

EVOLVING HORIZONS

An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Education,
Humanities, Social And Behavioral Sciences

(A Peer Reviewed Journal)

Volume 8 • November 2019 • ISSN : 2319 - 6521

THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT AND GANDHIJI

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Abstract

Indian Muslims were always attached to the *Khilafat*. The British tried to usurp this situation for its own interest. In the 'dark' days of the 1857 Mutiny, the British ambassador to Turkey managed to obtain a command from the *Khalifa*, restraining Indian Muslims from thwarting attacks upon Britain. Britain, in order to safeguard its own interest and to win over the Muslims to its side revitalised pro-Turkish feelings among the Indian Muslims and portrayed to be the custodian of the Islamic interests. But when the World War broke out in Balkans, the part played by the British government infuriated the Muslim and shook their loyalty in India. Gandhiji saw that the anti-Raj stance received momentum from various sections of Muslim community mainly on account of the fact that Turkey and the Khalifa. The Muslim community felt greatly insulted and humiliated on account of the unbearable political conditions placed on their shoulders. Therefore Gandhiji put in all of his effort to create an unprecedented awakening among the Muslims, an awakening which they were prepared to pour into Nationalism and into a struggle which was supposed to be developed eventually into a freedom movement. The present paper intends to make an inquiry of the role played by Gandhiji to secure the Muslim political support and to arrange a unified national movement towards the achievement of Freedom, through the Non-cooperation.

Keywords: Khilafat, Gandhiji, Noncooperation, British, Turkey, National.

“The purpose of Allah in creating Khilafat on earth is to set up a responsible community and government for the guidance and welfare of mankind, to establish justice, to remove

oppression and tyranny, to prevent people from going astray, and to bring about peace and happiness in the world.”

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Thus said the holy *Quran*,(IV: 62). With the passage of time, Khilafat became an essential institution, which held the Muslim world together as one family under one leader - Khalifa. Mohammed Ali, one of the chief exponents of the Khilafat Movement in India, once explaining the importance of Khilafat said:

Islam is super national and not national.. the base of Islamic sympathy is not a common domicile or common parentage but a common outlook on life and common culture in Khilafat... The Khalifa is the commander of the faithful. His commands are the commands of God and that is why our main claim is that Khilafat should be preserved. We cannot tolerate affront to our Khalifa." (Rai, 6)

Indian Muslims were always attached to the *Khilafat*. This may have been done because of a strong feeling for religious unity and to grasp legitimacy under the Islamic law by the 'slave' sultans so as to empower themselves against the "squeamish ulema and factitious nobles" (Minault, 72). Later on, the Mughals, according to the inscription on their coins, assumed the title of *Khalifa*¹ within India. It is interesting to note that the office of *Khilafat* issued legitimate seals to the Indian Sultans when they asked for it. In 1785-90, Tipu Sultan of Mysore is said to have sent an embassy to the *Khalifa*. It was only after securing the letter of investiture that he assumed the title of an independent king. Thus, the Indian Muslim, unequivocally, was attached to the *Khilafat* and abhorred its affront.

Cunningly enough, the British tried to usurp this situation for its own interest. In the 'dark' days of the 1857 Mutiny, the British ambassador to Turkey managed to obtain a command

from the *Khalifa*, restraining Indian Muslims from thwarting attacks upon Britain. Britain, in order to safeguard its own interest and to win over the Muslims to its side revitalised pro-Turkish feelings among the Indian Muslims and portrayed to be the custodian of the Islamic interests.

Partly owing to their imperialistic designs and partly out of fear of the Russian advance in Central Asia which threatened the safety of the subcontinent, the British pursued a policy of bolstering up Turkey against Russia. The British sent Indian troops in 1878, when there was an imminent danger of Russian attack on Constantinople. This policy of protection was followed during the Crimean War and even after the Russo-Turkish War. All these friendly gestures and British propaganda in favour of Turkey went a long way in creating an impression among the Indian Muslims that England was the true ally and a faithful friend of the Ottoman Empire.

But there was a reversal after the Treaty of Berlin, which ended the Russo-Turkish war. Change in British policy was destined to shake the foundations of the loyalty of the Indian Muslims. They were afraid that if Turkey too lost her independence, then the Muslims, like the Jews would be reduced to a mere religious sect without any government of their own.

Muslim opposition to the British grew in the years 1911-13, when the series of Balkan wars added to the anxiety to the Muslims. The Muslim press in India viewed the wars as evidence of "the conspiracy of the Christian powers to crush the Ottoman Empire and its Khalifa" (Iqbal,49).

The Sick man of Europe, as Turkey was called, began its tribulations with Tripoli - a desert with oases. Its European population was composed of a large proportion of Italians. Austria and France made territorial acquisitions at the expense of Turkey. Italy covetously made careful military and diplomatic preparations for years. Under the pretext of ill-treatment of Italian nationals living in Tripoli, the Italian Government in September 1911, sent 50,000 soldiers to Turkey. Turkey was unprepared and succumbed to the raid. Italy occupied the territory and began an orgy of indiscriminate slaughter. The Italian adventure soured the Indian Muslim mind (Muhammad, 22). Britain, following its appeasement policy simply sided with Italy (*The Times*, 1 December 1911). Turkey was even denied the right to use her own territory to repel the onslaught. The request of the Sultan to be allowed to send troops to Tripoli via Egypt was refused. Ultimately, Turkey had to make peace in humiliation with the aggressor on the aggressor's own terms.

When the World War broke out in Balkans, the Muslims in the whole of India desired that Turkey should not join it. The Sultan appealed to the big European power for help when the Balkan allies threatened to invade. King Ferdinand out rightly denied support and called it a crusade. While King George V avowed neutrality, the Prime Minister Asquith and his ministers remained bluntly unfriendly. The part played by the British government infuriated the Muslim and shook their loyalty in India. The Viceroy, Lord Hardinge was nearly forced to declare that the British Government meant no harm to Turkey. But the war situation did not improve. In November 1914, owing to the persistent aggression, Turkey decided to join the war against England and her allies. The Urdu press of India

increased their anti British campaign. Maulana Azad wrote: "We must always remember that the Ottoman Khalifa is the guardian of the holy places of Islam, and that support for Turkey is same as support for Islam" (*al-Hilal*, 19 February, 1913.) This in turn, provoked the British Government in India to react sharply by forfeiting, shutting down the newspapers and finally declaring internment of its editors/ proprietors. The Government imprisoned the Ali Brothers under the Defence of India Act and ultimately confined them to Chhindwara in a remote area of Central India.

The Indian Muslims came out in protest and it provided Indian politics, many years after the joint struggle of 1905 against the Partition of Bengal, another unique opportunity to connect the Hindu Muslim sentiment and fight against British imperialism. Already the national leaders like Annie Besant, M.A.Jinnah, Mazharul Haq, Raja of Mahamudabad, Wazir Hasan, Sarojini Naidu, Tilak, etc. were attempting for a rapprochement between the Hindus and the

Muslims and to erase the differences between the National Congress and the League. The environment suited them best and the leaders of Muslim League and National Congress signed an agreement at the Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916. Separate electorates was accepted by Congress and an agreement was reached as to the distribution of seats for the communities by which the Muslims got a weightage in the provinces where they constituted a minority, but abandoned their majority in Bengal and Punjab. Moreover, they also gave up their right to vote in the general electorates. Thus, concessions were made by both, but the Muslims gained the best of it.

Initially it was mainly the Muslims who were shy of adopting a responsible Government on the British parliamentary pattern, because in such a case they could be crushed by the Hindu majority. Even Tilak and Gokhale reconciled and supported the Plan (Rothermund, 73-74). Raja of Mahmudabad who presided over the Calcutta session of the Muslim League spoke thus:

“The interests of the country are paramount. We need not try to argue whether we are Muslims first or Indians. The fact is we are both; to us the question of precedence has no meaning. The League has inculcated among the Muslims a spirit of sacrifice for their country as their own religion.”

Mohammed Ali Jinnah explained that the understanding between the two would give them a chance to come together and take a decision on the future policies of India (*The Leader*, 13 June 1915). Appreciating the role played by Jinnah in the Lucknow pact, Mohammed Ali wrote to Moulvi Abdullah Ahmed “We will not lose by conferring with the Hindus...”. This pact was like dream come true for Maulana Azad who said, “For the Hindus patriotism might be a secular obligation, but for the Muslims it was a religious duty” (*al-Hilal*, 18 December, 1912).

When Arthur James **Balfour in his famous 1917 declaration** observed that one of the objects of Britain was “The setting free of the populations subject to the tyranny of the Turks; and the turning out of Europe of the Ottoman Empire as decidedly foreign to western civilization...”, the Indian Muslims once again felt insulted. But Lloyd George substantially altered the Balfour’s Statement on 5 January 1918, and de-

clared: “Nor we are fighting...to deprive Turkey of its capital or of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace which are predominantly Turkish in race... while we do not challenge the maintenance of the Turkish Empire in the homelands of the Turkish race with its capital at Constantinople...Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia and Palestine are in our judgement entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions.” The Indian Muslims once again vacillated and pinned high hopes on the British Prime Ministers promise. They voluntarily enlisted in great numbers for the war recruitment.

However, when victory came, the British government broke its words. India office functionaries tended to deny even of taking any pledge and contended it to be “an explanation of war aims to the Labour Party” and the Government of India took a similar line when in a circular letter to all Local Governments; it stated that it had been an offer of peace terms which, having been rejected by Turks, was no longer operative.

The Muslims, initially, requested Britain, to interfere further and change the official stand. The rulers of the princely states Lord Sinha, Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmed Khan and Yusuf Ali went in a deputation for representing the Muslim case before Lloyd George, President Wilson, M. Clemenceau, and the Italian Prime Minister, a body commonly known as *the Council of Four*. But they sadly failed (*The Times of India*, 17 July 1919). Mohammed Ali appealed on 17 March and again on 21 March 1920 to

spare us the one thing which is to us more than all territory - more than all financial resources, and that is the lib-

erty of our conscience. We have come to you.. .to help us in presenting the sanctity of our soul. This question...is not nearly a Turkish question. It is...an Indian question.
(Iqbal, 158)

But all efforts were in vain. The allied powers published the peace terms with Turkey on 14 May 1920 by which all the territorial possessions and principalities, which were the marks of stately Turkey were stripped off and were distributed among the Allied Powers.

The Treaty was an outrage on the Muslim conscience and *fatwas* were issued by the *Moulvies* and *Maulanas*, asking the followers to sever all relations with the government (Abbas, 329-31). Maulana Shibli, Maulana Azad, Maulana Abdul Bari and the other eminent religions minded Muslims were opposed to the too much loyalism displayed by some Muslims. Even the most loyalist element of the British government, Sir Aga Khan now, openly became hostile. About September 1919 Indian Muslims began to feel the necessity to make themselves heard by means of an organization created especially for the purpose of supporting the Khalifa. Simultaneously two conferences - one met at Lucknow on 21 September and the other on 23 September 1919 at Delhi - were organized which culminated into the All India Khilafat Conference.² Previously, on 20 March 1919, at a public meeting of 15000 Bombay Muslims, a Khilafat Committee was formed. The president was Seth Mian Muhammad Haji Jan Muhammad Chotani, a wealthy local merchant, who had made a fortune by trading with the British.. Chotani was a sincerely religious man, concerned about the future of the Khilafat and the security of the pilgrimage plac-

es. This Conference merged with the All India Khilafat Conference and Chotani became the chief financier of the Khilafat Movement both in India and in England. In an open letter to Gandhi, Maulana Abdul Bari called for a rapprochement between the major communities of India to uproot the evil Government. Gandhi and Swami Shraddhanand attended the Conferences on 23rd September (Khaliqzaman, 32- 33). Gandhi presided over the 24 September Conference.

Gandhiji saw that the anti-Raj stance received momentum from various sections of Muslim community mainly on account of the fact that Turkey and the Khalifa. The Muslim community felt greatly insulted and humiliated on account of the unbearable political conditions placed on their shoulders. Therefore Gandhiji put in all of his effort to create an unprecedented awakening among the Muslims, an awakening which they were prepared to pour into Nationalism and into a struggle which was supposed to be developed eventually into a freedom movement. He knew the feeling of Islamic brotherhood was one of the few things on which most Indian Muslims-Aligarh or Ulema, Loyalist or Nationalist, Conservatives or Reformist, Hindustani or Deccani could agree. It gave them a basis for solidarity among themselves to hinder their minority status in the political shows. Their religious identity and their political identity were thus inextricably entwined.

Gandhiji made no secret of the fact that he was harnessing the Khilafat issue to a political cause, the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity and self Government for India. He was glad that Muslims were thinking in a similar way, but he made it clear that, so far as he was concerned, he would not make Hindu support on the Kh-

ilafat issue a part of bargain. Gandhiji wanted Hindu support for the movement to be wholly unconditional. He said that, "such a chance of winning over the Muslims would never come in a hundred year times and if twenty two crores of Hindus intelligently plead for the Muslims on the Khilafat issue, they would forever win . . . Muslims." He did not deny that the fate of Khilafat was a Muslim problem and Hindus were not directly concerned with it. But it seemed to him that this was an opportunity for the Hindus to make a great gesture, that 'compelling act of love' to their Muslim neighbours. He wanted to create a reservoir of good will of the Hindus which could comfortably disarm Muslim fear and suspicions, and ensure participation in a common struggle against colonial rule forging a new bond between the two communities (CWMG-Vol. 20, p.290.3). He called upon Hindus, as the majority community, to take lead in cultivating a spirit of mutual harmony. He very well knew that true unity would come only when the Hindus, while scrupulously following his own religion, were prepared to regard the Muslims as their brothers. He advised in favour of sanity and tolerance and said, "I can imagine no better cement for perpetually binding us both, Hindu and Muslims. We must conquer not by hate, but by love. And in a just and sacred cause, firmness of purpose and unconquerable will are the least qualities required of us." Gandhi ji wrote, "It is not for uniting the religions. The attempt today is for cultivation of tolerance"(CWMG, Vol. 19, 305).

He did not pretend that he was qualified to adjudicate on the theological and juridical aspects of the Khilafat. It was enough for him that influential Muslim opinion in India was united on it. It was, he believed, the duty of the Government of India to impress on the British

Government the importance of placating the sentiments of eighty million Indian Muslims in devising the Peace Treaty with the defeated Ottoman Empire. Gandhi ji believed, the most of the Muslim leaders were inspired by the lofty sentiment of Nationalism.

Gandhiji sought to contact a number of Muslim leaders in the interest of communal harmony. And incidentally he found this opportunity, when Maulana Abdul Bari requested for his support in the campaign to secure the release of Ali brothers. Gandhiji took this opportunity for gaining Muslim support to the drive for self Government, which he called Swaraj. Tilak, Annie Besant and Gandhiji were the leading Congressman who supported the agitation for the release of the Khilafat leaders, particularly the Ali brothers. They realised, since the Ali brothers enjoyed popular support amongst Muslims, by taking up their cause they would keep the Congress-League entente alive. Therefore, Gandhiji gave his full support, for the release campaign of Ali brothers and in some way he also convinced Mohammad Ali about the sincerity and purity of his faith in Islam (Shakir Moin, 72.) In December 1917, he assured the delegates at the Muslim League Session that the Hindus were with them in their just struggle for the Ali brother release (CWMG- Vol. 14,120.) and he wrote a letter to the Viceroy on 27 April, 1918:

"Lastly I would like to request His Majesty's ministers to give definite assurance about Muslim states. I am sure you know that every Muslim is deeply interested in them. As a Hindu I cannot be indifferent to their cause. Their sorrows must be our sorrows. In the most scrupulous regard for the rights of these

States and to the Muslim sentiment as to the places of worship and in your just and timely treatment of Indian claim to Home Rule lies the safety of the Empire.” (Bamford, 134 -35.)

But the Viceroy paid no heed to his requests. So, in July 1918, the Gandhiji announced his decision to “engage the Government in a duel” on the issue [Chelmsford Papers (21)- Gandhi to Maffey, July 12, 1918].

Gandhiji said, “Maulana Abdul Bari, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali are the three jewels of the Muslim community and I feel that, as they are true Muslims, they are true Indians. . . I can see that none of them will be afraid to follow the path they think is right” (*Navajivan*, February 1, 1920.). Mahatma wrote to Mohammad Ali, “my interest in your release is quiet selfish. We have common goal and I want to utilize your services to the uttermost, in order to reach the goal, because the proper solution of the Mohammadan question lies in the realization of Swaraj” (Gandhi to Mohammad Ali- November 8, 1918, p. 6.4). Gandhiji was able to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity due to his remarkable organizational skill, and in part because he campaigned for the release of Ali brothers and took an active interest in the Khilafat issue. His early contact with influential Muslim enabled him to understand the importance of religious institutions, rituals, symbols in Indian Islam and he never ignored them all through his career.

In the post 1917 the Hindus and Muslims alike joined the protest movement against the Raj. By mid April 1919, the scene was set for Hindu-Muslim co-operation in the Khilafat movement- a movement which marked the rise to

highest point of the anti-British feeling in Indian Politics. Hasrat Mohani, one of the notable Khilafat leaders, said it clearly in his speech that without complete independence the Khilafat question could not be settled. And for complete Independence , he assured that, the Muslim would join the Hindu majority. Gandhiji also tried to cemented the Hindu- Muslim unity through his weekly journals, “*Young India*” and “*Navajivan*”. He argued that Hindu-Muslims tension could never have taken the form, it did, if the country had understood his message. He said, the principle of non-violence held the key not only to the freedom of country, but also peace between the communities. Gandhiji hoped to strengthen the bond of Hindu-Muslim unity, which he regarded as “a thousand times more valuable than our connection with British”(Desai, 237). But Britain was afraid for this unity because they believed that British rule had been saved mainly by the anti-Muslim feelings of the Hindu races. (Laing, 172)

By the efforts of Gandhiji and some Muslim politicians Hindu-Muslim friction decreased and progress towards amity continued during the following year. In the middle of 1919 the All India Khilafat Conference was organised and having been cordially invited there, Gandhi in an eloquent speech , categorised the Hindu population of the country into three sections:

1. Those who feared that in the zeal of their extra-territorial loyalty, the Muslims might go so far as to invite Afghanistan to invade India and usurp power with help, a prospect which would establish Muslim rule once again.

2. Those who were prepared to join hands with Muslims in their anti-British campaign on the condition that Muslims gave up cow-slaughter.
3. Those who attached no conditions and believed in the good faith of Muslims.

Most of those among the last category, were Congressmen, even the wavering persons among them were converted to unconditional co-operations by Gandhi's powerful advocacy.

Gandhiji addressed a joint conference of Hindu & Muslims at Delhi on 23 November 1919 and said,

"It had been said that Hindus have laid Mohammedans under a debt by sharing their feelings of sorrows and protest, but I maintain that they have done no more than their duty. You have passed a resolution of thanks to Hindus, but the fulfilment of duty and the settlement of debts deserve no thanks. It was their duty because there has been much talk of unity lately. But the test of unity and real fraternal feeling lies in sharing one another's sorrow and happiness alike. How can twenty-two crores Hindus have peace and happiness if eight crores of their Muslims brethren are torn in anguish? The pain of eight crores is also the pain of other twenty two crores inhabitants of India, therefore, although peace has been concluded, India has not known any real peace

(*The Bombay Chronicle*, November 29, 1919.)

On the same day, 23rd November 1919, Fazal-ul-Haq also delivered an address in Calcutta, which was full of spiteful accusations against the British Government and violent abuse of other European power. The majority of the delegates came from the United Provinces Delhi, Rajputana and Sindh. The consensus of opinion was undoubtedly strongly anti-British. Resolutions were passed to boycott the Peace celebrations, to boycott British goods, to send a deputation to England and, if necessary to America and to refuse to co-operate with the Government unless the Khilafat and the holy places of Islam were treated in accordance with Muslim desires. This meeting was also attended by Swami Shardhananda, a member of the Arya Samaj and one of the most prominent Hindu leaders who assisted Gandhiji much in building the Hindu-Muslim entente. Gandhiji supported all the resolution of Calcutta conference except one, which was the boycott of British goods. His reason was that it would confer 'economic punishment' to the native merchants and traders, and thereby divide the indigenous force into class based interests. His mission was to oppose and confront the British as one unified India and not an India cracked, split and torn apart by narrow, selfish interests of class, creed or caste.

On 24 November, 1919, Gandhiji presided over the same All-India Khilafat Conference in Delhi and supported the resolution of boycotting the Peace Celebration. He said:

There can be put only one question and it is whether the Muslims are in the right and their cause is just. If it is legitimate, then every child of the soil must sympathies with them as a matter of duty. . . When Hindus are in trouble,

Muslims should help them, and if the Muslims are in trouble, Hindus should come to their rescue. We want no return for our assistance and sympathy. If you Muslims are in the right, we shall offer you unconditional help. The Muslims are struggling in respect to the Khilafat question on just ground, and all Hindus, Parsis should share their sorrow. It is our duty to demonstrate to the British people the king and responsible Ministers that we regard the sentiments of Mussalmans with respect and consider their cause just. . . . Since eight crores Mussalmans regard the Sultan of Turkey their religious head, we, as the neighbours and compatriots realizing the just of their feelings should join them in the resolutions, they passed yesterday. God knows we are with them, because we know them to be justly aggrieved. . . . We shall witness quite another India on 13 December. Mr. Lloyd George shall have to yield to us, but should it not come to pass, we must do our duty. The Mussalmans have, therefore, resolved that, if the Government fails to secure them the fulfilment of their righteous demands, then they will cease to [offer] Government cooperation. . . . It amounts to this: 'If you cannot help us, it is our privilege to withdraw our help from you. Let it be said in plain language that we do not want to co-operate with you to help you to crush us. Spare us your help. Let there be no reciprocation of any kind between us. We do not help you and do not want your help.

(The Bombay Chronicle –December 6, 1919)

One can easily find that Gandhiji is courteous to the religious sentiment of the Muslims and at the same time, like an experienced political leader, is careful enough to prepare ground for his ultimate object, the Non Cooperation to the British Government.

With the Congress, the Muslim League, the Khilafat conference and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema holding their annual session simultaneously at Amritsar in December 1919, it became clear that Hindus and Muslims would present a joint National demand and fight for it⁴². Muslim attention generally seemed riveted on issues that were specifically Islamic, having little to do with the Indian National cause. But these Islamic issues also had their essential anti-British feelings. Muslim loyalty had been severely eroded, if not extinguished, by the war. The Muslim Khilafat leaders and Gandhiji realized this and sought to make the emergent Muslim rage and disgust against the British, as an important component of an expanding National movement. Their strategy was supplemented by the post war aftermath that rapidly accelerated both economic and Political afflictions to affect the whole population and produced a mass political agitation among both Hindu and Muslims.

NOTES

1. Khilafat in general term also means Sultan or ruler of a territory. But particularly it meant the Ruler of the Islamic world with his suzerainty over the whole Muslim population and his dictates could be considered as the dictates of God himself. Regarded as the 'Sword of Islam', he was actually a servant of God.
2. H.N.Mitra dates the formation of the Conference on 22nd September, *Indian Annual Register*, 1920, p.250-51.

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