
UNIT 12 KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Beginning of the Khilafat Movement
- 12.3 Background to the Non-Cooperation Movement
- 12.4 Convergence of the Two Movements under Gandhi's Leadership
- 12.5 Main Phases
- 12.6 Contribution of the Movements in Anti-Imperialist Struggles
- 12.7 Summary
- 12.8 Exercises

12.1 INTRODUCTION

It is generally recognised that the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements were important milestones in the history of Indian nationalism. They initiated a new era of mass mobilisation and radically shaped the future of Indian polity. In a way, the Non-cooperation movement emerged out of the anti-Rowlatt movements and the Khilafat. In fact, it was the Khilafat Conference which earlier adopted the non-cooperation programme. However, it could become a full-fledged movement only after the Congress decided to adopt it. Moreover, when Mahatma Gandhi withdrew it and the Congress ratified the withdrawal, the Non-cooperation movement ended, whereas the Khilafat movement continued beyond this. Thus, the Khilafat movement had originated earlier and lasted longer than the Non-cooperation movement. But, although their trajectories were somewhat different, both were anti-imperialist movements and were brought together during 1920-22 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, in the absence of Mahatma Gandhi, it may not be possible to conceive of a successful convergence of these two anti-imperialist streams. In this Unit, we will discuss the causes for the emergence of these movements, the way they proceeded, the role of Gandhi's leadership and their impact on the Indian people and the colonial state.

12.2 BEGINNING OF THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement in India arose out of the sentiments of the Indian Muslims to protect the institution of the Khalifa in Turkey. The Khalifa in Islamic tradition was considered as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the commander of the believers and the custodian and protector of the Muslim holy places. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was the only Islamic empire and, therefore, the Sultan of Turkey was held in great esteem by the Indian Muslims as the Khalifa. As Turkey was defeated in the First World War and it was certain that the victorious Allies would impose strict terms on it, the Muslims in India launched the Khilafat movement to pressurize the British government to be lenient and preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of Khalifa.

* Resource Person – Prof. S.B. Upadhyay

The ideological origins of the Khilafat movement have been explained in two ways. On the one hand, scholars have located it in the pan-Islamic sentiments and movements across the world, and their non-Indian and external character. On the other hand, some historians have emphasised its inward nature and its efforts to use pan-Islamic symbols to build a pan-Indian Muslim identity and to bring it in sync with Indian nationalism. In fact, both these trends were not contradictory.

The Khilafat may be seen as the attempt on the part of the Indian Muslim leadership to bring their pan-Islamic and Indian nationalist sentiments together. It was this synthesis that brought about the major mass mobilisation from 1919 onwards.

This quest for the unity of Indian Muslims found a religious centre in the office of Khalifa and in the person of Turkey's Sultan. Since the late nineteenth century, there was a widespread acknowledgement among the Indian Sunni Muslims of the Turkey's Sultan as the Khalifa who would protect the Muslim holy places. Thus, pan-Islamic sentiments surged among Indian Muslim leaders whenever Turkey was involved in hostilities, for example, during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 and the Greco-Turkish war of 1897. During 1911-13, a series of Balkan wars created fears in the minds of Muslim leaders that the Christian powers were attempting to crush the Ottoman Empire and the Khalifa. During and after the First World War, these sentiments again came to the fore. Turkey was part of the Axis powers along with Germany and Austria which fought against Britain and its allies. After its victory in the War, the British government removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. There were also talks about imposition of a harsh peace treaty on Turkey which would deprive it of territories and influence. Under these circumstances, a widespread movement among the Indian Muslims developed which demanded that the Khalifa must retain control over the Muslim holy places and that sufficient territories must be left with the Khalifa to enable him to defend the holy places. This movement known as the Khilafat movement quickly spread among the elite as well as among the urban popular classes and the ulama or the Muslim religious scholars. The British government was declared an enemy, Khilafat funds were flooded with money and ornaments, the Khilafat meetings were attended by thousands of people, and thousands from the border areas migrated from the land of enemy (*Dar al-Harb*) to the land of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*).

The movement derived its leadership from two streams, both involved in educational reforms for the Muslims in the wake of colonial rule. One was the Aligarh-based Westernizing intelligentsia which advocated English education and canvassed for employment in government services. The other was ulama who attempted to strengthen the traditional Islamic system of education based on Madrasas and were opposed to English education and Western manners. The presence of these two types of leadership created a variation in the movement. While the Western-educated leadership generally sought moderation, the ulama provided a radical edge to the movement. However, both these streams, at that moment of time, were united in their anti-British stance and in their support for a pan-Islamic cause.

In order to properly organise the movement, the leadership established two all-India bodies – the All-India Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat al-Ulama-e-

Hind. The earlier Muslim political organisation – Muslim League – was completely overshadowed by these two organisations until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the drive to mobilise the Muslim community for Khilafat demands began successfully. However, it was quite clear that the fight against the British could not succeed unless the non-Muslim Indians were also mobilized in a broader anti-imperialist struggle. At that point of time, the Congress as a nationalist organisation and Mahatma Gandhi as the most acceptable leader were the most suitable options. Gandhiji was quite ready to lead the Khilafat movement, but the Congress was not yet prepared for an all-India movement. However, various other circumstances made it possible for the many anti-imperialist organisations to come together on one platform.

12.3 BACKGROUND TO THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement, besides its pan-Islamic character, was also deeply anti-imperialist and nationalist in its impulse. Beside this, there were several other factors which gave rise to intense anti-imperialist feelings among the Indian people in general. The economic and political situation of the country during and after the First World War created dissatisfaction against British rule. The prices of commodities rose sharply during and after the War creating much hardship for the people. Moreover, the peasantry in some areas was also restive due to increasingly high demand of rents and taxes. This was reflected in the agitations by peasants and workers in various parts of country like Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Madras, etc.

The political optimism of the War years also received severe setback when the British government backtracked on its promises to consider nationalist demands in return for Indian support in the War. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms which resulted in the Government of India Act 1919 disillusioned the nationalists who had expected much more in the direction of self-government. The Indian National Congress, in a special session at Bombay in August 1918, condemned these proposals as ‘disappointing and unsatisfactory’ and demanded effective self-government. As if to add insult to injury the colonial government passed the Rowlatt Act in March 1919 which empowered the government to arrest and imprison any person without trial. The Act was passed even when the Indian members in the Central Legislative Council opposed it. This incensed the Indian people and widespread unrest followed. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi countrywide Satyagraha was held. There were huge meetings, demonstrations and strikes which sometimes also resulted in violence.

The massacre by the colonial government of peaceful protestors at Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab proved to be the last straw. On 13 April 1919, a huge but peaceful crowd gathered at Amritsar in the Jallianwala Bagh to protest against the arrest of their leaders who were participating in the anti-Rowlatt agitations. General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on the unarmed people. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured in the firing. Such brutality shocked the entire nation and ripped open the mask of civilisation the British government was wearing. The great poet, Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest and declared that the ‘I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen’. Similar sentiments were widespread and it was time for an all-India nationalist movement to emerge.

12.4 CONVERGENCE OF THE TWO MOVEMENTS UNDER GANDHI'S LEADERSHIP

Gandhiji emerged on the national political scene after his constructive intervention in the peasants' and workers' struggles in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. After the War, he was emerging as almost a consensus candidate for the leadership of the Congress, particularly due to ill health of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His belief in non-violence and his method of struggle through Satyagraha had also become known to people. The anti-Rowlatt agitation and the Khilafat movement were two widespread mobilisations after the War which were directed against the colonial government, and Gandhi played a major role in both of these. It may be said that it was his leadership that made the convergence of the two anti-imperialist streams – nationalist and the Khilafat – possible during this period.

The Khilafat leaders were very keen right from the beginning to get the support of the Hindus for their cause. In this effort, they found Gandhi as their staunchest ally. He further tried to join the nationalist demand for self-rule to the Muslim assertion over Khilafat question. He declared that 'In the proper solution of the Mahomedan question lies the realisation of Swarajya'. This endeavour brought about an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity which was reflected in the subsequent mass mobilisations against the colonial rule. During the anti-Rowlatt agitations, Hindus and Muslims demonstrated together, and symbols of unity were made overtly public. The Khilafat leaders exhorted the Muslims not to kill cows for the Bakr-Id festival; an Arya Samaj leader, Swami Shradhdhanand, was requested to give a speech from the pulpit of Jama Masjid in Delhi; in Amritsar, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was given the keys of the Golden Temple; in Calcutta, Hindus were admitted for the first time to the Nakhuda Mosque; in Bombay, the leaders of both communities actively tried to sell banned political literature. There were similar shows of unity throughout the movement.

On 20 March 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay. Prominent local Muslim merchants were on the Committee which initially took a moderate stand, and their activities were restricted to meetings, petitions and deputations to secure a better treatment for Turkey at the Peace Conference. It was, however, the *ulama*-driven militant trend which pushed the movement beyond its narrow confines. The advocates of a militant movement gave whole-hearted support to the anti-Rowlatt agitation and wanted to launch a non-cooperation movement against the colonial government. An all-India Khilafat Day was observed on 17 October 1919 which was a huge success. The markets were closed; fasting, prayers, meetings and *hartals* were observed. In Delhi, Madras and Bombay, there were huge audiences gathered to hear their leaders. It was clear that the new Muslim leadership was reaching a much broader urban audience. In its wake, an all-India Khilafat Conference was organised in Delhi on 23-24 November 1919 in which Gandhi was also called. The Conference passed some important resolutions in case unjust treatment was meted out to Turkey during the peace settlement: boycott of peace celebrations by Muslims, non-cooperation with the government, and boycott of British goods. Gandhi was declared to be the leader under whose guidance the movement would be carried forward and who commanded the respect of both the Hindus and the Muslims. Gandhi himself wanted all-round support for his nationalist cause and, therefore, he was not averse to the idea of bringing the two movements together provided they

conformed to his method of politics. Thus, early in 1920 he declared that the Khilafat issue was more important than constitutional reforms and even the Punjab atrocities, and he was prepared to launch a movement of non-cooperation if the peace terms were antagonistic to the interests of Turkey. Besides this, other issues necessitating a wider movement were also present. The government had refused to rescind the Rowlatt Act, the Hunter Committee appointed to enquire into the Punjab atrocities tried to shield the guilty, the British House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer's heinous crimes, and in Britain, 30,000 pounds had been collected from the public as a gift to Dyer.

The terms of the Peace Treaty, which became public in May 1920, were a blow to the wishes of the Khilafat leaders. The Ottoman Empire controlled by the Turks was dismembered. The Arab countries were declared independent of the Ottoman Empire; Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia were put under French and British mandates; Eastern Trace and Smyrna were ceded to Greece; and although Constantinople remained with Turkey, the Straits were internationalised. Such disregard of their sentiments hurt most of Indian Muslims very much. In a series of meetings held by the Khilafat Conference and in a meeting held along with Congress members on 1-2 June 1920 in Allahabad, it was decided to begin a programme of non-cooperation towards the government which would include:

- renunciation of titles conferred by the government,
- resignation from all kinds of government jobs, including military and police, and
- non-payment of taxes to the government.

Both Gandhiji and the Khilafat leaders were keen to start the non-cooperation movement as soon as possible. However, for this the support of the Congress was necessary. Certain leaders of the Congress were opposed to this move as they felt that a movement on a religious issue like the Khilafat would not be conducive for the growth of Indian polity. Their apprehensions were justified to some extent. The vocabulary of the Khilafat movement was entirely Muslim-oriented and filled with Islamic ideology and rhetoric. The arguments of even the best nationalists among them, such as Maulana Azad, was in support of allying with one set of non-Muslims (i.e., the Hindus) against another set of non-Muslims (i.e., the British). Through the entire course of the movement, the emphasis was on the separate existence of two communities and the need to unite them against the British who were considered as aggressors against both the Khalifa in Turkey and the Muslims and Hindus in India. So, although the Khilafat movement was anti-imperialist in orientation, the language of its articulation was basically Islamic.

However, at another level, strong nationalist sentiments were expressed during the course of the movement and constant appeals for communal amity were made. Moreover, the Khilafat leaders whole-heartedly supported the nationalist anti-imperialist movement like Rowlatt Satyagraha launched by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress and exhorted the Muslims to fully participate in this which resulted in the immense success of this agitation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali together toured throughout the country mobilising support for the cause of non-cooperation. Other Khilafat leaders were also active in rallying support for the cause under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, it may be said that during the summer of the 1920, there was a convergence of these two movements.

12.5 MAIN PHASES

The non-cooperation movement was formally launched on 1 August 1920. That day was also marked by the death of Bal Gangadhar Tilak which witnessed strikes and processions to mourn the passing away of this great national leader.

A special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta in September 1920 to finally deliberate and decide the issue of non-cooperation. It gave its assent to non-cooperation, despite some opposition by those interested in Council entry. By the time of the regular Congress Session in December 1920 held at Nagpur, the programme of non-cooperation was accepted without opposition. It involved the surrender of government titles and honorary positions, boycott of government schools and colleges, law courts, and foreign cloths. It could also be extended to include resignation from government service and non-payment of government taxes. Moreover, it was decided to set up national schools and colleges, establish and strengthen the panchayats for settlement of disputes, promotion of hand spinning and weaving, condemnation and renunciation of untouchability, maintenance of communal amity and strict observance of non-violence. Thus, for the first time, an open extra-constitutional programme of mass mobilisation was started by the Congress.

From January to March 1921, the main emphasis of the movement was on the boycott of government schools, colleges and law courts, and the use of *charkha*. Thousands of students left schools and colleges and joined 800 national schools and colleges that had come up throughout the country. There were massive student strikes in Calcutta and Lahore, and the educational boycott was particularly successful in Bengal and Punjab. Although the boycott of the law courts was not as successful, many leading lawyers of the country like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Saifuddin Kitchlew, C. Rajagopalachari, M.R. Jayakar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali and T. Prakasham quit their practice. The boycott of foreign cloth became a very successful programme. Thousands of volunteers moved from house to house trying to convince people about the necessity to adopt Swadeshi. The foreign-made clothes were collected and set on fire. There was also picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. The impact of this was enormous. The value of import of such merchandise fell from Rs. 102 crore in 1920-21 to Rs. 57 crore in 1921-22. Import of British cotton piecegoods declined from 1292 million yards in 1920-21 to 955 million in 1921-22. Many merchants took vow not to deal in foreign cloth. Another type of boycott movement was against liquor and toddy shops leading to a substantial fall in government revenue. Excise revenue declined in Punjab by Rs. 33 lakhs and in Madras by about Rs. 65 lakhs.

The next phase of the movement may be said to have started from the Vijayawada session of the Congress held in March 1921. It was decided to concentrate in the next three months on enrolling one crore members for the party, collecting one crore rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and distributing and installing 20 lakh *charkhas*. This phase also achieved its objectives to a large extent: Tilak fund was oversubscribed, 50 lakh members were enrolled and *charkhas* were widely popularised and khadi became the dress of the movement.

The third phase of the movement witnessed its high points in the an challenging speech by Mohammed Ali in July 1921 declaring it 'religiously unlawful for the Muslims to continue in the British Army' and asking them to resign and in the successful boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921. The

colonial government immediately arrested Mohammed Ali along with some other leaders. Another important nationalist campaign during this phase was against the visit by the Prince of Wales. As soon as he landed in Bombay on 17 November, he was greeted with city-wide strikes and demonstrations which sometimes culminated in riots. Wherever he went there were strikes and demonstrations.

In the fourth phase, both the non-cooperators and the government appeared in confrontationist mood. Khilafat leaders like Hasrat Mohani were in favour of demanding complete independence from the British rule. At the ground level the Congress was influential among a very large number of people and its Volunteer Corps became almost a parallel police force. The Congress had sanctioned its provincial committees to start civil disobedience movement wherever it was felt necessary. The government, on the other hand, had started using repression as its official policy. There were large-scale arrests, ban on meetings and prohibition of the volunteer corps. The threat of violence on both sides was increasing and it was extremely disturbing to Gandhiji who not only abhorred violence particularly among the non-cooperators but also feared that intensive state repression would crush the movement. His apprehensions proved correct when on 5 February 1922, in Chauri-Chaura in Gorakhpur district the police provoked a crowd of demonstrators. The people attacked the policemen who then fired on them. Angered by this the people set fire to the police station building in which many policemen died. When Gandhiji heard this violent incident, he decided to withdraw the movement which was later ratified by the Congress Working Committee.

Soon after Gandhiji was arrested on 10 March 1922 and was sentenced to 6 years in jail. The Khilafat movement also declined due to several national and international factors. The withdrawal of non-cooperation was a severe blow and the Khilafat leaders reacted angrily to the decision of withdrawal. Even the international situation was not favourable. The Turks themselves under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal first abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and then did away with the office of the Khalifa itself in 1924. After this, there was little justification for the movement to continue.

The withdrawal of the movement after the incident at Chauri Chaura has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Gandhi's contemporaries such as Motilal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others viewed it as a question involving violence. Later Marxist commentators such as R.P Dutt and A.R. Desai introduced a class angle arguing that it was the fear of an outburst from the masses that led to the decision to withdraw. In this view, both Gandhi and the British were on one side as both did not want this. More professional historians such as Sumit Sarkar and Gyanendra Pandey linked the withdrawal of the movement to the Gandhi's and Congress' need to retain control and the political undesirability of a spontaneous outburst. The fear of losing control over the movement prompted its withdrawal. Bipan Chandra, on the other hand, particularly in his later writings, viewed it as part of a long-term nationalist strategy to carry out the anti-imperialist movement in phases so as to gain wider hegemony. Shahid Amin has looked at the Non-cooperation movement, particularly the Chauri Chaura incident, from a completely different angle probing how the people understood Gandhi in their own ways and used his name as a legitimising device to do their own things. Therefore it was perfectly consistent for people to participate in violent incidents in the name of Gandhi.

12.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE MOVEMENTS IN ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLES

The Khilafat and non-cooperation movements played extremely important role in generating and spreading anti-imperialist consciousness among Indian people. To begin with, there was a remarkable unity between various communities. The Hindus and Muslims together participated in the movement throughout the country and often it was difficult to distinguish between non-cooperation and Khilafat meetings. Despite the Malabar happenings, in which the Muslim peasants revolted against their largely Hindu landlords and killed and converted scores of them, the Hindu-Muslim unity remained intact throughout the period. At some places, two-thirds of those arrested during the non-cooperation movement were Muslims. Gandhi played the most important role in bringing about and sustaining this relationship.

Another important issue which the non-cooperation movement brought to the fore was the need to fight against caste discrimination and untouchability. Gandhi must be credited for emphatically bringing this issue to forefront of the national politics for the first time. From then on this issue would remain quite important for the nationalist politics. The need for social justice was clearly acknowledged, pushed forward and was later enshrined in the Constitution of independent India.

Strong anti-colonial movements were afoot among various sections of population. Peasants and workers were particularly active during this period, besides the middle classes in both the urban and rural areas. Several peasant and worker movements occurred during this period. In 1921 alone there were 396 strikes involving 600,351 workers and a loss of 6,994,426 workdays. Peasant movements were even more prominent. In Awadh region of the United Provinces, in Mewar in Rajsthan, and in many districts of north Bihar there were very strong peasant movements involving millions of people. Even in the urban areas the participation by various middle class groups was unprecedented throughout the country. Moreover, Gandhi's insistence on non-violence brought a large number of women into the movement. Such mobilisation of women was a very significant phenomenon both for the nationalist movement as well as for the liberation of women from the boundaries of their houses.

Thus, these movements under Gandhi's leadership of Mahatma Gandhi revolutionised the structure of Indian politics in several ways. The most significant success of the movement should be located in its mobilisation of various sections of people across the country and the creation of political and social consciousness in them. The common people now became integral to the project of nationalism.

12.7 SUMMARY

The Khilafat issue was of central concern to the Indian Muslims in the wake of the British pressure on Turkey and the impending reduction in size of the Ottoman Empire after First World War. These religious sentiments became even more intensified due to Britain's presence as a colonial power in India. Thus, the religious and anti-imperialist feelings of Indian Muslims produced a very strong reaction against the British colonial rule. On the other hand, the failure of the colonial government to fulfill their promise of some measure of self-government

for the Indians after the War created resentment among politically active groups. In addition to this, the Rowlatt Act further hurt the feelings of a large number of Indians, and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre following the anti-Rowlatt agitation was the last straw. At this moment, Gandhiji provided an able leadership and united various strands of these anti-imperialist movements which developed into the non-cooperation movement involving millions of rural and urban people across the country. Although the movement failed to attain its objectives of either saving the Khalifa or to secure self-government for India, it mobilised a large number of people and imbued them with consciousness about their political rights. The small, powerless people in the dusty corners of the country stood against the mightiest of the empires in the world and raised their voice for freedom. In itself, it was the most significant achievement any movement could aspire to.

12.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the nature of the Khilafat movement and its role in formation of the Non-cooperation movement.
- 2) What was the programme of the Non-cooperation movement?
- 3) What were the major achievements of the Non-cooperation movement?

