



## Kattilassery Muhammad Musliyar-Mappila Leaders series

Malabar region of south India has produced many luminaries in the freedom struggle of India. Kattilassery Muhammad Musliyar was one among them. Basically Muhammad Musliyarar, as the epithet indicates, was a religious scholar, but he came into prominence in Malabar as a freedom fighter and reformer. His family belonged to Kolathur near Perinthalmanna Taluk and later settled at Karinchappadi in the same Taluk. He was born in 1879 at Karinchappadi as the son of Ali Musliyar and Ayishumma Beevi. In the records he is known as Manakkad Vakkathodi Moulavi. Kattilassery is the place name where he had served as an Islamic scholar and preacher (Khateeb) of the mosque. He had his early studies at the feet of his own father Ali Musliyar who was a renowned scholar and sufi. Later he joined the Mosque academies of Thirurangadi, Ponnani and went to Vellore Baqiyat Salihat College for higher studies.

It was from Baqiyat College he took interest in National activities and decided to work for the freedom struggle. When he came back to his home town after completing the studies he joined in the freedom struggles along with his friend Mr. M. P Narayanan Menon . Both of them attended the first Malabar Political Conference held at Palakkad in April 1916. The conference was presided over by Madam Anni Besant, the leader of Home Rule League Movement. Subsequently, he participated in four more political conferences held at different places. The moulavi along with his friend Menon resolved to help the peasants of Malabar, particularly in their native place by spreading the ideas of Congress and Khilafat Movements. The grievances of the peasants lay in the persecutions of the landlords and their agents (Kanakkar). They exploited the peasants and evicted them from their lands without any specific reasons. The persecutions continued under the protection of the British raj. Mr. Narayanam Menon was a barrister and at the same time an agent of land lords. He appeared before the courts for the land lords in the eviction cases. However, he decided to save the tenants from the atrocities and entered into freedom struggle. The moulavi was his close ally in his activities and both of them spread the movement at various parts of Perinthalmanna. The organized strikes of the peasants against land lords and their cruel eviction had desired effect. The Malabar leaders of the Congress had started a Tenant Society (Kudiyam Samgam) to strengthen the movement among the tenants. The society worked among the peasants at different parts of Malabar and Mr. Moulavi and Mr. Narayana Menon toured in a bullock cart to organize the Kudiyam samgam in their region.

At Kodur near Malappuram, the tenants organized a strike against the land lord Kutty Malu Amma and his agent Pocker who approached Mr. Madhavan Nair, a lawyer and Congress leader to make a compromise with the tenants to avoid further issues. But Kattilassery Moulavi and Menon objected against any kind of compromise in favour of the land lord. The tenants mostly belonged to Muslim community and it is said that Mr. Pocker in order to get support to his land lord approached some ulama and collected a fatwa (religious edict) in support of the land lord. Thereupon Mr Moulavi challenged the fatwa and issued a counter fatwa denouncing the misinterpretation of *sharia* for the land lords. At Kuruva near Kottakkal, Nemath Mussad the land lord of the area took the support of the Muslim *ulama* to avoid a struggle against him. By hearing this Moulavi and Menon rushed to the place and through his fiery speech he countered the false verdicts of the local mullahs. Moulavi was an excellent orator and people flocked to his religious as well as political sermons. He was well versed in Arabic, Malayalam and Urdu and had a scant knowledge of English also. By 1920 the Kudiyan Samgam became a popular Movement in Malabar.

In the Samoothiri estate under Kottakkal western Kovilakam, witnessed a strike by the tenants due to the atrocities committed by its manager up on them. The kudiyan samgam unit of the estate decided to stop all the works when the manager assaulted a Muslim and Cheruman low caste tenant. The aggrieved tenants approached Maulavi and Menon. A siege was organized in the estate and all the tenants stopped their work. It was the time of harvesting of paddy. The manager feared that the whole cultivation will perish if the harvest had not taken place in time. He came for a compromise and KV. Gopala Menon, the secretary of the Kudiyan society approached Moulavi and Menon and a settlement was effected. The land lord has to surrender to the demands of the tenants. A jubilation meeting of the samgam was held at Angadippuram, Perinthalmanna.

When the British Government imposed the Rowlatt Act of 1919 to crush the risings of Indians for freedom, the congress and the national leaders came against it by observing hartals and organizing processions. A large meeting was held at Jallian Walla Bagh in Panjab in which the army fired against the innocent mob who had flocked to hear the speech of their leaders. A number of people were killed in the incident. It was at the same time the Muslims of India raised their voice against the treacherous attitude of the British government towards the Khalifa of Turkey. They started the Khilafat Movement against the British under Moulana Muhammad Ali and Shoukat Ali. Simultaneously Indian National Congress started a Non Cooperation Movement against the British. Both the Non Cooperation Movement and Khilafat movements joined together under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and this had a miraculous effect up on the masses that both Hindus and Muslims joined together against their common enemy.

It was in this back ground the fifth Malabar Political Conference was held at Manjeri in 28&29 April 1920 under Kasthuri Rangayyar, the editor of the Hindu. In the meeting there arose differences of opinion between Annie Besant, the leader of Home Rule League Movement and Malabar Congress leaders, Madhavan Nair and KP.Kesava Menon. Annie Besant stood for Cooperation with the British and the latter opposed the move. The majority was not favouring Annie and insisted on the continuation of the agitation against the Government. The conference also supported wholeheartedly the khilafat Movement. Again another dispute arose regarding the Tenancy bill. A group of land lords in the Congress argued that some amendments should be made in the bill. Kattilassery and Narayana Menon stood against such a move and the bill was passed. Another resolution was passed against untouchability. After this conference the landlords and rajas gradually left the congress and the party became strong with popular support extending the membership to the common people. The congress party spread its wings to the villages and the peasants became an integral part of the party. Besides, students and lawyers also joined. Kattilassery and Narayana Menon had played a major role in making the party popular among the common folk.

Kattilassery and Menon became very active in the Khilafat movement. When Mahatma Gandhi visited Malabar along with Moulana Shoukat Ali, both of them were at Calicut to receive the leaders on 18 August 1920. On 30 January 1921 the Congress activists convened a meeting at Calicut and Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee was formed. U. Gopala Menon and Madhavan Nair were the first congress secretaries. The meeting decided to strengthen the Khilafat Movement by organizing Khilafat committees at different parts of Malabar. Later the Malabar Khilafat Committee was formed. Kattilassery Muhammed Moulavi was the president and Muhammad Abdu Rahman the secretary. An office was opened at Palayam at Calicut. The Tenancy Movement organized by Kattilassery and Menon later became the back bone of Khilafat Movement. The peasant class of the Muslims joined the khilafat and it raised a strong protest against the British rule. However, the British with the help of some loyalist Muslim leaders and scholars brought a religious sanction against the movement by insisting that Muslims had no right to support such a movement. Despite the conspiracies of the loyalists, Kattilassery and Narayana Menon, acted together to give fervor to the movement and they toured all over the south Malabar spreading the Khilafat message. Large number of people gathered to listen the fiery speeches of Kattilassery who stressed the need of unity of Hindus and Muslims for the cause of freedom. Narayana Menon was there along with Moulavi wearing a khilafat dress – a Turkish cap and *Kaili mundu*. Moulavi wore a slack white shirt and covered his head with a white cloth. He continued his speech for hours and the people from different parts flocked to hear him. The presence of Moulavi was inevitable in the Congress – khilafat and Tenancy meetings. Government issued Martial Law by banning all the meetings and gatherings. Notice was issued to arrest the leaders – M. P Narayana Menon, K.M Moulavi, Kattilassery, Moidu Moulavi, Ali Musliyar, Variyam Kunnath Kunhahammad Haji and K. Madhava Menon. These actions from the part of the government added fuel to the fire. More people joined the movements and secret activities continued, though the prime leaders were arrested. In the letter sent by Thomas, the Collector, he requested the Governor of Madras to arrest Kattilassery along with the other 22 persons. Kattilassery was the tenth of the list.

The Moulavi never respected the British authorities who always kept a grudge against him. Once, while Moulavi was sitting in the Khilafat office at Calicut, the Collector Thomas and Police Superintendent Hitchcock came over there. Moulavi paid no heed to them and when questioned Moulavi replied that he is not bound to pay any respect, since they had come to the office without permission or prior notice. Another time when Mr. Thoams came at Chalappuram Congress office, Moulavi preferred the same attitude and remained in his seat. When asked by Thomas why he is there in the office, moulavi replied that he used to stay there. 'Staying with Hindus!' asked the collector. Moulavi simply stated: "So what?"

During Ottappalam conference of the Congress in April, 1921, Moulavi was an active member there. A meeting of the Khilafat committee was also held in the same pandal where the Moulavi delivered the key note address. His presence was also there at the meeting of Indian Majlis al Ulama held at Erode in Tamil Nadu on 2 & 3 of April 1921. He contacted with Ali brothers, Moulana Abdu Bari and Moulana Abul Kalam Azad and subsequently Kerala Majlis al Ulama was organized. When the khilafat agitation was started at Tirurangadi, Kattilassery was at Ottaplam, near Palakkad. Moulavi strongly believed in the non violence of Mahatma Gandhi and didn't support violent methods to get the demands accepted. He issued a statement criticizing the method adopted by Ali Musliyar and also tried to prevent the rebellion spreading to Valluvanad. He also faced criticism from a section of the khilafatists for his anti violence attitude and some of the ulama came with a verdict against him. He along with Pangil Ahmad Kutty Musliyar and Village officer Venkitta Moideen Kutty Haji protected the Mussad Jenmi family of Kolathur from the khilafat agitators.

After issuing the arrest warrant, Moulavi decided to escape from Malabar without a surrender. Many a time the police was about to reach him but he narrowly escaped. Once, while he was sitting at the shop of of Ramunni Menon at

Ottappalam, the police appeared there to arrest him, but he ran out of the place and escaped. The police and army surrounded his house when he was out of place and tried to put fire to the house, but due to the interference of local Hindus they left out of the place. He reached Madras where he joined Jamaliyya College as a teacher. Mr. Amu Sahib, the Police Superintendent got the news and he proceeded to Madras. When Amu reached the college Moulavi escaped from the college wearing a burqa and in a car reached Karaikkal which was a French territory.

The people of Karaikkal, received Kattilassery with respect and he was given all the facilities. Moulavi started a Marasa here and spread education among the natives. He decided to settle at Karaikkal, but Muhammed Abdu Rahman and others asked him to return to Malabar. Few years he stayed at Mahi, another French territory near Malabar. In 1933 when the cases against Malabar rebels were withdrawn, Kattilassery came to his home town and continued national activities. Kattilassery was a reformist and started Othupallis and schools at different parts. The Punarppa UP school, formerly known as Makhtabat al Sumiyya was established by him. Another school was started at Pulamanthole with the name Ma'danul Uloom.

In 1937 he was elected to Malabar District Board and won the seat. He became the Vice President of the Board. He brought many measures to improve education among the Mappila Muslims, as they were very faraway in education from the Hindu upper class. Kattilassery submitted a memorandum to Rajagopalachari, the congress leader of Madras to include Muhammad Abdu Rahman in his cabinet, but the attempt failed due to factionalism in the Congress. He supported the establishment of Malappuram Government High School.

Kattilassery worked hard to enlighten the community with new education and he supported the activities of the Alkya Sangham in its early phase. Later when the Sangam maintained its loyalty towards British rule, he along with Abdu Rahman left the sangam and criticized its attitude. Under his leadership a conference of Kerala Jamiyyatul Ulema was held at Punarppa near Malappuram on 22 & 23 February 1936. At the same time he had no grudges with traditional ulama and following his father Ali Musliyar, he became the chief Qazi of the mosques at Karinjappadi, Mannumkulam, Pulamanthol, Kattuppara and Puthanangadi. He was always at fight with the Muslim landlords for their loyalty towards British rule and monopoly over community affairs. But as the brave son of Ali Musliyar he was respected and obeyed by the common people.

Kattilassery was a poet and wrote many Mappila songs, most of which were taken by heart and sung by common people. He left the world on 22 August 1943 leaving ten children.