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Arabi-Malayalam Account of Foreign Antagonism; A Study on Malappuram Padappattu and Cherur Padappattu

Abdu Rahman Kari

In the history of India, Malabar has always been a politically important region. Starting with the Portuguese, the British East India Company and later the British Government unleashed many atrocities in Malabar. The Mappila community of Malabar has always strongly resisted foreign invasions in the region. Ever since the Portuguese invasion was unleashed, the Muslims of Malabar have been on the path of struggle against it with weapons and literary works. The Mappilas have maintained the same tradition even during the British occupation. Arabi Malayalam literature has contributed greatly to such activities. Many books have been written in Malabar that uphold the anti-foreign stance. This article intends to bring up the historical significance of the earliest compositions, such as Malappuram Patapattu and Cherur Patapattu. Although these two works written in Arabi Malayalam do not appear to use a single word against the British, both of them were banned by the colonial administration, and therefore this article tries to examine in what form they are anti-British.

Key Words: Arabi-Malayalam, Padappattu, Foreign Antagonism, Mappila Rebellion

Introduction

The Mappilas of Malabar were often characterised as rebellious and fanatic by colonial historians and officials, and they

made an effort to deflect every outburst and incursion in a religious manner. It was their strategy carried all over India as part of the “divide and rule” policy. F. Fawcett bestows an interpretation of Mappila Muslims in “A Popular Mappila Song.” The Mappilas of Malabar, ardent and fanatical Muhammadans as they are, are much devoted to songs, mostly religious, about the prophet’s battle and also their own for the most part (F. Fawcett, 1899, p. 64). They tried to picture the Mappilas as fanatics and shifted whole histories and incidents into the fanatical character. (Kurupp, 1998, p. 65–66) Therefore, their entire descriptions stated the Malabar rebellion and other uprisings in Malabar merely as Hindu-Muslim conflict and the endeavor of Muslims to take over the rule of that region. For that, they set up all sorts of fiction about northern India (Kooiman, 1995), and the same strategy applied to the Mappila rebellions.

Malabar came under the power of the British after the decline of the Mysore regime in 1792 (Mandalamkunnu, 2014, p. 354). British officials have acted as antagonists to Muslims; their records assert that the community always became a dilemma and was suffering to them that could not be overcome by them. Therefore, they utilised landlords of Malabar to handle the community, who were the tax collectors of the British colonial government in the Malabar region (Kurupp, 1998, p. 94). In the second half of the 18th century, the landlords became proponents of the colonial rulers, and they satisfied their conditions and rules over the region (Mandalamkunnu, 2014, p. 354). Mappilas were mostly occupied with agribusiness (Kurupp, 1998, p. 94), although troubles always took place between the Mappilas and landlords, and the landlords were predominantly Hindus, although some of them were also Muslims. But these peasants’ uprisings were characterised as Hindu-Muslim conflict by colonial historians, and sometimes the narrative was continued by modern Indian historians also (Kurupp, 1998, p. 53–62). Most of the rebellions arose as an aftermath against the overexploitation of landlords. This column is discussing the position of Mappila literature in these uprisings and rebellions as a source of motivation and spirituality.

Malabar as a center of anti-colonial struggle

Malabar became a striking territory in the history of Kerala and Indian history as a crucial centre of anti-colonial struggle, which started from the foremost period of colonialism in the subcontinent. (Ahammed, 2014, p. 262) Malabar sighted numerous fights and conflicts; these are merely peasant uprisings, not based on religious doctrine. But it was interpreted as religious by the colonial historians. Many peasant uprisings took place in Malabar from the 19th century on, such as Malappuram [1834], Panthallor [1836], Pallippuram [1841], Cherur [1843], Pandikkad [1845], etc. (Ahammed, 2014, p. 263) If we examine these uprising localities based on topography, we can see that most of the rebellious areas are in the taluks of Eranad and Valluvanad in the Malabar district. (Mandalamkunnu, 2014, p. 355)

The Muslims of Malabar have a tremendous history and inheritance of anti-colonial struggle and writings; the tradition of writing commenced with the arrival of Vasco de Gama on the coast of the Malabar region. (Ahammed, 2014, p. 263) Malabar Muslim rebels resist the colonial agenda in the region with the assistance of their material and intellectual power. Scholars wrote poems and proclamations against their colonial agenda and its difficulties; their writings became an inspiration to the bravest Mappilas. Everyone knows the history of the Kunjalimarakkars and Kunjimarakkar Shaheed, who sacrificed their lives while retaining the identity and land of the Malabar region. (Randathani, 2010, p. 188–189)

Anti-colonial writings from Malabar

Anti-colonial writings of the Ulemas of Malabar are very popular, like the Thuhfathul Mujahedeen by Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdoom, the first anti-colonial work from the subcontinent, which gave fierce inspiration to jihad against the Portuguese. (Narayanan, 2015, p. 114) Thahreelu Ahlil Eimani Ala Jihadi Abdathissulbah by sheikh Zainuddin Maqdoom Ibn Ali and Fathhul Mubeen by Qali Muhammed are the important works produced in Malabar during the time of Portuguese invasion. Saiful Bathar by Sayyid Alavi Thangal Mamburam is also a notable work in this stream. (Mandalamkunnu, 2014, p. 355) Despite being in Arabic, these could have a deep impact on the society and brave Mappilas.

From the second half of the 19th century onward, the flame of the writing tradition was carried by Arabi Malayalam correspondents. This century glimpsed the restraint of British authority in the whole part of Malabar, and they threatened the civilians of Malabar to obey their rule and policies. They differentiated whole activities of the people, like what they would produce and how much they would pay as tax to the government. It was a question about the pride of the people of Malabar, and therefore they felt compelled to resist colonial rule by all means.

Mappila poets bestowed ideological assistance and inspiration through their literary works, interpreting the holy wars of their predecessors from the beginning of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. (Mandalamkunnu, 2014, p. 356) If we analyse the Padappattu as a tool of these anti-British or anti-feudal attacks, the period of these works is notable; most of the Padappattu were completed in the second half of the 19th century, and some of them in the first decades of the 20th century. (Tharammal, 2014, p. 310) Cherur pada [1845], Saqoompada [1848], Badarpada [1876], and Malappuram pada [1874] are some of them in the network.

Important conflicts also took place during the same period. It suggests that these Padappattu had a limited role in these peasant uprisings; some of the rebellions later became substances of the Padappattu composition. Malappattu also has a connection to the uprisings. Mappilas were ardent men, although this malappattu became part of their everyday recreations, which bestowed sacred relief on them. William Logan noticed the Muhiyudhin Mala. Mappila rebels were reciting the Muhiyudhin Mala before they began the incursions.

Padappattu as an anti-colonial composition.

Padappattu was notified as to the anti-colonial composition. Even in the colonial writings, William Logan and F. Fawcett observed these songs as the stimulating instrument of Mappila's fanatical behaviour because they obtained the evidence to support the arguments. The rebellious attitude of Mappilas was the main difficulty that faced British officials in Malabar. T.V. Krishnan added a note in the translation of the Malabar Manual with the description of Cherur Pada as "British officials hesitated to dispatch troops to prevent the Mappila uprising." Logan, 2017, p. 94)

Fawcett, in describing Mappilas as fanatics, also added a note from “The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review” (1897): “Men, who exhibit a courage which is dauntless, and a contempt for death which is merely paralleled and certainly unsurpassed in any other part of the world by any race.” (Fawcett, 1901) It says that the British officials also realised the influence of this literature over the community; it worked as an indispensable part in inspiring the brave Mappilas. The observation of Fawcett was not merely a literary review. It started as the result of their attention to the literature based on influencing characters in these Mappila revolts.

Around fifteen of Padappattu’s works have been written down in Arabi Malayalam, completed in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Karassery, 2003, p. 130) An important point is related to Padappattu: most of the works are composed by two Taluks of Malabar district, Eranad and Valluvanad. These areas were the main centres of the Mappila rebellion. The poets were natives of Cherur and lived in this community and society, so the fire of anti-British thought should have affected their minds also; they started to give ideological support and bravery through their works. (Ahammed, 2014, p. 263-264) Cherur pada by Muhammad Kutty and Muhiyudhin and Malappuram pada by Moyinkutty Vaidyar are two important works that indirectly challenge British policy and systems. These two works were noticed by the British officials; they describe the fight of Mappilas against their government system.

Cherur Padappattu

Cherur Pada, written in Arabi Malayalam by Muhammed Kutty and Muhiyudhin in 1845, is one of the earliest Padappattu. (Vallikkunnu, 2011, p. 120) It tells the story of the assassination of Kaprat Krishna Panikkar, the Adhikari¹ of Tirurangadi Amsham,² who lived in Venniyoor. Panikkar was slain after learning that his housemaid, a lower-class woman, had converted to Islam and that he had humiliated her. To avenge this, a group of Mappila fighters assassinated him and then hid themselves from the British army in a house near Cherur. The conflict between the Mappila fighters and the company army that came to conquer them is described in this battle. (Vallikkunnu, 2011, p. 127–136) The author of Cherur Pada narrates the entire occurrence in detail, having experienced it firsthand. As a result, this

work clearly criticises British policy, and Mappilas were encouraged to exact vengeance on the company by these descriptions.

The Malabar Manual added its description in the section on Malabar people. “The ruler of Tirurangadi Amsham, Kapratt Krishna Panikkar, was killed by Kunnatheri Ali Athan and other five persons on October 19, 1843. They went to Cherur and settled into one Nair house. British officials sent a large force into the site; it was the fifth regiment of the company force, which included one lieutenant, Subedar,³ Jameendar,⁴ three Havildar,⁵ four Nayak,⁶ one drummer, 51 privets, one pukkali, and Lasker. (Logan, 2017, p. 92–94)

On October 24, troops started to attack the Mappila combatants, who came out and started to fight back against the troops. The company Sepoyies⁷ was retrieved by fear due to the sudden attack, and in the counter-attack, Subedar and three Sepoyies were killed, and five Sepoyies and their leader were wounded. But the Mappila combatants, handled by a peon of the Taluk office and other indigenous people, finally killed seven of them. (Logan, p. 93) Malabar Manual tries to separate the rebellious people from society, as they never supported these attacks. (Logan, p.93) He tried to argue that these Mappilas were anti-social as they were rebelling against the will of society.

Malappuram Padappattu

Malappuram pada of Moyinkutty Vaidyar is also a notable work in the section of Padappattu; it describes the relationship between Paranambi⁸ and Muslims and the later conflict between these two groups. (Tharammal, 2014, p. 312) The history of this relationship was that Paranambi had a good relationship with the Muslims of Malappuram, and they helped him during the war against the king of Vellattiri.⁹ With the help of the Muslims, Paranambi successfully overcame the task. (Randathani, 2015, p. 107) He built a village for Muslims in Malappuram with a mosque; it has three floors and was completed in 1731. (Randathani, 2015, p. 107) They appointed Hassan Kutty Musliyar of Ponnani as their Qali, and Paranambi took over the whole expenditure of construction work. (Kareem, 2015, p. 357) The next Nambi also had a good relationship with the Muslims, but the problems came in the form of tax collection, which was handled by

one brave Muslim man named Marakkar. His strict tax collection made him unpopular with Nambi's relatives, which led to a conflict between the Nambi and the Muslims. (Kareem, 2015, p. 367). Nambi proclaimed to burn the Malappuram mosque. Muslims came to protect the mosque, and finally, 44 Muslims were killed in the conflict. (Fawcett, 1901, p. 503)

At the end of each revolt, the heroic stories of the Mappila rebels, who fought with the landlords and the British soldiers, were circulated among the Mappila community. (Malayamma, 2014, p. 367) The exchange took place mainly during the weekly markets, where the Mappilas used to meet each other, and at the Friday prayer meetings and pilgrimage centers. In the course of time, these stories turned into folk songs. Mappila choirs travelled to the countryside to sing these songs, which helped popularise them. (Panikkar, 1989, p. 106) These songs preserved the heroic memories of the Mappila riots and were passed down from generation to generation, narrating the adventures of the rebels. The songs played a major role in fostering anti-British feudal sentiment by giving the protests a romantic and idealistic color. As a result, the government confiscated several songs that were highly anti-British and banned them from being sung in public. (Panikkar, 1989, p. 106)

Cherur Pada is a battle that was often the subject of heroic poems and folk songs. Many works have been published on this subject. Many of these works were confiscated and destroyed by the British government. Cherur Padappattu and Cherur Chinth are two poems that have survived and are also available today. (Malayamma, 2014, p. 367) Malappuram Govt. College History Department teacher Dr. Zakir Hussain has published a study named "Cherur Padappattu: *Kanal Padhangalile Ishal Jwalakal*" that contains the detailed meaning and interpretation of Cherur Padappattu. "Cherur Chinth" also describes the Cherur incident and was banned by the British. (Mandalamkunnu, 2014, p. 357) The Muhimmathul Mu'mineen by Pareekutty Musliyar is also an effective work banned by British officials (Kodoor, 2021, p. 316), which called for the Muslims to join the Khilafat movement and protests against the British. (Suhail, P. 220-222) Like the Cherur pada [1845], the British government also

banned many other works of Arabi Malayalam literature, like Mannarkad pada and Manjeri pada. (Malayamma, 2014, p. 387)

These types of poems give inspiration to the Muslim bravery to react against British policy and the exploitation of landlords. It had a great influence on society. The ruling class feared that the work would inspire the Mappilas into an anti-British struggle. (Moulavi and Kareem, 1978, p. 387) William Logan, a descendant of that ruling class, later wrote that folk songs about the Cherur atrocities fascinated the Mappilas and unleashed an aggressive movement of religious fanaticism.

Following the ban on Cherur Padappatt, the police searched several Muslim houses in South Malabar. But they found only two manuscripts of that great poem. (Malayamma, 2014, p. 368) British government officials surrounded the Malharul Muhimat Press in Tirurangadi, run by Karakal Saeed Ali, a native of Thalassery. They conducted a press raid as soon as they knew that the Cherur battle song was being printed. As a result, the manuscript of the battle song and a few printed pages were seized and confiscated by the British. (Malayamma, 2014, p. 368) The Malabar Gazetteer reported that “possession of the pamphlet will be punished by five years’ imprisonment without inquest or judgment.” (Randathani, 2021)

British officials appointed F. Fawcett to study the Mappilappattu of the Mappilas, which came out as the result of the attention of British officials to the Mappila literature. He describes the Mappilas of Malabar as passionate and fanatical Mohammedans, extremely devoted to the religious songs about the battles of the Prophet and also to the songs about their own battles. The songs are inscribed in Arabic characters, and their language is a strange polyglot patois of Malayalam, local slang, Tamil, Telugu, Hindustani, Arabic, and many other languages. (Fawcett, 1809, p. 64) He continued his narration of the song: “I am now going to consider the songs of the Mappilas, which relate to war and stir up fanatical passions.” In quantity, they probably make up about nine-tenths of their literature. (Fawcett, 1901, p. 499) Eranad’s Mappila is certainly extraordinarily impressive and emotional, capturing the truths and beliefs of his faith. (Fawcett, 1901, p. 504) To the Mappila, the joys of heaven that await those who die in battle are not a distant and indistinct vision, or, like many people, what

they think they believe; it is not that, but something that impresses his whole being. (Fawcett, 1901, p. 504)

The literature plays an important role in Mappila's anti-colonial struggles; most of them were well educated in the Arabi Malayalam language and could read and understand these war songs. They also held sessions to stage the recitation of these padappattu, explaining the brave stories of their ancestors. The role of war songs in the emergence of unity and collective notions among the Mappila community is an area of curiosity. Indeed, the role of popular culture and oral tradition in the creation of self-consciousness and anti-colonialist awakening within the respective communities has been reflected in their anti-colonial spirits in Malabar. (Haseeb N., 2018)

End Notes:

1. an administrative title created by the British in Malabar in 1816 by Special Commissioner H. S. Graeme, The British divided the villages into Amshams and each Amsham's leader was designated *Adhikari* and 2. given control of the village. They exercised police powers and had the right to collect taxes.
2. Amsham is the smallest administrative unit in medieval Malabar.
3. Subedar is a rank in the British Indian Army, ranking below British commissioned officers and above non-commissioned officers. The rank was otherwise equivalent to a British lieutenant and was introduced in the East India Company's presidency armies.
4. armed officials of the Zamindars
5. the military commander of a fort during the times of the Maratha Empire. In the British Indian Army it was equivalent rank to sergeant, next above Naik.
6. Camel Corps, ranking between lance Naik and havildar.
- 7 The designation given to an Indian soldier in the service of a European power.
8. Who was the chieftain of Malappuram under Zamorin, and Malappuram was the military headquarters of the Zamorin in the Eranad region
9. The ruler of Valluvanad were known by the title Valluvakonathiri or Vellattiri

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