

'Moulavi' and 'Swadeshabhimani'

By B. Kalyani Amma

Smt. B. Kalyani Amma is a writer and wife of Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai. The Govt of Kerala returned the press to Moulavi' s family in 1957. This article appeared in a Souvenir brought out during the occasion.

The owner of 'Swadeshabhimani' publication and press Vakkom Abdul Khadir Moulavi – who had shown immense determination and steadfastness from 1905 till the end of September 1910 – was a gem of a person. A 'Swadeshabhimani Souvenir' will not be complete without a reference to him. But, as a matter of fact, I really don't know what I ought to write about him. I had a distant and very limited relation with him. But I shall write whatever I had come across of him and what I had come to know about him through my husband.

It was in 1906 that my husband joined 'Swadeshabhimani'. It was Moulavi himself who came to our house in Thiruvananthapuram and invited him to take charge as the editor and then took us to Vakkom. Though I did accompany him then, I had to return to Thiruvananthapuram within days. During Moulavi' s visit to our house and my short stay at Vakkom I had just got distant glimpses of him. I had always considered and respected him as an elder brother.

I went back to Vakkom in the same year. We lived in a house next to that of Moulavi' s. In most of the evenings, after the editor had come home, Moulavi used to drop in our house. They used to sit in the verandah and discussed many things. I had listened to them from the inner room. He was very concerned about our well being and comforts. Moulavi was soft-spoken and always wore whites. Many times, I had seen him passing by either alone or with friends. In those days, Hindu-Muslim unity was never in jeopardy. But still, what my husband and Moulavi had was above mere friendship. I'd rather put it as a perfect example of fraternal affection.

I met Moulavi' s mother and sisters during my second stay at Vakkom. They used to send servants to take me to their house as they did not move about freely because of the 'purdah' system which they had followed. I did enjoy their hospitality. I am still thankful to Moulavi' s mother for her maternal affection towards me during my pregnancy at that time.

In July 1907, the press and newspaper office were shifted to Thiruvananthapuram. Though Moulavi was still the proprietor, the editor had been given total freedom in the running of the publication. They never had any legal or financial contract between them. Still, Moulavi provided all the financial aid to set up the press in Thiruvananthapuram. My husband thought he would once repay Moulavi. But somehow he could not. Moulavi used to come to Thiruvananthapuram to meet the editor who was mostly busy with his work. I had seen him regretting not having enough time to spend with Moulavi.

Travancore Government had been waiting for a chance to corner 'Swadeshabhimani' since the beginning of 1910. But they had to wait until the historic declaration of '10th of Kanni' to see the press locked up. I need not go on in detail about it here. For Moulavi, the parting with his close friend and colleague was more touching and appalling than the financial loss it had caused.

It was after Sree Moolam Thirunna had passed away in 1925 that I came to Travancore again after I had accompanied my husband during his exile. It was at that time that I was fortunate enough to meet Moulavi. Once during my train journey from Kollam to Thiruvananthapuram, some of my friends came at the Chirayalkeezhu station to meet me. They pointed to a man standing by the fence and asked me if I remembered him. I recognised him, it was Moulavi. I let him know that I would be returning to Kollam after a few days and also that I would like to meet him.

After I returned to my daughter's house in Kollam, he paid me a visit and we talked for almost half an hour. Both of us were moved when we talked about my husband and our family. Both of us were at the brink of tears and could not carry on the conversation any longer. Before going, he said his relatives had been persuading him to file an appeal to get the press back. And he added that he had not yielded. "Why do I need the press without my editor?" he asked and went away. I was just silent.

I have come to know that the present Government have decided to return whatever remaining of 'Swadeshabhimani' to its inheritors. There is a fitting inheritor as well. Moulavi's son Sri. Vakkom Abdul Khadir. I hope the Government will do well in giving him what was due to his father without much delay. The press will certainly be of great help to the son who is also a journalist and a writer.

My sincere obeisance to a man who was cultured, wise, learned and with a true heart!

(Translated from Malayalam by Sabeen Eqbal)