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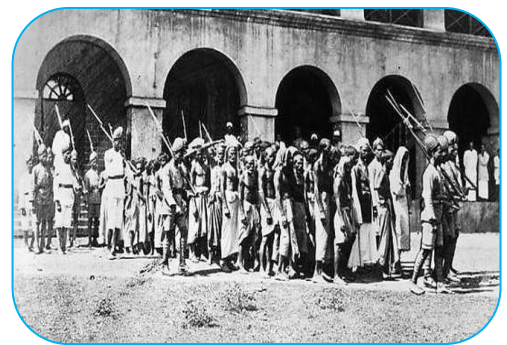
THE MOPLAH REBELLION OF 1921: A COMPLEX UPRISING IN MALABAR

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ABSTRACT

The Moplah Rebellion of 1921, also known as the Malabar Rebellion, is a significant chapter in India's struggle for independence and a subject of historical analysis that continues to captivate scholars and researchers. This article delves into the multifaceted nature of the rebellion, exploring its socio-economic, political, and religious dimensions, while also examining its historical legacy. Through a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources, this article seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the Moplah Rebellion's causes, course, and consequences.



KEYWORDS: *socio-economic, political, and religious dimensions.*

INTRODUCTION

The Moplah Rebellion of 1921 stands as a testament to the complex web of factors that can trigger a popular uprising against colonial rule and oppressive socio-economic conditions. This rebellion, which unfolded in the Malabar region of Kerala, India, was marked by a convergence of agrarian grievances, religious fervor, and political turmoil.

1. Socio-Economic Underpinnings : The Malabar region had a long history of agrarian discontent, with landlords imposing oppressive tenancy practices and high land taxes on impoverished peasants. The rebellion was, in part, a response to the economic exploitation endured by the Moplahs, predominantly Muslim peasants, who felt marginalized and dispossessed. This economic backdrop created a fertile ground for discontent, as peasants struggled to make ends meet while landlords prospered. Landownership was concentrated in the hands of a few, and tenants were often subjected to onerous rent and land revenue demands, leading to widespread agrarian unrest.

2. Religious Dimensions: The Moplah Rebellion was not devoid of religious influences. Many participants were motivated by a belief in a religious prophecy that foretold the fall of the British and the restoration of Islamic rule. This religious fervor added a unique dimension to the rebellion, as participants saw themselves as fighting not only for political freedom but also for the establishment of Islamic governance. Additionally, the rebellion was intertwined with the Khilafat Movement, which sought to support the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate. The British decision to suspend the Khilafat Movement further stoked the flames of discontent among the Moplahs, who viewed it as a betrayal of their religious aspirations.

3. Course of the Rebellion: The Moplahs, in their quest for justice and independence, adopted a confrontational approach. They attacked landlords, British officials, and police, seeking to overthrow the existing order. In some areas, they established their own rule, challenging British authority. These actions were accompanied by looting of government treasuries, which further escalated tensions. The British response was swift and forceful. They deployed troops to quell the rebellion and imposed martial law, effectively curtailing civil liberties. Reports of atrocities on both sides marred the conflict, with violence spiraling out of control in some instances. This brutal confrontation left a deep scar on the region's history.

4. Consequences and Legacy: The Moplah Rebellion had far-reaching consequences, reshaping the socio-economic and political landscape of the Malabar region. It led to significant changes in landownership and tenancy rights. Some landlords were dispossessed, and tenants' rights were strengthened through legislative reforms. This marked a significant shift in the power dynamic between landlords and peasants, as the rebellion highlighted the need for land reforms and tenant protection. However, the rebellion's legacy is still debated today. Some view it as a valiant struggle against colonialism and oppressive landlords, highlighting the socio-economic injustices faced by the Moplahs. Others emphasize its communal and religious aspects, arguing that it exacerbated tensions between different religious communities in the region. This complex legacy continues to be a subject of historical inquiry and debate, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the rebellion.

5. Political Context: To understand the Moplah Rebellion fully, it is essential to consider the broader political context of the time. The early 20th century was marked by a rising tide of anti-colonial sentiment in India. The success of the non-cooperation movement and the emergence of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru energized the Indian freedom struggle. Against this backdrop, the Moplah Rebellion can be seen as part of the larger wave of resistance against British rule.

6. The Khilafat Movement: The Khilafat Movement, which aimed to support the Ottoman Caliphate, played a pivotal role in the lead-up to the Moplah Rebellion. Muslims across India, including the Moplahs, were deeply invested in this movement. When the British government decided to withdraw support for the Ottoman Caliphate, it led to widespread disillusionment among Indian Muslims, adding fuel to the fire of discontent in the Malabar region. The suspension of the Khilafat Movement by the British authorities further exacerbated the Moplahs' sense of betrayal and contributed to their willingness to engage in rebellion.

7. Socio-Political Mobilization: The Moplah Rebellion also witnessed significant socio-political mobilization. Leaders and charismatic figures emerged within the Moplah community, galvanizing support for the rebellion. This mobilization was not limited to any particular class or section of society; instead, it drew participants from various strata, united by their shared grievances and aspirations for change. The rebellion showcased the power of collective action and grassroots movements in challenging established authority.

8. British Response : The British response to the rebellion was characterized by the use of force and the imposition of martial law. British troops were dispatched to quell the uprising, resulting in intense military operations in the Malabar region. The imposition of martial law curtailed civil liberties and allowed for arrests and punitive actions against those suspected of involvement in the rebellion. While the British justified these measures as necessary to restore order, they were also criticized for their heavy-handed approach and the reported atrocities committed by some British forces.

9. Atrocities and Violence: The Moplah Rebellion was marked by a significant level of violence on both sides. While the Moplahs engaged in attacks on landlords and British officials, there were also instances of retaliatory violence by British forces. Reports of massacres and atrocities added to the brutality of

the conflict. Such violence deepened the divide between communities and left a lasting impact on the collective memory of the region. It is essential to acknowledge and analyze these acts of violence within the broader context of the rebellion's causes and consequences.

10. Socio-Economic Reforms: One of the lasting impacts of the Moplah Rebellion was the socio-economic reforms that followed. The rebellion brought to the forefront the need for land reforms and tenant protection. Legislative changes were implemented to address these issues, leading to a redistribution of land and more equitable tenancy arrangements. The rebellion, in this sense, served as a catalyst for change in the agrarian structure of the Malabar region.

11. Communal and Religious Dimensions: The communal and religious dimensions of the Moplah Rebellion have been a subject of historical debate. Some argue that the rebellion exacerbated communal tensions, particularly between Hindus and Muslims, while others emphasize the economic and political motivations behind the uprising. It is crucial to examine these dimensions critically, recognizing that the rebellion had both socio-economic and religious aspects that influenced its course and outcomes.

CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, the Moplah Rebellion of 1921 is a complex historical event that defies simple categorization. Its causes and consequences are intertwined with socio-economic, political, and religious factors, making it a rich subject of study for historians and scholars. As we reflect on this chapter in India's struggle for independence, we must acknowledge the intricate tapestry of influences that shaped the rebellion and its enduring impact on the Malabar region's socio-political landscape. The rebellion serves as a reminder of the multifaceted nature of popular uprisings and the need for a comprehensive understanding of historical events.

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