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International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 5, Issue 5, Sep.-Oct., 2025, pp: 462-472 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

The Origins of the Non-Cooperation Movement – A Khilafat Initiative Appropriated by Gandhi

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Date of Submission: 28-09-2025 Date of Acceptance: 08-10-2025

ABSTRACT:

The Khilafat Movement was a key yet complicated part of Bharat's fight for freedom, blending religious feelings, political goals, and the changing role of leaders in resisting British rule. It began with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, which worried Bharatiya Muslims about losing their spiritual leader, the Caliph. Leaders like the Ali brothers, Abul Kalam Azad, and Hakim Ajmal Khan led the movement, which soon joined the growing anti-British feelings in Bharat. Gandhi's choice to support the Khilafat leaders, supposedly to boost the Non-Cooperation Movement and bring Hindus and Muslims together, is still debated by historians. His letters, speeches, and actions show a mix of loyalty to the British Empire, efforts to win over Muslim leaders, and clever moves to strengthen his role in Bharatia politics. This paper looks closely at Gandhi's ties with the Ali brothers, his push to free them, and his surprising support for British recruitment during World War I. It explores how Gandhi turned a religious movement into a national one, while questioning the true motives behind this shift. By tracing the Khilafat issue from the Balkan Wars to the Treaty of Sèvres and studying Gandhi's letters and plans, the study sheds light on the uncertainties of Bharatiya politics in the early 20th century. It questions whether the Khilafat–Non-Cooperation alliance was really about achieving Swaraj or just a smart use of Muslim concerns. This paper is a humble attempt to find out the facts behind the scenes and to reveal the complex mix of faith, politics, and freedom in Bharat's early nationalist movement.

KEYWORDS:
Non-Cooperation Movement, Khilafat Movement, Gandhi, Indian National Congress

I. INTRODUCTION

The early 20th-century era reshaped Bharat's historical narrative, emphasising its flexibility and contributions, fostering national pride, and turning the freedom struggle into a powerful expression of identity and self-determination. Simultaneously, it was at the same time that Bharat was going to witness a new development in Bharatiya politics led by the Muslims. A new trend of the Pan-Islamic movement in the name of Khilafat was emerging in Bharat. Most of the Muslim intellectuals started distancing themselves from the traditional Bharatiya culture and narratives and started focusing on the broader Islamic world, particularly Turkey, the stronghold of the Khilafat. In this pan-Islamist movement, where most actions taken by Muslim leaders were in favour of the Muslim Brotherhood, what role did M.K. Gandhi play? The NCERT Class 12 textbook states that "To broaden the struggle (freedom struggle) further, he joined hands with the Khilafat Movement." However, in regular textbooks, it is often simplified as Gandhi's effort to strengthen the Non-Cooperation Movement and foster Hindu-Muslim unity against British rule. The general concept among the people was that a) the Indian National Congress launched the Non-Cooperation Movement under the guidance of M. K. Gandhi to attain Swarajya, and b) to strengthen the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi merged the Khilafat Movement in Bharat. But was that truly the case? Was it as simple as it appears before us?

II. BACKGROUND OF THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT IN BHARAT

Often, our standard textbooks jump straight into the Khilafat agitation during World War I, without first explaining how and why the movement began in Bharat. But actually, it started taking shape during the Balkan War. Due to the Balkan War, Turkey, or the Ottoman Empire, started losing its possessions in Europe. The Balkan developments

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International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 5, Issue 5, Sep.-Oct., 2025, pp: 462-472 ISSN: 3048-6874
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had rudely shaken the Ulemas in Bharat. In the year 1913, a new society was formed in the name of *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*. The society's main objective was to protect the honour and safety of the Kaaba and to defend the Holy Places against non-Muslim aggression. Its members pledged to be ever ready to sacrifice their lives and property. The initiative received strong support from prominent leaders such as the Ali Brothers—Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, as well as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Abdul Bari Firangi Mahli, all of whom later played significant roles in the Khilafat Movement. Meanwhile, in late 1914, Muhammad Ali launched a new newspaper in Delhi called *Hamdard*. Reports indicated that its office became a venue for discussions on *Jihad* in Bharat. During these discussions, Shaukat Ali and other Muslim leaders expressed their view that Bharat was *Dal-ul-Harab*.[1]

A dramatic shift occurred in Bharatiya history when Turkey entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers, specifically against Great Britain. The Muslim leaders like Muhammad al Hasan, Abdul Bari, Ajmal Khan, Ansari, Abdul Kalam Azad, Muhammad Ali and Shoukat Ali, were initially hopeful about Germany and Turkey's victories in World War I and sought to influence them to weaken British rule in Bharat. In their enthusiasm, some leaders even sent delegations to Afghanistan and Arabia, urging Turkey to invade Bharat and expel the British. However, these hopes were dashed when Turkey itself fell under Western influence. Still, despite the global wave of democratic revolutions, many Bharatiya Muslims remained committed to establishing Islamic rule rather than merely ending British colonialism.[2] This period marked a significant shift in Bharat's struggle for independence, connecting religious aspirations with anti-colonial resistance. But still, the Muslims of Bharat were aspirant about the generosity of the British government towards them, and the common Muslim's hopes in Bharat still remained vibrant after the speech given by Mr. Lloyd George on 5th January, 1918, when he said, "Nor are we fighting to deprive Turkey of its capital or of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace which are predominantly Turkish in race". However, the British broke their promises regarding Turkey, causing distress among Bharatiya Muslims. They viewed the Caliph of Turkey as their spiritual leader, and were deeply disheartened when they learned that he would have no control over Islam's holy places, which he was expected to protect.

The discovery of broken British promises further intensified the Khilafat Movement, which aimed to restore the Caliphate in Turkey and oppose British imperialist policies. This period marked an important turning point in Bharat's freedom struggle, as religious concerns became closely linked with the fight against colonial rule. In response to the political climate, Gandhi decided to support the Khilafatists in Bharat. He utilised his tool of satyagraha to do so. This united front led to the formal beginning of the Khilafat Movement and later the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920.

Here arises the question of why M. K. Gandhi was very interested in unifying the Khilafat Agitation with the Non-cooperation movement. The answer that is provided by our history textbooks is that it was for the Hindu-Muslim Unity and to strengthen the national freedom struggle. Hence, that period in the History textbooks remains significant as it merged religious sentiments anti-colonial resistance, influencing the broader freedom movement in Bharat. But is it really so? The Khilafat question was purely religious, both in its outlook and its activities. The Muslims of Bharat were protesting for their own religious cause, so why was this religious matter amalgamated with the Freedom Movement in 1920? The question arises whether the Muslims of Bharat at that period were not interested in the freedom struggle, or whether Gandhi was not able to bring the Muslims into the mainstream freedom movement against the British rule or whether the non-cooperation movement was an extension of the Khilafat Movement.

III. RELATIONS BETWEEN ALI BROTHERS AND GANDHI

To understand the motive of Gandhi, we have to first understand what the relations were between the Ali brothers, i.e. Mohammed Ali and Saukat Ali, the two main leaders of the Khilafat movement in Bharat and Gandhi. Gandhi said that he came in close touch with the Muslims when he went to South Africa, due to a Muslim case, and there, he came across the habits, thoughts and

[1] P. C. Bamford, Histories of The Non-Co-operation And Khilafat Movements, Govt. of India, Delhi, 1925, p-113

[2] Yajvender Yadav, The Journey of Appeasement 1921-2021, Secular and Liberals, Shri Krishna Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2021, p.3

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aspirations of Muslims. He said that before coming back to Bharat, he was well aware of the Muslim aspiration regarding Khilafat and with an idea of Hindu-Muslim unity and the Turkish question, provided a proper solution to the problem, he landed in Bharat.[3] So after coming back to Bharat, he was in search of "Good Mahomedan Leaders"[4] and his search was completed when he met the Ali Brothers at Delhi in the year 1915, and according to him, "It was a question of love at first sight between us."[5] He was so kind and emotionally attached to the Ali brothers that when both were arrested by the British Government for their pro-khilafat and anti-government speeches and activities, Gandhi, in a letter to Manilal Gandhi (his second son), he wrote that he may have to enter into a big fight for Mohammad Ali's release, though nothing has been decided as yet.[6]

In another letter to Mr West on 12th February 1918, Gandhi once again expressed his feelings to the Ali brothers and said he was endeavouring to lead the movement for the release of the Ali brothers.[7] In a letter (27-02-1918) to Shuaib Qureshi, editor of the *New Era*, Gandhi expresses with full regret his inability to meet the Ali . He said, "I am ashamed of myself. I am not anxious to be there. Yet the facts seem to have conspired against me…I know that the delay about the Ali brothers is dangerous. I, therefore, stay where I am till I feel free. I know you will not have me do otherwise. Will you please apologise to Maulana Saheb? Do please keep me informed of what goes on there."[8]

Once again, in a letter to Devdas Gandhi, his son, he wrote, "The fight for Mohammad Ali's release is a crushing burden, though I know it has but to be borne. However, I have completely made my own faith that God is going to give me the power to lift the load."[9] He was so determined in his effort that in April 1918, when the Viceroy invited Gandhi and other leaders to a War conference in Delhi, he at first refused to attend the meeting on the grounds of the release of the Ali brothers and argued that the discharge of the Ali brothers had become more than imperative.[10] From the above statements from Gandhi, it appears clear to us that Gandhi badly wanted the Ali brothers to be released from jail.

However, with a heavy heart, when Gandhi went to meet Sir William Vincent, he asked:

"I cannot give you a single minute. What has the Brothers' question to do with the recruitment question?

In reply, Gandhi said, It has a lot to do. The whole question of recruitment will be solved by the release of the Brothers.

Once again, Sir William asked, Well, what have you done for the war? So far as I know, you have simply given a lot of trouble to the local authorities.

In reply, Gandhi said, I did a lot of work in England. I offered to do similar work here, but the offer was refused."[11]

Again, in a letter dated 30th April 1918, Gandhi wrote to Sir William Vincent,

"I ruffled you on Sunday. But I really came to further the object for which you have overworked yourself. I merely came to tell you that the release of the Ali Brothers was calculated to encourage recruiting…You asked me whether I had brought the authorities a single recruit. I suggest to you that it was not a fair question, and one might truly serve the Empire and yet not bring a single recruit.[12]

Here lies the question: What recruitment are they talking about and why, according to Gandhi, is the release of the Ali brothers necessary for recruitment?

IV. GANDHI'S LOYALTY TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

In his letter to the Viceroy dated April 29, 1918, Gandhi expresses a profound sense of loyalty to the British Empire, rooted in both moral duty and strategic vision. Despite his advocacy for Bharatiya

[3] CWMG, Vol. 17, May 1919, p. 33
[4] Ibid,
[5] Ibid., p. 34
[6] M. H. Desai, Day-to-Day with Gandhi, Vol. 1, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, 1968, p 20
[7] Ibid., p 33
[8] Ibid., pp 52-53
[9] Ibid., p 93
[10] Rakhahari Chatterji, Gandhi and the Ali Brothers, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2013, p. 85
[11] M. H. Desai, Op.cit, p 108
[12] Ibid., p 112

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self-rule, Gandhi emphasises that, in the Empire's hour of crisis, Bharat must offer "ungrudging and unequivocal support." He asserts that such loyalty stems from the belief that it will hasten Bharat's inclusion as an equal partner in the Empire, akin to the Dominions overseas. Gandhi's view is that if duty to the Empire is performed wholeheartedly, it justifies an expectation of corresponding rights, including political reform. Even while advocating for responsible government in Bharat, Gandhi distinguishes this aspiration from rebellion or antagonism. He makes clear that his faith in British justice, as demonstrated in Champaran and Kaira, underpins his willingness to serve. He regards his work in those regions as a direct contribution to the Empire's moral strength. In the letter, Gandhi declares his love for the English nation and his desire to inspire in Indians the same depth of loyalty that he perceives in English citizens.[13] He was so dedicated towards the British Government during the time that to prove his loyalty, in the letter to J. L. Maffey, on 30th April 1918, he said,

"*I suppose I must give you something of my past record. I was in charge of the Indian Ambulance Corps, consisting of 1,100 men, during the Boer Campaign and was present at the battles of Colenso, Spionkop and Vaalkranz. I was specially mentioned in General Buller's dispatches. I was in charge of a similar corps of 90 Indians at the time of the Zulu Campaign in 1906, and I was specially thanked by the then Government of Natal, Lastly, I raised the Ambulance Corps in London consisting of nearly 100 students on the outbreak of the present war, and I returned to India in 1915 only because I was suffering from a bad attack of pleurisy brought about while I was undergoing the necessary training. On my being restored to health, I offered my to Lord Hardinge, and it was then felt that I should not be sent out to Mesopotamia or France, but that I should remain in India. I omit reference to renewals of my offer to Provincial authorities.*"[14]

V. MUSLIM APPEASEMENT AND BRITISH COOPERATION

In the same letter to the Viceroy dated April 29, 1918, Gandhi firmly advocated for the Muslim cause as an essential component of national unity and imperial stability. He urged the British government to provide "definite assurances about Mahomedan States," recognising the deep emotional and religious attachment of Muslims to these regions. Gandhi emphasised that "every Mahomedan is deeply interested in them," and, as a Hindu, he expressed solidarity by declaring that "their sorrows must be our sorrows." He called for scrupulous regard for the rights of Muslim states and sensitivity toward Muslim sentiments, particularly concerning places of worship. Gandhi linked the just treatment of Muslims and respect for their concerns to the broader success and **safety of the Empire**, arguing that such respect was vital not only for harmony in Bharat but for the legitimacy of British rule.[15]

In a letter to J. L. Maffey on April 30, 1918, he expresses his wishes to offer his services to the authorities, on condition that he will not harm anyone. Gandhi said that he believes his services would be best utilised by visiting Chindwara to consult with the Ali brothers regarding the Conference's objectives. Their release by the Government would help ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims and would be a strategic move in the context of the war. While he is content to meet with them for now, he will advocate for their release as necessary.[16] Here, it seems that Gandhi demonstrates a dual strategy of Muslim appeasement and British cooperation, which is rooted in his broader vision of inclusive nationalism and non-violence.

Hence, we are in a state of real confusion. Why was Gandhi so keen to release the Ali Brothers? Why did he say, "I merely state that their (Ali brothers') release would, from the war standpoint, be a more effective act"?[17] How will the release of the Ali Brothers develop Hindu-Muslim unity? Why he said, "Champaran and Kaira affairs are my direct, definite, and special contribution to the war."[18] How did the Champaran and Kaira Satyagraha become a contributory factor to the British Empire in the 1st World War? Why, in a letter to J. L. Maffey on April 30, 1918, he wrote, "If I became your recruiting agent-in-chief, I might rain men on you."[19]

[13] CWMG, Vol. 14, The Publications Division, Govt of India, 1965, pp- 377-380
[14] Ibid., p 381
[15] Ibid., pp- 377-380
[16] Ibid., p 380
[17] Ibid., p 380
[18] Ibid., p 379
[19] Ibid., p 382

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The entire episode vividly illustrates that Gandhi acted as a recruiting agent for the British Government, aspiring to become the chief recruiter. His activities during this period were aimed at supplying manpower to the British for their war efforts, and he was very much loyal to the British Government. His fervent desire to secure the release of the Ali brothers was strategic, driven more by political manoeuvring than by a genuine commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity or the national struggle. Hence, Stanley Wolpert said,

"While Gandhi courted popular Muslim support by allying himself most outspokenly with the struggle on behalf of the Ali brothers, he sought simultaneously, and won, official confidence by urging all Indians to enlist in the British army. Both positions appeared paradoxical to disciples who had never considered the Mahatma enamoured either of Muslims or of war, yet in late 1917 and throughout 1918, those causes proved to be Gandhi's most important springboards to political power."[20]

Hence, from an ardent supporter and admirer of the British Government's policy and administration, what led Mahatma K. Gandhi to initiate his non-cooperation movement against the government? The question may arise, what led him to take the help of the Hindus and the Indian National Congress for the purely religious movement of the Muslims? Why did he want to take up the religious issue of the Muslims and pour it into the fight for the freedom struggle? In this regard, B. R. Ambedkar rightly said, "The movement was started by the Mahomedans. It was taken up by Mr. Gandhi with a tenacity and faith which must have surprised many Mahomedans themselves. There were many people who doubted the ethical basis of the Khilafat movement…"[21] Let's try to find out the answer from the next episode, i.e. after the introduction of the Rowlatt Act and the genocide in Jallianwala Bagh.

VI. BIRTH OF THE CONCEPT: NON-COOPERATION

In November 1919, at the Delhi Conference organised by the Khilafat Committee, Gandhi first called for non-co-operation to compel the British government to address Muslim demands. He said, "I described it by the word non-cooperation, an expression that I used for the first time at this meeting…The only true resistance to the Government, it, therefore, seemed to me, was to cease to co-operate with it. Thus, I arrived at the word non-cooperation."[22] But Gandhi was so moved and determined with his target of providing justice to the Muslim Population that he even refused to accept the incorporation of the question of the human genocide of Jallianwala Bagh with the Khilafat Non-cooperation Movement. In the conference, where some crucial decisions were going to be taken, on a suggestion from some quarters, Gandhi replied:

"There was a suggestion from some quarters that the Punjab question should be tacked on to that of the Khilafat wrong. I opposed the proposal. The Punjab question, I said, was a local affair, and could not therefore weigh with us in our decision to participate or not in the Peace celebrations. If we mixed up the local question with the Khilafat question, which arose directly out of the Peace terms, we should be guilty of a serious indiscretion."[23]

He firmly advocated the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of Punjab as a local affair.

If we see the book, "*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*" of Gandhi, where he clearly stated that, in that conference, a resolution urged both Hindus and Muslims to take the Swadeshi vow and boycott foreign goods by Hasrat Mohani, and he demanded a boycott specifically of British goods as vengeance if justice was denied in the Khilafat matter. This proposal was opposed by Gandhi on grounds of impracticability and principle, since almost everyone present used British products, making enforcement futile. He also stated that while Mohani's speech drew applause, his counter-arguments based on non-violence and realistic limitations won wide support, convincing many that a selective boycott would do more harm than good, and in seeking an alternative, the idea of "non-cooperation" first emerged. The notion that denying the British cooperation in administration, services, titles, and support was the truest form of resistance

[20] Stanley Wolpert, Jinnah of Pakistan, Oxford University Press, New York, 1984, p- 52
[21] B. R. Ambedkar, Pakistan, Partition of India, Dr Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, p. 147
[22] Indulal K. Yajnik, *Gandhi As I Know Him*, Danish Mahal, Delhi, 1943, p. 115
[23] M. K. Gandhi, The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad, 1929, p. 533

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if armed revolt was neither possible nor desirable. Yet, it would take months, and subsequent political betrayals, for non-cooperation to gain recognition as the central strategy of resistance.[24]

VII. KHILAFAT TO NON-OOPERATION

The Khilafat movement was strengthened by key events, such as the release of the Ali Brothers, vigorous Khilafat advocates, and the support of the Indian National Congress during its Congress session in Amritsar in 1919. The Congress and Khilafat leaders assembled at Amritsar decided to organise the future Khilafat work under the guidance of Gandhi, and the Congress provided full support of its prestige and organisation to the cause of the Khilafat.[25] Immediately after the Congress Session, an All-India Khilafat Conference was held in the same place, and it was decided to send a deputation to the Viceroy comprising both Hindu and Muslim representatives. Despite these efforts, Britain's response to the Khilafat demands, including replies from the Viceroy and Lloyd George, offered no hope for resolution. Anticipating harsh terms for Turkey, issued a manifesto on 10th March 1920, advocating Non-violent Non-cooperation—a doctrine he believed to be the only effective remedy. According to R. C. Majumder, "This Manifesto is historically important as it contains the first definite elaboration of Gandhi's doctrine of Non-violent Non-co-operation, which was shortly to play a dominant role in Indian politics."[26]

On 15th May 1920, when the peace terms were offered to Turkey, immediately after that, on 17th May 1920, Gandhi issued a statement advising the Muslims of Bharat to adopt Non-cooperation as the only effective remedy.[27] The advice of Gandhi was accepted by the Khilafat leaders of Bharat and the Central Khilafat Committee on 28th May 1920 in their Bombay session, publicly announcing their adoption of Non-cooperation as the only practical line of action. Immediately after that, a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was held at Banaras on 30 May 1920. In the meeting, Gandhi explained the details of the scheme and tried to impress upon the assembly the fact that it was not necessary for the success of the movement that the whole country or even a large number of people should take part in it.[28] However, sharp disagreements over the non-cooperation movement dominated the assembly's discussions throughout its sessions. In that meeting, some important resolutions were made, and among them, the most interesting was the non-approval of the Non-Cooperation Movement adopted by Gandhi and the Khilafat Committee. In the resolution, it was stated that, "That in view of the general situation in India with reference to Indian public feeling on Turkish peace terms, His Majesty's Government's action with regard to the Punjab atrocities, and the policy pursued by the Government of India in giving effect to the reform scheme through the proposed draft rules and regulations, a special session of the Congress be convened at Calcutta as early as possible, not later than the 15th September, to consider the adoption of the policy of Non-cooperation or any other suitable course of action.''[29]

After a few days, the Central Khilafat Committee once again arranged a meeting on the 1st and 2nd of June 1920 at Allahabad to reaffirm the movement of Non-cooperation in accordance with the four stages, which were already approved by the Central Khilafat Committee. The four stages of Non-cooperation referred to by the Central Khilafat Committee were:

a) The resignation of titles and honorary posts.
b) The resignation of posts in the Civil Services of the Government.
c) The resignation from service in the Police and the Army.
d) The refusal to pay taxes.[30]

During the meeting, Muslim leaders urged Hindus to join with them and support the Non-Cooperation initiative. Gandhi, in the meeting, suggested forming a committee consisting of members prepared to remain with him, with full powers and to work out the scheme whose decision would be binding on all people.[31] In the meeting, a separate Non-cooperation subcommittee was prepared to implement the writings into practice, consisting of seven members: M. K. Gandhi, along

[24] Ibid., pp. 534 – 539
[25] R. C Majumder, Struggle for Freedom, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 2003 p. 317
[26] Ibid. p. 318
[27] Ibid. p. 330
[28] The Indian Annual Register 1921, p 115
[29] R. C Majumder, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol. 3, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963, pp. 70-71
[30] P. C. Bamford, op.cit, p.15
[31] R. C. Majumder, op.cit., p. 331

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with six other Muslim leaders, viz. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulvi Muhammad Ali, Mr. Ahmad Haji Siddik Khattri, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Dr. Kitchlew, and Maulana Hasrat Mohani. [32] From this meeting, a letter signed by about 80 Muslim leaders was sent to the Viceroy, where it was stated that, "If, unfortunately, your Excellency will not adopt our humble suggestion, we shall be obliged, as from the first August next, to withdraw co-operation from the Government and to ask out co-religionist and Hindu brethren to do likewise."[33] Also, that subcommittee issued a manifesto outlining the demonstration programme to be held on 1st August 1920.

Hence, after the denial of the revision of the peace terms, the day 1st August 1920 was observed as Khilafat Day, and the Central Khilafat Committee launched the Non-cooperation campaign, and on the day of the inauguration, several leading Muslims and Hindus returned their medals, renounced titles and resigned from honorary posts, seats in the legislatures and law practices.[34] At the same time on the same day, i.e. 1st August, 1920, Gandhi wrote a letter to the Viceroy, where he stated that,

"It is not without a pang that I return the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal, granted to me by your predecessor for my humanitarian work in South Africa, the Zulu War medal granted in South Africa for my war services as officer in charge of the Indian Volunteers Service Corps in 1906 and the Boer War medal for my services as Assistant Superintendent of the Indian Volunteer Stretcher-Bearer Corps during the Boer War of 1899. I venture to return these medals in pursuance of scheme of non-co-operation, inaugurated today in connection with the Khilafat movement. Valuable as these honours have been to me, I cannot wear them with an easy conscience so long as my Mussulman countrymen have to labour under a wrong done to their religious sentiments. Events, which have happened during the past month, have confirmed me in the opinion that the Government have acted in the Khilafat matter in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner and have been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immorality. I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government."[35]

VIII. NON-COOPERATION CAMPAIGN, GANDHI AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

This non-cooperation campaign was not accepted by all Khilafat and Congress Leaders. However total led was taken by Shaukat Ali with the help of Gandhi. Neither could succeed without the other. Shaukat Ali outwardly supported Gandhi's non-violence and affectionately called him Bapu, even though they were only four years apart in age. Gandhi, in turn, drew much of his influence from the Khilafat supporters led by Shaukat Ali and could not risk losing their backing. To be a leader, he also had to be willing to follow.[36] Hence, when Pandit Malaviya appealed to Gandhi to suspend the campaign till after the special session of the Congress, Gandhi refused to listen to his advice. He considered himself helpless and opined that, "My suspending non-cooperation means that the Muslims also should do likewise. For them, after the announcement of the Khilafat terms, non-cooperation has become a religious duty. How can they co-operate with those who have insulted their religion and endangered its existence? How can they accept any gift from them? Moreover, how can I suspend non-cooperation without some strong reasons after having, with full deliberation, advised the nation to follow a particular course of action? It has become my inescapable dharma to continue non-cooperation on the Khilafat issue.?[37] He further opined that waiting for Congress to initiate action or provide opinions stalls progress, as it only expresses a view when a majority consensus emerges. Therefore, individuals or minorities with reform ideas should proactively share them with the public to influence Congress, rather than waiting for its approval. According to him, the historical reforms, like the opposition to the Rowlatt Act, succeeded because people acted independently without waiting for Congress's stance.[38]

Hence, it was clear from the above opinions of Gandhi that he never waited for the decisions of the Congress to fulfil his own agenda. However, the situation became more favourable for

[32] P. C. Bamford, op.cit., p.15
[33] R. C. Majumder, op.cit., p. 331
[34] Muhammad Naeem Qureshi, 'The Khilafat Movement in India 1919–1924', PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1973, p. 151.
[35] CWMC, Vol. 18, p. 104
[36] Muhammad Naeem Qureshi, op.cit, p. 152
[37] CWMC, Vol. 18, op.cit. p. 123
[38] Ibid., pp. 123-124

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him in the political arena of Bharat when Tilak died on the 1st August 1920. This vacuum in the leadership of Congress provided him the opportunity to become the "Kingmaker".

However, to provide support for the Non-cooperation campaign launched by the Central Khilafat Committee, Gandhi and Shaukat Ali went about their whirlwind tour of the country between 1st August and 1st September 1920, particularly in parts of the Madras Presidency. But in spite of their efforts, the outcome of the non-cooperation experiment was still uncertain. The pockets of resistance, even among Muslims, were quite strong. There were still many who objected to the specific items of non-co-operation, like the boycott of professions, services and Councils. Many leading Muslim people from various parts of Bharat openly rejected the non-cooperation campaign and sometimes publicly dissociated themselves from the campaign.[39]

After the denial of the Non-cooperation campaign launched by the Central Khilafat Committee by the large section of the Muslim population in the country, the Committee started to rethink their method and felt the support of the mass Hindus of the country. However, the Congress had not changed its attitude regarding mass movement from the Allahabad Conference, especially the moderates. Leaders like Anne Besant, Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyer, Narayan Chandavarkar, Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Surendranath Banerjee, Sundar Singh Majithia V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, and Srinivasa Iyenger vehemently protested it. Mrs Besant called it 'a National suicide'.[40] Leaders like C.R. Das, B.C. Pal, Byomkesh Chakravarty, G. S. Khaparde, N. C. Kelkar, and Vithalbhai Patel remained like soldiers without arms. The Hindus were in doubt about supporting the Non-Cooperation campaign for the Muslim cause and became confused when they found Gandhi claiming himself to be a Khilafatist and touring the country on the finances provided by the Khilafat funds.[41] People could notice the conflict in the tune of Gandhi and the Saukat Ali. As the *Modern Review* pointed out: "Reading between the lines of their speeches, it is not difficult to see that with one of them the sad plight of the Khilafat in distant Turkey is the central fact, while with the other attainment of Swaraj here in India is the object in view".[42]

Nevertheless, Gandhi pressed on and continued to travel across southern Bharat, visiting places like Tanjore, Trichy, and Bangalore, where he spoke passionately about the movement. At the same time, his weekly publication, Young India, regularly featured his writings. Each week, Gandhi used its pages to respond to critics and explain practical ways to implement Non-cooperation.[43]

Therefore, the upcoming Special Congress Session in Calcutta, scheduled for September 1920, became a battleground of ideas. While some Congress leaders who disagreed with Gandhi were prepared to defend their positions, the Khilafatists and some Congress leaders led by Gandhi worked to persuade the Congress to support their cause. Nevertheless, to capture the Special Congress in Calcutta, Khilafat Special trains from Bombay and Madras had flooded the Congress with delegates sworn to vote for him.[44]

IX. SPECIAL CONGRESS SESSION IN CALCUTTA, SEPT. 1920

However, the Special Session of Congress took place in Calcutta on September 4, 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai, presided over the session. The Congress convened in a highly charged and anxious atmosphere, with the entire nation watching in anticipation. At this pivotal moment, a new strategy that was crafted by Gandhi was now about to be unleashed by Bharat against the powerful British Empire. Several resolutions were moved, but the most important resolution of the session was the third one, dealing with Non-cooperation, and which was moved by Gandhi and after a strong opposition by a large section of the members, it was carried by 1886 delegates against 884. The session also resolved that the next Congress should meet at Nagpur in December 1920. However, B. R. Ambedkar expressed his views regarding the delegates present in the meeting, stating that once Mr Tairsee informed him, "a large majority of the delegates were no others than the taxi drivers of Calcutta who were paid to vote for the non-co-operation resolution."[45]

[39] Muhammad Naeem Qureshi, op cit., pp. 152-153
[40] Ibid., p. 153
[41] Ibid, 1973, p. 155 – 156
[42] B R Ambedkar, op.cit, p. 151
[43] C. F. Andrews, Speeches and Writings of M. K. Gandhi, Madras, 1922, p. 46
[44] Ibid., p. 46
[45] B R Ambedkar, op.cit, p. 151

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International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
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www.ijhssm.org

In the Calcutta session, in the resolution that was moved by Gandhi, we may observe that the 1st line of the resolution read by him started with the "Khilafat question", the second paragraph started with "the events of April of 1919". So it was clear from the resolution that, firstly, the main focus of non-cooperation to the British was to solve the Khilafat question, and secondly, the barbaric chapter of Jallianwala Bagh was simply portrayed as "events of the April of 1919".[46] Famous historian R. C. Majumdar also expressed his view regarding the resolution read by Gandhi and stated that, "It is necessary to draw attention to the third para of the Non-co-operation resolution moved by Gandhi and accepted by the Congress. It conveys the definite idea that Swaraj was demanded only to redress Panjab and Khilafat wrongs, and thereby vindicate national honour and prevent their repetition in future. This side-tracks the main issue of the fight for freedom and unnecessarily emphasizes only two side-issues. The inclusion of Khilafat wrongs as a ground for demanding Swaraj would perhaps appear to many as nothing short of grotesque. Even the Panjab wrongs, grievous though they were, should not have been put forward as the basis of demand for Swaraj."[47]

The spiritual undertone in Bharatiya politics, highlighted by Gandhi's sudden shift in approach in early 1920, continued to influence events throughout the year. This was clearly seen during the Annual Congress session at Nagpur in December 1920, led by President Vijayaraghavachariar. The Non-cooperation resolution, which had previously been passed at the Special Congress Session in Calcutta, needed to be confirmed at this regular session. The Congress saw an extraordinary turnout, with over 14,000 people attending. Many anticipated another major clash between Gandhi and those who opposed Non-cooperation. Interestingly, such a confrontation did not occur, and the resolution was approved with minimal opposition. R. C. Majumder, in this regard, said, "That a great movement, though based on such a weak foundation, received wide popular support was undoubtedly due in a very large measure to the personality of Gandhi and peoples' almost blind faith in, and complete devotion to, him. Such blind faith and devotion have a tendency to become contagious. This was proved when, only four months later, those very people and leaders who had vehemently opposed Non-co-operation in the Congress at Calcutta accepted it without demur at Nagpur. No adequate grounds are known which may account for such a complete change of views on a serious question of policy."[48] This officially marked the nationwide launch of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

X. CONCLUSION

The Non-Cooperation Movement, often celebrated as a cornerstone of Bharat's freedom struggle, reveals upon closer scrutiny a narrative far more complex and strategically composed than the simplified accounts in many history textbooks. Contrary to the representation of the movement as an organic outgrowth of the Indian National Congress under M. K. Gandhi's visionary leadership, historical evidence suggests that its roots were firmly embedded in the Khilafat Movement, which was a pan-Islamic campaign driven by Muslim leaders to safeguard the Ottoman Caliphate. Gandhi's role, while pivotal, was one of tactical alignment and appropriation, leveraging the Khilafat cause to amplify his influence and mobilize broader support against British rule. His plan was calculated and opportunistic. He bypassed Congress deliberations, refusing to suspend the campaign despite appeals from leaders like Pandit Malaviya, arguing that non-cooperation had become a "religious duty" for Muslims.

This historical reality starkly contrasts with the narrative perpetuated in many Bharatiya history textbooks, particularly those from bodies like NCERT, which attribute the inception and leadership of the Non-Cooperation Movement solely to Gandhi and the Congress. Such accounts often state that Gandhi "joined hands with the Khilafat Movement" to broaden the struggle and foster unity, implying that non-cooperation was a Congress innovation inspired by nationalist ideals.

"It was the Rowlatt satyagraha that made Gandhiji a truly national leader. Emboldened by its success, Gandhiji called for a campaign of "non-cooperation" with British rule. Indians who wished colonialism to end were asked to stop attending schools, colleges and law courts, and not pay taxes…To further broaden the struggle, he had joined hands with the Khilafat Movement."

[46] B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, The History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. 1, Padma Publications Ltd. Bombay, 1946, p. 202

[47] R. C Majumder, History of the Freedom Movement in India, op.cit, p. 95

[48] R. C Majumder, op.sit., p. 335

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International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
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www.ijhssm.org

*(*NECER textbook, *Themes in Indian History – Part III*, page No. 290)

This narrative is not only oversimplified but arguably fabricated, as it confuses the movement's origins in a sectarian religious agitation and Gandhi's pragmatic exploitation of it to gain Muslim support and political influence.

Secondly, some of our textbooks and some academic discussions often emphasise that Gandhi gave up his medals and awards to protest the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the Rowlatt Act. However, as noted earlier, in his letter dated August 1, 1920, Gandhi made it clear that he actually surrendered his medals to protest in support of the Khilafat cause and to stand with his Muslim brothers in their religious struggle.

Thirdly, Gandhi's concept of Swaraj was deliberately vague and seemed aimed at winning favour with Muslims. After a year, as the Non-Cooperation Movement began to weaken and Bharatiya Muslims voiced their frustrations, Gandhi remarked, "In their impatient anger, the Musalmans ask for more energetic and more prompt action by the Congress and Khilafat organisations. To the Musalmans, Swaraj means, as it must mean, Bharat's ability to deal effectively with the Khilafat question. The Musalmans, therefore, decline to wait if the attainment of Swaraj means indefinite delay…It is impossible not to sympathise with this attitude...I would gladly ask for postponement of Swaraj activity if thereby we could advance the interest of the Khilafat. But in my humble opinion, attainment of Swaraj is the quickest method of righting the Khilafat wrong…".[49]

Fourthly, the narrative of Hindu-Muslim unity was drawn by the academicians in the light of the Non-Cooperation Movement. But R. C. Majumder opined that, "The blind faith in Gandhi was, however, confined to the Hindus, and was not shared by his Muslim followers. They gathered round him only to exploit his influence with the Hindus in order to enlist their service in the struggle for the Khilafat against the British. A high regard, not to speak of veneration, for a Hindu was perhaps not compatible with the tenets of Islam. This was openly admitted by no less a person than Muhammad Ali, the life and soul of the Khilafat movement, whom Gandhi called his dear brother."[50] A few years later, Muhammad Ali himself opined that, "However pure Gandhi's character may be, he must appear to me from the point of view of religion inferior to any Mussulman, even though he be without character." And repeated it once again, saying, "Yes, according to my religion and creed, I hold an adulterous and a fallen Mussalman to be better than Mr. (no longer Mahatma) Gandhi. "[51]

At the same time, the so-called Gandhi followers, freedom fighter and Congress leader, Dr S Kitchlew, himself, said in his speech that the "Congress was lifeless till the Khilafat Committee put life in it. When the Khilafat Committee joined it, it did in one year what the Hindu Congress had not done in 40 years. The Congress also did the work of uplifting the seven crores of untouchables. This was purely a work for the Hindus, and yet the money of the Congress was spent on it. Mine and my Musalman brethren's money was spent on it like water. But the brave Musalmans did not mind…Listen my dear Hindu brothers, listen very attentively! If you put obstacles in the path of our Tanzim movement, and do not give us our rights, we will make common cause with Afghanistan or some other Musalman power and establish our rule in this country".[52] Although Dr Kitchlew is often celebrated in history books as a freedom fighter for his role in the Amritsar movement against the Rowlatt Act, his speech reveals that his primary motivation was to support his own religion. Rather than fighting for Bharat as a whole, he viewed the Indian National Congress as a "Hindu Congress" and was focused on advancing the interests of his religious community. So, where is the sign of Hindu-Muslim unity?

Even M. A. Jinnah could understand this myth of Hindu-Muslim unity in this movement, and while Gandhi sought his co-operation in that movement, he replied, "I thank you for your kind suggestion offering me to take my share in the new life that has opened up before the country. If by 'new life' you mean your methods and your programme, I am afraid I cannot accept them, for I am fully convinced that it must lead to disaster. Your methods have already caused split and division in the public life of the country, not only amongst Hindus and Muslims, but between Hindus and Hindus and Muslims and Muslims and even

[49] R. C Majumder, History of the Freedom Movement in India, op. cit, p. 96

[50] R. C Majumder, op.cit, p. 335
[51] Ibid. p. 336
[52] The Times of India, 14-03-1925

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International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 5, Issue 5, Sep.-Oct., 2025, pp: 462-472 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

between fathers and sons; people generally are desperate all over the country and your extreme programme has for the moment struck the imagination mostly of the inexperienced youth and the ignorant and illiterate."[53] Mrs Annie Besant also remarked that, "since the Khilafat agitation, things have changed and it has been one of the many injuries inflicted on Bharat by the encouragement of the Khilafat crusade, that the inner Muslim feeling of hatred against 'unbelievers' has sprung up, naked and unashamed, as in the years gone by.[54] And the immediate result of the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement was the "Moplah Hindu Genocide".

In essence, the Non-Cooperation Movement exemplifies how religious movements can be reprocessed for nationalist ends, but at the cost of historical accuracy in popular retellings. By reevaluating its origins, it tried to uncover the strategic cleverness and ethical uncertainties of Gandhi's approach, while highlighting the need for historiography that prioritises factual integrity over mythmaking.

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[53] R. C Majumder, op.cit., p. 336
[54] B R Ambedkar, op.cit., p. 274