

## Vakkom Mohammad Abdul Khadir (1873-1932)

Vakkom Mohammad Abdul Khadir who is now popularly known as Vakkom Moulavi, no cleric or religious teacher, was one of the tallest leaders of the Kerala Renaissance which began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued till the end of the first half 20<sup>th</sup> century with great vigour that caused great awakening in Kerala in the tidal waves of which several of the superstitions connected with religious beliefs of almost all communities in Kerala were washed away and new ideas of freedom and progress blossomed.

The role played by the Moulavi in several spheres of life during this period has been evaluated as really epoch-making. Education, social and religious reforms and political journalism are the areas in which the Moulavi's works are considered to be memorable. A great scholar and a multi-linguist, he made periodicals in Malayalam and Arabi-Malayalam, mainly for illiterate Muslims, particularly their womenfolk. Journals were the main medium through which he propagated his programme and ideas of social and political changes, the effect of which was profound. That the orthodox leadership of the community who had a sinister hold on the ignorant masses was furious at the Moulavi's efforts at emancipation of these exploited sections of the society was positive proof of the deep impact of his multi-prolonged reform work. They tried to create and obstacles in the Moulavi's movement in so many mean ways.

The first journal '*Swedeshabhimani*' (The Patriot) that the Moulavi started in 1905 was meant to create an awareness among people of the evil effects of the then feudal autocracy on their life and well-being of the people of the State. The Policy-statement of the paper in its inaugural number was bold and clear which stated that the *Swedeshabhimani* would never shrink away from its responsibility of promoting the welfare of the people out of fear or any adverse consequences due to its policies. The paper lived up to this policy declaration until the paper was banned, the printing press confiscated and its then editor, Shri. K. Ramakrishna Pillai was arrested and exiled from the State on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1910, through a royal proclamation.

The journal 'Muslim' was mainly meant for religious reforms of the community and restore the the purity and essence of Islam shorn of all the accretions of superstitious and meaningless rituals and other evil practices. 'Al Islam' in Arabi-Malayalam was begun with the purpose to take his ideas of reform to illiterates in general particularly Muslim women who were steeped in ignorance. It had its intended effect. Another Malayalam monthly 'Deepika' was begun almost at the evening of his life. The publication had a wide range of interests like education, history, science, literature, philosophy etc. The Moulavi wanted to publish his Malayalam translation of Quran with commentary in each issue.

The works of the Moulavi include original writings of seminal value and translation. Among the former, 'The Basics of Islam', though a thin volume, is of great fundamental value. The Moulavi traveled tirelessly throughout the length of the state and inspired people through word of mouth, formal and informal, to take up reform work through organizations and take up meaningful activities under their auspices. All these ceaseless activities told heavily upon his health. His generous spending for these various activities almost completely wiped out the rich patrimony he inherited and was deep in debt at the time of his death. All these hastened his early death and he passed away on October 31, 1932.

The trail that Moulavi blazed in the spheres of general education, emancipation of the then society from social stagnation and cultural poverty was largely responsible for the making of modern Kerala with the Renaissance values still relevant for further progress. Therefore he is looked upon as the makers of enlightened Kerala along with half a dozen leaders of that historically important period

By Dr.N.A.Karim