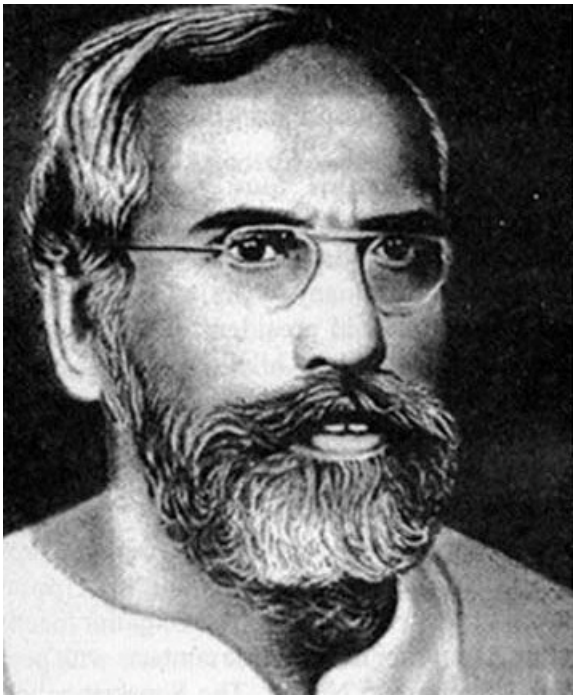

BRAHMADATTAN NAMBUTHIRI

A BRAHMIN WHO WROTE ON MALABAR KHILAFAT STRUGGLE

Mozhikkunnath Brahmadathan Nambootirippad (1897-1964), as the name indicates was a Brahman landlord of Malabar. He belonged to the patrician (Atyan) class of the Brahmins, and called as Namboothirippad, 'pad' being a special addition to the class. He was born in 1897 as the son of Narayanan Somayajippad and Savithri Adithirippad, in the village of Cherpulassery, now in the district of Palakkad , in the state of Kerala, India. After his traditional studies he became well versed in Vedic literature and later in 1918 became active as a reformer and politician. He was arrested during the Khilafat struggles of Malabar with false accusations that he was one of the kingpins of the rebellion. In fact he was the leader of native National Congress Committee and Khilafat Committee and a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He was arrested and subjected to hardships in jail. After his release he continued his activities as a reformer and Congress activist.

Mr. Brahmadattan wrote an autobiography with the name Khilaat Smaranakal (Khilafat Reminiscence) in Malayalam in the year 1965 and the book was edited and translated into English by Dr. KKN. Kurup in 2012. The book gives a clear picture of the nature and character of the Khilafat movement in Malabar, from the point of view of a Brahmin Congress leader. He denies the allegation that the rebellion originated from the communal conflicts, but it broke out as a result of police atrocities. He also asserts that the Malabar rebellion is a part of the freedom

movement of india. The people lost their patience when the police unleashed atrocities against them and it became an unplanned one causing hardships to all (Mozhikkunnath Brahmadattan Namboothirippad, Khilafath Smaranakal, Kerala Sahity Academy, 1993,p.7). He says: I am a Hindu suffered harsh treatment than Muslims and that can be realized from "my experiences." "I am sure that, no issue of communal enmity will arise when I describe these events because we have together suffered the hard ships loving each other." (8). Again he invites the attention of the readers by asserting that ,"the 1921 struggle shouldn't be designated as 'Mappila Rebellion or Malabar Rebellion'. It is better to be called as Khilafat Revolution. What happened here was not a rebellion, but an internal revolution (p.13).

Brahmadattan praises the scrupulous participation of the Mappila people of Eranad under Ali Musliyarin the rebellion. Ali Musliyar was a gentleman and a religious teacher with many disciples who were very much loyal to him. But they worked on religious emotions and lacked political consciousness. They didn't observe non violence, but preferred war against atrocities. They retaliated against police assaults and that ultimately turned to rebellion. He quotes the words of Babu Rajendraprasad on the struggle : " In 1921 relations between Hindus and Muslims had been cordial. During the bakrid celebrations of that year the Muslamans stopped cow slaughter of their own accord at many places. The co operation between hindus and Muslims in the Khilafat movement appeared to strengthen Hindu Muslim unity. Yet, there were some incidents which wounded this relations. The Khilafat movement was very strong in the Malabar district. Muslims form a large part of the population of Malabar. They are known as Mappilas. There also the Hindus joined the Khilafat as in other places. The fighters didn't learn the lesson of non violence as much as in other places. The agitation moved into violence (India Divided, p. 207).

Brahmadattan denies the notion that the rebellion occurred as a result of communalism or it originated due to the landlord- tenant issues. It was a combined reaction against the aggression of the rulers. At the same time it was done with the help of religion. The rebellion was not a mass attack without any plan, but it was a planned one and led by the Muslim sepoys who retired after the First World War (p.25).

Brhamadattan invites our attention to the rebellion at Thrissur on 16 February 1921. A conference was arranged at Thekkinkad Maidan to congratulate the Khilafat and Congress leaders, K. madhavan Nair, U. Gopala Menon, Yaqub Hassan and Moideen Koya who were arrested at Calicut. But the Christian loyalists of the area gathered there to prevent the meeting. However, the meeting took place after three days. The Christians took a procession in which they attacked a mosque and burnt few houses belonging to Muslims. The riot continued for few days attacking the Muslim shops and houses. Hindus also were not spared. The loyalists called their procession as Loyalty Procession and it was sponsored by the British authorities to suppress the Khilafat and Non Cooperation. By hearing the incidents at Thrissur the Mappilas from Eranad and Valluvanad area flocked to Thrissur in trains and by other means. At the end, both parties reached a compromise and thus saved the situation of a riot.

The training of the Khilafat volunteers at different parts of Malabar, increased anti -Birtish feeling among the Mappilas. They no more feared the police and the Government. On 25 March 1921 the first Khilafat Conference of Malabar was held at Ottappalam in which the Khilafat volunteer core assumed the title "Khilafat Army". Sri. Murta Gosh was the president of the session. This time Gandhiji declared, "Swarajya within one year". This had the desired effect both among the masses and leaders alike. The police took steps to prevent the Khilafat meetings. At Ponnani a conference was convened on 24 July 1921 under the Khilafat Committee. The Police with the support of loyal Mappilas convened another meeting supporting the British at the same place and at the same day. The success of the Ponnani conference gave further inspiration to the khilafatists. On 1 August 1921 a death anniversaryof Bala Gangadhara Tilak was held at at Puthanalukkal Kavu Bhagavati temple under Brahmadattan. In the meeting a number of Muslims also participated. He was the local Congress committee. The police now put an eye on Brahmadattan and began to trouble him.

He refers to the Khilafat conference at Tirurangadi under the chairmanship of Sri K.P Kesava Menon. Ali Musliyar and his lieutenants Lavakkutty and Kunhalavi nwere in the meeting. Police took stringent actions against the Khilafatists and the Congress fabricating false accusations and arresting and inflicting all kinds of brutalities. Meanwhile, a skirmish took place at Tanalur, near Tirur, on the issue of liquor prohibition. The quarrel was between the Tiyya community and the Mappilas. The Tiyya community always stood up with the British and their mouthpiece *Mitawadi* supported the government. To retaliate against the police brutalities, the Khilafat army decided to start armed struggles against the British. They began to collect arms and train the volunteers. M. P Narayana Menon and Kattilasseri Muhammad Musliyar who were the leaders of the congress now wrote to the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (K.P.C.C.) about the seriousness of the situation. They also approached Ali Musliyar, at Tirurangadi and requested him to continue the agitation in a peaceful manner.

Brahmadattan gives a clear picture, how the struggle was going on at Tirurangadi and how the Khilafat army retaliated the army and police. The fighters rushed to the police station and forcefully collected arms from the police. They destroyed all the records of the courts nearby. The reason for destroying the official files was to prevent utilizing them for evicting the tenants in the courts. When the landlords of Nilambur Kovilakam helped the British in the struggle, the rebels attacked the house (Kovilakam) and robbed rice and other belongings. When they found that the landlord and the family had escaped from the house they questioned the servants, but he didn't disclose the hiding place of the family. Then the furious Mappilas killed all who remained in the house. Brahmadattan adds: The attack on the Nilambur Kovilakam was the work of the Mappilas of Pookkotur, where the Kovilakam branch was under the Thirumulppadv(Thambran). The affairs of the brach was maintained by one Vadakke Veetil Muhammad. When Muhammad joined the Khilafat committee, Tirumulpad disliked it. He made intrigues against Muhammad, with his relatives who were supporters of the government. Tambran dismissed Muhammad from his job and filed a false suit against him, implicating him on attacking his house. On 1 August

1921, Inspector Mayangottu Narayana Menon summoned Muhammad to his office. Muhammad came with a band of about 2000 Mappilas. By smelling the danger, Mr. Menon took an appeasement policy towards Muhammad, who forced him to pledge in the name of Mambram Thangal, the spiritual leader of the area and the inspiration behind the rebellion, that he no more do any harm to the Khilafat volunteers (p.32)

This was the reason, why the Mappilas of Pookkootur went to attack the Nilambur Kovilakam. A section of the Mappilas were supporters of the Tirumulpad. They gave news to Kovilakam about the intention of the fighters. The landlord and his family, thereupon, escaped from the house and hided somewhere saving themselves from the murder. The rebels continued their attack and they robbed the treasury at Manjeri and attacked nearby police stations. Some miscreants exploited the opportunity and robbed the bank of Pullur and took away the mortgaged ornaments. But when Kunhahammad Haji, the Khilafat leader, knew this incidents he asked the miscreants to give back the ornaments and gave the owner compensation for his loss. Meanwhile a Hindu mortgager, complained to Haji of a Mappila who forcefully took back the land documents from him without paying back the loan he had taken. Haji ordered to cut the hands of the the Mappila man. The Mappila , fearing the consequence, gave back the documents to the mortgager. In order to prevent the theft and robbery Kunhahammad Haji convened a peace meeting in which he proclaimed protection to the landlord families from the hands of the Mappila robbers.

Towards Communalism

In the opinion of Brhmadattan , the struggle was turning to a communal one and the loyal Hindus and Muslims suffered at the hands of Khilafat fighters. The fighters thought that Hindus may support them, but mostly they stood with the British. So the struggle turned against the Hindu landlords and exacted money and belongings from them to support the Khilafat Raj. If the Jenmis desist, they were attacked and often killed in the encounter. When anarchy prevailed in the region the robbers took the opportunity and raided the houses of the land lords. The author says: In the beginning it was the landlords who suffered most. There were reasons for this. There were wide spread notion that landlords were infinitely rich. Though this was not wholly correct, they were comparatively rich than others. The reason is that their expenses were limited. Second reason was the cowardice of the landlords. The very sight of the rebels made them tremble with fear and act in a stupid manner. Thirdly, their extreme pain to leave their wealth. They will not give up their wealth even if they lost their life. They don't know other means to live, if they left out their wealth (p.52). Bramadattan praises Varian Kunnath Kunhahammad Haji that he is somewhat decent and wishes to rule without oppression (p.53). The rebels left the Kizhakke Kovilakam (House of the zamorins' family) due to their respect for that family that in early days they were friendly with Muslims. At the same time theMappila guards of the Kovilakam, went to other houses for robbery.

Brahmadattan says that the rebellion was not a necessary evil. The rebellion broke out and became widespread due to the inefficiency of the district authorities. The idiocy of the District Collector and DSP and the bad intentions of Inspector Narayana Menon and Superintendent Amu brought this calamity (p.54). The main reason that transformed Ali Musliyar's internal revolt into such a terrible and titanic rebellion was the defeat sustained by the Collector and his party in the clash which occurred on the 20 August at Tirurangadi (p.54). It was caused by the ill- planned adventure hastily organized by the district authorities who couldn't assess properly the serious developments of the day. The district authorities, disregarding the advice of the officer A.R Knapp, tried to enter the mosque, that infuriated the rebels. It was a splutter from the part of the Collector Thomas.

Congress Attitude

Though an active worker of the Congress, Mr. Brahmadattan criticizes the attitude of the Congress towards the rebellion. He says: One can boldly say that, if Mahatma Gandhi had taken an attitude towards Malabar rebellion as he had taken towards Chouri Choura and Amritasar, it would have stopped where it started (p.57). Both Chouri Chaura and Jallian Wallah Bagh incidents took place in non violent manner and Mahatma Gandhi ordered to stop them immediately. Unfortunately, this didn't happen in the case of Malabar rebellion. Congree took a step motherly attitude towards the rebellion. Both Khilafat and Non Cooperation movement worked jointly. Both were led by the Congress. It is an offensive negligence from the part of the Congress that, the party had wriggled out of the responsibilities (p.58). The failure of the Congress in preventing the violence and taking a lukewarm attitude in the beginning of the rebellion made the people dissatisfied with the Congress.

If the Non Cooperation movement had stopped when the rebellion started at Tirurangadi on 20 August it would have been an intelligent and suitable act.That would have minimized the police atrocities and the rebellion wouldn't have spread. On the contrary the conditions became more sensitive and serious consequences took place. Hindu Muslim Unity was the basis of Non Cooperation Movement. But it was shaken by the rebellion. Without analyzing the real cause of the rebellion, the journalists from North India wrote articles in Hindi and English new papers by depicting the rebellion as an assault of Muslims over the Hindus. For this they fabricated stories of massacre and forced conversions. This deepened Hindu Muslim divide in North India also. Hindu leaders from North India visited Malabar and one Arya Samajist leader Rishi Ram from Panjab , settled in Malabar spreading *Shuddi* Movement. This further infuriated the Mappilas who were already inimical towards the Hindus on account of their pro British policy. The negligence of the Congress made Malabar a fertile soil for the growth of the Muslim League.

Brahmadattan describes how Mr. KP.Kesava Menon, Abdu Rahman and Moidu Moulavi went to Tirurangadi, the head quarters of Ali Musliyar and asked him to surrender to the police to avoid further consequences. Kesava Menon also talked with Kunhalavi and Lavakkutty, the lieutenants of Ali Musliyar, but in vain. If they had agreed to the advice of Kesava Menon , there would be

no further rebellion. Abdu Rahman blames Ali Musliyar and he told it at the face of the Musliyar at Calicut. The British army from different places gathered at Tirurangadi. After a fierce encounter Ali Musliyar and 37 Mappilas surrendered. The Khilafat volunteers have to suffer a lot from the hands of police and army. The police unleashed human hunting and killed a number of innocent people. "Had the Indian national Congress moved a little finger against these cruel repressive measures, the government wouldn't have been emboldened to undertake such a brutal persecution. Had there not been so much persecution, the rebellion would haven't taken such huge proportions. This is one of the dark chapters in the history of Indian struggle for independence." (68). "Let those who eat the salt now drink the water" says the Malayalam proverb. This was the Congress attitude towards this episode. The Congress forgot the fact that those who ate the salt were not the only people to drink the water."(Ibid). The police repression including the "Wagon Tragedy" was considered by the Congress as a usual occurrence. At the same time they considered the police atrocities in the Punjab as a devilish event." (Ibid).

Brahmadattan Captured

Brahmadattan was a Congress worker. He says that he had never indulged in any unlawful act. But the police targeted every Congress man and arrested him imposing false charges. He narrates how the police conspired to capture him and send to jail. Indifferences and sectarianism among the landlords often led to acute skirmishes in those days. It was mostly in connection with the temples, those played an important role in the administration and revenue of the land. When rebellion came, the land lords supported the rebels and the police simultaneously and these often led to conspiracies and riots. Brahmadattan invites our attention to such conspiracies prevailed during the rebellion. Sub Inspector Moideen was keen to arrest the Congress and Khilafat leaders on false charges. He found Brahmadatan as the arch enemy of the British and pledged to arrest him. Moideen wanted to impose the guiltiness of the rebellion on the head of Brahmadattan to save his relatives who were active rebels. His only blame was that he was the president of Local Congress Committee. Brahmadattan was subjected to hardships in the jail.

The days of the rebellion gave a free hand to the police who did whatever they liked. There was none to question their persecution. They robbed Hindu and Mappila houses alike. They murdered or arrested any one at their will. They blamed the Mappilas and Congress men for whatever injustice they did. The persecution of the army was horrible. They mercilessly attacked the families of the Mappilas, molesting the women and murdering their children (p.117). Brahmadattan gives details of his persecutions in the jail and how the British authorities and their supporters were acting as tyrant and terrorists. He also brings to light, how the landlords were playing with their family feuds incriminating one against the other with the help of the police and courts. drhussaink@gmail.com

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