Chapter I

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The Muslims of Malabar (generally known as Mappilas) are either descendents of Arab traders or of 'Hindu' converts to Islam. Malabar was the chief centre of Arab trading activities right from 4th century AD and by about 7th century AD, several Arabs had taken permanent residence in some port cites of Malabar.\(^1\) Hence it is probable that Islam came to Kerala almost immediately after it was founded in 7th century AD. Several Foreign accounts have mentioned about the existence of considerable Muslim population in coastal towns of Malabar between 9th and 16th century AD. Duarte Barbossa, who lived in Malabar during the first decade of 16th century, observed that 'the Muslims were so rooted in the soil throughout Malabar that it seems that they are a fifth part of its people, spread over all its kingdom and provinces.'\(^2\) Shaik Zamuddin in his *Tuhfathul Mujahideen*, written in 16th century, placed Mappilas at 10% of the total population.

Up to 16th century, as noticed by the contemporary observers, these Mappilas settled mainly along the coastal tracts. However between 16th and 19th centuries, the Mappilas had shifted to the interior parts of Malabar and so far no plausible explanation has been given to this shift. K.N. Panikkar is of the view that it was due to the increase in conversion and European intervention in Malabar that began in 16th century, which forced Mappilas to settle in the interior taluks of Malabar.\(^3\) With the coming of Europeans, the

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\(^1\) George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Princeton, 1951, p.61.
Mappilas who had been participants and collaborators of Arab trade, were looked upon as enemies and as a consequence, a good number of Mappilas employed in ports might have been forced to migrate to the interior in search of alternate employment. What is relevant in this context is the fact that by about 20th century the Mappila population became predominantly rural. Unlike the coastal Mappilas who engaged in trade, the interior Mappilas were cultivating tenants, landless peasants and petty traders.

The British census data tell us about the steady growth of the community in Malabar. From 1,70,113 in 1807, the strength of the community rose to 10,04,321 in 1921. The census tables show that the growth rate of Mappila population was much higher than that of other communities. Another notable aspect of demography of Mappilas was that 60% of them were concentrated in three southern Taluks of Malabar - Ernad, Valluvanad and Ponnani. By the census of 1961, the Mappilas constituted 31.43% of the total population of Malabar area, which comes around 67% of the total Muslim population of Kerala. As Gleason stated, 'Looking at a map there is no area so extensive with so concentrated a muslim population in all of peninsular India as in Malabar.'

What was the nature of the religious and social life of Mappilas of Malabar during the pre-reformist phase or prior to 20th century? What was the nature of Islam they practiced in Malabar during this phase? Can it be called Scriptural Islam or was it a kind of syncretic or popular religion? These are the questions addressed in the following pages.

The Phase of 'Popular Islam' in Malabar

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4 The Census Report, Malabar Presidency, 1921.
Everything that failed to measure up to norms and prescriptions of scriptural Islam was considered as folk or popular Islam which was attributed to either incomplete conversion or corrupting influence of 'Hinduism'. Almost all scholars who have worked on Muslim communities in India agree on this term. 'Folk Islam', 'Popular Islam', 'Hinduised Islam', 'Degenerated Islam', 'Census Muslims', 'Nominal Muslim', 'Syncretic Islam' are the terms used to denote the pre-reformed phase of Islamic communities throughout India. There is also a generally rooted assumption that syncretic beliefs and practices are mere relics and remnants from a pre-conversion cultural substratum.⁶

Islam as conceived and practiced by the mass of Muslims in Malabar prior to the emergence of Reform movement in 20th century was syncretic and contradicts the fundamentalist view of the beliefs and practices to which Muslims must adhere. A chronicle in Hadrmouth of 17th century AD says, 'Malabaries were people of great courage and zeal for Islam even though they have few scholars among them and no more of Islam than the merest name of it'⁷. It was with the emergence of an Islamization process by about the beginning of 20th century that the 'orthodox and orthoprax great tradition of textual Islam superseded the heterodox, heteroprax little tradition'⁸ of Malabar. Though Mappilas acknowledge the five pillars of Islam - creed, prayer, fasting, alms (Zakath) and pilgrimage (Haj) as per the pattern laid down in Quran, Hadith and Shariath, the Islam they practiced up to the early quarter of 20th century was heavily underlined by elements which were

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⁶ Asim Roy, "Being and Becoming a Muslim: A Historiographic Perspective on the Search for Muslim Identity in Bengal" in Bengal Rethinking History, (ed.), Sekhar Bandopadhyaya, Delhi, 2001, p.198.
⁸ Francis Robinson, Islam and Muslim History in South Asia, OUP, Delhi, 2000, p.45.
accretions from the local environment of Malabar as well as Yemen.  In all Islamic societies we find this mixture of textual Islam and local pre-Islamic practices. In Java, Muslims pray to the Goddess of Southern Ocean as well as to Muslim saints. In Ottoman Turkey, the Bektashi Sufi order recognized an Islamic Trinity of Allah, Muhamed (the prophet) and Ali (the 4th caliph). In southern Arabia the Beduins practiced the pre-Islamic practice of sexual hospitality. In India, much in common with Islamic societies elsewhere, the Bengali and Tamil Muslim communities also practiced a syncretic Islam.

Textual Islam, embodied in Arabic literature, proved unable to communicate to Muslim masses of Malabar, who knew only Malayalam. Adherence to folk beliefs should not be taken to mean that orthodox traditions had no place in Malabar Islam. There were many in the coastal towns who tried to remain as Islamic as possible. They were punctual in their daily prayers (nemas) and observing fast during Ramzan. However, the bulk of the Muslim masses knew very little about the orthodox beliefs and practices. At the same time, in the coastal towns, there were men of letters in Arabic and proficient in textual Islam. They were observing Islam in its pristine purity. But the case of the bulk of Mappilas who lived in the interior of Malabar, was different. In Malabar, the idea of Islam as a closed system with rigid boundaries is itself largely a product of 20th century reform movements. Up to that phase, the line separating non-Islam from Islam appears to have been porous, tenuous and shifting. 'The rural Muslims,' as pointed out by Richard Eaton in another context, 'were remarkably open to accepting any sort of agency, human or superhuman, that might assist them in coping with life's everyday problems.' The religious reform movements of 20th century were

found to regard such cults and rites as debasement of the pristine purity of Islam. Binaries were used by historians to demarcate between these two phases - Orthodox/Heterodox, Great Tradition/Little Tradition, Normative/Popular etc. These binaries are used because as pointed out by Richard Eaton, generally scholars viewed indigenous Muslim cultural history from the standpoint of Arab heartland, understood as the natural home of an unadulterated pure orthodox Islam. This perspective necessarily consigned under to the role of periphery and hence its vast and diverse population of Muslims as practicing forms of religions that were debased or diluted, Middle East as exporter and India as importer of religious culture. The assumption is that any religion that is conceived in terms of pure essence, will, if mixed with another religion, yield debased, diluted or distorted offspring. Joya Chatterji also observes that 'biological metaphors of insemination, implantation and germination abound in scholarly writings on conversion to Islam.'

It is a fact that Malabar could evolve its own variant of Islam which was rich, dynamic and flexible and marked by a capacity to accommodate themselves to indigenous patterns of faith and worship. In other words, Islam could take root in Malabar because of its capacity to forge links with the religions and peoples of a wider society. It is not orthodoxy but orthopraxy - adhere to a standard of identifiable Muslim behavior allowing considerable latitude. Certain basic forms of observance like that which govern the recitation of prayer, operation of mosque, practice of circumcision and key marriage forms were part of this Muslim behavior.

Most of the studies on Kerala Muslims ignore this eclectic side of Islamic religious life. It is often relegated to the domain of superstition or

12 Richard M. Eaton (ed.), India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750, OUP, Delhi, p.18.
13 Ibid., p.18.
folk worship. Most of such studies concentrate on the domain of High Islam which of course was prevalent in certain pockets of coastal Malabar. Hence it is relevant here to analyse how the Mappilas of Malabar lived and practiced their many manifestations of Islam.

**Channels of Acculturation**

A major reason for this hiatus between Scriptural Islam and popular Islam was the peculiar social condition under which average Mappila lived. Majority of them were converts from the lower castes of Malabar. The census Superintendent in 1881 observed that 'among some of them there may be a strain of Arab blood from some early generation but the mothers throughout have been Dravidian and the class has been maintained in number by wholesale adult conversion.\(^{15}\) Veliyamkodu Umar Qazi, the reformer and traditional intellectual of 19th century Malabar, referring to the vanity of elite Mappilas with regard to family pedigree, wrote:

'Aya faqiran binnasabi
Kaifata faquru
Wa asluku-min qablu
Thiyyan wa Nayaru
Wa Asari Musari
Wa Mannanu Pananu
Wa Koyappanu Chettiaru
Wa Nayadi Parayaru\(^{16}\)

[You who boast about pedigree
What is your base?
Are you not converts from

\(^{16}\) *Umar Khazi*, (Biography) published by Veliyamkodu Mahallu Jamaath Committee, Veliyamkode, 1999, p.143.
Thiyyas, Nairs
Asari, Musari
Mannans, Panars
Koyappans, Chettiars
Nayadis & Parayars]

As this poem depicts, a major chunk of Mappilas were converts from various castes of Kerala. The size and distribution of Mappila population by the end of 18th century makes it obvious that conversion to Islam had persisted in Kerala for centuries. The process of conversion to Islam continued in 19th and 20th centuries, although at what rate, it is impossible to say. We have got the periodic annual reports of Mounathul Islam Sangam, Ponnani, which was established in 1900 for the training of new converts, that testify to the fact that up to the mid 20th century, this process of voluntary conversion was taking place. Hence, as put forward by Fawcett in 1901, 'on the west-coast, where the Arab blood and influence is strongest, the religion is, so to speak, purely spiritual; in the interior, where there is little or no Arab blood, it is more animistic: the religion is more strongly infused with once universal ancestral worship and its concomitant phases. For example, on the coast the favourite moulud ceremony is entirely spiritual in its essence. . . but in the interior, where we find fanaticism, it is to obtain some favour from a deceased person who is invoked.'

Thus the inherited beliefs and practices, which derived from folk traditions, had a powerful hold on the Muslim masses of rural Malabar. It is argued that these converts had no knowledge of even the basic tenets of Islam due to absence of any mechanism for the same. As mentioned earlier it was

only in 1900 that the religious leadership began to think in that line. Thus, many non-Islamic beliefs became intermingled with Islamic belief system. Popular Islam or the folk beliefs and practices, which had evolved as a part of indigenous life habits for centuries, remained intact despite the formal act of conversion. It is to be noted that not all the unIslamic customs belong to indigenous traditions. Certain customs practiced by Mappilas were derived from countries like Oman and Yemen, from where Islam came to Malabar. Many of these customs of Malabar Mappilas could be seen prevalent in Oman. The custom practiced by Mappilas like piercing of ear, carrying the Malappuram knife, shaving off head, tom-toying during festivities, use of family names, eating from common vessel, tying of scarf round the head, wearing Topi, and several mortuary rites like feast on the day of death, celebration of Kannukku, Kurikalyanam, particular dress genres like kindan, tanipattu, kuttari, soop (various forms of Mappila women dress) were derived from Oman. Though basically Islamic and indigenous, the folk Islam in Malabar was thus vegetated by various foreign streams also.

Tomb Worship

A major feature of this popular Islam was the veneration of shrines containing tombs of Saints. Malabar Mappilas worshipped at shrines of a variety of holy men (auliya), whose identity was at best uncertain. Though tomb worship is contrary to Islamic tenets, it was part and parcel of Mappila religious life. As C.A. Innes observed, 'the religion of Koran is pure monotheism, but Mopla worships many saints (auliyakanmar) and martyrs (shahids); and his religion betrays not a few traces of primitive animism and ancestor worship. Celebrated Tangals such as the Tangals of Mamburam and men of holy and austere life were freely canonized and their tombs (makham)

20 Ibid.
become holy shrines and popular places of pilgrimage (Ziyarath)\textsuperscript{21}. About the tomb worship, E.K. Moulavi observes, 'a devotee, visiting such tombs, gives money to the custodian of the tomb and discloses his intentions. He will transmit this message to the dead auliya and after a while a handful of mud or ashes, or pepper will be given to the devotee which he will eat or smear on the body. After kissing the flag, he leaves the Maqam'.\textsuperscript{22} The important maqams of Malabar were at Mamburam, Kondotty, Ponnani, Kootayi, Calicut, Pattambi, where annual nerchas were held with traditional pomp and gaiety. 'Canonization is often easily obtained, for it is both honourable and profitable to the guardian of such a shrine; and an unknown beggar who dies of starvation on the road side may be endowed with all sorts of virtues after death and worshipped as saint and miracle maker'.\textsuperscript{23}

Except among the most orthodox, it is supposed that prayers offered through the intercession of a vali (saint) were more acceptable in the eyes of Allah than those offered direct. Many superhuman powers were attributed to the Auliya (Plural of Vali; Saints). They could avert any impending calamity or danger and cure all kinds of disease. It is the hymns composed in their honour that were chanted to ward off cholera and other epidemics. Their names were repeated to get out of present difficulties and to them are vows made to realize the objects of life. At Vettathuputhiyangadi (Malappuram Dt.) there was a maqam (tomb) of one Yahoom Thangal. When the cattle were lifted or banana stolen, the maqam keeper would put his head in to a hole and pull out his head with solutions. The usual mode of offering in the maqam was a bottle of oil\textsuperscript{24}. It is to be noted that the land for this Maqam was donated by Ambatt Tarwad, a Nair family and at the time of annual nercha

\textsuperscript{23} C.A. Innes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.190.
\textsuperscript{24} K. Moidu Moulavi, \textit{op.cit.}, p.37.
the oil to the lamp was usually supplied by another Hindu family, the Kizhedath family and the beaten rice provided by the nearby Kurulikkavu Temple.\footnote{India Vision (News channel), 'Vasthavam', February 3, 2006.} People used to take the mud and stone of the holy tombs of saints for the treatment of abdomen pain and diarrhea.\footnote{C.N. Ahmad Moulavi and KKM Abdul Kareem, \textit{Mahathaya Mappila Sahithya Paramparyam} (Mal.), (herein after MMSP) Al Huda Book Stall, Kozhikode, 1978.} The shahids (martyrs for the cause of Islam) were also commemorated in similar fashion and many tombs of martyrs who were killed in Mappila riots of 19\textsuperscript{th} century were erected and worshipped. For example, Mutiara Shuhadakkal's graveyard in Munniyur in Malappuram district was a pilgrim centre of \textit{Mappilas}. Very often the British authorities tried to burn in to ashes the dead bodies of Mappila rebels in 19\textsuperscript{th} century riots for fear of such veneration.

Hymns were composed in their honour and a major chunk of the Arabi Malayalam literature belongs to this genre. Among these the most popular were \textit{Malappuram mala}, \textit{Mampuram mala}, \textit{Manjakulam mala}, etc. These songs and hymns were composed in praise of indigenous auliyas but in tune with the \textit{Malappattus} of Muhiyudin, Rifai or Badar Shahids\footnote{See chapter 'Print and the Imagined Community of \textit{Mappilas}' for more details about these songs.}

Recitation of these \textit{malas} was specific to particular needs. At times the malas were chanted to ward off diseases. For e.g., \textit{Manjakulam mala} was recited to ward off small pox, to cure insanity and for protection from thieves. The poem tells:

If you recite this \textit{mala}  
You will be relieved from  
The witches of smallpox  
The moment, you complete recitation.\footnote{Malabari, \textit{Manjakulan mala}, Amina Printers, Trichur, 1970, p.2, This \textit{mala} is an eulogy of Syed Husain who is believed to have died in the battle with infidels during Tipu's time and buried at Manjakulam in Palghat.}
It tells further that when a worker destroyed the wall of the *maqbara* of this *Auliya*, in connection with railroad construction, he died on the spot due to the wrath of the saint. Similarly, at the time of *nercha* at the *maqam*, when a man denied water to the devotees, his house was burnt by the wrath of the *Auliya*. This kind of miracles were attributed to the *Mamburam Thangal* also. Even the mud stained with the saliva of *Mamburam Thangal* was considered to have healing power. Throughout India, the bodily secretions, especially saliva and human wastes were thought as being charged with a form of power and energy. The devotees perceive their lord's saliva as a medium which carries and transmits his *barakath*. 'Indeed it is wonderful what all good offices the saints are supposed to be able to perform', says Qadir Hussain Khan.

**The Cult of Nerchas**

*Nerchas*, the largest public festivals of *Mappilas* were closely linked with this saint-worship. 'These were expensive and elaborate ceremonials which combine nominally Islamic elements with certain features of indigenous folk festivals.' Anniversaries of each of the *Auliya* mentioned earlier were celebrated in all the major centres of Malabar with great pomp and splendour. This celebration commences with the planting of a flag-staff (*Kodiyettam*) as in the Hindu festivals. As Qadir Husain Khan points out, 'the prayers offered to the deceased *Pirs, Thangals* and *Shahids* which, though contrary to the spirit of Islam, are very common in Malabar, where as it is well known that ancestral worship with all its concomitant phases was once widely prevalent'. The respect paid to such notable dead, in some instance

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31 Qadir Husain Khan, *op.cit.*, p.52.
had bordered upon idolatry. It was believed that they had direct intercourse with the god and they can help a person to make or mar one's fortunes. Thus all the nerchas were conducted within a ritual framework derived from the worship of folk deities in Malabar. These were important just because of this hybrid character, that is, they provided examples of an especially complex variety of Islamic saint and martyr worship. The most prominent nerchas of Malabar were of Kondotty, Malappuram, Pukottur, Kuttayi, Mamburam and Idiyangara in Calicut. Though the pattern of ceremonies was almost similar, the saints commemorated through them were of different nature. Kondotty nercha honours the Sufi landlord Mohamed Sha, who settled at Kondotty during the period of Tipu Sulthan. The Pukottur nercha, which does not exist today, was held in memory of martyrs of 1921 rebellion. Malappuram nercha commemorates the martyrs of the revolt against Paranambi in 1728-9 AD. The nercha at Idiyangara in Calicut town, which is known as Appa Vaniba Nercha or Idiyangara Shaik Urus is the one which is celebrated in honour of Shaik Mamukoya, a sufi saint of Calicut who died in 1562 AD (H.E. 980). The tradition says that one night, some Mappilas dreamt that his grave which was near to the reefs, was in danger of being washed away and that they should remove his body to a safe place. They accordingly opened the grave and found the body quite fresh (after a lapse of 100 years) with no signs of decomposition. The remains were poisingly re-interred in another place and a maqam was built known as Idiyangara Shaik Maqam. An interesting aspect of this nercha is the offering of bread and hence the name Appa Vanibha nercha. The devotees believe that if they are having ailment in any part of the body, they may prepare bread in the shape of such body parts and offer to the shaik, the disease in that part of the body can be cured. The biggest in the history of the Nercha at Idiyangara was the one held in 1914 in which Srambikkal Mammad organized a Varavu (procession) with 20 elephants, a

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A cart full of vegetables, a cart of rice and 50 baskets of Appam (cake), accompanied by usual art forms of Kolkali, Kalari and Daffmuttu. Kuttayi nercha honours the memory of a Sufi Shaik or at least a Muslim who is believed to have been a Sufi for no one knows his name or even exactly when he came to the village.

Whatever the content of these nerchas, these were celebrated annually in which Mappilas participated in large numbers. The Government report of 1868 says that the Kondotty nercha was attended by 8000 people with 20 carts, 15 manchils and 8 horses. Similarly in Ernad and Valluvanad Taluks, barring the aged and invalids, 90% of the Mappilas attend the Malappuram nercha and it shows the sympathy and honour of Mappilas towards martyrs to the cause of religion. At the same time it is pertinent to note that Hindus vigorously participated in Malappuram nercha. In the nercha held in March 1924, Mathrubhumi reported that besides the Mappila’s drums, ‘Hindu drummers were also participating in it and this showed that Hindu-Muslim unity had not been hurt in Ernad. In 1934 the Malappuram nercha was attended by 1500 Mappilas.

There were many minor nerchas in Malabar like Pullara Nercha, Kottakkal Nercha at Palapra Palli. In connection with Kottakkal nercha in 1932 there were fire works, and many types of gambling called Chattikali, Pullivali etc. During the nercha in Tanur mosque in 1893 the local Mappilas had, without getting any license, arranged for fire works and gambling at a kind of roulette called Pot-roulette (Chattikali). Hearing this

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33 Ibid., p.224.
35 Report on Fairs and Festivals in Madras Presidency by Major J.L. Ranking, 1868, R. 201, XCVII, KRA.
36 K. Madhavan Nair, Mathrubhumi, dated 31st May 1923.
37 Mathrubhumi, dated 18th March 1924.
38 FNR, dated 19th April, 1934, No.pp.4-8, TNA.
39 Mathrubhumi, dated 29th March, 1932.
the police laid an interdict on the proposed amusement whereupon some 2000 Mappilas carried their illegal intentions.\textsuperscript{40}

Hydros Kutty Moopan popularly known as \textit{Manathala Shahid} is believed to be a lieutenant of Tipu and nercha was celebrated every year at his tomb in Chavakkad. He was the patron saint invoked by fishermen of both Hindus and non-muslims.\textsuperscript{41} A replica of the \textit{Jaram} (tomb) was taken out in procession through out the streets at the time of \textit{nercha}. Similarly the fishing community of Badagara used to invoke the blessings of Cheru Seethi Thangal \textit{Jaram} for a good catch.\textsuperscript{42} The identity of many of the auliya\textasciitilde s laid to rest in the \textit{maqbaras}, where \textit{nerchas} were held was very often unknown. No definite information is available regarding the historicity of 'Papamkoya Tangal (Kasargod), Munnupettumma (Kannur), Munambath Beevi (Ponnani), Kasart Auliya (Ponnani) etc.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus the \textit{nerchas} not only reveal many of the variegated elements which form the mosaic of popular religious culture, such as the influence of velas and purams or the participation of Harijans but the \textit{nerchas} also bring out many of the specifically Islamic aspects of Mappila practice which are not immediately evident in everyday life. This is particularly true of the influence of devotional religion which is present as an aspect of popular religious practice, but which does not seem to have an organized sectarian manifestation.\textsuperscript{44} This explains the apparent reason behind the popularity of \textit{nerchas}. At the one hand, it provided the rural Mappilas, including women, an opportunity to express genuine religious piety and on the other, it was a

\textsuperscript{40} Kerala Pathrika, dated April 1893, MNPR, 1893, TNA.
\textsuperscript{41} V. Kunhali, Sufism in Kerala, Calicut, 2004, p.107.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p.113.
\textsuperscript{44} Stephen F. Dale and M. Gangadhara Menon, op.cit., p.193.
spectacular entertainment, featuring the varavus (arrivals), fire works, tom-toy ing, Duffmuttu, Kolkali and an occasion for shopping in clothing, toys, sweets and household utensils and agricultural implements. All these elements come together in different combination to make nerchas popular in Malabar.

The ceremonial pattern of the nercha reveals the fact that, it represents the Mappila adaptation of indigenous religious traditions. 'Mappilas could have Islamized already existing festivals or created new ones using indigenous ceremonial patterns. Most of the rituals connected with nerchas were similar to those of poorams or velas practiced by Brahmanic or non-Brahmanic communities. In terms of music, and dramatic performance as well as Varavus, (offertory procession), there was a marked similarity. Another link of nerchas with puram is the seasonal agrarian context. Majority of nerchas like purams take place during the harvest season. It is to be noted that Kondotty nercha began as a ceremony in which Muslim peasants brought agricultural produce to the senior Thangal. Besides, the Varavu was common to both nercha and pooram. The use of decorated elephants, the fireworks, the hoisting of flags all further support non-Islamic aspect of the nerchas. A remarkable aspect is the participation and varavus of untouchable organizations of villages and the artisan groups like goldsmiths. This participation of non-muslims also testifies to the syncretic nature of nerchas. It was this syncretic nature and its disjunction with scriptual islam that led reformist group to despise nerchas as unislamic. All these were in direct conflict with the teachings of the prophet who did not even favour the building of a tomb at the place where his sacred remains was interred.

Thus, as Aysha Jalal opined, 'The shrines of holy man as a place of devotion may be deemed contrary to the strict precepts of Islam. Yet

46 Roland E. Miller, op.cit., p.96.
Maqbara or tombs of Sufi saints have been the focal points of religious devotion, often cutting across the communitarian divide.  

Almost similar is the ritual called Kodikuthu nercha or flag hoisting nercha. When there occurs famine due to drought, the devotees of certain Auliyas, go to the custodians of Maqbara, give an amount, take the flag off the Maqbara and carrying this flag, huge crowd of devotees with tom-toying circumvent the entire village and thereby the procession sanctify the Muslim residential areas.48 Another variant of this was Nadappu Moulud which was performed to ward off contagious disease. Taking a lamp from mosque and reciting moulid, devotees in large numbers circumvent the village.49

Sandanakudam, sandalwood paste anointing was another popular ritual among Mappilas. But this was more popular in southern part of Kerala. It involved the ceremonial parading of pots of sandal paste to the maqbara (tomb). The devotees anoint the tomb with sandal paste and distribute it to the devotees. This practice was quite identical with Hindu festivals all over India. As in the case of nerchas, Hindu devotees also take part in this procession. Barring the high caste groups, all the people of Malabar, irrespective of creed and caste, shared a common perception of sacred power and this common cults cut across formal boundaries of communities and sects.50

Though the Mappilas identified themselves as Sunnis, they had actively participated in the Shia rite of Muharrum, the great festival of

50 Despite the efforts of reformist, tomb worship continues in Malabar even in the 21st century. Even progressive political parties contest the election to the governing bodies of Jarams like Perumpadappu which receive a huge amount annually as vows. Also note the legal battle around the ownership of Mampuram Jaram today.
mourning and penitence. It commemorates the slaughter of the historic shia martyrs of Hasan and Husain, the sons of Ali, the orthodox caliph. As Yousuf Moulavi observed, 'this Shia festival came to Kerala from Persia and both Shias and Sunnis and even non-Muslims began to celebrate it as an opportunity for merry making'.\(^{51}\) During the procession, Tazias, known in Malayalam as 'Koodaram' was paraded. Muharram was elaborately celebrated in Kannur and Calicut during 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries. It was celebrated with elaborate merry makings even in 1930 at Kannur as testified by a report in Mathrubhumi.\(^{52}\) Very often, the non-Muslims wore the characters of animals in the procession. By 1920's, both reformists and traditionalists urged their followers to distance themselves from Koodaram festival.

**Sufi cult in Malabar**

In order to understand the cult of intercession which was widespread among Mappilas, one has to examine another aspect of popular Islam - the Sufi cult. By about 16\(^{th}\) century, many Sufi Tarikas (orders) had found a favourable and fertile ground in Malabar and in course of time the veneration of Sufi shaiks came to be regarded as an integral part of Malabar Islam. V. Kunhali has observed that it was the Taifa stage in the development of Sufism which became popular in Malabar.\(^{53}\) During this stage the disciples were not longing for spiritual elevations but only for fulfillment of some worldly desires with the baraka (blessings) of the saint. Very few Sufi divines who had come over to Malabar, set up their own shrines. Most of the ancient mosques are known by the name of certain sufi Shaiks. In Calicut

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\(^{52}\) The report says that one Kanaran was indicted by committee for prevention of cruelty towards animals for squeezing the blood of a goat at the time of Koodaram procession (*Mathrubhumi*, dated 10\(^{th}\) June, 1930).

\(^{53}\) V. Kunhali, *op.cit.*, p.8.
itself we come across 'Mohiyudin Palli', Shaduli Palli, Rifai Palli etc. named after Sufi shaiks, popular in Malabar. It also shows that the prominent Sufi orders in Malabar were those of Qadiriya, Shaduli and Rifai. As already mentioned, the most popular Moulids of Malabar were of Abdul Qadar Jilani and Shaik Rifai. Besides this, there was the Sufi order of Kondotty Tangal, considered to be of Shia orientation.

Qadiriya, which was founded by Shaik Muhiyudin Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), was the oldest Sufi order in Islam. The growth of Ponnani, 'the little Mecca of Malabar' as a Muslim centre of learning is related to one saint called Ibn Abdul Qadir Khurasani, a disciple of Shaik Jilani.\textsuperscript{54} Kondotty Tangal was a descendant of Persian Mohammed Sha.\textsuperscript{55} Shaik Zainudin-ibn-Ali-al-Mabari (1467-1521) belonged to Chisthi Tarika which was founded by Hazrath Kwaja Muinudhin Chisthi.\textsuperscript{56} Rifai Tarika also claimed a good number of followers in Malabar as is evident from the popularity of Rifai Mala and the number of its reprints in Malabar. But among these, the most popular one was of Qadiriya Tarika. Until recently, an average Muslim in Malabar used to call out ‘Muhiyudin Shaik’ in times of trouble. The Qadiriya, which had a high reputation for orthodoxy, was on the whole literary, rather than propagandist and is said to maintain a higher standard of Islamic instruction than its rivals.\textsuperscript{57} Perhaps this may be the cause for the relatively high piety of Malabar Muslims even now.

Thus, it could be seen that by about 19th century, the Malabar Mappilas were polarized in to many Tarikas and heated debates were going on in Malabar between the disciples of this Tarikas. As Thurston observed, 'There

\begin{enumerate}
\item[]\footnotesize Syed Mohiyudeen Sha, \textit{Islam in Kerala}, Trichur, 1974, p.43.
\item[]\footnotesize C.A. Innes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.415.
\item[]\footnotesize A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, \textit{Mappila Muslims of Kerala: Their History and Culture}, Sandhiya Publication, Trivandrum, 1989, p.22.
\end{enumerate}
are always religious disputes between these sects of Kondotty Tangal and Ponnani Tangal and the criminal courts are seldom called in to settle them'.

Each sect was vying each other and trying to get followers from other sects. For, Muhiyudinmala warns the followers of other Tarikas:

"Leaving him, where do you go (rely) oh! people.
All the cocks will crow and stop.
But Muhiyudin's cock will crow up to Qiyamam (Dooms day).
Oh! The people who yearn Akhiram (Life after death).
Be his Murids without delay".

The local founders of these orders like Kondotty Thangal and Mamburam Thangal were often sanctified after their death. Their veneration gave rise to cults, which often overshadowed the devotion due to the true founders of the Tarika. This explains why the cult of Kondotty Tangal and Mamburam Tangal were of extreme importance, ignoring the ideology and sufi philosophy, they espoused during their life time. The ejaculatory prayer 'Oh Muhiyudhin Shaik' was so popular in Malabar. Similarly 'by the feet of Mamburam Tangal' was a sacred seal to a mappila contract. Tottenham says, 'It is quite common now for Mappilas to invoke Mampuram Thangal when in difficulties. I have heard a little Mappila who was frightened at my appearance and ran away across a field calling out 'Mampuram Thangal . . . Mampuram Thangal". Their tombs became shrines tended by descendants of the Shaiks. To the Shrines, devotees come and take part in pilgrimage on the anniversary of his death.

58 E. Thurston, op.cit., p.461.
59 MMSP. pp.152-156.
60 As quoted in Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p.463. Pulikkottil Hydru (1879-1975) the Mappila poet wrote in one of his poem, 'No one other than you had touched me, By the feet of Mampuram Thangal, I swear'. See M.N. Karassery, Pulikkottil Krithikal, Wandoor, 1979.
Very often, these Sufi pirs claimed Sayid (Prophet’s lineage) pedigree for that would enhance their prestige. They were the earthly reminders of God's presence. For the rural Mappilas, the theological polemics of Ulema were often remote and hard to grasp, but the saint was a ready exemplar of reality of divine forces in the universe. By performing Karamaths (miracles) or having people believe he does, through use of his divine power (barakath), the saint demonstrates the immediacy of Allah's existence. Both the founder as well as the local pirs was considered imbued with such miracles. Muhiyudin Shaik is described as 'one who, since born in Ramzan, did not drink mother's milk for one month' and as 'one who made the skeleton of cock to crow and fly or 'one who sees the heart of disciple like an object inside a glass.' We have already seen the miracles attributed by disciples to Mamburam Tangal. The devotees believed that by the barakath of Mamburam Tangal, bullets can't pierce through the body and, out of this belief, many indulged in heroic fight with British soldiers in 19th century.

Similarly, goats were dedicated to Muhiyudhin Shaik and such goats were butchered and feasts were organized during the death anniversary of the Shaik. Vowing the cattle to Nagore Shrine (Tamil Nadu) was also prevalent in Malabar. A considerable number of devotees used to visit this shrine of Shahul Hamid (1532-1600 A.D), a Sufi missionary buried at Nagore in Tamil Nadu. Such bulls vowed to Nagore were paraded with green shawls along the streets, weeks before the actual nercha at Nagore. The accompanying devotees would carry a box with silver objects in the shapes of leg, arm, ear, genital organ etc. of human bodies. The devotees believed that by vowing a

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64 Roland E. Miller, op.cit., p. 243.
particular organ of the body, the illness of that part of the body could be cured by the grace of Nagore Andavar.\textsuperscript{65}

\textbf{The Cult of Ratibs}

It was the sufi cult which introduced \textit{Ratibs} in Malabar and attached with every mosque, there was \textit{Ratib} house (\textit{Ratib pura}) to perform recitation of \textit{dikr} on every Thursday evenings.\textsuperscript{66} The most popular Ratib recited in Malabar was \textit{Haddad Ratib} composed by Abdulla Ibn Alavi al Haddad (d. 1726 AD).\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ratib} was a ritual in which members of a \textit{Tarika} form an immense circle and recite the hymns eulogizing their sufi \textit{shaik}. At a particular phase of the \textit{Ratib}, they begin to recite their formulae in rancorous saw-like voices rhythmically swaying their bodies. The influence of \textit{yoga} could be seen in this practice. The \textit{Rifai} devotees practiced 'Rasping Saw' \textit{dikr} like 'Ha, Hy, Ha Hu, Hu, Allah.' Walking on fire and swallowing live snakes were the miracles of \textit{Rifai} Sufis.\textsuperscript{68}

A special \textit{Ratib} was performed by the devotees of \textit{Shaduli Tarika} called 'owl \textit{Ratib}' in which they practiced a kind of rhythmic humming and finally fall down foaming to the ground in induced epileptic convulsions.\textsuperscript{69} Special \textit{Ratibs} were organised in times of epidemics like cholera and small pox. Another form of this \textit{Ratib} was \textit{Kuthuratib} in which the participants swing left and right and to and fro, calling out 'ya Shaik Muhiyuddhin' or 'Ya shaik Rifai'. 'After a while one of them stabs on his belly with a dagger, another cut his tongue, still a third piercing his cheek with a needle. This \textit{Ratib} of self mortification was usually performed by professionals called

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Till 1940's, at Muhiyudin Mosque in Calicut, there was a \textit{Ratib khana}, \textit{Ibid.}, p.106.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} V. Kunhali, \textit{op.cit.} p.23.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}, p.64.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} K. Moidu Moulavi, \textit{op.cit.}, p.40.
\end{itemize}
Another cult associated with Sufism was *Jinnuseva* (propitiation of spirits) which was derived from the Sufi practice of *Arbainiyya* (Forty days retreat to solitude). It was believed that once a man retreats to jungle and completes his meditation of 40 days, he can perform miracles with the help of Jinns at his command.

An interesting aspect of Sufi cult was the practice of placing the *Silsila* (the complete genealogy of the order from the founder to the diseased) in the grave of the disciple and it was believed that when the angels realized his identity, he would be left unhurt. Very often this written genealogy was kept in bottles to protect from moths. This practice of putting *silsila* bottle in graves was prevalent in Malabar until recently.  

Again, the *murids* used to hand over their jewellery and even land to the local *pir*, as he is taught by the *pir* that all wealth belonged to God. Hence, to get paradise, the disciples present their worldly assets to these *pirs*. As observed by Makti Thangal, 'these *shaiks* tantalized their disciples boasting that they had 20,000 murids and their grand fathers had 50,000, just like the provincial landlords boasting about their wealth in terms of coconut trees'. A major share of the revenue of Kondotty Tangal was in the form of such offerings from the *murids*. 

Mohammed Sha Tangal of Kondotty came from Bombay and he belonged to the Muqaddam sect. Kondotty Tangal turned to be a big *janmi* of Ernad as he was given considerable landed property by his *murids*. Even Tipu Sulthann was his *murids* and had given the right to collect tax in that area. His

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70 *Qalandars* is a family name in Malabar even now.
71 V. Kunhali, *op.cit.*, p.23.
74 *M.M.S.P*, *op.cit.*, p.193.
disciples used to prostrate before him. It was on account of this that there arose schism in Malabar Islam called Ponnani - Kondotty Kaitharkam. As Kunjain observed, 'The reason why they (the disciples of Kondotty Tangal) are believed to be heretics and as such outcast is that they are enjoined by their preceptor (the Tangal) to prostrate before him. Prostration (Sujud) according to strict doctrines is due to God alone.'

Thus, these Sufi leaders exercised a marked influence, not only on the spiritual but socio-political life of Malabar Mappilas. The belief that a Muslim should have a leader in his life (Imamuzzaman) was strong among Mappilas and it was this belief that was exploited by the Shaiks of Tarikas and made people to accept these saints as their pirs. As Baber observed in 1822, "both Tarammal Tangal (Mampuram) and Kondotty Tangals pretend to an extra ordinary sanctity and such is the character they have established that the people believe it is in their power to carry them harmless through the most hazardous undertakings and even to absolve them of most atrocious crimes. To propitiate them, their votaries were lavish in their presents. The Thangal (Malappuram) possess great influence in the Taluks of Ernad and Valluvanad and resides for half the year at Malappuram and for the other half at Ponnani. The late collector Canaran regards the character of this man as quite inoffensive man, fond of good things of life and anxious for nothing better than to enjoy in peace the offerings of his numerous disciples.

All these point to the fact that Sufism contained two elements - a sophisticated intellectualism which is represented by Ibn-Arabi and Al-Gazzali, as well as simple minded manifestations of folk religion as seen in

76 K. Moidu Maulavi, op.cit., p.38.
77 Cited in E. Thurston, op.cit., p.463.
78 Letter, A. Mac Gregor, Magistrate to Chief Secretary, Madras. 19th Jan. 1874, Judicial Dept. 23rd April 1874, KRA.
Malabar with its amulets, *nerchas*, exotic ceremonies and half-illiterate saints. The Malabar experience also tells us the fact that although Sufism is a product of sophisticated civilized centres of Islamic world, it is also suitable to a tribal society. It provides an interpretation of Islam which while preserving the supreme absoluteness of *Allah*, mitigates the uniqueness of prophet in favour of more accessible and more immediate intercessors.\(^79\)

They claim to be within strict *Sunni* orthodoxy (except the Kondotty Tangal, who was a *Shia* but later gave up his *shia* affinity after the *Kaitharkam*) but, later, they were accused of heresy by the reformers of 20th century. Makti Tangal who initiated Islamic reform in Kerala says, 'Islam does not permit to disclose the spiritual secrets to ignorant and to make the spiritual advice as means of livelihood by enlisting clients (*murids*) and collecting dues from them. But wherever you go in Kerala, you can see this 'give and take' (between *pirs* and *murids*) and the 'scramble' for *murids*, both men and women'.\(^80\)

Despite this isolated attacks on the part of the early reformers, the emotional attachment of average Muslim to his Sufi saint, living or dead, and his faith in his immense miraculous powers was so deep and pervasive that no amount of denunciation could undermine his devotion. Many felt that it was through the intercession of the *Shaik* alone (*Thavasul Isthigaza*), they could come closer to God. This immutable conviction of average *murids* proved an insuperable problem for the later reformists and encouraged the fundamentalist theologians to come forward to oppose the reformists. As pointed out in a subsequent chapter, the reformist and the traditional *ulema* engaged in very long heated debate on this single issue of intercession through Sufi *Shaiks* during the period of 1930's & 1940's. Thus, Sufism as

\(^{79}\) I.M. Lewis, *op.cit.*, p.159.

\(^{80}\) KKM Kareem, *MTSK*, *op.cit.*, p.656.
practiced in Malabar was part and parcel of the popular religion and not the part of sophisticated intellectualism.

As Richard Eaton observed in the context of Bijapur, 'devotion to some saints, exercised through the veneration of his descendants and his tomb' exerted a powerful appeal among common folk whose goal was not the mystic's goal of spiritual affinity with god but the simpler one of achieving relief from worldly anxieties or attaining possession of worldly desires. It was through the intercession of saints that God's help could be secured in attaining these goals. This explains the introduction of astrology, magic, belief in Talisman and Charms and other superstition as means of prescribing the flow of *baraka* from saints. **81** This observation is applicable to most of the saints of Malabar too. Trimmingham has identified three phases in the evolution of Sufism in Islam: *Khanqha* Phase, *Tarika* phase, and the *Taifa* stage. If Sufis in *Kanqha* phase surrendered to God and in the *Tarika* phase to a method of discipline, in the *Taifa* stage they surrendered to a person, the *baraka* possessing saint of whose cult they were members. **82** Hence, it could be argued that Sufism reached Kerala in 16th and 17th centuries, when it had reached its *Taifa* stage. Sufism in Kerala betrays all the characteristics of *Taifa* stage, when disciples were not longing for spiritual elevations, but only fulfillment of some worldly desires with the *baraka* of a saint. **83** It also explains the high popularity of *Muhiyudin Mala* of Qazi Mohammed (1607) while *Kappappattu*, which is highly philosophical, could not gain that popularity among *Mappilas*. **84**

**Other Folk Beliefs of Mappilas**

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**83** V. Kunhali, *op.cit.*, p.61.

**84** For details see chapter 'Print and the Imagined Community of Mappilas'.

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The influence of surrounding Hinduism is also found in the belief in magic, in the practice of exorcism and such other black arts which commonly obtain amongst the Muslims in Malabar, notwithstanding the distinct expression of condemnation in Islam of all such beliefs and practices as treason against God.\textsuperscript{85} Though magic is condemned by Quran, the Mappila was very superstitious and witchcraft was not by any means unknown.\textsuperscript{86} The Musaliyars and Thangals pretend to cure diseases by writing selection from Quran on a plate with ink or on a coating of ashes and then giving the ink or ashes mixed with water to the patient to swallow. This was the most popular method of curing diseases among Mappilas of Malabar right up to the middle of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. They also wore charm cylinders round the waist (Elassu), which contained copper scrolls inscribed with sacred verses to avert misfortune. The Mappila jinn and shaithan corresponded to the Hindu demons and were propitiated in much the same way. The rumour that the elassu provided by Konnara Tangal and Chembrasser Tangal would protect the body from bullets, was widespread in Malabar during the 1921 Rebellion.\textsuperscript{87}

One of the methods of witchcraft was to make a wooden figure to represent the enemy, drive nails into all the vital parts and throw it in to the sea after the curses in due form.\textsuperscript{88} A square cavity, closed by wooden lid, is cut out of the middle of the abdomen of such figures and fills with hair, scorpion, ganja (Indian hemp) etc. Such exorcists pretend to have power to cause death or injury to enemies, to increase worldly prosperity, to command victory and in short to accomplish all wishes, spiritual and material, which the

\textsuperscript{86} E. Thurston, \textit{op.cit.}, p.489.
\textsuperscript{88} E. Thurston, \textit{op. cit.}, p.489.
seeker desires. As this belief in evil spirits was most common, witchcraft was a lucrative business in Malabar. Very often the Mappilas sought the help of exorcists, who belong to paraya and pulaya castes. When a lady conceives, the village musaliyar (priests) writes selections from the Quran\(^89\) on the plates (Pinjanamezhuthu) and the plate is washed with water and the pregnant lady drinks this water. Similarly, she is asked to stick a yanthram (cabalistic signs) on her both thighs.\(^90\) Homam (a form of exorcism practiced on terminal patients) Kuppi Thukal (to hang a bottle on the roof with inscriptions from Quran in it) and to bury the copper plates with inscriptions in or outside the house, are other forms of magic practiced by Mappilas.

Many evil spirits were propitiated by Mappilas in Malabar. 'Parallel to 'Chathan' and 'Kuttichathan' or 'Gulikan' of the neighbouring sects, there were the Muslim versions of the same known by different names like Chekkuttypapa or Kanjirakudam. In Muslim houses, there were separate rooms and stools, which were dedicated to such spirits.\(^91\) Kunjirayinpapa was another popular evil spirit propitiated by Mappilas in South Malabar. It was actually a tribal spirit, the lower orders of Malabar believed in and once they converted to Islam, they also islamized this evil spirit with a Muslim name.\(^92\)

Belief in Jinn was quite common and innumerable ballads in Arabi-Malayalam, which dealt with the miracles of jinns like 'Valiya jinnpattu' and 'Cheriya jinnpattu' were popular among Mappilas. Valiya jinn pattu deals with an imaginary battle between Hazrath Ali, the orthodox caliph, with jinns.\(^93\) These are songs which extol Ali and hence belong to Shia cult. Other important works that belong to the shia cult and popular among Mappilas

\(^89\) Usually, the Musaliyar selects 'Ayathul Kursi' a particular chapter from Quran for Pregnant women.
\(^90\) K. Moidu Moulavi, op.cit., p.20.
\(^92\) K. Moidu Moulavi, op.cit., p.20.
\(^93\) P.K. Muhammed Kunji, op.cit., p.265.
were Pakshipattu (Birds song), written by Naduthopil Abdulla and Kuppipattu (Bottle song), many versions of which were available and Thalipattu, written by Syed Husain. All these songs were sung with veneration by Mappilas, without being bothered about its contents, even when the orthodox Muslims considered shi’ism as outside the fold of Islam.94

Belief in Rouhani (soul of dead) was also popular. Those who were caught up by Rouhani were exorcised through Asmah (witchcraft) by musaliyars as well as non-muslim sorcerers, with the help of articles like copperplates, egg, tender coconut, cock etc.95

Though Quran denounces the idea of prying in to future or the unknown, several varieties of divination were popular among Mappilas like divination by astrology, dreams and oracles. Specialists in casting horoscopes were there among them. Otherwise they sought the help of traditional Kaniyans (Hindu Astrologers). Oracular divination was much popular in Malabar.96 Inspired Shamanists who inhale divine afflatus were consulted and their replies were delivered in frenzy just like the oracles in Poorams and Theyyams. These professional convulsionists worked themselves in to violent hysterics and thundered out such curses or prophecies as the occasion demanded. Even in 20th century Malabar, we come across newspaper reports of convulsionists called Faqir papa and Bibis.97

94 MMSP, op. cit., p.474.
95 Qadir Husain Khan, op.cit., p.59.
96 Usually, the Musaliyar selects Ayathul Kursi, a particular chapter from Quran for pregnant women.
97 Malayala Manorama reported in 1922 that 'at Muhiyudhin mosque in Calicut, a Thangal from South Travancore was staying and performing miracles. When a toddy tapper approached him complaining about the scarcity of toddy yield, he asked him to bring the next day's yield to the mosque. Surprisingly, he got an abundant yield next morning and brought it to the mosque, and the Thangal sold the whole toddy from the mosque itself. The report added that no Muslim objected to this deed of Thangal. The Thangal was also seen leading a huge procession comprising boys and elders shouting the slogan 'let the dawn come and Badr crack down; Let the jasmine blossom and the fragrance spread' and the devotees attribute
The annual report of Basel Medical Mission of Calicut in 1907 says that ‘it is regrettable that the people during epidemics (cholera and smallpox) do not resort to hospital medicines but ascribe them to the devil's scourge. Especially the ignorant and superstitious Mappilas believe that cholera is due to demonic possession and can only be cured by exorcism.\(^{98}\) Another Mappila form of treatment in Malabar was *Kombuvekkal* (Treatment with horn). With the use of animal horn the bad blood was sucked out of the body. This was done by *Shaiks* with the assistance of *Ossans* (barbers). This was the treatment especially for acute headaches. Even now this system of treatment is prevalent in Saudi Arabia which shows that this was derived from Arabia.

Belief in evil eye was also prevalent among Mappilas. In order to avert the evil eye, black threads were tied round the animal or child's waist. Similarly, the steady gaze of the hungry at a man eating, causes indigestion and stomach pain. In such cases, some red chillies are taken in hand; a prayer uttered and put it in to the oven. Evil eye may also affect new buildings and an effigy, a pot covered with cabalistic signs, a branch of cactus were installed near the new building to catch the evil eye of the passers-by. This is also done in paddy fields until the crop reaches maturity. All these were things they shared with their non-muslim neighbours.

Umpteen rites, the Mappilas observed on the occasion of death have also been adopted from the non-muslim brethren in Malabar. The mortuary rites of Mappilas were almost similar to that of other communities in Malabar. The idea of death pollution (*pula*) prevalent among Mappilas, was altogether foreign to Islam.\(^{99}\) On the day of death, the family members umpteen meanings to this utterance of *Thangal* (*Malayala Manorama* dated, 3\(^{rd}\) October, 1922)

\(^{98}\) As quoted in E. Thurston, *op.cit.*, p.467.
\(^{99}\) Qadir Husain Khan, *op.cit.*, p.75.
abstain from food. The second day, food is being prepared in the neighbours house. But on the 3rd day (Kannook) elaborate feast is arranged in the house itself, with which the mourning ends. Members of the bereaved family weep aloud sitting in front of the dead body.\footnote{Holland Pryor, \emph{Mappilas or Moplas}, Culcutta, 1904, p.42.} During the observances of grief (\emph{Pula}) in the house of the dead, \emph{Ossans} (barbers) used to shave off the hair of those who visit the house and he will be paid by the relatives.\footnote{P.K. Muhammad Kunji, \emph{op.cit.}, p.267.}

Another mortuary ritual of \emph{Mappilas} was \emph{Talqin}, a catechism read to the deceased after burial. \emph{Mappilas} thought that reminding the dead the tenets of their religion spared them from harsh beating by vengeful angels. Not content with this, there was also the practice of placing a paper which contains the answers related to the questions, the angels are supposed to ask. Usually this was performed by \emph{musaliyars} for which he was paid. The appropriateness of \emph{Talqin} was an important issue of contention between the reformists and orthodox sections in twentieth century Malabar. If the family could afford, prayers were conducted at the graveside for forty days (\emph{Kuzhikkaloth}) and at house on third, fifteenth and fortieth days of death and on each anniversaries after death, a \emph{moulid} was read at house.

Widows of the diseased had to keep secluded in their own house for three months and ten days without seeing any of the male sex\footnote{C.A. Innes, \emph{op.cit.}, p.194.}. Similarly, if the dead were rich, there was the \emph{Yamoth} (recitation at the tomb) for seven days in specially built \emph{Yamapura} (a thatched house built on the tomb). On 15th and 40th day of death, sumptuous feast and \emph{moulids} were performed.\footnote{K. Moidu Moulavi, \emph{op.cit.}, p.63-64.} Usually, the site of the tomb was fixed by the eldest member of the \emph{Mahal} committee. The dead bodies of the rich were buried near to the mosque; usually the poor were buried far away from the mosque in cemetery. All
these were on the basis of the economic status of the individual. Contextually, 'when Attakoya Thangal died at Mecca in 1886, his 15th day of death ritual was organized in Miskal mosque in Calicut with a grand feast of 40 mooda (one mooda contains 50 kg) of rice. The food was served inside the mosque which was opposed by Valiya Qazi and finally the mosque was sealed by Cheriya Qazi.104 All these ceremonies observed after the funeral were not part of Islam but were part and parcel of the animistic belief system prevalent in Malabar. These practices like building any structure around the grave, chanting near the grave reciting Quran at the home of the deceased etc. were vehemently opposed by the reformists in 20th century.

Numerous innovative practices were seen in the ceremonies held in connection with birth, marriage, circumcision etc. One among this was Kathukuthu Kalyanam or the ceremony of ear boring. All Mappila ladies bore their ears just like women of Hindu castes like Thiyyas. P. Kunjain, the first Mappila Deputy Collector says, 'As many as ten or fourteen holes are bored in each ear, one being in the lobe and the remainder in the ala (helix). The former is artificially widened and a long string of ornaments of beautiful manufacture suspended from it. As strict sunnis of Shafi School, the boring of the nose is prohibited.'105 Thurston also writes, 'Mohamedan women have their ears pierced all around the outer edges and as many as twenty or twenty five rings of iron or gold are inserted in the holes but the lobes are not elongated.'106 Arab and Persian women did not have so many bores in their ears as in Malabar.107 Ear-piercing of girls, which corresponds to the circumcision of boys, was celebrated as of a marriage festival with feasts. 'As amongst Tiyans and Mukkuvas, a great number of ear-rings were worn; the

104 Parappil Koya, op.cit., p.129.
107 Qadir Husain Khan, op.cit., p.46.
rim of the ear was bored in to as many as to or a dozen holes in addition to the one in the lobe.\footnote{C.A. Innes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.188. For details see the 'Kathukuthumala' of Pulikottil Hydru, in M.N. Karassery (ed.) \textit{Pulikkottil Krithikal}, Wandoor, 1972.}

\textit{Markakalyanam}, or circumcision was performed after the boy attained seven years of age. This was performed by \textit{Ossan} (the Muslim barber) with a sharp razor. The ceremony was the outward sign of the boy's admission in to the fold of Islam. It was celebrated with elaborate feasting and rejoicing, spending huge sums of money. As in the case of marriage, the rich used to print cards for inviting friends and relatives.\footnote{For samples of the invitation cards see Parappil Koya, \textit{op.cit.}} Fireworks, \textit{Kalari} performance and caparisoned elephants were arranged in connection with this ritual. On the seventh day, the boy was taken to the nearby mosque with new attire. This was called \textit{Ezhukuli} (bathing on the seventh day of circumcision). Similarly \textit{Tirandukuli} (bathing on the seventh day after puberty) was observed by the \textit{Mappilas} of Malabar. On the seventh day, the girl was dressed in bridal fashion and sweets (coconut and jaggery) were distributed to friends and relatives.\footnote{P.K. Mohamad Kunji, \textit{op.cit.}, p.303.}

In ceremonies related to marriage, the only religious ritual practiced by \textit{Mappilas} was \textit{Nikah}, which consists in the formal conclusion of the contract before two witnesses and the \textit{Qazi}, who then registers it. The rest of the functions had nothing to do with the religion. For instance, the betrothal or settlement of the dowry was arranged by the parents of both bride and bridegroom before the \textit{nikah} itself. Large dowries were expected, especially in north Malabar, where husbands were at a premium and a father with many daughters needed to be a rich man. E.K. Moulavi, the reformist leader, considered this as anti-islamic and an adoption of Hindu custom and exhorted the wealthy section of the community to come forward against this evil.\footnote{E.K. Moulavi, Note no. 22, p. 160.}
The dowry system was not sanctioned by Islam and what was prescribed by Islam was the system of Mahar which was nothing but a present by bridegroom to the bride. Similarly, despite the fact that Muslims all over the world are patriarchal, in North Malabar and coastal towns of south Malabar, the bride lived in her own house, with her mother and sisters, till death, unless her husband was rich enough to build her a house of her own. Due to this system, polygamy was rarely practiced in North Malabar, where as in South Malabar polygamy was the rule. In South Malabar 80% of husbands were having two wives or more and 20% three or four.\footnote{C.A. Innes, op. cit., p.193.} Again while in North Malabar divorce was comparatively rare, in South Malabar it was most common. This difference related to marriage and divorce was due to the systems of inheritance followed.

**Matriliney among Mappilas**

In North Malabar and in coastal towns of Malabar generally, the Mappilas followed the Marumakkathayam system of inheritance, though it was opposed to the precepts of Quran, but a man's self-acquisitions usually descended to his wife and family, in accordance with the Mohammedan law of property.\footnote{Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p.491.} This combination of two systems often led to much confusion and troubles in Muslim joint families. This practice of matriliney was ascribed to the orders of Raja of Chirakkal and seemed to have been further encouraged by the example of the Bibi of Arakkal, the only Muslim royal family and head of North Malabar Mappilas.\footnote{Qadir Husain Khan, op.cit., p.78.}

Mahar is the amount which husband is required to pay his wife as a formal nuptial gift. It is one of the most important conditions of Islamic
marriage. There was no limit to amount of mahar. But among Mappilas, the amount of mahar was determined and fixed by customs. The amount of mahar of a group was correlated with its social status. The higher the amount of mahar, the higher was the social status.

Many Hindu rituals connected with marriage like lamp lighting, and smearing of rice (Ariyeriyuka) at the time of bride's arrival, vettilakettu (presentation of betel leaves), sprinkling of rose water at the time of the arrival of bridegroom etc. were practiced by Mappilas. Generally, Makhathayam system was followed in interior parts of South Malabar. It is to be noted that succession to religious posts like that of Valiya Jarathingal Thangal of Ponnani, usually went according to matrilineal system. The sacred offices of the Makhdooms were also inherited in the female line, the nephew and not the son being the successor. Marumakhathayam system, lacking provision in Islam, was a major issue of debate in Malabar in 20th century. Contextually, it is to be noted that the minute division of property between a man's heirs, which shariath prescribes, was considered as the cause of the poverty of South Malabar Mappilas and the absence of it as the cause of relative affluence of their brothers in north Malabar. At the same time, even among those who follow Makhathayam in South Malabar, the Hindu joint family system was kept up and father and sons had community of property to be managed by the father and after his death by eldest son.

Art and Architecture

Sacred architecture was another site where one could see the indigenous influence. Mosques in Malabar were built according to the

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115 K. Moidu Moulavi, op. cit., p.45.
116 Francis Buchanan, A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar (Reprint), Vol. II, Madras, 1870, p.103.
117 C.A. Innes, E. Thurston and Fawcett, share this view.
118 Quadr Husain Khan, op. cit., p.79.
architectural style of temples. No mark of Islamic architecture could be seen in them. As Fawcett remarked, 'the mosque of Moplas are quite unlike those of other Muhammedans. Here one sees no minarets . . . The mopla mosque is much in the style of a Hindu Temple even to the adoption of the turret-like edifice which among the Hindus, is here peculiar to the temples of Shiva. They often consists of several stories, having two or more roofs, perhaps in imitation of Kaaba at Mecca, one or more of upper storeys being usually built of wood, the sides sloping inwards at the bottom. The roof is always pent and tiled; there is a gable end at one extremity, the timber on this end being often elaborately curved.\textsuperscript{119} The introduction of German mission-made tiles brought about a metamorphosis in the architecture of Hindu temples and Mappila mosques. The mosque, though no better than the hovel, was always as grand as the community could make it and once built, it could never be removed, for the site was sacred ever afterwards.

In place of the srikovil of temple, the mosque had got an inner room which is surrounded by courtyards which were used for dars (religious teaching) and keeping books. There were many doors and windows and thick wooden columns. Certain mosques were having roof tops covered with copper plates. Similarly the mihrab was constructed in the form of snake's hood. 'Ornamentation of the mimbar was like that seen in srikovil of a temple and such mimbars were not seen in Arabia\textsuperscript{120}

The pulpits were exquisitely carved out in wooden plank. The closed prayer halls and sloping tiled roofs were peculiar to Malabar because of the monsoon climate. 'The distinction of Malabar mosque from Indo-Islamic mosque was not simply the result of physical forces or any single casual factor but was the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors that

\textsuperscript{119} F. Fawcett, \textit{Indian Antiquary}, xxx ,1901 as quoted in Qadir Husain Khan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.83.

\textsuperscript{120} K. Moidu Moulavi, \textit{op. cit.}, p.197.
moulded the Muslim culture of Malabar. The Saracenic tradition did not reach Malabar where the Arabic tradition of simplicity of structural forms had combined itself with indigenous Hindu style of temple construction.\textsuperscript{121} The Hindu architects who built mosques followed the \textit{shilpa sastra} tradition for the construction.

Enough floral designs including lotus were inscribed on the wooden column and paintings. The \textit{mimbars} (the special stage for friday sermons) were adorned with wooden sculpture which reminds one of the \textit{Garbagriha} (\textit{sanctum sanctorum}) of temples. These traces of Hindu influence were due to the fact that both temples and mosque were built by the same masons. Thus, in terms of structure, sculptures and motifs used to decorate the wooden structure, the mosques followed the pattern of Hindu temples.

Now, if we turn to the cultural life of the \textit{Mappilas}, this mix of micro and macro traditions or indigenous and the exotic become more visible. An investigation of the historico-semiotic discourse of the arts and festivals of \textit{Mappilas} of Malabar would certainly shed light on the cultural interface that made them possible and on the experience of diverse communities, who came together to enact the vital moments of their shared existence.\textsuperscript{122}

\textit{Kolkali} or \textit{Kolattam} was a folk art mythologically traced back to lord Krishna.\textsuperscript{123} The Mappila brand of \textit{Kolkali} retained the basic structure of original folk form, but used songs written by Mappila poets. These songs deal with life stories of holy saints like Mamburm Tangal or stories related to prophet or holy warriors. Thus it attained the status of Mappila art form. In \textit{Oppana} too, this blend of indigenous and Islamic expressions could be

\textsuperscript{121} K.J. John, "The Muslim Arabs and Mosque Architecture in Malabar" in Asghar Ali Engineer, (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, pp.47-54.
\textsuperscript{122} Dr. V.C. Haris "From Structure to Communities and Back: Notes on the Arts and Festivals of Muslim of Kerala" in Asghar Ali, Engineer, (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, pp.200-206.
\textsuperscript{123} See Mohanachandran S., \textit{Kolkalippattuka:: Oru patanam} (Mal), Thiruvananthapuram, 1989.
noticed. Here, one can trace the influence of certain indigenous art forms such as *Kaikottikali* and *Thiruvathirakali*, but songs are related to Islamic themes like prophet's marriage.

Another aspect of this cultural symbiosis was *Theyyam*. There were popular Mappila *Theyyams* like *Aryapukanni*, *Bapuriyan* and *Alichammundi*. The *Tottams* (eulogies recited at the time of *Theyyam* performance) of *Aryapumkanni* and *Bappuniyan* contain reference to the origin of *Mappilas* of Malabar. It tells about conversion of Cheraman Perumal and the arrival of Tajudhin to Kerala and the establishment of mosques including Madayi mosque. Similarly, many *Theyyam* characters like *Kalandumukri*, *Kozhimammad* and *Alichamundi* explicitly deal with the Mappila situation. Certain *Theyyams* introduce Mappila character during interludes, often for the sake of comedy. The Muslims had nothing to do with a *Theyyam* performance normally, yet they figure in some *Theyyam* in a prominent way which indicates the cultural interaction at the most fundamental level, that of the shared experiences of the village folk. In terms of costumes and language, these *Theyyam* characters were *Mappilas*. Some scholars are of the opinion that the *Mappilas* were also involved in certain rituals of *Theyyam*.

**Social Stratification among Mappilas**

Caste system as it is ordinarily understood, was a distinctive feature of Hinduism and has got no provision in Islam. But it is interesting to find that the spirit of caste prevailed among the Muslims of Malabar until the early decades of 20th century. As observed by Victor, S. D'souza, 'despite their

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126 Dr. V.C. Harris, *op.cit.*, p.203.
similar origin and many common characteristics, such as religious persuasion language, dress etc, the Moplas do not constitute a homogenous group for certain reasons of ethnological and political diversities'.

Among the Mappilas, the main body was termed a Malabar and other sections were called the Thangals, Arabis, the Puslars and Ossans. But interestingly enough, these distinctions were not familiar to the non-muslims. Among these, the puslars were considered as the inferior caste. The term Puslar literally means 'new Muslims' or Muslims who are later converts. Whether it was among Muslims or Christians, the new converts as a rule did not have the same status as the people who had been in the faith for many generations. Generally the Puslars were converts from among Hindu fishermen called Mukkuvans. Due to their low occupation of fishing and late conversion to Islam, they were allotted low status in the Mappila social hierarchy. The Puslars regarded themselves as untouchables and were not ready to sit at dinner by the side of Mappilas. Similarly, the Ossans, the barbers among the Malabar Muslims, by virtue of their low occupation were ranked the lowest. Their women folk acted as midwives within the community and also as singers on weddings. Though it is enjoined by Islam that for Friday congregation, the Muslims of a town should meet in a common mosque, in many coastal cities like Calicut, Ponnani and Tellicherry, the Mappilas and puslars were not only having different mosque for daily prayers but they also had separate Jumua Masjids (which conduct Friday prayers). They also had separate burial grounds. Until the middle of 20th century, in these towns, there were mosques called Puslan palli. Thus, there existed a huge social gap between the Mappilas and puslars.

129 Qadir Hussain Khan, op.cit., p.61.
130 Victor S. D' Souza, op.cit., p.54.
Among the Mappilas, the highest sect was the Sayyids, which trace ancestry through the progeny of prophet's daughter Fathima. In Malabar, these Sayyids were called by a respectable term of Thangal. Most of these Thangals were immigrants from the Hadramouth of Yemen and by virtue of their descent from Ahl-Baith (prophet's family), they were held in high esteem by all Mappilas. When Thangals were invited to social functions, they were provided with separate seating arrangements and had to be served separately. Their women were honorifically addressed as Bibi or Bu.\(^{131}\) Arabs were small groups concentrated in certain coastal pockets like Quilandy, Calicut etc. They were descendants of Arab men and local women and had retained their Arab lineages. Since they traced their lineage from Arabia, they occupied a high status next to Thangals.

Besides this distinction on the basis of descent, there was the distinction based on system of succession. The father-right and mother-right Mappilas usually formed two different compartments. While the Mappilas of coastal regions in North and South Malabar were matrilineal, the interior Mappilas of south Malabar were patrilineal. Inter marriage between these different groups, formed either in terms of descent or system of inheritance or profession, was not possible. Generally these were endogamous groups and only in rare cases inter-marriages had taken place. But even such marriages were strictly hypergamous type in which only male members of superior group marries the female of an inferior and not vice versa. For eg, a Thangal woman could not marry a man other than a Thangal.

Prejudices like those of caste were commonly found among the Mappilas. The word Puslan was used as a derogatory term by the Mappilas generally. Marriage between a Puslan and other Muslims was never possible. The Dakkini Muslims formed another endogamous group and there were

\(^{131}\) Ibid., p.53.  
\(^{132}\) Bu was the term used to address the ladies of Kondotty Thangals, while the ladies of all other Thangals were addressed as Bibi.
separate mosques for them which Mappilas did not frequent.\textsuperscript{133} Similarly we come across instances of clash between Mappilas and Ahmadiya Muslims of Calicut with regard to the possession of mosques and cemetery.\textsuperscript{134} As remarked by Q.H. Khan, 'the separation had gone so deep down in this matter that though Hanafis and Shafites really represent two schools of jurisprudence, they had separate mosques of their own, even when they lived in one and the same street.'\textsuperscript{135} The Mappilas even disliked being styled as Sahib which was generally used by the Dakkini Muslims.

The stratification was visible also in terms of wealth. Among the Mappilas, the exogamous section called Keyis enjoyed a high status, they being big merchants and bankers in the past. They had separate mosque and burial grounds. As in the case of Thangals, they were given differential treatment like separate seating and eating arrangements in social functions. The keyis may well be termed the aristocracy among the Mappilas of North Malabar, next only in importance to the Sultan Ali Raja. The Odathil mosque built in 18\textsuperscript{th} century by the Keyis, had its own graveyard, where the Keyis were buried.\textsuperscript{136} The Arakkal Tharavad also enjoyed high social status in north Malabar. Being the only royal family of Kerala, the women of Arakkal family did not marry from Cannanore, however, respectable they were, as the latter were regarded as their subjects. Among other Mappilas, the husband addresses his wife in singular as ni (thou) but the Arakkal ladies had to be addressed in the plural as ningal by their consorts and generally the husbands were subservient to their wives.\textsuperscript{137} Members of Arakkal tharavad had a separate mosque, separate qazi and separate burial ground. The Koyas of

\textsuperscript{133} Until the dawn of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Pattala Palli in Calicut which was established by the Government for soldiers of Hanafi sect in 1848 was not frequented by Mappilas. It was in 1925 that one Moideen Musliyar transformed it to a Shafi mode of prayer (Mathrubhumi, 12\textsuperscript{th} February 1925).
\textsuperscript{134} Mathrubhumi, 29\textsuperscript{th} April 1933 and 1\textsuperscript{st} February 1934.
\textsuperscript{135} Qadir Husain Khan, op.cit., p.63.
\textsuperscript{136} Churiya Vasudevan, The Keyis of Malabar, Tellicherry, 1930, p.2.
\textsuperscript{137} Victor S. D'Souza, op.cit., p.55.
Calicut region occupied a position similar to that of Keyis in north Kerala and they followed matrilineal system.

Even among father-right Mappilas of interior South Malabar, social division had existed. For instances, in Ernad Taluk, the Kurikkal, Naha, Moopan, families formed an endogamous group of highest status. The Tharavads of Koorimannil, Valiamannil, Kodithodi etc. formed another group just below them. Similarly, the tharavads of Avunhippurath, Puzhikuthu, Athimannil etc., composed of another group in the third position. It was these elite families, who were the wealthiest within the community and who were the custodians of mosques, organised nerchas and settled disputes.138 Barring the Thangals, whose status rested on pedigree, the social divisions among Mappilas were based on consideration like wealth, occupation and family connections. Even within the mosque, there were separate seats for the members of such families. 'There was the distinction between inner portion (Akathey palli) outer portions (Purathey palli) within the mosque. While the inner side of the mosque was reserved for the elites and mosque Committee members, the outer sides were meant for the subalterns like labourers, Ossans, puslans etc. Specific space was given to the Karanavars (elders) of respected families in the front raw of the inner hall. Even if one Karanavar was absent on a friday, that space was kept vacant.139 Mosque functionaries like Mukri (Muezin) Thanneer Kori (water carrier) Khabran (gravedigger) were given a degraded position. Members of respected families never accepted such posts and it was difficult for such functionaries to get spouse form ordinary families.140

In the business world, even religious injunctions were not honoured. Muslim merchants in Malabar who engaged in liquor sale were not given a low status. 'In the early decades of 20th century the Mappilas of north Malabar began to dismantle the Thiyya monopoly in toddy trade. The

138 Ibid., p.59.
139 K. Umar Moulavi, op.cit., p.85.
140 K. Moidu Moulavi, op. cit., p.27.
profession of liquor extraction and distribution was coming under attack from temperance campaigners, rhetoric as yet in the wings.\textsuperscript{141}

Members of the elite families were the trustees of mosque committees and on account of this position, they exercised unbounded power over the entire community. Mosque functionaries like Mudaris, Khatib, Mukri, Molla, Musaliyar, Khabran (gravedigger) Thaneer kori (water carrier) were all dependents of this Umarakkal (trustees of mosques). It was these sections who fixed the marriages, divorces, partition of property of the families under the jurisdiction of a Mahal. On weddings, only after their arrival, food was served. At the time of death of a Muslim, they would fix the spot for the burial and the wages of those involved in burials were distributed through them. They collected the subscription to mosques, managed the madrassas, organized the wa’az etc.\textsuperscript{142}

All these facts show that though Islam does not formulate any caste system, the Mappilas were affected by the influence of the social organization of the 'Hindu's and social stratification was rampant among the Mappilas until the middle of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The social distance among these caste-like sections among Mappilas were very great and they practiced endogamy. The interaction of those of higher castes was treated deferentially. The sections ate separately; they had separate mosque, separate religious organization and separate burial ground.\textsuperscript{143} Thus the Islamic traditions in Malabar, hardly escaped certain aspects of one time micro traditions, transformed in to the component of Brahmanical macro traditions, for instance, the institutions of lineage, caste and hierarchical ranking.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{142} K. Moidu Moulavi, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.63-64.
\textsuperscript{143} Victor S. D'Souza, "Social Organization and Marriage Customs of the Mappilas on the South West Coast of India", \textit{Anthropos} 54, 1959, pp.487-516.
Conclusion

Thus, the above survey of the cultural life of Mappilas underlines the formulation of K. Umer Moulavi in his autobiography. He says, 'The Kathukuthukalyanam, Pettinirikkal, Mara Avasanippikkal, Tirendu Kalyanam, assignment of cattle to jaram, welcoming a bride with lamp and rice sprinkling, lighting the khabar, covering jaram, placing the boy on elephant's back on the initiation ceremony, receiving the Musaliyar for wa'as with fire works, and tom-toying, music and fireworks with weddings, Kodikuttu nercha, procession carrying the maqam flag in times of epidemics, eclipse or drought, chandanakudam, nercha etc. were the marks of Muslim life in Malabar until the middle of 20th century'. Moidu Moulavi also has observed that during the early decades of 20th century, there was very little Islamic spirit in the life of common Muslims. Namaz, fasting, Haj, Zakath or even Jumua (Friday congregation) were not observed. Often, due to the scarcity of required number of devotees, Friday congregations were disbanded. In short there was nothing Islamic about the life of rural Mappilas. A report of 1822 tells about the interior Mappilas 'as not quite abstemious in the use of liquor as their brethren on the coast. It shows that the interior Mappilas never bothered about the religious injunction against the consumption of alcohol. Thus the Mappilas had either retained or adopted many of the manners, customs and even religious beliefs and practices of the neighbouring communities, from whom they had sprung or amidst whom their lot had been cast. As put in by Romila Thapar, 'those from across the Arabian sea who settled as traders along the West Coast and married in to the existing local communities - the Khojas and Bhoras of Western India, the Nawayaths of Konkon, and the Mappilas of Malabar assumed many of the

146 K. Moidu Moulavi, op.cit., p.89.
customary practices of these communities and sometimes even contradicting the social norms of Islam.\textsuperscript{148}

The belief in evil spirits and methods adopted to placate their wrath, the veneration of saints and offerings at their tombs, the faith in divination and magic, the caste like divisions with gradations, elaborate rituals and extravagance connected with marriage, birth and death, the system of inheritances; in all these, one could find resemblance between popular Islam and popular Hinduism. At the same time, all these were in violation of important Islamic principles. Hence, what we could see was the blending of the inherited beliefs and practices of Hindus with the manners and customs which were essentially of Arab origin, especially those of Yemen and Oman. The result is variously called 'fusion' and 'amalgam' or 'syncretism'. Syncretism is often defined against an abstract normative model of Islam. But, it is interesting to note that \textit{Mappilas} during the pre-reformist phase rarely perceived their own practice as non-Islamic, as very few among \textit{Mappilas} were conversant in scriptural Islam. It is also sometimes assumed, blanket fashion, that syncretism offers greater possibilities for communal harmony and tolerance. In fact, syncretism does not preclude religious conflict either inter-or intra-group or eruption of violence.\textsuperscript{149} The experience of South Malabar in 19\textsuperscript{th} century, with intermittent isolated riots between \textit{Mappilas} and upper caste Hindus, often due to the issue of land control and even apostasy, underlines this formulation.

Despite all this, the fact remains that Islam in Malabar was embedded in indigenous social and religious order of Malabar and its surroundings. About the \textit{Mappilas} of interior North Malabar, Dilip M. Menon observed that 'they worshipped at local mosque shrines of holy men as well as a variety of

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\textsuperscript{148} Romilla Thapar, "Tyranny of Labels", \textit{Cultural Pasts}, OUP, Delhi, 2004, p.1005. \\
\textsuperscript{149} Shail Mayaram, \textit{Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and Shaping of Muslim Identity}, OUP, Delhi, 1997, p.38.
shrines devoted to snakes, tribal deities and local divinities, loosely within a Hindu pantheon. There may have been little sense of 'us' and 'them' except at the level of popular prejudice regarding differing life styles and patterns of speech'.\(^{150}\) This kind of flux and assimilative dynamism precluded the possibility of a uniform islamisation in Malabar or even in India. It was against this syncretism of *Mappilas* that the reformists in 20\(^{th}\) century started a crusade by which they tried to shake off most of the factors in social and religious life, which they had in common with their Hindu brethren but which went against the spirit of their religion. In a way, the reformist movement of 20\(^{th}\) century was a 'movement back from communitas to structure.'\(^{151}\) The victory of the Reformists was also a victory of an orthodox great tradition of Islam over a heterodox, heteroprax little traditions of Malabar Islam.

\(^{150}\) Dilip M. Menon, *op. cit.*, p.6.
\(^{151}\) Dr. V.C. Harris, *op.cit.*, p.205.