INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with several distinctive representations of a death. It is a death, which has been conceived in popular imagination as both a sacrifice and a martyrdom. The person thus represented, K C Gopalakrishnan, was a schoolteacher and an activist of the Communist Party of India. He died on the First Republic Day of India, 26th January 1950, in a clash with the police. He had been leading a demonstration called 'Rally for the Rights of the Citizens' pauravakaasajatha, against the highhandedness of the police in the name of maintaining law and order, in Nattika Firka in the erstwhile district of Malabar in the presidency of Madras.

There is no proof or evidence according to Law to the end that he was killed by the police. There are eyewitnesses to his death, but none of any consequence to the Law of the land, that can establish a fact of custodial death or homicide. The people of his native place therefore deem it as a matter of self-esteem, that a person's life has been sacrificed for a cause dear to the whole Nation on the very day it became a Sovereign Republic. This unique historicity gives it a cultural dimension, that allows for our primary hypothesis in the study; the hypothesis that, death as a total social phenomenon, has continued and continues to sustain its meaning even in the modern as opposed to archaic or primitive societies.

The concept of total social phenomenon was derived by the French Social Anthropologist, Marcel Mauss from a survey of ethnographies of the culture of the 'primitive people'. According to Mauss, in the “total social phenomena, as we propose to call them, all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral and economic. In addition, the phenomena have their aesthetic aspect and they reveal morphological types” (Mauss, 1970:1). The concept as such assumes the primacy of the social in all forms of thought.

We may consider as an instance the types of facts of death caused by the individual intuitively on himself following a violation of a taboo - for example the eating of a
totem animal amongst the Wakelbura tribe of Australia - described by Mauss (1979:35-47). Such deaths seek expiation from the sin through the slow pining away to death of the individual in these societies. It is acting against the instinct of self-preservation that the individual in the examples of these types, invite death upon themselves. The collective idea of death becomes the bedrock of his/her slow progress towards total self-consumption as opposed to the instinct of total self-preservation of the enlightened modern rational man. Mauss indicates in a vein of self-criticism, how the culture that he represents, is prone to see these facts as cases of collective or individual hysteria; with the afflicted as country bumpkins to be treated in hospitals (ibid:54). For the culture that Mauss represents, these facts have “constituted the matrix from which our moral strength has slowly disengaged itself” (ibid:54). Here, he links it up with the concept of *homo duplex* introduced by Durkheim (1952), in his study of suicide. The *homo duplex* in Mauss’ explanation, refers to the dualistic nature of the human personality- “sensible of our persons and resistant of the collectivity” (Mauss, 1979:54). Truly enough as Mauss claims, his idea is to extend the theory of anomie suicide, that Durkheim expounded (ibid:54).

So, the reason here to treat the death of Gopalakrishnan as a total social phenomenon, is to show how modern society (ies) is in itself capable of ‘generative violence’(Girard, 1988:269-73). Such a death(s) helps assume a totality in the face of ‘dissociation’ (Durkheim, 1952), begotten by the modern society, with regard to instances of individual death that resemble anomie death (not necessarily suicide; but, all instances of violent or accidental and unnatural deaths that fall outside the conventional praxis of morality and religion in a society). In the process, however such instances of death are transformed by their act of generative violence into the foundation for the formation of a new cult; if not, a new religion. Robert Hertz (1960) also shed light on the comprehensive totality with which a society treats death. Every death is more than merely the loss of an individual life. It is a time for the members of the society to renew structural arrangements and to renew communal ties. There is a process of mental disintegration followed by synthesis, behind all funerary rites and “it
is only when this process is completed that society, its peace recovered, can triumph over death" (Hertz, 1960:86).

Thus, total social phenomenon, as such reflects not just any singular aspect of the society, but, its various aspects, such as legal, political, economic and aesthetic all at once. It thus forms a nutshell of the existing social relationships of the society (Mauss, 1970:1).

In the course of the ethnography, methodologically we have empirically interpreted the concept. But, the first phase of stating the problematic evolved after the first round of field study. This was the classification of the narratives into the binaries of sacrifice and martyrdom, borrowing from the structuralist paradigm of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who had always recorded his debt to Marcel Mauss.

In their collective imagination of his death the community of the Nattika firka represented the past in terms of two theories of how Gopalakrishnan must have died. One theory looks at him as martyr, as a person who willingly laid down his life for the sake of certain values that he considered ideal. Another theory looks at him as a victim that was chosen to be sacrificed for certain values or ideals that are bound by tradition to be sacred or ideal. A martyr is a significant ideal of progress, growth and ambition, whereas a victim is the opposite of all these— he / it is the ‘accursed share’ offered to the divinities as a sign of surplus, prosperity and well-being (Bataille, 1991).

To begin with, let us consider the practice of sacrifice in the various religions of the world. Among the religions of the ‘primitive’, Sir James Frazer (1932) cites examples from the Sioux tribes of the American Northwest and the Konds of India who are reported to have practiced human sacrifice. Frazer treats them as part of agrarian rites, performed in order to propitiate the Earth Goddess for good harvest. The victim was treated with special reverence and deference before the sacrifice. The body of the victim after he/she was slain was partly devoured by the priest and the sacrificing community or group and then buried in the fields at various places in a just distribution amongst the families or clans participating in the sacrifice. Amongst the Konds, the victims were called the Meriahs and were bought, patronized and kept
within the tribe for the exclusive intention of sacrificing for the earth Goddess. The blood of the victim when mixed with Earth was believed to deepen the red in the colour of the turmeric cropped, which basically meant a healthy crop (ibid: 434-438).

The sacrificial victim may be treated here as, either inhering the spirit of the divinity to whom he/she is sacrificed, or the spirit of the crop to ensure whose fertility the sacrifice is made. Frazer concludes from the ethnographic details at his disposal it is difficult to conclude what the true nature of the sacrifices is.

In this regard taking a look at the way ancient scriptural religions have treated the theme of sacrifice can be fruitful.

Ananda Coomaraswamy holds sacrifice to be the central principle of diversification from the cosmic union, that existed in "the beginning", according to the Vedas. This "beginning" is the apocryphal beginning common to all religions. "In this eternal beginning there is only the supreme identity of "that one" (tad ekam) , without differentiation of being from non-being, light from darkness or separation of sky from earth "(Coomaraswamy, 1975: 6). The indivisible one may be embodied in the Person, Progenitor, Mountain, Tree, Dragon or the endless serpent. The One has to be sacrificed to make way for the many. And so is born the dragon-slayer to supplant the Father and take possession of his kingdom. The Gods impose passion upon the Dragon, the Person, the Father or the indivisible one or he chooses it voluntarily, to be the sacrificial victim. The sacrificer and the victim are of one mind behind the scenes, but the Dragon Father- "He is Death, on whom life depends" (ibid: 7).

The implication of the victim is more than mere implication. It is actually his complicity in the sacrifice. Therefore, the agreement of the victim is uppermost in sacrifice. According to Vedic sacrifice thus, "in the first case, the deity is multiply born in living beings, in the second they are reborn in him" (ibid: 9). The humanity thus born, dismembers itself daily through the forms of its knowledge, or rather ignorance, from which the only expiation is provided for in sacrifice. Even though the victim's will is complicit to the sacrifice, it is nonetheless an act of cruelty and even
treachery; and this is the original sin of Gods in which all men participate by their separate existence and forms of knowledge based on good and evil, subject and object.

In sharp contrast is sacrifice, in monotheistic religions where the God demands the sacrifice from his followers and is deemed the act of investiture of responsibility/ethics on the sacrificer. Implicit is also an act of differentiation of Being, spawning from the gaze of the infinite Other or God; seeing everything without being seen (Derrida, 1995). In that, sacrifice provides the expiatory ritual for the differentiated existence of human lives, there is a striking resemblance between the Vedic and Semitic religions. Still, as regards the choice of a victim, the story of Abraham, gives room to intense emotional ambivalence, till finally his victim, his son Isaac, is substituted with a goat by God. This ambivalence has provided for a symbolism that expresses a closure of responsibility in the story, a closure that cannot be communicated or expressed through the character of Abraham. Derrida quoting Kierkegaard says, on the sacrifice of Abraham that, time and again, he (Kierkegaard), admits that he does not understand Abraham nor deems himself capable of doing what he (Abraham) did (ibid:80). This symbolism is imagined within a secret that is apart from the discourse of sameness or homogeneity of the quotidian life. Derrida calls it, the "Jewish experience of a secret, hidden, separate, absent, or mysterious God, the one who decides, without revealing his reasons, to demand of Abraham that most cruel, impossible and untenable gesture: to offer his son Isaac as sacrifice. All that goes on in secret" (ibid: 58).

So what we have here are two distinct theories of sacrifice. Sacrifice succeeds the beginning in Judaism and exposes a crisis of responsibility reflected in the father figure of Abraham, which sacrifice is in fact the foundation of all creation in Hinduism. It must be reiterated that the symbolic rather than truth value of these representations is what is valuable for mythical analysis. In this context, the crisis of responsibility spawned by the Semitic idea of sacrifice, becomes an important point of our discussion in the thesis when discussing the nature of representation inherent to the fact of Gopalakrishnan's martyrdom in the Nattika firka. Its pertinence lay in the conflicts of representation and a crisis of responsibility in the light of the contention
of the political parties of the Left, who try to appropriate for their distinct ideologies the truth value of Gopalakrishnan's martyrdom.

For the time being, our point of departure is the study of certain phenomena that reveal in itself a totality of social relationships. In this regard we have already taken our cue from Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert the ethnologists of early twentieth century France. 'Sacrifice :Its Nature and Functions' (1898:1964) by Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert looks at sacrifice as one of the original and archaic forms of collective representation. The definite aspects of its (sacrifice's) portrayal of the Universe and the specific allocations of roles - both human and divine, sacred and profane - to its participants, makes it a conclusive theory of sacrifice. The act of sacrifice is located at the axis of a world that is divided between the sacred and the profane, any exchange between the two shall be ordained as and through sacrifice.

Hubert & Mauss' theory is general and comparative. Examples are drawn from all religions and all forms of sacrifice (human and otherwise, largely the 'soma' sacrifice of the Vedas) show how the various actors in the sacrifice are integrated through a unifying theme, characteristic of sacrifice.

Even prior to Mauss, Robertson Smith shed light on sacrifice drawing from the study of primitive religions. He found the clue to sacrifice in totemism. Robertson Smith saw in totemism not merely the religion of the primitives but also the early stages of the Arab and the Semitic family. Sacrifice was the renewal of a covenant;' the blood covenant' that bound the association of the clan together. According to him, it was a "common meal at which the devotees, by eating the totem, assimilated it to themselves, were assimilated to it and became allied with each other or with it" (Hubert&Mauss,1964: 5).

But, the totem animals were soon to be replaced by domestic animals and later when all kinship between men and animals had ceased to be understood by the Semites (a point raised also by Rodney Needham in his preface to Levi-Strauss' Totemism (1964:3), where he said that 'totemic illusion' arose due to the discontinuity between
man and nature that Christian thought held to be essential), human sacrifice replaced animal sacrifice (probably the stage of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac).

The sacrifice gradually took root as the gift-sacrifice of the domestic herder, making a gift to the God through his sacrifice. The shedding of blood, nonetheless attached a similarity between the rites of punishment (implying thus a system for justice) and sacrifice “that gave a punitive character to communions of piacular origin and transformed them into expiatory sacrifices” (Hubert & Mauss, 1964: 4).

Evans-Pritchard’s study of the religion of the Nuer gave us further insights into the nature of sacrifice, on the gift-sacrifice of the domestic herder that Robertson Smith and Mauss also wrote about. He threw light on the possibility of substitution for the sacrificed victim in bloody sacrifices, not without retaining its basic characteristics. Writing about the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1956), he showed us how the offerings of cucumber to God, can take the place of bloody sacrifice after they are consecrated. The sacrifices amongst the Nuer can be expiatory rites as well as rites of passage. Thus the expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice is made to absolve person(s) from sin or to avert a great danger or misfortune. A sacrifice indicating the rites of passage is done on occasions of initiation, marriage, death etc. reinforcing a sense of community. Evans-Pritchard classifies the former as personal sacrifice and the latter as collective sacrifice. This distinction may also be read as piacular and confirmatory. The Nuer sacrifice differs from agrarian sacrifice in that they do not intend to control variations in nature as in rainfall, sun, fertility of soil etc. Being cattle-herders, they are resigned to these variations in nature and sacrifice amongst them pertain to spiritual and moral crises. Yet, they retain the essential nature of sacrifice, in performing the two functions identified by Mauss and Hubert; that of prestations and justice (ibid: 197-286).

The expiatory character of sacrifice was identified again by Freud in his study of totemism. Sacrifice was a rite to mourn the act of the original sin of parricide in founding the savage community. Partaking of the meal or the body of the slain victim
was a communion binding the brothers in their faith of originally slaying their father (Freud, 1950: 140-46).

Mauss’ observations make significant progress in the understanding of sacrifice. To begin with, he posits the question of the nature of the victim, that reflects and inheres within it the vitality of a collective. It (the victim) mediates an exchange between the sacrificer—a community, individual or society—and God. The view that holds sacrifice as a communion ignores the vitality of the victim. The victim is necessarily destroyed at the altar of sacrifice. If, it is a goat that is sacrificed, then its throat is slit. Thus, it is totally different from charitable oblations of any kind. On the contrary, it is a Gift, a system of total prestations between the profane and the sacred, and hence transgresses the limits of any utilitarian notions of justice. “In the case of sacrifice, the religious energy released is stronger” (Hubert & Mauss, 1964: 12), which meant it had a function more than a dispensation of justice or a presence exceeding the *piaculum*.

At the same time, it does not amount to saying that there are no rites of communion associated with sacrifice. The same is true of expiatory rites. The point Mauss argues for looking at the classifications of sacrifice followed in the Hebraic and Vedic texts is that, “they are too diverse, yet too similar for it to be possible to divide them into overspecialized categories. They are all the same in essence and it is the same which constitutes their unity” (ibid: 18). It was fifty two years later, that in his work on ‘Gift’, Mauss put forth the idea of a system of total prestations, a form of exchanging material commodities, that is distinctly removed from any conception of an economic rationality, that premises all exchange in modern capitalist societies, and which assume the form of a contract. Mauss’ study of the notions of Gift and Sacrifice thus has to be placed in the realm of a critique of a utilitarian notion of exchange and a utilitarian notion of justice, respectively.

The analyses of the unity in the scheme of sacrifice, regardless of the rites they are expected to serve or the deity it was meant to propitiate, is a significant contribution that Hubert & Mauss make. The scheme as we shall see, is meant to be a phenomenon of totality that ensures the continuity of an exchange between the realms of the sacred
and the profane. Being based on the Vedic sacrifice of animals, this scheme may not be claimed as the general scheme for all the sacrifices. But, even with a shift in categories, all sacrifices essentially serve to make a profane participation in a sacred life. The sacred is here taken as the vital source of energy for life to sustain itself. Hence, following Mauss’ observations, it may be surmised that every community followed some rite of sacrifice or the other. These observations have been proficiently endorsed by Rene Girard as well (1988), to which we shall come in detail in chapter 5.

Now, let us see how best we can portray, sacrifice as a system of total prestations, wherein exchange is holistic and is more than merely material, but economic, political, and legal all at once. We are interested in such a portrayal, because at the stage of Hubert & Mauss’ initial formulation of the idea of Sacrifice, the concept of total prestation was yet to be formulated. This came only in Mauss’ work on Gift, which came several years later. Still, the Sacrifice as a system of total prestations, was already conceived in the work on Sacrifice. This may be noted, in a closer examination of the instance of the sacrifice of god, that is discussed in the work on sacrifice. Thus Gift and Sacrifice, profane and sacred, find a conceptual bed-rock, in ‘total social phenomenon’.

One of the commonest forms of sacrifice is the sacrifice of the God, that “has penetrated into the most recent religions and given rise to beliefs and practices still current” (Hubert & Mauss, 1964: 7). This is an agrarian rite in which there is a close affinity or better an identification between the victim and the God. Dionysus with Ram, Rudra with Bull, Adonis with Corn, Soma with Soma-the plant, Varuna with Barley etc. “like is offered to like and the victim is the food of the gods” (ibid: 91). Soma is represented as the archetype of heavenly ‘sacrificers’ in the Vedas. Soma the food of the gods, the intoxicating drink of men, is there in the sun, moon, the nourishing principle in nature etc. In soma as the victim all these forms are combined. They are concentrated, created and distributed anew by sacrifice. The sacrifice of Soma is the epitome of self-less sacrifice which is necessarily present in all sacrifices of God. The concept of God sacrificing himself is, “the highest expression and, as it were, the ideal limit of abnegation, in which no apportionment occurs ” (ibid: 101).In
God here is fused the entire meaning of sacrifice- all its actors and participants the sacrificer, the sacrifier (the priest) and the victim enter into each other and become mixed together. Such mixing, however, is possible only for mythical, that is ideal beings. The sacrifice of God, then is a most unique instance of collective representation, in that it fuses the idea of gift and sacrifice into one.

A study that has attempted the unification of the concepts of gift and sacrifice in ritual and myths, is ‘The Christians of Kerala’ (Visvanathan, 1993). In an analysis of the person of Christ, in the Eucharistic rites among the Syrian Christians of Kerala, the author points to the constitution of a god-figure in Christ through the collective notions of the gift and sacrifice.

The person of Christ is represented in the mythic consciousness of these Christians at two levels- the canonical and popular. The author argues along with Leach that it is the mark of a patriarchal society, that diminishes the role of Mary in myths. The author points out that this transformation in the role of Mary was effected through changes in the liturgy during the 18th century reformations in the Syrian Jacobite church, in Kerala. The mythic consciousness itself, that ordains the belief and lives of the lay Christians were thus affected through this transformation in the role of Mary. A diminishing of the role of Mary implies a diminishing of the person of Christ or Christ as a man and his passions.

It is the Eucharist that plays the role of a leveler in maneuvering the idea of God, through the person of Christ, thus making way for older traditions of the myth a longer lease of life. This it (the Eucharist) does by bringing in, the performative play of the ideas of gift and sacrifice into the life of Christ. The author says, “Gift and Sacrifice are inextricably interwoven: for as the birth of Christ was a gift, his sacrifice was also a gift” (Viswanathan, 1993:173). Following Bakhtin (1969), the author also analyses the function of popular festivals in relocating the Christ in his relationship to Mary, where as his Mother the biography of Christ is re-read in temporal terms.

In our review so far, on the theme of sacrifice, this is a crucial turn that we would propose. Along with the proposition that sacrifice is a collective representation, we
would add, that the sacrifice of God is a unique instance of collective representation, where in like the act of gift which, is an act of total prestation, all elements of the society- legal, political, economic, aesthetic- are present, all at once. In understanding the unity of the thought of Marcel Mauss, and his concept of total social phenomenon the example of the sacrifice of God plays a central role. In the explication of the death of Gopalakrishnan as a heroic victim, that is conceptualized in collective representation as a martyrdom or/and sacrifice, it is the same theme- sacrifice of God- that assumes the central role. This is because of the unique instance of symbolic fusion, far removed from the precincts of a utilitarian notion of justice and an economic rationality of accumulation, that it allows, as we proceed to see in chapters 4&5.

In a community that follows traditional religious and magical practices, notwithstanding its change of scene in politics -like the coming of democracy, or the declaration of the republic etc.,- the role and nature of collective representations can be cumbersome to understand. But, the prevalence of certain social facts can offer valuable clues in understanding the fused mixture of symbolism ordaining the spaces of the religious and the magical. In conceiving the death of Gopalakrishnan, as a total social phenomenon, we are grappling with the nature of collective representations in the context of such a community. The social fact that we are going to explore, retains its cultic form and the beliefs and practices that accrue from it.

One such study that tries to locate this rite in specific historic circumstances, is Felix Padel’s ‘the sacrifice of human being’ (2000), that deals with the encounter of the Konds of Orissa with the colonial regime of the British. More than an ethnological inquiry into the structure and conventions of this rite; Padel’s study is on colonial culture; the way it has imposed on the Konds of Orissa. The Konds, a tribe in Orissa are believed to have practiced human sacrifice to propitiate the earth before the sowing of the crop. It is claimed to have been brought to an end, by the colonizers on grounds of its ‘savagery’ or ‘barbarity’. Contrary to this, what Padel finds is that, “it is a practice that at least affirms that a human life is something sacred and of great value” (ibid: xiii). What outraged the colonizers was the blatant presence of violence, in the
conduct of the ritual. What they neglected in so doing was the kind of violence perpetrated by the Western forms of power and authority, which in imposing itself on people such as the Konds, with a ‘civilizing’ mission, “go beyond human sacrifice, sacrificing the essence of what it means to be human” (ibid:xiii). Padel thus posits, human sacrifice of the Konds against the ‘sacrifice of the human being’ itself, which is a much greater, yet less visible and much more indirect mode of violence’.

This was executed through a combination of forces – of the administrator, the colonist who has his eyes set upon the natural wealth and resources of the tribal environment, the missionary, who wants to save the ‘savages’ from themselves, and the anthropologist, who by producing a ‘scientific’ but dehumanizing discourse, undermines the people’s sense of who they are. In analyzing the role of the anthropologist, he is also analyzing himself, thus appreciating, the opportunity to learn the ‘mystery of being human’ that was offered through the study (ibid: xvii).

Padel’s study is an illuminating one, to the extent that he locates an ancient rite within the dynamics of its expropriation and extermination by the modern discourse of rationality and order. It shows us the various ways in which a holistic conception of a universe, a cosmos gets appropriated by a centralized, colonial power and order.

Nandini Sunder (1995), in a similar strain grapples with the colonial records of alleged human sacrifice in 19th century Bastar. This was the point when the British administration was struggling to make inroads into the thickly forested heartland of India. It was believed that, the human sacrifice was made to the Goddess Danteswari at the behest of the King. Therefore confronting the sacrifice became as much necessary for the British as winning over the authority from the Raja, which it successfully did, even suppressing a rebellion that broke out in 1876. The colonial administration, but, was not satisfied with that, and was determined to uproot the “barbarous” rite of sacrificing human beings to propitiate the Gods. But, even after successive depositions before the judiciary, the investigative officers of the administration could not find any conclusive evidence to the fact, that such a practice
really existed. It nevertheless led to the marking of the land in the colonial map and "the way had now been paved for the theft of land".

Nandini Sunder looks at an allegation of the rite of sacrifice and not its practice as such. Regarding the existence of the rite as such, there was no proof to determine whether it ever was, or if it continues to be. Sunder's analysis of the colonial reports go to show at least one event summarily, that of the removal of the Raja of Bastar from his throne in 1883, on allegations of giving orders to human sacrifice, even though such allegations could not be substantiated in a court of Law. The study shows us the incompatibility of thought, that were thrown up by the colonists, when their ideals of Christian self-sacrifice, encountered the 'barbarity' of human sacrifice.

Lawrence A. Babb (1998) discusses the role of sacrifice in a far more recent context of Indian society. His focus is on how sacrifice serves to create new social groups from the existing ones. The example of the trading community of Aggarwals in North India located around the areas mainly of Agra, Jaipur and Delhi, is discussed in this context. The rites of sacrifice among them, according to Babb, symbolize a rite of passage from the identity of being Kshatriyas to Vaisyas. Sacrifice also constitutes an integral dimension of the community's origin myth. The myth tells the story of the community's ancestor called King Agrasen who is immortalized through his vow of abjuring all acts of violence. Babb links the origin of three other trading communities—the Khandelwal Vaisyas, Khandelwal Jains and Maheswaris—from the same region, through similar vows to abjure violence and practice vegetarianism. The Khandelwal Vaisyas believe they were the descendants of Rsi Jamadagni who brought the carcass of a deer that he killed to the sacrificial site set up by the King of Khandela. The ascetic Durvasa who was officiating the sacrifice, was enraged at Jamadagni's act of defiling the site, and killed him. Later, upon the bequest of his wife, he was resurrected by Durvasa himself. But, he was no longer a Brahmin. The cult of non-vegetarianism and non-violence for these communities take roots from such mythical tales, that bespeak of an emotional ambiguity towards the act of violence as such, which is an integral part of all sacrifices (Girard, 1988). Though, unrelated to specific
historic circumstances, Babb's analysis does not fail to take note of the states of emotional ambiguity from where new social groups and new social identities emerge.

A study by Linda Isako Angst (2001), on the other hand point to the importance of specific historic circumstances, assume the shape of sacrifice, that help create sub-national identities. Angst explores one of the ways in which a community identifies with the image of a sacrificial victim in the process of engaging in a wider political discourse. In September, 1995, three U.S. service-men brutally gang-raped a twelve year old school girl, in the island of Okinawa, Japan. The service-men belonged to the occupying US Forces in Okinawa. The author analyses how the issue of rape was enlisted in the political discourse that followed, for its powerful symbolic potential: Okinawa as a sacrificed daughter. The essay imaginatively captures the portrayal of Okinawa's sub-nationalism within the periphery of Japanese nationalism, as a daughter who has been sold into prostitution. The mythical fusion of territory and nationality, through the use of the trope of sacrificial victim- or the sacred daughter-constituted the bulwark of Okinawa's identity ever since the World War, when it was that such an identity, first ever discovered. The *Himeyuri*(or Maiden Lily) Student Nurse Corps, is another prominent icon of modern Okinawan victimhood, says the author. In 1945, 219 of the *Himeyuri* who accompanied the Japanese soldiers in the War, were mostly killed, trapped between the U.S. and Japanese soldiers. The *Himeyuri* thus began the iconography of Okinawa within the larger context of Japanese nationalism as the sacrificial victim. The author points out how the rape of the school girl as a violation of one girl's body is equated to the violation of Okinawa's body-politic, in media representation. It signals a re-orientation of the rape from the private/personal to the public/political realm in political interpretation. The author argues that, when women are thus objectified into symbols, they are also compromised in their Human Rights. The construction of the homogenous identity of Okinawa as a sacrificial victim/prostituted daughter, does not serve to strategically voice the true individuality of the social group- Okinawa women- that such identity seeks to represent.
If, such are the theoretical contexts in which the concept of sacrifice finds its explication, the concept of martyrdom emerges as a total contrast to this. If, sacrifice, in all its facets, is bound by tradition and orthodoxy, martyrdom is "untethered by tradition" (Eliade, 1986, Vol. 9: 231). The Greek term from which the word martyr is etymologically derived means, "witness". As The Encyclopaedia of Religion says, "martyrdom, by placing ideology ahead of physical survival, affirms the priority of culture over nature and the group's life, law and civilization over biological self-interest" (ibid:233). Martyrdom is a progressive mark in crecive societies\(^1\), that are on their way towards becoming self-determining and towards social and cultural freedom. The Encyclopaedia cites as examples, the Irish Republican Army soldiers and the early Christian missionaries. Self-determining societies have achieved total political control over themselves and martyrs in such societies are active, guiding the society in its expansion, openly propagandizing, sending missionaries to the unconverted, and warring against adversaries. In a decaying society, martyrdom is latent. Adversary claims mere victims who affirm no ideology by their death. They are opposed as passive victims to sacred witnesses or as political pawns to proud martyrs (ibid.).

J.P.S. Uberoi's study of Sikhism (1996), essentially holds the same point of view. It throws light on the medieval Indian State, civil society and religion from the cauldron of which Sikhism emerged. Manochehr Dorraj's essay (1997) on Iranian political culture also looks at martyrdom in relation to the confluence of state, society and religion. He tries to locate the place ascribed to the Shi'ite cult of martyrdom in asserting the value of tradition in directing Iranian politics. Dorraj, citing Frend (1967) ascribes the tradition of martyrdom to the religions of Judaism and Christianity as well. Such tradition preaches that, only through examples of martyrdom can the believers prove themselves worthy servants of God. In this regard, we have found useful, Derrida's (1996) study of martyrdom in monotheistic religions (the Semitic trio of Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in the context of the martyrdom as the 'gift of death' or source of a 'phantasmic' political power that they jointly breed in their fight for the occupation of the holy site of Jerusalem which, in turn, has generated a

\(^1\) A cresive society is one that is weak, but on the rise (Klausner, 1998).
discourse on crisis of a responsible politics in contemporary West. The Marxist and Liberal critiques of an authoritarian State (discussed below), also assume their importance in this respect. The cult of martyrdom seeks to thrive on the memories of a kind of State reprisals of the Communists in the region, that no longer exists.

As such, the cult’s (martyrdom) ethnological roots lay in a concept of a heroism in the South Indian tradition pointed out by Susan Bailey (1989). Bailey’s book discusses, heroism as emerging from the war like power divinities, at the village level or lineage level, that in turn explains the martial roots of the warrior kingships that ruled most of South India, in pre-colonial times. A heroism open to severe challenges and is seen fighting oddities of nature and culture, in localized narratives of praise or hagiographies, often meeting with its end in violent conflicts and other mishaps. It is following such disastrous consequences in their lives, that many of them earn a divine visage, posthumously. The significant light in which Bailey examines them is that, it is around these divinities that cultural symbiosis began with Islam and Christianity, in South India. As the author says, “to a large extent the success of Muslim Sufi teachers and Christian missionaries in the region were to depend on their capacity to set up some kind of viable relations with these divinities” (ibid:69). The Teyyam (a performance ritual of Northern Kerala) deities, especially are of such a genre. This ritual is of great significance in understanding the ethnological roots of the martyrdom rites for Gopalakrishnan. Susan Bailey also discusses the local nature of the worship of these deities, which means how they have formed instruments of local organization and identification, through specific village or clan based rituals and hagiographies celebrating the heroics of the particular warrior, deity, demon or the king, all of which holds essentially the same position in terms of the power they wield, irrespective of a social demarcation of their roles as virtuous or vicious/ good or bad. These deities have to be propitiated irrespective of any of these considerations, because they represent the energies that activate and sustain the universe. Bailey cites the instance of an Englishman, who was also incorporated into this pantheon and who died valiantly fighting against the Marthanda Varma of Travancore in 1809. Offerings of
brandy and tobacco were made to this new deity, to appease his fiery tastes and appetites (ibid:34).

This is not an exhaustive or comprehensive review of either of the concepts-martyrdom or sacrifice. Our intention was to highlight certain aspects of these concepts that have been brought to academic notice, so that, it will help us in linking to the two concepts the etymology of which is ethnographically plotted in our study, and which in their dualistic interplay seek to constitute the totality of the social fact we have chosen for study. Not to mention that, such a dualism only forms merely one of the various strands of representation of this fact, though, it is the most dominant one.

In plotting the two theories, our focus of attention is a period of history, a tract of land called Nattika Firka, a village called Edathiruthy, a culture facing a bi-polarity in its change from colonialism to post-colonialism, slavery to independence and feudalism to democracy.

The two theories find a ritualistic expression on the martyrdom day commemorations of Gopalakrishnan popularly known as Sirdar Dinam or Sirdar Day. Gopalakrishnan, owing to his stint with the British India Air Force, as a fabric worker, during the days of World War II, was addressed ever since his return as Sirdar Gopalakrishnan. Sirdar is an Urdu word, meaning chieftain. The semantic context in which this title stands is discussed in chapter 2. The 26th of January every year is commemorated as his martyrdom day. The ritual of commemorating the martyrdom day on the 26th of January has virtually displaced the ritual of celebrating the birth of the Republic on the very day. The Republic Day is a celebration all over India. But, it is a day of mourning in Nattika Firka, even more so, in the village of Edathiruthy, the home village of Gopalakrishnan.

The rituals of celebration and the rituals of mourning provide contrasting ways of identifying with a larger political formation called the 'Sovereign, Secular, and Democratic Republic of India' born on that day. In understanding the celebration of the formation of the Republic as a ritual we are propounding the view of the
anthropologist Edmund Leach, who suggested that the term ritual should be applied to all “culturally defined sets of behaviour”, that is, to the symbolical dimension of human behaviour as such regardless of its explicit religious, social or other content (Leach, 1968: 524). The definition of ritual may be thus extended to scientific experimental procedures, for example. In our study, both the celebrations of the Republic Day and the commemoration of the Martyr’s Day fall under the definition of ritual. Yet, there, is a distinction in the two rituals. If, the celebrations of the Republic Day is a written-legalistic affirmation of the birth of a Sovereign Nation; the commemorations of Sirdar Dinam is an unwritten-excessive affirmation of death; the former is a positive affirmation of thought as absolute and sovereignty as Statehood; the latter is a negative affirmation of thought as nothingness and sovereignty as subjective; the former is the philosophic desire for the constitution of unity; while the latter is the path to its consummation, its annihilation.  

The ritual of mourning represents a stark, visual and spectacular originality in the larger framework of the rituals of celebration. A ritual is also a rite of passage between two distinct stages in the life of a community according to the ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep (1960). Here the two communities concerned are 1) the Nation of India and 2) the firka of Nattika. One is not exclusive of the other in their everyday existence within the political framework of the Indian Republic. But, on the 26th of January, the community of Nattika, in definite ritualistic dimensions demarcate one from the other. The Indian State on this day is an external agency, any representation of which is visually overcome through a spectacular exhibition of the red flag, of the Communist (the CPI, the CPM and the CPI (ML) who together through their separate and united demonstrations achieved this effect. 

The formation of this ‘communitas’ as Victor Turner addresses it (1986:84), amongst the people of Nattika, with the village of Edathiruthy (home to Gopalakrishnan)

\[2\] Julia Kristeva on Georges Bataille; in Botting and Wilson (ed.):1998: 13. The contrasting principles in this explication of sovereignty is the state and the subject. In order to help explain this contrast better, one may place it in the context of the criticism leveled against Hegel’s idea of the state by Bataille. If for Hegel, the state is the representative of the universal spirit, Bataille deconstructs such spirit and its absolute state and brings back the idea of sovereignty to the realm of subjectivity(Bataille,1993).
providing a tragic core to it – narrating Gopalakrishnan’s death like a tragedy of the satyr, Dionysiac God who challenges the Apollonine vision and attains to it, is a fundamental act, belief or faith in the ritual (Nietzsche, 1993). The breach of faith in the Indian Republic is subsequently redressed and the ‘communitas’ dissolved at the end of demonstrations, that are actually enactments of the original ‘social drama’ (Turner, 1986:94), that sacrificed the life of Gopalakrishnan. The ritual of commemorating his death ends by immortalizing him as the sacrificial victim or the martyr through eulogies and praises in the form of songs, speeches, stage plays and kathaprasangom.

This ritual marks its trace within popular consciousness through the twin representations of Gopalakrishnan’s death, caught between themselves in the form of a double helix. The helix thus represents the praxis from which several practices issue and multiply in meaning through different representations and different actors.

The formation of ritual as a realm which defined the hierarchy of power was one of the definite and distinctive aspects of the caste system as it was practiced in India (Dumont, 1972:112-123, Kolenda, 1981:250-59). The period that pertains to our study and the region of our focus establishes this fact substantially. The departure point for us in this study is the Marxist problematic of the base and the superstructures as interpreted by Levi-Strauss, in his definition of structuralism as a heuristic device to learn about the structures of the human mind. Structuralism focuses on how meaning is created in language through the operation of symbols derived from nature and culture. The theories of martyrdom and sacrifice are independent explanations of a concrete natural phenomenon; death. As specific representations of death, they form a "conceptual scheme by the operation of which matter and form neither with any independent existence are realized as structures, that is as entities which are both empirical and intelligible (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 130).

"Matter and Form" from the above quotation must be read as Indian social reality and Indian Constitution. This parenthesis is derived from a criticism of the Constitution

3 Oratory story telling- a traditional art form of South India
raised by B. R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly on 25th November 1949, a day before the adoption of the Constitution. "On the 26th January, 1950, we are going to enter a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. . . . . . . . . We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this assembly has so laboriously built up" (Kaviraj, 1975). The Constitution says Kaviraj, was more than a legal charter, and contained political and ideological corroboration in favour of a capitalist social structure (ibid.). It is in resolving this contradiction or bridging this chasm or divide, that the conceptual scheme of martyrdom and sacrifice operate giving newer dimensions of meaning that integrate the gross structural inequality within the social system. Kaviraj elsewhere criticizes the Indian Constitution for its "extreme constructivism: the myth, seriously believed by the earlier ruling elite, that patterns of laws can direct social relations rather than reflect them, an illusion which made the framers carry the constitutional document to an unreadable and agonizing length: In this footnote to the preceding sentence he adds sonorously, "This is not merely a petty and querulous point. Constitutional documents must be read and understood by the people. The Indian constitution is a lawyer's document, a document of the lawyers, for the lawyers, by the lawyers".

Our ethnography, therefore is also aimed at arriving at the ethnic derivatives of the concept of the Republic. But, the angle that we would be looking at in this regard would be apropos the ethnic force of signification operational in representing the idea of the Republic.

It is with a study of the political aspects of the fact of Gopalakrishnan's death that we start our ethnography. As will follow in the narrative accounts of our respondents, the representation of the State vis-à-vis the fact, is reduced to the repressive arm of the State- the police.

The period ranging from 1948-'52, is the period where the role of the State emerges in relation with the fact. Prior to this, the State enjoyed the legitimacy of the ideological assessment of the CPI. It was in 1948, following the adoption of what has come to be known as the Ranadive or Calcutta Thesis, that the role of the State adopts its repressive arm. There were enough ambiguities within the movement itself, that the essence of the Thesis, was revised by the Party, completely by the 1955 Palghat Congress. We are not attempting in this study to follow the ideological persuasions that progressively led the way towards the Palghat Resolution for the adoption of parliamentary ways of waging the class struggle. The nature and sources of influences that formed the backdrop for this transformation, within the CPI, forms in itself the subject for a detailed thesis. But, for the time being we have to make the area of our study distinctly clear. Our purpose is to try to bring to the fore-front certain ethnic characteristics in the formation of the Communist movement by looking at it through the prism of the total social fact. Here the ritual of political martyrdom is our starting point. Our aim is not a rationalization of the ritual, but, the representation of key mythemes through dialogue with the main actors in the performance of the ritual, as well as such actors who were participants in the event; the commemoration of which lie at the root of the ritual.

Regarding theories of the State, the incident of Gopalakrishnan's death at the hands of the police in the firka of Nattika; on the very day of the formation of the Indian Republic, places it in the centre of some of the prominent Liberal critiques of the State in the tradition of Jurgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt.

Of interest is writings of Hannah Arendt (1973:9-42) on the American State. Hannah Arendt uses analytical terms such as deception, self deception, defactualisation in her discussion on the Pentagon papers released on the U.S. policy on Vietnam (history of U.S decision making process on Vietnam policy) commissioned by Secretary of Defence Robert S McNamara. The subject matter of the essay is "Lying in Politics" i.e., how the U.S defence machinery has synthesized information on it's Vietnam policy to compose the various ideological grounds of containing communism, known as the domino theory, (that Vietnam is a domino or a test ground and no real interests
of the U.S. are staked there). Hannah Arendt offers a brilliant insider’s point of view, which shows how information gets concocted to create ideal situations that do not hold any reference to reality.

In our study of the Indian politics on the eve of the formation of the Republic also we can find these patterns emerging. There are two distinct actors at play here. One is the Republic of India represented by the police and the second is the community of Nattika firka represented through the ritual. In the assertive violence of the foundation of the Republic, the Citizen’s life as ordained by the State gets ingrained into the irrepressible lie behind the Republic, because the Republic even though grants its Citizens the Fundamental Rights, nonetheless wrests powers to abrogate any such promise. In the process, the Citizen’s life necessarily assumes the truth of the Republic and Sovereignty and in this embodiment immortalizes itself through death. In the act of proclaiming the Republic and at the same time usurping the Rights of a citizen on the grounds of jeopardy to State security the State ascertains that it has the powers to grant and usurp in one instance any Right Constitutionally granted. The belief in the Republic thus from the point of view of the community of Nattika firka represented through the ritual is warranted through the absolute command the State enjoys over the Rights of a Citizen. Even when the Constitution guarantees Basic Freedoms, the firka has to necessarily see the lie that lurks behind such promise, as Hannah Arendt analysed in the Pentagon papers. It is only through such an awareness that the new sense of community can be arrived at.

The State here assumes the role of a perpetrator of assertive violence, in taking the life of the Citizen. Whereas in the ritual of martyrdom commemoration, the violence that marked the event becomes a generative violence paving the way for the formation of a new and distinct community. A community that strives for its Sovereignty separate from the repressive realm of the State. The different ways by which – one of them being the ritual of martyrdom day commemorations - the Community of Nattika firka achieves this is discussed at length in chapter 4.
Events at Nattika on the 26th January 1950 substantiates factually the hypothesis that the Indian State on the first day of the Republic was a "Leviathan" in the Hobbesian sense. The Leviathan retains for itself the right to decide the extent of its liberalism in preserving its own sovereignty. It derives the legitimacy for its liberalism from its own unrestrained powers to act upon itself and sacrifice the original parties to, and principles of, the "contract social". As Habermas opines with his four strong reasons that only Hobbes is the real founder of Liberalism, though "in the end he cannot rid himself of the spirit he has conjured up at the beginning of his system. The liberal justification of the State is devoured by the State's absolutism, and in this it is indeed a Leviathan" (Habermas, 1986:69).

Habermas boils the equation down to the dialectics of Natural Law, that orientates its liberal contents against its own absolutist contents. The norms of natural reason fall finally prey to the instincts from which that reason is derived.

In Nattika the political events of the day of adoption of the Indian Constitution apart from exposing the essential character of the guarantor of the basic freedoms went on to create a legend of heroism in the area's culture that decisively influenced it's body-politic in the years to come.

The absolutist State exists not to serve the purpose of the State, but to serve the logic of the State. As Marx observes in his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, about the absolutist State envisaged in Hegel's ideas, "Logic is not used to prove the nature of the State, but the State is used to prove the logic" (Marx, 1980:18). The absolute idea in its act of differentiation is a necessary aspect of the actual existence of the Idea. The moment of forming the Constitution is the consummate point of being for the Idea that reflects as the State. The Constitution is the testimony to the self-knowing and self-willing realization of the Ideas into a State.

The manner in which the State reacted in such a moment as in Gopalakrishnan's case subverts the logical existentialism of the State. Further reasons for the State to continue in existence would be necessarily grounded upon the dent caused by the State on the civil society through the sacrifice of its own Citizen. The concreteness of the
Idea henceforth becomes an expiatory rite; the apotheosis of the martyr becomes the State's reference to reality.

It has to be noted that the question of sovereignty is apart from this discussion of Hegel in the context we have derived. This because, in Hegel, the sovereignty rests with the Crown or the Monarch. The embodiment of Reason. In fact, Reason could overstep or breach what is written in the Constitution in the organisation of the State. “The Constitution is nothing more than an accommodation between the political and non-political State; hence it is necessarily in itself a treaty between essentially heterogeneous powers” (ibid: 58.).

While studies of the State have been a pre-occupation of the political sociologist, this thesis is centrally concerned with the symbolic representation of resistance to forms of coercion. Thus the concept of the Republic and it's representation is the pivot of our analyses, especially, the manner in which these ideas evolved with a signifying force that is generic to it, in the *firka* of Nattika on the eve of the first Republic Day of India.

Over the years several perspectives have been developed for a critique of the democratic and developmental culture of the Indian State. They fall into different streams of criticism, like literature, social sciences, cinema, art, theatre and music. Various political, regional, and national groups also become involved in this discourse through their political representatives, and through the media- both local and national. Our study takes its departure from the milieu of this discourse on the Nation’s democratic process and seeks to reengage with the same discourse in focusing our attention on the role of a ritual in making its critique on the democratic experience of the Indian Republic. It is this respect that we already discussed the ritual of martyrdom, of Sardar Gopalakrishnan in Nattika *Firka*.

In our first chapter, we have done a survey of the historic background to the event of martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan. We describe the formation of a collective identity for the people of the region through various sources; the most important of which is the historical texts that have appeared on Kerala. At the period of our reckoning, a sub-nationality within the Union in the form of a Federal State was only
in the making. But, a distinct sense of political identity was already emerging out of the Social and National movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Intertwined with the formation of this identity was the emergence of the ideologies of Nationalism, Socialism and Communism. The course of events make an interesting sequence, when they summit towards a climax on the eve of the 26th January, 1950, when India having declared its Independence, was defining its sovereignty through a Constitution drafted by a popularly elected (no universal adult suffrage, yet) Constituent Assembly.

The Second chapter deals with the morphology of the social groups that are the chief actors in the dramatic ritual of death and its commemoration. We have done an analysis of the clan formation amongst the Ezhavas with the clan of the martyr in focus, to highlight the social impact the clan has had on the rest of the village in terms of representation of the fact. Having covered the system of caste relations and relations of land ownership in the first chapter, this section mainly deals with the patterns of worship among these clans and how the clan contributes towards the building of an image of the victim around Gopalakrishnan. Then we also consider how over the years his image has been constituted and reconstituted as the martyr by the Left parties. It may be noticed, that however there were no watertight formation of communities around these representations. The representations of the death and its rituals come from varied sources. They emerge with distinctive patterns, but any community formation around such representations have been at best contingent and they often show the tendency to dissolve one into the other. Yet, certain events also are discussed that have fixed the rough peripheries of these communities that we have sought to trace.

In the third chapter, we have taken a methodological detour once again to arrive at the relevance of looking at the statistical backdrop from the ritual’s point of view for understanding the phenomenon in its instance of totality. A discussion of the importance of the study of the ritual of commemorating the death in the form of rallies, cultural festivities and the mythical significance that the places associated with the ritual assume have been highlighted to contextualize the ritual within the larger
dimension of the political economy of the State of Kerala in particular and the Republic of India at large.

The fourth chapter looks at the aesthetic genres inherent to the forms of representation in the fact. They are mainly the genres of myth, magic, theater and the novel. A good part of the narratives collected from the respondents, fall under the last genre- that of the novel.

The fifth chapter is an attempt to grapple with the unifying strand of tragedy that connects all the genres of representation and a theoretical consideration involving interdisciplinary writings from philosophy, anthropology and literary criticism to arrive at the end result of our study- ‘the closure of representation’.

The conclusion attempts to analyze succinctly the main arguments presented in the thesis.

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5 A concept taken from the twentieth century dramatist Antonin Artaud, who inaugurated the genre of ‘theatre of cruelty’. The concept essentially points to the possibility of a representation beyond the confines of language, the essential datum of all communication. We go into its details further ahead.