



The Khilafat Movement of the Indian Subcontinent

One of the biggest political developments for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent after World War I was the Khilafat Movement. It was formed because it became reasonably clear that the losing powers would have their rulers deposed. In the case of the Ottoman State that meant the Sultan. It also meant in his case that the Caliphate would also be abolished. The State itself was also to be abolished, which meant that the Arab lands were to be split up and given independence, while the State's lands in Europe were to be further reduced, along with the abolition of the Kingdom of Hungary and the independence of its lands.

The Muslims of the Subcontinent were not so much concerned with the Sultan of Turkey as with the Caliph. The Khilafat Movement energized the Muslims of the Subcontinent, and forced all existing Muslim political forces to join in. The symbol of the movement were the Ali Brothers, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Shaukat Ali, the former going to jail after he used the Khilafat Movement as a reason to suborn Muslim troops who were being sent to Iraq to help occupy the Arab lands. He was convicted for distributing pamphlets among them in Mumbai (Bombay).

The Khilafat Movement, in origin, got its impetus from the wishes of the Muslims that the Caliph should retain control of the Holy Places, as well as sufficient lands as would allow him some independence. Perhaps the salient lesson of the Khilafat Movement at the time was the futility of seeking a common future with the Hindus, because Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar obtained the support of the Indian National Congress by adding Home Rule for India to its demands, as well as a pledge to stop cow slaughter. One result of this was to give India, in the shape of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a Muslim icon. Azad along with many Muslims, had gotten involved in politics through the Khilafat Movement, and after the Caliphate was abolished, remained to win Home Rule, choosing Congress as the vehicle for the expression of their political aspirations.

Another important dimension is that it represented the first venturing by Indian Muslims into politics since the extinguishing of the Mughal rule in 1857. After 1857, the Muslims had been advised to avoid politics by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, which they had done, thus standing apart from Congress when it was founded. The founding of the AIML can be seen as an attempt to play catch-up, especially since the AIML drew close to the Congress to the extent that it virtually merged with it in 1917. The Khilafat Movement showed that Muslims did not see Home Rule, or any other of that era's slogans, as the prime motivator of politics, but the Caliphate.

Another consequence of the Khilafat Movement was that it drew a large number of people into politics who had not been involved in it before. When the Khilafat Movement came to a disappointing end because of a failure to achieve its aims, a record number of Muslims were left without a political platform. Some went into the Congress, but others went into the AIML, because they wanted to achieve both Home Rule, and a Muslim state.

There seems to have been some confusion about what exactly the Muslims of the Subcontinent wanted. Did they want what the INC wanted, which was a kind of replica of the British Raj? Or did they want to be part of the Caliphate? With the Caliphate abolished, the latter was not possible. It should not be forgotten that when the Khilafat Movement took place, Ireland was winning its independence, and providing an example from which all Indian leaders, not just Muslims, were learning, on what post-Independence India might be like.

That the abolition of the Caliphate created a restlessness among the Muslims of India is shown not just by the Khilafat Movement, but by the Reshmi Rumaal Tehrik, as well as the founding of the Tablighi Jamaat. After the Khilafat Movement, the AIML underwent a revival. It underwent a split in the 1920s over the question of meeting the Simon Commission, and it was at an annual session of the anti-Commission faction that Allama Sir Muhammad Iqbal proposed, in his presidential address, a separate state for Muslims. The AIML reunified, but it did not adopt this idea as official policy until 1940.

That the Khilafat Movement affected the Pakistan Movement occurred for two major reasons; first, the carry-over of personnel, and second, the tremendous impact of the first. It should not be forgotten that large numbers of those who became involved in politics for the first time in the Khilafat Movement stayed in politics through the AIML. Though they did not go against party policy, they interpreted it in ways that made it accord with their earlier political experience. Because of both these reasons, the Khilafat Movement had an important effect on the Pakistan Movement, and on the Pakistan Ideology which underpinned it.

Thus Pakistan is not so much the result of the reaction of the colonized to colonialism, as of the Muslims to the abolition of the Caliphate. There are two strands apparent within Pakistan. One is an admiration of Mustafa Kemal and Kemalism, of the nationalist experiment in post-Ottoman Turkey. This may have owed something to the desire to create a national, or rather nationalist, identity for the new state of Pakistan. Then there is the pan-Islamist strand, which saw Pakistan as a laboratory of Islam. This assumed that Islam needed modernizing. It is forgotten that this need was felt not just because of the experience of colonialism, but also because of the abolition of the Caliphate, and the problems in the practice of Islam that appeared after its destruction. This was partly the reason why Pan-Islamic movements found such acceptance, indeed popularity, in Pakistan, whether it was the World Islamic League, or even the OIC.

The problem for the new state has been that it has been diverted from this purpose by its rulers to support the former colonial masters. Pakistan will only find its destiny if it becomes part of a Caliphate. The Caliphate is not limited to the Ottoman state, but must be a state which fully implements Islam on the example of the Prophethood. Any party which does not work towards this goal is only a diversion.

Also, as Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ﴾ **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you - when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided.”** [Surah Aali Imran 3:103.]

The Khilafat Movement was based on this desire to obey the command of Allah (swt). Pakistan came into being because of this desire, but could not satisfy it. Until that desire is fulfilled, that yearning will continue.

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