



Melmuri Massacre :A Milestone in India's Struggle for Independence

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Abstract: The Melmuri Massacre, which took place on October 25, 1921, in the Malappuram district of Kerala, is a deeply tragic yet often overlooked event in India's struggle for independence. Carried out by the Dorset Regiment of the British army, this brutal attack resulted in the deaths of 246 innocent civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and the sick. The massacre was part of a broader British crackdown on uprisings in Malabar during the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. Despite its significance, the Melmuri Massacre has not been adequately highlighted in historical records. This paper aims to delve into the events surrounding the massacre, its causes, the horrific acts of violence committed, the aftermath, and the lack of recognition it has received in mainstream historical narratives.

Index Terms –

Melmuri Massacre, Dorset Regiment, Malabar Rebellion (Moplah Rebellion), Colonial Brutality, Khilafath Movement

I. INTRODUCTION

The Melmuri Massacre, which occurred on October 25, 1921, in the villages surrounding Malappuram, Kerala, stands as one of the most brutal and tragic episodes in India's struggle for independence. The massacre, led by the British military forces, specifically the Dorset Regiment, resulted in the killing of 246 innocent civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and the sick. This paper seeks to examine the Melmuri Massacre within the broader context of British colonial repression, its lasting impact on the region, and its historical neglect in the larger narrative of India's fight for freedom.

Melmuri Massacre

The massacre unfolded on the morning of October 25, 1921, when British soldiers from the 2nd Battalion of the Dorset Regiment, under the command of Lieutenants Hewick and Gough, arrived in the region. Armed with heavy artillery and armored vehicles, the British forces launched a violent assault on the region of Konompara, Athikarathodi, Melmuri, Muttippadi, and Valiyattapadi, located within a 1.5 km radius of each other. The Region located around 3 kilometers from Malappuram town, is one of the darkest chapters in Kerala's history. It also Known as Melmuri Athikarathodi Massacre. This brutal attack was carried out by the Dorset Regiment, a British military unit, under the leadership of Lieutenants Hewick and Gough. The British forces targeted innocent civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and the sick, dragging them from their homes, brutally assaulting them, and shooting them without mercy. The massacre began in the early morning hours, with the soldiers firing cannons to create a loud noise and in still fear before

entering each house to beat and stab the residents with the butts of their rifles. Those who resisted were shot dead on the spot, and the violence continued morning to After noon.

The soldiers not only killed the villagers but also looted their homes, set fire to their houses, and destroyed their livelihoods. Around 100 houses were burned to the ground, leaving the community devastated. Some women and children managed to escape, hiding in nearby forest and banana plantations, though many were caught and killed. The soldiers used silent guns to prevent any sound during their attacks, making it even harder for the villagers to flee. Among the tragic stories of resistance, one stands out: an eleven-year-old girl named Keedakattu Fatima was shot dead when she tried to stop British soldiers from taking her father away. The terror was widespread, with no one spared, not even those who were bedridden due to age or illness.

The aftermath of the massacre was equally grim. The bodies of the victims were left in the streets, and the local women, in the face of ongoing danger, took on the solemn task of burying the dead. They buried the bodies in shallow graves near where they had fallen, but many victims could not be interred at the time. Later, when Khilafat fighters arrived from nearby areas, under the leadership of figures like Kunjahammad Haji and Kunjithangal, the remaining bodies were buried. However, some of the victims still remain unmarked in unrecorded graves, and the total number of casualties remains uncertain. While the British authorities officially reported the deaths of 246 people, many believe the true toll was much higher.

The Melmuri Massacre occurred In the context of the larger Malabar Rebellion (or Moplah Rebellion), a series of uprisings against British colonial rule and the oppressive landlord system in Kerala. The region of Melmuri had become a hotbed of anti-colonial sentiment, particularly influenced by leaders like Alimusliyar, a key figure in the Malabar rebellion movement. Alimusliyar was a prominent leader who inspired his followers to engage in resistance against British rule, which led to increased British military presence in Melmuri. British forces set up camps in the area from October 20 to November 10, 1921, in an effort to crush the growing resistance. The Melmuri Massacre was, in many ways, a retaliatory measure by the British to suppress the rebellion and intimidate those supporting the anti-colonial movement.

Despite the significance of the Melmuri Massacre as part of India's larger freedom struggle, it has been largely overshadowed in historical accounts. Other massacres, such as the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, where around 379 people were killed, and the Waggon massacre in Tirur, which claimed 70 lives, have received more attention. Similarly, the Pookottor battle, which resulted in around 250 deaths, is more widely recognized. However, the Melmuri Massacre, in which 246 people were killed, remains largely forgotten. The massacre, which targeted innocent civilians caught in the crossfire of a larger political struggle, serves as a stark reminder of the brutality of British colonial rule and the immense sacrifices made by ordinary people in the fight for independence.

The Melmuri Massacre Is an essential yet underrepresented event in the history of India's struggle for independence. The brutality inflicted upon the innocent people of Melmuri, many of whom were caught up in the violence through no fault of their own, highlights the extent of the colonial forces' ruthlessness. The event was part of a larger movement of resistance that sought to break free from colonial oppression. The survivors of the massacre, and those who perished, became part of the larger struggle for freedom, and it is crucial that their stories are remembered and honored. While the massacre has not received the attention it deserves, acknowledging it as an integral part of India's history is necessary to ensure that the victims are not forgotten and that their sacrifice is recognized in the broader narrative of the country's independence movement.

Historical Context and Neglect:

The Melmuri Massacre is a tragic event that has been largely overlooked in the broader historical narrative of India's freedom struggle. While the JallianwalaBagh massacre of 1919 is widely recognized as one of the most notorious examples of British brutality, the Melmuri Massacre has not received the attention it deserves. In comparison to other significant events like the Wagah massacre in Tirur or the Pookottor battle, which also saw the loss of many innocent lives, the Melmuri Massacre remains relatively obscure.

This historical neglect can be attributed to several factors, including the lack of documentation and the regional nature of the event. Although the British army's own telegram (S/250/453/G) recorded the killings, it was not widely publicized, and local histories of Malabar in the early 20th century failed to highlight the significance of this massacre. Additionally, the Khilafat movement, which was seen as a threat by the British, was often minimized in mainstream history, further marginalizing the importance of such events.

Conclusion

The Melmuri Massacre stands as a stark reminder of the violence that characterized British colonial rule in India. The deliberate targeting of innocent civilians by British forces reflects the ruthless methods employed by the colonial government to suppress resistance and quell uprisings. Despite the massacre's profound impact on the region, it remains largely unrecognized in the broader historical discourse on India's struggle for independence.

Acknowledging the Melmuri Massacre, alongside other events like Jallianwala Bagh and the Pookottor battle, is crucial to understanding the full extent of British brutality in India. These events serve as painful reminders of the sacrifices made by countless Indians in their fight for freedom. It is only through recognizing and remembering such tragic episodes that we can truly honor the resilience and courage of those who suffered and died in the struggle for India's independence.

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