

ROLE OF ERANAD REGION IN MALABAR REBELLION

By

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Abstract

The Eranad region of present-day Malappuram district occupied a central position in the Malabar Rebellion, one of the most significant anti-colonial uprisings in the history of British India. As the principal centre of agrarian discontent, religious mobilisation, and nationalist sentiment, Eranad witnessed intense resistance against colonial authorities and the prevailing landlord system. The rebellion emerged from a combination of socio-economic exploitation, peasant grievances, the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements, and long-standing tensions between tenants and landlords. Several prominent leaders from Eranad mobilised local peasants and volunteers, transforming the region into the epicentre of the uprising. Although the movement initially reflected anti-colonial aspirations, it gradually assumed communal and violent dimensions, resulting in significant loss of life, displacement, and destruction. Despite its controversial legacy, the rebellion remains an important episode in India's freedom struggle and the socio-political history of Kerala. This study examines the pivotal role of the Eranad region in the Malabar Rebellion by analysing its historical background, socio-economic conditions, political mobilisation, major events, and long-term consequences. The study also evaluates the rebellion's contribution to agrarian reforms, regional identity, and historical memory.

Keywords: *eranad region, malabar rebellion, agrarian conflict, british colonial rule, khilafat movement, peasant resistance, kerala history.*

JEL Classification: *N35, N45, Z10.*

Introduction

The Malabar Rebellion of 1921 occupies a distinctive place in the history of India's anti-colonial movement. While the rebellion spread across several parts of the Malabar district, the Eranad region emerged as its principal centre, witnessing some of the most significant events and confrontations during the uprising. Located in present-day Malappuram district, Eranad was characterised by a predominantly agrarian economy, a large population of Mappila Muslim tenants, and a rigid landlord-tenant system that generated widespread socio-

economic inequalities under British colonial administration.

For centuries, the agrarian structure of Eranad had been marked by unequal land ownership patterns, where large landholders exercised considerable control over tenant cultivators. British land revenue policies strengthened the authority of landlords while offering limited protection to cultivating tenants. These conditions created deep resentment among the rural population, particularly the Mappila peasants, who experienced high rents, insecurity of tenure, and frequent eviction. Economic exploitation combined with

political dissatisfaction created fertile conditions for organised resistance.

The rise of the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement further intensified political consciousness in Eranad. Nationalist leaders encouraged mass participation against British rule, while religious leaders mobilised local communities around the defence of Islamic institutions following developments in the Ottoman Empire. The convergence of nationalist, agrarian, and religious motivations transformed Eranad into the focal point of collective resistance against colonial authority.

The rebellion witnessed widespread participation by peasants, religious scholars, local leaders, and volunteers. Important centres such as Tirurangadi, Manjeri, and surrounding villages became major locations of armed resistance. Colonial administrative offices, police stations, and communication networks were attacked, leading to prolonged military operations by British forces. The suppression of the rebellion involved extensive military action, arrests, executions, and the tragic Wagon Tragedy, which remains one of the most remembered incidents associated with the uprising.

Although historians differ in interpreting the nature of the rebellion—viewing it as an anti-colonial struggle, an agrarian revolt, a religious movement, or a combination of these factors—there is broad agreement that Eranad played the most decisive role in shaping its course. The region's experience demonstrates how local socio-economic

grievances became intertwined with broader nationalist movements during the struggle against colonial rule.

Understanding the role of the Eranad region in the Malabar Rebellion is essential for appreciating the complex relationship between agrarian structures, colonial governance, popular resistance, and regional identity. This study therefore seeks to examine the historical significance of Eranad by analysing the causes, leadership, major events, socio-economic impacts, and lasting legacy of the rebellion.

Review of Literature

Several historians and scholars have examined the causes, nature, and consequences of the Malabar Rebellion from different historical perspectives.

Conrad Wood (1987) argued that the Malabar Rebellion originated primarily from agrarian discontent arising from exploitative landlord-tenant relations under British rule. According to Wood, economic grievances formed the foundation of the uprising, although religious and political influences intensified the movement.

Stephen F. Dale (1980) emphasised the historical evolution of the Mappila community and highlighted that repeated agrarian conflicts in Malabar reflected deep-rooted social and economic inequalities. He argued that the 1921 rebellion represented the culmination of long-standing tensions within the colonial agrarian system.

Panikkar, K., N. (1989) interpreted the rebellion as a complex interaction of anti-colonial nationalism, peasant resistance, and religious mobilisation. He noted that the influence of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements transformed localised agrarian grievances into a broader mass movement against colonial authority.

Gangadharan, M observed that the Malabar Rebellion represented an important phase in Kerala's social and political transformation. His studies emphasised the role of local leadership, rural mobilisation, and popular participation in Eranad and neighbouring regions.

Recent research on Kerala's colonial history has highlighted the importance of regional studies in understanding the rebellion. Scholars have argued that Eranad served as the principal centre of mobilization, where socio-economic inequalities, religious institutions, and nationalist movements converged to produce widespread resistance. However, relatively few studies focus specifically on the role of Eranad in shaping the overall course and legacy of the Malabar Rebellion.

This study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the historical, social, political, and economic significance of the Eranad region within the broader context of the 1921 uprising.

Theoretical Review

Social Conflict Theory

Based on the ideas of Karl Marx, Social Conflict Theory explains that unequal

distribution of economic resources and power creates conflicts between dominant and subordinate groups. The Malabar Rebellion reflected the conflict between landlords supported by colonial authorities and tenant cultivators in Eranad who faced economic exploitation and insecurity.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory argues that social unrest develops when people perceive a significant gap between their expectations and actual living conditions. The peasants of Eranad experienced deprivation due to heavy rents, limited land rights, and colonial discrimination, contributing to widespread dissatisfaction and collective resistance.

Resource Mobilisation Theory

Resource Mobilisation Theory suggests that successful social movements depend upon leadership, organisational capacity, communication networks, and community participation. The Eranad region possessed strong religious institutions, local leadership, and village networks that facilitated large-scale mobilisation during the rebellion.

Functionalist Theory

The Functionalist perspective considers major social conflicts as catalysts for institutional and structural change. Although the Malabar Rebellion resulted in violence and hardship, it exposed weaknesses in the colonial agrarian system and contributed to later discussions on land reforms, tenant rights, and social justice in Kerala.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of the Eranad region in the Malabar Rebellion of 1921.
2. To identify the socio-economic, political, and religious factors that contributed to the outbreak of the rebellion in Eranad.
3. To analyse the relationship between agrarian grievances, colonial policies, and the spread of the rebellion.
4. To evaluate the social, economic, and political consequences of the Malabar Rebellion on the Eranad region.
5. To suggest measures for preserving the historical heritage of the Eranad region and promoting awareness of its role in India's freedom movement.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Agrarian grievances significantly influenced the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion in the Eranad region.

H2: British colonial policies had a significant impact on the intensity and spread of the rebellion in Eranad.

H3: Religious and nationalist movements significantly contributed to the mobilisation of the local population during the rebellion.

H4: Public awareness and government initiatives significantly influence the preservation of the historical heritage of the Eranad region.

Research Methodology

Data Sources

The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Primary Data

Primary data were collected from 200 respondents, including historians, academicians, teachers, students, local residents, descendants of participants in the rebellion, museum officials, heritage activists, and researchers from the Eranad region. A structured questionnaire was administered to respondents.

Secondary Data

Secondary information was collected from:

- Kerala State Archives
- Kerala State Archives Department Reports
- National Archives of India
- Indian Council of Historical Research publications
- District Gazetteers of Malabar
- Books and research journals on the Malabar Rebellion
- Census of India
- Government publications
- Historical records and archival documents
- Newspaper archives
- Museum records

Sampling Design

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents from different parts of the Eranad region, including historians, educational

institutions, heritage centres, and local communities.

Sample Size

200 respondents

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Eranad region of present-day Malappuram district, Kerala, which served as the epicentre of the Malabar Rebellion. The study covers important locations such as Manjeri, Tirurangadi, Pandikkad, Nilambur, and neighbouring villages associated with the rebellion.

Variables Used in the Study

Dependent Variable

HR = Historical Role of Eranad in the Malabar Rebellion

Independent Variables

- AG = Agrarian Grievances
- CP = Colonial Policies
- RM = Religious Mobilisation
- NM = Nationalist Movement
- PA = Public Awareness
- GH = Government Heritage Initiatives

Model Specification

The econometric model is specified as

$$HR_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AG_i + \beta_2 CP_i + \beta_3 RM_i + \beta_4 NM_i + \beta_5 PA_i + \beta_6 GH_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where

- β_0 = Intercept
- β_1 – β_6 = Regression coefficients
- ε = Error term

Table 1. Variable Description

Variable	Description
HR	Historical Role of Eranad (Dependent Variable)
AG	Agrarian Grievances
CP	Colonial Policies
RM	Religious Mobilization
NM	Nationalist Movement
PA	Public Awareness
GH	Government Heritage Initiatives
β_0	Constant
β_1 – β_6	Regression Coefficients
E	Error Term

Profile of Respondents

Table 2. Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20 years	18	9.0
21–35 years	84	42.0
36–50 years	60	30.0
Above 50 years	38	19.0
Total	200	100.0

The majority of respondents (42%) belong to the 21–35 years age group, indicating strong interest among young adults in the historical significance of the Eranad region and the Malabar Rebellion.

Table 3. Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Education	18	9.0
Secondary Education	46	23.0
Graduate	88	44.0
Postgraduate and Above	48	24.0
Total	200	100.0

Interpretation

Graduates constitute the largest category (44%), indicating that respondents possess a good educational background and awareness of Kerala's history and the Malabar Rebellion.

Factors Responsible for the Role of Eranad in the Malabar Rebellion

Agrarian Grievances

The exploitative landlord-tenant (Jenmi) system, high rents, insecurity of tenure, and economic inequality created widespread dissatisfaction among tenant cultivators.

British Colonial Policies

Colonial land revenue policies, administrative repression, and lack of protection for tenants intensified rural unrest and contributed to the rebellion.

Religious Mobilisation

The influence of the Khilafat Movement encouraged collective mobilisation among the Mappila community and strengthened resistance against colonial rule.

Nationalist Movement

The Non-Cooperation Movement inspired anti-colonial sentiments and encouraged mass participation in the uprising.

Community Participation

Local leaders, peasants, religious scholars, and village communities actively organised resistance, making Eranad the principal centre of the rebellion.

Historical Significance

The events of the Malabar Rebellion continue to shape the historical identity of Eranad and contribute to Kerala's freedom movement heritage

Table 4. Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Agrarian Grievances	4.42	0.61
Colonial Policies	4.36	0.69
Religious Mobilisation	4.18	0.74
Nationalist Movement	4.25	0.67
Public Awareness	3.91	0.86
Government Heritage Initiatives	3.58	0.92
Historical Role of Eranad	4.53	0.55

Interpretation

The highest mean score is recorded for the Historical Role of Eranad (4.53), followed by Agrarian Grievances (4.42) and Colonial Policies (4.36). These findings indicate that respondents strongly perceive agrarian exploitation and colonial administration as the principal factors that made Eranad the epicentre of the Malabar Rebellion. The comparatively lower mean score for Government Heritage Initiatives (3.58) suggests that greater institutional efforts are needed to preserve and promote the historical significance of the region.

Correlation Analysis

The analysis reveals:

- Agrarian grievances have a strong positive relationship with the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion.
- British colonial policies are positively associated with the intensity and spread of the rebellion.
- Religious mobilisation positively influenced mass participation in the movement.
- Nationalist movements strengthened anti-colonial resistance in Eranad.
- Public awareness is positively associated with historical heritage preservation.
- Government heritage initiatives show a moderate positive relationship with historical conservation and awareness.

These findings indicate that the Eranad region played a pivotal role in the Malabar Rebellion due to the combined influence of agrarian exploitation, colonial policies, religious mobilisation, and nationalist movements. The study also highlights the importance of preserving the region's historical legacy through education, heritage conservation, and public awareness initiatives.

Findings of the Study

1. The Eranad region emerged as the principal centre of the Malabar Rebellion due to its agrarian structure, socio-economic inequalities, and widespread dissatisfaction with British colonial rule.
2. Agrarian grievances, including the exploitative landlord-tenant (Jenmi) system, high rents, insecurity of tenure, and economic exploitation, were the primary factors that contributed to the outbreak of the rebellion.
3. The influence of the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement significantly mobilised the local population and transformed agrarian protests into a broader anti-colonial movement.
4. Local religious leaders, village communities, and peasant organisations played a crucial role in organising resistance against British authorities throughout the Eranad region.
5. The rebellion highlighted the deep socio-economic inequalities prevailing in

colonial Malabar and exposed the limitations of British land administration.

6. Although the rebellion contributed to India's anti-colonial struggle, it also resulted in considerable loss of life, displacement, destruction of property, and long-term communal tensions.
7. The historical significance of the Eranad region continues to influence Kerala's collective memory and contributes to understanding the state's freedom movement and agrarian history.
8. Respondents believe that greater efforts are required to preserve historical sites, archival records, and public awareness regarding the role of Eranad in the Malabar Rebellion.

Suggestions

1. Strengthen historical research on the Eranad region through collaboration among universities, research institutions, archives, and government agencies.
2. Preserve and restore important historical sites associated with the Malabar Rebellion through coordinated initiatives by the Government of Kerala and heritage conservation authorities.
3. Digitise archival records, official documents, photographs, oral histories, and other historical materials related to the rebellion for future generations.
4. Introduce educational programmes, seminars, exhibitions, and heritage walks to increase awareness among students

and the general public about the historical significance of Eranad.

5. Develop museums, interpretation centres, and digital archives dedicated to the Malabar Rebellion and its leaders in the Eranad region.
6. Encourage interdisciplinary research focusing on the socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions of the rebellion to promote balanced historical understanding.
7. Promote responsible heritage tourism by integrating important rebellion sites into Kerala's historical tourism circuit while preserving their authenticity.
8. Formulate comprehensive heritage conservation policies that encourage community participation, historical documentation, and sustainable management of sites associated with the Malabar Rebellion.

Conclusion

The Eranad region occupies a unique and significant position in the history of the Malabar Rebellion, serving as its principal centre and shaping the course of one of the most important uprisings against British colonial rule in South India. The study demonstrates that the rebellion in Eranad emerged from the interaction of agrarian exploitation, colonial land policies, nationalist movements, and religious mobilisation. These factors collectively transformed local grievances into a large-scale movement that challenged colonial

authority and highlighted the demand for social and economic justice.

The study further reveals that the rebellion had far-reaching consequences for Kerala's political and agrarian history. It exposed the weaknesses of the colonial land tenure system, influenced later discussions on tenant rights and land reforms, and contributed to the broader Indian freedom struggle. At the same time, the rebellion left a complex legacy marked by violence, human suffering, and differing historical interpretations, making it an important subject for objective historical research.

Despite its historical importance, many sites, documents, and oral traditions associated with the Eranad region remain inadequately preserved. Increasing urbanisation,

changing socio-economic conditions, and limited public awareness present challenges to conserving this important historical heritage. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts by government agencies, historians, educational institutions, heritage organisations, and local communities.

Strengthening historical documentation, promoting heritage conservation, encouraging academic research, and increasing public awareness will ensure that the contribution of the Eranad region to the Malabar Rebellion is preserved for future generations. Such initiatives will not only safeguard an important chapter of Kerala's history but also enhance understanding of India's anti-colonial movement, agrarian struggles, and regional heritage.

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