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Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji

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Why in News

The year 2021 will mark the **100th year anniversary** of the **Malabar/Moplah uprising of 1921**.

The freedom fighter **Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji** led the Moplah uprising against the British in Kerala's Malabar region.

Key Points

- **Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji** was born into an **affluent Muslim family sometime in the 1870s** (the exact date is not confirmed) and grew up hearing stories of the torture and injustice done by the British.
- His father, **Moideenkutty Haji**, was **deported and jailed in the Andaman Islands** for his participation in a rebellion against the British.
- Kunjahammed Haji was very much **fascinated by the traditional music-based art forms** like **Daffumutt** and **poems** like **'Malappuram Padappattu'** and **'Badr Padappattu'** and he used them as an instrument to rally the locals against the British.
 - These poems were on the **exploitation of the peasants by feudal lords** under the British so these were banned later on by the British.
 - Kunjahammed Haji **simultaneously challenged the British and ignited sentiments against them** among the local population.
- Haji was respected for his **scholarship and knowledge in Urdu, Arabic and English**.
- **Leaders of the Khilafat movement and the INC** introduced him to the **Khilafat cause** and he promised to join them against the atrocities of the British and the landlords.
- Haji decided to take arms against the British and **took the leadership of the Khilafat** and was mostly heard all over **Calicut and south Malabar**.

- Haji ensured that the movement had a secular character as he was aware of the strength of Hindu-Muslim unity and ensured people of other faiths were given adequate security.
 - **Britishers cast him as a religious fanatic to create divisions** within the movement and there was a possibility of the movement losing direction and perhaps even resulting in a communal riot.
- As the **rebellion spread across the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks of erstwhile Malabar** district, **Britishers and their loyal escaped**, leaving vast territory under the control of the local rebels.
- The territory was declared an **'independent state'** in **August 1921** with **Haji as its undisputed ruler**.
 - For **nearly six months**, Haji ran a **parallel Khilafat regime** headquartered in **Nilambur**, with its own separate passport, currency and system of taxation.
 - An **extensive army with the participation of Hindu men was built** with the aim of thwarting any attempt by the British to overthrow the Khilafat rule.
 - **Tenants were granted the power over the lands** they cultivated along with tax incentives.
- In **January 1922**, under the **guise of a treaty**, the **British betrayed Haji through his close friend Unyan Musaliyar** and **arrested** him. He was **sentenced to death** along with his compatriots.
- The bodies were **cremated fearing that the grave may become an inspiration** for the rebels and **all the records** connected with the Khilafat raj were **burnt** in order to make the people forget the Mappila khilafat rule of six months.

Malabar/Moplah Rebellion of 1921

- The Malabar rebellion, also known as the Moplah rebellion, was an **armed revolt** staged by the **Mappila Muslims of Kerala** in **1921**.
- In **August 1920**, **Gandhi** along with **Shaukat Ali** (the leader of the Khilafat movement in India) **visited Calicut** to spread the combined message of **non-cooperation and Khilafat** among the residents of Malabar.
- In response to Gandhi's call, a **Khilafat committee was formed in Malabar** and the **Mappilas**, under their **religious head Mahadum Tangal of Ponnani who pledged** support to the non-cooperation movement.
- During the same time, the **agrarian situation in Malabar was worsening** with the **low-class tenants suffering under the oppressive measures** of the landlords who were patronised by the British.
- In this situation, the **Indian National Congress (INC) reached out to the Mappila cultivators** to actively support both the agrarian reforms and independence.
- The Moplah tenants **agitated against the Hindu landlords** (locally referred to as **janmi**) and the **British government**.
 - Most of their **grievances** were related to the **security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other unfair exactions** of the landlords.

- The British government **responded with much aggression**, bringing in Gurkha regiments to suppress it and imposing martial law.

Wagon Tragedy: A noteworthy event of the British suppression was the wagon tragedy when approximately 60 Mappila prisoners on their way to prison, were suffocated to death in a closed railway goods wagon.

- The **six-month-long rebellion** is often perceived to be **one of the first cases of nationalist uprisings in Southern India**.
 - However, the **real motive of the revolt still remains a highly debated topic** among historians.
 - There are some who call it a case of **religious fanaticism**, there are others who look at it as an **instance of struggle against British authority** and then there are others who perceive the Malabar rebellion to be a **peasant revolt against unfair practices of the landlords**.

Source: IE