

TAHREEDH: IDEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE FREEDOM STRUGGLES

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Abstract

Tahreedh was the first anti-colonial resistance literary work that was born in Kerala. *Tahreedh* is a revolutionary poem that gave a historically significant twist to the struggle against colonial powers. *Tahreedh* provides ideological support to the fights against the imperial powers. The prime objective of writing *Tahreedh* was to organise public agitations against the colonial powers. *Tahreedh* made ample contributions towards awakening and motivating the Mappilas whose calibre was stymied by issues related to their identity and existential crisis. This article analyses the content and significance of the poems in this book.

The Author

The author of *Tahreedh*, Shaykh Zainuddin Makhdum-I was born in Cochin in 1467 (Thursday, 12 Sha'ban 871 A.H). His father was a famous religious scholar, Ali Bin Ahmed Al Ma'bri. The roots of his family could be traced to Ma'br in Yemen from where the family migrated to places such as Keelakkara, Kayalpatanam and other parts of Tamil Nadu. He made Ponnani a centre of education. Apart from the *Tahreedh*, he has penned several poems and pieces of prose work. He was buried on the southern side of the Grand Mosque of Ponnani.

Introduction

The full name of this poem is *Tahreedh Ahl-al Iman Ala Jihadi Abadat al Sulban* (Rousing the People of Faith to Struggle against the Portuguese). The essence of the title of this work, that has hundred and thirty five verses, is a call to the believers to fight against the Portuguese forces. There existed peace, co-operation and harmony between Kerala and foreigners for centuries in the realm of trade. With the arrival of Vasco da Gama and his band, the total atmosphere in the trade sector was shattered for the first time. Since their arrival, the Portuguese violated all international trade agreements, ethics and human standards, in dealing with the Muslims and the Zamorins who supported them. With evil plans in mind, the Portuguese either created enmity between the native kings and their chieftains or made them their foot-servants. Consequently the streets and coastal areas of Kerala were converted into battle fields. The Zamorin fielded his Nayar regiment, which consisted of one lakh men, and the Muslims against the Portuguese. The birth of *Tahreedh* was at this juncture of Kerala history when both the Muslims and the Zamorin were losing their strength and vitality due to frequent wars against the Portuguese. The impact was that the Muslims were in a helpless state. It was in 1524 that Kunhali Marakkars and family shifted their residence from Cochin to Kozhikode and engaged themselves in the war against the Portuguese. In the meanwhile the author of *Tahreedh* had already passed away in 1521.

The author bemoans the poor state of Muslims in *Tahreedh*. At the same time, it reminds the Muslims of their religious obligation to take arms against the Portuguese forces to ensure the deliverance of Mappilas from defeating the colonial powers.¹

Thousands of handwritten copies of this revolutionary poem were made and spread among the important kings of various parts of Kerala, apart from spreading them among the Muslims of Kerala through Muslim *mahals*. The copies of this poem were also sent to some foreign countries such as Egypt, Turkey and Arabian countries. It is assumed that the circulation of this revolutionary poem was probably an inspiration for the Kunhali Marakkars to shift their residence from Cochin to Kozhikode.

The Mappilas considered those who allowed them to live and practice their faith without any hindrance as their friends, and those who destructed their freedom to live and practice their religion as enemies. That is why Muslims considered the Zamorin and the Hindus, as friends and the Portuguese forces, as enemies.

The Poem

This poem consists of 135 verses and can be divided into five parts according to the subject matter dealt with in the poem.

The first part of the poem praises god and prays to God. The poet offers prayers for eliminating the hardships of the people and to bless them in order to fulfil their aspirations. He also prays to help those who protect and strive for the well-being of the Muslim community.

“God, praise be to you always. You are well aware of the distress and needs of the people.

Mercy and peace be upon Muhammad, the best of your creation, the inviter to the best path.

The most gracious, the best helper, we pray to you for removal of distress and for fulfilment of our desires.

You help those who fight for saving the people from distress, grief, infidelity and humiliation”.²

In the second part of the poem, the poet describes the miseries and atrocities suffered by the Muslims with the arrival of the Portuguese. The purpose of such a description was also to get help from the rulers in India and Arabia.

“Peace be upon you (the Muslim rulers) who are the hope of the people and the shelter of the needy in the society.

We are stretching our weak, needy, humble and empty hands to you, hoping for your help for removal of our distress.

We have been grieved due to the atrocities of the Portuguese, who worship the cross and icons”.³

¹Dr. Hussain Randathani, *Mappila Malabar*, p. 32.

² Shaykh Zainuddin Makhdam-I, *Tahreedh*, Eng. trans., P.G. and Research Dept. of Arabic, Farook College, verses 1- 4.

³*Tahreedh*. verses 5- 7

Thereafter the poet continues with the description of the atrocities committed by the Portuguese and the sufferings of the Muslims.

“Burning the properties, strangling the Muslims, hindering the journeys, blocking the means of living.

Devastating the countries, enslaving the faithful Muslims and fielding their women in attractive attire to entice Muslim women.

They blocked lands and seas and pounded highly flourished cities and villages”.⁴

The Portuguese enslaved the Muslims. They robbed them off their wealth. They divested Muslims of all the means of their livelihood. They resorted to siege of sea and land. They conquered important towns. Even the pilgrims of Hajj were not spared from their brutality. They robbed and killed them. The poet continues with his narration.

“The captives were driven to and gathered in narrow cells, like wretched animals.

They were brought in chains to market to be sold as slaves, and were severely punished to get high ransom.

They were forced to do unbearable jobs and threatened with severe punishment in case of disobedience”.⁵

He says that the atrocities of the Portuguese are inexplicable as words fail to convey the real intensity of their brutality.

“All these are beyond the description of a man. God, punish them and destroy them with your power”.⁶

In part three, Shaykh Zainuddin enlightens the Muslims about the necessity of engaging in a war against the Portuguese. He dwells upon the reward for those who get killed in such wars. He emphatically states that it is the obligation of each and every Muslim to engage in the holy war against the foreign imperial power.

“It is the duty of all Muslims who have physical strength, provisions and equipment, to wage holy war against them.

As for slaves, they need not get the permission of their masters, or children of their parents, or wives of their husbands”.⁷

Hence the poet solicits the help of neighbouring Muslim kings and leaders.

“The leaders – thanks to god of *Arsh* – you are the object of our hopes in all severities. We are thirsty. You are the rain clouds. I wish I knew if we are lucky to be quenched. If you save us from the distress, you will get innumerable rewards”.⁸

⁴*Tahreedh*, verses 11- 13

⁵*Tahreedh*, verses 20- 22

⁶*Tahreedh*, verse 25

⁷*Tahreedh*, verses 26-27

⁸*Tahreedh*, verses 32-34

After having solicited the help from the neighbouring Muslim kings and leaders, in part four Shaykh Zainuddin persuades the Muslims to fight against the Portuguese. He then speaks about the blessings of God to the brave warriors. He also elaborates on the choicest blessings of God which await the warriors once they courted martyrdom. To substantiate his views and the significance of Holy War, he quotes *Hadiths*.

After making Muslims aware of the benefits conferred by god on those who fight against the colonial forces, he persuades them to face enemies with courage and determination which will win them god's pleasure.

“Oh the people of Islam, people of the Prophet Muhammad, come on to this Holy War with ardour and zeal.

There in is the pleasure of the creator and all creations like mankind, jinn, animals and birds”.⁹

The poet employs harsh words for those who do not extend financial assistance to the war against colonial powers.

“Do not withhold your wealth covetously. If you do so, the loss will afflict the wealth you withheld”.¹⁰

The poet uses crude and tough language in his warning against those who flee from the war front. He says that they will always have to live in fear and disgrace. They will be liable to god's punishment.

“Those who ran away on the day of Moses' battle, in fear of the enemies' power, fell in disgrace and curse.

They returned with the hatred of their lord and their abode is hell, very hot and burning”.¹¹

In the fifth and last part of the poem the poet requests the rich to offer financial help to those women and children in Malabar who are in miserable conditions. He also adds that they will be blessed abundantly by God if they do so.

“When you spend your wealth and fight against the enemies you have really saved all the servants of god from all afflictions.

And you have protected the servants of god from the evils of deceivers and guarded children and women with zeal.

You will be praised at both east and west.

.....

(In that paradise) there will be no scope for fear and sorrow. It is built of golden and silver bricks.

⁹*Tahreedh*, verses 82- 83

¹⁰*Tahreedh*, verse 90

¹¹*Tahreedh*, verses 97-98

It is plastered with mortar of sweet smelling musk. Its soil is perfumed and pebbles are pearls and sapphires.

One who enters it will become blessed. He will dwell therein forever. His dress will not wear off and his youth will not be spoiled by greying.

There are oceans of water, honey, milk and wine.

From these oceans, rivers flow to the courtyards of the houses of every, dweller, for entertaining him".¹²

The poem concludes by offering prayers for Prophet Muhammad and his family.

In fact, it was when Shaykh Zainuddin was rendering spiritual guidance and leadership to Muslims the Portuguese came to Malabar. Soon Shaykh Zainuddin was convinced of the necessity of raising an organized resistance against foreign power and he exhorted and organised the Muslims to rise against them in the midst of his reformation activities. *Tahreedh* played a vital role in inviting and motivating the Muslims to fight for their independence. This is evident from all those struggles and battles the Muslims fought against the Portuguese. Shaykh Zainuddin visited each and every *mahal* with a view to persuading the Muslims to unite under the Zamorin to fight the colonial power. Each verse in *Tahreedh* is packed with the intense passion Shaykh Zainuddin felt for his fellow beings. *Tahreedh* was the first anti-colonial resistance literary work that was born in Kerala. This great piece of literature came out about seventy years before the publication of the world famous work, *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* by Shaykh Zainuddin-II, the grandson of the author of *Tahreedh*.

Mappilas from all parts of the land visited Shaykh Zainuddin and got ready to engage themselves in the battle. It was thus the successors of Marakkars came from Cochin to Ponnani. It was the relationship between Shaykh Zainuddin and the Zamorin that made Marakkars the commandants of naval forces in Malabar. Shaykh Zainuddin was the spiritual leader of Marakkars. It was the leadership of Shaykh Zainuddin that inspired the Kunhali Marakkars who led the sea war.

The 1572 Chaliyam battle against the Portuguese was led by Shaykh Zainuddin's son Abdul Azeez, Abdul Wafa alias Mamukoya, the spiritual leader of Kozhikode; and Abdul Azeez, the Qazi of Kozhikode. They were all inspired and motivated by Shaykh Zainuddin. In fact, Shaykh Zainuddin's relationship with the Zamorin and Ponnani being the headquarters of Shaykh Zainuddin are the two reasons attributed for Ponnani being the arena of the struggles against the Portuguese.

The revolutionary zeal inseminated by the poet in the minds of the Mappilas took such a form and momentum that even the mighty colonial forces stood stunned and perplexed in front of it. *Tahreedh* which offered doctrinal grounds for the anti colonial struggles can rightly be described as the seminal work in anti colonial literature.

¹²*Tahreedh*, verses 125-135

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