

## The Stance of the Early and Later Ulama on the Mappila Revolts

- Abu Bakr Sidhiq VP

### Abstract

*Throughout the history of Kerala or Malabar<sup>1</sup>, it can be seen lucidly the bloody blots created by Mappila riots. The history of Malabar is drained of looting, dacoity, arson, pillages and violent atrocities led by the Mappilas. What galvanized them to take themselves into the battlefield is intricate and hence a controversial issue in the Mappila literature. The concerned historians are divided in their opinions with regard to the real factors that led to the uprisings. While the early foreign historians, the sycophants of British colonialism, illustrated the Mappila riots as communal and the reason as religious zeal of the Mappilas, the left historians are of the opinion that the revolt, initiated by the poor tenants against the Hindu landlords, was solely of an agrarian nature. To throw a clear and detailed description on the actual motives behind the riots and how the contemporary ulama perceived and responded to them, this article is all about.*

**Key Words:** *Ulama, Mappila Riot, Mappila Muslims, Malabar, Khilafath Movement, British Colonialism*

### Introduction

Recently, many interpretations have been given about the history of Mappila Muslims by the contemporary historians especially those ultra-conservatives and extremists who depict Mappilas as warriors or war lords, and their history as only of riots and outbreaks. The early *ulama* of Malabar too were described as warriors who courageously led Mappila to the open war against the British government. In brief, the cultural and educational reforms these *ulama* fostered are completely ignored. Consequently, the picture of the male of the Mappila community is represented as a figure carries a dagger and sword who wore a turban and loudly utters the divine word. These distortions are done by aforementioned breakaway factions for their own vested interests. An objective reading of our history would lead us only to conclude thus that in the very inception, religion was neither significant in the riots nor a motive for the revolutionaries and the contemporary *ulama* like Syed Alavi, Syed Fazl and Umer Qazi were by no means the proponents of those riots who intrigued with Mappila to do so.

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<sup>1</sup>The northern part of Kerala consisting of the present day Kasargod, Wayanad, Malappuram and Palakkad districts and was part of Madras province before the formation of the Kerala state

Really, following the subjugation of Malabar by British tyrants and when Sultan Tipu was forced to surrender in 1792, Mappila community, majority of whom enjoyed a sumptuous and satisfactory life under Sultan Tipu, were brutally repressed and both culturally and financially exploited by British government and Hindu Janmis that provoked them to fight back. In such context, when life seemed unworthy and troublesome due to the poverty and scarcity of the products, Mappilas were forced to take themselves into the uprisings against the British and native Janmis. Right in that moment, *ulama* neither supported them nor opposed them, which proves their consent. Further on, when these riots transformed as though communal outbreaks, *ulama* firmly stood against it.

### **Mappila under tyranny**

From the very beginning of Sultan Tipu's invasion of Malabar, Muslims, majority of whom were peasants, enjoyed a gratified life under his regime. The Reform Act of Tipu was rather a relief for the Muslim peasants while it seemed risky and suppressive to the Hindu land lords. Nonetheless, it was neither a period of Mappila domination nor of Mappila rule. But, in fact, Tipu had encountered resistance from the Mappilas like Athan Gurukkal in his endeavor to collect the revenue.<sup>2</sup> The Hindu Janmis( the ruling elite of the Hindu community) aligned themselves with the British in all their efforts against the mysoreans<sup>3</sup>. Eventually, as Malabar was subdued by the British and when Tipu was forced to hand over the helm of Malabar provinces, British made it easy for the Hindu Janmis to enjoy the luxurious life as they did before the arrival of Tipu and Muslims were reckoned as the adherents of Tipu and thus they were totally neglected and brutally oppressed. KN Panikkar found that this seems to be the case as he points out “looked upon as the supporters of Tipu sultan, they (Mappilas) were treated as natural enemies of the new government.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the conquest of Malabar, there were different opinions among the British officers on how they should deal with the Muslims; some argued for strong punitive and terrifying measures from the beginning against the Muslims while others were more diplomatic who believed that though Tipu Sultan was defeated, he was still a force to reckon with and the complete alienation of the Muslims would go to strengthen him. The latter also believed that creating skirmishes between Mappila and local rulers may

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<sup>2</sup>KN Panikkar, Against Lord and State; religion and peasant uprisings in Malabar 1836-1921,p.56

<sup>3</sup> Prof.KM Bahaudheen, Kerala muslims; the long struggle, modern book centre, Trivandrum, 1992, p.94

<sup>4</sup>KN Paniikkar, Against Lord and State; Religion and Peasant uprisings in Malabar 1836-1921, p.55

deteriorate the power of both<sup>5</sup>. In the early years of British's accession to power in 1792, the latter opinion was accepted by the British authority. Later in 1794, British administration began to unveil its real facet of tyranny and its revenge to Muslims for supporting Tipu against them. They offered the Janmis the power to collect the revenue for five years.<sup>6</sup> Under the Mysore regime, it was the state, not any intermediaries or Janmis who collected the tax directly from the peasants. Now, British not only reassigned the intermediaries but it also provided Janmis the power to collect any rate of revenue they wished to and the ultimate power to ouster and evict the ones who couldn't pay. Janmis were given the right to confiscate and then annex the lands of peasants without paying for it. Moreover, as a part of repressive policy of the British authority, *Nairs* were assigned to suppress the Mappila peasants with the support of the police and judiciary in such an extent that Francis Buchanan wrote that 'their greed and misrule were without comparison and if any one complained he was killed.'<sup>7</sup> In his autobiography, Kesava Menon holds that police repression was the only cause of the rebellion.<sup>8</sup> To comprehend clearly the chaotic situation of Mappila peasants, it is useful to quote the words of Brown, the British commercial resident in Malabar, that "nothing could exceed the despotic rapaciousness of these men"<sup>9</sup>. In 1800, Alexander Walker, then commander of Malabar commission, ordained his officials "impose higher taxes on them (Mappila), don't offer government jobs to any one of their family. They are a curse upon Ernad and Vellattiri".

After 1800s, when British authority unfolded their real face of cruelty, Mappila Muslims began to strongly confront these oppressions from Janmis and British officials. It was not merely in the case of land that they faced discriminations but also in the recruitments to the government services. The reports concerned to it unfold this truth vividly. A report on the revision of judicial systems in the province Malabar, describes that after 1800, most appointees for the posts of *adhipkaris* and *menons* were from the Hindu landowning classes. Also, during the first half of the century all *tahsildars* and an overwhelming majority of village officials were Hindus<sup>10</sup>. In 1851, H.V Conolly reported that in Ernad, Cheranad and Walluvanad taluks, where the population was almost evenly

<sup>5</sup> Prof.KM Bahaudheen, keralamuslims the long struggle, p. 94

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis on the land reform policy of British government see, Willium Logan, Malabar Manual and K.N Panikkar, Against lord and state.

<sup>7</sup> Prof.KM Bahaudheen, keralamuslims the long struggle, p. 98

<sup>8</sup> K.P Keshava Menon, kazhinjakalam, p.116

<sup>9</sup> Prof.KM Bahaudheen, keralamuslims the long struggle, p. 98

<sup>10</sup> Hashim T, colonialism and the Mappila muslims of Malabar; a review of Mappila revolt and khilafat movement, kerala sociologist society

divided between Hindus and Mappilas, the former had the lion's share of village posts.

In brief, Mappila Muslims were culturally, economically and socially repressed and exploited by the British. Facing these all oppressions, the hatred and enmity against the British reign accidentally emerged within the poor Mappila community which took them to the riots against Janmis and land lords.

### **The Mappila riots; communal or agrarian?**

Concerning the Mappila riots in Malabar, lots of the interpretations were given by the contemporary historians and British officials, but all in different ways. Fanaticism and the turbulent character of the lower classes of Mappilas were the causes initially attributed by the British administration to the revolts of the Mappila peasantry.<sup>11</sup> Stephen F Dale opines that the Mappila revolt was fanatical in character.<sup>12</sup> To him, the religious Mappilas, inspired by the fanatic leaders, devoted their life to establish an Islamic state in India. He considers this revolt as religiously inspired, deliberately targeting the Hindu population and the khilafat movement as a revolt against Hindus. Outlining the riots, Miller observed "reckless bravery and the conviction that death for the faith brought a blessed end, remained constant in all the incidents".<sup>13</sup> D.N Dhanagare, emphasizing the role of religion in the Mappila revolts, writes that "in general, the outbreaks followed a similar pattern almost invariably, the outbreak would involve a group of Mappila youths attacking a Brahmin janmi, a *nair* official or janmi's servants; often it also involved the burning or defilement of temples and occasionally the burning and looting of landlord's houses."<sup>14</sup> British officials in the Malabar called the revolts 'Mappila outbreak' and depicted it as fanatical. Conrad Wood writes that T.L Strange, an officer appointed by the British authority to enquire into the factors that led to the revolt, discarded all possibilities of agrarian causes and foregrounded the fanaticism of Mappila Muslims as the main reason for the outbreaks.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the left historians depicted them as the massive protest of the Mappila tenants against the repressions of Janmis and the British colonialism. K.K.N Kurup observed that the khilafat and non-cooperation movements in Malabar led to violent uprisings by the Mappila peasantry in the southern taluks of Ernad and Walluvanad and

<sup>11</sup>Madras judicial proceedings, 11 May 1841, No.27, Indian office records(IOR)

<sup>12</sup>Stephen F.Dale, the Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922 islamic society on the south Asian frontier, oxford, clarendon press, 1980, p.44-48

<sup>13</sup>Roland E Miller, Mappila Muslims of Kerala; a study in Islamic trends, 1971, p. 109

<sup>14</sup>D.N Dhanagare, agrarian conflict, religion and politics; the moplal rebellion in Malabar in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's past and present, economic and political weekly, No. 74, 1977, p.119

<sup>15</sup>Conrad Wood, the Mappila rebellion and its genesis, new delhi, peoples's publishing house, 1987, p.27

that the Mappila rebellion gathered strength primarily from the poor peasants.<sup>16</sup> Conrad Wood claimed that the Mappila outbreaks were the result of antagonism between the landlords and the poor Mappila tenants.<sup>17</sup> Prakash Karat, another left writer, described the Malabar rebellion as anti-imperialist and anti-feudal and claims that seminal reason for the Mappila peasant movement was economic due to the agrarian financial exploitation of the poor peasants by the landlords and the British officials.<sup>18</sup> However these scholars believe that the exploitation by the intermediaries which created tremendous disturbance in the normal life of the poor Mappila peasants and the hostility towards the British law gave the impetus to a mass uprising among the peasants.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that there was a general feeling, as Brahmadathan Namputhiripad assumed, among the rebels that the British rule had ceased and the Khilafat rule had started.<sup>20</sup> It is also true that some of the rebels with a concept of millennium and messianic hope took to the revolts anticipating their probable success and rule in this region.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, both interpretations are seemingly neither to be denied at all nor be relied upon. The only conclusion we can come up with here is that the riots, in its inception, were actually anti-colonial protests that the poor peasants, particularly Muslims, led against the repressive and exploitive approach of the Janmis and the English officials. Later on, in the 19th century, the riots, for the several causes, began to be turned out to be a sort of the communal outbreaks where some Mappilas somehow turned aggressive and lunatic upon the Hindus, plundered the houses, brutally murdered the women and children and even forcibly converted them to Islam. That is what A. Sreedhara Menon lucidly stated “what began originally as a reaction against police repression, turned out in its last phase to be a sort of communal flare-up in which the Hindus became the special target of attacks by the Mappila. There were even some cases of forcible conversion and looting of the wealth and property of the Hindus.”<sup>22</sup>

In the very inception, the riots that broke out among the Mappilas were held out in response to the agrarian grievances arising out of the eviction, *melcharth*, and excessive rent imposed by the landlordism. Also it was not in terms of religion that the masses were aroused to react but their individual social problems which they faced from the police, the

<sup>16</sup>K.K.N Kurup, peasantry and the anti-imperialist struggles in kerala, social scientist, vol.16, 1988, p.35-36

<sup>17</sup>Conrad Wood, the Mappila rebellion and its genesis, new delhi, peoples’s publishing house, 1987, p.8-10

<sup>18</sup>Prakash Karat, Mappila peasant revolts, social scientist, 1990, p.96-99

<sup>19</sup>Hashim T, colonialism and the Mappila muslims of Malabar; a review of Mappila revolt and khilafat movement, journal of the kerala sociologist society, v.45, Dec 2017, Trivandrum

<sup>20</sup>BrahmadthanNamputhiripad, khilafat smaranakal, p.57

<sup>21</sup>Conrad Wood, The Moplah rebellion and its genesis, p.12

<sup>22</sup>A Sreedhara Menon, A Survey Of Kerala History, P.28

British officers and native Janmis. Further on, as a result of the administrations to make it so, religion slowly began to creep into and it took a substantial place in the mind of revolutionaries that could be apparently seen through the formation of *khilafat* movement and the rebellion of 1921. How an agrarian resistance turned out in its last phase to be a sort of communal confrontations can be answered thus that some local leaders –not *ulama*– who were already extremists and ultra-conservatives, could successfully spread many rumors that made the Muslim masses concerned over the existence of their religion under British reign and simultaneously promulgated the concepts of jihad along with the dignities of the martyrdom. This spurred the Mappilas to dedicate everything even their life.<sup>23</sup> Majority of these local leaders did so not for the religious zeal but for the acquirement of the vested interests. For instance, Kunholan who was deprived of his land through *melcharth* (over lease) killed his landlord, Perumbali Nambudiri and induced his neighbors to accompany him in the attack on the assurance that they would become martyrs and be entitled to paradise.<sup>24</sup> Here, he was neither influenced by the desire for martyrdom nor by the lure of the pleasures of paradise. That, as a part of 'divide and rule' policy of the British government, all officials concerned with Malabar had strived hard to interpret these massive and inclusive agrarian revolts as the communal and thus to bifurcate the bilateral harmony between Hindus and Muslims, is a fact that cannot be denied.

Unfortunately, some Muslim scholars dreamed the successful victory of the khilafat movement and thus the establishment of an Islamic kingdom. It is referred to this context of the riots that Brahmadhathan Namboothiripad wrote in his book '*khilafat Smaranakal*' that Ali Musliyar had punished the culprits in accordance with the holy Quran and even imposed the ordain of Quran to cut the hand of the looter.<sup>25</sup> As the communal approaches were seemed to be accepted widely among the Muslims, Abdu Rahman Sahib, being enraged, stoutly admonished “oh my brothers, who endeavor to enter the paradise through martyrdom, you can watch over there the good views of your women being ravished by the soldiers and also can smell well the ashes of your land after being burnt”.<sup>26</sup> It is phenomenal that in these circumstances the rebels in general lacked effective centralized leadership and hence the gang leader or more than one leader of a gang decided the nature

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<sup>23</sup>Mozhkkunnath Brahmadathan Namboothiripad, *Khilafath Smaranakal*, P.19

<sup>24</sup> K.N Panikkar, *Against lord and state*, p.68-69

<sup>25</sup>Mozhkkunnath Brahmadathan Namboothiripad, *Khilafath Smaranakal*, P.51

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 64

of rebel operations in any region.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Ulama and their stances***

No one can question the piety and the knowledge of the Keralite *ulama* like Syeds of Mamburam, Maqdooms and Umer Qazi, or even doubt whether they had done anything unislamic. Likewise, what they encouraged the society to do was quite Islamic and what they abandoned was the unislamic i.e. that is against the fundamental doctrines of Islam. Hence, the question still looms around the issue is that whether the *ulama* supported the riots that the Mappilas led against the colonialist interests of the British regime or not; that is what this article meant to provide a lucid and delicate clarification. Hashim T in his article ‘colonialism and the Mappila Muslims of Malabar; a review of Mappila revolt and khilafat movement’ elucidates:

“There were differences amongst the *ulama* regarding the participation of Muslims in the Khilafat and Mappila revolts. Pan-Islamic and salafi inspired scholars in Kerala were in support of the national movement against the British power. Contrary to this, a group of *ulama* (Sunni-traditionalist scholars like Syeds of Mamburam, Maqdooms and Umar Qazi) was against the anti-British rebellion and preached the importance of being loyal to the British crown.”<sup>28</sup>

Hence, the *ulama* who took part in the revolts were the former while the latter either kept silent or firmly stood against it. The latter scholars are referred here as *ulama*. After scrounging all historical texts concerned with the Malabar, one must conclude with rare information about how the *ulama* perceived the riots because, none of the reliable sources clearly claim that *ulama* of Kerala like Syeds of Mamburam had led these riots or at least supported them. Why? the answer is simple that they hadn't any significant roles in promulgating the riots and arousing the revolutionaries to fight against the government, because, they were conscious about the profound teachings of Islam and that they believed that Islam never encouraged suicidal jihad against a government that allows freedom of religion and doesn't abandon the people from practicing their religious prayers and cults. They also thought that it was anti-Islamic to fight against the standing government. In contrast to the British government, the earlier invaders like Portuguese curbed the freedom of religion and deliberately committed an ethnic cleansing against the Muslims. That is

<sup>27</sup> M Gangadharan, The Malabar Rebellion, p.203

<sup>28</sup> Hashim.T, colonialism and the mappilamuslims of malabar; a review of mappila revolt and khilafat movement, kerala sociologist. V. 45, p.121

why the then *ulamas* like Sheikh Zainuddin Maqdam and Qazi Muhammed stood firm against them and produced the works to call the Muslim masses for jihad.<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned above, the *ulamas* are not seen in the history as leaders of any riots but they kept silent until these riots turned out to be a sort of mere communal flare up when they opposed it then. Different reasons are there for *ulama* not to proclaim loyalty to the riots of Malabar and refuse to hold its helm. Firstly, the riots, which Mappila led, were obviously suicidal for, merely hundreds of less armed Mappilas fought against the thousands of the well-armed and mighty soldiers. In the 32 total riots that were waged between 1836 and 1919, 351 men of the Mappilas were killed while only 83 soldiers lost their lives.<sup>30</sup> More pernicious was the Malabar rebellion of 1921 that it was soon repressed very brutally and avenged savagely in such an extent that A.Sreedhara Menon clearly illustrated “the rebel leaders were captured and shot, while hundreds were either imprisoned or deported. It is estimated that about 10000 people lost their lives in this rebellion”.<sup>31</sup> Despite the harmonious and secular facets of the nation, growing communal tendency of the rebels and their strong endeavor to establish an Islamic state was the second cause that forbade the *ulama* from leading the rebellions. It is true that those who assumed that Khilafat movement should establish an Islamic country promulgated forced conversion and killed those who refused to obey.<sup>32</sup> Dr. K.N Panikkar observes that leaders of the rebellion of 1921 like Ali Musliyar, Chambrasser Tangal and Variamkunnath Haji were averse to those sorts of doings of Mappilas and they even punished those who forced the infidels to convert to the Islam. Variamkunnath Ahmad Haji had enforced a code of behavior on the Mappilas. David S. Mary says “Variamkunnath ordered that Hindus are not to be molested, nor their poverty be looted; there should be no forceful conversion; those who violate these rules would be severely punished.”<sup>33</sup>

Also, the *ulamas* always stood unfavorable to any doing that deteriorated religious and racial harmony that was present in the land of Malabar. Of course, the Mappila riots, in its last phase, were, as mentioned above, a sort of communal flare up among the Muslims and Hindus. Besides a reaction to the deplorable circumstances that prevailed in Malabar

<sup>29</sup> Sheikh Zainuddin wrote *tuhfatulmujahideen* and Qazi Muhammad wrote *fathulmubin*

<sup>30</sup> MoinMalayamma And Mahmood Panangangara, MamburamThangal;

JeevithamAathmiyadhaPorattam( Mamburamtangal; life, spirituality and struggle , P.271

<sup>31</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, P.283

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Kn Panikkar, Malabar PaithrkavumPrathapavum, 1921-Le Kalabam, P.206

<sup>33</sup> David S. Mary, was it a fanatical outbreak? in CK Kareem(ed), Malabar lahala; 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary special book, Trivandrum, 1972, p.94-113

under colonial rule, the *ulama* were largely concerned over the existence of the Muslim society that was in the cautious question mark during the Malabar rebellion of 1921 in which more than 10000 people lost their lives and 1277 were banished. To perpetuate the *ummah* is essential role the *ulamas* ought to play.

Had the *ulama* directly taken part in arousing the spirit of the rebels and valorously led them in the battlefield, the picture could not be same as it had been actually. Because, the influence these *ulamas* had among the multitude was something that by no means can be denied and was not denied by any historians even the British officials. Mamburam Tangals were most influenced, pious leaders of Malabar whom everyone, irrespective of their religion, race and wealth, respected and obeyed. William Logan writes about the massive influence of Mamburam Tangal as follows:

“Mappilas regarded him as imbued with a portion of divinity. They swear by his foot as their most solemn oath. Earth on which he had spat or walked is treasured up. Marvelous stories are told of his supernatural knowledge. His blessing is supremely prized. And even among the higher class of Mappila his wish was regarded as a command, and no consideration of economy was allowed to stand in the way of its being gratified”.<sup>34</sup>

Had these popular *ulama* called for an anti-colonial rebellion, what kind of the results it will produce is unimaginable. If the *ulama* called for jihad against the tyranny of the British government, none of the Muslims can sit still without taking part in it. Also, the rebellion of 1921 that was in the beginning called ‘Mappila rebellion’ was later called by R.H Hitchcock, the then deputy superintendent of police, as ‘Malabar rebellion’ for two prime reasons; firstly, a number of Mappilas hadn't taken part in them and secondly, the non-Muslims too had participated in them.<sup>35</sup>

### **Syed Alavi of Mamburam**

Settled in Tirurangadi, Syed Alavi of Mamburam or *Mamburam Tangal* with his spiritual and religious teachings intervened in the social affairs of the keralites and soothed everyone arrived there even from the far distances with abundant problems they face in the everyday life. Suffice to say, Mamburam was a sacred sanctum where a number of the masses came seeking remedies for their problems and there was not any consideration in

<sup>34</sup>William Logan, Malabar Manual, P.571

<sup>35</sup> Dr. M Gamgadhara, Mappila Padanangal( Mappila literature), P.53

whether he is Muslim or not. Actually, the mesmerizing influence, Mamburam Tangal had achieved among the society is what caused to incite the authority to doubt whether he is rebel or not. It is very probable to think that, perhaps, few people, who had once visited Mamburam, might have stood in front of the riots. It is that that strengthened the doubt of government on whether he is rebel. Also, the revolutionaries, to galvanize the support of the multitude, might have promulgated the rumors over the consent of Mamburam Tangal for rebellion or claimed that they are blessed by him. The assertion of Syed Fazl that ‘he never encouraged fanaticism or rebellion against the government and that it was his misfortune if any of his devotees to whom he gave his blessings in a mass interpreted it as a sanction to commit atrocities which they considered a service to God’<sup>36</sup> makes the fact more obvious.

Even though the Anglo-Indian historians had interpreted the riots as communal outbreaks and presented the vague and opaque events as evidences for their claims, none of their historical texts lucidly explain the role of Mamburam Tangal in the anti-colonial riots, except only some speculations. As K.N Panikkar opines, the suspicion of the district officials over the role of Tangal was based on nothing but circumstantial and negative evidence. The British officials drew their conclusion over the role of Tangal in revolts by deductive logic; ‘if uprisings had not occurred during the absence of Tangal, his presence must have been responsible for their incidences.’<sup>37</sup> Also, there is no evidence of any hostility on his part against Hindus. On the contrary, it is known that he did not hesitate to employ Hindus in his establishment and even his manager was a Hindu.<sup>38</sup> He hadn’t called for a jihad, as he is often accused of, against the British administration, but, instead he emphasized on self-purification-a jihad against *nafz*- which he considered essential for the advance of the community.<sup>39</sup>

Who actually penned the '*AssaifulBathar*' and whether it is anti-British work is a disputed issue among the historians. Some see it as a work written by Mamburam Tangal to arouse the masses against the British colonialism and to maintain the necessity of jihad. Others maintained that it was written by Abdullah bin Abdul Bari al-Ahdal calling the Muslims of the world to help Ottoman sultan Abdul Majid against Russian army and that there is no particular mention about Malabar and British invasion. They also claimed that

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence OnMoplah Outrages, Vol.1, P.137

<sup>37</sup> KN Panikkar, against lord and state, p.97

<sup>38</sup> C.N Ahmad Moulavi and K.K Abdul kareem, Mahathayamappilasahithyaprarampariyam, calicut, 1978, p.178

<sup>39</sup> K.K Kareem, Sayyid Alavi, thirurangadi, 1975, p.31

the name of author given on the text was not of Syed Alavi but of Abdullah bin al Ahdal. The latter perception seems more compatible to the facts. In contrast to the earlier works of Maqdooms and Qazis of Kozhikode against the Portuguese invasion, *Assaiful Bathar* doesn't even mention Malabar and foreign colonialism but it comprised only the Christian invasions of the Muslim countries and how the Muslims should respond to them. It is also illogical to think that he dares not to unveil his identity as the author of an anti-colonial work. Had MamburamTangal, a pious Sufi who never feared anyone except his God Allah, wanted to sound against something or someone, he should do it clearly as the earlier *ulama* did against Portuguese sovereignty. It is also likely to assume that when al-Ahdal asked eight common questions, Syed replied it which was collected by al-Ahdal; but, yet this possibility too doesn't reveal the anti-colonial stance of Mamburam Tangal. Moreover, it was published in Egypt and Istanbul (Constantinople). Therefore, jettisoning the historical distortion of Tangal's life is imperative.

### **Syed FazlPookoya**

Syed Fazl, the son of Syed Alavi, who led the society after his father's demise, received same moderate concept of his father, therefore, he neither ordained for riots nor encouraged the rebels to indulge in anti-colonial rebellion. Due to the presence of some people in the rebellions who used to come at Mamburam, Syed Fazl was cognized by the British officials as the leader of those riots particularly in the case of Thalasseri-Mattanur riot of 1852 when it was commenced two months after the rebels visited Mamburam. But, Syed Fazl, a pious Sufi who believes in the telling lies as a superior moral crime, had explained in front of the government that he has no role in these suicidal riots. In a letter to government secretary, H.V Conolly admits that: "Tirurangadi Tangal claimed he hadn't supported any uprisings against the government and he condemned that it is quite unfortunate that some of those who used to approach me for blessings had indulged in these kinds of doings".<sup>40</sup> Had Syed Fazl supported the riots and encouraged the rebels to indulge in it, he should have admitted it valorously without telling lies. In fact, he had even offered to dispel any wrong impression created by his sermons in the minds of his disciples.

Moreover, Syed Fazl, when realized that he has somehow become motive for the rebels to perpetrate the violence and his speech had been distorted, he decided to leave

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<sup>40</sup> Correspondence OnMoplah Outrages, Vol.1, P.13

Malabar not to make more harm to the government. William Logan writes down, “Tangal reiterated that he had done nothing to deserve the displeasure of the government; that he repudiated the deeds of the fanatics; and that it was his misfortune that a general blessing, intended to convey spiritual benefits to those alone who acted in accordance with the Muhammadan faith, should be misinterpreted by a few parties who acted in contradiction to its precepts”.<sup>41</sup> Also, he informed the government that ‘as his blessing was sometimes misunderstood and his presence in the country unfortunately had led to deeds of horror, he was willing if the government chose it, to end further embarrassment by leaving Malabar and taking up his permanent abode among his people in Arabia.’<sup>42</sup> Not only English historians, but left historians too had admitted that Tangal had promised the government that if his speeches are wrongly comprehended among his disciples, he is ready to correct and make them cognizant of the reality.<sup>43</sup> Even those British loyalists who from the very beginning of the Mappila riots had strived to interpret them as communal flare-up between Hindus and Muslims, couldn't, beyond the mere speculations, find precise evidences that testify the role of Syed Fazl in the riots. In the letter to the government secretary, the crime that was accused by Conolly against Syed Fazl was that he kept a blind eye towards the riots without barring the rebels from indulging in the revolts.

As in the case of *Saiful Bathar*, the *Udhathul Umara* of Syed Fazl, which was argued by the Left-Islamist historians as a revolutionary work that spurred the Mappilas to war against British colonialists, also doesn't consist of the mentions of Malabar or British invasion. Its plot is, actually, to announce the Muslim world to support the then Ottoman *khaleefa* against the foreign invasions. It was firstly published in Egypt in 1856, four years after his leaving and was submitted to sultan Abdul Aziz. Also, at the bottom of each of its pages is thus written that “Allah! Help the Ottoman family and bring upon them fortune to attain the truth”.

Also, Syed Fazl had produced copious works on Islamic theology in Arabic like ‘*fususathul isalm*’, ‘*ala man yuvaril kaffar*’, ‘*kaukabudurar*’, ‘*hululihisal li tasiyiniil insan*’, and ‘*asasulislam*’. Though they are all dealing with Islamic theology mainly, they contain teaching on religious tolerance and love apart from the message of struggles against the

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<sup>41</sup>William Logan, Malabar Manual, P.571

<sup>42</sup> ibid

<sup>43</sup>Dr.Kn Panikkar, Against Lord And State; religion and peasant uprisings in Malabar 1836-1921, P.118

British.<sup>44</sup> Given the above maintained facts, it becomes clear that Syed Fazl never had deliberately taken part in the Mappila riots.

### **Umar Qazi's protest**

It is widely popular myth; Umar Qazi of Valiancode had valorously warred against the British colonialism through his tax-denial (Non-payment) strikes. In fact, as the historical texts prove, he had neither led any riots against the government nor refused to pay the tax. All he did was that he only expressed his exasperation in the partiality of tax collectors as they imposed more tax on him than on Hindu Janmis. This denial provoked the Janmis who accused of him as tax- defiant and hence, in the order of collector, he was incarcerated. In a letter from prison to Syed Alavi of Mamburam, he explains his innocence in the case and deplors the partial approaches of tax collectors. He was blaming not the government but the local Janmis and Hindu landlords. Had he wanted to fight against the government, he should have ordered the masses that followed his way to prison to do so and to refuse paying the tax but what he did then was directing them to be calm and disperse in peace.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, he was a profound writer who penned abundant works including *nafaisudurar*, *qasidathul umariyya* and *maqsidul nikkah* but, he, though lived forty years after being released from the prison, hadn't produced at least one revolutionary work inciting the Mappilas to fight against the British colonialists and refuse to pay the tax.

### **Approach of the later *ulama***

The *ulama* who came after Mamburam Tangal and Umar Qazi, received the same approach as the earlier *ulama* did during their life; opposing the extremist approaches and anti-colonial suicidal struggles. Their firm stance was seen apparent when they jettisoned the collective attempts of the congress and Muslim nationalists to push down the masses into the bloody and armed rebellion of 1921. During the rebellion of 1921, Muthukoya Tangal, a great grandson of Syed Alavi, asked the Mappila Muslims of south Malabar to keep away from rebellious activities and to remain loyal to the government.<sup>46</sup> While the ultra-conservatives under the leadership of E Moidu Moulavi and Muhammad Moulavi came into

<sup>44</sup> KKN Kurup and Prof. E Ismail, Emergence of islam in kerala in 20<sup>th</sup> century, standard publishers, New Delhi, 2008, p.155

<sup>45</sup> *Veliancode Umar Qazi yudejeevacharithravumkrithikalum*, VeliancodeMahalluJama't committee, veliancode, 1999, p.60

<sup>46</sup> Dr. Husain Randathani, Mappila Muslims; a study on society and anti-colonial struggles, p.149

mainstream pronouncing the anti-British riots in the label of khilafat, the contemporary mainstream *ulama* stepped forward and abandoned them with rejoinders and counter *fatwas*. Consequently, an *ulama* conference was held in Pathar on 24 July 1921 in which about six hundred scholars thronged and was presided by Maqdoom Kunchan Bava Musliyar and Valiancode Thattangara Kuttyamu Musliyar, the well-known and gifted Sunni scholars of Malabar. As an action against the khilafat movement and anti-British revolts, a fatwa namely *mahaqulkhilafah ala ismilkhilafah* (erasing the khilafat in the name of the khilafat), was published and 25000 copies were distributed all over the Malabar. Fatwa included a proclamation to the society to be loyal with the government.<sup>47</sup> During the period of 1889-1915, known as relatively the peaceful period, the Muslims of Malabar organized an association called the '*Himayatul islam sabha*' under the presidentship of Muthukoya Tangal which passed several resolutions and called upon the Muslims to keep peace in places where they resided. A fatwa was issued by the chief Qazi, Pukkoya Tangal, saying that no one would resort to any outbreak or evil designs against the lawful government.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the *Alim* Kuthubi declared a fatwa against the participation of the Mappila Muslims in the khilafat movement and Mappila revolts as well as in the Indian freedom struggle and he quoted the Quranic verse "You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers (to be) the Jews and those who associate others with Allah; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant" (5:82). Citing the Quranic verse "obey God; the prophet and those who are in authority amongst you", Makti Tangal asserted the necessity of obeying the british authority.<sup>49</sup> Hadn't the foresighted *ulama* intervened so and stopped the Muslim society from joining in the suicidal uprisings, the history of rebellion of 1921 might be more pathetic than we heard. Further on, those stances of *ulama* was presented as the resolutions of the sixth anniversary of Samastha<sup>50</sup> which was held on 5 March 1933 in Faroke<sup>51</sup>. The Samastha firmly stood against the congress and urged the Mappilas to keep aloof from its activities. The 11 and 12 resolutions of the conference announced the Muslims to keep away from the congress party

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Husain Randathani, Maqdumum Ponnaniyum (maqdam and ponnani), P.394

<sup>48</sup> KKN Kurup and Prof E Ismail, Emergence of islam in kerala in 20<sup>th</sup> century, p.160

<sup>49</sup> Dr. Husain Randathani, Mappila Muslims; a study on society and anti-colonial struggles, p.150

<sup>50</sup> An Islamic *ulama* organization which played a substantial role in the socio-political and religious resurgence of Mappila Muslims.

<sup>51</sup> Simaojas, Socio-political resurgence of Mappila muslims under the Samastha keralajamiyathululema; a revisit, Amierj, V.vii, issue. iv

which pushed Muslims into the suicidal riots that led them into the catastrophic miseries and from taking into the streets for the uprisings against the British regime.<sup>52</sup>

### Conclusion

From the early beginning of the 19th century, Malabar passed through a turbulent phase of violent disturbances caused by the Mappila riots. What motive led the Mappila community to take themselves into these outbreaks and how the contemporary *ulama* responded were interpreted by a number of historians in distinct ways; hence, it is a controversial issue. As elucidated herein, the poverty and agrarian grievance that caused through the revenue policy of the British government which considered the Hindu Janmis as the real lord of the soil and the Mappila tenants as has no right on the land and according to which the Janmis were allowed to exercise the power of *melcharth*, ouster and eviction on the peasants, forced the Mappila peasants to fight against the Land lords and the British government. Meanwhile, as the historical texts testify, the *ulamas* including Mamburam Tangal and Umar Qazi had neither supported it nor publicly opposed. Further on, as these agrarian riots turned out to be a sort of the communal flare-up between Hindus and Muslims and the goal of a minority of the rebels became the establishment of an Islamic regime, the *ulama* never supported it but condemned the brutal violence of the rebels. It is gesturing to this phase of the riots that some historians conclude that religious bigotry was real cause of the riots. To establish the facts, a number of reliable sources and historical texts are scrutinized and researched.

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<sup>52</sup> Sixth anniversary souvenir keralajamiyathululama, Calicut, 1986, P.33-34

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