

India-Türkiye Relations: Civilizational Roots, Lost Promises and the Imperative of Strategic Rediscovery

Iftikhar Gilani

Abstract

Relations between India and Türkiye are commonly interpreted through the contemporary disputes that periodically divide New Delhi and Ankara, particularly Türkiye's strategic relationship with Pakistan, its position on Jammu and Kashmir, and India's growing engagement with Greece, Cyprus and Armenia.

While these issues constitute important elements of present-day foreign policy, viewing India-Türkiye relations primarily through them obscures a much longer and considerably richer historical relationship.

For several centuries, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Anatolia formed parts of overlapping commercial, political, intellectual and cultural worlds. Turkic dynasties shaped important periods of Indian history; merchants travelled through Central Asian and Himalayan routes connecting India with the wider Turkic world; Indian commodities circulated through Ottoman markets; and languages, literature, architecture, military technology and Sufi traditions travelled between societies.

The Mughal or Baburid Empire, founded by Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur in India in 1526, remains part of Türkiye's wider understanding of Turkic history, a connection visibly acknowledged in contemporary Turkish scholarship and ceremonial representation.

Although Qutb-ud-din Aibak had founded the first Turkic empire as the Delhi Sultanate in **1206 CE**, much before the Ottomans established their empire in Bursa in 1326.

The relationship acquired an extraordinary popular and political dimension during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indian sympathy for the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars led to fundraising, humanitarian assistance and organised medical missions. It was actually anti-colonial sentiments in India that converged into support against Türkiye's dismemberment and for its freedom struggle.

The majority of Turks also want to remember this support with this formulation rather than support for the continuation of the decaying Khilafat system.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari led a major Indian medical mission to Ottoman Türkiye in 1912-13. Abdur Rahman Samdani alias Peshawari, a young student connected ancestrally with Kashmir and studying at Aligarh, travelled with this movement of solidarity and subsequently devoted much of his short life to Türkiye, serving in military campaigns, joining the Turkish

national struggle, working with the newly established Anadolu Agency and serving the Ankara government diplomatically.

Interestingly, Samdani alias Peshawri is the elder brother of Mohammad Yunus Khan (1916–2001), a prominent Indian diplomat and close confidant of the Nehru-Gandhi family. So he is also linked to the family of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan.

Most significantly, the fate of Türkiye became deeply intertwined with India's own struggle against British colonial rule. Mahatma Gandhi's support for the Turkish cause and his alliance with the Khilafat leadership helped transform what had begun as concern over the Ottoman settlement into one of the first genuinely mass movements of Indian anti-colonial politics. The Turkish question became a vehicle for Hindu-Muslim political mobilisation at a crucial stage of India's national movement.

The central argument of this paper is that the subsequent estrangement between India and Türkiye was therefore neither historically natural nor civilizationally predetermined. Türkiye after becoming Republic choose to look towards the West and abandoned its connections to the East. India preferred to look inwards after its independence.

A deeper strategic disconnect developed during the Cold War, when Türkiye joined NATO and entered security arrangements with Pakistan while India championed non-alignment and developed an increasingly close relationship with the Soviet Union. Kashmir, Cyprus and competing regional alignments subsequently institutionalised mutual suspicion.

The end of the Cold War removed much of the structural rationale for this estrangement, yet the mental maps created during that period have proved remarkably durable. The task before contemporary India and Türkiye is therefore not to manufacture a relationship where none existed, but to rediscover a neglected one and translate civilizational familiarity into a sustainable framework of economic, diplomatic and strategic cooperation. It has become more necessary now as Türkiye plays a lead role in the Turkic Council and Central Asian countries treat it as their lead guide. It must also be borne in mind that out of 22 Arab nations, only Palestine is occupied, but most of the Turkic nations remain occupied, like Bashkortostan, Sakha (Yakutia), Chuvashia, Tuva, Khakassia, Altai, and Karachay-Cherkessia, Dagestan and Chechnya, etc., under Russia and Xinjiang under China.

I. Introduction: A Relationship Remembered Unevenly

When **Şakir Özkan Torunlar**, Türkiye's Ambassador to India from 2017 to 2021, was serving in New Delhi, he would occasionally employ a striking formulation to describe the historical proximity of the two countries: centuries ago, he observed, only the Himalayas separated India and Türkiye, whereas today the distance between them can be covered by an aircraft in approximately six hours. The geographical formulation was obviously metaphorical, but its diplomatic meaning was profound. Modern transportation has brought the two countries physically closer at precisely the moment when political perceptions have often pushed them psychologically apart.

The paradox identified by Torunlar provides an appropriate point of departure for examining India-Türkiye relations because the contemporary relationship bears little resemblance to the intensity of interaction that characterised earlier centuries. The historical record includes Central Asian migrations, Turkic dynasties in India, Ottoman relations with rulers of the subcontinent, commercial exchanges through the Indian Ocean and overland routes, common Sufi and Persianate traditions, linguistic interaction, Indian medical assistance during the Balkan Wars, popular financial support for the Turkish national struggle and a remarkable convergence between the Turkish question and India's movement against British colonial rule.

The depth of this connection was still sufficiently understood when independent India and republican Türkiye formalised their relationship in the middle of the twentieth century. The **Treaty of Friendship signed in Ankara on December 14, 1951** did not describe relations as something newly created by two modern states. Its preamble explicitly recognised the ancient ties of friendship between the two countries, while its first article envisaged enduring peace and friendship between them.

Yet within a few years, India and Türkiye found themselves occupying remarkably different strategic locations in the emerging Cold War. Türkiye joined NATO in 1952 and later entered regional security arrangements with Pakistan, while India emerged as one of the principal architects of non-alignment and developed increasingly important ties with the Soviet Union. Pakistan and Kashmir consequently entered Türkiye's strategic imagination, while Cyprus and Greece increasingly influenced Indian perceptions of Türkiye.

The most enduring problem in India-Türkiye relations has therefore not been geographical distance or an absence of common history. It has been the progressive replacement of a direct relationship by a **third-country relationship**, in which India disproportionately understood Türkiye through Pakistan and Türkiye interpreted its relations with India through Greece, Cyprus and, more recently, Armenia.

This constitutes what may be called the lost promise of India-Türkiye relations.

The promise was not that India and Türkiye were destined to become military allies or that historical sentiment would eliminate disagreements. Rather, the promise was that two societies connected through centuries of interaction and through unusually powerful experiences of anti-imperial solidarity would develop the ability to manage disagreements without allowing them to consume the entire relationship.

That ability has never been fully institutionalised.

II. Civilizational Geography Before Modern Borders

Any serious discussion of India-Türkiye relations must begin by distinguishing between the historically broader category of **Turkic** peoples and the more specific identity of modern **Turkish** nationality. The Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire cannot simply be described as

Turkish empires in the modern national sense. Their ruling elites emerged from different parts of the wider Central Asian Turkic and Persianate world and developed distinct political identities after establishing themselves in the Indian subcontinent.

The distinction is academically important, but it does not eliminate the civilizational connection. Modern Türkiye itself places significant importance on the wider history of Turkic peoples extending from Anatolia through Central Asia, and consequently regards several historical states associated with the Indian subcontinent as components of the broader Turkic historical experience.

The Indian subcontinent had interacted with Central Asian Turkic peoples long before the establishment of modern Türkiye. The movement of soldiers, merchants, scholars, mystics and political elites across Afghanistan and Central Asia gradually connected northern India to a wider cultural geography extending through Samarkand, Bukhara, Herat and eventually towards Anatolia.

The establishment of the **Delhi Sultanate under Qutb-ud-Din Aibak in 1206** represented an important political manifestation of this process. For several centuries thereafter, dynasties of Turkic or Central Asian origin played major roles in northern India. They did not merely import institutions from elsewhere; instead, they participated in the creation of a distinctive Indo-Islamic civilisation in which Central Asian, Persianate and indigenous Indian traditions became deeply intertwined.

Persian developed into an important administrative and literary language, while Turkic military traditions, architectural techniques and courtly practices interacted with Indian institutions. The resulting cultural synthesis subsequently shaped architecture, cuisine, vocabulary, clothing, literature and systems of government across much of the subcontinent.

The relationship, moreover, cannot properly be understood as a one-way movement of influence from Central Asia into India. India itself became one of the principal centres of the Persianate world, generating literature, scholarship, architecture and cultural practices that travelled beyond the subcontinent.

The civilizational relationship was therefore circular rather than linear.

III. Babur and the Indian Chapter of Turkic Historical Memory

Perhaps no historical personality illustrates this overlapping civilizational ownership more clearly than **Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur**, founder of the Mughal, or Baburid, Empire in India.

Babur was born in Andijan in the Fergana Valley in 1483, inherited the Timurid political tradition, established himself in Kabul and eventually entered northern India, where his victory over Ibrahim Lodi at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526 laid the foundations of one of the most consequential empires in Indian history.

Babur was not an Ottoman Turk, nor can he accurately be described as Turkish in the modern national sense. Nevertheless, his cultural and linguistic world was unmistakably Turkic. He wrote the celebrated *Baburnama* primarily in Chagatai Turkic, and his political imagination was rooted in the Timurid-Central Asian world.

For this reason, Babur occupies an important position not only in Indian and Central Asian history but also within Türkiye's broader understanding of Turkic civilisation.

This is not a merely antiquarian association. In February 2026, the **Turkish Academy of Sciences, TÜBA**, convened a major workshop in Ankara titled *Babür Şah ve Mirası* or *Babur Shah and His Legacy*, commemorating five centuries since Babur's establishment of his empire in India. The programme described Babur as a ruler, military leader, poet and statesman whose career connected Fergana, Afghanistan and India and whose intellectual legacy extended well beyond the political dynasty he established.

This contemporary Turkish interest is revealing. While debates about the Mughal past within India have increasingly become entangled in domestic political controversies, institutions in Türkiye continue to treat Babur and the Baburid experience as part of a wider Turkic civilizational narrative.

The symbolism became even more striking during the recent NATO summit in Ankara. At ceremonial events hosted at the Presidential Complex, soldiers representing historic Turkic states appeared as part of the visual representation of Türkiye's historical inheritance. Among the traditions represented was the Baburid-Mughal lineage associated principally with India.

The scene carries considerable symbolic significance. NATO represents the twentieth-century Western alliance architecture that contributed indirectly to the post-independence strategic separation between Türkiye and India, yet at a NATO gathering Türkiye's own representation of its historical identity reached eastwards to include the founder of an empire centred in India.

There are also more concrete Ottoman connections to the early Mughal state. Babur's use of gunpowder warfare and field artillery at Panipat drew upon techniques associated with the western Islamic military world. Sources identify **Ustad Ali Quli and Mustafa Rumi** among specialists connected with the effective employment of artillery and firearms. The designation *Rumi*, commonly associated with Anatolia or Ottoman lands, is itself indicative of the military-technological networks through which expertise travelled across Asia.

Later Mughal and Ottoman rulers maintained diplomatic contacts, even though relations were neither continuous nor always harmonious. Both courts considered themselves major imperial centres, and questions of precedence and political legitimacy could produce tension. Nevertheless, letters, emissaries, merchants and intellectuals circulated between these worlds.

The relationship was thus not between an imperial centre and a distant subordinate civilisation. It was an interaction between multiple centres of Eurasian power.

IV. Ottoman-Indian Connections: Diplomacy, Commerce and the Sacred Geography of the Hajj

Formal interactions between the Ottoman state and rulers in India preceded the establishment of the Mughal Empire. Indian official accounts trace diplomatic exchanges between the Ottoman court and the Bahmani rulers of the Deccan to the late fifteenth century.

The Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 significantly expanded the relevance of the empire to India. Ottoman political control now extended across major approaches to the Red Sea and the holy cities of Makkah and Madina, while merchants and pilgrims from the Indian subcontinent travelled through territories under Ottoman administration.

The growth of Portuguese naval power in the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century created another field of interaction. Indian Muslim rulers concerned about Portuguese maritime domination periodically looked towards the Ottoman Empire for assistance, while Ottoman policymakers themselves sought to protect Red Sea routes and commercial access to the Indian Ocean.

Commercial ties were equally important. Indian textiles, spices, dyes and other commodities circulated through Ottoman commercial networks, while ports linking the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean formed components of a much larger trading system.

Religion and intellectual life reinforced these commercial connections. Indian Muslims travelling for the Hajj passed through Ottoman-controlled territories, while Sufi orders and religious scholarship circulated between South Asia, Central Asia and Anatolia.

The extraordinary popularity of **Jalaluddin Rumi** in the Indian subcontinent represents perhaps the best-known example of this shared spiritual vocabulary. His poetry became part of Indian Muslim intellectual and mystical life, while Sufi networks helped create cultural connections extending far beyond the boundaries of individual states.

Such interactions also left linguistic traces. Indian and Turkish diplomats have periodically drawn attention to the large vocabulary shared between Turkish and Hindustani. Exact numerical claims should be treated cautiously, since much of the vocabulary entered both languages through Persian and Arabic rather than necessarily through direct Turkish-Hindi transmission. Nevertheless, the linguistic convergence demonstrates that both societies participated for centuries in overlapping cultural and literary universes.

V. The Living Turkic Landscape of India

One of the more striking but relatively neglected dimensions of this civilizational relationship is the continued presence in India of communities that preserve memories of Turkic ancestry.

There are large Turkic communities living across **Sambhal, Moradabad, Rampur, Amroha and Nagina** in India's largest province of Uttar Pradesh.

Historian Abhay Kumar Singh of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University told the Anadolu Agency in 2019 that Turkic settlement in the region had been documented by historians including K.A. Nizami and A.L. Srivastava. Communities described themselves through sub-groups such as Jhoja Turk, Khoja Turk and Bobna Turk, while another Turkic-descended community, Tirklu Turks, was reported in parts of southern India.

What is historically interesting is less the precise demographic number than the preservation of collective memory. Families interviewed in the region referred to customs, foods and forms of hospitality that they regarded as survivals of their Turkic ancestry, illustrating how migrations associated with medieval political history became embedded in local Indian society over generations.

Sambhal itself contains an additional Baburid connection. Its historic congregational mosque dates to the period immediately following Babur's conquest of northern India and is associated with one of his commanders. The survival of these communities and monuments means that the Turkic dimension of Indian history is not confined to museum collections or royal chronicles; in several regions it remains embedded in social memory.

This living heritage deserves greater scholarly investigation from both Indian and Turkish institutions.

VI. Ladakh: When the Himalayas Were a Corridor Rather Than a Wall

If western Uttar Pradesh demonstrates the demographic residue of historical migration, **Ladakh** reveals the commercial geography that once connected India directly with the Turkic world.

The modern political imagination tends to view Ladakh primarily as a remote Himalayan frontier separating India from China and situated close to Pakistan-administered territories. Historically, however, Ladakh was not a peripheral endpoint but an important junction linking South Asia with Yarkand, Kashgar, Khotan, Tibet and the wider Central Asian trading system.

Historian Abdul Ghani Sheikh has recalled that, because of extensive commercial and civilizational contact, **Turkish or Turkic speech functioned as an important second language in Ladakh until roughly a century ago**. The region provided direct overland access from the Indian subcontinent towards the cities of Turkestan through routes traversing the Karakoram passes.

Salim Beg, former Director-General of the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department and a historian associated with heritage conservation, has pointed to the *Hudud al-'Alam*, the tenth-century Persian geographical text, while describing the antiquity of Ladakh's connections

with neighbouring regions. Central Asian Muslims travelling towards Makkah could pass through Leh, demonstrating that the town was connected not merely with commercial routes but with the sacred geography of the Hajj.

The **Leh-Yarkand route** turned Leh and Nubra into meeting points for merchants dealing in silk, carpets, silver, coral, brocade, precious stones and other commodities. Goods travelled in the opposite direction from Kashmir and the Indian plains towards Tibet and Central Asia. These exchanges produced a composite commercial culture in which Central Asian merchants settled locally and married Ladakhi women.

Their descendants became known as **Argons**, or Turk Muslims, and were eventually integrated into Ladakhi society. Turkic vocabulary entered the Ladakhi language, while commercial and family relationships linked the region to Yarkand and other Central Asian centres.

The material traces of this history still survive. Near the seventeenth-century **Tsa Soma Mosque in Leh**, a museum has been developed to preserve the region's Central Asian and Turkic heritage. Local families contributed artefacts, manuscripts and antiques, while objects transferred from the Jama Masjid collection include valuable Yarkandi carpets and manuscripts.

Even familiar geographical names preserve forgotten histories. **Ghulam Rasul Galwan**, a Turk-Argon explorer whose knowledge of the Karakoram and Pamirs proved valuable to British expeditions, gave his name to the Galwan Valley, now associated almost exclusively with the India-China military confrontation. Similarly, the strategic location known as **Daulat Beg Oldi** preserves the memory of Sultan Said Khan, a Turkic ruler associated with Yarkand whose expeditionary history became embedded in Ladakh's geographical nomenclature.

The transformation of Ladakh during the twentieth century is a useful metaphor for the larger India-Türkiye disconnect. Routes that had facilitated movement for centuries were gradually closed by Partition, the India-Pakistan conflicts and the Sino-Indian confrontation. The 1947 division of the subcontinent and subsequent conflicts transformed commercial corridors into strategic frontiers. After the 1962 India-China war, the old networks effectively disappeared.

The Himalayas, in other words, became a barrier only after modern geopolitics had turned what had once been connective spaces into fortified borders.

VII. The Balkan Wars and the Extraordinary Indian Medical Mission

The most remarkable chapter in modern India-Türkiye relations began not at the diplomatic level but through popular mobilisation in British India.

The **Balkan Wars of 1912-13**, during which the Ottoman Empire suffered enormous military and humanitarian losses, generated widespread concern across the Indian subcontinent.

Indian newspapers reported extensively on the conflict, fundraising campaigns were organised, and public sentiment generated concrete humanitarian initiatives.

The most important of these was the **Indian Medical Mission led by Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari**.

Ansari deserves far greater prominence in the historical narrative of India-Türkiye relations than he generally receives. A physician trained in Britain, he subsequently became a central figure in the Indian national movement, served as president of the Indian National Congress, was associated with the Muslim League at an earlier stage of his political career, became an important advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, and played a foundational role in Jamia Millia Islamia.

Before attaining these political positions, however, he led one of the most important organised Indian humanitarian missions ever dispatched to the Ottoman Empire at the instance of Mahatma Gandhi.

Recent research presented by Istanbul University's Department of Urdu Language and Literature, drawing upon reports and correspondence published in Muhammad Ali Jauhar's newspaper *The Comrade*, provides important detail about the scale of the endeavour. The proposal for a medical mission gained momentum in October 1912, accompanied by public fundraising whose contributors and donations were regularly published.

On December 15, 1912, a 22-member delegation led by Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari left Bombay for Istanbul. It consisted of **five doctors, seven dressers, and ten nurses and ambulance attendants**. The delegation reached Istanbul on December 30 and subsequently worked for approximately six months before returning to Delhi in July 1913, where it received a large public welcome.

This was therefore not a symbolic delegation dispatched for ceremonial purposes. It was a sizeable organised medical undertaking created by civil society in a colonised country to assist another society experiencing war thousands of kilometres away.

Ansari's letters from Türkiye, published in *The Comrade*, played another crucial role. They transmitted information about conditions in Ottoman territory directly to Indian readers and helped transform a distant military conflict into an issue of immediate political and humanitarian concern in India.

The medical mission is particularly important because it predates both the Khilafat Movement and Türkiye's War of Independence. It demonstrates that Indian public engagement with Ottoman Türkiye did not suddenly appear after the First World War; a substantial network of sympathy, information and humanitarian mobilisation already existed.

It was within this environment that another extraordinary individual entered Turkish history.

VIII. Abdur Rahman Samdani alias Peshawari: A Human Bridge Between the Two Struggles

Abdur Rahman Samdani alias Peshawari represents perhaps the most compelling human symbol of India-Türkiye relations.

Born in Peshawar in the 1880s into an affluent family whose earlier roots were traced to Baramulla in Kashmir, Peshawari was studying at the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, which later became Aligarh Muslim University, when the medical mission to the Ottoman Empire was being organised.

Samdani alias Peshawari is the elder brother of Mohammad Yunus Khan (1916–2001), a prominent Indian diplomat and close confidant of the Nehru-Gandhi family. In 1971, in an interview with Delhi-based Urdu journal Huma, Yunus Khan, then India's ambassador to Algeria, mentioned that his elder brother Abdur Rahman had migrated to Türkiye and was an associate of modern Türkiye's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. So he is also linked to the family of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan.

He was not originally medically trained. According to family accounts preserved in later interviews, he undertook paramedical training specifically so that he could qualify to join the mission. Knowing that his father was unlikely to approve of his departure, he sold personal belongings, including clothes and books, to finance his journey.

For most members of the mission, Türkiye was a humanitarian assignment.

For Peshawari, it became a new life.

He remained after the mission and entered Ottoman service. He subsequently participated in military campaigns, including the Gallipoli campaign during the First World War, and later became involved in the Turkish national struggle led by Mustafa Kemal. Anadolu Agency's historical accounts describe him as one of its earliest journalists, working alongside figures associated with the foundation of the agency at a time when communicating developments from Anatolia was itself an important component of the independence struggle.

Peshawari's importance went beyond journalism. His command of languages, including English, Persian and Pashto, made him valuable to the nationalist administration's external relations. Turkish archival material associated with Rauf Orbay records Peshawari's role in correspondence and his appointment in connection with the Ankara government's relations with Afghanistan. Anadolu's historical accounts describe him as Türkiye's first ambassador or representative to Kabul.

His personal history is remarkable because it intersects with several of the defining struggles of the early twentieth century: anti-colonialism in India, the Balkan Wars, Gallipoli, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish War of Independence, the creation of republican institutions and the emergence of new diplomatic relationships across Asia.

Family memory records that he became known affectionately as “**Lala Turki**” and “**Chacha Turki**,” approximately “Turkish brother” and “Turkish uncle.” During his posting in Kabul, when his relatives went to meet him, they urged him to return to British India; he reportedly refused to return while the country remained under colonial rule.

Peshawari never married. Family recollections attribute to him the explanation that he was “**married to his cause**,” by which he meant the struggle for Türkiye's liberation.

His surviving papers provide another remarkable connection. When Istanbul's Atatürk Library acquired the private archive of **Rauf Orbay**, one of the major figures of the Turkish national struggle, researchers discovered that approximately one-fifth of more than 5,000 documents were connected to Peshawari. The material included correspondence in several languages and illustrates the extent to which this young man from British India became integrated into the political world of the Turkish national movement.

Peshawari was assassinated in Istanbul in 1925 while still a relatively young man.

His life deserves recognition in India as much as in Türkiye. He cannot properly be appropriated exclusively by the national histories created after Partition. He had been born in British India, belonged to a family with Kashmiri origins settled in Peshawar, studied at Aligarh, travelled under an Indian humanitarian initiative and devoted himself to the emergence of modern Türkiye.

In this sense, Peshawari belongs to the shared history of the entire Indian subcontinent and Türkiye.

IX. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari: Physician, Nationalist and Architect of Indo-Turkish Solidarity

If Peshawari became the individual embodiment of Indian devotion to Türkiye, **Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari** provided the organisational and political bridge through which that devotion entered the mainstream Indian national movement.

His importance lies in the unusual combination of medicine, humanitarianism and politics that defined his career.

The 1912-13 mission gave Ansari first-hand familiarity with Ottoman society and the consequences of European intervention in the region. His experience subsequently made him an important source of knowledge about Türkiye for Indian leaders, including Gandhi. Gandhi himself acknowledged in *Young India* that Ansari had expanded his understanding of the Turkish question.

Ansari therefore served as an interpreter of Türkiye to India's national leadership long before modern diplomatic missions began attempting to perform that task.

His Delhi home, **Dar-us-Salam**, consequently acquired historical importance far beyond being the private residence of a prominent physician.

Located at what became **1 Ansari Road in Daryaganj**, the house emerged as a political meeting point for leaders of the Indian national movement and for discussions concerning support for Türkiye. Following the Allied occupation of Istanbul on March 16, 1920, Hindu and Muslim Indian leaders assembled at Dar-us-Salam and agreed to observe **March 19 as Khilafat Day** throughout the subcontinent in protest against the occupation.

Gandhi himself frequently stayed at Dar-us-Salam during visits to Delhi. The Gandhi Heritage Portal records repeated stays at Ansari's residence between **1921 and 1931** and identifies Ansari as one of Gandhi's important political associates in Delhi.

The building is therefore significant at several levels. It is associated with an Indian physician who personally travelled to Ottoman Türkiye to treat soldiers during the Balkan Wars; with the political response in India to the occupation of Istanbul; with the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements; with Gandhi's presence in Delhi; and with the broader attempt to construct Hindu-Muslim unity around opposition to imperial power.

That such a place is scarcely known today, whether in India or Türkiye, reveals the extent to which a once powerful shared political memory has faded.

X. Dar-us-Salam and Khilafat House: Forgotten Monuments of a Shared History

Historical relationships acquire permanence when they become embedded in places. India and Türkiye possess several such physical sites, yet few have been incorporated systematically into bilateral cultural diplomacy.

Dar-us-Salam in Daryaganj is perhaps the most important surviving Delhi example. Once standing amid large properties belonging to aristocratic and political families, the house eventually found itself surrounded by the dense publishing district of modern Ansari Road. Despite the transformation of its surroundings, parts of the old structure survived into the twenty-first century. Anadolu reporting in 2020 described its then owner as having deliberately preserved important elements of the building and some furniture associated with the Ansari period.

The building should not be understood merely as an Indian nationalist heritage site. It is also part of the history of Türkiye's national struggle because decisions to mobilise support for the Turkish cause were taken within its rooms.

A comparable site exists in Mumbai.

Khilafat House, associated with the All India Khilafat Committee, became one of the institutional centres of the movement that connected the fate of Türkiye with mass politics in India. Its own institutional history describes the building as a major centre of freedom

movement activity and Hindu-Muslim unity and associates it with the nationwide Non-Cooperation mobilisation embraced by Gandhi in 1920.

The significance of Khilafat House extends beyond Muslim political history. The Khilafat agitation became one of the principal vehicles through which Gandhi attempted to build a mass Hindu-Muslim anti-colonial front, thereby linking the Turkish question directly with the transformation of the Indian National Congress from an elite political organisation into a mass movement.

These two surviving sites, **Khilafat House in Mumbai and Dar-us-Salam on Ansari Road in Delhi**, can consequently be regarded as architectural testimonies to an almost forgotten Indo-Turkish political moment.

They offer obvious possibilities for cultural diplomacy.

A joint India-Türkiye historical initiative could document their role, produce archival exhibitions, install interpretive plaques, support conservation and connect them with Turkish sites associated with the medical mission and national struggle.

Such an initiative would require little geopolitical negotiation yet could restore public knowledge of a relationship that once occupied a central place in Indian politics.

XI. Gandhi and the Turkish Question: More Than a Footnote to the Khilafat Movement

The most important reason the history of Türkiye belongs within the history of modern India is the role the Turkish question played in the political transformation of **Mahatma Gandhi**.

It would be historically excessive to claim that events in Türkiye alone created Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. Indian anger had accumulated through several developments, particularly the Rowlatt legislation, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, racial discrimination and growing frustration with constitutional politics under British rule.

Nevertheless, the fate of Türkiye supplied Gandhi with something these grievances alone had not yet produced: an issue around which he could attempt to create an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim mass coalition.

Following the First World War, the victorious powers contemplated the dismemberment of large parts of the Ottoman state. The Treaty of Sèvres of 1920 became the most visible expression of this settlement.

For large sections of India's Muslim population, the question had both political and religious dimensions because the Ottoman Sultan also held the title of Caliph. The possibility that the

Ottoman Empire would be fragmented, and that the political position of the Caliph would be fundamentally weakened, generated enormous mobilisation across British India.

Gandhi recognised that this grievance could not be treated as a narrowly Muslim issue.

His political intervention transformed the meaning of Khilafat by arguing that Hindus who expected Muslim participation in a common Indian national struggle should support Muslims when they believed they had suffered a grave imperial injustice.

In *Young India*, Gandhi repeatedly addressed the Turkish question. In June 1920 he appealed to Hindus to join their Muslim compatriots in resisting the proposed dismemberment of Türkiye, framing the cause in terms of truth, non-violence and resistance to imperial domination.

The movement represented an important stage in Gandhi's transition from seeking concessions within the British imperial framework towards systematic non-cooperation with colonial authority. India's official historical publications likewise acknowledge the close relationship between Gandhi's decision to pursue non-cooperation and the Khilafat agitation, noting that Khilafat leaders endorsed non-violent non-cooperation even before the Indian National Congress formally did so in September 1920.

Author R.K. Sinha, whose work examines Mustafa Kemal and Gandhi in relation to the Turkish question, has argued that the programme of non-cooperation had been adopted within the Khilafat political framework in Bombay in May 1920 before Gandhi took the programme more broadly into Congress politics. Gandhi subsequently travelled extensively with Muslim leaders, including **Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar**, in an attempt to mobilise public support.

The political importance of this episode is difficult to exaggerate.

Türkiye became an issue through which a colonised Indian society debated its own relationship with imperial power.

The Turkish cause helped expand political mobilisation beyond constitutional elites and enabled Gandhi to experiment with techniques that subsequently became central to India's freedom movement: boycott, surrender of titles, rejection of colonial institutions and mass non-cooperation.

For a brief period, events thousands of kilometres away in Anatolia helped reshape politics in India.

XII. Türkiye and the Brief High Point of Hindu-Muslim Political Unity

The Khilafat-Non-Cooperation alliance is also important because it represented perhaps the most ambitious attempt before independence to unite large sections of Hindu and Muslim political opinion in a common mass mobilisation.

For Muslims, opposition to the treatment of the Ottoman Empire possessed obvious religious and emotional dimensions. For Gandhi and many Hindu supporters, however, Türkiye represented something different but equally significant: a test of whether Indian nationalism could develop an ethical politics in which one community regarded the deeply felt grievance of another as its own.

The Turkish question thus briefly performed an integrating role in Indian politics.

Mass fundraising campaigns were not confined exclusively to wealthy Muslim donors. Contemporary accounts describe both Muslims and Hindus contributing to funds raised for Türkiye. The movement extended across Bombay, Delhi, Punjab, the North-West Frontier, Bengal, the United Provinces and other parts of British India.

The solidarity had a deeper anti-imperial logic. Many Indians interpreted the proposed dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire through the same political vocabulary by which they understood British domination of India. A defeated Asian power was being partitioned by victorious European empires at the same historical moment that Indians were demanding greater control over their own political future.

The disappearance of this common campaign after the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 had consequences within India as well. The Khilafat organisation gradually lost the issue around which it had mobilised, while communal political currents strengthened during subsequent years.

The historical irony is therefore profound.

Türkiye briefly became one of the issues around which Hindu-Muslim political cooperation reached an extraordinary level, yet the subsequent Turkish republican transformation simultaneously removed the institution that had enabled much of that mobilisation.

XIII. Indian Financial Assistance to Türkiye's National Struggle

Indian solidarity with Türkiye was not confined to resolutions, speeches and political demonstrations. It also produced substantial financial assistance.

Fundraising campaigns across the Indian subcontinent collected money for Turkish relief and for the nationalist struggle led by Mustafa Kemal.

Research published by Türkiye's **Atatürk Research Center** provides important quantitative evidence. Archival material records **781,570 Turkish liras sent by the Indian Khilafat Committee** and a further **254,038 liras from other sources directly to Mustafa Kemal**

Pasha, producing a recorded total of approximately **1,035,608 Turkish liras**. ([ATAM | Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi](#))

The funds were subsequently used for a variety of purposes associated with the national struggle and the social consequences of war, including assistance to families of martyrs, prisoners and institutions as well as information and public communication activities. ([ATAM | Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi](#))

The story acquired additional symbolic importance following the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

Archival research reproduced by the Atatürk Research Center connects remaining assistance funds, including money originating from Indian Muslim donations, with capital accumulated during the establishment of **Türkiye İş Bankası**, founded in 1924 at Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's initiative as the Republic's first national bank. The precise accounting of different pools of funds requires careful historical treatment, but Turkish archival material explicitly records the contribution of assistance from Indian Muslims to the financial resources available during the bank's formative period. ([ATAM | Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi](#))

Türkiye İş Bankası itself records that Mustafa Kemal envisaged the creation of a modern national bank capable of contributing to the economic independence of the new Republic and that the institution began operating in August 1924. ([İş Bankası](#))

The symbolic meaning is difficult to overlook.

Citizens of a country that had not yet achieved its own independence contributed financially to the survival of another nation's independence movement, and part of the financial legacy of those contributions entered the early economic history of republican Türkiye.

This provides India-Türkiye relations with an unusual moral foundation that contemporary diplomacy has barely utilised.

XIV. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Indian Imagination

Mustafa Kemal's military success in Anatolia had enormous psychological significance well beyond Türkiye.

Across colonised Asia, the Turkish national movement demonstrated that the territorial settlement imposed by the victorious powers after the First World War was not irreversible. An Asian society could resist military occupation, overturn an externally imposed settlement and reconstruct political sovereignty.

This outcome inevitably attracted attention in India.

Gandhi and Mustafa Kemal represented very different political methods. Gandhi made non-violence the organising principle of his struggle, whereas Mustafa Kemal led an armed national resistance. They also differed significantly in their understandings of religion, state and social transformation.

Yet they occupied parallel positions in the anti-imperial imagination of the early twentieth century.

Both insisted that political legitimacy could not be permanently imposed from outside.

Both transformed movements that initially appeared incapable of challenging imperial power.

Both subsequently became foundational figures in the political histories of their respective countries.

The difference was chronological: Türkiye achieved military and diplomatic sovereignty in the early 1920s, while India remained under British rule until 1947.

The Indian response to the Turkish struggle must therefore be understood as part of the wider Asian history of anti-colonialism rather than simply as a religious campaign concerning the Ottoman Caliphate.

XV. The First Great Disconnect: 1924 and the End of a Shared Political Moment

Türkiye embarked upon an ambitious programme of republican consolidation and national reconstruction, while India remained immersed in its anti-colonial struggle.

This was the **first great disconnect**.

Importantly, it was not caused by hostility.

Türkiye did not become anti-Indian, nor did the Indian national movement become anti-Turkish. Rather, the political structures that had generated intense interaction disappeared.

Türkiye turned inward towards state-building, economic reconstruction and social reform.

India concentrated increasingly on its own struggle against British rule.

The density of engagement that had characterised the period between the Balkan Wars and the early 1920s consequently diminished.

By the time India achieved independence in 1947, much of the extraordinary history of Indian participation in Türkiye's struggle was already fading from public memory.

XVI. Independence and the Attempt to Rebuild Relations

Independent India and republican Türkiye initially made serious efforts to construct a modern relationship.

Türkiye recognised India immediately following independence, and diplomatic missions were established soon afterwards.

Indian Education Minister **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad** visited Türkiye in 1951, an encounter carrying particular historical symbolism because Azad himself had been deeply involved in Indian Muslim politics during the Khilafat era and had emerged as one of the most important Muslim leaders of the Indian national movement. Prem Shankar Jha, a noted Indian journalist, then a student in primary class in Ankara, acted as Azad's translator. Jha was the son of India's ambassador C. S. Jha, who served in Ankara from 1950 to 1954.

A cultural agreement followed.

Most importantly, the two governments signed the **Treaty of Friendship in Ankara on December 14, 1951**.

The language of the treaty consciously connected modern diplomacy with older historical experience. The governments did not describe their relationship as beginning with the exchange of ambassadors; they recognised that ancient ties of friendship had existed between the two countries and expressed their intention to deepen contact between their peoples.

Had international politics evolved differently during the following decade, the treaty might have provided the political basis for an important Asian partnership.

Instead, the Cold War moved India and Türkiye into increasingly divergent strategic environments.

XVII. The Second Great Disconnect: NATO, Non-Alignment and the Cold War

The strategic divergence between India and Türkiye during the 1950s was not initially a product of bilateral hostility. It emerged from radically different geographical assessments of security.

For Türkiye, the Soviet Union represented an immediate strategic threat. Türkiye shared a maritime and regional frontier with Soviet power, had historical experience of Russian-Ottoman rivalry and emerged from the Second World War deeply concerned about its security. Moscow, long before the Communist revolution, had harboured the intention to capture Istanbul, the seat of Orthodox Christianity.

To avoid the Soviet threat, Türkiye's response was integration into the Western security system.

Türkiye joined **NATO in 1952** and subsequently became a participant in regional alliance arrangements including the Baghdad Pact and CENTO.

India faced a very different strategic environment and drew almost the opposite conclusion from the emerging Cold War.

Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru** believed that the division of Asia into military blocs would compromise the autonomy of recently decolonised states and import great-power rivalry into regions struggling to build sovereign political orders. India consequently became one of the principal architects of **non-alignment**.

India also developed increasingly close political, defence and economic relations with the Soviet Union.

The divergence therefore became systemic:

Türkiye found security through alliance; India sought security through strategic autonomy.

Less than a decade after independence, two states that had formally declared enduring friendship were operating through fundamentally different conceptions of international order.

XVIII. Pakistan, Kashmir and the Institutionalisation of Estrangement

The relationship might still have remained manageable had Cold War differences remained abstract. Pakistan transformed them into specifically bilateral disagreements.

Türkiye and Pakistan entered many of the same Western-sponsored security arrangements and gradually developed close military and political relations. Religious and social sentiment reinforced this partnership, but its strategic depth derived significantly from Cold War institutions.

As Turkish relations with Pakistan deepened, Ankara increasingly supported Islamabad's interpretation of the Kashmir dispute and referred to United Nations resolutions when discussing its settlement.

New Delhi regarded such statements as interference in an issue closely connected with Indian sovereignty and national identity.

Türkiye therefore increasingly entered Indian strategic debate through the **Pakistan-Kashmir prism**.

India simultaneously developed positions on Cyprus that Ankara regarded unfavourably. New Delhi's understanding of anti-colonial politics, international law and non-aligned solidarity often produced greater sympathy for Cyprus and subsequently closer relations with Greece.

A diplomatic pattern therefore became established that has survived, in modified form, into the twenty-first century:

India viewed Türkiye through Pakistan and Türkiye increasingly through Cyprus and Greece.

The critical consequence was the disappearance of an autonomous bilateral relationship.

Rather than asking what India and Türkiye could accomplish together, both capitals increasingly asked how the other's policies affected relationships with third states.

XIX. The Post-Cold War Moment: A Structural Opportunity, Only Partly Used

The end of the Cold War should logically have weakened the principal structural causes of India-Türkiye estrangement.

The Soviet Union disappeared.

India initiated major economic liberalisation in 1991 and gradually expanded its relationships with the United States, Europe, Israel, the Gulf states and East Asia.

Türkiye had already undergone significant economic transformation under Turgut Özal and sought to deepen its role as a manufacturing, commercial and logistical hub connecting Europe and Asia.

High-level contacts resumed with greater regularity. Turkish Prime Minister and later President **Turgut Özal** visited India, while Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi** travelled to Türkiye. Prime Minister **Bülent Ecevit's visit to India in 2000** was particularly important because it indicated interest in developing Turkish relations with India without automatically subsuming them under the Pakistan framework.

Trade began to grow.

Indian businesses increasingly recognised Türkiye's value as a manufacturing and logistics gateway to Europe.

Turkish construction and infrastructure companies saw opportunities in India's massive development requirements.

Tourism gradually created another constituency for engagement.

Yet the strategic relationship never developed the institutional resilience required to protect these advances from political disagreement.

The Cold War ended.

Its diplomatic psychology did not.

XX. Erdoğan's 2017 Visit and the Possibility of De-Hyphenation

President **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's** state visit to India in April-May 2017 represented one of the most ambitious modern attempts to reset the relationship.

Erdoğan travelled with a very large delegation of ministers, officials and business leaders. Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** personally participated in the India-Türkiye Business Forum, signalling the importance New Delhi initially attached to economic engagement.

The itinerary itself carried symbolic meaning. Erdoğan travelled directly between Türkiye and India without packaging the visit with Pakistan, thereby providing an opportunity to engage India as a major power in its own right rather than merely as one pole of a South Asian rivalry.

The diplomatic context was particularly instructive.

Only days before Erdoğan's arrival, then Indian Vice President **Hamid Ansari** had visited Armenia and paid respects at the Tsitsernakaberd memorial, an exceptionally sensitive issue for Türkiye.

Ankara conveyed its concerns but did not allow them to derail Erdoğan's India visit.

This approach offers an important lesson for contemporary diplomacy: strategic relationships require the capacity to register disagreement without allowing every disagreement to destroy cooperation in unrelated fields.

The immediate economic consequences were encouraging. Indian tourism to Türkiye expanded substantially during the following years, business contacts multiplied and Turkish companies explored opportunities connected with Indian infrastructure and urban development.

Yet political trust remained insufficiently developed.

The relationship continued to lack the shock absorbers required to manage future crises.

XXI. The Return of Third-Country Diplomacy

The recurring tensions of recent years demonstrate the durability of inherited perceptions.

In India, Türkiye's military and political relationship with Pakistan is scrutinised closely. Turkish comments on Kashmir receive extensive media attention, sometimes overwhelming coverage of virtually every other aspect of Turkish foreign policy.

In Türkiye, Indian military and political engagement with Greece, Cyprus and Armenia is increasingly noticed through a similar strategic lens. Türkiye also viewed IMEC (India Middle East Europe Corridor) with suspicion, as it was announced at the G20 summit, which was attended by Erdogan. The corridor ignores Türkiye and, more importantly, traverses through the contested waters of the Eastern Mediterranean, guarded by a heavy Turkish naval presence.

Both countries consequently object to the other's relationships with third parties while simultaneously using their own third-country partnerships as instruments of strategic signalling.

The result is a familiar diplomatic cycle.

Türkiye argues that its relations with Pakistan are historically established and need not constitute hostility towards India.

India argues that Türkiye cannot expect New Delhi to remain indifferent when Ankara adopts positions on Kashmir or strengthens Pakistan's military capabilities.

Türkiye in turn observes Indian engagement with states with which it has serious disputes.

Both positions contain elements of legitimate national interest.

Neither provides an adequate framework for building India-Türkiye relations.

XXII. A Relationship Without a Direct Conflict

The most important structural fact about India-Türkiye relations is often overlooked:

The two countries have no direct territorial dispute, no common contested border and no inherent military conflict.

They are not natural strategic adversaries.

Neither threatens the territorial integrity of the other directly.

Their economies are more complementary than competitive.

Their most serious disagreements arise overwhelmingly from relationships with third states or differing interpretations of regional conflicts.

This distinguishes India-Türkiye tensions from genuine structural rivalries elsewhere in international politics.

It also means their disputes are potentially manageable.

The obstacle is not an irreconcilable conflict of national existence.

It is the absence of sufficiently strong bilateral institutions capable of preventing peripheral disagreements from consuming the centre of the relationship.

XXIII. Economics and the Unfulfilled Potential of Two G20 Economies

Economic relations provide perhaps the clearest illustration of lost potential.

For much of the twentieth century, bilateral trade remained remarkably modest. It began to rise more significantly only after India's economic reforms and Türkiye's increasing integration into global manufacturing and European value chains.

The submitted economic material, drawing upon the TEPAV study *Increasing Economic Synergies between India and Türkiye*, records bilateral trade remaining below half a billion dollars until the 1990s, crossing approximately \$1 billion in 2004, reaching \$10 billion in 2021 and peaking at roughly \$14 billion in 2022-23 before moderating subsequently.

Even these higher figures remain small relative to the scale of the two economies.

India has become one of the world's largest economies, with considerable strengths in pharmaceuticals, information technology, digital services, chemicals, engineering, automobile manufacturing, space technologies and an expanding advanced manufacturing ecosystem.

Türkiye possesses significant capabilities in automobiles, machinery, household appliances, textiles, construction, engineering, food industries, logistics, defence manufacturing and integration with European production systems.

Türkiye's Customs Union relationship with the European Union and its geographical location offer Indian firms opportunities to establish manufacturing and distribution platforms close to European, Mediterranean, Black Sea and West Asian markets.

India offers Turkish businesses access to a vast consumer economy undergoing one of the largest infrastructure and manufacturing expansions in the world.

The logical objective should therefore extend beyond increasing the bilateral trade figure.

The more ambitious goal should be **joint production and integration into value chains**, particularly in pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, information technologies, automobiles and components, machinery, urban infrastructure, food processing, healthcare, electronics, startups, aviation and emerging technologies.

Economic interdependence cannot remove political disagreement.

It can, however, create institutional constituencies with an interest in preventing political disputes from repeatedly destroying accumulated gains.

XXIV. Connectivity: Recovering the Geography That History Once Provided

The historical India-Türkiye relationship developed largely because geography encouraged movement across interconnected spaces.

The old routes passed through Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan, Ladakh, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The twentieth century converted many of these corridors into political frontiers.

The twenty-first century is creating an opportunity to reconnect them through modern infrastructure.

India requires diversified access to Europe, Central Asia and West Asia.

Türkiye seeks to consolidate its position as a manufacturing, logistics and energy hub at the intersection of Europe and Asia.

Both countries have interests in resilient transport corridors, secure supply chains and diversified markets.

Although New Delhi and Ankara may participate in different connectivity initiatives, there is little strategic logic in treating every transport route as a geopolitical zero-sum contest.

Practical interoperability should be explored wherever commercially feasible.

The broader historical lesson of Ladakh is particularly relevant here.

Regions now perceived primarily as security boundaries once derived prosperity precisely from being open corridors.

A modern India-Türkiye relationship should rediscover the connective logic of Eurasian geography without romanticising the political conditions of the past.

XXV. Why Türkiye Matters to India's Wider Strategy

India's long-term interests also require an understanding of Türkiye that extends far beyond Pakistan.

Türkiye occupies a highly unusual strategic position.

It is simultaneously a NATO member, a Black Sea power, a Mediterranean power, an actor in the Caucasus, a major participant in Syrian affairs, an increasingly important presence in Africa, an influential partner of the Central Asian Turkic republics, a significant defence-industrial power and an economic bridge into European manufacturing systems.

It has maintained dialogue with both Russia and Ukraine while also retaining its formal Western alliance commitments.

It has expanded diplomatic and commercial engagement in Africa.

It has built substantial influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

It has become increasingly involved across the Gulf and West Asia.

An India seeking greater influence across Eurasia cannot construct a serious regional policy while treating Türkiye primarily as Pakistan's partner.

Türkiye is too consequential geographically, economically and diplomatically for such a narrow approach.

XXVI. Why India Matters to Türkiye's Asia Strategy

The same logic applies in reverse.

Türkiye cannot develop a comprehensive Asia strategy while treating India primarily as Pakistan's adversary.

India is one of the world's largest economies and populations, an important technology and manufacturing power, a major Indian Ocean actor, a nuclear-armed state and an increasingly influential participant in global institutions.

Its economic and diplomatic footprint across the Gulf, Africa and Southeast Asia is expanding.

Its diaspora connects it with major Western economies as well as the Gulf.

India is also becoming increasingly active in precisely the regions where Türkiye seeks greater influence, including Central Asia, Africa and West Asia.

A Turkish foreign policy that seeks strategic autonomy and greater global influence therefore requires sustained relations with New Delhi regardless of Ankara's separate relationship with Islamabad.

Professor Mehmet Özkan's observation, cited in the submitted material, is relevant in this context: India and Türkiye are better understood as **systemic relationships**, because developments involving either country have consequences extending well beyond the bilateral sphere into South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and Europe.

The paradox is that India remains insufficiently incorporated into Türkiye's Asia strategy while Türkiye remains insufficiently incorporated into India's West Asian and Eurasian thinking.

XXVII. The Most Serious Deficit: Societies That No Longer Know Each Other

Perhaps the most striking measure of the disconnect is not diplomatic but societal.

In 1912, ordinary Indians raised money to send doctors to Türkiye.

In 1919 and 1920, developments concerning Istanbul could produce mass political meetings across British India.

Indian newspapers published correspondence from Türkiye.

Gandhi discussed Turkish affairs repeatedly.

Indian volunteers travelled thousands of kilometres despite rudimentary transportation.

A century later, when communication is instantaneous and flights connect Indian and Turkish cities within hours, intellectual interaction is in some respects thinner.

There are relatively few sustained university partnerships.

Systematic exchange between think tanks remains limited.

Journalists from each country are rarely permanently stationed in the other.

Literary translation is inadequate.

Academic knowledge frequently passes through English-language Western scholarship rather than direct Indian-Turkish intellectual engagement.

The result is a paradox of modernity:

the two societies possess more means of communication than at any point in history, yet frequently understand each other less directly than they did a century ago.

This vacuum is filled by third-country narratives.

Türkiye becomes, in Indian public discussion, predominantly Pakistan's military partner.

India becomes, in Turkish public discussion, predominantly Pakistan's adversary.

Both representations contain elements of reality, but neither captures the complexity of the countries involved.

XXVIII. Recovering the Physical Heritage of the Relationship

A serious diplomatic effort to rebuild societal understanding should begin with history that people can see.

Several potential heritage projects require relatively little political negotiation.

Dar-us-Salam at 1 Ansari Road in Delhi could be formally documented as a site connected with Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Gandhi, the 1912 medical mission and the Indian mobilisation over the occupation of Istanbul.

Khilafat House in Mumbai could become a second point in this historical network, explaining the role of the All India Khilafat Committee, the Ali brothers, Gandhi and the Non-Cooperation Movement.

The history of **Abdur Rahman Peshawari** could be jointly documented through material preserved in Turkish archives and institutions, particularly his papers associated with the Rauf Orbay archive.

The Turkic and Central Asian heritage collection near **Tsa Soma Mosque in Leh** could become part of broader India-Türkiye cultural research concerning old Silk Road connections.

Universities in Türkiye and India could collaborate on the medical mission using Ansari's correspondence published in *The Comrade*.

A digital archive could gather documents concerning Indian donations to Türkiye's national struggle.

Such initiatives would not require the two governments to agree on Kashmir, Cyprus, Armenia or Pakistan.

They would simply require both societies to acknowledge their own documented history.

XXIX. Babur, Peshawari and the Strange Geography of Memory

Two figures, separated by four centuries, illustrate the broader problem.

Babur, who established his empire in India, remains visibly incorporated into Türkiye's civilizational understanding of the Turkic world.

Abdur Rahman Peshawari, who travelled from British India and devoted himself to Türkiye's freedom, remains substantially better remembered in Turkish institutional history than in Indian public memory.

This asymmetry is revealing.

The historical connection has not entirely disappeared.

It survives in fragments, but those fragments are held by different institutions and interpreted through different national narratives.

A serious India-Türkiye historical dialogue could reconnect them.

Babur should be studied neither as a foreign invader appropriated exclusively by one modern nationalism nor simply as a Turkish figure transferred retrospectively into another country's national history. He belongs to a transregional Timurid and Turkic political world that eventually became deeply rooted in India.

Peshawari similarly cannot be understood exclusively through the national boundaries created decades after his birth.

Such figures reveal why civilizational history is often larger than the modern state.

XXX. From Historical Memory to Strategic Architecture

History alone cannot determine foreign policy.

Shared medieval rulers cannot resolve twenty-first-century security disagreements.

The memory of Gandhi's support for Türkiye cannot substitute for negotiations over contemporary political differences.

Civilizational affinity cannot automatically generate strategic convergence.

Nevertheless, history can create **political capital**, particularly where strategic conflicts are indirect rather than existential.

India and Türkiye possess more such capital than most bilateral relationships.

The problem is that almost none of it has been institutionalised.

A serious programme of strategic rediscovery could therefore include:

A Joint Historical Commission

India and Türkiye could establish a bilateral commission of historians and archivists examining relations from the Ottoman period through the Indian independence movement and early republican era.

An Ansari-Peshawari Fellowship

A fellowship named jointly after **Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari and Abdur Rahman Peshawari** could support historians, journalists, diplomats and graduate researchers working on India-Türkiye relations.

Digitalisation of Archival Collections

Relevant Ottoman, Turkish, Indian and British records concerning the Balkan Wars medical missions, Khilafat Movement, Indian donations, Gandhi's correspondence and the Turkish national struggle should be digitally catalogued.

Heritage Recognition

Dar-us-Salam and Khilafat House could receive historical interpretation acknowledging their connection with Türkiye.

Corresponding sites in Türkiye associated with the medical mission and Peshawari could recognise the Indian contribution.

University Partnerships

Dedicated India-Türkiye studies programmes should be encouraged rather than relying almost entirely on broader South Asian or Middle Eastern programmes.

Media Exchanges

Journalists from both countries require opportunities to report directly rather than depending on third-country media narratives.

Regular Strategic Dialogue

Foreign ministries, national security institutions and independent think tanks should establish structured dialogues on Eurasia, West Asia, Central Asia, connectivity, energy and emerging technologies.

Economic Insulation

Trade and investment mechanisms should continue functioning during diplomatic disagreements rather than being suspended whenever political rhetoric intensifies.

XXXI. Principles for a More Mature Relationship

A realistic India-Türkiye relationship cannot be built upon demands that either state abandon its existing partners.

Türkiye will not abandon Pakistan.

India will not abandon Greece, Cyprus or Armenia.

Any strategy beginning from those expectations is likely to fail.

A more practical framework would rest upon four principles.

First, **bilateralise the bilateral relationship**. India should be discussed in Ankara as India rather than primarily as Pakistan's rival, while Türkiye should be discussed in New Delhi as Türkiye rather than primarily as Pakistan's ally.

Second, **institutionalise disagreement rather than allowing disagreement to institutionalise estrangement**. Kashmir and other contentious issues will remain. The purpose of diplomacy is not necessarily to eliminate differences but to prevent one disagreement from paralysing every other field.

Third, **protect economic and societal relations from political cycles**. Businesses, universities, tourism and cultural exchanges should not become automatic casualties of diplomatic disputes.

Fourth, **restore direct knowledge**. Countries cannot sustain strategic relationships when their intellectual, diplomatic and media communities understand each other primarily through intermediaries.

XXXII. The Symbolism of the 2026 NATO Summit

The representation of the Baburid historical tradition during the 2026 NATO gathering in Ankara deserves particular attention because it encapsulates the central paradox of this paper.

NATO became one of the principal institutional markers of the geopolitical order that separated Türkiye from non-aligned India during the Cold War.

Yet within the ceremonial historical narrative presented by Türkiye at the heart of a NATO summit was an empire whose centre of power lay in India.

The twentieth-century alliance system separated the two countries.

The older civilizational memory still connected them.

That contradiction should not be dismissed as ceremonial curiosity.

It demonstrates that modern foreign policy alignments exist on a much shorter historical timescale than the civilizational networks underlying them.

XXXIII. Lost Promises

The idea of “lost promises” should not be interpreted romantically.

India and Türkiye were never destined to become allies.

Their security environments differed profoundly.

Their political systems evolved separately.

Their regional priorities frequently diverged.

The promise was more modest but also more realistic.

When the two states signed their Treaty of Friendship in 1951, they consciously acknowledged that their relationship had not begun with modern diplomacy.

They inherited memories of interaction extending from Central Asian and Ottoman connections through the Indian medical mission and the Turkish War of Independence.

Yet the institutional architecture that followed proved weaker than those memories.

Türkiye's security concerns drew it towards NATO and Pakistan.

India's strategic philosophy produced non-alignment and an increasingly important Soviet relationship.

Kashmir and Cyprus turned those divergent orientations into bilateral grievances.

The Cold War ended, but the diplomatic habits created by it survived.

This constitutes the central lost promise of the relationship.

Conclusion: Rediscovering Rather Than Inventing the Relationship

India and Türkiye do not need to manufacture a historical relationship in order to justify future cooperation.

The relationship already exists in an unusually rich historical archive.

It can be found in the Turkic and Central Asian dynasties that became deeply embedded in Indian history; in Babur's journey from Fergana through Kabul to India; in Ottoman contacts with rulers of the subcontinent; in the merchants travelling between Leh and Yarkand; in the Argon families of Ladakh; in Turkic-descended communities of western Uttar Pradesh; and in linguistic, literary and spiritual traditions shared across Eurasia.

More significantly for modern diplomacy, it can be found in the extraordinary period between the Balkan Wars and Türkiye's War of Independence.

It survives in the story of **Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari**, the British-trained Indian physician who organised and led a 22-member medical mission to aid wounded Ottoman soldiers.

It survives in **Dar-us-Salam on Ansari Road in Delhi**, where Gandhi stayed and where Indian leaders gathered after the occupation of Istanbul.

It survives in **Khilafat House in Mumbai**, a centre of the movement through which Türkiye's fate became intertwined with India's mass struggle against British colonial rule.

It survives in **Abdur Rahman Peshawari**, the Aligarh student with ancestral links to Kashmir who sold his belongings to travel with the humanitarian mission, remained in Türkiye, fought in its wars, worked for its nascent national news agency and served its emerging diplomatic state.

It survives in Indian donations sent to Mustafa Kemal's national movement, some of which entered the economic history of the Turkish Republic.

Above all, it survives in **Mahatma Gandhi's political evolution.**

The Turkish question helped Gandhi build one of the first truly mass coalitions of India's national movement. By insisting that Hindus should share the grievance felt by Muslims over the treatment of Türkiye, he attempted to transform solidarity with another people into an instrument of unity within India itself.

Few contemporary bilateral relationships possess such a history.

Yet remarkably little of it informs present-day diplomacy.

Instead, India and Türkiye remain trapped too frequently within twentieth-century strategic categories created by the Cold War.

Türkiye sees India through Pakistan.

India sees Türkiye through Pakistan and increasingly through Greece, Cyprus and Armenia.

Disagreements that are essentially triangular repeatedly overwhelm a relationship that contains no direct territorial conflict and no inherent strategic rivalry.

This approach is becoming increasingly difficult to justify.

India and Türkiye are now consequential G20 powers operating across overlapping geopolitical spaces. Both value strategic autonomy, although they pursue it through different institutional arrangements. Both seek diversified markets and resilient supply chains. Both possess significant manufacturing capabilities. Both require stable access to energy. Both increasingly operate in Central Asia, West Asia, Africa and Europe.

Neither benefits from treating the other as an extension of a third country's foreign policy.

The purpose of rediscovering civilizational history is therefore not nostalgia.

It is perspective.

History reminds policymakers that the present estrangement is comparatively recent and that very different patterns of interaction once existed.

The medical volunteers who left Bombay for Ottoman Türkiye in 1912 could not have imagined a world in which New Delhi and Ankara would possess instantaneous communications yet struggle to understand one another.

The Indians who contributed money to Mustafa Kemal's national struggle did not ask whether Türkiye belonged to their strategic bloc.

Abdur Rahman Peshawari did not regard the distance between Aligarh and Anatolia as an argument against solidarity.

Gandhi did not regard the fate of Türkiye as irrelevant because it lay outside the Indian subcontinent.

Their world was in many respects less connected technologically, yet more connected politically and emotionally.

The lesson for contemporary India and Türkiye is not that they should recreate the politics of 1920.

It is that they should recover the capacity to see one another directly.

The **civilizational bridge** was built centuries ago.

The **political bridge** reached its highest point during the struggles against imperial domination a century ago.

What remains unfinished is the **strategic bridge**.

Building it is one of the lost promises, and potentially one of the most consequential opportunities, of India-Türkiye relations.

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