From Pan-Islamism to Muslim Nationalism: The Indian Muslim Response to the Turkish War of Liberation

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Introduction

While Mustafa Kemal Pasha was fighting the British-led European conspiracy to destroy Ottoman/Turkish civilization, the Muslims of the Subcontinent opened a second front against their Britain rulers by launching the Khilafat Movement. The Movement was an expression of the Subcontinent Muslims’ sentimental attachment to the Ottoman Turks, who were perceived as not only the last stronghold of Islam but also their Sultan was viewed as the Caliph of all Muslims. In fact, the spirit of pan-Islamism among the Muslims of British India had been growing ever since the collapse of the Mughal Empire. The Khilafat Movement was led primarily by Muslims leaders but also participated by Hindu leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. It included mass rallies and arrests, media campaign, non-cooperation tactics and deputations abroad. In terms of its impact, the Movement boosted the Turkish nationalist struggle and might have influenced the British diplomacy at the Lausanne Conference. The Khilafat Movement lost its momentum in the wake of the victory of the Turkish nationalist forces and the consequent adoption of secular-modernist reforms by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. However, its relevance continued in the Subcontinent’s domestic political context until 1947, as the Muslim unity resulting from it gave rise to Muslim nationalism that finally created Pakistan under the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

This paper narrates the evolution of the Khilafat Movement, especially its contributions to the Turkish war of liberation. It starts by placing the rise of the Khilafat Movement in a historical context. This is followed by a narration of the main developments in the course of the Khilafat Movement, including the Khilafat leaders’ successive moves to pressure the British authorities in India, especially non-cooperation and Hijraat activities; their attempt to persuade the British leadership in London and cultivate European support for the Turks; and their political engagement with the Turkish nationalist leadership. The paper also highlights the dilemma that Khilafat leaders faced when the Ottoman Caliphate was ended by the Turkish nationalist leadership itself and how they tried to adjust to the new reality. The paper concludes with a mention of the ideological transformation from pan-Islamism to Muslim nationalism in British India, highlighting the broader significance of the Khilafat struggle for the Muslim Freedom Movement in the Subcontinent.
Historical Context

The Muslims of British India had always taken keen interest in the affairs of Muslims elsewhere in the world. In view of a common religion which bound its adherents together as one nation and recognized no ethnic or geographic boundaries in its ultimate worldview, this was quite natural. But the attitudes of the Indian Muslims towards the Turks were somewhat different: They felt sorrow at the Turks’ woes and found happiness at their joy and successes, which demonstrably manifested itself on every occasion, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. In the late nineteenth century, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the founder of Aligarh College, had urged them to stay loyal to the British and emulate the Ottoman Empire’s progressive reforms. Sir Sayyid published articles in his magazine Tehzeebul-Akhlaq, citing examples of Ottoman rulers like Sultan Mahmud II and Sultan Abdul Hamid who, he argued, gave up religious prejudices and saw no harm in taking advantage of European arts and sciences, or in adopting European customs and manners.¹

However, the deep affection of Indian Muslims was only for the Turkish nation, and not for Sultan Abdul Hamid or any other Sultan. Thus, when Sultan Abdul Hamid was deposed by the Young Turks in 1909, a cross-section of Muslim leaders—including Maulana Muhammad Ali, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Nawab Viqarul Mulk, Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali and Maulana Shibli Nomani—paid warm tributes to them. But before the Young Turks could strengthen their hold, the European powers, led by Great Britain, started realizing their plan of dividing the Ottoman empire—beginning with the War of Tripoli, 1911, and the Balkan War of 1912-13. By this time, however, the Indian Muslims’ affinity with the Turks had crystallized to such an extent that it turned into a forceful movement throughout the subcontinent. Maulana Muhammad Ali, Maulana Shaukal Ali, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Maulana Azad launched a massive media and political campaign in support of the Turks, urging Indian Muslims to provide material aid to the suffering Turks.²

For the purpose, in addition to the weekly Comrade, Maulana Muhammad Ali started publishing daily Hamdard, Maulana Zafar brought out the daily Zamindar, and Maulana Azad began to publish the weekly Al-Hilal. As a result of this dissemination campaign, subcontinent Muslims sent donations worth thousands of British Pound-Sterling to the Turkish Red Crescent to help it rehabilitate the Turks displaced during the wars of Tripoli and the Balkans. Owing to its pro-Turkish
leanings, the Muslim press became a victim of the British government’s repressive policies. Comrade, Zamindar and Al-Hilal were in particular penalized. Twice, Maulana Muhammad Ali had to deposit huge sums of money as security for continuing the publication of Comrade after the arbitrary forfeiture of the previous security amount. What annoyed the British was “The Choice of the Turks,” a long article serialized by the paper on the eve of the First World War, castigating the British and explaining why the Turks were forced to join the Axis Powers during the First World War. Later, during the War, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Maulana Zafar and Maulana Azad were imprisoned, and their papers were forced to cease publication.  

Khilafat Movement

That only helped to formalize the Subcontinent Muslim reaction to British attempts to ‘divide and rule’ the Ottoman territories. From December 1918, the Muslim leaders launched the Khilafat Movement, led initially by a small group of leading individuals like Maulvi Abdul Bari, Dr. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Seth Chotani, Abul Qasim, Maulana Azad, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Mushir Husain Kidwai, and, of course, the Ali Brothers—Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Muhammad Ali. The first expressions of pro-Turkish sentiment were made in December 1918 at the annual session of the Indian Muslim League in Delhi. The intention was to organize a popular movement for the Turks before the peace conference that would decide the fate of the Ottoman Empire. On the occasion, Muslim League President Fazlul Haq and other Muslims leaders condemned the acts of Sherif Husain at the behest of the British and demanded that the Jaziratu’l-Arab and the Holy Places should remain under the Sultan-Caliph’s rule. Then a separate body, the Central Khilafat Committee, was founded at a meeting held in Bombay on 14 November 1919 with Seth Chotani as its president. Later, local and regional Khilafat committees were also founded all over the country.  

The objectives of the Khilafat Movement were as follows:

1. To maintain the Turkish Caliphate.
2. To protect the holy places of the Muslims.
3. To maintain the unity of the Ottoman Empire.

The Central Khilafat Committee met in Delhi on 23-24 November to decide on its activities. By then, Gandhi had also shown interest in the Movement. He presided over the Delhi meeting, which asked for Indian representation at the peace
conference and demanded that Istanbul should remain in the hands of the Turks. Finally, the Khilafat question was taken up by the three main representative bodies of Indian society: the newly-founded Central Khilafat Committee, the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. In their December 1919 meeting in Amritsar, they reiterated their commitment to Muslim aspirations and decided to send a delegation to Great Britain and other European capitals headed by Maulana Muhammed Ali who had recently been set free.\(^5\)

The Khilafat Movement by then had also captured the imagination of the Muslims. Even though they were handicapped by British control over the country, they were determined to voice the cause of the Turks in India. An all-India Khilafat Day was declared on 17 October 1919. It was the first real expression of the unity of Indians on the Khilafat question, as Gandhi also joined in and issued statements to encourage the Hindus. Gandhi linked the issue of \textit{Swaraj} with the Khilafat issue to associate Hindus with the movement. The result was a huge success. There was almost no business in the bazars of India and hundreds of thousands of people gathered at meeting places in different cities.

\textbf{European Mission}

The Indian Khilafat delegation to Britain and other European capitals consisted of Maulana Muhammed Ali, Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi and Abul Kasim. Mr Kidwai was later to join them. The delegation left Bombay for London on February 1, 1920. While it was on its way, the peace conference started in London. The delegates reached London on February 26 and immediately went to British Parliament where a debate was going on about the Turkish question. They followed the proceedings, which were staunchly anti-Turkish.\(^6\) They were particularly shocked to observe that the British public opinion was equally hostile to Turks. The British arguments were enriched with religious fervour, as they demanded the redemption of the Hagia Sophia to Christianity. In the sermons of the Anglican Archbishops of York, London, Manchester and Canterbury, it became clear that the Anglican Church saw it as a struggle between the Cross and the Crescent. The British Cabinet was also unsympathetic towards Turkey, In view of the well-known anti-Turkish attitude of Prime Minister Lloyd George, it was difficult to expect a lenient British approach to the Khilafat cause.\(^7\)

The Khilafat delegation held two official talks with cabinet ministers. First,
they were received by Lord Fisher on 2 March 1920, on behalf of Lord Montague, the Indian secretary who was ill at the time. Maulana Ali expressed the Indian Muslim view that the Caliph was the defender of their faith and his spiritual and temporal authority must remain as it was, and the Turkish territories remain unspoiled. Lord Fisher assured them that the British Government would take the Muslim feelings into account.  

The second interview was with Lloyd George, but only after the Treaty of Sevres was signed. The delegation’s plea that a meeting held after all of the decisions had been made would be futile met with no success. On March 17, Lloyd George received them, and they repeated the same demands. Lloyd George’s reply was blunt, paying no attention to the points raised by the delegates and making no reference to his own pledge of 5 January 1918 to keep the Ottoman territories intact. The Turks were to be dealt with according to the same principles that had been applied to other vanquished nations. No preferential treatment was to be given to them. They had fought against Britain and had to bear the consequences of the defeat. He also justified the Greek activities in Anatolia saying that Greece had a right to annex Thrace and Izmir and that the Arabs were to have self-determination as determined by the European powers.  

These developments were not promising, but in spite of their disappointment the delegation decided to stay in Europe and do whatever they could to enlighten the public. They toured Britain and went to France and Italy to meet politicians, journalists and intellectuals, including the Pope at the Vatican. They also organized several public meetings and spent a lot of money on spreading their message as well as on their contribution to the Red Crescent fund for Turkish relief. They finally returned to Bombay in October 1920.  

While the delegation was in Paris, the Treaty of Sevres was signed containing all that the Indian Muslims had feared it would. The proposed treaty meant just about the death of the Ottoman Empire. Although the Sultan-Caliph still remained in Istanbul, he was virtually a prisoner of the Allies. Under the circumstances, all of the efforts made on behalf of the cause of the Khilafat and Turkey were about to go to waste. They telegraphed Sultan Vahiduddin to express their support and appealed to him to reject the treaty and to not sign it. While in Europe they also communicated with the prominent Turkish figures scattered about there like Talat Pasha, Halil Halid and even Mustafa Kemal Pasha. The Turkish leaders asked them to continue their pro-
Turkish activities, and suggested to them that if they were forced to go back to India, they should continue agitating there.\footnote{11}

Meanwhile, the Muslims in India were anxiously following the activities of the Khilafat delegation in Europe. When the news of the disappointing Sevres Treaty reached India, they were in protest. The British Government’s disregard of its assurances of fair treatment for the Turks was clearly a breach of promise. Maulana Shaukat Ali took the lead and issued an appeal declaring March 19 a day of mourning. The atmosphere was very tense and the leaders of the Indian community, Muslims and Hindus alike, described the question of the future of the Khilafat Movement as “a matter of life and death.” They also decided not to submit easily. Hence, a new method of struggle was decided on, and that was no one was to work in government offices in order to implement a policy of non-cooperation in which no force was to be used. This was regarded as a test of the popular feelings.\footnote{12}

Non-Cooperation Move

On June 22, Gandhi wrote a letter to the British Viceroy in India protesting the treatment of Turkey and asking him to resign because he had failed to meet the expectations of Indians. This was followed by a \textit{fatwa} sanctioned by hundreds of Muslim Ulema forbidding Muslims to cooperate with the government in any way and in any form. It stressed that this was a time for supreme sacrifice which was the mark of a true Muslim.\footnote{13}

This was a clear warning to the Viceroy that unless he did something to make known the Muslim position on the Sevres Treaty, the non-cooperation policy was to be instituted with effect from 1 August 1920. Indeed, the non-cooperation policy was started on this date, and the people were asked to give up all the titles and offices that had been conferred on them by the government and to refuse to attend all official functions. Students were also asked to gradually withdraw from the government schools and institutions. The programme also advocated a boycott of all foreign goods and refusal to enlist for service in the British army. Soon the movement had the overwhelming support of all sections of the Indian community. The general public feeling that prevailed in India was that Britain and its European Allies had decided on destroying Islam.\footnote{14}

The Muslims vowed to resist the British-led machinations by using all possible means. Tremendous sacrifices were made in order to carry out the non-
cooperation policy. After Maulana Ali’s return to India, he and Gandhi toured all around the country, making speeches to enlist public support. Initially, the policy gained ground peacefully, but as time went on, despite all the efforts made by the leaders, violence started creeping in. In the meantime, the jails were being filled with activists. India almost lapsed into anarchy and the spirit of uprising became evident everywhere. Developments, in fact, were getting out of control. In February 1922, a group of non-cooperation activists attacked a police station in Chauri Chauri and set it on fire, burning more than 21 officers to death. At this point, Gandhi felt that he should call off the policy and suspend the mass civil disobedience. This also, in a way, marked the end of the Hindu-Muslim alliance.\footnote{15}

\section*{Hijrāt Blunder}

Another type of reaction to the Allies’ treatment of the Ottoman Empire and Britain’s disregard of Indian aspirations was the Hijrāt Movement which started in the summer of 1920. It was an offshoot of the Khilafat Movement and advocated the mass migration of Muslims from a land viewed as daru’l-harb to Muslim lands considered daru’l-Islam. In early 1920, Maulana Shaukat Ali, at the Khilafat conference in Patna, declared that “if the Khilafat was tampered with, there were but two courses open to them: Jihad or Hijrēt.” Maulvi Abdul Bari issued a fatwa stating that Hijrāt was permissible in circumstances where people felt that they could no longer perform their religious duties while they lived under an alien non-Muslim authority.\footnote{16} Many other Ulema followed suit. Maulana Azad stated that “all Muslims who would like to fulfil Islamic obligations must quit India. Those who cannot migrate immediately should help the migrants as if they were migrating from the country. The Sharia gives no alternative course, except migration. Emigration from India before the war was desirable, but now it is mandatory. Only those Muslims can remain in India who are needed to carry on the struggle or have acceptable reasons against migration.”\footnote{17}

The most enthusiastic supporter of this undertaking was a young man named Aziz Hindi from Amritsar who after many contacts with the Afghan Government got permission for the entrance of those who wished to go to Afghanistan. Many Hijrāt offices opened in different parts of the country. Although the government of India regarded the developments as dangerous, it did not stop people going to Afghanistan. Thousands of Muslims were persuaded to sell their possessions and join the Hijrāt
movement. Within a couple of weeks, the procession became a sort of exodus in the direction of the Khyber Pass. In August 1920 alone, around 25,000 people moved. However, the Afghan authorities soon realized that they could not cope with this sudden influx and took measures to turn the migrants back. As a result, the migration slowed down. Altogether 60,000 Indians were estimated to have attempted emigration; but, after much suffering and hardship, two-third of them returned to India. The cold weather, diseases, humiliation, disillusionment and the hardship of the journey had cost them dearly. Some of those who did not come back to India were scattered to Central Asia and some even went to Turkey.  

Even though the Khilafat Movement suffered due to the failure of the Hijrat option, it did not suddenly subside, for it was essentially linked with developments in Turkey. There, the war of Liberation had already started and was going on relentlessly. To show their support, the Indian Muslims carried on their pro-Turkish activities and worked hard to collect subscriptions for the Turkish Relief Fund. By 1922, Rs. 375,000 had been remitted to the Turks. In addition, with the news of Turkish success over the Greeks, enthusiasm in India was further stimulated. Meanwhile, the British Government persisted in its anti-Turkish stand. Lloyd George’s reaction was that “in any case the policy of the British Government will not be affected in the least by agitation in India”. This stand was, however, to change after the final victory of the Turks over the Greeks. Britain, after remaining alone among its allies, was in a way forced to come to terms with the Ankara Government led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.  

Kemalist Reforms  

During the crucial days of the Greco-Turkish War as well as during the famous Canak crisis between Britain and Turkey, there was obvious tension among Indian Muslims. Many meetings were held and relief funds collected. They also anxiously waited for the revision of the Treaty of Sevres. Indian Muslims even contemplated forming a special Ankara Legion to be sent to Turkey, and a committee was elected for this purpose. The political changes made by the Turks themselves, though, were what really surprised the Indian Muslims. The separation of the Sultanate and Caliphate in November 1922 came as a shock to them, for it meant a division of the indivisible spiritual and temporal powers of the Sultan-Caliph. This was exactly one of the points the Indian Muslims had raised in Europe when they
protested against Western plans to the same effect. Even before their reactions reached Turkey, Sultan Vahiduddin had fled the country, having been deposed, and Abdulmecid elected the new Caliph with no political power.\textsuperscript{20}

The Indian Muslim reaction to these unexpected developments was initially a mixture of hesitation, disbelief and denial. Most thought that the news reaching them was fabricated, distorted or transmitted by the Europeans in order to cause a gulf between the Indians and the Turks. When it turned out to be true, not everyone was prepared to accept this \textit{fait accompli}. The decision of the Ankara Government was found to be against the principles of the Sharia by a number of Ulema, and statements followed one another as to the reasoning behind the decision. Most were optimistically hoping that the Turks were only trying to save the Caliph from the burden of ruling the country so that in this way he would be able to concentrate more on matters related to the Muslim world. In the view of some of the prominent persons in the Khilafat Movement like Dr Ansari and Hakim Ajmal, the decision indicated a return to the tradition of electing the Caliph which was more Islamic than before.

Therefore, the Khilafat Conference of Gaya held on 27 December 1922 cautiously welcomed this change viewing it as a return to original Islamic practice. Mustafa Kemal Pasha was also given the title of \textit{Seyfu’l-Islam} (the Sword of Islam) and \textit{Mujahid-i Khilafat}.\textsuperscript{21}

Evidently, the Khilafat leaders were relying entirely on the Turkish nationalist view of the developments in Turkey. This was reflected in the speech of the President of the Congress, Dr. Ansari, who said that the ex-Sultan Vahiduddin had been acting selfishly which lead him into coercing his ministers into signing the unjust Treaty of Sevres. Had he been allowed to continue he would have complacently guaranteed the doom of his country and religion if the nationalists had not intervened and established themselves in Ankara, thereby placing the ratification of the Treaty out of his reach. He continued saying that the ex-Sultan had done all of this out of self-interest and at the instigation of the Allies, for he had been too weak to oppose them.\textsuperscript{22}

After this, resolutions were passed congratulating Mustafa Kemal for the victories that had brought honour not only to Islam but all of Asia as well. The Muslims were also reminded that “the defence of Islam was as much the duty of Indian Muslims as that of Mustafa Kemal.” The Indian Muslims, on the whole, were still trying to understand and explain the changes in Turkey as being within the boundaries of Islam. To them there was no reason to conclude that the loyalty of the
Turks to Islam had weakened. Thus, they kept supporting the Ankara Government.\textsuperscript{23}

**Lausanne Campaign**

Meanwhile, the Lausanne Conference, which had already convened to discuss the final settlement, produced the on 24 July 1923.\textsuperscript{24} The harsh attitude of the Allied powers, especially Britain, towards Turkey during the conference had upset the Khilafat leaders. This was also reflected in the Khilafat Conference of Gaya which passed the following resolution:

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‘Musulmans will opposed all those terms of the Allies at the Lausanne Conference which either impair the power and the prestige of the Khilafat or in any way interfere with the Khalifah’s complete independence or do not safeguard the sanctity of the Holy Places and do not free them from non-Muslim influence or help to place other Muslim states under non-Muslim control….This meeting warns that in the event of war with Turkey due to the unjust attitude of the Allies, particularly Britain, the Muslims of India would immediately launch civil disobedience with a programme which would include spreading their propaganda among the police and the army, stopping of fresh recruitment, refusal to subscribe to war loans, recruitment to the Angora legion, picketing of foreign cloth and liquor and preventing the exports of food grains.’\textsuperscript{25}
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This message undoubtedly reached London, although it is not clear to what extent it influenced British attitudes. However, the Indian Muslim factor at Lausanne is acknowledged by many British writers as being “one of the decisive factors.” It is true that Indian agitation and the Viceroy’s warnings about it certainly affected the British, but the treaty in its final form still fell short of fulfilling Indian Muslims’ expectations. The Khilafat leaders kept on criticizing the British Government for not honouring their demands regarding \textit{Jazirat-ul-Arab}. Thus, there was still reason to keep the movement alive.\textsuperscript{26}

**Caliphate’s Abolition**

However, six months later on 3 March 1924, the Khilafat Movement faced its biggest blow. The Turkish Parliament abolished the Ottoman Caliphate. The developments in Turkey regarding the Caliph’s position, especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923, had already been a source of anxiety for Khilafat leaders. In November 1923, the Central Khilafat Committee
wanted to send a delegation to Turkey to express Indian Muslims’ support and explain their views on the Khilafat issue. However, this visit did not materialize because the British authorities refused to give passports to the delegation. The same month, Agha Khan and Amir Ali, as representatives of the Indian Muslim community, wrote a letter to the Turkish Prime Minister, Ismet Inonu, urging the Turkish Government to restore the caliphate “on a basis, which would command the confidence and esteem of Muslim nations, and thus impart to the Turkish state unique strength and dignity.”

Although the letter was addressed to the Turkish Prime Minister in Ankara, some Istanbul papers published it even before the Turkish Government became aware of it. This was taken as evidence of a conspiracy against the Turkish state, for the Istanbul papers were identified with the pro-caliphate opposition. There was a furore in Ankara for what was called an unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of the Turkish Republic. Since both Agha Khan and Amir Ali were known to be loyal to the British, their move was interpreted as a tactic motivated by the British Government. By using this letter as a pretext, Mustafa Kemal seized the opportunity to abolish the caliphate. The matter was taken to the Grand National Assembly on March 1, 1924 and two days later the deputies voted to banish the office, depose the Caliph within 24 hours, and expel all members of the Ottoman dynasty as well.

One of the main reasons why Mustafa Kemal Pasha did so was that the republican form of the new regime and the secular reforms that were foreseen were deemed incompatible with the existence of the caliphate. However, whatever the reasons behind it, the decision of the Ankara Government came as a great shock to Indian Muslims, especially the Khilafat leaders. They invited the Turkish government to reconsider its action. Mustafa Kemal Pasha’s formal explanation to the Indians was that there was no need for an extra caliphate in the new Turkish Republic, and that the caliphate had been a constant source of strife and duplicity among Muslims, fell short of convincing the Indian Muslims.

After the initial shock and furore, the Khilafat leaders, seeing that Ankara was not prepared to withdraw its decision, suggested that Mustafa Kemal accept the title of Caliph himself. The offer was rejected by the Turkish leader. Maulana Azad argued that the caliphate as an institution had been vested upon a person of the most powerful Muslim nation. Hence, the expulsion of Abdulmecid could not do away with the institution which now automatically passed to the Turkish Parliament as the representative body of the most powerful Muslim state.
However, other Muslim leaders who approached the matter in a different way. They considered the developments in Turkey as progressive and acceptable under Islam. Allama Dr Muhammed Iqbal, for example, approved of them saying that they involved an exercise of the right of *Ijtihad*. According to Allama Iqbal, the Ottoman Caliphate had long become a “mere symbol of power which departed long ago. The idea of a universal caliphate was a workable idea when the empire of Islam was intact.”

Despite all the efforts, appeals and protests from the Indian Muslims, nothing was to change in Turkey where a process of secularization was already in full swing. The abolishing of the caliphate also dramatically changed the political situation in India. The Khilafat Movement lost its political force, for it was deprived of its *raison d’être*. The leaders of the Movement were even divided among themselves. In their frustration and disillusionment, they chose either to remain silent or to join communalist organizations. In this way, the ambitious Khilafat Movement, though it lingered on for some time, died slowly.

In retrospect, it could be argued that the goals of Khilafat Movement and Turkish Liberation Movement were always different, because the former was based on the ideal of pan-Islamism and the latter was founded upon the realist notion of Turkic nationalism. Tensions between the two Movements—initially showing the compatibility of interest vis-à-vis the common enemy, Great Britain—were bound to appear as soon as the nationalist leadership succeeded in its mission of liberating the Turkish nation.

In the end, while the Khilafat leadership was still holding on to its utopian pan-Islamist vision for post-liberation Turkey, the Turkish nationalist leadership was busy adopting one modernist-secular reform after another. Each Turkish step away from the Caliphate added to the moral dilemma facing the Khilafat leadership. Yet until the Caliphate’s abolition, they tried to convince themselves and their Subcontinent Muslim audience that Ataturk’s reforms were motivated by circumstantial realities and have only temporal significance. The Khilafat leaders’ opposition to Ataturk came with his decision to abolish the Caliphate, because it was the greatest blow to their pan-Islamist ambitions.
Towards Muslim Nationalism

For the Indian Muslims, the Turkish freedom movement and the establishment of the Modern Turkish Republic served as a source of inspiration and as an example of resistance to foreign domination. The pro-Ottoman feelings and proceedings in India undoubtedly contributed to the development of Indo-Muslim national identity and the eventual alienation of the Muslims from the British. Above all, perhaps for the first time in history, the Muslims of the Subcontinent could patch up their differences on a single issue—the concern for the Ottomans and the Caliphate—and get together. People from all walks of life, the Sunnis and the Shiites, the traditional Ulema and the western educated, the rich and the poor, the men as well as the women all joined hands in this common cause and united.

Even more significantly, it was primarily the Ottoman factor that was to provide a meeting ground for the Muslims and Hindus and unite them in action against their rulers. However, this unity was short-lived, as Gandhi was only using the Khilafat Movement as a tool for Indian nationalism against the British. As a Hindu, he was neither concerned about pan-Islamism nor Muslim nationalism. His sudden departure from the Khilafat Movement was considered a betrayal by the mainstream Muslim leadership, including Khilafat leaders as well as Muslim nationalists.

The genesis of the Khilafat Movement can be traced to the mindset of the Indian Muslim that if Ottoman Turkey, the symbol of Islam’s worldly power, was to disappear, their political importance vis-à-vis the Hindus would be extremely compromised. This psychological factor, quite apart from the romantic appeal of pan-Islamism, pushed the Muslims to action. The Khilafat Movement was a political ride propelled by the Indian Muslims’ minority syndrome and apprehensions about an uncertain future. Gail Minault has argued that the movement was concerned with power, not piety. According to her, communalist politicians looked to rally Muslim masses to the symbol of the caliphate, and in the process gain a following that they could use for their own, political, ends. The Khilafat leaders may not be politically as opportunist as portrayed by Minault; however, the movement did have a domestic political relevance.

The Khilafat Movement left an indelible mark on the history of the Subcontinent. It was the first country-wide agitation of the Muslims of British India with a central organisation to guide its course. It transformed the psyche of the people, trained them in political agitation and taught them how to press come their demands.
It changed the political alignments and introduced new ones in their place. Areas hitherto lagging in political experience, such as the Punjab, Sindh and the Frontier, responded side by side with Bombay, Bengal and the UP which had well-established political traditions. It brought the Hindus and Muslims on one platform for the first and the last time. It also produced a leadership which, though concerned with the immediate issues, was able, with varying fortunes, to sustain the agitation effectively. The leadership of the movement bowed a preponderance of urban middle class educated elite with the total exclusion of the landed class which reappeared only after the movement had failed and the Muslim League was back in business. But it unwittingly bequeathed a pattern of politics which the Muslims of India later tried to follow. The end of Tehrik-e-Khilafat was the beginning of Tehrik-i-Pakistan for the Muslims of British India. Neither impacted their relationship with the Muslim Turkish people. No surprise that this relationship, even in the post-partition context, is not impacted by ideological shifts or political developments in the two Muslim countries.

The real success of the Khilafat Movement was that it served as a morale booster for the Turkish nationalist forces under Mustafa Kemal’s command. Additionally, it helped generate the much-needed financial resources for the Angora Fund from subcontinent Muslims in the form of British currency as well as gold and silver ornaments deposited voluntarily by Indian Muslim women in the Khilafat account. It was partly this financial help with which the building for the Turkish Grand National Assembly was constructed, and the gold and silver contributed by Indian Muslims women helped create the reserve for the Turkish Ish Bankasi. The victory of Turkish nationalist forces led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, which was celebrated throughout the Subcontinent by its Muslim populace, also inspired the Indian Muslim League and its leaders and followers in their struggle for freedom. Indian Muslims saw Turkey’s struggle for independence similar to their own struggle against the colonial British and chauvinistic Hindus. They looked towards Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah in the same spirit as they looked towards Kemal Ataturk. Both personified the Muslim world’s quest for freedom. Inspired by Ataturk and his vision of modern Turkey, Allama Muhammad Iqbal wrote a series of poems. Two verses from one such poem written in July 1922 are worth-mentioning:

“There was a nation through whose wisdom we learned the secrets of destiny
Our origin was just a small spark; He cast a glance at us, and we became Sun, which conquered the world.”

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Notes and References

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