# The National Movement in Malabar: Beginning of the Gandhian Phase

S. M. MOHAMED KOYA

The Gandhian phase marks a decisive stage in the history of the movement all over India. This paper seeks to explore what Gandhiji's spell meant for Congress and Khilafat activity in Malabar, then a part of the former Madras Presidency.

Malabar was in the forefront of the national movement and the Indian National Congress had its adherents in Malabar from very early days. A District Congress Committee was formed in Malabar in 1908. From 1916 onwards political conferences were held in Malabar to bring the grievances of the people to the attention of the government.

The 1920's marked an important phase in the Indian national movement. The entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the mainstream of the movement and its leadership was the main development of this period. The period saw unprecedented scenes of Hindu-Muslim harmony. The Khilafat movement was one in which both Hindus and Muslims came together under one banner to fight the British. During the movement Gandhiji was sought after by Muslims to address their meetings and to be a member of the commission to represent their case to the Viceroy. Many Muslims were among his closest friends.

The decade 1920's saw the emergence of a band of nationalists in Kerala. Malabar was the scene of hectic activity of freedom fighters. The Non-Co-operation movement had been launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Responding to his call lawyers, students and government employees came out of their respective institutions. The boycott of educational institutions created a situation where students could not pursue their studies. This led to the establishment of national educational institutions.

Muhammad Abdurahiman was the representative of the new generation of political activists that emerged in Malabar. The example of Abdurahiman is one who plunged into the vortex of freedom struggle at a young age and took to himself the leadership of the movement. He stopped his studies as a student of B. A. Honours course in the Madras Presidency College at the instance of Gandhiji's call to boycott British institutions. He had attended as a student the Nagpur Congress session held in December 1920. It was this Congress that adopted the resolution on Non-Co-operation. Muhammad Abdurahman completed his studies at the Jamia Millia Islamia at Aligarh. Maulana Muhammad Ali deputed him to Kerala for participation in active politics.[1]

National leaders like Gandhiji, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Abul Kalam Azad visited Malabar to promote the cause of Khilafat. On 18 August, 1920 they addressed a meeting at Calicut. Gandhiji in his speech said that: "the imperial government had knowingly flouted the religious sentiment cherished by seventy million Mussalmans".[2] He called upon the lawyers to suspend their practice at the Bar and withdraw their children from the government-aided schools. At the meeting in the evening Shaukat Ali was presented with a purse containing Rs. 2500. The Saits (Bombay merchants) were the organisers of this reception. Gandhiji was able to convert several people to his ideology.[3]

The visit of Gandhiji and other leaders influenced Malabar considerably as far as the national movement was concerned. After the departure of the leaders Malabar saw the formation of Khilafat committees in various parts of the province. A committee was formed in Calicut with U. Gopala Menon, as its secretary. By 30th June 1921 about two hundred Khilafat committees were formed in places like Kondotti, Tanur, Tirurangadi, Pulikkal, Malappuram, Mampadam, Ponnani and Ottappalam. The Khilafat activists included both Hindus and Muslims. In all Khilafat meetings the resolution demanding that "the Indian Muslims will not rest and will not allow the enemies of Islam to rest" were read.[4]

The 1920's in Malabar represented a period of political activity which rose to a high pitch. Political conferences under the auspices of the Congress were held and people were attracted to Congress activities. The first all Kerala Political Conference was held at Ottappalam in 1921 which heralded the entry of many activists including Muhammad Abdurahiman. Moidu Moulavi, colleague of Abdurahiman, recalls that Kerala got the illustrious leadership of the 'Sahib' from this time onwards. Along with the Kerala State Congress Committee a Kerala State Khilafat Committee was also started functioning after the Ottappalam conference.[5]

The Ottappalam conference was a landmark in the history of Congress organisation in Kerala. At the venue of the conference various sessions like the Khilafat session, students' session, farmers' session were held. A Majlis e Ulama was organised and E. Moidu Moulavi was elected its general secretary. The main object of this body of religious scholars was to extend support to the freedom struggle. The presidents of the various sessions of the Ottappalam conference were Sri Prakasam, Syed Murtaza Sahib, Barrister George Joseph and K.P. Raman Menon. The conference was well attended and among them were a large number of Mappilas. Some policemen manhandled P. Ramunni Menon who became the editor of *Mathrubhumi* later and this created confusion in the conference pandal and some Mappilas attempted to take revenge upon the policemen.

The Ottappalam conference marked an important event in the history of Congress in Kerala. The common masses became politically conscious and there existed perfect communal amity among them. The period marked the expansion of Congress activity and constitution of Khilafat committees along with Congress branch committees. The Congress movement became more powerful. K. P. Kesava Menon who returned from Madras discontinuing legal practice there became the K.P.C.C. secretary. There was no president for the committee in those days. The Khilafat committee had Kattilasseri Muhammad Moulavi and Muhammad Abdurahiman as president and secretary respectively — Moidu Moulavi recalls.[6]

Ordinary Congress workers, including the illiterate Mappilas, were inspired by Congress ideals of non-violence exhorted by Mahatma Gandhi. The authorities wanted to disrupt this peaceful situation and create trouble by resorting to arrest the leaders. The British arrested leaders like Maulana Yakub Hasan, K. Madhavan Nair, U. Gopala Menon and Ponmadath Moideen Koya. The district authorities looked with suspicion upon the activities of Yakub Hasan in Malabar, who arrived at Calicut on 15 February 1921 as they were afraid of any sense of fraternity growing between the Hindus and the Muslims. They were anxious to prevent the doctrine of Non-Co-operation from spreading among the Mappilas. The authorities served prohibitory orders on Yakub Hasan and other leaders. On 16th February they were arrested. On 17th August Yakub Hasan and other leaders were set free. They were accorded an affectionate reception at a huge public meeting held at the Calicut beach. The meeting made the Congress-Khilafat bond stronger.[7]

Moidu Moulavi recalls his own arrest on 18th May 1921. The police arrested him on the charge of sedition. He was sentenced to two and a half years' rigorous imprisonment. This was the beginning of rebellion in Ernad and Walluvanad taluks of Malabar. The British used all their might to weaken the movement by dividing the Hindus and Muslims.[8]

The high enthusiasm seen among the masses and Congress workers during the period would amply show that they were inspired by Gandhiji's principles of non-violence inspite of the repressive policy adopted by the government. It was under heavy disabilities that the enthusiastic workers spread the new message among the masses.

Except for the Mappila Rebellion which shook British power for six months and paralysed the government machinery in the southern taluks of the district, communal relations presented a high degree of cordiality between the two communities. The violence that marked the rebellion also halted the nationalist activity. Presiding over the special Khilafat conference at Tellicherry in 1923 Dr. Syed Muhammad said that "the British had subotaged both openly and secretly the commendable amity and concord that had existed between the Muslims and Hindus of Malabar. The British made clear their merit by causing 90 rebellions in the course of 70 years of their rule."[9]

In the second provincial conference held at Palghat on 6th May 1923, Ali Brothers' aged mother addressed the conference and exhorted to foster Hindu-Muslim brotherly feelings. She said " .... If becoming free you should concentrate on Hindu-Muslim unity. All religions, people and races living in India should work unanimously, if not so, swaraj will not come".[10]

This paper on the ushering in of the Gandhian phase of the national movement has touched upon the single aspect of Hindu-Muslim relations represented by the Khilafat movement. Hindu-Muslim concord was a brilliant spark of light lit in the hearts of the masses but for the repressive policy of the British who sought to put off its flame.

## REFERENCES


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8 Moidu Moulavi, n. 6.

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