

Review Article

THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT: RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN INDIA. By Gail Minault, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, pp. 294, ii, Price \$32.50.

The Indian Khilafat Movement of the 1920s excited a good deal of interest in the West at the time. Why? Because it cut across the Western plans to despoil and dismember Turkey, parcel out its coastal lands to Greece, Italy, France and Britain, and put Constantinople under British occupation, thereby leaving only the Anatolian plateau for the vanquished Turks. The movement received extensive notice in the writings of, among others, Valentine Chirol, Lothrop Stoddard, John R. Mott, J.T. Gwynn, and Toynbee. These authors as well as William J. Watson (in his 1955 McGill University's Master's thesis) have stressed for the most part the pan-Islamic or the international aspect of the movement.

This, however, is not inexplicable. For one thing, the Indian Muslims had been praying for the long life, prosperity and victory of the *Khilafat al-Islam* at the Friday prayers, and pleading its cause in the press and from the public platform since 1870s. For another, Khilafat as an institution had been part of their religious lore and history since the Prophet's demise, and as such had long been embedded as a sort of a millennium in their social consciousness. Furthermore, since as has been rightly pointed out by Syed Mahmud, Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Aziz Ahmad and Hafeez Malik, the Indian Muslims had long identified themselves with Turkey. To them, Turkey, to quote the Aga Khan, 'represented a visible and enduring reminder of the temporal greatness of Islam's achievement'. This rather increasing identification with Turkey since the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 had two consequences — one internal and the other external. Internally, it provided Indian Muslims

with some psychological make-weight against their own unenviable position as a minority, and to regain their self-respect and self-confidence. Externally, it gave Turkey a leverage in her dealings with her Western despoilers, especially the British, the foremost Western power. Thus, what really mattered to Western observers at the time were the implications and consequences of the Indian Khilafat movement for their designs against the defeated Turks — i.e., the international aspect of the movement.

While not denying 'the existence of feelings of Islamic brotherhood' in the movement, the present study emphasizes 'the variety of individual motivations within the movement, as well as its distinctly nationalist character' (p. 2). In order to delineate these aspects, Gail Minault as against A.C. Niemeijer (in his *The Khilafat Movement in India, 1919—1924*) also taps deftly indigenous (i.e., Urdu) sources, and tries 'to look at who among the Indian Muslims were involved in the movement, and what was being said to whom at different levels in the political process' (p. 2).

This obsession with the internal aspects, in particular with the 'individual motivations' of the leading participants, leads Minault to assert that the movement was primarily concerned with 'the use of pan-Islamic symbols to force a pan-Indian Muslim constituency' (p. 2). It was, she contends, primarily a campaign to unite and mobilize 'the Muslim community politically by means of religious and cultural symbols common to all strata of that community' (p. 2). This, she asserts, was done with a view to enabling the Muslims to participate in the Indian nationalist movement. The Khilafat leaders felt that the Muslims, if united, could vastly enhance their bargaining position vis-a-vis the British government as well as the more numerous and more resourceful Hindus organized under the Indian National Congress (pp. 2—3).

Thus, the central focus of the study is how a certain group of leaders tried to unite and mobilize the Indian Muslims with a view to creating a self-conscious and unified Muslim constituency. Minault finds the antecedents of this quest in the cultural and educational reform movements of the nineteenth century. Both the religious-oriented Deoband (and other *madrāsas*) and the West-oriented Aligarh were interested in mobilizing, and hence competed for, community support for their respective educational ventures, leading to the setting up of separate but more or less comparable

networks of mobilization. These networks 'provided structures within the Muslim community which were alternatives to the political and administrative structures of British rule'.

Initially, these movements were devoid of an anti-British strain, but factional conflicts, based on personal or policy differences; for control of educational institutions led one faction to seek government support, thus forcing the other to tread an anti-government path, if only in order to mobilize community support for their policies.

The Ali Brothers were pitted against Aftab Ahmad Khan at Aligarh; Maulana Mahmud Hasan, the *sadr-i Mudarris* (principal) and *sarparast* (patron) of the Dar al-Ulum at Deoband (along with his chief disciple, Ubaidullah Sindhi) against the *muhtamim* (head administrator), Maulana Hafiz Muhammad Ahmad, son of Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi the founder of the Deoband *madrasa*; and Maulana Abdul Bari, founder of the Madrasa-i Nizamiyah at Firangi Mahal, against two former pro-British teachers (at the Madrasa) and brothers, Abdul Majid and Abdul Hamid (Badayuni?), who would eventually receive a government grant of Rs. 3,000 to set up another *madrasa* near Firangi Mahal as a rival to the Madrasa-i Nizamiyah. In their tussle for control over educational institutions, these leaders sought community support. Since by inclination as well, the former set of contenders for absolute power at their respective institutions were politically oriented, they took to the path of Islamic self-assertiveness in cultural and political matters. At this juncture, British policies towards Muslims in India (e.g., annulment of the partition of Bengal, 1911, and the Kanpur Mosque affair, 1913) and those in the Middle East came in handy to give an anti-British orientation to their campaigns and rhetoric. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan served as intermediaries between the ulama and the West-oriented elites during and after the First World War. Both were eminently studied for the task. Dr. Ansari, a trustee of Aligarh, had organized (and led) the Red Crescent Mission to Turkey during the Balkan War (1912) in collaboration with Mohamed Ali; he also had close family links with Deoband. Likewise Hakim Ajmal Khan was an active trustee of Aligarh, and one of the patron of Nazarat al-Ma'arif al-Quraniya, set up by Ubaidullah Sindhi in Fatehpuri Masjid in old Delhi, when Ubaidullah was forced out of Deoband in 1913. Maulana Abdul

Bari, whose avid support for Turkey dated back to 1890s, became active in fund raising for Turkish relief and Red Crescent Mission in 1912, and found kindred spirits in Dr. Ansari and the Ali Brothers.

Shaikh al-Hind Mahmud Hasan 'went back to the medieval pattern of seeking Muslim allies from across the border'. In consequence, he went to Makkah ostensibly to perform the *Hajj*, but contacted the Turkish authorities in the Hijaz, while Ubaidullah, at his instance, went to Afghanistan 'to set up a base for an eventual invasion of India by a force of Afghans and Indians', when the Shaikh al-Hind had secured Turkish aid for his scheme. But their plans got aborted when one of the emissaries fell into British hands, and upon the Shaikh al-Hind's refusal to sign a *fatwa* in favour of Sharif Husain of Makkah's revolt against the Turkish Sultan in 1916, he and his companions were arrested and turned over to the Sharif's patron, the British; they in turn interned them at Malta. This episode, known as the 'Silk Letters' Conspiracy', came in for extensive notice in the Sedition Committee Report.

This tussle for control of educational institutions is the base on which Minault builds her thesis. In them she finds the "individual motivations" of the leading participants in joining the movement. The cultural and educational movements as also the Muslim League and sensitive issues such as the Kanpur Mosque affair had thrown up a sizeable leadership among Muslims, and the Khilafat issue, she contends, was seized upon to mobilize opinion, and to provide linkage between political leadership and the bulk of the community since concern for the fate of the caliph in the disastrous aftermath of the Turkish defeat in the First World War was widespread.

In a sense, mobilization of public opinion, with Turkey, her despoilation and her fate, as the central issue, had been going apace since 1912, leading to the emergence of a leadership which had established considerable rapport with the community and, hence, could claim grass-root support for the first time in Muslim India's history. This leadership, by no means monolithic or completely united, included ulama like Shaikh al-Hind and Maulana Abdul Bari, publicists such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Maulana Hasrat Mohani, and activists like the Ali Brothers. Although except Bari, all were interned or jailed, the Ali Brothers — first interned under the Defence of India Act in May

1915, later confined to remote Chhindwara and much later, in June 1919, locked up in the Betul Jail in Central India — reaped the greatest dividend, their internment and imprisonment having been widely focussed and commented upon in the extremely vocal Urdu press and even being raised in the Imperial Council. Thus, by December 1919, when they were finally released, they had become “heroes”, and their triumphal journey from Betul to Amritsar, where the Congress and the League were holding their annual sessions, indicated beyond doubt ‘as to who would lead the Muslims in their postwar political campaign’ (p. 63).

The Introduction and the first chapter — wherein, as set forth in the foregoing discussion, the emergence of the new leadership, its background and orientation, its whys and wherefores, the sort of symbols it utilized for political action, its techniques and organizational networks, and the relationship between the various institutions and the key figures in the Khilafat movement are delineated at length — set out the framework of the study. The next three chapters — ‘Emergence of the Movement, 1919–20’, ‘Noncooperation and Popular Mobilization, 1920–21’, and ‘Decline and Fall of the Movement, 1921–24’ — tell the now familiar story of the Khilafat movement, but within the author’s framework of how religious symbolism was deftly exploited to cause political mobilization. A brief concluding chapter, setting forth the main findings of the study, a glossary and a bibliography comprize the rest of the study.

Although the study, within the parameters of the utilization of religious symbolism for political mobilization set forth in the subtitle, is self-contained, it is by no means a self-contained study of the Khilafat movement itself. Briefly stated, the three dominant strands in the movement were: (i) the international interestedness of Indian Islam or Islamic altruism of South Asian Muslims; (ii) their opposition to British rule in India, in part inspired by British policies in the Muslim countries and in part by its policies in India; (iii) the need to cause mass awakening among Muslims, deepen their Islamic consciousness, and create a united pan-Indian Muslim community out of a mass of people, characterized, in some measure, by (horizontal) ethnic, linguistic, regional, and (vertical) sectarian divisions, and loyalties. A study of the Khilafat movement would show that each of the these three strands went into the formulation of

the movement. The emphasis on a particular strand, of course, differed from time to time, from one occasion to another, from one participant to another, but, nevertheless none of them got dropped at any stage. Indeed, as the movement progressed, these three strands, or goals, became entwined. However, Minault emphasizes only the last strand or goal.

She contends that 'the anti-British nature of the Khilafat symbol was the common denominator in an otherwise variegated movement' (p. 209). The anti-British nature of the Khilafat movement is not contested here; but, following Nehru and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, to say or imply that people took to anti-Britishness because of their supposedly perceived relationship between 'Khilafat' and the Urdu word, *khilaf* ('against') tantamounts to over simplification of the prevailing mood of, at least, the Indian Muslims. For one thing, as indicated above, they had been praying for the long life, prosperity and victory of the *Khilafat al-Islam* at the Friday prayers, and pleading its cause in the press and from the public platform since 1870s. For another, *khilafat* as an institution had been part of their religious lore and history since the Prophet's demise, and as such had long been imbedded as a sort of a millennium in their social consciousness. This *khilaf* analogy also contradicts her earlier statement that widespread concern for the fate of the caliph helped in political mobilization and in providing linkages between the political leadership and the bulk of the community. Furthermore, contemporary evidence as well attests to even illiterate rural folk in remote places being knowledgeable about the basic issue involved. 'Even the Mohammedan villager and his wife are at this moment full of zeal for the Khilafat', reports J.T. Gwynn, *The Manchester Guardian's* correspondent, who toured India in 1922. The villagers in Gujarat (Bombay Presidency) had reportedly told him, "The Khalif must get back the guardianship of the holy places. England must take her troops out of Mesopotamia and leave Arabia alone.'

In view of Minault's contention it is also pertinent to ask: Which came first — pan-Islamic or anti-British orientation of the chief participants — and which led to which?

A study of the nascent Muslim press during the closing decades of the nineteenth century indicates a growing pan-Islamic tendency among Muslims since the Russo-Turkish war of 1875, crystallizing

itself into one of the basic strands in their orientation towards the British in India over the next four decades which saw the Turko-Greek war of 1896, the Italian raid on Tripoli (1911) and the Balkan war of 1912-14. Thus, by 1914, Maulana Abdul Bari, the Ali Brothers, Zafar Ali Khan, Hasrat Mohani and Azad, the leading participants in the Khilafat movement, were all full blooded pan-Islamists — but not (yet) anti-British. Mohamed Ali's counsel to the Turkish authorities to stay neutral in the war, if they could not join the Allies besides his correspondence with Meston, U.P.'s Lieutenant Governor, and with the Viceroy during his internment, attests to the fact that he did not launch upon an anti-British path till late in the day.

It is true that pan-Islamism from its very inception contained a build-in anti-imperialist strain, for the simple reason that the various Muslim lands were being despoiled by the Western imperialist powers, but so long as the British were not *directly* involved, pan-Islamism in India did not take on an explicitly anti-British orientation. And because the British, as the senior partner in the allied camp and even otherwise, were perceived to be bent up scuttling Turkish power and territory and enfeebling the Caliph's power and prestige in the postwar period, the Indian pan-Islamists set out on a pronouncedly anti-British course in that period. And when Montagu, Secretary of State for India, permitted the publication of a Government of India memorandum, favouring the revision of the Treaty of Sevres in March 1922, Maulana Bari and Hasrat Mohani proposed dropping noncooperation with the British (p. 187). This also indicates that pan-Islamic goals, i.e., the future of Turkey and of the caliphate, were at the centre of the Khilafat movement.

Minault views the Khilafat movement 'as a quest for 'Pan-Indian Islam' '(p. 2), implying thereby that it was not essentially a pan-Islamic movement. But the fact of the matter is that the launching of a pan-Islamic movement calls for the prior existence of a pan-Indian Muslim community, at least in a nebulous form. Viewed thus, working for a pan-Indian Islam, becomes an internal Islamic goal, and a preliminary step towards seeking external pan-Islamic goals.

Minault seems to be too much obsessed by the 'individual motivations' of the leading participants. Surprisingly though, she, for the most part, finds them to be ulterior in nature. It would take us far afield to scrutinize her contention about each of the

leading participants, but suffice it to say that seldom has there been a great movement in history which could claim identical motivations on the part of even the chief actors. Indeed, all great movements are coalitionist in nature, rather than monolithic in its inspiration, aims and goals; they draw upon or receive the support and adherence of diverse groups for diverse reasons. But what is important is the formal enunciation of goals and a formal acceptance of them by the participants. These goals represent the primary motivation, and as a movement gains momentum, the participants, whatever their initial or individual motivations, are obliged, by sheer force of circumstances, to identify themselves increasingly with its *raison d'être*, and, to that extent, depart from their initial, personal motives and goals. This was true of the Khilafat movement as well.

Although one may not accept Minault on this motivation theory, yet her delineation of the chief actors in the story, the communication networks, utilization of religious symbolism for political mobilization, and the changing styles of political and religious leadership provides new insights and clues to the origin, the course and the finale of the Khilafat movement; her delineation also adds new dimensions to the extant studies on the subject.

For her part, she has gone in for a story-telling style, and so far as it goes, her account is both interesting and refreshingly enjoyable. But while Muslim apologists usually trot out a romantic version, she has gone over to the other extreme. One feels that she has rather played up the contradictions in the movement and between the main actors a little too much. Nonetheless it is a work of painstaking research, and the first one in English on the Khilafat movement to tap sources in Urdu so extensively. It is true that she makes scant reference to the impact of the Indian Khilafat movement on Turkish fortunes, to the tremendous diplomatic leverage it gave her in her dealings with the Allies, especially with the British, or to the contribution it made to the political rehabilitation of Turkey in the postwar period. Yet, within the parameters delineated above, the study represents a contribution towards a better understanding of the movement, and of the role of its main actors.

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