

Vakkom Moulavi's Contributions: Prof. K. M. Bahauddin

Prof. K.M. Bahauddin (From the book 'Kerala Muslims' – the long struggle)

The religious leaders in Kerala in the latter part of 19th century and early in this century were different from those of the previous periods. The emphasis in the ritualistic aspect of the religion and hatred of all that was western which was common during the 19th century made the Muslims an inward looking community. The effort to make the community outward looking came from the leadership of Sannaullah Makti Thangal (1847-1912) and Vakkom Abdul Khadir Moulavi (1873-1932).

Makti Thangal was born in 1847. His father was a disciple of Umar Qazi. Makti Thangal joined the British administration as an excise inspector but resigned in 1882 to devote full time and energy for the uplift of the community. His main effort was to resist the Christian offensive for conversion. At the same time he wanted to make the community aware of the problems in a changing world situation. He advocated education of girls, and deplored the reluctance of the community to learn Malayalam and English. He wanted the socioeconomic problems of the community to be looked at in the modern way without minimizing the religious aspects. Vakkom Abdul Khadir Moulavi followed the same trend from the beginning of this century. He emphasized the religious and socioeconomic aspects much more than the ritualistic aspects of religion. He also emphasized the need for modern education, education of women and drawing upon the western sources. He campaigned for modern education. Moulavi Sahib was very much influenced by Mohammed Abdu of Egypt and his reform movement following the footsteps of Mohammed Abdu, Moulavi Sahib started journals in Arabi Malayalam and in Malayalam. In 1905 Mohammed Abdu's paper was prevented from publication. At about the same time Vakkom Abdul Khadir Moulavi started a paper, 'Swadesabhimani (Patriot) in Malayalam. He declared that 'the paper will not hesitate to expose injustices to the people in any form'. Moulavi Sahib could find K. Ramakrishna Pillai as editor of the paper to champion the cause and together they fought the battle. Vakkom Moulavi tried on one side to modernize the community and to forge a link with the radical elements of Hindu community to fight against injustices and social evils of the time. The paper was banned, the press and property of Moulavi Sahib were confiscated and Ramakrishna Pillai banished from the state. The attempt was to build a joint front of Hindus and Muslims to fight social evils. The importance of a Muslim starting a newspaper at the beginning of this century and naming it 'Swadesabhimani', appointing a Nair reformist as its editor and jointly struggling for social justice is not being fully understood. Our thinking even today seems to be colored by communal considerations. While Ramakrishna Pillai is honored, Vakkom Abdul Khadir Moulavi has been consigned to oblivion.