THE MAHATMA AND THE MAULANA: UNDERSTANDING MINORITY POLITICS IN BRITISH INDIA*

M. RAISUR RAHMAN

This article provides a fresh initiative and insight into issues that are rather well trodden. Gandhi, Mohamed Ali, Muslim politics, and the Khilafat Movement — each topic has been studied exhaustively. What this essay does is to pose them all together in an interactional framework to understand minority politics in colonial India. Here, minority politics is defined as issue-based politics around Muslims as minorities. This paper uses the terms “Mahatma” and “Maulana” as literary devices to understand Gandhi-Mohamed Ali relationship around the Khilafat Movement arguing how minority politics in British India became a terrain laden with individual motivations. The argument is unraveled through the analyses of Mahatma-Maulana interrelationship as understood from a range of sources in English as well as Urdu.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to understand minority politics in colonial India by way of the political interaction between Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Mohamed Ali Jauhar that took place mostly around the Khilafat Movement. The Khilafat Movement, one of the biggest political mobilizations of Muslims in India, emerged in 1919, reached its height in 1920-21, and finally went into oblivion by 1924. Its association with the

* This essay developed out of a presentation made at a conference organized by Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi in February 2006. I am deeply grateful to Gail Minault and the anonymous reviewer for their incisive comments and useful suggestions on an earlier draft. I owe special thanks to Amir Ali, Saad Abi-Hamad, and Rahul Nair for a careful reading of the paper. Any mistakes, by default, remain mine alone.

RIVISTA DI STUDI SUDASIATICI II, 2007, 57–84
ISSN 1970-9501 (online), ISSN 1970-951X (print)
Islamic world outside India through its adherence to the Ottoman Caliphate, and its simultaneous alliance with the Indian independence struggle have always attracted scholars and readers alike. There have been many questions raised, explored and discussed about this particular movement. Such questions have centered on issues such as pan-Islamism, imperialism, anti-colonialism, Indian nationalism, and Gandhian mass movements. Yet there remains an additional topic of great significance that has not been adequately and explicitly discussed. Taking a more or less chronological approach, this essay examines the evolution of Gandhi-Mohamed Ali relationship before, during and right after the Khilafat Movement to comprehend the way minority politics took shape in colonial India. Existing historiography does not adequately treat Mohamed Ali’s conception and practice of minority politics and how Gandhi’s politics placed the two in unison. In addition, this paper digresses from earlier writings in providing a fresh analysis of the Gandhi-Mohamed Ali estrangement since most writings have only cursorily swept the issue. All this is done through the analytically innovative perspective of seeing the minority politics played out by Gandhi as the *Mahatma*; and Mohamed Ali as the *Maulana*.

To begin with, let it be clear that we are not concerned here with analyzing the traditional literal attributes of the two terms—*Mahatma* and *Maulana*. The Khilafat Movement helped Gandhi (1869-1948), a personality as much known globally as within India, enlist Muslim support for his nationalist movement, thereby broadening his political base. Although the literal meaning of *Mahatma* in Sanskrit is “Great Soul”, this paper uses the term in its political intent. The argument is that Gandhi was able to be viewed as a leader with a broad base across communities because of his support to the Khilafat Movement and association with the Ali brothers. He could thereby emerge as a “Mahatma” who could lead Hindus and Muslims alike. Similarly, this paper attempts to redefine the term *Maulana* in its political usage. Although derived from Arabic *vali* (“master”), Maulana commonly refers to individuals with certain Islamic scholarship or to graduates of *madrasa* or *darool-uloom* (Islamic seminary), Mohamed Ali’s epithet “Maulana” can be seen in a slightly different light. Always referred to as Maulana, Mohamed Ali lived his life as a politician symbolizing Muslim interests. He is not at all known either for his Islamic scholarship or for his affiliation with any madrasa. Mohamed Ali emerged into politics as a leader safeguarding minority interests, rose to nationalist politics on the same claim, and kept underscoring his minoritarian leadership status until the end of his life. He thereby justified his epithet of Maulana in this particular sense. This paper attempts to place the interrelationship between
the Mahatma and the Maulana to develop a perspective on minority politics in British India.

What does minority politics mean? In general, the term “minority” refers to a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group living within a larger society.¹ A cohesive group can be called minority on the basis of one or more of the following categories: race, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, caste etc. Moreover, minorities are conscious of themselves as groups.² The term when used may entail political, social, cultural, and legal implications depending on the context. For instance, whereas religious minority is the most prominent category in India; in America, religion rarely defines minority. In India, Muslims have always constituted and been looked at as the largest minority group numerically. The basis by and large is religion, than culture or politics. In fact, it is religion and religious interests that have influenced Muslims’ minority status in India and the politics associated with it. Representation of Muslims or its deficiency at different levels of state machinery, rights pertaining to religious, cultural and ritual practices, preservation of minority status through political and educational institutions have always been the center of minority politics participated by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This paper’s approach to minority politics is limited to the community-based politics centered on Muslims and their interests. The Khilafat Movement has been one such site through which minority politics in India can be seen unfolding itself. Most remarkably, Gandhi’s participation in it was as much as Mohamed Ali’s. Both upheld the cause of the Khilafat enlisting Muslim support differently for their respective political ends. One qualification that needs a mention at the very outset is that whereas Mohamed Ali indulged in this minority politics all through his political career, participation of Gandhi in minority politics through the Khilafat Movement was mere episodic in nature. This fact should serve as a forewarning that our discussion would be somewhat asymmetrical as far as these two personalities are concerned.

Before we proceed further, it becomes imperative here to recall the context under which Gandhi and Mohamed Ali joined forces. The Khilafat Movement in India was initiated during World War I by some Muslim leaders who were growing concerned over the fate of the Ottoman Empire, and the Caliph, the spiritual as well as the temporal head of the Muslim world. Its leadership

---

comprising educated Muslims of national stature included the Ali brothers, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), M. A. Ansari (1880-1936), and Hakim Ajmal Khan (1863-1927), among others. The Ottoman Empire was fighting on the side of Germany against the Allied powers of which Britain was a part. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers made the Muslims of India very concerned over the fate of the Caliphate itself, which had long been vested in the office of Ottoman sultan. Born on December 10, 1878 at Rampur and educated at Aligarh and Oxford, Mohamed Ali was one of the most articulate Muslims whose concerns for fellow Muslims encompassed the wider Islamic world while at the same time being grounded within the Indian nationalist context. Therefore, the movement had both religious as well as a growing anti-colonial substance. However, its nationalist undertone was not as much stressed until the time Gandhi involved himself and the Indian National Congress with the movement.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

What made Gandhi and Mohamed Ali come together during the Khilafat Movement? How do we look at their relationship budding and blossoming during this period? What limitations did either of them face, and what caused them part ways towards the end of the Khilafat movement? There exist several interpretations of what Gandhi and Mohamed Ali were trying to accomplish. In the history of political careers in India, their relationship is one of the most illuminating examples of studying the motives and motivations behind the meeting of minds of two leaders which produced a unique political moment and movement. Historians of modern India have stressed the pan-Islamic nature of the movement, and emphasized the nationalist content of Gandhian politics. B.R. Nanda, for instance, argues that Gandhi’s purpose was mainly to create a mass movement that was all-inclusive and anti-colonial in nature, as were his other movements. He says that “by linking the Khilafat issue with Indian independence, Gandhi had for the first time brought the Muslim community into the heart of nationalist politics”.

On the other hand, Gail Minault has argued that Gandhi took up the Khilafat cause to give a boost to his plans to reorganize the Congress into a mass movement by bringing Muslims into the nationalist movement.

Historians such as Francis Robinson and Judith Brown have viewed Mohamed Ali as a politician with an insatiable hunger for power. Their analyses go to the extent of saying that “the Mahatma in fact was won for the Muslims and not the Muslims for the Mahatma”, and that “Gandhi does not appear to be just the masterly politician in search of allies, but also the ally who is sought and occasionally even manipulated”. They, thus, suggest that Mohamed Ali manipulated Gandhi over and over again. On a different note, Stanley Wolpert shows that it was actually Gandhi who gained the most, and not Mohamed Ali. He argues that “Gandhi’s alliance won him greater national popularity than was enjoyed by any other nationalist leader”. Wolpert, thus, indicates that Gandhi was playing his tactical, principled appeal to India’s Muslim community. Moreover, David Hardiman’s analysis of Gandhian politics speaks of Gandhi’s endorsement to the Khilafat Movement as a matter of “misplaced trust” — the idea that a handful of English-educated Muslims raised the Khilafat issue and Gandhi took it to be “the heartfelt plea of the Indian Muslim”.

Interpretations are many. This warrants a closer look at how the relationship began, developed, and gradually faded away. More so, different levels of the relationship merit a minute examination as they happened evolutionally. It was Gandhi who opened correspondence with Mohamed Ali and his elder brother Shaukat Ali (1873-1938) when they were in detention for their alleged sympathies with Turkey. Commenting on such an initiative, a biographer of Gandhi rightly puts it that he had “sensed the strength of Muslim feeling on Khilafat earlier than most”. Another biographer aptly adds: “Gandhi made no secret of the fact that he was harnessing the Khilafat issue to a political cause, the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity and self-government

Thus, Hindu-Muslim unity reached its “high watermark” during 1919-20. But Nanda adds that the leaders of the Muslim community denounced imperialism based on edicts issued by their ulema, the religious leaders. This statement implies that it was not just because of Gandhi’s initiatives or propulsions. Secondly, Muslim leaders of nationalist inclination were at the forefront of the entire movement. This shows that Muslim leadership and followers derived their own understanding of imperialism in the context of the Khilafat Movement: their anti-imperialism had nationalistic roots watered with certain Islamic considerations. One of the most pertinent issues here is to understand how both Gandhi and Mohamed Ali themselves were addressing their concerns under varying contexts.

Gandhi and Mohamed Ali Joining Hands

What was the context under which Gandhi thought of lending support to Mohamed Ali? When Turkey declared war against the Allies in 1914, Muslims in India were perturbed. It was a difficult situation for them to rise against the British all of a sudden. The explanation lies in the leadership. It mostly belonged to the Aligarh’s first generation of English-educated Muslims who had been brought up on the thoughts of reconciling Muslim and British interests. At this point, Mohamed Ali wrote an article “The Choice of the Turks” in response to one with the same title that appeared in the Times, London. In his article, Mohamed Ali expressed a vindication of the prestige and honor of the Turks as opposed to the Times’ article that was trying to unite nations against Turkey. For writing this article, he was arrested on May 15, 1915 as it was taken as “a direct incitement to Turkey to go to War”. Through writings in his English weekly The Comrade, Mohamed Ali took an aggressive approach in favor of Turkey, and issues such as the Kanpur Mosque incident — donning the robe of a responsible Muslim

13. B.R. Nanda, Gandhi and His Critics (Delhi: OUP, 1993), 82.
14. Nanda, Gandhi and His Critics, 82.
17. This incident occurred on August 3, 1913. A part of the mosque had been knocked down for the purpose of constructing a road. It invited widespread protests. Mohamed Ali went to London as part of a deputation. After negotiations, the damaged portion of
intellectual. His growing concern for the fate of the Muslim community had also resulted in his public appeal, joined by his brother, in 1913 that all Muslims should combine in a society to be called the Anjuman-i-Khud-dam-i-Ka’aba (Society for the Servants of the Kaaba). The purpose was to save the holy places of Islam from non-Muslim encroachments. With an ambition of enlisting Muslims from all over India, Anjuman opened offices in Delhi, Lucknow, Bombay, Hyderabad, and several smaller branches everywhere. In 1913 itself, Anjuman had enrolled over 8,000 members. Thus, Mohamed Ali’s passion for the world of Islam can truly be seen with his fame spreading far and wide. The two brothers were also eloquent enough in propagating their cause. Consequently, they were interned at various places — Mehrauli, Lansdowne and Chindwara during the duration of the war. Muslim opinion in India increasingly began to view the question of Khilafat as a religious issue close to their hearts and found it under British threat. Until then, Muslims were also skeptical of the brand of nationalist politics of their Hindu brethren, relying for their guidance on what Aligarh’s first generation had preached about Muslim interests lying solely under loyalty to the British crown. This was the period of initial years of politics for Gandhi. He saw in the bruised feelings of Muslims around Khilafat a way to gain Muslim adherence to the drive for self-government, which he called swaraj. Nanda says that Gandhi’s calculation was “to create a reservoir of goodwill which would once and for all dissipate Muslim suspicions and fears”. No doubt Gandhi intended to show Muslims that he shared their concerns. But was it exclusively directed towards alleviating Muslim suspicions? Gandhi did want Muslim support. He had enjoyed the backing of the Muslim community in South Africa and, was on the lookout of an occasion that could get Muslims rally behind him. This gets confirmed by no other statement than what he said in a speech on Khilafat.

the mosque was restored on Viceroy Harding’s intervention. See Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990), 91.

18. Home Dept. Political 7: July 1913, NAI.
in Bombay on May 9, 1919: “After my arrival in India, I began to find out good Mohammedan leaders. My desire was satisfied when I reached Delhi, and found the Brothers Ali, whom I had the privilege of knowing before”.24

In addition, here is what he wrote to Mohamed Ali while urging the Viceroy for the release of the Ali brothers:

[…] my interest in your release is quite selfish. We have a common goal and I want to utilize your services to the uttermost, in order to reach that goal. In the proper solution of the Mohammedan question lies the realization of Swarajya.25

Gandhi proposed to the Ali brothers to join hands in the larger fight to obtain self-government. Supporting Gandhi might be desirable for a segment of the Muslim community. But in supporting a Muslim religious issue, Gandhi did have his own calculations in mind. It was here that Gandhi struck the right note. His notion of swaraj pulled the Ali brothers to his side, and hence he was successful in enlisting their support. Gandhi’s idea of swaraj or self-rule was two-dimensional: it supported self-rule for India as an independent nation and, self-rule for each individual Indian. This definitely meant an assurance to the Ali brothers of freedom from the anti-Muslim British, while at the same time must have allayed any fears of Hindu domination in that possible independent India. The extent to which Gandhi’s idea had an impact on Mohamed Ali can be gauged from this statement of the former:

If all the country joins in, the Swaraj we attain would not be anybody’s in particular, it would not be Gandhi’s Swaraj, neither Shaukat Ali’s, Mohamed Ali’s, Nehruji’s or Lala Lajpat Rai’s, but all the country’s together.26

It then became easier for Mohamed Ali to follow Gandhi’s suit, and shout for the demand of swaraj on a higher pitch, though there was little in common between the two.27 What made Mohamed Ali become so much of a follower? As a way of explaining this relationship, Nanda opines that Gandhi’s efforts for the release of the Ali brothers made an impression upon them. What Nan-

25. Quoted in Minault, The Khilafat Movement, 68.
27. Nanda, Gandhi, Pan-Islamism, 200.
da means here is that Gandhi’s benevolence acted on them as something that readied the brothers to support Gandhi and his causes. One question that immediately crops up is about the impact Gandhi could exercise so easily on Mohamed Ali’s mind. Was Mohamed Ali so pregnable to personal suasion? Or, did he have his own hidden political estimates and ambitions up his sleeve? The explanation lies in what minority politics meant to Mohamed Ali and how he played out his politics centered on minority issues.

MOHAMED ALI’S MINORITYISM AND MINORITY POLITICS

To Mohamed Ali, minorities needed to be reassured about their security. He was an out and out leader of the minorities, always holding his title Maulana true to its political connotation, as we discussed earlier. He kept fighting as the leader of the minorities throughout his political career. One of the initial tasks he undertook was to voice concerns over the representation of minorities in the legislature. As one of the authors of the provision of separate electorates for minorities in Indian politics — although he revised his opinions later — one can read into how little he really diverted from his original demands. He later announced that minorities should have, in the interest of Indian nationalism, a mixed territorial electorate”, instead of separate electorates. However, he did not want the type of mixed territorial electorate that was prevalent in England. He came up with his own calculation of a mixed electorate system to be implemented. Firstly, that the seats should be reserved for the two communities — Hindu and Muslim — but a candidate should not be elected unless he could get at least 40 percent of the votes cast by his own community. Secondly, that at least 5 percent of the votes cast by the other communities wherever he is in minority, and 10 percent where he is in a larger minority or majority, should go to him. By laying these conditions down, Mohamed Ali intended to make sure that a candidate did not just appeal to his community and thus, could represent all. He viewed this plan of his as a means by which true nationalism would get a chance. The point here is that this notion of a “mixed electorate” system was certainly presented as something different but was not quite unlike the system of separate electorates. In addition, although his demand for guaranteed

29. With all awareness of applicability of such arguments to either gender, the author keeps it the way it appears originally in the writings of Mohamed Ali.
seats in Indian federal and state legislatures was basically for Muslims, he claimed that it was a demand for the minority community per se, i.e., all non-Hindu communities. And that any minority community could suffer from a sense of insecurity which needed to be done away with:

I can assure you no one would rejoice more than myself on the day that the minorities themselves announced that they needed no such protection. It may perhaps help you to judge of my bona fides in this matter if I tell you that I had strongly urged the adoption of the Indian plan for the protection of the Christian minorities in the Eastern Vilayets of Turkey known as Armenia.  

Whatever may be the intention behind the parallel being drawn between the two minority communities, Mohamed Ali seems to have considered minority community as a suffering tribe for which he advocated for some sort of protection. And this is exactly where he situates the Hindu-Muslim problem in one of his articles entitled “The Communal Patriot.” In keeping with his concern for his minority community, he regarded the Lucknow Pact (1916) arrangement of communal representation satisfactory in the short term but also added that the Indians should hasten the pace to Swaraj “so that we may readjust communal shares in representative bodies”. What needs to be noticed here is that communal representation was still advocated by him, be it with swaraj or not, and most remarkably, even when he was a close aide of Gandhi. This again brings home the point of how tactfully he kept the minority cards close to his chest. Moreover, his demands for minorities were happening at a time when he was equally concerned with the cooperation between communities. To him, cooperation between Hindus and Muslims was as important as securing for the Muslim community a rightful space in the Indian society and polity:

It is our firm belief that if the Mussalmans or the Hindus attempt to achieve success in opposition to or even without the cooperation of one another, they will not only fail, but fail ignominiously.  

31. This article came out in February 1912. Afzal, Select Writings, 65-70.  
Mohamed Ali knew what his constituency was and was never hesitant in addressing it. He showed a deep and firm faith in his religion. Islam, to his consideration, was “the last word in human salvation; an ardent and active sympathy for the entire Moslem fraternity; a keen desire to see the end of communal discord in India and the commencement of an administration increasingly responsible to the people and extremely sensitive to their needs and responsive to their aspirations”. Though here he eulogizes Islam highly, in fact it was during his internment that he got to learn more about Islam and grew more religious, remaining so till his end. While his attachment to Islam can be seen as a part of his cultural embeddedness, it can at times be also seen as a close-ended option. In an article published in *The Comrade*, he writes thus: “Take away his religion from the Mussalman and you close for him the fountainhead of his inspiration”. This could, however, be a perception of him being a religious person. But his attentiveness to Islam as one of the determinants of the identity of a Muslim could easily be gleaned through what he said in 1911 that Islam needed to be preserved by a Muslim while fitting himself in with Indian unity. Although the religious content of his identity is often found arguably compatible with his nationalist concern, his frank religiosity was otherwise as good as Gandhi’s. Gandhi was also no less aware and hesitant of the importance of religion in one’s life when he said that “no man can live without religion” while also boldly declaring himself as a “Sanatani Hindu”.

Outside politics, Mohamed Ali showed his concern for Islam more as a matter of faith than a worldly consideration. He writes that Islam has laid down certain rules for the conduct of its members. If they choose to follow them they are entitled to certain benefits. If they rather choose not to do so, nobody should restrict their freedom of conscience or of action; but they cannot claim the benefits which are directly contingent upon the observance of those rules. He, thus, accentuates the spiritual nature of religion: “Islam as a spiritual force was never dependent upon temporal dominance, except in the way regarding worldly dominion as

34. *Mohammad Ali Papers* (hereafter MAP), MOH/L-3958 (New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia).
the handmaid of the Faith”. It would be too much of a stretch to say that he could have become a rather more inclusive leader than just a leader of minorities by shedding his religiosity. But it would not be an exaggeration to argue that he had the political acumen of preserving the leadership of a minority community by striking the right chords at the right moments. He knew how to flaunt his title of Maulana and be at the helm of Muslim religious affairs. And, it was out of such concern that Shaukat Ali and he had gone ahead to found the Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Ka'aba (Society for the Servants of Kaaba) with the purpose of uniting the Muslims of all sects for the protection of the holy places of Islam. Commenting upon this society, he said:

[…] no Mussulman can regard it as other than a clear and solemn religious duty based on the Holy Quran and Traditions of our Prophet (on whom be God’s beneficitous speech) neglect of which must jeopardise his personal salvation hereafter.

Such a religious duty was termed by him as a part of his faith. He considered it as a “duty” of the Muslims in India to intervene between Arabs and Turks and bring about reconciliation. Since the Caliph in the capacity of the administrator of the Divine commands was the backbone of the Muslims worldwide to carry out religious obligations and purposes, the Caliph’s position should be maintained. His concern for Islam was seamless. Reportedly, in 1916, at the Eidgah (place where Muslims congregate for Eid prayers) in Chhindwara in Central India where he was under internment, after offering up Eid prayers, he got up and before the imam could intervene proclaimed: “May Islam be promoted and blessed and the enemy [meaning the British Raj] be destroyed”. It shows how Mohamed Ali could even opt

40. For details, read Maulana Abdul Bari’s note on the objectives and scope of this organization. One of Mohamed Ali’s contemporaries and a co-founder of the Anjuman, Abdul Bari (1878-1926), a major educationist and leader of the Khilafat Movement, ran the madrasa (Islamic seminary) of Farangi Mahal in Lucknow. Syed Rais Ahmad Jafri, *Ali Biradraan* (Lahore: Mohamed Ali Academy, 1963), 221-2.
41. *MAP. MOH/L*-3926.
42. Home Dept. Political 3: May 1921, NAI.
43. This incident was reported by the District Superintendent of Police, Chhindwara and is recorded in his confidential diary. He also wrote: “I think however it would be as well if both brothers were stopped speaking at any meetings of any sort religious or otherwise”. Home Dept. Political 25: September 1916, NAI.
for a public demonstration of his personal feelings. Whether he did so out of a purely religious concern or to whip up the religious passion of the people present there is difficult for us to say. But his sense of public exhibition of religious feelings cannot be overlooked, that too in front of a multitude of people assembled in a larger public space such as Eidgah. Once again, it only indicates how far he could go to address the minority constituency he claimed to be representing, especially since he had been arrested for his pan-Islamic concerns, and was still interned for that reason.

A public display of his religious feelings can also be viewed present in his poetry that he would often publish in his Urdu journal *Hamdard*. Some of these were published later even when the Khilafat Movement had fizzled out. This only shows that he never waivered from addressing his minority citizenry. His poetical articulations such as these in public sphere also exhibit the fact that he did not believe in keeping his religiosity a private matter:

\[
\text{Ho Mohammad kyoN naa Qur’an aur bhii humko aziiz}
\text{Ismain khud teri jo jiiti jaagtii tasweer hai.}^{44}
\]

Why not Mohammad and the Quran be most dear to us
As they simply illustrate You illumined.

He also wrote the following couplet in another issue of *Hamdard*:

\[
\text{Yeh namaaz aatrii hai mujhe, naa wazuu aata hai}
\text{Sajda kar layta hooN jab saamnay tuu aata hai.}^{45}
\]

Neither do I know the prayers nor the ablutions.
I just prostrate whenever I come before You.

Mohamed Ali’s minority politics is self-evident in his efforts in trying to save the office of the caliph. Strikingly, much of his anti-colonialism was very much based on this concern, at least the way it took its inception. Putting forth the religious claims regarding preservation of the Khilafat, with adequate temporal power for the defense of the faith, he spoke vehemently against its dismemberment.\(^{46}\) He pronounced that it could not

---

44. *Hamdard*, August 7, 1925.
45. *Hamdard*, December 3, 1926.
46. Iqbal, *Select Writings*, 186.
be given up under any condition since it was a duty imposed by Islam on every Muslim. The institution of the Khalifa or Caliph was within Islamic injunctions but without any absolute power. Leading the Khilafat Delegation to the Prime Minister of England Mr. Lloyd George on March 17, 1920, Mohamed Ali elaborated upon the position of Khalifa: "The Commander of the faithful; he commands them within the law of Islam and on behalf of God. He does not arrogate to himself a kingly function. I think, Sir, that will appeal to your personally — that the doctrine of the Khilafat is the doctrine of a Republic, and that, alone among all the Sovereigns of the world the one whose coronation ceremony does not take place in a palace is the Khalifa".47 To him, the office of the Khalifa was an important and inevitable reference point for the unity of the Islamic world. Mohamed Ali continued his struggle to preserve it. Joining hands with Gandhi, he toured round the country exhorting the people to boycott the government, during the Non-Cooperation Movement. In due course, he, along with other leaders such as M. A. Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan, urged the students of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh to abandon the institution since it was substantially under government control. The Aligarh boys followed his call, boycotted the College at Aligarh, and helped found the famous institution that later became the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. This episode in history underlines his emphasis on an anti-imperialist education for the Muslim youth. Thus, he turned the Muslims of India against the British rule. Meanwhile, the All-India Khilafat Conference passed a resolution in July 1921 at Karachi urging Muslims enlisted in the army to resign with the verdict that "in the present circumstances the Holy Shariat [Islamic law] forbids every Muslim to serve or enlist in the British Army".48 This basically implied that it was un-Islamic for a Muslim of India to fight and kill his own Muslim brethren in Turkey. Earlier, addressing a crowd at Shahjahanpur on 27 March 1921, he exhorted:

I declare today in the presence of my brethren who are taking down notes of my speech that I have made it an object of my life to alienate every Muslim from the Government as that he may not remain in the police or

47. For a complete version of the interview of the Prime Minister of England with the Khilafat Delegation headed by Mohamed Ali, see Rafiqur Rahman, Mohamed Ali: A Sketch of His Life, His Writings, and Speeches (Calcutta: The Mussalman Publishing Company Limited, 1932) 86-108. For the quotation mentioned above, see 105.
48. Independent, July 24, 1921.
the army to betray the cause of his own country. If it is a crime I am prepared to suffer for it.⁴⁹

Mohamed Ali had exhibited his passion for minority politics on certain other occasions as well. For instance, he did not like the annulment (1911) of the partition of Bengal (1905) but advised India’s Muslims to come to terms with it, as says one of his biographers.⁵⁰ One can at once draw the conclusion that he probably took this stance conforming to the larger interests of the nation. That might be true. But it also shows how he would attempt to influence Muslims public opinion at large. In another example, his religious fervor can be seen as tainted with immaturity signified by a person given to exaggeration and hyperbolic language. He had announced that if the Afghans came to India for the sake of Khilafat and religion, it would be a duty for the Muslims to give them all possible help. Most surprisingly, he could unhesitatingly declare that it would be better to be slaves of Mohammedans than of the English.⁵¹ Furthermore, as a part of his anti-British rhetoric, he appealed to the Muslim masses to go either for jihad (holy war) or hijrat (flight)⁵² but he himself neither led any jihad nor migrated. However, as a result of this stark option given by him to his followers, thousands of Muslims suffered when they moved to Afghanistan. Although he had clearly advocated for hijrat, he did not know how to deal with the sufferings of those Muslims who had taken his message with all seriousness and were willing to put it into practice. All of these examples distinctly show the lack of constraints with which he could practice a brand of politics circled around Muslims as a minority community, at times pushing his title of Maulana to such an extent to cause disadvantage to all and one.

**UPS AND DOWNS: GANDHI–MOHAMED ALI RELATIONSHIP**

Mohamed Ali hogged considerable limelight during the Khilafat Movement. Understanding his relationship with Gandhi chronologically gives a sense of how both of them worked on issues concerning minority politics. Gandhi, who had recently joined Indian politics after his days in South Africa, was attracted to the courage displayed by the Ali brothers in rising against the Brit-

---

⁴⁹. Home Dept. Political 20: June 1921, NAI.
⁵¹. Home Dept. Political 20: June 1921, NAI.
ish Raj. He started asking for their release. He also insisted upon seeing the
two so that he could involve them and the Khilafat question with nationalist
politics. A meeting was arranged and Gandhi met Mohamed Ali in 1915 about
which Gandhi wrote later: “It was a question of love at first sight between
us.” On the other side of this oft-quoted saying, Mohamed Ali was prob-
ably already smitten since 1911 when he had written an essay on Mohandas
Gandhi eulogizing his anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. This mutual
attraction bloomed into their association against the British Indian govern-
ment during the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat Movement. The partnership be-
tween them made the imperial forces feel the shock caused by the strength
of Hindu-Muslim unity. Nanda says that Gandhi’s gesture of supporting the
Khilafat cause was like sharing the sufferings of his fellow countrymen. What
Nanda completely ignores is the political motive underlying this “grand ges-
ture” of Gandhi. On a different note assigning importance to Mohamed
Ali, Afzal Iqbal credits him for all the efforts towards Hindu-Muslim unity
that characterized the Non-Cooperation Movement. He writes that “with his
entry in the Congress began a historic phase in the history of the national-
ist movement” and that “never was the climate of Hindu-Muslim unity so
pervasive”. Iqbal also highlights the complications in the relationship of
Mohamed Ali and Gandhi that despite being a non-convert to the principle
of non-violence, Mohamed Ali became Gandhi’s chief lieutenant. It was he
who led millions of Muslims into a battle whose rules were certainly strange
and unfamiliar. There is no denying the fact that Mohamed Ali did enroll
Muslim support to the Congress — exactly as Gandhi had expected of him.
“Such was the vigor of Muslim mobilization over the issue [Khilafat] as well
as Gandhi’s forcible insistence on Hindu participation in it that the Khilafat
indeed became one of the most powerful mass movements”. Although not
a believer in non-violence, Mohamed Ali did conform to its application. He
also displayed immense faith in Gandhi and his variety of politics: “[...]

53. *CWMG*, vol. 17 (May 1, 1919 – September 28, 1920), 34.
54. In an Urdu essay titled “Mr. Mohandas Gandhi”, Mohamed Ali wrote: “[Gandhi]
do not like seeing anyone as a slave”. In this essay, Mohamed Ali seems to be in awe of
Gandhi’s fight against racism and the fact that he had been jailed thrice in this regard. Jafri,
56. Iqbal, *Select Writings*, 186.
57. Iqbal, *Select Writings*, 252.
can say that I have not found anyone superior to Mahatma Gandhi”. And, “After the Prophet, on whom be peace, I consider it my duty to carry out the commands of Gandhi”. Mohamed Ali and Gandhi cooperated hand in hand to give the national movement its real mass character. So much so was Mohamed Ali’s faith in Gandhi that while presiding over the Khilafat Conference at Lucknow, in the presence of Gandhi, he said:

I declare today that the Indian army is the army of Mahatma Gandhi; the Indian police is the police of Mahatma Gandhi; every man is on the side of Gandhi, nay, on the side of religion and country. The aspect of affairs is now quite changed. I see that God hath already issued His Commandments.

Mohamed Ali supported Mahatma Gandhi to an extent that he wrote an entire article titled “In Defense of Gandhiji’s Leadership” responding to a criticism of Gandhi, besides his support in accelerating the Gandhian Movement. Their coming together had an immense impact. A statement by the then Viceroy Lord Reading leaves no doubt as to the combined strength that their association produced: “If trouble comes between Mohamed Ali and Gandhi, it means the collapse of the bridge over the gulf between Hindu and Muslim”. Moreover, this quote also points out to the fragility of Hindu-Muslim unity, dependent as it was on the personal rapport between Gandhi and Mohamed Ali.

It is worthy of being mentioned here that it was the same Mohamed Ali who, prior to his alliance with Gandhi, was an out and out loyalist to the British government: “… we are not only God-fearing Mussulmans but also patriotic citizens of the Empire and Loyal subjects of the King-Emperor and that no danger to public safety can be apprehended from

61. Iqbal, Select Writings, 255.
62. This article was published in The Comrade in 1925 and was originally titled “Self Revelation of an All-India Leader”. It was written as a response to a series of articles by Lala Lajpat Rai attacking Gandhi’s leadership. Iqbal, Select Writings, 373-389.
63. Quoted in Iqbal, Life and Times of Mohamed Ali, 267.
Now, he had transformed into a staunch anti-imperialist the genesis of which lay in the Khilafat issue, and the Balkan wars of 1911-13 which made him think, like other Muslim leaders, that Christianity was on the rise at the cost of the Ottoman Empire and the office of the caliph. So powerful was his political anxiety over the fate of the Caliphate and Islamic interests that he could admire Gandhi to the extent of placing him next to the Prophet, probably the greatest honor a Muslim could give to a fellow human being. What caused this great change in Mohamed Ali’s persona? The Khilafat question provides one part of the answer. Once Gandhi showed an interest in both the Ali brothers, it was hard for them to resist the proposal for a number of reasons. Firstly, it immediately gave their movement a national character without which the Khilafat Movement would not have achieved the degree of success and popularity it actually did. Secondly, Gandhi’s offer included that he would try hard for their release from internment which did happen, and they were released. Thirdly, Mohamed Ali was quite aware of his political success that could happen by dint of being a lieutenant of Gandhi. This does not directly mean that he was extremely calculative in his politics. What is implied here is that he would never shirk his position as a Muslim leader, and that was what Gandhi needed out of him. Nothing more tangible could Mohamed Ali achieve than immediately rising to become the President of the Indian National Congress in its 1923 Coconada session. Had Mohamed Ali not associated himself with Gandhi, it would have been next to impossible for him to become acceptable to the nationalist political circles, although being President of the Congress carried mere symbolic importance. However, it is hard to overlook the fact that it was basically due to the strength of his minority status and politics that facilitated for his political upswing.

The combination of both Gandhi and Mohamed Ali was something rare to find. But the real test was yet to come. The Ali brothers were criticized by some Muslims for following the religion of Gandhi. Perhaps, one of the answers Mohamed Ali could give to his critics was that he was following Gandhi because, in his perception, Gandhi was following the most humane principles of Islam as per his understanding of the Quran and, so long he could perceive Gandhi to be so, he would accept his leadership. But

64. He wrote it to Sir James DuBoulay, Home Member of the Government of India, Simla, from Chhindwara, Central Provinces where he was interned, in a letter dated October 27, 1917 (MAP, MOH/L-3112).

65. Mitra, The Indian Annual Register, 67.
he answered in the following manner which shows that his relationship was more emotional than intellectual and political:

[…] between belief and actual character there is a wide difference. As a follower of Islam I am bound to regard the creed of even a fallen and degraded Mussalman [as] entitled to a higher place than that of any other non-Muslim irrespective of his high character, even though the person in question be Mahatma Gandhi himself.66

Such a testimonial shows an absence of intellectual clarity on how certain varieties of Islam and Hinduism could have forged a social and political understanding against imperialism. The above statement also depicts how Mohamed Ali, despite having been with Gandhi, kept tumbling back to his minority constituency, even to the extent of writing Gandhi completely off his discourse. He remained faithful to Gandhi and his ideals so far he could defend them. But once he found it hard to respond to his Muslim followers, all he did was to shrug his shoulders off. Moreover, with the ruler of Turkey Mustafa Kamal Pasha abolishing the office of the Khalifa on March 11, 1924 and expelling the Sultan, Mohamed Ali’s mission faltered. Although Mohamed Ali boycotted the Simon Commission, he was no longer in the Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that after his year of Congress Presidentship “Mohamed Ali gradually drifted away from the Congress…. The process was slow but the rift widened, estrangement grew”.67 Mohamed Ali was critical of Congress even before joining it. In 1911, he had written that a “few except Hindus accepted the claims of Congress to be “Indian” and “National”.68 Later, he had grown appreciative of it while working with Gandhi. Discussing the Congress of the period 1920-24, he said that the earlier Congress consisted only of Hindus and a few Parsis but then it consisted also of Muslims and Sikhs with complete unity.69 He, thus, makes it clear that Congress was accommodative only for a brief period. What happened in the period following 1924? Was the process of estrangement gradual or abrupt? This question needs greater attention than what historiography has paid to it.

Historians have assigned importance either to the Kohat riots of 1924 or the Nehru Report of 1928, among others, as the major factor behind the

growing bitterness between Gandhi and the Ali brothers. Some scholars attach too much weight to the Kohat riots as if it were the crossroads from where Gandhi/Congress and Mohamed Ali parted their ways. No doubt both the incidents affected the process of this estrangement, or a change from “devotion” to “disillusionment” on the part of Mohamed Ali, as says Hasan. The course of drifting apart of Congress and the Ali brothers was definitely not one-way. It also was not just the occurrence of many riots and the failing health conditions of Mohamed Ali. Another important factor considered by scholars is that Mohamed Ali gradually moved away from Congress. That he became a party to the famous “Delhi Manifesto” of 1927 signed by nineteen other Muslim leaders including Shaukat Ali, Jinnah and Mohamed Shafi who urged the Muslims not to participate in the Congress activities. All of these factors did have a role in the overall political development. What we need here is a fresh analysis of how and why both Mohamed Ali and Gandhi both distanced themselves from a relationship that rested on an intense camaraderie.

The factors that went into the souring of this relationship need to be aggregated to be analyzed afresh and with greater depth. The whole issue of the detachment of these two personalities also demands some reconsiderations and analyses that merit due attention. How did the Kohat riots become one of the factors? In 1924, there had occurred frequent riots, one of them being in the month of September at Kohat in the North Western Frontier Province, now in Pakistan. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali investigated jointly the causes leading to the Kohat riots which arose out of the publication of an anti-Islamic poem of Hindu authorship. They arrived at different conclusions. Moreover, Shaukat Ali’s findings were not only different from Gandhi’s. In fact, his version of the report forced out a response from Gandhi that made clear that differences were merely widening. On this whole issue, Gandhi wrote:

I have twice read your commentary and I see the wide gulf that separates us in the affair. I am prepared to condemn the publication of the poem but I am unable to condone the looting and arson. I do not endorse your opinion that the pamphlet was the cause of the conflagration. The ground was already prepared. I cannot treat the conversions as lightly as you seem to do.

In my opinion the Khilafatists have greatly neglected their duty and Maulvi Ahmed Gul certainly betrayed the trust reposed in him.... I tremble to publish our statements. The publication will give rise to an acrimonious discussion. I would therefore even suggest the whole matter being examined by Hakim Saheb or Dr. Ansari.74

Afzal Iqbal deems such a public admission of their differences could only widen the distrust between the two communities.75 What strikes one here is the way Gandhi seems to have alternated Shaukat Ali by other Muslim leaders, something we shall be discussing in a while. Furthermore, events and episodes kept adding on to the gradual growing disenchantment between Gandhi the Ali brothers. Mohamed Ali wrote in 1925 that the Hindus and Muslims lacked a “joint hatred of slavery” (read, colonialism) that could unite them for a national program.76 In other words, there lacked harmony between the two. This was coming out of the pen of the same writer who would leave no stone unturned in fathoming the depth and strength of Hindi-Muslim unity, only a year earlier. Keeping in mind Mohamed Ali’s earlier statements, it becomes clear that the common factor that kept him united with Gandhi in particular and Muslims with Hindus in general — the Khilafat — was a lost cause. This factor should be underlined and deserves greater analysis than what historiography has assigned it. As a champion of the Khilafat issue, Mohamed Ali must have felt exasperated over the way the symbol of Khilafat lost ground in Turkey itself. He could do nothing. He could blame no one. He could fight no more. 1924 was not only the year when Kohat riots took place. It was the same year that pushed him away from a hyper-political state to a being politician with no immediate issue at hand. He could find himself wary of nothing but his own surroundings. It was this state of his psyche along with political developments within Congress in the following years that were partly responsible for the way his relationship unfolded with Gandhi. Associated with the issue of “lost cause” was another facet. A sidelined Mohamed Ali was pushed back even more, and eventually replaced. The role and prestige he had enjoyed nationally in the last few years were fading out, giving way to another set of Muslim leadership. In 1927, it was Dr. M. A. Ansari who became the Congress President in its Madras session. It was the same Mohamed Ali who

74. *CWMG*, vol. 30 (December 27, 1924 – March 21, 1925), 298.
75. Iqbal, *Life and Times*, 331.
was all praise for M. A. Ansari’s medical services in 1913 during the Balkan Wars, and who now started calling Ansari a “puppet” in the hands of Congressmen.\(^{77}\) As a person who had enjoyed complete limelight as a minority leader, Mohamed Ali might have felt the pinch of being brought down. Moreover, the following statement of Gandhi does show how Mohamed Ali was easily replaced:

The readers know the influence that the Ali Brothers exercised over the Congress during the Khilafat days. Today the Working Committee does not move without Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s co-operation and wise guidance. His is the decisive voice on Hindu-Muslim questions.\(^{78}\)

Muslim leaders such as M. A. Ansari and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who had shared Mohamed Ali’s concerns for the Balkan wars and the Khilafat movement in the past, started having an edge over him. Their political careers were more stable in terms of falling in line with the general political philosophy of Gandhi and the Congress. This is also apparent in the way these people mattered in the making of the Nehru Report later, and not the Ali brothers. The follow-up question here is why the Ali brothers themselves became irrelevant to Gandhi and the Congress. The answer lies in the pragmatic politics of Gandhi whose focus was on enlisting and promoting such minority leaders who would matter both in terms of Congress’ political ideology as well as their own standing and popularity among minorities. Ali brothers were bygone, no more crowd pullers with the demise of the Khilafat issue. Congress was rather gradually finding a more reliable Muslim leadership in Maulana Azad, a rival of Mohamed Ali, who thought of the latter as no more than a munshi (an assistant or clerk), despite all his intellectual abilities.\(^{79}\) Azad had nothing but contempt for the elder brother Shaukat Ali. However, the Ali brothers, despite feeling being marginalized continued their championing of minority rights for the Muslims, something that is clearly evident in their bitter opposition to the Nehru Report. Mohamed Ali no more mattered in the Congress politics but he carried on with his old constituency, addressing minority rights and privileges for Muslims – issues that he never let off his chest.


\(^{78}\) *CWMG*, vol. 77 (October 16, 1939 – February 22, 1940), 90.

\(^{79}\) Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, 42.
It was the Nehru Committee Report (1928) which gave the relationship the final blow. The Nehru Committee Report was submitted by Motilal Nehru on August 10, 1928 as per the instructions of an All Parties Conference held at Bombay earlier that year on May 19. Mohamed Ali was away in England then for medical treatment. The report of this committee was supposed to determine the principles of the Constitution for India. Mohamed Ali had supported the issue of separate electorates right from 1906 on the basis of mistrust between the majority and the minority communities. On the other hand, this Report said:

It is admitted by most people now that separate electorates are thoroughly bad and must be done away with…. Everybody knows that separate electorates are bad for the growth of a national spirit, but everybody perhaps does not realize equally well that separate electorates are still worse for a minority community. They make the majority wholly independent of the minority and its votes and usually hostile to it. Under separate electorates therefore the chances are that the minority will always, have to face a hostile majority, which can always, by sheer force of numbers, override the wishes of the minority. This effect of having separate electorates has already become obvious, although the presence of the third party confuses the issues. Separate electorates thus benefit the majority community.

Mahatma Gandhi, who had rather kept the issue of the separate electorates under carpet during the Khilafat Movement in larger interests, now started speaking against it. He determinedly announced that he was planning to do away with separate electorates. Probably, he cared no more for the Ali brothers’ brand of politics. Gandhi had given Motilal Nehru a freehand in deciding these matters. He had moved from the Khilafat Movement and had more Muslim allies, unlike his earlier days, to tread his path through the nation. However, acceptance of the Nehru Report led Mohamed Ali

80. Mohamed Ali clarified his position on the Nehru Report vis-a-vis Congress and its leaders after he came back from England. He gave a speech in the Khilafat Conference held in Calcutta, the same venue where Congress met for its annual session, in December 1928. He lambasted not only Hindu leaders of the Congress but targeted more so Muslim leaders such as M. A. Ansari, Sir Ali Imam etc., whom he blamed to have betrayed Muslim and minority cause. For his complete speech, see Jafri, Ali Biradraan, 568-73.


82. CWMG, vol. 30 (December 27, 1924 – March 21, 1925), 270.
to believe that the gap between communities still existed. Mohamed Ali also translated it as a fear of Hindu domination. The report had rejected the demand for reservation of seats for the Muslims in Bengal and Punjab on the ground that reservation for majorities was “incompatible with real representative and responsible government”. The weight of Muslim representation in Hindu majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal was also lessened from what it was earlier. In the case of the United Provinces, it was said that “the Muslims stand to gain more seats under our scheme than the number fixed for them under the present system”. Separate electorates were thus abolished causing much annoyance to Mohamed Ali and, those who believed in his political vision. Mohamed Ali opposed the Nehru Report vehemently. He saw in the removal of separate electorates a possible onslaught of Hindu Mahasabha on Muslims. Moreover, he viewed the provision of dominion status in the Report as “inconsistent with the independent spirit of Islam” since it entailed compromises for the Muslims of India with the forces of the British government as well as the Hindu Mahasabha.

However, Mohamed Ali’s disputation of the Nehru Report was not just a political critique, as has been generally believed. In fact, the Nehru Report provided him with an avenue to articulate his concerns for his religion and co-religionists. He expressed his feelings in Urdu, which translates:

Let us see whether Pandit Motilal wins or Pandit Jawaharlal becomes a puppet in the hands of the trickster, or whether the idol-worshippers triumph or the iconoclasts at the hands of Abraham [the Prophet].

He also added that he trusted neither the majority of the Indians nor the majority of the Muslims. If he did trust someone, it was God. This shows how he was using the political instrument of the Nehru Report to bag favors from his community. Expressing distrust for human beings, and invoking

---

83. The Nehru Report, 40-52.
84. Mohamed Ali’s complete criticism of the Nehru Report is found in one of his last letters written on January 1, 1931, only three days before his death, addressed to Ramsay MacDonald, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. See Abu Salman Shahjahanpuri, Siyaasi Maktubaat Rais-ul-Ahrar: Maulana Mohamed Ali (Karachi: Modern Publishers, 1978), 85-104.
85. The Nehru Report, 53.
God or Allah could only add to his popularity among Muslims, his regular audience. He was also a poet, and he left no chance in articulating this feeling through his poetry. The following couplet reflects his strong religious oratory in which he addressed God, in a public speech:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Meri marzii huii gum jab se terii marzii main} \\
\text{Bandagii main hii milay humko khudaaii ke mazay.}^{89}
\end{align*}
\]

Ever since my will has merged into Yours.
Slavery by itself is akin to divinity.

Thus, Mohamed Ali continued to promote his minority politics by incorporating aspects that could relate him to his community. Political issues came to be of immense help to him in this regard. The actual frustration is seen in the way Mohamed Ali found himself relegated amidst the political churning that took place around the Nehru Report. On December 21, 1928, the Ali brothers rejected the Nehru Report in the Khilafat Conference meeting. Mohamed Ali had started feeling that Mahatma Gandhi was increasingly functioning under the influence of the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu rightist party. To him, Gandhi was allowing certain prominent Hindu right-wing leaders a freehand within Congress. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946) was an emerging favorite of Gandhi. Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) had played a key role in the Nehru Report. He was responsible for the Supplementary Report that was published as a corollary to Motilal Nehru’s main report. This supplementary report reiterated the main report’s arguments but with rather more bluntness: “The question of reservation of seats for Muslim majorities must therefore be taken as finally settled…”.^{90} The Ali brothers could not have liked Lala Lajpat Rai playing such a central role within Congress. Lajpat Rai was for long a leading member of Arya Samaj in Punjab and headed the Sangathan movement that aimed at uniting the Hindus. The Ali brothers could trust Gandhi but never a leader like Lajpat Rai, a Hindu right-winger. Lajpat Rai who himself pursued Hindu communal politics was telling Muslims such as Mohamed Ali as to why the system of separate electorates was communal. It was, in other words, the muted response of the Congress high command and Gandhi to the growth of Hindu communalism that made Mohamed Ali rather more uncomfortable. So much so that he even began thinking of Gandhi as a Hindu, than

“the Great Soul” representing all. He articulated this viewpoint in a letter to one of his contemporaries, Ghulam Bhek Nairang, in 1929:

For a Muslim, simply to oppose Malaviyat [Malaviya-ism] will be like supporting him among Hindus. And, in this lies the benefit of neither Islam nor Hindustan, nor even of Hindus themselves. Possibly, you think that Mahatma Gandhi himself must have committed many mistakes. I can agree with such an idea to an extent. But Gandhi is a human being, not an angel. He has had a large following among Hindus, particularly Punjabi Hindus.91

One can analyze the above statement in multiple ways but the most basic point is that he was now thinking of Gandhi as a leader of the Hindus. On such grounds, the Nehru Report made apparent one definite side of Mohamed Ali’s personality, i.e., his unwillingness to accommodate any compromise on minority issues. This was confirmed through both his religious and political criticisms of the Report. It reflected his rigid outlook on a matter on which he used his usual rhetoric of Muslim electoral politics. Even when he went to London to participate in the First Round Table Conference in November 1930, he spoke fervently of minority interests, along with those of the nation. In his last letter addressed to the Prime Minister of England, he said:

[…] we want to go back not with separate electorates only, nor with weightage only for the Muslims but with freedom for India including freedom for the Muslims and unless we can secure that, I can assure the Prime Minister that the Muslims of India will join the Civil Disobedience Movement without the least hesitation no matter what we may say and what the other Muslim Delegates may say.92

This pronouncement of Mohamed Ali implies that he was equally concerned with the rights and freedoms of minorities as he was for the nation. It was this swaraj that he lived for: for the nation as well as for Islam. To achieve these freedoms, non-cooperation was his main facilitator. This was also the reason why he opposed the Swarajists, a political faction led by Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das who were willing to compromise with the British for

92. Iqbal, Select Writings, 477-8 [Emphasis added].
the sake of entering legislatures. Although later in his life Mohamed Ali was not involved with the Congress as before, his patriotic fervor remained the same. But again, his community’s interests never lost the foreground. Leaving aside the debate whether he was more patriotic or more communitarian, it can safely be argued that his political career took off with championing minority rights and politics, and remained so till his demise on January 3, 1931. From being a co-founder of the All India Muslim League in 1906 to championing the cause of the separate electorates in late 1910s, from leading the Khilafat movement in early 1920s to passionately opposing the issue of mixed electorates until late 1920s are some of the major phases that get us a glimpse of how he kept thumping minority interests.

Conclusion: The Mahatma and the Maulana

Most studies agree that Gandhi’s support of the Khilafat issue was a strategic move to incorporate Muslim support into his mass movement. There could be differences among historians regarding why he did so—solely to enlist minority support, or to genuinely bring them into the mainstream nationalist politics. It is also widely accepted that Gandhi could not prolong as much minority involvement in his succeeding movements as during the Khilafat Movement. What he did succeed in was to give Congress a national character, something that undercut the Muslim League’s claim later for being the sole spokesman of the Muslims in British India. Gandhi made Mohamed Ali a partner in politics, and won greater national popularity than was enjoyed by any other nationalist leader.93 Thus, through minority politics, Gandhi was to emerge as a “Mahatma”, not in any religious or cultural sense but in the sense of becoming “the Great Soul” who had a rather broader base of support to his mass movement than before. It was the Khilafat Movement that helped him become that. Even Shahid Amin’s study of peasant perceptions of Gandhi as Mahatma in Gorakhpur in terms of his pratap (glory) is based around stories that took place during 1921-22, a time when Gandhi traveled with the Ali brothers under the Non-Cooperation Khilafat Movement.94

Mohamed Ali, since the time of the foundation of the Muslim League in 1906 until his death in 1931, remained a leader of the minority community

93. Nanda, Gandhi’s Passion, 103-04.
of Muslims in India. From the issue of separate electorates to the Khilafat Movement to the Nehru Report, he succeeded in portraying himself as a champion of Muslim causes. He did look up to Gandhi as his source of inspiration, and expressed vehemently a love for his nation, but that never deterred him from raising issues pertaining Muslim interests. His emergence in politics was as a person who led Muslims, championed their demands, and died as one upholding Muslim interests. His rise in his career traces to being a leader of national stature owed a great deal to his position as a leader of the Muslim community. Whatever may be the origin of his title Maulana; he remained a “Maulana” in this sense and lived up to it as a minority leader throughout his life.

How the Khilafat Movement, initially a pan-Islamic movement, became centered on minority national politics was a story of the interaction between the Mahatma and the Maulana, both of whom had their own visions and accomplishments to achieve. Mohamed Ali did see Gandhi as his leader during the movement, but his was never a politics of surrender and obedience. No wonder, Gandhian politics of instrumentality is more than legible here, but a similar gesture on the part of Mohamed Ali is equally writ large. If Gandhi served his own purposes, Mohamed Ali was not far behind. No other anti-colonial movement witnessed such inter-community mobilization as did the Khilafat Movement. The minority politics that was seen operative during this phase of history continues to resonate itself in the Indian politics every now and then.