

Role of Memon Community during the Caliphate Movement

Dr. Ismail Moosa

Chairman, Political Science Department
Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology
Abdul Haque Campus, Karachi.
Email: dr.im62@hotmail.com
Contact: +92-321-8986088

Abstract

The Caliphate Movement had great impact on the politics and history of India. After world war-one, Germany faced defeat and the world suffered a painful and suffocated situation. The Indian Muslim also had to face a lot of problems as affiliation with Turkish Caliphate of Ottomans. The reason behind that affiliation was in the fact that the Ottoman caliph was curator of the Holy Ka'aba and other holy places of Muslims world. Now it became a question for the Muslim about the treatment of Turkey, as well as sacred places of Muslims, because Turkey was an ally of Germany in the world war one. Hence, it had to bear the same fate. In these miserable conditions, the Muslims of India started a Movement for the restoration of Caliphate. That's why, this Movement had given the name of Caliphate/Khilafat Movement, in which every community shared its resources; specifically Memon community of Karachi and Sukkur were among them. This article is an endeavor to underscore the specific role of Memon community in the Khilafat Movement.

Introduction

The Muslims of South Asia, under the leadership of the Ali Brothers, Maulana Muhammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali launched the historic Khilafat Movement after the First World War to protect the Ottoman Empire from dismemberment. On the eve of launching this movement they were looking out for allies.¹ At that time Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi became hopeless and sick of getting justice from the British bureaucrats and was led by Ali Brothers unconsciously towards non-cooperation with the British Government itself.² Therefore, he linked the issue of Swaraj with the Khilafat issue to associate the Hindus with the Movement. The Khilafat movement was the first country-wide popular movement, which gave new dimensions to the political struggle of Indian Muslims.³ In fact, the Khilafat Movement gave new dimensions to the freedom struggle of Muslims in India.⁴ It trained the Muslims in political action and agitation. For the first time a definite plan of action was drawn up and executed. It also brought the extremists and the moderates on one platform and created harmony in their taughts.⁵ The British Government knew how sensitive Muslims feeling was on the question of the preservation and safety of the areas known as the Holy Lands of Islam and the monuments and shrines which were sacred in the eyes of the Muslims. Soon after its declaration of war against Turkey the British Government made the announcement to the effect that it was forced to take this step and that the war had been declared against the Turkish Government and not the Khilafa-tul-Muslimin. A definite promise was given with regard to the Holy Places of Islam that their sanctity would be respected and no harm would be done to them. On the whole the Muslims relied on these promises and thought that the results of the War would not be harmful to their interests.⁶

As far as the role of Memon Community during the Caliphate Movement is concerned, it was since a part of Indian Muslims and its elders had taken the Movement to its zenith. In this regard, Seth Ahmed Chuttani, Seth Ahmed Haji Siddique Khatri and Seth Yaqoob Hassan Memon played prominent role.⁷

Likewise Memon of Bombay, Kathiawar, Gujarat and the Memon of Karachi and Sukkar stood high. They offered a great helping hand on the fiscal side as well. They felt honored when they used to say that they had Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon and Seth Haji Abdul Sattar with them to strive for the Movement.⁸

Dr Munnawar Hassan Kamal had described that;

*The Caliphate Movement founded in Delhi likewise Sindh Caliphate Movement started in Sindh by the Muslims of Sindh Mr. Haji Abdullah Haroon was their leader. On 16th April 1919, a strike was called in all over India, and therefore a complete strike was observed in Sindh as well. All Hindu and Muslims took part side by side; even they drank water in each other's glass and that was a rare example of brotherhood among two different religions.*⁹

Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon (1872-1942) played the most prominent role in Sindh Caliphate Movement. He was famous for his social welfare activities in Karachi. The Memon of Sindh who migrated India where they settled in Kutch, due to which they were called "*Kutchi Memon*". The ancestors of Haji Abdullah Haroon again migrated to Sindh and made Karachi their abode.¹⁰ He joined Sindh Caliphate Movement in 1918, and remained its unopposed president till the year 1923. He worked hard in all over India for the success of this Movement. Other leaders of Caliphate Movement include: Moulana Muhammad Ali Johar and his brother Moulana Shoukat Ali along with other members reached Karachi; they stayed at the house of Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon, who motivated the masses to take part in the Movement.¹¹ In fact, he made the Movement as a real people's Movement. He supported all the decisions made by the leadership of the Movement. A conference on Caliphate Movement was held in 1920 in Hyderabad, Sindh, and chaired by Moulana Ghulam M. Malkani.

At that time, a newspaper was an essential requirement for the Sindhi Muslims to support the Movement. Fortunately, it was decided in the conference to publish a newspaper with the name of "*AL WAHEED*" which was actually derived from the name of Caliphate of Turkey, i.e. Sultan Waheed-ud-Din. The scarcity of funds was the major problem for the newspaper. On that occasion, Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon stepped forward for his generous financial support and soon become a very popular leader of this Movement.¹²

Muhammad Usman Damohi writes in his books; "*Karachi in the mirror of History*".

*He had published a newspaper "Al Waheed", Karachi in April 1920, in the name of Caliph of Turkey "Waheed uddin"; very soon this news paper became a guide line and safe guard of this Caliphate Movement and soon brought this Movement at the peak of success at Sindh level. Muslims of Sindh considered the reporting of those newspapers a sacred one to which they believe very much. This trust of common Muslims of Sindh took the Movement and newspapers at very high level even they usually thought other news papers as bogus propaganda.*¹³

The British rulers had tried to close that newspaper; due to that effort they published a newspaper named "*SACHAI*". All expenses of that newspaper were borne by the government officers. The policy of "*SACHAI*" was to appreciate all government policies and conclude it as savior of Sindhi people.

This government paper was issued on every district level and was delivered free of charge. However, the government issued a decree through a Qadiyani clerk Molvi Faiz-ul-Karim, in which the reason was given for the Caliphate of sharifs of Makkah but all these efforts were failed, due to the charismatic personality of Haji Abdullah Haroon. Daily "*AL WAHEED*" was published continually and promoted day by day. Hindus and Muslims got benefited from the newspaper at same level. The newspaper raised the sentiments of the people of India and particularly the Muslims got guidelines from the newspaper "*AL WAHEED*".¹⁴

For the solution of financial problems of Caliphate Movement, the Muslims aristocrat under the leadership of Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon helped generously. The other people of Memon community also came forwarded specially Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon paid a good amount as donation. They opened a *Bait-ul-Mall* and collected Rs. 905,174/= of which Rs. 52,369/= were spent on prisoners and those who migrated. The remaining amount donated to central Caliphate committee. A plenty of amount Rs. 40,000 was given to Moulana Shoukat Ali when he visited Karachi. The purpose of that amount was to cope up the expenditures of Caliphate Movement; consequently Caliphate Movement became strengthen and revitalized.¹⁵ Sir Abdullah Haroon had organized Caliphate Movement under his leadership. The Muslims of Sindh were ready to obey all orders of the leaders of Caliphate Movement.

In this regard, Dr. Munnawar Hassan Kamal writes;

*“Caliphate Movement was a single Movement which had branches in all over Sindh. It called protests and public meetings, and the attendance of the people of Sindh reflected the interest and organization. They had exemplary strike calls and conferences. Hijrat Movement, Civil disobedience, Freedom Movement and other Movement were launched under the organization of Caliphate Movement. This was a rare example of Hindu Muslims unity that when all the Muslim leaders were in jails Mahatma Gandhi was leading the Movement. In 1921, the Movement had converted in rebel. After 1857, it was the first time the Indian government felt danger that the days of their rule in India is perhaps numbered. It was undoubtedly a great success of Caliphate Movement.”*¹⁶

Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon had the credit that, since he was a very important leader of Caliphate Movement, his home became head quarter of the Movement. Whenever the Ali Brothers visited Karachi they used to stay there. The relatives and mother of Ali Brothers “*Bi Amma*” also stayed in that house. Besides, it was also a centre of all the activities of Freedom Movement. Following the Movement, the Haroon family left silk dress and use to wear *khaddar*. When Ali brothers were facing a case in the court of Karachi, their mother stayed there in house of Haji Abdullah Haroon. The family of Haji Abdullah Haroon looked after the relatives of Ali brothers. At the time, when Ali Brothers were imprisoned in Karachi for two years, every one declared them as Karachi prisoners.

The wife of Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon had also taken part in Caliphate Movement beside “*Bi Amma*”. Begum Nusrat Haroon got that spirit from her husband Sir Haji Abdullah Haroon. She organized a welfare project for women in Karachi with the intention to educate the women of Sindh.¹⁷

Caliphate Movement and Memon Community of Sukkur

The district of Sukkur had many great personalities and Seth Abdul Sattar (1894-1988) was among them. He belonged to the Memon community of Sukkur; his forefathers belonged to Bhej of state Kutch. He played a very active role in Caliphate Movement. He started his political career from this Movement and was very close to Moulana Shoukat Ali. In 1934, he was elected as the president of Caliphate Movement. He worked hard for the Movement in Sukkur and surrounding areas.¹⁸

Sukkur district had an important place in Caliphate Movement. The people of Sukkur have a very soft corner for the Movement. They were very sentimental about its success. The central leaders of the Movement also visited Sukkur for several times. Others attended public meetings organized by Seth Haji Abdul Sattar who born all the expenses of those meetings. Due to his great efforts, the Movement got success with popularity. Three days Caliphate conference was held in Larkana on February 07 to 09, 1920. A call for donation was given and the first bag of Rs. 500 was presented by Seth Haji Abdul Sattar. The participants of that conference also visited Sukkur. The elders of Memon community welcomed them warmly.

Regarding this warm reception Dr. Munawar Hassan Kamal describes;

*Although that reception was not announced previously, a large number of people were gathered at Sukkur railway station and they were very excited to see the glimpse of their leaders who could not step down from the train. Then, volunteers gave them way to come out Moulana Abdul Bare Faraangi Mahal, Moulana Abdul Kalam Azad and Moulana Shoukat Ali were there with public. They were throughout to the city. The leaders were mounted on a decorated tonga. A public meeting was held in the evening and 7,000 to 8,000 public was there to listen the speeches of leaders there was not such a large public gathering held in Sukkur before. The speeches delivered by central leaders had given a new phase of life to the Movement.*¹⁹

Moulana Shoukat Ali said that today he have seen a new spirit in the people of Sindh. They are now awakened and presented an example for others.²⁰

Seth Abdul Sattar Adam had worked for the Caliphate Movement not only in the Sukkur but in the surrounding of it as well. His struggle has brought good results in the form of awakened common people. He remained secretary general of the Caliphate Movement of Sukkur till his death. He had a passion for the Caliphate Movement. He organized different conferences and public gatherings which were attended by central leaders.

On the recognition of his welfare services, the municipal committee of Sukkur has named a road to Mr. Seth Abdul Sattar Adam. He worked selflessly for the betterment of the society.²¹

C o n c l u s i o n

I. H. Qureshi appraises the Khalafat Movement thus, "Though the Khilafat Movement achieved no ostensible success, yet it was of considerable value as an instrument of creating public consciousness in the Muslim masses. It provided a broad-based leadership and taught the techniques of organizing a mass movement to the Muslims. These proved great assets in the struggle for Pakistan."²² Furthermore, the failure of Khilafat Movement and inception of its various offshoots had shattered all hopes for the Hindu-Muslim unity.²³ A tragic offshoot of the Khilafat was the Hijrat Movement. When a land is not safe for Islam, a Muslim has two options - Jihad or Hijrat. This was proposed by Jamiyat al Ulama-i-Hind, a fatwa signed by 925 eminent Muslims. According to one version, the idea of Hijrat was originated by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.²⁴ "Hindu-Muslim unity over the Khilafat Movement was never based on firm foundation. To the Muslims it was a religious movement without any thought of Indian freedom, whereas for Gandhiji it was a weapon for his own ends."²⁵ Viewed in historical perspective, khilafat Movement was a failure as far as attainment of immediate objectives was concerned. But taking as an important link in the chain of freedom movement, it had played important role towards the struggle for an independent Muslim State.²⁶

After the two years imprisonment of Ali brother, the Caliphate Movement was slowed down due to the following three reasons:

- a) Due to incident of *chora chori* Gandhi ended Civil Disobedience Movement.
- b) After withdrawal of Caliph of Turkey, the all sacrifices which were given by Muslims of India were gone in vein. The Indian people sacrificed the property, money and their precious lives but they were neglected at once.
- c) After the end of Ottoman Caliphate by Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, the Muslims of India became disheartened.

On March 19, 1924, a meeting of Caliphate committee was held in which the leaders expressed their deep sorrow on the abolition of the Caliphate. Mr. K.K Aziz writes:

*Muslims of India had got the lesson of unity from that Movement which is great step for the success. It had developed a feeling of identity.*²⁷

Mr. Aziz-ur-Rehman Jamai had written in his book, ‘the analysis of one and half century sacrifices of Muslims’:

*“There were 200,000 Muslims arrested in the Caliphate Movement. They spent Rs. 50 million and faced loss of 200 million.”*²⁸

Abdul Sattar Parekh wrote in the reference of services of Memon community:

*During Caliphate Movement some notable Memon like Mr. Muhammad Umer Subhni and the two brothers, Ahmed and Muhammad, sons of Haji Jan Muhammad Chotani, sent huge donations to Ali brothers for Movement and one of the chhotani’s donated his huge banglow which still know as Caliphate house in a central district of Bombay. Further, uneducated women particularly in Karachi and Bombay had donated money. These meetings were addressed by the legendary “Bi Amma”, the mother of Ali Brothers.*²⁹

The full participation of the Memon community in the Caliphate Movement proves that Memon community had affiliation with the sacred places of Muslims. They donated million of rupees and filled up a new spirit in the Movement.

Yousuf Muhammadi had written in the Memon Bulletin:

*Whenever we discuss Caliphate Movement, the name of Memon is an essential symbol of participation in the Movement. All the Memon community of Bombay, Kathiawar, Gujarat and Sindh, they took part in the Movement passionately. Memon volunteers collected Rs. 5 million in fund from their community to help people of Turkey. The Memon women of Karachi, Sukkur and Bombay donated their clothes, cash and jewelry to prove their participation.*³⁰

This community was basically a business community. They donated and supported the Caliphate Movement with a great zeal and passion so that the Caliphate Movement may not face any financial problems.

References

1. Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, London: Wishart & Co., 1935, p.55.
2. Swami Shardhanand, *Inside Congress*, Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1946, p.114.
3. Jamiluddin Ahmad, *Middle Phase of Muslim Political Movement*, Publishers United Ltd, Lahore, p.21.
4. Muhammad Munawwar, *Dimensions of Pakistan Movement*, Rawalpindi: Pap-Board Printers (Pvt.) Ltd., p.128.
5. K.K Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan*, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1998, p.113.
6. Molana Abul Kalam Azad, *Masla-i-Khilafat*, Lahore: Maktabah-i-Jamal, 2006, p.291.
7. Gul Mangar Wali, *Asas Sourath-o-Sindh*, Uru Tr. Asmat Ali Patel, Karachi: Pak Sourath Dar-ul-Adab, 1978., p.197.
8. Ibid., p.187.
9. Munawwar Hussain Kamal (Dr.) *Tehrik-i-Khilafat Aur Jadojehed-i-Azadi* (Urdu), Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2007., p.75.
10. *The Daily Muslim*, Islamabad: November 24, 1988., p.5.
11. *Monthly Memon Alam* (Urdu), Karachi: April-1996., p.6.
12. *The Daily Jang, Matbooa Ali Nawaz Wafai*, Karachi: June 24, 1987., p.8.

13. M. Usman Damohi, *Karachi Tarikh Ke Aaine Main* (Urdu), Karachi: Indus Publications, (N.D). p.370.
14. Haider Sindhi, *Sindhi Sahafat ki Kahani* (Urdu), Karachi: 1979., p.22.
15. M. Usman Damohi, op. cit., p.369.
16. Munawwar Hussain Kamal (Dr.) op. cit., p.86.
17. M. Usman Damohi, op. cit., p.370.
18. *Monthly Memon Alam* (Urdu), Karachi: March-2000., p.37.
19. Munawwar Hussain Kamal (Dr.) op. cit., p.83.
20. Ibid., p.84.
21. H.B Khan, *Barre Saghir Pak-o-Hind Ki Siyasat Main Ulema Ka Kirdar* (Urdu), Islamabad: NIHCR, 1985., p.182.
22. I.H Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Karachi: University of Karachi, 1979, p.41.
23. Mahmud Hussain, *A History of Freedom Movement*, Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1961, p.205.
24. Ibid., p.209.
25. S.K. Majumdar, *Jinnah and Gandhi*, Lahore: Peoples Publishing House, 1976, p.6.
26. K.K Aziz, op. cit., p.113.
27. Ibid., p.115.
28. Abdur Rehman Jamai, *Mussalmano Ke Derh So Sala Qurbanio Ka Jaeza* (Urdu), Karachi: 1986., p.167.
29. Abdul Sattar Parekh, *Enterprising Philanthropists*, Karachi: Ahmed Abdullah Foundation, (N.D.), p.26.
30. *Monthly Mamon Paltan*, Yousuf Muhammadi, Karachi: June-July 2003., p.63.