

CHANGING POLITICAL SCENERIO OF MALABAR IN THE VICINITY OF AGRARIAN UNRESTS (1800 -1884)

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Abstract

Agrarian unrest in world context or Indian context of historical research always tends to relate itself with some kind of reaction or retaliation against some kind of oppression meted out to the people belonging to the lower strata of society by the privileged class better known as class of elites. While analyzing the impact of such struggles upon the society one can clearly understand the changes it brought about in the society affecting various spheres of development directly or indirectly. It also provides a vivid picture about the underlying reasons behind such outbursts and thereby serves as an apt indicator of the nature of the then society affected by such unrests. This eventually happens as agrarian sector plays a major role in affecting society as it is unduly depending upon the same for basic sustenance. Hence, it is always advisable to understand the problems related with agrarian sector to clearly analyze the problems related with society which is exactly what the nationalist leaders of Indian freedom struggle did to find solution to a long period of suppression by British regime. British always targeted the agrarian sector and land revenue settlement related with the same to control the basic crux of the society. Furthermore, it also played a major role in impacting upon the socio-political scenario of India. Thus, by and large many agrarian unrests broke out as a result of the unscrupulous exploitation meted out to the peasants and tenants by the landlords and other higher officials related with agrarian sector and related taxation policy followed by various agencies both local as well as foreign in nature. However, speaking about agrarian unrests affecting the society, the one related with peasants and tenants of Malabar region in Kerala attains a special position pertaining to movements related with Indian freedom struggle. This particular, agrarian unrest that transpired in Malabar region stands out among the other in the sense of its impact upon the society, the range of out breaks in a span of say 84 years and the underlying reasons behind such a series of revolts raised against a regime within a stipulated point of time clearly states about the condition of the Malabar society at that particular point of time. Thus to make a clear evaluation about the changing socio-political scenario of Malabar in the vicinity of a series of agrarian unrests and its impact upon Indian freedom struggle, one need to understand about the socio political nature of the then Malabar society, the very reasons that paved the way for such agrarian unrests, the impact of such unrests upon the society and last but not the least the predominant role played by such outbursts in paving the way towards Mappila rebellion which in itself played a major role in affecting the course of Indian freedom struggle in a peculiar way. Moreover through a scrutinized study of such a problem one can clearly trace out the condition and the life pattern of the society that existed in the then Malabar of 1800.

Introduction

Socio-political scenario of Malabar prior to unrests was such that the entire region was inhabited by people belonging to various castes and communities, the majority being mappilamuslims and Nayars. This particular fact attains primordial importance pertaining to the events that took place in this region which eventually paved its way towards a series of unrests mostly agrarian in character. According to the feudal system, henceforth followed in Kerala, Nambuthiri-Nair communities enjoyed everything related with divine rights and power to rule over other communities, which they maintained all-throughout history without any obstruction.¹ The peasantry of Malabar consisted mainly of mappilamuslims and were controlled by Hindu landlords who were mostly from either from the Brahmin or Nair communities. As a matter of fact, Mysorean interlude in Malabar created a great paradigm shift with respect to the already existing socio-political scenario of Malabar. In simple terms it initially stopped the exploitation of peasants by feudal landlords. One need to keep in mind that, pre-colonial Malabar society was a caste dominated society, where the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* or ruling chieftains, the *Ambalavasis* or

intermediary castes and the *Nairs* constituted the political and social elites.² They installed their own plans and policies pertaining to agrarian sector which proved to be beneficial for peasants. Tax collection and every other transaction related with the same were done directly with the government without the help of intermediaries or the intervention of landlords. Rules and regulations formulated by Mysoreans in Malabar proved to be harmful for landlords and initially put an end to their exploitation over the peasant class. The same policy adopted by Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan was followed by the British to regulate revenue policy, in the later period.³

However, after their reign situations began to change as Malabar came under the hands of British by the infamous treaty of Srirangapattanam. Here at this very particular juncture, British began to reverse the policies that existed in Malabar when they were under the sway of Mysoreans. They reinstated the lost positions of landlords and used their help to control the agrarian sector of Malabar, which eventually culminated in the formation of the society that existed prior to the coming of their Mysorean counter parts. The land revenue system administration under Mysorean rule was another cause of the disturbances in Malabar. According to tradition, land-tax was unknown in Malabar until the Mysorean occupation.⁴ Hence, the necessity of a new efficient system was felt by him which subsequently got implemented by Mysoreans. However, things began to change when it came to the hands of British. This scenario in turn created a tense situation in Malabar. The peasant class mostly comprising of Mappila Muslims and other lower castes felt betrayed and exploited, as those privileges and freedom which they enjoyed under the reign of Mysoreans were curtailed instantaneously when the region came under the control of British and their new agrarian policies which proved totally harmful for the peasants and farmers of the then Malabar region. They considered it as a plot hatched against them by the British along with caste Hindus Nairs and Nambuthiris. A close scrutinized study proves that, even before the coming of British or Mysoreans the whole of Malabar was divided into petty *Rajaships*, mostly feudal in character. *Nairs* who attained pre-eminence among other castes and tribes organized the the country on a military basis. They divided the entire country into *nads* and placed them under their control. Hence, after the conquest of Malabar, Haider Ali directed his attention to reduce the power and prestige of the Nair Chiefs, and to introduce the same system of revenue which prevailed in the rest of his dominions.⁵

Though, this was the social condition that persisted in Malabar, events began to change as British wanted to bring forth the system that existed prior to the coming of Mysoreans. This fact made them to take activities initiating such transitions. This was further, aggravated by the fact that, there was no guarantee that the agreements would be observed because state monopoly of pepper was never successfully established by the native Rajas of North Malabar in the past.⁶ Hence, the action taken by the Company and subsequent actions, finally prompted Mappilas and peasant class to raise their voice against British through mass protests and unrests which however, were mostly individual in character and hence struggled to achieve success in the initial stages. Agrarian unrests thus transpired as a result of such a transformation in political structure played a crucial role in re- molding the society for a mass protest against the British better known in history as Mappila rebellion of 1921. While analyzing the history of freedom movement in India, one can vividly understand the significance of Moplah uprising and the subsequent formation of Malabar Special Police in the Malabar region of the then Kerala. This incident along with the formation of MSP attains a predominant place among the freedom struggle movements that took place against the all-powerful British regime. Moreover, the year 1920 is considered as a very significant year pertaining to in the history of Indian national movement.⁷ British wisely used the concept of communalism that existed in India at that point of time for their own advantage, which was the exact case scenario in Malabar region just like any other region in pre-independent India. Though Moplah uprising is depicted in history as a part of nationalist movement, close scrutiny of events reveals that it is an inter-play between the forces of nationalism and

communalism alongside agrarian factor playing a major role in the transformation of events in such a peculiar manner. A series of riots was mostly communal in nature such as that one which transpired in the year 1847. In February 1847, this area (Ponnani), was a witness for an excited performance of the Mappilas, aimed at Captain S.W. Patridge of the 18th Regiment, Bombay Native Regiment, who was staying at the Traveller's Bungalow in Ponnani.⁸ Furthermore, it is feasible enough to state that everything started with agrarian sector as the focus point of attention and any other advances in the events can be seen as an extension of the basic issues related with agrarian sector of Malabar. In fact, the rebellion of 1921 is considered as the eighty third resurgence of people of India against cruel landlords and colonialist tendencies of the British empire.

Events Leading To Agrarian Unrests

According to Al-Beruni, the whole of Malabar region is comprised of different regions such as the former nine taluks of Kottayam, Kurumbranadu, Calicut, Wynad, Ernad, Walluvanad, Ponnani and Palghat. The region thus densely populated with people from various caste and communities had to face Mysorean invasion headed over by Haider Ali and later by Tipu Sultan. Mappilas and Nairs were the two major caste communities that were predominant in Malabar region during the time period of Mysorean interlude. While Nairs were part of local community it is widely believed that Muslims or followers of Islam religion came to Malabar coast by A.D.642, as per historical records. However, the rulers of Kodungalloor region welcomed them with open hands.⁹ The Mysorean conquest proved to be a turning point in the history of Malabar as it brought about certain changes in the political as well as agrarian spheres which proved to be fatal for the upcoming events in relation to this region as well as in terms of ongoing Indian freedom struggle. The concentration of land in the hands of a few by exploiting the labor force was the main characteristics of feudal system in Malabar region during the time period when Mysorean invasion took place out of nowhere. It was such that the concept of '*janmam-kanammaryada*' and '*Tharavad*' controlled or acted as the base of all land revenue settlement in Malabar region. This traditional kingship unit known as Tharavad was an administrative office also. The origin and growth of this institution as a land owning units are not properly traceable from historical writings or sources.¹⁰ Their economy was mainly depended upon agriculture and related activities are pertaining to the same. Mappila Muslims who formed the crux of the peasant class alongside others were striving to retain their social status which they once enjoyed in Malabar region.

From time immemorial they enjoyed a high status in the society. Now, tracing out their ancestral origin, one can evidently state them as the offspring of Arabs, who contracted marriage alliances with women of the native land of Malabar and other adjacent regions. In an earlier society that persisted in Malabar they maintained cordial relationships with *rajās* of Malabar region including Zamorins of Calicut. They played a pivotal role in exploring and giving publicity to the entire world about the huge trade prospects of this particular region. In fact, they were more closely associated with Moors or *Muhammadens*¹¹, often considered as those who came here for trade related purposes. Later they began to propagate their religion and settled in Malabar region by aiding the rulers of Malabar in administration and various other fields of activities, by rendering their help to them.

After a certain time period it was such that the Mappila Muslims enjoyed trade monopoly and thereby concentrated mainly in the regions of Kodungalloor, Pallipuram, Edavanakadu (Kochi) of southern Malabar region; Chaliyam, Kozhikode, Parappanangadi, Thanur, Paravanna, Ponnani, Veliyankode of central Malabar and Faknoor, Manglapuram, KazargoDe, Pazhayangadi, Nadapuram, Valapattanam, Kannur, Dharmadom, Chemmalode, Thiruvankadu, Sreekandapuram, Edakkadu, Koyilandi, Thikodi, Karakadu of northern Malabar region. In view of the various ideas as regards the advent of Islam in Kerala, it is obvious that the Arabs had extensive commercial

relation with Kerala even before the rise of Islam in Arabia.¹² However, by 1500, the Portuguese onslaught served to intensify the Muslim's awareness of their own identity and in consequently to increase their sense of separateness from the rest of Malayali society. As, the Portuguese were rivals of the moors in their efforts to secure good trading conditions from the native powers.¹³ Malabar was leading a comparatively happy though politically isolated life at that point of time. Even though, the entire Malabar area was inhabited by various castes and tribes with various positions that are being ascribed to them by the society itself, they were very much keen enough to maintain a harmonious relationship and a sense of brotherhood within the society. Meanwhile, Mappilas never wished an Islamic statehood, they had in earlier years enjoyed the obvious advantages of a favourable alliance with the ruling power.¹⁴ In many ways her organization was primitive and traditional in nature, however, she had evolved a system in which trade flourished, and different communities lived together without friction and with absolute religious toleration.

During the time period of Mysorean occupation in Malabar, Nambuthiri Brahmins and Nairs enjoyed a predominant status in the society. Second half of the eighteenth century was a critical period in the history of South India.

The confusing political situation in the south offered an alluring opportunity to any ambitious chieftain to fight for the crown of the South.¹⁵ At the meantime, Mappila Muslims were striving hard to retain their lost status which they once enjoyed in the society. The drastic measures adopted by Haider Ali affected much change in the agrarian sector with a major political back up. Haider Ali after the invasion took control of the area and initiated many changes in revenue settlement and agrarian policies which adversely affected the status and privileges enjoyed by the then high caste communities that belonged to this area. Being the largest land-owning class, it was the Nambuthiris who suffered most mainly due to the conquest and the consequent changes brought about by the new revenue settlement. Another important cause of the disturbances in Malabar was the profound changes that came upon society in general and the Brahmin and the Nayar communities in particular, as a result of the Mysorean occupation. The Nambuthiris, the native Brahmin community of Kerala, were the largest *janmi* (land-holder) class beside royalty and the temples.¹⁶ Nambuthiris being the native Brahmin community of Kerala were the major land-holders (*janmis*) among other castes of Malabar region. The land-tax with its sole authority as government system as introduced by the Mysoreans, affected Nambuthiri Brahmins and other high caste Hindus severely as it was that share of the *pattam* which the tenant used to pay the *janmis* in those days even before the coming of Mysoreans. According to the new system, peasants are only answerable to the government who collected rent in the place of Nambuthiri Brahmins. Mappilas who were suppressed for a very long period regardless of the existing laws prior to the occupation by Mysoreans cherished the fact that they were for the first time living under Muslim rulers and made it appear that matters had finally turned their way.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, *Nambuthiris*, *Nairs* and other high caste people related with *janmam-kanammaryada*, kept themselves away from attending government offices, thereby showing a kind of protest to initiate changes in land tenure system. Some of them even fled from that area as the policies followed by Mysoreans in land tenure system, felt unbearable for them. Policies such as reduction in *pattam*, uprooting of royal houses and chieftaincies affected them the most, as it questioned the authority of Nambuthiris and other local chieftains over Malabar region. Nairs who served the purpose of government as well as defense prior to the coming of Mysoreans, were rendered jobless as most of the ruling classes were suppressed and disbanded under the vicinity of new rules and regulations thus initiated. The above mentioned measures adopted by the "new masters", proved to be fatal for Brahmin landlords and their chief dependent, that is, Nayers. Thus, it was the onslaught of a new society, based no doubt, on the old but all the same on the new principles of land holding and legal rights that took its place.¹⁸

As a matter of fact, it ruined their employment prospects, who despised all professions other than those of arms and government service. It seems that *Negadi*¹⁹ was imposed on the arable lands under Nambuthiri Brahmins, which proved unbearable for them to pay. Likewise, corruption and exploitation of peasants and tenants were brought to an end with apt measures ensuring the smooth running of new systems adopted in land revenue system. Moreover, they fixed many *inams* or freeholds to further increase the efficiency of the system thus implemented. Haider exempted temple lands from assessment, meanwhile Tipu considered it as a private property owned by the elite and he had them accessed to land-tax. He went for such an act to support the peasants and to further uplift the agrarian sector. However, this only made the situation much tenser as it seriously affected the selfish interests held by the real landowners of this region. The reforms initiated was such that, in the case of the rice lands the cultivator retained one-third of the net produce, leaving the residue to be shared by the government and *janmi* : 60 per cent to the former and 40 per cent to the latter. Similarly, in the garden lands, one-third of the produce was set apart for the cultivator and the rest was shared equally by the government and the *janmi*.²⁰ He further monopolized pepper trade which proved highly beneficial for local cultivators consisting of people from lower strata of the society. Religious persecutions and temple destruction followed by the mysorean rulers due to certain political reasons instigated certain communal distresses among the Hindus against the Muslim, as they firmly believed that they are doing these things with the support of the latter one. This eventually bifurcated the whole society of Malabar into two mainly based on communal feelings. Caste Hindus such as Brahmins, Nairs etc. utilized this situation to seek vengeance upon Mysoreans by spreading more and more communal feelings among the masses. In collecting this revenue, the state appropriated a large share of peasant surplus.²¹ The reformative measures thus introduced by Mysoreans however played a pivotal role in changing the complete socio-political-economic structure of the entire Malabar society as it redressed the issues of peasant class and other low castes by suppressing the exploitation and selfish motives held over by the landlords and high ranking officials (*Nambuthiris and Nairs*) of the then society. These in fact became highly instrumental in redressing the grievances of low castes to an extent and thereby elevate their miserable position in the society.

Malabar under British Administration

The specific region named 'Malabar' was very crucial to the then rulers for many reasons. Firstly, it acted as a bone of contention between native rulers as well as among the foreigners right from the time immemorial due to its geographical location, climate favoring trade activities, pepper trade etc. As traders *Moors* were the first among the foreigners who discovered the great prospects of Malabar region and played a primordial role in spreading its huge trade prospects all-throughout the world. This eventually resulted in the booming of pepper trade concentrated specifically in this region. Moreover, a close study regarding the same proves that it flourished at a rampant rate from time to time under various rulers. As a matter of fact it paved way for many foreigners to arrive here and establish trade contacts with the then rulers of Malabar. In this way foreigner's like *Moors*,²² Portuguese, Dutch and English all came here for trade purpose and other related activities. However in this 'rat-race', English became successful in establishing a firm foothold in here. At the same time others failed in this endeavor due to completely unfavorable condition offered by the unstable political and social conditions that persisted in Malabar. Ralph Fitch was the first Englishman to set his foot on the shores of Malabar. However, it only came under their full control by 1792 as a part of Sreerangapattam treaty concluded with Tipu Sultan. This particular treaty ended the third Anglo-Mysore war between English and Tipu. This conquest however became the culmination of the East India Company's quest to control the Malabar Spice Trade. According to certain specific terms of the treaty, Mysore ceded about one-half of its territories to the other signatories. The Peshwa acquired territory up to the Tungabhadra River;

the Nizam was awarded land from the Krishna to the Penner River, and the forts of Cuddapah and Gandikota on the south bank of Penner. The prize property seized at Seringapatam immediately after its fall was estimated at 40,30,300 star pagodas, equivalent to f 1,600,000.²³

The East India Company received a large portion of Mysore's Malabar Coast territories between the Kingdom of Travancore and the Kali River along with other areas of Baramahal and Dindigul districts. Mysore granted the rajah of Coorg his independence, although Coorg effectively became a company dependency in the latter years. Tipu Sultan, unable to pay an indemnity of 330 lakhs of rupees, was required to surrender two of his three sons as hostages of war. Though this was the core element of treaty, it is very evident that the whole of Malabar was not ceded to the British, as Wayanad that formed the north-eastern region of Malabar was not included in the provisions of the treaty. This issue anyway got resolved when; British accepted the suzerainty of Tipu sultan over this region in the year 1798. Subsequently, it came under the sway of British regime owing to the death of Tipu Sultan in Fourth Anglo Mysore war. Thus, by early 1800 whole of the coveted Malabar region came under the control of British and they pensioned the native rulers of the concerned area to enjoy a complete supremacy over the region under. During the one century of British rule in Malabar only the Brahmins and Nayars seem to have been benefited, whose caste prejudice was responsible for keeping down other communities in the scale of progress.²⁴ This rule continued up to 1947 particularly characterized by various changes initiated British in the field of land tenure system. Initial period of British suzerainty over the region proved highly beneficial for Brahmins and Nayars s, whose caste prejudice was responsible for keeping down other communities in the scale of progress. The Company, at the mean time a acquired political influence and and territorial hegemony over Malabar region through their strategic activities.

The British officials who were initially entrusted with the task of administering the newly acquired territory drew guidance for revenue management from the system introduced by Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan.²⁵ Their policies pertaining to political and economic spheres targeted the exploitation of low castes with the ardent help of high castes who supervised the entire system based on *janmam-kkanammaryada*. The most distinctive land tenures in Malabar were *janmam and kanam*, such that one can evidently state it as the foundation stone of the entire feudal system once persisted in this place. According to this system *janmam* holder otherwise known as *janmi* or the feudal lord was the absolute owner of his holding and was therefore free to take a big share of the produce of the soil. However, these so called 'birth rights' of a feudal lord was officially accepted by the then British administrators who exercised their rule over northern Kerala. More documents related with *janmam* rights were mostly deciphered from *Nambuthiri* documents of 17th century with abrupt details. Brahmanical literature even testifies to this particular fact about *maryada* (customary laws), *janmamaryada*, *janmam* and the transaction of *adiyar*.²⁶ Land revenue policy thus adopted by the company tended to upset the traditional land relations, as it initiated varying changes in the already existing system of policy so far followed in Malabar. Policy thus formulated by the British regarding the same drained Mappilas of the position which they once enjoyed under the Mysorean's reign.

The laws thus formulated by them were directed to destroy the privileges of Mappilas along with other low castes of this region, which however can be viewed as the mere exploitation of the social conditions that persisted in Malabar even before the coming of British. Landlords and British took a vengeful attitude towards Mappila Muslims and very cleverly executed the same using their policies, since Mappilas sided with Mysoreans during the time of Mysorean occupation in Malabar region. They used local chieftains as the land revenue agents in their own territories to inflict more enslavement to Mappila peasantry and people belonging to other low caste communities. Traditional form of land revenue policy, which existed there prior to the arrival of Mysoreans were once again reinstated to inflict pressure upon the peasant class ultimately resulting in massive exploitation of the same at the hands of British.

Agrarian Unrests

The new taxation policy followed by them created many problems among the masses, which eventually culminated in a series of outbreak among the peasant class from 1800 -1921. For collecting the proposed revenue the state eventually appropriated a large share of surplus attained and acquired with the assistance of peasants and their detrimental labor force. In this particular policy thus followed a lion share of the product and revenue were distributed among *janmis* and British officials. The landlords now abrogated the traditional rights of the peasantry and started to encroach upon the tenant's share of produce as an absolute owner enjoying the right in the Roman concept of *dominium*.²⁷ However, systematic analysis of revenue settlement was not followed until 1900 in these regions. The system anyway followed under them was partial in every manner possible, as it focused mainly on the quantity of seed sown and number of trees and plants in the fields were cultivation took place under their supervision. This eventually led to corruption and exploitation by feudal lords and British officials. The records thus maintained on the same issue by certain collectors between this time periods holds testimony to this particular fact. It was such that the collection became increasingly difficult and arrears started accumulating, swelling from only Rs. 917 in 1810 to Rs. 1,70,707 by the year of 1820. At the meantime, one need to understand the revenue collected in 1801, the first year of direct collection, was Rs. 20,08,179 which was only Rs. 1476 less than the land revenue value of Malabar mentioned in the schedule provided by Tipu Sultan at the time of the treaty in 1792.²⁸ Burden of the revenue system thus adopted fell mainly upon tenants and small landholders who cultivated in the concerned region.

The monopoly of Company over tobacco and salt also adversely affected the condition of farmers and those related with agrarian system of Malabar region. According to H.S. Graeme, 6,348 manufacturers had gone out of business as a consequence of the introduction of the tobacco monopoly. Besides, over taxation policy followed by company and feudal lords with unjust rent and land leasing systems also invited widespread discontent among masses, especially low classes related with agrarian sector. They procured the benefits of peasantry through illegal measures, under the pretext of *janmi-kanammaryada*, as testified by Robert Rickards, collector of Malabar 1803-04. According to the 1901 census, the number of landlords in a district was 57,040 with major tenurial categories being *kanam*, *kuzhikanam*, *ottian* and *verumpattam*.

As a result of oppressions and exactions practiced by landlords it was indeed strange that only 15.1 per cent of the tenants should have attributed their indebtedness to excessive rents, tax, renewal fees and various other financial formalities. Thus, the British administration was in a way that it collapsed the already existing relationship between the landlord and the tenants of Malabar.²⁹ Disturbances related with the same first emerged in Walluvanadu and spread to the neighbouring areas of Ernad. There was massive discontent among the Muslims as British along with landlords tried to completely curb the right of peasants and exploit them incessantly. The Mappila outbreaks that transpired just after that were the expression of a feeling of futility and despair. Revolt of Pazhassi Raja and Kurichyas can be considered as a part of these outbreaks against the yoke of British regime. Starting from 1821 there were almost 51 outbreaks related with the same. Thus this event can also be viewed from the perspective of communal reasons playing a major part in rebellion as here one can witness unjustifiable exploitation being done to Mappila peasants and other low castes with a sense of selfish agenda behind such acts of suppression. There were single incidents that happened in these rebellion prone areas in the year 1817 which involved the British and Tipu Sultan. They transpired within a quarter of the century, the first series of peasant revolts commonly known as the Moplah-Outbreaks.³⁰ Yet another one happened in 1849 characterized by two outbreaks. Subsequently in these outbreaks Three Nayers and a Nambuthiri Brahmin were killed the temple of the Manjeri Karnopad Raja was sacked and two companies of sepoy troops were routed by fifteen Mappila assailants.

However it got suppressed in September 4 where a massacre of 65 Mappila youths occurred as a procedure or plan to suppress it. Kottayam outbreak of 1852 is yet another one pertaining to series of outbreaks in Malabar region .PukurKutti Moiliaris was directly associated with this particular outbreak. Furthermore, Manjeri Athan and KunjiKoya were in all probability discussing an outbreak during the devotion period of Ramadan. However, the major outbreak which happened in 1884 was influenced by Mambram Tannals in the second half of the nineteenth century.Outbreak that happened in 1873 also depicted the same scenario as it was also influenced by the ideology and guidance of *Tannals*. The year 1854 saw a major setback to the series of rebellions as British adopted various punitive measures to try to end the attacks. These attacks bear ultimate evidence to the fact that even before the remedial measures as initiated by the British, they have to face the fury and rage of Mappila peasants through these isolated unrests.³¹

The entire course was marked by the influence of Khilafat movement which eventually can be considered as a major factor inspiring the course of rebellion as well as the subsequent formulation of MSP.it started as an emotion in support of turkey and its ruler. Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali were the pioneers of this movement in India. The course of the movement once again thrived on the communal feelings of one group that is Muslims against British due to the ill treatment meted out to the ruler of their religion in Turkey.Hence, one can witness the course of events that happened in Malabar region was mostly of agrarian nature highly influenced by communal agendas. In Malabar, Mappilas formed the majority of population and when such a communal emotion was fostered by events that took place in the global perspective nationalist leaders tactfully used such feelings to generate anti-British feelings among the masses, which again was influenced by the ongoing events in agrarian sector. In the late 1920, the Khilafat movement was changing with the changing political situation, but its symbolism remained the same.³² This particular strategy in the initial stages found success as Mappila Muslims were more inclined towards their religion. Many nationalist leaders both in Malabar as well as India tried to turn Mappilas against British using this communal feeling as a weapon. Even Gandhi supported this endeavor as he saw it as a golden opportunity to unite both Muslims and Hindus at a regional level.

All throughout the pre independent era one can witness the British adapting ‘divide and rule’ policy to establish their control over India. They used this strategy in agrarian sector and political sector of the then Malabar area. Besides, implementing many commissions headed by T.L.Strange, William Logan etc. they were able to arrive at certain conclusions. Subsequently, they studied about the entire situation based on its historical relevance, farmers-agrarian nexus; landlords and tenants; government and its policies; conflicts between different sections, crimes, rebellious activities etc³³.These in-depth studies allowed them to follow a strategy whereby, they were able to contain it after a certain stage without spreading to other regions.Though they followed an appeasing policy towards Muslims in national level, when it came to Malabar they nourished a hostile attitude towards them mainly due to the circumstances that persuaded them to do so.Malabar provided an entirely different strategical ground for British.To accomplish this very purpose they sought the help of Nambuthiris ,and other local chieftains who were mostly from Hindu community.. Naturally, Mappilas turned against them. This coupled with communal feelings initiated by local leaders and Khilafat completely turned the situation unfavorable for British. Khilafat meetings headed by educated classes of Malabar region also played a major role in initiating communal- nationalist feelings among the masses to turn against the British to fight for their rights as well as for their religion.

The Khilafat Movement was started and soon gathered momentum. Mahatma Gandhi embraced the cause of his Muslim fellow-countrymen, and in November 1919 he was elected president of the All-India Khilafat Conference.³⁴ Peasants and Mappilas also actively gave their whole hearted support to such meetings as it united them by breaking through the barriers of

caste, community, religious and social barriers. Gandhialong with other nationalist leaders directly got involved in this particular endeavor. Among the meetings that were held in Malabar, Manjeri Conference held on April 28th, 1920 played a predominant role in influencing the locals especially Mappila Muslims to fight for their nation against the British. People of the Malabar region got familiarized with the term 'Khilafat', only with the conference held at Manjeri in the month of April, 1920.³⁵ Likewise in an early period, dominated largely by Tamil Brahmin and Nair interests, the first Malabar District Conference was held under the presidency of Annie Besant. Four hundred and fifty-five delegates attended.³⁶ The condition of the then Malabar and the events that transpired in the latter years were highly influenced by agrarian unrests and every activities related with the same, as the entire region was an agrarian centered society and the measures thus adopted to control them by various 'masters' eventually affected the society and there by its political conditions as well.

Rebellion and its Anticidents

Now, as the situation went completely out of control British were left with no other option than to formulate a force to suppress the upcoming rebellion. As far as the judicial law and police system that existed in this region is considered it is very much clear that Cornwallis system of judiciary was prevalent in here with other laws of local governance. However, by the end of 19th century British were able to establish an 'atrocities free Malabar' with the help of certain rules and regulations especially formulated for this purpose.³⁷ In Malabar there was a punitive force that existed as a paramilitary force by name Malappuram Special Police. Studies conducted on the same shows that they were successfully utilized to suppress the series of agrarian unrests that broke out between 1836 and 1921.

Since, they were outbreaks by Mappilla peasants and other low castes it was not organized well and lacked adequate plan to make it a success. Moreover, organized political activity motivated by nationalist sentiments started in Malabar only by the middle of the second decade of the 20th century.³⁸ Isolated events here and there with inappropriate planning gave an ample opportunity for the British to suppress it with iron hand and once again set its unequivocal hegemony over the unrest affected areas. Hence, they attained an upper hand over the upcoming rebellion and rebels as the base of such a rebellion which emerged from agrarian unrests is no more a threat to them at all. The demise of such agrarian unrests was further aggravated by various laws thus formulated by the British with the help of many case study commissions and their reports. Rules and regulations, thus formulated were also implemented successfully among the masses. Though many commissions and committees were appointed to resolve the issues regarding agrarian unrests, the acts thus formulated based on the same left everything to the discretion of the courts and the assessors commissioners appointed by the courts. Therefore the provisions of the Act were mutilated by the courts in favour of the landowning groups.³⁹ Finally, they were defeated after a stiff resistance, as they were of no match to the modern weaponry and strategy of British, which they successfully used to suppress the outbreaks among the agrarian population. It can only be viewed as a show of distress and anger towards the attitude of British and landlords against them initiating heavy taxation policies, discriminations and ill treatments meted out to them in different paths of life. Though there was a sense of doubt in the mind of Logan stating, "I doubt if the police would be strong enough to cope with such a desperate gang as the Trikkallur gang of 1884".⁴⁰ However, all those major and minor outbreaks were suppressed with an iron hand by using a force which was not organized until 1884. It was organized as a permanent force with added responsibilities in the year 1897. Main purpose of formulation of such a force was not only suppressing agrarian unrests but also to curb the meetings and nationalist ideas thus initiated by nationalist leaders and khilafat movement. In fact, Malabar Special Police otherwise known as MSP, succeeded in completing all assignments meted out to them with regard to the very purpose for which they have been created.

As a matter of fact, besides suppressing other rebellious activities that came forth as a ramification of agrarian unrests, they became successful in obstructed many such meetings and arrested prominent leaders of rebellious movement against the British such as P. MoyideenKoya, Yakub Hassan, K .Madhavan Nayar etc. Strict rules restricting such kind of meetings were initiated. Those who acted against such strict orders were lathi -charged and arrested without any prior notice. Influence of local leaders such as Seethikoya Thangal, Ali Musaliyar and Variyam Kunnathu Kunjahammad Haji were the backbone of the rebellion since they were able to raise the feelings of masses against the policies followed by the British in Malabar. Most of the influential leaders thus participated in in rebellion were from the Mappila social strata of the society.⁴¹ they eventually became successful in that endeavor due to their enormous influence upon the society. They won in turning people's emotion against British partly because of their social influence and partly because of their communal influence. Even the immediate cause for the outbreak of such a rebellion is said to be somewhat of communal nature.

The immediate cause for the outbreak of such a rebellion is said to be the effort of the police to arrest PukotturKhilafat Committee Secretary Vadakkeveetil Muhammad from his own house on the fake charges of stealing a gun from a Hindu land lord by name Nilambur Thirumulppadu. This was followed by the beginning of the rebellion in which they attacked the Manjeri Police Station and landlord's house simultaneously. Hitchcock clearly testifies to this fact that Pukkottur battle was the greatest throughout the rebellion and was marked by a fanaticism which only showed on rare occasions later.⁴² They destroyed everything that stood in their way. Meanwhile, at the initial stages British suffered to suppress the rebellion which prompted them to reorganize the same in 1921. Through re-organization they aimed at maintaining an army which is self- dependent and highly efficient in nature. This force was formulated not only with British men but also with native men especially from that of the Nair community as a way to initiate communal grudge against each other. Such a selection was made in the recruitment of force to exploit the bitter communal feelings that already exist between Mappila Muslims and Nairs of Malabar region.

Moreover, they preferred uneducated men to educated ones, as they wanted someone in the force who would execute their orders without doubting or questioning their authority. In fact high physical stature along with certain formal fulfillment of criterions as set forth by their rules and regulations were preferred by the British for the selection procedure to the force. However, in the later stages of rebellion they were able to bring the situation under their control through strategies, reinforcements, strategic formulation of laws, formulation of highly efficient MSP, arrest of leaders and through obstruction of certain meetings and other discussions that formed the corner stone of nationalistic ideas and its spread among the people. In December 1921 and January 1922 most of the important rebel leaders were either killed in action or captured and shot.⁴³ Thus, a rebellion initiated by agrarian unrests came to an end with certain changes through the efficient strategies and the execution of the same through a force named Malabar Special Police.

Conclusion

It is all about Malabar, and its agrarian background and the way it affected the on-going events which were mostly political in nature, though it does have impact upon other areas as well. Initially, one can evidently state that Malabar was a society highly influenced by agrarian related activities and a society highly depended on agriculture for their subsistence. Hence, any changes affecting them initially affects the various spheres related with society. This change, however was set forth by a drastic change in political and administrative powers controlling the region. It was such that the area initially came under the sway of Tipu Sultan and subsequently under the reign of British, as an end result of Sreerangapattanam treaty. This change of powers along with the policies adopted by them in controlling revenue system , bifurcated the entire

society into two, namely those supporting British such as Nairs, Brahmins(feudal lords) etc.; and those who opposed British and their revenue policies such as Mappilas, crux of peasantry and other low caste people of Malabar region.

The discontent finally led to a series of agrarian unrests from 1790s to early 1900s. These unrests though not successful as envisioned, initiated many changes in Malabar region encompassing all spheres of life. It became a way to destroy caste-community and harness a sense of unity among the natives, as they were united together against the ill treatment of British upon the natives of this region. The British who tried to curb the rebellion was only partially successful as most of the losses were on the side of civilians and military.⁴⁴

This however was influenced by on-going ideas and activities in relation to freedom struggle movements against British. Furthermore, it provided a fertile ground for nationalistic feelings to flourish and give rise to what is better known in history as Malabar Rebellion and subsequently played an indirect role in the creation of one of the effective local forces India has ever witnessed, by name Malabar Special Police (MSP). Moreover, the events that took place involving the same had far reaching impact upon socio-cultural and religious fields along with serious effects upon the economy of Malabar. Thus, the role of agrarian unrests in influencing the political scenario of Malabar and vice versa is very significant as far as the historical studies based on Malabar region in this specific time period is concerned.

Endnotes

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