

IRCICA JOURNAL

A Journal on Islamic History and Civilisation

VOLUME I © ISSUE 1 © SPRING 2013

Political Activities and Popular Outcry on the Turkish Question in Muslim Bengal (1908-1924): an Archival Report

Kazi Sufior Rahaman*

Abstract. *This study presents an analysis on the "politics of romanticism" among the Bengali Muslims concerning the survival of the Ottoman Empire as the home of the Islamic Caliphate in the late 19th century and the success of Turkey's War of Independence in the early 20th century. The Muslims of Bengal (including Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal) who formed the single largest Muslim ethnic group in the world after the Arab societies were very active in pan-Islamic politics through the 'Khilafat' and 'Non-cooperation' movements. Especially during the heady days of the 'Khilafat movement' in Bengal, Muslims occupied centre stage and formed a mass movement supporting the preservation of the Ottoman Caliphate against the attacks of the Western Powers. The study gives illuminating examples from the sort of public, financial and spiritual support that the Muslim communities and intellectuals of the Indian subcontinent provided to the late Ottoman Empire and the young Turkish Republic as they were perceived to represent the dignity and honour of the whole Muslims in the world. In so doing, the study forms crucial linkages between the Khilafat movement and the seeds of Indian independence which occurred decades later.*

Keywords. Muslims in Bengal, Ottoman Empire, Khilafat movement, politics of romanticism.

* Assoc. Prof., Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Calcutta, India.

The Muslims of Bengal (including Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal) form the single largest Muslim ethnic group in the World after the Arabs. The largest concentration of Muslims and their socio-economic and political conditions in the early twentieth century served the "politics of romanticism" among the Bengali Muslims. This trend was, however, most strongly visible in pan-Islamic politics and, more particularly, during the 'Khilafat' and the 'Non-cooperation' movements. During the heady days of the 'Khilafat movement' in Bengal, Muslims came to occupy centre stage and the movement turned into a mass movement. The masses had taken some serious initiatives in anger and protest.

The general impression among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent was that the Western Powers were waging a war against Islam throughout the world in order to rob it of all its power and influence. The Ottoman Empire was the only Muslim power that had maintained a semblance of authority and the Muslims of India wanted to save the Islamic political power from extinction at a time when the Muslims of the subcontinent had no sovereign ruler of their own. When the Ottoman Empire fell into any sort of trouble they would give expression to their fears and anxieties, while offering various types of assistance. In the same way, they conveyed their congratulations and communicated their joyful feelings when they heard good news concerning the Ottoman Empire.

Since 1877, the Bengali Muslim literature and press have occasionally published reports of Turkish affairs in their own ideological-political interest. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Bengali Muslims offered cordial support to the Ottoman Sultan as Khalifatul Muslimin (Caliph of Muslim). The Treaty of San Stefano (1877) which showed disrespect to the Ottoman Sultan evoked deep antipathy in the Bengali Muslim Press. On June 15, 1877 Muhammad Akbar appealed to Bengali Muslims through the newspapers to send financial support in order to help the innumerable Turkish widows and orphans whose husbands or fathers had fallen in the

First World War.¹ C.E. Buckland testified that religious services were held in some of the Calcutta mosques and subscriptions were raised for the same purpose.² Sultan Abdulhamid II, after the defeat to Russia in 1878, attempted to take advantage of the sympathy of the Muslim world and sent emissaries to Egypt, India, Afghanistan, Java and China to remind the Muslims of those countries the fact that there was still a Caliph in Islam. The Albert Hall speech of Jamaluddin Afghani in Calcutta (today's Kolkata) in the year 1882 and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1897 also helped a great deal in the process of disseminating pan-Islamic ideas among Muslims of Bengal.

Islam Pracharak, Pracharak and Lahari published articles on the Turks and the Ottoman Empire. Both the Islam Pracharak and Pracharak came out with special issues to commemorate the anniversary of the accession of Sultan Abdulhamid II to the throne and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi wrote a book on the subject. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 greatly disturbed the minds of educated Bengali Muslims. In May 1913, the Ottoman Empire was driven out of Europe and the Great Powers did nothing to prevent it. The Mussalman wrote in an exclamatory sentence that the attitude of the Great Powers clearly demonstrated to the world that the principle of 'might is right' was still determining the policy of those nations. The Mussalman published in five weekly issues the text of 'Come over into Macedonia and help us'-a pamphlet on Bulgarian atrocities issued from Istanbul.³ In July 1913, the British Indian government prohibited the publication of the copies of that pamphlet. On the 3rd of August 1913 at a meeting in Calcutta the participants expressed their joy for the brilliant march of Enver Pasha and the recapture of Edirne and, for this action; the Ottoman Sultan and the Ottoman Nation were enthusiastically applauded. In view of the rumours concerning

¹ Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*, Dacca, 1969, p.26.

² C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenants-Governor*, vol. 2, 1901, p. 691.

³ *The Mussalman*, May 5, 23, June 6, 13, 20, 1913.

the coercion of the Ottomans by the Great Powers, the meeting hoped that Great Britain would respect not only her earlier 'declaration of neutrality' but also the 'feelings and sentiments of the Indian Muslims'.⁴ In September, the offices of *The Mussalman* were searched and seven of its issues were forfeited and seized because of the publication of the text of the said pamphlet.⁵

Meanwhile, in August 1914, the First World War broke out, and the Ottoman Empire took the side of Germany. As a precautionary measure, the Government of British India arrested and interned a large number of prominent pan-Islamic leaders and, because of an editorial entitled 'England, Turkey and Indian Mussalman' the editor, Maulavi Mujibur Rahman, was served notice with an order to introduce fresh security measures and the pre-censorship of editorials. He continued to publish the news weekly, keeping editorial column blank as a mark of protest against the government action, until the government finally withdrew the order.⁶ The Ottoman sympathisers of Bengal raised funds in the name of the 'Ottoman Red Crescent Society', the funds raised were to be spent on the wounded and Ottoman war victims.⁷ A delegation of the Medical Mission was sent from Bengal, led by Ismail Hossain Siraji, to aid the Ottoman soldiers with moral and material support. On his return, he wrote about his experiences in the Ottoman Empire in a book in Bengali entitled 'Travels in Turkey' published in 1913. In this book Siraji depicted the tragic condition of the Ottoman army engaged in the Balkan Wars and the shabby treatment meted out to Turkey by the Western powers.

In March 1919, a Central Khilafat Committee was formed in

⁴ *Op. cit.*, August 8, 1913.

⁵ Abul Fazal, *Sangbadik Mujibur Rahman*, Dacca, 1967, p. 24.

⁶ *The Mussalman*, Dec 6, 1926, p. 6, (20th Anniversary Issue).

⁷ Even the students raised funds. As for example, the boarders of Carmichael Hostel of Calcutta University, having cancelled their Grand Eid feast, collected money for that purpose and sent it to Turkey. Not only had that hosteller offered spontaneously one-month scholarship and also sent tiffin money for the same purpose. See Ibrahim Khan, *Batayan* (window), Dacca, 1967, p. 282.

Bombay. A few months later, Maulavi Abdul Rahman Dinajpuri and Maulana Akram Khan took the initiative and finally organised a Khilafat Committee in Calcutta. Soon some affiliated branches were opened in different parts of Bengal.

However, the Muslims of India launched 'an extraterritorial loyalty and community' movement called 'Tehrik-i-Khilafat'. It was designed to put pressure on the British Government (a) to preserve the 1914 boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, (b) to preserve intact the spiritual and temporal authority of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph of Islam and (c) to protect the Muslim holy places. At a meeting of the All India Khilafat Committee at Lucknow on 21 September 1919 it was decided to observe Khilafat Day all over India on 17 October by praying and participating in a general strike. At the same time Muslims all over India were asked to contribute a day's income to the Khilafat Fund. In Bengal, response to the call for a strike marked a turning point in the process of the politicization of the Bengali Muslims. Post-Juma prayers and public meetings were held and fasting observed in Calcutta, Dacca, Chittagong, Chandpur Gaibandha, Jessore Barisal, Bogra Feni and many other parts of Bengal.⁸ The Muslims were not at all happy with the internal politics of the British Government⁹ and strong rumours that the British Government was involved in the conspiracy against Islam added fuel to the fire.¹⁰

⁸ *The Mussalman*, Oct 24, 1919.

⁹ The Great War affected Muslims who had been suffering from the price rises of essential commodities and the ravages of the great influenza epidemic. The Muslims of East Bengal were angry with the British government because of the cancellation of the orderly partition of Bengal in 1912.

¹⁰ Specific propaganda was deluged with a flood of speeches made by the Khilafat Movement. It was at first given out that the British had bombarded the holy places in Mecca. However, this story was gradually improved upon in various ways. Abdul Rahman, Secretary of the Coomilla Khilafat Conference, gave a speech in April declaring that the British had not only demolished the Prophet's tomb but also relieved themselves on the Koran and converted the Muslim burial ground into a latrine (p.183). Similarly in July, Abdurrazzak announced that the following occurred in a speech by Lord Kitchener: 'If I am a true officer of the British

The 'All India Khilafat Committee' met in Delhi in November 1919 and took the decision that anti-peace celebrations be observed religiously to foil the peace celebration arrangements of the government. This view was recently expressed by Kenneth McPherson that the British Government had passed plans to check anti-peace celebrations among the Muslims of rural Bengal.¹¹ The Khilafatists distributed manifestos, leaflets and handbills to Bengali Muslims citing the Holy Koran with a request to abstain from participation in the festivals (14-17 Dec, 1919) celebrating the end of the First World War. They pointed out that the Ottoman Empire had been defeated as well as humiliated as a result of her participation in the War and had suffered great losses.¹² The Mussalman and Muhammadi published fiery editorials in English and Bengali respectively in support of non-participation in peace celebrations by the Muslims of Bengal. Public meetings were held

Government, if I am really a noble Englishman, then I shall erect a wine shop in that very Mecca facing which the Muslims of the World say their prayers' (p.183). Early in 1920 and again in 1921 rumours were sedulously circulated to the effect that the government had ordered the transfer of the Muslim holy day from Friday to Sunday, the substitution of the name of the King-Emperor for that of the Khalif in the khutba and the proscription of the Koran (p. 211). As an instance of the most extravagant of the claims, we may take a statement of Hakim Abu Yusuf Isfahani made in May 1923. Speaking in Calcutta he said: "There is an open place surrounded by a wall in London which is called "Hedjaz", and in which there is an artificial hill resembling the sacred place "Arafat" where "Hajj" takes place every year, and people go there for target practice and amuse themselves by saying they are destroying Islam." (p. 211). In March, Maulana Muhammad Ismail said in a speech at Noakhali that the English had violated ten thousand Muslim women in Angora and Smyrna and infants had been torn from the arms of their mothers and bayoneted. See, Mushirul Hasan and Margrit Pernau, *Regionalizing Pan-Islamism*, Delhi, 2005.

¹¹ K. McPherson, *Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta Muslims 1918-1935*, Wiesbaden, 1974, p.58.

¹² I. B. Weekly report, dated 3.12.1919. This *fatwa* was widely circulated among all classes of Muslims throughout Bengal: "No Mussalman can take part in the Peace Celebrations and any Mussalman found taking part in them will be deemed as a *kafer* (infidel)." The following notice was found on the Notice Board of the Baker Hostel in Calcutta: "No peace in aching hearts. Sweets mean plain jokes. Do not volunteer. Oh God, God! Save us from Mir Jaffars."

in most of the districts of Bengal on the question of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Resignations from the local Peace Celebration Committees were also organized.¹³ In some places, in Howrah and Noakhali for instance, groups of Muslim youths paraded through the main thoroughfares wearing black ribbons round their arms and carrying black flags. Occasionally they held street corner meetings, urging people not to take part in the celebration activities.¹⁴ On the 12th of December a fatwa was issued to proclaim from the pulpits of the mosques on Friday¹⁵ how and why participation in the Peace Celebration was a sacrilege for the Mussalmans.¹⁶

The feeling of the common Bengali Muslims and their participation in anti-peace celebration movements is worthy of note. Muslim students of Barisal, Chandpur and Ramganj pulled down the decorations of the peace celebrations as well as the Union Jack put up for the occasion.¹⁷ The spontaneous response of the general public was remarkable.¹⁸ The Mussalman called upon the

¹³ In Bengal 26 members of the Ulema issued a *fatwa* forbidding Muslim participation in the Peace Celebration. See *The Mussalman*, January 9, 1920, p.4. In one such leaflet Maulana Akram Khan, quoting the Koran, declared that are those who love people of another religion are *munaifiq* (hypocrites) and are betraying Islam.

¹⁴ Freedom Movement papers, paper No. 75.

¹⁵ *The Mussalman*, November 28, 1919, p.4.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 7 December 1919, The Burdwan Muhammedan Association organized a mass meeting where Abul Kasem argued that the Prime Minister distinctly said that the Great War was not a religious war and no power would interfere with the religion of another. Relying on this promise, the Muslims of Bengal helped the government with men and money but no sooner had the war terminated and the Ottoman Sultan in Turkey was defeated than the British were trying to establish British supremacy over Islam. See I.B. weekly police report, Burdwan, dated, 9.12.1919.

¹⁷ G. B. Home (pol) confidential Police Report, File No-472 of 1919.

¹⁸ At Chatkhil High School, Noakhali sweets meant for distribution among the boys of the school were thrown away. At *Murshidabad*, Muslim students of Raghunathganj, Lalgola, Kandi etc. refused, of their own free will, to accept sweets distributed to them by the local Peace Celebration Committee. The volunteer group formed by

Muslims to teach a lesson to those 'who, however vain-glorious or however purse-proud' must be made to feel that there was 'such a thing as public opinion' in the country and that they could not 'with impunity ignore or trifle with that opinion'.¹⁹ In the first week of January 1920 the Reuter's news on the fate of the Ottoman Empire was published. The Moslem Hitaishi in utter anguish asked, 'are righteousness and justice vanishing from the earth'?²⁰

Abul Kalam Azad and other national leaders reached Calcutta in the last week of February 1920 with the intention of organising demonstrations in the Khilafat cause. On the 28th of February 1920 a Bengal Khilafat Conference was held in the Town Hall of Calcutta to deliver a counter blast to the anti-Ottoman campaign in England. In a high-powered gathering the committee resolved that Muslims should renounce loyalty to Great Britain if the decisions of the Caliph were not observed.²¹ Some of the resolutions passed in the conference, including a boycott of the Legislative Council and all kinds of British goods, as well as the surrender of British titles and offices, were widely anticipated as part of the non-cooperation programme. The conference unanimously decided that

the Faridpur town *Anjuman-i Islamia* actively opposed Muslim participation in the peace celebration and the distribution of sweets in the *Chawk-Bazar* Mosque. Shopkeepers in the Bangabazar of Faridpur kept their shops closed. In Tangile, printers refused to print the peace celebration programme and there was so much feeling there that few or none turned up even at the alms distribution centre opened by the local authority as part of the celebration program. At *Chittagonj*, peace celebration efforts flopped so completely that local authorities were forced to cancel all other connected programs. In *Bankura*, the Head Master of a local High School read out a leaflet entitled 'Participation in the Peace Celebration is An Act of Sacrilege.' In Calcutta the exhibition and fair organized by the celebration committee was thinly attended. Muslim shopkeepers in Calcutta refused to illuminate their shops while local Muslims organized an anti-peace celebration demonstration. See Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims*, Calcutta 1991, pp. 87-88; Kazi Sufior Rahaman, 'Wahabi British Relations', *Institute of Bangladesh Studies Journal*, issue XI, 2004.

¹⁹ *The Mussalman*, January 9, 1920.

²⁰ *Moslem Hitaishi*, January 9, 1920.

²¹ G. B. Home (pol) confidential Police Report, File 106/1920, s1, n.1.

Bengal would observe 19 March 1920 as the second 'Khilafat Day' by organising a hartal (general strike) while, in the meanwhile, telegrams were sent to the Prime Minister and the Viceroy protesting against dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.²²

A strike committee of twelve was formed in Calcutta to organise a province-wide movement. On the eve of the Khilafat Day they printed strike placards entitled 'Response to the Call of Allah' which were displayed in almost all towns and cities.²³ Even local meetings were preceded by the distribution of leaflets and the display of placards.²⁴ Leading Muslim personalities of the province were contacted telegraphically to work up agitation in their respective localities in favour of the strike.²⁵ The ulama and religious leaders were mobilised to remind the rural population of their religious obligation to observe the day. Local branches of the Anjuman-i Ulama-i Bangla were instructed to explain to the people the significance of the Second Khilafat Day on March 19, 1920.²⁶

Amidst all this unrest and discord the Khilafat Committee observed the Third Khilafat Day on 1 August (Sunday) in the same year with the same agenda. Attempts were made to rouse mass enthusiasm by issuing leaflets and posters and despatching telegrams and emissaries to urban and rural localities. One such leaflet entitled 'response to the call of the day' infringed the Press Act in insisting that no one should enlist as a soldier and was promptly proscribed.²⁷ The security deposits of the Muhammadi

²² I.B. Weekly Report, dated, 1.11.1919. Ekramul Huq of Murshidabad, Muhammad Rosan, Intaz Ali, Panchu Sheikh of Maymansingh, Abdul Huq of Kishoregunj, and Asrafuddin Ali of Katiadi, Kudratullah, Enaitullah, Kebratullah and Asadullah from Sarisabali, and many others sent telegrams to the Prime Minister. A sample copy of a telegram was also published in the *Muhammadi* on 29 August 1919.

²³ G.B. Home (pol) confidential Police Report, File 106/1920, Sl. 21.

²⁴ *Op.cit.* S.I No 39 D O No 5261, Bogra, Feb 20, 1920.

²⁵ *Op.cit.* S.I No 1 D O No 3043D, March 9, 1920.

²⁶ *Op.cit.* appendix part 11, p.8.

²⁷ G, I. Home (Pol) secret deposit (printed) Prog.

and *Nayayug* (New Age) were forfeited for having published that leaflet.²⁸ In the campaign, the boycott of foreign goods was given priority. Injunctions from the Koran were evoked in support of the boycott. Just on the eve of the strike, *Muhammadi* (July 30, 1920) sought to rouse Muslim mass sentiment by an inflammatory editorial which stated: "Look at their lolling tongues soaked in blood. That blood is your brother's blood, your sister's blood...Until now we have been only weeping. But we shall weep no longer".

The Secretary of the Central Khilafat Committee issued a notice to all concerned calling them to celebrate Ankara Victory Day on 17 September (Sunday) 1922 for the commemoration of Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha's victory over the enemy. Syed Majid Baksh, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee issued instructions to celebrate Ankara regime's victory by illuminating mosques and private houses on Sunday 17 September. In addition, he called for special prayers to be held for Ankara's final victory at 9 pm. Wahed Hossain Asstt, Secretary of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, mentioned in a letter that the spontaneous demonstrations and sincere prayers on Sunday clearly showed that great enthusiasm prevailed in Calcutta for the Khilafat movement.²⁹ In a letter to the editor of the *Khilafat Bulletin*, Bombay, Muhammad Ishaque, Secretary of the Calcutta Khilafat Committee, expressed his desire that the people of Calcutta should present, on behalf of the citizens of Calcutta and its suburbs, an aeroplane to the victorious army of Mustafa Kemal Pasha as a token of appreciation for the work undertaken for Islam.³⁰ The Muslim working class responded to the strike in different ways. In the Kharagpur Railway workshop only 250 workers out of 10,000 had shown up for work.³¹ Many of the transport workers did not turn up on that day and in the absence of the stevedores

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ I.B.confidential report,SB/1276/1922, p.273.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ G.B. (pol) File No106/1920, weekly police report March 10, 1920.

the business of the Calcutta port came to a standstill. The workers in cottage industries and mill owners gave wholehearted support to the Khilafatists. The Khilafat leadership called for an organized boycott. Ismail Hossain Siraji and some of his friends evoked the swadeshi spirit among the Muslim youth and started a limited company under the name of Anjuman-i- Majdran or the Association of Labourers for the sale of swadeshi goods. In various parts of East Bengal the farmers refused to pay local rents.³² In Comilla, a large number of jute cultivators took the oath not to cultivate jute and indigo.³³ General workers, steamer-transport workers and coolies (labourers) called a strike for higher pay.³⁴ The economic grievances of the masses were thus linked up with the grievances of the Khilafat.

On the arrival of the Prince of Wales in Calcutta in December 1921 there was a 'carnival of arrests' and some of the administrators willingly resigned from their posts.³⁵ A great meeting was held in the town of Sirajganj under the leadership of Ismail Hossain Siraji. A special prayer was offered for the success of the Ottomans

³² I.B. weekly report 24 April 1920.

³³ *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 16.11.1920.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Khawaja Abdul Karim of the Dacca Nawab family resigned from his Honourary Magistracy and returned his *Durbar* invitation card to the Government. Maulvi Muhammad Kazem Ali of Chittagong renounced his Honorary Magistracy and returned his Certificate of Honour and Coronation *Durbar* Medal. Syed Abdus Samad (advocate) of Berhampore, Syed Abdul Majid (advocate) of Rampurhat and Muhammad Samsuddin (advocate) of Calcutta High Court, stopped practice. He also resigned from his membership of the District Board of Nadia. Maulvi Najmuddin Ahmad, a retired Deputy Magistrate, tendered his resignation from the post of Honorary Presidency Magistrate; Calcutta. Maulvi Muhammad Abdus Samad of Burdwan resigned from his nominated membership of the Katwa Local Board. Maulvi Abdul Karim, A.K.Fazlul Huq, Syed Sultan Ali, Muhammad Mosiah, Moudud Rahman, Wahed Hussain Azizul Huq, Tamizuddin Ahamed, Ekramul Huq Abdur Rashid Khan, Muhammad Khan, Syed Majid Baksh — all of whom had stood for election to the reformed council — withdrew their candidatures in accord with the resolution. Nawab Habibullah of Dacca withdrew his candidature for Indian Legislative Assembly from the Dacca Muslim constituency.

in the war with a large jamaat. Thus, in several public meetings heartfelt congratulations were offered to Mustafa Kemal Pasha for his brilliant success in the fight against the Greek army.

The process of revitalization of the Khilafat organisation received a new impetus from the news of Kemal Pasha's victories over the Greek army. By October 1921, there were approximately 347 Khilafat Committees in Bengal with a membership of 16,680 and 27 khilafat corps with 3010 members.³⁶ The office bearers and full-time volunteers were paid Rs.30/per month and most of them were released as detainees. It is hugely significant that the strong supporters of the movement abided by the organisational decision in offering their government services for Ankara and joining as volunteers in the service of the Khilafat. Muhammad Hussain Kadri of Salar, Murshidabad, a topographical surveyor, resigned from his post on 24 May 1922 and became a full-time member of the Khilafat services.³⁷ Preachers of Turkish propaganda were appointed on monthly salaries to counter British propaganda. The Calcutta Khilafat committee, for example, appointed Muhammad Inayatullah for the purpose. He received a salary of Rs.30/per month from the Calcutta office. Their activities were generally confined to supervisory activities, such as arranging meetings, organising mass sentiment, mobilising propaganda work and taking account of the branch Khilafat committees of Bengal.³⁸ It was claimed by the leadership that a large body of Khilafat volunteers was active in different parts of rural Bengal.³⁹ The use of patriotic songs was another technique adopted to create mass enthusiasm. Printed leaflets were distributed containing Iqbal's song 'Hindustan Hamara' (India belongs to us) and 'Rise, O Mussalman to the call of Allah'.⁴⁰

³⁶ GBIB, confidential, File No: 121/1922, weekly report, 29/10/1921.

³⁷ I.B.confidential report, SB/1276/1922

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ G.B. (pol) confidential. File No 106/1920, SL 23.

⁴⁰ Freedom Movement papers, paper No. 77.

A meeting of the Khilafat secretariat committee was held in Calcutta on 20 January 1922 to discuss ways of collecting the largest possible sum for the government in Ankara. At this meeting, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Banu Begum, mother of Muhammad Ali, were present as guest members. Begum made an extensive tour through Chittagong, Dacca, Noakhali, Faridpur etc. in aid of the Ankara fund. All volunteers were ordered to organise meetings and processions for the same purpose. Some of them wore the Khilafat dress and went round Bengal villages collecting funds for the Khilafat cause and created considerable stir among the rural Muslims. They collected money from Islamic funds such as zakat, usur, etc. and with the same object they sold Khilafat bonds as Muslim unity bonds and Islamic unity bonds in Calcutta and in different provincial towns of Bengal like Bolpur, Krishnagar etc. The bond resembled the paper money of the time and was known as a Khilafat Committee Note.⁴¹



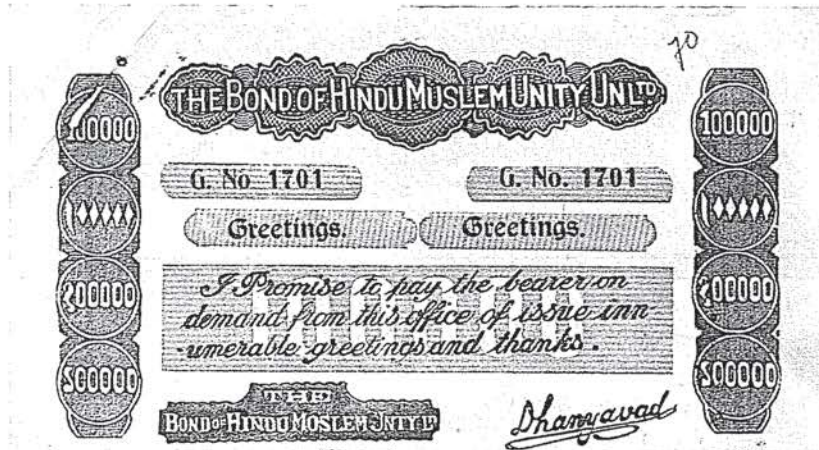
Picture 1

Seal (with Number) of the Bengal Khilafat Committee

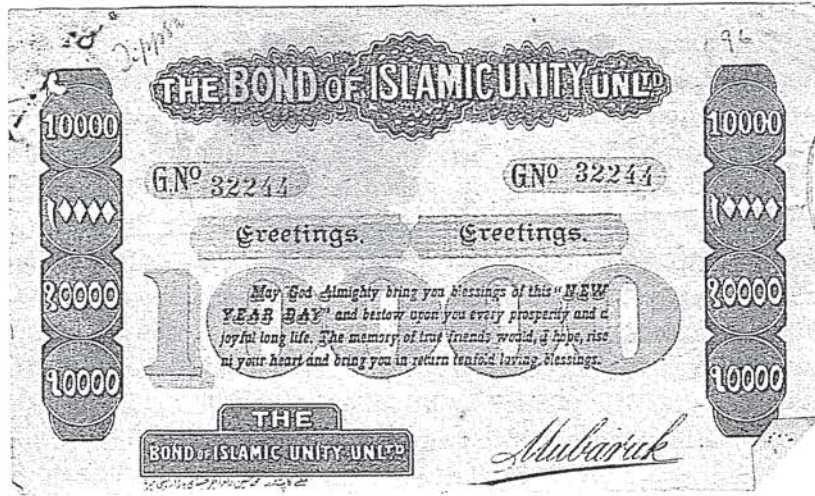
⁴¹ S.B. confidential Report File No 382/1920.



Picture 2
The Reverse Side of the Rupee



Picture 3
The Bond of Hindu Muslim Unity



Picture 4
Khilafat Bond for Islamic Unity



Picture 5
The Bond of Islamic Unity

Ismail Hossain Siraji moved a resolution to send thousands of mujahedins to Ankara from India to fight on the Turkish side.⁴² A Women's Association was formed to raise funds from the women for Khilafat activities in Bengal. The wife of Khodja Allauddin, private secretary of the Nawab of Dacca, became secretary of the Women's Association. On 29 April 1922, the women of the Ahsan Manzil held a meeting at which it was decided that they should all contribute some rice by the 'Musthi Bhiksha' (handfuls of rice for beggars) system. They sold it at five seers per rupee and the money was sent to the secretary of the Khilafat Committee. It was resolved that they would communicate this decision to the women of the villages through the local Khilafat Committee.⁴³ The deposition of the Sultan and the deprivation of the Khalifa of his temporal power by the Turkish National Assembly in Ankara caused much discussion amongst the Muslims of Bengal.⁴⁴ The clash came in March 1924 when the Republican administration decided to abolish the Caliphate.

The people of Bengal, along with the rest of South Asia, were deeply influenced by the ideas and achievements of Ghazi Mustafa Kemal. He was seen as one of those rare charismatic political leaders whose unparalleled struggle and exploits and historical and moral influence have transcended the boundaries of his own country and become an international phenomenon. The victory of the Turkish army against the Greek army in at the battle of Sakarya in 1921 was a moral victory for the Muslim world, which

⁴² I.B confidential, File No: SB/1276/1922, Letter of Siraji.

⁴³ IB confidential weekly district report, No: 141/1922, 6 May Dacca.

⁴⁴ The moderates were inclined to believe that the Turkish Parliament in Ankara was responsible for the decision. They had erred in not asking the opinion of other Muslims before taking such an extreme decision. They also believed that the Bolsheviks had influenced the Turkish government. The extremists were somewhat divided in their opinions. Some refused to accept the news, which had come out through British news agencies. Others argued that what Kemal Pasha had done was quite right from the religious point of view. They also believed that Kemal Pasha would not do anything to alienate himself and his government from the sympathy of the Muslim World. See: I.B. police report, File No 362/22.

began to realise that the Oriental nations could stand their ground in a duel with Europe. Beyond the borders of his homeland Kemal Pasha was revered as one of the first successful anti-imperialist leaders of the Third World, as a statesman who deeply believed in and contributed to world peace and one of the outstanding pioneers in the liberation movement of the 20th century.

The new trend among the Bengali Muslims during this period was to read with avid interest essays and poems with an anti-British flavour, expressing sorrow over the loss of power by Muslims at different periods of history at the hands of the imperialist Western powers. It was in this psychologically and emotionally receptive state of mind and feelings that the Muslims of Bengal became aware of the nationalist movement in Turkey and its leader Mustafa Kemal. The Bengali Muslim literary figures expressed their discontent through their writings and the people at large warmly received them. In Bengal, poems, verses and newspaper articles were important media through which mass enthusiasm was aroused in favour of political and other issues.

The deep and penetrating influence of Mustafa Kemal's revolutionary ideas and concept of nationalism had bequeathed a permanent legacy giving a new direction in the field of Bengali literature and ushering in a new era. He was regarded as a legendary hero to whom glowing tributes were paid in prose and verse. Mustafa Kemal's activities had a profound impact on the thought processes of the Muslim leaders. Among others, the great Bengali Muslim leader Abul Kasem Fazlul Haqq took an effective part in the Indian Khilafat Movement (1918-1920) and was a great admirer of Turkey and its leader Mustafa Kemal. Other prominent Bengali Muslim intellectuals who popularised the cause of Turkey and the achievements of Mustafa Kemal in Bengal was Maulana Akram Khan, a distinguished theologian and an outstanding journalist. Mustafa Kemal's resounding victory over the Greek army inspired no less a person than the revolutionary Bengali Muslim poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, to produce famous political poems like the 'Rana Bheri' (trumper call to battle) and the more

popular 'Kamal Pasha',⁴⁵ published in September and October 1921 respectively. Kazi Nazrul Islam was positively influenced by Mustafa Kemal and his ideas during the early years of his literary career.⁴⁶ The soldier-poet Nazrul discovered in "Commander Kemal" his cherished Hero whom he later immortalised in his poem 'Vidrohi' (an eternal rebel) "a symbol of an uncompromising fighter who would not lay down his sword until he had attained final victory". He wondered why the reforms in Turkey could not be replicated in India and Bengal.

Writers of poetry and prose were joined by historians, journalists and political leaders in playing a major role in propagating the achievements of Mustafa Kemal among the Muslims of Bengal. As a pioneer of anti-colonialism and nationalism Mustafa Kemal became an "iconic hero" to the people of the subcontinent. This made a powerful emotional appeal to the Muslims of Bengal and helped to infuse a new spirit of hope in the community. The popularity of Mustafa Kemal in Bengal can be easily understood from the fact that the news of the sad passing away of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (10 November 1938) was published in all contemporary newspapers and journals and the death was universally mourned by the enlightened, educated and masses alike. The popular daily newspaper Azad came out with banner headlines on 11 November 1938 saying, "The world's greatest statesman and the maker of modern Turkey, Ghazi Kemal Ataturk has passed away". In its issue on 19 Nov. 1938 the paper published detailed accounts of the "Kemal Day" observed on 18 November in Calcutta and in different regions of the Bengal province. The Day

⁴⁵ The poet wrote "*Kamal tune kamal kiya bhai.*" The meaning of the line is that Kamal is a symbol of success or perfection. After the poem, 'kamal' became an idiom in the Bengali language.

⁴⁶ Kazi Nazrul Islam referred to the spirit of Kemal Pasha and wrote in Dhumketu (comet): "Kemal, being a Muslim, realized that neither the Khilafat nor the country could be saved just by wearing beards, eating beef or performing Raza, Namaz... Religious hypocrisy cannot save Islam." Dhumketu, editorial - 'KAMAL' Aswin 30, 1329 (Bengali year)

of Mourning was observed by holding condolence meetings and offering funeral prayers in the mosques. Popular newspapers and journals like the Dhaka Prakash, Mashik Muhhamadi, Saugat, and others published editorials, numerous articles, essays and poems through which the Bengali Muslims and the Non-Muslims paid their homage to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

The great Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, was a devout supporter of the Turks. During the Balkan Wars the poet wrote, "The choice of the Turks" in *Comred*, edited by Muhammad Ali.⁴⁷ The poet was deeply grieved by the death of Ataturk and he paid the highest tribute to the departed at the condolence meeting he organized at his own university. The poet remarks that "Turkey was once called the 'sick man of Europe' until Mustafa Kemal came and set before us an example of a new Asia where a living present recalls the glories of the past...To his own people he was a great deliverer; to us he should remain a great example."⁴⁸

Conclusion

Among the landmarks of the long and arduous struggle of the Indian Muslims for freedom, the rise of the Khilafat movement (1918-1924) stands out as one of the most significant political events. It was designed ostensibly to save the Ottoman Empire from dismemberment following the First World War, while at the same time it was a conscious attempt to promote Muslim political interests in India. The movement was powerfully anti-colonial and the leaders used religion as a means, as did numerous Hindu extremists in the history of the Indian Nationalist movement. The struggles for Khilafat and for India's independence and inter-communal solidarity were inseparable. Pan-Islamism was merged with Indian nationalism to obtain freedom for India. The

⁴⁷ Ibrahim Khan, *op. cit.*, p.396.

⁴⁸ The Daily Star, vol. 5, No 169, November 2004.

leadership of the movement came from a cross-section of Indian society and included in its ranks both the western-educated and the alumni of the traditional madrasas. The participants belonged to all strata of the Muslim community. In addition, M.K. Gandhi and his Indian National Congress provided useful sustenance by bringing in the Hindus to join forces. The networks of the movement were local mosques and madrasas, while the vernacular press and the branches of various Anjumans came in quite useful. The Movement fired the imagination of the young and old, men and women, and compelled even the ulama to come out of their 'hujras' and the wealthy from their portals to join the masses. It was the first countrywide agitation of the Indian Muslims with a central organization to guide its course. It transformed the psyche of the people, trained them in political agitation and taught them how to press for their demands. During this period, this spontaneous organization was more popular and powerful than the All India Muslim League which was back in operation. Never since the War of Independence of 1857 had the Muslims of India been roused so much and called upon to make so many sacrifices.