Islam in India, as elsewhere, continues to be represented as a pre-modern entity in its refusal to "conform" to national and international secular-modern norms. Such a perception has had tremendous impact on Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, right from the colonial period to contemporary times. I have tried to investigate this complex issue in its various institutionalized forms across elite and peasant domains by constituting an archive comprising popular, administrative and academic discourses. In order to scrutinize secular-modernity from the religio-political perspective of Islam, a key issue I address is Muslim engagement with the modern, especially the processes (in terms of its necessary repetition and re-affirmation) of nation-formation.

There have been consistent attempts by Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, both individually and as a community, to engage (with) modernity. The foundation of three Islamic universities in the wake of the post-1857 repression is a case in point. However, nationalist historiography has characterized such initiatives more often than not as "communalist" or "separatist." I argue that "separatism" is not a productive tool to examine or understand the complexity of Muslim response, individually and as communities, to issues of secular-modernity and nation-formation. Rather, it has worked as a cover for the contradictions within nationalist thought that were brought to a head during the mass mobilization campaign and the Congress-League's Khilafat movement of 1920s. It was the events following this crucial phase that culminated in the formation of two nation-states.

One would have thought that with the formation of Pakistan, the Muslim question would have become redundant. But Islam has continued to haunt a nation that is given to valourize unity
over diversity. Haunting implies a habitation, and Islam's critical charge in contemporary India is that of being the "spectral truth" of the nation. Muslims are the source of a deep-seated anxiety for secular nationalism and the targets of a resurgent Hindutva in that they expose the fault-lines of a demographically, geographically and culturally unified nation. It is my contention that an uncritical insistence on unity has led to a formation in which "minor" subjects embody an excess of identity in contrast to the Hindu-citizen whose identity coincides with the national. In this perspective, difference is perceived by the national imaginary as "foreign," as something that has to be excised or exorcised. In this context, my endeavour is to engage with, not the fissures, but the interstices of the nation. While "fissure" denotes a crack, split or breach, "interstice" designates an in-between space or interval of time within a formation that is also an integral part, even connects other parts of the whole. Anatomically speaking it is the fine connecting tissue between cells of other tissue.

I draw on an archive that cuts across various disciplines in order to examine historical and literary discourses that tend to represent the Muslim as a recurring remainder that unsettles nationalist calculations. An early source is Mohamed Ali, who endeavoured to thematize difference from a, albeit rudimentary, critical-subject position. I examine his autobiographical fragment and other writings in order to map the compulsions of elite Muslim politics in its nascent and unresolved form. Thereafter, I engage with more recent writers on Islam in India and argue that the concept of "community" enables one to critically engage with secular-modernity and its norm of individuation. This is substantiated by analyses of colonial and nationalist representations of the Malabar Mappila peasant uprisings from 1836 to 1921.

The first chapter, "'Two Circles of Equal Size': Muslim Response in Modern India," traces the trajectory of Muslim attempts to engage (with) modernity, as individuals and as a community. In
order to highlight this, I contrast Mohamed Ali's autobiographical writing (a fragment) with better-known full-length autobiographies by Gandhi and Nehru. In striking contrast to Gandhi's seamless narrative of self, region and nation and Nehru's taking for granted that he is addressing others like himself (including foreigners), Mohamed Ali's autobiographical fragment is confronted with the task of articulating a critical-subject position. It is as if the genre of autobiography does not lend itself to a minority life, and Mohamed Ali's autobiographical fragment also points to the "unfinished" nature of Islam in India. I also focus on the typescript of Mohamed Ali's address to the jury during his trial at Karachi in 1921 to bring out the significance of his point that the question of a Muslim's allegiances are far more complex since they are a threatened minority in a nation increasingly being mirrored in a Hindu idiom. For Muslims, Islam and India are circles of equal size, neither of which they can abandon. It is in this context that Mohamed Ali proposed the possibility of a Federation of Faiths. I also examine Muslim engagement with modernity through the establishment of the Darul Ulum of Deoband (in 1867), the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU; 1877), the Darul Ulum Nadwatul (in 1898) and Jamia Millia Islamia (in 1920). My analysis of the political imbroglio that these educational establishments were caught in concludes by pointing towards the possibility of more than a nascent similarity of the Muslim response vis-à-vis the Dalit one.

The second chapter, ""An Impossible Factor": Muslim as a Critical-Subject Position," reviews major writers on Islam in India as well as engages with the re-conceptualization of community as a category that critically engages with our secular-nation formation. The first two sections deal with the problem of working with the secular-modern frame as exemplified in the writings of Akeel Bilgrami and Javeed Alam. The third section engages with the important work by Ayesha Jalal, who has taken note of the possibility that the teleology of separatism could be the byproduct of a methodological confusion regarding the notions of state and nation. Drawing on
her critique of the Subaltern School for its scant attention to the interconnections between the subaltern peasant and elite domains, I postulate that Partha Chatterjee's formulation of the moments of departure/manoeuvre/arrival of the Indian nation needs to be further amplified in that the Muslim response to post-Enlightenment thought was to re-cognize itself in terms of a moment of arrival (an arrival at modernity; viz. Syed Ahmad Khan) a moment of manoeuvre (mobilization; Ali brothers) and a moment of departure (out of the Indian nation; Jinnah). In the light of my review, I place my contention that though the communities of Islam have different orientations, they are all marked by a particular experience of modernity, secularism and nationalism. This section ends with a review of Francis Robinson and Rafiudin Ahmed's work on Muslim communities, respectively, in UP and Bengal. Their work is symptomatic of existing scholarship on Islam which, by and large, misses the larger picture wherein communities, regardless of their majoritarian or minoritarian status within the local setting, are linked together across the Indian subcontinent by a minoritarian experience forged through the structural position of Islam. The last section tries to come to terms with the impasse and sense of crisis evoked by Islam in contemporary India. I try to re-conceptualize the Muslim as a critical-subject who provides a window on secular-modern nation-state especially since Islam is in the position of being the nationalist other’s other in the sense that nationalist itself is the other of European modernity.

The third chapter, “‘The Fanatical Mappilas’: Accounts of Malabar Uprisings, 1836-1922,” examines the Mappila peasant community in Malabar and their risings against British overlords and Hindu landlords in the light of the critical engagements with modern secular-nationalism from the perspective of “community.” I trace the genealogy of the figure of the “fanatic,” coming into existence alongside, if not at the inception of, History in Malabar, through
colonial and nationalist discourses, often reading texts against their grain and juxtaposing texts against each other.

In the fourth chapter, "‘Re-presenting Islam’: Malabar in the Processes of Nation-Translation," I focus on Islam as an other in the processes of nation-translation, by which I mean the whole complex of imagining and imaging a nation that has to be continuously repeated and re-affirmed. Drawing on Derrida's critique of representation, I examine in detail mainly three literary representations of the proper noun "Malabar," as a shorthand notation for the Muslim communality in literature. I examine the machinations of the aesthetic in NS Madhavan's short story "Higuita," where a Muslim becomes the villain and trace its genealogy to O Chandumenon's Indulekha, written almost a century ago, in which a nameless and nation-less villain becomes a Muslim. As against these representations, I examine Donald Sinderby's The Jewel of Malabar, a popular novel, in which the Muslim-villain is represented as an other that is at the same time the self-same, the double of the western subject.