Allama Mashriqi and the Khilafat Movement

By Nasim Yousaf



For centuries, the institution of the Khalifa (Caliph), the temporal Head of Muslims around the world, was seen as an important symbol of Islamic unity. However, after the Ottoman Empire was defeated by the Allied powers in the First World War, Muslims worried that the office of the Khalifa would be dismantled. To prevent this from occurring, the Muslims of India launched the Khilafat Movement, which ran from approximately 1919-1924.[i] For Allama Mashriqi, who would go on to become one of South Asia's most prominent freedom fighters, the Khalifat was an important institution, but had become impotent and irrelevant. Mashriqi seized this moment in history to demonstrate the vulnerability of the British, point the Muslims in a new direction, and help bring about India's independence from British rule.

At the time that the Allied forces were fighting to defeat the Ottoman Empire, Mashriqi was working as Under Secretary of Education for the Government of British India in the Secretariat of the Viceroy of India (Lord Chelmsford). When the Ottomans were defeated in 1918, Muslims around the world were extremely distressed. In India, the Ottoman downfall brought great resentment against the British rulers. Since he was a high official of the Government of British India, Mashriqi

was expected by the British to speak out against the Ottomans in order to help remove public resentment against the British. Mashriqi refused to denounce the Ottomans and his non-cooperative attitude (on this and other matters of education policy) strained relations between him and the British. As a result, he was demoted from his Under Secretary position on October 15, 1919 to Headmaster of Government High School (GHS) in Peshawar. Two days later, Mashriqi joined GHS (on October 21, 1919).

Around the same time, the Khilafat Movement (KM) was started in an effort to preserve the institution of the Khalifa. When the said Movement was at its peak, Islamic scholars issued a *fatwa* (formal ruling) declaring India as a *Dar-ul-Harb* (home of war) and asked people to move to a *Dar-ul-Aman* (home of peace). As a result of the *fatwa*, there was a large scale exodus of people from India, primarily to Afghanistan. This was known as the *Hijrat* Movement. A large number of people sold their homes, lands, livestock, and other belongings for dirt cheap and left the country. The British feared that the surging migration out of the country would deepen the people's resentment against them and could eventually lead to an overthrow of their rule in India. The British were also concerned about the damage to their reputation around the world.

As it turned out, Peshawar (where Mashriqi was working as Headmaster) became the epicenter of the migration. Knowing Mashriqi's influence over the Muslim community, Sir Alfred Hamilton Grant (Chief Commissioner of NWFP), following instructions from his superiors, invited Mashriqi for a meeting. Upon his arrival to the meeting, Mashriqi was given a red-carpet welcome. During the discussion, Grant offered Mashriqi the Ambassadorship to Afghanistan in 1920 and Knighthood (Title of Sir) in 1921 in exchange for his public support of British policy regarding the Khilafat Movement and efforts to stop the exodus of Muslims from India.

But Mashriqi had strong "feelings for the Muslim people of the Indian Sub-Continent" (*Dawn* 1963 Aug. 28) and could not be bought with titles and high-ranking positions. Mashriqi declined both offers presented by Grant. He also informed the rulers that if they continued to pressure him, he would resign from Government service. The rulers were shocked at Mashriqi's principled stance, as most Indian Muslims or non-Muslims would have jumped at the opportunity to accept such prestigious and lucrative offers. As a result of Mashriqi's rebuff of the British, their relationship went from bad to worse.

Meanwhile, supporters of the Khilafat Movement continued passing resolutions and organizing protest marches. The Movement was miserably disorganized and deficient of a solid agenda to bring the desired results and Muslim leadership remained divided over its launch. To make matters worse, Afghanistan did not have the infrastructure and financial resources to bear the burden of these migrants. As a result, food, medical facilities, lodging, and other arrangements were non-existent. The poor migrants were sick, starving, and facing extreme financial hardship; many died due to a lack of medical assistance.

Mashriqi felt that the Movement came too late. In fact, some of the Muslim and Non-Muslim supporters of the Movement, including M.K. Gandhi, had actively recruited for the Allied Forces in WWI, which had led to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and endangered the existence of the institution of the Khalifa. Now these same supporters were demanding the protection of the institution of the Khalifa. Mashriqi saw that the Movement was poorly organized and would only lead

to further misery for the migrants. He also recognized that passing resolutions, delivering speeches, and organizing protest rallies would not do anything worthwhile to the world's most powerful regime – the British Empire. Mashriqi believed the Movement was destined for complete failure. Mashriqi was contacted by leading Khilafat leaders, including Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, to join the Khilafat Movement and support the *Hijrat* Movement. Considering the overall circumstances, it was not appropriate for Mashriqi to support the Movement.

Recognizing the loss of the Mughal Empire and now the Ottoman Empire and the continuous and rapid decline of Muslims (because of their *own shortcomings*), Mashriqi decided to undo the situation by guiding the Muslims. He embarked on writing his book *Tazkirah*, in which he explained the reasons behind the rise and fall of nations and interpreted the Holy Quran in light of science. In the said work. Mashriqi also discussed peace and the importance of science (a field where Muslims were hardly contributing). The book earned world-wide acclamation and was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature by Eastern and Western scholars.[ii]

Learning of Mashriqi's outstanding credentials, Sheikh-ul-Islam of the renowned Al-Azhar University (Egypt) and Shaykh Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Al-Gizawi invited Mashriqi to attend the International Khilafat Conference in Cairo in May of 1926. The conference was primarily convened to appoint a new Khalifa (who was to be chosen by the British behind the scenes). Mashriqi considered this an opportunity to propose the criteria for a powerful Khalifa, establish an International Islamic Organization (or League of Muslim Nations),[iii] and present his suggestions for the return to Muslim grandeur. He also considered the conference an opportunity to meet with delegates and prepare the ground for ending British colonial rule. Mashriqi accepted the invitation to attend the conference.

After Mashriqi's arrival in Egypt for the conference, delegates from King Faud of Egypt, several scholars of Al-Azhar University, the ex-Amir of Tripoli Imam Shaykh al-Sanusi and his son (namely Shaykh Muhammad Idris Sanusi, who later became King of Libya and was deposed by Col. Muammar Gaddafi) came to meet with Mashriqi at his hotel.

On May 13, 1926, the opening day of the conference, Mashriqi addressed the attendees in a historic speech arguing against the appointment of a new Khalifa. Speaking in fluent Arabic, Mashriqi stated, "[translation] If something has more benefits/qualities than inconsequential attributes, it is unlikely that somebody [meaning Turks] would toss it [Caliphate] away."[iv] To Mashriqi, holding on to an institution which had become impotent, "superficial," [v] and one that "only exists in name" [vi] was meaningless. He also rejected the idea of appointing a puppet Khalifa, as that would never bring the desired results. He felt that this step would be harmful to Muslims. He stated, *"*[translation]*...Khilafat only suits to a person whose order will be obeyed. A mere figurehead Caliph is absolutely meaningless...*" (*Khitab-e-Misr*).

During his address, Mashriqi outlined a broader set of reasons why he felt the Muslims were facing their current circumstances and outlined a program to address these challenges. For example, Mashriqi felt that Muslims focused too much on the hereafter (propagated by *Maulvis*), while ignoring the life at hand. According to Mashriqi, this approach had led Muslims to avoid contributing towards discoveries or exploration of the world because so much was focused on the afterlife.

Mashriqi's point was that the life here and after were interlinked and that the world was not created purposelessly. He stated that the "[Translation] the main objective of the creation of humanity is the exploration of the universe" and that "to have a supremacy of the world, constant struggle and action is required." [vii]

In his speech, Mashriqi outlined a program to bring about a Muslim renaissance. Syed Shabbir Hussain summarized Mashriqi's words in his book, *Al-Mashriqi: The Disowned Genius*:

"His [Mashriqi's] first proposal was to gradually evolve a system in every Muslim country under which each mohalla [town, locality, or neighborhood] would have a Religious leader [*Deeni Mudeer*] to be linked through village and town leaders [*Deeni Amil*] with a Religious Ameer [*Deeni Ameer*] for each country. The Motamar [Conference/Convention], he said, should have the responsibility to choose or remove such an Ameer who would look after the religious and collective affairs of the people. Through the second proposal he sought to make the Motamar as the permanent custodian of Khilafat instead of vesting this status in an individual ruler. The Motamar, he said, should hold annual sessions in every important city of the Muslim world. His third proposal was to establish Central Bait-ul-Maal [Central Treasury] to be operated by the Motamar. Contributions to this should come from every Muslim ruler and individual Muslims…" His fourth "proposal was a declaration by each delegate to the Motamar that he did not belong to any sect of the Muslims but was a pure and simple Muslim, to show equal respect to all ulema, soofia, mashaikh, and imams, but not to make them idols."[viii]

Mashriqi considered sectarianism [*Firqa Bundi*] a deadly poison for Muslims: "[Translation] The reason for our national downfall is sectarianism, and the last and only remedy is to remain silent, rather than engaging in confrontations and arguments." He believed that without a proper infrastructure that connected Muslims of the world to the institution of the Khilafat, the Khalifa would be ineffective. Mashriqi also suggested that the current *Motamar* should be declared permanent and its ceremonial head office, under the leadership of Shaykhul-Islam, should be based at the *Jamia Al-Azhar*.[ix]

After presenting his proposals, Mashriqi gave his reasons in *opposition* to the appointment of a new Khalifa. Concluding, he said, "*Gentlemen! I present you my last resolution and invite you to approve with one voice [all together/jointly] that the subject of electing the Caliphate is left for some other time"*[x]

Mashriqi astounded the delegates with his bold and thoughtful speech; many expressed that they had not heard such an eloquent and powerful speech before. As a result of Mashriqi's speech, the delegates approved the aforementioned three proposals unanimously and the fourth by a majority vote. This was considered one of the crowning victories in Mashriqi's career, as he had successfully thwarted the appointment of the British sponsored King Faud as Khalifa, at the height of the British Empire's global power.

Based on Mashriqi's (who was born Inayatullah Khan) outstanding academic credentials and vision, the scholars of Al-Azhar University bestowed upon him the title of *Allama Mashriqi* or *Sage of the East*. Later Mashriqi's speech was published not only in Egypt but thousands of copies were distributed in many countries. In British India, the Arabic speech was translated into Urdu and

published from Amritsar. The speech contributed to an awakening in many regions against the suppressive rule of the British Empire, and so, the downfall of the Empire began.

After his return from Egypt (and Europe), in 1930, Mashriqi launched his Khaksar Movement to implement the program that he had covered in his speech in Egypt. Mashriqi followed up his previous book, *Tazkirah,* with additional works to enlighten the people. In 1931, he published *Isha'rat* and later *Qual-e-Faisal* on November 15, 1935. The first book provides "[translation] the sole method and practical solution to make Muslims powerful again." The second work discusses "[translation] the downfall of nations and its cure - a complete interpretation of the Khaksar Movement program." His ideology was so successful that over 5 million members joined his Khaksar Movement along with many millions of additional followers and supporters. The Movement also established branches in a number of countries to reach the masses.

The Khaksar Movement became so powerful[xi] that, despite all its might, the British Empire could not crush the Movement. The British rulers became so fearful of the Khaksar Movement's plan to overturn their rule, that they had no choice left but to abandon their rule in India in 1947 (much of the established history around Pakistan and India's freedom movement is fabricated and needs to be re-written[xii]).

As for the Khilafat Movement, it neither paid any dividend to the Turks nor put a dent into the British rule in India. When the Khilafat Movement collapsed in 1924 (the same year the institution of the Khalifa was abolished by the Turks), Mashriqi's prediction was proven correct. While Mashriqi was sympathetic[xiii] to the Khilafat Movement, he felt that having an ineffective or British sponsored Khalifa was pointless. And so, while the Khilafat Movement began as a misguided effort to protect the institution of the Khalifat, Mashriqi was able to use the opportunity to advance his broader agenda around bringing an end to colonial rule.

While Mashriqi believed that the Khaksar Movement (Private Army) needed to be powerful enough to bring about independence, he was generally a peace-loving individual.[xiv] Throughout his life, he preached brotherhood, equality, justice, and the uplifting of all poor, regardless of religion, class, color, or creed. The world can learn from these lessons even today.[xv]

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1. Kashmir Reader (Srinagar), November 12, 2021
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12. Pakistan Christian Post, November 11, 2021
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[i] The exact date and year that the Khilafat Movement was launched differs in various sources. Some sources state the dates as 1918-1924.

[ii] For more information, see my articles on Allama Mashriqi & *Tazkirah* in Springer's publication entitled "Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism," part of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*, 2018.

[iii] Mashriqi, Allama. [1926] 1997. *Khitab-e-Misr*. Lahore, Pakistan: Al-Tazkirah Publications. p. 82.

[iv] Ibid. p. 91.

[v] Ibid. p. 92.

[vi] Ibid. p. 92.

[vii] Ibid p. 92-93.

[viii] Hussain, Syed Shabbir. 1991. *Al-Mashriqi: The Disowned Genius*. Lahore, Pakistan: Jang Publishers., p. 38.

[ix] Mashriqi, Allama. [1926] 1997. *Khitab-e-Misr*. Lahore, Pakistan: Al-Tazkirah Publications, p. 105.

[x] Ibid, p.11.

[xi] "Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Untouchables, Christians of the Frontier Province have witnessed with their own eyes that one order from Khaksar-i-Azam sets in motion five million…Khaksar soldiers." — *Al-Islah*, Dec. 01, 1946

Also see my published books and articles such as "India & Pakistan Owe their Freedom to Allama Mashriqi." https://archive.org/details/india-pakistan-owe-their-freedom-to-allama-mashriqi

[xii] The Governments of Pakistan, India, and the United Kingdom have not yet declassified Mashriqi and the Khaksar Movements' materials, which were confiscated before and after the partition of India in 1947. This further supports that Mashriqi's role in the freedom movement is being suppressed in order to hide the truth, and that history as currently presented is widely fabricated.

[xiii] It is to be noted that Mashriqi's father, Khan Ata Mohammad Khan, held the Ottoman Empire and Turks in high regard. His famous newspaper "Vakil" (from Amritsar) regularly published news and stories about the Turks and the Ottoman Empire. In the early 1900s, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (who ruled from 1876 –1909) of the said Empire asked for donations from Muslims around the world for building the Hejaz Railway (Damascus to Medina). On Sultan's call, Khan Ata collected substantial funds. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to literature as well as for raising funds for the Hejaz railway, the Sultan bestowed upon him the *Tamgha-i-Majeedia* (a high-status medal). Mashriqi also held the same feeling for the Turks. For example, in his youth, Mashriqi used to wear a Turkish *Fez* (traditional Turkish hat). His Khaksar flag was also quite similar to the Ottoman/Turkish flag. His weekly "Al-Islah" newspaper also carried news about the Turks. The Khaksar photo album also carried several photos of Turkish soldiers. Upon the death of Kemal Ataturk,"Al-Islah" weekly dedicated its front-page to offering condolences from Mashriqi and the Khaksar Tehrik Headquarters. In honor of the departed soul, from November 10-20, 1938 the Khaksar flag flew at half-mast at the Khaksar Tehrik's Headquarters in Lahore and also all over India for six hours on November 20, 1938. Also see my article entitled "Allama Mashriqi & Kemal Ataturk" on Ataturk's 78th death anniversary.

[xiv] This is also obvious from the fact that Mashriqi disbanded the Movement in 1947 after British rule ended.

[xv] It is recommended that this piece should be read in conjunction with Mashriqi's speech *Khitab-e-Misr* and my work entitled *Allama Mashriqi's Monumental Speech at the Global Islamic Khilafat Conference: Cairo, May 1926.*