CHAPTER VI

MUSLIM FOLK LIFE IN KERALA

There was an overwhelming influence of Sufism among the Muslims of Kerala. Traditions of hundreds of Sufis are extant all over the land. The Sufis came from Arabia as early as the 8th century as in the case of Malik Dinar group and the Kasaruni Sufis of the 13th and 14th centuries, mentioned by Ibn-Battuta came from Persia. From the Coromandal coast came the Makhdums of Ponnani and somewhere from Eastern coast came the saints of Bimapalli. The Hamdani Sayyids came from Bukhara. Sufis had migrated to Kerala even through the Palghat gap of the Western Ghats as did Muhammad Waliyullah.

Therefore all along the coast and the interior innumerable Jarams sprang up with their own specific traditions. But the most popular saints were of the Qadiri and Tariqahs.

During the Taifa stage, the main reason for men getting introduced to a Tariqah was the desire to get the blessing or Karamah of the saint. The reputation of the saints varied according to their power to perform Karamah. So the murids, devotees and sympathisers helped in giving currency both to trustworthy and also unreliable Karamahs.
Saints, Sufis and non-Sufis were readily given the honorific title of Auliya by Muslims. They were then considered to be the near-ones to God, and befitting treatment of Wali were meted out to them. Even during the lifetime of Biran Auliya, Moulud was held in his honour. The Muslim concept of Auliya was always as personified in the Muhiyuddin Mala. All the hagiographic works that followed were composed on similar lines.

Rifai Mala, second only to Muhiyuddin Mala in popularity, has characterised Ahmad Kabir al-Rifai as an 'Auliya'. It should be remembered that Rifai Mala was sung in every house-hold in the early hours of the night and especially on appointed days. The Mala has lines extolling the merits and greatess of Shaykh Rifai.

"When his carrying mother asked whether it is son or daughter, he said, son, Ahmad al-Kabir". When he was to be born on earth he asked God "If Paradise is given to me (promised) and to those who follow me, I shall descend on earth". "I am there in Ila al-Yaqin, Ayn al-Yaqin and Haqq al-Yaqin", he said. "I have created...

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1. Supra, the incident of canonising the dead beggar in Ernad.
2. At Manjeri in a house a money-box in his name was kept. Mouluds were held on every Thursday night in his honour.
3. It would suffice to reproduce Muhiyuddin's words. "My wills are the wills of Allah, If I say 'be' (Kun) it will become (Yakun)". Muhiyuddin Mala, p. 4.
4. Rifai Mala's significance as protection against snake-bite and burning has been discussed elsewhere.
you to be company with me, thus he heard the words". "The eighteen thousand worlds are not sufficient for one step of mine, he said". He is characterised as the unique Wali because "for forty days 'Khizr' came and stood in front of him, but he did not utter a word and then Khizr said "I have not seen any one like him among the Auliya". The Auliya were considered to be above all the creations, Jinn and Ins. Jinn were at their command as people believed, that it was with the help of the Jinn that they performed miracles. Jinn would even fight for them. People believed that any thing incomprehensible to their mind was done by supernatural beings, the Jinn.

They were the people to whom 'Ghayb' was made known, the Mappilas believed. The Muhiyudin-Mala and Rifai-Mala have verses to the effect that their eyes were always in Lawh (Lawhal-Mahfud), the most secret thing known only to God. Some Karamah connected with Makkah and Haram were always attributed to all saints. One day, people saw Hazrat Sayyid Madani while performing ablution, throwing water in the air three times. When

5. Zayn ud-din Ibn Ahmad, Rifai Mala, pp. 1-10.
6. When Nayar soldiers attacked the shrine of Kundotty Tangal, they were defeated and they ran away from the battlefield abandoning their weapons and even cannon. The devotees believed that they were frightened seeing the Jinn of the Tangal. Ibn Meeraan Kutty, Hazarat Muhammad Shah (Mala), pp. 23-4.
they asked him he said "I saw a fire in Haram". That
year Hajis who returned after Haji confirmed that there
was a fire in Haram and water from the sky descended to
extinguish it".7

It was believed that they could ride over
time and space. Muhiyuddin was considered omni-present.
"If anybody calls me from any land, I will answer him
before he closes his mouth (finishes the call), Sayeth
Muhiyuddin". One day, Abdul Qadir as-Sani was travelling
in a boat from Baliapetam to Cannanore. When the boat
was nearing the port the Shaykh disappeared. The fellow-
sailors landed and finished their prayer. Then the
Shaykh returned and said "My teacher (Shaykh), Ahmad al-
Khabushani, died and I performed the prayer (Hamas) for
the dead".8 Another instance is cited in his Manaqib
that one day a group of his murids were going back after
visiting him. At Cannanore9 they performed the Subh
prayer, and began to recite the 'Asrad' advised by the
Shaykh. One of them committed a mistake. Then they
heard the sound of a strong blow from the Shaykh's walking

7. Gadi Bappan Kunhi Musaliyar, Sayyid Madani Mala
   (Arabi-Malayalam) The Manaqib of Abdul Qadir as-
   Sani, and Nuruddin Mala has similar lines.
9. About sixteen miles away from the Shaykh's residence
   at Porattel.
They were terror-striken. Some of them out of fear began to recite the awrad aloud and some of them wept and amidst them stood the Shaykh with his stick in hand. People believed that this was made possible by Jinn's help. Such a concept itself was taken from Prophet's Miraj (journey to heavens, when "He transported His servant in one night from 'Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa". He could have the knowledge of hidden things due to Jibril's assistance. When he was questioned by those who did not believe the story of his ascent, questioned him on the Dome of Rock, it is said, that Jibril held a replica of the sacred Dome of Rock and the Prophet described it to those who questioned. Angels will be obedient only to Prophets but Jinn could be propitiated and made obedient by Jinna Seva.

Several Manaqibs and Malas ascribed to their heroes the power of mind reading. It is quite the same what Prof. K.A. Nizami mentioned of Shaykh Farid, that "he could read a man's inner heart by a glance at his face". Not a single work among the hagiographic

10. Maniqib Abd al-Gadir as-Sani, p. 11.
11. K.A. Nizami, Life and Times of Sheikh Farid ud-din Ganji-i-Shakar, p. 3.
literature produced in Kerala was without the Saint or Wali curing an incurable disease, curing the blind or chronic diseases. The saints were even otherwise well-known for their knowledge of medicine. People believed that by the Karamah of the saint, recitation of his Mala would keep off all Balal and Musibat. One of the lines of Istighasa in the Badr Mala runs. "From all the Balal and Afat and strains and Musibat, Oh God, please give me Shifa with the Barakah of Badringal."

People believed that reciting these malas themselves would bring happiness to the one who recited and to his whole household. Illiterate masses considered it auspicious to have copies of these malas in their house. A guest would ask for a particular mala to sing himself or if it was an elderly person he or she may ask children of the house to sing it to them. Perhaps the best example of such beliefs was the Malappuram Patappattu (Malappuram war-song) the most popular song in Malabar and which was said to be one of the stimulants

12. evils.
13. Trouble.
14. The shahids of Badr.
15. I have seen in my boyhood days elderly guests asking the girls to recite these Malas. A guest would appreciate it and recommend to his relatives that they should hear such and such Mala being sung by so and so.
to the Mappila rebellion of 1921. The author named it 'Kulliyat us-Shife' (Remedy for all) that is 'Hymn of praise for the benefit of all mankind'. That was composed as a necklace for the kings. Those who wear that necklace here will be rewarded by God in the Hereafter with a necklace of God. Naming every ill and misfortune possible to men the author prays to God that for the sake of the Malappuram Shahids the man (who recites) may come to no harm. The song is also intended to be repeated amidst vows in times of sickness, for wants to be supplied, diseases to be cured, wells to be filled and even cholera to be driven away.16

Sea-faring people, fishermen, and boat-men had special devotion to certain saints. The reverence with which the Saint of Ullal Dargah, Sayid Madani, is held by mariners has been discussed. Hydross Kutty Mupan of Chevakkad, is patron-saint of fisherman community of both Muslims and non-Muslims in recent times. One of the Karamah of Mamburam Tangal is said to have saved a lost ship. Once he asked one of his murids to bring a

16. Fawcett, "War songs of the Mappilas of Malabar", I.A., XX (1901). The belief that cholera and small-pox were the work of Shaitan, was a lingering of the old faith, that persisted among Muslims too. A procession with banners of the local Wali chanting moulids under the Tangal was taken out beating drums to drive away the Satan (devil).
burning bundle of olas (dry coconut palm leaves). Then he asked one of them present to climb on top of a coconut tree and to wave the burning bundle in the air. Far in the sea, those seamen who had lost their course had prayed so Mamburam Tangal for help. The sailors saw the light and they paddled ashore. Poor farmers used to invoke his blessings against pests.

The dualism of Islam and attachment of women-folk to Pirs are discussed elsewhere in the work. All the saints could be invoked for a smooth delivery. A number of Malas, Mouluds and Manaqibs that were examined for the study revealed the fact that they had special

17. People used to tie these 'olas' in a bundle usually three or four feet long. The bundle is tied so tightly that even when lighted, it would not burn to flames except when waved in the air. These bundles served the purpose of torches.


19. When farmers complained of the pests one day Mamburam Tangal asked them to catch some insects and put them in a drum. Thereafter the pests disappeared. "The Mala of Shaykh Muhammad Waliyullah (d.1390) of Palghat has the same Barakah recorded. In the paddy fields of country-side of Malabar may still be seen white flags on short poles to guard against pests, obviously a reminiscent of the old flags taken out of a Jara in bygone days."
appeal to women. It was believed that if the Cherusiti Tangal Mala was sung for 41 days barren women will conceive.

The fishing community of Badagara, where Cherusiti Tangal's Jaram is situated, believed that if the sea is without fish they could invoke his blessing for a good catch. Lost things could be recovered by making vows to the saints. It is recorded in the Mamburam Mala that a man approached the Tangal, complaining of the loss of his ox. The Tangal gave him a key and told him to go back and he would get back his ox. It was raining heavily when the man was on his way back and he took shelter on the veranda of a locked and uninhabited house. The wind and rain was too severe that he could not withstand the cold. He said to himself, "Why should not I try to open the house with this key". He opened the house, and there stood his lost ox in the room. The man remembered with gratitude the words of the Tangal.

The veracity of the above Karamah and Barakah

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20. Nuruddin Mala, p. 8; Madani Mala, p. 10; Teruvatte Palli Mala, p. 7; and Shadili Mala, p. 12 (All Arabic-Malayalam works).


as people believed may be questioned, but the intent behind them were sincere love and blind belief in the saints. It has got some practical values too. The Kondotty Tangals still removed the thorn or bones from throat with chanted plantain. The most curious fact is that if the patient cannot eat the plantain, his friend will be asked to squat with their backs touching each other and will be made to eat the fruit. The patient would get relief by this act. 23

Mappilas considered it solemn to take an oath. 'By the foot of Mamburam Tangal' is the sacred seal for every Mappila contract. They also swear in their saints' names. Mappilas believed that if false vows were taken or oaths were made, the liar would be punished by the saint. Many Malas mention how of false vows a person lost his sight. These Walis were, thus the guardian saints of common folk, the fountain of their hopes and solace in distress.

23. Removing bones from throat is a Karemah attributed to many saints. Kondotty Tangals continue this treatment for generations. On one night in October, 76, some of the non-Muslim friends brought a youth to be immediately taken to the hospital. The doctors at Manjeri District hospital asked him to go the Calicut Medical College. On the way anyhow they decided to try at Kondotty. The patient got cured by the chanted plantain given by the Tangal.
Devotional acts to the saints consisted of celebration of Maulids and performance of Ratib. Celebration of Maulids of the Prophet and Saints was practised in other parts of the Islamic world too. Muslim legal opinion considerably differed on the topic. Ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328 A.D.) condemns it and Hallaj (d. 1336), his contemporary, criticised the participation of women. Suyuti (d. 1505 A.D.) concluded it as an innovation but bidatun hasanah. He considered the recitation of the Quran and of the history of the Prophet often in verse or in a combination of prose and poetry as the core of the celebration, and the processions, feastings and fairs later accretions. These panegyrics on Prophet’s life later on began to emphasise its miraculous character and dwell reverently and extravagantly on his manaqib or virtues. Later on recitation of Maulids was conducted on all important occasions. The fact that ‘Dhikr’ meetings were an integral part of Maulid celebrations testifies Sufis’ role in popularising Maulids. Later on, Maulids and Manaqibs came to be composed on all important companions, heroes of Sufis and Saints. They were recited on the third, seventh or fortieth day of death or on the occasion of circumcision ceremony, on fulfilling a vow, or on starting any new venture. On appointed days
often on the day of death of a saint, Moulids were recited or on particular days of the week by devotees. The Nerccas were celebrated with great pomp and reverence by Muslims on the day of death of the saints. The term used in Andu Nercca. In the case of Kendotty Nercca, the date was fixed by the murids and the Tangals. This nercca had no fixed date. The date was fixed when the paddy fields around the Kubba were harvested in the summer for convenience of the assembling devotees. It was on the conclusion of Kendotty Nercca that the Tangal and murids declared the date of the 'Pullara Nercca'. Days before the Nercca 'Kodiyerram' was conducted. A white banner was hoisted on a permanent

24. The most popular Mawlid recited in Malabar is Mawlid on the Prophet by Shaykh Zayn uddin Ibn All of Ponnani. (d.923 A.H./1521 A.D.).

25. Means Annual Urs. Sometimes the single term 'Andu' (annual) is also used.

26. 'Nercca' literally means a vow. The use of the word for festival is derived from the practice of taking oaths in the name of the saint concerned and fulfilling the vows on particular day, generally on the day of death of the Shaykh.

27. Celebrated in commemoration of some of the shahida of Pullara. This Nercca is significant by its colourful fire works. The experts of fire works of Pullara are often invited to other festivals. The fire works in urs is a local custom.

28. Flag-hoisting ceremony.
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flag-post. This flag-hoisting was followed by similar acts by the devotees. During the Urs season white flags were seen fluttering all over the adjacent localities. Special sweets-shops fully decorated, sold the special 'Narasa Mittayi' and people sent them to relatives as a token of love and respect. On the days of the Urs, 'Varavu' or 'Petti' are still conducted. These 'Varavu' were made colourful and interesting with bands playing, dancing and even fancy dress. Groups from various localities compete in making them most colourful. "The banner-bearer goes ahead followed by the musicians. Then follow some young men of the party, encircling their leader and dancing according to the tempo given by him. He swings a sword, a stick or a handkerchief in the air and dances with them, thus giving the tempo..... While singing and dancing the party clap their hands in a rhythmical way". The above description of Von Grunebaum of the Urs festival of Musa Nabi in Jerusalem seems to be quite typical of such processions or 'Varavu' in Malabar too. These Varavu were received by the representatives of the Dargha near the shrine and in the case of

29. Even the 'Kotimaram' (flag post) is considered sacred.
30. Urs sweets prepared only during the season.
31. Varavu means coming. Literally people coming with Petti (box) with offerings to the Shaykh or the deceased saint.
32. G.E. Von Grunebaum, Muhammadan Festivals, pp. 81-83.
Kondotty Nercca the Tangal's representative rides a horse half a mile from the Jaram to welcome the procession. The offerings carried are bestowed to the Shaykh. In Kondotty and Malappuram Nercas, the communal harmony is exhibited in the act of the last 'Varavu' of a Tattanre Petti. 33

The most important Nercca of Malabar was the Malappuram Nercca which commemorates the death of forty-four Mappilas martyred in a battle against the Hindu ruler of the area defending a mosque in the year 1148 A.H./1734 A.D., according to the Mal. 34 This Nercca, more than any other single event, illustrates the emotional spirit, occasionally approaching frenzy, which arises from the religious commitment of especially the poorer and uneducated Mappilas. Parades (Varavu) from several villages come to the narrow street of old Malappuram bringing money offerings and bearing flags. The columns mass together and proceed with high commotion to the mosque where the martyrs are buried. On the way, they were met by representatives of the four original families from whom the martyrs came and were escorted to the mosque.

33. Tattan means gold-smith. His coming being the last, in rural Malabar 'Tattanre petti' is a phrase used for the last item of any work.

where they place the flags on posts and give to the head of the mosque.

Because of the explosive nature of the gathering, frequently erupting into violence, and in the light of tensions related to participation, the Madras Government placed a ban on the conduct of the festival in 1947. In 1957, it was again permitted by the Communist Government of Kerala as a favour to Muslim voters, but after violent incidents it was banned again in 1960. In 1967 and 1972 the Government granted permission to conduct the Nercca under the supervision of large numbers of special police.

The Appani Nercca conducted at the Shaykh's mosque in Calicut is next in importance. Shaykh Abdul Wafa Muhammad al-Kalikutti was a man well versed in physical feats and he had led the Muslim armies in the Battle of Chaliyam in 1571 A.D. against the Portuguese. He died on 18th Rajab of the year 980 A.H./1579 A.D. His fame had reached far and wide as a Wali with innumerable karamahs. The sea-farers vow to his Jarar 'Appam' the special sweets which they carry even from far-off gulf countries. 35 According to tradition one night some

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35. K.M. Muhammad Koya, Al-Shaykh Abul Wafa Muhammad al-Kalikutti, (Mal.), pp. 16-20. The custodian of the Jarar gave us the Arab's sweets given as offering-fulfilling some vow made on the sea, when we visited the tomb for the study.
Muslims dreamt that his grave near the shore was being washed away by heavy seas. They hurried to open the grave and found the body not only intact but as it was in life. After that the saint's corpse was re-interred in a safer place and the mosque was constructed. The Nercoa is called 'Appam (bread) festival' because devotees bring rice-cakes and bread to the mosque as offering, which are later distributed to the poor.  

But it is only in the Nercoa of Hydros Kutty Muppan of Chavakkad where a replica of the Jaram is taken out in procession through the streets. In other Nercoas devotees carry only banners and flags. Hydros Kutty Muppan was a Muslim chieftain of the eighteenth century. When Haidar Ali, the Mysorean ruler invaded Malabar, Chavakkad and the nearby villages were entrusted to him for revenue collection. Later on, in the time of Tipu Sultan due to some misunderstanding they became enemies and in a battle Hydros Kutty Muppan was killed. His Barakah was considered helpful from sea perils, especially by fisher-folk regardless of faith. Though Chavakkad is a panchayath it is the place where price of land is highest  

36. R.E. Miller, Mappila Muslims of Kerala, pp. 244-46.  
due to the flow of foreign money. Vows are made to the saint for Pettiyedukkal. The devotees with gulf money compete in adding pomp and grandeur to the festivals, and the mosque, adjacent to the tomb itself being the best example of the community's prosperity. In 1976 forty-six caparisoned elephants were paraded in the procession. But it was about 1784 that Hyross Kutty Muppan was killed. Therefore before 1792 he was not probably enshrined.

Social and economic causes keep the Nerccas flourishing. People take them as occasions to family get-together. The convenience of those abroad is specially considered in the Malik Dinar Nercca of Kasaragod and it is held only once in three years. But this oldest Nercca was held annually till the first half of this century. During the Nerccas devotees bring all their

38. Pettiyedukkal literally means taking the box. Parents would vow that if their son gets visa they will take 4 or 5 boxes. The ceremony is, an elephant from the Jaram would come to the house, where it will be given something to eat, and go back with the petti (box), one of the family member often a boy riding the elephant, if they like. An amount is fixed for one box. If five boxes are vowed either five elephants would go together or an elephant would go five times.

39. In 1975 the President of the celebration committee explained the reason, at the Urs festival. He said it was an arrangement made for the convenience of those residing abroad especially in Malay, Singapore and Gulf regions, who would find it difficult to attend the Urs if it was annually held.
offerings fulfilling their oaths. The floor-rent paid by various temporary trading-stalls, theatres of amusements and moving soos provide another source of income for the custodians of the Darghas. The hotels and shops in the whole town get roaring business. Therefore, businessmen often take initiative in organizing Nercoos though they may have little faith in the saint or his Karmah.

Ratib was another devotional rite performed in Kerala. This is practised by the followers of the famous Sufi Ahmad al-Kabir al-Ri'ai (d. 578 A.H./1182 A.D.). Ratib originated only as 'Awrad' and Adhkar, referred to in the Quran and Hadith. But in course of time modifications occurred and they used to be very long and were concluded usually late at night. They were followed by a feast as in the case of Mawlid and were meant for invoking the blessings of a saint for curing an epidemic or for preventing a calamity. Ratibs of Muhiyuddin Shaykh, and Rifai Shaykh were important. The most popular Ratib recited is Haddad Ratib composed by Abdulla Ibn Alavi-al Haddad (1132 A.H./1726 A.D.) Ratibs were

40. Popularity of Haddad Ratib among Mappilas could be attributed to their respect for Ba-Alavi saints of Tarim.
of two kinds, one consisting of only 'Awrad' and 'Adhkar' and the other followed by beating of drums followed by striking of the body with sticks, clubs, swords or knives. 41

Ratib was celebrated in Laccadive Islands also where Islam is believed to have spread from Malabar. K.P. Ittaman in his book on 'Amini Islanders' has given a lively description of a Ratib performance. "Dhikrs were sung to the accompaniment or rhythemic beating of tamburines known as Daffs. This singing of 'dhikr' is known as Baith. The persons who participated in the Baith - about 10 or 15 in number - grouped themselves into two rows, each holding a Daff in his left hand, and performed a series of well-timed bending exercises, keeping perfect time between bending and beating on their Daffs, while five or more performers who showed astounding feats with different weapons danced up and down between the rows. Gradually the performers who recited the Baith increased the speed of their recitation and also bending exercises which created a sudden impulse in the performers of feats who then jumped into the air as if caught in a fit of frenzy, shouting all the time

41. Ratibs were embodiment of religious frenzy and not always associated with Sufi orders but with individual saints as in the case of 'Bimapalli'. It is also held by the devotees of Muhiyuddin Shaykh.
'Said Mohammed Kasim' and striking their chest or abdomen with all their might with the weapons or instruments like sword and pointed needles, which they held in their hands. Some performers would pass pointed needles right through their cheeks or lips. The extraordinary thing was that very little blood oozed out from these wounds. Haddad Ratib was recited in every household after Maghrib prayers especially by the ladies.

Aravankali is another devotional dance. Devotees with Daff stand in a circle with their leader in the centre. The songs are 'Baith' or some Mala on some saints. Gradually the song, the beating of the drum and the bending exercises get a fast tempo when the performers move as if in a trance. Now-a-days this practice is seen only in Kondotty. The team of performers is trained under Avaran Mulla, a near associate of the Kondotty Tangal. The Kolkali is another devotional act. Though it is a folk-play of lower castes in Kerala, it seems that the play might have continued, obviously

42. Thousands of the viewers witnessed piercing the cheek with an iron needle in an unbelievable manner by the performers on the stage at the exhibition of Mappila arts during the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Farook College, held in 1973.

the songs being replaced in theme and spirit. The lower class Harijans still play Kolkali where they sing simple and humorous folk-songs. Instead the Mappilas sing, songs on the Prophet or Shahids. This had been recognised as a Muslim folk-play decades ago. Muslims have included rhythms and sounds in accordance to their spirit. Familiar words from the Quran and sounds like Allah, Ha-Allah can be heard in dancing. The circling of players in the Sufi dances is compared with the eternal circling of the earth and leaping high is described as man's hope, symbol of human longing to reach the High.

Often along waysides in Kerala may be seen Nerccapatteis, in the name of some Auliya or Shuhadakkal. Painted green, these boxes were opened by the custodians of the Mahal who would utilise the money for Nerccas. A Muslim would consider it auspicious to have such a box installed on his wall or compound wall on which would be written 'Biran Auliya Nerccapetti (box to put Nerccas), for Biran Auliya...) or any other Shaykh or Shahadakkal. In rural Malabar, school-going children would be seen depositing coins in these boxes for passing the examination or not to be beaten by the Musalyar or Mulla. A passing mother would suddenly halt seeing a Nerccapetti and put
some coins to fulfil some vow she had taken earlier to cure her children's disease or to see her daughter wedded.

A man with a long beard, an old coat and a fez cap with some beads hanging on his hands and a staff from the shoulder, beating a Daff may still be found going round singing some unfamiliar tune in a dull voice and claim Nercessas. He would claim to be the one coming from Ajmir or Nagur. Often a lady with him will have a wooden box with silver replica of human organs—eyes, legs, hands or tongue. The practice is that when the leg is broken or somebody has an eye disease, the householder mostly women without male's knowledge vow a silver leg or silver eye to the Nagur Shaykh or Ajmir Shaykh. The woman would then handover the replica to the ladies. They would return it with its price as demanded by the vagabonds. They believe that their vows are fulfilled. Hardly any one bothered to ascertain whether these Nercessas actually reached Nagur or Ajmir or even to verify the veracity of their claims.

Sufis had an important role in the spread of Islam in South India, as have already been discussed in

44. To Khawaja Muin ul-din Chishti. But only 'Ajmir' is pronounced. Many of them even may not know who the saint of Ajmir is.
Chapter II of this work. It is said while Alauddin Khalji's armies came to south "the disciples of Nisamuddin Auliya led three consecutive expeditions of their spiritual army, each of which was 700 strong. These Sufi-Missionaries led a spiritual life and by their spirituality and humanity attracted to themselves not only the Muslims but also low-caste Hindus and also a few Brahmins". Malabar was a land where no Muslim invader had entered before 1766. In this land where "different deities co-existed in peace like wild beasts forgetting their natural animosity in the vicinity of a holy hermitage", the peaceful propagation of Islam by the Sufis, was welcomed. People who welcomed Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism and Christianity, with innumerable gods and goddesses and a strong tradition of hero-worship had no difficulty even in deifying some of the Muslim heroes. The best example is Vavar of Sabarimala.

47. Atula, Musakayamsa Kayva, as quoted in M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis, introduction, p. 11.
48. Vavar was according to tradition a pirate but later became the close associate of Sri Ayyappan, the Svevi of Sabarimala, the most important Hindu pilgrim centre in Kerala. Ayyappa Darsana is permitted only after making offerings to Vavar.
and the Mappila Theyyams of Ali Bappan and Ali-Chamundi. The conversion effected by various saints has been discussed in their proper contexts. Von Grunebaum's statement that "the miracles of saints cut across denominational lines", is true in the case of Kerala also. A lower caste Hindu would take his problems to a local saint to seek his blessings or Barakah for curing a disease or for protection from an evil spirit.

For the Muslims adoration and homage to saints and veneration of Sayyids had great practical value. These divines were themselves conscious of their responsibility in leading the community as a religious duty. Syed Hussain Kunhi Koya stated: "My reason for joining these people arises from the dictates of religion; for when a member of Muselmans are in trouble and in danger, it is for us Syeds to join and die with them".

49. Theyyam is a temple folk-dance of lower castes in north Malabar. It is a corrupt form of 'Daivam', god. According to a tradition goddess Chamundi was one day taking bath in a tank. Ali, a Muslim happened to pass by. He was dazzed by the beauty of the goddess and tried to do some mischief. The goddess cursed him and he died. But after death as he died due to the curse of a goddess, devotees defied him and the Theyyam of Ali-Chamundi came to be celebrated. K.K.N. Kurup, Cult of Theyyam and Hero Worship, pp. 76-77.

50. Correspondence on Mappila Outrages in Malabar (1849-1853), Vol. II, p. 32. The Tangal was being interrogated for joining Mappila outbreaks.
to this commitment the Sayyids and Sufis stood with the community in thick and thin and strove hard for its uplift. It was Puthiya Maliyakkal Pukkoya Tangal, an Aydaruse saint who organised the Maunath al-Islam Sabha of Poonani in 1900 A.D. with 800 representatives from all over Malabar. Vakkam Abdul Qadir Moulavi in Travancore pioneered the uplift of the community at the same time. Makhdum Abdul Asis Mabari of Poonani, the Chisti saint personally led the Mappila allies in 1571. Shaykh Abul Wafa Muhammad al-Kalikutti was himself a good archer who took part in this battle.\footnote{Qazi Muhammad, Fathul Mubin (1573), in Jawahir al-Ashar, p. 251.} With him was Qazi al-Gusat Abul Asis al Kalikutti Sayyid Fazal, the Ba-Alavi saint was banished by the British government for his inspiring the Mappila outbreaks, which was a regional variant of Muslim revivalist movement of the 19th century.\footnote{K.K. Mohammad Abdul Karim, Mamburum Sayyid Alavi Tangal, p. 64. For his role in the outbreaks, vide, Stephen F. Dale, "The Mappila Outbreaks", Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXXV(1), pp. 90-97.} Sayyid Hussain Tangal, the Aydaruse saint and great-grandfather of the present Aydaruse Shaykh was imprisoned by the British and banished in 1882. He died in captivity and was buried in the grave yard of the mosque attached to Baqiyat us-Salihat Arabic College at Vellore. Diwan
Rajagopalachari inaugurated an Arabic college on 6th May 1914 at Alwaye and the man behind it was Hamadani Tangal, a Suhrawadi Sufi. From 1911 onwards the Chisti Shaykhs, Makhdum Tangal and Valiya Jarattingal Kunhi Sithi Tangal and the Aydaruse Sufi Putiya Maliyakkal Muttukoya Tangal of Ponnani were working for the educational uplift of the community. All Musaliyar, the Khilafat leader was a disciple of Makhdums of Ponnani who spent seven years in Masjid ul-Haram for higher studies. Variyan Kunnath Kunhahmad Haji, the man who for six months ruled Ernakul defying the British Army in 1921, was a bullock-cart driver and had only Madrasah education. It was Moulavi Abussabah, the man who topped the highest examination of Al-Ashar in 1936, who was instrumental in the foundation of Farook College.

The above examples clearly indicate the fact that Saints, Sufis and theologians were always the leaders of the community in its struggle for survival and attempts for reform. It was not only English education but also the inner realization of the need that helped reform of the Nappilas. The political unity

of the community under the leadership of Sayyids helped them to bargain for their real rights including reservation in jobs, age relaxation in appointments and proportionate representation in government services in recent times. To a great extent it was the charisma of P.M.S.A. Pukkoya Tangal, the late Aydaruse saint that saved Muslim League from the chaos that followed the death of its former President, Sayyid Abdurahiman Bafaqi Tangal. Bafaqi Tangal was a wholesale rice dealer having ware-houses in Burma and Ceylon. He was one of the architects of the present political set-up in Kerala and of the first experiment of coalition government in the country bringing Muslim League to power.\(^{55}\) The glowing tributes paid by eminent educationists to Pukkoya Tangal reflects the character of that great lover of humanity. "Pious and loving Tangal combined in him the qualities of a Sufi. He was of course a Sufi, who lived among the people and identified himself with their problems and never an ascetic living in seclusion..... He lived among the people and toiled hard to relieve them of their miseries and agonies. His tenderness and unbounded hospitality were just manifestations of his inner love

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55. For his life and activities, Attakoya Pallikkandi, Bafaqi Tangal (Mal.), pp. 7-11.
and generosity and they were real sources of his captivating personality. His charming low voice had sometimes the power and magnanimity of thunder. All his memories are pleasant and sweet. 56

Perhaps Muslim divines and Sayyids were more in number in other parts of the country. But they could not take the leadership of the community as among the Muslims of Kerala. One reason was perhaps that these people were pushed behind in their confrontation with political power and had to bow down. In Kerala they were always supreme, never subject to any such authority and were held in high esteem, which made them bold enough to take the reins in their hands.

These Sufis were also responsible for the communal harmony in Kerala. In their presence were settled family quarrels, property disputes, and political and communal discords. Thousands of disputes of mosques were referred to them for solution, hundreds of separated couples were united. If anybody brought a word that the Tangal wanted to settle the problem among themselves, the concerned parties sat together days and nights for an agreement and a court was never approached. Their

56. K.A. Jaleel, article in Panakkad Tangal Smarak Grandham (Mal.), p. 76.
decisions social and communal problems were regarded with equal respect by Muslims and non-Muslims, thus averting many a chance of communal conflicts. Sufism was a creative ideology and force for the Muslims; in fact it was the all-comprising dominant factor guiding their life.

The Muslims of Kerala have been influenced by a number of local and purely Hindu customs and traditions. The reason was obviously the large-scale conversion from the Hindu population who even after conversion did not part with some of their older practices. The influence of such customs are more evident among communities continuing as vocational groups, their old profession, which compelled them to continue the necessary rites and ceremonies required by their calling. The complexities of social organisation and economic set-up compelled them to persist in those vocations since it assured them employment, and such groups would find it hard to be absorbed in any other profession. Since by tradition and compulsion there was a near-total absence of education, the lack of modern education again helped the persistence of such rituals and ceremonies to form a vicious circle. Such communities as Pusalans are fine units for studying the persistence of pre-conversion rites and ceremonies.
P.R.G. Mathur in his *Mappila Fisherfolk of Kerala* has given deep and informative discussion on the ritual complex. The Amini Islanders of the Laccadives Islands, where Islam is believed to have spread from Malabar and who lag behind half-a-century from the mainland, have also preserved many of the folk-rituals and magico-religious rites.

P.R.G. Mathur noted the following folk-rituals as practised by the fisher-folk of Tanur.

Moulud was a non-Quranic ritual conducted by Muslims all over Kerala on appointed days, generally on Thursday nights. It was also held on specific occasions like birth-day of the Prophet, sometimes on the two 'Id' occasions and circumcision ceremony. On the beginning of a new venture like business or launching of new boats and nets of fishermen and on the successful completion of any act by way of thanks-giving or to fulfill a vow taken earlier also Mouluds were held. In particular mosques or at the home of a murid of a Sufi silsila or in any household Moulud was conducted.

The relations, neighbours of immediate vicinity are invited, where they assemble in a room, filled with

the fragrance of the burning incense, when all the guests arrived a sumptuous feast is given to them before the Moulud ceremony begins. The Moulavis then take their seat facing Qibla, whereas the guests crouch on the mats spread on the floor. The host then express his gratitude to the guests for their company and explains the reason that prompted him to hold the Moulud. These are generally in the nature of poor business, bad crops, illness of children, attack of evil spirits and so on and so forth. The Moulavi then recite Fatiha and Surahs from the Quran. Then follows the 'Duairaakkal' (begging supplications), where the Moulavi invokes Allah's help and the blessings of Prophet Muhammad for the fulfilment of the intentions of the house-holder. The assembled then utter in chorus, 'Amin, Amin' whenever the Moulavi pauses. When the Duairakkal is over they rub their palms on their face as if they are getting up from slumber. When the prayer is over the Moulavi begins to read loudly stories connected with the birth, life, miracles and sayings of the Prophet or his predecessors or descendants or the saint in whose honour the ceremony is performed, as the case may be. The reading takes about two hours. When the reading is over, the Moulavis are invited to a 'Shirni' (sweets—generally Halwa, sweet bread cakes, coconut pieces, etc.).
The Moulud session comes to an end with another Duairakkal, in which the Moulavi invokes the blessings of Allah and the Prophet in favour of the host, by uttering 'Oh, Fatachone! (Oh! creator), Enre Rabbel! (my lord)'. The host and all the assembled in unison says 'Amin'.

Moulud forms the core ritual of the Muslims of Kerala especially of Mappilas and Pusalans. Moulud was the foremost of non-Quranie ritual invariably practiced all over Malabar and in Laccadives where Islam is said to have spread from Malabar itself.58

P.R.G. Mathur observes on the practice of Moulud among the fishermen. "The Moulud symbolizes the mystic element the Mappila society and the unity of the fishermen. Friends, neighbours, members of the fishing crew, kins, departed ancestors, near-forgotten deities, etc. get together as a social group in the Moulud feast and they pledge mutual support and co-operation. The Moulud introduces a new element among the Mappilas which helps to minimize uncertainty, tension and conflict".59

Moulud was performed collectively in the local masjid or individually in one’s own household, in honour of a number of personalities. "The Prophet, his four

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companions Abu Baker, Umar, Usman and Ali, Refai Shaikh (21st grandson of the Prophet), Shaikh Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani (Mohiyuddin Shaikh in short), Khadeeja (wife of Prophet), Fathima (daughter of Prophet) Hamse, Husain and Hasan, Nagore Shahul Hameed, Mwaja Moinuddin of Ajmer, and the Mamburam Tangal are the most important worthies in whose honour Mouluds are held on their birth days every year". The predecessors of the Prophet, such as Khizr Nabi, Ilyas Nabi, Sulayman Nabi and Isa Nabi are also honoured by holding Moulud sessions. The martyrs of Malappuram and Badr (Badrningal) are also honoured so. The communal mouluds are held to ward off fire hazards, natural calamities and epidemics like cholera and small-pox.

The most popular moulud in Kerala was Manqua Moulud. It was composed by Sheikh Abdul Asis Makhdum of Ponnani (d.1521). Among the Muslims of Kerala Pusahans were by nature of their vocaction bound to perform Moulud to invoke the blessings of the Prophet and various patron saints, for instance to mark the launching of new nets and boats, and getting bumper catches. A new net was always launched either on Friday afternoon or on Sunday.

60. Ibid.
after the sunset. The belief in the auspicious occasion of Friday afternoon was as it still is a universal fact all over Kerala. A new venture is started, a new car is taken for registration after Juma on Friday, so also a New bus makes its first regular trip only on Friday after Juma. In the case of Pusalans they earmark the occasion for performing Manqus Moulud. They believe that the failure to perform Manqus Moulud before launching new nets and boats would cause their fishing equipment sink in the sea. "The performance of Manqus Moulud is an insurance against uncertainties". Such insurance notions were universal among mariners. During the middle ages Shaykh Khazaruni was considered to be the patron saint of voyages to India and China in whose name a 'powerful insurance system came into existence' as noted by Spencer Trimmingham. 61 In Northern Kerala Hasrat Madani, the Saint of Ullal Dargha had been always

61. At the face of calamities on high seas mariners used to vow a sum to the Khanqah of Shaykh Khazaruni to avert such calamity, which they would write down on a paper. When the ship reached the shore the men of Khazaruni Khanqah of the place would go to the ship and demand the amount. They would even give a bill to a needy person to collect the sum from such ships, the balance of which could be claimed by the custodians later on.
the patron-saint of mariners. When the building of a boat was completed, Pusalans performed 'Kurripuja' (ceremony performed by the carpenter on finishing a house or boat).

Khattam Otikkal, the reading and recitation of the full text of the Holy Quran by one or more Moulavis was another important rite. Reading the Quran by oneself would be rewarded, as Quran itself declares. But to perform this in the form of a rite was never sanctioned by the Quran. Khattam otikkal was held in honour of (1) The Prophet, (2) Muhiyuddin Shaykh, (3) Rifai Shaykh, (4) Shahul Hamid, (5) Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, (6) Fatima and Khadija, (7) Badringal, (8) Hamza, (9) Abu Baker, Umar, Usman and Ali, (10) Hamshuram Tangal, Ilyas Nabi, Sulayman Nabi, Isa Nabi and Yunus Nabi. Khattam Otikkal was generally held even after death or as a vow. The Pusalans who were more habituated to rituals performed this rite for getting bumper catches, prevention of capsizing of boats, curing of illness caused by sorcery and

62. The devotees on high seas vowed a sum to the Dargha with the replica of their boat to be presented to the Dargha of Hazrat Madani to avert calamities. The custodian of the Dargha showed me large number of such models of boats of different name, size and shape received for fulfilment of such vows.

63. Shahul Hamid Tangal was popular only with coastal communities. He was believed to be instrumental in introducing Ratib in Amini Islands.
spirits, getting ownership in fishing units, restoration of the irregular menstrual periods of fisherwomen, easy and natural delivery, etc. One to ten Maulavis are generally engaged for performing this ceremony.

Ratib was performed in honour of Shaykh Muhiyuddin and Shaykh Rifai, and in honour of local walis and saints.

Muslims also believed that sorcerers, mantravadis, and astrologers would bring about good and evil by practising witchcraft. Besides a number of Muslim sorcerers like many Tangals, Musaliyars and Mulas, Hindu Kaniyans (Astrologers), Panas (sorcerers by tradition) were approached. Certain Jinn Hadarats (people who claimed to be possessed by Islam Jinn) also appeared among illiterate Muslims, whose fame soon spread as helpful in finding out lost things. In this case the possessor would utter some unfamiliar sounds which a helper would translate into words. But the reputation of such Jinn Hadarats very soon be lost the whole episode ending as a farce.

People resorted to 'ulinjuvangal' and even 'homam' to get cured from diseases. The Pussalans believed in various Hindu spirits like, Karinkutty, Akasa Gandharvan, Cetta, Kutticattan and Gulikan and Muslim spirits like
Ruhan Jinn (spirit of a person who met with unnatural death) and in Apasmara Murtikal (spirits who cause epilepsy).

Among the Muslims of the interior settlements, where the bulk of the population formed converts from low castes some of the Hindu spirits had their Muslim counter-parts. Thus Kutticcottan had Cekkuttipappa Calttan the Hindu spirit had Ruhani or Jinn. These equivalents were evident in the rituals, to ward off the evils of the spirits. When the Hindus made offerings to the local Bhagavati temple to ward off 'Cetta', the goddess of smallpox, chicken-pox and cholera, the Muslims performed 'Kutta Bank' (Mass Bank - call of prayer) and took out the flag and banner from the jaram of the local Tangal, to the accompaniment of moulud and beating of drums. Such rituals and beliefs provided relief from the stress and strain of daily life boosted the confidence and morale in one's own action and revived the religious consciousness of common man.

Finding equivalents in good and evil spirits, evolution of nerccas and mouluds and ratibs in place of local festivals and rituals are some of the features of wonderful adaptation of Islam in Kerala. Since there was a complete absence of Shism and the consequent influence
of 'Muharram', during the period under discussion the
taking out of the replica of the jaram, of Hydros Kutty
Muppan in procession was a counter-part of the
'Elunnallatt' or 'Aratt' of a temple festival. The
Malayalis who welcomed Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism and
Christianity had no difficulty in even deifying some of
the Muslim heroes as evinced in the Theyyams of
Alicamundi, Ali Bappan and Arum Pumkanni.