned scholar Ali Mazrui, who is the Head of the Department of Political Science at the State University of New York, Binghamton, gave the keynote speech on the theme "Islam in World Affairs: A Reappraisal." It was a frank, illuminating and thought-provoking speech. He dealt with the overall world situation of minority/majority relations on a cultural plane and said that it was amazing how Western culture had soaked up other cultures and that the world system had become heavily Western. Other cultures are enfeebled slowly by Western culture; the latter is destroying plurality while singing its praises, he said. He said that the Muslim governments are anti-communist but not anti-West. He said that the West no longer understands other cultures nor does it project any religion.

Dr. Mazrui cautioned that heavy responsibility lay upon Islam as a younger culture to stand up against Western cultural hegemony and expressed the hope that Islam will emerge successful.

Muslim international organizations were represented in the conference. Mr. Monsef Klibi of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Dr. Kaid Abdul Haq of the Islamic Development Bank, and Dr. Hasan Ahdal of the Muslim World League represented their respective organizations. Aside from this, several non-Muslim and Muslim governments had sent their diplomats and consular officials to represent them in the conference. The international media was also there. The proceedings of the conference were covered, among others, by the Voice of America, Radio Cairo, Radio Liberty of West Germany, and the Okaz press of Saudi Arabia.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, London, which organized the conference, arranges

publication of the conference papers which would become a source of valuable information and a reference for scholars all over the world.

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