



*The exile of Sayyid Fazl Tangal of Mamburam*

*is a page in the history of Malabar*

*that is as curious as it is little mysterious.*

*This research article examines*

*rare documents and concludes*

*that the Mappila outrages*

*were not instigated*

*by the 'fanatic' Tangal or his associates;*

*"their roots lay elsewhere"*

**PROF. A.P. ABDURAHIMAN**

## **DEPORTATION OF SAYYID FAZL**

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Sayyid Fazl of Mamburam was banished to Arabia, because the British suspected that he was inciting the people to revolt against the British government and the land-lords who supported them. But the perusal of official records would reveal that the assumption of the British was erroneous; the Tangal underwent all the sufferings and persecution merely because he devoted his time for the promotion of his religion.

The rebellions that broke out in Malabar in the middle of 19th century are attributed to the fanaticism fanned by the preachings of the priests and Tangals. Tirurangadi became the hotbed of fanaticism, according to the British administration, because of the presence of Sayyid Fazl alias Pukoya Tangal of Mamburam. This was not a new theory, for the same charge had been levelled against his father, popularly known as Taramal Tangal.

The Malabar Collector had reported that Taramal Tangal made a daring attack on the escheated property belonging to the former rebel Attan Moyin Kurikkal<sup>1</sup>. When the District authorities issued summons, he absconded but appeared in Calicut with twenty five armed men<sup>2</sup>. The permission of the Government was sought as to whether coercive measures were to be used for it was feared that any attempt "to seize the Tangal by force would lead to an atrocity which would be attended with the most dreadful consequences....."<sup>3</sup>. The District Collector's report, based on the information furnished by the subordinate officials was erroneous for the former had to recommend to the Government to ignore Tangal's Office. On further enquiry, the Collector found that Tangal, who was very advanced in age, and had been living in Malabar for 50 years, never associated himself with these who were hostile to the Government<sup>4</sup>. But his son Sayyid Fazl was not destined to get such lenient treatment. His popularity among the people of Malabar was viewed with suspicion by the British officials.



The Manjeri riot (1849) gave an opportunity to the British to start their campaign against Fazl. The lieutenant of Attan Kurikkal, the Chief of Manjeri riot was Kunhi Koya Tangal, son of Sayyid Mohammed Tangal, who was closely "connected with Pukoyah." The association of a relative of the Tangal in the rebellion was construed as his direct involvement in the rising. Moreover it was pointed out by the Collector that the Mappilas believed it was essential to go to Tirurangadi for the blessing of the Tangal<sup>6</sup> before their exploits. But the Tangal clearly stated that he never encouraged fanaticism or anti-government rebellion and he could not but bless the people who sought it. It is his misfortune if any evil-designing people who partake of this blessing.... shall hold that it warrants them to commit any atrocity, which their perverted minds consider a service to God<sup>7</sup>. In spite of his bold assertion that he never assented to their evil doings, the District authorities insisted upon his removal to Cannanore, alleging that the Tangal blessed the insurgents. But the Government turned down the request saying there was no sufficient ground for his removal from his place.<sup>8</sup> To the enquiry of the Government regarding the complicity of Tangal<sup>9</sup>, Collector Conolly reported that as far as direct evidence of his involvement none is forthcoming, but there are indirect evidences such as that all perpetrators are his disciples" and songs of thier exploits 'are dedicated to the Tirurangadi Thangal<sup>10</sup>

The Collector had no proof to offer for his complicity. It appears that he was very much concerned about the high esteem in which the Tangal was held by the local people, which could be used for instigating the people against the Government. The common folk, Collector writes, looked on the Tangal 'as imbued with a portion of divinity'. They swear by his foot as their most solemn oath, Earth on which he has spat or walked is treasured up<sup>11</sup>. Since the Tangal was of friendly with the British, it was presumed that he was the brain behind the rebellion. Though the British officials in Malabar were insistent on his removal from the District, they were not unaware of the risk involved in carrying out thier plan without his consent, for the Collector noted that it would be needful to guard against any sudden eruption of fanaticism from an armed mob by having a sufficient force at hand<sup>12</sup>. But the Government was not asking to act upon the lines suggested by Conolly, the Malabar Collector, as the indirect evidences of his encouragement of the outrage, cited by the Collector "is quite insufficient.... to warrant any measure for his removal from Malabar<sup>13</sup>.

Immediately after the Mattanur rising Conolly began to press the Government to take urgent steps against this dangerous person. The Tangal was, in the opinion of the

Collector, a dangerous person, against whom the police were powerless. To illustrate that he enjoyed an *imperium in imperio*, he cited the incident that occurred at Belutnad, where some followers of the Tangal approached the Tahsildar demanding to give a cow under dispute for arbitration by the Tangal<sup>14</sup>. The Government viewed seriously the activities of the Tangal, but instructed the Collector that no measure was to be taken against him until the final orders passed<sup>15</sup>.

Meanwhile the Collector apprised them of the military and administrative facts involved in the removal of the Tangal from Malabar. A strong body of troops armed with a few guns might do to take possession of the Tirurangadi mosque and to repulse the attack of the fanatics. But the danger of 'excessive slaughter of the deluded wretches who would cheerfully rush on certain death to help or avenge their spiritual head<sup>16</sup> was not ruled out. More over the Government could expect risings in all the villages inhabited by the Mappila. As an alternative to the measure suggested above, the Collector requested the Government to permit him to use the good offices of the important Mappilas to persuade the Tangal to leave the country; for no personal consideration would lead him to desert his post, but the conviction that his further presence would tend to the damage of his faith and the injury of those who profess it Malabar..... might lead him to go away voluntarily<sup>17</sup>.

The moderate policy of the Collector was not appreciated by his subordinates. W. Robinson, Acting Joint Magistrate of Malabar pressed Conolly to take the Tangal into custody for his role in the recent outbreak in the Kottayam Taluk. Nine of the group visited Tirurangadi and got the consent and <sup>18</sup> blessing of the Pukoya Tangal on their horrid determination". The Government was of the view that the Tangal should not be allowed to remain in the country to encourage and abet the crimes, and accepted suggestion of the District Collector to use the good office of the influential men to persuade the Tangal to leave quickly<sup>19</sup>.



Meanwhile the Government appointed T.L. Strange, Judge of Sadr and Faujdavi Adalat to enquire into the Mappila disturbances, and directed him to give his earliest attention to the conduct of Tirurangadi Tangal and to advise the Government regarding the measures to be adopted against him. It was resolved that no steps were taken for arresting the Tangal or removing him from the district until orders passed on the report of Strange<sup>20</sup>.

The rumour that the Government was going to the Tangal brought nearly twelve thousand armed Mappilas to the Tirurangadi Mosque on 13th Feb. The Collector reported that the Tangal was closeted with the chiefs till 3.p.m when he came out and dismissed the majority of his visitors<sup>21</sup>, that the armed men were dismissed shows that the Tangal had no intention to misuse his popularity and the apprehensions of the British about his activities were unfounded.

But Robinson continued to harp on the same string pointing out the complicity of the Tirurangadi Tangal in the Mattanur outbreak. He asserted that the people of Mattanur had no connection with Tirurangadi, a place some 80 to 90 miles away and they "obtained his full assent and his all efficacious blessings on the murderous intent....."<sup>22</sup>. Relying on the words of subordinate officials Robinson argued that the Tangal should be brought to trial.

Meanwhile Strange Commission recommended to the Government to bring the Tangal to submission to the Authority or suffer the consequences<sup>23</sup>. Conolly continued his efforts to persuade the Tangal to leave the District peacefully. To the emissary of Conolly Tangal said that he had not done anything to deserve the displeasure of the Government. He repudiated the deeds of the fanatics; "that it was his misfortune that a general blessing intended to convey spiritual benefits to those alone who acted in accordance with the Mohammadan faith should be misinterpreted by a few parties who acted in contradiction to its precepts"<sup>24</sup>. The Government approved

the suggestion of Conolly to persuade the Tangal to leave Malabar voluntarily. The Tangal himself expressed his willingness to leave Malabar and take permanent settlement in Arabia in order to avoid misusing his name for deeds of horror.

On 19th March 1852, Sayyid Fazl, with his family, followers and servants set off for Arabia. His adherents tried to persuade him to change or delay his departure from Malabar. Till the last he remained inside his house and thus avoided popular excitement. When the news of his departure became public, a huge crowd gathered at his place. So he resolved to take boat from Parappanangadi abandoning the earlier plan of going to Calicut. By the time the Tangal reached the coast, the crowd swelled into 8000 showing strong sign of grief at his departure. Tangal's behavior after his resolution to leave Malabar was 'prudent and polite'<sup>25</sup>.

The departure of Sayyid Fazl did not produce any change in the turbulent and volatile situation of Malabar. Not only did riots break out in various parts of Malabar in the following years, but Conolly, the District Collector was murdered by the Mappila convicts (11th Sept. 1855). This shows that the Mappila outrages were not instigated by the 'fanatical' preachings of Sayyid Fazl or Muslim priests, and their roots lay elsewhere.

#### REFERENCE

1. Collector's letter to secretary to Government of Madras, dated 10-4-1817, F.434, Collectors Records Vol. 2284
2. *Ibid.* F. 437
3. *Ibid.* F. 439
4. Collector's letter dated 29th April 1817, F. 510, Collectorate Records Vol 2284
5. Collector to the Government dated 12th Oct, 1849.
6. *Ibid.*, para 35.
7. Minutes by the President dated 22nd Oct, 1849
8. Minutes of consultation dated 20th Nov 1851
9. Collector's letter to the Government dated 29th Nov, 1851
10. Collector's letter to the Government dated 29th Nov, 1851
11. *Ibid.*
12. Minute dated 10th Dec, 1851
13. Collector's letter to the Government dated 29th Jan 1852
14. Minutes of consultation (Jud) dated 6th Feb, 1852
15. Collector to the Government dated 7th Feb, 1852
16. *Ibid.*, para 8.
17. Robinson's letter to Conolly dated 5th Feb 1852, para 5.
18. Minute by the President dated 12th Feb 1852
19. Minute of consultation dated 17th Feb 1852 para 11
20. Collector to the Government dated 17th Feb, 1852
21. Robinson to Conolly dated 13th Feb 1852
22. Strange to the Government dated 21st Feb 1852
23. Conolly to Secretary to Government dated 21st Feb 1852
24. Conolly to Secretary dated 26th March, 1852