Khalifat and Non-Cooperation Movement in India

Two mass movements were organized in 1919-1922 to oppose the British rule in India—

i)the Khilafat

ii) Non-Cooperation.

Though the issues were separate but they adopted a unified plan of action—that of non-violent, non- cooperation.

The immediate thrust to the movement was provided by the Khilafat issue, though not directly n linked but gave an added advantage of cementing Hindu-Muslim unity against the British.

Background:

Series of events after the First World War serve as the background which belied all hopes of the Government's generosity towards the Indian subjects. Few of them are

1. 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.

2. The **Hunter Commission** on the Punjab atrocities proved to be 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.

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

4. 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.

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;

(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 emerged the Khilafat issue around which the historipaved the ground for 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 the 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 to Turkey. Thus, the grounds for a country-wide agitation were 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 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 Prof 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 them 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;
- ii. The Congress was losing faith in constitutional struggle, especially after the Punjab incidents and the blatantly partisan Hunter Commission Report;
- iii. 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.

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 over¬shadowed 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 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 organizational 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 organized; ward committees was organized; 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 Banerjee* 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. About 90,000 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. Raja Gopalachari, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali, T. Prakasam and Rajendra Prasad. Heaps of foreign cloths were burnt publicly and their imports fell by half. Picketing of shops selling foreign liquor and of toddy shops was undertaken at many places. 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 that 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, 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.

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 and 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 (1) political prisoners were not released, and (2) press controls were not removed. The movement had hardly begun before it was brought to an abrupt end.

Chauri Chanra Incident:

A small village named Chauri-Chaura (Gorakhpur district, UP) 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 sales 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 violence. Gandhi, not happy with the increasingly violent trend of the movement, immediately announced the withdrawal of the movement.

The CWC met at Bardoli in February 1922 and resolved to stop all activity that led to breaking of 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 excitement and fervour turning the movement generally violent. A violent movement could be easily suppressed by the colonial regime that could use the |incidents of violence as an excuse to use 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 and Non-Cooperation Movement:

The movement brought the urban Muslims into the national movement. 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 activisation 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.