

Non-Cooperation Movement and Khilafat Aandolan

During 1919-22, the British were opposed through two mass movements—the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation. Though the two movements emerged from separate issues, they adopted a common programme of action—that of non-violent non-cooperation. The Khilafat issue was not directly linked to Indian politics but it provided the immediate background to the movement and gave an added advantage of cementing Hindu-Muslim unity against the British.

Background

The background to the two movements was provided by a series of events after the First World War which belied all hopes of the government's generosity towards the Indian subjects. The year 1919, in particular, saw a strong feeling of discontent among all sections of Indians for various reasons:

- The economic situation of the country in the post-War years had become alarming with a rise in prices of commodities, decrease in production of Indian industries, increase in burden of taxes and rents etc. Almost all sections of society suffered economic hardship due to the war and this strengthened the anti-British attitude.

- The Rowlatt Act, the imposition of martial law in Punjab and the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre exposed the brutal and uncivilised face of the foreign rule.

- The Hunter Committee on the Punjab atrocities proved to be an eyewash. In fact, the House of Lords (of the British Parliament) endorsed General Dyer's action and the British public showed solidarity with General Dyer by helping *The Morning Post* collect 30,000 pounds for him.

- The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms with their ill-conceived scheme of dyarchy failed to satisfy the rising demand of the Indians for self-government.

The post-First World War period also saw the preparation of the ground for common political action by Hindus and Muslims—(i) the Lucknow Pact (1916) had stimulated Congress-Muslim League cooperation; (ii) the Rowlatt Act agitation brought Hindus and Muslims, and also other sections of the society, together; and (iii) radical nationalist Muslims like Mohammad Ali, Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Hasan Imam had now become more influential than the conservative Aligarh school elements who had dominated the League earlier. The younger elements advocated militant nationalism and active participation in the nationalist movement. They had strong anti-imperialist sentiments.

In this atmosphere the Khilafat issue emerged, around which developed the historic Non-Cooperation Movement.

The Khilafat Issue

The Khilafat issue paved the way for the consolidation of the emergence of a radical nationalist trend among the younger generation of Muslims and the section of traditional Muslim scholars who were becoming increasingly critical of British rule. This time, they were angered by the treatment meted out to Turkey by the British after the First World War. The Muslims in India, as the Muslims all over the world, regarded the sultan of Turkey as their spiritual leader, Khalifa, so naturally their sympathies were with Turkey. During the war, Turkey had allied with Germany and Austria against the British. When the war ended, the British took a stern attitude

towards Turkey—Turkey was dismembered and the Khalifa removed from power. This incensed Muslims all over the world.

In India, too, the Muslims demanded from the British (i) that the Khalifa's control over Muslim sacred places should be retained, and (ii) the Khalifa should be left with sufficient territories after territorial arrangements. In early 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed under the leadership of the Ali brothers (Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali), Maulana Azad, Ajmal Khan and Hasrat Mohani, to force the British government to change its attitude towards Turkey. Thus, the ground for a country-wide agitation was prepared.

■ Development of the Khalifat-Non-Cooperation Programme

For some time, the Khilafat leaders limited their actions to meetings, petitions, deputations in favour of the Khilafat. Later, however, a militant trend emerged, demanding an active agitation such as stopping all cooperation with the British. Thus, at the All India Khilafat Conference held in Delhi in November 1919, a call was made for the boycott of British goods. The Khilafat leaders also clearly spelt out that unless peace terms after the War were favourable to Turkey they would stop all cooperation with the Government. Gandhi, who was the president of the All India Khilafat Committee, saw in the issue a platform from which mass and united non-cooperation could be declared against the Government.

■ Congress Stand on Khilafat Question

It was quite clear that the support of the Congress was essential for the Khilafat movement to succeed. However, although Gandhi was in favour of launching satyagraha and non-cooperation against the government on the Khilafat issue, the Congress was not united on this form of political action. Tilak was opposed to having an alliance with Muslim leaders over a religious issue and he was also sceptical of

satyagraha as an instrument of politics. According to Professor Ravinder Kumar, Gandhi made a concerted bid to convince Tilak of the virtues of satyagraha and of the expediency of an alliance with the Muslim community over the Khilafat issue. There was opposition to some of the other provisions of the Gandhi's non-cooperation programme also, such as boycott of councils. Later, however, Gandhi was able to get the approval of the Congress for his programme of political action and the Congress felt inclined to support a non-cooperation programme on the Khilafat question because—

- it was felt that this was a golden opportunity to cement Hindu-Muslim unity and to bring Muslim masses into the national movement; now different sections of society—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, peasants, artisans, capitalists, tribals, women, students—could come into the national movement by fighting for their own rights and realising that the colonial rule was opposed to them;
- the Congress was losing faith in constitutional struggle, especially after the Punjab incidents and the blatantly partisan Hunter Committee Report;
- the Congress was aware that the masses were eager to give expression to their discontent.

■ Muslim League Support to Congress

The Muslim League also decided to give full support to the Congress and its agitation on political questions.

The Non-Cooperation Khilafat Movement

February 1920 In early 1920, a joint Hindu-Muslim deputation was sent to the viceroy to seek redress of grievances on the issue of Khilafat, but the mission proved abortive.

In February 1920, Gandhi announced that the issues of the Punjab wrongs and constitutional advance had been overshadowed by the Khilafat question and that he would soon lead a movement of non-cooperation if the terms of the peace treaty failed to satisfy the Indian Muslims.

May 1920 The Treaty of Sevres with Turkey, signed in May 1920, completely dismembered Turkey.

June 1920 An all-party conference at Allahabad approved a programme of boycott of schools, colleges and law courts, and asked Gandhi to lead it.

August 31, 1920 The Khilafat Committee started a campaign of non-cooperation and the movement was formally launched. (Tilak had, incidentally, breathed his last on August 1, 1920.)

September 1920 At a special session in Calcutta, the Congress approved a non-cooperation programme till the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were removed and swaraj was established. The programme was to include—

- boycott of government schools and colleges;
- boycott of law courts and dispensation of justice through panchayats instead;
- boycott of legislative councils; (there were some differences over this as some leaders like C.R. Das were not willing to include a boycott of councils, but bowed to Congress discipline; these leaders boycotted elections held in November 1920 and the majority of the voters too stayed away);
- boycott of foreign cloth and use of khadi instead; also practice of hand-spinning to be done;
- renunciation of government honours and titles; the second phase could include mass civil disobedience including resignation from government service, and non-payment of taxes.

During the movement, the participants were supposed to work for Hindu-Muslim unity and for removal of untouchability, all the time remaining non-violent.

December 1920 At the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress—

(i) The programme of non-cooperation was endorsed.

(ii) An important change was made in the Congress creed: now, instead of having the attainment of self-government through constitutional means as its goal, the Congress decided to have the attainment of swaraj through peaceful and legitimate means, thus committing itself to an extra-constitutional mass struggle.

(iii) Some important organisational changes were made: a **congress working committee** (CWC) of 15 members was set up to lead the Congress from now onwards; **provincial congress committees** on linguistic basis were organised; ward committees was organised; and entry fee was reduced to four annas.

(iv) Gandhi declared that if the non-cooperation programme was implemented completely, swaraj would be ushered in within a year.

Many groups of revolutionary terrorists, especially those from Bengal, also pledged support to the Congress programme.

At this stage, some leaders like Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Annie Besant, G.S. Kharpade and B.C. Pal left the Congress as they believed in a constitutional and lawful struggle while some others like Surendranath Banerjea founded the **Indian National Liberal Federation** and played a minor role in national politics henceforward.

The adoption by the Congress of the non-cooperation movement initiated earlier by the Khilafat Committee gave it a new energy, and the years 1921 and 1922 saw an unprecedented popular upsurge.

■ Spread of the Movement

Gandhi accompanied by the Ali brothers undertook a nationwide tour. Thousands of students left government schools and colleges and joined around 800 national schools and colleges

which cropped up during this time. These educational institutions were organised under the leadership of Acharya Narendra Dev, C.R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, Zakir Hussain, Subhash Bose (who became the principal of **National College** at Calcutta) and included **Jamia Millia** at Aligarh, Kashi Vidyapeeth, **Gujarat Vidyapeeth** and **Bihar Vidyapeeth**.

Many lawyers gave up their practice, some of whom were Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, C.R. Das, C. Rajagopalachari, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali, T. Prakasam and Rajendra Prasad.

Heaps of foreign cloth were burnt publicly and their imports fell by half. Picketing of shops selling foreign liquor and of toddy shops was undertaken at many places.

The Tilak Swaraj Fund was oversubscribed and one crore rupees collected.

Congress volunteer corps emerged as the parallel police.

In July 1921, the Ali brothers gave a call to the Muslims to resign from the Army as it was unreligious. The Ali brothers were arrested for this in September. Gandhi echoed their call and asked local Congress committees to pass similar resolutions to that effect.

Now, the Congress gave a call to local Congress bodies to start civil disobedience if it was thought that the people were ready for it. Already, a no-tax movement against union board taxes in Midnapore (Bengal) and in Guntur (Andhra) was going on.

In Assam, strikes in tea plantations, steamer services and Assam-Bengal Railways had been organised. J.M. Sengupta was a prominent leader in these strikes.

In November 1921, the visit of the Prince of Wales to India invited strikes and demonstrations.

The spirit of defiance and unrest gave rise to many local struggles such as Awadh Kisan Movement (UP), Eka Movement (UP), Mappila Revolt (Malabar) and the Sikh agitation for the removal of *mahants* in Punjab.

■ People's Response

The participation in the movement was from a wide range of the society but to a varying extent.

Middle Class

People from the middle classes led the movement at the beginning but later they showed a lot of reservations about Gandhi's programme. In places like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, which were centres of elite politicians, the response to Gandhi's call was very limited. The response to the call for resignation from the government service, surrendering of titles, etc., was not taken seriously. The comparative newcomers in Indian politics found expression of their interests and aspirations in the movement. Rajendra Prasad in Bihar and Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat provided solid support and, in fact, leaders like them found non-cooperation to be a viable political alternative to terrorism in order to fight against a colonial government.

Business Class

The economic boycott received support from the Indian business group because they had benefited from the nationalists' emphasis on the use of swadeshi. But a section of the big business remained sceptical towards the movement. They seemed to be afraid of labour unrest in their factories.

Peasants

Peasants' participation was massive. Although the Congress was against class war, the masses broke this restraint. In Bihar, the confrontation between the 'lower and upper castes' on the issue of the former taking the sacred thread got merged with the Non-Cooperation Movement. In general, the peasants turned against the landlords and the traders. The movement gave an opportunity to the toiling masses to express their real feelings against the British as well as against their Indian masters and oppressors (landlords and traders).

Students

Students became active volunteers of the movement and thousands of them left government schools and colleges and

joined national schools and colleges. The newly opened national institutions like the Kashi Vidyapeeth, the Gujarat Vidyapeeth and the Jamila Milia Islamia and others accommodated many students.

Women

Women gave up *purdah* and offered their ornaments for the Tilak Fund. They joined the movement in large numbers and took active part in picketing before the shops selling foreign cloth and liquor.

Hindu-Muslim Unity

The massive participation of Muslims and the maintenance of communal unity, despite the events like Moppila Uprisings, were great achievements. In many places, two-thirds of those arrested were Muslims, and such type of participation had neither been seen in the past nor would be seen in the future. Gandhi and other leaders addressed the Muslim masses from mosques, and Gandhi was even allowed to address meetings of Muslim women in which he was the only male who was not blind-folded.

■ Government Response

Talks between Gandhi and Reading, the viceroy, broke down in May 1921 as the government wanted Gandhi to urge the Ali brothers to remove those portions from speeches which suggested violence. Gandhi realised that the government was trying to drive a wedge between him and the Khilafat leaders and refused to fall into the trap. In December, the government came down heavily on the protestors. Volunteer corps were declared illegal, public meetings were banned, the press was gagged and most of the leaders barring Gandhi were arrested.

■ The Last Phase of the Movement

Gandhi was now under increasing pressure from the Congress rank and file to start the civil disobedience programme. The Ahmedabad session in 1921 (presided over, incidentally, by C.R. Das while still in jail; Hakim Ajmal Khan was the acting president) appointed Gandhi the sole authority on the issue.

On February 1, 1922 Gandhi threatened to launch civil disobedience from Bardoli (Gujarat) if (i) political prisoners were not released, and (ii) press controls were not removed. The movement had hardly begun before it was brought to an abrupt end.

Chauri Chaura Incident

A small sleepy village named Chauri-Chaura (Gorakhpur district in United Provinces) has found a place in history books due to an incident of violence on February 5, 1922 which was to prompt Gandhi to withdraw the movement. The police here had beaten up the leader of a group of volunteers campaigning against liquor sale and high food prices, and then opened fire on the crowd which had come to protest before the police station. The agitated crowd torched the police station with policemen inside who had taken shelter there; those who tried to flee were hacked to death and thrown back into the fire. Twenty-two policemen were killed in the

Views

To sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling point was nothing short of a national calamity. The principal lieutenants of the Mahatma, Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai, who were all in prison, shared the popular resentment.

—**Subhas Chandra Bose**

A mass wave of revolutionary unrest in India in 1919 (evident from the labour unrest and strike wave of 1919-20 and peasant protests in UP and Bihar) worked as a kind of popular groundswell virtually forcing the leadership to a radical posture...Gandhi and the Congress bigwigs sensed that a revolutionary mass movement was in the offing. They decided to take over the leadership to keep the movement a 'controlled' affair and 'within safe channels'. The movement was called off just when the masses seemed to be taking the initiative.

—**Marxist Interpretation**

I would suffer every humiliation, every torture, absolute ostracism and death itself to prevent the movement from becoming violent.

—**M.K. Gandhi**, in *Young India*, February 16, 1922

violence. Gandhi, not happy with the increasingly violent trend of the movement, immediately announced the withdrawal of the movement.

The Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli in February 1922 and resolved to stop all activity that led to breaking of the law and to get down to constructive work, instead, which was to include popularisation of khadi, national schools, and campaigning for temperance, for Hindu-Muslim unity and against untouchability.

Most of the nationalist leaders including C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, however, expressed their bewilderment at Gandhi's decision to withdraw the movement.

In March 1922, Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years in jail. He made the occasion memorable by a magnificent court speech: "I am here, therefore, to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen."

Why Gandhi Withdrew the Movement

Gandhi felt that people had not learnt or fully understood the method of non-violence. Incidents like Chauri-Chaura could lead to the kind of excitement and fervour that would turn the movement to become generally violent. A violent movement could be easily suppressed by the colonial regime who would make the incidents of violence an excuse for using the armed might of the State against the protestors.

The movement was also showing signs of fatigue. This was natural as it is not possible to sustain any movement at a high pitch for very long. The government seemed to be in no mood for negotiations.

The central theme of the agitation—the Khilafat question—also dissipated soon. In November 1922, the people of Turkey rose under Mustafa Kamal Pasha and deprived the sultan of political power. Turkey was made a

secular state. Thus, the Khilafat question lost its relevance. A European style of legal system was established in Turkey and extensive rights granted to women. Education was nationalised and modern agriculture and industries developed. In 1924, the caliphate was abolished.

Evaluation of Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement

The movement brought the urban Muslims into the national movement, but at the same time it communalised the national politics, to an extent. Although Muslim sentiments were a manifestation of the spread of a wider anti-imperialist feeling, the national leaders failed to raise the religious political consciousness of the Muslims to a level of secular political consciousness.

With the Non-Cooperation Movement, nationalist sentiments reached every nook and corner of the country and politicised every strata of population—the artisans, peasants, students, urban poor, women, traders, etc. It was this politicisation and activation of millions of men and women which imparted a revolutionary character to the national movement. Colonial rule was based on two myths—one, that such a rule was in the interest of Indians and two, that it was invincible. The first myth had been exploded by the economic critique by Moderate nationalists. The second myth had been challenged by satyagraha through mass struggle. Now, the masses lost the hitherto all-pervasive fear of the colonial rule and its mighty repressive organs.

View

It (Khilafat movement) was a purely retrograde and reactionary movement, and more importantly for Indian nationalism, it was an intrinsically anti-nationalist movement pitting specifically Islamic interests against secular and non-Muslim interests.

—Dr. Koenraad Elst

Summary

● **Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement**

* **Three demands—**

1. Favourable treaty for Turkey
2. Redressal of Punjab wrongs
3. Establishment of swaraj

* **Techniques used**

Boycott of government-run schools, colleges, law courts, municipality and government service, foreign cloth, liquor; setting up of national schools, colleges, panchayats and using khadi; second stage to include civil disobedience by non-payment of taxes.

* **Nagpur Congress Session (December 1920)**—Congress goal changed to attainment of swaraj through peaceful and legitimate means from attainment of self-government through constitutional means.

* **Chauri-Chaura Incident (February 5, 1922)**—Violence by agitated mob prompted Gandhi to withdraw the movement.