CHAPTER 2

THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE MARTYRDOM/SACRIFICE IN REFERENCE TO THE SOCIAL GROUPS GUIDING THEIR REPRESENTATION

As observed in the Introduction, there is a dialectic inherent to the representation of the heroic death under study. In this chapter, we shall deal with its morphology. By morphology, we mean an analysis of the fact, in the light of the social groups that define the fact through their specific acts of representation (Mauss, 1979:7-8).

The terms under consideration may be summarized as follows.

Martyrdom – The laying down of life for a cause one believes to be true and later retold through stories of praise and hagiographies of the martyr. The cause of the martyr is re-appraised in collective imagination.

Sacrifice – The taking of a life that is offered as an oblation or offering to the Gods. The victim that is sacrificed is later venerated and worshiped as an embodiment of exchange between the sacred and the profane, the immortals and the mortals. The belief of the victim is shared with the rest.

Political Community - Believes martyrdom to be self-willed. Represses the possibility of a sacrificial scheme involving a victim and glorifies the memory of the martyr with a sense of guilt, marking the commemoration of the martyrdom as an expiatory rite for the martyr.

Ethnic Community - Believes martyrdom to be false. Anxious to disclose the truth that the martyrdom was actually a betrayal of truth. The martyr was a victim of the secretly contrived circumstances; even though, willfully invited his nemesis upon himself.

It is between the space of these four concepts that the conceptualizations of Gopalakrishnan’s death as a sacrifice and/or martyrdom, takes place. They multiply
the space of collective representations of death\(^1\). It is very difficult to arrive at the definite formulation of which is which and who is who in the context of the different narratives. In the same narrative, one can see the agency of narration moving from one end to the next; from the ethnic community to the political community and vice versa; from regarding Gopalakrishnan's death as martyrdom to sacrifice and vice versa. The semantic grid that forms the space of death may be represented thus,

\[\text{Ethnic Community}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sacrifice} \\
\text{Political Community}
\end{array}\]

\[\text{Martyrdom}\]

\(^1\) It was Robert Hertz (1960), who first attempted the study of death as a 'total social phenomenon' (Kopping, 1999:39). Hertz 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 (ibid). Hertz followed the classificatory scheme propounded by the early structuralists (Durkheim and Mauss (1970)), and equated death with the left side of the body.
There can be any number of co-ordinates, in this graph. Similarly, the number and form of narratives are also innumerable. There can be several kinds of combinations and permutations within this semantic grid, all of which serve to constitute the totality of the social fact called the death of Goapalakrishnan.

The individuated narratives do not find a place in this semantic graph. They form part of a heteroglossia\(^2\) and are independent of the semantic graph analyzed above, and depend on a totally different set of referents for meaning. They enter into a realm of ideologies criss-crossed by the different representations of Indian Nationalism as such, with the essential stem of narrative being the serio-comic heroics of the individual against the oddities of life, to the back drop of the intensity of the political experiences opened up by the multitude of life-chances generated by the democratic set-up of the country. The death of Gopalakrishnan forms an event in such narratives, and do not necessarily appreciate it as martyrdom or/sacrifice. They do not form either a part of the political community or the ethnic community, but conceptualize the death of Gopalakrishnan, in distinct ways of their own. We shall come to a detailed discussion of this, in chapter 4.

It is the ritual of the commemoration of the death that has ensured the sustainability of the semantic grid. The two major organizing forces in terms of the conduct of the ritual in the home village of Gopalakrishnan, are his kinsgroup and his comrades. It is the nature of the collective representation in terms of the morphology of these groups that we proceed to see, now. At the level of the semantic grid, they constitute the ethnic community and the political community respectively. For us, they are two essential units orientating the discourse of sacrifice and martyrdom respectively. The two are distinct, in that, if apropos the semantic grid, they are congenital, arbitrary and unpredictable in formation, as essential units of a discourse, they evince a certain historicity and periodicity which we go on to explore now.

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From Ancestor Worship to Ancestor Worship- The Martyr's Clan and its Worship Patterns in Perspective

As we already saw in charting the course of social movements in the villages of Nattika firka, a meeting point for all the new entrants into the arena of politics and public activity was the system of modern school education instituted by the British in Malabar. The newly educated youngsters were also given allowances from the Madras district government to set up independent schools. This helped for the most part the Ezhava community, that was already waking up to the benefits of a communitarian organization of equals centered around the construction of new temples, the initiative to which have already been received through the spread of the ideals of the spiritual reformer Sree Narayana Guru. If, the teachings of the Guru were influential in South and Central Kerala, Menon (1994:68) has pointed out how the Tiyyas of Northern Malabar discarded many of their ancient worship rites involving the sacrificial offerings of toddy (coconut palm liquor) and cock sacrifices, in their efforts to rise in ritual hierarchy amongst the Hindus. Aiyappan (1965:175) has shown how many of these rituals were even sought to be replaced by other rituals resembling the higher castes; and in certain other instances, some of the rituals totally abandoned with, for economical reasons.

This point in fact forms one of the serious departure points in our ethnography of the sacrifice or martyrdom of Gopalakrishnan in the village of Edathiruthy. There are two distinct ways of approaching the life of the martyr. One as the hero and the other as the victim. Both are collectively represented images. The nature of the collectivity involved in the two instances are yet different. The collectivity that imagines him as the victim, happens to be his family or his kinsgroup or clan called the Kumblaparambu clan3. This is in fact a totem name that identifies an exogamous grouping of kinsmen tied together by common descent from common ancestors. One legend has it that the ancestors were a high caste Nambuthiri man and a lower caste-

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3 The overweening identification of the martyr with the paternal side of his clan has to do with the social structure as well as the specific historic juncture that made way for his role as a sacrificial victim within it, a matter to be discussed in chapter 4.
maid servant who ran away from a village in Northern Malabar called Kumbla, fearing persecution for falling in love with each other. This legend is significant from our perspective because, the common strand of transgression of the caste principles of purity and impurity that is part of the legends of origin of migratory caste groups may be seen here also. The Nambuthiri was learning martial arts from one of the kalaris (martial arts school, usually run by the caste called kuruppu a sect of the Nairs) in his neighbourhood, as a resident scholar, when one of the maiden servants in the household, fell ill. The Nambuthiri who was also a medicine-man treated her back to good health. In the process of healing, the doctor and his patient fell passionately in love with each other. The Nambuthiri could not go back to his mana (home) with his consort, therefore, the pair of lovers eloped and reached the village of Edathiruthy in Southern Malabar, where at the specific plot of land called the kudiyirippu of the clan, the Goddess Bhagavathy gave sanctuary to them. The Goddess and Muthappan the founding ancestral deity of the clan are the two deities worshipped at the kudiyirippu of the clan.

The cult of Bhagavathy represents the so-called Sakta tradition of Kerala which has strong tantric elements. Kodungallur, barely twenty kilometers from the village, is one of the most important pilgrim centres for the believers of this cult, that goes back to its Sanghom past, preceding the emergence of Brahmin influences in the history of South India. The cult thus also represents a pan-Dravidian nature, and in the scope of its ritualistic potentials in terms of performances of ritual arts, encompassing music, dance, theatre, visual art, possession, curing, magic, comedy and exorcism; it is a unifying cult that allows for the participation of the various castes in Kerala, as well as its two prominently different sets of population - lowland and highland (Caldwell, 1999:12-27). This transgressive nature of the Bhagavathy cult is most evident, in the ritual performance of Teyyam, the anthropological significance of the performance of which is ritual, is related in detail with respect to the subject of our study- the martyrdom or sacrifice rites for Gopalakrishnan.

JR Freeman shows that Teyyam traditionally a Hindu lower caste ritual, has deities that are represented and revered in the ritual dances of the Teyyam as outcastes from
the elite pantheon usually worshipped amongst the upper caste Hindus. Freeman writes, "For instance, the great hunting Teyyam of the Tiyya caste, Muthappan, is recorded to have killed his Brahmin adoptive father when the latter forbade him to hunt and cook his jungle meat in the temple’s environs. Similarly, the Teyyam Vayanattu Kulavan was blinded and banished from Shiva’s presence when he defiantly hunted in the god’s sacred grove and drank toddy from the pots reserved there as Shiva’s offering" (Freeman, 1999:257-302). Freeman argues against ahistorically positioning an archetype of the kavu or the sacred grove as a biotic representation of an ahistorical Indian tradition. Yet his analyses takes us to the deeper levels of the polity and the economy of the colonizing and the post-colonial times in the Northern Malabar villages in the hill regions of the erstwhile kingdoms of Kolattunadu, Nileswaram and Kumbla, i.e. prior to the conquest of Tippu. In reproducing the conception of nature in the consciousness of these communities Freeman has contended for a closer look at “where sylvan tracts were resource pools for actual or potential human use, and where the constraints and imperatives on that use could be cruelly oppressive, and so, occasionally meet with violent resistance. This is the context for how ‘nature’ was viewed in the highlands, and how the sacred and non-sacred forests could be viewed not just as resources benignly held in trust, but also as resources unjustly withheld" (ibid.: 281).

J R Freeman is involved in a polemic against looking at castes as units of reproductive isolation and occupational specialization. He quotes, Gadgil and Malhotra (1994), “with its reproductive isolation and hereditary mode of subsistence, a caste population can be considered an analogue of a biological species……..We therefore expect the evolution of a number of cultural practices resulting in a sustainable use of natural resources by the caste group which constitute not only the genetic but also the cultural units of Indian society”.

Freeman argues that this is only a matter of conjecture. Occupational specialization even though it existed, functioned largely at the symbolic level (Dumont,1972). In Kerala, the caste-occupations, had more ritual than practical overtones because the livelihood for a majority of members from a caste-group, with a particular caste-group
designation, did not arise exclusively from its traditionally identified occupation. Freeman ascribes to the migration of caste groups, the reason for such alterations in the system of caste hierarchy. His examples are mainly drawn from the hill-tribes of Northern Malabar, who trace their lineage from no exclusive reproductive endogamous group, but from mixture in such endogamy through contacts with nobler, lowland or foreign caste groups (Freeman, 1999.286).

The specific deities of the Teyyam performances, for example Vettakkorumakan and Vayanattu Kalavan, detail stories of the original heroes, that made the beginnings of particular caste groups in their movements from one place to another.

In Southern Malabar also such traditions exist, amongst the temples of the Ezhavas folk songs and performances during the temple festivals praising the migrations of the original founder of the clan and the founding of the temple around which the clan flourished as a kinsgroup. Such songs are called Muthappanpattu and are sung to the accompaniment of a chorus, by members of the Velan caste after drawing ritual patterns on the floor. These songs begin with a praise for the Gods of the grove, thus conceptualizing the temple premise as a grove and narrating how the Muthappan came to establish the temple in the grove.

Freeman alleges that there is an environmentalism inherent to the idea as held by the Hindu ecologists who held that all such groves formed the allowance for the cosmic complacency of every clan within a caste. But, the example of Malkkudiyans, Kurubi or Nyakka shown by Freeman shows us that a migratory trend is a part and parcel of these traditions.

Today, the way it stands, the Ezhava temples in the village of Edathiruthy are believed to be ancient symbols announcing the identity and heritage of clan formations. The reality is that they have come to their current shape owing to the social reform movements in the caste, when the pioneer reformers of the caste realized the need for the community to be organized well together for socio-political reasons of clan unity and endogamy to articulate a powerful voice in the act of proportioning social goods.
In the village of Edathiruthy itself, the instance of a lacuna of any such tradition of a Muthappan folklore, detailing the origins of the temple or the clan-group serves as the clue to the existence of this fundamental social reality. The Kumbalaparambu clan (the paternal side of the martyr’s clan, with which he was identified as was the norm amongst the Ezhavas) about which we proceed to examine in detail does not host any such festivals, whereas all the other Ezhava clans in the village have their own respective temples that host annual festivals with folk songs praising a Teyyam like deity responsible for founding the clan.

The Ezhava clans in the region, differentiate among themselves by virtue of their formation as distinct marriage or alliance groups. The thrust of modernization that came in the form of the British rule and the modern education so prescribed that they also form their own clan temples, that were also seats of their ancestral property (kudiyirippu) from where they diversified into different families and settled in separate plots of land.

One of the major deities in these temples was the Muthappan an ancestral deity who being the first among them to get initiated into the arts and forms of worshipping the various deities was the founder of the clan. He is often identified with the possession of a mana for which reason alone he is also worshipped although he be totally human.

For the Kumbalaparambu clan, the Muthappan folklore assumes a subdued or surrogate role, vis-a-vis the rest of the Ezhava clans in the village, the only reason that can be adduced to which fact is the migratory nature of the clan as may be gathered from their founding legend.

The legend of the Nambuthiri ancestor who eloped with his lower caste consort from Northern Kerala, is very recent in origin, and not all the clan members, are even aware of this. Nonetheless, the fact that the legend has been invented after an ashtamangalyaprasnam (an astrological calculation)⁴, has earned for it currency

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⁴ According to Sarah Caldwell (1999:27) prasnam is a ritual art of divination, especially related to the worship of Goddess bhagavathy. She says, “Sakta ideas, along with ritual arts of divination (prasnam) and sorcery (mantravadam) are integral to Kerala Hindu worship. Kerala priests, called tantris are well versed
amongst several others. This has in its turn also provided way for the revival of a clan temple, even though as an ancillary to the original place of worship, called the kudiyirippu. An even more ancient legend of the origin of the clan links it with the origin of the neighbouring clan kollarayil with whom the kumbalaparambu clan joins to form a singular marriage group. The clan’s divine or sacred connections also seek to accrue from its alliance with the neighbouring Kollarayil clan, with whom the clan maintains a principle of exogamy. One version of the origin of two clans - the kumbalaparambil and kollarayil -has it that the two clans were founded by two different ancestors, both of who came from the North and decided to settle down in the village of Edathiruthy. Intermarriage between the two clans have been conventionally discouraged even though amongst the Ezhavas there is no such taboo against intermarriage amongst contiguous clans. The kollarayil clan has an ancestral temple where it holds annual festivals with accompanying rituals.

This symbiosis is an interesting aspect and forms a most interesting sub-text of the martyrdom of Gopalakrishnan. The kollarayil now boasts of their identity as one of the largest investment groups in the district of Trichur, state of Kerala, and having produced K.S.Chathuny, whose firm earned fame and riches through different kinds of trade-liquor, textiles, hospitals, hotels etc. The kumbalaparambil is renowned in the village of Edathiruthy and the firka of Nattika at best and flaunt their identity as mostly Government servants or political activists.

The point we wish to make here is that, identity formation for the martyr’s clan has taken place through a process of cultural symbiosis between the two caste sub-groups/clans of the kollarayil and kumbalaparambil. It is this symbiosis that holds fast the world view of the caste as a cosmic unity. With the changing scenario of society, such symbiosis also undergoes various transformations. The formation of this symbiosis is rooted in the socio-political history of the village, and in modern times is distinctly marked as an invention following the divorce of a couple who “dared” to marry crossing the boundaries of the principle of exogamy observed between the two

in the arts of prasnam, astrology and certain aspects of mantravadam.” The ashtamangalyaprasnam mentioned above is a variation of the prasnam and falls under the category of rituals of the Sakta cult.
clans as one. The divorce is moralistically projected as an instance of penalization for 
disregard of conventions. The moralistic allusions point out that, in the whole process, 
it is the transformation of the socio-political scenario that takes the leading role, in 
redefining these traditions and the identity of the clan members.

Their kudiyirippu or the ancestral piece of land wherefrom the different families of the 
kumbalaparambu clan diversified has no temple. It has the idol of the mother deity 
called annapoorneswari a form of one of the many female deities that are worshipped 
among the Hindus all of which are believed to be one or the other form of the Goddess 
bhagavathy worshipped on a larger scale at the nearby, ancient temple of 
Kodungallore. The paternal deity called the Muthappan is also worshipped alongside 
the mother deity at their kudiyirippu. The paternal deity is specific to the clan. None 
other than the clan members, ideally, defer to him and at no place other than the 
kudiyirippu shall he be worshipped. He is regarded as the genealogical ancestor of 
the whole clan, that is divided into four phratries. Every single clan amongst the 
Ezhavas have their own specific muthappan deities. The elders today trace back their 
ancestors backwards to a period of a hundred and fifty odd years, dividing the whole 
clan into four major phratries- aalengottey, angitteyil, kaliparambil, and tharayil. The 
different branches are identified with respect to a common ancestry and are ordained 
on patriarchal lines. The basis for this classification seems to be rising from the names 
of the land holdings of the clan members in the village. There is no hierarchy, amongst 
them and the classification can only be understood as a diversification that the clan 
members attained to as farmers or lease-cultivators, following their settlement in the 
village. There is no intermarriage between the groups, and any sexual relationship 
between the members is considered incestuous.

Amongst the kumbalaparambans temple rituals or ceremonies associated with the 
worship of similar deities amongst the other Ezhava clans, in the village, is absent. 
There are contending traditions within the groups regarding the nature of worship to be 
followed at the kudiyirippu plot. One of the family members also donned the role of

5 The members of kumbalaparambu clan (gender masculine).
the priest at the *devi* installation in the plot. The contentions surfaced when the time of modernization took over the whole Ezhava community in the village. A temple was constructed for the deity by one of the family elders in a plot of land alongside a school of which he was also the manager. A new set of rituals was instituted including the celebration of an annual festival with a regalia largely uncommon amongst the Ezhavas in those days. The practice unfortunately, according to many clan members did not last long, and the elder who began it and upon whose initiative the temple was built, in a fit of frenzy carried the idol out of its seat and deposited it in a well nearby. The temple also was brought down along with it and the school also wound up in due process. The incident may be read as an assertion of the principle of the primacy of the individual in defining the modes of worship amongst the Ezhavas, in the backdrop of the Enlightenment ethic prophesied through the preachings of the influential spiritual reformer of the Ezhavas, Sree Narayana Guru. The strong difference of opinion that exists amongst the clan members even today, about the nature of the worship to be followed in the temples, can also be one of the reasons behind this act of fury. The diversifying pulls that the clan was facing in the context of modernization, had severe impact on the four phratries that comprised the clan (please see the diagram of the clan given in the appendix to understand the organization of the clan divided into four phratries). One has to keep in mind that, there was no consensus amongst the clan members when the effects of modern socio-political involvement in their day-to-day lives, often belied the temple or the rituals associated with it as a theatre of collectivity that held the four different phratries of the clan together. For instance, there was Raman Master, who was the president of the Harijan Sangh who for this reason was nicknamed *vettuva* raman, there was Sardar who was an avowed Communist and showed little or no interest in the activities involving the temple, there was Velayudhan, who became an ascetic a *sadhu* or a *sanyasin* and lived like one until his death in the temple for Subramanyan (a God, who is also his namesake) at Palani in Tamil Nadu. Such strong individualistic exceptions to the rule of the collectivity that held the various clan temples amongst the Ezhavas together at that point was a conspicuous element in the trail of modernization that the clan as a whole has taken.
The act of throwing the idol of the deity into the well, may be also seen as an
overwhelming reflection of the passion implicit to the cult of mother goddesses. The
elder by the name Chathunny master’s act thus is often seen to be an oracular
statement upon possession by the spirit of Muthappan the heroic ancestor credited
with founding the clan, assigning to the deity a place most appropriate to it according
to mythology. In the sakta cult of bhagavathy, the pilgrim centre of which is
Kodungallore bhagavathy temple, which is less than twenty kilometers away, there is
the ritual act of desacralization of the deity on one day, every year. On this day, the
temple is thrown open to all devotees irrespective of caste ranking, since ancient
times. The Goddess is abused, and her grove is defiled by the devotees in a ritual act
called kaavutheendal. All the devotees come wielding their swords, in possessed states
to the officiating priest, and from whom they receive the offerings as well as the
blessings and leave their trances. The above cited incident of the family ancestor
throwing the idol of the deity into the well, may be seen as the ritual enactment of the
kaavutheendal. Yet, it is difficult to conclude the true motive that lay behind such an
act.

This incident send the believers back to the kudiyirippu as the original seat of the
Goddess and henceforth no attempt has been made to revive the temple. Efforts are
now on –as late as the last ten years-to build a subsidiary temple to the original seat at
the kudiyirippu that very consciously and secretly guards the ‘purity’ of the
kudiyirippu camouflaging the fact that a temple for some reason is not a sustainable
idea at the place/plot of the origin of the clan.

The clan members who were talked to assign different reasons for this general
downplaying of the significance of the question as such. A couple of them were of the
strong opinion that the ritual singing and offerings of toddy for the Muthappan was
stopped with the intention of avoiding the use/abuse of alcohol. On the whole, it may
be said that the conspicuous absence of a temple at the plot of land exclusive to the
clan linking its genealogy to an ancestry begun by an original ancestor- the
Muthappan- does not raise any significant concern for the clan members. This is
significant from our point of view given the prevalence of the afore-mentioned patterns of worship amongst the other clans of the Ezhavas in the village.

This in fact seems to be the crucial role played by the clan in the terms of contributing towards the creation of a space for the inception of a host of new ideas that made their entry into the collective consciousness of the village with the integration of the village into a greater canvas of ideology called nationalism. At certain points, the attitude of the clan members resonated the intensity exemplified by the slogan of the Mozambiquean political party, FRELIMO, in the context of African post-colonialism, “kill the tribe to build the nation” 6. The net effect of such evocations, but, have been only to the effect of fixing a certain identity for the clan members as social activists till the peripheries of their native village Edathiruthy, or at best those of Nattika firka. This in its turn is no secular identity, but very much an ethnic one. But, as Sudipta Kaviraj (1993: 1-39) tells us the ideas of nationalism has always arrived with their specific rendition in traditional idioms. This is a mythological space, and the integration of these ideas in the settings of the locale of a village of Edathiruthy for instance, with the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan as its facsimile sends us to the theme of peregrination that alone explains the space for the foundation of myths in the mind. As observed earlier, the clan to which Sardar belonged and that has given to him the role of a victim in his death, is grappling with the migratory trait given according to its founding myth. This means that the origins of the clan as such lay elsewhere (in the present case, Northern Malabar, in kinship parlance, shortened as merely North) and the story of its ancestors can be only told by others about whom little can be factually known today. A factual rendition of the stories of the origin of the clan as such can be given, if at all hypothetically possible, in the words of others, who and who alone contemporaneous to the clan’s founding ancestry, can render the factual sequence of events that led to the differentiation of the clan from the rest.

We have dealt with the significance of this background of the kumbalaparambu clan's patterns of worship, in understanding the rites of the commemoration of martyrdom for Gopalakrishnan, in chapter 5. For the time being it is sufficient to reasonably account for the absence of mythology in terms of temple rituals. We read Marcel Detienne (1986: 82-103) in regard to his consideration of the work of Plato - Timaeus. The story of Athens according to Plato comes to the Hellenes from Egypt, when the poet Solon –one of the wise seven sages of ancient Greece – set out to know the origins of ancient things, in an ethnographic manner by inducing the Egyptians of the land of Amasis, to narrate on it. Referring to how a civilization like that of Egypt had kept written records of “all that is good, great or remarkable in the world and without interruption due to their special location on the Nile”, the elderly Egyptian priest draws Solon’s attention to the very nature of Greek civilization itself. Addressing the Athenians as “children”, the priest tells Solon of his ancestors’ time; repeatedly visited by devastating floods sent down by the gods and in their survival, though both ignorant and illiterate, are the true originators of the Hellenes. They lived in the mountain peaks and as Plato finds them, “in forgetfulness and an absence of legitimate descendants”(ibid:88). That leads Plato to conclude that “mythology and research in ancient traditions only appear in societies along with leisure and when certain individuals ascertain they have collected everything that is necessary for survival. Not before”(ibid:88).

The crux of Plato’s observations in this book is that the story of one’s origin is essentially heard in/through the voice of others. There is an implicit appreciation of this fact, with respect to the kumbalaparambu clan which is an exemplary instance of appreciating the clan’s identity as formulated in the words of others, than through the presence of one’s own temples/institutions, in the clan members’ unconscious yet diffident refusal of building a temple at the place where its ancestors are first believed to have found sanctuary. The clan is here outliving the post-modern clash of civilizations, by its bland refusal to be a party to it. In so far as, the clan members do not define their identity in the milieu of their own conclaves of worship, which is all what clan temples of the Ezhavas in the village and contiguous areas represent, they
have left it to the public space to define the same. In coming to a sense of being a member of the clan from the public space (agora, as Bakhtin(1981:131) put it), they were exposed to a feeling of ambiguity. It is this ambiguity that in the modernizing phases of the clan through the spread of modern education and government jobs, many clan members found it difficult to grapple with especially in the light of the Sree Narayana ideals that sharpened the communitarian identity of the Ezhavas, differentiated into clans in the form of a hubris. We use the word 'hubris', because the fostering of this separate sense of identity was the result of the initiative of a select group of wealthy Ezhavas who were also landlords and even local rajas according to Nossiter. He continues, “By the 1880s there was a small educated and professional elite and in 1903 ten of the wealthy Ezhavas established Kerala’s first caste association, the SNDP yogam named after Sree Narayana Guru (an Ezhava divine comparable locally to Vivekananda” (Nossiter,1988:50); with its underlying assumption of a power shared amongst equals and to the exclusion of other communities- castes and religions. The clan members even though did not follow the traditional caste occupation of toddy tapping and were mostly educated and employed mostly in various Government jobs; nonetheless were not rich landowners, when compared to Ezhava clans like the Adiparambil or Valiparambil in the neighbouring villages Kazhimbrom and Edamuttom. These clans mainly due to the economic well-being they enjoyed in the social milieu of the time, were ardent supporters of the Sree Narayana idealism and the formation of a communitarian identity for the Ezhavas outside the caste and the ritual hierarchy of the Hindu religion of which they would be the leaders.

In the instance of the martyr’s clan, there were but obstacles in accepting the communitarian identity of the Ezhavas. The claim to difference sought to be instilled amongst the various clans through the building of separate temples for each and every one of the clans, did not gather currency with the Kumbalaparambu clan. The attempts to build a temple and the tragic end that it came to with the family elder officiating as priest consigning the deity’s idol to the bottom of the well, has been already discussed. Any such ambiguity that may have risen following these events, we find expressed in
the earnestness with which the identity of a Communist following the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan was adopted by most of the clan members. As an instance of conversion to a new faith or a new cult it gave instant fixity of origin in time (i.e. the historic sequence of the national and social movements in India) rather than ill-defined mythology of origin scattered in places and people and that too within a magical sequence of time (mentioned by Marcel Mauss (1972) as the gigantic variation to the principle of causality)⁷.

The spread of modern education was taken by the clan members as a boon to travel and diversify the means of earning a living. The life of Sardar Gopalakrishnan, here took a vital turn in that his journeys as part of the British Air Force during the World War II in different parts of India, and his forays into the nationalist and communist ideology believed to have evoked within him a sacrificial victim that was a meeting point for a world of virtues and a society of structures in transition. The general point that you can travel to different places and yet return to the point of your origin unchanged or untransformed are denied in all narratives or accounts of his life by the clan members.

The life of a victim lacks all definitions of a chronology. Still journey as the central axis orientates the story of his sacrifice, divides it into at least two phases. The totemic dialectics of the clan casts him always at variance with the point of origin. At the point of his death he was the embodiment of all impurity that ever was possible at the time. For instance, he came to take leave from his eldest brother Kumaran on the eve of the rally planned for the First Republic Day. His brother from what he advised to Sardar sounds to have already resigned to this role of the victim that Sardar had donned by then. He told his younger brother to abstain from the path of revolutionary politics that he had chosen. But, he also added how it was futile for him to advise his younger brother for it was evident to him that he (Sardar) would not listen to his elder’s words. Panickettil Chandru -neighbour of Kumaran- who described the parting

⁷ These mythical variations in self-identity here may be also seen as espousals of distinct forms of historical consciousness arising from shifting circumstances, a phenomenon observed amongst the Syrian Christians of Kerala, according to Susan Visvanathan (1993: 13-69).
scene thus, conveyed the impressions of a fatalistic departure that Sardar had taken from a world of values represented by his elder brother.

According to the model of sacrifice offered by Hubert and Mauss, the only possible alternative that would follow not by choice but by imperative for his clan members thence would be that he as a sacrificial animal be slain and his carcass be shared amongst the clan members. Going by the progress of events, this is what one is inevitably led to conclude. Because, the very next day after this meeting, Gopalakrishnan was killed and his corpse was abandoned to Nature without any rites. Back home, at his brother Unniappan’s house, (which was home for Gopalakrishnan too after the two brothers Unniappan and Gopalakrishnan, left their ancestral, joint house-hold together), when the news of his death broke, there was loud wailing, especially the women of the house, who notwithstanding Unniappan’s bidding to stay silent, wept out loud. The neighbours came rushing in thinking that it was Gopalakrishnan’s nephew, Unniappan’s son, who was morbidly ill, that died. There was, in short, in the meeting of the family with its neighbourhood and the public at large, an immediate ritual substitution for the presence of Goapalakrishnan’s corpse in the living form of his nephew. A ritual sharing of the victim’s carcass which in the case of human sacrifice, is done to reinvigorate the clan or the community, so that it may live longer (Girard, 1988, Frazer, 1932) found its reflection in infusing life into the body of his moribund nephew. The life of one was taken, so that the life of another was spared.

Our discussions at this point are limited to the domain of collective representations. But, they have not to be seen in analytical isolation, because there is also a heteroglossia of representations of this death, wherein one finds the criss-crossing representations of the sacrificial victim as the romantic, the one who is on the move always, the one who is beloved by the women and children etc. But, before entering the realm of heteroglossia it is essential to not overlook the symbolic potentials in the form of a culture-capital that the body of the victim contained on the eve of his sacrifice.
This symbolism emerged into a narrative of pathos and tragedy at the forefront of which the clan planted the ghost of the victim as its new totem symbol thus rising to a unique role of leadership and identity that was hitherto denied to it in the village for its lack of a 'proper' place and ways of worship. There were no attempts on the part of the clan members to out-wit, avenge or retribute the Law of the Republic. The clan members in their emotional ambiguity arising from the passive acceptance of the fact of the death of Gopalakrishnan gave it the ritual power and forcefulness, embedded in the idea of human sacrifice.

The Martyr's Clan and Left Politics

Communism as an ideology donned the role of a new faith in the symbolic resurrection of Gopalakrishnan as the martyr. The identification of the clan members with the Communist Party became a matter of necessity; a primordial necessity arising out of religious sentiments, in terms of the fixity in identity that in the process of the Sree Narayana led reform movements the clan had failed to assimilate. No particular rationale followed to sustain the option of an identification of the clan members with the ideology or politics of the Communist Party of India. Such identification provided the locus for the clan to make their presence visible in the village. Communism is rescripted as ascriptive for the clan members of kumbalaparambu in the village. A look at the topography of the village of Edathiruthy where Sardar was born would make this fact more evident. The junction from where the road towards the house where Sardar was born is called the 'Kumbalaparambu Centre' and the road itself is named after him as the Sardar road. This in itself is illustrative of the ascriptive association that the Kumbalaparambu clan has formed with the Communist movement that alone has transformed Kumbalaprambil Chathunni Gopalakrishnan into Sardar Gopalakrishnan.

The absence of the customary rituals for the reigning paternal deity is linked with any instance of lunacy and idiosyncrasy that has happened among its members in the village. Some of the clan members also believe that for lack of it, the clan lacks an
effective unity, minus all the processes of ritual initiation into learning, puberty, naming and feeding rituals that are associated with such temples amongst the Ezhavas in the village.

As noted above, and depending on the study by Menon (1994:66-71), the new forms of worship that took shape in the temples that cropped up amongst the Ezhavas following the call of the reformer Sree Narayana Guru to the Ezhavas to organize, educate and liberate amongst themselves led to these temples playing the role of a nucleus in terms of socio-economic organization of the specific clans of the Ezhavas in the village.

These temples held annual festivals celebrating the day when the temple was founded, and the installation of the deities were made. One of the important rituals in such festivals is the *thottampattu*[^8], that celebrate the heroic achievements of the different deities in the temple with group singing by the local bards[^9] along with ritual drawings. These festivals formed an integral part of the organization of the temple calendar and the clan's community life surrounding it.

If all the Ezhava clans in the village celebrate their own respective temple festivals, in this way, the Kumbalaparambu clan remains a lone exception. Even the temple organization of this clan is different in a significant way. The *kudiyirippu* or the ancestral place chosen by the clan's founding ancestor (*Muthappan*) to install the deities and found the temple, in their case, is not the place where the temple is situated today.

The temple of the clan as it stands today, was built only in 1987. The annual festival mentioned above is conspicuous by its absence, in this temple. The practice was abandoned way back in the 1920s, when the then trustee of the temple- one of the

[^8]: A traditional form of singing praise for the rule of a local chieftain detailing the Parasurama myth (see foot-note 12), the rule of the perumals and the rule of the particular naduvazhi or chieftain who is being honoured, according to Gurukkal & Varier(1995). In this instance, we find that the *thottampattu* can be more than praise for a naduvazhi and may be sung in praise of different local deities too. The elementary theme of praise for the achievements of a particular icon the ornate elaboration of a heroism to the backdrop of the parasurama mythology remains unchanged.

[^9]: Called *velan* after the name of their caste.
family elders- went berserk, destroying the temple and abandoning the idol in his well. Even this attempt at building the temple was not at the place called the *kudiyirippu* of the clan, the original seat of the deity. These attributes of the clan fall into sharp relief when seen in a dyad along with the neighbouring *kollarayil* clan of the Ezhavas with which it has a symbiotic form of exchange in terms of forming through mutual and complementary exchange the identities of the two clans in the village.

The temple of the *kumbalaparambu* clan, today most significantly of all, from this thesis point of view, does not have the idol of *Muthappan*, and functions only as an ancillary to the original place of worship at the clan’s *kudiyirippu*. This is a significant lacuna in the terms of worship compared to the other Ezhava clan temples in the region. The events following the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan, contrived the worship patterns in such a way that, this absence appears glossed over. This gives us reason to propound that there is a veritable exchange of roles between Sardar Gopalakrishnan and *Muthappan* in the consciousness of the clan members.

Meanwhile, it is significant also to look at the manner in which the clan has coped up with the splitting of the Communist movement while retaining its ascriptive virtues of Communism. With the Communist movement splitting into the various factions in the years following Independence the clan has always sided with the most powerful of the factions. It is in the discourse of this identification that the story of the martyr’s role as the victim is most arduously portrayed.

The background for the split begins with the border disputes India had with China in the late fifties. This initiated the split in the Central Committee of the CPI on the stand to be taken vis-à-vis the dispute. The divide sharpened when China launched full-scale aggression upon India in Ladakh and NEFA, in October 20, 1962. A faction of the leadership led by Jyoti Basu, P. Sundarayya and Harkishen Singh Surjeet took the stand that a socialist state cannot commit an act of aggression. The other faction, that rallied behind the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, took a ‘nationalistic’ position criticizing Chinese claims on Indian land. This faction was led by the Chairman of the
party and supported by the likes of M.N. Govindan Nair and Dr. Z.A. Ahmed in the Central Committee.

The war had resulted in a state of Emergency, declared by the President of the Union, S.Radhakrishnan that initiated widespread arrests of people making anti-national protests or remarks. Many Communists also were arrested all over India, following this including those members of the Central Committee of the CPI who took a pro-Chinese stand- Jyoti Basu, Sundarayya, E M S Namboodirippadu and B T Ranadive.

The split sharpened with the publication of the scandalous “Dange letters” – allegedly written by the Chairman S A Dange, while he was in prison in 1924, on conspiracy charges of promoting Communism and denouncing the British Empire, seeking to collaborate with the British for his release- and persistent demand by the opposite group for impartial inquiries into them. Disciplinary action was taken following this against 32 members of the Central Committee, who walked out of its meeting following the refusal of the Dange faction to comply to their demands. Finally, as a cumulative effect of all such dissensions, A.K.Gopalan, the leader of the Communists in the Lok Sabha along with eleven of his colleagues separated themselves from the Parliamentary wing of the CPI and formed an independent Parliamentary Party. They became known as the Marxist Party or the CPI(M), the way they were recognized by the Election Commission on September 15th for the forthcoming State Legislature elections in Kerala (Fic, 1970).

According to a nephew of Sardar, who is a retired school teacher and a sympathizer of the CPI(M), this split was already presaged in the sacrifice of Sardar which happened in 1950, i.e., fourteen years behind the time when the split actually materialized. He drew his hindsight from the incident involving a couple of the leaders (who are no more) from the CPI; the less powerful in terms of strength in numbers are implicated as traitors, who through an act of surrendering in later times played significant role in the political scenario of the village and the state of Kerala after its formation in

10 See foot-note 76 and the section on biography for details of these events that are often portrayed as 'betrayal'.
1956. But, when the Communist movement first split in 1964, they joined the CPI, and this has led to the distinctive coloration of the CPI in the village as a conservative outfit. Nonetheless, it - the CPI in reference to the fact of Sardar’s martyrdom - forms the bedrock on which the dynamic dualism of its counterpart the CPI(M) and the refashioned identity of the kumbalaparambu clan as communists thrives.

According to this interpretation, so far as the clan is concerned, the scheme of the sacrifice that plotted the slaying of the victim is tactfully crafted within the ‘outside’ world of realpolitik in which the original, pure and untainted world of kinship virtues had no role to play. The sedition that is exclusively thrust on the martyr’s own comrades who for their own personal gains made the sacrifice of the martyr. The leaders of the CPI who along with Sardar Gopalakrishnan are expected to have led the procession on the fateful day, for their absence are featured as traitors. The same leadership came to the forefront of the CPI during the time of its split in the year 1964. The opposite faction the CPI(M), by virtue of their non-chalance retained the allegiance of the clan.

This scheme of sacrifice that was originally hatched within the periphery of the clan relationship- the return of the voyager to his nemesis- found its mirror image in the other scheme of sacrifice- the one in which the Communist leadership of the village was implicated as part of the underground activities in the years 1948-52. So much so that, even the split in the Communist movement that surfaced in the year 1964, is ideologically presaged in the story of sacrifice by sedition thus described from the year 1950 starting.

The Multiple Partaking of the Martyrdom/ The Political Community of the Left

If the construction of the martyr as the victim is thus maneuvered by the clan of the martyr, his portrayal as the hero is carried forward by the political community of the left, in the village. All factions of the Left, including the so-called conservative and radical formations of it, apportion the image of the martyr as a hero in their public speeches and demonstrations. This is a far more secular sphere of articulation but
thrives by its various possibilities of narrativity, accorded in the form of spectacular violence, cruelty and pain that marked the death of the martyr in his ‘clash’ with the police, on the fateful day of January 26th of 1950.

What constitutes such a political community is difficult to determine. It is a hotly contested arena of political allegiances. There is no homogenous formation at work behind the proliferation of these narratives. On the other hand there are contesting ideologies at work.

The Communist Party of India claims the legacy of the martyr through the naming of their local committee office after the name of Sardar, and through the allocation of land for the construction of a martyr’s pillar at a junction in the village. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) claims it through a consistent valorization of the martyr’s memory through the pages of its organ, the popular daily called Desabhimani, on every 26th of January, the day of Sardar’s martyrdom. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) does it through the organization of rallies and meetings separate from the joint rallies of the rest two Communist parties on the day of the martyrdom. Still, they all cater in their representations of the martyr to the local idioms of heroism and thus serve to draw well defined peripheries in terms of perceiving the posthumous persona of Sardar, notwithstanding its ghostly variability or spectrality - a potential that threatens the domestication of the martyr’s spirit, in such a manner.

All the three parties had split ways at different points in the growth of the Communist movement in India. Their ideological differences are also acute, although in the later times, the CPI and the CPI(M) have found themselves to be partners in ruling alliances in the State. The first serious rupture in the Communist movement took place in the year 1964, following the war with China when one faction of the Party took the strong view that a ‘socialist state cannot make an act of aggression’. This coupled with the allegations of espionage for the British during the under-trial days of the Meerut Conspiracy Case, 1928, against the then Secretary of the CPI, S.A.Dange held the centre stage in 1964. The formation of the CPI(M), that followed soon after saw the
first split in the Communist movement in India. In the State Legislative Assembly elections of 1965 in Kerala the CPI(M) came to the fore front. It defeated the ruling alliance at the Centre of which the CPI formed a part along with the Congress (I).

In 1967, the CPI and the CPI(M) re-united again and along with five other parties formed an electoral alliance called the United Front that remained in office upon winning the Assembly elections from 1967-69. In 1969, the CPI expressed dissidence within the Front and consequently the UF Ministry headed by EMS fell following the carrying of a no-confidence motion against his ministry in the House. This formed the backdrop for the second split between the CPI and the CPI(M) that had come together only for electoral alliances and not on the basis of a common party programme. From 1969-79 the CPI ruled in alliance with Congress and other parties in coalition till the years starting from 1969 till 1979 with C. Achutha Menon as the Chief Minister for the most part, succeeded by the Congressmen K. Karunakaran and A.K. Antony, following the Assembly elections in 1977. It was in the Assembly elections of 1980 that the two Communist Parties-CPI & CPI(M) decided to join hands and form a Left Democratic Front, fought the elections, won; but, stayed in power only till 1982. The electoral alliance has remained intact ever since. Both the Parties took out separate rallies on the day of Sardar’s martyrdom whenever they were in opposite camps of electoral alliance and joint rallies when they were part of the United Front (1967-69) or the Left Democratic Front (1980----).

The radical wing of the Communists that was formed following the Naxalbari uprisings in West Bengal found its resonance prominently amidst the youth in the village. For them Sardar was the embodiment of the Maoist militancy that such ideology held to be one of their founding tenets (Rao, 1971). The stories of the guerilla tactic that was used by the Communists during the days of underground activism following the Calcutta thesis found ample resonance in the heroic martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan. They also harp on the story of the victimization of Sardar; how he was made the sacrificial goat by the conservative leadership of the two other

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11 See Nossiter, T.J., 1988 pp. 82-108 for the splits and alliances within the Communist movement in Kerala vis-à-vis electoral politics.
Left parties. They thus articulate the theme of martyrdom as a trope to invoke an urge to return to certain original principles of ‘revolutionary innocence’ by which the mistakes of the Communist movement in the country to this date can be rectified.

The Communist parties often exhibit a kind of religious bigotry, in trying to apportion the memories of the martyr as their own private share of a sacred responsibility. This is probably due to the fact that the unfulfilled ambitions of the Calcutta Thesis find a burial ground along with the memorial column and commemoration rites for Gopalakrishnan. The collective responsibility of the Communists to have established a Socialist State, ruled by the Proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry, is transformed into a secret responsibility, through the institution of Gopalakrishnan’s martyrdom. Here it is comparable with the sacrifice of Abraham (Derrida, 1995:84-88).

Gopalakrishnan’s death, retold as a sacrifice, was a sacrifice in the utmost silence and secrecy. From all accounts that have followed, this was forged by Gopalakrishnan himself in extreme and exceptional loneliness, any sharing of which was merely a hypothetical proposition. As Derrida (ibid:80) observes the remarks of Kierkegaard, on the sacrifice of Abraham, that time and again, he (Kierkegaard) admits that he does not understand and does not deem himself capable of doing what Abraham did.

The Communist Parties, fight amongst themselves (as monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam around the hill at Montmartre, the site of Abraham’s sacrifice), for different appropriations of the same sacrifice, different orders of responsibility. The hill at Montmartre is sacred to all the three religions. It is also believed to be the way of the cross, in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, as well as the place where from Prophet Mohammed is believed to have ascended to heaven. For the solitary occupation of this sacred place, the three religions have fought several wars in different formations over centuries, and the strife continues even today, creating new martyrs and inspiring many others to do so, in its wake, almost every other day. Derrida (1995) evaluates the crisis of a responsible politics in the wake of this strife. A crisis of responsibility, because, in these martyrdoms, it is impossible to discern “the religious from the moral, the legal from the political” (ibid:82). The question that is basically raised is; if there is the possibility of a politics of responsibility, when the
gift of death, or the politics of martyrdom is defined within the undetachability of the self, from religiosity, as conceptualized in the gaze of the monotheistic God. The powerful God, has set his gaze on his believers and is demanding valuable sacrifices from them. The prototypical sacrifice demanded of Abraham looms in the horizon of this imagination. On the one hand, there is Abraham in his loneliness, rolling over in his mind, in extreme secrecy, the event of sacrificing his son’s life to the God. On the other hand, is the God, who has set his unraveling gaze upon Abraham, and sees through all Abraham’s thoughts without himself being seen. This is the cauldron of religious imagination from where human lives are issued forth every day, as gifts to the sacred Other; in trying to appropriate for oneself, the realm of secrecy, the realm of loneliness, as an endurable source of phantasmic power. The only solution to such a crisis is the multifarious dispelling of the secret, as ever-renewable source of knowing oneself, without necessarily joining the simulacrum or iconography of martyrdoms that sustains itself on the phantasmic power assumed by the secret. In the instance of the Communist parties and their internal bickerings over the possession of the value or virtue of Gopalakrishnan’s martyrdom, they are perpetuating the secret value of the truth, as well as truth as secret, which truth the martyr saw upon witnessing his death as self-sacrifice or gifting his own death, in total obeisance to a totalizing scrutinizing gaze of the Other. Their appropriating strategies thus thwart the multifarious expressions possible for a human life; any human life, not necessarily, that of Gopalakrishnan, in entering into a dialogue with the Other, on terms of mutual transparency. It is only in such representations that the power of the secret is disarmed and a new environment of truth established, that neither represses nor integrates the secret, but celebrates it within a carnivalesque space of heroisms, where man himself becomes God. It is this essential ritualistic experience in the death of Gopalakrishnan, that the Communist parties powered by the imagination of a homogeneity and singularity of truth seeks to repress. It is in Mauss’ conceptualization of death as a total social fact, that we arrive at, again in resolving the crisis of responsibility inherent to the sectarian portrayal of death as martyrdom. It is Mauss’ exposition that helps us situate this death; which is primarily political in definition, in the broader
light of the social, thus showing all aspects of the social-religious, legal, aesthetic, moral, political, economic, within it; without distinctions of the primary or secondary.

As the irrational or dark side of these contestations there also exist various other interpretations of the martyr's life - sexual life, i.e., mired as it is in the crude visions of a life in the underground removed from the limits of the civil society and hemmed by its peripheries amongst the untouchable and the lower castes a life of consummation - that attach to his memories a disastrous sovereignty of subjectivity arising out of nothingness. (Bataille, 1993: 173-183).

A study by Shulman, Subramanyam and Rao (1992), of a seventeenth century Sanskrit text by a Tamil Brahmin of the Nayaka period, shows that in the literary genre celebrated as campu such a tradition existed that linked heroism with eroticism. The authors of the book, 'Symbols of Substance', argue that, "Death in battle is an erotic experience: the slain hero can expect the welcoming embrace of the heavenly courtesans, who waste no time in inflicting on him the scars of coitus- so often tellingly compared to those of war. One sacrifices one body in order to achieve sensual delight with a new (less perishable) one" (ibid:11). The text in question Visvagunadarsacampu by Venkatadhvarin is celebrating the rise of warriors from amongst the hitherto marginal Balijas; Telugu migratories into the Tamil country in the 15th and 16th centuries, recently politicized, to political and cultural power. They were an important source of power and support for the Nayaka State-system. Celebrations of heroism have remained an integral aspect of pazhamtamil songs, the root language of South India, from which Malayalam as well as other South Indian languages have taken shape (Gurukkal & Varier, 1995). To that extent they have remained and continue to remain a part and parcel of the oral tradition in these regions. The stories of sexual licentiousness thus get integrated with the heroic ring around the martyr, even though in some respects, the memory of the martyr assumes a demoniacal or spectral capability that detaches him from all the representations of an overtly political nature and links him to the most primordial state of humanity, civility or savagery where every form of transgressions of the rules and the prohibitions of the civil society was possible. The image of a human being detached from all the
emotional and material needs of the civil society. Someone, who has found an outlet for these requirements, by not being a part of the civil society. Such representations, even though inevitably present, evoke the deepest sense of fear and danger, in the minds of the interpreter that, his death is often depicted as a necessary outcome of stepping into the danger zone of taboo.

The taming of the hero has been most singularly achieved in the form of a novel that was written on the life of the martyr although the author, a school teacher by the name E.V. Gopalan, from a village called Mathilakom that neighbours Edathiruthy, does not make any claim to it being an authentic biography. The novel is a rather sanitized version of the various real accounts on the life of the martyr collected from the villagers. The novelist, nonetheless a person of the martyr’s own stature in social ranking and repute, if not more has written his story in such a way as to give shape in his own mind to the ideal-typical revolutionary desired by common consent in their days. Yet, there is little strikingly resembling in the novel with the life of Sardar Gopalakrishnan as such, as we have gathered from the various respondents, notwithstanding the ‘chronotope’ of theatre-classical and folk- in which the novel itself has been written and the heroism constructed¹².

The idioms associated with theatre as a consistently evoked characteristic can be seen in the multiplicity of narratives regarding the leadership virtues of Sardar. The booming voice, the towering presence, unusually big moustache all relate to the portrayal of the hero in recollection of memories by the various respondents. Most accounts of his life are portrayed in a theatrical manner with a lot of emphasis on his presence. According to Sudhir Singh (late), a son-in-law of Sardar’s brother Unniappan master, from the village of Kazhimbram, Sardar was described against the natural setting of the village in romantic ways, as the man who walked with his head held high dwarfing the leaves of the pineapple shoots (not the edible pineapple; but a

¹² By ‘chronotope’, we mean “a literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality” (Bakhtin, 1981:243). A critique of this novel is added in the appendix in which I have tried to show how forms of theater like a ballet or a kathakali stage mark progressive interventions in the narrative as well as the idioms associated with theater serve to hold the narrative coherent and intact
wild variety of the plant that is used mostly in fencing and from the dried-processed leaves of which mats are woven) that hedged the paths in the village. The recollections here are of an avidly theatrical nature and the imagination always conveys the presence of an enacted stage.

This stage climaxes with the spectacle of cruelty and pain with which the martyr met his death. Without the detailing of the enormity of pain that was involved in his death, no narrative is regarded as complete or the depth of the tragedy conveyed. In the Nattika of today, it is regarded with the awe a Republican and Sovereign State commands over a state of terror. The historic background of the National movement, the attainment of Independence and the declaration of Sovereignty in the form of the Republic stand mute witness to the narration of these events that essentially portray the martyrdom of Sardar.

The heroism also thrives through the continuos initiation of ever new stories about the ritual of observing the martyrdom on the day of the 26th January. This is the essential nature of the story that Ravi, one of my respondents, tells about the Martyrdom Day in the year 1976. The time was when a state of internal emergency was declared in the State by the then Government ruling the Centre, headed by Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi of the Congress Party.

Ravi, a veteran Communist from the village of Edathiruthy was with the Communist movement from his school days in the 1940s. He is a reputed dramatist having penned plays and staged them at different places in and around Nattika right from the late fifties. He talks about the incident that happened on the Martyrdom Day in 1976 as an effort of self-affirmation of against what allegedly was an attempt by the CPI(M) to appropriate entirely for itself the right to hold rallies or demonstrations for the martyr.

It was counter revolution at its worst according to Ravi when he saw the notice issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), announcing the commemoration of the martyrdom day that year, with no mention of the venue at which the programmes would be held. He became suspicious about the occurrence of such a 'mistake'. He had an inkling that there was a lie hidden somewhere looking at the way things were
progressing. His suspicions were confirmed when he saw the CPI(M) party organ on the 26th morning which said that the Sardar day commemoration was cancelled that year. He was infuriated about the decision of the party—that the Party did not want to hold a demonstration on the Sardar day for no rhyme or reason. He was even more enraged about the lie concealed in the decision, when it was written all over the face of the notice issued by the Party, that for the fear of the bans and restrictions on the Party owing to the state of internal Emergency, it had thus decided. For him the notice presaged the open statement that the Party lead organ, the daily Desabhimani that came out with the announcement on the 26th of January that the Sardar day commemoration for that year was cancelled.

Obliging the law for the repudiation of a martyr’s memory who witnessed his death at the hands of the very Law when it had lost all moorings of justice was the most outrageous act of insolence to the martyr.

Enraged upon this, on the morning of January 26th, Ravi came to the flag post of the Party at the Pulichodu junction in the village and pulling down the Party flag plucked the insignia of star on the flag leaving just the hammer and sickle behind, thus reinstating it into the form it was at the time of Sardar’s death when the Communist Party was an undivided entity. Then he took out in procession all by himself, shouting the slogan edathum valatham thulayatte, rathsaakshi jayikkattey—damn the Left and the Right, victory to the Martyr.13

He reached the martyr’s column erected in the memory of Sardar at a distance of a kilometer’s walk from the junction and planted the flag of the old undivided Communist party and spoke against the lie and the hypocrisy that the Communist movement had spawned in the last so many years of its existence to the people who had joined him in the demonstration.

13 The Left and the Right are the slang for the two Communist Parties, the CPI and the CPI(M) who were opposite camps then, the Right or the CPI supporting the Congress regime at the Centre and hence also the Emergency declaration and the Left or the CPI(M) opposing it both at the Centre and in the state.
In the afternoon that day, when the Secretary of the Local Committee of the CPI(M) got to know about the incident, Ravi recalls he came in a car to the spot from where Ravi had taken the Party flag and crossed words with him about the use of their Party flag. Ravi retorted saying the flag did not belong to anyone specific and belonged only to World working class movement and the Party had no rightful claim to it when it was so outrageously betraying the principles of this movement when it cancelled the Sardar day commemorations. The Secretary was finally dumbfounded in the long argument that followed between him and Ravi and had to return empty handed with no retrieval of the flag that he came claiming for.

The sovereignty of the heroism was affirmed thus, through a re-enactment of the story of the martyrdom on that day of 26th January 1977, with the scripting of a discourse that was being sought to be repressed by the machinery of the Communist Party (Marxist). The ‘social drama’ of this subversion concluded with Kochupennu,- a veteran Communist who had been active since the forties entering the stage. She had entered the nationalist foray in the village to protest against the strictures of the landlord. She came up and congratulated Ravi for the way he treated the Party Secretary, yet herself chiding him for his impudence to claim the flag of the undivided Communist Party as theirs.

This also forms a sub-text to the concept of martyrdom, elucidating the role of women in the theory of martyrdom. The idea of martyrdom as a rebellion against the state (kingdom according to medieval Islam that spawned this idea of martyrdom) and women as the ‘leaders of the caravan of the captives and the survivors of the martyrs’ according to Ali Shariati, one of the champions of Iranian revolution in 1978 (Uberoi, 1996: 133), finds its reflection in this incident.

The extension of a public space of democratic dissent and articulation is an integral feature of the observation of the Sardar day. This factor continues even to this day, notwithstanding the appropriation of the theories of martyrdom by the three labeled organizations of the Left- the CPI, CPI(M) and the CPI(ML). During my field work in the year 2000, a group of volunteers who were suspended from the local committee of
the CPI(M) for disciplinary measures invoked against them in coming up with the choice of an alternative candidate for the Panchayat elections of 1999, made the Sardar day a rallying point to make the voice of their dissent clear. They claimed to represent a heroic image of Sardar 'different' from the way he was often featured in the organized representations by the dominant Left.

They achieved this by publishing a souvenir on Sardar; by collecting several stories about the death of the martyr by meeting several veteran Communists in the firka from the forties and the fifties, and interviewing them. The souvenir was released at a public meeting in the village of Edathiruthy on the day of January 26th. They threw an open challenge to the representations of heroism manipulated by the CPI and the CPI(M) who had used colourful, sprightly drawn pictures of the martyr. They substituted them with a sober photograph of the man, that in its very appearance conveyed a different feeling from the one usually flaunted. They made claims to bringing to life the man in the martyr who was so far camouflaged by portrayal of vested interests of the organized Left.

The ardor of revolting and subverting against dominant representations of reality is instinctively grafted to all representations of the martyr's heroism as we learn from these different articulations of the heroism in the death of Sardar Gopalakrishnan.

The cultural milieu of heroism that is thus constructed has essentially helped to unify the diversifying pulls of the state, civil society and religion. According to J.P.S. Uberoi (1996) the ideal of martyrdom was one of the most crucial unifying elements of the medieval society in Northern India. This was the point when a confluence of religions—Islam and Hinduism was occurring in India. According to him the growth of Sikhism that held the ideal of martyrdom as its basic canon, served as a conduit for the bridging of the two cultures, that had begun to co-exist peacefully. The act of voluntary renunciation of self-hood with which a novice is initiated into Sikhism is the exact inverse of the initiation of Hindu boy into Brahminhood (ibid: 13-18). At the same time, Islam represents a way of life, that teaches its followers exemplary ways of dying. In both Sikhism as well as in Islam martyrdom is a unifying symbol, the
collective potentials of which have been evidenced in the history of both the religions (ibid: 112-134). This milieu in fact forms the foundation for the heroic representations of Sardar as martyr by the political community, which fact is borne out by the title of Sardar with which Gopalakrishnan is known throughout Nattika today. Sardar is originally an Urdu term that stands for the chieftain. In the socio-cultural milieu of the national and social movements of Kerala in the twentieth century this word has served to connote the encounter of the two religions—Islam and Hinduism, as in Sikhism and Gopalakrishnan was represented as a widely traveled man reflecting a pan-Indian consciousness.

In the next chapter, we shall try to address the aspects of political economy pertaining to the fact of Sardar's death. Given the fact that the commemoration rituals have great volatility, perhaps because of the continuing existence of essentially agrarian modes of production, the next chapter focuses on the relation between ritual and political myth. Ritualistic spaces have great vitality in Nattika even within the larger context of the utilitarian capitalist economy catching up with the older forms of production and consumption, with the legitimate sanction of the Laws of the Indian Republic.

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14 This is more clearly elaborated in pages 170-171, chapter 3.