

Post Malabar Rebellion, British entomologist honoured 'Moplas' by naming grasshopper species after them

The British researcher did so 21 years after the rebellion, in which Muslims fought a valiant battle against the very British.



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The 'Mopla' grasshopper specimens collected by British entomologist G M Henry kept at the Natural History Museum in London

By Amiya Meethal

Express News Service

KOZHIKODE: When the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 is being hotly debated now, history has shed light on an interesting aspect from the past. British entomologist George Marrison Reid Henry had bestowed honour on the Moplas (Mappilas or

Muslims in local parlance) of Malabar in 1940 by naming two newly discovered grasshopper species after them.

The British researcher did so 21 years after the rebellion, in which Muslims fought a valiant battle against the very British. Henry named the grasshopper species as 'Mopla guttata' and 'Mopla rubra', under the genus 'Mopla'. He found the former from Anamalai Tiger Reserve (then part of Malabar) and the latter from Nilambur. Henry had described Moplas as a Muslim tribe inhabiting the Malabar region of South India.

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“Normally, no one will name a discovery after someone whom the society hates for any reason. This honouring is a testimony to the Malabar Rebellion’s anti-colonial spirit and debunks the communally motivated narrative by vested interests,” points out conservator biologist Dhaneesh Bhaskar. Dhaneesh had rediscovered the specimen of genus Mopla (Mopla guttata) in 2016, after 76 years, from Parambikulam Tiger Reserve and Mopla rubra from Silent Valley this year.

Born in Sri Lanka and having spent considerable time in the island nation, Henry had collected the species from southern India as a part of a joint expedition of the British museum and the Colombo museum from 1936 to 1938.

“We heard about the ‘Mopla’ genus for the first time after seeing the specimen kept at Natural History Museum in London in 2016 as a part of a visit organised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). I was surprised. Mopla are small grasshoppers without wings characterised by bright yellow stripes and spots in a dark brown background,” elaborated Bhaskar. Wayanad-based ecologist C K Vishnudas also told TNIE that discoveries are named after persons/communities of stature and not after something which caused dishonour to the society.

The Mopla grasshoppers are all set to include in the IUCN Redlist, of which assessment is going on, says Bhaskar, who is also the Asia regional vice-chair of IUCN species survival commission (SSC) specialist group. The Redlist assessment of grasshoppers, which is done for the first time in the country, is supported by the UAE’s Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund.

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