

MP. Narayana Menon: Malabar Leader of the Congress and the Khilafat

Hussain Randathani

Malabar had witnessed the longest period in India, in the anti colonial struggles. Starting from 1498 when Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut with the intention of establishing Portuguese hegemony over the land, till the dawn of freedom in 1947 the struggle continued. Since 1498 the kings and the people of Malabar waged war in the land and the sea and the struggle continued. With the establishment of the British rule after defeating Tipu Sultan who had been ruling over the region, the anti colonial struggles took the shape of a holy war by the Mappila Muslims of Malabar against the British and landlord conspiracy. The landlords with the help of the British began to inflict harsh measures upon the tenants and used to evict them from the land without reasons. Since the low caste tenants, who as per the Hindu law couldn't resist the landlords, the Mappila Muslims who were mostly converts from among the lower castes took arms under the leadership of religious leaders- Ulama and Sayyids. With landing of the Arab saint Sayyid Alavi Thangal and his son Sayyid Fazl, in Malabar the whole affairs took the shape of a holy war and fighting took place at different parts of Malabar in which many Mappilas laid their lives as martyrs. With the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885, the freedom struggle had taken the shape of a national movement based on Indian nationalism. Now the religious leaders, instead of a holy war wedded religion with nationalism and the whole affair of struggles became a part of a national struggle on an all India basis under the Congress leadership. The leadership of early days of the

Congress was a platform of landlords and industrialists who often didn't believe in struggles; instead, satisfied with submitting petitions to the Government asking for more representation in the ruling councils. The party stood for the demands of the upper castes and the Muslim representation was scanty.

The whole programme of the Congress changed when Mahatma Gandhi stepped into the Congress politics as its president. He, in order to unite all the communities under the banner of the Congress and transform the party into a vibrant movement met the Muslim leaders like Maulana Muhammad Ali and his brother Shoukat Ali. To him a joint platform for the national movement was inevitable. This time the Muslims were in the warpath against the British for imposing harsh measures on the Khalifa of Turkey, who was regarded as the leader of the Muslim world. Gandhi took the lead in establishing the Khilafat movement and the Congress gave full support for a combined movement against the British. In Malabar the Congress was not in a political mood, since many of its leaders were lawyers who always argued the cases in favour of the landlords in the courts. They were mostly easy chair politicians not believing in strikes and struggles.

Menon emerges as leader

The Home Rule League, under the leadership of Annie Besant was more influential in the Congress platform and most of the leaders were under its influence. The Home Rule League stood for self rule and dominion status for India, and its activities sufficed in convening meetings and submitting memoranda and petitions to the government. With the arrival of Gandhi, the Congress leaders supported him and this caused a setback to the Home Rule and its policies. With the national visit of Gandhi and Shoukat Ali, the Congress became powerful, extending its arms to the common people and upper-class alike. Since the Khilafat became an agenda of the Congress, Muslims began to rally behind the party and in Malabar the Muslim leaders and the peasants allied with it. The Manjeri Conference of April 1920 comprised of 3000 participants most of whom, were Mappila Muslims. The meeting dissatisfied with the work of the Home Rule League and Annie Besant and her supporters left the party criticizing Gandhi and his ideals. M.P Narayanan Menon was now budding as a veteran

Congress leader leading the party in the Malabar region particularly in Ernad and Walluvanad Taluks. Though he was a merited lawyer, he stood for the welfare of the tenants and often argued cases for them without fees. Most of his friends who were also Congress men, always sided with the landlords, didn't like the way Mr. Menon behaved in the courts and outside it. Mr. Menon cautioned his colleagues that unless the grievances of the tenants didn't met, there is no meaning for freedom at all and the landlords must see the miserable condition of the poor peasants. Other Congress lawyers gave only a lip service to the cause of the tenants and they often ridiculed Menon for his pro tenant and pro Mappila attitude.

Narayana Menon, belonged to a Nair family of Menon and was born at Puzhakkattiri in South Malabar in the year 1887. He belonged to the Puredath Padinjarekarayil Nair family. Ancestors of Narayana Menon were soldiers of Valluvanad Raja. His father Karunakara Menon, was of Parambot family of Alipparamb near Perinthalmanna of South Malabar. As matrilineal system prevailed among the Nair families, Karunakara Menon married Narayani Amma of Puredath family. The family later settled at Angadippuram near Perinthalmanna. He had his formal education at Ottappalam School, Kollankode Rajas High School and Madras Presidency College and Madras Christian College. He studied law privately and started practice in the Perinthalmanna Munsiff court. At Madras he came in touch with the national leaders like Bipin Chandrapal, Annie Besant, Lokamnaya Bala Gangadabra Tilk and others. By 1919 he had become a full time servant of the people.

Tenancy Movement

In Malabar the activities of the Congress was moving very slowly. Leaders of the party were mainly drawn from lawyers and officials of the British government. Also they were from upper castes. Sir.C.Shankaran Nair, Rairu Nambyar, Dr. T.M Nair, C. Gopalan Nair, K. Karunakara Menon were important among them. All of them were pro British landlord class and stood for protecting their rights. At the same time there was no one in the party to argue for the rights of the tenants. In the conference of the Congress held at Calicut in 1903 very few members participated. In 1910 started the District Malabar

Congress and the Home Rule League established in 1916. Ramayyar was the President of Home Rule League. Only the land lord class had access to the Congress meetings. Doors were closed to the local people including the peasants and the workers. In the court Mr. Menon found that most of his colleagues were arguing the cases for the landlords. The tenants were helpless in the courts since the magistrates, lawyers, clerks, and even sepoys were from landlord class. Like Menon, Mahatma Gandhi also had realized this fact. He observed in Young India that the reason for Mappila fanaticism is up to the Hindu landlords. Hindus were not ready to treat the Mappilas as their brothers. They either hated the Mappilas or feared them. The Hindus hesitated to accept the fact that the Mappilas are their neighbours who deserve love and respect” (26 Jan 1922, Collected Works, Volume XXI,I, 269 , Delhi)

In 1916 in order to collect funds for the World War , Evans, the Collector convened a meeting at Calicut. K. P Kesavea Menon, Diwan Bahadur Kelu Eradi, Kavalapara Mooppil Nair, Manjeri Ramayyar, , K. Madhavan Nair, , Kalladi Unni Kammu Sahib and many other prominent men including Mr. Menon attended the meeting. The meeting presented a resolution for giving a money bag to the governor when he visits Malabar. Menon vehemently opposed the resolution by saying in Malayalam language that Indians cannot contribute to the war front because of their extreme poverty. Collector insisted for speaking in English. Menon criticized the collector in harsh words and the meeting was dispersed without taking any decision.

Mr. Menon was well aware of the pathetic condition of the tenants. He realized that unless the tenants were united themselves to redress their grievances they will not get justice in the courts. He came out of the court as the leader of tenancy movement. He formed the Tenants’ Society (Kudiyam Samgam) with the help of his friend Kattilassery Muhammad Musliyar, who was a Muslim scholar and orator, lived at Kattilassery, near Menon’s home town Angadippuram. This time the Congress party was weak in Malabar under the leadership of Brahmins, Nairs who had no interest in the welfare of the tenants. They blocked entering of the down trodden and peasant class and Mappilas to the Congress. They opposed every bill connected

with concessions to the tenants. About this time Mr. Menon was elected as the Secretary of Ernad Congress Committee. He actively worked to expand the space of the party by attracting the common people. He with Kattilassery also started a society for redressing the tenants' grievances (Kudiyam Samkada Nivarana Sangam) and attached it to the Congress. This gave an open door to the common people to the party, though this act of Mr. Menon was disliked by other Congress leaders. He left his job as a lawyer and became a fulltime Congress man working for the welfare of the tenants. Besides Kattilasseri Muhammad Muliyaar, other Mappilas like Pottayil Muhammad Haji and Perinthalmanna Muhammad Musliyaar also worked along with him. Menon used to appear before the people in Mappila dress, a kaili and Kanchi frock and his own people ridiculed him as Mappila Menon. Muslims called him Abu Thalib, who was the uncle of Prophet Muhammad and at the same time an unbeliever respected by all Muslims. He even preached in the mosques to spread the message of the Congress and the Tenants' Society. In a statement submitted in the court Menon denied that he isn't wearing any Mappila dress. He said: "I used to wear Lungi and Baniyan. Mappilas also wear the same. Lungi is also used by Burmese and Sri Lankans. How can it be a Mappila dress. Even if, it is so, I don't know, what the blame in that is." (M.P.S Menon, 1994: 163)

In the Calicut meeting

On 18 August 1920 Mahatma Gandhi and Shoukat Ali visited Calicut in connection with the Khilafat and Non Cooperation. They got down at Calicut railway station around 2.30 pm, and were garlanded by Khan Bahadur Muthukoya Thangal. They were hosted by Shyamji Sunder Das, a Gujarati merchant. About 20,000 people attended the conference held at Vellayil beach. On the Khilafat question Gandhiji made the following remarks:

“...I claim to have studied the Khilafat question in a special manner. I claim to have understood the Mussalman feelings and I am here to declare that in the Khilafat question, the British Government had wounded the sentiments of Mussalmans, as they have not done before. The Gospel of non-co-operation is preached to them and if they had not accepted it, there would have been blood-

shed in India by this time. I am free to confess the spilling of blood would not help their cause. But a man, who is in a state of rage, whose heart is lacerated, does not count on the results of his actions. So much for the Khilafat wrong, I propose to take you for a moment to the Punjab, the northern end of India and what the Government done for the Punjab ? I am free to confess again that the crowd in Amristar went mad for a time. They were goaded to madness by a wicked administration but no madness on the part of the people can justify the spilling of innocent blood and what have they paid for it?"

He continued:

“ If the Mussalmans of India offer non-co- operation to the Government in order to secure justice on the Khilafat, it is the duty of every Hindu to co-operate with their Moslem brethren. I consider the eternal friendship between Hindus and Mussalmans as infinitely more important than the British connection. I therefore venture to suggest that if they like to live with unity with Mussalmans, it is now that they have got the best opportunity and that such an opportunity would not come for a century. I venture to suggest that if the Government of India and the Imperial Government come to know that there is a great determination behind this great nation in order to secure redress for the Khilafat and Punjab wrongs, the Government would then do justice to us.” (The Hindu, 19 August 1920).

Shoukat Ali in his speech exhorted the Mappilas to fight away the rulers unto death , otherwise one has to migrate to any other country. Muslim leaders like Kunhi Kader, Moidu Moulavi and others also raised the same voice. Mr. Menon realized the imminent danger of such a war cry by the Mappilas and after the conference he met Gandhi and reminded him of the consequences. He asked Gandhi to give necessary discourses on Ahimsa and non violence to the tenant Mappilas before starting the Khilafat agitation. He was supported by the Mappila leader Muhammad Abdu Rahman. He also reminded Gandhiji of the tradition of jihad among the Mappilas who fought against the enemies since the arrival of the Portuguese. (MPS Menon, 66). but Mr. Raja Gopalachari, Madhavan Nair and K.P Kesava Menon

objected, saying that Mappilas will follow Muhammad Ali and Shoukat Ali and their leaders. Menon, being the leader of the Congress followed the decision.

Manjeri Conference of 1920

As the Secretary of the Ernad Congress Committee, Mr. Menon was behind making the Manjeri Congress Conference of 28 April 1920 successful. About three thousand people attended the conference and majority among them were Mappilas. In the Conference a dominant group under Annie Besant tried to make a compromise with the Government accepting the Montague- Chemsford administrative reforms. They were against the Non Cooperation of Mahatma Gnadhi. Mr. Menon along with Madhavan Nair, President of the Congress Committee and K.P Raman Menon who was the Secretary of the Khilafat Committee supported the resolution for the Non Cooperation and defeated the Annie Besant faction. Annie Besant left the Conference and later resigned from the party. The Congress hitherto prevented any discussion on the rights of the tenants, now for the first time voiced for the tenants' rights. This gave the party popular support, particularly among the Mappilas.

With the Manjeri Conference, Mr. Menon gained more influence among the Congress men and the Mappiolas alike. The conference brought people from all strata of society into the Congress. The Non Cooperation and the Khilafat became wide spread. The pamphlet in Urdu called Tark e Muwalaat (Non Cooperation) was translated into Malayalam and Arabi Malayalam and distributed everywhere. The main points in the pamphlet were the following:

1. Muslim should keep away from government jobs
2. Muslims should not pay taxes.
3. Muslims should boycott educational institutions.
4. Muslims shouldn't join the British army.
5. Muslims should surrender all rewards and titles and no one should receive such things from the British

In his conversation with M.P.S Menon, Narayana Menon explained his view on freedom: Freedom will not come when the British leave the country. The real freedom comes when the tenants and the coolies save themselves from the landlords, rich people, money lend-

ers and the officials.” (M.P.S Menon: 48). It is not the British, but the Indians insist that the peasant would continue as slaves and poor. It is not the British who prevented freedom in the land to the peasants but the landlords who confiscated the land and homes of the tenants (Ibid.). Mr. Menon criticized the Congress leaders for not living with the Mappilas and the tenants. He says that, neither the Congress leaders nor his own relatives stayed with him because he broke the caste rules by dining with the Mappilas. Likewise, some Mappilas also objected Menon working with them, but they never said it public, fearing Kattilassery Muhammad Musliyar who was his close ally.

Against Violence

As the Congress leader Mr. Menon along with Muhammad Abdu Rahman and Kattilassery Muhammad Musliyar , toured all over Malabar to spread the message of Khilafat and Non Cooperation. He met Ali Musliyar and discussed the matter with him. Soon Khilafat committees sprang up at different parts of the region at the initiation of Ali Musliyar, and the rich and poor alike, despite their caste and religious differences strengthened the Khilafat, and even the tenants’ societies dissolved in it. The khilafatists followed a line of non violence in the early stages. but the British Collector Mr. Thomas and Police officer Mr. Hitchcock, executed plans to vandalize the whole movement. They brutally attacked the Khilafat volunteers and destroyed their offices and homes. This naturally infuriated the Mappilas and the Congress activists. Many of the Congress people were arrested and subjected to brutalities. Now the Mappilas under Ali Musliyar decided to take up arms against the British. Menon along with Kattilassery Muhammad Musliyar, Mannarkkad Muhammad Musliyar and Muhammad Abdu Rahman, toured Ernad and Walluvanad taluks to dissuade the people from violence. Though the people heard them and stopped armed struggle, the police atrocities compelled them to resort to violence again. Man hunting of the army and police forced the Mappila families to evacuate to the forest and reside there for long days. The Mappilas were brutally killed by the Gurkha regiments. The Nair force under Malabar Special Police also participated in the attacks. The whole movement was slipping away from the hands of the leaders.

By now the Congress had developed into a powerful organization through the Hindu Muslim unity gained through the Khilafat and Non Cooperation. In every village Khilafat Committees were formed. They organized meetings at least twice a week. Menon along with Varian Kunnath Kunhahammad Haji, Moidu Moulavi, Kattilassery Musliyar, Ali Musliyar and Muhammad Abdu Rahman visited different parts of Malabar and preached the message of the Khilafat and Non Cooperation Movement. The police tried to prevent them speaking in the Khilafat meetings. Mr. Hitchcock telegraphed to Madras to get permission to arrest Menon so that the Khilafat could be crushed, but the Madras authorities denied the request. There were rumours that Menon and his colleagues may be arrested soon. The Mappilas now tried to empower themselves by collecting arms and training the volunteers with the help of retired sepoy.

Mr. Thomas, the collector and Hitchcock, the police officer, unleashed atrocities against the people and arrested even innocent Mappilas who hadn't any connection with the movement. Once, the Police arrested few Mappilas without any reason. When Menon knew this, he rushed to the police station and insisted for the release of those who were arrested. He threatened to start a Satyagraha in the police station. The authorities by knowing the danger of the situation released these Mappilas. When he got the information of the khilafatists collecting arms, as a Congress man, he rushed to Tirurangadi to know the truth. He met Ali Musliyar, the leader of the Khilafat with security guards with long knives on their waist band. Menon made a friendly conversation with Musliyar explaining to him the non violence preached by Mahatma Gandhi. The Musliyar then stated the need of a war against the British, because they insult the religion and attack the people without any reason. Menon reminded him of the consequences, if a war is declared against such a great power like the British and insisted him to follow the Congress ideals of struggle peacefully. Ali Musliyar, for the time being accepted his advice and asked his comrades to stop the preparations.

Yakub Hassan

The Congress invited Mr. Yakub Hassan, the Congress Khilafat leader from Madras to advise the Mappilas to follow peaceful method

as prescribed by the Congress leadership. He reached at Calicut on 15 February, but the authorities prevented him from speaking in the meetings. Leaders including Hasan, Madhavan Nair, Gopala Menon, and Ponmadath Moideen Koya were arrested at the order of the collector. Police officers Mr. Amu and Hitchcock asked the leaders to write a pledge that they will not speak in any meeting for the next six months, but they declined. They were jailed in the Central jail at Kannur. The news spread like wildfire. People from all sides gathered in Calicut town. Shops were closed. A huge procession moved towards the house of the collector. The police prevented the procession at Beach Road. But the people didn't disperse. Mr. Menon now reached the place and talked with Mr. Amu and Hitchcock. After reaching a compromise, he and Koyatty Moulavi asked the people to disperse.

Ottappalam Conference

Menon was the member of the reception committee of the Ottappalam Congress session held from 23 to 27 April 1921. Along this there were different sessions for Khilafat, ulama, tenants and the students. T. Prakasham was the President of the main session. Sayyid Murtaza of Andhra Pradesh presided over the Khilafat session. In the meeting prominent Mappila and Hindu leaders participated. Menon headed the tenants session. The Malabar Kudiyan Samgam (Malabar Tenants' Society) was formed and different tenants' organizations merged in the Samgam. Menon addressed the Khilafat meeting also. He asked the Mappilas to join the Congress in order to strengthen the anti imperialist struggle. Around 4000 representatives attended the Khilafat Congress. On 27 the police without any provocation attacked some volunteers to create trouble, but the timely intervention of Menon, K.M Moulavi, Malappuram Kunhi Thangal, Kattilasseri, Muhammad Abdu Rahman, Kesava Menon and Sayyid Alavi Koya Thangal avoided further skirmishes. The role of Menon in creating a cordial atmosphere for furthering the struggles is very important. The Kudiyan Samgam and the Khilafat movement were united in the efforts in the anti British and anti landlord struggles. Menon and Kattilassery addressed people in the markets and the mosques and the Muslim leaders, Musliyers and Thangals supported them.

Pookkottur Episode

Pookkottur is a hamlet in Ernad Taluk of South Malabar. The whole region was under the landlord of Nilambur. He had a bungalow (Kovilakam) at Pookkottur and here stayed a relative of landlord. The land was cultivated mostly by Mappilas. Here the Khilafat and Congress activities were strong due to the work of Ali Musliyar, Kattilasery Muhammad Musliyar, Muhammad Abdu Rahman, Menon and others. Here in the mosque Ali Musliyar served as a teacher for few years and the people of the region were his spiritual disciples. So the place was easily subjected to the freedom activities. Sayyid Ahmad Kutty, an influential man of the area and a Sufi was made the president of the Khilafat Committee. Karat Moideen Kutty Haji and Vadakke Veetil Mammad (Kalathil Muhammad) were Vice President and Secretary respectively. Muhammad was the manager of the Kovilakam, but was dismissed from the post for being the worker of the Khilafat. Peraparamaban Ahmad Kutty, the Village officer was friendly to the landlord and at the same time an ill will remained between Ahmad Kutty and Muhammad. The landlord fabricated a case against Muhammad by saying that he had stolen the gun of the Kovilakam. The police officer Govinda Menon who was also a relative of the landlord made a search for the gun, but became disappointed. Muhammad and the Mappilas by realizing the intrigues of the landlord rushed to the Kovilakam and bounded him. Muhammad demanded the arrears of his salary from the landlord for his service as Manager. The landlord was helpless. However, the Khilafat leaders appeared there and the issue was settled.

Again another incident took at Pookkotttur. The landlord lodged a complaint to the Police Inspector Mangod Narayana Menon, against Vadakke Veetil Mammad. The inspector arrived at the Kovilakam and summoned Muhammad to the Kovilakam. Mammad realized the imminent danger and informed the Mappilas to rally to the Kovilakam. This time Menon, Karad Moideen Kutty Haji and others were sitting in the Khilafat office. They heard continuous beating of Nagara (drum) from the mosque. It was the signal of a danger in the area. They were informed that the Mappilas were moving in bands to the Kovilakam. The Mappilas surrounded the Kovilakam in order to kill the landlord

and the Police Inspector. Menon rushed to the Kovilakam. Malappuram KunhiThangal, the Khilafat leader and a revered man also reached the place. They intervened in the issue and saved both landlord and the Inspector.

Not against Hindus but against traitors

Mr. M.P.S Menon, the biographer of Narayana Menon points out many examples to show the influence of Menon among the Mappilas. His words were accepted without question and he consoled the community in the midst of the police and army atrocities. The houses of Menon and his relatives were never touched by the rebels (MPS Menon:104). The authorities intentionally concealed the letters written by landlords that they had no threat from the Mappilas. There were instances of police and the people of rival landlords attacking the houses of others and the police instigating some Muslim landlords to attack the Hindu landlords to make the struggles, a communal one. On 27 August 1921 Chengalath Narayana Menon wrote a letter to the authorities. He said: "My information is that at Angadippuram no Hindu houses were attacked by the rebels. It is a virtue that the Mappilas help their Hindu brothers. My daughter of sixteen years of age and three sons live at Angadippuram safely, shows my faith in Mappilas. Mappilas helps them." (The Hindu, 27 August 1921). MPS writes that the fury of the Mappilas were not against Hindus altogether, but to the landlords and those British officials who supported them.' (M.P.S Menon:104) The rebels turned against the Hindus, only when they helped the army and police.

Mr. Narayana Menon and his friend Kattilasseri Muhammad Musliyar were very active in preventing the riots, spreading at Perinthalmanna area. They preached against violence in the Khilafat meetings. At his behest he created Khilafat Committees in the surrounding areas. He was also assisted by O. Unniyali, V. Kunhammad and Achuthan Kutty Menon. At Alanallur a Khilafat committee was organized under Parambott Appunni Menon and Thaliyil Unniyen Adhikari. The rebels from outside, however attacked the Munsif Court and the Sub Registrar office at Perinthalmanna and destroyed the documents. Madhavan Nair writes that these Mappila rebels attacked the relatives of Menon, but M.P.S rejects the statement and confirm

that no rebels attacked the relatives of Menon. He also criticizes Madhavan Nair for giving false information to depict the Mappilas as fanatics as done by the British. Even Hitchcock, the police officer had stated that the atrocities at Perintalmanna against Government offices were done by rebels including Hindus and Muslims. (Hitchcock : 170)

When Madhavan Nair got the information on the advancement of the army, he decided to leave Manjeri and invited Menon to come along with him. But Menon insisted that his presence at Manjeri is inevitable to protect the people in the midst of skirmishes. In August 1921 a notice was issued by the Congress leaders asking the people to discard violence and warned, any such act would only aggravate the situation. The notice was signed by seven Congress leaders, including Narayana Menon, but the name of Madhavan Nair was not there among the signatories. Mr. M.P.S points out to the false statements in the book of Madhavan Nair and says that the statements often shows his resentments against the Mappila rebels. He also notes that, when all the Congress leaders were arrested Madhavan Nair and K.P Kesava Menon saved themselves from the arrest with the help of some British officials.

Saving the Police Inspector

The Khilafatists were furious towards the Police Inspector Narayana Menon, who was behind the false accusations connected with the Pookkottur incidents. After murdering Khan bahadur Chekkutty Sahib, Kunhahammad haji and his comrades had taken pledge for killing the Inspector, for his intrigues against the Khilafatists. While the Khilafatists were moving to the city of Manjeri raising the chopped head of Mr. Chekkutty, the inspector was at the town. He begged Mr. Menon for saving him from the attack. Menon showed kindness to the inspector and concealed him in a Mappila house at Melakkam near the town. Disguised himself as a Muslim woman, the inspector was brought to the court at Manjeri. Ironically it was the same inspector who falsely convicted Menon allegedly involving in the Manjeri bank robbery.

Intrigues of the Collector and arrest

Malabar Collector, Mr. Thomas was adamant in suppressing the Khilafat movement at any cost. He found that Menon is a threat to his move and decided to arrest him and fabricated false accusations. He was included in the list of criminals of Tirurangadi incident as per the Mappila Act of 1859. In the list, names of twenty nine Khilafat leaders including that of Menon. The case against them was praying at the graves in the prohibited area, trying to murder the landlord and the inspector at Pookkottur and assaulting of the Tiyya community at Tanalur near Tirur. Though Menon was innocent, he was arrested on 17 August 1921 at Manjeri. Some put the date as 10 September 1921. He was beaten harshly and chained like a worst criminal. He was twirled for 20 miles from Malappuram to Tirur accompanied by police and army. From Tirur he was taken to Coimbatore. Along with him K.Kelappan, Moidu Moulavi, and K.V Balakrishna Menon also were arrested. From Valluvanad, Purambot Achuthan Kutty Menon and Brahma Dattan Namboothiripad were also arrested. Besides, a number of khilafatists and other Mappilas were taken into Custody. Absence of the leaders, particularly of Mr. Menon created a vacuum in the Congress Khilafat activities of Malabar. Menon was arrested without any specific reason. The District Collector Mr. Thomas had calculated that if Menon was arrested it was easy to create a Hindu Muslim divide in Malabar and the Khilafat agitation can easily be suppressed. But again rebellion broke out and spread to more areas. The Mappila warriors crashed with the army and the police at many places.

Paradoxically, no Congress men came to protest the arrest of Mr. Menon. Neither Kesava Menon nor Madhavan Nair, the leaders of the Congress said a word for Menon, says M.P.S Menon (M.P.S:144). Madhavan Nair was allowed to remain at Calicut on the condition that he will not indulge in any activities of the Khilafat Non Cooperation movements. Menon remained in the Coimbatore jail along with criminals. The jail authorities denied him even pen and paper, or books. After the suspension of the Martial law he was allowed to see other detainees and it was this time Mr. Brahma Dattan, the Congress leader of Cherpulassery, Palakkad used to meet him at jail.

Accusations on Menon were the following:

1. Ten or fifteen days before the beginning of the rebellion, one Friday, he exhorted the Mappilas for waging war against the British at a mosque in Odavampatta. He instigated the people in the mosque for rebellion against the government. (As a witness for his speech, Narayana Menon, the inspector presented one Husain who claimed that he had heard the speech and had revealed the matter to Karunakara Menon, another inspector who gave this news to Narayana Menon. In the speech, Husain said that Menon asked the Mappilas to fight against the British uniting with Hindus with readiness to sacrifice their lives so that the British can be expelled from the country)
2. On 29 July 1921 Menon made a speech at Pandikkad Masjid in which he said that if united, a Khilafat state can be easily created. One should sacrifice his self and wealth for this purpose.
3. Mr. Menon talked with the rebellious Mappilas of Pookkottur on 21 August 1921. The Mappilas were said to be the rebels who returned after the Nilambur assault. It was alleged that Menon talked with the people of the necessity of murdering the landlord of Nilambur, because he was the enemy of the Khilafat and the Congress. He asked them to wait for another opportunity to kill him. He also advised them not to be sad over the death of some of them and asked them to fight sincerely and if died in the encounter one will attain either paradise, or the country. "Don't spend the cartridges and weapons unnecessarily. We are in need of arms when the army reach us. At the same time swords and canes are sufficient to fight our own countrymen who are against the Khilafat."
4. When his friend Varian Kunnath Kunhahammad Haji was attacking the Namboothiri bank, Menon was assisting him. There he made a speech: "The rule of the whites had come to an end. The rule of Mappilas had been started. Everyone knows it already that the Mappilas are courageous. We fought at Tirurangadi and drove away the British. We can drive them out of the country if we united. For the whites there are only few soldiers. We have crores of people. If we resist the soldiers for few days we will reach assistance from other countries. I am sure that we would follow that kind of resis-

tance. Those who remain against the Khilafat are our enemies. We wouldn't let them free."

5. It was alleged by the court that Menon joining with the Khilafat leaders, Ali Musliyar, and Variyan Kunnath Haji precipitated rebellion against the British and led the Mappilas astray.

Mr. Menon was convicted for treason according to Indian Penal Code section 121. The Government gave sanction to take legal action against him as per the order No.375 of 3 May 1922. The court with the help of the statements of false witnesses was putting the blame of the rebellion upon his shoulders. Most of the witnesses were bribed and statements were put into their mouth. Inspector Narayana Menon with whom Mr. Menon had friendly relations was the sole man behind all this conspiracy by producing false witnesses and giving false statements in the court.

During the court proceedings Menon had submitted a statement before the court in which he affirmed his stand on the non violence and tenants' agitation. He explained: When he heard that Ali Musliyar and his people had started arming themselves to wage a war against the British, he rushed to Tirurangadi and met Ali Musliyar with whom he had a friendly relation. He said that the Mappilas of Ali Musliyar were wearing a special knife sharpened on both sides and it was different from the traditional knife existed in Ernad. When we go through the whole judgment, it is clear that most of the evidences were fabricated and the prosecution witnesses were men brought falsely under pressure and rewards. Menon never asked the people to take arms against the British, but, following the principles of the Congress, he believed in a struggle without arms. However, it is true that Menon had fought for the freedom and the emancipation of the tenants and supported struggles to expel the British from the country. This was sufficient for the authorities to punish him, but it was not done in the proper way.

As per the judgment Menon was guilty of treason and waging war against the British. He was sentenced to ban from the country for life. Though his friends including those of the British asked Menon to repent for his guilt and assure the authorities that he will not enter Malabar for two years, Menon ridiculed them and asserted that since

he had not done any wrongs, he will not repent before any one, particularly before the British. When his wife also insisted for a compromise he asked her not to come to the jail to see him again. In the jail Menon voiced for the hygiene of rooms and rights of the prisoners. He started hunger strike to get his demands accepted by the authorities. From the jail he wrote a letter to the Congress leader Yakub Hassan, to take care of the security of Mappila women who were cruelly persecuted during the rebellion. However, the letter was intercepted by the jail authorities. When Menon knew this he started a hunger strike in the jail for one week. The authorities then sent the letter to Yakub Hassan. Yakub Hasan subsequently sent a report to the Hindu regarding the plight of the Mappila women. He also wrote to Mahatma Gandhi requesting him to save the Mappila women by making a compromise with the Hindus of Malabar (For the letter see *Young India*, 1 May 1924, 12). Mr. Hog, an English friend of Menon got it published in the Hindu.

After few years Menon was transferred to the jail of political prisoners at Vellore. EMS Namboothiripad, the Marxist leader of Kerala stayed with him in the jail for about one year. EMS records that, he was lucky to stay with Menon in the jail. "He has been a brave freedom fighter. A man of courage who never allow to lower the freedom flag of his country even an inch. He was also an erudite scholar." (Reminiscence of an Indian Communist). At Vellore jail Mr. Menon was close to the leaders like Raja Gopalachari and Kamaraj. Kamaraj was very young at that time. Kamaraj found that Menon teaching Rajaji, the Sanskrit language. Kamaraj observes: Narayana Menon was a "Periya Manathir" (great man). (Kamaraj, *Indian Express*, 5 October 1966). In the jail Mr. Menon was friendly to everyone. He taught Vedas and literature to the prisoners. He helped them in many ways even in cutting their hair. He opposed Communism by saying that it stands for autocracy. Menon was released from jail in 1934. His internment was for twenty year imprisonment, but he got a concession for six years.

When Mr. Menon came out of jail he was well received by the people of Madras. He presided over a meeting of national political prisoners in Madras. Now Menon actively participated in politics. He

found that the leadership of the Congress is in the hands of a new generation. He was respected by the youth and they sought advice from him in the organizational matters. He stood for the tenants and was attracted to socialist activities, though he was not interested in Communist politics. When Jayaprakash Narayan, the Socialist leader visited Kerala, he met Menon and this friendship continued till the death of Menon. He believed that Socialism is not only a condition for gaining independence for India, but it is also a workable project for organizing and leading the workers, peasants and common people together. The Congress party unanimously selected Menon for contesting the National assembly, but Madras State Congress objected it by saying that one who is punished for criminal case wouldn't be allowed for contesting. However, Menon himself stated that he is not interested in contesting elections.

Meanwhile, Menon took the job of the Manager of the West Coast branch of United India Assurance Company. But he resigned from the post when its head Sri Aron asked Menon to support him in the election of council of States against the Congress candidate. Soon he was appointed as the Superintendent of Hindu Endowment Board by the Rajaji Government of Madras. He had to quit the job when the Congress ministry itself resigned as a protest when the British government decided to support the Allies in the World War without discussing it with the Indian leaders. He also interested in studying the poverty of the people including those of the Mappilas and encouraging the children, particularly the girls, to go to schools. This was objected by the orthodox section of both Hindus and Muslims.

In 1942 When Mahatma Gandhi declared the Quit India Movement, Menon actively led the movement in Malabar. He, along with Moidu Moulavi was arrested while speaking at Paran Squire of Calicut. Both were sent to Vellore jail. When compared with 1921 situation the Jail was more comfortable and all the Congress leaders were put in a single jail. Congress leaders including T. Prakasham, V.V Giri, Kala Venkitta Rao, Kamaraj, Kelappan, Abdu Rahman and K. Madhava Menon and A.V Kutti Malu Amma were there. He held classes and speeches for the political prisoners in the jail. To Kutti Malu Amma, Menon was a man to his words. He was well disciplined and strict.

He was proficient in Sanskrit and was in the habit of reading books. He came out of jail in 1946 one year before freedom. The Madras government of free India appointed him as the Head of the Jail Reconstruction. He brought reforms in the jail administration. He insisted that the Jail warden should be a man of considerable education, so that the corruption and bribery in jail can be minimized. He recommended to give training to the jail authorities. He started a school to give education to the prisoners including vocational training like yarn- ing, carpentry, weaving etc. Another reform was regarding women prisoners. He gave them education and made them responsible ser- vants of the people. When Madras Government under Kamaraj de- clared rewards for the freedom fighters, Menon was offered five acres of land and a pension of Rs. 500 and Thamra Patra. But he politely declined the offers. He never demanded land even from his own fam- ily.

Though Menon was a Gandhian in every sense, he had his own views on freedom. He believed in giving education and labour to all. He never accepted the Charkha as symbol of freedom struggle. He also was not in the habit of writing letters to the Congress leaders from jail. The Congress leaders tried to persuade Gandhi to recom- mend to the authorities for the release of Menon, but Menon objected to it. In a letter to Menon, Gandhi praised his scrupulous mind of ser- vice and education among the prisoners. Gandhi also contacted Lord Irwin, the Viceroy for his release. Menon was not ready to bow be- fore the authorities to get his release from jail. Gandhi in his letter reminded Menon that Charkha was like a tonic and asked him to fol- low the method. However, Menon remained in his earlier stand.

Mr. Menon left his political life after 1955 and remained at home at Anamangad, near Perinthalmanna. He was critical to the Congress leaders who were mongering for getting rewards for their struggle for freedom. Many Congress leaders have already left the party. Even Rajaji, Kripalani and Jaya Prakash had left the party forming their own parties. Menon blamed Jawaharal Nehru for all these. He used to write articles in the Mathrubhumi during this period.

Menon fell ill in 1966 and died on 5 October of the same year. He was a pious believer in God. His jail note book shows his firm

belief in God. He hated the caste rules and dined with Muslims and lower castes which was a taboo in those times. He worked among the poor tenants including the Mappilas and took them to his bosom and spent his life for their emancipation. He was highly critical towards the landlords including those of his own relatives for their inimical attitude towards the tenants.

Reference:

- Dale, Stephen F, The Mappilas of Malabar, 1498-1922, Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier, Oxford,1980.
- Desai, A.R., Peasants Struggles in India, 1979.
- Gandhi, M.K, Collected Workds of Mahatma Gandhi, Ahmadabad, 1966.
- Gangadhara Menon, M., Malabar Rebellion, 1921-22, New Delhi, 1989.
- Guha Ranajit, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in India, Delhi, 1985.
- Hardgrave, Robert, The Mappila Rebellion, 1921, Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, Modern Asian Studies, II,1,1977.
- Hitchcock, R.H, A History of the Malabar Rebellion, 1921, Delhi,1983.
- Hussain Randathani, Mappila Muslims, A Study on Society and Anti Colonial Struggles, Calicut, 2016.
- K.Madhavan Nair, Malabar Kalapam, Calicut,1999.
- M.P.S Menon, M.P Narayana Menon, A Forgotten Pioneer, Malabar, 1920-47,Thiruvananthapuram, 1992.
- Pnikkar K.N, Against Lord and State, Religion and Peasant Uprising in Malabar, Oxford,1993.
- Tottenham, G.R.F., The Mopla Rebellion, Madras 1922.
- Wood Conrad, Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis,1921-22, Delhi, 1975.

Hussain Randathani

Email: drhussaink@gmail.com