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The Khilafat Movement: A Struggle for Muslim Political Identity

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ABSTRACT
The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) emerged as a landmark episode in modern South Asian history, representing the first major pan-Islamic political mobilization in British India that transformed religious loyalty to the Ottoman Caliphate into a structured assertion of Muslim political identity. Triggered by the post-World War I dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire through the Treaty of Sèvres and Greek incursions into Anatolia, the movement rapidly evolved from elite petitions into a mass-based agitation under the dynamic leadership of the Ali Brothers, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Hasrat Mohani. Through a sophisticated organizational network of provincial, district, and village Khilafat Committees anchored in mosques and madrasas, coupled with powerful mobilization strategies involving religious symbolism, Urdu press campaigns, poetry, and nationwide tours, it achieved unprecedented inclusion of women, students, and rural Muslim masses. The strategic alliance with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement broadened the anti-colonial front through joint boycotts and events such as the Nagpur Session and the 1921 Prince of Wales boycott, yet simultaneously sharpened a distinct Muslim political consciousness separate from mainstream nationalism. Despite its dramatic decline following the Chauri Chaura incident, Gandhi's suspension of Non-Cooperation, Atatürk's abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, and ensuing communal riots, the movement's failure paradoxically laid the ideological foundations for Muslim separatism, culminating in the Two-Nation Theory and the 1940 demand for Pakistan. This article examines the movement's historical background, leadership and mobilization, alliance dynamics, and long-term impact, arguing that the Khilafat agitation was a pivotal crucible in the forging of modern Muslim political identity in the subcontinent. Its legacy continues to illuminate the complex interplay of faith, nationalism, and identity politics in plural societies.

Keywords: Khilafat Movement, Muslim Political Identity, Pan-Islamism, Non-Cooperation Movement, Two-Nation Theory, South Asian Nationalism

Introduction
In the chaotic crucible of the post-World War I global order, where victorious Allies redrew maps and toppled centuries-old empires, Indian Muslims confronted an existential threat to the Ottoman Caliphate the spiritual and symbolic heart of the Islamic *ummah*. For millions in British India, the Caliph represented far more than a distant sovereign in Istanbul; he embodied pan-Islamic unity, religious sovereignty, and a

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Vol. 4 No.3 (March) (2026)

bulwark against Western domination amid the empire's steady decline through the Balkan Wars and Italian incursions. This anxiety, simmering since the late nineteenth century, erupted into organized protest as the war's aftermath exposed the fragility of Muslim political agency under colonial rule. Far from an abstract theological concern, the Caliphate crisis galvanized a community already strained by wartime loyalty tests, economic hardship, and the Rowlatt Act's repressive shadow, transforming diffuse religious sentiment into a powerful assertion of collective identity (Minault, 1982). The movement's leaders harnessed this fervor not as nostalgic revivalism but as a dynamic response to imperial betrayal, laying bare how transnational Islamic solidarity could intersect with anti-colonial resistance in unexpected and potent ways.

The historical rupture crystallized with the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which the Allies led aggressively by Britain imposed on a defeated Ottoman Empire, carving away Arab provinces into mandates, granting Greek claims in Anatolia, and reducing the Caliph to a ceremonial figurehead stripped of temporal authority. British assurances during the war, promising safeguards for the holy places and the Caliphate in exchange for Indian Muslim support, proved hollow, fueling accusations of deliberate dismemberment to neutralize pan-Islamic influence. Indian delegations dispatched to Europe, including the landmark Khilafat mission, confronted dismissive Allied negotiators and witnessed the treaty's signing in August 1920, an event that extinguished hopes for Ottoman restoration and ignited fury across British India's mosques and madrasas (Qureshi, 1999). This was no mere diplomatic slight; Britain's role in engineering the Caliphate's eclipse exposed the limits of imperial paternalism and forced Indian Muslims to reimagine their political future beyond petitioning a hostile raj. The crisis thus bridged religious grievance with anti-colonial grievance, forging a platform where faith became the language of resistance and identity the currency of mobilization.

The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) emerged precisely as this first major pan-Islamic political mobilization in British India, channeling religious outrage into structured, nationwide agitation through the All-India Khilafat Committee, provincial networks, and mass conferences that drew in *ulama*, journalists, and ordinary believers alike. Spanning from the formation of the Central Khilafat Committee in Bombay to its effective dissolution after Atatürk's abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, the movement transcended elite petitions to embrace boycotts, *hijrat* migrations, and alliances with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation campaign, mobilizing millions in an unprecedented display of Hindu-Muslim unity (Shamshad & Rehman, 2021). Yet its deeper significance lies in the analytical transformation it wrought: religious sentiment was not merely expressed but strategically politicized into a demand for Muslim political identity distinct from, yet allied with, broader Indian nationalism. This was the crucible where pan-Islamism met pragmatic separatism, planting the ideological seeds for the Two-Nation Theory and the eventual Pakistan Movement. By asserting that the defense of the Caliphate constituted an inalienable right tied to Muslim self-respect under colonial rule, the Khilafat pioneers reframed faith as a tool of empowerment rather than submission demonstrating how a seemingly quixotic religious cause could catalyze modern Muslim political consciousness in South Asia and beyond (Minault, 1982). In this light, the movement stands not as a footnote to Gandhian nationalism but as a foundational episode in the forging of a resilient, identity-driven Muslim politics that would reshape the subcontinent's destiny.

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Study Rationale & Significance

With the voluminous scholarship on India's independence movement, the Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) continues to be dismissed as a mere footnote to Gandhi's Non-Cooperation campaign, its unique role as a distinct assertion of Muslim political agency largely overlooked in favor of narratives that privilege Hindu-Muslim unity. This study directly addresses that persistent historiographical gap by placing the formation of modern Muslim political identity at the very center of analysis, treating the Khilafat agitation not as religious nostalgia but as a deliberate, organized redefinition of communal agency under colonial rule. Its significance is profound and far-reaching. It explains the decisive shift among South Asian Muslims from passive religious solidarity to structured, mass-based political action, forging nationwide committees, conferences, and networks that politicized faith itself. It further illuminates the complex interplay between pan-Islamism and anti-colonial nationalism, showing how transnational Islamic loyalty both reinforced and complicated the broader freedom struggle. Most critically, the movement laid the ideological foundations of Muslim separatism that matured into the demand for Pakistan in 1940, offering fresh insight into the origins of the Two-Nation Theory. In the twenty-first century, its lessons remain urgently relevant for understanding faith-based political mobilizations, the mechanics of identity politics, and the enduring power of transnational Islamic solidarity amid globalization and resurgent religious nationalism.

Literature Review

The foundational scholarship on the Khilafat Movement (1919–1924) framed it primarily as a religious-symbolic mobilization rooted in pan-Islamic sentiment, portraying Indian Muslims' defense of the Ottoman Caliphate as a defensive reaction to the post-World War I imperial order rather than a sustained political project. Niemeijer's (1972) seminal study remains the benchmark, meticulously documenting how wartime grievances, ulama leadership, and vernacular press networks transformed diffuse loyalty into mass agitation, while underscoring the movement's internal contradictions between universal Islamic ideals and localized anti-colonial goals (Niemeijer, 1972). Complementing this archival depth, Bhargav (2022) examines the cross-communal engagements, demonstrating that even prominent Hindu nationalists engaged sympathetically with Khilafat demands, thereby revealing early fault lines that were not inevitable but actively negotiated (Bhargav, 2022). Together these works establish the historiographical baseline: the movement politicized mosques, madrasas, and public discourse yet has often been subordinated to the Non-Cooperation narrative, underplaying its distinct role in constructing a modern Muslim public sphere under colonial rule.

Subsequent scholarship has moved beyond origin stories to interrogate the movement's transformative legacy for Muslim political agency and its contribution to ideological separatism. Anwar (2023) offers a detailed exploratory analysis showing how the Khilafat's nationwide committee structure, conferences, and mobilization tactics provided the institutional scaffolding for the Muslim League's revival and the communal politics of the 1920s-1930s, directly feeding into the Two-Nation Theory and the 1940 Lahore Resolution (Anwar, 2023). Zaman (2024), by contrast, globalizes the lens through the Indian Khilafat delegation's European activities, illustrating how activists reframed caliphate authority in republican and consultative terms, challenging Eurocentric dismissals of the movement as mere theocratic nostalgia. This second wave of literature reframes the Khilafat not as a failed religious protest but as the first major assertion of autonomous Muslim political identity within the Indian nationalist

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framework, politicizing religious solidarity into a demand for recognition that reshaped the subcontinent's future trajectory (Zaman, 2024).

More recent interventions have further transnationalized and contemporized the debate, linking the movement's collapse to enduring patterns of faith-based activism. Özcan (2025) traces the reverberations of Atatürk's 1924 abolition of the Caliphate across South Asia, arguing that the resulting sense of sovereignty loss intensified Muslim anxieties about political autonomy and continues to inform twenty-first-century identity politics and transnational Islamic solidarity. By synthesizing these perspectives, contemporary historiography positions the Khilafat as a prototype for understanding how religious grievance can be strategically converted into modern political consciousness in plural, post-colonial societies offering analytical tools for examining today's faith-driven mobilizations without reducing them to anachronistic revivalism (Özcan, 2025).

Historical Background and the Emergence of the Khilafat Movement

The pre-1919 context of the Khilafat Movement was rooted in the protracted decline of the Ottoman Empire, which Indian Muslims had long viewed as the last bastion of Islamic temporal power and the living embodiment of the Caliphate. Successive crises the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, and the empire's catastrophic alignment with the Central Powers in World War I eroded Ottoman sovereignty and fueled a profound sense of existential vulnerability among South Asian Muslims. During the war, Indian Muslim soldiers and civilians demonstrated remarkable loyalty to Britain, believing British assurances that the holy places and the Caliph's authority would be safeguarded in exchange for their support against the Kaiser. This loyalty, however, shattered in the war's immediate aftermath when Britain's repressive policies crystallized. The Rowlatt Act of 1919, which extended emergency wartime powers to detain Indians without trial, and Gandhi's subsequent nationwide Satyagraha campaign against it, acted as immediate triggers, merging anti-colonial outrage with pan-Islamic anxiety (Krishna, 1968). What began as diffuse religious sympathy for a distant Caliph rapidly coalesced into a political awakening, revealing how colonial betrayal could transmute abstract transnational solidarity into concrete domestic resistance.

By mid-1919, this ferment found institutional expression through the deliberate formation of the All-India Khilafat Committee in Bombay in July, spearheaded by the Ali brothers Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali alongside figures such as Hakim Ajmal Khan, Hasrat Mohani, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. The committee's creation marked a decisive shift from sporadic petitions to a structured, pan-Indian organizational framework capable of coordinating protests across provinces, districts, and even villages. Its crowning early achievement came with the first All-India Khilafat Conference held in Delhi in November 1919, an event that drew thousands of delegates, including prominent Congress leaders, and elevated Mahatma Gandhi to the conference presidency. Resolutions passed there demanded the preservation of the Ottoman Caliphate's territorial integrity and spiritual authority, while explicitly linking the issue to broader Indian self-rule. This conference did not merely air grievances; it forged a disciplined political platform that harnessed mosques, madrasas, and vernacular presses for mass mobilization, transforming elite-led concern into a genuinely popular movement that transcended class and regional divides (Ahmed, 2011).

The galvanizing force behind this momentum was the Allies' punitive postwar settlement, most notably the Treaty of Sèvres signed in August 1920, which dismembered the Ottoman Empire by awarding Arab provinces as mandates to Britain and France, internationalizing the Straits, and granting Greece substantial claims in

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Thrace and Anatolia. Compounding the outrage was the Greek military invasion and occupation of Smyrna (Izmir) in May 1919, an act widely perceived by Indian Muslims as a direct assault on the Islamic heartland enabled by British complicity. News of these developments, disseminated through returning soldiers, Urdu newspapers, and fiery sermons, ignited fury across British India. Delegations were dispatched to London, and public meetings reverberated with calls for justice, framing the Caliphate's survival as inseparable from the dignity of every Muslim under colonial rule. This external shock did not merely intensify emotion; it provided the strategic rationale for sustained agitation, exposing the hollowness of imperial promises and accelerating the movement's transition from petitioning to confrontation (Karaman, 2004).

Beneath these diplomatic and military catalysts lay potent socio-economic undercurrents that amplified the movement's reach and depth. Postwar economic distress spiraling inflation, skyrocketing prices of essentials, heavy taxation on peasants, and widespread unemployment among demobilized soldiers created a fertile ground for discontent. Returning Muslim troops brought firsthand accounts of Ottoman suffering, while the ulama issued influential fatwas declaring British India a *Dar-ul-Harb* (abode of war), thereby sanctioning migration (*hijrat*) to Afghanistan as a religious duty and lending theological legitimacy to political defiance. These factors converged to reframe what might have remained a purely religious grievance into a sophisticated political struggle against British imperialism itself. The movement's leadership astutely politicized the Caliphate issue, converting pan-Islamic sentiment into an anti-colonial ideology that asserted Muslim agency on both domestic and international stages (Hasan, 1981). Far from nostalgic revivalism, this reframing demonstrated how faith could serve as a powerful idiom for modern political mobilization, laying the groundwork for subsequent assertions of Muslim separatism while simultaneously forging a temporary yet historic alliance with the Indian National Congress.

Leadership, Mobilization Strategies, and Mass Participation

The leadership of the Khilafat Movement crystallized around a formidable cadre of visionaries who fused religious charisma with political pragmatism, catapulting the agitation from elite petitions to a nationwide phenomenon of unprecedented scale. Central were the Ali Brothers Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali whose incendiary speeches and editorial command of the Urdu press electrified audiences, positioning the defense of the Caliphate as a sacred duty inseparable from anti-colonial defiance. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad brought intellectual gravitas and Congress linkages, while Hakim Ajmal Khan lent aristocratic prestige and organizational acumen, and Hasrat Mohani infused the cause with revolutionary poetry that resonated across classes (Kattiparambil, 2021). These figures did not simply lead; they engineered a deliberate transition from deferential lobbying to assertive mass mobilization, forging a unified platform that transcended regional and sectarian divides. By embodying both *ulama* authority and modern publicist savvy, they constructed the first coherent articulation of a collective Muslim political self in British India one that asserted dignity and agency on the global stage while confronting imperial power domestically.

At the operational core lay a meticulously layered organizational structure that penetrated every stratum of Muslim society, turning abstract grievance into coordinated action. Khilafat Committees proliferated at provincial, district, and village levels, with mosques and madrasas serving as vibrant hubs for daily prayers, fiery sermons, and public meetings that drew crowds in the thousands. Mobilization techniques were culturally masterful and strategically sophisticated: religious symbolism elevated the Khilafat to an

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inviolable article of faith, rendering participation a moral imperative; the Urdu press most notably the Ali Brothers' *Comrade* and *Hamdard* disseminated vivid accounts of Ottoman suffering and British duplicity; stirring poetry and *naats* by Hasrat Mohani and others ignited emotional fervor; and relentless leadership tours across India created personal bonds between the center and periphery (Mansur Noor, 2020). This infrastructure transformed passive sympathy into active resistance, achieving a level of grassroots coordination never before witnessed in Indian Muslim politics and ensuring the movement's reach extended far beyond urban elites.

The movement's inclusive ethos further amplified its transformative power, drawing women, students, and rural Muslim masses into the political arena and completing the shift from elite petitions to authentic mass-based agitation. Women participated in processions, fund-raising drives, and *purdah* meetings, while students boycotted government institutions en masse, injecting youthful energy and moral urgency. In rural heartlands, village-level committees and *ulama* fatwas mobilized peasants and artisans, embedding the cause in everyday life and creating a shared sense of political belonging (Qureshi, 1978). Analytically, this broad participation did not merely swell numbers; it forged a collective Muslim political self that politicized religious identity into a modern instrument of empowerment. What began as transnational solidarity evolved into a domestic assertion of autonomy, demonstrating how faith-based symbolism could catalyze organized resistance and lay ideological foundations for later separatist consciousness under colonial rule.

Indian National Congress and the Non-Cooperation Movement

Gandhi's dramatic entry into the Khilafat fold in early 1920 forged one of the most potent yet fragile alliances in modern Indian history, catapulting the religious agitation into the heart of the nationalist struggle. Having already championed the cause by presiding over the 1919 Delhi Khilafat Conference, Gandhi seized the moment to link the defense of the Ottoman Caliphate with his emerging program of non-cooperation, viewing Muslim grievances as a golden opportunity to forge unbreakable Hindu-Muslim unity against the Raj. The Congress-Khilafat pact was sealed not through abstract ideology but through concrete personal diplomacy: Gandhi's intimate collaboration with the Ali Brothers, Azad, and Ajmal Khan transformed elite negotiations into a mass covenant. Far from a passive Congress endorsement, this alliance represented Gandhi's masterful appropriation of Khilafat momentum to radicalize the nationalist movement, injecting religious passion into satyagraha while giving Khilafat leaders a secular platform (De, 2025). Analytically, it broadened the anti-colonial front by drawing millions of Muslims into Congress-led resistance, yet it simultaneously sharpened a distinct Muslim political identity rooted in transnational faith rather than territorial nationalism setting the stage for future separatism even as it promised temporary solidarity.

The merger of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation programs in 1920 created a seamless tactical symphony of boycott and civil resistance that paralyzed British administration across vast swathes of India. Under the joint banner, Muslims and Hindus alike were urged to renounce British titles, boycott government courts and educational institutions, and shun foreign goods in favor of khadi and indigenous enterprise. This fusion was not cosmetic; Khilafat volunteers became the shock troops of non-cooperation, their fiery oratory and mosque networks amplifying Gandhi's call for swaraj. The programs reinforced each other: Khilafat's religious symbolism lent moral urgency to Congress boycotts, while Non-Cooperation's disciplined non-violence tempered the movement's

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potentially explosive communal edge. What emerged was an unprecedented display of interfaith coordination that shook the colonial edifice more effectively than any prior agitation (Jabeen, 2017). Yet this tactical brilliance masked deeper analytical tensions by embedding pan-Islamic demands within the nationalist framework, the merger politicized religious identity without fully subordinating it, thereby nurturing a parallel Muslim political consciousness that would later assert autonomy from mainstream Congress nationalism.

Major events in 1920-1921 dramatized the alliance's explosive potential while exposing its inherent fragility. The Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress in December 1920 formally adopted non-cooperation as official policy, with Khilafat leaders playing pivotal roles in drafting resolutions that intertwined the Caliphate issue with Sawaraj. The spectacular boycott of the Prince of Wales' visit in November 1921 marked by hartals, processions, and fiery speeches turned Bombay and other cities into theaters of defiance, showcasing the movement's capacity to mobilize urban and rural masses alike. Parallel to this, the Hijrat Movement saw tens of thousands of Muslims migrate toward Afghanistan in search of an Islamic homeland, an emotional outpouring that both energized and strained the alliance by highlighting the limits of purely religious mobilization (Malik, 2020). These events collectively amplified the anti-colonial front, drawing peasants, students, and workers into sustained resistance on a scale never before seen. However, they also accelerated the sharpening of Muslim political identity: participation in joint action paradoxically reinforced the perception that Muslim interests required separate safeguards, foreshadowing the communal fault lines that would fracture the unity once the Caliphate dream collapsed.

Points of convergence and tension within the alliance ultimately revealed its dual legacy temporarily expanding the anti-colonial struggle while indelibly sharpening a separate Muslim political self. Convergence was breathtaking: shared platforms, joint conferences, and mutual endorsements fostered an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim fraternity that rattled British confidence and popularized non-violent resistance nationwide. Yet emerging communal fault lines evident in localized riots, competing visions of swaraj, and the ulama's insistence on religious primacy exposed the alliance's fault lines. Muslims increasingly viewed the Khilafat as an existential article of faith rather than a bargaining chip for Indian unity, while many Hindus saw pan-Islamism as a distraction from territorial nationalism. This dynamic, far from accidental, constituted the alliance's profound analytical significance: it broadened the anti-colonial front by harnessing religious energy for mass politics, yet simultaneously honed Muslim political identity as distinct and non-subsumable within mainstream Congress nationalism (Nauriya, 2021). In the end, the 1920-1922 partnership did not dissolve Muslim separatism; it accelerated its ideological maturation, proving that tactical unity could coexist with and even nurture long-term communal assertion.

Decline, Fragmentation, and Long-Term Impact on Muslim Political Identity

The decline of the Khilafat Movement accelerated dramatically in February 1922 with the Chauri Chaura incident, where a mob of protesters in Uttar Pradesh burned a police station, killing 22 policemen. This outbreak of violence provided Mahatma Gandhi with the pretext to unilaterally suspend the Non-Cooperation Movement, a decision taken without adequate consultation with Khilafat leaders. The abrupt withdrawal shattered the fragile Hindu-Muslim alliance, leaving Muslim participants feeling betrayed and abandoned at a critical juncture. Gandhi's insistence on strict non-violence clashed with the emotional intensity of Khilafat agitation, exposing the tactical incompatibilities

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between satyagraha and the religious fervor driving Muslim mobilization. Internal Muslim divisions compounded the crisis, as differing visions among *ulama*, modernists, and regional leaders fragmented organizational cohesion (Anwar, 2023). These factors collectively eroded the movement's momentum, transforming a once-vibrant pan-Indian agitation into a demoralized and directionless effort.

The final, decisive blow came from Turkey itself in 1924, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secular nationalist government formally abolished the Ottoman Caliphate. Indian Muslims had invested immense emotional, financial, and political capital in preserving the institution as the symbolic heart of the global *ummah*. Its unilateral dismantling by the very Turks whose sovereignty the movement sought to defend rendered the entire agitation obsolete overnight. This external shock, combined with the earlier suspension of Non-Cooperation, triggered the rapid collapse of Khilafat Committees at all levels. Provincial and district networks disintegrated as enthusiasm evaporated and funding dried up. The immediate aftermath was marked by profound disillusionment: the grand dream of restoring Islamic unity through transnational solidarity lay in ruins, forcing a painful reevaluation of strategies that had relied heavily on external religious symbols rather than indigenous Muslim political power (Minault, 2015).

In the vacuum left by the movement's fragmentation, communal riots surged between 1923 and 1924, signaling the brutal end of the Hindu-Muslim political honeymoon that had characterized the 1920-1922 period. The breakdown of joint platforms unleashed pent-up tensions, with competing revivalist movements such as Hindu Shuddhi and Sangathan alongside Muslim Tabligh further polarizing communities (HowTests, 2025). Khilafat organizations, once engines of unity, withered, while the abrupt loss of momentum left ordinary participants disillusioned and radicalized. This immediate communal flare-up was not merely reactive but symptomatic of deeper structural shifts: the alliance had temporarily broadened the anti-colonial front but failed to resolve underlying identity divergences. Muslims increasingly perceived that reliance on Congress goodwill offered no lasting safeguards for their distinct political and cultural interests.

The decline and fragmentation of the Khilafat Movement paradoxically catalyzed its most enduring legacy the sharpening and consolidation of a distinct Muslim political identity in British India. The failure demonstrated the limits of pan-Islamism as a viable strategy against colonial modernity and the unreliability of tactical alliances with mainstream nationalism. Disillusioned by the Chauri Chaura suspension and the Caliphate's abolition, Muslim leaders and intellectuals turned inward, emphasizing self-reliance and autonomous organization. This shift accelerated the revival and radicalization of the All-India Muslim League, providing fertile ideological soil for the Two-Nation Theory. The movement's collapse thus marked a pivotal transition as from faith-based transnational protest to a pragmatic assertion of Muslim separatism that culminated in the 1940 Lahore Resolution and the eventual demand for Pakistan (Butt, 2012). Far from a mere historical footnote, the Khilafat episode illuminated how religious mobilization, even in failure, could forge modern communal consciousness and redefine minority politics in plural societies.

Conclusion

The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) stands as a defining yet tragic chapter in the history of modern South Asia, representing far more than a religious protest against the dismantling of the Ottoman Caliphate. It emerged as the first major pan-Islamic political

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ISSN Print: 3007-3146

mobilization in British India that successfully transformed diffuse religious sentiment into a structured, mass-based demand for Muslim political identity. From its roots in the post-World War I global upheaval and the betrayal embodied in the Treaty of Sèvres, through the energetic leadership of the Ali Brothers, Azad, Ajmal Khan, and Mohani, to its strategic alliance with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement, the agitation demonstrated the extraordinary power of faith to galvanize millions across class, region, and gender lines. The movement's organizational sophistication manifested in layered Khilafat Committees, the strategic use of mosques, madrasas, Urdu press, poetry, and nationwide tours elevated what began as elite petitions into genuine popular agitation. Its temporary success in forging Hindu-Muslim unity at Nagpur and during the boycott of the Prince of Wales visit broadened the anti-colonial front in unprecedented ways. Yet its rapid decline, triggered by the Chauri Chaura incident, Gandhi's abrupt suspension of Non-Cooperation, Atatürk's abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, and ensuing internal divisions, exposed the limits of relying on external religious symbols and tactical alliances. The immediate aftermath of collapsing committees and surging communal riots (1923-1924) marked the painful end of the political honeymoon, but this very failure paradoxically crystallized a resilient and autonomous Muslim political consciousness. By highlighting the unreliability of mainstream nationalism in safeguarding Muslim interests, the movement laid the ideological groundwork for the Two-Nation Theory and the eventual demand for Pakistan in 1940. In essence, the Khilafat episode was not a dead end but a crucible in which South Asian Muslims forged a modern political self that refused to be subsumed within a singular territorial nationalism.

The enduring significance of the Khilafat Movement transcends its immediate historical context and offers profound lessons for contemporary times. It illustrates how transnational religious solidarity can intersect with anti-colonial resistance to reshape identity politics in plural societies, while simultaneously revealing the tensions inherent in such fusions. The movement's trajectory from pan-Islamic fervor to sharpened communal assertion underscores the complex interplay between faith-based mobilization and modern political agency. Today, as the world grapples with resurgent identity politics, faith-driven movements, and questions of minority rights amid globalization, the Khilafat experience remains strikingly relevant. It warns against romanticizing religious unity without addressing underlying power asymmetries and highlights the creative potential of marginalized communities to convert perceived defeats into long-term ideological victories. Ultimately, the Khilafat Movement reminds us that political identities are rarely static; they are forged in the crucible of hope, betrayal, mobilization, and reflection. Its legacy continues to echo in the political landscape of South Asia and beyond, serving as a powerful testament to the enduring human quest for dignity, autonomy, and collective self-definition in the face of imperial and global forces.

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