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THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT IN VELLORE DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

Khalifat, the Muslim Empire founded by Muhammed, the Prophet, stood extended far and wide from the beginning of the 8th century to the end of the 19th Century, when European Powers made onslaughts on it under the garb of Nationalism, Democracy and Self-Determination. With the dawn of 20th Century further onslaughts were made and at the end of the First World War the extinction of the Khalifat was almost a certainity. The Khilafat Movement was a response of the Indian Muslims to the British participation in the disintegration of the Empire and an attempt to sustain the Khalifat. The paper is a study of the response of the people of Vellore District to the Movement and its impact.

THE KHALIFAT

The Khalif was the religious as well as the political and military head of the Muslim state founded by Muhammed, the Prophet. Islam attributed great importance to the Khalif. He was next only to Allah and the Prophet, Muhammed[1].

The early Khalifs extended the Khalifat far and wide that by 732 AD, the hundredth death anniversary of Muhammed, the Prophet, the Muslim Empire extended from the Pyrenees in the Western Europe through Spain, across Northern Africa, through Syria and Armenia, Mesopotamia and Persia, and on through Central Asia to the very frontiers of India and China-an Empire, the greatest in territorial extent so far in World's history.

The Khalifat had been in existence through the centuries. In 1517, Salim I, the Ottoman Sultan became the Khalif and thence onwards Turkey became the centre of Khalifat. The Ottoman Khalifs conquered Asia Minor, Adrianople, Belgrade and Budapest

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at the cost of European Powers and under the Ottomans the Khalifat reached its greatest glory and prestige[2].

Why the Khilafat Movement

The glory and prestige of the Khalifat lasted to the second half of the 19th Century, when it was the turn of the Christian European Powers to wreck vengeance on Turkey under the garb of ideological concepts of Nationalism, Democracy and Self-Determination. They aided and abetted - many the times occupied - the North African and the Near Eastern territories against the Khalifat. This narrowed down the extent of the Khalifat to a considerable extent. The Muslim reaction to this was an Young Turk Movement in Turkey, Pan-Islamism around the Islamic World and the Khilafat Movement in India.

Khilafat Movement Becoming Aggressive

Muslim opposition to the British rule in India was virulent and consistent from the very beginning. Of course, the growth of Aligarh School of thought and the Muslim League brought about collaboration with the British. However, with the rise of Muslim middle class in the second decade of the 20th Century with its leaders- Abul Kalam Azad, the Ali Brothers - Muhammed Ali and Shaukath Ali - antagonism with the British and collaboration with the Congress became preferable to the Muslims. This, alongwith the Muslim grievances over the repartition of Bengal in 1911 and over the British support to Italy in the Italio-Turkish war and to the Balkan States in the Balkan War of 1912 and the British declaring war against Turkey in support of Serbia in 1914, brought about a rapproachment between the Congress and the Muslim League in the form of Lucknow Pact and aggravated the anti-British feelings of the Muslims that attaining Dominion Self-Government became the aim of the Muslim League and it formed Sub-Committees to work for `Home Rule' in

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the Presidencies[3] and spoke about not cooperating with the Government and about renouncing their titles and honorary posts[4].

The complete surrender of Turkey in November 1918 and the statements of the British statesmen that Turkey should suffer for her `rash acts' further aggravated the anti-British feelings of the Muslims that the All-India Khilafat Committee was formed in September 1919 and it came to be called Central Khilafat Committee in November 1919[5]. The All-India Khilafat Committee organized the First Khilafat Day on 17 October 1919. Despite its successful observance in India, exhibiting the Muslim solidarity against the ill-treatment of Turkey, Lloyed George, the British Prime Minister, violating his earlier promise, observed that Turkey could not be treated in a way different from other countries[6]. Obviously the Treaty of Sevres imposed very harsh terms on Turkey, disintegrating its Empire and subjecting the Khalif to a High Commission appointed by the Allied Powers. This became the last straw on the camel back and the Indian Muslims began to indulge in the anti-British activities in a very aggressive way that "the Khilafat Movement became a steadily increasing danger to the peace of the country"[7].

Gandhi's Involvement

Gandhi, whose rise in the Congress was very much jealoused and cornered, "fully realised the value for his own purposes of the excitement caused by the Khilafat question. He lost no opportunity to stimulate it"[8]. He began to guide the Muslims. Impressed by Gandhi's involvement in the Movement, "the Muslims became stronger supporters of Gandhi than were his fellow Hindus"[9]. Gandhi gave a shape to the Movement and a resolution was passed in the Khilafat Conference at Allahabad, in June 1920, to launch Non-Cooperation Movement to redress the Muslim grievances over the Khilafat and demanding the revision of the Turkish peace treaty, i.e, the Treaty of Sevres. On 1 August

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1920 the Non-Co-operation Movement was launched for the Khilafat Cause[10]. Hartal was successfully observed throughout the country.

The Khilafat Movement in Tamil Nadu

The Non-Cooperation Movement, launched for the Khilafat cause, had a few aspects. They were the observance of hartals, Khilafat days, surrendering of titles and honorary posts, boycott of educational institutions, courts and Legislative councils, picketing of liquor shops and non-payment of taxes etc. The response of Tamil Nadu to the call of the Central Khilafat Committee was overwhelming that it bewilders the concept of political backwardness of Tamil Nadu. In fact Tamil Nadu was much ahead and exhibited much aggressiveness in carrying on anti-British activities in support of Khilafat cause. Yakub Hassan and Abdul Masjid Sharar were the live-wires of the Khilafat Movement in Tamil Nadu. They formed a Khilafat Committee for Madras Presidency. Khuddus Bacha was its president and C. Abdul Hakkim of Vellore was its vice-president[11]. A Khilafat Sub-Committee was formed for the erstwhile North Arcot District. Haji Abdur Rahim of Vaniyambadi was its secretary. C. Abdul Hakkim, Maulana Sherfuddin Sahib, V. M. Obaidullah and Abdul Rehman Beg of Vellore and Subramania Sastri of Arni were the important Khilafat workers of the Vellore District. They along with HaJi Ziauddin Saiyyid Muhammed, Principal, Arabic College, Vellore, Jaffar Hussain Kalami and Maulvi Syed Muhammed Kamaluddin of Vellore, exhorted the Hindus and the Muslims for a united agitation against the British[12]. At the Conference of the Majlis-ul-Ulema, held at Tanjore, preachers were selected to instigate the Muslims against the British. Muslims of Vellore attended in large number the Madras Provincial Conference held at Trichinopoly where resolution asking for the release of Ali Brothers and the restoration of the Khalifat to the Khalif were passed.

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Khilafat Days

The Provincial Khilafat Committee on the directions of the All-India Khilafat Committee successfully organised the First Khilafat Day on 17 October 1919 and exhibited the depth of the anti-British feeling in this Presidency. On the directions of the Central Khilafat Committee the Madras Presidency Khilafat Committee observed the Second Khilafat Day on 19 March 1920 wherein the inability of the Government to maintain natural activities was exposed because of the observance of complete and successful hartal[13]. On this day there was a meeting in the beach at Madras. Leaders from Vellore District, C. Abdul Hakeem, Obaidullah Sahib of Vellore spoke in the meeting[14]. Also, the day was observed with success at Vellore, Vaniyambadi, Gudiyattam, Ambur and Tiruppathur.

Madras Khilafat Conference

Responding to the call of the Central Khilafat Committee, Yakub Hassan and Abdul Masjid Sharar organized the Khilafat Conference in Madras in April 1920. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali addressed the Conference. Many from Vellore District attended the conference.

Publication of the Peace Terms

The terms of the Turkish peace treaty were published in May 1920. The terms were so harsh that it hardened the stand of the Muslims. Many tendered their resignations of honorary offices, Local bodies and Legislature. In fact, in all 11 persons resigned their honorary magistrate posts, three surrendered their titles, one relinquished the Delhi Darbar Medal, three resigned from Legislative Council from the erstwhile North Arcot District[15]. A very many of them belonged to the present-day Vellore District.

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Provincial Conference at Tinnevelly

Muslims of Tamil Nadu became Politically very active by now that they attended the Provincial Conference held at Tinnevelly, in June 1920, in a large number where the resolution for Non-Cooperation for the Khilafat cause was passed despite the opposition to it by the president of the Conference, S. Srinivasa Iyengar[16]. Vellore District with its Muslim dominated centres like Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Arni and Tiruppathur contributed much to the Conference in the form of men and money.

Submission of Ultimatum to the Viceroy

The Central Khilafat Committee submitted an ultimatum to the Viceroy in June 1920 and warned of launching of Non-Cooperation Movement if their demand with regard to Khilafat was not conceded. Of the 92 signatories to the memorial more than half were the Muslims of Tamilnadu[17]. Of them five were Muslims of Vellore District[18].

Launching of Non-Cooperation Movement

1 August 1920 marked an important turning point in the Khilafat Movement. It was the day on which the Non-Cooperation Movement was launched for the Khilafat cause. Tamil Nadu responded extremely well for the call of the Non-Cooperation Committee and launched the Non-Cooperation Movement in a fitting manner. The Third Khilafat Day was observed on that day and the hartal organized on that day was complete and successful. In Vellore District complete hartal was observed in places like Vellore, Tiruppathur, Vaniyambadi, Gudiyattam, Visharam and Arakkonam[19]. Shops were closed and grand meetings were held and non-cooperation resolutions were passed. Islamiah College in Vaniyambadi became the centre of this struggle[20]. The former students of this college formed the Khilafat Volunteer Corps which became an example and model for the

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formation of National Volunteer Corps by the Indian National Congress. A Khilafat Publicity Board was started by M. A. Khalis here[21]. These two organizations - the Khilafat Volunteer Corps and the Khilafat Publicity Board - played a major role in carrying on the Non-Cooperation Movement propaganda and activities in this District[22].

North Arcot District Khilafat Conference

The North Arcot District Khilafat Conference was held at Ambur on 14 August 1920. Gandhi, Yakub Hassan and Rajaji came here on the night of 13 August. Yakub Hassan Presided over the Conference. As a first step towards the programme, four persons from this District namely Abdul Rahim, Banki Hayath Batcha, Moulvi Muhammed Kasim and Singallappa Chetti resigned their honorary Magistrate Posts[23]. Gandhi appreciated the enthusiasm of the people of this area and wanted them to boycott the elections. Rajaji spoke in Tamil about the Movement and finally the resolution for Non-Cooperation was passed. All through the Conference the people raised the slogans "Gandhiji Ki Jai, Muhammed Ali Ki Jai, Shaukath Ali Ki Jai". Gandhi wanted these slogans to be substituted by "Hindu Muslim Ki Jai"[24].

Special Session of the Congress

In September 1920 a large number of delegates were to be taken to the special session of the Congress at Calcutta to make sure that the Non-Cooperation resolution was approved by the Congress. So "a special train freely placarded with the notice `Khilafat Special' carried from Madras some 200 delegates, the majority of them being Muhammadans from Bangalore, Trichinopoly and places in the North Arcot District"[25]. Obviously, the places in the North Arcot District refer to the Muhammadan Centers of erstwhile North Arcot District, i. e. Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Vellore and Tiruppathur. Among

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the delegates from Tamil Districts 161 voted in favour of Non-Cooperation resolution. Of them 125 were Muslims[26].

Boycott of Educational Institutions

The Khilafatists indulged in the boycott of the educational institutions. The students of the Muhammadan College at Madras were induced to follow the lead of Aligarh Students. Similar movement was on foot at Vaniyambadi where strenuous efforts were made to boycott both the Islamiah College and the Muhammadan Girls School[27]. Here the local Muhammadans threatened to withdraw their subscription to the school unless government aid was refused[28]. The boycott of the educational institutions was quite successful. For the pupil absented themselves in large number despite dissuasion. For example, the number of pupils had fallen from 393 to 179 at the Muhammadan College at Vaniyambadi[29]. Also, the District witnessed the starting of National Schools. One such school was established at Arni and W. S. Srinivasa Rao, who was a teacher in the Board School, Arni, left his service and joined the National School[30].

Boycott of Elections

The boycott of elections launched by the Khilafatists was much more successful and effective that in the Muslim dominated erstwhile North Arcot District, the polling was just 12%[31]. Boycott of elections was more successful in the Muhammadan than in the Non-Muhammadan Constituencies[32]. For example, in Madras City only 75 out of 656 Muhammadans Voted[33].

Boycott of the Duke of Connaught

The Khilafatists carried on the boycott of the visit of the Duke of Connaught to a

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more extreme level that it served as an eye opener to the officialdom which had misreckoned Madras as docile and meek[34]. The effective boycott of the Duke was because of the formation of the volunteer corps by the Khilafatists.

Corrupting the Village Officers

The Khilafatists indulged in corrupting the Village Officers. Because of their work, the Government experienced great difficulty in inducing the Village Officers to collect the land revenue[35]. Also, the movement for the non-payment of taxes took place.

Picketing of Liquor Shops

The Khilafatists exhibited vigor in picketing of liquor shops and in the promotion of Khaddar. The Khilafat Movement continued to be the chief force behind the temperance agitation and caused a heavy loss of exercise duty[36]. The Madras Government sustained a loss of Rs.55.08 lakhs because of the movement and in the erstwhile North Arcot District the loss was Rs.2,10,088[37]. This, along-with the no-tax campaign, caused huge deficit of finance to the Government that Government could not undertake the promised schemes; on the other hand was to impose new levies[38].

Civil Disobedience for the Khilafat Cause

The All-India Khilafat Conference at Karachi in July 1921 passed a resolution declaring service in the army and police to be *haram*[39]. Ali Brothers, Dr. Kitchlew and four others were arrested in connection with this Conference and were sentenced for two years rigorous imprisonment each[40]. This infuriated the Muslims that they decided to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement in protest against the repressive policy of the Government[41]. The Muslims of Ambur, Vaniyambadi and Tiruppathur of Vellore District were ready for

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Civil Disobedience[42]. In Vaniyambadi the Deputy Superintendent of Police was boycotted[43]. Fateh Khan Mohammed Ghouse and Sherfuddin of Vellore and several others delivered fiery speeches condemning the arrest of Ali Brothers. Consequently, they were arrested. Subsequently Pasupathy Iyer, Muhammed Abdullah Batcha and eleven more persons of Vellore were arrested and sentenced for similar offence[44].

When these agitations were going on the All-India Congress Committee, in November 1921, decided in favour of launching the Civil Disobedience Movement. In Tamil Nadu a five-member Committee was formed under the leadership of Rajaji and M. V. Subramania Sastri of Arni[45]. Vellore was selected to stage the Civil Disobedience Movement as it was the most vigorous centre of political agitations[46]. Accordingly on 14 December all the leaders under took Civil Disobedience by violating prohibitory orders issued against them. Subramania Sastri, Rajaji and several others were arrested and sent to jail[47]. The arrest of the leaders created a sense of unrest in this District and strengthened the agitation. So, Government indulged in large scale arrests. In all 275 persons including Fateh Khan Ghouse, a dreaded Khilafatist of Ambur, were arrested between November 1921 and December 1921.

Boycott of the Prince of Wales

During this agitational situation the Prince of Wales arrived at Madras on 13 January 1922. As decided earlier the Khilafatist launched a hartal on that day. The hartal was so vigorous that it not only attracted the attention of the `man in the street' in the far off England but also warranted the military to be called in to help the civil police in combating the agitators[48]. To break the hartal the Government of Madras issued free train tickets to the poor from Chinglepet to Arakkonam and also arranged to feed the poor all over the Presidency. The people of this area protested against the visit of the Prince by holding

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meetings and opposed the feeding of the poor.

Continuance of the Movement

Gandhi called off the Movement after the Chauri Chaura incident of February 1922. But the Khilafalists decided to continue the Movement vigorously. There was popular excitement and very strong volunteer activities in the Muhammadan centres like Vaniyambadi.

The Suppression of the Movement

The Government went all out to suppress the Movement. It indulged in all kinds of activities - suppressive, repressive deceitful and forceful - to put an end to the Movement. The suppressive and repressive activities of the Government were many and cruelly severe. The Government not only used all the resources at their disposal to suppress the `organized outrage and rioting' but also used all the preventive measures available to check `the disorder'. But the severity of repression made the Movement more aggressive and enduring rather than suppressing it. The force behind the Khilafat Movement subsided only after the signing of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, which gave favourable terms to the Turks.

The Vellore District with its Muhammadan centres like Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Tiruppathur and Vellore actively supported Khilafat Movement, sustained it against all odds of suppression and helped the cause of Gandhi, Non-Cooperation and Nationalism.

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FOOT NOTES

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