CHAPTER 3
STRUCTURING AN ILLUSION - DEFINING THE REALM OF RITUAL

Having dealt with the historic and sociological backdrop to the fact of martyrdom/sacrifice in the last two chapters, here we enter a theoretical, methodological domain with the intention of demarcating the realm of the ritualistic aspects of total social phenomenon and what gives it the 'generative violence' characteristic to the sacred, according to Girard (1988:269). In doing thus, we are also highlighting the political and economic aspects of the phenomenon; from the methodological viewpoint of "general economy", a concept introduced by George Bataille, into the study of society. But, before moving on to the analysis of George Bataille, we have to first locate the base elements that constitute the death of K.C. Gopalakrishnan on 26th January 1950, into his martyrdom or sacrifice.

First of all, is the conspicuous absence of Law, in the definition of his death. The Law it is believed records the birth and death of every Citizen in this country. But, the same Law that declared its Sovereignty through a written draft; the Indian Constitution, erased the existence of the person called K.C. Gopalakrishnan, incidentally on the same day, that it declared itself Sovereign.

Traditional societies have their own ways of ascertaining the basic facts about a human life. Most traditional societies have their own practices of initiating a new-born child into the society. According to the rituals of the Ezhavas, into which caste Sardar was born, it begins with the 28th day in the life of the new-born, which is considered to be a very auspicious day. Following this is the ceremony of naming the child. Then, feeding it for the first time on rice-the staple diet, when it is three months of age. This is followed by initiation into education-the art of learning to read and write including the practice of martial arts. For the girl child the rites on the attainment of puberty, the rites of the nuptial, the rites of pregnancy and child birth and finally when he/she is
dead, the rites of cremation. All these rites were performed for Gopalakrishnan except for the rites of marriage or rites of fatherhood. In the performance of his cremation rites, there is a vital difference. They were done in the absence of his corpse and were done twice. In the absence of a corpse it is the symbol of a corpse that takes the place of corpse. The rites were done twice because the first time the rites were performed the departed soul that is represented in a particular species of crow (balikkaka) is believed to have refused to accept the ritual offerings. Both times, the rites were performed only in the symbolic presence of Gopalakrishnan’s corpse, and were performed by his nephews. In the ritual oblations, made in the second round, according to his Sister-in-law, the birds accepted the offerings, thus symbolizing the initiation of the departed soul in its journey to the nether world.

If the modern Law glossed over the death of Gopalakrishnan, the traditional or moral Law, accepted it and made its profound significance clear by making two rounds of crematory rites to his soul. Yet, death as a total social phenomenon, according to the definition of Robert Hertz, was left unfulfilled. The dual and painful process of mental disintegration and synthesis; the process, was yet to be completed for the society, for its peace to be recovered triumphant over death (Hertz, 1960: 86). The crematory rites, did fulfill the requirements of this peace to some extent. But, it was restricted, in the sense that it was only Sardar’s clan that was party to it. As a martyr of the political movement, as a victim of ritualistic desire; the primordial desire for the collective, the mental disintegration in the villages of Nattika firka of that Sardar’s death had begun was not yet treated to 1. Thus began the martyrdom day commemorations for him, that is observed ritualistically till date, every year on the 26th of January, posing as a critical and radical choice; death, in the form of sacrifice to fulfill, the greater requirements of society for collective bonding, much more so than affirmation of faith in a document; deed or draft of Rights (the Constitution that was adopted on the same day), adopted through mutual consent. The idea of a ‘generative violence’

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1 For a graphic description of this scenario in the village of Edathiruthy, home to both Ravi and Gopalakrishnan, see the section on Ravi’s recollections when he returned from Bombay, in March, 1950, pages 254-255.
fundamental to rituals; and ritual as such as the foundation of society was unknown to the modern philosophers or social contract theorists according to Rene Gerard (1988). Hence, they often made recourse to a social contract that is implicitly or explicitly rooted in "reason", "good sense", "mutual self interest" and so forth according to Gerard (ibid: 259). For the people of the firka the cost of announcing sovereignty and the Republic, incurred nothing less than the sacrifice of a human life.

The ritualistic dimension is gained for his martyrdom day commemorations, from a very complex milieu of association of meaning to usual objects and artefacts, including names of people and places, in every day life, that gain such a dimension only when seen through the ritualistic pattern of the commemorations.

First, the title of 'Sardar' attached to the name of the martyr. It is a word that has immense ritualistic significance in India, because a Sardar is often identified as an adherent of the religion of Sikhism, even though it has its etymological roots in Urdu, where it means chieftain. J.P.S. Uberoi has done a study of the militant tradition of self-sacrifice that can be seen in Sikhism. Sikhism according to him arose in medieval India as a reconciliation between the two prominent religions of the contemporary period- Islam and Hinduism and also as a path to 'the total human emancipation of religious man' (Uberoi, 1996: 17). Sikhism also 'marked the opening of the modern period of history in the Punjab'. Sikhism had already marked its ideological presence in the social milieu of Kerala in early twentieth century, during the Abstention movement in the princely State of Travancore through the conversion of some

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2 A movement begun in 1932, December the movement had representations from basically the lower strata of society mostly the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims. Their major demand was that reservation of seats on the basis of the strength of population alone would save and safeguard the interests of these communities. Towards this end, four main communal organizations- Ezhava Political League, Travancore State Catholic League, All Travancore Muslim Service League and Latin Christian Mahajana Sabha formed the Travancore Joint Political Congress as the organization for their struggle. It is true that the Congress did not put forward the right to universal adulthood franchise as one of its demands; but, the democratic stirrings behind the formation of the Congress was still largely accepted by the Nationalist leadership of the time including the likes of A.K.Gopalan, P.Krishnapilla, EMS Nambuthirippadu etc. The Abstentionists derived their name from their call to boycott the 1933 elections to the Travancore Legislature against the Dewan's diffidence in not allowing for community-based electorates over and above the existing system of contesting for elections and casting votes for which ownership or property rights and payment of tax to the Government formed one of the major
prominent Ezhava leaders into Sikhism (Kusuman, 1976:19). Gopalakrishnan, even though a Communist, thus representative of a philosophy that denied the existence of God and treated religion as ‘false consciousness’ or ‘the opium of the masses’, is but represented in his martyrdom, also as a religious person. This is evidently due to the pre-fix of Sardar attached to his name. Our main source of this argument is J.P.S. Uberoi’s analysis of the spirit of martyrdom in Sikhism. It (the spirit) is the Sikh’s cultic willingness to die for the sake of attaining martyrdom for his faith. This attaches a specific value to the epithet of Sardar, with which a Sikh is identified. This epithet certainly adds a religious dimension of meaning to Gopalakrishnan’s martyrdom, as well. Uberoi quotes Niharranjan Ray, a historian on the distinctive feature of death according to Sikhism, who says, “For the first time, fear of death, the darkest and greatest of all fears, was taken out of man, death not merely in the heat and tumult of war, but, death in silent defiance of the most painful and tortuous tyranny........Yet the universal God was ever their sole inspiration and ideal of social and individual activity ” (ibid: 61).

This symbolic dimension of the word ‘Sardar’ notwithstanding, there is a local derivative of the epithet as some of the contemporaries of Gopalakrishnan revealed. This originated from their experiences with serving the auxiliary units of the British Indian Army, at various places in the North and East of India. The captain of this ‘unit’ was also titled ‘Sardar’. A couple of Sardar’s brothers; Unni and Sreedharan, who had worked for these auxiliary units were also captains of these ‘units’ and hence carried the title ‘Sardar’. Yet, it was Gopalakrishnan, who served the Air Force, who came to be addressed with the title of ‘Sardar’ when he returned from the Force. Working for the ‘Unit’, as it came to be popularly addressed in conversation, became a singular opportunity for many peasants to earn a livelihood, even though far from home, in the acute days of scarcity spawned by the Second World War, coupled with the destructive storm of 1942, in Nattika.

criterion (Kusuman: 1976).) in the princely state of Travancore through the conversion of some prominent Ezhava leaders into Sikhism (Kusuman: 1976:19)

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Also of cultic and ritualistic importance are a couple of objects that belonged to the martyr. These are his watch and pen. His pen became the subject of a short story by a well known writer and theatre personality from Nattika firka, viz., Damodaran Pottekkattu. The story was titled, ‘The Story of the Pen’, *pena paranja katha*. The martyr, Sardar Gopalakrishnan, left his pen and watch with P.K.Gopalakrishnan, another leading Communist from the firka, who went on to become the Deputy Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, before, going forward to meet his end in the rally, on the 26th of January, 1950. According to him, these two objects, were later on transferred to Jyoti Basu, at a meeting of the Communist Party organized at Calicut, in late 1951. Its whereabouts now, even though, unknown to the firka, they have also taken their place in a ritualistic ordering of space, distinct from his corpse, that was disposed with the accompaniment of no ritual at all. The sacred nature attained by objects that are associated with the victim in a sacrifice, has been pointed out by Hubert & Mauss (1964:48). Such objects are consecrated and hence deserve special attention in treatment. The martyrs’ watch and his pen, in this case enter a piaculum- a ritual space wherein expiatory rites are performed for a departed soul; which is represented by the stage upon which they were handed over to Jyoti Basu by P.K.Gopalakrishnan. From now on, these objects shall be removed from their profane order and they become sacred in value that reflects in such examples as the aesthetics of a short story or the gist of an essay paying homage to the memory of the victim.

Then, there are places associated with the commemoration of his death. These are the monuments erected for his memory, which assume a ritualistic significance, when seen through the prism of his death as a total social phenomenon.

Gopalakrishnan’s sacrifice is an example of the way modernity creates its theaters of worship. The spectacles of landmark that preserve the memory of the martyr have a certain aspect of sacredness to them, even though they be set amidst the most profane of surroundings. In fact, such a dualism—of the sacred and the profane—collapses, when we look at the precincts of this landmark. Yet, they announce unique features of

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3 Reference here is to the short story *pena paranja katha* by D.M.Pottekkattu and the memoir by P.K.Gopalakrishnan, both taken from the commemorative souvenir on Sardar, *Chirasmarana*. 

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both the sacred and the profane, that are perceptible to an anthropologist. This is true of the martyr's column or pillar erected for him in the village of Edamuttom or the spot by the sea shore in the village of Valappadu where his corpse was allegedly buried by the police. The former forms an androgynous symbol of cosmic unity whereas the latter represents a fusion of the five basic elements of cosmos - earth, air, water, fire and sky/ether (bhumi, vayu, jalam, agni, aakasam).

First let us take a closer look at the topography of the memorial at Edamuttom. In deciphering the symbolic lay out of this place, we take our concepts from analytical psychology. It is the psychologist Carl Jung who heralded the study of human mind, in the context of the archetypes combining therefore, cultures and collective symbols. Archetype is a symbolism integrated with the unconscious mind. They are such symbols that have not been consciously elaborated, and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience. Even though collective, as a representation, they have no historic specificity. They are neither genetically transmitted nor traditionally handed down. The collective that it represents is a collective that lives only in the individual unconscious. From his clinical experiences on which he has based his proposition, Jung has concluded that, the knowledge of archetypes is limited to the nervous system as opposed to the cerebro-spinal system that forms the biological datum for perceptions), and hence its formation intuitively, through sympathetic excitations (Jung, 1969, Vol.9,Part I:5). It may be compared to Michael Taussig's idea of dialectical images⁴, that come to the individual's mind, fleetingly, in a moment of danger. The nature of the functioning of both dialectical images as well as archetypes, is intuitive and sympathetic. The archetypes are the bridges that connect the individual consciousness with the collective unconscious according to Jung. Though a product of the individual psyche, knowledge of the archetypes opens a realm of the universal, in that it involves, "a knowledge of the innermost life of other beings" (ibid: 20).

⁴An idea originally propounded by Walter Benjamin, who says, "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and never seen again........Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger" (Benjamin quoted in Taussig:1987: 367).
Coming back to the spatial layout of archetypal symbolism, at the village junction of Edamuttom, there stands the memorial column for Sardar Gopalakrishnan, next to the National Highway, that was built in the sixties and is an unmistakable sign of modernity in the village. Its past goes even further back in time when it was called the Tippu Sultan road attributed to the Mysorean invader who raided Malabar in late eighteenth century. It was modernized following Independence and renamed the National Highway 17 (NH 17, in short). If the phallic looking octagonal pillar erected in front of the Local Committee office building of the CPI stands to the West of the Highway, to the East of the Highway and facing the pillar stands the feminine; dome shaped mausoleum for a reputed Ayurvedic physician from the neighbouring village of Kazhimbrom, Cholayil Mami Vaidyar. Both Gopalakrishnan and Mami Vaidyar belonged to the caste of the Ezhavas; but, both represented in a more or less contemporary life time, distinct and often mutually contrasting ideologies in the social milieu of their time. Gopalakrishnan is often cited as the prototypical comrade or activist of the Communists, and Mami Vaidyar as a follower of the teachings of the social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. Both of them share one thing in common, though. The space of death. If, Gopalakrishnan is believed to have virtually foreseen his death at the hands of the police on the first Republic Day of India, Mami Vaidyar is believed to have attained samadhi which means the well anticipated and timely departure of the soul from the body, the manner in which Narayana Guru also is believed to have died. The archetypes of the feminine and the masculine symbols are thus blended together with the significant separation or difference brought on them by the National Highway. If the masculine (animus) and the feminine (anima) archetypes lay to the west and the east of the road respectively, the famed bhagavathy temple of Kodungallore, to the South, assumes the role of the archetype of the chthonic Mother, and the muthayyan temple at Parachini to the North, becomes the archetype of the wise old man. Linking the four archetypes runs the road on which Sardar met with his

5 Sanoo (1986:497), says Mami Vaidyar was alongside the Guru, even in his last days supervising and attending to the treatment of his illnesses that set in late. Along with Mami Vaidyar was Panavalli Krishnan Vaidyar, another disciple of the Guru.

6 In local parlance, as well as Government calendar, the death of the Guru is referred to as samadhi.
sacrifice, the four archetypes thus constituting the psychic totality of the victim’s self. Jung calls this the marriage quarternio, which is also an example of the Jungian symbol of a psychic totality of Self. The archetype of quarternio, as such is derived by Jung, from the Buddhist *mandala* symbolism.

It may be argued that, it is the powerful metaphor of the road that runs through it, that gives the *mandala* its elementary motion in signification. The road runs like an axis that not merely rotates the wheel of the *mandala* but also links the famous *bhagavathy* temple of Kodungallore in the South to the original seat of the cultic deity *muthappan* in Parachini. As discussed in chapter 5, the *sakta* cult is a powerful sub-text of martyrdom day commemorations. It is in thus dividing and uniting an otherwise parallelogram of forces that do not meet, if not in a place demarcated for worship, in an archetypal symbolism that the road becomes a mytheme.

If such is the nature of symbolic collation at the place where he died, at the place where he was buried, the symbolism is that of the *pancabhuta*, of the RigVeda, found in existence as part of oral tradition in contemporary India. This we shall now proceed to discuss.

The landscape at the sea shore inheres a different set of signs in ascribing the divinity that it announces spectacularly. The spot where Gopalakrishnan’s corpse was buried and the spot from where the commemoration rallies began on the day of his martyrdom, is a spot where the land (*prithvi*) meets the sea (*ap*) where the wind (*vayu*) always blows strong, where the red flag of the Communists symbolizes the fire (*tejas*); with the etherial sky (*aakasa*) looming the horizon. This is a primordial order of signs, that in their multiple ways of ordering maneuvered the thought of the Vedic collectives. Although, the study of the Vedas has remained a recluse of the upper caste Hindus, the same order of signs may be seen amongst the Santal tribals of West Bengal, and Orissa and also amongst the Viswakarmas (artisans) of Karnataka, as part of oral tradition. In a rudimentary essay (based on the yet to be fully revived OIChi script of the Santals, and based largely on Santal songs ) N. Patnaik⁷, discusses how the

pancabhuta play a decisive role on the ways of healing amongst the Santals. The human body is made up of the five elements which, when balanced and in harmony with one another, bestow well-being on mankind and other living organisms. For the Viswakarmas the five elements form the basis of the professional specialization found amongst them as a community- the ironsmith (earth), the coppersmith (fire), the goldsmith (sky), the carpenter (water) and the sculptor (wind). The five crafts-men are independent, there is absolute separation between them, but it is only together that, they are self-contained. They are manufacturers who disturb an existing natural order to obtain material which they transform into cultural artifacts meant to be static and permanent. Besides the five elements, they are also worshippers of Kali and Siva, thus forming a part of the saktta cult, which symbolically conceives energy as feminine (Bailey, 1989:28, Preston, 1980:14) that was/is wide-spread elsewhere in South India. Jan Brouwer in this essay⁸, discusses the essential equality amongst the Viswakarma craftsmen, who like the Buddhists, have stepped out of the Hindu fold, but, unlike them have at once stepped back and formulated their own cultural ideology without rejecting the Vedic and classical Sanskrit literature.

Such an ambiguity is written large over the ritual symbolism ordained in the martyrdom commemorations for Sardar, as well. There is an anxiety to break free of all traditions, yet there is a diffidence, in making it happen. Such an ambiguity that lay at the roots of the history of the CPI itself, came to its climax in the death of Gopalakrishnan, in a spectacular manner. Today, as an expiatory rite, there is an affirmation of faith in the rites of mourning for the martyr that begins from this very spot, by the sea-shore where he was buried.

It is here the fore-ground for the commemoration of the martyrdom day begins, on the 21st of January, every year known as the Flag Day of the Communists. The birth day of Lenin, on this day a flag post with the red flag fluttering atop goes up at this spot

⁸ Brouwer J, The Viswakarma Worldview, www.igncas.nic.in. Both these essays (foot-notes 2&3) have been presented as proposals for research project, at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, Delhi. Jan Brouwer already has a published work, The Makers of the World: Caste, Craft and Mind of South Indian Artisans on the Viswakarmas. Aananda Coomaraswamy’s work, Viswakarma: Examples of Indian Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Handicraft is also a valuable reference in this regard.
which remains there till the 26th of January, when the martyrdom day rally begins from the same spot after the participants of the rally shower petals of the red flower hibiscus\textit{(chembarathy)} at the bottom of the flag post. The landmark transforms into a piaculum or a sacred space for a ritual through the ordaining of the signs in the aforementioned order. This is not part of any narrative. But, it is a representation of the human consciousness, that transforms this piece of land into a space of ritual for the participants of the ritual.

Between the two places of memoria built for Sardar Gopalakrishnan, there is also a running strand of modern historical narrative, that identifies Kerala’s ancient past with Buddhist influence. Thus the sea shore and the village corner at Edamuttom present a dichotomy; the former symbolizing the later Hindu influence in the society of Kerala, and the latter the ancient Buddhist influence. We have already dealt with some of the reigning debates on these themes regarding when and how these religions are thought to have made their entry and influence on the people of this land, in chapter I. With the case of these two memoria, they make the historical presence of these myths visible to the naked eye, and thus a part of the consciousness of the people. It goes to show how powerful a role, the collation of signs in the form of archetypes can play in the process of evolving and dissipating knowledge.

Similarly, there is a ritual definition of the place called the Nattika \textit{firka} as opposed to a revenue-based legal definition. If, the Nattika dealt within our study at the time of the martyrdom/sacrifice that we have studied in our thesis was a part of the Malabar district of Madras State, today it is a part of the Trichur district of Kerala State\textsuperscript{9}. The villages that comprised the revenue division of the \textit{firka} today lay scattered in different Taluks under the Trichur district. The Nattika \textit{firka} as a revenue division with a revenue inspector at its helm continues to exist even today as a part of the administrative machinery of the State, but its constitution has changed in terms of the villages it contained. Many of the villages that were a part of the \textit{firka} now come under the Kodungallur Taluk, whereas the Nattika \textit{firka} as such continues to be a part

\textsuperscript{9} See also foot note 2, Chapter I.
of Chowghat Taluk as before. Even the Edathiruthy village that was home to the martyr Sardar Gopalakrishnan, now belongs to the Kodungallur Taluk and a different firka. Still, the memory ordained by the martyrdom/sacrifice of Sardar Gopalakrishnan is of such a nature that it affords mnemonic totality to Nattika firka as it existed prior to the days of the formation of the Kerala State. The old-timers in the village still recall with a finite approximation and a deep rooted nostalgia, the names of the fourteen villages that comprised the Nattika firka in the Malabar district which actually formed the rear or southern end of the district, what with Cochin lying a distant eighty kilometers further south and separated in between from Malabar by the princely State of Cochin.

There is little appreciation of the status of the firka as it stands today, other than the way it stands described in the Trichur District Gazette. More of it’s identity is preserved from the pre-State formation days, as the home of the first martyr of the Communists in the Indian Republic. The formation of this unique political identity and its continuance even today in the imagination of the people owes to the memory of the martyrdom/sacrifice. Nattika was also a constituency for elections to the District Board or the representative body of the Madras Government administering the District affairs. In the State of Kerala, it is the name of a constituency in the State Legislature. Yet, the fondness for the association of the name of the place with firka still remains to this day, owing to the martyrdom of Gopalakrishnan by which it became witness to the re-birth of the Nation-State in the form of a Republic. The villages that constituted the firka in 1950, coincided also with the villages constituting the manappuram committee of the CPI, that was also called the Nattika firka committee. It was under the leadership of this Committee that the Republic Day rally (Citizens' Rights Rally) was staged by the Communists on the first Republic Day and following which Sardar Gopalakrishnan lost his life. It may be said that through such martyrdom/sacrifice the people today imagine the finitude of a geographical space that is perfect in ritually defining the space of Gopalakrishnan’s martyrdom itself. The existence of the Indian Republic is established through a romantic association with mortality or through the space of death. In attaining to this identification with the Republic of India the people
of the *firka* transformed the event of martyrdom/sacrifice into a sphere of transformative synthesis that has kept itself alive in the successive years of the Indian Republic. There is a distinctive political geography of this place that emerges from the commemoration of the successive martyrdom days over the last more than fifty years in the existence of the Republic. It is this geography that more than anything else that has allowed for the mythification of a place called Nattika. The villages that formed the Nattika *firka*, during the period related to our study, that is prior to 1956, before the formation of a unified State of Kerala, now lay scattered within two different *firkas*—those of Nattika and Kodungallur. The integration that the fifteen villages or *amsams* that the *firka* enjoyed in the revenue map of Malabar District does not exist any more. But, in the realm of 'dialogic imagination' pertaining to the fact of martyrdom/ sacrifice, these villages still retain their colonial identity (the Nattika *firka* as it existed under the Madras Presidency 1792-1956).

This in fact, was one of the crucial turning points in the course of the field work; in the search for identifying the statistical aspects of the social fact. The search for a revenue map of the village, post -Land Reforms (1963) in the State of Kerala, left one stranded and in a very difficult situation. Our inquiries at the Village Office of Edathiruthy where the land records are kept, taught us that a re-survey has not been done, even though following the Land Reforms Act, 1963, the State had taken unilateral possession of all land in the State, minus the forests and plantations, in the Ghat ranges that were specifically mentioned in the Act. Every tenant was given the Right of possession to the piece of land where he/she had a settlement (*kudy*- the Right itself was called *kudykidappavakaasam*). Land Tribunals were set up centered around the Taluks to give the erstwhile tenants, title deeds to their respective plots of settlement. This meant the breaking up of the huge land- holdings that were under the singular possession of individual landlords. In the effort of the Tribunals working in tandem with the Village Offices at the basic level, a systematic reallocation was essential. In the absence of a total re-survey of the land, following the Reforms Act of 1963, the next best choice, in terms of a systematic map of land holdings in Kerala, came, in the instance of Edathiruthy village from the 1905 survey done by the British dispensation.
of the erstwhile District of Malabar. This map bore the stamp of feudalism that the Land Reforms sought to erase. Dependence on the same map, for the redistribution of land, amongst the 1,881 house-holds (according to 1981 census), in the village proved an onerous task for the Village Officers, giving rise to many disputes about the drawing of the boundary lines on the map. If there were 214 landholders who split the area covered by the village on the map into distinctive plots according to the 1905 survey; today, the same area is divided by overdrawing on the same map, amongst 1,881 land holders. The redrawing of the boundaries on the map left by the British dispensation according to the Village Office authorities give rise to many a serious land dispute in the village. Generally, the State has followed three different ways for re-distributing the land amongst the tenants. The Revenue Department, accepted as valuable, only three types of documents, with regard to the tenant’s possession of his/her plot of land, after it declared itself the sole owner of all land in the State, through the Reform legislation. The latter basically meant the denial of any Right on the land to the erstwhile land-holders, mainly the janmis. These three types of documents were called, 1) kraya certificate 2) kudy kidappu avakaasam, and 3) janmi’s deed. The first certificate had to be directly obtained from the Land Tribunal, which after hearing the petitioner’s claim to the land, decided whether he/she was to be duly awarded possession over the plot of land claimed in the petition. Such awards were final, and hence mostly undisputed and non-controversial10. The second was the tenant’s right to the plot where he/she had set up her/his holding, which in the case of most of the peasants were part of a larger piece of land belonging to the landlord. This claim, extended to 7½ cents of land, which was also awarded to the petitioner upon his approaching the Tribunal and following its decision, that the land may be given11. The third was the land given by the landlord (janmi) to the tenant. The tenant’s due claim according to the Reforms Act, did not exceed 2½ cents and it was left to the discretion of the landlord, to choose how much land and where in his holding was

10 Known as tenancy reforms, such awards secured the possession of 36.5% of the net sown area by 1.3 million house-holds (Leiten, EPW, Apr 20-26, 2002).

11 Also mostly a success, the kudykidappavakaasam was distributed to 2,75,000 of the 4,50,000 applications received (Leiten, op. cit.).
such land to be given. The tenant had to pay a price for this, as well, although in
instalments. According to the Village Officer, this was the trouble-shooter, which
gave rise to many a land dispute in the village. In the dissection of his own plot of
land, the landlord, apparently followed little of the correspondence to the survey-
numbers of the plots of land, as given according to the Survey Map of 1905. This led
to overlapping of lands under the possession of different tenants and led to bickering
over land in the village, according to the Village Officer. To put it short, it was the
colonial mapping of the land, that enjoyed hegemony. This led to the creation of many
a social dispute. In resorting to the antiquated colonial records(tailored to the needs of
a zamindari system of land adjudication), for the redistribution of land, the Village
Officer vouches there are many possibilities for the rising of a land dispute. The
reason why we deal with this problem at such length, is that there is a crisis of identity
stemming from a location of the entity called Nattika firka in the colonial mapping of
the place. This crisis of identity is also one of the emotional pillars, for all parties of the
Left, in defining the phenomenon of Gopalakrishnan’s martyrdom, even today.

According to Ravi, one of our respondents, the landscape of the village when this map
was drawn has changed entirely from what it has become today. Periodic floods

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12 The gross failure in the implementation of the Reforms. Amount of land re-distributed came to a mere
19% of the net sown area (Leiten, op.cit).
13 T.K. Oommen (1985) has pointed out citing Herring (1980) that, in the land reforms of Kerala, “the
conceptualization was explicitly anti-feudal and pro-capitalist” (Oommen, 1985:209). Pointing out one of
the serious discrepancies in the implementation of the Act, Oommen says, the reforms were achieved
through conferring ownership rights on the peasants rather than through an actual re-distribution of the
excess land acquired through the operationalization of ceiling on the extent of landholdings (ibid:212). The reforms that were enforced in two stages of legislation (the Reforms Act of 1963
and the Amendment Act of 1969) gave in the interval between the two legislation, enough time for the
landlords to manipulate the new laws to their advantage. They took advantage mainly of the fact that the
ceiling did not hold for plantations. Therefore many landlords changed their agricultural plots to
plantations Oommen suggests that this change in the nature of the plots led to the baffling increase in the
account of the forest land in the state by 1,60,000 hectares between 1961 and ‘68 (ibid:212). Many land
owners even managed to sell off large amounts of surplus land in the meanwhile. Efforts to enlist local
participation in the process of land re-distribution by forming popular committees at the grassroots’
level also did not succeed in the end robbing the peasant movement in Kerala of its
‘vitality’ (ibid:217). This because it managed to only institutionalize and not mobilize the peasant
carticipation at the grassroots’ level. According to him, a survey of the reforms instituted by the state
government in 1966-67 also did not bear the desired results because it failed to arrive at the root
questions of distribution by focussing its attention on the number of cases lodged with the Land
Tribunals for claims of land by the peasants (ibid:214).
inundated the paddy fields every year. The months of rain from June to August were months of misery for the peasants. But, it was also a time for ferrying goods by boat to otherwise inaccessible locales of the village. The picture that emerged from the accounts of various other respondents was also mostly similar, of a land that is covered by paddy fields for the most part and traversed only by small foot paths hedging the fields at most of the places. The rains made the paddy fields a virtual highway, for people to ship goods like granite and wood for purposes like construction of a house, a shop etc. It was on this ritualistic map; conditioned according to the rhythm of the seasons and its changes, that the colonial regime’s survey map was imposed for the redistribution of land, in the year 1905.

The reason for highlighting this fact is also to show that, in respect of the fact of martyrdom, our subject of inquiry, it is the colonial mapping of the space that takes pre-eminence. The spatial ordering of the village, winds back in time, and signify places with names drawn from the pre-State formation; but, post-colonial days. The very association with Nattika firkas is a primary instance of this. It serves a mnemonic function as opposed to the way it was originally identified; i.e., as a revenue unit. But, most place names in the village still retain their feudal and pre-colonial inheritance, as well14.

This ordering of space is the ritualistic ordering of space, and hence indicate the passage from Colonialism to Sovereignty as well as pre-Statehood to Statehood. It is in relating to the political map of the Nation as a Republic, that we arrive at this terrain that is criss-crossed by trips of nostalgia, and hence evoking place names

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14 The northern tip of the village is now as it was then called munayatte nilam meaning the land at the tip. The cutting of the Connolly Canal in the 1850s made it into an island which was totally under the Trustee of a temple in the neighbouring state of Cochin. Now, it’s ownership has changed and the plot is divided amongst various owners, connected to the mainland by a bridge called koonan paadam or the hump-back bridge, that true to its name, has the shape of a hump back kneeling on its fours across the river as a conveyor belt for the people. The bridge, though dilapidated stands even today and still, is the only connection with the main land. It is interesting to note how the description of human shapes blended with the names of places. Daivem Thazhathil Nilam is another example. This is the plot in the village where during the annual festival in the region the reigning deity of the temple at Triprayar, in the last phase of the festival alighted on an elephant-top, which is caparisoned and taken through all the lands over which the temple had trusteeship. The ritual follows even today, the place retains the name also even today, though the revenue and ownership of the plot has changed hands.
simultaneously pertaining to pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial; but, pre-State-hood and post State-hood days. This multiplicity in addressing a place by a name probably is the reason why there are so many land disputes pending with the Land Tribunals and the Civil Courts of Kerala today. A comprehensive re-survey of the land in accordance with the re-distribution that has followed the Land Reforms may be one way out of it. Anyway, our concern with the place names go only insofar as the place called Nattika firka still retains its post-colonial; pre-Statehood, identity; an identity announcing a rite of passage from one genre of body-politic to another, through the ritual of Sardar’s Martyrdom.

The commemoration has begun only since 1952. The legal ban on the Communists continued till the year, 1952, in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Therefore there was no way the people could hold a procession in commemoration of the memory of their departed leader. The leadership of the Communist parties has remained an inalienable feature of all Sardar day commemorations so far. But even within the Communist parties there are divisions of various kinds. Right now, there are the celebrations of three different Communist organizations of the same event. These are the CPI, the CPM and the CPI(ML).

The state of terror that reigned in the minds of the people, in the interim; 1950-52; was such that a profound respect for the rituals notwithstanding there was none to show the daring to overcome the pall of fear over the village and retrieve Sardar’s corpse for the cycle of rituals prescribed by tradition. The result of this angst was that the first commemoration of the day of Sardar’s martyrdom became also the occasion for the wailing and mourning for his soul. This mourning was joined in not merely by Sardar’s kinspeople but also others in the village who were no less closer to Sardar than the people who were related to him in blood.

When Sardar’s day of martyrdom was first celebrated in 1952 on the 26th January it was more than anything an occasion to cry. So many of them who participated in the procession on that day remember clearly how it began from the beach where Sardar’s
body was abandoned by the police as a communal mourning when everybody cried with the absolute feeling of unshackledness.

This event has its parallel again in world religions and according to Elias Cannetti’s classification (Cannetti, 1960: 170), the crowds that exhibit their passion in this manner are called the mourning pack and their religion, the religions of lament. Such packs are seen in historic settings as diverse and afar from each other as the Phrygians in their festivals for the God Adonis to the native Australians—the Aborigines. The mourning takes place in two distinct phases. The initial phase is marked by the pack’s effort in trying to keep the god (man) alive and away from death. There is a hanging air of diffidence on the face of death, refusing to leave the god for the dead and desperately seeking to keep him with the living. The second phase begins only once it is certain that the god will not come back from the dead, thus pushing him away to the world of the dead. The dead man’s passion is represented in his anniversary commemorations.

There was uninhibited mourning as soon as the news was broken. Gopalakrishnan’s sister in law remembers, that when she wept loud her husband shut her mouth telling her to slow down or the police would pick them too. Such was the kind of fear that ruled the minds of the people. So the first occasion, in the year 1952, when they were permitted to make the sense of their loss loud and clear they did so. Not only that in the mourning rituals that day Gopalakrishnan’s sister-in-law was joined in her wailing not merely by her daughters and relatives but almost the entire village and most of the peasant women in the firka. The commemoration soon proceeded from wailing to laughing and merry making being one of the rare occasions when the women and children of the households got a time out of their homes. Thus it continued to be in the years to come. With programs that would keep them awake late into the night the people would go prepared for a Rabelaisian holiday with folded mats in their hands for the family to rest as the programs lasted late into the night. The cultural fete invariably hosted several shows like kathaprasangom, dramas, orchestras, singing etc.

15 A Form of story-telling set to songs and music.
The ritual commemoration of the sacrifice of Sardar Gopalakrishnan shows prominent strains of the carnival, a term employed by the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his study of the literary genre in the works of the pre-Renaissance novelists; Rabelais and Boccaccio. As a ritual form the carnival was a celebration associated with the different feasts of the Catholic church.

In retrospect, this laid an unshakable foundation for the commemoration of the memories of his life in the later years. The commemoration of his martyrdom became the platform for celebrations of the freedoms that the villagers won through their struggles. The loss of Sardar became an event to ascertain the joy of their living. For the majority of the village population Sardar Day became the first ever celebration in which everyone could participate equally without a discrimination of any kind. This virtue was especially evident in the early years of these celebrations. Now, even though it is restricted to memory, their association to the celebrations in the fifties and early sixties is so nostalgic that the event as such occupies a carnivalesque space in the every day lives of the people.

The ritual commemoration of the sacrifice of Sardar Gopalakrishnan shows prominent strains of the carnival, a term employed by the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his study of the literary genre in the works of the pre-Renaissance novelists; Rabelais and Boccaccio. As a ritual form the carnival was a celebration associated with the different feasts of the Catholic church.

Bakhtin looks at carnival as “grotesque realism” that represents the unofficial ideology against the official ideology rigorously, maintained by the church. The carnival is an encompassing view of the world, the totality of which is obtained through experience and participation in the carnival. It was only in subsequent times, that the spirit of the carnival found its way into literature, into the novels of Boccaccio and Rabelais thus preparing the stage for the entry of the Renaissance consciousness.

The inspiring motif of these works, as Bakhtin understood them were laughter; the victory of laughter over fear. “All that was terrifying becomes grotesque” (Bakhtin, 1981: 209) Carnival celebrations which were in large numbers in the Middle ages,
were also linked externally (officially) to the feasts of the Church, in commemoration of various patron saints.

The comic spirit of the carnivals were contained in writings especially intended for the carnivals and different acts of mime and farces in which the monk, the clergy, or the scholar participated beside the ordinary folk. The writings—in both Latin and the vernacular included parodical liturgies, parodical gospel readings, parodies of the most sacred prayers etc.

Occurring under a unique legalized carnival licentiousness, they always resulted in creating ambivalent symbols and images that were representative of a new means of communication. It subverted spirituality and sublimeness by thrusting the human body into focus. The body was presented not in a private, egotistic form severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. Bakhtin says, “manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated, biological man, not to the isolated private, egotistic economic man, but to the collective, ancestral body of all the people” (ibid: 105).

The arrival of the modern State has offered great resistance to the continuation of these carnivals in Europe. In 1855 the Great Donnybrook Fair of Dublin was abolished and the same year Saint Bartholomew’s Fair was also abolished in London after the London Mission Society petitioned for its suppression. In the decade following the Fairs Act of 1871, over 700 fairs, mops and wakes were abolished in England. By the 1880s, the Paris Carnival was being transformed into a trade show cum civil/military parade (White (in) Armstrong and Tennerhouse (Ed.), 1989). There are several more instances like these that can be cited from the history of Europe. The rising bourgeois State was on a collision course with the celebrations of the carnival kind in its interest of compactly conserving the middle class-capitalist hegemony.

Today, when the villagers from the Nattika firka participate in the martyrdom day commemoration of Sardar Gopalakrishnan, they are re-enacting the confrontation of the police and the volunteers of the CPI on the 26th January 1950, in the form of a carnival. On the day of the formation of the Republic, a demonstration was carried out
against the State. The demonstrators were Citizens of the State who were denied their basic freedoms ensured by the Republic. These Citizens, in the process of being declared outlaws by the Republic, were forming themselves into a carnivalesque band of revelers, who on the particular day of the 26th of January, were enacting an act of the political grotesque in the eyes of the Republic. The modern State as an imperative was blind to all freshly released charges and exhortations to liberty; a long cherished dream in the minds of the Citizens, which finds its way out through the vibrant cultural idioms of the country. The Law, believes these carnivals and celebrations to be a threat to its own authority to confirmation and hegemony. Thus, the Law perceived a contradiction within the sheer spectacle of the celebration of the first Republic Day itself, to which it reacted violently thus succumbing to the contradiction. In the firka of Nattika, the celebration of the Republic Day has henceforth assumed the character of a medieval carnival, that is externally or officially linked to the State in the form of an expiatory rite, imparted to the first martyr of the Indian Republic, Sardar Gopalakrishnan.

Another crucial aspect for identifying the ritualistic aspect of the phenomenon, is the system of justice that it bears within. Such an analysis shows that, the ritual does not have a punitive nature to it, understood in a legalistic sense. Girard(1988:298) has argued that, acts of punishment, especially capital punishment cannot be considered as acts of generative violence. If one were to look into the 'true' causes of Gopalakrishnan's death (in order to do a criminal investigation to determine the culprit) the results can only be very unfulfilling because the kind of rationality which the Law demands to present a case or an argument are just impossible to find, and hence the death of Sardar Gopalakrishnan evades the controversial realm of denial of Human Rights. Everyone knows that he was killed by the policemen of the Malabar Special Police on the road or in the custody on the crucial day of January the 26th. But, who was responsible for his killing? No one would be willing enough to attest. The plain reason is that no one is willing enough to attest to any single person who must have brought about the death of Sardar. Of course, there is the reference time and again to Sardar's rivalry with the police inspector Mr. Nambiar which many
people believe took the things this far. But even Mr. Namijar is told in stories as a man of awesome presence that equals Sardar. The roar of his motor-bike, the only one in the entire firka, many of my respondents recalled announced Namijar’s presence. In a memoir written for the souvenir published on the 50th death anniversary of Sardar, a contemporary of Sardar wrote (the memoir was titled, ‘Sardar Made Me a Communist’), that Namijar and his gang of Congress sympathizers called ‘Home Guards’ even paraded a woman naked on the street of Nattika for her Communist leanings (Bhaskaran,2000:75). Namijar is always condemned in the stories. But, he is not accused. There is a crucial difference between the two, in that if the former is already a conclusion, the latter is pending a conclusion in a court of Law. Girard rightly points out the system or mechanism of the ritual as that which, “in a single decisive movement, curtails reciprocal violence and imposes structure on community” (ibid:317). It is the sacrifice of Sardar that lies at the root of this sense of community.

Namijar and Sardar are always portrayed- whenever portrayed together in one narrative- in a scheme of intense rivalry. This rivalry between Namijar and Sardar appears blown out of proportion in a manner that calls for plenty of mutual respect. With the kind of awe they treated each other it was impossible for Namijar to have killed Sardar at the earliest and the easiest opportunity he got. The stories of miserable death that Mr.Namijar died in abandonment and want with no one to care for in his home town/village somewhere in Northern Kerala allude to the guilt that he allegedly bore for the atrocities that he along with his accomplices had committed towards the people of Nattika, besides the killing of Sardar. Incidentally, not one of the respondents from the different villages of the firka could recall by name the native place of Namijar. But the belief that he died in absolute destitution is fixed in the minds of all those who remember the rivalry of Sardar and Namijar. But they still would not hold him singularly or directly responsible for the death of Sardar. The style or the manner of presenting the story of their conflict is fatalistic and awesome. When the two meet one another as the leader of the rebels and as the Inspector of the police at the rally what the Inspector tells Sardar is a word of caution, “Sardar, today is not the day we are destined to meet”. The fatalism underlying the statement redeems the

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Inspector Nambiar in a religious way from the course of events that followed. The same respondent told us how after the altercation between the Inspector and Sardar, the battered body of Sardar was flung inside the police van that was waiting. A loud noise was heard from inside the van afterwards. According to him, it was difficult to decide if it was the last sigh of Sardar, when he breathed his last or the victorious laughter of the Inspector, thus highlighting a biblical kind of rivalry that existed between two brothers- Abel and Cain. According to the interpretation of Rene Girard (1988:4) it is the lack of a sacrificial outlet for Cain who is a tiller of the soil that drives him into the murder of Abel, who is a shepherd and regularly sacrifices the first-born of his herds to God, thus earning His undisputed favour. The fact that Nambiar represents the arm of the Law is often subdued in these interpretations of the account of the loss of the life of Sardar. For such reasons it becomes plain that the fight of the police and the Communists on the 26th day of January lies beyond the comprehension of the usual parameters of Law according to which the justice of the courts is dispensed. As long as the Law itself does not find a witness that can establish the ‘authenticity’ of facts pertaining to the death of Sardar, the question, who was responsible for the death of Sardar will continue to remain dormant. Such a witness that can prove its authenticity in a court of Law can emerge only from the people who witnessed the murder. But, given the way the people relate to it, from whatever we have understood from the narratives of this conflict; this murder, it was a spectacle. The nature of relating to a spectacle however, is subjunctive and carnivalesque, which means, society in a “mood of feeling, willing and desiring, its mood of fantasizing, its playful mood; not its indicative mood, where it tries to apply reason to human action and systematize the relationship between ends and means in industry and bureaucracy” (Turner, 1986:123), the Law does not find a place in it. It could indeed be a blemish on the Law of our country should it fail to react to issues of Constitutional importance like police brutality and Citizen’s Rights. In fact it has. The Law of the country was forced to give its verdict on such matters following the challenge of the State’s authority in such instances to curb the rights of the Citizens by A.K. Gopalan, prominent leader of the CPI, who was imprisoned under the Preventive Detention Act.
In 1950 on charges of fomenting rebellion against the State, A.K. Gopalan challenged the State’s authority to take action against the Citizens of the State in such instances, citing the Article 13(2), of the Constitution, which says that the State shall not make any Law which takes away or abridges the Rights conferred by Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution. The Court in a monumental decision in one of the most important cases of constitutional importance in the history of the Indian judiciary, turned down A.K. Gopalan’s plea, in *A.K.G. v State of Madras*, but stipulated that clause 14 of the Preventive Detention Act invalid, which held that the grounds of such detention cannot be disclosed in a court of Law.

But the way the Law has treated the issues raised by the Communists on the Fundamental Rights elsewhere is better not mentioned. In Nattika *firka*, the police charged an act of sedition against the State in that small rally of volunteers and charged cases against 39 Communist volunteers picked and chosen from the *firka* leadership of the Communists.

P.K. Gopalakrishnan, a student of Law from the Law College, Madras, who finished his course in the year 1948 and came back to his native place in the village of Mathilakom, Nattika *firka* to join the activities of the Communists was one of them (see the biographical note on him given in chapter 1, pp. 124-128). The case charged against him and others was of attempting to attack the Mathilakom out-post of the Valappadu police station, the only police station within the precincts of the *firka*. He was not a part of the demonstration even though he was one of the prime accused in the case framed by the police against the ‘miscreants’. There is no possibility of obtaining the archives of these cases because the sessions court at Chavakkadu, which tried all such cases within its jurisdiction, the *firka* of Nattika being a part of it, does not keep the records of adjudicated disputes for more than a period of ten years. They are either destroyed or transferred to the District Court, which at that point was located in Calicut. The search for any such documents at the District Court itself was futile, because the authorities apparently never realized the deep Constitutional importance of these cases, and therefore failed to transfer them to the Police Office functioning under the District Superindent of Police, that keeps a file of classified documents.
relating to important cases from the region. There is added reason to believe it was the negligence of the police that led to the overlooking of the constitutional import of these cases, when we consider the context in which and the intent with which many of these cases were framed. P.K. Gopalakrishnan, himself gave the instance of two other cases that were charged against him that had no rational ground of justice. One of the cases was for trying to persuade the wife of a former Communist to pour acid into her husband's eyes. In yet another instance, when the CPI was yet to be legally banned in the Madras Presidency, at the time of the elections to the Madras District Board in September 1949, P.K. Gopalakrishnan was arrested on charges of inciting the public against the police, when he was addressing a meeting organized as part of the election campaigning for the CPI candidate, K.S. Nair.

Yet another incident of the extremely aberrant reaction of the police following the rally by the Communists on the 26th of January 1950, according to my respondents was the arrest of a villager from Perinjanom in Nattika firka by the name Kumaran Thumbappally. He was one person who was not even remotely identified with the Communists in those days, or even in later times. The people have by now reached to this conclusion that it was his act of distributing sweets on the first Republic Day that incurred the wrath of the Police. Judging from the wantonness the police was capable of indulging in against the Communists, the people have concluded that members from either the Ezhava or the Moslem community may have tipped the police that this man had links with the Communists in order to frame him for communal reasons. Born a Hindu; he was a convert to Islam for some time, later, deserting that religion, sought to convert back to Hinduism.

In yet another incident which is strikingly similar for the irrational grounds on which many innocent people were framed, a tailor from the village by the name Kalarikkal Raman was also charged with a case, even though the nature of the case is not known. The police were searching for a clan member of Raman by the name Narayanan, who had gone into hiding following the rally on 26th January, 1950 and apparently in their frustration in not gaining any clue of his whereabouts, the police
surmised that if Narayanan was a Communist, then Raman who belonged to the same clan as well ought to be a Communist and hence liable to be prosecuted.

The manner in which these cases were framed had a necessary element of ridicule ingrained within. The purport of this ridicule was to diminish the character of the Communists within the eyes of the public. They were aimed at dispelling the aura that the Communists were deriving from the changing social milieu of these villages. On a larger scale, this ridicule represented the face of authority, at a juncture where the traditional grasps of power were fast slipping away from within the grip of the landlords.

The Law represented by the police, thus summarily concluded that the firka was the culprit here for playing host to the Communists. On the occasion of the rally, Gopalakrishnan, was made the sacrificial victim for all the blemish of the firka in the eyes of the Law represented by the police and was sacrificed, so that the community of the firka may continue to live.

The ritual space opened up through the sacrifice, continued to live in the commemoration or expiation that arose from it. The way it stands today, it provides the general clue for understanding certain aspects of the political economy of Nattika firka with the village of Edathiruthy in focus, thus endorsing the hypothesis of Georges Bataille, who advanced the concepts of restricted economy and general economy in social criticism.

Georges Bataille’s fundamental proposition turns on the distinction that he makes between general economy and restricted economy. Restricted economy by its own endemic design eludes the category of ritual. Restricted economy is bound by strictly utilitarian ends and any means of non-profitable expenditure is alien to the notions implicit to its perspective. The general economy on the other hand looks at the economic processes of life from the perspective of the imperative of non-profitable expenditure without which life cannot sustain itself. For instance as Bataille writes, “The very principle of living matter requires that the chemical operations of life, which demand an expenditure of energy, be gainful, productive of surpluses”
The surplus can only pave the way for growth that manifests itself in different life forms. The idea of growth is distinct from the idea of accumulation that an advocate of restricted economy may subscribe to. With respect to human beings as distinct from animals, the phenomenon of growth leads to such a multiplicity of life forms, that Bataille says, "there is generally no growth but only a luxurious squandering of energy in every form! The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome ways of life" (ibid:33). The ritual of sacrifice is one form of this growth. It is burdensome, yet luxurious, exuberant and overflowing with excess of energy. The sacrificial victim is the medium through which this energy is expended, destroyed in fact, so that the society shall endure and not turn itself into a collective hubris, that in its conceitedness augmented by the accumulated products of nature transmogrify an act of gift into a declaration of war.

The act of sacrifice gives ritual its value in its intransigent refusal of utilitarian ends for the community/person as drawn by Bataille from the study of sacrifices of the Aztecs (ibid:45-61). Sardar’s martyrdom as seen through the ritual by the community of the firka assumes the same characteristic, by which a human life is taken out of the profane circle of exchange and offered as a prestation to the sacred order of things. In making this prestation, the community of the firka is attaining a sovereignty. This because an act of gift involves an assumption of sovereignty (ibid:64). Bataille substantiates his propositions with Mauss’ observations (1970) of the potlatches among the Indians of American Northwest. Bataille, makes the theses of Mauss his basis for a critique of the capitalist economy. Thus in the act of profitless consumption as in sacrifice or the exuberant dispossession of wealth as in gift, what he finds interesting is the modes of economic behaviour that revolt against the accumulative ways of capitalist expansion and wealth. He writes, “Beyond a military exploitation, a religious mystification and a capitalist misappropriation, henceforth no one can rediscover the meaning of wealth, the explosiveness that it heralds, unless it is in the splendor of rags and the somber challenge of indifference. One might say, finally, that the lie destines life’s exuberance to revolt” (ibid:77). Ideally, this is the perspective in
which the community of the *firka* highlights the death of Gopalakrishnan as a sacrifice on the Republic Day of India\(^{16}\). Such a perspective is contingent, though in its existence. By contingent we mean that, this perspective opens up before us suddenly and without anticipation. For example, it may be communicated through the tears of an old woman who knew Gopalakrishnan, or a silence that follows the mention of his name between two old friends who knew Gopalakrishnan. The martyrdom rituals, as such, are always tailored to suit the needs and interests of specific political formations, in their effort to win legitimacy in the *firka*. It is contingency in occurrence that determines the prevalence of this perspective and not the staging of the ritual as such. The ritual, through its concrete presence, nonetheless offers the opportunity to discern such a perspective as a fact.

The commemoration rituals counterpoint martyrdom as an instance of even more comprehensive representation of the idea of sovereignty than the ritual of the Republic Day celebrations itself is meant to stand for. This it achieves through highlighting the act of sacrifice as a ‘gift of death’\(^{17}\), that stands as central to the idea of sovereignty. Without correlating in the image of the sacrificial victim the ideals of sovereignty and sacrifice in inextricable a manner the day of the 26\(^{th}\) of January cannot pass in the *firka* of Nattika. The ritual commemorating the martyrdom of Sardar thus is not merely a ritual of mourning, but one of sovereignty as well. Thus donning the role of a surplus that is conventionally offered to the Gods, the *firka* on every year 26\(^{th}\) of January, represents the spirit of the victim as the ‘accursed share’; a political surplus that is offered to enrich the idea of sovereignty, transgressing the accumulated share of a State that gratuitously avers any claims to sovereignty as merely its own.

With the formation of the State of Kerala, and the coming to power of the first Communist Government in the State, there was an even further extrapolation of his martyrdom day rites. This linked his martyrdom with the formation of a distinct nationality within the Union, and the struggle of the CPI towards that cause. Further,

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\(^{16}\) See also Introduction (page 20-21), where we have already discussed the role of the lie in the act of proclaiming the Republic, seen through the prism of the ritual.

\(^{17}\) See chapter 2, the section on the ‘multiple partaking of the martyrdom’, page 158-159.
when the Government finally passed the Land Reforms Act in 1963, it became an even greater matter for the celebration of the Communists. Many interpreted it as the realization of the dreams of the Communist during the days of the Underground politics of 1948-52, when comrades like Sardar lost their lives (EMS Nambuthirippadu, Desabhimani, 26 January, 1998).

Studying the ritual in the light of the General Economy does help us to come to certain of these conclusions. The very necessity of the ritual is explained in terms of prosperity. It is the share that cannot be consumed; because it is accursed. This explains to a large extent why the ritual has continued to find a place in the general economy of the place. Still, it would not be a waste of energy to make a detour of a few statistics, that illustrate the kind of transition in the economic scenario that has come about in the village over the last hundred years.

This subject has to be treated with the due attention it deserves. For instance, let us take the question of land redistribution. According to the 1901 census, the Desam of Edathiruthy had a population of 3183. The land settlements of 1905 show 214 from this number to be landholders. This meant that only less than 10% had any rights or titles to land. The rest were tenants. Of the 214 land holders in the village,

40 paid patta of Re.1 and less, but over Re.1
130 paid patta of Rs.10 and less but over Re.1
26 paid patta of Rs.30 and less, but over Rs.10
8 paid patta of Rs.50 and less, but over Rs.30
5 paid patta of Rs.100 and less but over Rs.50
3 paid patta of Rs.250 and less but over Rs.100
1 paid patta of Rs.500 and less, but over Rs.250
1 paid patta-exceeding Rs.1000 (Rs.1055)
Of the entire cultivated land of 1366 acres, 331 acres and 41 cents were under the possession of one landlord\textsuperscript{18}. Another had possession of 74 acres and 54 cents. This scenario remained more or less the same, even through the resettlement of 1935, to the period of time that witnessed the communist uprisings, i.e. 1940s.

This scenario underwent a radical change with the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963. Following the Act the State Government was declared the owner of all land in the State. The purport of the legislation was to redistribute the land in such a way that the zamindari system was abolished and the dependents of the landlords and other landless peasants got an equitable share of the land. This legislation wrought changes in the relations of land ownership all over the State and the firka of Nattika was no exception. For example, if according to the 1891 census, amongst the thousand plus resident population of the village only a small fraction (a little above two hundred) owned any property in the form of land, now, from a population of ten thousand plus residents (12641-Census, 1991), it would be hard to find more than a hundred who are actually landless.

Hovering about the phenomenon of Sardar’s death this transformation in the pattern of land ownership, reveal the milieu of a financial unburdening that has taken place for the poorest in the village. All representations of his death, the collectivized ritualistic, and the individuated narrativistic, both inhere this as an elementary virtue of Gopalakrishnan’s sacrifice. All factions of the Left- the CPI, CPI(M), the CPI (ML)- pay their due respects to their comrade for having staked his life in the movement for achieving this transformation.

In fact, all the statistics that we collected above, are of little significance to the peasants. For them, the ritual is part of their every day life, by now. Gopalakrishnan is like any other sacred presence in the village. The mere mention of his name reflects prosperity, welfare, richness and sovereignty of an order that is distinctively marked

\textsuperscript{18} This overwhelming concentration of land in the hands of one landlord as a general feature of feudalism in Malabar has been recorded by Panikkar(1989:25-27), which led to a high concentration of power, in his hands, the implications of which surfaced drastically for the village of Edathiruthy during the time of the underground challenge by the Communists.
from the digression of the accumulative rationality of a restricted economy. It is due to the peasants' awareness of the general economy, that notwithstanding, the lack of statistics, it is taken to be understood how the prosperity came. Younger generations are getting schooled into the chaos or disorder that lay behind the carnivalesque rituals of Sardar's martyrdom. It is the peasants that celebrate this memory more than any other class or caste in the village. This becomes evident in the imaginative vividness within which they narrate the history or happenings of a time, of which the sacrificial death of Gopalakrishnan forms the mythical binding force, like the sacrifice of a god.

In the firka of Nattika the coming of Independence was experienced mostly in the form of the lack of it which it heralded. The peasants mostly the Harijans and Ezhavas who had dreamed of the coming of a 'golden age' with the Indian Independence were the people who endured the desire that the idea of freedom instilled in them. One remarkable thing about most of the respondents who were from the lowest castes in the village- mainly pulayas, paraiahs and vettuvas- identified themselves as Harijans, the name with which Gandhi had identified them. This indicates an early nationalistic awakening amongst them and its endurance till date. The Harijan Sangh was a very active unit in the village and worked in tandem with Kisan Sabha, Beedi Workers' Union, meeting in study classes, under the blanket leadership of the early Congress leaders, who were subsequently the Socialists and then the Communists. It was the Harijan Sangh, that hosted the underground movement of the CPI in toto, during the period 1948-52, in Malabar. The house-holds of the Harijans played host to the leaders of the CPI, hiding from the police. For this, they were often put to the most brutal ways of torture, very proudly announcing the "culture of terror" that flourished in the firka in those days, as we shall see in greater detail in the next chapter. Velayudhan, an activist and Convenor of the Sangh in late 1940 remembers the couple of occasions he was confronted by the police. Once, they interrupted a public meeting that he was addressing, and forced him to speak to the crowd, that Communism was meant for the destruction of the Country. On another occasion, he was taken by force to the temple and asked to swear upon the deity that, he was not a Communist. His house was raided several times, on the pretext of looking for
underground Communist leadership. In the *firka*, speaking at the gross level of caste, *Harijans* bore the brunt of the consequences of the ‘adventurism’ of the Communists. Their pains of torture are not celebrated in any martyrdoms, though there were more than a few who succumbed to the police beatings, and many more who were rendered invalid. Their houses were violated and almost each and every one of them were treated with extreme inhumanity. The police revelled in calling the entire family out of their homes, in the middle of the night and indulged in a kind of mimetic masochism, by making the son beat his father or vice versa. Arakkaparambil Aappu remembered how he along with a lot of others like him, were paraded naked down the streets of Edathiruthy. Then at nightfall, they were made to run back to their homes. He vividly recalled, how, on that black moon night, they ran, through thick and thorny pineapple bushes, in a crowd of twenty, falling down the edges of ponds and channels, but, kept running, to reach a place of safety. With all this suffering, and when Independence came, they felt everything was set to change. But, no significant change followed. Only the persecution intensified. The person whom they had all reposed their faith in, identifying themselves as *Harijans*- Gandhiji- was a martyr by January, 1948.

The Communists were the first to react to this situation. The nature of leadership to be given to the awakening was therefore naturally emotional. This emotion contained within it the past of a set of people that had lived on their land for many generations. The strength of their ties with their land was inexhaustible. This laid the ground for the field of underground politics that in its turn became the field for the conception of a whole lot of new ideas and ideologies into the cultural milieu of the village in a remarkably short time. When this period of intensity was ended in Nattika with the death of Sardar and that too on the Republic Day itself the cognitive mechanism of the village or the *firka* as a community broke down. So much so that, as Ravi recalled people began to stop greeting and even recognizing any one other than their closest kith or kin in the village corners and streets. A pallor of gloom descended on the village. It was in the ritual commemoration of his martyrdom two years hence, that the confidence of the peasants and the *firka* at large was re-instilled. Over the years, they
nourish the symbolization, apparent in the last five decades, of Gopalakrishnan as the ‘accursed share’ who had to be sacrificed, so that the community may live.

The economic prosperity and the financial unburdening notwithstanding, it is in the coincidence with the Republic Day, that the question of inalienable subjective sovereignty of the Citizen and the definition of Republican Nationhood with which his sacrifice is often identified. This has become remarkably so, because, it was in this spirit that the first ever martyrdom day was commemorated. Every other development in the history of the place was progressively added on to the staging of the ritual, so that it grew in meaning progressively over the years.

In this chapter, we saw the importance of the role that the ritual of martyrdom or sacrifice plays in describing the ethno-history of a place covering its most essential aspects- the statistics of its growth in terms of a more equitable distribution of resources. This was an ideational surplus, because, in achieving this the State of Kerala was far ahead of any other comparison in the rest of the Union (Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal are the other two States that have implemented comprehensive Land Reforms ). In attaining martyrdom for such an ideology, the death of Gopalakrishnan came to assume the idea of a distinctive political surplus, that, in the form of a ritualistic sovereignty came to be represented through distinctive aesthetic genres . These genres form the subject of our inquiry in the next chapter.