

INTRODUCTION

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The research study outlined here viz, “Anti-European Struggle by the Mappilas¹ of Malabar² 1498-1921 AD.” is an attempt to bring to light the role of the Mappilas of Malabar in defending the land of spices from Portuguese onslaughts and their efforts to throw the yoke of colonial administration in nineteenth and early parts of twentieth centuries.

‘Malabar’ is the name familiar to Ancient, Medieval and Modern historians of India and of the World. The narrow coastal strip of land had attracted the attention of travellers, geographers and scholars and all those interested in history. Greek writers were familiar with the land and the people. Arab geographers were full of praise for the land and its rulers and people. The spices attracted the Europeans. Pyrard de Lavel in eighteenth century notes that, Zamorin, the merchant Prince had attracted the wealth of the whole world to his market places.

It was the position of Malabar as an entrepot of the East - West trading activities in the Indian Ocean littoral that availed her prominent place in the medieval world. The frequent references in ancient sources on trade with Malabar are impressive. It was the background of this extensive trade in Indian Ocean that formed the base of the Mappila identity. The Arabian Sea has been the permanent and determining factor in the history of Malabar. Thus Malabar with its fascinating natural beauty claims a venerable antiquity in the history of Indian culture.

¹ See Appendix -I for a brief discussion on the origin of the word ‘Mappila’.

² See Appendix -II for a discussion on the geographical area of Malabar.

The anti-European struggles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and peasant uprisings of nineteenth century attracted the attention of sociologists and historians to Malabar and to its people. Later in the beginning of 20th century the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 led by the Mappilas practically expelled the British Administration from Mappila homelands of Ernad-Walluvanad Taluks for six months. No other people in Colonial India had been bold enough to launch such war against ruling masters.

Sources of the Study

The source material for the study constitutes Archival records from National Archives New Delhi, Tamilnadu Archives Chennai, State and other Regional Archives of Kerala, and other published and unpublished materials from different libraries of Delhi, Aligarh and Kerala.

Though the traditional sources like *Keralolpatti* and *Keralapazhama* have some inaccuracies in citing the events and dates, they prove their value in historical writings. The earliest evidences for the presence of Muslims in Kerala are the signatories of the Copper plates of Sthanu Ravi (851), which mention the land grant to Mar Sapir Iso. The fact that Muslims were included as witnesses to the grant indicates their status in the society.

The accounts left by Arab geographers form a mine of information. They, except for Sulaiman's statement, were full of praise for the Muslim community on the Malabar Coast. They all invariably respect the people, the Masjids, *Qazis*, and

Customs, merchandise especially pepper and other spices and teakwood, ivory etc. as exports from the coast.

Best of all, it is Ibn Battuta, who gives a vivid description of flourishing Muslim community, their *Jamaath masjids* and shipmen like Nakhuda Mithqal (who built the grand Mithqal Mosque bearing his name in Calicut), the strange customs of food, curd, betel leaf, hospitality, pollution, load being carried by men not by animals of burden. He was full of praise for the women folk, etc... His statements were authentic as he had occasions by unexpected turn of events to travel across Malabar two or three times. His description of Qazis of foreign origin and the Madrasa and Mosque being run by the charity of merchants and ship owners visiting the ports is important³. The travelogue of Marco Polo is a treasure house of information on Malabar and its role in trade⁴.

During the 15th Century we have the description of Calicut and its ruler by the Chinese traveller, Ma-Huan. He was a Muslim who had visited Calicut in the company of the great Chinese General Cheng-Ho who harried the coasts of Indian Ocean with 13000 soldiers and sixty ships. Ma-Huan also noted the flourishing Muslim community of Calicut, its Hindu ruler who was very favourably inclined to the Muslims and who was more enthusiastic in the observance of Islamic rules⁵.

³ See H Yule, *Cathey the Way Tither*, Vol II, series II, Hakluyut Society, London, 1913, K A Nilakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India from Megesthenese to Ma-Huan* Madras, 1939, S M H Nainar, *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of South India*, Madras, 1942, Ibn Battua, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, Selected and Translated by H A R Gibb, London, 1929

⁴ H Yule, *Cathey the Way Tither*, Vol II, Series II and Vol IV, Series II, Hakluyut Society, London, 1913

⁵ For Chinese source, Ma-Huan, *Ying Yai Sheng Lan*, J V G Mills (Translated), Cambridge, 1970, Nilakanta Sastri, *op cit*

Abdurrazzak, the ambassador of Shahruk of Herat was given a grand welcome in Calicut. His references are very useful for the reconstruction of the social and economic life of Calicut of those days. He was assigned a horse, an accountant, and servants and was provided ghee, fowl, sugar, chicken and goats etc... This shows the hospitable nature of welcome accorded to the foreigners. He gives one of the important aspects of Zamorins' friendly subjects. He has noticed that in many places ships destined to a port, if blown to a different port or beach will be looted by natives, where as in Zamorins' kingdom the whole merchandise and the ship, even if sent ashore by a storm or shipwreck, was returned to the owner⁶.

Pyrrard de level, the French traveler noticed with amazement the Muslim population of Calicut composed of different nationalities, and the hectic trade, trustworthiness of its ruler who attracted the whole wealth of globe to his market places. His observations are especially useful with regard to the army and administration. He was full of praise for the Calicut Navy and was a personal friend of Kunjali Marakkar IV. He praises the fort Puthupattanam and the marvellous paintings of Kunjali's engagements with the Portuguese.

For eighteenth century William Logan's Malabar Manual is the most authentic work. So also the Joint Commissioner's Report on the peasant revolts of 19th century⁷. *Malabar* of Innes and Ivans provides us the basic issues of agrarian exploitation, which was part of the existing agrarian structure⁸.

⁶ R. H. Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, London, 1857.

⁷ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, Madras, 1951; *Report of the Malabar Special Commission 1981-82*, 3 Vols., Madras, 1882.

⁸ C. A. Innes and F. B. Ivans, *Madras District Gazetteer; Malabar*, Madras, 1951.

The issue of Khilafat that surfaced into the politics of Muslim world with the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire by European powers. The concept of pan Islamism had influenced the Mappilas of Kerala and it was also evident in the writings and teachings of theologians. The social reform movements and internal criticism of social inequality in community by reformers like Mamburam Sayyids and Umar Qazi, and religious reformers like Vakkam Abdul Qadir Moulavi exhibits the strong influence of Pan-Islamism and one community.

During 1921 the Khilafat, National and Non-co-operation movements took the country by the storm. The preachers' guides like *Saif-ul-Batar* (Cutting Sword) and *Muhimmat-ul-Mu'mineen*, Government records, British Correspondences, Police Reports, criminal and jail records and memoirs of many freedom fighters also form the sources for the study of Mappila Muslims of Kerala.

A notable contribution in this field was the recent monograph, *Sufism in Kerala* of Kunhali V. Hamid Ali's article 'The Moplahs' in T.K. Gopalapanikkar's, *Malabar and its Folk*, P.A. Sayed Muhammed's *Kerala Muslim Charithram* and Monographs of R.E. Miller, A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, S.M. Muhammed Koya and the well-known work on Mappila Sahithyam by two authors and innumerable articles in Souvenirs, Annuals, Journals and proceedings of academic societies have been useful.

In the series of monographs, *The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922* by Dale Stephan Frederic is of considerable value for the present study. The study of Conrad Wood, *Moplah Rebellion and Its Genesis* provides a class-oriented explanation to the 'Mappila outbreaks' that had struck the colonial powers. M.G.S. Narayan's *Cultural Symbiosis*, K.K.N. Kurup's articles on 1921, K.N. Panikkar's *Against Lord and State* has been useful.

With the help of these sources, primary, secondary and personal observations, a probe have been made in to the anti-European struggle of the Mappilas of Malabar.

Scope of the Study

The scope is limited to the regional study and it attempts to study the problems regarding the genesis and growth of Mappilas, their role in trade in the Indian Ocean littoral and the Portuguese onslaughts on them. It also evaluates the anti-European struggles of Mappilas in 19th century and their role in the Khilafat Movement of 1921. Though regional in nature, the study covers a long period of 1498-1921, namely that of the epoch making event, the landing of Vasco-da-Gama and the final confrontation of Mappilas with Europeans in the wake of the rising Khilafat and Non-co-operation Movements. Such a long period of four and a quarter century requires much labour and here the study is a humble attempt to evaluate this period of Malabar History in a wide perspective. Infact three aspects of the topic invite special attention vize; the role of the Mappilas under Kunjalis with enduring support of Zamorins to protect the land of spices from the Portuguese onslaughts, their Anti-European struggles in 19th century; and the Khilafat Movement of 1921.

Thus a century-long fight against the Portuguese, who bore the vengeance of Cross against the Crescent had bred militancy in the character of the community. The influx of Dutch and French powers into the fry are intentionally omitted in order to focus more on the Portuguese and the British period. The Dutch and the French obviously had played a noticeable role in moulding Mappila mind and their social structure. However, the British, being the last volley of European onslaughts that established their rule in India, deserves serious attention in any research.

Chapterisation

The study is presented in five chapters besides introduction and a conclusion. In the first chapter an attempt is made to study in detail the genesis and spread of Islam in Malabar. Here every effort has been made to explore the importance of Malabar with special reference to her role in the lucrative trade in Indian Ocean littoral. The role of rulers and Sufis in the spread of Islam is also emphasised.

The second chapter highlights the period of lucrative Arab trade with Malabar prior to the advent of the Portuguese and the settlement of Arabs in the coastal trade centres of Malabar.

The third chapter deals with the landing of pioneering colonizer Vasco-da-Gama at Kapat near Calicut and the Portuguese atrocities on the Mappilas and foreign Arab merchants. It enumerates the valuable service rendered by the Kunjalis the Admirals of Calicut who became the synonym of courage and valour. Untiring zeal of the Marakkaras with the enduring support of Zamorins and Mappilas kept the Portuguese away from Malabar who was compelled to confine themselves to Goa on Konkan. They ceaselessly tried to have a foothold in Malabar, but their efforts failed and with the Chaliyam battle of 1571, the decline of Portuguese power in India became imminent. Among others the Makhdums of Ponnani tried to instil the spirit of nationalism and patriotism in the minds of Mappilas of Malabar and encouraged them to rally behind Kunjalis in the 'Hundred Years War' against the Portuguese.

The fourth chapter discusses in detail the Anti-European uprisings of the Mappilas in the nineteenth century. Attempt is made here to look into the various aspects and dimensions of the peasant uprisings of nineteenth century. The role of

traditional intellectuals like Mamburam Sayyids, Umar Qazi and others has been evaluated.

The fifth chapter discusses the emergence of the trends of Pan-Islamism and Khilafat movement in the world scenario. The Mappilas were concerned over the question of Turkey and Islamic world as early as 1864 AD. The attitude of the Mappilas towards national issues like Khilafat and Non-co-operation, and their active participation in these movements are discussed. Though it had an unexpected and tragic end by the 1921 Malabar Rebellion it was an eye opener to the British Administration. But instead of trying to rectify genuine grievances of the people, the Government resorted to repressive measures, mass fines, detention and deportations to the Andamans.

The magnitude of the problem can be gleaned from the fact that hundreds of people deported from one area joined together in settlements which later bore same name of their *Desams* like Manjeri or Areacode in the Andamans. Probably they knew that they would never return to home and indeed they did not.

The role of Congress Khilafat leaders like Abdu Rahiman Sahib, E. Moidu Moulavi, Ali Musliyar, K. M. Moulavi, Variyamkunnath Kunhammed Haji, M.P. Narayana Menon, Kattilasserri Muhammed Musliyar and Brahmadathan Namboodiripad, in propagating nationalist Khilafat ideals among the Mappilas and their efforts to strengthen the unity and accord among Hindus and Muslims have been assessed. The reason for alienation of the Mappilas from Congress just after the rebellion of 1921 has also been examined.

Lastly it also traces the phase of freedom struggle where Mappilas were actively involved because of Khilafat and Non-co-operation movements combined against the Colonisers. At the same time the study also highlights the feeling of estrangement of Hindus and Muslims because of the failure of Khilafat movement and unfortunate turn of events that resulted in the hatred of Hindus, a turn that was beyond the control of a loosely organised and immature leadership.

Historiography

Though historiography of the socio-economic history of Malabar has some valuable contributions of both Indian and foreign scholars, still it require a study in a larger framework. It is quite pitiable that the authentic historical works did not ascribe adequate attention to the glorious episodes of Mappila history. When the colonising of lands has been started the colonisers attempted to write the history of the colonised country. The principles of historiography are ignored and the facts are crucially distorted, misrepresented and misinterpreted⁹. The case of Malabar does not vary from the existing lacuna, perceivable in the works of colonial historians on Malabar. Hence the study attempts to present a comprehensive picture of Mappila resistance to the European Colonisers between 1498-1921 AD.

⁹ C.K. Kareem, *Kerala Under Hydar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, Ernakulam, 1973, (Preface) p.1.