Chapter Three

“THE FANATIONAL ZONE”: ACCOUNTS OF MAPPILA UPRISINGS, 1836-1921

I know, the only thing that the government dreads is this huge majority I seem to command. They little know that I dread it even more than they.

—MK Gandhi.

Muslims, in the dominant community perspective of the pre-independent subcontinent, especially during and as a result of the Khilafat movement, were feared to owe their primary allegiance to their religion and thus to a pan-Islamic, transnational world-community of Islam. They were represented as symbolizing the communal, even the fanatical. Working against the grain of such constructions, I have, in the first chapter, argued that Mohamed Ali’s “communalism” can be considered as exemplifying a critical-subject position, albeit rudimentary. For Indian Muslims this offer to a national self imagination, a position shaped by the reform and educational initiatives undertaken by the community at large in its endeavour to come to its own terms with modernity. The second chapter examined contemporary debates that posit “community” as a concept that enables a critique of capital and the secular modern nation formation. In this chapter, I will look at the implications of Islam in the context of nationalist struggles with special reference to the Mappila peasant community in Malabar and the history of their resistance to British overlords and Hindu landlords. In particular I focus on the concept “fanatic.”

In the first section of this chapter, I show how the peasant insurgencies from 1836-1921 were “phrased” by the colonial administration so as to lead and lend to a construction of a “fanatic.” To prise open the concept “fanatic” I will scrutinize the micro-sites of this “naming.” It is my

¹ Young India, 2 March 1922. All emphases in this chapter, unless mentioned otherwise, are as in source.
thesis that the fanatic is not born; he is forced, or rather, administrated, into existence. “Fanatic” is a construct first deployed by the colonial administrator for the political control of a people. The label constructs a particular kind of individual and in doing so conceals the machinery of control exerted on the Mappila peasant body. The violence involved in the process is erased, and colonialism and the processes of counter-insurgency are represented as the impartial rule of the “enlightened” over a “primitive” people. The designation “fanatic” was of immense use to the colonialist since it instituted “disciplinary control and the creation of docile bodies [both] unquestionably connected to the rise of capitalism.”2 This kind of appellation is designed to control the insurgent Mappila body while at the same time excusing the resort to counter-violence. What is required would be an endeavour to extricate the Mappila peasant “from the state and from the type of individuation which is linked to the state.”3 After all, who is a fanatic? A fanatic is among other things “a dangerous individual,” that is, inversely, an individual dangerous to the nation-state. In fact, the metaphors commonly employed, like that of “outbreak,” “outrage,” “fanatical eruptions,” “madness” (the latter two from Gandhi4), conjure up the picture of an uncontrollable violence and an extreme irrationality on the part of the individual. In so far as these metaphors are employed in order to master the people, they also testify to the lack of control on the part of the British on the peasant body. This is brought out by the fact that the Mappila community not only celebrated the insurgents through songs, but can also be said to have sanctioned such “madness.” Such “madness” is dangerous in that it is directed against the social body symbolized by the colony and later the nation-state.

2 Hubert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Sussex: Harvester, 1982) 134.
3 Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” afterword, 208-226 in Hubert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, 216; hereafter referred to by the year 1982.
In the second section, I closely read memoirs by leading regional and local Hindu Congress leaders and participants in the 1921 rebellion to track the manner in which “Malabar” came to be a trope/metaphor of irrational fanaticism. My reading of various texts is not to suggest that the causes for the Mappila uprisings were purely economical in nature; rather it was to undercut the phrasing of “fanaticism” so as to enable a more dynamic conception of religion as embodying an individual/community’s outlook, not so much in terms of a colouring or a conditioning, but as an integral, even governing, part of that consciousness.

In the third section of this chapter, I return to the colonial construction of the “fanatic” and its afterlife in nationalist imaginary that was pre-occupied with controlling the “communal.” Analyzing the mystification of race and caste, both being used to describe the Mappilas by colonial administrators, I bring out the reduction to/of religion involved in the construction of the “fanatic.” Similar problems are encountered in nationalist phrasing/framing of the revolts/rebellion. I examine the nationalist Congress perspective on the 1921 Malabar rebellion in order to show how contradictions within the nationalist ideology played out and predetermined the rebellion as a violent religious “outbreak.” In this section, I also analyze the Marxist analyses of the rebellion, which, while acknowledging the anti-imperial, agrarian peasant nature of the rebellion, nevertheless conclude that, in the final analysis, fanatical elements determined the course of what could have been a seminal revolution in the life of the nation.

In this section, I try to set up a genealogy of the figure of the “fanatic” as it appears in colonial and national texts regarding the Malabar Mappila revolts so as to point towards the possibility of reading these moments in frames other than that of “fanaticism.” The category “fanatic” makes
an initial appearance in colonial records, wends its way through a variety of later texts and even today, looms large—updated and refurbished—in discussions of the Malabar revolts and Mappilas themselves. By reading, against the grain, the representations of these revolts, I hope to retrieve the Malabar Mappila uprisings from 1836 onwards and the major rebellion of 1921 for historical interpretation and analysis. Rather than present as “objective” a picture as possible by digging for more “facts,” in order to write a more “true” and “accurate” account, my attempt is to analyze the conceptual apparatus in which each uprising was reframed as another event in a series of “fanatical outbreaks.”

The Mappilas are geographically located in Malabar, the northern part of present day Kerala. Their ancestry is often traced to the Arab traders/settlers and converts to Islam from among the native population of Malabar. Arab trade dates back to the 4th century AD, and most records accept that Islam was a significant presence in Malabar at least by the 9th century, if not earlier. Islam thus came to Kerala through traders and pilgrims and its place in the region was firmly established by the last of the all-“Kerala” kings, Cheraman Perumal. It was believed that the Perumal, entrusting his land to various chiefs, secretly left for Mecca in 822 AD and met the Prophet. Reaching the Arabian coast, he changed his name to Abdul Rahman Samiri—a name that appears on a tomb in Shahr or Zuphar on the Arabian coast. His plans of returning to his

---


7 According to “legend,” the Perumal dreamt that the full moon appeared on the night of the new moon at Mecca and, at the meridian, she split into two, one half remaining and the other half descending to the foot of a hill. The two halves then joined together and set. Later, Muslim pilgrims told him that the Prophet had performed such a miracle to convert a number of non-believers. See, William Logan, *Malabar*, 2 vols. (New Delhi and Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1989) vol. 1, 193-195; Roland E Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study of Islamic*
kingdom was interrupted by ill health and he implored his companions to return to Malabar on his behalf and gave them undertakings in Malayalam for various princes/chiefs. These companions were permitted by local princes/chiefs to build mosques at Kodungallur, Kollam, Chirackal, Srikandapuram (this is debated), Darmapattanam, Pantalayini-Koolam in Kurumbranad and, lastly, Chaliyam in Ernad. Other traditions maintain that the King returned and was called the Zamorin (as-Samuri, "mariner").

Almost a thousand years later, William Logan⁸ comments: "There is good reason to believe that this account of the introduction of Muhammadanism into Malabar is reliable" (195). In the preface (1887) to his history of Malabar, he also emphasizes a harmonious social formation and an enduring "wonderful civic constitution" (vii). In contrast, while pioneering a history of the "Malayali race" (v), Logan takes note of the impact of trade rivalry among Christian powers in Malabar; "if foreign peoples and foreign interventions had not intervened it might, with almost literal truth, have been said of the Malayalis that happy is the people who have no history" (vi). The co-existence of various religious communities is underlined by his remark that the Nair caste has become so entrenched that "but for foreign intervention there seems no reason why it should not have continued to endure for centuries on centuries to come" (v). It is apparent that, in contrast to the nationalist projection of the subcontinent’s Northern experience of waves of "Islamic invasions," there is a peaceful entry of Islam into Malabar.⁹ Logan elaborates:

A people who throughout a thousand and more years have been looking longingly back to an event like the departure of Cheraman Perumal for Mecca, and whose rulers even now assume the sword or sceptre on the understanding

---

⁸ William Logan, Malabar, 2 vols; unless otherwise specified, all references are from the first volume.
⁹ Interestingly, Logan dubs the Mysorean conquest of 1766 as the "Muhammadan invasion," and colonization as "British occupation" (109).
that they merely hold it "until the Uncle who has gone to Mecca returns," must be a people whose history presents few landmarks or stepping stones, so to speak,—a people whose history was almost completed on the day when that wonderful civil constitution was organized which endured unimpaired through so many centuries. The Malayali race has produced no historians simply because there was little or no history in one sense to record. (vii)

Although Logan wishes that a history had existed, written by some other hand, so as to free him to do what he actually wants to do: wander along "some of the many fascinating vistas of knowledge which have been disclosed in the course of its preparation" (v), he is forced to render an account of Malabar, thereby inserting it into History, a narrative marked by violent resistance of the militant Mappilas and Nairs during the Portuguese period (1498-1663), during the rivalry for trade supremacy between European powers (1663-1766), during the Mysorean conquest (1766-1792) and during the British supremacy (1792 onwards). The 700 odd pages of history he compiles from diverse source in the first volume and the 400 odd pages of appendices in the second volume underlines the fact that historical resources, in fact histories, did actually exist. What Logan is lamenting is the lack of a usable/readable past, where a specific consciousness is at work, amassing information and ordering them into readily accessible data, so that a usable past is constructed that would lend itself to the processes of colonization/modernization.

The intervention of the colonizer playing the role of modernizing agency is significantly linked to the insertion of "traditional" societies into History. The ethnographic task structuring the first volume of William Logan’s *Malabar* is brought out by his division of the volume into four sections, entitled "The District," "The People," "History," and "The Land." Such ethnographic undertakings clearly point to the political project behind institutionalizing History: to support and strengthen the existing power structure. Logan’s project too can be better understood as generated by the colonial
context, indeed deriving its meaning and function from administrative exigencies of a colonial setup. Logan acknowledges as much in his analysis of what he calls the English company’s decision to dispatch several officials to Malabar in 1663 to look after its investments: “It would be difficult to over-estimate the benefits of the experience thus obtained . . . for the factors [officials] had perforce to study native character and to adapt themselves to it; and in so doing this they were unconsciously fitting themselves to become the future rulers of the empire” (339).

Despite Logan’s initial assertion that Malayalis have “little” or no history, his narrative systematically asserts the historicity of a Malabar interacting vibrantly with peoples of various countries on account of its importance to trade routes of the time. This is the context in which Logan records the influence and spread of Islam in Malabar, a region that was the battleground of European rivalry for trade monopoly:

the Portugese [did not] content themselves with suppressing Mohammadan trade; they tried to convert the Moslems to Christianity and it is related that, in 1562, they seized a large number of Moorish merchants at Goa and forcibly converted them. Of course these converts reverted to their religion at the first convenient opportunity. (331)

Nonetheless, Logan’s ability to perceive the manner in which trade and religion were enmeshed in the episode above does not inform his account of British interventions in the region. For example, when the Company “factors,” as per instruction, tried to stop Mappilas from trading in pepper:

In retaliation . . . Mappilas took to committing outrages. In March 1764 two of them entered a church on Darmapattanam Island, where a priest was saying mass, and murdered one man and severely wounded several. They were shot by the garrison “and spitted.” A few days afterwards another Mappila came behind two
Europeans while walking along one of the narrow lanes leading to Fort Mailan and cut one of them through the neck and half way through the body with one stroke of his sword. The other was mangled in such a way that his life was despaired of. After this the Mappila picked a quarrel with a Nayar [Nair] and was subsequently shot by the Tiyar ["lower" caste] guard. His body was "spitted" along with those of the others, and then thrown into the sea, to prevent their caste men from worshipping them as saints for killing Christians. (403)

Logan’s "account" sets up Malabar as a heterogenous place, with different religions, competing races and nationalities. However, his neutral description of events is structured around the religious/caste denominations of the actors, despite his acknowledgement that these "outrages" were the result of East India Company’s attempts to delimit Mappila pepper trade.

It is in this context of the "history" of Mappila "outrages" that it would be useful to locate Logan’s characterization of Mappila Muslims. Logan observes that the learned Arab settlers, who are described as the "Malayali Arabs" (191) belong to an order different, indeed superior, from the other inhabitants of the region:

Genuine Arabs, of whom many families of pure blood are settled on the coast, despise the learning . . . imparted [by the 600 years' old Muhammadan college in Ponnani] and are themselves highly educated in the Arab sense. Their knowledge of their own books of science and of history is very profound, and to a sympathetic listener who knows Malayalam they love to discourse on such subjects. They have a great regard for truth, and in their finer feelings they approach nearer to the standard of English gentlemen than any other class of persons in Malabar. (108)
The few Christians in the area, Logan notes, are divided among themselves into the four main sects of Syrians, Romo-Syrians, Roman Catholics and Protestants of all denominations (199-214). Since, according to him, they seem to have played no significant role in local affairs, Logan does not discuss them in any detail, all he does is to provide an inventory of the number of Churches and numbers of priests in each parish. Of Hindus, "[o]f the strange medley of cults and religions which goes by the name of Hinduism, it is very difficult to give any adequate idea. . . ." (179). Examining caste and occupations among them, Logan takes note of the fact that "Brahmans had a monopoly of learning for many centuries, and doubtless this was one of the ways in which they managed to secure such commanding influence in the country" (108). Logan traces their eminence to the preservation of their Aryan heritage and adds: "There can hardly be a doubt that the high degree of civilization to which the country had advanced at a comparatively early period was due to Aryan immigrants from the North, and these immigrants brought with them Aryan ideas of method and order in civil government which became the law of the land" (110). A part of this heritage is jati or caste, derived from the Sanskrit jan which means birth, a concept, word and practice alien, Logan acknowledges, to Malayalam or Dravidian culture. The concept of caste as an "ordinary every-day system of civil government imported into the country by Aryan immigrants [was] readily adopted by the alien peoples among whom the immigrants came, not as conquerors, but as peaceful citizens, able by their extensive influence elsewhere to assist the people among whom they settled" (112). However, according to Logan, organization along caste lines, "capable of easy and rapid development" and "accounts for the advanced state of the people in early times" (113), reached a point of stasis. "The final organization of castes in Malabar probably took place about the eight century AD, simultaneously with the rise of the Nambutiri Brahmans to power and influence," and "the idea of caste as a religious institution . . . imported into the country by the Vedic Brahmans [brought] about the crystallization (so to speak) of the various caste elements" (116). Consequently, "custom" became paramount and
caste norms became rigid and ceased to be a cohesive force. The evil ways of caste will, according to Logan, continue to multiply "till British freedom evokes, as it is sure to do in good time, a national sentiment, and forms a nation out of the confusing congeries of tribal guilds at present composing it" (113). The parallels between the introduction of caste and the timely British intrusion need not be belaboured.

In contrast to the divided Hindu community are the Mappilas, the "indigenous Muhammadan[s]" (108) who "as a class pull well together" so much so that "he is a daring Hindu indeed who dares now-a-days to trample on their class prejudices or feelings" (198). They are "frugal and thrifty as well as industrious," "serviceable on ordinary occasions, and the most reliable in emergencies." They become attached to those who treat them "with kindness and consideration," but must be controlled with a firm hand since "leniency is an unknown word, and is interpreted as weakness, of which advantage [will] be taken at the earliest possible moment" (198). They are also "illiterate," and "as a class, being thus ignorant, are very easily misled by designing persons, and they are of course as bigoted as they are ignorant." From the promise held out during his initial survey of the people, "[o]f their fanaticism and courage in meeting death enough will be said further on" (198), it seems clear that the Mappilas are firmly fixed in the frame of a religion, which through their ignorance is transformed into bigotry.

The "mixed race" of Mappilas, in whom "the Arab element . . . is now very small indeed," and their "fanaticism" is even more worrisome as their "race is rapidly progressing in numbers" (197). Logan observes that the "country would no doubt have soon been converted to Islam either by force or by conviction, but [for] the nations of Europe" (294). Logan explains Islam's influence as an effect of Calicut Zamorin Raja's policy enjoining Hindu fishermen families to bring up at least one of their sons as Muslims so that the Raja would have skilled persons ready

147
to risk their lives and man his navy. He also acknowledges that the spread of Islam in Malabar was significantly due to voluntary conversions from “lower” castes. A case in point was the Cherumar caste. Citing the Presidency Census (1881 Report, paragraph 151), Logan notes that this caste, characterized by their degraded position and humiliating disabilities, numbered 99,009 in Malabar at the census of 1871, and in 1881, is returned at only 64,725. This is a loss of 34.63 per cent, instead of the gain of 5.71 per cent, observed generally in the district. Logan wryly observes that the District Officer attributes this to “some disturbing cause” which “is very well known to the District Officer to be conversion to Muhammadanism” (197). The District Officer notes that the “honour of Islam” enabled “lower” caste Hindus to move, at one spring, several places higher socially, a fact corroborated by what has been actually observed in the district and the figures that show that nearly 50,000 Cherumars and other Hindus have availed themselves of the opening (197). Logan, in a footnote, adds that since the Cherumars numbered 187,758 in 1856, “the decrease in 25 years has been over 65 percent” and comments that the District Officer’s comments were “written before Mappilla outrages exalted this community so greatly in the district” (197). He also takes note of the fact that the “Hindu is very strict about such matters now” (198) than when the District Officer was writing; there have been more conflicts between Nairs and Mappilas, particularly “in consequence of the complete subversion of the ancient friendly relations” (478) by the introduction of new colonial policies. Leaving aside, for now, the question whether this bigotry is narratively construed as an attribute of Islam or of the Mappilas, I merely point out that other categories through which the Mappila might be identified—peasant, working class and lower caste—are overwritten through an emphasis on religion. Such emphasis (ironically similar to an overemphasis on class) leads to the notion that Islam is the indivisible and recurring remainder that disrupts modern social formation.
Over a period of 70 years, from 1851 to 1921, the Mappila population increased by eight percent in spite of a high mortality rate. Though, according to the 1921 census, Mappilas comprised only 33 percent of the population of Malabar, as against 66 percent of Hindus, the concentration of Mappilas in the three taluks (Ernad, Walluvanad and Ponnani) of Malabar was as high as 60 percent. These taluks were delineated in administrative records as the “fanatical zone.” The overwhelming majority of Mappilas were poor and middling peasants (cultivating tenants, landless labourers, petty traders and fishermen) while the landlords were mostly Namboodiri Brahmins or Nairs. The British land reforms, aimed at righting the “wrongs” done by Tippu Sultan, made it all the more easy for the better equipped Hindu lords to resort to evictions, and the Mappila peasantry was soon reduced to penury. The Mappila “outbreaks” or “outrages,” as the uprisings are customarily designated—“rebellion” is reserved for the larger uprising of 1921-22—are a series of uprisings by the Mappilas of Malabar against their Hindu landlords and Christian overlords during the period 1836-1919. The number of Mappila participants in most of the uprisings was between one and twenty; three uprisings, however, of 1849, 1894 and 1896, had 65, 34 and 99 participants respectively. Of the 352 peasants who actively participated in

11 Wood traces the problem to the return of Hindu landlords from their exodus to Travancore during Tippu’s reign. “In 1792, in the wake of victorious British arms, the hindu jenmies returned to Malabar from exile eager to reclaim their rights in their ancient landed estates” (100). The British who had drawn on Hindu support to defeat Tippu favoured the landlords and decreed that all usurpations after 11 September 1787 were to be illegal. Further, legal and police persecution of Mappilas continued, thereby lending conviction to the theory of Hindu-British collusion (Wood, 106). However, Wood errs in presuming that Tippu’s reign was one of prosperity for peasant Mappilas in the light of the evidence of their insurgency during the time.
12 Isolated rebellions have been traced as far back as 1796-1800, and even beyond; see, especially entry under serial number 429 in records stored by Herman Gundert, Tuebingen University Library Malayalam Manuscript Series, vol. 5, published later as Tellicherry Records, ed. Joseph Zacharia (Kottayam: DC Books, 1996) 245 F & G, 114. The failure of the administration to redress Mappila grievances can be deduced from the following: “Whereas the Mappilas of the village of Cundooty have represented to us that they have heretofore been greatly oppressed by the Nairs in so much that they were obliged to take up arms in their own defence. We hereby warn all persons whatever from molesting them in any shape in future, and the said Mappilas are hereby required to apply themselves to their former occupations and if they meet any oppressions from the Nairs they must come to Calicut and represent the same to us, when speedy redress shall be given them, Given under our hands and the seal of the Honourable Company in Calicut, this 26th day of June 1792, Sd/- WG Farmer and Alexander Dow,” in William Logan, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Other Papers of Importance Relating to British Affairs in Malabar (New Delhi and Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1989, first published 1951) 152.
these uprisings only 24 (of them 12 in one instance) were captured alive.\(^{13}\) As against 328 Mappila casualties, one British District Magistrate, HV Conolly,\(^{14}\) was murdered in 1855 (another, CA Innes, narrowly escaped death in 1915), and 82 Hindus were killed, of which 63 were members of the “high” castes (Wood, 15) presumably Namboodiris. This is indicative of the odds firmly stacked against the “rebelling” Mappilas.\(^{15}\)

A significant change in the pattern of Mappila uprisings occurs at around the turn of the century. Logan was appointed as special commissioner because of the increasing number of anonymous petitions received by the British. Logan himself received about 2200 petitions from 4021 individuals of whom 2734 (over 67 percent) were from Mappilas complaining about the unjust evictions. The evictions were a consequence of a new system of fixing a standard rent as against the customary practice of sharing each year’s produce as per a fixed ratio. In effect, the new system replaced the traditional relationship between “landlord” and “tenant” with that of ownership; instituting thereby the landlords’ “right” to evict tenants.\(^{16}\) Logan notes that the


\(^{14}\) KN Panikkar examines the influence of traditional intellectuals among the Mappilas (59-65) and concludes that one of the reasons for the murder of HV Conolly was that he was instrumental in compelling Mambram Thangal, a prominent priest as well as community leader, to peacefully comply to his deportment to Mecca on 19 March 1852. The Thangal was seen as instrumental in causing “outbreaks” because the relatively peaceful years between 1843 and 1849 coincided with the Thangal’s pilgrimage to Mecca; see, KN Panikkar, 1989, 97-98. Later, Ali Musaliyar was to acquire similar status in the Mappila community.

\(^{15}\) For a list of the rebellions, see, Conrad Wood, *Moplah Rebellion*, 11-14, and Stephen Dale, appendix, 227-232. Apart from the 29 actual rebellions, there were also 12 putative outbreaks, with a total participation of 70, in which the insurgents had no deliberate intention to die. There was also as an incident when a Mappila, due to a dispute over family property, attacked his own relatives, see, Wood, appendix 2, 246-247. Though both Wood’s and Dale’s count seem to tally overall, there are minor variation in dates, and some major differences: Dale has recorded rebellions on 1) 28 July 1849 (Ermad, exact location not known, in which 1 Nair boy was killed by a martyred Mappila); 2) 28 July 1851 (Ermad, one Nair killed by a Mappila tenant who was captured); 3) 17 September 1865 (Nemini, Walluvanad, in which one Nair, possibly a jenmi, was attacked by three Mappilas) which are not in either of the lists of Wood. On the other hand, Wood has recorded a rebellion on 1 May 1885 (at Omachachapuzha, Ponnani taluk) in which 12 Mappilas attained martyrdom while attacking six Cherumars. What is most interesting is, however, that they seem to differ on the date of the rebellion in which CA Innes was attacked: whereas Wood notes the date as 28 February 1915, Dale puts it on 2 November 1915. Panikkar does not dwell on this particular rebellion at all, while K Madhavan Nair only confirms the year, *Malabar Kalapam* (Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi, 1993) 39; hereafter, KMN.

“British authorities mistook [the landlord’s] real position and invested him erroneously with the Roman *dominium* of the *soif*” (582). The uprising on 25 February 1896 in which 99 Mappila insurgents were involved, 94 were killed (five were captured alive), had the highest toll ever. The next uprising, barring the one in 1898, was on 28 February 1915 and targeted the British District Magistrate, CA Innes. However, in the uprising of 6 February 1919, the number of deaths among Mappilas (seven) and “upper” caste Hindu landlords (seven) were level. It is possible to read, as Wood does, the pattern of Mappila uprisings at the turn of the century as a gradual falling off, consequential to Logan’s reforms. However, it would perhaps be more productive to read the shift in the nature of later uprisings—from the heavy casualty in 1896, the surrender of all insurgents in 1898, the targeting (after 1855) of a British Magistrate in 1915 and the equal ratio of insurgents and targets in 1919—as not so much as due to the success of Logan’s reforms as the result of the emergence of a “modern” consciousness; a consciousness that is taking stock of the futility of waging war against a better-armed adversary and is attuned to the wider significance of the anti-imperialist struggle in the context of a nascent nationalist aspiration. Read in this manner, the 17-year hiatus that Wood attributes to Logan’s reform initiatives could be attributed to the decimation and perhaps reconstitution of existing Mappila leadership. The resurgence of Mappila resistance should also be viewed in the light of the colonial government’s sluggishness in implementing Logan’s suggestions for reform. Logan had perceptively criticized the foolhardy colonial policy of treating native landlords on a par with the British aristocracy that had resulted in economic deprivation among the peasants. But the colonial machinery dragged its feet because they feared the landed class turning against them


17 In the rebellion of 1 April 1898, all the 12 participants who killed a jenmi surrendered, firstly, because, as Wood points out, they did not start out with the intention of dying in the battle, and secondly they were urged by other Mappilas to give in. Wood highlights this to show that the reforms initiated by Logan were finally having some effect.
The obverse of such British inertia would be that, overall, the landed classes were content with colonization, were in fact its supporters, and, hence, could not have been convinced of any anti-imperialist or nationalist manoeuvres, peaceful or otherwise.

The writings on the Mappila Malabar uprisings can be grouped broadly under two main heads corresponding to two different perspectives: the first is the colonial, and the second comprises the nationalist and the Marxist. Writings of the first category are exemplified by TL Strange, the special commissioner appointed by the Madras government on 17 February 1852, in the wake of several "outbreaks" which had alarmed the British. Strange set in motion a mode of analysis and explanation that found renewal in wave after wave of administrative and political commentary.\(^2\)

His conclusion was that "the Mappila outrages have been one and all marked by the most decided fanaticism" fostered by a 'selfish, ignorant and vicious priesthood,' in the minds of the illiterate Mappilas who were 'grasping, treacherous and vindictive' in character" (cited from Panikkar, 1989, 95). The Mappilas are depicted by the British not only as ignorant and bigoted, but as "rabid animals . . . possessing no spark of reason" (Panikkar, 1990, 110). The most liberal colonial voices under this category acknowledge economic hardship as a contributory factor, though in the final analysis "fanatic" causation has remained the deciding factor.

However, it is possible to interrogate the colonialist construction from the perspective of the insurgents. There is not much written material left behind by the rebels; "evidence" of Mappila voices are mostly typescripts of police interrogations of captured rebels. Hence, I will venture to illustrate my counter-arguments by examining a pamphlet found in a mosque by Mappila

\(^{18}\) In the rebellion of 4 January 1852, in which 15 Mappilas died attacking 19 people, the victims outnumbered the martyrs.

\(^{19}\) It is also significant that no putative uprisings are recorded between 1894 and 1915.
insurgents as against the colonial records of uprisings. Since this pamphlet relates to the uprising that occurred in the month of 14 November 1841 at Koduvayur in Ernad taluk, I focus on administrative records of this uprising. Moreover, being sandwiched between two other uprisings in April and December of the same year,\textsuperscript{21} and compared to the uprisings from 1836 to 1921,\textsuperscript{22} it is through the “reports” of this rebellion that we can perceive a significant shift in the colonial perception. The year 1841 saw a significant rise in the number of insurgents (from one to eight/eleven) as well as in the incidence of insurgency (three in a year) that alarmed the colonial government and necessitated a change of policy.\textsuperscript{23}

The colonial record I examine first is by the Magistrate, HV Conolly, and the report is dated 22 November 1841. Understandably, Conolly’s account traces the event beginning from the moment it disrupts his government. It starts with a statement that places the “outbreak” as one of a larger series. For example, he writes that, on the 14 November 1841, there took place “a similar outbreak, attended with similar results” like an earlier one in a different place in which “nine mopla criminals met their death” (94). The narrative continues: here an “upper” caste landlord had complained that Mappila peasants had encroached upon his land and built a mosque. The tahsildar sent a peon to summon the peasants concerned. The peasants killed the peon and the landlord who had accompanied the peon. Subsequently, the peasants, along with some associates, took refuge in a small mosque. This is where Conolly’s account stops and the story is unfolded in one of the enclosures, a report written by the official IL Platel, who had

\textsuperscript{20} I use the official and other documents collected from various sources in KN Panikkar, ed. \textit{Peasant Protests and Revolts in Malabar} (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research and People’s Publishing House, 1990); hereafter, referred to by the year of publication.

\textsuperscript{21} In the three separate uprisings in April, November and December of this year the rebel/victim ratio was 9 : 3, 11 : 2 and 8 : 2.

\textsuperscript{22} The first recorded uprising was on 26 November 1836 and had a rebel/victim ratio of 1 : 1; the uprising on 15 April 1837 had a ration of 1 : 1, the one on 5 April 1839 had a ration of 2 : 1, on 6 April 1839 it was 1 : 1 and the last one before 1841, the one on 19 April 1840 had a ratio of 1 : 1, Wood, 11; Logan, 554-555.

\textsuperscript{23} Panikkar, 1990, 94-105; Logan, 556. All citations are from the former, unless mentioned otherwise, and pagination is incorporated within parenthesis.
rushed to the spot (100-104). Platel's account of the hardships his men underwent in reaching the site, apart from emphasizing the fact that they had to travel from 10 pm to 3 am and had little rest since they reached the mosque where the insurgents had taken refuge at about 6 am, also tells us that the insurgents took position in the mosque only after the troops had reached the locality. After a short rest they reached the mosque and, Platel narrates, they found the tahsildar, a great number of peons and villagers already assembled there. Since the insurgents were seen walking outside the mosque, "people" were sent to induce the insurgents to surrender. Platel does not specify who these "people" were. The "infatuated" Mappilas are then reported to have "shouted back taunting answers, such as 'you are not enough to capture us—not one of you shall return alive, we have been waiting for you these three days, give us [50 minutes'] time so that we may take our [gruel], and then we will come down and meet you, but we will not lay down our arms,' or words to this effect..." Finally, the last message calling for surrender meets with the following response: "If you are men, come up here, we are ready for you. We will not surrender ourselves, the sirkar will hang us. We wish to kill and die that we may become syeds" (100). Platel remarks that the peasant rebels must have been bent on forfeiting their lives since they had sufficient time to escape capture, "for a time," before the troops arrived. About 200 to 300 villagers are reported to have remained near the mosque throughout the time. The tahsildar remarks that the villagers are no longer on his side, and the officials decide to use the peons to flush out the insurgents. Platel writes: "Great was indeed the difficulty experienced in prevailing upon the peons and villagers to do this, at length after much persuasion and promise and instant support on the part of the military, they resolved to go." Seeing the advancing party the Mappila peasant insurgents prayed loudly, and then "rushed out like mad men with their knives, shields and spears" (101; emphasis added). Two or three of the insurgents were immediately shot down, and Platel adds as an afterthought in a footnote, almost as if to underscore the "irrationality" of the rebels, that even now the rest of them could have escaped through the jungle lying to the
South-West of the mosque. But they did not. Within minutes all the insurgents were killed. On the official side only two or three were wounded, though none dangerously. Platel then recounts the almost fanatical arrangements made by him to ensure that the relatives of the deceased did not take the bodies away. Though the authorities "would have liked to have made an example of the rebels by burying their bodies with a dog or some other unclean animal and by escheating their property" (Panikkar, 1989, 70), they were unceremoniously buried. Logan adds: "On the 17th of the same month a large band of Mappillas, estimated at 2000, set at defiance a police party on guard over the spot where the . . . criminals had been buried, and forcibly carried off their bodies and interred them with honours at a mosque. Twelve of these were convicted and punished" (556).

An interesting detail emerges when the narrative lets slip that "[a]mong the villagers assembled there was not a single mopla nor could the presence of the [chiefs] of that caste [sic] be procured" (103). This surely suggests that the villagers, as a body, irrespective of religious affiliation, supported the insurgents. Yet Platel's narrative is structured by the thesis of "fanaticism," blind to the fact that he had already labeled the insurgents as "infatuated" and "mad." He notes that the only musket which the insurgents had between them was recovered from the road leading from the mosque, and that a boy was seen carrying away the musket when the insurgents were rushing out from the mosque so as to prevent "the discovery of its owner." Such forethought demonstrates that Platel's narrative clearly runs counter to his characterization of the peasants as "mad" and "infatuated." Rather, the whole episode can be read as a carefully planned operation on the part of the Mappilas. Conolly's report also stresses that the tahsildar was right in requesting reinforcements since the "criminals" would "meet with sympathy and assistance from the surrounding mopla populations" (94). The desperation of the Mappilas, concludes the Magistrate,
is explainable only by the unhappy feeling prevalent among the ignorant and bigoted mussulman population of Malabar, that revenge is no crime, and that they are secure in paradise if they die fighting against an infidel power, whatever be the reason that has caused the use of their arms. (95)

What punctuates this representation by both officials is their desperate need to explain to the higher authority, in this case the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort St George, why they were not able to comply with the instruction to capture the peasants alive. On the peasants' side, we do not need much imagination to figure out why they dreaded being taken prisoners.

The warola or pamphlet was written on 14 November 1841, on the day of the uprising,24 by one of the “martyrs” and was found at the gate of the mosque where the eleven insurgents met their death. This short pamphlet frames the event in terms quite different from the colonial account. It narrates how the disputed land had been leased by one Mappila (22 years before, according to Logan, 556), enumerates the improvements made by him on the land, and stresses that the rights over this land was purchased from the landlord.25 Thereafter, a mosque, and later a mud wall around it, was constructed. The landlord, this narrative continues, “went and made a false representation” (99) to the court, and the tahsildar “without any consideration of the state of things” dispatched a peon to summon the “tenants.” Accompanied by four or five people, the peon “with directions to seize and drag the nine of us” reached the mosque “before sunset of the 28th day of our fast” and “abused and called us out.” When the peasants “told him that we would go with him after we shall have broken our fast” (99), the peon and the others abused and “laid

---

24 Conrad Wood dates this rebellion on 13 November 1841.
25 This was also a period of competition among the agrarian farmers and peasants for procuring land on lease for cultivation; a result was that landlords kept hiking up the rent every year and evicting those who could not pay the revised rent. The colonial government made a policy decision that in cases of eviction the landlord must pay for any improvements on the land. However, this only resulted in more and more litigation because, with the help of lawyers, the landlords argued that they had to pay only the actual cost of the improvements and not its, considerably higher, market value.
hold of the right hand" of one of them, the "owner of . . . [another] mosque," dragged him to a nearby well and began to tie him up. Then the "eight of us, with the weapon, which were kept ready" for the landlord when he returned had done "what has been done" (99). The warola concludes by noting that they have been trying "to get hold of the useless" tahsildar and another person who was "the instigator of the complaint" (100).

Similar "records" left by Mappila peasants, few as they are, are not often part of the archive. Athan Gurukkal, the leader of the revolt on 25 August 1849 in which 64 Mappilas were killed and one captured, left behind in the temple where the rebels made their last stand, a very illuminating record addressed to the Collector. Pointing out the colonial government's ignorance of the real state of affairs, Gurukkal writes that the collusion between the landlords and the Hindu public servants have resulted in their

preferring false and vexatious complaints in the adalat and police, against several wealthy Mussalman who held land on mortgage . . . which were the means they had of supporting themselves and family, which complaint, the sirkar without knowing the real merits of the case, decreed against them, upon the arguments (false pleas) brought forward in support of them, and afterwards thus passed, were enforced . . . the consequence of all these has been, that many Mussalman have been reduced to a state of beggary, so much so, that they find themselves unable to represent, and prove to the sirkar, the real state of matters, with the view of putting a stop to such practices. Hence, the cause of the events which took place before this, in this part of the country, when some of the landed proprietors and their adherents were cut
down and put to death, the perpetrators of which, after setting the public
authority at defiance, were punished by Government.26 Despite the careful manner in which, about August 1849, Gurukkal—whose ancestors reportedly rebelled against Tippu Sultan in 1784-1785 and the British in 1800-1802 (Panikkar, 1989, 71-72)—critiques the colonial policy and its effects on the socio-economy of a community, colonial authorities insist on framing the Mappila uprisings as “fanatical,” so much so that by 25 September 1852, TL Strange, after analyzing 31 separate instances can conclude: “It is apparent thus that in no instance can any outbreak or threat of outbreak that has arisen be attributed to the oppression of tenants by landlords.”27 Among the numerous such representations found among the colonial administrative records, one very chilling anonymous document is the “Petition Purporting to be Addressed by Certain Mussulmans, Nayars [sic], Tiyyans and Men of Other Castes.”28 Submitted on 14 October 1880, this petition points to the reason why it was mostly Mappilas who resorted to violence.29 “That the mussulmans are the people committing riots; all the hindu officials and landlords impress this fact upon the European officers of the district; that there are no mussulmans holding high offices or acquainted with English; that this accounts for the mussulmans being declared the principal offenders” (Panikkar, 1990, 186). The petition delineates the complicity of the Travancore native state in securing land for “upper” caste Hindus returning and also newly migrating to Malabar, and goes on to add:

That the people having, therefore, conspired to create a disturbance are advised by some wise men to wait until a representation of the popular grievances has been made to government and orders received thereupon.

26 Cited from KN Panikkar, 1989, 73, from Correspondence on Moplah Outrages in Malabar, vol. 1, 52.
27 Report of TL Strange, Special Commissioner, to T Pycroft, Secretary to Government, Judicial Department, Fort St George, Correspondence on Moplah Outrages in Malabar, vol. 1, 399-477; reproduced from Panikkar, 1990, 175.
28 Though unsigned, it was purportedly written by E Thompson, the Malayalam translator to the government. See, Judicial Department, GO no. 281, dated 5 February 1881; Panikkar, 1990, 185-188.
29 Stating that “demolition of mosques, religious persecution, cruel oppression and ejectment of mussulmans by landlords are the causes that have led to moplah outbreaks,” the petition even tries to placate the authorities by
That whatever enactments may be passed, before all such suits have been decided and all such decrees executed, disturbances and bloodshed of a kind unknown in Malabar will take place; and that this should not be construed into a vain threat held out to deceive. By the Almighty God who has created all, petitioners swear that this will be a fact. (187)

Though this petition could be the work of a single individual in the name of a collective, a number of anonymous petitions were continually made alongside other overt and physical means of resistance even if it led to death. The anxiety caused by these “outbreaks” is exemplified by the studied parallel drawn by the colonial authorities between Malabar and Ireland, whereby they try to “understand” the Mappila “outbreaks” as caused by “a real grievance” (Panikkar, 1990, 189).

blaming earlier Mappila rebels: “That the assassination of Collector Conolly was committed by some mollahs of bad character whose continued imprisonment made them despair of being liberated from jail” (187).

30 I reproduce another anonymous petition, Judicial Department, G O no. 884, dated 19 May 1896 (KN Panikkar, 1990, 245-247), to strengthen the possibility of reading these uprisings in terms of the counter-narratives: “To, The Honourable Governor-in-Council, Madras. We, numbering not less than 363 rioters belonging to an area extending from Calicut eastwards up to Palghat, and from Cochin northwards up to Wynad, who have held ourselves in readiness, with the help of god, for an outbreak in the month of ramzan to government as follows: After the close of the enquiries, which were made by the commissioner Mr. Logan, under the pretense of securing redress of the grievances of the tenants oppressed by the janmis, the tenants have been all the more ground down by the janmis and reduced to indigent poverty, destitute of any means of obtaining a livelihood. . . . Owing to the present levy of punitive fines it has been rendered absolutely impossible for us to live in the country with our children weeping on account of intolerable hunger. In the recent outbreak at Pandikad, mothers and sisters, after being stripped of their clothes, were severely tortured by painful pressure being applied to their breasts, and by introducing into their eyes, nostrils and anal and urinary orifices, thorny sticks . . . smeared over with ground chilly, sulphate of copper and similar terrible materials. By inflicting such terrorising cruelties in the manner described, head constables Kumaran Nair, Krishnan Nair, and others extorted and amassed large fortunes and reduced us and our sorrow-stricken family and children to poverty. As these miseries were too hard for us to bear any longer, we have been forced to make preparations and to hold ourselves in readiness for an outbreak. So long as the janmis continue to oust their tenants and so long as the government refuse to institute any enquiries whatever into the grievances of these mussalmans such as we are, we, the petitioners, are prepared to fight until the whole lot of us perish in the struggle.” After suggesting eight immediate measures that the government can carry out, the petition continues: “Instead of protecting the subjects by these means, if the sovereign should abandon true justice . . . we the rioters do hereby particularly announce that we are determined to die in the struggle, rather than give government any respite. Should government . . . still proceed on to levy punitive fines, we are determined to become syeds (martyrs) of our cause; and have also arranged with certain hindu friends of ours to chop off the heads of such of those and others as so found with the accounts to levy the said punitive fines. Believing that these particulars will receive special attention we, the rioters, proceed to assume the role of syeds (martyrs). In vain, have many representations been, on several occasions, made to subordinate officials; but on the present occasion we believe that similar negligence and indifference will not be shown. In conclusion, remember well that a due reply to this will be demanded of you at the srathpalam.”
The manner in which the Magistrate's report on the 14 November 1841 uprising commences frames the event as "a similar outbreak, attended with similar results" where "nine mopla criminals met their death" by killing two landlords (94). Though he frames the event of 14 November as similar to the earlier uprising of 5 April, he himself acknowledges in the report made at that time that the two Brahmans who were murdered had acted with "great duplicity" towards a Mappila who, with eight others, attempted to redress the "great injustice" done to him (92, 93). The re-characterization of the earlier "outbreak" as "fanatical" despite prior recognition of non-religious causes for it certainly points to reductive uses of a "fanatical" frame. The earlier uprising, devoid of details, now has a new function; it determines the new event, and in the process is itself rewritten as "fanatical."

The veneration and support enjoyed by the insurgents from the whole community is an index of a widespread dissatisfaction with their conditions of life. Conolly noted that "the most melancholy feature attending the case is the view taken of their conduct by their ignorant countrymen" who look up to the martyrs as saints who have earned paradise by their gallantry which betokens a more awful ignorance and a fiercer bigotry (110). For example, the uprising on 27 December 1841 following the two uprisings that year is unhesitatingly represented as "another outbreak among the moplahs, of a more outrageous and extraordinary character" (106; emphases added). So much that in this new event, unlike the earlier two events that "had some intelligible cause," "the sole wish of the insurgents seems to have been to kill some one and then die themselves. Their conduct indeed was more like that of rabid animals" (110).

In the earlier report we see the Magistrate hesitating between "criminality" and "fanaticism"; the Mappilas of the region have "dangerous habits" and they have been "gang robbers" and "general disturbers of the district." The transition from "crime" to the "criminal" is part of the shift from
the "act" to the "individual" which, Foucault has shown, occurred in the West during this period.\(^3\) If crime and insanity can coincide, that is, if insanity manifests itself in a crime, is the criminal legally responsible and hence punishable for the crime? In attempting to resolve this problem judicial and medical (psychiatric) institutions shifted the focus from the event to the individual. Confronted with people whose lives could not be contained within the accepted definitions of individuation, the colonial administration invented personalities in whom "fanaticism" aided and abetted their inherent "criminality" allied to insanity. Consequently, it also changed its stance from the "sympathetic and conciliatory" attitude of attributing the "'Mappila turbulence' to the 'political misfortunes of the country,'" that is, the oppression by the Hindu landlords, to the "inherent aggressive character and lack of civilization among the Mappilas" (cited in Panikkar, 1989, 56-57). Mappila "acts" of rebellion were then determined as more than criminal since the individuals volunteered their lives in accordance with the needs of a "fanatical" community. As a measure to cure this "mad" community, the Moplah Outrages Acts (1854) were enforced to curb "fanaticism" among its members and police them into individuality. In the report about the earlier uprising the Magistrate had complacently written: "I can see no reasonable fear of a similar excess occurring, especially, as this one has been so summarily repressed" (92). Though one uprising by the native peasant population has been "summarily repressed," the Mappilas were not completely crushed; in fact, they came back with greater dedication and better organization. Unable to perform its "civilizing mission," its very roots under threat, the British administration invented a new category, the "fanatic": the cause of the local resistances to the "imperial" government would henceforth be organized around this new name. Answers to problematic questions (such as: How could the victimized Mappila get

associates with such ease? Why were they forced to sacrifice their lives when they were offered possibilities of escape?) could now be confidently sought in “fanaticism.”

Working against the idea of the natural stupidity of a peasant, I would interpret “martyrdom” as a strategy formulated by them to avoid capture. It was, after all, not an easy task to risk an insurrection against a well-armed adversary. Having everything to lose yet confronted with the sheer impossibility of continuing as before, the peasant-insurgents had to be aware of the implications of their deed. Once, the peasants’ decision to become “martyrs” is reconfigured as a political choice, it is possible to see how such a decision is a strategic choice, taken after careful consideration of available options. In 1507, when the Portuguese withdrew into their fortress and teased the might of the Zamorin and his Muslim troops, “[n]umbers of Moors took oath to die as *sahids.*”33 “Fanaticism” is not invoked here, trade interests visibly structure Muslim action. In contrast to the approach to the strategy of “martyrdom” adopted by the Mappilas, Logan and his sources commend the courage and determination of the Arabs. Though Logan, in contrast to less sensitive analyses, acknowledges that the Mappilas were driven to rebellion due to economic and cultural oppression, it is fanaticism which eventually provides him with a frame with which to understand the peasant-subaltern. The inadequacy of “fanaticism” as an explanatory category is amplified by the fact that the members of the “lower” caste communities either voluntarily espoused Islam or resorted to banditry.34 That caste was always just beneath the surface of the various revolts is particularly evident in the documentation of the

---

32 The move from everything-to-lose to nothing-to-lose is the first step in insurgency. Frantz Fanon writes: “In the colonial countries peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength,” *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 47.


34 During 1790s, that is before the period of “outbreaks,” when the breach between Nairs and Mappilas was very wide, “on the outskirts of this lawless country there dwelt a tribe of what were in those days called ‘jungle’ Mappillas, who were banded together under chiefs and who subsisted on the depredations committed on their neighbours,” Logan, 485.
19 October 1843 uprising. HV Conolly, the Magistrate, records that some Mappilas had complained against the village headman dishonouring Islam "by forcing a hindoo woman of one of the lower castes (teer) to apostatize from the mussulman faith to which she had lately converted, probably, tho' I am not certain of the fact, by the zeal of the Hal Yerikum party" (114). This merits a footnote in which Conolly notes:

The woman, a bold and disrespectful looking person, had taken advantage of her new position to be insolent to her master, as the teer of the day before she only approached within 12 paces of him and called him by the peaceful title of Lord or Master as the mussulmans. On the next day she came close to him and called him by his proper and familiar name, a peculiar insult in this country, from an inferior to a superior. The adigharee was naturally very angry, and ordered her with abusive language to take off the dress which had led to her change of behaviour. She was cowed and did so but on going abroad reported what had taken place. (114)

This conflict is temporarily resolved impartially by replacing the headman, though when a Mappila "refused to pay the tax demanded of him and was insolent in his demeanour, refusing to take off his slippers" (115; emphasis added), it flares up again and again.

II

There is conclusive evidence that the Malabar rebellion of 1921 played a significant role in determining the Congress policy of dealing with Muslim aspirations. Though the Chauri Chaura

---

35 Not much evidence is available about the extent and nature of participation by women in the uprisings, though RH Hitchcock's report (first published in 1925 as A History of the Malabar Rebellion, 1921) mentions (citing Fawcett) the active participation of women in the uprising of 25 February 1896. Hitchcock also notes that it was women who incited the men in Pukkotur and he takes note of the participation by women during the 1921 rebellion, especially of the "fanatical cruelty" of one Chetali Biyumma, see, section B, "Part Taken by Women and Children in the Rebellion," Peasant Revolt in Malabar: A History of the Malabar Rebellion, 1921, by RH Hitchcock, intro. Robert L Hardgrave, Jr (New Delhi: Usha Publications, 1983) 150-152; hereafter, cited as Hitchcock.
event of 1919 was the immediate context of Gandhi's calling off the Non-cooperation movement, much to the chagrin of most nationalist leaders, the fear of the Muslim masses and their proneness to violence and incomprehension of the virtues of a sacred ahimsa and the real meaning of non-cooperation as represented by the Mappila outburst played a major part in determining the nationalist and Hindu communalist attitude towards Muslims. The Malabar rebellion was more than a “significant event,” as M Gangadharan Menon puts it, “in the history of the Indian National Movement” (vi). In fact, it was a turning point in the course of the history of the subcontinent. In the same manner that the uprisings of the Mappila peasantry during 1836-1919 became a metaphor for Mappila fanaticism, the Malabar rebellion of 1921 was to become a metaphor of Muslim irrationality, communality and violence in the national imaginary, helping to bolster the separatist myth.

I have already pointed to the significance of the 17-year break in the uprisings during 1836-1919. By the 1920s Mappilas had reconfigured their strategies as a result of a growing awareness about the larger scale of the anti-imperial struggle. The Tenancy movement and the Khilafat movement provided a public platform to address their problems. Grievances of the tenants were the central theme of the debates in Malabar so much so that tenancy reform became a debate unavoidable even in the District Congress conferences. Though “the Congress avoided taking a clear-cut stand on the issue in deference to the wishes of the janmis” (Panikkar, 1989, 120), by 1916 there had evolved a Tenancy Movement that focused on unjust evictions, over-leasing and illegal rent collections. At the national level, meanwhile, concerns about the fate of the Turkish Caliphate led to the observance of 17 October 1919 as the Khilafat day (Miller, 130). The first Khilafat conference, chaired by MK Gandhi, was held in November 1919 in Delhi, and resulted

---

X It was EMS Namboodiripad who took note of the wider participation, even leadership, of Hindus, at least during the early stage, in the rebellion. Hence, he argued for a re-designation of Mappila rebellion as Malabar rebellion or Malabar freedom struggle: The National Question in Kerala (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1952) 121.
in the formation, in February 1920, of a Central Khilafat Committee at Bombay. Congress had also adopted a policy of involving the masses in the anti-colonial struggle. It was in this context that Congress launched a campaign for Non-cooperation in September 1920. In a telegram sent in April 1920, the Chief Secretary of Madras declared that Gandhi’s speeches were “the source of trouble among Moplahs” (Miller, 132). Later, accompanied by Shaukat Ali, Gandhi visited Malabar. In a public meeting on 18 August 1920, attended by a great number of Mappilas, while Shaukat Ali called for “more vigorous action,” Gandhi outlined the principle of non-violence and noted:

If the Mussulmans of India offer non-cooperation to Government in order to secure justice in the khilafat matter, I believe it is the duty of Hindus to help them as long as their means are just. (cited, Miller, 132-133)

Literally the whole of Malabar, in contrast to the princely states, responded to the nationalist call. The tension between diverse movements with different agendas was accentuated by Mappila grievances that were often sidelined amidst larger concerns, and a volatile situation prevailed. In order to diffuse the situation, the concerned authorities decided to arrest Ali Musaliyar and searched, unsuccessfully, the Mambram mosque on 20 August 1921. A rumour that he was arrested and the Mambram shrine (according to other reports, the Tirurangadi mosque) destroyed drew people from various places towards the town. Mappila anger was further exacerbated when British forces engaged a crowd, reportedly, of 3000 Mappilas, killing seven and arresting several. In another instance, Mappilas killed two British officers, by now pouring into the town. Consequently, various leaders (according to one report, Ali Musaliyar and his followers also emerged from hiding and) tried to reach a compromise. Led by a local Mappila leader, a large number of Mappilas approached the British camp to negotiate the release of prisoners. “They

---

37 As evident in the report that on 1 August 1921, 2000 Mappilas threatened to attack the Nilambur palace; then an “actual outbreak was narrowly averted by the actions of leading Mappilas and police officials” (Miller, 127; emphasis added).
were ordered to sit on the ground, and, after obeying, were fired upon by soldiers” (Miller, 137). After this incident, Mappilas in groups dispersed to different locations leading to attacks on *jenmis* and guerilla-type skirmishes with the police and the military.

Though my focus is as not such on the chronology and details of various events of the rebellion, I reproduce K Madhavan Nair’s summary of the events of the rebellion.38 Madhavan Nair—the first secretary of the local Congress Committee, established in 1921, and the first managing director of *Mathrubhumi* newspaper—divides the rebellion into five phases: First phase: 20-08-1921 to 31-08-1921; military lay siege to the Tirurangadi mosque to arrest Ali Musaliyar; encounter between Mappilas and the military; District Collector flees; a major battle at Pukkotur; Mappilas spread the message of rebellion; groups travel to Nilambur and the Eastern region; treasuries and some Hindu homes plundered; Ali Musaliyar surrenders (5). Second phase: 01-09-1921 to 20-09-1921; no *lahalas* at all; further repression by military; Hindus attack Mappilas—leading to later rapes, proselytism and murder; major leaders: Variamkunnath Kunhamed Haji, Chembrasherry Thangal and Lavakutty and Kunjalavi (Ali Musaliyar’s disciples) still active in different parts though their followers had almost deserted them; the *lahala* almost over, so the people thought, but the stupidity of the authorities made it flare up again (6). Third phase: 20-09-1921 to the end of 1921; cruel human behaviour, worse than animals; encounters between the military and the rebels, and Mappilas’ evil deeds—terrible murders, proselytism and looting (6). Fourth phase: the end of 1921 to the first week of January 1922; arrest of more Mappilas; even those not involved in the *lahala* are arrested; fined/punished; the military, police and Hindus turn on the Mappilas; surrender of the major rebel leaders. Variamkunnath Kunhamed Haji and Chembrasherry Thangal; other leaders killed,

38 See, fn. 15.
end of lahala (6-7). Fifth phase: January 1922 onwards; famine-relief measures; court cases; the misdeeds of police; fights between the Hindu and Muslim Khilafat workers (7).

The impact of the rebellion on the struggle for independence at the national level is sidelined by nationalist histories. Gandhi had set the trend when he examined the rebellion as the primary cause of Hindu-Muslim tension, only to dismiss it since though the “Malabar happenings undoubtedly disquieted the Hindu mind. What the truth is no one knows . . . it is impossible to arrive at the exact truth and it is unnecessary for the purpose of regulating our future conduct.”

Examining the series of “riots” which followed, year after year, for example, 39 different instances documented between 1921 and 1931, Gandhi acknowledged that it certainly is possible that a “vital connection” exists between them since “a peaceful Tehsil at the foot of the Himalayas will be affected by a violent hamlet situated near the Cape Comorin.”

At the same time, Gandhi tried to distance the Congress from the Malabar rebellion, not allowing it “to affect any of our plans.” Gail Minault, taking note of the distorted form in which the Khilafat movement reached the Mappilas, argued that Hindu-Muslim understanding had been irrevocably violated by the Malabar rebellion (149). The newspaper Independent testified precisely to such a sentiment when, on 27 October 1921, it wrote: “The Muslim lion and the Hindu lamb will lie down together, but the lamb will be inside the lion” (130). However, it was not so much the rebellion itself as the representations generated by the Congress nationalist perception and persuasion of the causes of the Mappila uprisings and the character of the Mappilas that affected
this change. Accounts by Congress leaders in Kerala\textsuperscript{44} were significant in disseminating these ideas. It is revealing that nationalist histories have mainly endeavoured to reduce it to a footnote in the struggle for independence. Only the Wagon tragedy of 20 November 1921—in which 67\textsuperscript{45} out of a 100 Mappila prisoners died due to suffocation, the rest mutilated and barely alive, while being transported from Tanur to Coimbatore in a wagon which had no ventilation—often finds a place between the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 13 April 1919, in which 379 people, as per official sources, were, following General Dyer's order, killed and the Chauri Chaura incident of 5 February 1922, in which angry peasants burned alive 23 policemen. Compared to the impact of the Malabar rebellion (the final toll, according to official sources, of the Malabar rebellion of 1921 was 2337 rebels killed, 1652 wounded, 45,404 imprisoned—unofficial sources put the figures at 10,000 dead, 50,000 imprisoned, 20,000 exiled and 10,000 missing), the other events are of a lesser magnitude. These figures and the fact that the rebels had virtual control of the whole region for about six months is enough to underline the significance of the rebellion. In contrast, the figures of 600 Hindus killed and 2500 forcibly converted (according to an Arya Samajist source; Sumit Sarkar, 217) in an area inhabited by four lakh Hindus seem to have captivated the national imaginary.

In this section I propose to examine two key memoirs in Malayalam relating to the Malabar rebellion. Working within a nationalist framework, yet closely associated with events of the time, these writings—K Madhavan Nair's \textit{Malabar Kalapam} and MB Namboodiripad's \textit{Khilaphathu Smaranakal}—reflect the tensions structuring the Congress position in/on the rebellion. Although there is a fairly extensive corpus of writing on the Malabar rebellion from a nationalist perspective, these memoirs straddle the gap between autobiography and history and mark the moment of conjuncture between the elite and the subaltern. But before embarking on

\textsuperscript{44} Most of who, apart from MP Narayana Menon, worked under the umbrella of princely states.

\textsuperscript{45} According to Sumit Sarkar, \textit{Modern India, 1885-1947} (Madras: Macmillan, 1983; reprint 1992) 217, the figure is 66.
this, a remark about memory and narrative is in order. The very act of remembering involves narrativization. What was lived through is transformed through memory and later events may be rewritten, coloured or curtailed; an earlier event may sometimes even (re)generate a (false) memory. Since an event is only real in this discursive mode, I suggest that the implications of these memoirs emerge when they are counterposed with other versions.

K Madhavan Nair’s *Malabar Kalapam*, written and serialized in *Mathrubhumi* immediately after the 1921 rebellion, was first published in 1971.⁴⁶ K Kalyanamma, his wife, takes note of the historical, hence authentic,⁴⁷ nature of the personal account when she writes:

> as a Congress leader entrusted with the job of controlling the *kalapam*, Madhavan Nair had many opportunities to be involved in the *kalapam* and interact face to face with its leaders. Hence, the narration of the event in this book is almost that of a live commentary. At the same time, it involves an objective [matter of fact] and impartial criticism of the *kalapam*. In the description of the *kalapam*, Madhavan Nair’s sympathy for the grievances of the Mappilas of Ernad is evident. He appreciates their courage and simplicity; but he, at the same time, does not hide their fanaticism, rashness [hot-headedness] and intolerance. (KMN, v)

But contrary to Kelappan’s assertion in the foreword that “a historian’s objectivity is reflected/displayed throughout the text” (vi), Madhavan Nair himself writes that

---

⁴⁶ All translations from this text are mine.
⁴⁷ K Kelappan’s statement, which precedes the text, also focuses on this frame: “History of a place/nation should be objective. . . . By describing *Malabar kalapam* as communal lahala that seriously affected not only the ordinary life of Kerala, but also of India, some profited. Others associated it with the independence struggle. Some others described it as a community’s heroic and adventurous activity. Rather than attempt an evaluation of them, a better task would be to correctly grasp the atmosphere, and the directions and misdirections of events, of that time in order to make a decision. We should attach more value to past experiences than to present opinions/evaluations. Considering this, *Malabar Kalapam* is a collection in book form of the notes of an objective and well experienced person” (ix).
It is almost impossible to write a complete history of the events during the *kalapam*. It is not very difficult to get detailed information about the happenings in important places during the first phase of the *kalapam*. But it is indeed difficult to get information about matters/events during the middle and the last phase of the *kalapam*. Apart from the military and the *kalapakar* [rebels] there are very few who know about them. Because the government has not published anything regarding the movements/activities of the military, and because those involved in the *kalapam* are either dead or imprisoned, it is not possible to get detailed information from either of these two. Hence, I think to record in this history the matters as have been gathered from newspapers, from enquiries, and from those who had fled the place of the *lahala*. (KMN, 5)

The collapse of the registers is by now complete and his memoir is touted as a history though most of the “facts” were “gathered from newspapers, from enquiries, and [ironically] from those who fled the place of the *lahala*.”

Similar ambivalence and contradictions are present in *Khilaphathu Smaranakal*,48 a memoir written in Malayalam by MB Namboodiripad,49 which describes the events that “culminated” in the Malabar rebellion of 1921. As a participant of the rebellion, MB Namboodiripad had vainly endeavoured to contain the rebellion and suffered “police torture more than a Muslim” (MBN, 8), but the latter half of the text is devoted to his own post-rebellion experiences, which was published.

---

48 MB Namboodiripad, *Khilaphathu Smaranakal*, (Thrisur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1993; first published in 1965); hereafter, MBN; and all translations are mine.

49 Mozhiikunnath Brahmadathan Namboodiripad, lesser known than K Madhavan Nair, KP Keshava Menon or MP Narayana Menon, was born in 1897. He became well versed in Sanskrit literature and the Vedas and the Upanishads at a young age. Inspired by Gandhi’s entry into politics, he accepted Gandhi as his guru, and practiced the Gandhian path. In 1918 he started his political career, and soon became the Cherpulassery (his native place) Mandal President of the Congress party, which was cooperating with the Khilafat movement. When the rebellion started, he was one among the
in 1930 in *Unni Nambudhiri*, a paper run by radical youth, including EMS Namboodiripad. Despite advice from friends to publish it in book form, MB Namboodiripad had delayed its publication because he wanted it to be a book that presented the history behind his own experiences (8). The memoir refurnished with an account of its historical context was finally published in 1965, a year after MB Namboodiripad died at the age of 68. The gap between the historical account (probably written around 1960, if not later) and the personal account (written during late 1920s) is significant. When the memoir was republished, 28 years later, in 1993, KM Tharakan, the then president of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, notes that the book has an important place as literature since it is a heart-rending autobiography, though he goes on to add: “Even though it is an autobiography, it is at the same time the story of a place/nation, a historical story, and a political history” (5). Tharakan praises the author for depicting truth, without any adulteration, as he had experienced it. KP Kesava Menon, a prominent personality and erstwhile Congress President of Kerala, in his introduction to the 1965 edition, wrote:

This book contains a description of the *lahala* which took place in Malabar in 1921 during the non-cooperation movement. It is now 44 years since the *lahala*. The memories of it have begun to fade. As of now, there have been only three or four books published on the Malabar *lahala*. Besides, it cannot be said that those books have been of much use as far as informing us of the many facts about the *lahala*. There are only a very few who can objectively describe historical events—even if they know the facts. Given all this, there is no doubt that this book written by Sri Brahmadathan Namboodiripad is a welcome contribution to the writings on Malabar *lahala*.

prominent Congress members who tried to stop and, failing which, to contain the rebellion. But, charged with the crime of inciting the rebellion, he was arrested and sentenced, following which he was excommunicated by his caste.
In describing the events that led to the *lahala*, the author has depended mainly on his own experiences. He has not ventured to depict things which he has not known or which cannot be believed. Sri Namboodiripad’s experiences are very terrible and extraordinary. He describes them without any hyperbole. (6)

It is interesting that KP Keshava Menon refers to the rebellion as, not a *kalapam* or a *viplavam*, but a *lahala*, echoing in effect Madhavan Nair’s confusion. The terms in which we are to read MB Namboodiripad’s memoir are clearly laid down. What is posited is a sincere, unmediated, unadulterated and true description of the *lahala* that is at the same time more than an autobiography, since it depicts “the story of a place/nation, a historical story, and a political history.” These claims made in the publisher’s note and in the preface raise a number of questions, about autobiography, about literary/historical narratives, and representation. More than K Madhavan Nair’s *Malabar Kalapam*, it is MB Namboodiripad’s memoir that is classed as an autobiographical narrative. Apart from forcing us to rethink the narrative mode of representation and the ideological underpinnings of narrative (re)constructions of reality, this text, placed as a wedge, in its liminal existence, unsettles the distinction between the literary and the historical. The issue of narrativity, so to speak, becomes all the more problematic in a text like that of MB Namboodiripad’s. In fact, Tharakan’s comment, that though an autobiography, it is also the story of a place/nation, seems to make a distinction between the story of a self that is literary, and the story of a nation that is historical. But MB Namboodiripad’s text is literary and historical at once, because here the personal and the social, the self and nation coincide. In this coincidence of the individual and the social, the particular and the general, the private and the public, MB Namboodiripad’s text is different from other autobiographies for it sublimes the ordinary generic distinctions, thus dissolving the distinction between the historical and the literary. However, the historical text is also a cultural artifact underwritten by ideology, in its form, as well as in the narrative reconstruction of reality, that is to say, ideology determines what can be remembered and recounted. Hence, with a text like MB
Namboodiripad’s, what is required is an unravelling of the ideological formation which structures it and which it reworks (making it work, so to speak), while paying attention to the fact that the narrative convention interpellates a subject by the very ruse of endowing a self-identity.

The title of Madhavan Nair’s text refers to the 1921 rebellion as *kalapam*, but throughout the text we find the word *lahala* employed to denote the pre- and post-1921 uprisings, turning *kalapam* into a generic term for the many *lahalas* that took place during 1921-1922. Madhavan Nair’s ambivalence regarding the events around 1921 is all the more ironical as he intends his account to be a corrective to the District Superintendent Police, RH Hitchcock’s narrative: “Mr. Hitchcock was more capable of creating history than writing history” (1). Further, Madhavan Nair describes Malabar as if it were a Hindu deity (8-9). Nonetheless, he criticizes the casteism prevalent among Hindus and their resultant disunity (10). They are contrasted to the Mappila who are presented as physically strong, ignorant and fanatical. Though Madhavan Nair acknowledges that the cause of the *lahalas* is partly the *jenmis*, to “the increase in the number of the *lahalas* and in their cruelty definitely fanaticism has contributed” (11). He regrets the fact that the industriousness of the Mappilas, which would have made them equal to any other community in India comes to nothing since they were neither educated nor properly taught their religion; for example, they believe the Maulavis’ decree that by killing *kaffirs* one can achieve paradise.51 “As soon as they hear something related to their religion, without even bothering to find out whether it is true or not, they go berserk and behaving like mad people immediately start *lahalas*. They are not at all afraid to die” (11). The people as well as the government are to blame for this because both “have not done anything in civilizing them” (12). Equating

50 See, fn. 35.
51 K Kelappan in his foreword puts forward this analysis: while Hindus of Malabar are uneducated because they are a minority. Muslims are uneducated because they are ignorant and superstitious with a blind belief in martyrdom (xi-xii).
education with civilization and self-control, he notes that the presence of the railway would also have helped to remove some of the Mappila madness (11-12). Moreover, when

the deep-rooted evil comes out in the form of an outbreak, the government has only applied some severe external/superficial medicine for this wound, but has not experimented with any method to remove this disease. If only a part of the money spent to contain lahalas was used in educating them, the lahalas would have disappeared from Ernad long back. (12)

Quite clearly, such a characterization of the Mappilas as well as the uprisings of the previous century draws on the figure of the “fanatic” that was constituted and circulated in and through administrative reports of the colonial government.

Madhavan Nair notes that the rebellion—reportedly triggered by the government’s move to arrest the venerated Mappila priest/leader Ali Musaliyar and the rumour of the demolition of the famous Mambram mosque—did not initially target Hindus. According to him, it was the stupidly severe counter-insurgency measures adopted by the military and police that triggered further uprisings and attacks on the military as well as on Hindus. Tracing the history of the antagonism, Madhavan Nair comments that when the two communities, like two eyes of mother Kerala, were living in unity and trust, Tippu’s invasion and injustices turned Malabar upside down (13). In Madhavan Nair’s version “[n]ot only did Tippu cause great danger to the Hindus here, he also became the guru for the Mappila lahalas that caused danger to the Hindus” (15)

because he “implanted many misunderstandings about the real religion in the minds of the ignorant and fanatic Mappilas here” (15-16). Moreover, K Madhavan Nair’s resort to the myth of Tippu fostering communal tension goes against the grain of most histories (for example, Logan) that record instances where Mappilas rebelled against him. Paradoxically, Madhavan
Nair's history echoes Hitchcock's version: "Hyder Ali entered Malabar from the North in 1766, and it would appear to be the events in the next 25 years connected with the invasions of Hyder Ali and Tippu which resulted in the Ernad taluk and its immediate surroundings becoming the home of fanaticism and lawlessness" (5). Hitchcock, however, is aware that the Mappilas caused havoc to Tippu for he cites Colonel Dow's following statement in a minute of 1796: "The Mappillas hold all regular government in aversion, and never appear to have been thoroughly subjugated by Tippu. This habitual dislike to subordination is not to be removed by methods of severity, which are likely to excite resistance" (cited, Hitchcock, 14, 178). Madhavan Nair notes that after the defeat of Tippu and the takeover by the British, there were about 50 Mappila lahala to date, and these lahala have broken/affected the love and trust between the two communities as a result of which the "Hindus don't believe the Mappilas, the Mappilas don't love the Hindus" (17; emphases added). Hence, “[i]t is not surprising if the weak Hindus, with only tradition and superstition remaining and who have lost their energy, manliness, arms and skill as a result of 150 years of British rule, ran away from fear of the armed and ready-to-die lahalakkar (rebels)” (20).

However, his narrative is unsettled by two points. One, Madhavan Nair comments that it is not very difficult to identify the huts of the Mappilas and the lower caste Tiyyars and Cherumars (Mappilakudi, Tiyyapura, Cherumachala, respectively) because they “all are the habitations of the goddess of poverty. Though they, especially the Mappilas, are very wealthy in the matter of offspring” (18). His acknowledgement of the socio-economic condition of the Mappilas undercuts his reliance on the fanatic causation theory even as it suggests tacit alliances among Mappilas and “lower” caste Hindus. Two, Madhavan Nair illustrates with an example how the Mappilas have always spared those whom they love and respect (21) as well as how the

Later on, Madhavan Nair is more explicit; the Mappilas “follow not Prophet Mohamed, but Tippu Sultan” (19).
Mappilas always spared even "upper" caste Hindus when their identity was doubtful, especially if the Hindus were from another place (223). These reasoned acts too whittle away the narrative’s certitude regarding Mappila "madness." I merely indicate here the impossibility of uni-polar explanations. Though Mappila uprisings have been inserted into a register of "fanaticism" caused by their ignorant misunderstanding of their religion—“poverty, fanaticism and the blind belief in the pleasures of paradise—all entice him to give up his life” (18)—a close examination of most narratives reveals the fact that most nationalist satyagrahis have consistently understood and phrased the Mappila uprisings in their own "fanatical" register.

The nationalist framing of the rebellion seems to emerge most clearly when on 24 August 1921, significantly during the first phase when there was no violence against Hindus, Madhavan Nair meets Variamkunnath Kunhamed Haji, a prominent rebel leader. The latter sent a messenger to Madhavan Nair requesting a meeting in the context of panic among Mappilas because of rumours that the military was about to land, much to the joy of Hindus. Madhavan Nair discredits reports in English newspapers and in “Divanbahadur C Gopalan Nair’s Mappilalahula” (168) that Kunhamed Haji was a Khilafat worker since the Congress-Khilafat

53 A bullock-cart driver by profession and a neighbour of Ali Musaliyar, Kunhamed Haji had recently returned from Mecca after being deported along with his father by the British for his participation in earlier uprisings. C Gopalan Nair, “a retired Deputy Collector and a natural champion of the official view,” writes: “Variamkunnath Kunhamed Haji, of a family of outbreak tradition, as a lad was transported with his father for complicity in a previous outbreak; on his return six or seven years ago he was not allowed to settle down in his native village but after a time he went up to his village and started life as a cartman. On the introduction of the Khilafat Movement, he joined it and became one of its chief workers, organized Sabhas and became the guiding spirit of the Khilafat in Ernad. On the outbreak of the rebellion he became King, celebrated his accession by the murder of Khan Bahadur Chekutty, a U.Police retired Police Inspector.”

"He styled himself as the Raja of the Hindu, Amir of the Mohammedans and Colonel of the Khilafat Army. He wore a fez cap, wore the Khilafat uniform and badge and had a sword in his hand. He enjoyed absolute Swaraj in his kingdom of Ernad and Wannavanad. He announced that he was aware that the inhabitants have suffered greatly from robbing and looting, that he would impose no taxation on them this year (1921) save in the way of donations to the yudha fund and that next year the taxes must be forthcoming. He ordered members of agricultural labourers to reap and bring in the paddy raised in the Thirumulpad’s lands, the harvesters being paid in cash and the grain set apart to feed the Haji’s forces. He issued passports to persons wishing to go out-side his Kingdom and the cost of the pass was a negligible figure, according to the capacity of the individual concerned.”

"He was captured on the 6th January and shot on 20th January, 1922"; cited by EMS Namboodiripad, Kerala Society and Politics: An Historical Survey (New Delhi: National Book Centre, 1984) 115, 116, from C Gopalan Nair,
workers of Kozhikode were not aware of this, though he believes that like all other Mappilas, or maybe more than the others, he might also have been enthused about the Khilafat movement. "My younger brother, Keshavan Nair, told me on 24 August that he remembered [Kunhamed Haji] buying/taking some Congress-Khilafat leaflets" (168). Moreover, "though he did not participate in the movement, since he was a member of a family traditionally famous for their fanaticism, there is no wonder that he was ready to die for the Khilafat cause" (168). Recognizing Kunhamed Haji to be "one of the first to fight the British for the Khilafat and ... one of the foremost leaders of the lahala" (168-169), Madhavan Nair goes on:

At the beginning of the lahala, [Kunhamed Haji] rescued Hindus from attacks by robbers and punished the Mappilas involved in looting. He also punished and killed those Mappilas who abetted the British. He was, in those days, against conversion.

But, later, things changed drastically. Maybe he felt that the Hindus were his enemies in his fight against the British and he started to harm, kill and convert Hindus. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that he helped/saved Hindus during the initial stage of the lahala. (KMN, 169)

Accompanied by his younger brother, Madhavan Nair went to meet Kunhamed Haji, then around 60 years old. Though Madhavan Nair does not recall what Kunhamed Haji, who was accompanied by other rebels, some of them armed, wore on his head, he remembers the determination on his face. Madhavan Nair recounts "Kunhamed Haji, holding on to my hands, asked me in a requesting manner: 'What should we do next, please do advise us'" (170). Madhavan Nair felt the question to be very sincere and wondered at the trepidation he had felt before the meeting, for he was not sure, though they were not enemies, whether Kunhamed Haji

---


177
would receive him like a friend. Now, he was thoroughly nonplussed by the question since he believed that the Mappilas who had resorted to lahala in spite of his advice to the contrary would never listen to him. However, Madhavan Nair, for whom non-violence was a vow, had no difficulty in answering:

> Everything has gone wrong. The whole country has been despoiled/destroyed. Now what can I tell you. But, nonetheless if you are even now ready to take my advice, I will tell you, “Throw away all your weapons and go home, stop your attacks and advise others to remain calm. You may not like my words, but that’s the only advice I have for you.”

I thought my words would anger Haji, but in a calm voice Haji said: “There is no use telling that now, I started out like this, and have already done some things; there is no way I can withdraw now. Moreover, Ali Musaliyar is in danger. I have to help him. What other advice have you to offer?” After thinking awhile, I said: “I have nothing else to say. But did you see the outrages committed by Mappilas? Is there any Hindu home which has not been robbed? What injustice is this? Is this what your religion professes? If you have strength and willingness, you should stop this robbery.”

Immediately Haji rolled his eyes and told me: “I came here with that purpose in mind. I have already publicly declared the same at the Manjeri crossroads. I will cut the right hand off any Mappila who dares to steal. Let there be no doubt about that. I came here now because I heard there was some robbery afoot here.”

---

54 Interestingly, Chembarrasseri Thangal, another prominent rebel leader, had given evidence that he was forced into the Khilafat agitation by Kunhamed Haji; see, Hitchcock, 100.
"Cutting off a hand is too much, don’t do that. But it’s imperative that the robbery is stopped somehow," I replied.

Haji whispered in my ear: "They will be frightened only if I say things like that."

About to start back after the conversation, Haji asked me: "When will we meet again?" I replied: "We will never meet again. Our paths are different and there is nothing to be gained by our meeting," and returned home. (KMN, 170-171)

Thereafter, Kunhamed Haji went on to destroy bridges and cut trees to block roads in order to stop the military from advancing (171) as well as to stop Mappilas from robbing a bank by arranging a guard from among his followers and to oversee the returning, which went on till the afternoon of the next day, of the ornaments deposited in the bank to their rightful Hindu and Mappila owners before he was called away to the Pukkotur front (173-174). In Madhavan Nair's own phasing of the rebellion, there were no serious attacks on Hindus in the first phase (20-08-1921 to 31-08-1921), yet we find him asking Kunahmed Haji on 26 August 1921 about the horrors committed by the Mappilas, forcing one to review the anger felt by the Mappilas towards the Congress leaders for blowing isolated incidents of forced conversions and looting out of proportion.55

Apart from the obvious disjuncture between the Congress Khilafat movement and the Mappila peasant response, what becomes evident in this account of the meeting is the reluctance of the Congress leaders to associate with the Mappila insurgents. Yet, other events, which Madhavan Nair himself acknowledges, show that at some points the paths of the nationalists and the rebels

55 See, the biographical work by MPS Menon Malabar Samaram: MP Narayana Menonum Sahapravarthakarum (Angadipuram, Malappuram: MP Narayana Menon Memorial Committee, 1992) 194; hereafter MPSM.
were not so different. Madhavan Nair recounts that on 15 February 1921, the local Congress leaders had met with Yakub Hasan and had decided to conduct a meeting thereby disobeying the government order. This was despite a perceptive Madhavan Nair pointing out that once a noble leader like Yakub Hasan has disobeyed the government it may not be thereafter possible to restrain the "ignorant people" from following suit (73). The very next day most of the Congress Khilafat leaders, including Madhavan Nair, were arrested. Madhavan Nair was released on 17 August 1921, a few days before the Tirurangadi incident that triggered the militant resistance, and, hence, may not have been cognizant of the various events and preparations taking place all over Malabar. Moreover, Madhavan Nair acknowledges that the imprisoning of the Congress leaders "suddenly awakened a hitherto sleeping Malabar" (77). The government notices as per section 144, bail cases and punishments shook the whole of Kerala: "The khaddar dress spread over the land; the drunkards were surprised; liquor/toddy shops started to scream; officials panicked" (78). He writes of the Congress Khilafat cadre swelling up and of many Khilafat meetings; one in which over 20,000 people participated was the first sign of things going wrong. In that meeting, Mappilas who attended from distant places were armed and they attacked, but failed to provoke, a police force that was, strangely, very patient (81). Madhavan Nair is critical of the Congress Khilafat workers for forming about 200 Congress committees with around 20,000 members without properly finding out whether the leaders thus selected were imbued with the non-violent spirit (82). Madhavan Nair rationalizes that though evictions may have played a part, albeit minor, in the earlier Mappila uprisings, the true reason behind them is that: "In the competition between the desire to live and the bitterness at poverty, fanaticism supports the bitterness and uproots the fear of death" (15). He presents a picture in which the Tenancy movement and the Khilafat movement gradually elude the control of Congress. He writes that prior to the repressive measures and arrests as per section 144, it was possible to restrain Mappilas by convincing them that they could have recourse to legal measures; he talks of many
cases where the Mappilas have repented their revolt against the *jenmis*. However, the arrest of the leaders and the prohibition of public meetings resulted in depressing the Mappilas so much that they lost faith in the non-violent method (92).

The growing alliance between the Mappilas and the Khilafat worried the perceptive local Congress leader, MP Narayana Menon. He was afraid of the consequences of such alliances and had warned Gandhi, during his visit to Malabar in August 1920, about the danger of disseminating the Khilafat cause among the Mappilas who, traditionally, are known to war against all injustices, even to the extent of embracing a heroic death. But "big leaders like KP Keshava Menon, K Madhavan Nair and C Rajagopalacari were against [restraint]. Gandhi accepted their suggestion" and probably thought that Mappilas would listen to the Muslim scholars and the Ali brothers (MPSM, 40, 56). Though almost all sources suggest\textsuperscript{56} that the repressive measures initiated by the District Magistrate, Thomas, the infamous Dyer of Malabar, and Hitchcock, the District Superintendent of Police, were so severe as to brook no negotiation or withdrawal of the rebellion, it is clear that the Congress was significantly implicated in the mobilization of Mappila peasants.

Hitchcock, the architect of the colonial government’s response to the rebellion, details the specific linkages between the Congress and the Mappila rebels. Contrary to K Madhavan Nair’s disowning of any Congress-Khilafat association with Kunahmed Haji, Hitchcock states that in May 1920 Kunhamed Haji was appointed to collect subscriptions, though he lost interest and ceased to do so immediately (Hitchcock, 55). Hitchcock also asserts that "Variamkunnath Kunhamath Haji and Chembrasseri Thangal had started out with the idea of obtaining in the only

\textsuperscript{56} K Madhavan Nair, MP Narayana Menon (MPSM, 44, 66), MB Namboodiripad as well as KP Keshava Menon, *Kachinju Kalam* (Calicut: Mathrubhumi, 1986; first published in 1957) 90; hereafter KPKM, agree on this. MPS Menon also adds that KP Keshava Menon admired Hitchcock was greatly influenced by him (MPSM, 63).
practical way what the supporters of Non-cooperation and Khilafat had promised would be obtained on a fixed date by prayer and spinning" (79). Kunhamed Haji's participation in the Congress-Khilafat movement is further underlined by Chembrasser Thangal's statement to the police that he was inducted by Kunahmed Haji into the Khilafat (100). Moreover, Karat Moideen Kutti Haji, a 28-year-old literate rebel, more so than the leaders, who could write in Arabic as well as English, when captured "by chance" on 27 January 1922, stated that he was persuaded to join the Khilafat by Madhavan Nair himself (112; statement on 190-191). Although his statements were issued to the police under duress—for example, he describes Ali Musaliyar, with whom he had gone on Haj as a lad of 18, as "a religious fanatic [who] had the hope of obtaining Khilafat Government" (Hitchcock, 112, 190)—the detailed information provided about various political meetings that he had attended supports the perception that Madhavan Nair indeed played an active role in mobilizing the Mappilas. Hitchcock adds this comment about Moideen Kutti Haji's statements: "there is no reason to disbelieve it, it shows however sincere the agitators might be in preaching non-violence yet how inevitable it was that their teaching should have had the result it did and that without it, there would have been no rebellion" (112). Hitchcock also stresses the influence of outside events on the rebellion:

Three times it had seemed that matters would right themselves but each time it was something outside the district, over which the District officers had no control which upset the hope—in February 1921 the Nagpur Conference, followed by Yaqub Hasan's visit to Calicut—in April 1921 Muhammad Ali's speech in Madras and at the end of July 1921 the Karachi Khilafat Conference resolutions. Both these last were printed in Malayalam and circulated. There was no other organization. By August 1921 the result was inevitable and it was merely a question of the amount of force which might be required. (164)
These events had specific effects in Malabar, Hitchcock argued: "A speech in Calicut would rouse the local Mappila audience to such a pitch that they would offer their clothes to be burnt; the same speech in Ernad would send the audience away quietly to the making of swords" (178). Apart from the famous inflammatory speech by Gandhi, where he stressed the particular duty of all Muslims to rebel against the British government in the light of the Khilafat issue and pointed out that all Muslims were enjoined by their religion to follow their religious scholars in the ways they chose and to wipe away the shame facing Islam, several similar speeches were directed at the Muslims from various local Congress-Khilafat platforms (see, KN Panikkar, 1989, 127). Therefore it is not difficult to believe that Ali Musaliyar ardently believed in the Khilafat, as reported in Moideen Kutti Haji's police statement. Hitchcock attests to the influence and hope that the Congress-Khilafat held out to the Mappilas, when he writes: "Refugees, Hindu and Mappila, who escaped after being kept with gangs for some days at this time, reported from different places that the rebels were holding out in the expectation of the whole of India rising as a result of the Ali brothers' trial which was fixed for the 18th October 1921" (71).

Hitchcock's report also provides a glimpse into the careful manner in which the rebellion was organized by the Mappilas; looting to boost key supplies, and using terror as in the murder of the Mappila policeman Khan Bahadur KV Chekkuti in August 1921 (63), to prevent police from acquiring informants, thus "making it impossible to get messengers and informants anywhere beyond Manjeri" (66). Belying the idea of "fanaticism" and a grandiose dream of an actual Khilafat kingdom, Kunhamed Haji (in his statement where he narrates how Ali Musaliyar and his followers were collecting money and issuing notices while he, being under warning for his former involvements, stayed away) remarks: "They were collecting money for 'Swayabharanam' [self-rule]. There is no Khilafat here. Khilafat is a Turkey matter" (186).

57 Speech made at the Khilafat meeting in Bombay on 19 March 1920, cited in MSPM, 43.
Meeting between rebel and Congress leaders were consistently played out in the same mode. KP Keshava Menon’s meeting with Ali Musaliyar largely follows the pattern of Madhavan Nair’s meeting with Variamkunnath Kunhamath Haji. Keshava Menon writes that messengers were sent to him on 20 August 1921 to inform him of the events in Malabar. Apart from reporting about the military attack, the messengers—who believed that the rebels had also killed the colonial administrators, Thomas and Hitchcock—finally asked Keshava Menon’s advice. He, typically, suggested that they go home peacefully (KPKM, 97). The next day, on 21 August 1921, Keshava Menon went to Malabar in order to review the situation and, though he wanted to meet Ali Musaliyar, decided against it because it was too late that day and returned to his anxious family. It is only on 26 August 1921 that he ventured into Malabar again; this time he went to meet Ali Musaliyar at the Mambram mosque. He was welcomed by two boats packed with Mappilas waving the Congress and the Khilafat flags (106). When he asked the 65 year old Ali Musaliyar what he intended to do thereafter, Ali Musaliyar put the same question to him. Keshava Menon advises him to surrender to the military. Ali Musaliyar agreed to do so, though some of his followers would not have that, reasoning that Ali Musaliyar’s presence at the mosque would deflect the attacking military bullets (108). The Congress leaders’ incomprehension of the causes and nature of the rebellion is apparent when Keshava Menon advises Ali Musaliyar, the most significant leader who could perhaps have single-handedly changed the course of the rebellion, to turn himself in.  

Ali Musaliyar surrendered on 30 August, was sentenced on 5 November 1921 and was hanged to death on 7 February 1922. The significant point here is that neither the national leaders nor the local leaders protested or worked.

---

58 The judgement of Ali Musaliyar and 37 other rebels categorically states that though “[i]n the past [murderous outrages by the Mappila community] may have been due to fanaticism” (Hitchcock, 245), the 1921 rebellion was the result of the Congress-Khilafat initiative and that “Khilafat volunteers must, we should think, be unpaid soldiers, who are meant to fight, when occasion arises, in support of the cause for which they are enrolled. This would be the
towards influencing the government decision to deal summarily with the rebels, rather the colonial government and nationalist leaders worked hand in hand at different levels, and in different ways to quell the rebellion. No nationalist support accrued even to MP Narayana Menon though he was a Congress leader of no mean stature. Arrested in September 1921 for waging war against the King, he was transported for life. He was offered conditional freedom if he pleaded guilty, asked for mercy and agreed not to set foot in Malabar for a couple of years (MSPM, 175). His refusal to do so perplexed Congress; Gandhi conveyed his helplessness to Narayana Menon's wife because her husband was not ready to apologize; in fact Gandhi requested her to convince him to do so (MSPM, 188). The fact that Narayana Menon continued to languish in prison angered the Mappilas and, further, influenced them to turn away from and against other local leaders of the Congress. When, after 14 years, Narayana Menon was released, it is reported that he was warmly welcomed as one among them by Mappilas all over Malabar (MPSM, 125).

Unlike other Congress leaders who sought to distance themselves from the rebellion and downplay the effect of the Khilafat movement on the Mappila peasants, Narayana Menon openly allied with the rebel leaders. This was despite the fact that he had sought to prevent the violence he had predicted if the Khilafat was brought to Malabar. Ironically, he was arrested by the native police officer whose life he had saved from Kunhamed Haji on 29 August 1921 (Hitchcock, 217-243) and made to walk 30 miles before being transported with military escort for fear that the Mappilas may try to free him (MSPM, foot note no. 1, 152). This denotes a clear difference in the attitude of the Mappilas towards him when compared with their attitude to other Congress leaders, like K Madhavan Nair and KP Keshava Menon who feared the Mappilas (MSPM, 63, ordinary interpretation of the word 'volunteers.' Such volunteers have certainly been enrolled in large numbers in this district and have in due course fought exceedingly” (246).
The desire to disassociate themselves and the Congress from what was in their eyes a Mappila *kalapam/kalahala* may have underwritten the objection by most Congress leaders, especially by Keshava Menon, to the Commission—appointed by the Indian National Congress and headed by Dr Ansari and Vittalbhai Patel—coming to Malabar immediately (MSPM, 172).

While, following Gandhi's lead, most other Congressmen were set to put the whole blame on the Mappilas—K Madhavan Nair is reported to have met Thomas and Hitchcock to ensure his personal safety—MP Narayana Menon was critical of the Congress position as well as that of the colonial government. Although Keshava Menon as a lawyer was scheduled to represent Narayana Menon, he failed to turn up (MSPM, 161) and another advocate had to argue the defence: K Madhavan Nair, also a pleader of Manjeri court, was the chief witness. The judge ran through the evidence collected by the prosecution to prove that the Malabar rebellion was definitely the result of the Congress-Khilafat initiative and ridiculed Madhavan Nair and Keshava Menon for their pretension that they and other Congress leaders were totally unaware that the Mappilas were amassing arms, particularly in the context when Narayana Menon readily confessed to the knowledge. The judge ridiculed Madhavan Nair for his ambivalent attitude whereby he sought help from the government for personal protection while professing to be a freedom fighter against the colonial government. Madhavan Nair's attempt to disown the rebels, in his memoirs as well, is caught in a tangle, because of his statement that when he met Kunhamad Haji the latter was accompanied by 30 men with guns, of whom some were in uniform and bore the Khilafat flag. "DW 8 [that is K Madhavan Nair, defence witness no. 8] makes desperate and useless efforts to explain away the words 'Uniform and Khilafat flag' but it is clear that they were Khilafat uniforms and Khilafat flags" (Hitchcock, 223).

It is instructive to note that there is no evidence of DW 8 who had before both social and political influence with the rebel Mappillas, being turned to for any protection after his interview with Kunhamad Haji. I do not say that he had
the courage to personally defy him, but he seems to have been lukewarm enough not to be called on for assistance. I can hardly credit his statement that he had no previous acquaintance with Kunhamad Haji in the face of the District Magistrate’s order Exhibit Z prohibiting their joint work but he was probably far less deeply involved with the Mappillas than accused. . . . He had not apparently ever gone to the lengths of dining with Mappillas or wearing their dress and therefore it was easier for him to extricate himself than it was for accused, assuming that the latter wished at all to do so.

(Hitchcock, 236)

Madhavan Nair’s attempt to provide an alibi for Narayana Menon during the time of a meeting when the latter reportedly spoke against the King is exposed by the judge, because he is “as a witness entirely unworthy of belief” (228). The judge notes: “When . . . this witness swears to accused’s alibi or anything else ‘before God and man,’ as he puts it, he does not greatly impress me” (228). Madhavan Nair’s attempt to argue that they were “elsewhere”—symbolical of the Congress position regarding the rebellion—during the “inflammatory” speech at the meeting, collapses in the face of Narayana Menon’s admission that he participated in Kunahmed Haji’s stopping of a bank robbery and arranging for the return of ornaments stolen from the bank to their rightful owners. As the judge saw it, this “return of jewels therefore was an official act done to inaugurate the reign of the Khilafat Kingdom in Manjeri” (Hitchcock, 235). The judge expresses his own view of

59 These were crimes that MP Narayana Menon confessed to, pointing out that such dress was common in Kerala, Burma and Ceylon and that he does not eat or cohabit according to the dictates of caste or religion but those of friendship alone; cited in MSPM, 163. In contrast we have Gandhi’s response to MP Narayana Menon: “To the questions whether he would bless his own daughter if she wanted to marry a Muslim, and whether he would sit beside a Muslim and eat the food prepared by a Muslim, Gandhi’s answer is interesting: ‘if daughter desires to marry a Muslim I will advise her against it. But if she remained firm in her decision, she would have no place in my house. Eating food prepared by a Muslim alongside a Muslim doesn’t occur at all. Because, my eating habit is my own personal matter,’” from an interview with MP Narayana Menon on 10.10.1962 (MPSM, 38).
the position in which the accused, and as I think also DW 8 to a lesser degree, found themselves. When the rebellion broke out I think they were both in a most difficult situation with regard to the Mappillas whom they had incited. It was no wonder that DW 8's alleged attempts to pacify the people at Pukkotur failed in the face of the speech he had delivered three days before with a full knowledge of the position there. What wonder also if his advice not to believe all the rumours they heard about the Tirurangadi mosque being destroyed by Government failed when he himself had implicitly believed anything to the discredit of Government and the Police on far less evidence? (Hitchcock, 233-234)

Indeed, the judge is reported to have remarked later that if a person had friends like Madhavan Nair and Keshava Menon, there is no further need to have any enemies (MSPM, 171).

Like Madhavan Nair's memoir (KNM, 23-28) as well as most accounts of the rebellion of 1921, MB Namboodiripad's memoir also posits a history of previous "outbreaks" before 1921 (during 1836-1919). An examination of these "outbreaks" as available through administrative records of the colonial government shows how the attribute "fanaticism," a description that became an explanation, was the ruse of a colonial government to control the insurgent Mappila community. Transfigured from economic hardship that was compounded with oppression by "upper" caste landlords to inborn irrationality and religious fervour, "fanaticism" was picked up and enshrined in nationalist history. Moreover, the reference to a "fanatical" pre-history is pertinent because the first line of the preface by MB Namboodiripad asserts: "It is wrong to call the uprising of 1921 in Malabar Mappila lahala or Malabar lahala. It would be more appropriate to call it a Mappila revolution or a Khilafat revolution" (13). But despite this, throughout the text Namboodiripad keeps on referring to the event as a lahala, revealing how well established was the notion of a
“fanatical zone” and a “fanatic” people. In nationalist historiography, without investigation and introspection, these “outrages” become a metaphor for the violence of the Mappila peasantry in Malabar: a metaphor of the past configured as memory which becomes the “truth” of present and future events. Hence, “all subsequent accounts [have become] parasitic on a prior memory” or representation. Later, the new event of 1921, by now a lahala, figures in rendering the nation and becomes a trope for the irrationality and violence of Muslims in general: “as a result of this lahala India’s history was re-written. It paved the way for rending the nation into two . . .” (16).

However, a point of contrast between K Madhavan Nair and MB Namboodiripad is that, whereas for the former the past, traced back to Tippu, is the explanation for the 1836-1919 uprisings and thereby of the 1921 rebellion, for the latter, the 1836-1919 and the 1921 uprisings are read in terms of its future as embodied in the 1947 partition of the subcontinent.

Most accounts place the beginning of the rebellion on 20 August 1921, when police attempted to capture Ali Musaliyar from the mosque while a massive crowd gathered around forcing the surprised police to resort to firing in order to ward off an attack from them. Curiously enough, MB Namboodiripad argues that the rebellion started with the conflict between the Christians and the Hindus of Thrissur on 16 February 1921. Neither KP Kesava Menon and K Madhavan Nair in their memoirs, nor MPS Menon in his biographical work on MP Narayana Menon mentions this incident; nor do recent historiographies refer to this event. However, there is a brief reference to this event in Hitchcock. The significance of this event does not so much lie in its possible status as the “real” origin of the Malabar rebellion; rather its significance can be located in terms of its function in MB

---

61 “Early in March another incident helped to keep alive the unrest; a contest arose between Christians and Nayars [sic] at Trichur in Cochin State, the former opposing, the latter favouring the non-co-operation activities. The Nayars [Nairs] called in Mappillas to their assistance. Walluvanad Hindus were responsible for this and appealed to the Mappillas by false stories of danger to mosques at the hands of the Christians. No fighting occurred but several Mappillas responded
Namboodiripad’s narrative. According to MB Namboodiripad, some Christians loyal to the colonial government disrupted the reception arranged on 16 February 1921 for K Madhavan Nair, Yakub Hasan and U Gopala Menon, in honour of their refusal to obey the order of the Government and courting arrest. The Christians, with police escort, took out a “loyalty procession.” Muslims blocked this loud procession when it reached a mosque, resulting in a clash. That night the situation was so tense that “about 600 people, Hindus and Muslims combined, guarded the Hindu homes. The Christians guarded their side” (22). The situation worsened the next morning, with reciprocal stone throwing, and subsequently on 18 February 1921, Christians attacked Hindus to wreck their shops causing damage to the tune of about a lakh rupees (23). Therefore, Hindu leaders decided to send for the Mappilas of Malabar, who enthusiastically responded to the call, pouring in from 19 February 1921 onwards. Namboodiripad describes these Mappilas, whose number exceeded 1800:

They waited impatiently for their masters’ command to destroy Thrissur town. They had come prepared to destroy Lanka. A report in Yogakshemam (book 11, number 23) wonders whether those who have come prepared to die will have any interest in food or sleep. . . . (24; emphases added)\(^{62}\)

After negotiations conducted by the Resident and the Diwan the tension was defused, and the Mappilas, after a victorious procession, left.

MB Namboodiripad admits that he was not at all involved in this incident nor was he present anywhere near the location. Then what could possibly be the reasons in positing the Thrissur “riots” as marking the beginning of the 1921 rebellion in a narrative that purports to be his autobiography? While the debates about the cause of the rebellion have been concentrated on the violent religiosity inherent in the Mappilas, or on the agrarian question—cruelty of the jenumis and

\(^{62}\) Hitchcock, 21.
the hardships of the peasantry, or on the pre-mature or insufficient politicization of the Mappilas. here we have a singular voice positing a totally different explanation. Clearly, reasons would have to be sought in the complex situation of that time. In the 1920s, Malabar was volatile because of the triangular contest between the Tenancy movement, the Khilafat movement and the Non-cooperation of the Congress. The prejudices of the Congress leaders only served to underscore their distance from the Mappilas, with the exception of MP Narayana Menon, who was scoffed at for his Mappila dress. Mappilas were not allowed to enter Keshava Menon’s house, and Congress leaders who came visiting from Madras and the North preferred to stay there than at Narayana Menon’s house (MPSM, 28, 38, 45). The Congress leaders Madhavan Nair and Kesava Menon, both lawyers who had stopped their practice in response to Gandhi’s “swaraj within a year,” were actually afraid of the Mappilas, and also, especially in the latter phase of the rebellion, of the military (MPSM, 45, 63, 87, 111, 113). Slowly, the Khilafat cause, with the support of the Congress, took over the Tenancy movement. The people involved in these movements were disparate, a source of great frictions. The lack of influence, and the resulting bewilderment, on the part of Congress leaders in guiding the “masses” at this time was palpable. The leader of the movement, Ali Musaliyar was advised to surrender though it was he who the peasantry trusted and obeyed (MPSM, 122). Sandwiched between the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the

Ironically, the same report maintains that for “one meal for those who had gathered there 50 to 60 para [a measure] rice was used.

The Kerala Congress was described by Conrad Wood as a Congress of Nair Advocates (cited in MPSM, 12). The fact that as lawyers most of them had argued for the landlords in cases of eviction only deepened this antagonism (MPSM, 63). During the rebellion, K Madhavan Nair and KP Kesava Menon were only interested in escaping from the rebel zone, remarks MP Narayana Menon (MPSM, 87, 111, 113).

As Richard Tottenham, Commander of Feroke (near Calicut) wrote: “Non-cooperation is just a farce. . . . But the Khilafat is quite a serious, sincere and dangerous movement. Gandhi and ahimsa are not important to [the Mappilas]. [They] think of the Congress as a blind which will allow them to amass arms. Congress will always obey Gandhi, the government and the laws. Khilafat people will oppose; my translation from MPSM, 64, cited from GRF Tottenham, Moplah Rebellion, 1921-22 (Madras: Government Press, 1987) 17-18.

RH Hitchcock writes that during an encounter between the masses and the police at the Calicut beach, “[t]he local Hindu and Mappila leaders proved their sincerity in the non-violence part of their creed by hiding” (Hitchcock, 21).

Ali Musaliyar who tried to follow the Gandhian path, finally lost patience when the police repression intensified and the Congress leaders were nowhere to be seen. At the beginning of the rebellion he had asked his followers to disarm themselves (MPSM, 63), but later, his trust in Congress and its leaders totally eroded, and provoked by the police firing at his followers who had obeyed him and peacefully sat down on the road (MPS Menon 95), he let himself be persuaded
Chauri Chaura incident, the Malabar uprising put the Congress high command in a quandary. Despite being warned by MP Narayana Menon, Gandhi and the other local leaders of Congress, though they could not fully comprehend what was happening, had decided to go ahead with the Khilafat agitation. But when the rebellion took off, the Congress leaders, local as well as national, disowned and distanced themselves from it. When the police began repressive measures the Congress leaders were spared, not least because they had gone out of their way to give assurances to the government. However, the situation had changed by the time MB Namboodiripad was writing his history/memoir, as is evidenced by the fact in 1955 a Marxist government was voted into power in Kerala, a first in world history. One significant outcome of the rising Marxist influence and the dwindling Congress power has been the particular blend of religion and Marxism characteristic of Malabar. The Congress started to evoke a negative response, even suspicion, because of its role in and attitude towards the rebellion of 1921 that it had initially helped promote.

It is in this context that it is useful to read MB Namboodiripad’s narrativization of the Thrissur “riots” as the event that inaugurated the Malabar lahala. The stress in his narrative on Hindu-Muslim unity is very significant, for it goes against the Congress view that the rebellion was at best a misdirected independence struggle because of the inherent fanaticism of the Mappilas. What Namboodiripad is formulating is a picture of the rebellion as it might have been, how it could have been effectively conducted, that is, controlled/contained, by the Hindu leaders, if only the Congress

by them (MB Namboodiripad recounts a significant encounter between the local Congress leaders and the rebels, 63-64), showing the strength of the Mappila resolve which pressed their leader to preach what they wanted. When MP Narayana Menon and K Madhavan Nair approached the valiant Varamkunnath Kunhamed Haji, the most feared and the most efficient and just among the rebels, in order to dissuade him, he responded thus: “The struggle has started. If we retreat now, there won’t be any hope . . . the police won’t leave us alone” (MPSM, 50). The rebels’ resolve is further indicated by the fact that the struggle continued, with a strategic resort to guerilla warfare (ambushes and surprise attacks), for more than four months after the arrest of Ali Musaliyar.

67 In order to contain the Khilafat movement, police violently came down on the Khilafat agitators and their kin (MPSM, 44). Some of the cases charged against them out of desperation are really trivial; stealing an official’s pen was one among the petty, and often false, charges (MPSM, 60).
had played its proper role. The betrayal by the Congress, particularly by the local Congress leaders, of the people of Malabar, and particularly of MB Namboodiripad when he was arrested, is what underwrites MB Namboodiripad's narrative. It may be recalled that, in contrast to MP Narayana Menon, MB Namboodiripad was released after he sought pardon. Although MB Namboodiripad traces the Malabar rebellion to the Thrissur "riots," he continues to argue that

The root cause of this lahala is not inter-communitarian conflict. It has its origin in political punishments. Police repression is the reason for this nuisance. This lahala is only a part of the independence struggle. This tragic event is the bad effect of police assault, which made a section of the people lose their discipline at a time when the independence struggle had intensified. Because they had lost discipline others also suffered. They too became the targets of police attack. (7)

Nonetheless, he writes in the preface:

But truth is truth. When an intense liberatory agitation was energetically going on, the religious sentiments of its heroic soldiers were stirred, and it is as evident as daylight that this was the reason for the lahala. (16)

The torsion in the text, pulling in many directions, distorts the narrative; this is especially evident when MB Namboodiripad details the events of the lahala. My contention is that this results from the tension between Namboodiripad's attempt to "objectively" highlight the failures of local Congress leadership and his "subjective" consciousness of his own inability to disavow his class-caste affiliations. MB Namboodiripad was the Congress Mandal president of his native place; moreover, he too was an "upper" caste Hindu, and it is this which not only conditions/constrains his narrative, but in fact generates it.68

---

68 He narrates the moving story of how he had to go without food and water for a long time after his arrest because he refused to eat "impure" (that is, cooked by a "lower" caste Hindu or a Muslim) food (MBN, 87-88). When a Railway police sub-inspector, also a Brahmin, witnessing his discomfort to eat the food brought by a Muslim woman, told him not to eat the food, he answers: "It is happier to starve than to eat this food" (92). Also revealing is the "fun" in which
I will cite one more example to demonstrate the way in which the text is fraught with contradictions. Towards the end of the first part, the one dealing with the rebellion, MB Namboodiripad attempts to answer, according to him very important and pertinent, questions: was not this lahala avoidable? was it unavoidable? He asserts that it was not inevitable, and that the District administrators are wholly responsible for the event. Here the narrative presents a perspective so seemingly natural/normal to us. The District administration is guilty on two counts: the first that they should have heeded the advice from their superiors and not ventured to arrest Ali Musaliyar, or if they were intent on forcibly entering the mosque and arresting him they should have been more heavily armed; the second that since Ali Musaliyar had a following ten times larger than that of the earlier community leader/priest (Mambram Thangal, who was tactfully exiled by HV Connoly), the District Magistrate, Thomas, should have used the same strategy, that of persuading him to exile himself to Mecca (MBN, 54). This is definitely not the stance of a person sympathetic, despite his rhetoric to that effect, to the Mappila cause.

MB Namboodiripad’s narrative of the conspiracy that led to his arrest (he was accused of three “crimes”: of waging war against the King, of destroying a bridge to obstruct the army, and of convening a meeting against law; MBN, 120), also raises certain doubts. According to him, the sub-inspector of the place, Moideen, plotted against him in order to save his own family members who were the leaders of the lahala there. This Moideen was missing for some days, and the father, spreading the rumour that the rebels had killed his son is supposed to have sided with the rebels. This story is, significantly, repeated at least twice in the memoir (81, 86). MB Namboodiripad claims that the witnesses against him were coaxed and coached by the sub-inspector (87). This is

the Hindu prisoners, Namboodiripad included, indulged in: an example is the “purification ceremony,” where they reconverted their co-prisoner Abdulla back to Parangodan, his name before he espoused Islam (106).
exemplified in his account of his arrest for, among other things, “waging war against the King.” He attributes his arrest to a fabricated case and coached witnesses. If we juxtapose his account with that of MP Narayana Menon, a different picture emerges. In Narayana Menon’s version, MB Namboodiripad asked about the nature of punishment for waging war against the King and Narayana Menon, who was qualified as an advocate, answered very shortly that the penalty would be death. To a frightened MB Namboodiripad, he went on: “Who asked you, born in a good family, to join Khilafat? Before joining you should have thought of the consequences. Now it is better that you gather enough courage to die as a patriot. Don’t cry and go begging for pardon” (MPSM, 154). And, indeed, that was precisely what MB Namboodiripad did. Even more significant is the fact that, being excommunicated by the Namboodiri community after his release for co-habiting with Mappilas, he did the required penance/purification to become a Brahmin again.70 This fact is omitted from MB Namboodiripad’s memoir; in fact, the memoir represents him as ready to “leave behind the sour-smelling brahminhood and start living as a free citizen” (MBN, 151). MB Namboodiripad’s narrative manoeuvres to unfold the events of the rebellion and his own life/self. But the narrativization of the self is intertwined with that of the nation. The nation as an imagined community not only endows him with subjectivity and narrative capability, but it also authorizes his narrative, making it legitimate. This may be a pointer to the absence of rebellion narratives by the Mappilas themselves, either by those who survived it or by those related to the insurgents. The Mappila community at large was held solely responsible for this lahala, and the disavowal by the Congress leaders and exaggerated reports about Mappila violence fixed them as “fanatics.” The Mappilas, burdened with a miserable socio-economic situation, imaged as guilty of fomenting strife before the people of India, indeed of rending the nation apart, their notion of community collapsed into communality and viewed with suspicion, were hardly in a position to speak/narrate. There was

---

70 Who, according to The Muslim (of 8 September 1921), in “official arrogance and in most exasperating provocation,” “out-Dyered the much hated Dyer of Punjab” (Panikkar, 1989, 186-187).

no other logic which would vindicate them, especially during the Nehruvian period of national reconstruction. Indeed, the Mappilas could not, and perhaps even now cannot render their lives without endangering a unified nation. They, therefore, can be described as minus-subjects, to be translated into normal citizens, originally aberrant and, hence, never original/ordinary Indians.

What I have been trying to argue through the examination of this text is the narrative resolution of real conflicts. In the case of the Thrissur “riots,” the heavy stress on Hindu-Muslim unity is a blind to the stark exploitation of the Mappila peasantry and the marked imbalance in the agrarian structure. Police repression, postulated as the real reason for the lahala, is neutralized throughout the text: by insisting that the Khilafat workers were mainly disband soldiers of the first world war, reliving their lost glory (19-20)—they are even referred to as an “army” (26)—and by subtly insisting on the communal colour of the lahala (52). In fact, he asserts that the “Malabar lahala, in short, sowed the seed for the future riots of India” (59). Another narrative resolution involves the Congress betrayal of a movement it helped foster. The Congress is accused of adopting a step-motherly attitude to the insurgents (58), of “let-the-person-who-ate-salt-drink-water kind of approach” and not “raising even a small finger against the atrocities” (68). This is counter-balanced by MB Namboodiripad’s sincere, but futile, attempts to contain the rebellion (69-78), the plot to trap him, and the sufferings he underwent in the prisons (85-115; 129-139). The betrayal of MB Namboodiripad by a Mappila (a policeman whose family were, according to MB Namboodiripad, the real instigators of the lahala) is symbolically equated with the betrayal of the mass movement by the Congress.

In the case of the Mappila revolts, unlike in Chauri Chaura, the rebels were never reclaimed and renamed as martyrs of the independence struggle, making one wonder what role religion had played in this. Gandhi, in a letter dated 3 March 1922, to Konda Venkatappayya, expresses his late
realization: “I can still distinguish between Malabar and Gorakhpur [Chauri Chaura]. The Moplahs themselves had not been touched by the non-co-operation spirit. They are not like the other Indians nor even like the other Mussulmans . . . The Moplah revolt was so different in kind that it did not affect other parts of India, whereas Gorakhpur was typical, and therefore, if we had not taken energetic steps, the infection might easily have spread to other parts of India.”\textsuperscript{71} While the peasant violence at Chauri Chaura is redeemable, the 1921 Malabar rebellion cannot be. What is the difference evoked by Gandhi here, if not the difference of Islam? The casual conjunction of “other Indians” and “other Mussulmans” in Gandhi’s comment underlines this point: Indians and Muslims are separate, if not contradictory, categories. Ironically, what Gandhi had hoped to achieve by his alliance with Muslims was “a three-fold end—to obtain justice in the face of odds with the method of satyagraha . . . to secure Mahomedan friendship for the Hindus and thereby internal peace also, and last but not least to transform ill-will into affection for the British and their constitution.”\textsuperscript{72} What was achieved was the determination of Islam as a common denominator that symbolized an irreducible difference, an indivisible remainder outside the destiny of the Indian nation.

\textbf{III}

Colonial and nationalist/Marxist representations of the struggles of the peasant Mappilas have been mostly configured in a religious idiom, a move that involves a two-fold reduction: a reduction to religion as well as a reduction of religion. It is in this context that peasant insurgencies have often been represented as merely religious, or, to use the right term in this case, “fanatical.” The category “religion” in the liberal humanist framework is assigned to the private domain. For the national elite, the radical separation of religion and politics in part

\textsuperscript{71} MK Gandhi, \textit{Collected Works}, vol. 23. 3; emphases added.
mediated a passage into the secular modern. The entry of religion into the public domain was designated, indeed decried as "communalism." Therefore, events such as the Malabar rebellion cast as "fanatical" by the colonial administration had an after-life in nationalist thinking, governed as it was with the appellation "communal," justifying the intensity of efforts to sanitize (clean as well as cure) the "fanatical zone" by the shuddhi or purification initiatives. This is relevant because most of the accounts of the Malabar rebellion, like various memoirs, were written after independence that coincided with the "partition" of the subcontinent. The result of this attempt at a neat separation of religion from politics is that many local struggles are represented as "misguided." This "reduction-to-religion" has helped to consolidate the idea that the Mappila revolts were purely "fanatical." What the Mappila revolts and rebellion shows us is that religion is better understood historically as an integral part of a community's whole life. It cannot be separated from the political. Such a dynamic conception of religion necessitates a re-reading of peasant revolts in order to re-configure their agenda and agency.

Our norms define the "fanatic": a person who is excessively, insanely, religious; s/he needs to be controlled. The "fanatic" looks backward to the "heathen," or the "pagan," the one who believes in a different and "primitive" religion; s/he has to be educated. The figure of the "fanatic" also looks forward to the "fundamentalist" or the "terrorist"; s/he can only be confined or killed. The "fanatic," the "fundamentalist" and the "terrorist" constantly appear in contemporary discourses representing attitudes that have to be condemned outright. However, though according to consensus "fanaticism" is abnormal, for it exceeds the norm, it also, in turn, haunts the "normal" in that it also exposes the pretences of the "normal" and the "secular," by proving the ardent belief in religion professed by the "normal-secular" as subterfuge. The "secular" is the

---

73 Gail Minault takes note that the "new Shuddhi effort, however, was directly inspired by the Mappilla rebellion and renewed communal tensions, and the Muslims—especially the ulama—were alarmed," leading to the Tabligh initiative, The Khilafat Movement, 193.
normalized Indian (read “Hindu”). Its binary opposite, “fundamentalism,” the rationale of “fanaticism,” is the excess of the “secular.” Examining the figure of the “fanatic,” as it evolved through colonial procedures and continues to “live” in nationalist discourses is, hence, an essential exercise.

According to Logan, from 1834 onwards, “the administration [in Malabar] entered upon a period of disturbance, which unhappily continues down to the present time. The origin and causes of this are of so much importance,” that Logan proposes to treat the subject “with a view not only to exhibit the difficulties with which the District Officers had to deal, but to elucidate the causes from which such difficulties have sprung” (554). After about 40 pages summarizing various “outbreaks, Logan marks his disagreement with Strange’s repressive measures which were also “a departure from the policy of wise and just neutrality in all matters of religion” (572). Logan advocates measures by which fanaticism can be administered out of existence. “Fanaticism . . . flourishes only upon sterile soil. When the people are poor and discontented, it flourishes apace like other crimes of violence” (594). With increased security by the means of settled homelands and an assured income, Logan foretells, “fanaticism would die a natural death.” Logan underlines the importance of measures to ameliorate the economic condition of the peasants by stating that he disagrees with others who advocate education as the primary strategy. Logan astutely observes that “starving people are not easily taught, and, if taught, it would only lead to their adopting more effectual measures to obtain for themselves that security and comfort in their homesteads which it would be much wiser to grant at once” (594). What emerges from Logan’s formulation of “fanaticism,” is a sympathetic understanding of the economic hardships of Mappilas that remains a stumbling block in the progress of colonization and accumulation of capital.
Citing himself, Logan writes:

Mr Logan finally formed the opinion that Mappila outrages were designed “to counteract the overwhelming influence, when backed by the British courts, of the \textit{janmis} in the exercise of the novel powers of ouster and of rent raising conferred upon them. A \textit{janmi} who, through courts, evicted, whether fraudulently or otherwise, a substantial tenant, was deemed to have merited death, and it was considered a religious virtue, not a fault, to have killed such a man, and to have afterwards died in arms fighting against an infidel Government which sanctioned such injustice.” (584)

Logan’s imperatives are clearly laid out. His concern, after Strange’s repressive measures against “fanaticism” met with failure, is with laying the foundations for “civilizing” procedures. It is almost as if “fanaticism” exemplified in the “outbreaks,” has become generic. The repetition of “outbreaks” and the religious sanction accorded to them calls for a nomenclature with which “to order the manifold.” As Derrida has noted, what constitutes a genre is the repetition and reiteration of a distinctive trait with itself (64). The figure of the “fanatic,” as if in accordance, emerges in Logan’s “teleological ordering of history” (Derrida, 61). “Fanaticism” is the only “identifiable recurrence of a common trait” (Derrida, 63) in “outbreaks” as diverse as those caused by economic hardships, mere criminality and madness. The slippage between “outbreaks” with material justification and those without are brought out when Logan in his own voice notes: “While Pulikkal Raman was cleaning his teeth . . . on 31\textsuperscript{st} October 1883, Asaritodi Moidin Kutti . . . attacked him from behind with a sword. . . . Raman fled pursued by Moidin Kutti, who held the sword in one hand and a book in the other” (584). Moidin Kutti used “unintelligible expressions as he ran. After dancing about on a rock for sometime, brandishing his sword and striking the back of his neck with it . . . on the intervention of his brother [and
another Mappila, he threw the sword and book down and surrendered. He was afterwards tried and acquitted on the grounds of insanity" (585). “A Hindu . . . [K Raman] who had several years previously embraced and subsequently renounced Islam . . . was waylaid and attacked in a most savage manner by two Mappillas. . . . [He managed to escape and later] denounced . . . the men [responsible]. These men had intended to run the usual fanatical course, but their courage failed them at the last moment and they were in due course arrested, brought to trial [and transported for life]. Three other persons were also deported in connection with this case. . . . The Acting District Magistrate . . . proposed to fine [the village to the tune] of Rs. 15,000, [later reduced to Rs. 5000 because of the poverty of Mappilas] of which he proposed to assign a sum of Rs. 1000 to K Raman as compensation for his wounds” (585). The award of money to the apostate “rankled in the minds of the Mappilas generally [since] they held the perverted view that an apostate should suffer death” (586). It is as if the “fanatic” born at the moment of History exceeds its norm, and becomes its remainder. Following Derrida, “fanaticism” in Logan’s history of Malabar is also an instance of “the excess of genre in relation to itself” (61) in that at the moment of ordering, “lodged within the heart of the law itself [is] a law of impurity or a principle of contamination” (57). It is at such moments that the law of the genre (Derrida would add, the genre of the law) becomes problematic in Logan’s text, and its sources are those moments when the categories of “race” and “caste” become unviable.

One of the crucial nodes in Logan’s text is the confusion in his historical resources as to whether the Mappilas are a race or a caste. At times referred to as a race and at other times as a caste, this “mixed race” seems to combine the worst of Islam and India. Such confusion is all the more important in the light of Logan’s grasp of economic hardships on the one hand and his constant designation of “fanaticism” to Mappilas (sometimes, as many as six times on a given page, as in

---

and his description of their protests as “outrages” on the other. While Logan understands and respects “Arab” settlers and Hindu inhabitants, the mix of races and castes as embodied by Mappilas presents a methodological problem which arises because community formations do regroup, as is evident in the spate of conversions of the time. The Mappila as a sub-genre seems to exceed the law of genre itself. Faced with the incessant, insistent and inexplicable acts of rebellion that threaten his norms and terms of reference, Logan nonchalantly ignores all that opens inside out his ideas of civilization and progress. His proposals to the colonial authorities underline the need to provide material conditions in order to facilitate the processes of humanizing Mappilas, so that they can be assigned their appropriate role in the procedure of progress. As against Strange’s idea of ruling the Mappilas out, Logan recognizes that Mappilas have to be reconstituted as individuals, so that they can be ruled as subjects of History.

“The Mappilas of the interior Malabar have always been a troublesome and dubious description of subjects” (Panikkar, 1990, 92) wrote HV Conolly to the Chief Secretary to the British Government on 30 April 1841. Most of the records emphasize the religious fervour and excitability of the Mappilas, especially at the time of the yearly fasts. Their desire for death and martyrdom, their ignorance, criminality, blind faith in rumours and rituals, their inability to comprehend the virtues of non-violence and the politics of the national movement, their lack of patriotism, their hatred of Hindus, their proneness to believe what their religious priests “wrongly” interpret for them, their readiness to murder or attack another without any provocation or cause, the ease with which they can be incited and often made tools in the local power struggles of which they have no inkling—all these make up the Mappila “fanatic.” It is not that all these contribute and determine a “fanatic,” on the other hand, the concept “fanatic” determines the attributes. In a pre-capitalist society, the form of allegiance would be communal (read “communitarian”), and individual identities derive from membership in the community. A
well-fed Mappila would be a more amenable subject and perhaps the processes of individuation and subjectification can replace “fanaticism” which denotes a pre-political “communal” mode of subaltern consciousness. The very term “subject” has two meanings: subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Foucault reminds us that “[b]oth meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 1982, 212). The notion of “subject” is linked to a particular notion of the individual who serves the nation-state. Hence, the very epithet “fanatic” denotes that it has its logic and life as resistance to processes of secular modern nation formation. It tries to conserve and contain the “excesses” of the Mappila subject and turns the insurgent into a criminal, or, worse, into a fanatic. In fact, it names its own lack the excesses of the subaltern. The making of the Mappila “fanatic” is also a marking of the Muslim body so as to locate the rupture outside the liberal ideology that sustains colonialism/nationalism. Under the sweep of this appellative is hidden the stark contradictions within the colonialis/nationalist project, which pretend to be the ideal civilizing force in the expansion of world capital. The notion that there is a certain space provided for rightful dissent within the state apparatuses of power, that in our struggle for freedom we should never resort to violence, that we should engage in pressure politics, that, in fact, politics is the fight between equal adversaries who respect each other, that religion should belong to the private sphere and should be kept separate from the public sphere of politics—all these notions partake in the construction of the fanatic. Guha states that

in a pre-capitalist culture, prior to the emergence of any clear distinction between the sacred and the secular in the affairs of the state, politics, one would have thought, was so thoroughly mingled with religion as to permit of no categorical separation between the two. (1989, 302)75

Hence, unable to accept or understand or grasping only too well, the idiom of the subaltern who
revolts at an immediate as well as at a symbolic level, the colonialist is left with no choice, and
has to "name" the act "fanaticism" in order to explain away the act as well as to disavow any
responsibility for it. Thus, both the colonialist and the nationalist agree that the rebellions of the
subalterns can be checked by properly educating them, though several instances show that direct
control or suppression almost always displaces ideological control.

The figure of the "fanatic" has its after-life in nationalist discourses. The view of religion as a
factor that should be transcended continues to colour the nationalist writings on the Malabar
rebellion. Moreover, nationalist, even Marxist, representations of the Malabar rebellion offer
perspectives that are surprisingly complicit with the colonial ideology being underwritten by the
same liberal paradigm. I examined, in previous sections, texts written after the large scale
uprising of 1921-22, in order to illustrate the manner in which representations of the uprisings by
the colonial administration colour and curtail later nationalist and other interpretations of
subsequent events. In this context, Gandhi’s reading of the Malabar rebellion is a useful point to
begin an analysis of nationalist ideology. At the helm of Congress, when news of the rebellion
first reached him, Gandhi wrote: “our Moplah brethren” “undisciplined . . . all these years,” have
now “gone mad.”

Gandhi “reflecting in his own speech the discourse of public order,” as
Pandey has remarked, can only exclaim: “All that [the Mappilas] know is fighting. They are our
ignorant brethren. The Government of course has done nothing to reform them but neither have
we done anything.” Gandhi’s rhetoric re-lives the stereotypical character-construct of the
Muslim:

76 MK Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 21, 120; emphasis added.
77 Gyanendra Pandey, “The Prose of Otherness,” Subaltern Studies VIII, eds. David Arnold and David Hardiman
The Moplahs are Muslims. They have Arab blood in their veins. It is said that their forefathers came from Arabia many years ago and settled in Malabar. They are of a fiery temperament, and are said to be easily excitable. They are enraged and resort to violence in a matter of seconds. They have been responsible for many murders. . . . They always set out for fighting with a pledge not to return defeated. . . . It is not clear as yet what led to their present outburst.78

"The Moplahs are Muslims": is this informative or indictive? The adjectives and statements which follow, "fiery," "excitable," "enraged," "resort to violence in a matter of seconds," "responsible for many murders," "fighting with a pledge not to return" merely reiterate those of the colonial administration. Gandhi who had been to Malabar in August 1920 as part of his mobilization drive for Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements had pressed the Mappilas to resist the rule of the British Government, pointing out that it had wounded the sentiments of Muslims all over the world over the Turkish question. The speech by this "semi-lunatic" (as Gandhi was described by the police, cited in Panikkar, 1989, 125) was attended by about 20,000 people, of whom a large number were Mappilas. Shaukat Ali, who had accompanied Gandhi, exhorted his Malabar audience:

If you are strong and capable then it is your bounden duty, so long as one Musalman breathes, to fight the unjust king, the unjust government that proved to be an enemy to your faith and to your God. If you are weak and could not cope physically with your opponents then it is incumbent for you to go, migrate, to another country and leave that unjust kingdom and that unjust tyrant and king. (cited, Panikkar, 1989, 125)

Though there are isolated voices that speak of police repression or of the dream of a Khilafat Raj as principle causes for the massive outbreak, nationalists at that time tended to view the uprisings as nationalism driven into the communal channel. Gandhi’s remark: “It is not clear yet what led to their present outburst” underlines the essentialized “communality” thrust on the Mappila peasantry. What could be more symptomatic and disturbing than the readiness to judge the Mappilas without even bothering to find out “what led to their present outburst”! Gandhi, much like Conolly, frames the “present outbreak” as another event in a series, and “Muslimness” seems to be sufficient explanation for their action. Gandhi interprets the Malabar rebellion as a blow against nationalist aspirations and justifies the repression of the rebel-population:

Thus, for the time being progress has been arrested in Malabar and the Government has had its way. It is well versed in the art of suppressing such revolts. Many innocent men must have been, and more will be, killed. Who will come forward to blame the Government? And even if anyone does, what is the chance of the Government paying attention to him?

That is a Government which prevents or stops violence. . . . A Government to be worthy of its name should be able to get the people under control. 79

Yakub Hasan, a Congressman active and arrested during the 1921 rebellion, wrote to Gandhi from Malabar to inform him that:

Moplahs as a class have always been poor. . . . The oppression of the Jenmies [landlords] is a matter of notoriety and a long-standing grievance of the Moplahs that has never been redressed by means of legislation. . . . Something has to be done and immediately if the Moplah community is to be saved from moral, even physical, destruction. In spite of all his faults and shortcomings, the Moplah is a fine man. He has the bravery, the pluck and the
grit of his Arab father, and the gentleness and the industry of his Nair mother. His religious zeal is more misunderstood than appreciated. He is as a rule peaceful, but he brooks no affront to his honour or religion. Unfortunate circumstances, the causes of which I need not enter into on this occasion, forced him into the position of a rebel. He has done what anyone, Hindu, Muslim or Christian, under the same circumstances and in the same emergency, would have done in self-defence and self-interest. He has suffered the consequence of his deeds. Should the society also visit his sins on his wife and children?

Yakub Hasan's letter and Gandhi's response were published in Young India (dated, 1-5-1924) where Gandhi pointedly picks on Yakub Hasan's "sweeping assertion" that anybody else would have done the same and comments that "We may not remember against posterity the sins of its forefathers. The Moplahs sinned against God and have suffered grievously for it. Let the Hindus also remember that they have not allowed the opportunity of revenge to pass by." In a letter written to Congressman U Gopala Menon, in the context of the newspaper Naveena Keralam, Gandhi comments: "How to reach the Moplahs as also the class of Hindus whom you would want to reach through your newspaper is more than I can say, but I know that Hindus should cease to be cowardly. The Moplahs should cease to be cruel. In other words, each party should become truly religious." Moreover, elsewhere, he writes that

A verbal disapproval by the Mussulmans of Moplah madness is no test of Mussulman friendship. The Mussulman must naturally feel the shame and humiliation of the Moplah conduct about forcible conversions and looting.

---

82 MK Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 23, 81-82.
and they must work away *so silently and effectively* that such things might become impossible even on the part of the most fanatical among them.\(^{63}\)

Apart from the contradiction between the secular and communal idioms whereby being truly religious is being secular despite his own political use of religious rhetoric and symbolism, Gandhi is also completely taken over by the notion of a non-violent, even sacred, struggle for independence, eliding over the fact that non-violence is only a strategy worked out for a particular purpose. He condemns violence in absolute pietistic terms. There was an outright ruling out of any other alternative mode of struggle, and, later, this approach ensured a categorical writing out of local struggles that did not fit into this devised Indian history. In Guha’s schema, Gandhi employs the idiom of “Rightful Dissent and Dharmic Protest” which were then in currency among the nationalists and interprets all other modes of protest as aberrations where the people have to be “educated, civilized” and led on to the right path (Guha, 1989, 265).

The case of Marxist historiography has not been, in the larger context, very different. Put schematically, instead of a theory of “fanatic” causation, the Marxist version assumes that the economic grievances are *the* major determining factor. For instance, EMS Namboodiripad underlines the difference between the peasant and elite classes and notes that for the peasants “anti-imperialism was not . . . (as it was for the feudal classes) a mere national sentiment but a question of daily life.”\(^ {64}\) Hence, “spontaneous peasant actions . . . started developing in Malabar” (90). However, the national leadership, working with an “anti-democratic ‘theory’ that the exploiters are the ‘trustees’ of the exploited, as well as the ‘theory’ that the masses have no moral right to offer militant resistance to the exploiter and oppressor,” came to a clash with the

\(^{63}\) MK Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 21, 321; emphases added.

\(^{64}\) EMS Namboodiripad, *Kerala Society and Politics*, 89-90.
Mappila peasants who “were unlike the leadership, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal in the real and full sense of the term” (113). The Mappilas, organized by their local middle leadership, for real militant action, were thus successful in establishing “a real people’s government in the areas controlled by them; and the skilful use made of the terrain of South Malabar for guerrilla tactics showed that the Moplah peasants, when roused to action, were resourceful enough to devise ways and means of fighting an enemy superior in every respect except in that of people’s support” (114). However, instead of learning the art of revolutionary resistance from the peasantry, the national bourgeois leadership “abandoned the vanguard to the tender mercies of the British troops. Had it not been for this disgraceful betrayal by the leadership at the crucial moment, the history of the glorious rebellion of 1921 would have been different” (114).

Nonetheless,

at a subsequent stage of the movement, ie., at the stage when British troops had started their depredations and when British rulers and their Hindu stooges had spread the canard of Muslim fanaticism being the source of the militancy of the peasants, the movement acquired a communal colour. (114)

Though arguing that the 1921 rebellion was not a communal riot (“Two thousand five hundred forced conversions in an area of four lakh Hindus is very low indeed, if it was a communal riot,” 118-119), EMS Namboodiripad⁸⁵ hastily notes that he “does not mean that religious fanaticism was absent in the rebellion,” for “fanaticism . . . was simply a by-product of the rebellion” since the “intensely religious, extremely uneducated and highly organized community of Moplahs should contain a few fanatics who took it into their heads that every ‘kaffir’ killed or converted was a stepping stone on their path to heaven” (119). Moreover,

⁸⁵ Elsewhere, EMS Namboodiripad phrases it more pointedly. Explaining the meaning of the heading “summons and warning” for the statement issued by the Kerala Committee of the Communist Party on the 25th anniversary of the 1921 rebellion, he writes: “the summons given by the anti-imperial and anti-feudal emotions of the first stage of the rebellion; the warning against the communualism of the second stage,” my translation, from Malabar Kalapam: Oru Vilayaruthal (Thiruvananthapuram: Chitha Publishers, 1997) 17.
the helpless Hindus ... were sometimes forced to give information to the military regarding the ... rebels. This naturally created suspicion among the Moplahs who began to get furious against the Hindus. It was thus that the originally non-communal movement of a section of the common people was ultimately transformed into a communal Moplah rebellion. (120; emphasis added)

KN Panikkar, in his recent work, certainly presents a more complex picture. He attempts to weave together all the factors that influenced the rebellion in order not to be limited to a mono-causal interpretation. But he too keeps the categories of religion and politics neatly separated. He writes:

The mediation of religion played a dual role. On the one hand, it enabled the peasantry to act against oppression and, on the other, it negated their potential by circumscribing their vision to the pleasures of the other world. To the Mappila peasantry religion was at once an ideology of action as well as an opiate. (1989, 195)

The Marxist explanation is an interpretation from above, where the analyst knows what the category “religion” is and has the scale against which all resistances are to be measured. This view draws on the notion of the “pre-political peasant rebel” in order to analyze peasant insurgencies which are to a great extent influenced/informed by religious, ethnic, communal, or racial factors. Hobsbawm defines the pre-political people as those “who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world,” and “their movements are thus in many respects blind and groping, by the standards of modern times.”86 The term “pre-political” erases the socio-political from a historical analysis of local

struggles because they cannot be neatly characterized. All that is left is the task of bewailing religiosity and the lack of a "fully" developed class-consciousness. In this instance, their very methodological presupposition rules out the possibility of ever considering the peasant in any light other than that of "religiosity." My contention is that the religion of the peasant insurgent does not merely provide an "ideology which enabled discontent to be translated into action" (Panikkar, 1989, 199). Partha Chatterjee, distinguishing between elite nationalist and subaltern peasant politics has argued that they form two separate domains: the former is the domain of the formally organized political parties and associations, moving within the institutional processes of the bourgeois state forms introduced by colonial rule and seeking to use their representative powers over the mass of the people to replace the colonial state by a bourgeois nation-state, and the latter is the domain of peasant politics where beliefs and actions did not fit into the grid of "interests" and "aggregation of interests" that constituted the world of bourgeois representative politics.87

From the former domain, from the "above," so to speak, the peasant realm of politics "could appear only as a realm of spontaneity, which was of course nothing more than the acknowledgement that the specific determinants of the domain of peasant political activity remained incomprehensible from the standpoint of bourgeois politics" (159). Though elite nationalism depended on the mobilization of the peasant body for its anti-colonial drive, it distrusted the peasants for their supposed ignorance, and consciously monitored their participation, regarding them as a part of the nation but distancing them from its institutions (160). The changes wrought in each realm by the influence of the other needs to be examined in

a new light so that one is not rewritten in terms of the other. Religion is the crucial category that will figure in such an analysis. Unless a more dynamic understanding of religion is pressed into play, insurgencies will remain consistently analyzed either in terms of religious “fanaticism” or agrarian discontent. “Fanaticism,” and its rationale, “fundamentalism,” can be then re-interpreted so that they open up the issues involved instead of closing them for ever.

In colonial discourse, the concept of “fanaticism,” embodied in the “irrational frenzy” of the native, clearly worked to overwrite the stark exploitation of colonies in terms of a civilizing mission, to rationalize its administrative decisions and to justify the violence of colonial law enforcement. In the nationalist discourse, the “irrational fanatic” produced as the other of the secular national modern, served to define the boundaries of belonging, to prescribe the nation for the people. The contradictions ingrained in the very project of colonialism, where the notion of the ideal expansion of capital, its universalizing tendency, clashes against the real fact of colonialism, are highlighted by Guha in his essay “Dominance Without Hegemony and its Historiography.” Citing Marx, Guha writes that though “capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life,” and hence its “great civilizing influence,” Marx also suggests that “it is not about expansion alone, but about an expansion predicated firmly and inevitably on limitations capital can never overcome; not simply about a project powered by the possibility of infinite development, but a project predicated on the certainty of its failure to realize itself.”

Thus, colonialism becomes a stumbling block; it turns out to be that which disrupts the free flow of capital, and which promotes/prompts the destruction of the bourgeoisie. Guha contends that this "illusion about the power of capital" has "induced both the liberal-colonialist and the liberal-nationalist modes of writing about the raj to put their faith in the universalist pretensions of British capital" (Guha, 1989, 227). The normalization of this misrepresentation has trapped historiography in "an abstract universalism thanks to which it is unable to distinguish between the ideal of capital’s striving towards self-realization and the reality of its failure to do so" with the result that historiography has remained blind to the contradictions which gave colonialism its specific character in India. Being enmeshed in the liberal paradigm, liberal national historiography has remained an aporetic enterprise. What is required is to counter historiography predicated on "universalist assumptions of liberal ideology," which treat peasant uprisings as violent perturbations of law and order as in colonialist historiography or as subsuming or assimilating them under generalized rubrics such as "nationalism," "socialism," "freedom movement," etc. and then rule them out as always-already doomed by an inherent "fanaticism" or "communalism" as in nationalist historiography. The endeavour of the Subaltern Studies group has been to write the history of the subaltern in such a manner that the subaltern becomes the subject of history. Nonetheless, early formulations of the group exemplified in Chatterjee's distinction of the three modes of political power, viz. the communal, the feudal and the bourgeois assume a teleology whereby the communal mode of consciousness continues to be the domain of agrarian peasantry, anterior to the feudal and bourgeois. This would imply that with the emergence of the feudal and bourgeois modes of consciousness, the communal would necessarily vanish. As I have argued in this chapter, Islam presents a different picture. From the position of Islam, one could argue that the communal mode of consciousness can, in fact, exist in

---

postcolonial worlds alongside a bourgeois mode of power. In fact, it could be argued that the communal mode is a critique, especially so with Islam, which does not brook of a private/public division, of the bourgeois secular modern. It is this sense of community that, perhaps, enabled the Mappila insurgents to see connections between their local situation and the national, even global context.

The implication that a Subaltern Studies’ position might have for a reading of the Malabar rebellion emerges in David Arnold’s review article of Stephen Dale. Instead of drawing a distinction in studies of the Malabar revolts between colonial and nationalist/Marxist distinction, Arnold discusses the literature on the studies on these revolts in terms of a religious and an economic thematic. While, following Logan and EMS Namboodiripad, Dhanagare and Wood perceive the uprisings in an economic register, Dale, following Strange and Miller, seems to argue in favour of a theory of religious causation. Ridiculing both sides as the Tweedledees and Tweedledums, Arnold tries to read the Mappila uprisings in a peasant idiom from which a grammar of peasant consciousness may be worked out. In a way, such an understanding is central to my own analysis, though Arnold, examining the composition of the rebels as well as the role played by the religious leaders, concludes: “several aspects of the rebellion are expressive of a peasant, and not a peculiarly Islamic, mentality” (261). Arnold’s peasant mentality argument leaves unexplained why the large number of “lower” castes who did not espouse Islam remained immune to circumstances, a question posed by Dale in order to substantiate his religious causation theory. But Dale’s invocation of religion is also inadequate as an explanatory category for Mappila peasants; what is needed is an expansion of the scope of

---


91 The best example of such a peasant semantics is Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
such analyses. It is only an extension of analyses that can allow Mappila insurgency to be read in the context of Hindu caste hierarchy that might possibly account for the “silence” of the “lower” castes. Also significant is the factor of support lent to the insurgent Mappila peasants by the whole community, regardless of class, at large. Hence, Dale’s explanation, not accounting for the above, tends to produce the uprisings as “atavistic” and “tragically anachronistic.”\textsuperscript{92} rather than an index of a desire for a new socio-political order. It does not appear to be a productive mode of engagement with the revolts in that it erases the historicity of the events. Nor is Arnold’s argument that “religion was an intimate, even integral, part of translating Mappila discontent into action” (260) because it provided a “legitimizing ideology” or “a language of redemption, a crude egalitarianism, an antipathy to landlords and foreigners, a kind of institutionalized ‘inversion’ of the everyday world of the peasants” (263) fully satisfactory. I would argue that Islam, not read in absolute and essentialist terms, was the determining ideological factor because it provided a critique of secular modernity. That is why, as Arnold also notes, the \textit{thangals} (priests) may have been “pressed into preaching [revolt] by the intensity of the Mappilas’ own sense of injustice” (264) against British overlords and Hindu landlords. A small but significant shift in orientation and perspective, it seems, would allow peasant consciousness to be read as embodying or moving toward a critique of the secular modern because of, not despite, an engagement with the “communal.”

When the atmosphere was thick with rumours and reports of violence against Hindus, Variamkunnath Kunhamed Haji’s letter (from Pandalam Hill, dated 7 October 1921) published in \textit{The Hindu} (dated 18 October 1921) pointed out:

\textsuperscript{92} Dale, 179-180; elsewhere he puts it more vehemently when he writes that the 1921 rebellion had no organization and, coming after the 1857 revolt, was pre-historical, see, his translated article, “Political Awareness Shaped by Prejudices,” in the collection of Malayalam essays in \textit{Malabar Kalapam: Charitravum Prathyashasthavrnam [History and Ideology]} (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintah Weekly Publication, 1991) 69.
According to press reports from Malabar, Hindu-Muslim unity in Malabar has thoroughly ceased to exist. It appears that the report that Hindus are forcibly converted (by my men) is entirely untrue. Such conversions were done by government party and reserve policemen in mufti mingling themselves with the rebels (masquerading as rebels).

Moreover, because some Hindu brethren, aiding the military, handed over to the military innocent Moplahs who were hiding themselves from the military, a few Hindus have been put to some trouble. Besides, that Nambudiri, who is the cause of this rising, has also similarly suffered. Now, the chief military commander is causing the Hindus to evacuate from these taluks. Innocent women and children of Islam who have done nothing and possess nothing, are not permitted to leave the place.

The Hindus are compulsorily recruited for military service. Therefore several Hindus seek protection in my hill. Several Moplahs too have sought my protection.

For the last one month and a half, except for the seizure and punishment of the innocent, no purpose has been achieved.

Let all people in the world know. Let Mahatma Gandhi and the Maulana know it. If this letter is not seen published, I will ask for your explanation at one time.

(Panikkar, 1990, 417)

It is despite such efforts that “fanaticism” and religious hatred effected a systematic erasure of all other factors, especially the responsibility of the Congress and the tensions built up due to Gandhi’s “constant postponement of the day of attainment of Swaraj” (Panikkar, 1990, 420).

216
The factors that phrased the “fanatic” still animate the concept, and the prevalent consensus about a Muslim, presented in stereotypes and caricatures, is pre-determined by many such received notions. These representations reduce the options available for engaging (with) religion. Moreover, they impose an essentialized identity on a people, thus blurring the distinction between the religious and the racial, for “an identity over which [they] have no control” is no longer “communal.”93 The dream of a Khilafat Raj or a “Moplastan,” and its realization in Pakistan, has continued to traumatize the Indian national imaginary. “Secular nationalism itself . . . has become a kind of state ‘fundamentalism,’ a sort of self-legitimizing mode of coercion that ends up generating its own nemesis in the ‘communalism’ it demonizes” (Devji, 5). This burden is borne by the Muslim, who renders the nation as incomplete and ever beyond grasp, and who, in turn, symbolizes national frustration, anxiety and insecurity. The possibility that allegiance could be owed elsewhere is rationalized as irrationality; if it is represented as a rational political choice, the very foundations of the nation may crumble. The Muslim body is the site of a security-risk, being potentially “fanatical.” It is necessary, therefore, to break out from such convenient and simplified representations, whether it be of a single, “secular” nation which restricts our options and perspectives, or of a monolithic and monstrous entity called “Islam” which incites/inspires all Muslims to rally to its cry in danger to become martyrs.

93 Faisal Fatehali Devji. “Hindu/Muslim/Indian,” Public Culture 5.1 (Fall 1992) 11.