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[Selections from Books and
Parliamentary papers]

"MAPPILLA REBELLION" A Summary
of the Chapter on the Mappilla Rebellion
in the MALABAR GAZETTEER.

(PAGES 1-12)

Section 6

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GAZETTEER.

1612

HISTORY OF THE MAPPILLA OUTBREAKS.

(An Extract Summary from the Malabar District Gazetteer,
~~Malabar, the home of the Mappillas~~).

Malabar had been the scene of frequent violent outbreaks during the British regime. They at varying intervals of time had marred the tranquillity and peace of the district.

The outbreaks among the Mappillas may be attributed to three main causes, poverty, agrarian discontent and religious fanaticism. But more than the ^{other} two, it was the extreme religious fanaticism among the Mappillas community that was chiefly responsible for their violent outbreaks. As Mr. Baber (a noted Collector of Malabar) in 1822 observes "they formed a disgrace to the Mappilla community". Miserably poor, hopelessly ignorant and highly superstitious and fanatical, the Mappillas are peculiarly susceptible to the inflammatory preachings of their high priest called Mambram Taramal Tangal, whose sway over them is complete. "They regarded him," says a report "as imbued with a portion of divinity. They swear by his feet as their most solemn oath. Earth on which he had spat or walked is treasured up". Leading a miserable state here on earth, the Mappillas are easily fascinated by the wondrous joy and blessed life in paradise. Their frenzied bravery and preparedness for death to enter into the "blessed world" by their violent Jihad is something unimaginable. It almost passes belief. The Sahids or saints predestinate, prepare for death. They set their houses in order; divorce their wives and clad in the white robes of martyrs go out to die fighting against the unbeliever. "No words can depict" says Sir Henry Winterbotham, "the object terror of the Hindus of all ranks and classes when a gang of Mappilla fanatics is on the war path. An invasion by a hostile army could not cause more consternation or a greater panic".

With rare exceptions these outbreaks have always blazed out within a radius of some fifteen miles from Pandalur Hill in

in the Ernad Taluk, the 'Fanatical zone' in Malabar. The history of the Mappilla outbreaks starts from 1836 when the first incident took place in Pandalur area. From that time onwards there had been a chain of violent disturbances at frequent intervals, the outbreak of 1921-22 forming the last and the greatest of them. Mappilla unrest reached its high-watermark between the years 1836 and 1853. In this period of eighteen years no fewer than twenty-two outbreaks took place besides numerous abortive risings and conspiracies. The first that took place in 1836 was merely a crime. It was the case of a Mappilla, murdering a Hindu and wounding three others. He was shot dead by a taluk peon. In 1849 there was a violent outbreak, in Manjeri and Angadippuram. It was one of the bloodiest tragedies of the whole long series.

In August of that year five fanatics under Attan Gurukal, murdered some persons, caused disturbances, seized and took shelter in the Manjeri Karanamulapad's temple. Soon their number swelled. It became ^{a necessity} ~~necessary~~ to send troops to capture them. The well-armed sepoy^s in overwhelming numbers/^{refused} to face these handful of "Sahids", armed only with war knives. The storming party led by Ensign Wyse ended in a failure. He and his little band were slain. The troops posed in reserve fled in panic. Detachments of His Majesty's 94th Regiment and of the 39th N.I. were brought up/^{by} forced marches from Cannanore and Palghat and an encounter took place on 4th September 1849. The Commanding Officer's report vividly describes the encounter as follows:-- "The enemy came on with the most desperate courage throwing themselves on our bayonets; after firing off their matchlocks, they took to their war-knives, swords and spears, and when struck to the ground, renewed the fight even on their knees by hurling their weapons at the faces of our men and which continued until literally they were cut to pieces; others planted on the trees kept up a most destructive fire with their matchlocks loaded with iron slugs".

The losses of the troops were trifling but of the sixty four fanatics not one lived to tell the tale. Thus ended the outbreak of 1849.

This was followed by two other outbreaks between 1849 and 1852. In the disastrous outrage at Kolattur in the Waluvanad taluk, the sepoys once more broke and fled and even a detachment of British troops fell back momentarily before the onrush of the Mappillas. In 1852 disturbance at Mattanur in the Kottayam taluk, 'not only men, but women and children, the very infant at the breast' were put to the sword.

The next great outbreak was in 1852. It took place when the British authorities attempted to arrest Sayyid Fazl, the Mambran Tangal, the high priest, of the Mappillas. He had acquired an even greater ascendancy over the ignorant Mappilla mind than his predecessor. His very presence in the district had led to repeated deeds of horror. The government wanted to pass an order of arrest on him. On the very day that the order was passed, ten to twelve thousand Mappillas, many of them armed, assembled at Tirurangadi in secret conclave with the Tangal. Any attempt to arrest him would have led to terrible bloodshed but fortunately, Mr. Conolly, the District Magistrate, prevailed upon him to leave Malabar peacefully. He sailed for Arabia on March 19th, 1852.

This incident had severely shaken the prestige of the government. After this the condition of the Hindus had become more lamentable. Mr. Strange, a judge of the Sadr Adalat, was placed on special duty to enquire into the disturbances, their causes and remedies. Rejecting the explanations that the disturbances had their origin in agrarian depression or Mappilla destitution, Mr. Strange found their cause to be religious fanaticism fanned by the preaching of ambitious priests like the Mambran Tangals. He advocated a stern repressive policy and at his suggestion a special force of police was raised and Acts XXIII and XXIV of 1854

were passed into law. The latter rendered illegal the possession of the war-knife after February 1st 1855 and by that date 7561 knives had been surrendered. The former empowered the authorities to fine the Mappilla population of amsams implicated in outrages and to take stringent measures against all persons suspected of complicity in them. A few months later, Mr. Conolly, District Magistrate of Malabar, and provisional ~~member~~ member of council, was barbarously murdered by four Mappilla convicts.

Notwithstanding the heavy penalties of the Mappilla Acts, outbreaks still continued, though at longer intervals. In 1873, Kolattur was the scene of another tragedy. In 1880 there was another outbreak at Melattur. Mr. Logan and Mr. Wigram, District Judge of South Malabar, reported that the agrarian difficulties of the Mappillas were the root cause for the frequent troubles. Eviction was especially cited as the most fundamental of them. They said that Mr. Strange had given far too little weight to agrarian discontent as a cause of the disturbances.

On February 5th 1881, Mr. Logan was appointed Special Commissioner to enquire into land tenures and tenant rights in Malabar and to consider the best means of removing another long-standing grievance of the Mappillas, viz., the difficulty of getting from their Hindu landlords, sites for mosques and burial grounds. In his report he was of opinion that the Mappilla outrages were more engendered by the overwhelming influence of Janmis especially in the matter of evicting tenants for rent. He suggested various remedies which were elaborately discussed in two commissions. Finally the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act was passed. Provision for acquisition of lands for Mappilla cemeteries under the Land Acquisition Act was also made.

These land reforms did not however seem to have produced any ~~fear~~-reaching effects on the outbreak of the Mappillas. A time of excitement succeeded Mr. Logan's Commission, and

between 1883 and 1885 no less than five outrages broke out. Of these, mention must be made of the outrage of 1884. A gang of twelve men, mostly illiterate cultivators, set out to wipe away the stain on the honour of Islam. As usual they committed murder and caused disturbance in the country. Mr. Logan with troops and police had to suppress the rising with a heavy hand. The disarming of the Calicut, Ernad and Waluvanad taluks was immediately taken up. The dangerous operation was carried out in February 1885 carefully without resistance. More than 20,000 arms were collected including nearly 9000 guns.

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32 / Again there were outbreaks even ~~in~~ the disarming of the 'rebel zone'. Two of them were exceptionally serious. In the Pandikkad outbreak of 1894 the names of thirty-two Mappillas were added to the long roll of martyrs and the appalling tragedy of 1896 was unprecedented as well for the number of the fanatics that took part in it, as for the swift and terrible retribution that overtook them. The plot was nipped in the bud before it was mature. However even ^{then} ~~after~~ its suppression was followed by heavy casualties. The matter was precipitated by the sudden arrest of four of the ringleaders. The same evening a gang of twenty Mappillas went out on the war path and for five days in ever increasing numbers they terrorised the country side. Hindus were murdered or their "kudumis" were cut off and they were summarily converted to Islam. Temples were desecrated and burnt and houses were looted and destroyed. Finally they were encountered by the District Magistrate with the main body of troops near Manjeri Karanamulapad's temple. A terrible fight ensued. The troops opened fire; the fanatics instead of taking shelter, deliberately countered death offering themselves as a target to the bullets by coming from the temple. Demand of surrender was answered by hoarse cries of defiance. Finally when the troops entered into the temple, a horrible sight met their eyes. 92 Within the narrow precincts were piled up the bodies of ninety

two Mappillas. The great majority of them were dead. At least twenty had their throats cut from ear to ear. They had been murdered by their comrades to prevent them being captured alive. By March 13, 1896, the outbreak was at an end. Ninety nine Mappillas had gone out to die and all but six had accomplished their purpose. Sir Henry Winterbotham, a member of the Board of Revenue, was deputed at once to Malabar to enquire into the circumstances of the disturbance and the means taken to suppress it. His report completely justified the action of the District Magistrate. In 1898 there was another rising. It was however a small abortive outbreak.

No fines were imposed after these outbreaks, partly because it was feared that this would accentuate the already extreme poverty of the fanatical zone, partly because the Mappilla community in general had shown far less sympathy with the outbreak than on former occasions. After these risings the dangerous zones were linked by good roads. Special police forces were stationed at all important places and on important religious festival days like Ramzan, additional protective measures were made. The most enlightened Mappillas were enlisted on the side of law and order. The Pukkoyya Tangal, realising how the fanatical outbreaks only resulted in accumulating misery and disaster for the Mappillas, had issued a pamphlet sternly denouncing outbreaks as opposed to true religion. The cumulative effect of all these measures was that the district of Malabar was comparatively free from fanatical outbreaks for nearly two decades.

The influence of the measures on the life of the Mappillas was considerable. In spite of the pressure of ever increasing population, the low standard of ^{their} living and their traditional habit of committing crime; the Mappillas after these events were by no means slow to take advantage of some of the opportunities that were opened to them. They enlisted in the army, took up the work in the rubber plantations and in the timber trade and engaged themselves in petty trades and retail business. Some of them migrated to places outside the district

like Mysore to work in the gold mines and in the work connected with the construction of railways. There were also emigration to countries outside India like Ceylon, the Strait Settlements and the Dutch Indies for the purpose of trade and work.

The second phase in the history of the Mappilla risings begins with the outbreak of the first world war and the embroilment of Turkey in it. These had spread among the Mappillas a widespread belief that the British Raj was coming to its end.

The first in the second phase broke out in 1915, when some Mappillas kidnapped a Tiyya boy aged 10 or 12 and converted him to Islam, without the knowledge and approval of his guardian. The District Magistrate when the facts were proved, fined the Mappilla responsible Rs.50. A plot was formed to murder both the Magistrate and the boy, to commence dacoities and to collect arms and followers for an outbreak. The plot was discovered and prompt action was taken to put down the rising. The Collector was ambushed in this action and narrowly escaped with his life. The Mappillas in their traditional manner "Went out" in approved Sahid fashion for a holy war with the Government. However in ^{an encounter} they were soon ^{by the troops.} severely dealt with. ~~in an encounter.~~ The rising was suppressed with a number of deaths on the side of the Mappillas.

Four years later in 1919 there was another small outbreak in the Malappuran area, in which some youths led by Parapurath Valiacheck Haji, a man of 65 ⁴ who had previously been in the Police, murdered several Hindus for no reason except Moslem fanaticism. The gang were rounded up by the Police in a farm house and all shot.

The most formidable of the Mappilla outbreaks took place in the year 1921-22. It was the direct outcome of the Khilafat agitation and the non-co-operation movement. The outbreak of the world war and the fight against the Turks had already created much hostilities and contempt among the Map-

pillas against the British government in India. A wave of discontent and unrest was sweeping over the entire region. Now it was augmented by the violent preaching of the Khilafat agitators and members of non-co-operation movement. Both Muslim and Congress leaders like Shaukat Ali, ~~xxx~~ Gandhiji and others, toured the area and addressed the masses. The speeches did immense mischief by appealing to the Muslim prejudices of the Mappillas. For example, they said at a mass meeting at Calicut that if the Mappillas were strong enough they ought to fight and, if too weak, they should emigrate rather than continue, under the British Raj. By February 1921, the results of almost unchecked agitation, both by Hindus and Muslims, were sufficiently disquieting. Besides this, there was volunteer movement and the carrying of arms in these areas, in a pronounced manner. The volunteers preached that Amir of Afghanistan would come to overthrow the British government, that the Mappillas should help Gandhi and the Ali brothers and that Government officers should be done away with. The priests seem to have been in remarkably close touch with the development of the Khilafat agitation throughout India and to have passed on at once anything calculated to inflame the feelings of their hearers. On account of all these there was much excitement and signs of disturbance among the people. The district authorities found themselves facing a situation which grew steadily worse.

Incidents significant of coming real trouble occurred at the end of July and the beginning of August. There were threatenings/ demonstrations from Mappillas/ crowds on two occasions when the authorities wanted to arrest some persons who were involved in cases of theft and maltreatment of Tiyyans. The strength of the demonstrators at one/ time rose up to 2,000. There were signs also such as the making of special knives and preparing themselves for a 'Jehad'.

It was decided that an attempt should be made to nip the

the trouble in the bud by a surprise raid on Tirurangadi and its neighbourhood in order to effect the arrest of about 24 known ringleaders. The raid was fixed for the 20th August and was only partially successful. The news of arrest coupled with the spread of false rumours of desecration of the famous Mambram mosque brought great crowds ~~to~~ of Mappillas into clash with the authorities. Mr. Rowley of the Police and Lt. Johnstone of the Leinsters were cut down while parleying with the crowd and apart from the fighting there were several deliberate murders of police messengers, motor drivers and a special force Inspector. The District Magistrate handed over control to the Senior Military Officer present. As if at a prearranged signal the railway lines were torn up, telegraph wires cut, stations attacked and attempts made to destroy ^{Bridges. There were rebel activities up to within} six miles of Calicut. The district was for a time cut off from communication with the outside world and with a large Mappilla population at the situation Calicut/itself was far from reassuring. Ali Musaliyar had arrogated to himself the title of "King" at Tirurangadi and at Pandikad the local Khilafat ringleaders divided the country into ~~Khilafat~~ 'Khilafat kingdom' and appointed "rulers". Disorder rapidly spread through Ernad, Waluvanad and Ponnani Taluks and between 21st and 25th August most of the public offices were attacked, sub-treasuries robbed, police stations looted of their arms, many Hindu houses decoited and their inhabitants ill-treated or murdered; liquor shops were burnt, most of the main roads blocked with trees and bridges and culverts broken down. The murder of Hindus for refusal to accept Islam were, however, more frequent from September onwards, when troops were already operating against the various gangs into which the rebels broke up. In early stages of the rebellion a small number of Hindus, mostly agitators had actually joined up with the Mappillas.

A form of Martial Law was declared for the area, a military Commander appointed with a special civil officer attached and a moveable column sent from Bangalore. Another column

stationed at Calicut went to retake Malappuram. On the way, at Pukkottur it was attacked by a furious mob of 1000 rebels with all sorts of arms. The Mappillas came on determined to die and no less than 400 were killed before the relieving column could make its way to Malappuram. On 25th August 1921, H.M.S. "Comus" arrived at Calicut from Ceylon on the request of the Government to protect the town from the rebels. The first ^{regiment} Bangalore ^Y reached Malappuram. Soon another column was sent. Both of them met at Tirurangadi. A battle took place. Several rebels were killed and their leader Ali Musaliyar surrendered. Meanwhile a gang under V. Kunhamad Haji brutally murdered two men of the Police order, a Head constable and a retired Mappilla Police Inspector, Khan Bahadur Chekkutti Sahib.

Military posts were established at Wandur and Pandikkad and two moveable columns marched through the country trying to get into contact with the rebels. On the other-hand the rebels on their part instead of standing as of old to fight to the death had broken up into wandering gangs^{which}/ambushed several convoys and caused some casualties among the government forces. The total strength of those armed gangs was approximately 100000 and as they got more desperate, dacoities, forced conversions and murders became more brutal and frequent. Also by the middle of October rebel activities in the west of the Arikode area became more intense and developed into a jehad against the Hindus. It was about this time, the inland part of Calicut from Manjeri to Pudupadi had burst into flames. It was marked by much more savagery than rebel activities everywhere. Hindus refusing Islam were butchered wholesale. The rebellion in this area was dealt with mainly by the Malabar special police, Burma Rifles and Gurkha soldiers well trained in jungle warfare, accompanied by a wireless section and armed cars. A special police force of 350 local men also was raised. The forces also made a raid on Melmuri and accounted for 246 rebels. It was really a serious blow since Pandikkad and Pukkottur were struck.

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This success was followed by considerable offers of surrender. Offers to suspend military operations and overlook offences against Government property prior to 26th August on condition of surrender and active assistance in arresting wanted rebels and ~~in~~ preventing the entry of gangs were made, to certain areas but do not seem to have met with much response at first. It was then decided to organize a drive by the troops in small parties right across the country and this lasted from 11th to 25th November. Even during these organized drives there were attacks and outrages from the Mappillas. For example, at one time a surprise attack on the Gurkha regiment was made by 2,000 rebels. The Gurkha casualties were serious. But these drives had their own effects. They broke the organized resistance of the rebels. At the end of the drive, the area system was reverted to and the constant pressure exercised on the rebel gangs which prevented them getting supplies, together with numerous small encounters gradually broke their morale. Surrenders and also information leading to the capture of the ringleaders became very frequent. Seethi Koya Thangal, Chembrasseri Thangal and Kunhamad Haji, all these rebel gang leaders were captured one by one and after January 1922, the rebellion broke down and died a natural death within a short time.

It required practically two full brigades of infantry with transport and wireless details and detachments of sappers and ~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{and} pioneers and 700 special police to suppress the rebellion. The active part played by the Mappilla women deserves notice. Two are known to have been shot in actual fighting and 157 were known to have taken part in definite offences chiefly dacoities and thefts.

Special Courts were set up to deal with the enormous number of criminal cases. Court martials were employed mainly in case of rebel leaders. Martial Law Regulations and summary courts ^{were} however, but sparingly used. For a number of offenders a scheme of suspended sentence and instalment fines was origina-

ted. The total number of reported murders was 468, dacoities 5941, arson 352. Three hundred and ~~xxx~~ twenty Hindu temples were destroyed and in Ernad taluk alone 900 cases of forced conversion to Islam were reported. A most distressing occurrence which took place on the 10th November 1921, resulted in the death by asphyxiation of 870 Mappilla prisoners in the train between Olavakkot and Podanur while they were being conveyed from the disturbed area to the Bellary jail.

There was much distress among Hindu refugees. A central Relief Committee which ran 22 camps was formed. In these camps some 20,000 refugees were given relief. In the affected area itself liberally ^{grants for rebuilding of houses etc., were given.} More than 2½ lakhs of rupees were spent in these works. The destruction of Public and private records was very considerable. However the problem created by them was overcome with great difficulty. Special measures were adopted by general agreement in the Hindu community, to make it easy for those forcibly converted to Islam to return to the Hindu fold. The Malabar special police raised in the rebellion was continued as a permanent force and its strength eventually fixed at 680 with the complement of officers and N.C.O.s.

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