

UDDAT AL-UMARA: A PIONEERING WORK IN ANTI-COLONIAL WRITING

RASHEED AHAMMED P,

Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic, Darunnajath Arabic College, Karuvarakundu

Abstract: This article discusses "Uddat al-Umara", a book written by Sayyid Fazl Pookoya Tangal in 1856, with the aim to inspire people to fight against imperial forces, specifically the British and native kings and feudal landlords. The book was banned in 1851 by the district collector of Malabar, but remained preserved as a handwritten copy. It contains nine chapters. Overall, the book serves as a call to motivate and prepare people for a struggle against the British.

Introduction

Sayyid Fazl Pookoya Tangal, the author of the book *Uddat al-Umara*, was an intellectual and a fighter of great potential who offered doctrinal basis and provided pragmatic form to the politics envisaged by Mampuram Sayyid Alavi Tangal against the colonial forces and the feudal system. He was a towering figure in the arena of anti-colonial resistance.

Sayyid Fazl Pookoya was born as the only son of Sayyid Alavi Tangal at Mampuram in 1824 (1240 A.H). He obtained his primary education from the famous scholar and the companion of Sayyid Alavi Tangal, Chalilakath Qusayye Haji. Subsequently, Sayyid Fazl went to some of the most eminent scholars like, Parappanangadi Abubacker Koya Musliyar, Baithan Muhammed Musliyar, Veliyancode Umar Qazi, Muhiyudheen (Kozhikode Qazi), Zainudheen Musliyar (Tirurangadi Qazi) and Shaykh Abdulla bin Umar of Hadar Mouth for further studies in Islamic theology.

He was more advanced than his father in his anti-British stance. He wished to thwart the colonial powers and thus put an end to the cultural invasion and the oppression of the imperial government. His *fatwas*, writings and speeches were replete with anti-colonial and anti-feudal sentiments.

Sayyid Fazl's stance against the colonial powers posed a formidable challenge to the British government. They indicted him as the person who promoted and helped all rebellions against the feudal system since 1836. The then Malabar collector, H.V. Connolly, realizing that it was Sayyid Fazl's influence behind the Manjeri rebellion of 1840, Kolathur rebellion of 1851 and Mattannur rebellion of 1852, used pressure tactics to send him on exile. Sayyid Fazl understood that it was better to go on exile than letting his people to be subjected to British atrocities, and left for Arabia with his relatives on 19 March 1852.¹ Mappilas who came to know that Sayyid Fazl was forced by the Malabar collector, H.V. Connolly, to go on exile, murdered the collector at his own bungalow in Kozhikode on 11 September 1855.

Sayyid Fazl first reached Muscat. Then he went to Istanbul, which was the headquarters of the Usmania Khilafath, through Egypt. The Sultan of Turkey appointed Sayyid Fazl as the governor of Yemen in 1876.ⁱⁱ He was then appointed as one of the prime advisors to the Sultan Abdul Hameed in 1293 A.H. In fact

he intensely wished to return to Kerala and participate in the struggles against the colonial powers even when he was holding great positions under the Sultan of Turkey.

Uddat al-Umara

In this book, Sayyid Fazl Pookoya Tangal upholds his father's ideology which he spelt out in his book, *Saif al Bathar. Uddatal-Umara* was published from Cairo in Egypt in the year 1856. Before this, the same was preserved as a hand-written copy. During my research, I found that a copy of this book, published from Cairo, was found in the collection of books maintained by the great historian and scholar Nellikuth Ismail Musliyar. It was published by Sayyid Abdullahibn Abdul Rahman after getting the errors rectified by Ali Mukhallathi. On the top of each page is inscribed: "To fight the enemies of God; Heaven is under the shade of swords". At the bottom of each page, the following prayer was inscribed: "God, help the family of Usman, lead them on the right path."

The inscriptions on the top of the page show that the ultimate aim of the book was to inspire the people to fight against imperial forces. Sayyid Fazl Pookoya had visited Turkey after having been sent on exile. At that time the Usmania Khilafath was facing several issues which might have made the writer to inscribe the prayer at the bottom of each page. The full name of the book is *Uddat al-Umara wa-al Hukkam li ihanathal Kafarathawa Abadat al Asnam*. It may be translated as 'A Weapon for Conquering the Non-believers and Polytheists in the Hands of Ameers and Rulers'. Here, the term non-believers stand for the British and polytheists for the native kings and upper caste feudal landlords.

This book was written during the period of 1849-1850. In 1851, the district collector of Malabar, H. V. Connolly, banned the publication of this book.ⁱⁱⁱ This book, which runs into 168 pages, is structured in the following way: publisher's note, preface and nine chapters. The purpose of writing this book was to motivate and prepare both the leaders and the ordinary people for a struggle against the British. It is to be noted that the purpose of writing the book was not to create hatred and revenge in those people who were unsophisticated and ordinary without any spiritual insight, as it was being charge-sheeted by the British. In fact this book is an epitome of the prudence of the Kerala Muslim leaders who led the struggle against the British. They were governed by democratic spirit.

Below is a brief description of the topics dealt with in the book:

Chapter One

This chapter contains a few instructions and pieces of advice to the administrators and ministers. The first part of this chapter advises the ordinary people to obey the leaders. It says that if the people do not obey leaders the basic fabric of the country and religion, and the security and peace of the land would be in jeopardy. Towards the end of the chapter it reminds the leaders that it is their responsibility to invite and inspire the people into the Holy War. The book says, "It is obligatory for the kings to educate the people about the sanctity of struggle if the colonial powers are more in number". The author goes on, "You should know that bravery is the principal pillar of nobility. Without bravery, nobility cannot be perfected".^{iv}

Chapter Two

The second chapter of this book is *Saif al Bathar* of Sayyid Alavi Tangal. The reason for including *Saif al Bathar* might be to add authenticity to *Uddat al-Umara*.^v

Chapter Three

This chapter is a call to the careless ones. It is a direct indictment of those who consider the colonial forces as friendly and accept their rule. It also reminds such people that it is their duty and obligation to fight the imperial powers. The author quotes several Quranic verses and *Hadiths* in order to drive home his ideas. It appeals to the people to fight against the colonial forces after having established that it is not permissible to have alliance with the imperial powers in the light of Quranic verses and *Hadiths* and words of religious scholars. The chapter drives home the idea that there is no other alternative than fighting the British who exploit their life, faith and the country. The author says, "Fight in the way of god with their body and wealth. This is what is right if you are knowledgeable". This chapter strongly inspires the believers to fight in the name of god. Moreover, the chapter repeatedly addresses the believers as brothers and reminds them to rise up and fight against the colonial forces with no compromise.^{vi}

Chapter Four

The fourth chapter of this book speaks of the glory and systems of administration of an ideal state strongly built upon deep rooted ideologies. It does not specify the period and place of the king or his regime who was the ruler of this ideal state. However, it discusses in detail various factors involved in building a nation. It begins from the phase of initial construction of a nation, and talks about its administration, judiciary, army, trade, mercantile activities, agriculture and welfare activities, etc. It praises the king of such a welfare state. It envisages the king as a generous and modest personality.

Then the chapter describes the destruction of this ideal state, thanks to the enthroning of a foolish king. As a consequence of the regime of the foolish king, the number of crimes multiplied and the life of the citizens became miserable. People turned out to be crazy after material comfort and pleasure. Sayyid Fazl says: "The condition of the country got deteriorated and the hearts of people were separated from one another".

The author then speaks with no indefinite terms about the necessity of each believer to come to the front to protect their own country. He bases his arguments on sound philosophical grounds. He says empathically, "Get ready with all the potential to the battle. God will not lessen the lifespan of anyone who involves himself in the battle. Neither does he increase it if they abstain from the war. All have their predestined lifespan and fixed breaths".

Chapters five, six and seven furnish practical lessons to be learnt by the Muslims in the light of past events in the history. In this regard, the author makes an objective study of several issues that erupted in nations like Java, China and Persia in consequence with the recurring invasions of colonial forces during different periods of history. The purpose behind such an analysis is to remind the ruling class and the soldiers to learn lessons and rise up to protect their own country from the foreign invasions. It empathically reminds them to be vigilant and cautious of the colonial forces.^{vii}

Chapter Five

This chapter illustrates how the British imperialists entered the Island of Java under the pretext of trade and conquered and annexed it to the British Empire through malicious means. The motive behind this

illustration was to warn the Muslims against the British who came over to Malabar. The book advises the people to boycott the British if they want to avoid the repetition of the experience of Java. Towards the end of this chapter, the author asks the people to get ready for a battle against the British.^{viii}

Chapter Six

This chapter titled 'The Zionist Treachery behind the Conquest of China' deals with the manipulations of a Zionist king who had an evil design of conquering China, which was ruled over by four Chinese kings. He created enmity among these kings and made them fight one other and meanwhile he stood with one of the four kings. In due course of time, he took over the power and thus conquered China. It took a long time for the natives of China to realise the treachery. However, they ousted the foreign power through a great revolution. The author, after analysing this part of history gives strong warning to the people against involving the foreign powers in the administrative matters of their nation. He appeals to the people to purge their souls and minds so as to make them fit to fight against the enemy.^{ix}

Chapter Seven

This is an interesting chapter that unravels the mysterious tactics of Persians, who were comparatively weaker and more feeble than mighty Christian colonial powers, in ousting the latter from the former's land. The Christian powers exploited the resources of Persian land and robbed them of their possessions. It is only after quite a time that the Persians realized the fact that they had been exploited and robbed by the foreign powers. Then the Persians rose up to the situation and ousted the exploiters and robbers of their land. Then only the past glory of their land was restored.

After explaining the events associated with the ousting of Christian powers by the Persians, the author invites the people to the war front against the foreign power. Towards the end of the chapter, he indirectly enlightens them about the British colonial forces.

Chapters eight and nine contain some of the parts of Abdulla ibn Alavi al Haddad's book *Perfect 'Dawaah' and Public Advice*.^x

Chapter Eight

This chapter deals with the special aspects of scholarship (wisdom) and responsibilities of the scholars.^{xi}

Chapter Nine

The obligations of the government, merits and demerits of the government are the subject matter of this chapter. Several *Hadiths* related to governance, leadership, responsibility, etc. are given. Thereafter, the author provides advices to the ruling class to follow.^{xii}

Chapter Ten

This chapter titled 'Selected Verses that Forbid the consideration of Non-believers' clearly states that it is wrong to engage in a friendly relationship with the British or entrust them with any matters of the land. The term non-believers here stands for all the British imperialists and the native kings who acted as servants of the British powers. Several verses from The Holy Quran have been given in support of this statement. Apart from Quranic verses, the interpretations The Quran and *Hadiths* by various scholars of the Islamic *Fiqh* are also furnished in support of the above statement.^{xiii}

In this chapter, the author strictly forbids any compromise with the British in whatsoever matter. At the same time, the author also upholds the same slogans of struggle against the British that the author's father had upheld in his *Saif al-Bathar*. The author makes it very clear that making forging any sort of alliance with the colonial powers would make one a non-believer.

Uddat al-Umara has played a vital role in the struggle against the colonial forces in Malabar during the mid-decades of nineteenth century and years thereafter. Sayyid Fazl who was a religious and spiritual leader made substantial contributions towards organizing the ordinary people against the British powers. He could kindle the flame of patriotism in the minds of people who subsequently turned against the British and the native kings who supported them.

ⁱ C.N. Ahmad Moulavi and K.K. Muhammad Abdul Karim, *Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Parambaryam*, p. 182

ⁱⁱ C.N. Ahmad Moulavi and K.K. Muhammad Abdul Karim, *Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Parambaryam*, p. 189

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Hussain Randathani, *Mappila Malabar*, p. 139

^{iv} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, pp. 20-22

^v Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, p. 24

^{vi} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, pp. 41-43

^{vii} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, pp. 49-53

^{viii} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, p. 56

^{ix} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, pp. 56-60

^x Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, pp. 60-62

^{xi} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, p. 63

^{xii} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, p. 63

^{xiii} Sayyid Fazl, *Uddat al-Umara*, p. 64

Bibliography

1. Abdul Rasheed, Muhammad T.P. The Legacy of Anti-Colonial Struggle, P.G.
2. Teaching and Research Dept. of Arabic, Farook College, 2008.
3. Abubacker, P. Portuguese Colonisation in Malabar: A Study of Resistance Literature in Arabic, Al Huda Book Stall, Calicut, 2007.
4. Ahmad Moulavi, C.N & KK Muhammed Abdul Kareem Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Parambaryam (The Great Mappila Tradition), Calicut, 1978.
5. Ayyar, K.V. Krishna. The Zamorins of Calicut, Normans Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1938.
6. Correia, Gaspar. The Three Voyages of Vasco De Gama and His Viceroyalty, Trans. Ed., Hon. H.E. J. Stanley, London, 1863.
7. Dale, Stephen Frederic. The Mappilas of Malabar: 1498-1922, Oxford, 1980.
8. Randathani, Dr. Hussain. Mappila Malabar, Islamic Publishing Bureau, Calicut. 2008.
9. Husain, K.T. Kerala Muslimkal Adhinivesa Virudha Poratathinte Pratyasastram, Islamic Publishing House, Calicut, 2008.
10. Shasulla Qadiri, Prachina Malabar, Mal. Trans. V. Abdul Kayyum, Other Books, Calicut, 2010.
11. Zainuddin, Shaykh, (The Elder), Thahreedh Ahl Al Iman Ala Jihadi Abdat Al Sulban, Manuscript (Written in The Sixteenth Century)