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Turkey and Indian Urdu Press in the Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract:

The relationship between the Indian Urdu Press and the Turkish press and the Istanbul, London and Delhi connections have been very interesting when Khilafat questions were raised and were the major parts of debate in early 20th century. The paper examines the role of the Indian Urdu press in educating and influencing the minds of the Indians Muslims in relation to the Ottoman Empire and Imperial British Regime in early twentieth century and bring out the dilemma faced by the Indian Muslims during the period about their pro-Turkish sentiments and emotional learnings and political temporal divide created in their minds.

Keywords: Khilafat, Press, Turks, British Empire, Ottoman Empire

The interests of the Indian Urdu Press and the news of Turkish affairs began with the start of Urdu newspapers in India during the first half of the nineteenth century. The first Muslim ventures in modern Urdu journalism in India made in 1830s.¹ However, before 1870 there was hardly any Urdu newspaper of importance and until then the Urdu press had been very feeble and specialised in matters of religious characters. Furthermore, it had not yet developed as an instrument of public opinion and its total circulation was too little to be reckoned with.²

However, Indian Urdu Press soon became the most influential vehicle for the expression of pro-Ottoman feelings and sentiments due to the beginnings of ferment in the Muslim world. Hence, any news from Islamic countries especially from Turkey, found place in the newspapers. The public demand for day-to-day information concerning the Ottoman Empire during the Eastern Crisis paved the way for the start of the new newspapers, some of which were exclusive devoted to the coverage of Ottoman news for which the links were established with the Ottoman Press and news articles were reproduced in translation both from India and Turkey. In Turkey, this was especially encouraged by the Porte with a view to extending the image of Caliph Sultan.

The pro-Ottoman stand taken by the Indian Press and its sometimes open criticism of British Policy towards Ottoman Empire, soon became a matter of concern to the Indian

Government which ultimately led to the introduction of Vernacular Press Act of 1878, which in turn severely restricted the freedom of the press, excluding those newspapers published in English on a plea that, "the ignorant masses might be excited against the Government" by the hostile vernacular press. At about the same time, the tone of the Ottoman press was also found objectionable to British interests. The British Embassy in Istanbul especially pointed to the articles in the 'Vakil' and the 'Turkeman-e- Haqiqat' regarding Ittehad-e- Islam and the criticism of western policies towards Muslim countries. Hence, question of the press became a bone of contention between Britain and Turkey throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It started with the fear of the decline of Britain's prestige and influence in Turkey reflected in the Ottoman press after the Russo- Turkish War of 1877 thought to have an ill effect upon the Indian Muslims and the press too.

During the late nineteenth century, as the relations became increasingly cold, accusations and complaints over the tones of the newspapers continued between Britain and Turkey. While Britain accused the Ottoman Press of inciting the India Muslims against the British, the Sultan, on the other hand, complained that the British Press was trying to undermine his Caliphal influence, not in his own dominions, but also in the Muslim world at large.

Extracts from the Ottoman Press continued to be published by the Indian Urdu newspapers which no doubt exercised considerable influence among Muslims of India. The young Turks revolution was received enthusiastically among the Muslims in India. The proclamation of the constitutional government in Turkey in 1908 was warmly welcomed by the Muslim League and the All India Shia Conference.³ The Urdu Press in India regarded it as a sign of the awakening of the Orient, the spirit of democracy in Islam, and the second step of the revolution in 1909. The deposition of Abdullah amid cast doubt in the minds of the India Muslims on the sincerity and dedication of the Young Turks to Islam and the Caliphate. It immediately attracted attention in various quarters and became a sole topic of discussion almost everywhere. There was for a time an outburst of anti-Young Turks denunciation in the Muslim Press. Clearly, the balance of opinion in India was strongly in favour of Abdul Hamid and against the Young Turks. Strong opposition sprang up against any possibility of the of the Caliphate being stripped of its temporal functions. Furthermore, the Young Turks were threatened with a general boycott of Turkey and Muslims in India were advised through the Muslims to the ousting of Abdul Hamid, in a way, foretold what would be Indo- Muslim reaction to the abolishing of the institution of the Caliphate almost two decades later in 1924.⁴

The year 1911 marked a new phase in the development of the Pan- Islamic movement in the subcontinent and gave a new dimension to Indian Muslim solidarity with the rest of the Muslim world. The Turko- Italian war coupled with the annulment of the partition of Bengal and bombardment of Mashhad in Iran by Russia was in fact only a foretaste of the difficulties which were to follow. As would be expected, the Urdu press devoted its full attention to the war. It was almost impossible to find a single Urdu newspaper without heart rendering accounts of the Muslims sufferings in the war. The zamindar, the Watan, the Paisa Akhbar, the wakil and the Hablul-Metin published highly critical articles of the Europeans powers' attitude towards the Turks and Italy's action was depicted as the

fulfilment of a shameless expansionist design of a weak nation and an attack of Christians on Islam.⁵ Naturally, the demand for news was so high that in a week, the circulation of the newspapers increased considerably. Some papers were converted from weeklies into dailies. The increase and change of the 'Zamindar', for example, was beyond any recognition. Until 1910, it was simply an organ of the land holders. But then with the editorship of Zafar Ali Khan, it became a passionate mouthpiece of the Muslims' religio- political aspirations. Before 1911, its circulation was around 1200 copies. In 1911, it increased to around 4000 and during the war to 6000 daily. By 1914, it enjoyed the circulation of 15 to 20,000 which sometimes had to be published twice a day.⁶ Same was the case with the *Hablul-Metin* and the *Nama-e-Muqaddas*. Aga Moidul Islam was the editor of the '*Hablul-Metin*' and '*Nama-e-Muqaddas*' around this time. The Indian Muslim response to the Turko-Italian war, ranged from the boycott of the Italian goods to the call for commercial war. The *Zamindar* of 8th October 1911 wrote and invited Muslims to enter into commercial war against Italy and to burn the clothes made in Italy. This seemed to be apparently the only way, "so that the Indian Muslim's own territorial loyalty and extra- territorial patriotism should work in the same direction."⁷ However, the disappointment and disillusionment of the Indian Muslims with the British finally led to the crumbling of the long cherished idea that Britain was the protector of the interest of the Muslims in the world in general as well as those of her own subjects. For the first time, the British described the Pan- Islamism of The Young Turks a being offensive contrary to its defensive nature under Abdul Hamid.⁸

When the news of the combined attack of the Balkan states on Turkey reached India, emotions ran very high. But this time, the activities of the Indian Muslims were better channelled and were more organised. Virtually, the main activity of the Urdu newspapers published by the Muslims was to write or comment on the war news. They were vehement in their effective in their tone, effective in their style and active in organising public support in various forms. At the same time, some of the papers sent correspondence to Turkey to facilitate them extensive coverage of the war. '*Al- Helal*' and '*Zamindar*' of the period carried photographs of Turkish statesmen like Anwar Pasha, Talat Pasha, Niyazi Bay and Mahmood shauqat Pasha who had become the Indian Muslims' heroes and their photographs were to be found in many shops and houses. The '*Urdu-e- Mualla*' published a fatwa and said that the boycott of all European goods including British goods would be beneficial to help brethren in Turkey and injure the enemies of Islam. *Al-Helal* and *Zamindar* also published articles advocating the boycott campaign and demonstrated their earnestness in support of the Turks through subscriptions and opening up of relief funds. Not surprisingly, by May 1913, the Indian Muslims' donations amounted to well over 15 lakhs of rupees which amounted to more than half of the total that reached the Ottoman Red Crescent Society from all over the world.⁹

The two most outstanding endeavours made by the Indian Muslims were the Indian Red Crescent Mission to Turkey and the Anjuman-e- Khuddam-e- Kaaba . The idea of sending a medical mission to Turkey was first put forward by Shaukat Ali in 1912. The mission carried out a great service for the relief of the suffering Turks. Based on their impressions of Turkey, the members carried on rigorous pro- Turkish propaganda By a series of appealing

articles sent from Turkey which were published in their impressions of Turkey, which were published in the Indian Urdu press especially in the 'Zamindar' and 'Al- Helal'. There were some comparisons made between the British and the Indian Red Crescent Mission to Turkey criticising the British surgeons for their treatment of the Turkish patients. The Indian Urdu press, mainly the Zamindar also highlighted the proposal of the Mission to establish colonies for the refugee Turks and the wounded soldier's families and for this cause rupees 60,000 sent to Turkey by the Comrade and the Zamindar, and also the scheme of the sale of Turkish bonds issued by the Ottoman Treasury which however failed due to lack of public support and governmental apathy.

The Indian Muslims gave vent to their Pan-Islamic and anti-British feelings through another organisation 'Anjuman-e-Khuddam-e-Kaaba' or the Society of the servants of Kaaba, which owed its origin to the uneasiness that became manifest among Indian Muslims during the tripolitan and the Balkan wars. The original idea was to organise a military force to be sent from India to guard the sacred place of Islam. An outline of the scheme was published in April 1913 in a letter addressed by Sheikh Mushir Hussain Kidwai to Al- Helal newspaper. Soon, the parameters were engaged in earnest propaganda activities to popularise the Anjuman by extensive coverage in the Indian Urdu press. The Anjuman as a whole provided a common platform for political partnership among the traditional Ulema and the Western educated Indian Muslims which was to continue from then on. The Indian Urdu press came of age during the World War-1, which has been objectively analysed in detail on the basis of both national and international developments. Although the repressive Press Act of 1910 did not allow enough freedom to the press, some of the more representative Urdu newspapers such as the Hamdard, Al- Helal and Zamindar, took considerable risk in giving vent to the true Muslim feelings. These newspapers were run by the younger sections of the Muslim community. The 'Hamdard' was started at the close of 1913 and was practically a popular addition of the 'Comrade' and was called its Urdu 'stable companion' by Muhammad Ali, a distinguished graduate of Aligarh and Oxford, and a prominent nationalist Muslim. Pan-Islamic and anti-British writings had started appearing in the Hamdard before the outbreak of the World War-1. There was a sympathetic reference to the establishment of friendly relations between Turkey and Germany in the Hamdard of 15 April 1914. The pro- German feelings and stand was more than obvious in the Hamdard due to its various references to the value of Germany's friendship which was contrasted with the policy of the allied powers. It published articles expressing delight at the declaration of war between Austria and Serbia and the prospect of witnessing the same sight which they had witnessed earlier. It assumed through its articles that Turkey would derive advantage from the hostilities between the other powers. The Hamdard declared that there could be great enthusiasm in this country for a war, which means no certain gain to the people of India but a good deal of certain loss."10 It strongly suggested that the plea of honour was nothing but a good deal of interventions and that in reality Britain entered the war in the interest of the trade and business.

The belief that Turkey's importance will increase as a result of war was a source of secret satisfaction to most Indian Muslims. The Hamdard said that Turkey could not be expected

to help Britain as Britain had become involved in the war on account of Belgium but she did nothing to help Turkey during the Balkan wars. However, the Hamdard pondered over the question of Indian Muslims dilemma in the event of Turkey entering the war on the German side against Britain. Later on, it quoted a passage from the Serajul Akhbar of Kabul which said that the unrest in Persia was due to the Machinations of England and Russia.¹¹ It was about this time that the paper commenced a policy of giving prominent place to any news regarding the war which could be construed as unfavourable to the allies and belittling any progress which they reported. Muhammad Ali did not pay much heed to the warning conveyed in the criminal proceedings against the Comrade and confined to the Hamdard thereafter. It published on 7th October 1914, a violent attack on Russia its trustworthiness and double standard on its policy of granting independence to Finland and Poland.¹² The Hamdard assumed a tone of regret at Turkey's abandonment of neutrality when Turkey entered the war but continued to excuse her act and blamed Great Britain for her failure to fulfil her promise to evacuate Egypt and restore it to Turkey. However, it remarked that the war was temporal and that the Muslims may be expected to do their duty to the British government provided that the Holy Land of Arabia is treated as sacrosanct. ¹³ It also discussed about the possibility of a Turkish invasion of the Suez Canal and reproduced from the Egyptian paper a statement that the English were treating the Muslim population of Alexandria with great barbarity. On 7th April, 1915, the Hamdard published extracts from German newspapers reproduced from the London Times describing the strength of a Turkish position in the Dardanelles. However, later in the Hamdard, a skilful attempt was made to avoid the imputation of anything savouring of disloyalty or sedition but this effort was never maintained for long and as a result soon the orders of internment were passed against Muhammad Ali.¹⁴

The Al- Helal, an Urdu weekly of Calcutta also was markedly anti- British and strongly pro- German in its tone. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad ,earlier known as Mohiuddin Ahmed, started the publication of Al-Helal in June 1912 which not only infused a new spirit in the intellectual and literary life of the Muslims but also led to their religious and political awakening.¹⁵ After the Kanpur mosque disturbances in 1913,he had written a series of anti-British articles, as a result of which the issue of Al- Helal of 13th August 1913 was proscribed by the Bengal government under the Indian Press Act and all its copies were forfeited. However, when the World War-1 broke out, he clearly again manifested his anti-British feelings and Al-Helal expressed satisfaction at the probable bloodshed in Christendom and was strongly pro- German. The paper published a leading article on war, headed "The Universal sway of the demon of war. It was a magnificent treatise on the international relations of the times, relating to Turkey, England, France, Italy Germany and Russia since the Russo-Turkish war of 1878. It also praised German bravery and valour and appreciated Turkey's action. The writer clearly rejoiced to think that Turkey was about to make an effort to regain some of her lost possessions.¹⁶ Subsequent article entitled, 'The Approaching Signs of the Siege of Paris,' 'The Fall of Antwerp' and 'Talk About The Armies', attracted the wrath of the government and the subsequent forfeiture of the deposits and finally the publication was stopped as the government ceased its publications.¹⁷ Shaken

by this incident, Abdul Kalam Azad started another paper by the name of Al- Balagh, which was a reshuffle of the old Al-Helal. However, governmental orders forced Maulana Azad to leave Calcutta and take shelter at Ranchi in Bihar.¹⁸

The Zamindar of Lahore was an important Urdu paper started in 1903 as a weekly by Sirajuddin Ahmed, father of the well known journalist and Pan- Islamist Zafar Ali Khan. In 1909, Zafar Ali Khan became its proprietor and editor after the death of his father. He added the daily edition of the Zamindar in 1911 and its circulation went up to 15,000 copies by 1913.¹⁹ The newspaper owed its popularity to its anti-British and anti-Christian tone during the Balkan wars. In Zafar Ali Khan absentia, its stone became temporarily temperate. However, after his return to India in 1913, his articles on the Kanpur Mosque Case and the pamphlet "Come over into Macedonia and Help Us" resulted in Zamindar's first confiscation. Owing to its subdued tone after the warning from the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, its circulation decreased and its price had to be reduced. Nevertheless, the paper published some anti-British articles, one exultingly proclaiming that the desecration of the Mashad mausoleum was to be avenged by the Germans who were going to burn Saint Petersburg to the ground and another congratulating Muslims on the fact that Christian nations of Europe were now reaping the harvest of their tyranny.²⁰

However, when the World War-1 broke out, the Zamindar expressed certain sentiments which were apparently Pro-British. It wrote that it was the duty of Indians to give practical proof of their loyalty and contested the view that Germany was friendly to Islam by quoting some remarks made by the Kaiser. It also blamed Germany for acquiescing in the conquest of Tripoli made by her ally Italy.²¹ The government issued a general warning to the press and the Zamindar in particular as it was difficult for the British to believe in the sincerity of Zafar Ali Khan and therefore his movements were restricted to Karmabad, his native place and the paper had therefore to soften its attitude towards the British. The Zamindar failed to come into its own again. It finally ceased publication in 1916, when a newspaper Lamaat, with Akbar Ali son of Zafar Ali Khan as the editor, publisher and printer was started.

Besides The Hamdard, Al-Helal and Zamindar in which were promptly incapacitated in ventilating their true Muslim feelings, there were many more Urdu papers which strongly criticised the British and showed sympathy for Turkey. The 'Hablul-Metin' , which was published both in Persian and English from Calcutta urged Turkish neutrality in the war and wrote in pro-British tone, however, proclaimed that Muslim loyalty to Britain was conditional on Turkish neutrality . It is said that the Sultan of Turkey was also the caliph and even though the war was not a religious war, it held the Anglo- Russian alliance responsible for the rapture between England and Turkey.

The Curzon Gazettee, a Delhi- based Urdu weekly, generally avoided a Pan-Islamic attitude could not conceal its satisfaction over a war that was being folder between Christian nations. It asserted that God was punishing the Christian powers for the atrocities committed in the Balkan wars and the Turko- Italian war. This, however, provided sufficient ground for the British authorities to give his stern warning to the editor of the Curzon Gazette, Umrao Mirza alias Mirza Hairat who afterwards behaved well. The Curzon Gazette had a circulation of 8000 copies but half of it were distributed free of charge.²²

The Vakil, a Urdu bi-weekly of Amritsar, was an influential paper with a circulation of 3000 copies. It contained Islamic news of East and West and was critical of British policy in the North-East and Persia. Like other Urdu papers, its stone also became anti-British on account of the Balkan war. It was warned for violent anti-Christian writings in 1913 and was on security in 1914. It had been writing on possible complications if Turkey joined the war. It debated and contested the English Press and its accusations of British -Turkish military preparations as an offensive one against the Europeans. It defended through its articles and justified the Turkish preparations as a rightful defensive tactics of weak nation. However, it was very clear of the question of Muslim loyalty remaining unshaken towards British in case Turkey serves its political relations with Britain ,but not in case of Turkey fighting against other European powers.

Conclusion: Thus, in the Indian Urdu Press, we find more representative and uninhibited expression of Muslim opinion than in the official resolutions of the Muslim public bodies or the pronouncements of some important individuals. It did not always accept war- news that came through the British media and while examining them, at times, they displayed sympathy for Turkey an ally of Germany. They paid a heavy penalty for such an attitude. The issue of relationship between the Turkish nationalists and Indian Khilafatists, and the Hizrat Movement, gave impetus to the resistance of foreign domination. Indian Muslims in the end did not get what they expected from Turkey despite the enormous sacrifices they made over several decades. The most disappointing for them was the decisions of the Turks themselves to abolish the caliphate in 1924, thereby striking the most powerful blow to their cause and expectations.

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