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The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar

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In any society the dominant groups are the ones with the most to hide about the way society works. Very often therefore truthful analyses are bound to have a critical ring, to seem like exposures rather than objective statements, . . . For all students of human society, sympathy with the victims of historical processes and skepticism about the victors' claims provide essential safeguards against being taken in by the dominant mythology. A scholar who tries to be objective needs these feelings as part of his ordinary working equipment.

*Barrington Moore*¹

IN 1969, in response to the demands of the Muslim League in Kerala and as a reward for its political support, the United Front ministry of E.M.S. Namboodiripad redrew the boundaries of Kozhikode and Palghat districts so as to carve out the new, predominantly Muslim district of Malappuram. Denounced by its opponents as 'the illegitimate child of the old Two Nation theory,' Malappuram—'Moplastan' to its critics—combined within a single district those taluks which forty-eight years before, in 1921, had been the scene of the Mappilla rebellion.²

An earlier preliminary version of this paper was presented at a symposium at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University in November 1973, and has been included in the collection edited by Robert I. Crane, *Aspects of Political Mobilization in South Asia* (Syracuse: Maxwell School, Syracuse University, 1976). Research for this paper was conducted in the India Office Library, London; the Tamil Nadu Archives, Madras; the Kozhikode Records Office, Calicut; and the Jawaharlal Nehru Museum, New Delhi. For their assistance in tracking down materials on the rebellion, I wish to thank Professor T. K. Ravindran, the University of Kerala; Dr. C. K. Kareem, Registrar of the University of Cochin; and C. H. Mohammed Koya of Calicut.

¹ *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 523.

² See *Memorandum Submitted to the Chief Minister of Kerala* (Perintalmanna: Anti-District Bifurcation Committee, 1968). For a discussion of Muslim politics in the post-independence period, with special note of Kerala, see Theodore P. Wright, Jr., 'The Effectiveness of Muslim Representation in India,' in Donald E. Smith (ed.), *South Asian Religion and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 102-37. For a general account of the community, see Rolland E. Miller, *Mappilla Muslims of Kerala*, Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, forthcoming.

The Mappillas

In August 1921, rebellion broke out among the Mappillas in the Malabar district of Madras Presidency. Extending over some two thousand square miles, two-fifths the area of the district, the rebellion, the culmination of a long series of Mappilla 'outrages,' was carried on for six months by peasant bands in what was described by British authorities as open war against the King.

The Mappillas, the Muslims of Malabar, traditionally trace their origins to the ninth century, when Arab traders brought Islam to the west coast of India.³ By 1921, the Mappillas (or Moplahs) constituted the largest—and the fastest growing—community in Malabar. With a population of one million, 32 percent of that of Malabar as a whole, the Mappillas were concentrated in South Malabar. In Ernad taluk, the center of the rebellion, they formed nearly 60 percent of the population.

The community has been characterized as consisting 'of pure Arab settlers, of the descendants of Arab traders and women of the country, and of converts to Muhammadanism mainly from the lower Hindu castes.'⁴ The pattern of Arab settlement and of the conversions, however, fundamentally affected the character of the community. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Portuguese and Arab chronicles provide the first detailed descriptions of the Malabar coast, the Mappillas were a mercantile community concentrated along the coast in urban centers and dominating intercoastal and overseas trade. Segregated from the Hindu population in separate settlements, the Mappillas had considerable autonomy, and under the patronage of the Zamorin of Calicut, they enjoyed prestige as well as economic power. 'Hindu-Muslim relations... appear to have been characterized by limited contact and self-interested toleration.'⁵

From the sixteenth century, while Mappillas remained urban merchants, the greater portion of the community—'through the interrelated processes of immigration, intermarriage and conversion'—increasingly came to be agricultural tenants, low in status and

³ For accounts of the origins of the community and the meaning of the word *Mappilla*, see Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. IV (Madras: Government of Madras Press, 1909), pp. 456–61; and C. A. Innes, *Madras District Gazetteers: Malabar and Anjengo* (Madras: Government Press, 1915), pp. 189–90.

⁴ Innes, *Malabar*, p. 26.

⁵ Stephen Dale, 'Islam and Social Conflict: The Mappillas of Malabar 1498–1922,' unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1972, p. 2.

desperately poor.⁶ With the rise of Portuguese power in challenge to Mappilla commercial interests, many Mappillas moved inland in search of new economic opportunities. As they moved into the interior of Malabar, they brought the fervor of Islam, heightened in the intensity of conflict with the Portuguese.

Early converts to Islam appear to have included many from among the propertied classes of the high castes, for along the coast and in North Malabar, where they first settled, the Mappillas are characterized predominantly by the *marumakkathayam* law of inheritance—the

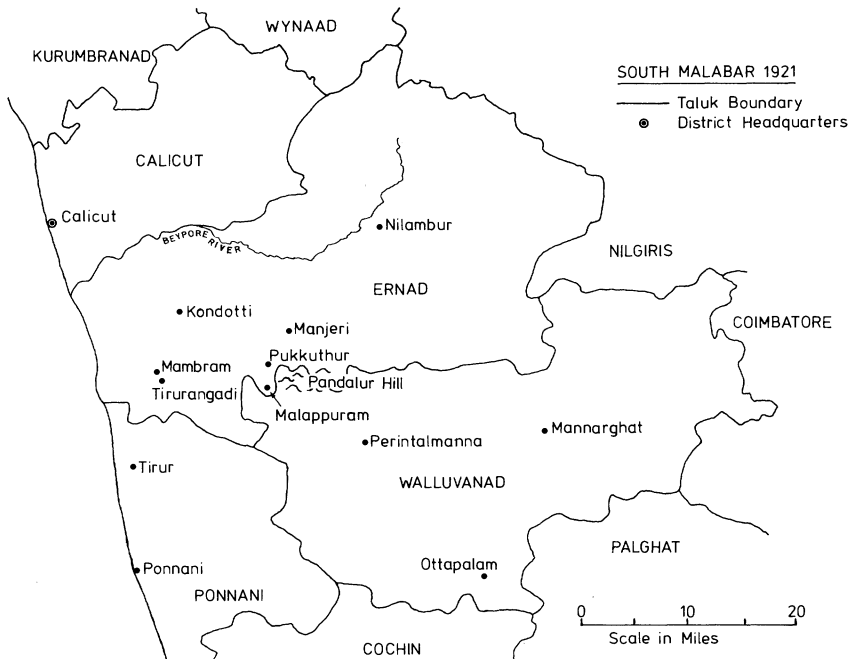
TABLE I
Mappilla Population

Region and Taluk	Population	% of total population
South Kanara	130,562	10.5
North Malabar		
Chirakkal	86,207	24.9
Kottayam	54,790	23.6
Kurumbranad	95,939	26.9
Wynaad	12,833	15.1
South Malabar		
Calicut	86,952	29.9
Ernad	236,873	59.1
Ponnani	228,522	42.9
Walluvanad	131,487	33.3
Palghat	18,060	4.2
Malabar: Total Mappilla population	1,004,327	32.4

Source: *Census of India, 1921*, Vol. XIII, *Madras*, Pt I, *Report*, Madras: Government Press, 1922, p. 160; Pt II, Tables, pp. 121, 341, and 350.

matrilineal pattern traditional to the high castes of Malayali society. Though in violation of Muslim law, this traditional system of joint ownership and inheritance through the female line served to retain property within the family unit. In sharp contrast to the general prosperity enjoyed by the Mappillas of the North, the Mappillas of South Malabar were principally converted from the lower Tiyya, Cheruman, and Mukkuvan castes, for whom 'the honor of Islam' brought freedom from the disabilities of ritual pollution. Governed by the *makkathayam* law of inheritance, these converts were by their own tradition in

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Also see pp. 54–82.



conformity with Muslim law, but the division of what little property they had among all heirs served to perpetuate their poverty.⁷

It was in these inland areas of the South, in Ernad and Walluvanad taluks, and among the poorest sections of the population that the Mappilla community expanded most rapidly. R. H. Hitchcock, in his secret history of the Mappilla rebellion, described the Mappillas of South Malabar as having become

entirely separate from those of the rest of Malabar. . . . The low state of their intelligence, the subservience in which they had hitherto lived, and the absence of any men of learning to instruct them in their new religion, even were they capable of understanding, all tended to provide a race which would prove an easy prey to fanaticism and lawlessness.⁸

⁷ See Hamid Ali, *Custom and Law in Anglo-Muslim Jurisprudence* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1938). F. Fawcett noted the distinction in inheritance and wrote that in contrast to the Mappillas of North Malabar, those of the South are wretchedly poor and 'divide up their property in such a way that prosperity is impossible.' 'The Moplas of Malabar,' *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Third Series, Vol. IV (October 1897), p. 295. For a detailed discussion of the matrilineal system, see Kathleen Gough, 'Mappilla: North Kerala,' in David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough (eds), *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 415-42.

⁸ R. H. Hitchcock, *A History of the Malabar Rebellion, 1921* (Confidential) (Madras: Government Press, 1925), p. 9.

Stephen Dale, in his examination of Islam and social conflict in Malabar, writes that in these areas, the relationship between Hindu and Mappilla was one of continuous conflict.

For whereas the lower Hindu castes were part of a hierarchy in which an oppressive Nambudri landlord was also a social and religious superior, the Mappillas as Muslims would identify the same Nambudri as an unbeliever and could invoke Islamic tenets to justify a challenge to his authority.⁹

During the successive invasions by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in the late eighteenth century, Malabar was thrown into social turmoil.

The Haidar's invasion, or more precisely his and Tipu's sporadic persecution of the Nambudris and Nairs weakened the political and social position of these castes. The Mappillas were then free from previous restraints, and their actions made explicit the profound antagonisms which prevailed between the Mappillas and the dominant Hindu castes in rural Malayali society.¹⁰

Many Hindus fled in fear of death or forced conversion before the advancing army and the even more terrifying bands of marauding Mappillas who in the areas of Ernad and Walluvanad had become a law unto themselves. The defeat of Tipu and the subsequent British land settlement policies in Malabar, leading to the restoration of the social and economic position of the dominant castes, severely affected the position of the Mappillas in South Malabar.¹¹

Reduced to insecure tenancy, vulnerable to rack renting and eviction at the hands of Hindu landlords (*janmi*) sustained by British courts, the Mappillas responded in a series of outbreaks, which Dale has described as 'social protests conducted as religious acts. Each one was a *jihad* in a social context.'¹² Three hundred years of commercial conflict with the Portuguese, and later the British, had been conducted in these terms, and it had 'bequeathed to the entire Mappilla community a heritage of religious militancy...'¹³ 'The ideology of *jihad* had become an heroic ideal, leaving the Mappillas with a belief in the virtues and rewards of martyrdom and a disposition to justify and sanctify disputes with non-Muslims in terms of *jihad*.'¹⁴

During the course of the nineteenth-century outbreaks, the number

⁹ Dale, 'Islam and Social Conflict,' p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-109; Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, pp. 5-7.

¹² Dale, 'Islam and Social Conflict', p. 109. See also Stephen F. Dale, 'The Mappilla Outbreaks: Ideology and Social Conflict in Nineteenth Century Kerala,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXXV (November 1975), pp. 85-97.

¹³ Dale, 'Islam and Social Conflict,' p. 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52. For a discussion of the ideology of *jihad*, see *ibid.*, pp. 27-52.

of conversions to Islam heightened dramatically, particularly after the liberation of the Cheruman serfs. In converting to Islam, those of low caste were not only freed from the traditional social disabilities of the outcaste, but they joined a community of resistance wherein their protest against *janmi* tyranny was supported by their fellow Muslims.¹⁵

The term *outrage* was used by the British to refer to those outbreaks of Mappilla violence in which the attack—usually against a Nambuduri or Nair landlord; sometimes against a European official or a convert who had slipped back into the Hindu fold and thus threatened community solidarity—was followed climactically by the religious suicide of all involved, in the secure knowledge that by their martyrdom they would attain the *houri* bliss of Paradise. The incidents in which the Mappillas “sought actively their own death,” 29 in number between 1836 and 1919, were normally suppressed in a few days and involved in each case a relatively small number of people.¹⁶ Only in eight of the outbreaks did more than ten Mappillas become martyrs (or *sahids*). Moreover, ‘with rare exceptions these outbreaks...always blazed out within a radius of some fifteen miles from Pandalur hills in the Ernad taluk, the so-called “fanatical zone.” The Arab strain, strong on the coast, is here very faint,’ C. A. Innes wrote in the *Malabar Gazetteer*, in a characterization of Mappilla violence which was widely quoted during the rebellion,

and the followers of ‘the way’ are for the most part proselytes drawn from the dregs of the Hindu population. They are miserably poor and hopelessly ignorant, and their untutored minds are peculiarly susceptible to the inflammatory preaching of the church militant and to alluring contrasts drawn between their miserable state here on earth and the wondrous joys of Paradise. The Mappilla, brooding, it may be, over some fancied slight to his ‘pearl-like’ faith or over the tyranny of some Hindu landlord till it assumes

¹⁵ *The Census of India*, 1871, notes that the Cherumars ‘have to a large extent, embraced Mohamedanism, and in so doing have raised themselves and their successors in the social scale. The tyranny of caste no longer affects the Mussulman convert, and under these circumstances it is no cause for surprise that the Mussulman population on the Western Coast should be fast increasing.’ *Madras* (by W. R. Cornish), Vol. I (Madras: Government Press, 1874), p. 71. Subsequent census reports recorded the continued Mappilla increases and actual declines in the numbers of Cherumars reported. Between 1871 and 1881, the Mappilla population of Malabar increased by 12.3 per cent, compared to only 3.4 per cent for non-Mappillas. *Census of India*, 1881, *Madras* (by Lewis McIvery), Vol. I, *Report* (Madras: Government Press, 1883), pp. 39–40. Between 1881 and 1891, Mappillas increased by 18 per cent, in comparison to a 10 per cent increase for Hindus. *Census of India*, 1891, *Madras* (by H. A. Stuart), Pt I, *Report* (Madras: Government Press, 1893), p. 67.

¹⁶ See Conrad Wood, ‘Historical Background of the Moplah Rebellion: Outbreaks, 1836–1919,’ *Social Scientist*, III (August 1974), pp. 5–33.

in his mind the proportion of a gigantic wrong that can be washed out only in blood, determines to win eternal bliss by a martyr's death. Others join him, and the murder of a landlord or his agent or of an apostate sets the seal on their resolve. The *Sahids*, or saints predestinate, prepare for death. They set their houses in order, divorce their wives, and clad in the white robes of martyrs go out to die fighting against the unbeliever. Their contempt for death and frenzied bravery almost pass belief. . . . Few have ever been captured alive, . . .¹⁷

In 1852, a special commission, headed by T. L. Strange, was appointed to investigate the causes of the outbreaks. Strange rejected the view that the disturbances had their origin in agrarian discontent or poverty. Their cause, rather, was to be found in religious fanaticism stirred by the teachings of ambitious priests, the most infamous of whom, the Mambram Tangal of Tirurangadi, had been forced by the District Collector to leave Malabar following the outrage of 1852.¹⁸ Strange recommended a repressive policy, enacted into law in the Moplah Outrages Acts, XXIII and XXIV of 1854. The first empowered authorities to impose heavy fines on the Mappilla populations in localities where outrages occur; to confiscate the property of those found guilty of outrages; and to deport persons suspected of complicity. The second act declared possession of the Mappilla 'war knife' illegal. To enforce these measures, a special force of police was raised in Ernad.¹⁹

In response to an anonymous petition identifying eviction as the cause of Mappilla violence, William Logan, the District Collector, was appointed in 1881 as Special Commissioner to inquire into land tenures and tenant rights in Malabar. Logan believed the problem to be rooted fundamentally in the early British misunderstanding of the traditional relationship of the *janmi* to the land. Rather than seeing the *janmi* as one of several agricultural classes with rights to the land and its produce, British officials viewed him as rather like an English landlord, and he was, accordingly, protected with the force of law. Logan saw the outrages as the Mappillas' attempt to counteract

the overwhelming influence, when backed by the British courts, of the *janmis* in the exercise of the novel powers of ouster and of rent raising conferred upon them. A *janmi* who through the courts, evicted, whether fraud-

¹⁷ Innes, *Malabar*, pp. 82-3. The gazetteer was actually written in 1904-05, although not published until 1915.

¹⁸ Two years later, the Collector, H. V. Conolly was sitting on his verandah in the evening when he was attacked by a Mappilla gang and hacked to death in the presence of his wife.

¹⁹ William Logan, *The Malabar Manual*, 1887, reprinted as *Malabar*, Vol. I (Madras: Government Press, 1951), pp. 570-1.

ently or otherwise, a substantial tenant, was deemed to have merited death, and it was considered a religious virtue, not a fault, to have killed such a man, and to have afterwards died in arms fighting against an infidel Government which sanctioned such injustice.²⁰

In his judgment, Logan concurred with the view of the former Collector, MacGregor, who had declared himself 'perfectly satisfied' that the essential nature of the Mappilla outrages was agrarian. 'Fanaticism is merely the instrument through which the terrorism of the landed classes is aimed at.'²¹

Logan's proposals for fundamental changes in the system of land tenure in Malabar were duly considered by two commissions. In the end, the Government of Madras was neither persuaded by his theoretical arguments nor moved to provide security of tenure for those who tilled the soil.²²

Logan's views had some impact on subsequent perspective. Fawcett, writing in 1897, described the land tenure system of South Malabar as 'such as if arranged specially for the purpose of making people discontented.'²³ In the Class Handbook for the Indian Army on the Mappillas, P. Holland-Pryor described the outbreaks as originating 'in mixed motives, mostly agrarian and partly fanatical.'²⁴ Innes, however, writing at the same time, just after the turn of the century, attributed the outbreaks to 'three main causes, poverty, agrarian discontent, and fanaticism, of which the last is probably the chief.' According to Innes,

The repressive policy initiated in 1854, has had a salutary effect. The fining of whole villages has brought home to the community a sense of its responsibility for its unruly members, . . . the most enlightened Mappillas have been enlisted on the side of law and order; and the Pukkoya Tangal . . . has issued a pamphlet sternly denouncing outbreaks as opposed to true religion. The fanatical zone has been opened up by good roads; and during the Ramazan fast, when religious enthusiasm is easily roused, the Special Police Force is distributed over the zone, and signallers keep the various detachments in touch with one another and with the troop at Malappuram. The complete immunity of Malabar from Mappilla disturbances in the last few years is perhaps the result of these precautions.²⁵

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 584. See Dale's discussion for a critique of Logan's argument, which he regards as being 'as one-sided as Strange's earlier effort.' 'Islam and Social Conflict,' pp. 156-60.

²¹ Quoted in Logan, *Malabar Manual*, p. 581.

²² See T. C. Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1970), pp. 51-63.

²³ Fawcett, 'The Moplas of Malabar,' p. 296.

²⁴ *Mappillas or Moplahs, Class Handbook for the Indian Army* (Calcutta: 1904).

²⁵ Innes, *Malabar*, p. 89.

Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat Movement

The Nationalist movement came relatively late to 'sleeping Malabar.' While a District Congress Committee had been formed in 1908, it was not until 1916, with the founding of the All India Home Rule League, that Malabar began to awaken politically.²⁶ Dominated largely by Tamil Brahmin and landed Nair interests, the first Malabar District Conference was held under the presidency of Annie Besant. Four hundred and fifty-five delegates attended.²⁷ Opening with an oath of loyalty to the King and support for the war, the Conference resolved 'to start and carry throughout the District the propagandist and educative work to create public opinion in order to attain a system of Self-Government in India.'²⁸

The annual conference retained the character of a polite debating society until the fifth District Conference, held at Manjeri in Ernad taluk in 1920, when the District Congress Committee was reorganized as the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee. The conflict then being played out in the Congress at the national level between the moderates and the extremists emerged at the Manjeri conference. In overwhelming support for an extremist resolution, the Conference opposed the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and called for immediate and full self-government. Mrs Besant vehemently opposed the resolution and led the moderates in a walkout, leaving the Conference—and the Kerala Congress—in the hands of the extremist leadership. With the landlord interests removed, the District Conference now, for the first time, passed a resolution demanding tenancy reforms.

Despite the various investigative commissions in the late nineteenth century, Malabar continued to suffer under an oppressive system of land tenure and subinfeudation. As late as 1900, South Malabar—where the situation was most serious—had been characterized by a government settlement officer as having 'earned the unenviable reputation of being the most rack-rented country on the face of this earth.'²⁹ The demands for tenancy reform came principally from the class of

²⁶ K. P. Kesava Menon served as secretary of both the Malabar District Congress Committee and the Malabar branch of the Home Rule League. See A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala District Gazetteers: Kozhikode* (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1962), p. 175.

²⁷ *Report of the First Malabar District Conference*, Palghat, May 8–9, 1916 (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1917), pp. 16–17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

²⁹ M. Moberly, *Report of the Settlement of Malabar District* (Madras: Government Press, 1900), p. 9, quoted in Varghese, *Agrarian Change*, p. 81.

kanamdars, substantial tenants who were largely intermediaries between the *janmi* landlords and the vulnerable *verumpattomdars*, tenants-at-will. The *janmies* were mostly Nambudiri Brahmins; the *kanamdars* were disproportionately Nairs; and the *verumpattomdars* were overwhelmingly drawn from the Mappilla community and from the Tiyyas, Cherumars, and other depressed Hindu classes. The Nair *kanamdars*, prosperous and articulate in defense of their interests, had long been active before government commissions and in the Madras legislative assembly in efforts to secure more favorable tenancy rights for themselves. In 1916, they organized the Malabar Tenants' Association, but it was not until 1920, in linking the tenancy issue with the broader demands of the Congress-Khilafat struggle for Swaraj, that the tenancy movement gained momentum.

Although the 1920 District Conference was held in the heavily Mappilla town of Manjeri and was attended by a number of Muslim delegates—mostly from North Malabar—little impact was felt within the Mappilla community. The Congress was still a predominantly Hindu organization, dominated largely by Nair *vakils* (attorneys) from the *kanamdar* class. In 1920, however, the character of the Congress was transformed fundamentally in Gandhi's rise to power and in the link forged between Non-cooperation and the Khilafat movement. The Khilafat movement sought to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Sultan as the Caliph, successor to the Prophet Muhammad and spiritual leader of the Islamic world. The movement, beginning in 1919, protested against British support for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate.³⁰ The Indian movement was led by the Ali brothers, Shaukat and Muhammad, and they soon found in Gandhi a ready ally and champion for their cause. Gandhi sought to weld Hindu-Muslim unity in combining the anti-British issue of the Caliphate with the movement for Swaraj through non-violent non-cooperation.

Non-cooperation was formally begun on August 1, 1920, and on the 18th of that month, Gandhi and Shaukat Ali visited Calicut to bring the message of non-cooperation and the Khilafat to the people of Malabar. In his speech before a crowd of 20,000, Gandhi proclaimed that 'the Imperial Government have knowingly flouted religious sentiments dearly cherished by the 70 millions Mussalmans. . . If the Mussalmans of India offer non-cooperation to Government in order to

³⁰ See Gail Minault (Graham), 'The Khilafat Movement: A Study of Indian Muslim Leadership, 1919-1924,' unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1972.

secure justice on the Khilafat, it is the duty of every Hindu to cooperate with their Moslem brethren.'³¹ In a confidential report on the response to Gandhi's visit, Malabar authorities advised the Government of Madras that there was little sympathy with the non-cooperation movement, except on the part of a few 'fanatical Mappilla youths,' led by P. Moideen Koya, and 'briefless vakils,' such as K. Madhavan Nair (secretary of the K.P.C.C.), U. Gopala Menon, and P. Achuthan.³²

A Khilafat Committee, consisting of both Muslims and Hindus, had been formed in Malabar in June. Committees were now organized throughout the district, although many soon collapsed for lack of finance and effective leadership. After the Nagpur Congress in December 1920, securing Gandhi's leadership and the commitment to non-cooperation and the Khilafat cause, the Malabar Khilafat Committee became increasingly active. In January 1921, at a meeting in Calicut presided over by the Mahadum Tangal of Ponnani, the highest religious authority among the Mappillas, and attended by three to four thousand people, the Committee pledged support for the Nagpur resolution of non-cooperation. A number of Mappillas resigned official posts, stepped down from the bar, and dropped British titles, and pressure was exerted on others to do likewise. The courts and government schools were widely boycotted, and at Cannanore a National High School was opened under the auspices of the local Khilafat Committee.³³

In reporting on the impact of the Nagpur Congress within Malabar, however, the District Collector, E. F. Thomas, wrote that 'the non-cooperation movement hasn't caught on in Ernad where the Mappilla is much more interested in the tenants movement, and the agitators can't get a hearing unless they make tenancy questions the big cry.'³⁴

Early in 1921, a tenants' conference resolved to begin non-coopera-

³¹ Quoted in G. Gopalan Nair, *The Moplah Rebellion, 1921* (Calicut: 1923), pp. 19–22. Nair was the retired Deputy Collector of Malabar.

³² Confidential Report, File No. 307, Tamil Nadu Archives, cited in P. K. K. Menon, *The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Vol. II (1885–1933) (Trivandrum: Government of Kerala Press, 1972), p. 84.

³³ *Madras Mail*, January 17 and 28, February 3, and March 14, 1921.

³⁴ Collector's Fortnightly Report, 1st half, January 1921, cited in G. R. F. Tottenham, *The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921–22* (Madras: Government Press, 1922), p. 4. Along with Hitchcock's history, this 436 page compilation by Tottenham, Undersecretary to the Government of Madras, is the major published official source on the rebellion. For a brief official summary in that same volume, see Tottenham's 'Summary of Important Events of the Rebellion,' pp. 37–41, and F. B. Evans, 'Note on the Rebellion,' pp. 42–53.

tion against *janmis* in demand for a fixity of tenure for all tenants in South Malabar.³⁵ The agrarian situation had been steadily worsening. Both Travancore and Cochin had enacted legislation providing security of tenure, and the failure of the Government of Madras to act exacerbated discontent. In the face of rumors of impending tenancy reform in Malabar, landlords increasingly evicted tenants in the 'resumption' of lands for their own cultivation. As agrarian tensions increased, Nair leaders of the Tenancy Association and the Congress sought to mobilize the active support of the Mappilla cultivators—both for tenancy reform and, in the name of the Khilafat, for independence. These efforts, in the words of Thomas Shea, 'proved tragically successful... Egged on by the more fanatical of their leaders, the Moplah peasants transformed what had begun as a series of well-organized boycotts of evicting landlords into a large-scale spontaneous insurrection against all forms of authority—Hindu landlords as well as the British Raj.'³⁶

In February, leaders of the Congress in Calicut—K. Madhavan Nair, U. Gopala Menon, and Moideen Koya—invited Yakub Hassan, prominent Muslim leader in Madras, to Malabar for a series of speeches. Upon Hassan's arrival, the District Collector, warning of 'sinister forces at work all over the district,' imposed an order banning the Khilafat meetings contemplated for Ernad. He feared that an appeal to religion might 'prepare the way for something far more serious than the isolated expression of fanaticism that the ordinary Ernad outbreak represents.'³⁷ 'There is immediate danger,' Thomas wrote, 'that the feelings of the more ignorant Moplahs will be inflamed against not only Government, but also against the Hindu jenmies of the taluq... There may result riot and danger to human life.'³⁸ The *Madras Mail* applauded the ban on public meetings in Ernad: 'All those who realize the danger attendant on senseless, inflammatory politico-religious

³⁵ *Madras Mail*, January 20, 1921, p. 6. Fixity of tenure was, in fact, not guaranteed until the passage of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930.

³⁶ Thomas W. Shea, Jr., 'The Land Tenure Structure of Malabar and Its Influence Upon Capital Formation in Agriculture,' unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1959, p. 172.

³⁷ Collector's Fortnightly Report, 2nd half, February 1921, cited in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 4.

³⁸ Quoted in the *Madras Mail*, February 9, 1921, p. 6. The Collector justified his action on the claim that one of the people behind the invitation was Variakunnath Kunjahammed Haji, who 'comes from a family with outbreak traditions.' The others involved, he said, were two ex-vakils (K. Madhavan Nair and U. Gopalan Menon) 'who must, by their own act, seek a livelihood by agitation, regardless of what may be the results.' Both gentlemen denied any acquaintance or connection with Haji. *Madras Mail*, February 9, 1921, p. 6.

propaganda in the semi-wild Moplah zone will approve of the action....'³⁹

Hassan and the Malabar Congress leaders declared their intention to defy the ban, whereupon they were arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Their arrest brought an immediate storm of protest. In defiance of the ban on processions, a crowd of about 12,000 Mappillas, some armed with sticks and knives, gathered at a Calicut mosque and proceeded along the Beach Road, where they were met by the District Magistrate and the police. The mob dispersed only after two hours' tense confrontation.⁴⁰ The following day almost all shops in Calicut observed *hartal*, and with each passing day the *hartal* spread into Malabar, gaining support from Mappillas who had previously held aloof from the Khilafat movement.⁴¹

The arrest of the 'Kerala patriots,' as they were called, gave new impetus to non-cooperation and the Khilafat movement. The Malabar vernacular press supporting non-cooperation proclaimed Thomas' provocative action as the 'awakening' of Malabar and expressed delight that the Collector should serve as the unwitting catalyst to heightened political consciousness. Meetings of protest were called all over Malabar. At the height of excitement, C. Rajagopalachari and K. P. Kesava Menon, then practicing before the Madras Bar, arrived from Madras and were met by a huge crowd and led in a procession. Kesava Menon, on the advice of C.R., assumed the office of Secretary of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee, succeeding his imprisoned colleague, K. Madhavan Nair. Menon later indicated that as a result of the activities following Hassan's arrest, 230 Congress Sabhas had been formed and several thousand new members had been enlisted.⁴² Hassan's arrest was deplored in the Madras Legislative Council as 'likely to excite and arouse the Mappillas,'⁴³ and in a later judgment on the Mappilla rebellion, G. Gopalan Nair wrote that 'the Yakub Hassan episode was the turning point in the Khilafat movement and that it was from

³⁹ *Madras Mail*, February 8, 1921, p. 9.

⁴⁰ As reported by the District Superintendent of Police, in Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, pp. 20-1.

⁴¹ *Madras Mail*, February 18 and 21, 1921.

⁴² Reported in *West Coast Spectator* (Calicut), August 18, 1921, quoted in Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, pp. 13-14.

⁴³ Speech by Diwan Bahadur M. Krishnan Nair, quoted in Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, Appendix, p. 32. Speaking for the Government in the Council of State, New Delhi, H. D. Craik said, 'There is probably no single person who has done more to excite the feelings of the Moplahs than Mr. Yakub Hassan....' *Council of State Debates*, September 5, 1921, p. 107.

this point that the attitude of the Khilafatists became decidedly hostile and aggressive.⁴⁴

Agrarian tension in Malabar deepened, and under Congress auspices, the tenancy movement spread, much to the alarm of landlords and officials alike. On April 26, 1921, following the All Kerala Provincial Congress Conference held at Ottapalam (where they suffered considerable police harassment), a tenants' conference overwhelmingly supported resistance to landlords and Government in the form of non-cooperation. While the non-cooperators were meeting at Ottapalam, Mrs Besant presided over the first Reform Conference at Calicut, condemning the pernicious effects of both the Khilafat agitation and non-cooperation. Landlords themselves sought to organize against the tenancy movement, and the Kerala Janmi Sabha in July 1921 sent a deputation to the Governor of Madras.⁴⁵

The pro-British *Mitavadi*, a vernacular newspaper published in Calicut as the voice of the Liberal Party in Malabar, expressed its concern in English about the situation in Malabar in an article urging immediate land reform:

It is very grave news that . . . certain well-known jenmis of this district have issued an ultimatum to tenants, in regard to the agitation for agrarian reforms. . . . We are told that these jenmis would not renew the existing leases on their expiry, while some have filed eviction suits in the law courts. . . . We are greatly exercised in mind that this situation has been created just at present by a few jingoistic jenmis because the non-co-operator is abroad with his pernicious doctrines which must necessarily seduce those tenants who are thrown out of their holdings by the declaration of war of the jenmis. There was a time when the jenmi could with impunity play the bantum of the dung hill of his domain but the world in unrest, has caught the tenants as well. . . . [T]he shortsighted policy which . . . the territorial magnates have adopted is calculated to bring about an explosion that would shake Malabar to its very foundation.⁴⁶

Khilafat-Non-cooperation meetings were held with increasing frequency, sometimes accompanied by incidents of violence. Several incidents of Mappilla-Tiyya conflict occurred over the picketing of

⁴⁴ Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Madras *Mail*, August 1, 1921, p. 6. In that same issue, the *Mail* related 'a curious story . . . of a Walluvanad jenmi who, having lost a brass vessel, adopted the device of indemnifying himself by fining all his tenants in sums equivalent to the value of the stolen article.'

⁴⁶ *Mitavadi* (Calicut), 7 February 1921, cited in Report of English Papers examined by the Criminal Investigation Department, Madras, and on Vernacular Papers Examined by the Translations to the Government of Madras (hereafter noted as Newspaper Reports), No. 8 of 1921, pp. 230-1.

toddy-shops, a part of the non-cooperation campaign that particularly appealed to Muslim sentiment.⁴⁷ Itinerant preachers wandered over the countryside spreading Khilafat propaganda, and rumors circulated widely—one being that the Afghans were on their way, a story arising presumably from Gandhi's statement that a foreign invasion would be welcomed by him.⁴⁸ There were stories, too, that in anticipation of Swaraj, Khilafat leaders had already parcelled out the land among poor Mappillas and were only awaiting the movement to take actual possession.⁴⁹ It was 'pure mockery,' Hitchcock wrote, to deck the excitable Mappilla 'in the garb of a soldier and yet tell him that he should attain his aims by spinning.'⁵⁰

Considerable interest was stirred in Malabar by the Ali brothers' visit to Erode in April for a Muslim religious conference attended by a number of Malabar Musaliars. Perhaps a greater impact was made by the Madras speech of Muhammad Ali, circulated in pamphlet form in Malabar and proscribed by district authorities. The Collector had already proscribed an Arabic-Malayalam pamphlet and earlier in the month, by his own description, had used the search for the pamphlet as an opportunity to look into the accounts of the chief Khilafat centers. His conclusion was that the movement had little money behind it.⁵¹

In connection with the All Kerala Provincial Congress held at the end of April at Ottapalam, an *ulema* conference exhorted all Muslims to support the Khilafat as a religious duty, and they were urged to join local Congress Sabhas to fight for the Khilafat through the struggle for Swaraj.⁵² The correspondent for the Madras *Mail* reported that

already the speeches delivered at Ottapalam have been so violent and the attacks on the Government so bitter that the average man in the street is disposed to become insolent. Their attitude towards the police is becoming defiant and provocative. With Khilafat volunteers, who seem to have lost their heads, moving about arrogantly, the impression is created among the

⁴⁷ Mappilla-Tiyya tensions erupted, as well, in traditional forms of communal conflict. The *Mail* reported that in the Mappilla fishing village of Vallayil 'a large crowd of Moplahs, numbers of whom were armed with sticks, gathered this evening before the mosque . . . with the avowed intention of preventing a Tiyya religious procession from going past the mosque with music.' Violence was avoided only when the Tiyyas took a different route. March 9, 1921, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Madras *Mail*, August 29, 1921.

⁵⁰ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 26.

⁵¹ Collector's Fortnightly Report, 1st half, April 1921, cited in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 5.

⁵² At the same time as the Ottapuram Conference, a rival Malabar District Conference of anti-Non-cooperators was held at Calicut, under the auspices of the Home Rule and presided over by Annie Besant.

masses that the Government of the land is weak and powerless. It seems to me if the non-co-operation propaganda is allowed to be carried out unchecked throughout Kerala, it is bound to result in violence.⁵³

In another report, the *Mail* warned its readers that

the great bulk of the Moplahs are steeped in ignorance, and mischievous agitators, taking advantage of this fact, are playing upon their credulity and are trying to inflame them by appeals to their religious fanaticism. . . . Counter-propaganda should not be delayed until the poisonous teachings have been spread and the fanatical Moplah has got completely out of hand.⁵⁴

According to the *Mail*, the Khilafat movement was 'wonderfully organized. Every village has its own Khilafat Association and there is a regular system of inter-communication, whereby men from a considerable area can be rapidly summoned to any point.'⁵⁵ Perhaps far more important than the network of the Khilafat movement, however, was the traditional system of communications among the Mappillas. The system, Hitchcock recognized, constituted a major difference between the Hindu and Mappilla.

The few bazaars that exist are entirely Mappilla and most Mappillas do congregate at least once a week for Friday prayers and often at other times in Mosques. They can therefore form some kind of a public opinion of their own and combine but the fact that this is done under the cover of religion makes it difficult for Hindu or European even to become aware of it. Except at very occasional festivals the Hindus have no such opportunity of meeting.⁵⁶

Moreover, the congregational form of worship centered in the mosque drew Muslim settlement patterns into a nucleated form, in contrast to the more dispersed pattern characteristic of Hindu Malabar.⁵⁷

All Mappillas by no means rallied to the Khilafat cause. A pamphlet by a Ponnani Musaliar—written at the instigation of Government authorities—cited passages from the Koran forbidding the faithful from taking part in movements against the temporal power.⁵⁸ By the end of May, as a result of repressive measures taken by the authorities, the District Superintendent of Police, R. H. Hitchcock, was satisfied 'that

⁵³ Madras *Mail*, April 27, 1921, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Madras *Mail*, April 26, 1921, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Madras *Mail*, August 8, 1921, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ In making this point, Conrad Wood cites the comments of E. H. Colebrook that Hindus in Malabar have 'small houses each with its own compound spread over the countryside with no communal centre,' whereas the Mappilla 'tends to live in close villages and hamlets centered on his mosque.' Wood 'Historical Background', p. 16.

⁵⁸ In his Fortnightly Report, Thomas wrote that he 'was having a Malayalam pamphlet prepared by a learned Mussaliar by way of counter-propaganda' against the Khilafat movement. February 1921, cited in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 4.

the whole movement was moribund, though there may be a few convulsive quivers yet.'⁵⁹ The Khilafat movement in North Malabar was torn by dissension over money matters, and in the South, the Collector reported that 'the public generally had realized that authority had a long arm and a strong hand to deal with violence arising out of political agitation. In fact the Khilafatists are getting their tails down.'⁶⁰

In July, a meeting of loyal Mappilla religious leaders was held at Ponnani. The Khilafat movement and non-cooperation were denounced as in violation of the tenets of Islam. One leader warned, as well, that the Congress plea for Hindu-Muslim unity was a hoax and that Swaraj was only another name for Hindu rule. Hindu and Muslim, he said, could live together amicably only under a foreign king.⁶¹ Malabar authorities viewed the Ponnani meeting with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they were gratified at the loyal support expressed by the Mappilla religious leaders, but, on the other, the meeting withdrew moderating elements from the Khilafat movement. 'This has left unguided and exasperated the few noisy leaders who can only get a following by playing on the fanatical spirit, always there but hitherto dormant in the ignorant Mappilla. To them Gandhi is no one. Non-violence is not considered a serious suggestion or a political condition but merely as a party cry to hoodwink Government.'⁶²

The police noted the growth of the volunteer movement during the summer and reported the manufacture of knives and swords. But for all the rhetoric of the Khilafat, Malabar was certainly not seething with unrest, and according to Hitchcock, 'Ernad still remained the least affected part of the district in all this agitation.'⁶³ As of June 1921, there were fewer members of Congress Sabhas in Ernad than in any other taluk of Malabar District.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in the various incidents of violence occurring in connection with the Khilafat agitation, none were reported in Ernad.⁶⁵ That situation soon changed.

⁵⁹ As reported in the Collector's Fortnightly Report, 2nd half, May 1921, cited in *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Collector's Fortnightly Report, 1st half, June 1921, cited in *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶¹ Madras *Mail*, July 27, 1921, p. 3.

⁶² Report of the District Superintendent of Police, August 8, 1921, cited in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 16.

⁶³ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Report of K. P. Kesava Menon, K. P. C.C. Secretary, June 11, 1921, cited in the Madras *Mail*, November 16, 1921, p. 8:

Calicut	4 Sabhas	1,047 members
Ponnani	23 Sabhas	2,798 members
Palghat and Walluvanad	62 Sabhas	2,944 members
Ernad	7 Sabhas	365 members

⁶⁵ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 25.

On June 8, Ramadan, Ali Musaliar, a religious teacher in Tirurangadi, led a procession of 300 to 400 Khilafat volunteers, many in khadi uniforms and some with cross-belts and knives, from the Kizhikkapalle mosque to the site where Mappillas killed in one of the early outbreaks were buried. There they offered prayers. Traditionally prayers were offered here only before an outbreak, and meetings were prohibited at the graves. In this instance, the prayers were made for the success of the Khilafat movement.⁶⁶ In the judgment of the District Superintendent of Police, 'This was the first definite act towards a possible outbreak.'⁶⁷

In July, the Madras *Mail* began a series on the 'Moplahs of Malabar.' Recounting outrages of the past—Hindus murdered and temples defiled—the *Mail* reminded its readers of the 'violent excesses' to which 'the fanatical and turbulent spirit prevalent among the Moplahs' had driven them in the past, and of 'how the danger of some sudden outbreak of fanaticism, especially among the ignorant and backward Moplah inhabitants of Ernad and Walluvanad taluqs, is an ever present cause of anxiety to the officers encharged with the duty of preserving peace and tranquility in the district.'⁶⁸

The Attack at Tirurangadi

In late July, 1921, in the village of Pukkottur, north of Malappuram in Ernad taluk, a dispute arose between the Nilambur Raja (a Nambuduri landlord) and a Mappilla active in the Khilafat movement. Tension grew in the village, and on August 1, drums began to beat in the mosques of the area, and in the course of the day, several thousand Mappillas, shouting warcries, had gathered in Pukkottur before the palace gates. As reported in the Madras *Mail*, 'a large portion of them sported the Khilafat badge on their skullcaps, a good many wore khadi shirts, and the majority were armed with war knives, country swords, long spears, formidable bludgeons, and other weapons, several guns included.' The police inspector arrived and with several local Mappilla leaders succeeded in dispersing the crowd before the palace was attacked. 'The situation is still charged with peril,' the *Mail* correspondent warned, 'for, once his blood is up, the jungle Moplah

⁶⁶ As related in the Judgment in Case No. 7/21, quoted by Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, p. 19, and Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Madras *Mail*, July 7, 1921, p. 6. Part II appeared July 11, 1921.

cannot be relied upon to keep the peace, to redeem his pledge or to consider the consequences of his acts.'⁶⁹

The events at Pukkottur, Hitchcock wrote, 'have created an entirely new situation in Malabar; *Khilafat* was completely swallowed up by the old fanatical spirit on this occasion.'⁷⁰ The events had not been officially anticipated. The District Collector, E. F. Thomas, lamented that 'we are in for a bad time in Ernad, but there is this to be said—what has happened is not the result of repressive measures; repression gave us peace at Ramzan, the most dangerous time for the Mappilla. . . It's a bit of a blow but one can't foresee everything.'⁷¹ In his report of the Pukkottur incident, Thomas stated that 'the crowd was heard to express a desire or determination to add the heads of Mr. Hitchcock and myself to the bag.' The seriousness of the situation in the district could not be exaggerated, he wrote, and 'I feel powerless with my present force. . . We have peace now on a precarious tenure only if we make no move. . . It is with full sense of responsibility, as it is with the deepest regret, that I inform Government that the situation is beyond the District officials.' He called for reinforcements of British troops and, with sufficient force, proposed to disarm the district. 'We cannot go on as we are—with peace only so long as we remain inert. Crime has been committed and remains unpunished.'⁷²

The Governor of Madras, in his Fortnightly Report to the Viceroy, wrote:

It seems difficult to arrive at an exact appreciation of the situation at present, but there seems to be no doubt that continued provocative speeches on the Khilafat question combined with the resolutions of the recent All-India Khilafat Conference at Karachi have produced an impression on the mind of the Mappilla that the end of the British Raj is at hand. It is certainly true that as a result of Khilafat propaganda the Mappillas are better organized than they used to be and also better informed as to the strength of their own position and the difficulty of taking military action against them.⁷³

With the commitment of reinforcements, Thomas now summoned those implicated as leaders in the Pukkottur incident to answer charges. They refused to appear, and warrants were issued for their arrest.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Madras Mail, August 8, 1921, p. 6.

⁷⁰ Report, August 16, 1921, quoted in Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 29.

⁷¹ Letter from E. F. Thomas to the Government of Madras, dated Calicut, August 7, 1921, quoted in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 24.

⁷² Letter to the Government of Madras, dated Calicut, August 10, 1921, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷³ Dated August 17, 1921, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Madras Mail, August 22, 1921, pp. 5–6.

Thomas further regarded it as necessary to arrest certain other persons in Tirurangadi for incitement to outrage under the Moplah Outrages Act. Number one on the list of those to be arrested was Ali Musaliar of Tirurangadi. A sixty-year-old religious teacher, adorned in white robes and red Turkish cap with green turban, Ali Musaliar was described by the authorities as 'dangerous.' With family connections to earlier outrages, Ali Musaliar was believed to be at the center of attempts to ignite Mappilla fanaticism. Malabar authorities had also received information that there were a number of war knives in Tirurangadi, in violation of the Malabar Offensive Weapons Act.⁷⁵ The situation was viewed by Thomas as so serious that European women were removed from Ernad taluk,⁷⁶ and on recommendation of the military commander, the troops at Calicut were increased by one company 'to assist in searches for arms.'⁷⁷ To avoid the appearance of 'a declaration of war' on the Khilafat movement, Thomas modified his original language so as 'to charge the agitator with using Khilafat, its volunteer uniform and badges as a cloak for cultivating the fanatical spirit and inciting to the familiar outrage.'⁷⁸

On August 14, Thomas and Hitchcock conferred with military officers and civil authorities from Madras. The newly-appointed Special Commissioner for Malabar Affairs, A. R. Knapp, noted the following in his report to Madras on that meeting:

I found Mr. Thomas in a rather jumpy state . . . Mr. Thomas' nervousness was displayed rather in his general remarks, and more particularly in his readiness to embark at once on a large campaign of arrest and repression without, I think, any very clear foresight of its possible effects.

Knapp nevertheless agreed that 'something must be done to dispel idea . . . that the British Raj is finished and the Mappilla Raj has taken its place.'⁷⁹ It was decided that action should be taken at Tirurangadi. 'Tirurangadi had throughout been the center of the trouble; Pukkottur

⁷⁵ Communiqué from the District Collector to the Government of Madras, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 27, 1921. India Office Records (hereafter cited as I.O.R.): L/P&J/6/1782, item 5303 (1921).

⁷⁶ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 32.

⁷⁷ 'Report by General Rawlinson, Commander-in-Chief of India, on the Operations in Malabar, 20 August 1921, to 25 February 1922 (Confidential),' to the Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department, dated Simla, October 6, 1922. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782.

⁷⁸ Letter from Thomas to the Government of Madras, dated Calicut, August 16, 1921, quoted in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 28.

⁷⁹ Dated August 18, 1921, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

was but an incident.'⁸⁰ Following the plan agreed upon, and on schedule, a detachment of the Leinster Regiment of Gurkhas in the company of the Malabar police arrived in Tirurangadi just before dawn on the morning of August 20, and immediately set out to arrest 24 persons, 6 of whom had been involved in the Pukkottur incident, and to search suspected houses in Tirurangadi, Chembrasser, and Pukkottur. According to Hitchcock, the authorities

realized that matters were so serious in the district that immediate action was imperative and that it would be unwise for the police alone to attempt to make these few arrests and searches because of the opposition that might be expected; and they anticipated that if the attempt should fail at Tirurangadi, there would be serious trouble in Chembrasser and elsewhere.⁸¹

Indeed, arrangements had already been made for reinforcements from Bangalore, should opposition be encountered.⁸²

The operation was 'successful as surprise,' Thomas claimed in his telegram to Madras, 'but unsuccessful as regards arrests.' Only 3 of the 24 wanted men were apprehended. Through the morning, searches were conducted without incident. According to the Collector's later report, during the search for arms and the wanted men, the Kizhikkapalle Mosque was entered by Mappilla police officers who before entering removed their boots. The Mambram Mosque, on the other side of the river, was not approached by anyone. News of the action at Tirurangadi had quickly spread into the countryside, and it was fed by the rumor that the Mambram Mosque—headquarters of the Mambram Tangal and a focal point of religious fervor during earlier outrages—had been attacked and razed to the ground.⁸³ At 11.45 a.m., word came that a crowd of 2,000 Mappillas from outlying villages was advancing on Tirurangadi from the west. According to the official

⁸⁰ Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 33. The plan is described in the report of the District Superintendent of Police, August 16, 1921, quoted in Hitchcock, p. 31. The actual operation involved a slight deviation from the original plan, which had involved the simultaneous arrival in Tirurangadi of the Leinsters and special police forces from Malappuram. The special police, however, were not relieved by British troops, as planned, and they had to remain on guard in Malappuram. Hitchcock notes that 'this made no difference to the events that followed.' p. 34.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸² Report of the District Superintendent of Police, August 16, 1921, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸³ Telegram from the District Collector, Calicut, to the Government of Madras, August 23, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 25, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, Item 5224 (1921). Also see Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, p. 26. For a discussion of the Mambram mosque, see Innes, *Malabar*, p. 417.

account of the subsequent events, the Collector, supported by police and troops, 'went out to meet and disperse them.' On contact, the mob advanced steadily, refusing to heed the call to disperse. The police then charged with fixed bayonets and were met by sticks. The Mappillas yielded only in the face of police fire, with 9 known casualties. As this was happening, another Mappilla mob, estimated at 2,000, attacked those remaining police and troops guarding the camp at Tirurangadi. They were 'dispersed with Lewis and Magazine fire,' but not before they left the bodies of two British officers 'terribly mutilated and hacked.' That evening, after the report that the railway station and post office of a nearby town had been sacked and the lines cut, the District Collector handed authority over to the commanding officer of the troops, as the situation was 'now beyond Civil Powers.'⁸⁴

Another, very different, version of the Tirurangadi incident was given by Mahmud Schamnad of Kasargod, the only Mappilla in the Legislative Assembly in Delhi. On October 5, 1921, he was granted an interview with the Viceroy, wherein he related the findings of his personal investigation and interviews in Malabar:

[N]ews got abroad that their sacred mosque at Tirurangadi was besieged and going to be bombarded. All the people who heard this news hurried to the mosque from all the neighbouring villages, just to intercede and save the mosque. When the Collector heard that a crowd was advancing by the road . . . he went with a party of armed force, fired and dispersed them. In the meantime, the relations and friends of the arrested had gone to the 'Kacheri' and requested the 'Sahibs' there to release their friends. They were told to sit down and wait till the Collector came. . . . The Collector's party returned. Their arrival was the signal for opening fire on the mob, thus waiting without any suspicion. When they saw that they were being fired on from either side, they rushed forward and attacked the officers . . . In this conflict, some five or six . . . are said to have been killed on the Government side, while the casualties on the other sides are not fully known. It was already evening. The mob dispersed and on their way, joined by some Nayars and some disbanded sepoys, were removing the rails and cutting the telegraph wires.⁸⁵

Further details of the attack were embodied in a letter intercepted

⁸⁴ Telegram from the District Collector, Calicut, to the Government of Madras, August 23, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 25, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5224 (1921).

⁸⁵ *A Brief Sketch of Work Done by Mr. Mahmud Schamnad, M.L.A., during his Three Years' Tenure in the First Legislative Assembly, 1921-1923*, Mangalore: Kohinoor Press, 1925, pp. 96-7. Another Mappilla account of the Tirurangadi incident was provided by a young Khilafat volunteer to C. F. Andrews. See 'The First Days of the Moplah Rising,' *The Modern Review*, XXXI (April 1922), pp. 469-72.

by the C.I.D.⁸⁶ Writing soon after the Tirurangadi incident, Mohamad Abdul Rahman of the Provincial Khilafat Committee in Calicut sought to inform the Central Committee in Bombay of what had transpired. On August 19, the night before the attack, Rahman came to know of the intended raid. He immediately dispatched a letter to Ali Musaliar, begging that those named in the warrant imbibe the spirit of non-violence and not resist arrest. Setting out himself with another Khilafat volunteer, Rahman was able to make contact with some of those to be arrested. They were still meeting when news came that the police and troops had surrounded the Tirurangadi mosque and that—a rumor which Rahman later learned to be false—the mosque had been fired upon. ‘We tried to appease the people on the spot,’ Rahman wrote, ‘telling them that this was not a time for armed insurrection.’

Rahman returned to Calicut and the next morning, in the company of K. P. Kesava Menon, U. Gopala Menon, and others, started for Tirurangadi. On the way, they met T. V. Mohammed, who had been dispatched on the night before the raid with the latter for Ali Musaliar. Having delivered the letter to Ali Musaliar at 2.00 a.m., Mohammed stayed on for a night’s rest at the Kizhikkapalle Mosque. The next morning, he awoke to find the mosque surrounded. The mosque was searched for arms by Mr Amu, Deputy Superintendent of Police, and by a Muslim Head Constable. They found none. Meanwhile, the police and military searched various houses, entered the Khilafat office, took down the flag, broke the signboard, and arrested three persons. The story that Mohammed told of the events in Tirurangadi basically confirms the version presented by Schamnad to the Viceroy, except that he placed Ali Musaliar in the waiting crowd that was fired upon by the police.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ C.I.D. 20 September 1921. STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. Copy of a letter from Mohammed Abdul Rahman, Provincial Khilafat Committee, Calicut, to the Secretary, Central Khilafat Committee, Bombay, no date. Government of Madras, Secret. Under Secy’s Safe. File 327-A, November 2, 1921, Moplah Rebellion. Tamil Nadu Archives.

In giving evidence on a case before the Court, K. Madhavan Nair said that what infuriated the Muslims of Tirurangadi was the police action in pulling down the Khilafat flag and trampling upon it. ‘Ali Musaliar admonished his followers that when such slights of their religious beliefs grieved their hearts, it was the duty of Muslims to vindicate the honour of their religion, even resorting to force.’ A. K. Pillai, *Kerala and Congress* (originally published in Malayalam in 1938). Extract translated by Mrs Mary Samuel David in *Charitham*, Special Issue on the Malabar Revolt, edited by C. K. Kareem, No. 4 (October–December 1971), p. 179.

⁸⁷ The events of that morning in Tirurangadi are among the most disputed of any during the rebellion. One version has Ali Musaliar leading the crowd, but F. B. Evans writes that there is no evidence that Ali Musaliar or any of the other accused

Schamnad's account also is substantially the same as that related by K. P. Kesava Menon. On the morning after the incident, Kesava Menon, then Congress Provincial Secretary, left Calicut for Tirurangadi, where he appealed for restraint and an end to violence. He returned that night to Calicut, by which time martial law had been declared. The next day, Menon received permission from the Collector to go into the rebel areas with 24 Congress workers to try to bring an end to violence. He met with Ali Musaliar, 'the unquestioned leader of the rebels,' in 'an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.'

He asked for my advice. I told him frankly that it would be better for the more prominent rebel leaders to surrender to the military to save Tirurangadi from disaster. He was unable to make a decision. He asked me to consult Lavakutty [his minister] and Kunhalavi [his general]. It was getting dark. Friends who were waiting downstairs were getting uneasy. I bade farewell to Ali Musaliar. When I left him I had a talk with Lavakutty and Kunhalavi. Kunhalavi was a strong and sturdy man with a sword in one hand and another hanging from his shoulder. He had several cuts on his body. He plainly told me that he would never surrender to the military and that he would rather die fighting like a man. And that was what happened subsequently.⁸⁸

The events at Tirurangadi provoked an outcry in the vernacular press sympathetic to the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements. One paper wrote:

If Government officials had acted with prudence, there would have been no riot at all. . . . The actions of the authorities have so far only fanned the flame of trouble. . . . In short the principal parties in the riots now are the Police and the Military. It need no longer be called "Moplah riots."⁸⁹

had any part in the incident. He emerged from hiding only the next day, whereupon he proclaimed himself King. Evans sees Ali Musaliar as 'an energetic advocate' of the rebellion. 'I think it improbable that any definite date had been settled for a general rising or that any detailed plan of campaign had been drawn up; but I think that by the middle of August at least Ali Musaliar and other leaders thought that their organization was sufficiently advanced to enable them to be sure that when a message was sent round there would be simultaneous outbreaks on uniform lines throughout Ernad and most of Walluvanad and Ponnani.' Evans further assumed that the rumor that the Mambram mosque had been destroyed and that the Collector had been killed were of deliberate design—perhaps as the Chembrasseri Tangal later testified, by Ali Musaliar himself. E. B. Evans, 'Note on the Rebellion,' dated 15 March 1922, in Tottenham, *Mapilla Rebellion*, pp. 44–6.

⁸⁸ K. P. Kesava Menon, 'Crusading for a Cause,' in *1921 Movement: Reminiscences* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publications Division, Government of India, 1971), pp. 159–60. Also see Menon's autobiography, *Kazhinja Kalam* (Malayalam) (Calicut: Mathrubhumi Press, 1969). Menon's report was carried in the Malayali press. See, for example, *Swarat* (Quilon), September 1, 1921, cited in Newspaper Reports, No. 37 of 1921, p. 1080.

⁸⁹ *Puran* (Kayamkulam), September 3, 1921, cited in Newspaper Reports, No. 37 of 1921, p. 1081.

Other Malayali papers described Thomas as 'the Dyer of Malabar' and demanded the resignation of all officials responsible for the provocative action at Tirurangadi.⁹⁰ Even the more 'moderate' press, ready to condemn Mappilla violence, warned that 'excessive firing calculated to strike terror in the hearts of the people is fraught with danger.'⁹¹

In the judgment of the Collector, the Tirurangadi incident was the catalyst to open rebellion. Describing pillage, looting, murder, and forcible conversion, Thomas wrote to Madras that 'this attempt to make searches and arrests under Legal Warrants, in due conformity with law, has been the signal for an outburst of fanaticism throughout Ernad, Walluvanad and Ponnani, directed first against European officials and non-officials and latterly against Hindus.'⁹²

The Collector, police, and troops arrived back in Calicut the night after the raid on Tirurangadi. Had the column not returned, Thomas cabled Madras, 'most probably Calicut would have been looted.'⁹³ He reported that Calicut was surrounded on all sides, except the north, and that if the city were to be entered by Mappillas from outside, he expected a rising in the town.⁹⁴ To secure the safety of lives and property in the emergency, military Local Internal Security was put into force in Calicut. Women and children were evacuated to defended posts so that their security was assured.⁹⁵ On August 25th, the H.M.S. Comus arrived from Colombo and lay off the town, while a landing party of 90 sailors with police guides and flying colors marched through the big Mappilla bazaar. 'Should there be any trouble in Calicut,' officials reported, the 'Moplah quarters will be at once bombarded. . . .'⁹⁶

The Rebellion

Reports from the countryside recalled events of the Mutiny 64 years

⁹⁰ See, for example, the various papers quoted in Newspaper Reports, No. 36 of 1921, pp. 1045-8.

⁹¹ *Kistnapatrika* (Masulipatam), September 3, 1921, in Newspaper Reports, No. 37 of 1921, pp. 1074-5.

⁹² Communiqué from the District Collector to the Government of Madras, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 27, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5303 (1921).

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Reported in a telegram from the Government of Madras to the Viceroy, August 22, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 24, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5222 (1921).

⁹⁵ Rawlinson Report, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 27, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5302 (1921).

before. Much of Ernad and Walluvanad taluks had fallen under the control of Mappilla rebels. Some of the more zealous among them were said to have climbed onto the judge's bench of local courts, proclaiming the end of British rule and the advent of Swaraj. Ali Musaliar of Tirurangadi assumed the title of 'Ali Raji' in a ceremony at the Jammatt mosque in Ponnani, the central mosque of Mappilla religious organization. Seethi Koya Tangal of Kumaranpathor set himself up as 'King of Mannarghat.' One of the most important leaders was Variakunnath Kunjahammed Haji. Like Ali Musaliar, he was of a family with outbreak traditions, and as a youth, he had been transported with his father for complicity in an outbreak. Upon his return, some 6 or 7 years before the rebellion, he had settled down as a cartman in his native village. He was drawn to the Khilafat and became one of the principal organizers of the movement. On August 22, Kunjahammed Haji enthroned himself as Khilafat King and quickly established such ascendancy over Ernad and Walluvanad taluks that he even issued passports to those who ventured beyond the borders of his kingdom. By one account, he declared that no harm would come to the Hindus and that any Mappilla engaged in looting would be given exemplary punishment. By no means all Mappilla leaders shared such a beneficent view. The Chembrasser Tangal, who had assumed control over an Ernad locality, was alleged to have personally overseen the murder of 38 Hindus. According to the story, their throats were cut, and they were thrown into a well. One was a pensioned Head Constable against whom the Tangal had a grudge. His head was neatly divided into two halves.⁹⁷

With each day came new accounts of Hindus who had been massacred by frenzied Mappillas. Landlords—Nambuduris and Nairs—were principal victims of the attacks, but reports on incidents occurring during the first weeks of the rebellion frequently implicated Hindus in the rioting, and arrests often included Hindus taken along with the Mappilla rebels. The press gave special play to the case of a fairly influential Nair, Mannarghat Elaya Nayar, who was an associate of Seethi Koya Tangal.⁹⁸ Just before the outbreak, A. R. Knapp reported that the Khilafat movement in Malabar was in fact led by a Hindu, M. P. Narayana Menon, who had adopted Mappilla dress.⁹⁹ At the

⁹⁷ Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, pp. 76–9; Sreedhara Menon, *Kozhikode*, pp. 179–80.

⁹⁸ See *Madras Mail*, December 17, 1921, p. 7, and December 19, 1921, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Report on Malabar Affairs, August 18, 1921, in Tottenham, *Mapilla Rebellion*, p. 34.

earliest stages, Hindus were clearly involved, but with time and growing violence their numbers rapidly diminished, for the rebellion was centered in what had been traditionally the outbreak zone of Mappilla fanaticism. The proclamation of a Khilafat Kingdom in South Malabar demanded of each Mappilla that he make his choice between the Raj and Swaraj. Aside from scattered enclaves of Mappilla loyalists in Ernad¹⁰⁰ or the Ponnani manifesto of opposition to the rebellion,¹⁰¹ more and more Mappillas joined the rebel forces or at least extended their sympathy.¹⁰²

With the turn toward violence, Congress workers—Hindu and Muslim—called for non-violence and offered their service in help to the victims of the disturbances. Many were arrested for their efforts.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Hitchcock writes that in certain areas of Ernad, Mappillas remained loyal—in Mampal and Kondotti and to some extent in Edavanna and Wandur. 'Now these are purely Mappilla centres, by far the most flourishing and important ones in Ernad with the exception of Arikkod. The attitude of Mampal, Edavanna and Wandur was due entirely to the influence of a few leading Mappillas in those places; they would have nothing to do with the agitation and when the rebellion came they were strong enough and bold enough to oppose it.' In Kondotti, the Mappillas have their own Tangal and practice a slightly different form of worship from the 'Ponnani Mappillas,' as those of South Malabar are generally called. Other Mappillas consider them to be Shiahs, although they hold themselves to be Sunnis in common with other Mappillas. Writing in 1887, Logan recorded an agreement by the Tangal with the Company for exemption of revenue payments in exchange for a promise of loyalty—'a promise which they have ever since very faithfully fulfilled,' Logan said, and Hitchcock continues, 'throughout this rebellion the Kondotti Mappillas remained loyal.' *Malabar Rebellion*, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ *Madras Mail*, September 20, 1921, p. 6.

¹⁰² In his presentation to the Viceroy, October 5, 1921, Schamnad wrote: 'This disturbance as usual, originated in Ernad and is still confined to the two Taluks of Ernad and Walwanad . . . The Moplals of other districts and also of other Taluks of South Malabar are as loyal as any body could be and they ever have been. Even in these two Taluks, here are many Moplals who are loyally co-operating with the Government.' *Brief Sketch*, p. 94.

In response to a question raised some months later by Schamnad in the Legislative Council, New Delhi, Sir William Vincent answered for the Government: 'The Collector reports that North Malabar and other taluqs of the south cannot be described as loyal . . . He has had no assistance from any Mappilla except in a very few instances in the apprehension of rebel fugitives in Calicut and the northern taluqs. With very few exceptions, the Mappilla population is in sympathy with the rebels.' *Legislative Council Debates*, February 11, 1922, p. 2345.

¹⁰³ Sreedhara Menon, *Kozhikode*, p. 181. The author of the Kozhikode gazetteer relates the case of M. P. Narayana Menon, who was the Secretary of the Ernad Taluk Congress Committee at the time of the rebellion. 'When the lives of Englishmen were in danger during a critical phase of the rebellion, he had used his influence with the Mappilas and saved them. By a strange irony of fate Narayana Menon was later accused of treason and sentenced to 14 years rigorous imprisonment by a military court. . . . Menon served his full term and was released only in September 1934.' Sreedhara Menon argues that 'the Government's policy of arresting Congress leaders

Kesava Menon, Congress Secretary, went to Ernad to attempt to quell the rebellion. So, too, did K. Madhavan Nair and U. Gopala Menon, who only a week before had been welcomed by a jubilant Congress-Khilafat procession in Calicut on their release from six months' imprisonment. In a letter to Yakub Hassan, intercepted by the C.I.D., Gopala Menon wrote that the Hindus of Malabar were suffering terribly at the hand of 'the overzealous fanatical Mappilla.' He denied that the rebellion was in the main anti-Hindu, but warned that events in Malabar had brought back to the Hindu 'his former terror and suspicion of the Moslem.' Moreover, the rebellion had seriously undermined support for Congress within the district.¹⁰⁴ Also writing to Hassan, Abdul Rahman, of the Kerala Khilafat Committee, expressed concern for the plight of the Muslims:

Unfortunately Muslims have alienated Hindu sympathy. Even the Congress workers seem to have taken in their minds that the military regime should not be ended soon for fear of Hindus being molested. The military is reported to fire Muslim houses and loot Muslim shops. . . . Reports of very horrible atrocities which I won't mention for want of authenticity are reaching us. For God's sake, for the sake of these wretched Muslims, try your best to stop this martial law regime. I promise that we may give guarantee to any Hindu that we shall see that no Hindu will be molested if military is withdrawn. The Congress seems to give relief only to Hindus. Will you not do something to relieve the poor innocent Muslim women and children.¹⁰⁵

Yakub Hassan now sought to go to Ernad himself, but was prohibited by the authorities. In a personal letter to Edwin Montagu, Lord Willingdon, Governor of Madras, wrote:

The blackguard Yakub Hassan sought an interview with me yesterday, asking me if he might have a free pass from Government to go into Malabar and try to pacify the people. . . . It's an outrage that these ruffians, who have

and preventing them from using their influence with the Mappilas on the side of moderation and non-violence only helped to worsen the situation,' p. 181.

In a slightly varied account, Saumyendranath Tagore writes that Narayan prevailed on the rebel leaders to surrender, and those who followed his advice were executed. '...[S]uch is the irony of historical justice that as a reward for his faithful services to the government, Narayan Menon was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment on the strength of the accusation by the same Police Inspector whose life he had saved from the hands of the rebels.' *Peasants Revolt in Malabar: 1921* (Bombay: 1937), pp. 27-8. Tagore was a Bengali Trotskyite. The volume is frequently highly inaccurate as well as polemical.

¹⁰⁴ C.I.D., September 20, 1921, STRICTLY SECRET. Copy of a letter from U. Gopala Menon to Yakub Hassan, no date. Government of Madras. Secret. Under Secy's Safe. File 327-A. November 2, 1921, Moplah Rebellion, Tamil Nadu Archives.

¹⁰⁵ C.I.D., September 20, 1921. STRICTLY SECRET. Copy of a letter from Abdul Rahman to Yakub Hassan, dated Calicut, September 7, 1921.

been continuously preaching against the 'Satanic' Government, and have set the heather on fire, should now come cringing to me asking to be allowed to help put it out.¹⁰⁶

The Governor did not reserve his thoughts for private correspondence. Addressing the Madras Legislative Council, he said, 'In my speech at the last meeting of the old Council I pointed out how the propaganda which is associated with the name of Mr. Gandhi must inevitably culminate in chaos and disorder. I myself did not then foresee how soon my foreboding would be justified.'¹⁰⁷ A few weeks later, when Gandhi was expected to arrive in Madras, a martial law order was issued to prevent him from entering Malabar.

In Ernad and Walluvanad, the situation rapidly worsened. Police stations were burned, courts and record offices looted, and railway and telegraph lines were cut. Newspaper stories, like those of the *Madras Mail*, fed the anxieties of the Hindu community. Every alleged murder, atrocity, and forced conversion was reported in grisly detail, and the inflammatory character of the reports was exceeded only by the letters to the editor. At Tirur it was reported that a mob of 10,000 Mappillas had burned down the police station and had captured several men, including one European.¹⁰⁸ The *Mail* story said that in the attack, Mappillas had entered the famous Trikandayar temple, where 'all imaginable sacrilegious acts were done to inflame Hindu fury. It is said that the Moplahs spat and left the Koran near the sactum.'¹⁰⁹

On August 22, the Government of Madras called for the establishment of martial law in the areas affected by the rebellion. 'We... are satisfied from reports received that a state of open rebellion exists.'¹¹⁰ On August 25, the Governor-General of India issued an ordinance imposing a modified form of martial law in the taluks of Calicut, Ernad, Walluvanad, and Ponnani. Two days later, it was extended to Kurambranad and Wynaad taluks.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ August 27, 1921. I.O.R.: Euro. Mss. F. 93. No. 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Madras Legislative Council Debates*, September 1, 1921, p. 628.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram from Madras to the Viceroy, August 22, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 24, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5222 (1921).

¹⁰⁹ *Madras Mail*, August 31, 1921, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Telegram from Madras to the Viceroy, August 22, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 24, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5222 (1921).

¹¹¹ The form of martial law imposed upon Malabar during the rebellion gave rise to bitter controversy between the Government of India and that of Madras. In a personal letter to the Governor-General, Lord Reading, the Governor of Madras, Lord Willingdon, wrote: 'You may think me a brutal and militant person; you may

The situation at Malappuram, cut off from all communications, was viewed as especially critical, and a detachment of Leinsters and Special Police was dispatched from Calicut for the relief of Malappuram. The following morning at Pukkottur, a few miles from Malappuram, the detachment encountered a large body of rebels. 'Moplahs were armed with carbines captured from Police Stations they had looted, as well as with some sporting rifles and swords, and war knives. They displayed their traditional ferocity and eagerness for death, and after five hours of fighting were beaten off, their casualties being estimated at four hundred killed.' When the troops reached Malappuram that afternoon, 'they found all safe and well.'¹¹²

The battle at Pukkottur was described later by a very unsympathetic Hindu as 'the one bright light' during the first week of the rebellion, for it 'was the salvation of the Ernad Hindus.' As Gopalan Nair relates the story, 'It had been arranged on 26th August, Friday, after the Jama prayer, all the Hindus in Manjeri and the neighbouring villages should be brought to the mosques and converted to the Moslem faith: caps, dresses, and jackets were all ready for distribution among the converts, but the idea of wholesale conversion had to be given up at the time, in consequence of the Pookutur Battle.'¹¹³

feel we are not to be trusted with summary powers; but I am certain that in any other country the chief offenders would have been dealt with in summary fashion after such an outbreak; I suppose this excessive caution is due to the trouble over the Punjab, but I am sorry, very sorry you found it necessary to water the original ordinance down.' 'The extremist is loud in his abuse of me and I shall go down to posterity as a 2nd O'Dwyer! "Sic transit gloria mundi"!' September 6, 1921. I.O.R.: Euro. Mss. F. 93. No. 5.

The difficulties between Madras and Delhi were revealed with the Government's decision no longer to publish the telegraphic correspondence. In December 1921, the British government had published a Command Paper of the telegraphic correspondence relating to the Mappilla rebellion. [East India (Moplah Rebellion), Telegraphic information, &c., regarding the Moplah Rebellion, 24th August to 6th December, *Command Paper 1552*, London: 1921, 54 pp.] It was to have been followed by a second Command Paper, which was prepared in proofs but never released. [East India (Moplah Rebellion), Telegraphic information, &c., regarding the Moplah Rebellion, in continuation of Cmd. 1552, London: 1922 (proof only), 20 pp. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1774, item 6428 (1921).] In a telegram to the Secretary of State for India, the Governor-General wrote, 'We see no advantage and some danger in publishing,' as it indicates 'some differences of opinion between Local Government and ourselves and between Local Government and Military Authorities.' March 30, 1922. I.O.R.: P&J 1953 [1922, as corrected 1949 (1922)].

¹¹² Telegram from Madras, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 29, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5335 (1921). Also see Rawlinson Report, p. 3.

¹¹³ Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, p. 37. In the forepages of the book, Nair pays eulogistic tribute to Captain P. McEnroy, who led the march, 'for the conspicuous

Following the arrival of reinforcements from Bangalore, a 'converging movement' was carried out from Malappuram, Tirur, and Calicut against Tirurangadi, center of the Mappilla rising. The British column arrived on the evening of August 30, and surrounded the Kizhikkapalle mosque, where the rebels had chosen to make their stand. The next morning, according to official accounts, the rebels opened fire, rushed out and charged the troops. Twenty-four Mappillas were killed, and 38 surrendered, including the infamous Ali Musaliar. He was tried by the Special Tribunal at Calicut on the charge of waging war against His Majesty, the King-Emperor, and on November 2, he was sentenced to death and hanged.¹¹⁴

On the day of the Tirurangadi action, Madras advised the Government of India that the 'whole interior' of South Malabar, except Palghat tuluk, was in the hands of the rebels. Local civil administration had broken down; all government offices and courts had ceased to function; and ordinary business was at a standstill. In portions of the area, famine conditions were imminent. Europeans had either fled or had been evacuated, and 'numerous Hindu refugees of all classes' had sought protection in Calicut.¹¹⁵

Before the Legislative Council, Lord Willingdon, Governor of Madras, described the Mappillas as

ignorant and misguided dupes of unscrupulous agitators. . . . The suddenness and extent of the conflagration point irresistibly to the existence of a widespread and dangerous organization whose leaders were only watching for an opportunity to attempt by violence to overthrow the existing Government and to exploit for their own purpose the religious fanaticism of the Mappilla.¹¹⁶

His words were echoed in the Council of State debates in New Delhi: 'It is perfectly clear,' one Indian member declared, 'that the Moplahs were prepared for the occasion and that there was widespread organization behind them . . . a well-conducted and nefarious organization. . . .'¹¹⁷

gallantry displayed by him at Pookkottur . . . On behalf of myself and my Hindu countrymen of Malabar, I offer to the HERO of POOKKOTTUR and his small force our grateful thanks for their services on that memorable day.'

¹¹⁴ Rawlinson Report, pp. 3-4; Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, pp. 36-7, 76. In a brief biography of the rebel leader, it is claimed that he died a natural death, on February 17, 1922, before the sentence was executed. K. A. Mohamed, 'Ali Musaliar,' *Charitham*, No. 4 (October-December 1971), p. 112.

¹¹⁵ Telegram, August 30, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, August 30, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5364 (1921).

¹¹⁶ *Madras Legislative Council Debates*, September 1, 1921, p. 628.

¹¹⁷ Sir Meneckji Dadabhoy, September 5, 1921, p. 89. I.O.R.: P&J 6646 (1921).

The next stage of military operations was to take the form of 'locating and dealing with numerous small mobile parties of Moplahs in extremely difficult country'¹¹⁸—an early version of 'search and destroy.' A special police force had been formed to deal with the rebellion, but with each day, rebel activity expanded over a wider area within Ernad and Walluvanad taluks. 'The whole countryside east of Malappuram was openly hostile,' wrote General Rawlinson in his report. 'The main difficulties... were the absence of sufficient armed civil police to secure the maintenance of law and order in places which had been cleared by the troops and the difficulty of locating rebel bands and bringing them to action.'¹¹⁹ 'The country was eminently suited to the guerilla tactics' which the rebels soon adopted. The pattern of close cultivation alternating with thick jungle offered opportunity both for ambush and safe retreat. The movement of troops was impeded at every turn. Roads were blocked by trees felled by the rebels; bridges over monsoon-swollen rivers had been destroyed. Rebel scouts watched every move, rendering surprise impossible, and 'the jungle clad slopes of the Nilgiris afforded a sure refuge for any hard pressed rebel bands, from which only starvation could feasibly dislodge them.'¹²⁰

The Mappilla rebellion, in the judgment of the military, was 'framed upon guerilla warfare, plunder, terrorization and avoidance of battle.' The troops and police then in Malabar were insufficient and their powers inadequate to deal with such a situation. The Mappillas were operating in a number of armed bands, their total estimated in September at about 10,000.¹²¹ The British believed that among the rebels were a number of former sepoys who had served in the Near Eastern campaigns of the First World War. In late September, Major General Burnett-Stuart, the commanding officer for Madras, made a desperate plea to the Government of India for more troops and for military courts empowered to deal with the rebels on the spot. 'The situation is now clearly actual war, and famine, widespread devastation and prolonged

¹¹⁸ Telegram, August 30, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5364 (1921).

¹¹⁹ Rawlinson Report, p. 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²¹ Telegram from Major General J. T. Burnett-Stuart, the General Commanding Officer, Madras District, September 26, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, September 28, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 6000 (1921). A later report prepared by the Malabar Force Headquarters described the principal leaders and their gangs. Ten gangs were listed, ranging in size from that of the Chembrasserai Tangal, with approximately 3,000 men, to bands as small as 30 to 50 in number. Report to Army Headquarters, Delhi, from J. T. Burnett-Stuart, Major General, Commanding, Madras District, November 14, 1921, Wellington. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 7717 (1921).

rebellion can only be avoided by prompt measures to deal with it as such.¹²²

The Government of Madras itself, as gravely as it viewed the Malabar situation, had been initially reluctant to commit more troops. There had been serious rioting in the mill area of Madras City, sporadic riots in Trichy, and the prospects for disturbances in Guntur. Moreover, 'troops had to be held in readiness to deal with anticipated disturbances among Mohammedan population in North Arcot, Chittoor, and Cuddapah.'¹²³ New Delhi, sensitive to criticism of its handling of the Punjab situation two years before, sought to use a minimum of force in bringing the rebellion under control.¹²⁴ By mid-October, however, the Government had responded with reinforcements and a more rigorous form of martial law.

With reinforcements and expanded martial law powers, the British now sought to contain the rebellion within the area of Ernad and Walluvanad and to prevent its spread to the west into Calicut taluk and to the north of the Beypore River. Moreover, Thomas had taken action under the Mappilla Outrages Act to levy fines against specified villages unless leading rebels surrendered and loot was given up.¹²⁵ 'As things are now,' General Burnett-Stuart wrote to Army Headquarters, Poona, 'I cannot commit myself to any prophesy as to when the rebellion can be expected to end. It may go on in some districts until every Moplah is either exterminated or arrested.'¹²⁶ That the British were engaged in a policy of virtual genocide seemed evident to many Indians when it became known that in the transfer of prisoners in a closed railway van, 70 died of asphyxiation.¹²⁷

¹²² Telegram, September 26, 1921, quoted in the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, September 28, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 6000 (1921).

¹²³ Rawlinson Report, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Indeed, in response to a favorable account of military action against the Mappillas in early September, someone at the India Office in London had noted that it looked as if the rebellion 'had burnt itself out.' Below the note, Malcolm C. Seton, Assistant Under Secretary of State for India, wrote: 'The next step will, if precedent is followed, be an unofficial Committee of Enquiry, which will find that the Moplahs would never have touched Hindus but for the provocative actions of some subordinate police-officers.' Minute paper, September 14, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782, item 5614 (1921).

¹²⁵ G. F. R. Tottenham, 'Summary of the Important Events of the Rebellion,' in Tottenham, *Mappilla Rebellion*, p. 38.

¹²⁶ Letter, October 24, 1921. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1782 (1921).

¹²⁷ It is appropriate here to relate what became the subject of scandal and regret—the Mappilla train tragedy. The large number of arrests had led to an accumulation of prisoners at Malappuram. A portion of prisoners were transferred to Tirur, but the jail there was also full. It was then decided to send them on to Bellary by rail. A

In mid-November, in response to reports of a large concentration of rebels, troops and police began a massive sweep across the affected areas, but the Mappilla bands refused to engage in battle, disappearing into the hills as soon as they were located. In consequence, the military divided the rebel area into five regions, and to each, one battalion was assigned. Two companies of Auxiliary Police were to deal with the area north of the Beypore. It soon became evident that the sweeping operation conducted in November had had greater effect than realized. 'The majority of the inhabitants,' Rawlinson wrote, 'though not actively hostile had inclined to the rebel side partly through fear and partly because they had no idea of the forces against them.' The military advance provided a dramatic show of force, and when it was followed by the arrival of troops for an apparently extended stay in the neighborhood, various villages soon submitted petitions of surrender. The Government's terms of surrender were generous, offering amnesty for persons not guilty of grave crimes or violence. The terms were widely publicized, and the number of surrenders rapidly increased, with the effect that the area open to the rebel bands was substantially reduced. At the same time, there was considerable increase in information as to the whereabouts of the rebels.¹²⁸

Two of the largest bands—those of the Chembrasseri Tungal and Seethi Koya Tungal—were forced into the mountains east of the disturbed area and were there blockaded until their surrender in

van was unloaded, cleaned out and disinfected. The prisoners—97 Mappillas and 3 Hindus, who were also implicated in the rebellion—were loaded in the van after having been provided with food and water. The doors were shut and fastened, and the train left Tirur at 7:15 p.m., November 19. At 12:30 that night, the train arrived at Podanur, and the van doors were opened to give the men water. 'On opening the first compartment the prisoners were all found lying down in a state of collapse. Some of them were groaning and it was evident that a disaster had occurred.' Doctors were called in. Fifty-six of the men died that night. Of the 44 survivors, another 26 died soon after. A total of 70 were dead.

The investigation found asphyxiation the cause of death, with heat exhaustion as a contributing cause. Examination of the van revealed that the fixed venetians on the upper part of the doors had been covered inside by a lining of fine wire gauze, which had been painted over and was clogged with paint and dust—with the result that the van was 'practically airtight.' The use of such vans had been normal for transporting prisoners, but the gauze had turned this van into a death trap.

The investigative commission appointed to inquire into the deaths held the railway company responsible, but the sergeant accompanying the van was held 'negligent in failing to take note of the condition of the prisoners while on the journey, as evidenced by the exceptional clamour which they made.' *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Death of Certain Mappilla Prisoners*, 35 pp. I.O.R. L/P&J/6/1774, item 1534 (1922), with 6428 (1921).

¹²⁸ Rawlinson Report, pp. 8–9.

December to the Gurkha Rifles. The scattered bands which had taken refuge in the jungles north of the Beypore surrendered soon thereafter. The execution of Variakunnath Kunjahammed Haji on January 20, 1922, 'marked the collapse of the rebellion.'¹²⁹ By February 25, the situation was sufficiently well in hand that martial law, after 6 months in force, was allowed to lapse. In its place, the Governor-General empowered 'the local Government to make regulations . . . for the protection of law-abiding citizens and for the restoration and maintenance of order in the [affected] areas.'¹³⁰

In the course of the rebellion, official figures recorded that 2339 rebels had been killed, 1652 wounded, and 5955 captured. An additional 39,348 rebels surrendered voluntarily during the later stages of the rebellion. Government losses were minimal: 43 killed (including 5 British officers), 126 wounded.¹³¹ General J. T. Burnett-Stuart, who estimated rebel deaths at between three and four thousand, wrote in his 'Final Report on the Operations in Malabar' that 'though I regret the heavy loss of life, I am satisfied that the punishment has fallen on the guilty and that no lesser chastisement would have sufficed to bring the misguided and fanatical rebel community to their senses.'¹³² 'The terrible Moplah outbreak,' according to the official report on the moral and material progress of India for the year 1922, 'brought home to many people the ultimate dependence of law and order upon the military arm.'¹³³

By December 1921, Hindu refugees had already begun to return to their villages. Loans on easy terms were provided by the Government to those in economic difficulty. Some, however, chose not to return, as in the case of certain landlords who had taken refuge in Cochin State and forced converts who feared the consequences of their fall from ritual purity.¹³⁴ The claims of mass forced conversions during the rebellion met with considerable skepticism in India. Like the reports of atrocities,¹³⁵ they were no doubt embellished for effect. The Arya

¹²⁹ Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, p. 57.

¹³⁰ March 7, 1922. I.O.R.: L/P&J/6/1769, item 5891 (1921).

¹³¹ Rawlinson Report, pp. 9-10. K. P. Kesava Menon estimated that as many as 10,000 may have died in the rebellion. *Kazhinja Kalam*, p. 116, cited by Sreedhara Menon, *Kozhikode*, p. 182.

¹³² Secret, No. 5/250/766/6.3, March 14, 1922 (in Government of Madras. Secret. Under Secy's Safe. File No. 358. July 26, 1922). Tamil Nadu Archives, Madras.

¹³³ *Statement exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India During the Year 1921*, No. 57 (New Delhi: Government Press, 1922), p. 18.

¹³⁴ S. P. O'Donnell, in the *Council of State Debates*, March 28, 1922. I.O.R.: P&J 2771 (1922), with 5891 (1921).

¹³⁵ Gopalan Nair (*Moplah Rebellion*) devotes 21 pages of the appendix to itemized

Samaj, active both in relief work and in re-conversions, placed the number of conversions at 1766 and suggested that the true figure might well exceed 2500.¹³⁶ The process of re-conversion was an onerous ordeal. In August 1922, a council of Nambudiri Vaideekans (purohits) met under the presidency of the Zamorin Rajah of Calicut to decide the future status of Hindus forcibly converted during the rebellion. The new District Collector, R. H. Ellis, was present. The council prescribed ceremonies (*Prayachithams*) sufficient to expiate specified sins forced upon the victims.¹³⁷

The Roots of Rebellion

Reactions within India to the rebellion varied enormously. Controversy

atrocities allegedly committed by the Mappillas against Hindus. Appendix, pp. 52–72. Tagore writes in his account of the rebellion that Arya Samajists took photographs of the few Hindus who were killed by the Mappillas and displayed these as ‘the horror of Moplah atrocities’ in order to fan the flames of communalism (*Peasants Revolt*, pp. 22–3).

¹³⁶ Sreedhara Menon, *Kozhikode*, p. 183. The activities of the Arya Samaj were also directed to those few families who had suffered conversion at the hand of Tipu Sultan and who, while relapsing to Hinduism after Tipu’s defeat, had never been accepted to full Hindu status. Known as ‘Chela Nairs’ and ‘Chela Namburduris,’ they were regarded as polluted and were restricted in their associations with caste fellows. Innes, *Malabar*, pp. 190–1. The Samaj, Gopalan Nair notes, brought them fully back into the Hindu fold. *Moplah Rebellion*, pp. 118–19.

¹³⁷ The requirements were as follows:

- ‘1. *Cutting the tuft, repeating the kalima, ear-boring of women and wearing Moplah jackets*:—The victims in these cases are to take “panchagavya” [five products of the cow—milk, ghee, curd, urine, and dung] for three days at any temple, to make whatever offerings they can and to repeat “Narayana” or “Siva” at least 3,000 times every day.
2. *Circumcision or co-habitation*:—The remedy to be the same as mentioned above, but for 12 days the prayers are to be repeated 12,000 times every day.
3. *Eating food cooked by Moplahs*:—The victims in this case are to wash their sins off in the holy Sethu and to obtain a certificate to that effect from the temple authorities or the “purohits” and then observe the ceremonies prescribed in (1) and (2) for 41 days repeating the sacred names 12,000 times a day.
4. Sins not specified above are to be expiated by adopting the ceremonies for 21 days repeating “Narayana” or “Siva” 12,000 times a day.’

The Council required that the performance of these ceremonies must be validated by a certificate from appropriate religious authorities and ‘submitted to the Zamorin who in his turn is to certify formally that the sins above described have been properly expiated and that the persons concerned are restored to the condition which they have been occupying before the rebellion.’ The Council offered one limitation—that ‘the rules mentioned above are inapplicable to the Brahmin converts.’ There was only one reported Brahmin convert, and, apparently, he could never be fully cleansed. Details of the Council were reported in the *West Coast Spectator* (Calicut), August 22, 1921, and quoted in Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, pp. 117–18. Also see Hitchcock, *Malabar Rebellion*, pp. 162–3.

raged—as it does even today in Kerala—as to its causes and as to the parties responsible.¹³⁸

The Congress view was recorded in the resolution of the Working Committee in September 1921, expressing a 'sense of deep regret over the deeds of violence done by the Mappillas in certain areas of Malabar' and 'condemning destruction of life resorted to by the government in the name of peace and order.'¹³⁹ In speaking of the 'tragic events' in Malabar before the Congress conference at Ahmedabad in December 1921, the acting president said that 'we cannot help coming to the conclusion that the responsibility of provoking these disturbances rests entirely on the shoulders of the Government.'¹⁴⁰ In resolution, the Congress expressed its 'firm conviction' that the non-cooperation and Khilafat movements were in no way responsible for the outbreak. While deploring forcible conversion and the destruction of life and property by certain Mappillas, the Congress condemned the official treatment of Mappilla prisoners, noting that 'the asphyxiation incident was an act of inhumanity unheard of in modern times and unworthy of a Government that calls itself civilized.'¹⁴¹

Malabar Congress leader, K. P. Kesava Menon, rejected religious fanaticism as the source of the disturbances and emphasized the degree

¹³⁸ Although the rebellion was among the most traumatic events experienced by the Raj from the time of the Mutiny to the Quit India movement, surprisingly little has been written on the subject. Beyond official reports, notably that of Hitchcock and Tottenham, publications on the Mappilla rebellion in English are scant. The dissertation by Stephen Dale and the important work on Mappilla violence by Conrad Wood, now in progress, make significant contributions toward filling that gap.

The fiftieth anniversary of the rebellion, 1971, marked the appearance of a number of publications in Malayalam as well as a renewal of bitter controversy. The most important book on the rebellion is K. Madhavan Nair's *Malabar Kalapam* (Calicut: Mathrubhumi Press, 1971). Written soon after the rebellion, but published only after Nair's death, the account is balanced and is the most complete of any available. An anti-Mappilla tract was published by 'Dasaradhi,' *Malabarile Mappilalahalakal* (Calicut: Jayabharath Publications, 1971) and a pro-Mappilla compilation by M. Alikunhi, *Malabar Kalapam Oru Padanam* (Elathur: Rahma Book Stall, 1972). A special issue of the quarterly *Charitham*, No. 4 (October–December 1971), edited by C. K. Kareem, was devoted to the Malabar revolt. The issue included a number of personal accounts of the rebellion, and references were made to the following books by participants: Koyatti Moulavi, *Irupathonmile Malabar Lahala*; E. Moidu Moulavi, *My Friend*; and Brahmadathan Namboodiri, *Khilafat Samaranakal*.

¹³⁹ Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, p. 216, quoted in Sreedhara Menon, *Kozhikode*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁰ Address by Acting President Hakim Ajmal Khanji Saheb, 36th Indian National Congress, Ahmedabad, 1921. From A.I.C.C. File No. 3/1921, Jawaharlal Nehru Museum, New Delhi.

¹⁴¹ Resolution of the 36th Indian National Congress, Ahmedabad, passed December 27, 1921. From A.I.C.C. File No. 3/1921, Jawaharlal Nehru Museum, New Delhi.

to which Government officials had engaged in provocative action. 'There is no doubt regarding the genesis of the rebellion of 1921,' he wrote. 'It was born out of police repression. Its chief cause was the excessive violence used by the authorities to suppress the Khilaphat movement, and not any *Jenmi*-[*Kanamdar*] conflict or dispute regarding mosque. When police atrocities became unbearable they gave up the vow of non-violence and decided to meet violence with violence itself.'¹⁴² The Malayali newspaper *Swarat* (Quilon) contended that 'the continuance of the riot for such a long time and the various hardships suffered by the people are due to the foolhardy, foolish and autocratic harshness and severity on the part of the Government and their underlings.'¹⁴³

The anti-Mappilla reaction was presented by the *Mail* in a series on 'The Moplah Rebellion.' Referring to such 'innate characteristics' of the Mappilla as 'his mad fanatical fury, his murderous spirit and his reckless disregard for life,' the Special Correspondent wrote: 'I voice the sentiments of a host of victimized Hindus in Malabar when I say that it is their fervent desire, after their terrible experience, that the Moplahs as a race should be exterminated from their country.' In introducing the series, the correspondent wrote that he would present the Mappilla 'in his proper perspective. I will be charitable and will not paint him blacker than he deserves to be.'¹⁴⁴

In sharp contrast to the inflammatory diatribes of the *Mail*, which itself had done so much to arouse Hindu fears and hostility towards the Mappillas, was the position expressed in a pamphlet written by an associate of the Servants of India Society. Holding an unreformed Hindu society responsible for the tragedy, he asked: 'What right have these lovers of Hindoo nation and protectors of Vedic religion to cry over the Mopla rebellion when they did not try beforehand to . . . remove the cause of distance pollution which prepared the ground for Mopla atrocities?'¹⁴⁵

The official Government position on the causes of the Mappilla

¹⁴² *Kazhinja Kalam*, p. 117, quoted in Sreedhara Menon, *Kozhikode*, p. 182.

¹⁴³ January 12, 1922, cited in Newspaper Reports, No. 4 of 1922, p. 94.

¹⁴⁴ *Madras Mail*, November 14, 1921, p. 5. In the next installment, November 15, he 'explained' the Calicut Mappilla's lack of involvement. They are not less clannish and fanatical than their brothers, but 'a good many of the Calicut Moplahs are wealthy and prosperous merchants. . . All these are shrewd enough to know that they would stand to lose by giving sinister play to their innate religious fanaticism. The provisions of the Moplah Outrages Act as to the confiscation of property are plain and unmistakable,' p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ B. L. Satidas, in the introduction to Vishnu Shastri, *Mopla Rebellion of 1921*, (Letters by Shastri to Satidas from Malabar) (Nagpur: B. L. Satidas, 1922), p. iii.

disturbances was most succinctly expressed in the ruling of the Special Tribunal in the trial of Ali Musaliar:

But it was not mere fanaticism, it was not agrarian troubles, it was not destitution that worked on the minds of Ali Musaliar and his followers. The evidence conclusively shows that it was the influence of the Khilafat and non-co-operation that drove them to their crime. It is this which distinguishes the present from all previous out-breaks. Their intention was, absurd though it may seem, to subvert the British Government and to substitute a Khilafat Government by force of arms.¹⁴⁶

A very different interpretation was later given to the rebellion by a Bengali Trotskyite, Saumyendranath Tagore: 'The revolt of the peasants in Malabar, in 1921, constitutes, so far as India is concerned, the greatest manifestation of spontaneous mass upheaval in the first quarter of this century, against British Imperialism.'¹⁴⁷

E. M. S. Namboodiripad also pays homage to the Mappilla: 'It is to the illiterate backward Moplah of the Ernad and Walluvanad taluks that the honour goes of having raised the initial voice of protest

¹⁴⁶ Judgment in Case No. 7 of 1921, Special Tribunal, Calicut, quoted in Gopalan Nair, *Moplah Rebellion*, pp. 7-8. The *Mail* correspondent concurred in the judgment and argued that agrarian discontent is a 'myth.' He asked, 'If agrarian discontent was the cause of the trouble, how can we account for the fact that the rebels are light-heartedly decapitating tenants and mere coolies as well as landlords and capitalists?' *Madras Mail*, November 16, 1921, p. 8.

Rawlinson, in his report, wrote: 'The rebellion of 1921 was directly due to the influence of the Khilafat propaganda. Political agitators, in many cases directly connected with the Congress Committee, had for some time been trading on the religious fanaticism of the Moplah... The outbreak, when it occurred, took a very formidable shape from the start. The rebels aimed at the complete overthrow of law and order and intended to establish an independent Khilafat kingdom in Malabar.' p. 1.

In the Legislative Assembly, New Delhi, a motion was brought by a Muslim member from the Punjab for a committee of inquiry, with a non-official majority, to look into the causes of the Mappilla outbreak. Sir William Vincent responded for the Government: 'I think this Assembly must really have got a little tired of Malabar this session.' It was the third time that such a motion had been raised. 'There has never been any indication of any local demand for such an inquiry... In fact, the causes of the rising were taken for granted, because to those who live on the spot there is no room for any inquiry; they know the facts... (That) the Khilafat movement was the cause of the rising is well known.' The motion was defeated. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, March 9, 1922, pp. 2939-40.

Annie Besant shared the official view. She viewed the 'ghastly misery' and the 'heart-breaking wretchedness' caused by the rebellion as due directly 'to the violent and unscrupulous attacks on the Government made by the Non-Cooperators and the Khilafatists...' Quoted in P. K. K. Menon, *The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Vol. II, p. 95.

¹⁴⁷ Tagore, *Peasants Revolt*, p. 2.

against the oppression of the Jenmi.¹⁴⁸ E. M. S., however, is unwilling to accept a simple 'Marxist' explanation of agrarian discontent. He offers instead the most sophisticated analysis of the rebellion yet published. 'The oppression and exploitation of the Jenmi and the official,' as E.M.S. points out, 'are as bad for the Hindu peasants as for their Moplah comrades.' Had it been a purely agrarian movement, it would surely not have been nearly so confined to the Mappilla community. E.M.S. offers two explanatory factors underlying the almost exclusively Mappilla character of the rebellion:

- (1) The Moplahs as a community have a much higher sense of organization than the Hindus. Their congregational prayers, their common feasts and dinners, their conception of equality among themselves etc., make them much more amenable to organize work than their brethren of other communities. So when the message of organization and structure was preached by political leaders, the Moplahs took it much more easily and with much firmer determination than others.
- (2) The Moplahs had more reason to rally round the Congress and Khilafat than the Hindus. For, one of the slogans raised by the nationalist leadership was 'hands off the Turkish Khalifa,' a slogan dear to the hearts of every pious Muslim. While to the Hindu peasant it was only a question of freedom from bureaucracy and the Jenmi, it was to the Moplah a question of defending his religious head, a question of sacred war against the discriminator of his creed.¹⁴⁹

These factors, while significant, are not sufficient to explain the communal, anti-Hindu turn to the later stages of the rebellion. Here E.M.S. provides a perceptive class analysis of the Khilafat-Non-cooperation-Tenancy movement. The classes involved include:

- a. The Hindu elements of the central leadership in Malabar. They were vakils and intellectuals drawn from among the Kanamdars [substantial tenants]. They were the typical bourgeois nationalist leadership. Furious against the bureaucracy, earnest about the struggle against it, elated at the staggering response to their call for struggle, sanguine about their own ability to control the masses within the four corners of non-violent non-co-operation, indignant against oppressive Jenmi yet blind to the demands and aspirations of the Verumpatamdars [tenants-at-will], they went forth to the masses with the message of organization for a struggle. They were with and among the masses, till the latter began to adopt their own methods of struggle, i.e., went beyond the creed of non-violence and then left them to their fate.
- b. The Moplah elements of the same leadership. Closely akin to their Hindu counterpart, but with firmer roots in the masses. They stood for the

¹⁴⁸ *A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1943), p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Verumpatamdars and were therefore more progressive. They did not leave the masses, but tried to bring them into the limits of non-violent non-co-operation.

- c. The middle leadership in the rebel area consisted mainly of Musaliars, Thangals, Hajis and other saintly Moplahs. Sincere anti-imperialists, they, however, think and speak in terms of religion which had tremendous effect in rallying the Moplahs. Some of them may have had the adventurous and the careerist in them, but most of them were very good material as peasant cadres if only there had been a good and efficient central leadership. Their loss is irreparable to the peasant movement as they showed their mettle as good organisers both before and during the rebellion.
- d. Rank and Filers. These may have naturally included a certain percentage of unsocial and individualist elements but most of them were typical anti-Jenmi and therefore anti-government peasants.
- e. Hindu elements of middle leadership and rank and filers were on the same pattern as their leaders and left the movement altogether after the outbreak and the arrival of the military.

In the course of the rebellion, with the turn to violence, the Hindus initially involved, both leaders and followers, abandoned their Mappilla colleagues, and when Hindus assisted the military in the operations to suppress the rebellion, this brought communal reprisal. 'It was thus,' E.M.S. writes, 'that the greatest mass movement in British Malabar was diverted into the most tragic and futile mass action.'¹⁵⁰

While these factors serve to explain Mappilla involvement, the fact remains that a major portion of the Mappilla community, while perhaps sympathetic to the rebel cause, did not actively support the rebellion. The rebellion was almost wholly contained within the so-called 'fanatical zone' of Ernad and Wallavanad taluks. Here three additional explanatory factors are critical.

Firstly, the Mappillas of South Malabar were traditionally distinct from those of the North. Converted principally from the lower Tiyya and Cheruman communities, they came to Islam as agricultural laborers and poor tenants. Moreover, they followed the *makkathayam* law of inheritance, perpetuating poverty by the division of property among all heirs. In contrast, the Mappillas of North Malabar, many converted from among the higher land-owning castes, followed the *marumakkathayam* law of matrilineal inheritance and enjoyed relative prosperity.

Secondly, the two regions were characterized by different patterns of land tenure. In the North, where garden cultivation predominated, there were few big *janmies*. The great bulk of the population were

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

peasant proprietors, being both landlords and tenants at the same time. South Malabar, and particularly the taluks of Ernad and Walluvanad, was sharply different. In this area of wet, paddy cultivation, landlords were quite distinct as a class from the tenants, the poorest of whom were ever vulnerable to rack renting and eviction.¹⁵¹

Thirdly, the response of the Mappilla peasants of South Malabar to this situation had long been the 'outrage,' directed against those who would exploit and oppress them, the *janmis* and the governmental authorities who enforced their rights. As a form of tenant protest, the outbreak involved 'the maximum degree of terror with a minimum of numbers: What could be more chilling,' Conrad Wood asks, 'than rampaging men for whom death held no fear, but was eagerly sought?'¹⁵² Sanctioned by religion and offering the rewards of martyrdom, the outbreaks over the nineteenth century in Ernad and Walluvanad sustained a tradition of violence among the Mappillas. The rebellion of 1921, in response both to landlord oppression and the perception of Islam in danger, was nurtured by this outbreak tradition.

A multiplicity of explanatory factors may be identified in the analysis of the Mappilla rebellion: agrarian discontent, the perceived threat to Islam, the Congress-Khilafat agitation, inflammatory newspaper reports, and provocation by Government officials and police. Each of these (and, no doubt, others yet unidentified) may well have contributed to the explosive combination that produced the rebellion.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ 'Note by Mr. T. V. Anantan Nair,' Enclosure No. 2 to Appendix F(f), *Malabar Land Tenure Committee Report* (Madras: Government Press, 1887), p. 63.

¹⁵² Conrad Wood, in a seminar presentation on his doctoral research, 'An Interpretation of Moplah Violence,' University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, May 22, 1973.

¹⁵³ Traditionally, the unique event of rebellion or revolution has been 'explained' by a retrodictive procedure: moving from the event backward to the cause or causes behind it. More often than not, this has been in the form of a Procrustian model to which the data, having been carefully sifted, are neatly fitted. In self-fulfilling prophesy, the theory is validated by the fact that the rebellion did occur—the point at which we began. It is true by definition. The retrodictive power of the model, however, is not accompanied by *predictive* power. The conditions of rebellion and revolution are identified only after the fact. Whether we are talking of Johnson's system-dysequilibrium, Gurr's relative deprivation, Davies' J-curve, or Wolf's intrusion of the market economy, similar conditions at other times or in other places may not produce similar results. See Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966); Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); James C. Davies (ed.), *When Men Rebel and Why* (New York: Free Press, 1971); and Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). For a superb critique of the literature on revolution, see Charles Tilly, 'Revolutions and Collective Violence,' in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds), *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975, Vol. 3). 'It is not enough to show that these things happen sometimes,' writes Tilly

The Khilafat-Non-cooperation movement was the catalyst to rebellion. It provided a vehicle for the mobilization of the Mappilla community, but it served to mobilize Mappillas only under certain conditions. As all peasants did not rise against their landlords and the government, neither did all Mappillas join in rebellion. Indeed, the rebellion was centered in the area of Malabar where the organization of the Khilafat-Non-cooperation movement was least developed—in Ernad taluk. Rather than the end product of mobilization, the rebellion itself was the agent of mobilization. It demanded of each Mappilla in the affected areas that he declare his allegiance to either the British Raj or the Khilafat. As the level of violence increased, polarizing conflict between the two competing polities, more people were drawn into the struggle. Against the massive force of official violence, that which the Mappillas might offer in resistance proved feeble. Within six months, the rebellion was crushed.

of the explanatory factors identified by various authors. 'At the very least, they must happen more often than chance would predict.' Rebellion, like revolution, 'almost certainly depends on the convergence of different conditions.' The probability that revolution (or rebellion) is a complex process, as Tilly suggests, 'should encourage us to break it up into its parts before reconstructing a single model of the revolutionary process.' (pp. 483–555.)