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The Khilafat Movement in Dindigul Region

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Abstract

The Khilafat issue was an offshoot of the First World War. The War caused a lot of confusion of allegiance among the Muslims. Because, the Ottomann Khalif fought against Britain as an ally of Germany. So, it was a question of dilemma to the Muslim world whether to support the Khalif or to oppose the Fascists. The British Prime Minister Llyod D.George sought the support of the Muslims and declared that the War was not against the Ottomon Khalif; and whatever happened, the independence and sovereignty of the Khalif would be protected. Accordingly, Muslims all over the world supported Britain in the War. The Muslims of Dindigul Region also responded positively to the declaration. An attempt has been made in this paper to throw light on the role of Muslim and Hindu Satyagrahies in the Khilafat Movement of Dindigul Region.

Introduction

The dawn of the political consciousness in Dindigul came with the rise of the Home Rule, the Khilafat and Non Co-operation movements. All these movements, as it is well known, began to make themselves felt during the First World War and its aftermath, a period which may rightly be called the formative epoch of Indian Nationalism. It was this period that witnessed the untiring efforts of stalwarts like Mrs. Annie Besant, Tilak, Gandhiji, Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali in the field of nationalism. It was also the period which for the first time in many parts of this State, such as in the Madurai and Dindigul, made the people to assert their rights and to voice forth their grievances alike in the social, economic and political spheres of life.[1]The Khilafat was a movement which involved the Muslim people of India to vigorously take part in it. The Khilafat issue was an offshoot of the First World War. The War caused a lot of confusion of allegiance among the Muslims. Because, the Ottomann Khalif fought against Britain as an ally of Germany. So, it was a question of dilemma to the Muslim world whether to support the Khalif or to oppose the Fascists. The British Prime Minister Llyod D.George sought the support of the Muslims and declared that the War was not against the Ottomon Khalif; and whatever happened, the independence and sovereignty of the Khalif would be protected. Accordingly, Muslims all over the world supported Britain in the War.[2] The Muslims of Dindigul Region also responded positively to the declaration.

Khilafat Agitations

The Madras Presidency did not lag behind in extending its enthusiastic support to the Khilafat agitation. In order to make the movement in grand success, the prominent leaders both from Hindu and Islam of Madras Presidency rendered their selfless service. Rajagopalachari earned the esteem of the Muslims by his

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active involvement in the agitation. He addressed many Khilafat meetings and gained the support of the Hindus for the movement.[3] In the Provincial Congress Conference he moved a resolution demanding the release of Ali Brothers who had courted arrest for spear-heading the Khilafat Movement. He also mobilized the support of the Hindus to observe the Khilafat Day on 17th October, 1919. Khilafat Committees were formed throughout Tamil Nadu.[4] The Muslims in Madurai and Dindigul decided to hold meetings from October 13 to 17 to explain the Khilafat movement.[5] The District Collector of Madurai had meeting with the Mohammedan leaders of Madurai on the evening of 13th October. The Khilafat leaders conducted meetings as planned on the 14th, 15th and 16th October in different parts Madurai town including Dindigul and delivered speeches about the importance of Khilafat issue and observance of Khilafat Day.[6]It is to be pointed out here that Dindigul was a part of Madurai district till 15th September 1985 and because of its prominence in various kinds of human activity it was made as the headquarters of the Dindigul district.[7]

The leaders requested the people to suspend their business on the Khilafat Day, to offer prayers for the settlement of the Turkish Issue and to organise meeting in all towns and villages and to send telegrams to the Madras Government conveying their concern of on the issue. In Madras Presidency the Khilafat Movement was organised by Abdul Masjid Sarar and Yakub Hassan with the support of Hindu leaders.[8]In response theKhilafat Day was observed on 17th October, 1919.[9] On that day all the shops were closed in and around Madurai and Dindigul and prayers were conducted in all mosques.[10] Sivaramakrishna Iyer of Dindigul town made a campaign for the support of Khilafat Movement later in 1920 and delivered speeches in favour of the movement. He requested all communities and classes to observe hartal. He earned name and fame among the Muslim community and other people of this town. His campaigns became a source of inspiration for many.[11]A section of the Muslim community also involved vigorously in this movement. Peer Mohamud, Mohammud Rowther, Mohammud Kareem Rowther, Sikander Rowther, Thanga Meeran and Abdul Sattarwere prominent leaders among them.[12]

The wave of the movement had swept Dindigul region by the year of 1920. To start with local leaders attempted to mobilise mass support for the movement. The local leaders such as Thanga Meeran Sahib, Janab Haji Mohammud, Moulana Sahib and Mytheen Sahib were the leading propagandists of this movement in Dindigul and a host of others took strenuous efforts to both politicise and seek the support of the masses. They conducted meetings and rallies to elucidate the masses, the ideologies of Khilafat agitation.[13]The Madras Provincial Congress Committee in its meeting held on 16th March 1920 passed resolution requesting all to observe hartal on Khilafat Day by cessation of all business.[14]The Second Khilafat Day was observed on 19th March 1920 and requested the people to offer prayers at mosques for the good settlement at Turkey and to hold meetings of the kind in cities, towns and villages.[15]Meetings had been an effective weapon in politicising the policies to the people of the region. A large number of meetings were held in Dindigul, Kodaikanal, Nilakottai, Palani and other towns of Dindigul Region in 1920.

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In the meantime on 1st August 1920 was observed as the Third Khilafat Day in Tamil Nadu under the inspiration of Rajagopalachari and Yakub Hassan. It was declare a day of hartal, signalling the inauguration of Non-cooperation campaign.Meanwhile the Khilafat Satyagrahies turned to Non-co-operation Movement. They played a vital role in the movement.Thanga Meeran Sahib and Mytheen Sahib of Dindigul Town were the leading propagandists of this movement in Dindigul region.[16] The door-to-door propagation exerted influence on people and greatly attracted the Muslim community.[17]

Offices held by patriotic individuals were resigned and titles were given up. One Jamal Ibrahim, a honorary magistrate in Dindigul after some persuasion by the nationalists, sent his resignation letter to the Collector and the District Magistrate of Madurai in the later part of October 1920. He openly announced his decision to give up his practice and to consecrate his life for the country's cause.[18]

Several National minded members of the Muslim community such as Peer Mohamed and Abdul Sathar appealed to the fellow members through the leading Tamil newspapers to join the Non-co-operation Movement and they also protested against the resolution which condemned the Non-co-operation Movement. Thus a section of the Muslim community supported the freedom struggle and also encouraged their community members to join the National Movement.

The Non-co-operation Movement meeting held at Dindigul under the presidentship of Kanakasabapathy Ayyar. Its object was to organize arrangements for the Flag Day. Yakub Ali, Ismail, Banu and Thanga Meeran spoke.[19] On the occasion and instilled the spirit of nationalism among the people of Dindigul.

Mohammud Rowther is remembered as a great Congress volunteer and patriot fought for India's Independence. Rowther was born on 1903 in Dindigul town. His father was Mohammud mohideen.[20] As a volunteer of the Congress he was eager to agitate against the British in this movement. He paid a visit with a group of men to seek blessings of Gandhiji when Gandhiji visited Dindigul. He participated in the Khilafat Movement to Non Co-operation Movement and motivated other people of the town in this struggle. He spoke powerfully against the British and encouraged khadi. Hence he was arrested and sentenced to one year under Section 123 of Criminal Procedure Code. He was sent to Cuddalore Central Jail.[21]

Another man who was deeply influnced by Gandhiji was Sikender Rowther. He was the son of Kader Rowther of Dindigul Taluk. He attended the meeting on 21st September 1921. Sikender Rowther took part in Khilafat and Non-co-operation Movements and propagated the ideas of freedom and his commitment during the period and for which he was arrested and jailed for one year under Section 123 Criminal Procedure Code. He was kept in Central Jail at Madurai.[22]

Thanga Meeran Sahib was a moving spirit as for as Dindigul was concerned. Native of Dindigul town, Thanga Meeran was born to M.V. Khaddar Mohideen in 1895.[23] He had his education at a local primary school.

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But his studies were interrupted by his participation in politics. The Non Khilafat Movement whole heartedly supported by Gandhiji was inspired Thanga Meeran. This proved to be a turning point in his life. Inspired by the Gandhian ideals, Thanga Meeran began to take interest in the Khilafat movement. He became an active political worker in the town. Laterin 1921, he took part in the Non Co-operation Movement also. He carried on the Non Co-operation task with utmost sincerity. He actively worked for the non co-operation against the British and the propagation of Khadi and was carrying on propaganda in the villages in favour of prohibition. As he had revolted against the English Government, he was arrested under Section 188 Indian Penal Code and sentenced to one year and six months. He was kept in Vellore and Cuddalore jails. He passed away in 1945.[24]

Janab Haji Mohamud and Moulana Sahib were the leading propagandists of this movement in Nilakottai Taluk. They spoke about the importance of the movement and spread the awareness among people to participate in the agitations.[25]

Conclusion

The Khilafat Movement suffered a severe setback after the suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement by Gandhiji. However the Khilafat Movement collapsed in 1922 when the Ali Brothers were imprisoned. Then the Khilafat leadership was split into two parties, namely, Nationalist Muslims and the Khilafat group. Meanwhile the former merged with the Congress whereas the latter was slowly disappeared. The movement was started with the motive of protecting the Caliphate in Turkey but became effective in India. Both Hindus and Muslims saw this was an opportunity to unite them. In short, the Khilafat Movement was an exemplary exercise in Hindu Muslim unity in the history of Indian Freedom struggle.

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