

## Indian Muslims, Ottoman Empire and Caliphate during Colonial Period

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### Abstract

*Indian Muslim is a term applied for Muslims living in the Indian Subcontinent comprised of the modern day states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. India witnessed the first Muslim raids during the era of the Rashidun, and permanent dominance of Islam began in the Umayyad period upon the conquest of Sindh. Nevertheless, it was Turkish Muslim states, from Ghaznavids to Mughals, which ensured the spreading of Islam in other regions. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese were the first to arrive on Indian coasts, before they were subject to raids by Western colonialist states such as Holland, England and France. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, India entirely fell under the British rule. In those days, under guidance of their scholars and leading personalities, Indian Muslims looked for ways to get rid of the British rule. Besides, they provided both moral and material support so that the Ottoman Empire, as the only independent state within Islamic world, and the Caliphate [Khilafat] survive without surrendering to the British or other colonial dominance. The objective of this study is to analyze how Muslims in the Indian Subcontinent who were totally deprived of independence as a British colony, paid close attention to the Ottomans and the Caliphate.*

**Keywords:** Islamic World, Indian Muslims, Ottoman Empire, Caliphate, English Colonialism

### Introduction

Indian Subcontinent, also known as South Asia, includes modern states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. The first ever contact between the region and Islam occurred in the days of the Rashidun; nonetheless, the steps for a permanent dominance in the region were taken by means of conquests in Sindh region during Umayyad era in early 8<sup>th</sup> century. The Ghaznavid initiated a new wave of conquests towards Indian inland in late 10<sup>th</sup> century; this move was maintained by the Ghurid in 10<sup>th</sup> century and later by Delhi Sultanate. During the time of Delhi Sultanate, South India became a part of Islamic world; moreover, many local small states were annihilated and a central government was established for the first time ever in the country.<sup>1</sup> Mughals were the last to found a major Muslim state in India in early 16<sup>th</sup> century. One of prominent features of the period is emerging influence of Age of Discovery on Indian coasts. In this context, the Portuguese were the first Western colonists to arrive in India. British, Dutch and French settlers followed them as of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Towards the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British established dominance on the south, and achieved domination on the north in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Upon the downfall of Mughal Empire in 1858, entire Indian Subcontinent went fell under British rule. Thus, Muslims lost their long-lasting political supremacy over Hindus, receding suddenly and becoming ruled.<sup>2</sup>

Complete colonization of Indian Subcontinent paved way for notable changes such as rapid formation of Indian nationalism, Hindu-Muslim conflict and gradual impoverishment of Muslims. The new order pushed Muslims to found an organization separate from Hindus; accordingly Indian Muslim League was established in 1906.

<sup>1</sup> In parallel with the dominance of Islam, Muslim population in India increased; both locals and Muslim immigrants played their part in the process. See Kiran, Naumana, "Class-Structure and Social Stratification in Early Muslim India (1206-1526 A.D.)", J.R.S.P., 45/1 (2008), 1-16.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, T. W. – Mujeeb, M., "Hindustan", İA, Istanbul 1987, V/1, 521, 522; Özcan, Azmi, "Hindustan: III. Tarih", DİA, 18, 78.

The organization sought solution to problems of Muslims, especially for two relevant issues: One of them was various oppressions and restrictions by the British against Muslims, while the other was the goings-on in Muslim world, especially the situation of Ottoman Empire, which incorporated caliphate, in Tripoli, Balkan Wars and World War I, as well as the role of Turkish War of Independence in foundation of Turkey and the future of caliphate.<sup>3</sup>

Objective of hereby study is to analyze, especially during British colonial period, relations between Muslims in Indian Subcontinent and Ottomans, and actions by Indians to support caliphate.

## I. Indian Muslims and Ottoman Empire

Relations between Indian Muslims and Ottoman Empire date back to 15<sup>th</sup> century. Sultan Muhammad Shah III (1463-1482) from Bahmani dynasty was the first ruler to make a stride in this respect. Probably upon the growing reputation of Mehmed the Conqueror (1444-1446, 1451-1481) in entire Muslim world following the conquest of Istanbul, Muhammad Shah III congratulated him with a letter, indicating his intention for establishing good relations with Ottoman Empire. In the upcoming years, relation grew even stronger as Ottoman Empire seized the title of caliph. Muslim states in India were in constant search for support against Western colonialist powers such as Portuguese, French and British, also against the Safavid and subsequent states. As a result, friendly relations between Ottomans and Indian Muslims remained intact. Nevertheless, upon breakup of Mughal Dynasty (1858) following the death of Tipu Sultan (1799), there were no more political authorities in India to resist British rule or to establish diplomatic relation with Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup>

As of early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British were actually in control of India; the new state of affairs had a deep impact especially on Muslims, and led Indian Muslims, including the Shiites<sup>5</sup>, to look for a reliable center, and consequently, to get even closer with Ottoman Empire, the strongest Muslim state of the time still not colonized. This fact became more apparent as Ottomans opened consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Probably, as a corollary of inauguration of new consulates, khutbahs [sermons] were called in India on behalf of Ottoman caliph as of 1862. Since Ottoman Empire had the title of caliph, affinity between Indian Muslims and Ottomans gradually increased and reached at its peak as of the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The intimacy with Turkey explicitly remained intact in the person of Mustafa Kemal Pasha due to Islamist policies throughout National Struggle.<sup>6</sup>

## II. From Affinity to Aid: How Indian Muslims Helped Ottomans

In the second of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the affinity of Indian Muslims with Ottoman Empire transformed into an aid campaign. Initial steps were taken during Crimean War in 1853; in this respect, charity collection activities took place in some Indian cities for Ottoman Army. Upon Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878, relation between South Asian Muslims and Ottoman Empire acquired a new dimension. Indeed, these Muslims considered possible collapse of Ottoman Empire as a serious threat against the future of Islam. Actually, Indian Muslims did not have political power to generate any policy; moreover, they were citizens of another country.

<sup>3</sup> el-Faki, Isamuddin Abdurreuf, *Biladu'l-Hind fi'l-Asri'l-İslami*, Cairo 2011, 13-270; Keay, John, *India: A History*, London 2000, 180-484; Jackson, Peter, *The Delhi Sultanate A Political and Military History*, Cambridge 2003, 123-147; Afzal, Nasreen, "Khilafat Movement and The Province Of Sindh", *JHSS*, I/1, January to June (2010), 51-72; Rauf, Abdul, "Pan-Islamism and The North West Frontier Province Of British India (1897-1918)", *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, Winter (2007), 21-42.

<sup>4</sup> Uzunçarşılı, İsmail Hakkı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* 18. Yüzyıl, Ankara 1988, IV/2, 150-164; Asrar, N. Ahmet, *Kanuni Devrinde Osmanlıların Dinî Siyasetine İslam Âlemi*, Büyük Kitaplık Yayınları, İstanbul 1972, 296-338; Mughul, Muhammed Yakub, *Kanuni Devri Osmanlıların Hint Okyanusu Politikası ve Osmanlı-Hint Münasebetleri* 1517-1538, Fetih Yayınları, İstanbul 1974, 122-172; Eraslan, Cezmi, II. Abdülhamid ve İslam Birliği, *Ötüken Neşriyat*, İstanbul, 1995, 113-117, 314-329; Özcan, "Hindistan: IV. Osmanlı Hindistan Münasebetleri", *İA*, 18, 81-84; Kidwai, Mushir Hosain, *Osmanlı'nın Son Dostları Hint Alt Kıtasında Türk İmajı*, editor: Ahmet Zeki İzgöer, Nehir Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Toynbee, Arnold, "Pan-İslâmizm'in Başarısızlığı", 19. *Asırda Batı'nın Gözüyle Siyaset ve İslâm and Pan İslâmizm*, editor: Mümtaz'er Türköne - Ümit Özdağ, Rehber Yayıncılık, Ankara 1993, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Ayyubi, N. Akmal, "Hindistan Türklerine Neler Borçludur?", tra. Nejat Kaymaz, *AÜDTCF Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, II/2-3, 1964 (1966), 278; Ahmed, Aziz, *Hindistan ve Pakistan'da Modernizm ve İslam*, tra. Ahmet Küskün, *Yöneliş Yayınları*, İstanbul 1990, 151-156; Eraslan, II. Abdülhamid ve İslam Birliği, 113-117, 314-329; Özcan, "Hindistan: IV. Osmanlı Hint Münasebetleri", *İA*, 18, 81-84; Hülagü, M. Metin, "Millî Mücadele Dönemi Türkiye - İslam Ülkeleri Münasebetleri", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, November 1999, 15, 901-938; Kidwai, *Osmanlı'nın Son Dostları*, 14.

Nonetheless, according to them, it was necessary to be loyal to Ottoman caliph in religious terms, and to provide Ottoman government, which was the hope of all Muslims under the rule of caliph, with all resources at hand. Indeed, as of the breakout of the war, Indian Muslims provided Ottoman Red Crescent Society with notable financial aid. Besides, they applied Queen Victoria asked their ruler Britain to offer actual help and to prevent the oppression against Balkan Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

Ottoman Empire responded to aid campaigns by Muslims in South Asia with letters of appreciation; consequently, Muslim hearts in two distant locations of the world began to beat together. As a matter of fact, Indian Muslims were delighted with clear defeat of Greeks by Ottomans in 1897, as they were actively involved in aid campaigns during the war. In many regions of India, Muslims established committees in order to congratulate Ottoman Empire and arranged meetings. Thus, they publicly declared to entire world the religious fellowship and togetherness with Ottomans. Tripolitanian War, which began upon onslaught by Italy to Libya in September 1911, was perceived in Muslim world as a decision by Western colonialists to deal last independent Muslim state a death blow. The situation had a deep influence on all Muslims, including the Indians; they construed European support for Italy as “total war by the Cross against the Crescent.” In this respect, as of invasion of Tripoli, not only Muslims in India, but also many institutions in London in direct contact with Indian Muslims, held meetings in favor of Ottomans and decided to boycott everything Italian. Balkan Wars broke out on 8 October 1912, before Ottoman Empire could shake off consequences of Tripolitanian War. Balkan Wars was as important in religious terms for Indian Muslims as for Balkan Christians. Hence, Indian Muslims started to work against the British; they established committees and associations, made speeches and organized aid campaigns. So much so that, moved by Muslim sensitivity, members of other religions in India, including idolaters, Hindus and Zoroastrians, participated in similar activities. Meanwhile, Indian Ulama [Islamic scholars] issued a fatwa, indicating that it was fard to support Ottomans, whom the Indians could give alms as well. Thus, support for Ottoman Empire gained a new dimension; and Indian Muslim elite did establish direct contact with Ottoman pashas in the process. Besides, Indian Red Crescent Society served in Balkan Wars, sent physicians, medications and other health equipment and materials to the front in favor of Ottoman soldiers and Balkan refugees.<sup>8</sup>

Assistance by Indian Muslims to Ottomans was not restricted with battles. Indians showed due awareness for realization of Hejaz Railway Project and organization of Ottoman Navy. As is known, the railway access to Hejaz, which was actualized in the era of Abdul Hamid II, was a project of strategic importance, since it would ensure both easier transport of hajjis to holy sites and prevention of colonialist occupations in Muslim geography under Ottoman rule. Hence, Muslims all around the world were excited by the project; and those living either as majority or minority in Egypt, Russia, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, South Africa, Iran, Singapore, Java, China, United States, Cyprus, Balkans, Great Britain, France and Germany donated for construction of Hejaz Railway; Indian Muslims were once again the leading group in the campaign.<sup>9</sup>

Upon the beginning of World War I, Ottoman Empire called all Muslims via *Jihad Statements* for total war against Western colonialists. However, in all countries under their rule, the occupying states somehow managed to puncture public interest and affinity with Ottomans. On the other hand, Indian Muslims remarkably defended Anatolian Muslims both before and after Treaty of Sevres.

<sup>7</sup> Eraslan, II. AbdülhamidveİslâmBirliđi, 113-117, 314-329; Özcan, Pan-İslamizmOsmanlıDevleti, HindistanMüslümanlarıveİngiltere (1877-1924), İSAM Yayınları, İstanbul 1997, 23, 85-115; Özcan, “Hindistan: III. Tarih”, İA, 18, 81-84; Kidwai, Osmanlının Son Dostları, 14, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmet, Feroz, “KemalistHareketveHindistan”, KemalizmveİslâmDünyası, editor: İskenderGököl – François Geogron, tra. CüneytAkalin, ArbaYayınları, İstanbul 1990, 146; Ahmed, HindistanvePakistan’daModernizmve İslam, 158-162; Özcan, Pan-İslamizm, 148, 178-186, 193-199, 215; Ağanoglu, H. Yıldırım, Osmanlı’danCumhuriyet’eBalkanlarınMakûsTalihiGöç, Kum SaatiYayınları, İstanbul 2001, 220-221; İzgöer, Ahmet Zeki, “Osmanlı’nınYıkılışıÖncesinde Hind Hilâl-iAhmerYardımlarıve Dr. Ensari’ninFaaliyetleriyleİlgiliBazıNotlar”, Yeni Tıp TarihiAraştırmaları, VIII, (2002), 18-19; Ozaydın, Zuhâl, “The Indian Muslims Red Crescent Society's Aid to the Ottoman State During the Balkan War in 1912”, Journal of the International Society for the History of Islamic Medicine (JISHIM), 2 (2003), 12-18; Kidwai, Osmanlının Son Dostları, 16, 17, 18, 19, XX, XXI; Wasti, Syed Tanvir, “The Indian Red Crescent Mission to the Balkan Wars”, Middle Eastern Studies, 45/3, (May 2009), p. 397.

<sup>9</sup> Gülsoy, Ufuk, HicazDemiryolu, ErenYayıncılık, İstanbul 1994, 74-80, 86-89; Gülsoy, Ufuk – Ochsenwald, William, “HicazDemiryolu”, İstanbul 1998, 441-445; Özyüksel, Murat, HicazDemiryolu, TarihVakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2000, 90; Kidwai, Osmanlının Son Dostları, 16, 17; Çetin, Emrah “TürkBasınınaGöreHicazDemiryolu (1900-1918)”, History Studies Middle East Special Issue, (2010), 106.

In the wake of Armistice of Mudros, Ottomans were disarmed, Greeks were allowed to invade Izmir and Treaty of Sevres was put into effect; whereupon Indians from all social classes and branches, including non-Muslims, turned against the British and their allies. Consequently, at the Caliphate Conference on 24 November 1919 in Delhi, Hindu leader Gandhi, who presided the meeting, indicated that the cause of Muslims was also the cause of Hindus. Despite all, almost two thirds of British Army, which left Ottoman forces in the lurch in Palestine, Syria and Iraq fronts during the Great War, was recruited from India; and Indian soldiers fought against Ottoman Empire under command of Christian officers and commanders.<sup>10</sup>

### III. Support by Indian Muslims after Defeat of Ottoman Empire

Ottoman Empire was a source of hope for Muslims all around the world, since it was the last independent Muslim state; besides, caliphate remained an inspiration for colonized Muslims in various regions of the globe. As a result, the defeat of Ottoman Empire in World War I did not lead to radical changes in how Muslims saw Ottomans and Caliphate. Indeed, Muslims kept showing close interest in the incidents in Anatolia, the heart of scattered Ottoman land. In this respect, Khilafat Movement by South Asian Muslims made a notable contribution for strengthening and spreading Turkish National Struggle. Indian Muslim notables such as Aga Khan, Syed Ameer Ali, Abdelbari, MushirHosainKidwai and Isfahani, and associations such as Khuddam al-Kaaba led the supporters of Turks. Ottoman-British Society in London also organized a meeting and enabled making of certain decisions so as to defeat rights of Turkey. Muhammad Ali, who participated in the meeting as a delegate of Indian committee, expressed his hope about a fair treatment by Allied Powers on Turkey, and asserted such an act would have good influence on both Indian Muslim public and Indian soldiers of Great Britain, insisting on return of Izmir to Ottoman Empire. Besides, Kidwai, delegate of Indian Muslims, was among the personalities whom the journal *L'information* asked for opinion during negotiations on status of Istanbul. Kidwai explicitly told his view against evacuation of Turks from Istanbul. On the other hand, Indian Muslims arranged several conferences and demonstrations in India in 1929; they sent delegations to United Kingdom for diplomatic activities. Finally, Khilafat Committee resolved at the meeting in Mumbai in September 1920 that Indian people do not collaborate with the British in any manner whatsoever. Indeed, demonstrations and meetings in other cities of India revealed an almost unarmed war started by Indian people against the British. At Caliphate Conference in Karachi on 8 July 1921, Muslims declared they were on the side of the war of independence by Mustafa Kemal and government of Grand National Assembly of Turkey, adding that Indian Muslims would proclaim independence of India in case United Kingdom explicitly or implicitly declared and started a war against Ankara government.<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion and Evaluation

<sup>10</sup> Bayur, Yusuf Hikmet, *HindistanTarihi*, III, TTK, Ankara 1950, 538-540; Ahmed, *HindistanvePakistan'daModernizmve İslam*, 164-165; Allana, G., *BirMilletinYaratıcısıCinnah*, tra. Ahmet EdipUysal, KültürBakanlığıYayınları, Ankara 1982, 134; Hülagü, *Pan-İslamist Faaliyetler*, BoğaziçiYayınları, İstanbul 1994, 21-57, 94; Özcan, *Pan-İslamizm*, 189-231, 235-249; Hülagü, "I. DünyaSavaşıSırasında Pan-İslamist Faaliyetler", Osmanlı, ed. GülerEren, Yeni Turkey Yayınları, Ankara 1999, II, 555-566; Kulke, Hermann - Rothermund, Dietmar, *HindistanTarihi*, tra. MüfitGünay, İmgeKitapevi, İstanbul 2001, 404; Belgelerle Mustafa Kemal Atatürk veTürk-Bulgarİlişkileri (1913-1938), Prime Ministry General Directorate of State Archives, Ankara 2002, 220; Rahman, M. Raisur, "The Mahatma and the Maulana: Understanding Minority Politics in British India", *Rivista di StudiSudasiatici*, II, (2007), 57-84; Kidwai, *Osmanlının Son Dostları*, X15, X12-X13, X16; Ahmad, Ishtiaq - Butt, Mahmud-ul-Hassan, "From Pan-Islamism to Muslim Nationalism: Khilafat Movement and the Struggle for Pakistan", *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, XX13/2 (2012), 1-22.

About how the British assess the relation between South Asia Muslims and Ottoman within Islamophobia, see Gottschalk, Peter – Greenberg, Gabriel, "Common Heritage, Uncommon Fear: Islamophobia in the United States and British India, 1687-1947", *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 1/1, (Fall 2012), 82-106.

<sup>11</sup> Bayur, *HindistanTarihi*, III, 540, 547; Müderrisoğlu, Alptekin, "KurtuluşSavaşının Mali Kaynakları", *AÜ TİTE Atatürk YoluDergisi*, 4/13 (1994), 51-52; Özcan, *Pan-İslamizm*, 235-249; Qureshi, M. Naeem, "HindistanHilâfetHareketi", *DİA*, 18, 109-111; Akyüz, Yahya, *TürkKurtuluşSavaşıveFransızKamuoyu (1919-1922)*, TTK, Ankara 1998, 144; Qureshi, "HindistanMüslümanlarıBirliği", *DİA*, 18, 111-112; Toynbee, Arnold J., *1920'lerde Türkiye - Hilafetinİlgası-*, tra. Hasan Aktaş, *YönelişYayınları*, İstanbul 2000, 49-92; Kidwai, *Osmanlının Son Dostları*, X17, X18; Anwar, Zahid, "Indian Freedom Fighters in Central Asia (1914-1939)", *J.R.S.P.*, 45/2 (2008), 147-158; Gültekin, Aysun, *MilliMücadeleDönemi'ndeHindistanMüslümanlarıile Ankara HükümetleriArasındakiMünasebetler (1918-1924)*, *YayımlanmamışYüksekLisansTezi*, Balıkesir Ü.SBE, 2009, 65-67; Duman, Selçuk, "Atatürk DönemiTürkiye-Hindistanİlişkileri", *Turkish Studies - International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 9/4 (Spring 2014), 392-393.

The complete subjection of India to colonial rule paved way for notable socio-cultural and socioeconomic changes such as rapid formation of Indian nationalism, Hindu-Muslim conflict and gradual impoverishment of Muslims.

This fact prompted Muslims to found All-India Muslim League where Islam community would be exclusively represented in order to protect the rights of Muslims. The most important agenda of the organization was various oppressions and restrictions imposed by the British on Muslims in India, as well as the future of Caliphate on the world, due to everlasting combats started and maintained by Western states at several fronts against Ottoman Empire, which retained the title of Caliphate.

There were two interrelated motives which reinforced the affection between Indian Muslims and Ottoman Empire. The first is the inauguration of Ottoman Consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, while the second is the beginning of khutbah on behalf of Ottoman Caliph in India. The affinity with Ottomans remained intact and evolved towards Turkey in the person of Mustafa Kemal Pasha due to Islamist policies throughout National Struggle.

Indian Muslims explicitly demonstrated their feelings about religious fellows in Ottoman land by means of aid campaigns and meetings, as well as conducting diplomatic relations. They used every means possible in order to keep Ottoman Empire alive in its struggle against the West. However, since collapse of Empire was inevitable, they helped as much as possible to Turkish War of Independence so as to look after caliphate.

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