INTRODUCTION
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The present study 'Colonialism and Community Formation in Malabar: A Study of Muslims of Malabar' deals with the historical processes by which the Muslims of Malabar (generally known as Mappilas) became a well-knit community in the backdrop of colonial intervention. The study covers the period of a century from 1850 to 1950. It interrogates the generally held notion that communities are just survivals from pre-colonial phase or that they are natural, timeless spirits in search of incarnations appropriate to each epoch, As the present study problematises the community identity of Mappilas, it would be pertinent in this context to examine the various ways in which the category of 'Community' has been conceptualized in social science discourse.

Community as an Analytical Category

The concept of community has become a major analytical tool in the discourse of much of modern social sciences. We come across various ways of conceptualising ‘community’ in the recent writings of Benedict Anderson, Earnest Gellner, Raymond Williams, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakravarthy, Sudipta Kaviraj etc.\(^1\) Ambiguity has been a particularly key element in the chequered career of the category of community, especially in the discipline of

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Partha Chatterjee "Communities in the East", *EPW*, 33(6) 1998
history. As Partha Chatterjee observed, 'In spite of the fairly long history of its usage, there has been a poor theorization of the concept of community in modern social thought.' For a long period community was considered a foundational concept and therefore treated as given which does not need reflection. It was in recent years that the concept has been the focus of interrogation. This new attempt to study the genealogy and implications of 'community' brought to the fore two diametrically opposite perceptions about this category - the Primordialist and the Constructivist.

The primordialist (or substantivist) perception is that any collectivity of people that seems to have some kind of enduring social identity, solidarity and boundedness can be regarded as a 'community'. They generally regard communities as natural groupings based on ties of shared blood, language, history, territory but above all this, culture. Communities, in this perception, are characterised by continuity, cohesion, boundedness and adherence to tradition. They placed communities against a series of oppositions: East/West, Irrational/Rational, Traditional/Modern, Spiritual/ Materialist and finally, community/class. In their perception, ultimately, through an evolutionary movement, community will disappear and will be replaced by more homogenous social forms like 'class'. But, contrary to such expectation about the eclipse of community with the dawn of modernity, Asian countries and even Western world during 1980's and 90's witnessed aggressive assertions of ethnicity based on religion against homogenizing logic of national and international political economies and thereby the 'renaissance of the community'.

As against this position, the constructivists argue that most of the communities and identities which we see today are not anachronistic survivals from pre-colonial times but have emerged in recent past, in particular during

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2 Partha Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p.279.
the colonial period. In other words, groups denoted as 'caste' or 'ethnic group' were of recent origin, constructed during colonial phase by the colonial state through the utilization of technologies of power such as measurement and enumeration. Such technologies freeze and fixate the received fuzzy identities from pre-modern period and make them into categories of knowledge and power. Thus, the constructivists argue that modern community is a product of colonialism or specifically of colonial modernity. This colonial construction of community is both discursive and non-discursive. Drawing upon Foucault and Edward Said, they hold the view that community identity was invented under colonialism by the operation of certain political and discursive processes. A number of studies subscribing to this view of community have come up recently.\(^3\)

The strongest proponent of this constructivist theory of identity is Dipesh Chakravarthy of Subaltern School of historians. In his opinion, Indians were measured, classified and quantified by colonial state through census and other information gathering exercises employing various community categories. As governing practices entailed the counting and categorization of people in terms of collectivities, people began to see and organize themselves in terms of these categories leading to the formation of

\(^3\) See, Bernad. S. Cohn, "The Census, social structure and objectification in South Asia" in Cohn (ed.), *An Anthropologist among Historians and other Essays*, OUP, Delhi, 1987.

Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, Delhi, 1992.


Gyanendra Pande, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, OUP, Delhi, 1996.

Thus, colonial state is not only the source of modern collective identities but also of the ethnic conflict. The same idea is shared by his colleague in the subaltern school, Gyanendra Pandey, who argues that communalism in modern India, is the construction of the colonial state. Subaltern historians generally subscribe to the constructivist position but deviate slightly from other constructivists. They retain a primordialist understanding of community within a professed constructivist theoretical framework. Nicholas Dirks is another constructivist historian who has examined how 'caste' was invented by colonial anthropology and institutionalised through census and other administrative practices. He held the view that 'forms of casteism and communalism that continue to work against the imagined community of nation state have been imagined as well.'

Another proponent of the constructivist position, Benedict Anderson, in his book 'Imagined Communities' argues that identities (ethnic or national) uniting large number of people could arise only after a certain technological level had been attained. To him, it was the print capitalism which facilitated the collective imagining of communities. Francis Robinson, based on Anderson's thesis, argues that print capitalism played a major role in fashioning muslim identity in India. Eric Hobsbawm is another historian who subscribes to the constructed nature of traditions involved in the formation of community and national identities. He argues that the invented traditions, unlike customs, create claims of authoritative legitimacy on the part of some

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5 See Gyanendra Pande, op.cit.
7 See Benedict Anderson, op.cit.
power seeking groups, be it either a community or a state. In short, the notions of 'invention of tradition' and 'imagination of community' are probably the most widely cited theories today about community formations in history.

The difference of viewpoint between Primordialists and Constructivists have also found expression among historians who specialize on Muslim ethnicity in India. ¹⁰ Francis Robinson holds a Primordialist view that the religious differences between Hindus and Muslims in Pre-modern times were fundamental and that some of these differences such as on idol worship, on monotheism and on attitudes towards cow, created a basic antipathy between the two communities, which helped set them apart as modern politics and self-governing institutions developed. ¹¹ Paul. R. Brass, on the other hand, accepts an instrumentalist position and argues that Muslim separatism was not pre-ordained but resulted from conscious manipulation of selected symbols of Muslim identity by Muslim elite groups in economic and political competition with each other and elite groups among Hindus. He recognizes the crucial importance of the attitude and policies of colonial Government with its enormous capacity for distributing economic and political favours and patronage. ¹² This opinion is also shared by Asim Roy who argues that the growing Government pre-occupation with special Muslim questions and problems related to education, employment and political representation, was integral to the policy of 'balancing' the communities. ¹³

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¹³ See Asim Roy, "Being and Becoming a Muslim: A Historiographic Perspective on the Search for Muslim Identity in Bengal", in Sekhar Bandhopadhya (ed.),
Thus, the survey of the existing literature on community as an analytical category reveals the fact that majority of the modern scholars broadly follow a constructivist perspective about community. Almost all of them identify colonial administrative practices and ethnology as the major sources of modern ethnic identities. The primordialist argument that certain groups possess a collective conscience, whose historical roots are in some distant past and are not easily changeable but are potentially available to ignition by new historical and political contingencies, is not acceptable to most of these modern scholars. As Sudipta Kaviraj rightly remarked, 'pre-colonial communities which had fuzzy boundaries were replaced by discrete categories which could be enumerated exactly and which claimed exclusive identification by their members. Modern governing practices thus reconstituted the meaning of community and ethnicity, producing a brand of modern ethnic consciousness in India in which politics of cultural difference is primary'14 In other words, pre-colonial society was too fragmented by sub castes and local loyalties to have larger alliances to emerge.15 At the same time one has to admit the fact that modern community identities do not spring fully fashioned out of nowhere. 'They commonly employ the myths and symbols of earlier forms of identity which may be less clearly formulated and more restricted in circulation but are nonetheless incipient cores of identity.'16

15 Gyanendra Pande, Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India, OUP, Delhi, 1996, p. 199.

C.A. Bayly and Vander Veer are of the opinion that supra local identities indeed existed in pre-colonial India and that these identities themselves were historically constructed and hence constantly in flux.

It is to be noted that a problem common to much of the constructivist literature is the tendency to regard social identities as discursively constructed, ignoring the concrete economic or political structures within which such constructions take place. Very often, the constructivists ignore the ways in which the colonial discourses get played in real social life.

**About the Present Study**

It is in this theoretical backdrop that the present study examines the process of community formation among *Mappilas* of Malabar during the colonial phase. It interrogates the common habit of writing the history of community as a 'given' thing. The study anchors on the basic premise of the constructivists that modern community - whether Hindu or Muslim - is a product of colonialism or specifically of colonial modernity. It tries to emphasise the fact that the existence of a clearly defined community is not a pre-determined social fact. Even though loyalty to Islam might have provided the basis for the development of a religious identity for *Mappilas*, it was through a process of change and transformation as well as systematisation and articulation of religious and cultural symbols that the boundaries of Mappila community actually took shape. The role of colonial government in this process was instrumental. The Mappila community, like a nation, was often, an imagined entity. This imagination could not have been possible without a socio-territorial base. Though the same text and sacred symbols profoundly affected the lives of *Mappilas*, they could not separate them from the real life in the peculiar geographical and cultural settings of Malabar. In other words, those religious symbols, divorced from the real life world of Malabar, could not be the basis of the community because "beyond the core of Islamic

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symbols, all other symbols proved to be divisive and could not be made congruent with religious one.\textsuperscript{17}

This was the case with muslims of other parts of India. Infact the muslims of India never constituted a homogenous community though they professed the same religion, but reflected the regional and linguistic varieties of south Asian Islam. 'Neither to its adherents, nor to non-muslims, did Islam seem monochromatic, monolithic or indeed mono-anything'.\textsuperscript{18} What is important here is the fact that religion alone could not be a basis of a community.

Prior to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, masses of \textit{Mappilas} in Malabar were so fragmented from within by caste like features and so widely separated from their upper class brethren that the notion of a community could hardly exist. It was by the early decades of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, a self conscious Mappila community emerged in Malabar. Various factors were at work behind the emergence of a feeling of 'communitas' cutting across all diversities within. It included the discursive and non-discursive practices of colonial governmentality, improved means of communication like printing technology, colonial education, Islamic reform movement, increased tension between Hindus and Muslims in the post-rebellion phase, national movement etc. These factors contributed for a slow but steady growth of a concrete community identity among the \textit{Mappilas} during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Thus, the changing colonial context has to serve as the primary backdrop in any study of the discourse on Mappila identity in Malabar.

\textbf{Review of Literature on Mappilas}

\textsuperscript{17} Paul R. Brass, "Elite groups, symbols, Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among Muslims of South Asia" in David Taylor and Malcom Yapp (eds), \textit{Political Identity in South Asia}, London, Curzon Press, 1979, p.68.

At the outset itself, it is to be stated that among the umpteen works that deal with *Mappilas* directly or indirectly, not a single work examines the transformation of *Mappilas* into a community. Moreover, most of the studies, barring a few which deal with Malabar Rebellion, adopt the traditional narrative approach rather than analytical history. The corpus of historical writings on *Mappilas* is significantly small when compared to that on the Bengal muslims. This lacuna in historiography on *Mappilas* is due to the fact that much of the source materials related to them are either in Arabic or Arabi-Malayalam script. The thrust for the investigation of Muslim Malabar became noticeable only by 1980's and that too centered on the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. A major chunk of these studies revolve around the Rebellion and only in the context of the rebellion do they refer to *Mappilas*.

The earliest historical treatise on *Mappilas* is *Tuhfathul Mujahideen*, written in Arabic, by Sheik Zainudhin Makdum of Ponnani in 16th century AD. Contextually, it is also the earliest historical treatise written in Kerala. Though it is written with the intention of inciting the *Mappilas* to fight against the Portuguese, it could be called a valuable source book for any study on the early history of Mappila community. Among the notable works of recent period, Roland E. Miller's *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* ranks first as the only comprehensive work on Mappila Muslims. The book has got two parts: the 'Heritage of Past' and 'Encounter with Present.' The first part examines the growth of the community through centuries up to 20th century when the goal of *Mappilas* was 'survival, defense and the glory of Islam.' In this part Miller's converged with the formulation of Stephen Dale, who came out with his 'frontier thesis' in 1980, but of course without the latter's concern

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to develop an overall argument. He argues that during their long struggle with the Portuguese, the Mappilas had evolved an anti-western ideology in Malabar. The second part of the book examines the socio-religious changes that took place in the community in 20th century, specifically, the changing predilection of the community towards secular education. Overall, the book offers much information about the nature of Islam in Malabar. Even now the book is considered to be the master narrative on Mappilas of Malabar.

Malabar Rebellion of 1921 is the most widely researched area in Kerala history and we have got an abundance of literature on the subject. As David Arnold remarked, 'about the number and forms of Mappila disturbance, there has been little dispute but over their causation, a ding-dong battle has raged for more than a century.\textsuperscript{21} The prominent scholars involved in this battle in recent years were Stephen Dale, Conrad Wood, M. Gangadhara Menon and K.N. Panikkar.\textsuperscript{22} While Conrad Wood, K.N. Panikkar and M. Gangadhara Menon, though with variation in emphasis, view the outbreaks of 19th century and the Rebellion as examples of a long tradition of peasant protests and revolts, Stephen Dale deviates from this much treaded path and formulates a new thesis. He argues that the origin of Mappila violence lay much farther back in the arrival of Portuguese on Malabar coast in 15th century. He sees Mappilas fighting along two frontiers of Dar-ul-Islam, an external frontier, first that of Portuguese and then English and an internal frontier created by the pressure of Hindu landlord class. Unlike the other historians of the Rebellion, who confined to the period of the Rebellion or its immediate past, Dale goes back to 15th century and assumes that 'Mappila


Muslim Community always existed as an idea in their mind.'

In other words, right from 15\textsuperscript{th} century, due to their fight against the two frontiers, the Mappilas had developed a sense of community which was reflected through this Islamic militancy. He adds that this strong sense of Islamic identity was strengthened by their peculiar settlement pattern. As pointed out earlier, a liberal variant of this perspective could be seen in Roland Miller, who also examines the traumatic impact of the Portuguese on Mappilas. In analysing the religious context, not the religious content, of the Rebellion, K.N. Panikkar examines a variety of factors like the nature of early socialization, the influence of popular culture, the role of traditional intellectuals, etc.


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\textsuperscript{23} Stephen F. Dale, \textit{op.cit.}, p.217.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p.64.
\textsuperscript{25} K.N. Panikkar, \textit{op.cit.}, Specifically the Chapter 'The Making of a Tradition', pp.49-91.
\textsuperscript{26} A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, \textit{Mappila Muslims of Kerala: Their History and Culture}, Sandhya Publications, Trivandrum, 1989.
M. Abdul Samad, \textit{Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movement in 20\textsuperscript{th} century}, Kollam, 1998.
In this entire range of historical literature on Mappilas, one looks in vain for even a single contribution with primary focus on the question of Malabar muslim identity. What these literature share in common is the belief that Mappilas right from its inception in Malabar Coast formed a well-knit social unit without any internal contradictions and have been a community acting in unison. Hence, this notion of an exclusive ethnic identity existing right from pre-colonial phase is being interrogated in the present study. It tries to locate various discursive and non-discursive factors in the context of colonial rule in Malabar that helped the Mappilas to forge a community identity.

Organization of the Study

The present study is arranged thematically overlooking at times the chronological sequence of events. There are seven chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter 'The Phase of Popular Islam in Malabar' examines the nature of Islam as practiced by Mappilas during the pre-reformist phase. Various cults, beliefs and customs practiced by Mappilas during this phase do not converge with scriptural Islam and an understanding of this phase would provide the necessary background to perceive the changes that took place in the religious and social life of Mappilas during the 20th century.

The second chapter 'Colonial Governmentality and the Making of a Community' examines the various technologies of British Government in Malabar like census modality, counter-insurgency discourses, administrative devices etc. which helped to strengthen the community identity of Mappilas. In other words, it examines how modernization under colonial government had led to sharper articulation of identity among the subject population.

The third chapter 'Reform Movements and Efforts for a Separate Identity' tries to delineate the various reform movements as well as the works of individual reformers in Malabar. This phase is important in the formation of the community identity as the reformists made a conscious attempt to differentiate between Islamic and pagan beliefs. The reformist's emphasis on differentiating Islam in Malabar from local cultural tradition was a factor that brought about a separate identity.

This is followed by the chapter on 'Print and the Imagined Community of Mappilas', which analyses the self perception of community as reflected through print discourses. Following the formulation of Benedict Anderson about the role of print in nationalist imaginings, this chapter examines how print helped to foster community imagination among Mappilas. Bearing in mind the significance of print in identity formation, an exhaustive analysis of the entire print discourses has been attempted in this chapter.

The fifth chapter 'Khilafath and Pan-Islamism as Symbols of Solidarity' examines how pan Islamic concerns in the wake of Khilafath agitation amalgamated Mappilas into the pan-Islamic community of Muslims and how such sentiments helped Mappilas to identify themselves with their co-religionists in North India.

The sixth chapter, 'Representation of the Rebellion and its Aftermath' examines how the Rebellion was covered in the print media, vernacular Press including the nationalist and the literary narratives. This 'prose of otherness' did help to the articulation of identity among the 'other' (Mappilas). Along with this, the chapter also examines the post Rebellion developments in Malabar especially the entry of all India players like Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj JDT Islam, etc. and how their activities helped to sharpen the existing cleavage between Hindus and Muslims.
The final chapter, 'Towards a Political Identity', tries to examine how the religious identity that developed in Malabar due to various other factors was transformed into a political identity under the banner of Muslim League. It also examines the various factors that contributed for the drifting of Mappilas from the nationalist politics.

This is followed by a brief conclusion which sums up the study.

The patterns of documentation followed in the study are in the conventional style. At times 'Note No' is used when two or more works of the same author is referred to in the same chapter. In such instances the author's name will be accompanied by a foot note number pertaining to the specific book of the same author already referred to in the same chapter. The Arabic and Malayalam terminologies are given in italics and their corresponding meaning in English has been given in brackets. A separate glossary of such terms has also been given.

About the Sources

As regards to the sources, considering the centrality of print in community formation, emphasis has been given to literary sources like Arabic, Arabi-Malayalam and Malayalam works composed by Mappilas. The back volumes of muslim journals and newspapers like Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama, etc. have been used as primary sources. The primary sources available at National Archives and Nehru Memorial Library at Delhi, Tamil Nadu Archives at Madras, and Regional Archives at Calicut have been tapped. Special mention may be made about the Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Paramparyam (MMSP) co-authored by K.K. Mohamed Abdul Kareem and C.N. Ahmad Moulavi. This is a comprehensive source book on the life, culture and literature of the Mappilas of Malabar. Hence, throughout the study, the content of this source book has been profusely used. Similarly,
many valuable documents related to Mappilas, kept in the private archives of late K.K. Mohammed Abdul Kareem of Kondotty and Abdurahiman Mangad of Kakkove, have also been tapped for this study. Regarding the muslim journals used in this study, though most of these journals were published from outside the political boundary of British Malabar, the reading public of these journals were mainly Mappilas and hence all muslim print discourses, irrespective of location of print, have been utilized for this study.