



JINGOISTIC PROPOSITION IN MAHE –THE FRENCH SETTLEMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Mahe was the only French territory on the Malabar or western coast of India. It was a settlement founded way back in 1721 by the French in India. Mahe is located in the Malabar region is bounded by the ocean and Ghats in the east. Mahe town was situated on the left bank near the estuary of a small river known as Mahe River. In History, geography, culture and language Mahe was different from other French settlements in India. These peculiarities contributed to the evolution of a distinct political consciousness in Mahe. The Mappilas of Malabar more than the Hindus were imbued with a strong sense of nationalism and revolt against the British during this period. But this nationalism was tinged with Islamic religious fervor but it did not find much sympathy among the Hindus of both British and French Malabar. Mahe revolt never had the coloring of class conflict. However it cannot be claimed that there was no relationship between the independence movement in Mahe and the general economic evolution and structure put in place by the French. The independence movement in Mahe aimed to Indianise the entire state structure. This paper tries to highlight the freedom movement in Mahe and its uniqueness.

Keywords: Jingoistic, Proposition, Mappilas, Mayyazhikara, Mayyazhi

INTRODUCTION

Mahe was the only French territory on the Malabar or western coast of India. It was a settlement founded way back in 1721 by the French in India. It was

merged with the Indian union in 1954. With the marvelous accounts of Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler France was fascinated by the East because of its beauties and longed for its wealth and

opulence. The French minister Colbert founded in 1664, the French East India Company. The need for the establishment of a French settlement on the western Malabar Coast in order to buy pepper which was extremely costly in Europe at that time, the French established themselves at Mahe in North Malabar with the permission of the local prince of Badagara. Mahe brought the French nearer to the centre of production of pepper and other items like cardamom. They traded not only with Europe but also with other west Asian and south-east Asian countries.

LOCATION

Mahe is located in the Malabar region is bounded by the ocean and Ghats in the east. This factor contributed to its constitution as a single geographical unit cut off from Karnataka in the north and Tamilnadu in the east. Mahe town was situated on the left bank near the estuary of a small river known as Mahe River. Small boats could navigate inland up to a distance of 2 or 3 kilometers. This stream rose in the heavy forests of the Wynad Ghats and after a course of about 34 miles fell into the sea at Mahe. The name 'Mahe' seems to have been derived from 'Mayyali' or 'Mayyazhi'. There is also a reference to Mahe as 'Mayyazhikara' in an old record of 1724, which is an agreement

between the French at Mahe and the Muslims of Peringattur lies to the north of Mahe town.

FRENCH SETTLEMENT AT MAHE

Mahe was originally part of the territory of the Nayar ruler of Badagara. The French who already had a small settlement in Calicut in Zamorin territory approached the ruler of Badagara with the intention of founding a settlement in Mahe. The French chief of Calicut actually asked for two sites in Mahe one near the river and another on a small hill at the mouth of the river to build a fortified settlement. The ruler was ready to give the former but the latter he refrained because the small hill was used as cemetery by the Muslims. A treaty was signed accordingly on April 2, 1721. The ruler of Badagara conceded the land near the river and pledged not to sell the pepper of his country to anyone else except the French.

HISTORY OF MAHE

French Mahe encountered opposition from the English the other west European power based at neighbouring Tellicherry. The English waged wars against the French with the intention of driving the French away from Mahe and establishing a trade monopoly in the area. They conquered Mahe in 1761. The

English razed Mahe to the ground and the French were left with the costly task of reconstructing it when they recovered in 1765. Mahe seems to have been important for Hyder Ali as a port on the west coast for it was through that port that he received his guns and ammunitions and French reinforcements. Hyder Ali visited Mahe in 1766 during his invasion of Malabar. The relationship between the French and the Mysore sultans did not bring peace to the French at Mahe. In 1779 the English troops occupied Mahe. In 1782, its fortifications were not only razed to the ground but the town was almost entirely burnt. It was restored to the French in 1785 only to be reoccupied in 1793 by the British with the defeat of Tipu sultan in 1792. According to the treaty concluded between the British and the French in 1814-15

- ✓ French rule in India was restricted to Pondicherry, Karaikal, Chanderanagore, Yanam and Mahe which were geographically separated at the same time limited in area and population.
- ✓ French recognized the paramountcy of British India over all parts of French India.
- ✓ France was deprived from fortifying their settlements and they were to maintain force for

maintaining internal law and order only.

Thus the French established their control over Mahe. The French had established themselves in Mahe for economic and commercial purposes. But gradually they had become its political masters.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF MAHE

The area of Mahe was just 5909 hectares. In 1721 it must have been sparsely populated. In 1752 it accounted to 3500 inhabitants of which 500 were soldiers. The Christians 2000 and the remaining were Hindus and Mappilas. (The local name for Muslims) Towards the end of the 19th century the total population of Mahe had risen to 8383 in which Hindus and Muslims had risen to 6340 and 1852 respectively. The Christians became insignificant. The year 1948 was the last census held in French India. The Christians were of 2 or 3 percent of the population the rest being made up of Hindus divided on the basis of castes. There were great number of Tiyyas followed by Creoles Mappilas and the Mukkuwas, the Hindu fisherman. The Tiyyas and Mappilas were employed as local police and in the army. The high caste Nayar, the ruling class and the Nambuthiris, the Brahmins in Mahe left

the field and free for lower caste to predominate in the affairs of Mahe. The Mahe society underwent a change due to the establishment of European power in Malabar. This change was brought out by the introduction of three fundamental factors – in the domain of land ownership and taxation, of administration and politics and in the field of education. It led to the subsequent development of political and national consciousness in Mahe or French Malabar.

NATIONALIST STIRRINGS IN MAHE

In History, geography, culture and language Mahe was different from other French settlements in India. These peculiarities contributed to the evolution of a distinct political consciousness in Mahe. It was only in 1910, District Congress Committee was formed at Calicut in Malabar. The Mappila leaders were one of the first among Indians to resist not only the physical subordination involved in colonialism, but also the ideological subordination i.e., subordination to the system of values, traditions and cultures of European origin. It had its influence in French Malabar. But this nationalism was tinged with Islamic religious fervor but it did not find much sympathy among the Hindus of French Malabar. The mass movements like Non co-operation

movement and Khilafat movements had succeeded in instilling a certain national and religious consciousness among the people of Malabar. At that time Candotte Erampally Gopalan had emerged as the Mayor of Mahe.

With the call from Mahatma Gandhi, Kallat Damodaran, a Tiyya belonging to one of the prominent and wealthiest in Mahe plunged himself in the Civil Disobedience movement in neighbouring British Malabar. He was arrested by the British Indian police and underwent rigorous imprisonment in neighbouring Cannanore prison. Similarly, another Tiyya from Mahe, by the name of Kumaran, son of Iraye Kunger, a wealthy toddy shop owner joined the Gandhian movement and underwent imprisonment in British Malabar. Kumaran with other young men of Mahe were instrumental in organizing a youth league in Mahe in 1934. Anyhow the Civil Disobedience Campaign brought the leaders of British Malabar to become closely acquainted with French Malabar and its nationalities.

VISIT OF MAHATMA GANDHI TO MAHE

Karunakara Menon, a migrant to Mahe from British Malabar furthers the relationship of Mahesians with the Congress leaders and arranged for the visit

of Mahatma Gandhi to Mahe. Mahatma Gandhi came to Mahe in January 1934 for the avowed purpose of Harijan uplift and social reforms. In fact, he seems to have visited the famous Puthalam Bhagawathi temple of Mahe on condition that the animal sacrifice performed there traditionally was stopped. Gandhi did not refrain from giving a political message to the Mahesians. These moves by Congress and Mahatma Gandhi seem to have had a certain impact in the French Indian territories. One of the more visible impacts was the formation of the Youth League after Gandhi's visit to Mahe. But the Mappilas of Mahe remained aloof from the Civil Disobedience Movement and they were also indifferent to Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Mahe. Following Mahatma Gandhi's visit his son Abdulla Gandhi who had converted to Islam was also encouraged the Harijans and other low castes to convert to Islam.

Two years later in 1936, the same M.K.Menon was instrumental in arranging the reception to A.K.Gopalan, a prominent Socialist minded Malabar leader, who passed through Mahe on a Hunger March, which attracted the attention of a good number of students, traders and workers. On account of Menon's intense involvement in Mahe politics, the French Government finally

decided to expel him from Mahe on 23 May 1938.

During this period the Mahe Municipal and Local Council members were hailed from the landlord families of Mahe. They possessed huge areas of land had a preponderant importance in Mahe society. The prominent landlord politicians sympathized with the Franco-Hindu party which looked more towards France and they never paid attention to the question of independence or nationalism in India. After the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Mahe, Marie Savary an advocate and Purushottaman organized opposition in the name of a new party known as Mahajana Sabha party. This party was sympathetic to the Congress ideals. Its main aim was the abolition of the dictatorial powers of the Governor, the abolition of two-list voters' system and wanted to conduct free and fair polls and never went to the extent of demanding outright independence from the French.

The foundation of Mahajana Sabha in Mahe took place in the presence of Subbiah, the trade union and Mahajana Sabha leader from Pondicherry. He visited Mahe after attending thr Haripura session of the Indian National congress in 1938. He was given a rousing welcome by the Mahesians at the Mahe railway station. He was also taken in a procession by Mahe

stalwarts like Kumaran, Barathan, Muchikkal Padmanabhan and Anandan Nair. It could be said that Subbiah's visit had galvanized the forces favourable to the Congress and its nationalist objectives in Mahe.

In June 1938, the Kerala provincial congress committee which met at Calicut appointed a Muslim contact committee headed by Mohammed Musaliar to bring in Muslims within the national movement of All India Congress party. All India Muslim League which was revived by Mohammed Ali Jinnah was the strongest party among Muslims at least in North Malabar. As French Malabar was part of north Malabar geographically, it could be assumed that the Muslim league had a great influence among the Muslims of Mahe too. All India Muslim league under Jinnah launched the demand for Pakistan in March 1940, which envisaged the carving of independent Muslim states in the north-west and north-east of India. The Muslim league leaders toured the whole of India including Malabar to canvass support for Pakistan.

DEVELOPMENTS DURING II WORLD WAR

On the outbreak of II world war, all communist outfits in French India were banned and their assets liquidated. The Communist party in Mahe began to

function legally from September 1940, under the guidance of Kallat Damodaran. However the supporters of the Communist party in Mahe seems to have been limited in numbers. On account of the anti war propaganda of the Communists, many Communists including Kallat Damodaran were imprisoned in Vellore jail. But during the II world war, the Franco-Hindu party and Mahajana party declined rapidly. The vacuum was filled up to some extent by a new anti-fascist and anti-nazi movement known as Combat, started in Algeria, a French colony. It was started in Pondicherry by Julien Athisayam. It was a broad-based organization, it consisted of government officials, judges, doctors, professors, students, landlords, merchants, workers, peasants, communists, ex-servicemen and policemen and the Franco-Hindu party elements. The committees of combat were duly organized in Mahe.

The French Indians also had taken part in the French resistance movement against Nazi Germany. One such personality was Michilotte Madhavan, a student at Sorbonne University who had participated in the Youth League and Harijan Sevak Sangh of Pondicherry. He was executed in Paris by Nazi Germans on 21 September 1942. The very existence of such movements in Mahe proves that a section of population

were still sympathetic to the causes of their colonial masters.

In the individual satyagraha movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in October 1940, some members of the Mahajana Sabha in Mahe joined in it and were imprisoned. For the Quit India Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942, the leaders of Mahajana Sabha and the Mahe Socialist wing took active part in it. Raman and Mangalat Raghavan were arrested. The Muslims of Mahe stood aloof from the Quit India movement. With the death of Joseph David in 1944 the Franco-Hindu party passed into oblivion. A new party National Democratic Front was founded comprised of Communists, Socialists, some old Franco-Hindu party elements and many other associations, groups and individuals. The party wanted an autonomous government within the French Republic. The Mahajana party under Kumaran continued to exist and even grow. They sympathized strongly with the Indian National Congress nationalist objectives and participated in the Quit India Movement.

I.K.Kumaran, the leader of the Mahajana Sabha was the son of a wealthy toddy shop owner of Mahe. He was more inclined towards Gandhian ideals. He espoused the Gandhian cause from 1930. At this juncture the leading personalities of

the National Democratic Front N. Sahadevan and C.C.Kumaran, the relative of I.K.Kumaran belonged to Tiyya community. Many of the leaders of Mahajana Sabha were also Tiyyas. So the Tiyyas were politically mobilized. I.K.Kumaran was able to attract a good number of Tiyyas of ordinary background to his party but also people of a similar background from the other castes, especially from the numerous Mukkuwa communities. The ultimate aim of every leader involved in the politics of this period was the pursuit of power and prestige. The white colonial masters wanted to keep that power in their hands but it was not easy for them in the 20th century, now the Indians were clamoring for more powers within the institutional structure and even outside it. The colonialists by their actions and aloofness set an example to the Indians on the question of nationalism. The Indians became conscious of this simple factor. I.K.Kumaran was one among them.

Nationalists too were in search of power and prestige. But they sought them on the basis of certain nationalistic ideals and principles, with the ultimate objective of ousting colonialism or the foreign powers from India. It was at this time the election had come about and a question arose whether the French

should stay in India or Mahe should merge with the Indian union or not. The election date had been fixed as 10, October, 1948. There were two groups' pro-merger and anti-merger groups. Both wanted to win the elections at all cost. The October revolution was the first mass uprising in French India against French colonial rule. Though there was an element of violence involved in the forcible takeover of the administrative machinery and the police stations, yet the course of the revolt and the takeover never caused effusion of blood or death. I.K.Kumaran was the moving spirit behind the revolt, the takeover of Mahe and the setting up of provisional government of free Mahe, otherwise known as Defence Committee. During the revolt and the short reign of the provisional government there was hardly any instance of any attack by the revolutionaries whose prime target was the machinery of colonial state.

CONCLUSION

Mahe revolt never had the coloring of class conflict. However it cannot be claimed that there was no relationship between the independence movement in Mahe and the general economic evolution and structure put in place by the French. The independence movement in Mahe aimed to Indianise the

entire state structure. If the members of the ruling class had decided to throw in their lot with the nationalist forces during the revolt or after, the nationalist forces, as represented by the Mahajana Sabha would have only welcomed them with open arms. As independence approached in 1954, many members of the ruling class abandoned the sinking French ship and swam into the arms of the nationalist forces without much difficulty.

The revolt did not provoke any mass exodus from Mahe. There was no opposition in any form to the revolt from the supporters of the pro-French ruling class, except for the faint opposition by the Communists. The participation of Mahesians in great numbers in the revolt was fundamentally nationalist in nature.

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