FROM PANEGYRICS TO TV SOAPS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF MAPPILAPATTU AND OPPANA IN POPULAR CULTURE – CINEMA AND TELEVISION

Thesis submitted to the

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

by

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Declaration

I, Shibila A, hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled, "From Panegyrics to TV Soaps: A Critical Study of the Representation of Mappilapattu and Oppana in Popular Culture - Cinema and Television" is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Abubakkar KK, and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis have undergone a plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index was found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI-generated content.

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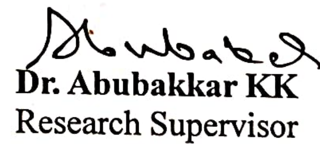
Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled "From Panegyrics to TV Soaps: A Critical Study of the Representation of Mappilapattu and Oppana in Popular Culture - Cinema and Television", submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is a work of bonafide research carried out by Ms. Shibila A under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title or recognition.



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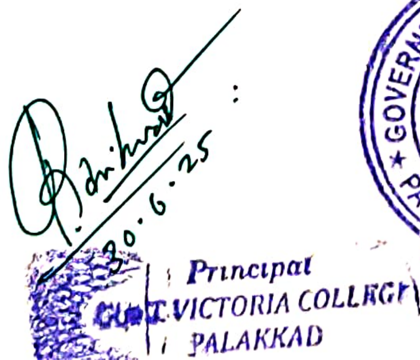

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of the traditional Mappila folk art forms- Mappilapattu and Oppana- in the realms of popular culture, particularly through cinema and television. Folk art, once deeply embedded in community life and collective rituals, is now increasingly mediated through mass media. Drawing from popular culture theory, folklore studies, gaze theory, and insights from globalisation studies, the research analyses how these cultural expressions are reimagined and reinterpreted when circulated as popular art. Through textual and content analysis of selected film songs and clips of TV soaps, the research uncovers how popular culture functions both as a site of resistance and commodification. While mass media gives wider visibility and new relevance to Mappilapattu and Oppana, it often does so by framing them within aestheticized or formulaic representations aimed at marketability and mass appeal.

The first chapter outlines the historical and social formation of the Mappila community, establishing the context of Mappilapattu and Oppana. The second chapter, drawing from folklore theory, explores these art forms in their communal dimensions. The third chapter analyses how they are reinterpreted in selected Malayalam cinema. The fourth chapter examines reality TV, employing glocalisation theory to understand how global entertainment formats adapt traditional practices. The findings reveal a shift from communal performance to mediated entertainment, where art forms are selectively stylised or standardised for broader appeal. However, these same media spaces also allow for partial agency and reinterpretation by folk artists. The study concludes that the representation of folk art in popular culture is a negotiated space where preservation, adaptation, and commodification occur simultaneously.

Keywords: Popular Culture, Mappilapattu, Oppana, Folk Art, Popular Art, Mass Art

സംഗ്രഹം

ഈ ഗവേഷണത്തിലൂടെ പരമ്പരാഗത മാപ്പിള കലാരൂപങ്ങളായ മാപ്പിളപ്പാട്ടും ഒപ്പനയും ജനപ്രിയ സംസ്കാരത്തിൽ, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് സിനിമയിലൂടെയും ടെലിവിഷൻ റിയാലിറ്റി ഷോകളിലൂടെയും, എങ്ങനെ പ്രതിനിധീകരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു എന്നതാണ് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നത്. ഒരിക്കൽ സമൂഹജീവിതത്തിലും കൂട്ടായ ആചാരങ്ങളിലും ആഴത്തിൽ പതിഞ്ഞുനിന്നിരുന്ന ഇത്തരത്തിലുള്ള ജനകലകൾ ഇന്ന് കൂടുതൽ മാദ്ധ്യമങ്ങളിലൂടെ പ്രതിനിധീകരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നവയാകുകയാണ്. ജനപ്രിയ സംസ്കാര സിദ്ധാന്തം, നാടോടിപ്രത്യക്ഷതാ പഠനം, ഗേസ്' സിദ്ധാന്തം, ആഗോളവൽക്കരണ പഠനങ്ങളിലെ അഭിമുഖ്യങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയിൽ നിന്ന് ആധാരങ്ങൾ എടുക്കുന്ന ഈ പഠനം ഈ കലാരൂപങ്ങൾ ജനപ്രിയകലയായി പ്രചരിക്കുമ്പോൾ എങ്ങനെ നവസൃഷ്ടികളും പുനർവ്യാഖ്യാനങ്ങളും ഉണ്ടാകുന്നുവെന്ന് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ചലച്ചിത്ര ഗാനങ്ങളുടെയും ടെലിവിഷൻ റിയാലിറ്റി ഷോകളിലെ ദൃശ്യങ്ങളുടെയും ഉള്ളടക്ക വിശകലനത്തിലൂടെ, ജനപ്രിയസംസ്കാരം എങ്ങനെയാണ് പ്രതിരോധത്തിന്റെ നിലയുമായി കൂടിക്കാഴ്ച ചെയ്യുന്നതിനോടൊപ്പം ഉൽപ്പന്നവൽക്കരണത്തിന്റെയും ഉപഭോഗത്തിന്റെയും വിഹിതമാകുന്നതെന്നും പഠനം തുറന്നു കാണിക്കുന്നു.

മാസ്മീഡിയയിലൂടെ മാപ്പിളപ്പാട്ടിനെയും ഒപ്പനയെയും കൂടുതൽ ദൃശ്യപ്രസിദ്ധിയിലേക്കും പുതിയ പ്രസക്തിയിലേക്കും നയിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. പക്ഷേ, പലപ്പോഴും ഈ കലാരൂപങ്ങൾ വിപണനക്ഷമതയും പൊതു ആകർഷണവും ലക്ഷ്യമാക്കി സൗന്ദര്യവത്കരിച്ച രൂപത്തിലോ ഫോർമുലാസിദ്ധമായ മാതൃകകളിലോ ചുരുക്കിക്കാണിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. പഠനത്തിന്റെ ആദ്യ അധ്യായം മാപ്പിള സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ ചരിത്ര-സാമൂഹിക ഘടനയെ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തുകയും, മാപ്പിളപ്പാട്ടിന്റെയും ഒപ്പനയുടെയും പശ്ചാത്തലത്തെ സ്ഥാപിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. രണ്ടാമത്തെ അധ്യായം നാടോടികലാസിദ്ധാന്തത്തിൽ നിന്ന് ആധാരങ്ങൾ എടുക്കുമ്പോൾ ഇവയുടെ സമുദായപരമായ പ്രത്യക്ഷതകളെ അടിവരയിടുന്നു. മൂന്നാം അധ്യായം ഇവ മലയാള സിനിമകളിൽ എങ്ങനെ പുനർവ്യാഖ്യാനിക്കപ്പെടുന്നുവെന്ന് പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. നാലാം അധ്യായം റിയാലിറ്റി ടിവിയെ പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു; ആഗോള വിനോദശാലാ മാതൃകകൾ എങ്ങനെ പ്രാദേശിക കലാരൂപങ്ങളിലേക്ക് ചേരുന്നുവെന്ന് മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ ഗ്ലോകലൈസേഷൻ സിദ്ധാന്തം ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു. പഠനത്തിൽ നിന്നുള്ള കണ്ടെത്തലുകൾ, സമുദായപരമായ പ്രകടനങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നുള്ള മാറൽ എങ്ങനെയാണ് മാധ്യമത്തിലൂടെയുള്ള വിനോദരൂപങ്ങളിലേക്ക് വഴിമാറുന്നതെന്ന് വ്യക്തമാക്കുന്നു. കലാരൂപങ്ങൾ വിപുലമായ ജനശ്രദ്ധ നേടാൻ വേണ്ടി തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത രീതിയിൽ ശൈലികൃതമോ മാനദണ്ഡപ്പെടുത്തപ്പെട്ടതോ ആകുന്നു. എന്നിരുന്നാലും, ഈ മാധ്യമ ഇടങ്ങൾ നാടോടികലാകാരന്മാർക്ക് കുറെ നിരീക്ഷിതമായ സ്വതന്ത്രതയും പുതിയതായി കലാരൂപങ്ങളെ വ്യാഖ്യാനിക്കുന്ന അവസരവും നൽകുന്നു. പഠനം ഉപസമാഹരിച്ചു കാണിക്കുന്നത്, ജനകലയുടെ ജനപ്രിയ പ്രതിനിധീകരണം സംരക്ഷണവും രൂപാന്തരവും ഉൽപ്പന്നവൽക്കരണവും ഒരേസമയം നടക്കുന്ന, ചേർച്ചയോടെയുള്ള ഒരു ഇടമാണ് എന്നതാണ്.

സൂചക പദങ്ങൾ: ജനപ്രിയ സംസ്കാരം, മാപ്പിളപ്പാട്ട്, ഒപ്പന, ജനപ്രിയകല, മാസ് ആർട്ട്.

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Introduction

Overview

The modern period, saturated by the revolutionary inventions in the field of communications brought about by the innovations in sound recording and broadcasting technologies, cinematography, and television, provides information, art, and entertainment in the current milieu of capitalist modernity. Visual media, the centre of public life and culture in the 21st century, promote audio-visual content over verbal, providing imaginative experiences through diversified forms of art and entertainment, thereby arguably dominating the modes of infotainment. In the bygone periods, art and entertainment were primarily live, direct, and community-based, trusting on interpersonal interactions through physical proximity of the performer and audience, strikingly contrasting the remote consumption of pre-recorded art and entertainment provided by mass media, which is perpetually broadcast to large streams of audience. Earlier, it was unquestionably an indissoluble part of the culture of the people- a suggestive quality of their folk culture, and these forms of cultural expressions not only entertained but also preserved their cultural heritage, communicated communal values, and nurtured a sense of collective identity within communities.

Though the concord between the culture of people and the production of creative expressions integral to entertainment is disrupted in the broadcast era, the folk cultural expressions of people are recurrently brought into the forefront of popular culture in novel format through mass media. Previously existing folk arts

are repackaged and marketed in a new or updated form. The standardised and commodified cultural products which restate the existing forms of arts, especially folk-art, succumbing to contemporary socio-cultural preferences, incorporating superior technologies that perpetually redefine and remodify the media of mass dissemination, in actuality, benefits the sustenance of such art forms through its reiterated production, heightened visibility and enhanced popularity, as these artistic expressions might cease to be produced, fall into extinction, due to alterations in the socio-cultural and political circumstances that produced such expressions in the past. "Since this folk culture and the way of life were so nearly interchangeable, we cannot now wish to revive the culture without restoring the way of life" (Hall & Whannel 53). In other words, it is indispensable for these folk-art forms to embrace the vicissitudes offered by mass media to ensure their survival, though succumbing to immense commodification.

Therefore, adapting various indigenous or folk expressions into the vastitude of popular culture, indisputably offered through the channels of mass media, consenting to commodification and standardisation of the same to appease the large corpus of spectators, in a way aids in the projection of such cultural expressions to a wide range of audience through the largescale distribution channels, and thus aids in its persistence, as mass media shapes popular culture by creating contents that becomes widely celebrated. The authentic culture of people, folk culture of indigenous groups, profuse with their vibrant artistic expressions, songs, music, and varied dance forms, are adapted into visual media like cinema and television programs, but are fused with established and proven formulas of entertainment that

definitely lure the audience and thereby profit. With the instance of Mappila art forms, the study investigates the domain of popular culture, which selectively breeds preferred and profitable dimensions of indigenous folk cultures necessitated by the flows of capital to reap ratings and commercial command. Simultaneously, the adoption of these art forms by popular media aids in the continued popularity and reproduction of those art forms, though the socio-cultural structures that birthed and sustained those art forms are on the verge of extinction.

Mappila art forms, with the pioneer and exemplary Mappilapattu, emerged from the collective creativity of Mappilas of Malabar, were launched by the devotional genre- *Malappattu*. These panegyrics eulogised the dignitaries of Islamic belief, especially the venerated Sufi saints who hold a place of great significance among Mappilas. Since the first ever discovered Mappila song *Muhyudheenmala* and the numerous other earlier compositions located, predominantly display the devotional tone, it could be deduced that the first ever Mappila art form emerged must have been the sub-genre of Mappilapattu, *Malapattu*, the panegyrics which exalted the religious signatories that influenced the Mappila life. Mappila art forms, with their humble origin as Mappilapattu, over time evolved and elaborated into various other aesthetic performances incorporating theatrical elements.

These Mappila folk expressions- their art forms- which matured in the communal circle of the Mappilas, entered the realm of popular arts in the decades preceding the mid-twentieth century through the globalisation of various technologies that recorded and broadcast songs and entertainment. In this particular study, two major sites of popular culture, cinematography and television, are taken

up for investigation. The Malayalam film industry from the 1950s onwards recognised the potential of Mappilapattu, which already proved its popularity through gramophone recordings and various other public performances, and the allied Mappila performing art Oppana in the showbiz, and tactically utilised these aesthetic expressions to entertain the movie goers. In the wake of the millennium, these Mappila art forms entered yet another realm of popular culture. Various television channels produced Mappilapattu talent search singing reality shows modelled on the global format of the *Idol* franchise to bring the melodies of Mappilapattu into the living rooms of the consumers. The research, mapping the trajectory of Mappila song and the allied art form-Oppana, with their root in panegyrics and currently occupying a dynamic presence on modern television, briefly analyses these folk-art forms and how these indigenous cultural expressions are embraced by popular culture, providing a major makeover.

Mass Media and Mass Culture

Mass communication media, usually modestly addressed as ‘mass media’ in the simplest way, can be “defined as the tools, instruments or materials, employing which senders can record information or experiences and transmit them to a large number of receivers in a short period” (Rissover 1). The general and impersonal characteristic typical of mass media, as it is intended for an extensive audience, and the business orientation of mass media aimed at amplifying the returns on the investments made, consequently produce art to appeal to the lowest common denominator and “operate at a level of ideas and styles which can be mass consumed by people at all points on the spectrum of age, interest, and education” (Rissover 4).

In essence, the various representatives of mass media- music, movies, television, news, and various other broadcasts- produce mass information and entertainment to make it accessible and appealing to a large number and variety of populations, often compromising the quality of the works created and broadcast.

The conservative literary critics and Marxist theorists from the early twentieth century employed the term 'mass culture' to address the presumed mediocrity of the commodity-based capitalist cultural products that are broadcast via these mass media. They claim mass culture to be manipulative, as its primary objective is to be purchased and expended; unsatisfying, as it neglects the soulful enrichment of its audience by demanding little effort from the consumers; and inauthentic, since it evades the touch of people through its mechanical production. These alleged attributes of mass culture are contrasted to the authenticity and pedagogic gratification advocated by high culture, where high culture is elevated as the epitome of civilisation, concerning an educated minority. It is argued that the authenticity and the sense of complexity, reflecting the quality of the work, upheld by the minority culture of the sophisticated elite, are absent or ignored in the industrialised 'mass culture'. Therefore, by distinction, mass culture is perceived as superficial and unsatisfying owing to its mechanical production by capitalist corporations in pursuit of ratings and the maximisation of their profits by marketing the least common denominator.

Adorno and Horkheimer devised the more polished term 'the culture industry' in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) to replace the term mass culture, and proposed that culture has been rehabilitated as a product of capitalist

corporations. The culture industry is simply defined as the mass production of popular music, film, television, and fashion by transnational capitalist corporations, which are highly standardised. In contrast to critical art, it is notorious for the commodification of art purporting to be autonomous, distinctive, and diversified, while in reality, producing works that are inauthentic, conformist, and extremely standardised. Adorno argues that the "culture industry fuses the old and familiar into a new quality," and the products are "tailored for consumption by masses," which are "manufactured more or less according to plan." And it "intentionally integrates its consumers from above." The technically produced cultural commodity in the marketplace dilutes the authenticity and originality of the cultural expressions and "transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms", prioritising profitability over artistic value (Adorno 98-99).

However, conforming popular art, hastily into this generalisation, is in actuality reductionist thinking, though it partly represents one side of the coin. "The idea of a uniform mass culture standing in bleak hostility to the traditional virtues is not based on fact" (Hall &Whannel 37).

Popular Culture

Popular culture, organised around the market, is widely defined as mass culture. The foremost persuasive presentation of popular culture as mass culture was executed by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). The text established the tradition of perceiving popular culture as mass culture, and it informed the cultural debates till the mid-twentieth century (Storey 16). However, the pejorative term mass culture has been recently jettisoned in cultural studies, since this

particular term has been superseded due to its signification generally as a term of abuse. Establishing the failure of 'mass culture', Simon During comments that the derogatory term mass culture "denoted an exploitative, mechanical, empty culture, one often thought to pedal cheap fantasies and to pander to impossible desires. That kind of theory failed to account for nuances, differences and qualities within the domains that it named, and did not even pretend to share whatever pleasures and benefits mass culture provided". Thereby, the negativity surrounding the notion of 'mass culture' was lifted by refiguring it as the 'popular'. Considering the fact that all popular-cultural products are not equally popular, as some are much more widely consumed than others, During classifies mass culture as "culture that accesses audiences across a variety of cultural sectors and is part of almost everyone's cultural literacy within a particular society. It's a sub-section of popular culture, where we think of popular culture, simply, as all culture that is not regarded as, or does not consider itself, elite culture" (196-197).

Popular culture mandates grave attention, basically "because it is by definition the main cultural expression of our time" (During 193). However, there has been a large academic neglect hovering over it, as it was the elite canonical expressions that occupied the centre of academia, and popular art, classified as entertainment, was discarded from critical pedagogy.

> There is usually an assumed distinction between the serious matters which call for study and discrimination and those classed as escapist diversions. On the one hand there is serious art designed to educate, and on the other there is entertainment which provides distraction for our idle moments. It would

> therefore be foolish, it is argued, to bring to bear on the latter the language of critical analysis. The label 'entertainment' is assumed to absolve us from making judgements. (Hall & Whannel 27)

Popular culture, obliged to deliver instantaneous indulgence with fleeting and ephemeral styles and trends, wrapping its gravity, however powerful and insightful, in entertainment, advertises the prime agenda to be consumable now. Whereas the academic disciplines are structurally inclined to the erudition of works that endure the test of time, they are deemed serious and historically significant. Additionally, scholarly inquest often pursues deeper political, moral, or progressive meanings in cultural works, targeting durable intellectual or social impact, which popular culture chiefly lacks. This partition is further secured by class discrepancies, with academia largely seated in middle-class authority, while popular culture frequently emerges from and engages with wider, less academically inclined sectors of society.

The gap underscores the critical need to examine the domains of popular culture. The omnipresence of the various elements of popular culture, shaping perceptions, representing cultures, and people obsessing over it, demands the nullification of the contentious relation between academic endeavours and popular culture. Primarily, popular culture is an arena of contestation for power and ideology. It both reflects and shapes hegemonic narratives, often fortifying dominating power structures and at other times taxing those same power structures. Substantially, various elements of marginalised cultures, which fall out of the purview of dominant discourses, are frequently celebrated in popular culture.

Secondly, popular culture is extremely global, spreading ideas, standards, and aesthetics across borders. Therefore, popular culture needs to be studied, and any substantial engagement with popular culture must also account for the forms of artistic production that sustain it. Popular art, made possible and popular in the current generation by mass media (Rissover 5), in this regard, necessitates dedicated enquiry, not merely as entertainment, but as a site where ideological negotiations are presented and cultural identities are articulated. Studying popular culture aids in comprehending how cultural appropriation works and how media shapes perceptions of different societies. It also effectively challenges the traditional divide between "high" and "low" culture, where artistic expressions and literature of the elite group, marked as high culture, have always been the concern for serious academic inquiry. In this regard, analysing popular art sustained by mass media and the entertainment industry demolishes elitist perspectives on what is respected as valuable in contemporary cultural studies.

The very history of popular culture is entangled in the relations between high and low culture. The culture of the aristocratic elite, centred on classical education, primarily the scholarship of the classical canon and patronage, was placed in opposition to a culture upheld by people, which was fundamentally unschooled and concentrated around non-commercial carnivals, festivities, ceremonies, and rituals. The elite culture gradually began to be structured around distinctive morals and aesthetic principles. It indulged in the perception of cultural expressions as timeless, with a focus on culture's assignment for moral leadership and culture's competence to complement and fulfil the personal character. It is epitomised in the individual

distinctiveness associated with each work of art or literature, establishing the prodigy who is the producer of such texts (During 194).

Oscar Handlin states that it "was usual to refer to popular music, popular literature, and popular art, set off and distinct from the music, the literature, and the art of Society" as popular or folk culture (327). The established other of this elite culture, that is the culture of the non-literate, alternatively became classified as folk culture, and "they were shut out from official 'high culture' by the barriers of class, money, literacy and education" (Hall & Whannel 52). This folk culture, with its representative art and literature, was integral to the communal ways of living, and in complete proximity to the 'life' and 'people'. The community as a whole significantly participated in the production of such art forms, and the primary consumers were also the members of that particular folk group.

> In the first place, popular culture, although unstructured and chaotic, dealt directly with the concrete world intensely familiar to its audience. There was no self-conscious realism in this preoccupation with the incidents and objects of the everyday world. Rather, this was the most accessible means of communication with a public that was innocent in its approach to culture, that is, one that looked or listened without ulterior motive or intent. In the second place, and for similar reasons, popular culture had a continuing relevance to the situation of the audience that was exposed to it. That relevance was maintained by a direct rapport between those who created and those who consumed this culture… In the third place, popular culture was closely tied to the traditions of those who consumed it…Finally, popular

> culture had the capacity for arousing in its audience such sentiments as wonder and awe, and for expressing the sense of irony of their own situation, which lent it enormous emotional power. (Handlin 328-329)

In this regard, the artistic forms that materialised from the encounter with the mundane world and shared experience of the people are considered as communal art, and ‘popular’ as it belonged to the culture of the whole people (Hall & Whannel 55).

Though the popular arts of the people were profound, based on its functional or instrumental nature, it was best conformed in the realm of entertainment rather than being placed in the category of high culture. Unlike pretentious high art, which is designed to endure and be contemplated as an aesthetic experience due to the individual richness retained by those works, these popular forms were delegated as communal artifacts, part of the rhythm of the everyday life of the people, unworthy of serious consideration. Even if some creative expressions manage to achieve the sublime timelessness, their fundamental purpose was to be expended and eventual disposal after its consumption by the community, not timeless artistic contemplation. Drawing such a sharp distinction, reinforcing an artificial hierarchy, tending to the idea that only works removed from function or mass appeal can hold cultural significance, disregards the acknowledgement of the ways in which popular and communal art forms shape identity, meaning, and aesthetic experience.

Further, the gulf between elite and popular culture itself presented a form of social domination. Governments and philanthropists primarily sponsored and promoted high cultural institutions like schools, libraries, concert halls, art galleries

and museums, in order to propagate hegemonic forms of civility. High culture gradually became tremendously associated with middle-class respectability, bolstering the conceptualisation that sophistication and bona fide culture belonged to the educated elite sessions with access to refined cultural traditions. It aided in maintaining hegemonic control over cultural values, decreeing what was estimated valuable, refined, and civilised. These endeavours further congealed the fissure between elite and popular culture.

However, by the second half of the twentieth century, this traditionally acknowledged arrangement began to crumble badly under the pressure from the novel advancements in audio-visual technologies. The rising power of radio, film, and television transformed how culture was consumed and regarded in the new era. These media systems rendered popular culture more prevalent and influential, questioning the ascendancy of conventionally established high culture. Audiences formed specific knowledge and appreciation for popular culture, developing familiarity with performers, genres, and conventions offered through these media platforms. Under the changing circumstances, the older cultural forms, such as classical literature, traditional fine art, began to be extensively perceived as heritage culture, while novel styles like film, television, radio, etc., were regarded as the throbbing contemporary culture.

The investigation of how folk arts or popular arts, discussed earlier, re-emerged within the modern media as popular entertainment divulges a substantial track of progression and variation. The earlier community, which held a significant role in the production of the art, had been replaced and relegated as audience, and

the art form had been extremely individualised. That is, the collective attribute of the folk culture had been steadily personalised and transformed into something else. While preserving much of the shared aspects upheld by folk art, the popular art of the modern media transpired to be a tailored art, existing within a literate commercial culture. Specific identifiable folk elements, particular to the origin community, were carried through, even though the trained popular artist substituted the unspecified folk artist of the past. The charm and technique presented in the mediated portrayal were that of the stylised performer rather than exhibiting a communal style. The relationships presented here are much more complicated, as the art at this point ceased to be simply a creation by the people, from below, yet the presentation and interaction restore and reproduce the rapport through the conventions of presentation and feeling, which is a common reference point. Although this newly produced art form is no longer the absolute product of the 'way of life' of an 'organic community', and is not 'produced by the people', it is nevertheless, in a manner not pertinent to high arts, but a popular art, of the people. There is a great distinction present between the older kind of folk culture and popular art. In the vocabulary of Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel:

> Popular art, we suggested, is essentially a conventional art which restates, in an intense form, values and attitudes already known; which, reassures and reaffirms, but brings to this something of the surprise of art as well as the shock of recognition. Such art has in common with folk art the genuine contact between audience and performer: but it differs from folk art in that it is an individualised art, the art of the known performer. The audience-as-

> community has come to depend on the performer's skills and on the force of a personal style to articulate its common values and interpret its experiences. (66)

In the modern media, the interaction between artist/performer or the creators of the popular culture, and the audience has become formalised and more distant. In the comments of Handlin:

> The mass media have also diluted, if they have not altogether destroyed, the rapport that formerly existed between the creators of popular culture and its consumers…The performer can no longer sense the mood of his audience and is, in any case, bound by the rigidity of his impersonal medium. The detachment in which he and they operate makes communication between them hazy and fragmentary. As a result, the culture communicated by the mass media cannot serve the function in the lives of those who consume it that the popular culture of the past did. (332)

Obviously, the mediated experience offered by the latest communication technologies lacks the close affinity between the artist and the consumers of the popular art. However, in the current transformed scenario it is only "through the popular artist and his art that some part of the values, attitudes and experiences of the common audience survives into and through the era of bourgeois individualism" (Hall & Whannel 67), as these novel forms of communication and broadcasting technologies have altered the earlier ways of life and expression. The overwhelming influence of modern technology changed the earlier modes of relationship between people within the community, which earlier generated ritualistic exchanges and

artistic expressions that carried the collective aspirations of the people and were performed within the range of the shared experience of that limited audience, limited by the collective nature of their organisation.

> The popular culture of the past was no more able to withstand the impact of the mass media…The loose, chaotic organization of popular culture, its appeal to limited audiences, its ties to an ethnic past attenuated with the passage of time, all prevented it from competing successfully against the superior resources of the mass media. Much of it was simply swallowed up in the new forms. (Handlin 332)

One major question that arises when these preexisting folk art forms are reappropriated as popular art is whether it stands as representative of an authentic, unadulterated culture or is it a product fashioned with formulae that are proven to magnetise profit. That is, whether it is imposed from above, as the advocates of the debasement of culture industries advocated, or spontaneously arises from below, as in the case of authentic folk/popular culture of the people.

There is a tendency to overlook the manipulative aspects of popular culture and claim it to be a whole alternative culture- authentic "popular culture", existing independently of mass production and commercialisation. But this absolute perspective basically neglects the irrefutable element of relations of cultural power- of domination and subordination-which is a fundamental facet of cultural relations. There is no autonomous popular culture that escapes the force fields of relations of cultural power and domination. However, invalidating the above viewpoint immediately opens up the theory of cultural incorporation, acknowledging that it is

heavily influenced by the workings of dominant ideologies. Subscription to either of the extremes-considering popular culture as autonomous cultural agents, which resist manipulation, or perceiving it as completely dominated by cultural forces with no resistance and agency at all-is in fact dubious. In reality, popular culture keeps oscillating between these two, quite paradoxical, extremes- in essence, pure autonomy or total encapsulation. Stuart Hall notes that:

> Popular culture is neither, in a "pure" sense, the popular traditions of resistance to these processes; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the ground on which the transformations are worked. In the study of popular culture, we should always start here: with the double-stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it. The study of popular culture has tended to oscillate wildly between the two alternative poles of that dialectic—containment/resistance. ("Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" 348)

The cultural industries do possess the command to constantly rework and reshape what they represent, and, by reiteration and selection, to impose and implant the preferred definitions of culture effortlessly that align with dominant ideological and commercial interests. The folk traditions, subcultures, and resistant cultural expressions are absorbed and repackaged within mainstream forms. While dominant cultural industries shape popular culture in ways that serve commercial and ideological interests, it is not purely manipulative because, alongside the false appeals, it also integrates familiar emotions, attitudes, and struggles that are true to the folk experiences of the people. There are patterns of recognition and

identification. While working inside the domains of dominant ideologies, it contains compelling nuances of resistance. Obviously, it challenges the one-dimensional assessment that popular culture is either a typical tool of manipulation or a window for pure resistance. Instead, popular culture is contradictory- it plays on aspects of truth and recognition while also reshuffling, trivialising, or even, to some extent, distorting them, to confine it within the limits of the new forms, which make Hall address the domain of culture as a battleground.

> I think there is a continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganize and reorganize popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms. There are points of resistance; there are also moments of supersession. This is the dialectic of cultural struggle. In our times, it goes on continuously, in the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for- all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost. ("Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" 354)

This argument regarding popular culture could be better explored with the aid of Gramscian cultural studies. The initiation of Gramsci's concept of hegemony into cultural studies in the early 1970s introduced a rethinking of the considerations concerning popular culture.

Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is a political concept extended to explicate the nonexistence of socialist revolutions in the capitalist democracies. The

conception is employed by Gramsci to suggest a situation in perpetual process in which a dominant class (in alliance with other classes or class fractions) does not simply exercise authority over a society but leads it through the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership, by winning the consent of the subordinate groups. This constructs a condition in which the predilections of one powerful section of society are "universalised" as the interests of the society as a whole. Accordingly, hegemony is utilised to refer to a society in which, despite the presence of oppression and exploitation, there exists a high degree of "consensus"; a society in which subordinate groups and classes seemingly provide active support as well as endorse the values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings, which "incorporate" them into the dominant structures of power (Storey 48-49).

The aforementioned rethinking of popular culture manifested particularly in two ways. To begin with, it generated a re-evaluation of the politics of popular culture; popular culture began to be perceived as a key site- a serious political space- for the production and reproduction of hegemony. Capitalist industrial societies are unequally divided along various axes of difference. Popular culture echoes these divisions, but it also plays an active role in shaping and negotiating them. Popular culture is one of the fundamental locations where these discords are established and contested; in essence, popular culture functions as a platform of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups. Popular culture is not mere entertainment or passive; rather, it is an arena of struggle, where meanings are fought over by both dominant and subordinate groups.

Secondly and more importantly, the introduction of hegemony into cultural studies garnered a re-examination of the notion of popular culture itself, that is, how popular culture was understood at its core. This re-evaluation brought into active relationship the two pre-existing, prevailing but incompatible ways of defining popular culture. The first tradition perceived popular culture as a culture enforced by the capitalist culture industries, "a culture provided for profit and ideological manipulation. This is popular culture as "structure."" The second tradition comprehended popular culture as a culture "spontaneously emerging from below; an "authentic" folk culture, working-class culture, or subculture - the "voice" of the people. This is popular culture as "agency."" From the standpoint of Gramscian cultural studies, however, popular culture is "neither an "authentic" folk culture, working-class culture, or subculture, nor a culture simply imposed by the capitalist culture industries, but a "compromise equilibrium" (Gramsci 1998:211) between the two -a contradictory mix of forces from both "below" and "above," both "commercial" and "authentic," marked by both "resistance" and "incorporation," "structure" and "agency."" (Storey 51).

The producers of authentic popular culture are shaped and constrained by the forms, sources, and ideologies made available by dominant power structures. However, within these limitations, they are still able to find creative resources to express themselves, articulate resistance, and negotiate meaning. Gramscian cultural studies is "informed by the proposition that people make popular culture from the repertoire of commodities supplied by the culture industries. Making popular culture

("production in use") can be empowering to subordinate and resistant to dominant understandings of the world" (Storey 52).

Mappila Culture as the 'Other'

Now turning the attention to Mappila culture, with its vibrant artistic expressions, has traditionally been dismissed as a vernacular culture, falling into the lower section of the categorical division of high/low culture. Classical literary traditions surrounding Sanskrit texts and temple art forms developed by the high caste were the hegemonic cultural expressions of India, the high culture. Whereas numerous aesthetic expressions campaigned by the unprivileged sections of the society, marked by the barriers of caste, class, and edification, were marginalised under folk culture, alienating such expressions from mainstream literature and culture, and Mappila culture belonged to this very category of folk culture along with copious other underprivileged cultural articulations.

Sanskrit enjoyed the highest pedestal during the period of the Aryan invasion. Sanskrit became linked to religious, philosophical, and literary traditions, and tied to Brahmanical scholarship, noble courts, and privileged institutions. Unlike indigenous languages, a medium of everyday expressions which often sponsored the oral folk traditions of the unschooled natives, Sanskrit was distinguished as the tongue of sacred texts, Vedas, Indian epics, classical poetry, and complex ancient philosophical discourse. However, it was slightly replaced in prominence by 'English' during the period of British colonisation, though "the administration remained supportive or tolerant of Sanskrit." The colonisers were "compelled to take

note of it by virtue of its being the language of the so-called Hindu law," which they wanted to implement (Kochhar 2).

The effective marginalisation of vernacular literary traditions heightened during the imperialistic course of the British regime as it proclaimed its authority by delegating 'writing' as the superlative form of literary expression and condescending the native artistic and literary articulations as oral traditions undeserving of serious academic attention. Consequently, various forms of native literatures traditionally conveyed through both oral and written expressions encountered a crippling setback. Indigenous linguistic systems, categorically delineated as primitive, were consigned to subsidiary positions. Dismissing the major functions of the diverse linguistic and cultural practices and discursive systems in the process of knitting the society and building the nation, these expressions were tactically marginalised and were subjected to gradual alienation (Tharamel, "Politics of Exclusion: Re-reading Texts and Culture of Mappila Songs").

Further, all practices of art and literature that resisted and expressed dissent towards the brutality of the colonisers were sidelined under the classification 'folk' during the British period (Tharamel, "Politics of Exclusion: Re-reading Texts and Culture of Mappila Songs") to diminish their political and intellectual legitimacy. The advent of external powers like the Portuguese and the British was perceived as an invasive authority by the Mappilas. Therefore, they relentlessly engaged in resistance against these oppressive forces. They utilised their linguistic expressions, especially *Padappattu* (discussed in the second chapter in detail), to politically mobilise the people against the colonial oppressors, and these linguistic expressions

were cast under the label of folk. Through this labelling of literatures with undertones of anti-imperialism as 'folk', they established it as unsophisticated, primitive, and fitting to the department of oral tradition rather than critical literary discourse. This strategic charge delegitimised local voices that questioned foreign authority. This cataloguing further armoured the colonial hierarchy, where literature and culture espoused by the western authorities were perceived as the epitome of culture, the high culture, while indigenous narratives became the other, low culture.

Further, the colonial encounter with the Sanskrit rekindled the prominence of the language and the classical texts among the elitist scholars of Europe. Kochhar notes that "Sanskrit was a grammarian's delight, the language of Hindu sacred texts, and rich in classical literature. Introduction to it enthused continental Europe" (54). It was under these hostile conditions, the marginalised Mappila literature and cultural expressions, labelled as folk, had to survive battling the hegemony of Sanskrit and the autocracy of anglophone discourses, articulating their divergence from these dominant cultural traditions. Even after enduring and surviving these unpleasant climates, the alienation of Mappila culture and literature persisted for a long time, though recent times have witnessed a paradigm shift.

As aforementioned, the literature, part of low culture, was denied academic attention and canonisation. The "canon is that select group of texts, artworks, etc., conventionally regarded as representing the highest achievements of the culture, and often discussed and disseminated as such in educational and high-status cultural institutions" (During 197). Mappila literature and art forms were omitted from the literary and cultural canon of Malayalam, again along with cultural expressions that

emerged from the minority, unprivileged sections of society. Muhammed Kasim E. observes that, in the academic realm of Kerala, the tales from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (exemplifying high culture) are unavoidable in the textbooks. The art forms like *Koothu*, *Krishnanattam*, *Thullal,* etc., which employ these stories in their presentation, were also part of academic erudition. It was only recently, apart from these hegemonic fine arts, that folk-art forms like *Theyyam* and *Padayani* were integrated into the syllabus. Still, it was delayed further to accommodate other artistic expressions like *Oppana*, *Arabanamuttu* (art forms of Mappilas), *Margam Kali,* and *Chavittunadakam* (Christian art forms) in the textbooks of Kerala. He laments that though there is a plethora of literary texts with exceptional literary and aesthetic quality, and folk festivals and art forms that mark the lived experiences of the people in their native circumstances, none have had the privilege to enter the canonical texts (74). It was only in recent times that Mappila expressions were incorporated into the scholastic realm of Kerala, probing serious academic enquiry.

Nevertheless, analogous to any folk expressions, Mappila cultural expressions were popular, in the sense that it was unanimously celebrated by the community. It was part and parcel of their day-to-day experiences. Their culture showed a special regard for songs, called Mappilapattu (discussed in the succeeding chapters). Songs served a functional quality in their mundane life, in the sense that it was closely linked to the felt needs and accustomed modes of articulation of the people they served. They employed songs as a way of imparting erudition regarding the Islamic theology to the unaccustomed Mappila who embraced Islam. They even communicated often in songs. The repertoire of epistolary songs confirms the

previous assumption. Every significant occasion in the existence of Mappilas was celebrated with songs. Apart from these songs, their culture is vibrant with plenitude of performing arts, ritualistic and aesthetic, separately performed by men and women. The "people found in this culture a means of communication among themselves and the answers to certain significant questions that they were asking about the world around them" (Handlin 329). However, in the post-industrial period, by the external factors like the novel advancement in technology and the communal reliance on these advanced gears, coupled with internal reformation, spirit of education, new found economic prosperity, and so on, the way of life and associated customs that birthed and sustained these aesthetic articulations in the past began to be extremely disturbed. The way these artistic expressions were produced as well as consumed altered due to the alterations in the lifestyle and ethos of the community.

Nevertheless, the cultural articulations of Mappilas acquired a larger platform and enhanced audience through the innovative communication technologies that broadcast sounds and visuals to an extended audience. Mappila sensibility was marketed to audiences through gramophone recordings, cassette, CD/DVD, etc. The art of cinematography exploited the popularity of Mappila songs among the audience to elevate the success rate of the movies. Television filled its schedules with programs like talent search singing reality shows, especially tailored for Mappila art forms. Mappila aesthetic manifestations were everywhere, occupying the centre of the contemporary popular culture of the state.

Primary Sources

This study investigates two major sites - cinema and television- to study the realm of popular culture where Mappila cultural representations are revived. From the 1950s onwards, Mappila songs and the Mappila art form Oppana have had a fascinating journey through the commercial markets offered by the medium of cinematography. Songs are a defining feature of Indian cinema, and the unpolished Mappila art forms were commodified and standardised to fit into the mould of cinematic expressions. Songs from a range of movies spanning over three decades have been employed in this study. The vast list of songs not only showcases the popularity of the genre among the audience with the extensive statistics, but also includes a wide variety of categorisation of Mappila songs that have been adapted to the big screen. The first-ever Mappila song appeared in the movie *Amma,* in 1952. However, it was through the song *Kayalarikathu* from the film *Neelakkuyil* (1954) that Mappilapattu became widely known among the populace. Apart from these two, song sequences from movies *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956), *Kuttikuppayam* (1964), *Kandam Becha Kottu* (1961), *Moodupadam* (1963), *Kuppivala* (1965), *Subaidha* (1965), *Kasavuthattam* (1967), *Asuravithu* (1968), *Maram* (1972), *Olavum Theeravum* (1970), *Yatheem* (1977), *Pathinalamravu* (1979), *Angadi* (1980), *Aarambham* (1982), *Mylnchi* (1982) have been analysed in the study to explore the commercialisation of collective Mappila ethos.

Another significant popular culture site inspected in the particular study is television. Exploiting the popularity of the genre, television promoted talent search singing reality shows modelled on the successful European format of *Pop Idol*.

Numerous Malayalam television channels reserved a prime-time slot for broadcasting Mappila songs melodiously vocalised by selected youths, who compete for the season title, tempting prizes, and, notably, fame. The first-ever television Mappilapattu singing reality show was conceived by Kairali TV. The show titled *Patturumal* was first aired in 2009. The show intermittently ran for more than a decade, with the twelfth season airing in February 2023, crossing 250 episodes. The ratings and acceptance received by *Patturumal* motivated various other Malayalam television channels to bring up similar shows based on Mappilapattu and allied art forms. Kairali TV itself created a spin-off called *Kutty Patturumal* for the budding, talented kids. Mappilapattu singing reality shows such as *Mappilapattu* of Jaihind TV, *Kasavuthattam* of Amrutha, *Pathinalamravu* of MediaOne, *Kuppivala* of Darsana TV, Asianet's *Mylanchi*, along with *Mailanji Monju*, Oppana reality show of Flowers TV, tactically capitalised on Mappila cultural expressions. However, within these dominant structures, the cultural producers find resources to champion their cultural nuances, resisting incorporation. Selected video clips of episodes of these talent search reality shows from the vast archive provided by YouTube have been utilised in the study to examine the marketing strategies employed by television, utilising Mappila songs and Oppana, to maximise profit. Simultaneously, it has aided in delivering the heritage of Mappila culture into the living room of Malayalees.

Research Objectives

This research attempts to comprehend the Mappila community through the analysis of their artistic representations. How these aesthetic products served

purposes beyond mere entertainment in the process of community formation is explored in the research. There is essentially a correlation between the growth of the cultural practices of Mappilas with the community formation made possible over the years of assimilation and preservation of its own original identity. Mappilas propelled their collective identity through their various literary and artistic endeavours, and they utilised the same to counter the hegemony of the high art of the privileged. They even strategically employed their literary expression to progress the political march against feudal and foreign oppressors. Their culture and day-to-day life were, in essence, once wrapped around these artistic manoeuvres.

The study further examines the evolution of these literary and artistic forms over time. The transitions and turbulations internally within the society, and the major alterations in the wider socio-political scenario, have affected the purpose and ways of production of these art forms. Further, the forces of globalisation and advancement in technologies also redefined the way these creative expressions of the Mappila community were produced and consumed. This study traces out the paradigm shift in language and thematic expressions of Mappila creative expressions, especially their songs, due to standardisation, popularity of the form, modernisation, and globalisation.

The research unveils the wider popularity of the indigenous Mappila art forms as a part of popular culture through representations in mass media like cinema and television reality shows. The popularisation of Mappila sensibility through movies and TV via multilayered tactics of commodification in the consumer-centric culture industry, necessitated by the flow of capital in the visual media, is

investigated in the study. Selective attributes of these aesthetic practices, appropriate to the screen, are adopted, stylised, and codified. There is a profusion of commercialisation of creativity and mechanisation of artistic expressions, along with the preservation of the community tag that is carried by these artistic articulations.

Review of Literature

There are numerous compelling readings conducted in the area of Mappila studies engaged from various perspectives and disciplines, but seldom have they ventured to fathom the representation of Mappila creative expressions in popular culture. From the colonial perspective, a notable pioneer study on Mappila literature was conducted by F. Fawcett, titled "A Popular Mopla Song", an appealing study about Moyinkutty Vaidyar and his magnum opus, *Badr al Munir Husn al Jamal*. Fawcett published this study in the *Indian Antiquary* in 1899. While delineating the story relevant to the composition of the song, the study probes into the cultural significance and popularity of Mappila songs within the community. He praises the poetic craftsmanship of Vaidyar, whom he addresses as an uncultivated man, "circumstanced just as the ordinary poor and ignorant people of his class around him" (64). Fawcett acknowledges the community's rich literary traditions and their role in expressing religious and other themes in their poetic compositions. His account is a testimony to the Mappila predilection towards songs. There is another article by the same author published in the *Indian Antiquary* in 1902 titled "War Songs of Mappilas of Malabar", detailing the *Padapattu* composed by Vaidyar.

Scholarly inquests from a historical perspective about Mappilas, deliberating their origin owing to the ocean trade networks, major historical and political

episodes encountered by the people of Malabar, the cultural peculiarities of their social life, etc., has been done by many historiographers. *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* and *Mappila Muslim Culture* are two major works by the Canadian historian Roland E. Miller. *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* is acknowledged as a foundational work that inspects the historical, religious, and socio-political evolution of the Mappila Muslim community in Kerala. Miller offers a comprehensive historical account of the Mappilas, tracking their genesis to early Arab traders who settled in the Malabar region. He explores the implantation of Islam in Kerala, highlighting the syncretic nature of Mappila religious traditions, which blends indigenous and Islamic practices, challenging the postulation that Islam in India was a monolithic coercion and instead highlights regional variations with the exemplification of Mappilas. The book probes into the socio-political ostracism faced by Mappilas due to the economic factors that furthered their deplorable conditions under the feudal system supported by the colonial authorities, setting the stage for their resistance movements. While it is exhaustive research, the study has been critiqued for its absolute reliance on colonial records for information and nurturing imperialist perspectives, replicating their agenda, particularly in ascribing the Mappila protestors, who rebelled against oppressive forces, as fanatics.

Countering the imperialist perspective, *Mappila Muslims: A Study on Society and Anti-colonial Struggles* by Hussain Randathani documents the rich political and cultural history of Malabar, incorporating “the past and present narratives of the people, mostly forgotten and unnoticed by mainstream historians” (9). The study elaborates on the unique social life of the Mappila community and describes the

anti-imperialist struggles, particularly the 19th and early-20th-century revolts orchestrated against British rule and Hindu landlords. He dissects how colonial historians and European administrators dismissed these uprisings as fanatic and unreasonable, rather than admitting them as justifiable manifestations of resistance. The study delineates how faith and ideology empowered Mappilas to relentlessly resist the oppressive empire. Along with documenting the missionary activities carried out by Sufi saints in Malabar, the study also analyses the harmony and amity upheld by the community in a multi-cultural scenario.

Origin and Early History of the Muslims of Keralam by JBP More, another record on the history of Mappilas, has numerous issues in its focus. The book, which deals with the detailed analysis of Mappila history from 700 AD to 1600, commences with a discussion on the historical background of Malabar before the advent of Islam. It probes into the complex socio-political and cultural dynamics that shaped the growth of Islam in the region. A meticulous study of the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese attempts at invasion to attain the monopoly of the spice trade, and the resistance offered by the community is provided in the book. He observes how these unremitting encounters led to significant socio-political transformations and influenced the trajectory of Kerala's history. More significantly, the study details the life and work of Sheikh Zainuddin, the author of the historical record, titled *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, which, according to More, is a unique work of great historical importance for peninsular India, written in the 16th century (121).

Distinct from the above studies on Mappilas, from the perspective of historiography, the work *Muslimingalum Kerala Samskaravum* written by P.K.

Muhammed Kunji, is a comprehensive work that discuss not only in depth the political history of Malabar saturated with struggles against various foreign oppressive forces, but also discusses varied aspects concerning the community like the literary heritage of Mappilas, their linguistic traditions, the powerful Mappila vocabulary with plethora of loan words, the cultural exchange between communities, the festivities and nercha celebrations observed by the people, marriage and related customs, costume, Mappila cuisines and delicacies, leisure, recreation etc. His work observes how the boundaries of religion and caste are absolved in the interactions of people living in a heterogeneous society.

The research paper by M.H. Ilias titled *Mappila Muslims and the Cultural Content of Trading Arab Diaspora on the Malabar Coast* serves as a critical analysis of the cultural dynamics stemming from the interactions with Arab trading diaspora, particularly the Hadramis, and their influence on the Mappila Muslim community in Malabar. The literature demarcates the historic reputation of Malabar as the focus of ancient and medieval trade. The interface between the Arab world and the Indian subcontinent, accentuating how trade dictated the emergence of foreign merchant settlements, and how these interactions laid the foundation for cultural exchanges, is probed in the study. The paper further outlines the unique cultural identity of the Mappila Muslims, positioning them as an amalgam of indigenous and Arab influences. This synthesis is exemplified in their unique customs, rituals, and a collective community identity that distinguishes them from other Indian Muslim groups. Ilias also specifies the materialisation of Arabi-Malayalam as a noteworthy cultural achievement tied to mercantile interactions. This unique dialect functioned

as a medium for religious discourse, and it is instrumental in shaping Mappila literature. The paper concludes with a note on the contemporary transformations in Mappila society, assigning the decline of traditional cultural expressions to the forces of modernisation and globalisation.

Moving onto Mappila literary research, there is a vast body of literature dedicated to Mappilapattu. The text *Mahathaya Mappila Sahithya Parambaryam* (*The Great Mappila Literary Tradition*), compiled by C.N. Ahammed Moulavi and K.K. Muhamed Abdul Kareem, along with detailing the origin and development of Arabi-Malayalam, ventures to introduce anonymous pamphlets and manuscripts written in Arabi-Malayalam. The work tries to locate the oral literature, both songs and tales passed down from generation to generation, which is an integral part of the Mappila community. The timeless anonymous songs, especially related to marital ceremonies, that have been passed down by singing at celebrations of matrimonial union like *Aadimuthal Puranam*, *Oppanamurukkam*, *Mylanchipattu*, *Pazhayaammayipattu,* etc., are detailed by the authors. The work published at a critical turn, when Mappila community encountered modernisation and urbanisation due to Gulf migration which garnered economic prosperity, was able to document the momentous attributes of the community, their life, historical engagements, reformation and the advocates of the reform and significantly the vast corpus of literature that carries the tag of Mappila. Along with the chronological study of the Mappila literature produced so far, the work also dedicates a lion’s share of the space to the major Mappila poets.

Balakrishnan Vallikunnu has done a scrupulous and comprehensive study of the literary culture of the Mappila community and their numerous poetic works. His work *Mappilapattu: Padavum Padanavum*, co-authored along with Umar Tharamel, discusses the historical and cultural significance of Mappila song. Along with introducing and elaborately discussing the classification of Mappila songs, the characteristic aesthetic expressions of the community articulated through this vibrant literary genre are exposed through this study. Another study by Vallikunnu*, Mappila Sahityavum Muslim Navodhanavum* investigates the intertwining of literature and reformation within the Mappila Muslim community, displaying the broader narrative of cultural renaissance among Mappilas. The work *Mappila Sahithya Padanagal* provides an in-depth analysis of the evolution, themes, and cultural significance of Mappila literary forms. The folk elements embedded in Mappila songs, the politics of Mappila songs, their transcendent significance, and broader social relevance are deliberated in that particular work. *Mappilapattu Vazhakkangal: Charithra Samoohika Paschathalathil* and *Malappuram Padappattu; Paadavum Padanavum* are other major studies conducted by Vallikunnu.

Another prominent name who dedicatedly studied Mappila literature and contributed to the reservoir of Mappila studies is V.M. Kutty. His work, *Mappilapattu; Charithravum Varthamanavum,* touches upon numerous aspects regarding the genre, Mappilapattu. The study explores the lineage of Mappila songs composed in the Arabi-Malayalam script, predominantly discussing aspects of devotion and the transformation encountered by the genre in the late nineteenth century, especially through the compositions of the celebrated Mappila poet,

Moyinkutty Vaidyar, who incorporated various themes apart from devotion in his compositions. Vaidyar's encounter with Arabian and Persian literary texts opened him up to new possibilities to explore within the Mappilapattu genre with the inclusion of common human emotions and experiences of love, separation, revenge, protest, reaction, recreation, etc., which makes a literary heritage wholesome. He also systematically explores the presence of non-Muslim writers in Mappila literature, which fortifies the universal appeal and popularity of the genre within the community. The inclusion of Mappila songs in visual media is investigated to some extent in this particular study. Distinct from other studies which celebrate the veteran Mappila poets of the past, this work acknowledges the talent of his contemporary writers and how the emerging composers are utilising the possibilities revealed before them through radio, gramophone, cassette, and CDs for their advantage, by popularising these songs. Another work by the same author, *Mappilapattinte Lokham,* positions this genre within the vibrant song tradition of Kerala. The folk characteristics of Mappila songs, their genesis and progression, metrics of composition, and a comprehensive study of *Oppanapattu* are provided in this particular text.

The research article "Poetics of Piety: Genre, Self-Fashioning, and the Mappila Lifescape" by Muneer Aram Kuzhiyan and A. K. Muneer Hudawi provides a nuanced examination of the literary culture of the Mappila Muslims in Malabar. Critiquing the prevailing attitude in Mappila literary studies, which predominantly focuses on the aesthetic and formal merits of literary texts, thereby overlooking their social context and the lived experiences of the community from which such literary

expressions emerge, the authors investigate the transformative social functions of Mappila literary texts. They emphasise that Mappila devotional genres, like the *Mawlud* and *Mala*, should be appreciated as transformative practices that not only convey devotion but also shape individual and collective identities within the Mappila community. Drawing on Michel Foucault's notions of power/knowledge and self-formation, they elucidate how Mappila literary genres promote the ethical shaping of individuals within the community.

The paper "Contested Devotion: The Praise of Sufi Saints in Three Māla Pāttŭ", by M. Keely Sutton, examines the sub-genres within the category of Mappila song, such as devotional songs, and studies the role of *Mala* songs as an agency for articulation of devotion and fashioning communal identity. The research paper delineates how these songs establish religious diversity, multivocality, and the communal attitudes within the Mappila society. Each *Mala* song operates as a hagiographical narrative that encapsulates the lives and supernatural powers attributed to various Sufi saints, highlighting the intricate intersections of spirituality and communal expression. Additionally, a substantial theme explored in the study is the renovation of the *Mala* tradition prompted by contemporary cultural dynamics. The literature deliberates the folklorization and commodification processes, how they encourage new forms of creative expression while jeopardising the traditional elements, and how they simultaneously make possible the preservation and promotion of Mappila cultural heritage.

The significant text *Mappila Songs and Performing Arts: Genesis and Synthesis* by Dr. Hussain Randathani studies the genesis and historical evolution of

Mappila fine arts concerning the folk and foreign elements apparent in it. The influence of Tamil, Arabic, and Persian traditions on these arts is showcased in this work. He observes that the folk culture espoused by Mappila Muslims in numerous regards identifies with the rural folk of Kerala. The artistic styles of the rural folk, in songs and performing arts, were adopted as it is, but, instead of the pagan beliefs and rituals, the nuances of Islamic faith were introduced by the subaltern converts who embraced the foreign Islamic belief. He also traces the origin of Mappila literature back to Tamil traditions. He acknowledges that Mappila songs follow certain rules and styles which are pertinent to folk traditions in Tamil. The influence of Persian culture on Mappila culture is multi-faceted, and even the alphabets of the Mappila language are modelled after Persian style. There are instances of visible Persian influences in the compositions of Moyinkutty Vaidyar. Above all, there is the undeniable mark of Arabic influence in Mappila art forms, like any other aspect of Mappila life. Numerous poetic meters from Arabic have been utilised in Mappila song compositions. The art form Daff, widely performed by Mappilas, has its roots in the Arabic tradition. The author analyses how Arabic and Islamic practices were skilfully integrated with the folk culture practiced by Mappilas.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research conducted on Mappila history, culture, and their literature from various perspectives, little attention has been paid to a nuanced understanding of how modernity interacts with traditional artistic practices, allowing for both continuity and change, with the case study of Mappila cultural expressions. Most existing descriptive analyses primarily concentrate on the underpinnings of the

Mappila uprisings, the aesthetic dimensions of their literary expressions, the construction of cultural identity, and various other thematic literary investigations. However, they often lack a critical engagement with contemporary reinterpretations and representations of these aesthetic products, particularly in relation to their dissemination through modern media platforms such as television and cinema. This oversight restricts an in-depth cognition of how such expressions evolve over time, how they are recontextualised according to modern discourses, and how they continue to function as sites of resistance and negotiation within evolving media landscapes. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the representation and enhanced visibility of Mappila art forms, with a special focus on Mappilapattu and Oppana, in popular culture. How cinema and televised programs exploit Mappila cultural expressions for profit while simultaneously aiding in their continued popularity. Problematising the representation of these Mappila aesthetic constructs within the framework of cultural studies is still largely an academically unexplored area.

Research Methodology and Methods

This particular study, which critically explores the representation of folk-art forms Mappilapattu and Oppana in popular culture by analysing these art forms in cinema and television, prominently employs methodological frameworks informed by theories from popular culture studies, which provide the conceptual tools to examine how these folk cultural expressions are represented, mediated, and rearticulated through popular culture. This study draws on the Gramscian perspective of hegemony within cultural studies, which conceptualises popular

culture as a site of negotiation, a compromise equilibrium between the commercial and the authentic, resistance and incorporation, structure and agency. In the interrogation of the modern media adaptation of these selected Mappila art forms, this methodology attends to how certain attributes of the authentic rendition are selectively accentuated, while others are marginalised or omitted, reflecting broader cultural negotiations and power dynamics embedded in the process of representation. However, the cultural producers are permitted with limited agency or creative autonomy within the dominant media structures. While commercialisation is indisputably a part of the process of incorporation from above, the limited agency afforded by cultural producers also permits forms of resistance, sanctioning elements of authentic culture to persist and reassert themselves within these dominant media structures. Insights drawn from theorists like Stuart Hall, Paddy Whannel, John Storey, and Simon During are employed in the study to comprehend the varied nuances of popular culture.

Apart from this, theoretical insights derived from folklore studies are utilised to establish Mappila culture within the framework of folk culture, by recognising and corresponding the definite communal characteristics and practices of Mappila traditions with established criteria of folk cultural forms. This research also exercises feminist film theory, particularly the concept of the male gaze as formulated by Laura Mulvey, to analyse the visual representation of Oppana in Malayalam cinema songs. The methodology highlights how Oppana performances are constructed and framed through a cinematic lens that positions the female body as an object of visual pleasure for a presumed male spectator. This approach

facilitates a critical investigation of gendered power dynamics embedded in the portrayal of this traditional art form within popular culture. The study also engages with globalisation, with a focus on glocalisation, put forth by Roland Robertson, to comprehend how these Mappila art forms, when adapted for television, actively establish the local/communal cultural specificities utilising a successful global format, predominantly through the aesthetics and narrative structures borrowed from reality television formats.

This qualitative study involves a close analysis of various video texts- including cinematic songs and television reality show clips- using research methods such as textual analysis and media content analysis. Media content analysis, a systematic method to study mass media, could be utilised to study the manifest content of television programming as well as films, for identifying specific characteristics and patterns within the text. In the third chapter on representation of Mappila art forms in cinema, the lyrics of the songs are examined to identify how specific elements of Mappila expression-such as linguistic peculiarities, certain vocabularies, and cultural references pertinent to the community are incorporated, thereby positioning these songs within the cultural and aesthetic framework of Mappila tradition. Scrutinising the dominant representatives of modern media - cinema and television- offers critical insights into how Mappila art forms- Mappilapattu and Oppana- are perceived, reimagined, and circulated within popular discourse. This approach sanctions an assessment of the tensions between authenticity, adaptation, and the influence of commercial culture.

Chapter Division

The thesis is conveniently divided into six chapters. The introduction locates this particular study of the representation of Mappila art forms- Mappilapattu and Oppana- in popular culture, in context by concisely exploring the relevance, scope, and primary objectives of the study, besides elucidating the methodological framework and research methods utilised in this research. A brief account of the primary theoretical framework employed, popular culture, is provided in the chapter.

Before delving into the thesis, it is mandatory to attend to the question of who the Mappila are, how they emerged as a community on the shores of Malabar, and what are the major factors that forged the community and informed their artistic expressions. Therefore, the first chapter titled *Mappilas Through Time: A Concise Analysis of the Origin and Socio-Political History of the Mappila Community,* analyses the origin and progression of the Mappilas owing to the optimal growth conditions received by the community in the initial stages of their development. The Arab-Malabar maritime trade interactions, the amicable disposition of the Arab traders as well as the special regard displayed by the native rulers towards the foreign traders; the rigid restrictions imposed by caste system that motivated conversion to Islam; specific matrimonial systems practiced among the Arabs and natives; and the missionary actions by Sufis, the foremost factors that facilitated the advancement of Islam in Malabar and significantly influenced the Mappila character, identity and culture are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, the direct Mappila involvement in the resistance against the political trials encountered by the nation in the form of colonial oppression furthered considerably the shaping of

Mappila existence. The economic instability and redundancy in the post-independence period prompted the Gulf migration of Mappilas, which eventually aided in uplifting the community. The flow of advanced technologies and forces of globalisation that redefined every aspect of the Mappila community, disrupting the old ways of Mappila life, are specifically detailed in the chapter, as these factors have considerably affected the ways Mappila cultural expressions were produced and consumed.

The second chapter, titled *Mappila Folk Aesthetics: Corresponding with Socio-Cultural and Historical Upheaval,* explicates Mappila culture as a folk culture, assessing the folk attributes displayed by the community. With theoretical inputs drawn from folklore studies, the chapter elucidates the culture of Mappilas, vibrant with various aesthetic engagements that are integral to Mappila life and customs. Mappila folklore; the religion of Mappilas which displays the peculiar characteristics of popular religion; celebrations and festivities, part of their communal existence; the distinct ways of attiring selected by the people which tell them apart in the heterogenous public life of Kerala; their unique linguistic system - Arabi-Malayalam, and the Mappila dialectic variant, advocated in their literary compositions are briefly explored in the chapter. Most significantly, this chapter engages with the artistic expressions articulated by the Mappila community, with particular focus on Mappilapattu and Oppana, examining their communal and cultural significance, as well as the social, performative, and ritual functions they served within the Mappila community. The transformation undergone by these artistic expressions over time are also delineated in the chapter.

Mappilapattu and Oppana, though far distinct from the way Mappilas conceived these artistic expressions, still have a flamboyant presence in the realm of Malayalam cinema. Therefore, the third chapter, titled *Adaptation and Assimilation: Mappilapattu and Oppana in the Big Screen*, critically analyses the reiteration of Mappila folk arts as popular arts. The significance of songs in Indian cinema, particularly to this study, in Malayalam cinema, and the production of filmy Mappilapattu is addressed in this chapter. Moreover, as an enthralling dance form, the Mappila art form Oppana was adapted to the screen with a mixture of choreographed dance moves. The chapter assesses the commodification of Mappila aesthetic expressions, enhancing the selective qualities of these art forms, carrying the Mappila tag, and occasionally disturbing the original rhythm of these cultural expressions to visually and acoustically engage the cinema lovers. However, through these representations, the communal art form of Mappilas received widespread recognition, and it helped in the preservation of these cultural expressions in the modern period. Various Malayalam songwriters showed special interest in composing songs that particularly go well with the assorted scenes and situations depicted in the movies. The individualisation and departmentalisation in the production of these folk-art forms, with their representation in popular culture, are further explored in this session. Songs from the films, *Amma* (1952), *Neelakkuyil* (1954), *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956), *Kuttikuppayam* (1964), *Kandam Becha Kottu* (1961), *Moodupadam* (1963), *Kuppivala* (1965), *Subaidha* (1965), *Kasavuthattam* (1967), *Asuravithu* (1968), *Maram* (1972), *Olavum Theeravum* (1970), *Yatheem* (1977), *Pathinalamravu* (1979), *Angadi* (1980), *Aarambham* (1982), *Mylnchi* (1982) are critically analysed in the chapter.

Another significant site within popular culture that strategically adapts Mappila sensibilities to the screen is television. The fourth chapter, titled *Televised Traditions: An Exploratory Study of the Representation of Mappilappattu and Oppana in Talent Search Reality Shows,* investigates how televised talent search programs not only commercialise but also promote Mappila aesthetic expressions. This chapter draws on globalisation theory, particularly concepts of glocalisation through format adaptation, to explore how indigenous art forms are restructured to fit into global entertainment models, such as the *Pop Idol* format. By doing so, it examines how Mappila songs are mediated through performance aesthetics and competition-based narratives tailored for mass consumption. Programs such as *Patturumal* and *Kutty Patturumal* (Kairali TV), *Kasavuthattam* (Amrita TV), *Pathinalam Ravu* (MediaOne), and *Mailanji Monju* (Flowers TV) are analysed to understand how these platforms contribute to both the commodification and preservation of Mappila cultural expressions. While these reality shows inevitably participate in commodifying traditional art forms by broadcasting them to a broad, often entertainment-seeking audience, they also function as sites of cultural celebration. These platforms actively revive and popularise forgotten songs and lesser-known Mappila writers, albeit in recontextualised, contemporary forms.

This final concluding chapter assembles the central arguments and findings deliberated across the preceding chapters. It reevaluates the key research questions and appraises how the thesis has addressed them. The chapter reflects on the implications of the representation of Mappila art forms- Mappilapattu and Oppana- in popular culture, considering the broader consequences of these representational practices. Furthermore, the recommendations chapter identifies possible directions for future research, suggesting how this study could be extended further.

Chapter 1

Mappilas Through Time: A Concise Analysis of the Origin and Socio-Political History of the Mappila Community

The study commences with the investigation of the genesis and growth of the Mappila community in the lap of Malabar, which has been assisted by the confluence and departure of numerous and varied factors. The Mappilas hold a vibrant and complex record, wrought by centuries of trade and associated interactions with various cultures that disembarked along the Malabar coast of Kerala, India. Their culture is pregnant with Arab, Persian, Indian, and other local and foreign influences, and it evolved through centuries of socio-political and religious turbulations and transformations. The time-honoured thread of trade persisted between Arabia and Malabar, facilitated by the monsoon wind system; the popularity of the tale of conversion of the legendary Chera monarch into Islam; the temperament of the Arab traders as well as the native rulers; the inelastic caste system existed in the region that traumatised the population belonging to the lower rung of social hierarchy; particular marital practices existed among the Arabs and natives alike; and the proselytiser activities piloted by Sufis, could be enumerated as the major grounds that facilitated the progression of Islam in Malabar, and these factors played a significant role in the crafting of Mappila community, their character, identity, art and culture. Moreover, the outright Mappila participation in the political trials of the Nation with the advent of foreign oppressive powers and the agrarian destitutions and resistance against landlordism sponsored by British colonialism, contributed substantially to the overall sculpting of Mappila existence.

The economic backwardness and rampant unemployment in the post-independence period, which triggered Gulf migration of Mappilas, which eventually served their overall well-being, and the technological flow and forces of globalisation, as well, considerably redefined the quirks of the Mappila community.

Mappila; Etymology

Before proceeding further, it is fundamental to delve into the etymology of the title 'Mappila', which has not yet been singularly established. Interestingly, there is no concrete literary or epigraphic evidence to suggest that this term 'Mappila' was in usage to indicate the Muslim community of Malabar before the 16th century. This term is neither mentioned in the *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, a pioneer record in Kerala history penned by a native, Shaykh Zainuddin, in the 16th century, a text of great significance, which attempts to illustrate the history, geography, socio-economic condition, and the cultural and religious aspects of Malabar. Therefore, considering the absence of this term in this *magnum opus*, it could be deduced that the title Mappila must have come into prominence during or after the 16th century. Additionally, it was in the records of the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa, who primarily mentioned this title 'Mapulere' to denote the native Malabar Muslims, to differentiate them from the foreign Muslims whom he encountered in Malabar (More 32).

The Malayalam term 'Mappila', often transliterated as Maapila, Mappilla, and Moplah, seems to be originally intended as a title of reverence and recognition. Formerly, Muslims, Jews, and Christians were addressed as Mappilas, but they were distinguished as '*Jonaka', 'Juda',* and '*Nasrani'* Mappilas, respectively. Jonaka,

derived from *Sonagam*, indicates Arabia in early Tamil literature, and it was utilised to distinguish Muslim Mappilas from others. However, currently, the individual term, Mappila, is usually circulated as an exclusive name that denotes the Muslim community of Kerala, especially in the Malabar region.

Some scholars regard the term as a portmanteau of the two Dravidian terms *Maha* (great) and *Pillai* (child), evidently settling Mappila as the 'great child' born out of the conjugal union of a foreign father and a native mother. The foreign traders, who visited Malabar, were highly esteemed and delightedly received by the indigenous inhabitants, and the name 'Mappila', to indicate their progenies, would have been intuitively utilised by the natives to show their reverence to those visitors from abroad, who occasionally settled there and wed their women.

Another interpretation regarding the origin of the term 'Mappila' is evidenced by its correspondence to the still-existing Tamil usage of that particular expression to indicate and address the prospective bridegroom, husband, or husband-to-be. This assumption is further strengthened when taking into consideration the habitual addressing of the newly-wedded groom as *puthiyappla or puthiya mappila* (new Mappila) by the Muslims of Kerala. Therefore, it is likely to infer that this term 'Mappila', formerly operated as an eloquent title of respect, is offered to the foreign men who were married into local families, and this title was transferred to the children born to those immigrants.

A third interpretation concerning the source of the term is that 'Mappila' is derived from the first syllable of *matawu* (mother), combined with *pilla* (child), possibly signifying "mother's child", which could be designated as the offspring of

foreign husbands and native wives. The children thus born are left in the care of the mother when the foreign father sets sail for his native home. While emphasising the indigenous relationship of the child, it also corresponds to the matriarchal system practiced by the Nairs and the particular matrimonial systems that existed among the Arabs, which will be discussed in the following sessions.

Apart from these indigenous variations, several Arabic derivations have been suggested, accentuating the Arab connection of the Mappilas. One proposition is that Mappila is a version of either '*muflih'* or '*maflih'* from *falaha* (to till), of which the noun form indicates 'agriculturalist' and by derivation implies 'the affluent ones', a name which might have been applied to the foreign Muslim traders who the natives comprehended as prosperous. Another suggestion is that 'Mappila' might have been a derivation of *ma-falah*. Most Mappilas of Malabar were traders in the earlier times, and they were addressed as *ma-falah*, which means those who are not agriculturalists, which eventually became Mappila. Another exposition proposes that the term 'Mappila' originated from the root word '*mahfil'* (assembling spot or meeting place), deduced from the Muslims' utilisation of this term for their community assemblies. Muslims have the habit of forming congregations or assemblies wherever they go, and the boundary of their congregation is called a *Mahal*. Therefore, native Keralites derived and allocated this name, *Mahfilkar* (people of *mahfil*), to address the community, and eventually *Mahfilkar* became *Mappilamar* (Mappila community) (Moulavi and Karim 142). Another interpretation is the corruption of the noun form '*mu'abbar'* of the verb '*abara',* suggesting 'one

from over the water'. *Ma'bar* or *Mu'bar* was the initial title provided by the Arabs to the Tamil Nadu area.

All these aforementioned interpretations regarding the etymology of 'Mappila' are plausible, and therefore, pinpointing a precise and certain derivation of the term denoting the Muslim community in Kerala is a bit problematic. Anyhow, the term carries the cultural history of the community, commingling of individuals and cultures at a historical juncture, through a communitarian life based on pluralist tradition and co-existence with the others.

The Monsoon Trade Route and the Diffusion of Islam in Malabar

Trans-regional trade routes facilitated interaction between the populace of diverse faith and culture, and they expedited the shaping of various communities, especially religious, around several trade centers due to the exchange of religious 'commodities' along with the export and import of commercial goods. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens, in their preface to *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange Between East and West,* state that trade functions as a "prominent generator of intercultural contact and is thus one of the most important triggers of religious contact. Through trade-based interactions, not only is merchandise traded, but sooner or later religious goods are also "traded" and interchanged" (xi).

For centuries, the spices, exquisite stones, animals and various other asset goods and commodities that India afford, have drawn the ships of traders along the monsoon wind to the port cities of India, and the longstanding corpus of trade

between Arabian Peninsula and India has given birth to various Muslim communities around the trade centers which spread along the coastal areas of India. Commercial exchanges existed between Arabs and Indians dating back to pre-Islamic times, as the South Arabians excelled in conducting trade and crossed the expanses of the Indian Ocean. However, it was with the dawn of Islam in the 7th century that the Arabs ascended as a prominent cultural race in the world, and consequently, Arab traders, who voyaged far and wide, emerged as the propagators of the new religious faith in locations where they operated mercantile interactions. The seafaring Muslim merchants settled along the major port cities of the Indian Ocean for the convenience of conducting trade, and they carried with them Islamic beliefs and practices, which came into confluence with various other cultures and customs. Sebastian R. Prange writes that the principal agents in the “extension of the medieval Muslim world were not sultans, soldiers, or scholars but ordinary, humdrum traders whose main objective was not to spread their faith but to turn a profit.” According to him, this process of religious dissemination “was fundamentally shaped by the interaction of these ordinary Muslims – ordinary in the sense that they were neither representatives of state power nor recognised religious authorities–with non- Muslim societies” (3).

The above statement seems be to be more realistic in the context of Malabar. Malabar is the northernmost promontory in the state of Kerala, situated in the southwest region of India. Unlike the spread of Islam in the northern regions of India, which was driven by political aspirations and geographical conquest, the spread of Islam in southern parts of India, especially Kerala, was quite peaceful, as

the religion gradually diffused through the region as a result of the trade relations between Malabar and Arabia. The Malabar coast, geographically inclined towards maritime trade, accommodates a number of prosperous ports. Pazhayangadi, Baliapattanam, Cannanore, Brahmapattanam, Dharmadam, Puthupattanam, Thikodi, Panthalayani, Kappat, Calicut, Beypore, Chaliyam, Azhikode, Cochin, Purakkad, Kayamkulam, Quilon, and Kodungallur exemplify the major ports that flourished in Kerala, and these port cities functioned as "the fulcrums of maritime trade" (Prange 27), and locus of religious broadcast.

Sailing was rather safe off the Kerala coast due to seldom obstacles in the sea, and the predictable pattern and the velocity of the seasonal monsoon wind made the voyages of the traders rather effortless, and aided the travellers to navigate the ocean's enormous expanses. Altogether, the wind system both facilitated and restrained human movement and shaped the patterns of commercial, cultural, and religious exchanges in Malabar. The season of the southwestern monsoon, which began in March/April on the East African coast and reached Malabar in late May. Seafaring on India's west coast halted entirely during June and July due to the heavy monsoon rains, along with high winds and huge waves. The monsoon winds switched directions during October/November and allowed the vessels to drift from India to the coasts of Africa. These seasonal circumstances, which halted their return journey for a while, mandated the Arab traders to settle in the locale of their transactions for a brief period, permitting the matrimonial union of Arabs and local women, resulting in the emergence of a new community, addressed as the Mappilas. The Mappilas possessed a close affinity towards their paternal ancestry, the Arabs,

and it eventually aided in disseminating Islam in this region, as this new community readily came to the fold of Islam. The Mappilas, organically close to the Arabs who secured the lead in proliferating the new faith, promptly befell as the nucleus of the Islamic religion in Kerala**.**

The Popular Legendry of Cheraman Perumal

Nevertheless, disparity in opinion prevails among both the people of Malabar and historians alike regarding the primary arrival of Islam in Kerala. There is a popular and well-cherished legend, passed down through generations - both among believers and non-believers - which centers around the conversion of the Hindu sovereign of the Chera Dynasty, Cheraman Perumal, whose dominion covers the western most parts of *Tamilakam* - a region popular among the foreigners as 'the land of pepper' or simply Malabar - into Islam at the hands of Prophet Muhammed after witnessing a miracle performed by him. Even though there are numerous versions of the account with conflicting chronology in circulation, the legend of the conversion of the king unfolds as he one night beheld the moon splitting into two halves and then returning to its customary appearance. The astronomers of the state couldn't account for this astronomical phenomenon, by which the king was awestruck. However, in a dream, the cause for this unprecedented celestial occurrence he had witnessed was revealed to the king. Later, through Jewish and Christian traders who arrived at Calicut, Perumal came to know about Muhammad ibn Abd-Allah, who claims to be the Prophet and has employed the magic of ripping the moon. Subsequently, through a group of Muslim pilgrims headed to the venerated site of Adam's peak, Ceylon, Sri Lanka, who arrived at the court of

Perumal, the king comprehended more about Islam and the holy Prophet. It is said that he accompanied the pilgrims on their return journey to Makkah and embraced Islam there, in the presence of the Prophet, leaving behind his Hindu descendants to rule his kingdom according to delegations.

Estimations about the conversion of the Chera King fluctuate widely, ranging from the conviction that there's credible evidence to validate the introduction of Islam into Malabar through this account, to its dismissal as a concoction by the Mappila community. Situated between these two extremes are those who acknowledge a kernel of truth in the narrative but admit it has mostly a legendary nature. Although there's a deficiency of persuasive historical proof for this particular tradition, there's also no inherent reason rendering it implausible. Nevertheless, despite conclusive historical shreds of evidence to validate the accuracy of the tale, Cheraman Perumal and his conversion to Islam are an integral part of Mappila's cultural heritage and continue to be cherished in the region, passing down from generation to generation, even through their celebrated literary expressions.

Surprisingly, the potency of this tale of the conversion of the Hindu monarch and the range and depth of its circulation among the populace have accredited it with the reputation as the sole reason for the accelerated growth of Islam in Malabar, compared to elsewhere in India. However, it could be assumed that this "legend provided a mythic explanation of the cooperative relationship between Hindu kings and Arab-Muslim trade communities" of Malabar, the southern part of India's western coast, unlike the northwest coast, which was hostile to Arab and Persian

merchant settlers (Martin 635). Yet, as the popular belief suggests, the conversion of Perumal alone couldn't have triggered the spread of Islam in Malabar. There is the presence and absence of other various principal factors that led to the sweep of Islam in Malabar, and the prospering of the Mappila community.

It is safe to conclude that the Mappilas as a Muslim community emerged shortly after the launch of Islam in Arabia itself as part of an ongoing process of peaceful interaction and economic connection pre-existed between Arabia and Kerala, that Islam found an affable atmosphere in Malabar in the circumstances of existing Arab colonies in the region along with the religious tolerance exhibited by the natives and native rulers, and that the progression of Islam might have received further reassurance through the popularity of the tale of the conversion of a beloved Malayali ruler (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 51).

The Coalition between the Monarchs of Malabar and the Arab Traders

A foremost aspect that facilitated the germination of Mappilas in the land of Malabar is the mutually beneficial alliance progressed between the Hindu rulers or Rajas and Muslims who arrived at their land. This symbiotic relationship ploughed the land for Islam to blossom in Malabar and sponsored the prosperity of Mappilas. The balanced and sensible interaction of reciprocal economic benefits and composed religious tolerance eased the whole process. Trade with the Arabs brought prosperity to the kingdom and, notably, each Desam or region competed with the other to allure the Arabs, to the extent that some rulers funded from the treasury of the kingdom for the services of the qazis and other mosque attendants. The size of the Arab merchants in the trading ports, as well as those who married and inhabited these

places, proliferated gradually over the centuries. Still, the inflow of the Arabs was neither substantial enough to pose a sense of political threat, nor did it intimidate the natives. The Arab traders never cherished political ambitions over their territory, and their objective was neither to colonise the nation nor to proselytise, and there was no perceivable attempt from their end to change the social fabric of the land. There was no significant endeavour at Political and religious imperialism (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 52). The Arabs enjoyed a privileged position among the natives of the land, as they respected the laws and customs of the land where they conducted trade. They commingled with the natives, thus introducing Islam gently and peacefully, and encouraged the gradual but steady growth of the Muslim community in Malabar (Bahauddin 42).

Prominent among the native rulers of Malabar is the Zamorins of Calicut, who showered special regard for the Muslim traders and Mappilas since the collaboration between the Zamorins and Muslims was economically profitable for both. The rise of the Zamorins was facilitated by two major factors: a lack of external invasions and, most significantly, their alliance with the Mappilas and Arab traders. This partnership allowed the Arabs to dominate Arabian Sea trade, while the Zamorins could monopolise trade through customs duties (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 54). Apart from economic advantages, Zamorins benefited militarily from their alliance with the Mappilas, whose forces reinforced the Zamorin army alongside the Nair fighters. With the support of Mappilas, the Zamorins conquered neighbouring regions and enhanced their status in Malabar.

Further, the Zamorins' just rule offered security for all who visited their realm, attracting various trading communities, particularly the Arabs. Their reputation for fairness and justice was widely appreciated, and Shaykh Zainuddin notes that Muslim trade thrived due to the rulers' respect for Muslim customs and their generally amicable relations, despite being a minority in the region (51). Thus, the large influx of Muslim merchants converted Calicut into a major metropolis, with Muslim communities establishing themselves around the city, and it further transformed Calicut into a leading port on India's west coast.

Moreover, Zamorins permitted and sometimes even encouraged the conversion of the natives into Islam and sanctioned the merchants to build mosques and observe their religious rituals without any hindrance. The Zamorins even remitted a fine from those who neglected the obligatory prayer on Fridays (Zainudhin 51). This policy fruition Zamorin's desire to enlarge his navy, which conducted a sustainable functioning relation with the Arabs. In fact, Zamorin commanded one or two members of fisherman families to embrace Islam. Thus, fishermen boys born on Fridays were mostly converted to Islam.

The conversion to Islam was not limited to fishermen, but also comprised other castes in the lower rung of society. The sixteenth-century Portuguese, Gaspar Correa, observes that none of the Nair castes, who enjoyed all the privileges and rights converted to Islam, but only the lower people turned to this religion, because by embracing Islam, they could travel freely and eat as they pleased. And the Muslim communities welcomed them by providing clothes and robes to clothe themselves. Quoting him, Miller points out a utilitarian aspect that benefited the

Zamorin. Unlike the lower castes, Muslims would be able to transport goods for trade with much lesser restrictions (*Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 55-56).

Those who converted were accepted in society, irrespective of the caste they belonged to earlier. Zainuddin notes that the "unbelievers never punish such of their countrymen who embrace Islam, but treat them with the same respect shown to the rest of the Muslims, though the convert belongs to the lowest of the grades of their society" (52). In reality, the treatment they received both from their fellow Hindus and others after embracing Islam energised the process of conversion. This introduces another critical element that accelerated the spread of Islam in Malabar, that is rigid caste system.

The Perils of Caste Hierarchy in Malabar

The caste system, which formulated certain unwritten obligations for the upper and lower strata of society, predominated the basis of the Indian social fabric. The distinctly divided caste lines, in which untouchability and pollution prevailed, primarily regulated the societal intercourse of the Hindu society, and Malabar was no exception. The majority of the population, or the masses, exhausted by the exponents of the caste system, endured exploitation at the hands of the aristocratic landed gentry who enjoyed the privileges of the caste. The caste system prevalent in Malabar not only considered pollution by the touch of the lower caste, but even the sight of the lower caste is regarded as pollution, restricting the lower caste people from coming into proximity with the upper class. They always had to observe a certain distance from the aristocrats, and contact with the lower caste is perceived as *ayitham*. The minimum penalty recorded for those who broke the caste rules was

excommunication or, often, death. Moreover, they were not supposed to travel freely on the road, they were not entitled to wear nice clothes of their choice, nor were they able to feed themselves with luxuries.

The lower caste populace suffocated by these caste laws found liberation and refuge in the new Islamic system, which provided them with emancipation. The egalitarian preaching of the new faith attracted the natives and resulted in mass conversion. Conversion took place rather peacefully and willingly, and the population of Mappilas steadily increased. By converting to this new faith, the lower caste people, so far encountered oppression and ill treatment, entered the brotherhood of Islam, and Mappilas treated them with equality in their new social position, and further, it would oblige their former masters or *janmies* to treat them well. Religion-sponsored caste system along with the social, economic, and political upheavals in the later centuries hastened the conversion of the oppressed castes to Islam, bulking up the community of Mappilas.

The statistics of conversion rapidly rose during the British governance, which was a tumultuous period of outbreaks. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Malabar witnessed numerous disturbances and revolts fighting British colonial imperialism and regional landlordism based on the caste system, which was then supported by colonial powers. The land settlement policies in Malabar reestablished the social and economic position of the upper caste landlords, and the colonial authorities encouraged the landed gentry to introduce brutal regulations to devastate the fate of the peasant classes, the preponderance of which constituted Mappilas and lower caste Hindus. Obviously, the tenants, both Mappilas and lower

caste Hindus, were tormented at the hands of the landlords. However, religious compulsions prevented the Hindu tenants from organising uprisings against their landlords, while they witnessed their Mappila counterparts causing insurrections against oppressive forces. The impulse of these helpless tenants to enrol in the uprisings compelled them to disown their religion and join the belief system of the Mappilas, which encouraged rebellion against oppression. Consequently, there was a startling escalation in the estimate of the population of Mappilas, especially during the period between 1831 and 1851, a period when the rate of outbreaks was at its peak (Randathani 22). The pattern of conversion in Malabar divulges the collective consciousness of an exploited community that had been agonised for a long time by the caste Hindus

Caste Hindus were mostly converted to Islam, generally due to excommunication, a punishment which the caste regulations imposed upon the Hindu population. To the people excommunicated or degraded from his rank, by not cleansing himself after coming in proximity to an untouchable, remaining in their religious belief proved immensely difficult. They either abscond to a place where they will not be recognised or they resort to Islam or other religious practices (Zainudhin 47-48).

The existing caste system, coupled with its associated evils, performed as a formidable factor for the stunted economic and social growth of the lower caste. Furthermore, it was a time characterised by predominant social ostracism among the various communities in Malabar. Islam enticed those who contemplated dissatisfaction with the prevailing religion of the state. More than the tenets of

Islam, it is the brotherhood and equality highlighted by the deeds of the Arabs and Mappilas that might have appealed to the converts.

As a result of this mass conversion, the religion and Islamic customs practiced among the Mappilas differ from the doctrinal Islam, as the converts somehow managed to maintain and incorporate some of the traditions and routines of their respective caste into religion. Therefore, the religion practiced by this community on some basis contradicts the accepted religious practices of the worldwide Islamic community, and what the Mappilas practice and carry forward became a form of Islamic folk culture for which they alone own the patent. They conveniently replaced their old deities with Allah, prophets, and Sufi saints, and integrated their usual forms of worship and offerings into the folds of this new religious belief. The vast corpus of Mappila literature, attributed as holy in its recitation and the ritualistic art forms practiced by Mappilas, further confirms the inclusion of native customs within the community.

The Matrimonial Practices of the Arabs and Nuptials with Native Women

The spread of Islam and the Muslim community in Malabar could be credited to certain systems of matrimony widespread among the Arabs from ancient times, which permitted the Arabs to contract marriages of a temporary nature with the native women of the localities where they conducted trade. As mentioned earlier, the monsoon wind system, the southwestern monsoon, delivered the vessels of the traders on the shores of Malabar in late May. It is followed by pouring monsoon rains, which brought with them high winds and enormous swells, thus ceasing navigation for months till the wind changes its direction in October/November. This

schedule obliged the traders to dwell in Malabar for a specific duration, and the voyages usually took about thirty to forty days. S.M.M. Koya observes that during their prolonged stay in Malabar, "they must have contracted some sort of marital unions, temporary or permanent, with the Indian women, for there is no evidence to show that they brought along with them their own womenfolk". He also mentions that due to "the peculiar nature of the social organisation of both the early Arabs and the people of Malabar, it was extremely easy for the Arabs to have such unions with the local women" (546).

In the early tribal Arabian society, which functioned on matrilineal right, it wasn't permissible for women to leave her own kin but she could accommodate a suitor as her husband at her own place. The man either lived permanently with his wife's tribe or paid a visit to her occasionally. In Kerala, there existed some sort of Nair polyandry where women received more than one husband. Since the Nairs practiced matrilineal and matrilocal customs, the children conceived of such bonds belonged to the mother's *tarvad* and also inherited from the mother. The husband, considered as a visitor at his wife's place, usually nourished no connections with his children. Likewise, in the early Arabian custom, too, children born of such interactions belonged to the mother's side and stayed with the mother's tribe. Such alliances, practiced in Malabar, bear the traces of a tribal visiting marriage, called *beena* marriage, which is characterised by the stay back of the bride at her home without accompanying her husband to his home. The wife remained in her home and retained complete independence, and the husband went to her abode. The conjugal union of the Arabs and local women on the Malabar coast explicitly carries some

features of the *mut'a* marriage too, a marriage contract of a temporary nature in which the contracting parties decide to live together in the house of the wife for a specified period, and the man has to gift her an amount mutually agreed upon, called *mahr*.

Evidently, the social conditions in Malabar at that time assisted nuptial unions like *beena* and *mut'a* marriages, and many of the communities, such as the *Nairs*, the *Thiyyas,* and the *Mukkuvans* with whom the early Arab traders had acquaintances, maintained the mother right character of their communal system even down to recent times. Property was inherited through the succession of females, and the institution of marriage was matrilocal. A woman possessed the authority to entertain more than one husband or terminate a relationship at her own will. These pre-conditions facilitated the Arabs to practice such forms of marriage like *beena* marriage and *mut'a* marriage, as it was not possible for them to settle down for a long time in one particular place fastening themselves to their wife or wives, and, moreover, children born of such ties were supervised by mothers and their families, so the traders could leave the wife and children behind, when their ship leaves the port. This supports the claim that the term Mappila might have been derived by combining *matawu* (mother) and *pilla* (child).

The matrimonial correspondence of the Arabs and native women establishes the ground for the hybrid nature of Mappila culture. This hybridity is very much apparent in various nuances of the Mappila life. From the lexicon of Mappilas jammed with Arabic words to their trade orientation, the seal of Arab culture and temperament is considerably perceptible. Mappila nomenclature, art and literature,

cuisines, musical tradition, grooming and dressing, matrimonial and other ceremonies etc. sustain the influence of a foreign culture, till date, commingling with the elements of native customs and tastes inherited from their mother's side, thereby formulating Mappila culture as a creolised culture- a mixture of Arabian and native culture- yet proclaiming its inherent distinction from both.

Sufism in Malabar and the Spread of Islam

Among several other factors that facilitated the spread of Islam and the fashioning of Mappila culture and beliefs in Kerala, Sufi missionary activities are significant. Due to the unavailability of enough information to base an evaluation of the relative prominence of missionary activity for Muslim growth during the early periods in Malabar, Miller surmises Sufi activity as a minor element in the process of the community's growth. However, Sufis have a significant role in the spread of Islam in Malabar, as elsewhere in the world, as their accommodating and compliant means of religious promulgation, harmonious nature, and unsophisticated and virtuous life appealed to a vast number of people and directed them to Islam. Numerous indigenous sources like Arabi-Malayalam works known as *Malappattu* (discussed in the next chapter) carry pieces of evidence to suggest that Sufi missionaries had their fair share in the spread of Islam and Islamic culture in Kerala.

Sufism, as a mystical movement in Islam with representative individuals, both men and women, who solely devoted themselves to the service of God, has played a crucial role in shaping the Muslim culture in Kerala by adapting Islamic principles to the unique context of the region. They restructured prevailing customs, integrating those in line with Islamic beliefs while enhancing the local art, language,

and traditions with a touch of Islamic culture among Kerala's Muslim communities. Their influence is evident in the presence of *dargahs*, *thaqiyyas*, and mosques across Kerala, as elsewhere around the globe. The rural masses of the region have endowed supernatural powers to the Sufis and the ability to perform miracles, and there are various miraculous stories associated with Sufi saints. Sufis are attributed with powers of prophesying the future, tracing missing properties, curing chronic illness and diseases, and influencing the climate by manifesting rain during devastating drought. V Kunhali traces the presence of eleven Sufi orders in Kerala in his book *Sufism in Kerala*, which are Qadiri, Rifai, Chishti, Suhrawardi, Naqshabandi, Kaszeruni, Shadili, Ba-Alavi, Ba-Faqih, Aydarus, and Nurishah (63).

The Qadiriyya order of Sheikh Muhyaddin Abdul Qadir, born in 1077 A.D, was most admired and influential in Malabar. The advocates of this order were the Makhdums, who came to Malabar in the second half of the fifteenth century, from Hadhramaut of South Arabia, noteworthy for their missionary activities centring the grand mosque of Ponnani, which transpired that region into a centre of Islamic learning and Mappila culture. The first Makhdum, Sheikh Zainudhin ibn Ali, was the author of the renowned mystic poem, *Hidayat al-Adhkiyah ila Taiqat al-Awliya*, which is considered the manual of Sufism in Malabar. Qazi Muhammed, a significant figure in the history of Mappila songs who penned the early datable devotional song *Muhyudheen Mala*, and his successors, the traditional qazis of Calicut, vigorously participated in the propagation of the Qadiri order (Kunhali 65).

The widespread reverence for Sufi saints is evident from the numerous *dargas* (mausoleums) across the region, such as those of Sayyid Alawi of

Mamburam, Sayyid Sharif Madani of Ullal, and others. These sites remain important spiritual centers, reflecting the deep impact of Sufi missionaries on the spread of Islam and the shaping of Mappila cultural identity. Integral to the Mappila religious and cultural life is the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Sufis to attain blessings, and it is widely practiced even today with high observance and reverence. Often, the non-Muslims who pay visits to the shrines occasionally pledge to convert to Islam with the fulfilment of their prayers and wishes, like the birth of a male child or healing from chronic diseases, etc., thus transforming these shrines often to a medium for conversion. Numerous Sufi leaders were revered, and they attracted a multitude of followers, especially from lower castes, leading to significant conversions to Islam.

Mappila Resistance: Colonial Encounters and Conflicts

The Mappilas of Malabar carry an intense and tumultuous history marked by their conflicts with colonial powers such as the Portuguese and British. These confrontations are not only a testament to their resistance against oppressive powers but also an indication of the broader socio-political dynamics of the time. These interactions serve not only as political events in Mappila history but also as transformative moments that shaped the cultural and historical landscape of the Mappila community.

Malabar upholds the status of the primary land in the Indian soil where the Portuguese encroached their brutal ambitions, and it altered the course of the life, history, and culture of Mappilas. The ways adopted by the Portuguese stand in stark contrast to the ways implemented by Arabs so far in establishing successful trade connections in Malabar. The tactics of the Portuguese, who detested the Arabs and

Mappilas alike, and the unresolved animosity exhibited towards them, testify that the Portuguese penetration of India was not only motivated by economic advantages, but also driven by religious motivations and contention, as for them the Indian expedition was an extension of the Crusades against Islam and the prolonged battle against the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, though the innocent Mappila population has no connection with those confrontations (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 62). They treated their interface with Malabar as the inauguration of another string of contests against Muslims to control their trade and commercial activities, impose restrictions on their autonomy, and seize their productive lands. Therefore, they continued the ill-treatment of the Muslim population, pointing them out as their enemies as determined to exterminate them and snatch their monopoly over the spice trade. This attitude is evident in numerous massacres carried out by the Portuguese authorities, including da Gama, in various regions of India (Bahauddin 46-48).

In Malabar, the Portuguese could neither effectively attain trade monopoly and political domination nor could they successfully spread their religion, especially due to the unwavering opposition from Mappilas in alliance with the Zamorins. Open conflicts between Portuguese soldiers and Mappilas became a routine in Malabar, as the Portuguese oppressed and exploited the local Muslim population in attempts to monopolise trade (Zainuddin 60). Bahauddin remarks that insurrection against the viciousness and piracy of the Portuguese by the people of Hormuz, Muscat, Bahrain, and Sohar was suppressed. The situation demanded either

complete surrender or resistance against domination, and the "Kerala Muslims took a difficult and dangerous path of resistance" (Bahauddin 66).

A century-old sanguinary warfare against the Portuguese depleted the resources and wealth of the Mappila community in their defence to protect their right to trade. Their defeat included their loss of trade, which was the foundation of their fortune, and thus, the Mappila economic impediment became widespread. Although the whole of the Mappila community was never individually prosperous, since the well-off Mappilas and Arabs dominated the maritime commerce, the whole community shared the well-being. The Portuguese domination and economic policy destructed this economic power of Mappilas as a community, and compelled them to abandon the profitable maritime commerce in search of new opportunities for economic well-being. They set off on the path of becoming a community of landless labourers, petty traders, and poor fishermen. When they travelled inland away from the coast in search of livelihood, to their misfortune, they discovered that the land had been occupied by the Hindu landlords and their tenants. "The Mappilas did not have adequate resources or initiative to work their way out of the predicament. It is here that we must find the starting point for the community's later poverty, ignorance, and inwardness" (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 75).

Nevertheless, the Portuguese engagement has dawned a novel spirit of militancy among the Mappila community, interpreted as an urgent reaction obligatory for the state of affairs then, as there is no prior testimony of the Mappilas being partaken in any sort of militant activity (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*

77). This newly acquired skill came in handy in the later periods, when following the Portuguese predecessors, another party of foreign powers molested their land.

Peasant Struggles and Land Reforms in Malabar

The occupation of Malabar by the British in the late eighteenth century, and the subsequent shift in their strategy, from trading to colonisation, initiated numerous agrarian policies that radically altered and restructured the existing agrarian relations of the region. The colonial bestowal of absolute authority of land on the *jenmies* sanctioned them the right to evict tenants from their property at their will, which was completely not exercised hitherto in Kerala (Kareem 35). In addition to these, there was an escalation in population, coupled with a reduction in indigenous occupations, and the cumulative effect was catastrophic to the peasant sections. Its force was intensified particularly in Ernad and Valluvanad Taluks, which were thickly inhabited by an agrarian population, and the majority belonged to the Mappila community, who were compelled to inhabit the inland, leaving the coastal areas in search of a living, by extermination during the hundred-year war against the Portuguese. Therefore, rural tensions erupted in the form of peasant outbreaks in numerous regions.

Besides, this period was characterised by the community's quest for identity along with the exposure to puritan religious reforms, as the prominent intellectual leaders of the period held a strict moralist attitude towards the social and religious affairs of the Mappilas. Spiritual leaders like Sayyid Alavi Thangal and Pookkoya Thangal spiritedly concentrated on the rejuvenation of the community and they battled against the un-Islamic practices- practices and customs of the native belief

systems that have been infiltrated into their Islamic devotion- observed by the Mappila Muslims, as well as they strived to regulate the social conduct of Mappilas. They were advised to abscond the old custom of revering the high caste Hindu landlords and to leave the convention of addressing the Nairs with an honorific 'you', which brought about an impression of social negation. Further, the reformers established numerous mosques and institutions for religious learning to propagate religious ideologies, therefore, impelling the search for Islamic identity in Malabar (Kurup 65).

These conditions provided the backdrop for the early uprising of the Mappilas against the landed gentry and colonial oppressors, which the British labelled as 'Moplah Outrages', distinguished by the phenomenon of religious suicide. A dissection of these 'outrages' reveals that the amplification of rural poverty in the colonial context and the emergence of a novel power structure of landed class or *janmies,* birthed and sustained by a foreign government, resulted in unrest, which provoked the pauperised or evicted lower sections of the peasant class. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. observes that, reduced to "insecure tenancy, vulnerable to rack renting and eviction at the hands of Hindu landlords (jenmi) sustained by British courts, the Mappillas responded in a series of outbreaks" (61). These ritualistic uprisings aimed to generate a possible threat in the psyche of the landed hegemonic classes, thus constraining their conduct towards the tenants and other deplorable sections. Peculiarly, most of the outbreaks followed a distinctive modus operandi. The revolutionaries prepared for the outbreak by donning usually white garments, clothes of martyrs, divorcing their wives, asking for absolution from those

whom they had wronged, and receiving the sanctifications of a Tangal for their triumph. The outrage is instigated by openly attacking a Hindu landlord, Nambutiri Brahmins or Nairs, and followed by their awaiting British officials for a confrontation and thereby attaining martyrdom. In the process, they shouted takbir as a war cry and vocalised songs that reminisce about the tales of previous outbreaks. Through this, the assailants acquire the status of *shahid* among the humdrum Mappilas. Stephan Federic Dale comments on the Mappila outbreaks that "they were performed in the highly stylised ritual of suicidal *jihad*, acts at once self-destructive but, in the long run, effective means of defending the interests of the rural Mappila population" (118)

A commission was put forth by the colonial authorities to investigate the uprisings. However, the enquiring officials were requested to be conscious of their heroic endeavour, which is to secure the Nair and Brahmin population sufficient protection and possible safety from Mappila fanaticism. Therefore, this prejudiced perception considerably affected the outcome of the investigation, as the root source for the uprisings was charged as intolerance promoted by Mohammedan faith along with the bigotry and treachery harboured by Mappilas. Although the commission observed religious fanaticism as the compelling force for Mappila outbreaks, it subsidiarily casts light on the agrarian tensions and disputes paramount in the rural regions of Malabar. Further, as K.N.N. Kurup observes, if the rebels were solely motivated by bigotry, they could have laid an attack on any member of the Hindu community, but mostly they marked their oppressors as targets, and particularly, the lives of women and children were spared during their fights. Further, they never

ventured to escape; rather, they embraced martyrdom in their confrontation with military forces. More importantly, the Muslim inhabitants of the coastal areas, or the Mappila trading communities of the coast, have not been engaged in these uprisings. The persons involved in the uprisings and the localities where it erupted were confined to agrarian sectors, and it fundamentally establishes rural disturbances as the driving force behind these outbreaks (67).

Altogether, it is an amalgamation of historical, social, economic, and political factors that sponsored the long and protracted struggle by the peasants of Malabar for land reforms. About three hundred Mappila uprisings ensued between 1791 and 1921, and a total of thirty-two Mappila outbreaks have reportedly occurred in the district of Malabar between 1836 and the Rebellion of 1921. Malappuram (1834), Panthaloor (1836, 1898), Mankada Pallipuram (1841), Muttyara (1842), Cheroor (1843), Pandikkad (1843), Manjeri (1849, 1896), Angadippuram (1894), Kulathoor (1851), Kottayam (Thalasseri- 1851), Parol (1865), Thootha (1873), Melattoor (1880), Melmuri (1884), Mannarkkad (1894) and Chembrasseri (1896) constitute a few among the major uprisings of this epoch.

Further, popular institutions were established around these uprisings, like *Jaarams*, *Mawlids, Nerchas*, Mosques, and popular ballads and songs venerated the uprisings and the martyrs. Apart from anti-feudal sentiments, these uprisings cherished an anti-British character as their socio-political arrangement altered the social and economic fabric of the society and undesirably disturbed the mundane pattern of Mappila existence, especially in the rural areas. When the British authorities and official documentations labelled the Mappila uprisings as fanaticism,

the Mappila literature, composed on these outbreaks, enumerating their struggles and narrating the episode, vindicates the motives of Mappilas behind their aggression, and divulges the anti-imperialist facets of these revolts. Ultimately, these struggles and the circulation of the popular songs composed around these various struggles instilled an alertness and consciousness in the whole community against social oppression, injustice, and colonial tyranny. Further, the institutionalised practices and the collective social memory and awareness set the background for the rebellion of 1921.

The rebellion of 1921, a much discussed, debated, and criticised episode in Mappila history, is branded as the culmination of a long series of 'Mappila Outrages'. The rebellion which broke out at Thirurangadi in August 1921 under the leadership of Ali Muslyar is imparted with different hues which range from imparting the rebellion with an agrarian countenance to being a significant chapter in the Indian freedom struggle. However, in the collective psyche of the people, it is tactically engraved as a defamed religious assault organised by the Muslims against the Hindus, by deliberately concealing its political (anti-British) nature. There is obviously an agrarian element and economic discontent, but unlike the previous Mappila uprisings, this one has been influenced by Khilafat and Non-co-operation movements (Nair 7). The rebellion acquired the fanatical allegation in the later stages of its progression when the Hindu supporters of the Mappila rebellion conveniently dropped out of the act, and certain Hindu aristocrats supported the British oppressors and partook in suppressing the Mappilas, which eventually pressed the Mappilas to raise arms against them. The British exploited this situation

by fanning the fires of intolerance to aid their policy of divide and rule, and also to defend the atrocities they directed against the Muslims (Kareem 441). Further, in order to completely erase the anti-imperialist aspects of the rebellion, any writing that carried such information was confiscated by the British, implementing the Press Regulation Act.

The Works of Mappilas Confiscated by the British Government

A literary work is confiscated when it is pregnant with the potency to ignite a spark of revolution in the hearts of the people, and it challenges the existing system of governance and those in power. C.N. Ahammed Moulavi and K.K. Muhamed Abdul Kareem list seven significant literary works that were confiscated by the British Government. The first one is *Muhimmaathul Mu'mineen,* which advocated, on the basis of Islamic guidelines, to resist the British at all costs and never to comply with them. In 1921, it was proclaimed that those who retained a copy of this work would be condemned to prison for five years without a trial. The publisher Aminummantakath Pareekutty Musliyar lived in exile and later migrated to Makkah. The second one is *Cheroor Padappattu*, which sings the events of the Cheroor revolt, a significant episode of the Mappila uprising. This particular work and the press in which it was printed were confiscated by the British government. Another one is *Da'vathulhaq,* written by Moithumoulavi, published in 1921, a subtle work that advocates for both the community and nation to resist the motives of the British colonialists. The author was sentenced to prison for publishing this work. The fourth and fifth ones are *Mannarkkad Padappattu* and *Manjeri Padappattu*, which tell the tale of the British Mappila confrontation at Mannarkkad in 1891 and Manjeri in

1896, respectively. The newspaper *Swadesabhimani,* published by Vakkam Abdul Qadir Moulavi in 1906, was confiscated by the British government in 1910, as the articles published alarmed the foreign rulers. The next one, another newspaper, *Al-Ameen*, which was confiscated in the year 1930 (85). Evidently, the writings of Mappilas were never passive; they carried within the pollen of discontent that can ignite organised resistance, which threatened the British authorities.

Contemporary Mappila Society

The beginning of the modern period unleashed an assortment of compelling pressures on the Mappila community that assisted in considerably amending their existing conditions. The radically shifting social milieu of Kerala, the novel political positions, the challenges posed by other communities, especially renascent Hinduism, and rampant unemployment, etc., presented in front of the Mappilas the requirement to adopt fresh approaches and outlook. In addition, the rising scorn of communism on outdated and irrational belief systems and practices aided in abandoning superstitious convictions among the Mappilas. In the religious realm, due to modernistic reformist actions that surfaced, plenty of un-Islamic practices and folk religious customs were terminated, and therefore, numerous social ceremonial observances in the name of religion dropped their significance. More importantly, the emergence and establishment of a learning system modelled on Western education, which encouraged learning Malayalam and later English, hitherto forbidden among Mappilas, eventually assisted in reshaping Mappila character, faith, social life, and leadership, however, without tampering with its foundation on Islamic tradition.

Traditional learning structures like *Othupallis* (single tutor learning institution) were replaced by *Madrasas* and Arabic Colleges for religious erudition. In order to acquire secular schooling, they relied on governmental institutions and other private institutions administered by various other communities. Later decades witnessed the advent of numerous educational institutions in Malabar to sponsor scholarship for this illiterate community, which has significantly moulded the young scholars of the Mappila community to successfully compete with the pupils of other sessions. Additionally, this remodelling instilled optimism into Mappila's existence, and further aided in shedding the negative tags associated with the Mappilas, as a result of caricaturing them as backward, ignorant religious bigots after the 1921 incident, to emerge as a reliable force in global Islam (Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* 158)

Further, a crucial milestone that redefined every aspect of Mappila existence is the circular migration of labourers, which commenced in the 1970s, especially to GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) nations. The migration and the large inflow of workers' remittances facilitated the unprecedented revitalisation of the Mappila community by stabilising their economy, which had earlier been depleted by the foreign powers. It further raised their living standards and equipped them to embrace further modernisation. The effect of these migrations stretches from the impact on the domestic household of the migrant to the building of the regional economy of Kerala.

The bulk of the migrants hailed from impoverished homes and were engaged in low-productivity menial activities. Also, they lacked proper education and

training and were essentially unqualified for advanced occupations. They were far behind in the technical and financial vocations which is required to build a proper career. Therefore, they largely occupied physical jobs varying from construction labour to menial employment. Contrary to the minimal earnings at homeland, working abroad offered much better wages, and the destitute households, recipient of remittances from these Middle Eastern nations, managed a substantial escalation in their domestic income. The individual financial prosperity and the flow of currency subsequently resulted in the escalation of construction activities and related employment in their native land. Similarly, prominent job opportunities were opened up in transport, trade, commerce, communication, education, health services, banking, etc., owing to the financial thriving offered by Gulf migration (Prakash 3212).

Financial prosperity alleviated poverty and substantially elevated the socio-economic status of the whole Mappila community. It brought about immense modification in their attitude, attire, lifestyle, food habits, cultural practices, etc. Moreover, the Mappila community as a whole developed self-confidence and cherished a new sense of hope, and was capable of executing frequent communal welfare activities. The family diet of the people was enriched, and consequently, their health conditions improved. Also, Muslim medical institutes erupted on the back of Gulf investments. Wages and working circumstances of the inadequately paid religious employees became significantly enhanced, along with the refurbishing of numerous deteriorating mosques. Plenty of new mosques were constructed with souvenirs from Arab donors. (Miller, *Mappila Muslim Culture* 122). The mark of

Gulf migration is visibly present in numerous facets of Malayali lifestyle, even in the current times.

Further, the forces of globalisation amplified cultural exchange and interaction among diverse communities worldwide, and have initiated the exposure of the Mappilas to divergent cultures, societies, languages, and ideas across the globe, especially in this broadcast and digital era. They adopted some aspects of the foreign cultures they came in contact with, occasionally modifying them to fit their own taste, fostering cultural hybridisation or syncretism, while also preserving their own cultural identity. Moreover, this expanded connection modified societal norms and principles within the Mappila community, encouraging the influx of modernity. Increased connectivity through technology and social media has facilitated communication and networking beyond traditional boundaries, influencing the social conduct and practices of Mappilas. The enhanced access to education and skill development prospects further aided this section to emerge from their ignorance. With the proliferation of modern educational institutions and other online learning platforms, like any other community, Mappilas as well acquired proficiencies that are relevant in the global job market, enhancing their employability and economic prospects, and this accounts for the attitudinal change that transpired in the community. Globalisation has further deeply affected the religious dynamics among the Mappilas, facilitating the construction of transnational religious networks and movements, modifying religious practices and beliefs carried by the community. Throughout the years, the community has presented alterations in their ways of living, occupation, productivity, consumerism, fashion, and other

social and cultural aspects of life in accordance with the fad and they have stamped their vibrant presence in the realm of contemporary popular culture as well.

In sum, the Mappilas of Malabar materialised as a distinct community through early Arab maritime trade contact and intermarriage with local populations. The historical baggage of this ethnocultural contact is evidenced even in the title addressed to this community. This mercantile interface, where different systems of cultures, languages, and beliefs meet, overlap, or even negotiate, crafted a hybrid cultural identity, combining Dravidian elements with Islamic beliefs and practices. In fact, it led to the emergence of a new identity, the Mappilas, who are neither entirely Arab nor entirely native, but a creolised community obviously distinct from both. The influence of foreign lineage is evident in numerous aspects of Mappila life. It is exemplified in the integration of various Arabic words along with Malayalam, and the adaptation of customs and practices, especially in ceremonies like marriage, dressing, festivals, art and literature, and so on of the native folk community.

Nevertheless, the authority of the maternal culture, as the Arabs espoused the local women and their progenies were disclosed as Mappilas, or the imprint of local folk culture of Malabar, as numerous indigenes embraced the Islamic belief system due to plenitude of compelling factors like caste regulations, tyranny of landlords and foreign authorities, proselytiser endeavours by Sufis and even the encouragement received from the ruling authorities to convert to this new faith, significantly permeate every aspect of Mappila existence. The touch of native

traditions along with foreign elements is visible across the entire spectrum of Mappila life.

Even the arrival of Western powers to the Indian sub-continent with the ambition of colonisation and exploitation, and their treacherous tactics to facilitate their desires to plunder the nation, has left its indelible mark on the customs and literature of the Mappila community. The colonial period, especially British rule, was marked by violent encounters and agrarian uprisings in Malabar, and in this period, art became a mode of resistance and memory. The war ballads, known as *Padappattu*, vehemently narrate the heroic Mappila engagements and anti-colonial martyrs. These songs aided in preserving subaltern perspectives and community cohesion through their oral transmission.

In the modern period, various amendments in the social practices, religious reforms, economic prosperity attained through economic migration, elevated educational access and encounter with modernity, the forces of globalisation etc. altogether altered the communal ways of living and the transformations are visible in the engagement of Mappilas with various traditional customs and practices, and even in the production and consumption of their literary expressions.

This concise analysis of the origin and evolution of Mappilas, which highlights the Arab-Kerala nexus, and the political trials and encounter with modernity sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the folk aspects of pre-modern Mappila community espoused in their religion, festivals, dressing, art and literature etc., which will be the focus of the subsequent chapter.

Chapter II

Mappila Folk Aesthetics: Corresponding with Socio-Cultural and Historical Upheaval

Mappila culture, a rich and motley medley that parades the unique heritage and riveting traditions of the Mappila community, is entrenched in their history, religion, customs, and everyday practices of life. Mappila folk culture comprises a myriad of artistic articulations, with Mappila songs reputed as one of its most distinctive and cherished cultural expressions, along with other performing arts like Oppana, Vattappattu, Daffmuttu, Kolkkali, Arabanamuttu, Kuthu Ratheeb, Kalarippayattu, Parichamuttu, Cheeni Muttu, etc. This chapter delves into the enthralling sphere of Mappila folk culture by analysing their artistic expressions, which evolved in correspondence with the needs of the hour. Intreating with the mystic forces and personages for guidance and protection; singing the trials and tribulations endured by the community; celebrating their war heroes and martyrs; and vocalising their vibrant and cheerful approach to life and its precious moments, Mappila art forms reflect the life and lived experiences of Mappilas of Malabar.

Mappila Folklore

Folklore is "concerned with the study of traditional culture, or the unofficial culture, or the folk culture, as opposed to the elite culture" (Dorson 117). As delineated in the introductory chapter, Mappila culture, along with numerous vernacular cultural expressions, has been marginalised into the realm of folk culture or the unofficial culture. Dorson states that:

> The unofficial culture can be contrasted with the high, the visible, the institutional culture of church, state, the universities, the professions, the corporations, the fine arts, the sciences. This unofficial culture finds its own modes of expression in folk religion, folk medicine, folk literature, the folk arts, and folk philosophy. Yet the unofficial culture reflects the mood of its times fully as much as does the official culture, for both are anchored in the same historical period. (46)

While in the West, the church has historically operated as a key site of high culture, in the Indian context, the temple has fulfilled a comparable role by representing and sustaining the high culture. These institutional embodiments of high culture, by design, acted as mechanisms of cultural arbiter, legitimising specific aesthetic and religious values while ostracising others, though those expressions as well capture the ethos of their era and people quite like the aesthetic and cultural articulations of the elites. Operating outside these dominant institutions, Mappilas produced alternative cultural expressions categorised as folk and were not conventionally recognised as part of legitimate cultural canons.

The definition of folk societies and cultures comprises communities that are not exclusively primitive but are relatively simple cultural forms. Peculiarly, these folk communities are strictly interdependent; their personal relationships are simple; familial institutions are much recognised with an emphasis on the conduct of piety, and are ritualistic, but they are being swiftly altered by the intensified contact with modern or more industrial civilisations. These cultures are neither ‘primitive’ in the traditional interpretation of the expression, nor are they ‘civilised’ since they lack

complete integration into modern industrial cultures. These societies afford further complex ways of life, with further intricate historical origins, and with better historical documentation. Further, these folk communities are not an isolated, whole society; rather, a "half-society" which is part of a larger unit (Foster 163). In this sense, Mappilas could be enumerated as a community that qualifies the characteristic attributes of a folk community. Though accommodated within the larger cultural landscape of Kerala, their culture, music, rituals, literature, and art forms endure the mark of their folk. However, this community is precipitously redefining these cultural signifiers owing to its negotiations with the forces of modern structures and ideologies.

Further, folk culture, defined as the "customary beliefs, social forms, and material constructions of specific folk groups…includes the totality of associated elements such as speech patterns, social actions and activities, beliefs, behaviours, ideology, and artifacts specific to the group" (Green 316). These specific elements, interests, standards, rituals, institutional patterns, and activities exhibited by a particular group are the reflections of its organisational core identity, and folk culture could be both a representation and a reassertion of the distinctiveness of that particular group, which is acquired through affiliation and interaction within the group. It blossoms in the familiar spaces of everyday life, sculpting identities and nurturing a sense of belonging among its practitioners through their shared experiences. Articulated through storytelling, songs, dance, cuisines, etc., folk culture espouses the unique and irreplaceable spirit of a people, deep-rooted in their history, environment, and shared values.

Investigating the facets of folklore, which determines folklore as the reflection of the suppressed aspirations and sentiments of a community; the articulation of the culture of a community, and a way to enlighten the individuals of the community, Balakrishnan Vallikunnu claims that Mappila folklore is intertwined with the kernel of Mappila social life, and it is the expression of the beating Mappila existence (*Mappila Sahithya Padanangal* 33). Folk expressions are born out of the communal concord, and they carry with them the stamp of that particular community. Mappila folklore intricately intertwines with the cultural and social tapestry of the Mappila Muslim community, which is profoundly reflective of their historical journey, religious beliefs, and societal intricacies. Its genesis and booming are deeply rooted in the unique cultural and social milieu of the Mappilas, where it has evolved and thrived over generations. However, the folk culture exhibited by Mappilas is, in numerous respects, consistent with the rural folklore of Kerala, which is "unique in richness and variety" (Panikkar 43).

Various aspects of folk culture, such as religion, celebrations and festivals, distinct costumes, linguistic attributes, and folk arts, which distinguish a folk community, are analysed in the ensuing sessions in order to acquire a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the realm of Mappila folk culture.

Mappila Religion

Miller opines that the Mappilas rely on their Kerala heritage for their day-to-day mundane life, and simultaneously they draw from their Islamic heritage for matters of their faith, religious ethos, and many customs (Miller, *Mappila Muslim Culture* 5). Rather than this distinct division, the actual Mappila culture and religion

is an interpenetration of both, as they amalgamated their rural cultural vestiges with the newly embraced religious beliefs and rites, and it is visible in various aspects of their existence. They established a distinct cultural and religious identity, blending both Islamic traditions and the local, native customs since, the preponderance of Mappila community were converts from the lower strata of social hierarchy who tilted soil and occupied in hard labour, rather than the Arabs who came and settled here, they carried their caste and class customs and characters into their reformed religious atmosphere, entwining it with the fabric of Islam. John C. Messenger, analysing folk religions, delineates that, in cultures where "monotheistic religions are dominant now, their followers cling to rituals and beliefs of religions that have been replaced and of those practiced at earlier stages in their own histories" (221). Therefore, Islamic traditions were, in reality, overlaid on local practices, resulting in a syncretic cultural and religious expression. As a result, the religion practiced by the community, different from the global Islamic practices, becomes a form of folk religion, abundant with the residues of the customs and practices of their old religion, and it falls outside the doctrine of organised mainstream Islam.

One prominent area where it is easy to investigate the incursion of old customs of the converts into the folds of the monotheistic religion is in their devotional recitation of eulogistic songs dedicated to various venerated Sufi Saints, to attain certain fulfilments (discussed in coming sessions), and other commemorative celebrations and ritualistic performances, as they took those old conventions of their previous belief system as it is and supplanted their primitive beliefs and rituals with the aspects of Islamic faith derived from the folk

interpretations of the Islamic doctrines. Their former deities were substituted with Allah, Prophets, and other Islamic historical figures and Sufi saints, thus birthing Mappila folk religion, an integral part of their distinguished culture.

Celebrations and Festivals

There are some days periodically set aside for celebrating moments of special significance to the community. "These recurring moments of special significance, with the celebrations that fill them, are called festivals" (Smith 159). Akin to the entire Muslim communities around the globe, Mappilas celebrate the two canonical festivals of Muslims- Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. They fast during the holy month of Ramadan and celebrate Eid al-Fitr on the first three days of Shawwal, indicating the end of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, is celebrated to commemorate the willingness of the Islamic prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismail according to the command of God. A key ritual during this festival is the sacrifice of an animal, usually a sheep, goat, or other cattle, and the meat is distributed among family, friends, and those in need, accentuating on the values like community, charity, gratitude, and compassion for others.

In Mappila households, during both these celebrations, families get together and rejoice with flavourful appetisers and rice dishes, especially aromatic biriyani cooked with meat and a variety of spices, with a signature recipe of the people. An interesting observation that highlights the religious harmony of the people of Kerala is that the friends, neighbours, colleagues, and acquaintances belonging to other religious groups are invited to the Mappila household for a feast during these celebrations. This trend is reversed during other festivals like Onam, which is

mainly celebrated by the Hindu population of Kerala. This gesture indicates that the people of Kerala, both the Mappilas and Hindus, have cast the old venom of religious intolerance injected by the colonial oppressors into oblivion.

Apart from these, there is another prominent celebration among the Mappilas, which is still debated on as to establish whether it is Islamic or not, is the celebration of *Mawlid al-Nabi* (the birthday of Prophet Muhammed) during the month of Rabi al-Awwal, a significant month for Muslims in which the Prophet Muhammed was born. Many communities around the world either reject this celebration, claiming it is un-Islamic, or celebrate the day with ways and customs which are regionally specific. Mappilas observe this day by reciting various *Mawlids* - eulogies of the Prophet that recount the historic tales from his life and his valuable teachings. On the first consecutive twelve days of this particular month, the observers of this tradition continue to recite *Mawlid*, and on the concluding day, a communal feast is organised, distributing food among the people as a religious service. Once *Madrasas* (religious teaching institutions) were established, the *Mawlid* celebrations became pompous with parades, songs, and art performances like Daff during the vibrant processions, centring these religious institutions.

In addition to these celebrations, the community cherishes as part of their religious practices, particular to the regions, folk festivities like annual *Nerchas* with rituals like *Chandana kudam*, *Pettivaravu, Kodikuth Nercha*, which resemble the temple festivities of the Hindus, as these customs were remodified to incorporate into the folds of Islamic belief, when the people of those faiths converted to Islam. Strictly following the conventions of the temple, but in place of the Hindu

devotional songs and specific chanting connected to their religion on those occasions, in the Mappila celebrations, these customs commence with recitation of the Qur'an in mosques and *Jaarams*. The venue of the festival, mosques or *Jaarams* - Sufi shrine or tomb, especially one associated with a revered saint or religious figure- would be decorated with oil lambs, and parallel to the temple patronage festivals, elephants are decorated and displayed along with the commotion of various musical instruments, fireworks and spectacular display of explosive colourful pyrotechnics (Kunji 226). People participate in these *Nercha* festivals with devotion irrespective of their religious inclinations and castes.

These folk festivals of Mappilas are mostly centred around the tombstones of holy men, *Sayyids*- Saints and martyrs, and are usually held on the anniversary of their obituary, hence came to be known as *Andunercha*. The term *Nercha* signifies the act of taking a vow to perform a good deed or make offerings in the name of God, if one's prayers are granted or wishes are fulfilled, or it can also be made unconditionally, without any wish fulfilment. This ritual has gradually taken the form of elaborate festivals persisting for numerous days and enticing flocks of devotees rushing to the revered sites of shrines of those saints, whom they devoutly invoke. Folk festivals include ceremonial acts prescribed by the rules and regulations of the organisation. The ceremonies associated with these *Nercha* festivals vary largely from place to place, though the basic observance is the presentation of the offerings, spectacularly accompanied by grand procession, various entertainments, folk performances, and parade of elephants, etc., known in local terminology as *pettivaravu*.

In addition to sanctioning a satisfaction of religious fulfilment, these folk festivals are a realisation of the collective emotions of a community, providing them an occasion to rejoice together and satisfactorily interact with each other in an ambience of acceptance and conviviality. Therefore, these festivals act as "a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals into a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance (Smith 167). These celebrations and festivals provided the Mappilas, a special occasion to rejoice in the performance of various Mappilapattu as a form of communally shared entertainment. Along with the vocalisation of songs, specific art forms are also exhibited by the members of the community during these celebratory events.

The Mappila Costume

The traditional dressing style employed by Mappilas has transformed into a spectacular costume in the current scenario, where the olden ways of attiring have retired to pave the way for more modern and sophisticated clothing. There is a gradual alteration in the way Mappilas clothed themselves, which is strikingly different from the days of the past when the Mappilas showcased their collective identity in the way they robed themselves. In the words of Don Yoder, folk costume is the "visible, outward badge of folk group identity, worn consciously to express that identity" (295).

The traditional dressing of Mappilas, both men and women, were different from their native counterparts and their religious Prometheus- the Arabs, and the unique style of clothing adopted by the community was a tool to project their

identity and cultural statement as a distinct community, which was undeniably necessitated by the prevalent social scenario then. An immediate identifier of a community is the way they robe themselves, as it identifies the person to the outside community, as well as to his own community, and being identified as a Mappila was so crucial at a time, as it earned them, who were predominantly converts from the lower castes of the Hindu religion, social respect and acceptance as individuals. Simultaneously, they did not intend to deviate from their native identity by completely adopting the ways of Arabs in order to be distinguished from the non-converts. Therefore, they formulated a unique way of dressing by carefully adopting a few sartorial elements from the foreign culture, mandated by the religious doctrines, like covering one's head, for both Mappila men and women, while significantly proclaiming their uniqueness in the costume.

Mappila men typically wore *mundu*, a piece of cloth draped around their waist reaching down just above the ankles, and a white vest or top, maybe a shirt, a belt around the waist, usually green in colour, and a turban or white Mappila scull-cap. They exhibit a noticeable distinction of style in draping the mundu, as they knot it around the waist by enclosing the two ends at both sides in a way that the flap of the mundu appears at the left-hand side. Whereas, for the non-Mappilas, the same will be present on the right-hand side. Occasionally, a talisman around the upper arm functions as an additional community identifier.

Promising the individuality in dressing, Mappila women usually wore *kaachi*- white or a coloured piece of cloth similar to the mundu, draped around their waist, with the fringes of the white kaachi mostly coloured in green, sometimes in

blue or red. As the upper garment, they wore a blouse that dangled below their waist, and it was designed with piping in contrasting colours. In addition to these, a plain or dotted scarf or shawl called *thattam,* around the head, is distinctive of Mappila women, as covering one's head is part of their religious identity, and it functions as a social marker.

However, this kind of men and women have become a nostalgia of the past, and such styling of clothes is currently costumes for Mappila art forms like Kolkkali and Oppana, respectively. Modernity and the sense of fashion it carried along erased the distinctiveness in Mappila clothing. And as time changed, the need for distinctiveness or identification as belonging to a particular group, Mappila, also drastically reduced. P.K. Muhammed Kunji observes that without visible distinction, men and women of all communities of Kerala nowadays are attiring in similar clothes. Even outfits like *Dhavani*, specifically confined to hegemonic Hindu castes, are worn by Mappila women (245). It implies the erasure of clothing particularity and flattening of visible social distinctions, at least in attire, suggesting a broader cultural give and take within Kerala's shared social fabric. In addition, such sartorial borrowing suggests a negotiated participation in a regional aesthetics.

The impact of westernisation is very much apparent in the way the modern Mappilas clothe themselves, and Kunji points out perpetual interaction with Gulf nations as one of the early reasons that promoted westernisation in attiring, even among the lowest classes of the community (245). Mappila men and women in the contemporary period are dynamically navigating the intersections of contemporary

global and pan-Indian fashion trends with the expectations of a broadly defined modern, popular, and locally rooted Islamic practice.

Mappila Malayalam and Arabi-Malayalam

The linguistic system formulated by Mappilas further reflects their unique cultural synthesis, and it exemplifies Mappila folk speech, different from the language of formal settings, permeated through schooling. There is a plethora of foreign words in the Mappila dialect they utilise on a day-to-day basis, and apart from that, there are many words particular to the Mappila community, conjured by them, different from the accepted Malayalam words. Even the basic words that indicate kinship are different from both local Malayalam usage and Arabic counterparts. It is their own, and those words indicate their divergence from the native communities and the foreign ancestors, which emphasise their uniqueness. However, those usages are considered derogatory and function in the civilised society as the indicators of Mappila backwardness and academic alienation. W. Edson Richmond differentiates between cultivated speech, "that is the speech patterns of the highly educated," and folk speeches that "develop independently of formal schooling and are characteristic of, but by no means entirely limited to, the older and relatively uneducated group" (148). However, Mappilas proudly embrace their linguistic variations in their artistic expressions, as there are numerous songs and rhymes composed in the language of the Mappilas with particular dialectal usages that assert their shared linguistic identity.

Further, Mappilas developed a unique writing style termed as *Arabi-Malayalam*- Malayalam words laced in Arabic script. It is difficult to trace the

period of origin of the script; however, there are two predominant postulations among scholars regarding its introduction. The Arabs employed the tradition of writing foreign languages using Arabic script for the means of communication and propagation of their faith. For instance, there are linguistic forms like Arabi-Tamil, Arabi-Kannada, Arabi-Sindhi, Arabi-Sinhala, and Arabi-Punjabi to reinforce that claim (Kunji 164). Therefore, the first postulation is to assume that Arabi-Malayalam, as well, originated following this common tradition of Arabs. The second postulation is that the creation of Arabi-Malayalam is not a conscious effort of the Arabs; rather, it gradually became instrumentalised among the Mappilas, who were taught Arabic letters to read the holy Quran, and to impart other religious lessons. Gradually, Mappilas employed this script for various instances of correspondence. One compelling factor that fuelled the necessity for such a transliteration is the conviction that Quranic verses and other religious exegesis should not be documented in native script, but in Arabic script alone, which was believed to be divine (Mansoorali 16-17). In addition, when they developed this transliterated script, the Malayalam alphabet and script were still in their infancy stage. The community, which could not altogether let go of their mother tongue and couldn't entirely abandon their religious affiliations, therefore, to express themselves in writings, employed Arabi-Malayalam. To incorporate native sounds, alien to the Arabic alphabet, into the Arabi-Malayalam style of writing, new symbols were invented imitating the style of Arabic script, and further, like Arabic, Arabi-Malayalam as well is written from right to left.

It is also addressed as Mappila Malayalam. Often, Mappila Malayalam is distinguished as the spoken form and Arabi-Malayalam, its script. The promulgators of Mappila Malayalam nourished this language with loan words from Arabic, Persian, Tamil, Urdu, Hindustani, Kannada, Telugu, and even from Sanskrit and authored plenty of exceptional prose and verse. Mappila Malayalam is extensively considered as a dialectic variation of Malayalam, but with a luxurious tome collection, and there are advocates for the claim that it should be considered as a language rather than a dialect.

The first discovered Mappila song, *Muhyudheenmala*, penned by Qazi Muhammed in 1607, was scripted in Arabi-Malayalam. Though Sanskrit, the tongue of the hegemonic class, was the celebrated literary language, and Malayalam with an overtone of Sanskrit was gaining momentum at that time, Mappilas deliberately employed Arabi-Malayalam to express their creative genius. There are both fiction and non-fiction work, including the translation of prominent texts like *Ashtangahrithayam,* scripted in this particular form of writing. Apart from Quranic translations, *Hadith*, other religious texts, historical texts, medicinal texts, dictionaries, and other texts on general matters, there were newspapers and magazines in circulation in Arabi-Malayalam. However, it is the versification in this script-Mappilapattu that received enhanced popularity among the populace. Arabi-Malayalam printer was established around 1850's in Nathapuram and Thirurangadi, and it was only after 1950s, due to the implementation of formal schooling and several other influences such as religious reinterpretation, the impact of modernisation, and the proliferation of technologies, that Mappila manuscripts

began to be published in Malayalam print and that disposition strongly continues till date.

Arabi-Malayalam, once an inexorable linguistic presence among Mappilas, so integral to their literary existence, a pronounced feature of Mappila culture, which nearly every Mappila grasped to read and write, has now confined its deployment in religious institutions alone, and it is only acknowledged by a few Mappila songwriters. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Arabi-Malayalam might be on the verge of extinction, as new editions of old Mappila literatures are being printed in pure-Malayalam, and novel Mappila compositions, especially Mappilapattu, except a very few, are being penned in the same format, though they preserve the dialectical peculiarities and folksiness possessed by Mappila Malayalam.

Mappila Art Forms

Unlike the sophisticated classical arts, which originated and moulded itself in the patronage of temple rituals and courtly settings, the songs and art forms of the Mappilas, on the other hand, have grassroots origins. It surfaced organically within the community, normally as a part of their respite after long hours of exhausting manual labour, as they found it alleviated their sufferings and torment. The folk tradition of Kerala is rich with songs that emerged among the toiling folks, for instance *Koithupattukal*, materialised when people harvested in the expansive paddy fields under the sun, and *Vanjipattukal* surfaced when they rowed their canoes. To ease their vocation and ward off their exhaustion, people engaged in vocalising the immediate realities of life that they felt. Mappila art forms thus materialised are intensely embedded in their humdrum lives, customs, and traditions and express

their collective identity, community cohesion, and religious observance, further exalting significant life events, historical episodes, community ceremonies, and festivities. Moreover, their art forms establish themselves as a creative expression of a marginalised community, and evidently, it is far from the aristocratic literary standards, therefore aligning it with articulations of the subaltern class. Quoting Boris Mikhalkov, who states that folk literature essentially stresses on the soundness of the body and mind of the subaltern class and it shows their intellect, ingenious and their soulful compassion, rather than their ignorance and innocence, Vallikunnu observes that in every aspect of Mappila literature we encounter the unsophisticated organic creativity of the Mappila community (*Mappila Sahithya Padanangal* 33).

1. Mappilapattu

When the Muslims of Malabar, utilising the Arabi-Malayalam script they devised, started expressing their emotions, thoughts, whims, and desires, Mappila literature emerged. Mappila literature refers to Arabi-Malayalam literature, and the poetic genre of Arabi-Malayalam literature is Mappilapattu (Kutty, “Mappilapattu: Ulpathiyum Valarchayum” 48). Although these poems are predominantly enthusiastically sung during various gatherings, rather than reading or reciting, and therefore, in humble terms, Mappilapattu or Mappila song could be appreciated as the song tradition of Mappilas.

“A song is a complex human action-music plus speech, relating performers to a larger group in a special situation by means of certain behaviour patterns, and giving rise to a common emotional experience” (Lomax 928). Though Mappila song is credited as the product of a community, it is distinct songs that are composed by

individual composers, but survive through communal reception and participation, as they readily integrate those compositions into their daily life. It has been traditionally sung in households as part of piety and ritual, as recreational and instructional in other social gatherings and as performance and entertainment at ceremonious occasions, and was passed down through generations orally. The language of composition- Arabi-Malayalam, the usages of vernacular wordings, mundane terminologies and idiomatic expressions pertaining to Mappila community, a distinctive feature of Mappila Malayalam; the rhythm, tune or mode -*Ishals*; Mappila socio-cultural and historical representations; and the stamp of Mappila folk religion set apart Mappila songs, highlighting its community label.

Another prominent feature of Mappilapattu is the unwritten guidelines followed by the Mappilapattu writers that govern the use of rhyme, repetition of sounds, or alliteration in their poetry to create rhythm and musicality in the verse. Those repetitions of sounds are categorised mainly into five types -*Kambi, Kazhuth, Valkambi, Valummel Kambi, and Chittezhuth*. *Kambi* is the repetition of the first letter. Each *mozhi* or line in a stanza (4 lines) starts with the same letter or a similar one that belongs to the category of the first one. *Kazhuth* is the repetition of the second sound or alphabet. The second sound in the first line of the stanza, or a similar sound, is repeated throughout the four lines. *Valkambi* is the repetition of the last letter or a similar sound throughout a stanza. Beginning a stanza with the last letter or a similar sound, or word which concludes the previous stanza, is termed as *Valummel Kambi.* Veteran Mappila poets exploited these poetic devices in their

compositions to render it easy for the populace to remember the song, which was usually sung in communal gatherings.

Further, highlighting the cultural and psychological significance of musical styles, Lomax observes that,

> The child begins to learn the musical style of his culture as he acquires the language and the emotional patterns of his people. This style is thus an important link between an individual and his culture, and later in life brings back to the adult unconscious the emotional texture of the world which formed his personality. Thus, from the point of view of its social function, the primary effect of music is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolises the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work-any or all of these personality-shaping experiences. As soon as the familiar sound pattern is established, he is prepared to laugh, to weep, to dance, to fight, to worship. His heart is opened. (929)

It justifies the popularity of Mappila songs within the community as these melodies are often collectively introduced to the younger generations of the past decades in tandem with religious education, language acquisition, recreational and everyday rituals. Mappila songs predetermine the emotional and cultural frameworks of the community. It is an essential connective between the individual and their culture. From sweet melodies of lullabies and celebratory Oppana songs to devotional and ritualistic *Mala* and resistant narratives, *Padappattu*, the musical idiom of the Mappilas, becomes a carrier of their collective memory and identity.

V.M. Kutty states that Mappila songs are still popular within the community. They still cherish Mappila songs close to their hearts. The songs are the lifeblood of their lives, their very breath (*Oppana Enna Vattapattu* 120).

Further, there are numerous categorical divisions or genres in *Mappilapattu*, each took form analogously with the social, historical and political milieu of Malabar.

- ***Malappattu***

Malapattu, the earliest formulated category of Mappilapattu, comprises the devotional songs penned by Mappilas in Arabi-Malayalam, and aforementioned *Muhyudheenmala*, written by Qazi Muhammed in 1607, which eulogises the Sufi saint Sheikh Muhyudheen Abdul Qadir Jilani, instigator of the Qadiri order of Sufism, belongs to this genre. *Malappattu* are typically panegyrics, which pay homage to holy personalities and martyrs in the Islamic tradition, especially Sufis, and they recount the miraculous deeds Mappilas believed to be performed by them. Holy spirits, who devoted their terrestrial life to the path of religion, addressed as '*Awliya'*, are the focus of *Malappattu*.

Allah thiruperum thudiyum swalavathum
Athinal tudanguvan arul cheythu vedambar
Aalam udayonee ekal arulale
Aaye Muhammed avarkkila aanovar
Ella kilayilum bankila aanovar
Ella disayilum keli Mikachovar
(line 1-6)

Muhyudheenmala begins with a hymn to Allah Almighty and praise to the Prophet Muhammad, typical of the genre, and recounts the marvels of Sheikh Muhyudheen Abdul Qadir Jilani indoctrinating devotion. The poet inculcates piety by presenting the glory of the Sheikh, which has disseminated far and wide in all directions. The poet articulates that he is exalted among all kinds of men.

Other writers, Nalakath Kunjimoitheen and A K Muthukoya Thangal, have penned versions of *Muhuydheenmala* and further examples of *Malapattu* or simply *Mala* include *Badr Mala, Manjakkulam Mala* written by M. Marakkar*, Rifai Mala* (1623), *Kilathi Mala, Nafeesath Mala* written by Manakkaantakath Kunjikoya Thangal in 1674*, Karamath Mala, Kodiyettamala,* etc.

The Sufi *Malas* typically follow a standard structural pattern which covers a concise description of the birth of the particular eponymous Saint, his schooling, initiation, miracles or powers (*karamat*), rivals, and death. Additionally, a brief note on the creation of the song is also provided, such as the author's name and/or the date of composition. These songs which carries a semi-formal construction, generally (but not always) tend to have one *Ishal* (tune or rhythm) that persists all through the song, and briefly summarise episodes from the lives of the Saints, often in a single couplet, which is distinctively divergent from other genres of Mappila songs, as they usually employ several tune changes and devise lengthy, sumptuously illustrated scenes (Sutton 151). Generally, these songs are composed in two parts. It commences with a traditional invocation to God, his Prophet, Muhammed, and his family, and the first part is dedicated to the eulogy of the holy individual epitomised in the song and the second part, or the concluding portion is titled as *iravu*, or

"begging," in which the author pleads to the creator to show compassion to the composer and pardon the mistakes he made in the composition of the particular work. In some *Malapattu,* there are two separate *iravu* sections- *onnam iravu* and *randam iravu* (first and second begging). The nucleus of *iravu* is the solicitation to God mediated through the Holy Spirit, who is embodied in that particular song (Vallikunnu & Tharamel 39). Occasionally, a *dua* or prayer to the *Tariqa*, or Sufi branch, with which the personage is affiliated, is appended towards the close of the *Malapattu*.

Further, the Bhakti Movement, which dominated the North Indian literary scenario, pioneered its prominence in Kerala during the 16th and 17th centuries A. D., and it was devised by formulating minor variations in theme and style of the literature during the Aryan invasion. Apparently, it established a genre, beyond the boundaries of hegemonic religious and cultural realisations, which expressed the forms and materialisations of the various facets of devotion harboured by the oppressed class. It is at this point of literary history that the first *Malapattu* of Mappila literature materialises, contributory to the whole of the literati of the Bakti Movement in Kerala. However, though *Muhyudheenmala* meets the thematic and stylistic requirements to be appreciated as part of the grand narrative literary form, Bhakti Movement, it is marginalised along with the companionship of other literary texts that were rooted in Buddhist-Jainist beliefs and other corpus of works that were essentially alienated by elitism.

A remarkable voice of the Bhakti Movement in the literary records of South India, Thunchathu Ezhuthachan, acclaimed as the father of modern Malayalam,

penned numerous devotional poems comprising recounting of grand Hindu religious epics. A parallel style is perceptible in *Muhyudheenmala* and subsequent other *Malas*, for which the aforementioned song operated as a template. The emotional tone prevalent in *Muhyudheenmala* echoes that of Ezhuthachan's. Despite, as Dr. Umar Tharamel accurately points out, even though "Khali Muhammed's *Muhayudheen Mala*, written before Ezhuthachan's *Adhyatmaramayanam*, and considered to be the first one discovered in Mappilah literature, is a work in which the devotional tone is prominent, it does not figure among the great works of the Bhakti Movement" (Tharamel, "Politics of Exclusion" 85-86).

Mala songs could be accounted as a prominent narrative site to investigate the influence of Sufism in the diffusion of Islam and the reverence shown by the community towards these holy Saints. Plenty of *Mala* songs are dedicated to various flag bearers of Sufism, which the indigenes consider miraculous and rewarding in recitation. *Rifai Mala* sings about the life and miracles of Ahmad-al Kabir Rifai, who is the nephew of Abdul Qadir and the eponymous founder of the Rifai order of Sufism. *Nafeesath Mala*, based on the life of Nafeesa, a Sufi woman who lived in Egypt in the eighth century, is widely renowned among women. *Manjakkulam Mala* praises the Sufi Sheikh Husain Madani, also known as Husainar Thangal or Manjakulam Awliya, who lived in the eighteenth century at Manjakkulam in Palakkad. *Shaduli Mala*, which centres around the life of Abu Hasan al Shadili (1258), *Shahul-Hamid Mala* on Shahul Hamid of Nagur, the *Farid Mala* on Fariduddin Awliya of Kanjiramattam near Ernakulam, and *Ajmir Mala* on Sheikh

Mu'inuddin Chisti of Ajmir (1236) are other prominent *Mala* songs endeared by the community.

In the initial phases of the Mappila community, the people devotionally recited *Malapattu* at their homes in the hope of acquiring godly rewards and blessings. It has also been customarily sung in other ritualistic contexts, festivals, religious gatherings, and predominantly as a part of domestic rites. These hagiographic texts, recognised as divine to recite and listen to, were trusted to bring about a sacred aura in the households of the commoners. Mappilas believed that the recitation of these particular *Malas* has specific effects, and the lines of the *Malas* themselves suggest the way to recite them to efficiently extract the benefits mentioned in the song. Recitation of *Muhyudheenmala* is supposed to protect from all forms of calamities. In *Rifai Mala,* the poet describes the reward for those who recite the *Mala* and the punishment for those who abandon it, and it is chanted as a cure for burns and venomous snake bites. Besides, it was sung in every household in the early hours of the night and particularly on selected days. There was an established similar custom in the Hindu households of Kerala to routinely recite *Adhyatmaramayana,* written by Thunchathu Ezhuthachan, and *Krishnagadha* by Cherusseri. Likewise, Muslim households adopted the custom of recitation of *Muhyudheenmala* and other sacred *Malapattus* (Vallikunnu & Tharamel 39). The womenfolk of the community usually vocalise the *Muhyudheenmala* after *maghrib* (sunset prayer) for the security and welfare of the domestic spaces. *Nafeesath Mala* is prescribed for women to recite at the time of child delivery to ease her labour, and Muslim families appointed someone to recite *Nafeesath Mala* along with a midwife

when labour pain commences. They believed in the simultaneous finishing of the recitation of this particular *Mala* song and the first cry of the newborn.

Moreover, another significant usage of *Malapattu* is its utility as a means of imparting education. Regarding *Nafeesath Mala*, Balakrishnan Vallikunnu and Umar Tharamel observe that, at a time when secular and even religious education was not prominent among the Muslims of Kerala, this particular song was composed with the aim to spread social and moral lessons among the Mappilas (32). Further, *Mala* songs were a vital part of the conventional schooling of the community until the 20th century. Students were taught to memorise and recite the *Malas* along with the Quran in their elementary religious institutes-*madrasas*. In the olden days, the matrimonial conventions necessitated the prospective bride to memorise the Quran and the *Muhyudheenmala*, as part of her religious education, to be eligible for marrying the prospective groom. It evidently implies the significance provided to the song for the well-being of the household in general and women in particular. Moreover, it was considered rewarding to compose, sing, replicate, learn by heart, or simply listen to the recitation of *Malas*. Apparently, these songs were much revered by Mappilas to a degree almost equivalent to the Islamic religious text, the Quran. Though it falls out of the purview of the Islamic doctrine, it was widespread and part and parcel of the regional peculiarity of Islam practised within Mappila culture. This reverence bestowed upon these *Malapattus* and their trusted outcomes, Mappilas believed to manifest in specific situations, exemplifies the incursion of native primitive customs into the folds of religion.

However, the religious reformation endeavours that arose around the early twentieth century conflicted with the customs followed by Mappilas so far, as these new waves of reformation perceived the traditional practices surrounding *Malappattu* blasphemous. Nevertheless, it couldn't entirely uproot the deeply entrenched impression of *Mala* from the collective social psyche of Mappilas; therefore, retaining the title *Mala*, novel experimental compositions emerged, shedding the old shackles, and providing it a modern vestige. For instance, there are *Parishkaramala*, *Duracharamala*, *Vellappokkamala*, *Kathukuthumala*, etc. In the lineage of such experimental compositions is the *Vaikom Muhammed Basheer Malakal,* penned by M.N. Karasseri and V.M. Kutti (Vallikunnu &Tharamel 40)

- ***Padapattu***

Padapattu, in simpler terms, Mappila war-song is the most popular and prosperous genre in Arabi-Malayalam literature. With the advent of the Portuguese and later during the colonial regime of the British in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, for Mappila Muslims of Malabar, it proved to be a period of social and political turbulence that disturbed and redefined every aspect of their existence. Therefore, it is at this particular juncture that Mappila literature remodified itself, leaving behind the devotional overtones, to step into the cast of vigorous and ferocious war-songs that energised Mappilas to duel various forms of oppression.

The Arabic *Anvaaul Baswr va Akhbarul Badr,* written by Kaipatta Muhyidheen Moulavi in 1832, is widely considered as the precursor of later Arabi-Malayalam *Padapattus*. However, *Sukhum Padapattu,* written in 1836 by Alim Umar Labba, is regarded as the pioneer *Padapattu* composition in Arabi-Malayalam,

which is the translation of the Arabi-Tamil work named *Sukoon Padaipor*. Later, *Fathhul Buswara* or *Mu'thad Padapattu,* written by Vallaanchira Moideenkutty, and *Thabook Padapattu,* penned by Chulliyan Mammadkutty, gained wide prominence, and these set the stage for the later immensely admired masterpieces of Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar (1852-1891). During 1880, the pinnacle of colonial oppression, aristocratic persecution, and consequent agrarian destitution, which resulted in numerous Mappila uprisings, witnessed the booming of the composition of *Padapattu*.

The war songs of Mappilas could be categorised into four types. The first category is identified as songs that are composed on the descent of the folk Islamic traditions, which don't really incorporate the Islamic or native history. The accounts might be modelled on Islamic annals or completely fictional in character. For instance, *Sukhum Padapattu*, *Saleekhath Padapattu*, *Salaseel Padapattu,* and *Jinn Pada* belong to this categorisation. The second category is based on the instances of resistance or prominent wars of Islamic History. *Badr Pada*, *Uhud Pada*, *Futhuhusham, Makkamfathuh, Khandakhpada, Kaibar Pada, Hunain Pada, and Karbala Pada* fall into this categorical division. The third division sings about the encounters of Muslims of Kerala against the landed gentry and colonial oppressors. *Cheroor Padapattu, Mannarkkad Padapattu, Manjeri Padapattu, and Malappuram Padapattu* are fine examples of this classification. The fourth one is merely a fictitious one like *Elipada* of Vaidyar, which recounts the battle fought between rats and cats that lasted for three days. Whatever the category, whether fictitious or historic in its composition, *Padapattu* essentially revolves around the racket and

frenzy associated with the brawl between two opposing parties and veraciously celebrates the heroic feats of the war heroes during the combat (Vallikunnu &Tharamel 58).

These *Padapattus*, especially those composed around the local outrages of Mappilas against varied forms of oppression, bore a tremendous influence on their further fight against subjugation and struggle for independence, and they also chronicle their version of history. William Logan has an interesting observation on *Padapattu* that is composed around the local incidents of Mappilas. He acknowledges that the “common people [Mappilas] still compose ballads in memory of passing events, and one of the most remarkable relates the circumstances attending one of the Mappilla outrages [Cheroor revolt], and recalls with graphic power and a great deal of exaggeration of course, the chief incidents that occurred” (101).

Much prominent among *Padapattus* is Moyinkutty Vaidyar’s *Malappuram Padapattu,* written in 1883. This song, which also recounts the tale of the Chera monarch and his conversion, is the explicit chronicling of the resistance of Mappilas and other socially disadvantaged castes against the privileged classes and the British who sponsor these aristocrats. This song was also a huge inspiration for the revolutionaries of the 1921 Mappila rebellion, as the pages of this song were secured from the hands of the Martyrs of the revolt. Various rewards that await those who die fighting for the greater good, as iterated in Islamic teachings, are recounted in the song, and it motivated the community to fight against oppression, rather than endure or ignore it. The song presents statement from the *Hadith* that the spirits of

the martyrs would be transformed by Allah, into green hued birds and for them chandeliers would be hung from the throne of the Almighty, to return to, symbolising their eternal peace and reward.

In 1763, the hostility between Para Nambi, a local landlord, and Ali Marakkar, who collected taxes on behalf of the British authority, fledged into a conflict when Para Nambi conspired to assassinate Ali Marakkar over a futile issue. Para Nambi, who felt humiliated, conspired against the Mappilas to demolish their mosque to compensate for his embarrassment. This impaired the harmony between the Muslims and Para Nambi, and the British authorities, along with some local Nair feudal lords, tried to take advantage of this hostile circumstance. This intensified the dispute and turned it into a full-fledged revolt. Historical records indicate that more than forty Mappilas and a lower caste Hindu, from the caste of goldsmiths that allied with Mappilas, embraced martyrdom in the revolt. *Malappuram Padapattu* vehemently vocalises this historical episode, which is much integral to Mappila history, and it is also commemorated through an annual ritual, Malappuram *Nercha*, conducted in Malabar, to venerate this rebellion and its martyrs.

The appeal of *Malappuram Padapattu* stretches beyond its mere representation of disregarded local historical events during the colonial era. It not only authenticates the struggles against colonial rule by Mappilas but also accentuates the imperative necessity to overthrow the British Empire and its divisive policies that shatter the unity of the nation. Colonial powers methodically planted discord between Muslims and Hindus, portraying Hindus as ‘the other’ in relation to the Mappila community, while simultaneously depicting Mappilas as religious

extremists. *Malappuram Padapattu* challenges and counters these colonial stereotypes by portraying the Mappila community as rational and respectful of social diversity. In the song, the sensible Mappilas advise Para Nambi not to incite violence against a whole community for his resentment against a fellow, and through the characters of Arumukan and Mukunthan, who counsel Hindus against unreasoning rebellion, the narrative underlines the potential for Hindu-Muslim harmony and unity against oppressive colonial forces. It reveals the British-Nambi partnership as anti-national and renders the protestors as champions of communal harmony.

Furthermore, *Malappuram Padapattu* is also a symbol of resistance at times of physical violence and suppression of religious expression and practices. Mappilas resisted when Para Nambi threatened to destroy their place of worship and persecute their community. The verses also express the Mappilas' willingness to surrender their land and possessions to protect their mosque, hence framing their rebellion as an act of defence, for religious freedom.

Furthermore, this song chronicles the struggle against agrarian exploitation by feudal lords, particularly Nair landlords who are supported by the British authorities, which culminated in the oppression of the peasant class. It emphasises how this conflict evolved into a class struggle, more than a communal riot, with lower-caste Hindu peasants aligned with their Mappila counterparts against the oppressive gentry. The death of the goldsmith along with 44 Mappilas in their struggle and the veneration of that fellow Hindu martyr through the ritual of carrying the chest of the goldsmith during the annual Malappuram *Nercha*

emphatically establishes the concord of the peasant class in the face of repression, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

Similarly, *Cheroor Padapattu*, co-authored by Muhammad Kutty and Muhayudheen Kutty, in 1841[1], recounts the tale of the Mappila encounter with the British regime at Cheroor in Malappuram district. Under the leadership of Mamburam Sayyidalavi Thangal Mappilas revolted against the British, assassinating twenty British soldiers. Seven Mappila militants attained martyrdom in the struggle. The manuscripts of *Cheroor Padapattu*, which vocalises this incident, were confiscated by the British officials, who recognised the potency of the song, while it was being printed at a press.

The *Cheroor Padapattu* illuminates the historical moment of the Cheroor revolt, for which additional historical sources are scarce. It pays homage to the seven dauntless Mappila youths who revolted against local feudal lords and the British, who served the whims of these landlords. The oppressed masses assassinated the *Jenmi* Kapratu Krishnapanikkar, the local representative of the British regime. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned by the British military dispatch, which consisted of sixty-four well-equipped soldiers, the seven Mappilas valiantly resisted. William Logan, in his *Malabar Manual*, reports the incident from the prejudiced perspective of a colonial officer, stamping the Mappilas as 'fanatics' and rendering them as barbaric for defending their rights and honour. Logan reports that the consequence was that "1 subbadar and 3 sepoys were killed, Captain Leader and 5 sepoys were wounded, the former in the neck and stomach, and, besides these

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1 The year of composition is given in some other sources as 1845.

casualties to the regular troops, 7 peons were wounded (3 of them severely). The fanatics, seven in number, were killed by the taluk peons and villagers" (560). He precisely enumerates the casualty statistics on the part of the British troops during the conflict, and also fabricates the arrival of taluk peons and villagers into the scene, who slay the seven Mappilas. Balakrishnan Vallikunnu, in his work *Mappila Sahitya Padanangal,* states that the seven Mappilas were actually assassinated by Taluk Sepoys and Amsam employees, challenging the narrative perspective offered by colonial authorities (121). In Logan's account of the history, the death of the Mappilas becomes a desired ending, as the anti-heroes deserve death because of the damage they inflicted upon the general public and their saviour British military, and it was rightfully carried out by the taluk peons and the villagers.

Vallikunnu observes that it's rather straightforward to recognise that asserting the Mappilas were murdered by local inhabitants, not by British forces, lends a certain legitimacy to the rebellion in the eyes of the public. This narrative creates a stark divide where the British government and its military are perceived to be aligned with the populace, while the Mappila insurgents are portrayed as being in opposition to the people. Therefore, the British entry into the field transpires as a catalytic governmental intervention to ensure the victory of the virtuous people. Disseminating this strategic logic into the milieu of societal jurisprudence, Cheroor revolt translates as the perfect success model of the governmental implementation of their noble and ethical obligation and the unmitigated subduing of destabilising forces that erupt within the society, which in this case stems from religious fanaticism. The aforementioned rebels perceive it as essential for their sustenance,

but the British convert it into a fundamental threat that should be wiped out (Vallikunnu, *Mappila Sahithya Padanangal* 122).

In this light, obviously *Cheroor Padappattu* serves as a counter-narrative to the colonial historical accounts on the Cheroor revolt, casting light on the factual causes of the revolt, exposing imperialist misconceptions. It grants insight into Mappila consciousness and also serves as a reliable source of history due to its timely composition. The poets distinctly depict the ghastly outcomes of the Cheroor revolt from the perspective of the oppressed, documenting a history of resistance against organised political oppression. In the eyes of the British, the seven valiant Mappila youths are agitators, but the poets, through *Cheroor Padapattu,* command, all "Mussulmen should remember these martyrs and should hold them in veneration" (translation of *Cheroor Padapattu* provided in *Malabar Manual*) (Logan 103)

- ***Kissapattu***

The title '*Kissa'* is the Mappila linguistic variant of the Arabic word '*Qissa'*, which denotes fables or tales, and the category of *Kissapattu* essentially narrates a tale or an incident. Hence, *Kissapattu* qualifies as the narrative poetry of Arabi-Malayalam literature, which may carry an anecdote, fable, or parable. It could be categorised into four distinctive types according to the thematic content.

The first division of *Kissapattu* is constructed on the stories of the prophets named in the holy Quran. There are numerous allegories in the Quran, usually fragmented, recounted in various chapters to establish the intellectual logic in a

passage. However, these stories are not coherently narrated and are without plot or embellishments. When these stories get rearranged from the realm of intellectual philosophy to the emotional level of humanity, it is essential to narrate the stories uninterruptedly. Further, to relate the interdependency of the details, to argue for its cause and effect, these fragmented stories are retold with hues of figurative and imaginative language. It is this restructuring that is evident in the first category of *Kissapattu*. *Ibrahimnabi Kissa*, *Ibrahim Thakhath Kissa*, *Isanabi Kissa*, *Kissathu Sulaiman ibn Davood*, *Mariyambi Kissa,* etc., belong to this categorical division. It is related to the Islamic philosophy as the story is taken from the Qur'an; however, the *Kissapattu* chiefly exhibits the imaginative faculty and creativity of the author.

The next types of songs are modelled on the stories of historical figures who were associated with the social advancement of the Islamic religion. *Ahmadul Kabir Rifai Kissa*, *Abdu Rahmanu ibn Awf Kissa, Ibrahim ibn Adham Kissa, Malik ibn Dinar Kissa,* and so on are examples of this second category of songs. Though these stories are not adapted from the Qur'an, it is provided with a religious aura as these personages are highly revered by the Muslim world.

Tertiary classification encompasses narratives detailing the historical conflicts between the followers of the Prophet and their rivalries. While the principal theme revolves around warfare, these accounts diverge from *Padapattu* in terms of presentation style. *Salaseel Kissa* and *Mundirub Navaain Kissa* are prominent examples belonging to this thematic category.

The fourth classification within *Kissapattu* comprises narratives that are fictitious yet crafted to exhibit semblance to Islamic motifs and themes. These narratives often draw upon elements of Islamic theology to infuse the stories with an

aura of religious significance, and authors adeptly blend imaginative storytelling with their cultural elements. *Thajul Umar Kissa, Thameemudhaari Kissa, Khamarsamaan Kissa, Kissathunnurjahan, Kissathu Barsakhiyan,* etc. are instances of this category (Vallikunnu & Tharamel 105).

The reiteration of Islamic stories through this category of songs imparts religious knowledge and erudition to the community. These songs not only narrate noteworthy events and figures from the Qur'an and Islamic history but also imbue local stories with an Islamic aura, effectively blending regional experiences with religious identity.

- **Philosophical songs**

There are numerous philosophical compositions in Mappilappattu, and the finest of them was composed by the eighteenth-century Mappila poet, Kunjayin Musliyar, exemplified in his *Kappappattu*. The tales featuring Kunjayin Muslyar and Mangattachan are legendary folk ballads in Kerala. In the allegorical poem, *Kappappattu* or *Kappal Pattu* (Ship Song), the human body is compared to a ship, and the terrestrial existence is presented as the vast ocean. The poet provides precautionary instructions to the navigator for the smooth sailing of the vessel before it leaves the shore. The poet says that,

Naalund kallar uruvuchusalum

Nanaathe naalum ath nallepaakam

Maalum thadiicha lokar immunnum

Mal'oon athenna Azazilumonn

(line 195-198)

The ship has to navigate by dodging four kinds of metaphorical thieves, which represent the momentary worldly pleasures. The first three are worldly wealth, corporeal desires, people, and the last one, the cursed devil, Azazil. The song earned immense popularity among the Mappilas, that even all the latter composed Arabi Malayalam poetry began to be known as *Safina Pattukal* or *Sabeena Pattukal*, as the Arabic word *Safina* denotes ship.

In the lines,

> *Kandittarivano kannille potta*
>
> *Karunor chonna chol kettille potta*
>
> *Pandullor chollil pathirundo potta*
>
> *Pai thanna palinu kaippundo potta*
>
> (line 336-339)

Philosophical statements are conveyed through satire. The poet divulges that human beings are fools, asking that don't they possess eyes to perceive things properly, and don't they listen to the sensible sayings of the elders. There is no adulteration in the sayings of the elderly like the milk of a cow, which is never bitter. There is another philosophical poem by the same author, *Noolmadh*, eulogising the Prophet, Muhammad, which presents a devotional tone like *Mala* songs, but the poet does not desire any earthly wish fulfilment, mediated through a holy personage. It differs from *Mala* in structural aspects as it doesn't present the concluding portion, *iravu*, particular to *Mala*.

Another prominent example is *Safalamala,* composed by Sujai Moithu Muslyar, which delineates the Prophetic wisdom from the first prophet, Adam, to the last, Muhammad. In the poem, rather than championing spirituality, the poet demands that the readers conduct a life anchored in moral principles and virtue. Vallikunnu and Tharamel observe that there is no aura of devotion like *Mala* songs in these philosophical songs. And it is not escorted by any religious ritualistic observances. Yet there is a spiritual quest that manifests within the philosophical nature of these songs (208).

- **Romantic compositions**

Romantic elements crept into the Mappila literary tradition in the latter half of the 19th century. Romanticism was a significant cultural and literary shift that emphasised emotion, nature, individualism, and imagination, and had a fascination with heroism and supernatural elements. In Arabi-Malayalam Literature, it was deputed due to the pulsation of the emotional liberty of the Mappila youths. *Soubagyasundari* (1868), authored by Chettuvai Pareekutty, and *Husn-al Jamal Badr-al Muneer* (1872), penned by Moyinkutty Vaidyar, are early compositions that confirm the traces of romanticism, which reject the traditional ways of *Mappilapattu* at two levels. Primarily, it discovers novel standards and techniques in thematic expressions, and secondly, it employs a new approach in poetic demonstration and renewed linguistic articulations. From its initial stages, in the 17th century to the mid-18th century, Mappila literature was strikingly pregnant with devotional premises, moral and ethical counsels, and Mappila poets were the paragons of moral advocates and ethical justice. The sole objective of their composition was to teach

and educate the community. From this unilateral purpose of schooling, through these novel compositions, *Mappilapattu* was exposed to a new realm of expression, which articulated the multi-faceted display of human emotions.

This genre explored the depiction of various levels of configurations and patterns of human sensations, especially love, desire, misery, and melancholy within the tag of *Mappilapattu*. It shattered the shackles of stringent clerical constraints on Mappila poets, which explicitly prohibited them from delving into the complexities of human passion, desire, and amorous affection. By marring this censorship, which controlled the moral narrative and preserved the cultural and ethical standards of the time, Mappila poets exposed the intricacies of fundamental human experiences in their writing. The dissent of Mappila religious leaders towards this new form of expression is evidenced in their explicit disapproval of *Husn al-Jamal Badr al Munir* when Vaidyar composed this romantic poem. However, to appease them, Vaidyar subsequently composed *Badr* and *Uhd* war-songs, which relate the racket of these two prominent Islamic wars (Vallikunnu & Tharamel 124). Therefore, it took another half a century for this genre to be cherished by the religious heads.

Husn-al Jamal Bar al-Munir, composed by Moyinkutty Vaidyar at the age of 20, recites the valiant story of the star-crossed lovers Husn al Jamal, the daughter of the king Mahaseen of Asmeer, and Badr-al Muneer, the son of Masmeer, the minister of the King’s court, who by birth and ranking could not be united. The poem was composed based on a Persian novel penned by Khwaja Moinuddin Shah Shirazi. The central plot of the poem recounts the romantic and adventurous saga of Husn al-Jamal, a princess of exceptional beauty, and Badr al-Munir, a noble young

man. Their narrative is one of love, parting, quest for each other, and eventual reunification, capturing themes of commitment, heroism, and the hardships of true love, and it encapsulates their deep emotional connection. In their journey to commune, they encounter challenges and obstacles of diverse nature that test the lovers' commitment to each other and showcase their valour. Their trials arrive in the form of battles, natural calamities, and conspiracies that seek to keep them apart.

One of the ultimate identifying factors of romanticism, its focus on emotion and the individual's subjective experience, is pretty much perceptible in *Husn al-Jamal Badr al-Munir*. The passionate excitements of love, yearning, and dejection steer the plot. Their story is suffused with profound emotional currents that surpass the sheer physical fascination, delving into the deep spiritual and emotional bond between the protagonists. Their adoration is portrayed as an all-consuming force, forging their destinies and driving their actions.

- ***Kathupattu***

Kathupattu, or the epistolary songs of Mappilas, which are enormously popular, is the category of songs that are composed in the form of letters, which might be addressed to a particular person, whether to describe an incident or as a love proposal or confession, or simply to correspond between mates. Though the matter encapsulated in the song may vary, the structure and form of these songs remain intact. The origin of these songs remains a mystery, yet this genre was in prevalence in the late eighteenth century, evidenced in the splendid compositions of Vaidyar and his contemporaries. Notable among these are the correspondence between lovers and spouses, especially spouses who are separated by circumstances.

One of the well-liked and early *Kathupattu* is penned by Pulikottil Hyder (1879-1975), the bard of Ernad, titled as *Mariyakuttide Kathupattu* (*An Epistolary Song by Mariyakutty*) in 1924. It is a perfect example that demonstrates the technique of *Kathupattu* composition. Hassan Kutty, imprisoned behind the bars of Bellari jail after the Mappila rebellion of 1921, resolves to divorce his wife Mariyakutti, as he received an anonymous letter expressing his wife as unfaithful to her husband. The infuriated husband writes a letter to his mother-in-law, depicting his intentions to separate from his wife based on these allegations against her. To compose a reply to this letter, Mariyakutty approaches the poet, Pulikottil Hyder, as her husband is an admirer of Mappilas songs, to compose a *Kathupattu* to express and vindicate herself, invalidating the claims of the previous anonymous letter. The poet proficiently portrays Mariyakutty's internal turmoil, and ardently fulfils her stipulations in this song, thus impelling him to withdraw the issue of divorce. The *Kathupattu* clarifies that a fellow from Urakam has been seeking to pursue Mariyakutty, but she resisted his advances by thrashing him with a broom. Her reluctance and resistance might have provoked him to spread such a scandal about Mariyakutty.

Yet another extremely appreciated *Kathupattu*, widely popular among the Gulf diaspora, is the *Dubai-Kathu,* written by SA Jameel. His *Dubai Kathupattu* quickly reached the top charts in Kerala in the 1970s. The Gulf migration of Malayalees, especially Mappilas in search of economic prospects, rifted the domestic space, tearing apart the husband and wife. The male provider of the house typically migrated abroad, leaving behind his wife and kids, and it was through

letters that the separated spouses shared their lives. They poured their emotions and longing onto papers, and it was brilliantly portrayed by SA Jameel in his *Dhabi Kathu* and *Marupadi Kathu*. These particular songs vocalise the anxiety that erupted between two souls in a long-distance marital relationship. The poem portrays a journey of emotional highs and lows, where the speaker experiences a range of feelings, from sweetness and nostalgia to pain and heartbreak.

Kathupattu exemplifies the day-to-day exploitation of Mappila songs. Regular exchanges are conveyed through poetically crafted letters, reflecting the deep-seated affinity for poetic communication espoused by the community that privileges aesthetic expression and emotional depth, even in mundane or personal exchanges. Such exchanges set to song are an indication of a community where oral tradition and poetic form are integral to both individual emotion and collective identity.

- ***Sarkkeett Paattu***

These songs exemplify travelogues of Mappila literature. The travelogue genre has acquired a position in the realm of Mappilapattu even before it was rooted in Malayalam literature (Vallikunnu & Tharamel 196). The Mappila poets tactically transformed any reality that was seen, heard, or experienced into poetry. More than discerning the details of the locations and sights of the journey, these songs are produced from the thrilling emotional experiences felt by the author. They found joy in sharing these exciting, emotive encounters with fellow Mappilas, and this aspect of disclosure among the community gave rise to the genre of travelogue songs. *Sreerangam Yathra* by Allu Sahib, *Kolar Yathra* by K Mammadkutty, *Bhadravathi*

Sarkeett Mala by Ottakath Aattakkoya Thangal, *Hajj Yathra* by P T Beerankutty Moulavi, *Kolar Yathra* and *Shoranur Yathra* by Pulikkottil Hyder are prominent songs in this genre.

- ***Kalyanapattu***

Songs are an irresistible part of Mappila marriage ceremonies, which are inspired by the Arabic tradition that sanctions songs and revelry during the occasion of matrimonial union, and *Kalyanapattu* can be categorised as various songs that are associated with the ceremonies during marriage. *Mylanchipattukal, Oppanapattukal, Vettilapattukal, Ammayipattukal, Palaharapattukal, Panthalpattukal* (describing the pavilion), etc., belong to this category. In earlier days, marriage was a colossal, ceremonious celebration that may have lasted for several days, and the festivities were conducted in the night hours. The function typically starts the night before the wedding. If the occasion is at the bride's home, then it is termed as *Mylanchiravu,* and the groom's is *Vettilakettu*, and there are separate songs to sing during these distinct events. Further, in the usual earlier Mappila marriage setting, a party from the bride's side departs to escort the groom to the bride's home, and similarly, a troupe from the party of groom is also dispatched to convey the bride. The bride is also typically escorted to the groom's household accompanied by a party of her friends and relatives. These matrimonial processions are characterised by the melodious vocalisations of Mappila songs that sing the praises of marital bliss. There are also songs termed as *Panthal Pattukal,* which describe the magnanimity of the erected pavilion, which is an integral part of weddings.

The range and depth of *Mappilapattu* and the myriad themes and the versatility of Mappila life it encapsulates are evident from these categorisations. These categorisations are apparently not watertight compartments; rather, they are fluid and overlapping, as numerous songs may resemble the attributes of other categorisations. Moreover, a significant peculiarity of Mappilapattu is that it readily adapted to the diverse media forms that arose from global technological changes and other momentous cultural platforms, securing its survival. It contemporaneously evolved along with the advent of radio, cinema, television, cassette recordings and new social media platforms and DJs, and adjusted itself to suit the stages of theatre, *Ganamela*, political platforms, youth festivals, and reality shows.

Distinguished Mappilapattu Composers from Other Communities

Mappila songs captured the attention and entertained the populace, nudging numerous poets from other communities to compose their verses in the mould of Mappila song. Further, the period after the 1940s was a time when Mappila literature, shedding the old tradition of scripting in Arabi-Malayalam, resorted to Malayalam script due to the prevalence of schools and educational institutions that administered the language learning and writing. Therefore, the dwindled obstinacy regarding the employment of Arabi-Malayalam in the composition of Mappila songs assisted various poets, illiterate in Arabi-Malayalam, to compose Mappila songs, pursuing the template of great Mappila writers like Vaidyar.

One of the significant Mappila song compositions by a non-Muslim is the song *Annirupathonnil Nammalimmalayalathil* (1944), which demands the demolition of the statue of Hitchcock, the director of the Mappila rebellion of 1921,

established at Valluvamburam, in Malappuram district, penned by the poet Kambalath Govinthan Nair, which received widespread appreciation both during and after the period of independence struggle. It is composed in the popular Mappilapattu *Ishal* '*Thamarapoonkavanathil'*. Another promising poet who composed Mappila songs was Prof. Krishnakumar, who explored the various *Ishals* of Mappilapattu and published the anthology *Suruma*. The eminent Malayalam poet Edasseri Govindan Nair has also composed a Mappila song titled *Muhammed Abdurahiman*.

Yet another prominent figure, who composed numerous Mappila songs, is P. Bhaskaran. The Mappila song, which he composed on the agrarian rebellion of 1921 and its martyrs, was confiscated by the British government, and an arrest warrant was issued for the poet, as it inspired the people to fight for their freedom. Even after the confiscation, the copy of the song was discreetly circulated among the people, and it was also transferred orally from person to person. In 1950, a Mappila song composed by Bhaskaran was sung by Kochin Abdul Khader for the HMV gramophone record, which recounts the travelogue of the locomotive journey from Shoranur to Calicut. The song, penned employing the local vernacular, was composed in the *Ishal*, *Oppana murukkam,* which was immensely relished by the Mappilas. Mappila song being noticed and appreciated by people of various other communities, and they taking interest in composing Mappila songs, is an indication that Mappila *Ishals* are gently diffusing into the public domain, preparing the mass audience for its debut in Malayalam movies. A momentous contribution of

P. Bhaskaran to the compendium of Mappila song is that he led this genre by the hand to the whopping big screen.

2. Oppana

Oppana, the beloved Mappila art form, both within and outside the community, traditionally performed during marriage ceremonies, which blend the Arabian and Kerala culture, is the conventionally bequeathed female performative art. It is not a ritualistic art form, a part of the religious observances, rather, it serves the purpose of delivering delight and festivity during various communal celebrations. Apart from its pompous presence at weddings, Oppana was also splendidly performed during other occasions like the ceremonious circumcision of the male child, the ear-piercing ceremony of the female child, during the tonsure of the infants, and the cleansing ceremony of the mother on the 40th day after childbirth. This art form had specific functions or purposes in the past, apart from enhancing the festivity of the occasion. During marriage, it alleviates the coyness and nervousness of the bride and groom, and it also blesses and extols the couple. Further, to a certain degree, it distracted and eased the distress of the child who is supposed to undergo the procedure of circumcision or piercing of the ear. Therefore, it was customary among the Mappilas to gather around the little one, clap and sing in unison, and rejoice.

As it is perceived today, Oppana was not an exclusive female dance form, rather, it was practiced by both women and men alike. The male singer troops were addressed as *Kalyanapattukar*, *Mukhathalapattukar,* and *Vattapattukar*, and female singers went by the name tag *Pattukarathikal* or *Kalikarathikal.* These singers were

highly esteemed in the Mappila society, and occasionally, the wedding date was fixed according to their availability and convenience. At this point in time, the prominence was provided to the songs and the singers, which is quite obvious from these handles themselves. Kutty mentions that it was the instantaneous song compositions by these artists during the energised performances that invigorated the pavilions of marriage. Such unpublished songs propagated within the locality disseminated the melodies of Oppana from lips to lips (*Oppana Enna Vattapattu* 116). However, this sonic expression transpired to the style as it is performed today, with bodily movements and choreographed dance moves, an enhanced visual experience, only after 1945, and it is only after this year that this cultural expression secured the title *Oppana* (Kutty, *Mappilapattinte Lokam* 148)

The word Oppana could be translated as example, comparison, coordination, or ornamentation. There are varied inferences about the derivation of 'Oppana', both from native usages and foreign terms. It is opinionated that it is derived from the root word '*pana',* which means mode or raga, or song. *Pana* vocalised collectively befitted *Oppappana*, which later, due to attrition over time, became Oppana. The term also resembles the Sanskrit word 'Upaana', which implies the act of adorning sandals on someone. When considering the socio-cultural contexts of Oppana, it connotes to the practice of adorning the person who is the focus of a particular ceremony. There is also the prevalent custom of *Oppana Vekkal* in certain temples in Kerala during the *Ezhunnallippu* ceremony, and contextually, it entails the act of adoration. Further, it is also deliberated that the word has an Arabic origin from the root word '*Hafana',* which means extending the arms and clapping hands. But, the

proper meaning of '*Hafana'* has a much different implication, which only denotes the act of gathering something with both hands, and it has no semblance to Oppana, apart from joining the hands similar in fashion to clapping. It is also advocated that the term Oppana might have its roots in the similar Tamil word *Oppanai,* which denotes polish, adorn, or decorate. Since Oppana is performed in an embellished social ceremony, this derivation proves appropriate. Moreover, this claim is strengthened when considering the strong chord between the Tamil language and Arabi-Malayalam (Puvvakkurussi 22).

Oppana traditionally is the name of a prominent *Ishal* in Mappila song compositions, and it is assumed that the forerunner of this particular art form emerged slightly after the surfacing of *Safeena* songs (earlier it was another name for Mappila songs, earned after the composition of *Kappapattu*). The *Ishal,* Oppana, poses a strong resemblance to the *madid* meter in Arabic (Kutty, *Mappila Pattinte Lokam* 148), and it accentuates the influence of Arabic poetry on Mappila songs. The Oppana *Ishal* has three modes- *Chaayal*, *Murukkam* and *Idamurukkam*. One of the earlier Mappilapattu compositions, *Sukhoom Padapattu* carries songs with the *Ishals Oppana Chayal* and *Oppana Murukkam,* and numerous other olden Mappila songs also employed this mode. The *Oppana Pattusangangal* (singing troops) extensively sang songs composed in this particular *Ishal,* and it gradually gained prominence during wedding celebrations. Oppana singers strategically employed this particular *Ishal* because it could be recited at a fast pace with rhythmic clapping (Kutty, *Oppana Enna Vattapattu* 37). Consequently, these singers came to be known as Oppana *pattukar* (Oppana singers), and their songs became *Oppanapattu*

(Oppana song) (Puvvakkurushi 47), and the current art form derived from this tradition became Oppana.

Apart from *Ishal* Oppana, *Kalyanapattukar* sang songs composed in numerous other melodious *Ishals*, like *Kappapattu, Thongal, Vazhineelam, Akhasham bhumi, Yamankettu, Kombu, Aarambam, Hakhana,* etc., and the songs covered a wide variety of themes like human creation, the creation of the universe, the stories of Prophets and their wives, matrimonial union in heaven, the description of heavenly *hooris*, the day of judgement, etc. Later, songs celebrating the bride and groom and romanticising the ritualistic aspects of marriage were composed. Kutty states that although these are the prominent observable themes dealt with in Oppana songs, a few have shown divergence by incorporating the romanticised description of the nuptial room- *maniyara*, and the luxurious ornaments of the bride (*Oppana Enna Vattapattu* 49).

There is not enough evidence to pinpoint the exact point in time when Oppana originated among the Mappilas. However, there are numerous age-old song sequences transferred over generations orally, without any information about their author or the period of their composition. Among the available Oppana songs, *Aadimuthalpuranam*, an anonymous work which carries the tale of Prophet Muhammad's birth and infancy, where he was nursed by Haleema Beevi, is the oldest surviving Oppana song. For generations, over generations, Mappilas cherished and sang this Oppana song. *Aakasambhoomi, Mi'raj, and Badryudham Oppanapattu,* etc., are other examples of traditional Oppana songs that were readily sung at ceremonies. Even before the glorious era of prominent Mappila song

composers like Moyinkutty Vaidyar, Chettuvayi Pareekutty, Ponnani Maliyakkal Kunjahammed, Kanjirala Kunjirayeen, Mundambra Unnimammad, there have been numerous Oppana songs performed at wedding nights, composed by various ancestral Mappila poetic forebears. Apart from these, the Arabi-Malayalam *Sabeena songs* of poets like P.K. Haleema Beevi, K.T. Amina, and Kundil Kunjamina were in circulation, exemplifying the prominence of women writers. *Ponnilum Poontharamil* by P.K. Haleema, *Thashreef Oppana* by Mattummal Kunjikkoya, *Mulapuraanam Oppana, Vettilapattu, Kilathimala, etc*, by Vaidyar, *Aalathil Mulam,* and *Mulapuranaputhuma* by Kottapparambathu Kunjikkaakk, *Thrikkalyanathinte vishayam* by Mayankutty Ilaya, *Thashraful Quran, Valiya Kachavadapattu,* etc., were the celebrated Oppana songs that echoed through the spaces of the auspicious Mappila households in the earlier times.

There is the custom of adorning *Mehandi* in the palms of the bride the day before the wedding widespread among the people of Malabar and even persists today. The bride is seated at the centre, and the relatives of the bride sketch mehndi on her palms. It is celebrated with the company of *Mylanchipattukal* beautifully vocalised by the Oppana singers, who either gather around the bride or are seated in front of the bride. Even the male *Vattappattu* singers composed and sang *mylanchi* songs. The following are the lines of *Mylanchipattu* taken from the book *Kurathipattu.*

Aadiperiyavan amaithe mayilanchi

Aadanenna swargathil ulla mayilanchi

Aadam Hawwabeekkirakkiye mayilanchi

Athimuthal ellaarum ittulla mayilanchi

(qtd in *Puvakkurissi* 34)

The above lines state that mylanchi or henna created by the lord, in the heavenly Eden, is sent down for Adam's Eve, and from then onwards, it is adorned by everyone. This is one of the popular traditional *Mylanchipattu* sung during the *Mylanchiravu* ceremony.

Furthermore, during earlier days, from the moment the groom begins getting ready until he sets out for the bride's home, the Oppana group would perform outside his residence. Afterwards, the groom is chaperoned outside and is seated in the pavilion where the singers gather around him and start singing '*Thashreef Oppana'*. There was also the custom of '*mothalam'* or '*mukhathalam',* which is extinct now, where the '*ossan'* (barber) shaves the groom's face. During this time, the associates of the groom gather around him and sing Oppana with clapping hands. The song sung during this ceremony is called *Mothalapattu* or *Mukhathalapattu.* Later, the groom and his party, consisting of his associates, march to the bride's home, and the procession sings Oppana all the way to the bride's abode. And this singing continues till the groom reaches the bride's residence. The particular mode in which the song is sung during the procession is called *Vaineelam* or *Vazhineelam* (all the way). V.M. Kutti notes that *Vaineelam* is a way of singing with extended or

prolonged notes, and any *Ishal* could be sung in that manner (*Mappila Pattinte Lokam* 156). On reaching the bride's residence, the groom is greeted and made to sit on a high chair (*Peedam*), and there is the custom of *Oppana vekkal*, after which the groom is ushered into the room. The bride is escorted to the groom's house by some of her relatives, neighbours, and friends, along with a few members from the groom's side. The singers of the bride's party accompany them, singing all the way to the groom's house.

> *Puthupenn chamanjitt puthuthozimaarumoth*
>
> *Puthumaaran mana kolla purappedunne*
>
> *Madurithapoovinte chendu malar kinavukal kand*
>
> *Marathaki naanichum kondithaapokunne*
>
> (qtd in *Puvakkurissi* 35)

The lines capture the moment when the bride leaves her home. The young, bedecked bride is convoyed by her maids to steal the heart of the groom. The bride sets out with shyness, dreaming of the matrimonial union.

From ancient times, there has been the practice of a particular kind of singing and dancing prominent among the Arabs, especially during the rejoicing of a matrimonial union. And there was the presence of singer troops in Arabia during and before the reign of the Prophet, and marriage is highly considered as a providential occasion which demands merry making and celebration with songs and other entertainments. Therefore, it is considered religiously sanctioned, and Mappilas followed the path of singing and cheering during the nuptial celebration. Oppana

might be the embodiment of the celebratory feat of the Arabs with music and dance that is being planted in the socio-cultural milieu of Malabar Muslims. Nevertheless, the native Kerala culture is rich with numerous and varied art forms, and the traces of the influence of native aesthetic articulations on this cultural expression are not negligible. The art forms like *Panenkali, Vattakali, Mudiyattam,* and *Kaikottikali,* practiced by the other native communities of Kerala, might have also influenced the evolution of this particular art form, as Oppana exhibits a strong resemblance to these native arts (Kurian & Arun 95).

Unlike the present use of Oppana as an art form, in the traditional Oppana, the literary quality of the song, its tune, rhythm, melody of the voice, etc., were given much prominence and attention. Even the handles provided to Oppana singers, proclaim the significance of song and singing, and only admirable and talented singers and composers perform Oppana. The Oppana singers, both from the part of the bride and groom, competed with each other on the wedding night, composing and singing Oppana till the morning, and it was called *Kambipaduka*. There would be a lead singer from both the male and female troops who are revered by the names *Gurukkanmar* or *Muppanmar* and *Moopathi, Karanothi or Thalavathi,* respectively. The lead singer, *Mooppan* or *Moopathi,* sings initially (*munpaattu paduka*), and the chorus singers echo the lines sung by the lead (*pinpattu paduka*).

Kutty writes that the singers of each locality received training for days. After the day's toil, by the evening, they gather around at a nearby home, convenient for their training, and they rehearse for long hours. The practice sessions were headed by highly proficient persons. If the locality lacked such a talented leader to train the

singers, they even brought in paid instructors from neighbouring localities to lead the rehearsals. When the training commences, the *Gurukkal* usually presents a show delivered by the talented trainees under his guidance, and to experience this, the people of the nearby localities would gather around. The performance by the apprentices would stimulate the Mappila song enthusiasts to flock in and join the team, to learn the art under his supervision. The practice would even stretch till midnight (*Oppana Enna Vattapattu* 14-15). From the description, it is evident that in those days, more than an art form of a trained individual, this art form was a part of the community. The communal participation was high. They gathered around in a convenient location to train in the art, the community contributed to ensuring the availability of a proper space and a trained master to teach them, they enrolled themselves to train in this art, and they were also the enthusiastic audience of the performance.

Oppana, with this humble origin, with an emphasis on lyrics and literature of the song, has now-a-days acquired multitude of dimensions to the extent where it is perceived and performed as a female group dance swayed according to the background Mappila song, rendering the older racket of Oppana a reminiscent of the past, which no one today appreciates or is familiar with. As aforementioned, it evolved from the *Kalyanapattu, Mukhathalapattu, Mangalappattu, and Vattapattu* traditions, supplementary to various auspicious ceremonies associated with the community and performed in the households for centuries. But, in the current scenario, it has become a highly trained performance delivered by professionally trained Oppana dancers, who are hired by event managers to perform at weddings

and other events with the cacophony of recorded Mappila song. It highlights the shift from a communal, informal, and oral mode of learning the art rooted in the familiar domestic and neighbourhood spaces, to a more formalised, professionalised training structure, rather than intimate community gatherings. Consequently, Oppana is not only aestheticized but also exposed to stylisation and codification that deviate from its traditional roots.

This cultural expression, performed by the singers seated around the bride or groom, accompanied by the clapping of hands, over time has inflated to something beyond. Gradually, it became performed upright with mild movements and sways, and later the entertainers sauntered and interchanged their spots to create more styles and movements. Now, the Oppana participants are preferred for their ability to dance or gracefully sway their bodies, forsaking singing. There is diminished significance for singers in Oppana as these singers with melodious voices are placed in the background, or they are represented through their previously recorded voices, positioning the trained dancers in the front to entertain the audience. Kutty notes that in modern times, Oppana is misunderstood as a form of dance (*Mappilapattinte Lokam* 157). Even Randathani introduces Oppana as a "kind of female group dance accompanied with Mappila songs" (*Mappila Songs and Performing Arts* 105).

Further, a uniformity in the costumes of the performers was established. Traditionally, Oppana performances were discernible by a lack of uniformity in costume, as the singers presented themselves in their own festive apparel, occasioning a vibrant display of individual and mundane identities. The emphasis was placed on participation and celebration rather than visual cohesion, attained

through uniformity. Performers of this art form now wear coordinated costumes, often designed specifically for the event. This step toward standardisation indicates the formalisation of this communal folk art as a staged art form, where visual presentation is cautiously curated to satisfy the expectations of professionalism and aesthetic harmony. Further, the attractive bride is the centre of the Oppana performance. Through the uniformity in attire of the dancers, the bride is distinguished and highlighted from them.

This paradigm shift in the presentation of Oppana was fuelled by a major incident in the mid-1950s. During a wedding function at the P.N.M. house, P.N.M. Alikkoya introduced some specially choreographed movements to the Oppana troop led by Imbichaminabi. It was the union between Subaida and E.V. Ahmmedkoya. It was strikingly different in its presentation from the traditional performances. There was noticeable alteration and modernisation in the costume, song, and movements. He altered the costumes of these performers by replacing the traditional *kachi* (a type of female *dhoti*) worn by Mappila women and *thattam* (shawl or dupatta) with maxi skirts, jumper tops, and dotted dupatta. He also brought the bride to the limelight on the stage, adorned in a sari, who was never an integral part of this art form. The traditional Oppana songs were also replaced by newly composed lyrics that praised the bride, in a new mode and tone. The Oppana performed by females in the insides of the home, since then, became performed in front of the public eye, and it was mesmerising for the younger generations. Numerous other weddings followed this trend. Later on. M.S. Baburaj, the popular musician, and T.K. Pareekutti, film producer, who were guests at the wedding and were among the audience, fascinated

by its novelty, anticipated a promising future for this art form in the movies. Therefore, they conveyed the newly tailored Oppana by Alikkoya to the Big screen, and Oppana elegantly debuted in the movies in the 1960s (Kutty, *Mappila Pattinte Lokam* 158)

Oppana in the Competition Arena

Fig. 1. Oppana performed on stage. Photo by Gosahin, 2022.

Another prominent location where Oppana is celebrated is the stages of youth festivals and art fests, especially related to educational institutions like schools and universities. Oppana is a significant female competition item, and there remain numerous guidelines provided as to how it should be performed. However, it has no reverence for the way it was traditionally performed by the members of the Mappila community. It is an altogether different art form solely cooked for the stage. The performers practice the choreographed Oppana days before the day of the competition. There would usually be six Oppana performers, along with a bride, and

mostly three singers who are stranded in a corner singing the song. The performers are adorned in the traditional Mappila attire, designated as the mandatory Oppana costume, all white, with the fringes of the *kachi* dyed in colour, a white scarf with designs fastened around the head. Various gold-imitation jewelleries are adorned by the dancers and the bride to imitate the traditional pompous wedding look, and they are smeared with thick make-up, unlike the traditional way. The bride, adorned in shimmering colourful upper garment, *kuppayam*, and *mundu,* is indeed a spectacle during Oppana performance, with the abundance of various glittering ornaments which signify the prestige of the bride conveyed through her adornments in the earlier setup. The singers are also donned in the traditional costume, and all the participants adorn their hands with henna. Nevertheless, since this art form is seldom performed in households nowadays, it is through the stages of art-fests, particularly school or university art-fests this cultural expression, though with significant alteration, is nominally preserved and familiarised to the populace.

Authentically, Oppana was not a public art form. It was a cultural aesthetic expression of a particular community performed both by males and females alike in ceremonial celebrations. It entered the public domain and became popular through its entry into the movie industry and youth festivals, slightly losing its legitimacy and also acquiring some fashionable elements oriented towards the market. Contemporary performance is choreographed with the accompaniment of songs tuned to sophisticated musical instruments, unlike the traditional mode of articulation, where instruments like *Kuzhithalam*, a traditional percussion instrument, were only in use. When the community participation became reduced

due to significant alterations in their ways and customs owing to varied factors like modernisation and globalisation, the meanings associated with this communal art in the traditional sense declined steadily. Thus, more than a community art form, it has currently transpired as an art form of the professionals and an art form for the stage.

3. Vattapattu

Vattapattu, predominantly assumed to be performed by men, also has its origin in the *Kalyanapattu* traditions of Mappilas, and it has been immensely popular among Mappila households till the 1950s. Kutty claims that, though addressed by numerous handles*, Kalyanapattukar, Vattapattukar, Puthiyappilapattukar, Mangalapattukar, Makhanipattukar, Mukhathalapattukar, Oppanapattukar, Puthukkapattukar, Kaimuttipattukar, Vilakkinunilkunnavar,* etc., all these are ultimately the same- the *Kalyanapattukar* (*Oppana Enna Vattapattu* 14). The name Vattapattu was not in prevalence traditionally; rather, this art form was popular by the name *Kaimuttipattu*, as the performers sat in a circular fashion and clapped their hands. Though it is nowadays generally considered a male performing art, credits to youth festivals and other cultural events, Vattapattu was performed by female singers as well. As a rule, it is a widespread notion that Oppana is the female performing arts of Mappilas, and Vattapattu is its male counterpart.

Usually, consisting of eight to ten singers, the male singers and female singers of the *Vattapattu* troupe were distinguished as *Kaimutti pattukar* or *Aanpaattukar* and *Kalikarathikal* or *Penpattukar,* respectively. This art form is notably performed by placing a spittoon in the middle of the singers, and it is repetitively struck by a hand-held fan made by the petiole or the leaf stalk of the

areca nut or betel nut leaf, producing a musical beat. Thereby, this creative cultural expression also received the name *Kolambipattu* (spittoon song). The spittoon and other musical instruments like cymbals were innovative introductions to this art form, which was traditionally performed solely by rhythmically clapping, to elevate the musical fervour.

As aforementioned, Vattapattu as well branched from the roots of Oppana, and therefore it was also performed on similar occasions. In the ancestral ways, Vattapattu commences when the guests from the bride's party receive the bridegroom at his residence, and the groom is seated along with the singers. When the barber shaves the head and face of the groom, the singers start singing melodiously. It is customary for the barber and the groom to continue the ceremonial action till the singers stop singing. Then, on the groom changes to his ceremonial attire and is accompanied by his brother-in-law, friends, and relatives starts off to the venue of the bride. The singers accompany them by singing *Vazhineelam*. When the party reaches the house of the bride, they are warmly welcomed by the veterans of the bride's family with their own appointed singers singing *Baith* (Arabic Songs), for which the singers appointed by the groom's party reply with a reply song. The *Baith* continues from both sides as the singers from the bride's side greet and welcome the guest singers who came along with the groom. Subsequently, the groom is accommodated on a high seat (*peetam*) or a special carpet sheet, and his right side is occupied by the singers from his side, and his left side is occupied by the singers from the bride's side, both sit in a circular form.

Usually, this art form begins with vocalising *Munajat*, a type of prayer song, followed by *Virutham*. Afterwards, the *Salam* song or *Salam* kavi, which is of Tamil-Arabic origin, welcomes the bridegroom, elders seated in the pavilion, and the guests. After this starts the vocalisation of marriage songs called *Kalyana Kavi*, which is followed by *Chatta Kavi,* which also extols matrimonial union, but in a different manner. It is followed by *Mangalam*, greeting songs which address the elders, the bridegroom, and other esteemed guests occupying the pavilion. Often, these people present gifts when their names are announced in the greeting song.

Compositions of Tamil Pulavar singers were usually sung while performing Vattapattu in the early centuries. However, this was transformed by the emergence of innovative Mappila composers in the early eighteenth century as they composed appropriate wedding songs suitable for the occasion, which easily caught the attention of the people. Nevertheless, the Vattapattu singers of Ernad and Valluvanad regions never completely abandoned the old-fashioned songs of Tamil Pulavar, as they vocalised those songs along with the new trending songs till late 19th or early 20th century. The novel attempt in compositions entirely oriented towards the performance at matrimonial ceremonies gave rise to the vast collection of *Kalyanapattu or Mangalyapattu* (wedding songs) in Mappila literature. Numerous wedding songs were exclusively composed for various Vattapattu singers, both male and female (Koppilan 53).

In the stages of cultural fests and youth festivals, Vattapattu, as a male performing art, was introduced by the name *Aan-Oppana* (Oppana of men). Though this stage-performed art form is distinctively different from the traditional way of

performance and costume, it essentially evolved from this singing tradition carried out by Mappilas for generations, and hence, the title *Aan-Oppana* was later replaced with Vattapattu by the state government in the youth festival manual. By renaming, the traditions of Mappila ancestors are acknowledged and honoured even though they are altered to suit the performing platforms (Koppilan 65). The group of boys stand and sit dividedly on each side of the groom and perform the art form, clapping in unison and singing. Since the performance by the male Vattapattu troupe does not require the same level of energetic movements as the female Oppana performers, the contestants themselves sing for the Vattapattu on stage, in contrast to Oppana, which typically involves three designated singers who render the song.

Fig. 2. Vattapattu. Photo by Manorama News, 2017.

This particular form of art related to the customs of matrimonial functions, which went by numerous names, including Oppana and Vattapattu, was immensely popular and was widely celebrated in the Mappila households till the 1950s.

However, with the advent of various recording technologies and the utilisation of loudspeakers, the glory of the traditional singers diminished as the entire countenance of wedding festivities among the Mappilas changed with the introduction of these novel technologies, and this art form gradually disappeared from those spaces. However, it resurfaced with numerous alterations, in unified terminology and appearance- Oppana designated as a female group performance with a bride at the centre, and Vattapattu designated as a male group performance with a groom at the centre- within the spaces of popular culture. Though there is seldom a difference between what the Mappilas perceived as Oppana or Vattapattu in the earlier days, it has been provided novel dimensions and distorted to fit into the time-bound performances on the stage and screen. The performance by the *Kalyanapattu* troupes, which competitively composed songs instantly and sang vigorously, and prolonged till the dawn, was cut short to accommodate it on the emerging audio-visual spaces and platforms dedicated to cultural events, as a spectacle.

A daunting inference one arrives when analysing both Oppana and Vattapattu, though both originated from the same tradition, in the contemporary entertainment scenario is that how Oppana, chiefly a female art form in the contemporary perception, is intricate with more seductive movements while Vattapattu is, to a great extent, performed stationary without much bodily movements. In terms of performance, Vattapattu more closely resembles the traditional *Kalyanapattu* custom of the Mappilas than Oppana, although elements such as the codification of costumes and shifts in performance dynamics are evident.

Oppana has become an object of gaze and pleasure with the female form adorned in body-hugging clothes and embellished ornaments, especially through its representation in movies. Movies solely attributed this tradition to the female category.

4. Daffmuttu

Daffmuttu (beating of Daff) is a popular Mappila art form which is profoundly appreciated by the Mappilas, and widely performed on the streets by young *Madrasa*-going boys on *Nabi-dinam* (*Mawlid*, the birthday of the Prophet) as part of the celebratory parades and processions. *Daffmuttu* is still in execution among the Mappilas as a significant jubilant feat as part of their communal celebration.

When the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madina, the Ansari girls welcomed him to Madina by singing *Baiths* and beating the Instrument, Daff. In Addition, the presence of Prophetic testimonies that sanction the use of Daff in rejoicing has led the Islamic scholars to approve this form of art, claiming it as the only religiously endorsed Mappila art form. The practice of beating Daff was prevalent among the Arabs even before the arrival of the Prophet. They utilised a variety of Daff to enhance the racket of a wide range of occasions like marriage, ritualistic ceremonies, other celebrations, and war. Therefore, *Daffmuttu* is an exclusive Arabian creative expression performed by the Mappilas of Kerala.

The term Daff is of Persian origin, where it is called Dap. In the earlier days, rectangular-shaped Daff instruments were prevalent; however, nowadays, the

circular-shaped Daffs are prominent. Further, Daff comes in different sizes, where usually the larger one is chiefly played by men and the smaller one is reserved for women.

During Daffmuttu performance, *Mad'hu Baiths*, Arabic songs eulogising Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, are usually vocalised. The performance launches in the name of God (*Bismillah*) and exalting the Prophet Muhammad and his family. Daff is beaten following the rhythm of the Arabic song. And no other emotion other than devotion is permitted in the performance of Daff. The beating adjusts according to the rhythm and mode of the *baith* and towards the end the beating becomes vigorous. The Arabic songs vocalised are taken from the traditional songs predominant in the locale, especially songs that are included in the *Mawlid* anthology. The performers beat the instrument, exercising various positions like standing, sitting, turning to both sides, and bowing their heads. The daff is also rotated and revolved while beating to enhance the appeal of the performance, and it demands agility and flexibility from the performer. However, overdoing the moves might result in losing the authenticity of the art form. There are usually eight to ten players in a Daff troop. The performers are donned in white dhoti, white shirt, and a turban of white loincloth. However, currently changes are regularly introduced to the costume of Daff performers who perform on the day of *Mawlid*.

The Sufi orders polished this art in their congregations, and the Rifai and Qadiri orders made Daffmuttu a ritualistic performance during their congregations. In Kerala, earlier Daff was performed at *Jaarams, Darga, Nercha*, flagging ceremonies, and other occasions like receiving *Ulamas* (scholars).

5. Kolkkali

This art form subsists among various communities in India under different names with slight variations in its presentation. Specifically, it is a dance form characterised by beating sticks in rhythm according to a song. This art form is said to be more than a thousand years old, and there are numerous legends in Indian mythology about its origin. Hindus generally hold the belief that this art form is connected with the epic *Mahabharata*. It is believed that the Pancha Pandavas crafted this art as a time pass while living in exile. Muslims attribute the emergence of this art to the tales of the Islamic Prophet Yaqub (Jacob). The sons of the Prophet, who often went to the jungle to rear sheep, used to play with sticks either to ward off wild animals or to merely entertain themselves, and this act sooner or later became a performing art.

Dandiya Raas, a socio-religious folk dance prevalent in some northwestern states of India like Gujarat and Rajasthan, popularly performed during the festival of Navaratri, is similar to the way Kolkkali is performed. A similar art form in the Tamil region is called *Kolattam,* and it is conducted by the low caste people of that region. In the Kannada area, the same performing art goes by the name *Kolattamu*. In Kerala, this art form, usually performed by men, is predominantly executed by various communities like the tribal groups *Kurichyar* and *Kurumar*, *Nairs*, *Harijan* (low caste people) and the Mappilas.

In Kerala, Kolkkali is immensely indebted to the martial art Kalari or Kalaripayattu. The agility and flexibility demanded by Kalaripayattu are a necessary factor for Kolkkali. The Kolkkali performers progress in a circle while striking small

hand-held sticks, keeping up with the rhythm with specially trained steps. The circle constricts and expands in accordance with their movements, as the performance advances. The song progressively escalates in pitch, and the performance achieves a climax.

In the earlier times, there were various plays that were similar to the art of Kolkkali called *Payattikkol* or *Panthrandinam Kali, Thalakkali, Oppanakkali*, etc., which eventually became addressed as Kolkkali. Though there are numerous variants of Kolkkali, *Vaimalakuth* is the widely recognised one. T.P. Alikkutty Gurukkal, a Kolkkali professional expert, traces the basis of *Vaimalakuth* to the coronation ceremony of the Arakkal Ali Raja of Kannur. A fisherman named Paithal Marakkan fashioned the art form and the rhythm, and convened the whole performance. Moyinkutty Vaidyar of Kondotty and his friend were present at the ceremony, and he composed a song for this performance, which was then called *Oppanakkali*, with modes (*Ishal*) *Oppana Chayal* and *Oppana Murukkam*. *Chayal* was for relaxed and controlled movements, whereas much vigorous and rapid movements were performed during the *Ishal Murukkam*. *Oppanakkali* or *Vaimalakuth* later branched into various other styles. (Aalikuttygurukkal 40).

Kolkkali was rejuvenated later by its inclusion in the recording of a Mappila song by S.M. Koya, and thereby it received much love and popularity. Kolkkali was also nationally performed during the Republic Day parade in New Delhi under the supervision of S.M. Koya. Subsequently, the widespread acknowledgement received by this art form rendered it an inexorable part in wedding functions, *Vettilakettu* ceremony, and other social and cultural gatherings and events. It was also performed

during the procession of political parties and cultural events like *Nerchas* (Kozhikode 26).

This art form could only be mastered through intense and constant perspiration and training. It demands enormous attentiveness from the performer because a little distraction could vitiate the performance. Songs are a significant part of Kolkkali, which garnishes the performance and aids in amassing popularity. Poets like Moyinkutty Vaidyar, Nallalam Beeran and Abdurasak Haji have composed numerous songs and these songs were traditionally utilised for Kolkkali performances. The deployment of various genres of songs like devotional songs, *Mad'hu* songs, *Padapattu, Kalyanapattu*, romantic songs, *Kathupattu*, songs with political themes, satiric compositions, and *Qawwali* songs aided in garnering the attention of the populace (Kozhikode 28). Songs for this art form are selected from traditional compositions, preferring modes or *Ishals* that are suitable for the variations of the rhythm of Kolkkali, and Alikuttygurukkal criticises that the contemporary compositions lack such an appeal (42).

Analogous to the other Mappila art forms, Kolkkali is also an art form that ignites the stages of cultural fests and youth festivals. However, the performance presented there is not executed in the authentic way, as the performers are not trained artists, and they only practice a performance which is crafted by clubbing together distinctive, aesthetically appealing fragments of different plays to produce a ten-minute performance. It is solely for the competition, and the performers may not be able to deliver a different performance like a trained Kolkkali artist (Aalikuttygurukkal 42).

6. Arabanamuttu

The term *Arabana*, of Arabic origin, suggesting ‘wheelbarrow,’ refers to a musical instrument, which is a bit larger than the Daff and habitually handled by men. Arabana had been utilised by the Arabs for centuries as a musical instrument accompanying their folk songs and dance, and they struck the Arabana in bands to announce an impending war and also to retrieve those who got lost in the vastness of the desert. Arabanamuttu is the art form of Mappilas where this instrument is employed.

Unlike the previously discussed artistic expressions, which are solely for entertainment, Arabana Muttu is more of a ritualistic art, enacted exclusively by men, either to accomplish oaths or to invoke the holy spirits of Saints for spiritual salvation. It is believed that this ritual could safeguard the population from unknown malicious forces and counteract epidemics such as smallpox and cholera, which reap the souls of thousands of humans. To evade these epidemics from the people gathered around at night and awakened the Arabana. They also performed Rifai Ratheeb to cleanse the houses that recovered from such pandemics. During the colonial rule in Malabar, the local populace responded to cholera outbreaks by chanting litanies in the name of Sufi saints, who are trusted to possess miraculous healing capabilities. The instrument Arabana is included in the performance of *Kuthu Ratheeb*, which uses weapons like knives and small spears. During the Ratheeb, Rifai’s litanies and eulogies are chanted while beating the Arabana.

The instrument Arabana is bestowed with a holy aura by the people of Malabar, and they believed that it should not be placed on bare ground or floor,

which suggests disrespect, and also, it should not be played singing songs other than Ratheeb or *Baiths*.

The prominence of Arabana in Malabar increased in the late nineteenth century. Backer Edakkazhiyur, renowned as the 'Sultan of Arabanamuttu' in Malabar, draws the differences between *Raheebmuttu* and *Kalimuttu,* where the former is ritualistic while the latter is purely an artistic expression aimed at entertainment alone. During the Ratheeb ritual, the Arabana is beaten to produce a frenzied state amidst the devotees. However, for the non-followers, it is just a show. In order to satisfy the non-devotee audience, the art trainers introduced the novel version called *Kalimuttu,* which is an artistic articulation. *Kalimuttu* was introduced as a leisure activity during the ritualistic performance; however, it began to be performed right before the actual ritual. Unfortunately, the audience resorted to leaving after the *Kalimuttu* without watching the ritualistic *Ratheebmuttu*, and gradually *Kalimuttu* transpired to be the art form that engages the audience (58). The art ensemble generally encompasses at least eight performers. At the outset, the performers were seated, but now they are often seen performing standing upright. As the art form advanced to competitive stages and other cultural spaces like all the other art forms, new techniques and styles have emerged.

7. Kuthu Ratheeb

Kuthu Ratheeb, a Mappila ritual art, stems from the Sufi culture, is characterised by knifing or piercing oneself with sharp knife-like weapons during the performance while reciting litanies in Arabic and praying incessantly. '*Kuthu'* in Malayalam means stabbing, and *Ratheeb* signifies litany in the Arabic language, and

the portmanteau Kuthu Ratheeb suggests the self-harming act of the art form**.** This art form emerged in the Middle East and subsequently reached Kerala, amalgamating several local customs and traditions, becoming an embodiment of their folk religion. It is prevalent among the Muslims of Iran as Rifayi Ratheeb. This ritualistic art is rooted in the traditions of Sufi saint Ahmad Kabir al-Rifai (1119-1182), legendary for his extraordinary deeds involving weapons and fire. Adherents of Saint Rifai emulate his routines through self-mortification with knives and fire. It is believed that by the miraculous blessings of the saint Shaikh Ahmad Rifai, the performers attain a state of frenzy where they are immune to pain and mutilations. However, many Islamic scholars abhor this practice as it is against the Islamic jurisprudence due to its self-destructive character. The supporters of this feat legitimise it based on the traditions and practices of the Sufis.

This ritual performance is normally scheduled after the observance of the nocturnal prayers under an illuminated traditional lamp. The teacher or the *Usthad*, who is the mediating authority between the saints and disciples, positions himself at the centre of his disciples, starts singing eulogies of the Prophet Muhammad and Sufi saints, predominantly, Shaikh Rifai. The disciples receive his blessings by kneeling before him and shaking hands with him while recounting the praises of the Prophet Muhammad. Subsequently, *Fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Quran, is recited, and also consecrations of the Sufi saints are solicited by calling their names. Then the performers commence the beating of the Arabana, simultaneously reciting Arabic songs taken from the traditional book of *Safeena* songs in adoration of the Prophet. The spectators of the event also experience the frenzied ambiance when the

trumpeting of the Arabana, chanting, and prayers fill the place. When the rite assents to an elevated state, the devotees accept weaponries like *Dabbus* (Mace), *Qadeeru* (trident), *Sikkeen* (knife), *Saif* (sword), etc., from their instructor to toy with them.

8. Cheenimuttu

Cheenimuttu, a spectacular medley of sounds produced by an ensemble of various musical instruments, which, when collectively and harmoniously played, generate rhythmic and strong acoustics. It is performed in association with celebrations like *Nercha* and *Urs* of holy personages to elevate the grandeur of the celebration. It is also known as *Muttum Vili, Varthiyam Muttu or Mappila Shahanayi*, as the term *Cheeni* is a regional variation of *Shahanayi*, a pipe instrument popular in Persia, often translated into English as clarinet. This instrument is popular in India, especially among Hindu communities, by the name *Nadaswaram* or *Mangal Vadya*, as it is one of the requisite musical instruments played during weddings. It is a double-reed musical instrument with a Wooden flared bell at the end. Other instruments played along with *Cheeni* during Cheeni Muttu are *Chenda (drum), Cheriya Chenda* (a small drum), *or Murashu*. All these instruments are played together in accordance with the rhythm produced by the *Shahnai*. The energising performance of the *Muttum Vili* troop, with the reverberations of these assorted instruments, has been an exciting and stimulating show for the spectators (Kuttyali 59)

Cheenimuttu is an instance of the amalgamation of foreign and native culture. The confluence of Persian and Malabar culture. The Shahnai of Persian lands might have been transported to the coasts of Kerala in ancient periods. This

foreign element was indigenised by complementing it with native musical instruments and festivities. It transformed into an essential part of the regional culture as it became a significant component of their ritualistic observances. This musical play prospered regionally in Malabar, especially at Kondotty, as part of the annual commemoration of Muhammad Shah Valiya Thangal. The Cheeni Muttu tradition was pioneered by the Valiyakath family, who were earlier patronised by the Kondotty Thangals. They actively partook in the event from the flag hoisting up to the concluding ceremony of the festival. The Cheenimuttu play of Valiyakath Kuttyali was immensely popular till very recent times.

9. Parichamuttu

This art form closely imitates the movements or practice (*payattu*) of Kalari, and its origin could be traced back to a period when Kalaripayattu was in prominence. Besides Mappilas, it is popular among the Christian and Jewish communities of Kerala. *Paricha* is the shield used in battles. Wooden shields and swords are the chief properties used in this art, which is performed by a group of twelve players. A wooden stick with a trinket and shield made out of Indian coral tree (Murikku) is employed by the players. The steps in this art form are called *Chavittu Kettu, Mukkanni,* etc. Except for the occasional use of cymbals or *Elathalam*, no musical instruments are played during the performance. The clamour of swords and shields when they rhythmically clash with each other is the typical sound produced during the performance. The trainer or the *Guru* (*Asan*), who places himself at the middle of the players, provides the rhythm, and the play usually starts after offering prayer to God and tributes to the Prophet and other divine figures.

Arabi-Malayalam songs with distinct lyrics, especially eulogising prophets and saints, are employed during the performance of this art form. This is prevalent among Tamil Muslims as well.

10. Kalaripayattu

Kalarippayattu, the indigenous martial art of Kerala, is one of the oldest and most scientific martial traditions. This art, preserved through the *guru-sisya parampara* (master-disciple tradition), is a holistic tradition that combines combat training with healing practices like *marma vidya*, offering physical, psychological, and spiritual development. Training in a *Kalari* (gymnasium) shapes not only the body but the individual's mental and spiritual disposition.

Historically, Kalarippayattu was integral to military training among communities such as the *Nairs, Koyas*, and *Kunjalis*, as Kalaris institutionalised body culture and combat instruction. However, its practice was never confined to military castes; it extended across religious and social groups, including *Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas,* Christians, and Muslims. These various communities conserved distinctive Kalaris, and each group commenced their training chanting litanies particular to their religion, though the methods and training provided are similar.

Different types of Kalaris, such as Nedung Kalari, Anga Kalari, Kuzhi Kalari, Kol Kalari, etc., were built based on precise measurements and served varied functions from training to meditation. In the north, Kalaris were constructed as pits (Kuzhi Kalari), in line with Vastu Sastra, and sheltered by thatched roofs. The trainees enter the Kalari on an empty stomach, reciting litanies, donning a cotton

wrap (*Kacha*), and receive oil massages before practicing under the *Gurukkal's* commands.

Training progressed from body movements (*adavus*) to weapons, beginning with wooden sticks and moving to swords, spears, and the flexible *Urumi*. Trained men, including Mappilas, often served in local military units. The training includes strikes, kicks, blocks, stances, forms, and healing methods. Regional styles in Kalari -Northern, Central, and Southern- reflect differences in lifestyle, geography, and teacher-specific practices. Nevertheless, the core of Kalarippayattu remains shared- physical control, mental focus, and swift movement.

11. Mappila Theyyam

There are numerous instances where Mappila life and characters appear in the folk and folk-art traditions of various other communities. *Mappila purattu*, where *purattu* means farce, which displays the life and social customs of various castes and tribes, in the *Kanyarkali* exemplifies such a Mappila cameo. Another such significant art form that depicts Mappila figures is Theyyam or Theyattam, an age-old ritualistic art form conducted at sacred grooves (*Kavu*), shrines (*Kottam*), and temples, celebrated by the exploited sections of Hindu society of Northern Kerala, especially Kannur and Kasaragod. Theyyam is the entrancing dance of the Hindu deities who manifest their presence through the person performing the character of Theyyam, as the artist attains oneness with the divine power. Theyyam personifies a Hindu god or goddess or a character from their traditional folk tales or an idolised person from the past, and there are more than four hundred Theyyams in Kerala, each defined by its distinct style, music, and choreography. This art form is

chiefly associated with the peasantry who perform it in order to appease the divine spirits, ghosts of heroes, and Goddesses.

Though Theyyam is the art form of Hindu sub-castes like *Vannaan*, *Malayan, Munnoottanvelan, Mavilan, Anjoottaan, Pulayan,* and *Parayan*, certain Theyyams are Muslim characters, and those Theyyams are collectively addressed as Mappila Theyyam, rendering this particular art form the paragon of the peaceful co-existence of Hindu and Muslim communities in those localities. The characters of Mappila Theyyam are generally the spirits of Mappilas who are associated with the local deities. The Mappilas or other aristocratic Hindus do not perform Theyyam. Obviously, the divergences of their religious doctrines never interfered with their harmony in folk beliefs and cultural articulations, as the Mappila Theyyams were significantly performed in Temples calling *Azan* and performing *Namaz*, and the Muslims never questioned it; rather, they encouraged this attribute. It also displays the reverence shown towards the Mappilas by the common men of the Hindu community, as they are provided with the status of deities, considered as *devata* and worshipped, cementing communal harmony. The divine Theyyam exemplifies the fluidity of cultures and the synthesis of communities beyond the texts and teachings of the religion.

There are more than a dozen Mappila Theyyams. Ali Theyyam, the Theyyam of Kalanthan Mukri, the Theyyam of Mukri Pokker, Bappiriyan, Muslim women Theyyams likre Neythiyar Theyyam, Ummachi Theyyam, Beevi Theyyam are examples of Mappila Theyyam characters. Both Muslims and Hindus alike worship

and pray to these Theyyams with folded hands, pleading for a remedy for their vows.

In sum, this chapter analysed the various defining aspects of Mappila folk culture. The religion practiced by the community, their celebrations and festivals, specific sartorial practices, folk speech -Mappila Malayalam and the Arabi-Malayalam script, and their folk-art forms, an integral part of various communal celebrations, with a particular focus on Mappilapattu and Oppana, have been conducted in this particular chapter.

As aforementioned, a folk community is constantly being altered by the pressures of modernisation, the march of civilisation and religious reformation, and the drive of industrial development. The prominence held by various components of their folk culture dwindled as the community negotiated with these external pressures. It is visible in their outfits, linguistic aspects, folk festivals, and art forms. The communal participation in the production and dissemination of Mappilapattu and the authority of Oppana in celebratory gatherings gradually declined, as the behaviour of the community transformed. However, these art forms were rescued by the prevalent popular culture, where indigenous folk expressions find novel standardised representations. Mappilapattu and Oppana were pompously introduced to novel platforms like cinema and television. The next chapter details the representation of Mappila song and Oppana on the big screen.

Chapter III

Adaptation and Assimilation:
Mappilapattu and Oppana in the Big Screen

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mappila art forms, especially Mappila song and Oppana, hitherto a possession of the community that matured within their communal circle, gradually started occupying the popular spaces, through their adaptation in cinemas, winning the hearts of the Malayalees. The assimilation of these art forms into cinema was effortless and fluid because the Mappilas were able to fine-tune their artistic expressions, so that they entertained the mass population through various pre-existed platforms. Further, a novel touch was introduced into Mappila songs with the initiation of orchestra, especially harmonium and *thabala*, to fine-tune the songs. Additionally, the ragas of Hindustani music were amalgamated with the idiosyncrasies of Mappilapattu tradition to bring about a novel composition that carries the quirks of Mappila song, at the same time delivering a freshness to the Mappila song enthusiasts.

The art form, Oppana, was likewise transformed into a proper female dance form to better suit the ways of cinema, in order to deliver a visually engaging spectacle. This chapter explores the representation of Mappila songs and Oppana in cinematography, the art of motion picture, that immediately became the defining character of the new era that ensnared the audience ensemble with enthralling entertainment. The chapter analyses the commercialisation of these cultural expressions within the cinematic medium. How these art forms are reworked and reshaped, aligning with the dominant commercial interest, simultaneously

employing as agents of familiar elements, emotions, attitudes, expressions, etc., concerning the folk experiences of the Mappila community, within popular culture.

The Echoes of Hindustani Music in Mappila Songs

The Tamil and Urdu musical theatres and the significantly, the Hindustani music tremendously influenced and redefined the musical culture of Kerala. Numerous nomadic Ustads and Pandits, carriers of Hindustani classical music which they imbibed from the northern regions of India, dispersed its melodies in Malabar in the early decades of the twentieth century. They were the distinguished guests in the mehfils of Cannanore, Calicut, Thirur, Ponnani, etc., and the regional music buffs of that period organised meet-ups and clubs integrating these musicians. It was these Ustads, who led a bohemian lifestyle free from the prejudices of caste and class, who taught the common folks in the hamlets of Malabar the notes of classical music and the utilisation of various musical instruments, during a period when the exclusivity of classical music was linked to social hierarchy. Only the caste Hindus had the privilege to experience it, and scholarly erudition in classical music was restricted to these privileged sessions of the society. Distributing the keys of classical notes among the common public marked a quiet cultural revolution, facilitated by this grassroots musical renaissance (Leelakrishnan 152).

Thus, the structured notes of Hindustani music became popular among the populace of Malabar, and various musical instruments were initiated into the song traditions of Kerala, and the harmonium was prominent among them. In the 1920s, Gul Muhammed, who won fame and name through his gramophone recordings, and Jan Muhammed, a renowned Hindustani musician from Bengal who often held

concerts and mehfils in Kerala, especially in Calicut, were renowned among the musicians who utilised and popularised various musical instruments. Their descendants, K.G. Sathar and M.S. Baburaj, successfully fused the modes and elements of Hindustani music tradition into Mappilapattu, and this fusion was further aided by the interventions of their contemporaries like S.M. Koya, a Mappila song veteran, who was also an expert in Hindustani music. He refurbished the folkish Mappila song tradition with his classical scholarship of Hindustani music. He popularised his preferred musical instruments like *Sarangi* and *Dilruba*, an element of Hindustani musical tradition, in Malabar.

M. S Baburaj (1921-1978), who primarily picked up the ragas of Hindustani music from his accomplished father, Jan Muhammed, and an expert in playing harmonium, composed numerous evergreen hit songs of Malayalam films blending various music traditions like ghazal, khayal, qawwali, and also various indigenous folk song traditions. He has also composed numerous songs for movies that utilise the various *Ishals* of Mappilapattu.

Their musical endeavours have created a manifesto for popularising Mappila songs, linking the Hindustani ragas and Mappila songs. Along with the captivating melodies of Hindustani notes, the lyrical style employing the Mappila vernacular and wording styles, presentation of Mappila cultural markers in the songs and its visuals, and significantly the exploitation of the devotional songs, romantic songs and *Kalyanapattukal*, (songs associated with weddings and other festive occasions) which has a humungous market among the Mappilas and others alike, contributed towards the success of these songs in the big screen. This mixing of Hindustani

music with the folk genre, Mappila song, found a promising prospect in the Malayalam movie industry as numerous Mappila songs were composed tainted with Hindustani notes. The initiation of various instruments into Mappilapattu, as well, aided in producing songs appropriate to the cinematic medium.

Cinematic Song and Dance

Cinema, often referred to as the seventh art, is a dominant medium of exhibiting stories, combining visuals, sounds, and a narrative. The visual artform produced utilising film technologies, later developed into a "form of mass communication – and thus mass entertainment and mass culture – with the introduction of the regular release schedule and an emergent mode of representation that was more accessible and consistent in meaning to a broad range of spectators" (Musser 38). The development of cinema in India as well parallels its development in Europe, as the cinematography of the Lumiere brothers was demonstrated in India that same year, and the Times of India immediately acknowledged it as the 'marvel of the century'.

India has secured its place in the top charts of super producers of cinema. "Cinema is the most important form of popular entertainment in India" (Kasbekar 179). The umbrella term Indian cinema comprises all the movies produced independently in the regional languages. The Malayalam cinema, the film industry of Kerala, primarily producing Malayalam language films, was launched in 1928, with the silent film *Vigatha Kumaram*, with insert titles in both Malayalam and English. Seven years later, in 1938 first Malayalam talkie, *Balan,* was released, and

the "'linguistic explosion' started to put Kerala on the Map of the Seventh art" (Thoraval 378).

A defining peculiarity of Indian cinema, including Malayalam cinema, is the songs, often accompanied by choreographed dances, which lie at the very heart of its cinematic tradition, with each new film bringing to the market a host of new songs (Thoraval 54; Kasbekar 22). It is a reflection of the pan Indian culture, which traditionally celebrates songs and dance. Though introduced sometimes as a well-knit part of the plot or sometimes completely superfluous, songs remain a representative trait of Indian films.

Playback singing became a staple characteristic of Indian cinemas from the 30's onwards (Thoraval 58). Since the actors performing in the films usually are not blessed with the talent to sing and the fact that professional singers aren't great actors or were traditionally not considered attractive enough to be cinema stars, professional singers were hired and songs vocalised by these talented singers were pre-recorded and then played back during filming so that actors performing the song sequence could lip-synchronise on camera, creating an impression of singing by themselves. However, these recorded songs are marketed under the tag of the professional singers carrying the name of the film. These singers, popularly addressed as "playback" artists, became celebrities in their own right (Kasbekar 185). Playback singing was introduced into Malayalam cinema in the late 1940s through the movie *Nirmala*, with twelve songs, and it soon became an integral part of Malayalam cinema.

Typically, songs serve multiple functions within the movies, beyond mere entertainment. It helps to exhibit emotions that spoken dialogue fails to convey, or better, exhibit the state of mind, conflicts, or motivations of the protagonists. Love songs, pivotal in displaying romance, often portray the intensity or progression, or both, of a couple's relationship, without elaborate dialogues. Songs might often become a tool to progress the storyline. It might also convey deeper messages or subtexts, or sometimes be utilised to reinforce the central theme of the movie. Light-hearted songs, featuring witty lyrics and situations, deliver comic relief in films. Songs also depict significant life events, weddings, festivals, and celebrations, etc. Songs are often representative of a culture through the introduction of songs belonging to particular communities or cultural traditions, enhancing the cultural authenticity of the film.

Malayalam movies strategically utilised the song tradition of Mappilas, that is Mappilapattu, as a cultural representative of the community, whenever a Muslim character appears in the movie. Thereby, from the mid-1950s onwards, Mappila songs became a significant part of the Malayalam movie industry, remaining vibrant and relevant in the existing culture. The aforementioned functions of the songs began to be executed by Mappila songs, in relation to the Muslim characters on the screen. For that purpose, various categories of Mappila songs that pre-existed the cinematic medium were brought into play, but in a novel appearance. Though there are Mappila songs in Malayalam movies that have been strictly composed in traditional Mappilapattu *Ishals*, regularly using the poetic devises manoeuvred by the veteran Mappila poets, most songs are instances of innovations and

experimentations. However, certain attributes unify all these songs under the umbrella expression Mappila song. It is particularly visible in its lyrics and language employment; expression of religious, social, and cultural themes pertaining to the Mappila community; simple melodic structure and rhythmic patterns; and certain visual elements, especially represented with cultural markers, exemplified in traditional Mappila attire.

Apart from these, there are song-and-dance sequences in popular movies, cooked with major entertainment elements, which are predominantly contrived as visual pageants characterised by exotic and enticing dancing, extravagant costumes, grand background settings, and spectacular lush landscapes. Presenting the subtle and minute emotions of romance and erotic pleasure, it allows the viewers to indulge in the pleasures of looking. The physical beauty of the actor is enhanced, and they exhibit themselves as pure objects of desire to be visually devoured by fans (Kasbekar 186). This function of delivering visual pleasure, in the context of a movie centring Mappila characters, was entrusted to the Mappila performing art- Oppana. The popular Mappila art form Oppana deputed on the big screen, as a dance sequence in songs, capturing the gaze of the spectators.

When these folk artistic forms are vigorously expressed through these innovative platforms, as stated above, there are quite sharp distinctions between the authentic cultural expression and the popular art of the mass media. Though it preserves much of the folk attributes of the authentic culture, it becomes extensively a personalised art, counting on the ability of the individual producer of the art and the performer. Central to these artistic expressions was the community it belonged in

the pre-industrial era. This art perpetrated through cinema is no longer precisely the product of the 'way of life' of an 'organic community'.

> While retaining much in common with folk art, it became an individual art, existing within a literate commercial culture. Certain 'folk' elements were carried through, even though the artist replaced the anonymous folk artist, and the 'style' was that of the performer rather than a communal style. The relationships here are more complex-the art is no longer simply created by the people from below-yet the interaction, by way of the conventions of presentation and feeling, re-establishes the rapport. (Hall &Whannel 59)

F. Fawcett clearly describes the "ardent and fanatical Muhammadans" (Mappilas) as "much devoted to songs" (64). From this narrative of Fawcett, it is obvious that the whole community was, in fact, obsessed with songs in its production, consumption, and circulation. As a community, they decided the tune, rhythm, vocabulary, poetic devices, themes, etc., regarding Mappila songs. When it was necessary to uphold the theme of devotion in the earlier stages, both to impart Islamic wisdom and to motivate the neo-converts, the whole songs produced and consumed by the Mappilas were devotional, and they even collectively practiced in the tradition of performing these songs for miraculous attainments. When the whole community was at war against invasive foreign forces, the dominant form of composition was *Padapattu*, invigorating the fighters. Thematic expressions vocalising against societal evils were expounded when the community needed reformation. The art form belonged to the community, not to the individual composer. It was in their communal pool. But when it was introduced into cinema, there was a significant change. The songs began

to be composed for the movie, for entertainment alone, though it served functions within the seventh art; the theme of the song became selected according to the progression of the plot; the rhythm or tune of the song became selected according to the mood of the protagonist. The art form was successfully alienated from the community.

Further, the production of Mappila songs became compartmentalised. An excellent poet writes the song, a talented musician composes the music and devises the orchestration, a melodiously voiced playback singer vocalises the song in the studio, and the actor enacts the song lip-synching to the pre-recorded voice. And the final product is marketed to a wide variety of audiences. Though things have drastically changed, people effortlessly connected with the songs due to the projection of a shared Mappila identity, expressed through various nuances in these verses.

The assimilation into popular culture was critical for Mappila folk expressions, as the community was also undergoing transition. Mappilas were embracing modernity, shedding the old ways of their existence. Reformation in perceiving the religion, inclining more towards the standard or doctrinal Islam, the influence of modern education, the economic migration to GCC nations, and the wider influences of globalisation, etc., were extensively altering the life and culture of Mappilas. It overrode the earlier community, which produced the astonishing cultural expressions. Moreover, the technological innovations were perpetually modifying how entertainment and art were consumed by the people. Hall and Whannel observe that:

> The old culture has gone because the way of life that produced it has gone. The rhythms of work have been permanently altered and the enclosed small-scale communities are vanishing…but if we wish to re-create a genuine popular culture we must seek out the points of growth within the society that now exists. (39)

The prominence held by the art form within the community was possible only when the communal interaction was in force. The production and consumption of these songs within the shared spheres of society began to be experienced less and less. Moreover, at the grassroots level, the direct communal participation in collectively rejoicing in Mappila songs was being overturned in the modern period. Therefore, the composition of songs within the community became oriented more and more towards its popularisation through gramophone recording and vocalising the song at radio stations. V.M. Kutty, the prominent Mappila songwriter, acknowledges that he has written a lot of songs in the 1960s to be distinctly sung on Calicut radio station and gramophone records (*Mappilapattu; Charithravum Varthamanavum* 160). This anecdote indicates the transformation in the production of Mappila songs, compared to the earlier times, when the songs were not created for any medium, but to be consumed within the community, to educate, to inspire, and to articulate their shared experiences.

Inevitably, the next big step was the movies. A wider market has been opened up for these cultural expressions, which is now systematically tuned with the accompaniment of the orchestra. Obviously, the popularity of the genre among the whole Malayalee audience received through radio broadcast, theatre, gramophone

records like HMV and Columbia etc., and the fact that Mappila songs serves as an indicator of the community identity, urged the producers of the seventh art to pursue Mappila songs in their cinematic articulation, when they introduce a Muslim character into the plot. Thus, a plethora of Mappila songs were composed specifically for cinema. "The songs ceased to be the direct expression of the 'folk', and became instead the recorded story of 'folks' (Hall &Whannel 91). However, within the limits of popular music, Mappilapattu holds so much of its original force while being so rapidly and widely absorbed and adapted.

Mappila Melodies in Malayalam Movies: The Beginning

A significant milestone in the trajectory of *Mappilapattu* is marked by its introduction into the mainstream cinema, epitomised by '*Kayalarikathu valayerinjappo'* penned by P. Bhaskaran and music by K Raghavan, from the landmark film *Neelakkuyil* (1954) jointly directed by P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat. The song was an instant success at the time of its release, and even after decades, it is indeed a favourite among the playlists of many.

It was through the film *Amma,* released in 1952, that the *Ishals* of *Mappilapattu* debuted on the big screen. Lyrics by P. Bhaskaran, the particular song was composed in the popular Mappilapattu *Ishal Kessu.* The song, which carefully recounts the wonders encountered by the lyrical speaker on a two-day trip to the *Madirashi* town, an example of Mappila's *Sarkeett pattu*, was sung by Balakrishnamenon.

Churukkathil randudinam kondee naattilente

Karakathil kandathellaam chollidaam

Njetteedum aa madirashipattanathil

chennupettaal

Kaarukalanavathijoril paayunnu- ottere koottan

Lorrykal bussukal vereyumodunnu

(line 1-6)[1]

This song, which vividly describes the busy town of Madras thronged with various motor vehicles like cars, lorries and buses, which was an amusing sight to a rustic Mappila hailing from a rural structure, instantaneously captured the auditory attention of the people and paved the way for the composition of the celebrated Mappila song- *Kayalarikathu*.

Over shadowing the previous song, *Kayalarikathu,* vocalised by K Raghavan, was a popular hit, and therefore many fallaciously perceive it as the debut Mappila song on the big screen. V.M. Kutty observes that *Kayalarikathu* was a massive hit and was on everyone's lips, and the song rippled through the ears of the Malayalee listeners wherever they were (*Mappilapattinte Gathimaattom* 33). Further, M N Karassery proclaims, accentuating the prominence and popularity of the song, that this was the song that connected the Mappila community with the

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[1] All song lyrics cited in this chapter are taken from the website *Malayalasangeetham; Malayalam Movie & Music Encyclopaedia*. As the site does not provide line numbers, I have manually counted them for citation purposes following MLA style.

cinematic medium, with hundreds of Mappilas rushing to the theatre to listen to this particular song (100).

Kayalarikathu valayerinjappo

Vala kilukkiya sundaree

Pennu kettinu kuriyedukkumbol

Oru narukkinu cherkkane

(line 1-4)

The song in every aspect respects the Mappilapattu tradition of Mappilas, as it closely imitates the writing style and vernacular usages of Mappilas in its composition. The images of the mundane village settlement, along the backwaters, the vision of casting the net for fishing in the backwaters, and the jingling of the bangles of a beautiful young lady are picturised in the mundane Mappila expressions, elevating the appeal of the song. Bringing justice to the Mappila song tradition, it employs the Mappilapattu poetic devices that have been discussed in the previous chapter. In the following stanzas,

Cheril ninnu balarnnu ponthiya

Hoori ninnunde kayyinal- ney-

Choru bechath thinnuvan-kothi

Eareyunden nenjilay

(line 8-12)

And

Vambezhum ninte purikakodiyude

Ambu kondu njerambukal

Kambodinjoru sheelakudayude

Kambi pole valinjupoi

(line 13-16)

there are instances of the poetic device *Kazhuth,* where the second letter of the first word is repeated throughout the stanza. In the former stanza, the sound /*r/* and in the latter stanza, the sound /mb/ are repeated. Similarly, in another stanza, the sound /d/ is repeated throughout the stanza.

Kudavumay puzhakkadavil vannenne

Thadavilakkiya painkilee

Oduvileeyenne sankadappuzha

Naduvilakkaruthikkalee

(line 17-20)

The lines which urge the love interest of the lyrical speaker, who appeared on the shore of the river with a pot and ensnared the man, not to make him stranded in the sorrowful river at the end, are also an example of the poetic device Kazhuth.

The song also employs certain usages that pertain to the Mappila community. In the above stanza, the conscious usage of the expression *balarnnu* instead of the standard Malayalam word *walarnnu*, in the song, carries the vestige of the Mappila linguistics, where it is common to replace the /w/ sound with /b/. Similarly, the word

njammal (indicating the self) is also a colloquial Mappila expression pertinent to the community, and a linguistic distinction of Mappila. The above lines encompass an oxymoron through the juxtaposition of the unpolished word "*cheril*" (dirty mire) and "*hoori*" (divine beauty), featuring a profound tension between the mundane and the sublime, suggesting that something beautiful materialises from the humble, earthy material, emphasising the terrestrial nature of that divine beauty. The term *hoori* is an Arabic word, and it is also a part of the Mappila dialect, which employs extensive loan words from Arabic in its day-to-day vocabulary. Another such example is *qalb* (heart), a routine Mappila expression extensively used instead of the Malayalam counterpart in Mappila compositions. Further, *neychoru* (ghee-rice) is a favourite rice dish among the Mappilas and a defining ingredient of Mappila culinary culture. All these lexicons collectively function as the indicators of the particularities of the Mappila community and Mappila song, as the community has always deployed the vernacular usages and expressions approximate to their life and culture in all their poetic endeavours.

The music of the song is composed modelling on the following stanza from *Badr Padapattu* written by Moyinkutty Vaidyar without altering the *Ishal*.

Aanapoothasathul ilaahari

Hamsa chaadi aduthudan

Aarada shuja athurathemay

Hawlil neendu kudippavan

(qtd in Kutty, *Mappilapattinte Gathimaattom* 33)

The music composer has also done justice to the musical peculiarities of Mappila songs, as the melodies of *Kayalarikathu* instantly take the listener to the realm of Mappila songs, and the Mappilas could identify the touch of their creative expression in that composition. Further, the immense popularity achieved by this song among the Mappilas compelled Mappila poets to further incorporate the tune in their compositions. In the *Badr Kissapattu* written by Haji M.M Moulavi in Arabi-Malayalam script, the sixth *Ishal* is written as *Kayalarikathu* (Muhammedali, *Mappilapattukal Nuttandukaliloode* 225).

Apart from the lyrical and auditory representation of Mappila culture, the song visually depicts a Mappila man (enacted by Moidu Balakrishnan) in the fashion prevalent in those days. It is an easily observable and identifiable Mappila costume from the past days, reflecting the man's communal or religious identity, which is widely distinct from the contemporary culture, where there is no distinction in attire. The man in the song is donned in a checked dhoti with a belt around the waist, a white skullcap, and a talisman around his upper arm, typical of the Mappila men of those days.

Fig. 3 Screenshot from *Kayalarikathu* where the Mappila sings while knitting the net.

The visuals of the song also show men in a tea shop relishing the song of the Mappila, exemplifying the widespread appreciation of this genre by the populace (*Kaayalarikathu* 0:00-3:45)

During the lines *Kanninalente karalinuruliyil / enna kachiya nombaram* (line 5-6), a Mappila woman dressed in the traditional Mappila attire appears on the screen with a pot, apparently hearing the man singing the song (*Kayalarikathu* 0:40-0:45). It is the first ever Muslim woman representation in Malayalam cinema (Karassery 100).

Fig. 4. Screenshot from *Kayalarikathu*, where the Mappila female character enters.

More than just a musical choice, the impact of a Mappila song in Malayalam cinema extends beyond mere entertainment. The insertion of these songs in Malayalam movies stands as a cultural statement, introducing the Mappila song genre to a broader audience, inspiring composers to explore its potential in the musical landscape, and also urging filmmakers to incorporate the various melodies of Mappilapattu into their narratives. Most importantly, it also provided a glimpse into the lucrative market offered through Mappila songs, which have the power to

lure audiences into theatres. It steered numerous later filmmakers and producers to capitalise on this trend. As a consequence, various categories of Mappila songs, depicting distinct emotions, feelings, celebrations, and occasions, etc., soon began to be incorporated into the plot of the movies.

Kutty observes that, stalking the huge success of *Kayalarikathu* and the later released Oppana song *Puranamathu* from the movie *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956), the Mappila song gained significant popularity, and it produced a situation in the Malayalam film industry that it became mandatory to incorporate a song in any *Ishal* of Mappilapattu in cinemas that released. Thereby, a Mappila song was composed for the movie *Asuravithu* (1968), directed by A Vincent, in the *Ishal Thadakimanatha samayathil* taken from the popular Vaidyar composition *Husn al Jamal Badr al Munir* (*Mappilapattinte Gathimaattom* 34). The song was written by P. Bhaskaran, and the music was set by K. Raghavan.

Pakalavaninnu marayumbol

Akiluputhacha murikkullil

Panimathi bimbamuthichapol

puthumanavatti-ezhaam

Baharinakathe hooriyakum

manimariman kutti.

(line 1-6)

The lines provide the image of a shy, young, beautiful bride seated in the nuptial room during the specified time when the sun sets. The song recalls the

Kalyanapattu of Mappilas as it is jammed with lexicons that extol the bride and the nuptials. This song also employs Arabic loan words, markers of Mappila identity, like *bahar* and *hoori*, elevating the distinct community appeal.

In the ensuing sessions of the chapter, selected songs from assorted Malayalam movies are thematically categorised to better comprehend the various ways Mappila songs have been incorporated into the cinematic canvas.

The Melodies of Traditional Mappilapattu in Cinema

Traditional Mappila songs, those circulated within the community for ages, and songs composed by the veteran Mappila poet Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar have been occasionally utilised in various cinemas. The incorporation of an authentic Mappila song into movies serves both as an act of agency and incorporation. It could be comprehended in terms of cultural negotiation, commodification, and reinterpretation within the cinematic medium. This act of revival of old songs provides a renewed cultural agency. It also reclaims the cultural identity by the act of bringing back historically significant, marginalised Mappila voices, thereby retaining subaltern expression relevant within mainstream visual culture. However, there are certain narrative functions carried out by these songs within the development of these cinemas.

The film *Maram* (1973), directed and produced by Yusufali Kechery and with music by G Devarajan, pays homage to the venerated Mappila poet, Moyinkutty Vaidyar, by encompassing bits and pieces of songs *Chithirathaale panintha koottil* and *Kandaarakkattummal*, both voiced by P. Madhuri. The movie

also presents the traditional Mappila song *Eariya Naalayallo*, of unknown authorship, but immensely popular among the community, delivered in the tenor of K.J. Yesudas and C.A. Aboobacker. These songs are interestingly woven into the fabric of the film at various stages in the progression of the plot to enhance the narrative. The Mappila heroine is shown reciting Vaidyar compositions at her household, depicting the significance of *Mappilapattu* in the mundane existence of Mappilas. However, *Eariya Naalayallo,* featured both at the movie's opening and its conclusion, is utilised in the movie as a leitmotif. The song is associated with a particular character (Aamutty, portrayed by Nellikode Bhaskaran) from the movie. The song vocalised by C.A. Aboobacker is played in the beginning, when the character is introduced in the plot, and it is replayed in the final scene in the voice of K.J Yesudas, but in a sorrowful tone (*Maram* 5:59-7:13 & 2:04:35-2:05:17). The strong connection established between the song and the character amplify the emotional impact of the final scene, where the character sacrifices himself for the union of his friend and his beloved. In the film, more than an aesthetic choice, existing as a standalone folk song, these traditional Mappila melodies are woven into the film's storytelling, successfully elevating the emotional appeal of the final scene.

> *Eriya naalaayallo madhumalar viriyunna*
>
> *Poorana madhu kudippaane ennil*
>
> *Ethoru kaalathaane viidhi kootti tharunnenna*
>
> *Vedana sahichirippaane*
>
> (line 1-4).

Similarly, M. S Baburaj has incorporated a medley of tracks in the movie *Olavum Theeravum* (1970), directed by P. N. Menon, which has been authored by Moyinkutty Vaidyar. *Oyye enikkond* sung by C. A. Aboobakkar and M.S. Baburaj, *Kandarakattummel* and *Thadakimanathe Samayathil* again voiced by M S Baburaj, from the well-cherished Vaidyar composition *Husn-al Jamal Badr-al Munir,* are consecutively integrated into the movie, reviving the literary legacy of Vaidyar while enriching the cinema, as an aesthetic element. The presentation of the song in the movie exemplifies the transformation of a folk art into a cinematic commodity. Evidently, there is a musical rearrangement combining modern instrumentation, fusing with popular musical trends.

> *Oyye enikkond payyal thiraayathil*
>
> *Othorumichu kalichum kond- Oruvan*
>
> *Uttoru vaak njan thetteedaath*e
>
> (line 1-3)

The scene depicts a group of men presumably gathered after a day's work, sharing their joy in singing the poetic artistry of Vaidyar, clapping their hands, along with the rhythmic beating of instruments, Daff and Arabana, which are tied to Mappila art forms. The sequence of songs displays the timeless appeal of Vaidyar's works, and the scene is grounded in the cultural practices of Mappila community, reinforcing the inevitable connection between art and daily life of Mappilas (*Oyye Enikkund* 0:07- 3:59). Nevertheless, the cultural appropriation of Vaidyar's songs utilise these songs as mere aesthetic elements, without much engagement with the deeper context or meaning upheld by these songs.

Further, the song *Muthunavarathna mukham,* again a traditional Mappilapattu without the tag of an author,[2] has been accommodated as a full-length song in the movie *1921* (1988), directed by I.V. Sasi. The melody of the Mappila song is acoustically engaging, and it has been adapted by systematically structuring its melody, harmony, and rhythm by the music composer Shyam. The orchestration has been brilliantly done by assigning various instruments to assorted parts of the composition. The traditional Mappila rhythm and melody are blended with orchestral components to create a novel version that perfectly fits the film's aesthetics. In the visuals portraying a progression of bullock carts, the Malayalam film star Mammootty is shown lip-synchronising to the song pre-recorded in the voice of Noushad Babu, while riding a bullock cart. Here, the song is presented as a cultural marker of the identity of the Mappila bullock cart driver Khader (Mammootty), the protagonist of the film (*Muthunava Rathnamukham* 0:14-3:03).

Mappila Songs Composed on Romantic Themes

Romantic songs or love songs, a celebrated genre within films, are musical compositions that traditionally express amorous feelings, longing, desire, and passionate emotions that arise between two heterosexual individuals. The overwhelming experience associated with being in love or stories centring romantic relationships, etc, are the focal points of these songs. Romantic elements crept into Mappila literature in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and since then,

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[2] The song is credited to Moyinkutty Vaidyar in the metadata on *Malayalasangeetham.info*, although it is not found in any of his published works. Scholars of Mappilapattu generally agree that the composition is not by Vaidyar. The same applies to the song *"Eriya Naalayallo"*, which is similarly misattributed.

numerous Mappila poets have utilised their creative expressions to articulate the emotions and experiences regarding this affectionate feeling.

In the film industry, romantic songs have a huge fan base. Therefore, the plenitude of songs detailing romantic affection has been composed for films that closely follow the tradition of Mappila songs. The expression of infatuated feeling, utilising Mappila vocabulary and the idiosyncrasies of Mappilapattu, opened an exploitative market. A few celebrated romantic Mappila songs that express various subtle emotions regarding amorous passion, blending Mappila elements, are discussed in the following sessions.

The celebrated song *Mylanchi thoppil* penned by the renowned Malayalam poet Yusufali Kechery and vocalised by M.S. Baburaj from the movie *Moodupadam* (1963), directed by Ramu Kariat, is composed in the traditional Mappila *Ishal, Aakasam bhoomi*. This traditional *Ishal*, familiar among the Mappilas, passed down through generations, has been remodified by M.S. Baburaj by infusing the ragas of Hindustani music to elevate its appeal. This song became a massive success, and V.M. Kutti observes that this song, by Yusufali Kechery, once reverberated through the stages of *Ganamela* (*Mappilapattu; Charithravum Varthamanavum* 135)[3]

The particular song is a lyrical expression of romantic longing and admiration, penned using words that are cultural signifiers of the Mappila community. The opening line *Mylanchi thoppil mayangi nilkunna monjathi*, the reference to *mylanchi* or henna, a symbol of beauty and tradition, simultaneously

[3] VM Kutty attributes the song to the film *Maram* in *Mappilapattu; Charithravum Varthamanavum*; however, archival and film records confirm its appearance in *Moodupadam* (1963).

evokes a cultural connection to Mappilas and a romantic allure. The utilisation of the word *monjathi*, a Mappila lexicon indicating a beautiful lady, accentuates the cultural connection. The whole song, composed in the simple layman's language, recounting the perils of earthly love, like most of the Mappila songs, resonates deeply with the listeners, as it utilises straightforward words to express emotions that are raw and accessible to everyone.

Kambillaathulla karimbu polulla nin meni

Kanda muthalkkaroo khalbil medunnu mullaani

Oliyambu kondente ullam nooray nurungunn

Oru vaakku mindaatholich nilkunnathenthinn

Karalinte vaathil njan ere mutti vilichalloo

Karal thurannakam onnu kaanichathillalloo

(line 3-8)

The lover is tormented by his overwhelming emotions towards his beloved, who doesn't reciprocate his feelings or uncover her feelings towards him. Those feelings evoked in him immediately when he witnessed her alluring body, which the lyricist declares as slender as a stemless sugarcane, made his heart throb with the pain of piercing nails. The painful sensations experienced by the lyrical speaker due to the torment of love are explicated in the above lines.

In the movie *Kasavuthattam* (1967), directed by Kunchacko, the duet Mappila song *Mayilpeeli kannukondu*, penned by Vayalar Ramavarma, composed by G. Devarajan, and sung by A.M. Raja and P. Suseela, was also a popular hit. Vayalar

has endeavoured to craft the song, aligning with the Mappila song tradition using the Mappila lexicon and their dialectical variations. The loan words from Arabic, a part of the Mappila Malayalam vocabulary, are lavishly utilised by Vayalar in the composition. The song expressing the romance between two lovers is crafted in a playful interrogative tone.

Mayilpeeli kannukond

khalbinte kadalasil

Mappilapattu kurichavane

Paattinte chirakinmel parimalam poosunna

Panineer poovinte perenth

Muhabbat

(line 1-6)

The lyrical speaker is asking her companion, who jotted a Mappila song in the pages of the heart of the speaker with the tail feather of a peacock distinct with the ocellus, that what is the name of the rose flower that smeared its fragrance on the wings of the song, to which her companion replies '*Muhabbat*', an Arabic term which means 'love', an extensively common usage among Mappilas to signify amorous affection. Likewise, in the song, the explicit usage of the term *Patturumal* (silken handkerchief) and the strategic utilisation of the Mappila phonological variation '*parayoola'* instead of the proper usage *parayilla*, etc., elevates the appeal of Mappila folksiness of the particular song. The song, light and fun, is presented as an amorous dialogical exchange between two lovers.

The renowned Mappila song, *Pathinaalam ravuthichath*, penned by Yusufali Kechery, music composed by G. Devarajan and sung by K J Yesudas, from the movie *Maram* (1972) is yet another extensively popular Mappila song that is still presented as DJ mixes and cover songs on various digital platforms like YouTube, blending the classic melody with fresh beats and often adding a personal touch by the cover artist or DJs.

Pathinaalam ravudichathu manatho,

Kallayikkadavatho

Panineerin poo virinjathu muttatho,

Kannadi kavilatho

(line 1-4)

A typical romantic song crafted beautifully in layman's linguistics, where the male figure praises the beauty and charm of his beloved. The lyrical speaker enquires, suggesting to his beloved, whether the 14th night, a popular metaphor for a beautiful full-moon night among the Mappilas, has risen above in the night sky or on the shores of Kallayi, and whether the rose flower bloomed in the courtyard or on the shiny cheeks of his beloved. The mystery behind the allure of the red lips of his beloved and the poetry in her eyes is inquired by the speaker in the song. Written from the perspective of the male part, the song extols the beauty of his beloved through metaphorical descriptions of various beautiful objects around them.

Religious/Devotional songs

Similar to love songs, devotional songs are another genre that has a humongous market among the Mappilas. The primary Mappila songs composed were devotional in tone and theme, with a ritualistic nature, termed as *Malapattu*, and they displayed devotion towards the Islamic God, Allah, and reverence towards the prophets, other Islamic dignitaries, especially Sufi saints. It had a specific compositional structure, and those songs had much cultural significance among Mappilas. Later, the ritualistic aspects associated with these Mappila songs were overthrown by religious reformation, and their cultural and social relevance gradually faded. However, songs featuring devotion and religious premises began to be written in novel ways. The inclusion of this genre into cinema serves a pure aesthetic purpose.

The song *Allavin Thiruvullam*, lyrics by P. Bhaskaran, music by M.S. Baburaj, and vocalised by P.B. Sreenivas, from the movie *Kandam Becha Kottu* (1961), directed by T.R. Sundaram, acknowledges the divine omnipotence, expresses deep reverence, praise, and devotion towards Allah, the creator, and highlights his supreme power, mercy, and guidance.

The lines

Allavin karamonnu chalichal

Asakottakal mannadiyum

Allavonnu ninachal akhilarum

Aanandathin madhu nugarum

(line 7-10)

instances of the Mappila poetic device *kambi*, where the first letter is repeated, highlight the divine omnipotence which can alter destinies by a single movement of his hand, which is capable of dismantling material wealth in an instant. Also, it underscores that a mere thought of him is enough to bring content and bliss, reflecting his boundless compassion. Similar images are carried onto the next stanza, depicting his mercy acknowledging that even in deep darkness, Allah lights the way (*Eathoru koorirul thannilum oru cheru paatha thelichidum Allahu*) and he becomes a hope for those who are in tears. The song carries several philosophical attributes, specifically in the domains of ethics, theology, and human fallibility.

Dhanamohathaal dharmathin thala

Kuruthi kodukkum duniyavil

Paavangalkkoru thanal neeyallo

Paripaalakanam Allahu

(line 15-18)

The song's concluding stanza criticises materialism in earthly life, claiming that the incessant pursuit of wealth is at the cost of righteousness. How greed (*dhanamoham*) undermines *dharma* (righteousness or ethical order) is a theme predominant in many philosophical traditions, including Sufism and Islamic ethics. Allah, the sustainer, is the ultimate sanctuary for the impoverished. Affirming Allah as the protector advocates a belief in divine supervision and justice, even when human systems fail.

The movie *Yatheem* (1977), directed by M. Krishnan Nair, has also integrated the melodies of Mappila songs into the plot of the movie, with the devotional song *Allavin karunyamillengil* inaugurating the film with the presentation of title credits (*Yatheem* 0:35- 3:24). The song featuring lyrics by P. Bhaskaran and music by M.S. Baburaj was sung by K. J. Yesudas. The deeply spiritual and philosophical song reflects the matters of divine mercy and human vulnerability, especially accentuating the necessity of exposing compassion to the less fortunate, especially orphans, who are central to the title of the movie.

The lines, "*Allavin Kaarunyamillengil bhoomiyil/ Ellaarum ellaarum yatheemukal*" (line 1-2), emphasise the dependence of all beings on the divine mercy, suggesting that everyone would be orphans if deprived of Allah's benevolence. Highlighting the transience of worldly life and the wealth and status it abides, the lyricist acknowledges the possibility of one's life turning topsy-turvy with the instances of the juxtaposition of king and beggar, wealthy and orphan, oppressed and sultan, etc.

Innathe mannavan nalathe yajakan

Innathe sambannan nale verum yatheem

Innathe poomeda Nalathe Pulkudil

Innathe marthithan nalathe Sultan

(line 4-7)

Each line contrasts the current grandeur with impending downfall, and vice versa, demonstrating the unpredictable cycles of fortune and misfortune. These

verses question temporal hierarchies, emphasising that status - king, rich or pauper- is ephemeral and ultimately inconsequential in the face of divine will.

Further, the song stresses the importance of comforting the orphans, calling those who wipe the tears of the downtrodden the messengers of God. And it also declares that the act of generosity, filling the vessels of the needy, makes one a noble soul. The song concludes with a reference, a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, which assures that paradise awaits those who take good care of orphans and the needy, tactically tying the song with Islamic teachings, highlighting the rewards for displaying compassion and charity in this life.

The devotional song *Ahadnote thirunamam,* written by the brilliant Mappila poet Puvachal Khader, with music by K. Raghavan and sung by Nilambur Shaji, from the movie *Pathinalamravu* (1979) directed by Sreeni Kodungallur, is a well-liked song among Mappilas which aligns with their reverence for God, entirely crafted in the traditional mode of Mappila songs, in the *Ishal Kessu,* touching on the intricacies of an ardent believer.

Ahadonte thirunamam molinthinte

samayath

Dua sheyth karam mothi

thelinth rabbe-

sthudiyal

Kadakkatte nabiyoriyil

salaathum binde

(line 1-7)

The opening lines set straight the dominant devotional tone of the song, commencing with one of the holy names of Allah in the Islamic religion, *Ahad* - the One. The acts of worship, invoking God, making dua, and thereafter kissing one's hands that were raised in prayer, a humble gesture, indicating devotion to God, and sending blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (*salawat*), are delineated in the above lines. The careful utilisation of the words, *molinth (mozhinj), Sheyth (cheyth), and binde*, resembling the ways of the old hand Mappila poets, renders this particular song remarkably similar to the traditional songs. And there are many instances in the song where the Mappila dialectical variations of the proper Malayalam sounds are employed.

Subahi baankilurannit

wuluvulla manathaale

Soojuthilinnuyarnnorislaam naad-

manithar

Thazhambulla virinetti thadavikkonde

(line 8-12)

The above lines capture the devotion of a believer who wakes up at *subh* (*fajr*) to engage with God. The phrase *wuluvulla manathale*, *wudu*, meaning ablution, a purification ritual of great importance in Islam performed before each prayer to ensure the cleanliness of the body, is metaphorically extended to represent the purity of the mind of an Islamic devotee. The Islamic land is mentioned in the song as rising from *sujood* (prostration), a symbol of submission, and the people of

the land are identified as stroking their forehead, which carries the visible callus from their repeated prostration before Allah, a sign of their dedication towards God. The term *manithar*, used to mean 'humans', is seldom found in the Malayalam language. Instead, it is a Tamil term which is commonly utilised among Mappilas, underlining the linguistic connection between the Mappilas and the Tamil region.

Similarly, the employment of *manussan*, instead of *manushyan* (human), and *sokam* instead of *sukham* (ease), the mundane words of Mappilas, highlight their cultural identity and project an emotional resonance. The phrase *sinehathin alif ezhuthum* (writing the letter *alif* of love) employs *alif*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, to symbolise a beginning, rather than the first letter of the Malayalam script. This deliberate choice accentuates the Arabic relation of the Mappilas, who are taught *alif* in *madrasas* instead of Malayalam letters, making it effortless for them to resonate with the song. The poet deliberately uses the phonological adaptation widely pronounced among the Mappilas, adding a sense of authenticity, reflecting the unique rhythm of the Mappila dialect, making it sound natural and relatable.

Towards the conclusion, the song delves into the emotional complexities that arise from the desire between a man and a woman, whom the poet refers to as *Arabi poo* (Arab flower). The lyrical speaker glimpses the sparkle of her kohl-lined eyes through her veil. However, they part ways, fearing the decree of the Almighty, the creator of all desires. These lines reinforce the song's devotional tone, capturing the tearful separation of the man and woman, who consciously prefer to honour their faith and follow God's will, in lieu of following their carnal desires.

Udayavan vidithulla

vazhiyaale pirinthe poy

Karalrandumozhukkiya pirishathenaar

ulakil

Kothiyellaam padeithavan

Eduthukondaal

(line 27-32)

Keeping up with the structure and style of traditional Mappila songs, the lyricist recurrently integrates the distinctive linguistic style of the traditional composers. Throughout the song, the poet repeatedly uses the sound '*ntha'* in place of standard Malayalam sounds, such as *paninthulla* instead of *paninjulla* (create), *malarnth* instead of *malarnnu* (bloom), *valarnth* instead of *valarnnu* (age or grow), *aneinth* instead of *ananju* (coming close), *vidithulla* instead of *vidichulla* (fated), *pirinth* instead of *pirinju* (part ways), and *padaithavan* instead of *padachavan* (the creator). This choice of language not only preserves the authenticity of Mappila poetic expressions but also emphasises the strong cultural and linguistic identity of the Mappila community. By retaining these unique phonetic elements, the lyricist underscores a connection to Mappila language and culture, adding depth and meaning to the song's regional character.

Comedic and Parodic songs

The Mappilapattu veterans like Vaidyar and especially Pulikottil Hyder have moulded the genre to encompass social criticism and satires, and it has been rightly

utilised in movies. These songs offer comic relief within the movie. However, the matters discussed in such songs, though covered in humour, are of grave importance.

The romantic parody song *Aatte potte irikatte Laile*, from the movie *Kandam Becha Kottu* (1961), a duet sung by M.S. Baburaj and P. Leela, written by P. Bhaskaran, is an exchange between two souls who are secretly in love. Their accumulated desire to meet each other and the resultant consequences of their action, which haunt them at the thought of their rendezvous, are conveyed through the lyrics, but in a hilarious approach.

Aatte potte irikatte Laile ninne

kaathu kaathu valanjallo mayile

Ninne kaanum neramente majnoo- ente

Chankiloru kirukiruppu varanu

(line 1-4)

In the opening exchange between the male and female, the male lyrical speaker acknowledges that he is worn-out by his await to meet his beloved and the female acknowledges that she feels butterflies in her stomach when she glimpses him, conveyed in the coarse vernacular of the people, which peaks in the usage *kirukiruppu* to denote how she feels, which is not a dictionary word, but which wonderfully conveys her feelings of love and angst. Additionally, in the song the employment of words like *bejaru* (anxiety), where the /v/ sound is replaced by /b/ in Mappila dialect and term *mayyit* (dead body), an Arabic loan word, along with the

mention of *perunnal* (Eid), an Islamic celebration and the repeatedly used term *bappa* (father), serves as cultural markers in the lyrics.

In the latter sessions of the song when the male lyrical speaker states that he would take her with him though it costs him his life, she is reluctant to elope with him even if he turns the home and *padippura* (the architectural structure that serves as entrance gateway) into gold dreading her father, who would sue him, highlighting the social castration. The whole song is composed entertainingly, with witty or comically exaggerated lyrics. Along with the amusing music or melody, the overall composition creates humour. The song satirises the morally strict society that polices the actions of the individuals based on the unwritten codes of conduct. These moral issues are delivered subtly in an entertaining and thought-provoking way.

Apart from this one, there are two more songs in the same movie crafted in a similar manner, which discuss and highlight social issues and moral questions. The song *Kandam bechoru kottaanu*, written by P. Bhaskaran, music by M.S. Baburaj, and vocalised by Mehboob and M.S. Baburaj, divulges the social issues like the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist ventures, and the morally corrupt society that is reluctant to help the poor. The song is crafted in a remarkable manner presenting the social and moral issues highlighted in the contrast between the *Kandam becha kottu* (a patched coat) belonging to a Mammadkaka, which visibly signifies his financial backwardness, but symbolises his richness at heart, and the polished perfect coat put on by the affluent ones who are blind to the sufferings of the impoverished.

The lines

Thozhilalikale kollayadikkana

Muthalalikalude kottalla

Kashtathaperukiya saadujanangade kanneeroppana

Kottaanu

(line 5-8)

contrast between the coat adorned by the capitalists who rob the labourers and the patched coat of Mammadkaka, which wipes out the tears of the economically impoverished.

Vakkeelmarude kottallaa ithu fakkeeraniyana

kottanu

Rabbin Kalpanakettu nadakkana khalbine moodiya

Kottanu

(line 12-15)

The coat of a lawyer, which symbolises justice, but in the corrupt world it has become a symbol of lies and deceit, is contrasted with the coat of Mammadkaka, which is worn by the *fakir* (poor). The coat literally covers the pious heart of the person, Mammadkaka, who obeys and follows the commands of God.

Similarly, the song *Zindabad-zindabad* criticises the society which is so self-absorbed and egotistic, devoid of qualities like love and kindness towards fellow beings.

Zindabad-zindabad

Swontham karyam zindabad

Enthinumethinum ee duniyavil

Swontham karyam zindabad

(line 1-4)

The term *Zindabad*, with its origin in Persian, used as a part of a slogan, denotes one's enthusiasm or approval for something. The above opening lyrics convey that in this world, the egocentric society shouts *zindabad* only for the affairs concerning them and their profit alone. The lyrical speaker laments that he has to witness this plight, where there is no compassion for a fellow being. The song enumerates in a comic tone the harsh treatments encountered by the lyrical speaker from his merciless fellow beings.

Recorded in the voice of Yesudas, the song *Paavada venam melada venam,* featuring lyrics by Bichu Thirumala and music by Shyam, from the movie *Angadi* (1980) directed by I.V. Sasi, humorously portrays the aspirations of a family and society centring weddings, particularly discussing the financial and social dynamics of marriage.

"*Paavada venam melada venam panjara panankilik / Ikkaante karale ummante porule muthaan nee njammak*" (line 1-2). The song commences humorously, emphasising the need for traditional clothing and accessories as part of wedding preparations, hinting at the anticipation of a future wedding. The song is presented as delivered by the elder brother of the prospective bride, teasing and

joking around the bride, fantasising about the wedding they wish to grandly celebrate. The emotional yet cheerful line, adding warmth and familial love to the narrative, proclaims the need for skirts and tops for the beloved sister, endeared by her brother and her mother alike.

Kithab padich udyogam bharich sulthante gamael varum

Abu Dhabi kaaran puthu manavaalan nikahiorungi varum

Oon vilikkumbo parannu varum

(line 3-5)

The grandeur of the groom's arrival, who has completed his education (*kithab*), secured a decent job, and has achieved a good status in society, is discussed in the above lines. The status of the groom is highlighted by the groom's Gulf connection, conventional among the Mappilas. The groom is addressed as *Abu Dhabikaaran* (someone from Abu Dhabi) a status symbol and a desired trait of the groom at a time when Gulf migration was at the zenith, reflecting the significance of Gulf migration in the enrichment of Malabar's socio-economic fabric, where many aspire to achieve better financial standing by working abroad. The last line of the stanza humorously depicts the enthusiasm of the prestigious expatriate groom, as if he will "fly" at the bride's beckoning, also reflecting the conveyance by flight, the indispensable mode of Gulf transportation.

Allahne umma pollaapp vendaa ayyaayiram kodukkam

Athinoppam panamavan maharaay thannaal

Nikah podipodikaam, Ayisha nte nikah podipodikam

(line 7-9)

The lyrical speaker, presumably the brother, makes a humorous plea to avoid any trouble during the wedding process, promising a monetary offering of five thousand, possibly as dowry or to cover the expenses of the wedding. Along with the father of the bride, it is a huge responsibility of her brother in the socio-cultural milieu of Malabar, to pitch in concerning the financial aspects of the wedding, which also demands a huge amount to be provided as dowry. The playful yet reflective lines discussing the financial negotiations during marriages emphasise the practical concerns in an otherwise celebratory event. Satirically, lightly poking fun at material expectations in weddings, the song also mentions about the *mahr*, (the mandatory gift from the groom to his bride) fancying that the *nikah* could be celebrated splendidly if the groom provides money generously as her *mahr*.

Towards the conclusion of the song, in a more affectionate and slightly sentimental tone, the lyrical speaker also urges his sister to remember her family while abiding with the groom, which he refers to as paradise. Adding a touch of humour with affection, the lady is asked not to hate her brother, who is the central voice of the song.

The song was entirely composed in the Mappila dialect, highlighted in the Mappila linguistic variations like *njammak* instead of *enik* (for me), lexicons like *Kithab* (Arabic word for book) and *mahr*, and pledging upon Allah (*Allahne*), which are marks of Mappila culture. The song beautifully presents the aspirations surrounding a wedding from the perspective of a brother, underscoring the financial strains, the societal expectations of a grandeur wedding, the inclination for an expatriate groom, and importantly, the emotional reminder to keep in touch with her

roots even after the marriage. Parody songs with the social mission of reform within the community provide social awareness through satire, lampoon, and irony, vehemently commenting on the social atrocities directed towards women.

Mappila Recreation and Celebrations

Even the Mappila pastime has found its way into cinema. *Kurukuru macham*, rather than a Mappila art form, qualifies as a pastime or game engaged in by young girls, on occasions like Eid, when family members assemble at their ancestral home for such celebrations. It is played in two groups- one pretending to be the faction of the bride and the other, the groom. The play progresses in the form of a question-and-answer interchange where the clique of groom enquires about the bride and the party of bride replies, and vice versa. The whole exchange is carried forward through a song which opens with the lyrics *Kurukurumacham pennundo/ Kunjaali macham pennundo*. The players usually sing traditional songs, or new compositions are instantly created according to the progression of the play, which might last for an hour. The songs utilised during these recreational plays are considered part of literary art forms (Nujoom 37).

This pastime, prevalent among the Mappilas, is introduced in the form of a song in the movie *Kuppivala* (1965) directed by S.S. Rajan. The song, written by P. Bhaskaran and with music by M.S. Baburaj, has been vocalised by L.R. Eshwari. Through the song, one gang enquires about a bride, with a list of qualities, for their groom. As a reply to the following opening lines sung by the supporters of the groom, which was the traditional song sung by the players,

Kurukurumacham pennundo

Kunjaali macham pennundo

Saamsarakka pennundo

Surukkaabeebide maaranuk

(line 1-4)

the party of the bride responds that

Kalichiri maariya pennund

Kaipunyameriya pennund

Kanninínangiya maaranundo ee

Penninu pattiya maaranundo

(line 5-8)

The bride's party describes the bride as a girl who is mature enough, suggested in the line *Kalichirimaariya pennund*, which implies that the playfulness and mischievous nature of childhood has faded as the prospective bride has approached her marriageable age, signifying her transition into adulthood, which demands responsibility from her side. In the next line, her culinary skills are praised, which is a definite skill that every bride should learn and possess, and the bride's party asks if there is a handsome groom who is a match for this bride who satisfies all the demands that are put forth by society. The lyrics of the song are aptly crafted, incorporating the traditional views on marriage by that temporal Mappila society.

It is followed by the enquiry from the groom's company, who asks if there is a bride who is adorned with mehndi and ornamented with bangles for the groom from the grand mansion, which indicates the high status of the groom.

Ponnu kondoru pura venam

Athil muthu pathichoru muri venam

Pattu virichoru vazhiyil koodi

Padaviyil pennine kondu ponam

(line 17-20)

In the above lines, as the play gets to a point of heightened excitement, the bride’s party demands a house constructed of gold with a room decorated with pearls, and the bride should be escorted through a silken pathway in high esteem. As a ridiculous reply to this demand, the groom’s party answers that she will be provided a house built of palm and a room fashioned using a reed, and the bride will be escorted by a broom.

Similar to the filmic Oppana (discussed in the following sessions), this recreational play is choreographed in the form of a dance performance mixed with occasional clapping of the hands, a signature feat attributed to female Mappila art forms. The dancers, adorned in traditional Mappila attire, are compartmentalised into two groups- one representing the bride and the other, the groom. The dancers perform the choreographed dance moves and formations in groups according to the lyrics of the song. Different steps and formations are assigned to both groups to distinguish their clan (*Kuppivala Movie Song* 0:00- 2:58).

A notable song from the movie, *Yatheem* (1977), *Manathu sandya koluthiya*, authored by P. Bhaskaran, music by M.S. Baburaj, and sung by S. Janaki, brilliantly describes the celebration of the holy festival, Bakrid (Eid al-Adha), in Mappila

households. The song, which encapsulates the splendid cultural traditions associated with the festival of Eid, such as singing, dancing, cooking, adorning henna on the palms, and playing various games, highlights the festival as not just a religious event but a cultural festival that brings families and friends together.

Maanathu sandhyakoluthiya mathaappum

poothiriyum

Manassilo swapnathinte pon vilakkum pon

thiriyum

Innallo bakrid perunnaal

Innallo valiya perunnaal

(line 1-6)

The song, commencing with the description of fireworks lit by the night sky, connotes the festive atmosphere. Associating this delightful external spectacle of the festival with internal emotions, the lyrics concoct that golden lambs of dreams are lit in the heart of the celebrant. And the final lines of the stanza divulge the occasion, setting the celebratory tone of the song, that it is the grand festival of Bakrid, conveying the brimming happiness at the arrival of the long-awaited Eid al Adha.

Kolaayil virunnukaarude

Kolahalavum khissakalum

Muttathe mullapanthalil

Aravanamuttum oppanayum

(line 8-11)

The song then moves on to vividly describe the various spectacles in the Mappila household on the night of the Bakrid. The common sight on the night of the festival, the *kolayi* (the porch like structure of the ancestral homes) bustling with visitors and the commotion of shared anecdotes and joy, symbolising the community bonding on these festive days, and the Arabana beating and Oppana performance under the *mullapanthal* (the canopy of jasmine wines), enhancing the festivity associated with Bakrid, are discerned as the sights outside the home.

The inside of the home is brimming with songs, laughter, and claps by the gorgeous ladies, highlighting their participation in the event, though inside the four walls, as the cultural custom suggests. The separation of spaces is pristinely presented here. The outdoor space is dominated by men, and in contrast, the space indoors is dedicated to the womenfolk. The scene inside the nuptial room of newlyweds is also mentioned, hinting at the swaying smile of the groom. There arise the playful giggles and sweet natters from the *thekkini* (the southern room of the *nalukettu* house) of young women, whose voice is metaphorically compared to the melodious calling of the cuckoo. The mention of *mylanchi* in the lyrics represents the practice of women beautifying themselves by adorning henna on celebrations like Eid.

Thekkiniyil monjathikalude

Chakkaravaakkum kalichiriyum

Mylanchi chundukal mozhiyum

Kuyilochakalum kusurthikalum

(line 17-20)

Aligning with lyrics, the visuals of the song present the pleasant celebratory Mappila household where the women, adorned in traditional Mappila attire, are depicted singing and dancing in joy while the kids and men play and revel outside. With occasional montage of fireworks enhancing the whole festive ambience of the song sequence (*Maanathu sandhyakoluthiya* 0:00- 3:34)

Various categorisations of Mappila songs have been represented in the movies. There are songs depicting amorous affection, religious devotion, satirical undertones, recounting a tale, or experiences, celebrations, and recreations of the Mappila community, and even lullabies. The lyricists have successfully incorporated particular expressive nuances of Mappila culture to closely resemble the authentic communal art form. The songs are engaging in their own aspects with catchy rhythm and melodies showcasing poetic craftsmanship, thereby popularising this genre among an elaborate stream of audience. Cinema has even ventured to incorporate the compositions of traditional Mappila poets like the celebrated Moyinkutty Vaidyar. However, all these songs, carriers of Mappila sensibilities, have been tailored for the harmless consumption by the audience. These representations of Mappila songs as innocuous entertainment alone exemplify the sanitisation, decontextualization, and depoliticization of cultural expressions tied to marginalised or resistant communities when they are mainstreamed, especially in popular culture like cinema. Mappilapattu, which initially expressed complex layers of cultural, religious, and political significance, was condensed to a form of delicate entertainment in these mainstream portrayals. This modification mirrors broader dynamics of cultural power, where subversive or oppositional cultural expressions

are stripped of their critical underpinnings and offered in ways that fit authoritarian narratives. Cultural articulations, components of the collective memory of Mappilas, with much significance in their daily life, singing their religious and communal history of resistance and resilience, are reinforced in ways that affiliate with the expectations of the commercial capitalists. This alteration often seeks to defuse the potential for dissent inherent in the authentic indigenous forms. The shift of Mappilapattu into entertainment, disseminated through mass media, reflects patterns of incorporation, when folk and minority cultural expressions are depoliticised in order to be premiered in mainstream cultural production.

Oppana on the Big Screen

Choreographed dance numbers, performed according to the swift beats of high tempo, are an eminent feature of Indian cinema. In the traditional Muslim setup, dancing is considered inappropriate. However, Oppana is perceived as socially acceptable and performed within female-centric spaces, during weddings and other celebrations. By integrating Oppana instead of mainstream cinematic dance, films portraying Muslim characters could effortlessly navigate these cultural limitations while still featuring songs and movement. Moreover, such a substitution further helps to establish the communal identity, rendering the portrayal of Mappila life on screen more authentic. The traditional alliance of Oppana with wedding rituals leaves the art form as a natural fit in wedding sequences in films. Nevertheless, the forceful impact of commercialisation on cultural expressions, when displayed on screen, is inescapable. Oppana was stylised, showcasing much deviation from the authentic routine practiced by the community. Numerous enticing

dance movements in bodycon costumes, which transformed according to the popular trend of the period, were adopted during the Oppana sessions to hook the audience.

Laura Mulvey argues, scopophilia, as a pleasure offered by cinema, and the pleasure in looking has been divided between active/male and passive /female.

> The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* (11)

Conventionally, Oppana was not exclusively female or supposed to highlight women as visual objects. However, in its cinematic adaptation, Oppana became concentrated on young, beautiful brides-to-be enclosed by female performers who sing and dance in celebration. The female performers (comprising the bride) are positioned before the cinematic gaze as spectacles for inducing male pleasure. They are staged as passive, adorned figures, styled in ways that accentuate their physical exquisiteness, grace, and ornamentation, reducing the communal, interactive nature of Oppana into something to be looked at rather than dynamically engaged in. The performance, with graceful movements and coy expressions, reinforces the passive, objectified role of women as sources of visual pleasure rather than active participants in the cultural expression. Oppana scenes often project their focus on the bride as the central figure, the ultimate object of male desire, through her acts of blushing, smiling, or looking down shyly, bolstering patriarchal ideals of femininity, modesty, and beauty.

Interestingly, Oppana, as a prominent cultural performance, was traditionally performed by both female and male singers, as delineated in the previous chapter. However, the cinematic rendition selectively adapted the art form as a female dance, completely obliterating the participatory role of male singers in this cultural aesthetic expression, when traditionally performed within the community. It became gendered as a predominantly female art form, informed by the dynamics of the male gaze. When read along with the concept of the male gaze, the discriminatory selection could be better understood. Mulvey observes that,

> According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence, the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. (12)

By the set of beliefs and values that support existing dominant power structures, men are not subjected to the same kind of sexual objectification as women. The male figure cannot bear or handle being perceived as an object of sexual desire; therefore, there is no cinematic representation of a stylised, eroticised male art form, though plenty of male-oriented art forms are integral to folk cultural expressions. The exclusion of men from cinematic representations of Oppana reinforces the binary gender roles- women as the objects of the gaze, while men remain the unseen, controlling force behind the gaze. This transformation erases the historical and cultural complexity of Oppana, reducing it to a spectacle that upholds patriarchal values rather than celebrating communal joy and interaction.

In its primary form, it is an articulation of female camaraderie and celebration. However, its presence on the screen unveils tensions between gendered spectatorship, objectification, and performative pleasure. In cinema, it is explicitly exhibited as an instance of feminine beauty, celebration, and eroticised modesty. The framing of the visuals, camera movement that pans across the corpse of the bride, and male spectators within the diegesis reinforce this dynamic. Further, Oppana sequences in Malayalam films recurrently divorce the bride or lead female dancers from the narrative, enhancing her fetishised presence. Spectacular costumes, stylised choreography, and slow-motion shots accentuate feminine charm, aligning with Mulvey's notion of women as passive objects of visual pleasure in narrative cinema.

A selection of Oppana performances from Malayalam films is investigated in the following sessions, focusing on two key aspects- the lyrics and the visuals. By analysing the thematic elements, cultural meanings, and linguistic peculiarities within the song, the proclamation of Mappila identity could be identified and analysed. Further, the gendered representations and the cinematic framing, spectatorship, and performative aesthetics in the visuals of the performance assist in comprehending the profit-oriented eroticisation of the art form.

The precursor of cinematic Oppana appeared in the movie *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956), directed by P. Bhaskaran. In the movie, a Mappila song track was introduced to depict the festivities of the Mappila home during weddings. A musical hit at the time of its release, the song was composed in the traditional *Ishal* Oppana, predominantly sung in Mappila households during marital celebrations by singing troops. This song was penned by P. Bhaskaran and composed by K. Raghavan.

Pooranamathu maarilenthiya punyavaan

Puthumaaranallo

Naarimaar nasheeda padiya sundaraputhumaranallo

(line 3-5)

Analogous to the conventional *Kalyanapattu* tradition of Mappilas, this song glorifies the adorned, beautiful bride, the handsome groom, and the blissful nuptial night. The above lines hail the handsome bridegroom, a divine youth who is the subject of *nasheeda* (hymns) sung by women, signifying the unparalleled virtue of the groom.

Poomaniyarakkullilirikkum pennu

Thaamarayithal pole thalarnna kannu

Nanmayil mikavulla surumayumezhuthi

Kanmashiyal kankonukal ezhuthi

Unmayilazhakin ponnoliyozhuki

(line 11-15))

These lines admire the allure of the lovely bride seated inside the *maniyara*, the nuptial room, whose tender, weary eyes, adorned with *suruma* (kohl), are compared to the petals of a lotus flower. The convention of beautifying the bride on her nuptial night refers to the cultural aesthetics of Mappilas. The stanza also employs the figure of speech *Kazhuthu*, where the second sound /m/ is repeated throughout the lines.

The visual representation of Oppana exhibited in the song strongly resembles the traditional way it was performed in Mappila households. It presents the unadulterated art form without the exaggerated bodily movements and scurried dance steps. Unlike the Oppana nowadays, the visuals of this song present the Oppana singers orderly seated around the decked bride, rhythmically clapping their hands and lip synching the pre-recorded lyrics without much movement, though the camera zooms in on the shy, eyes cast down, countenance of the bride. The groom is shown occupying the nuptial room, while the singers perform Oppana around the bride, and later she is escorted by the group into the room where the groom awaits, resembling the Mappila marital customs (*Pooranamathu* 0:00-2:20).

Fig.5. Screenshot from *Pooranamathu* where the bride is seated in the middle and the singers sit around the bride, clapping and singing.

Oppana, thus debuted as a simplistic representation of the Mappila tradition during the wedding night was drastically altered in the movies that followed.

Though, the tradition of praising the beauty of the bride, the grandeur of the groom and mention of the nuptial bliss was carried forward with each writer's distinct imagination fuelling the lyrics. It is noteworthy that as previously mentioned in the preceding chapter, the thematic expressions concerning Oppana was not limited to the extravagant description of bride and her adornments; the grandeur of the groom and the wedding bliss, but it contained numerous other conceptual focuses like Islamic histories, the tales of creation of man and the universe, the stories from the lives of the Islamic Prophets etc. The narrative evocation of nuptials and the descriptions of the ornaments were one among the numerous thematic portrayals. However, the analysis of the celebrated Oppana songs from various movies reveals that their thematic scope has been frequently constrained to idealised representations of the nuptials and the ornamented bride's beauty.

The most popular Oppana song, which is even now heard reverberating the wedding halls and other entertainment platforms and social media, from the movie *Kuttikuppayam* (1964), directed by M. Krishnan Nair, *Oru kotta ponnundallo*, penned by Bhaskaran and vocalised by L. R Eswari, is composed in the *Vaineelam Ishal* by M.S. Baburaj. As aforementioned, this particular *Ishal* was usually vocalised when the groom is escorted to the bride's home during Mappila wedding ceremonies. V.M. Kutty observes that this song became a hit number immediately after its release. Numerous Oppana were performed to this song at various houses during wedding ceremonies, and several singers chorused this song in countless stage shows. It was endeared by music connoisseurs irrespective of their caste and religion (*Mappilapattinte Gathimaattom* 35). The fact that this song was performed at various weddings exemplifies the alteration of cultural dynamics due to media

influence on society. The catchy lyrics, high tempo, and the perfect delivery of the dance performance might have contributed to the whole success of the song.

In the movie, the song visualises the celebration of the ear-piercing ceremony of a girl child. As aforementioned, Oppana was performed during the ear-piercing ceremony of the girl child, as part of the Mappila cultural tradition, with the purpose of distracting the child and relieving her pain.

The movie depicts such an instance, where young ladies clap their hands and dance around an infant who is adorned in various traditional gold ornaments, and the song also highlights the correlation between gold and gender, vividly describing various adornments. This precious metal is considered desirable by women in the form of jewellery, and additionally, dowry is provided in the form of gold jewellery when marrying off a woman in Mappila culture.

Fig.6. Screenshot from *Oru kotta ponnundallo,* where women clap around the infant in a crib.

Oru kotta ponnundallo minnundallo

Meni niraye

Karayalle khalbin maniye

Kalkanda kaniyalle

(line 1-4)

Through a hyperbolic expression, the lyrics disclose that there is an equivalent of a basket of gold on the corpus of the child, and the adored child, who is swung in a cradle, is being consoled by chorusing this.

Kanakathin niramulla kaathilaniyan

Kaathilola ponnola

Mampullichunambulla maarathaniyaan

Maangathaali manithaali

(line 8-11)

Traditionally, gold ornaments are gifted to girls during special ceremonial occasions like these. Mappilas follow the tradition of decking gold ornaments during special ceremonial events. Various designer ornaments, especially worn by women and girls, are integral to Mappila culture. To adorn the golden ears of the child, she is granted a pair of golden earrings and other assorted designs of neckpieces like *mangathali*, a necklace with designs resembling mangoes, and *manithali*, which are also presented to the child.

The song utilises numerous mundane expressions and specific Mappila vocabularies like *qalb* (heart) and *attar* (fragrant essential oil), highlighting the Arab

connection of Mappilas with these loan words, and *padachavan* (the creator), a Mappila synonym used for God. The catchy, fast number and the lyrics with repeated alliteration render it an acoustic wonder. Along with this, the vibrant visuals, presenting Oppana in a novel spectacular format, with choreographed dance steps, providing a template for the subsequent Oppana songs, enthused the audience.

The Oppana choreographed in this song is drastically different from the traditional art form of the Mappilas. It has been discussed that Oppana was an aesthetic expression with immense cultural significance, with an attentiveness to the brilliance of song composition and singing, rather than bodily movements. In the visuals of the song, women wearing bodycon traditional Mappila women costumes (contemporary at the time of the movie's release) are alluringly dancing to the song, swaying their hips, performing a choreographed number. They are stylised to arouse a strong visual and erotic impact, embodying a "to-be-looked-at-ness" that reinforces their roles as objects of pleasure. Their attendance serves to captivate the male gaze, metamorphosing them into representations of fantasy that conform to the expectancies and desires of male spectators. The Oppana song *Pooranamathu* from the previously discussed movie *Rarichan Enna Pouran*, released almost a decade earlier, has no traces of twirling or swaying of the female body. In that song, the companions of the bride are seen serenely seated around the bride, and they sing while clapping their hands. There is a striking contrast in the representation of this art form in this song, *Oru kotta ponnundallo*. The performance commences with the ladies gathered around the infant in the crib and clapping their hands in a room. With the change of music score, the circle expands and performs a seductive number,

running around and oscillating their hips, with occasional clapping of hands to resemble the Oppana. The Oppana performance presented here is a systematically choreographed and practiced one, where the performers are executing an art that is learned in unison (*Oru Kotta* 0:00- 3:05).

Fig.7. Screenshot from *Oru kotta ponnundallo,* where the dancers perform in a circle around the crib.

Apart from this one, there is another Oppana performance in this movie where the song is composed in a Qawwali style. The song, *Pullimanalla mayilallla madurakarimballa* again lyrics by P. Bhaskaran sung in the melodious voice of L. R Eswari, depicts his poetic excellence in penning down Mappila songs.

Pullimanalla mayilallla madurakarimballa

Maarivillotha pennanu-ival

maarivillotha pennanu

(line 1-3))

The song praises the beauty of the bride by comparing her to a rainbow, rejecting the more conventional comparisons like deer, peacock, and sugarcane, signifying that she is even more valued as a bride. She is called a pot of peals (*muthukudam)* and radiant gold (*pathara maattulla ponnu)* to emphasise her value.

Kaithapoo kavilaanu kaarakazhuthaan

Munthiri chundaan sundarik

Surumayezhuthiya Sundara mizhiyaan

Mylanchi kayyanu painkilikk

(line 24-27)

The bride is again compared to numerous things beautiful and praised in the song. The bride is compared to precious stones, and her beauty is extoled, claiming it as something that isn't seen anywhere else, penned purely in the mundane language of the people. The body parts of the bride are compared to flowers and fruits to emphasise the beauty and tenderness of the bride. The beautified eyes of the bride, adorned with suruma, and the palms decked with mehndi are articulated in the song. The act of lining eyes with suruma and the palms decorated with *mylanchi* alludes to the custom of Mappilas, where the bride is beautified with these adornments.

The song begins with the bride being escorted to the room and seated at the centre by her companions. This feat became a significant feature of Oppana, the opening act, when Oppana was performed widely on stages. The Oppana performers, on either side of the bride, escort her to the destined seat, with a gentle touch on one shoulder and hand. Subsequently, the bride's maids, seated on both sides of the bride, start dancing according to the music and song. They perform various feats standing upright, moving, and twirling around. The performers mesmerizingly perform a practiced number in front of the camera, capturing the gaze of the audience (*Pullimanalla* 0:00-6:44)

Another qawwali style Oppana song, *Puthan manavatti* from the movie *Kandam Becha Kottu* (1961), vocalised by P. Leela and Gomathi sisters, celebrates the festivity of the marriage between the hero and the heroin. The typical Oppana song praises the beauty of the bride and her coyness.

Puthan manavatti punnara manavatti

Pookaitha malarotha manavatti

Thathamma chundaan thanka kazhuthaan

Thaamara poovotha kannaan

(line 1-4)

The lovely new bride is compared to the fragrant native flower- *kaithapoo* (fragrant screw pine). Her red lips like a parrot's, her golden neck, and eyes that resemble a lotus flower are devised in the song.

Manavalanethumbo maniyaravittu nee

Maravilekkodalle manavatti

Mylanchikayyinal maanmizhi pothinee

Maarikalayalle manavatti

(line 5-8)

The coyness of the bride is conveyed through her gestures- shying away and hiding behind and gracefully covering her face with her hands that are adorned with *mylanchi*, which is integral to Mappila weddings, when the groom enters the nuptial chamber, carries cultural and traditional connotations, reflecting the bride's humility, modesty and innocence, expected from a young bride in the patriarchal set up, fuelling the male fantasy. This reticent demeanour is a romanticised desired trait that elevates the beauty of the moment in the male imagination.

The Oppana is performed by three talented dancers who are not part of the plot, dancing around the adorned bride who is seated in the middle. The dancers occasionally taunt the bride, and the bride reflexively covers her face with her mehndi-clad hands when the previously mentioned lyrics urging her not to shy away are sung by the bride's maids. Throughout the performance the bride is seen making facial expressions and gestures appropriate to the lyrics of the song and major screen space is provided to the Oppana dancers who perform rehearsed dance steps in unison with major erotic movements, turning around, lying on the ground and sitting down (*Puthan Manavaatti* 0:00-3:16). The alien presence of the fetishised woman disrupts the narrative flow; their appearance tends to pause the story for a few minutes, as the camera lingers on their glamorised body and movements, highlighting them as spectacle rather than as an active agent (Mulvey 11).

Fig. 8. Screenshot from *Puthan manavatti,* where one of the dancers performs Oppana lying down on the ground.

The choreography of the song is similar to the previous ones; however, distinct from those songs, which provide visuals of celebration within the four walls of the household, this one is set in an open space, thronged with both male and female spectators. In the Oppana performances discussed so far, there has been only the presence of female spectators in the cinematic visuals. However, with this song, there is the visible attendance of the groom and other men.

Fig. 9. Screenshot from *Puthan manavatti* displaying the male spectators.

The gaze, according to Mulvey, is twofold; the woman displayed on the screen is an "erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (11). Women are subjected to the diegetic gaze of male characters within the story, watching the performance as well as the extra-diegetic gaze through the cinematic camera that frames the performance for the audience.

In the whole dance sequence, the groom is seated across from the bride at a distance, enjoying the whole show. Montage creates the illusion that the men are watching and relishing the spectacle. In comparison with the Oppana, which first appeared in 1956, where the groom is shown seated in the *maniyara* (bridal chamber) away from the performance, the current song displays the groom as watching the bride and the performance, from a vantage point that aligns with the cinematic camera. The cinematic gaze, thereby, transfigures the art form from being a participatory cultural ritual into a visual spectacle, prioritising the pleasure of looking at the expense of the significance of doing. This altered depiction thus indicates a subtle departure from a more community-centred representation to one that deliberately affiliates with the mainstream cinematic codes of female exhibition and eroticisation, aligning with the dominant patriarchal aesthetic frameworks of cinema.

The Oppana song *Madhura poovana*, from the movie *Kuppivala* (1965), penned by P. Bhaskaran, music by M.S. Baburaj, vocalised by P. Leela, is in every aspect an elegant Mappila song which falls under the *Kalyanapattu* categorisation.

The song picturises and glorifies the prettified bride adorned with golden jewellery, a requirement in the wedding scene.

Madhura poovana puthumalarkodi

Kanakkunilkkana pennu

Kazhuthilokkeyum ponnu

(line 1-3)

The picture of a traditional young Mappila bride wearing golden necklaces and pendants covering her neck, which camouflages the dowry and proclaims the wealth and status of the bride, is considered a significant aspect in traditional weddings, and also a central feature of the wedding costume.

Kulikazhippich karimizhikalil

Puthusurumayum poosi

Vishari chuttilum veesi

Kilikal polulla kusruthipennungal

Cheviyil kinnaaram pesi

(line 6-10)

These lines explicate the traditional rituals associated with the wedding. It describes the scenes where the bride is given a bath and her black eyes are lined with fresh kohl, indicating the act of beautifying the bride, which is an essential Mappila custom. The prettified bride is then fanned by her teasing young female companions who whisper playful remarks in her ears, portraying a typical fantasy wedding scene.

The latter sessions of the song rhythmically describe tauntingly the nuptials where the *'puthiya Mappila*', the bridegroom groom awaits the bride in the traditional nuptial chamber, where the newlyweds spend their first night after the wedding, locally called the *maniyara*. This event is compared to the gradual union of dawn with the meadows. The vivid imagery of the bride being escorted to the decorated room and the door gently closing paints the nuptial scenes and emotions through words. The tinkling of the anklets of the bride when she approaches the cot, and the groom pinching the bride on her cheeks, and the ecstasy of the groom when he perceives her, a rollercoaster of various emotions, are transcribed in unpolished words utilised by the Mappilas in their mundane life.

The poet skilfully utilises lexicons that are pertinent to the community on various occasions to elevate the appeal of the song, accentuating the mark of Mappilapattu. The usage of *puthiya Mappila*, the terms *bahar* (sea) and *hoori* (divinely beautiful lady) are typical of Mappila vocabulary.

Analogous to the previously discussed Oppana songs, the bride is escorted by the dancers to the focus of the pavilion, and the dance routine showcases shimmering of shoulders, and a mix of traditional folk-dance steps, drawing attention to the dancers. The dance is choreographed, aligning with the song's lyrics, along with appropriate facial expressions enhancing the emotional appeal. The lead dancer enacts the application of kohl with her finger when she sings the action, and the background dancers wave the hand fan, according to the lyrics when it says '*vishari chuttilum veeshi'* (*Madurapoovana* 0:00-1:51)

Fig. 10. The lead dancer gestures the application of kohl.

The song *Oru kudukka ponnutharam* from the movie *Subaidha* (1965), directed by M.S. Mani, lyrics by P. Bhaskaran, music by M. S. Baburaj, and sung by L. R. Eeshwari and L.R. Anjali, similar to the *Kurukuru mecham pennundo* song discussed earlier, is also lyrically crafted in the arrangement of dialogical exchange where one party initiates their quest for a bride.

Oru kudukka ponnu tharaam

Ponnaal ulloru minnu tharaam

Aayiram miskanu vere tharaam

Annapidaikkotha pennundo

(line 2-5)

The lyrical speaker is enquiring if there is an ideal bride, and they are offering a pot packed with gold, a chain forged out of gold, and more, a valuable offer indicating the *mahr*, contributed by the groom, which is the right of the wife

according to the Islamic belief. The triangular correlation of marriage, gold, and women in Mappila culture is again highlighted in this song. The offer is denied by the other party, who demands a groom who is pleasant-looking, and they assert that the bride will only be given away after their *nikah*. The words like *kaanan monjulla Mappila* (handsome groom) and *kanoth* (the *nikah*) are common Mappila lexicons predominant in the Malabar region.

Kaanan chelulla kalyanakaaranu

Kaithappoo polulla pennundo

Muthilum muthaya munthiya maaranu

Thathamma polulla pennundo (11-14)

The playful dialogue continues again, where the good looks of the groom is acknowledged and they enquire if there is a bride as beautiful as the *kaithapoo*, matching the handsome groom. The highly esteemed groom, who is compared to a pearl, demands a girl like a parrot. The faction of the bride confesses that the bride is indeed beautiful, comparing her to a colourful, attractive bird, which in a broader sense signifies refined feminine grace, and her eyes are compared to the moon (*Ambili polulla kannaanu*). And towards the conclusion of the performance, the necessity of *nikah* for giving away the bride is again highlighted.

The Oppana performance in the song again is a perfectly choreographed one with captivating dance steps and movements. The performance begins with the dancers seated on both sides of the bride in a row, dressed in the traditional attire and rhythmically clapping their hands. The decked bride who expresses her coyness occasionally is seated at the centre in the traditional bridal attire. The dancers

perform with certain hand gestures and symbols to match the lyrics. The show opens with a dancer lip-singing the opening lines, and with expressive hand gestures, she conveys the message. The golden pot, the chain that is being offered, and the query for the bride are strikingly expressed through the mudras, facial expressions, and hand gestures. Occasionally, the routine resembles a perfect Oppana that is performed on stages, when they clap around the bride and switch positions, clapping their hands. But then again, there is the rush of enticing filmic dance movements (*Oru Kudukka* 0:00-3:56).

Another well-composed Oppana song from this movie*, Ee chiriyum chiriyalla*, penned by Bhaskaran and music by Baburaj, captures the essence of the wedding celebration with a focus on the mirth and romantic emotions during a marital union, portraying the anticipation and playfulness centring the bride as she prepares for the big day. The bride is teasingly told that the joys and the laughter from the nuptial room after her *nikah*, when the groom holds her hand after the formalities are done is superior to the current delight and smile, and playfulness she is experiencing, suggesting the hopeful anticipation of a life together filled with joy after the wedding.

Ee chiriyum chiriyallaa

Ee kaliyum kaliyalla

Kanothonnu kazhinjotte

Kaipidikkan vannotte

Maniyara vaathil thurannotte

Manimanipolulla chirikelkam

(line 1-6)

Similarly, in the latter stanza, the bride is assured that the cooing and beauty she experiences currently will be much reduced compared to the sweetness or affection she will receive when the guests leave and the groom enters the home. And these two souls longing for their union are compared to the legendary lovers Husn al Jamal and Badr al Munir, characters popularised among the Mappilas by Moyinkutty Vaidyar. The song highlights marriage as a harmonious, joyful event and the latter married life as the epitome of delight and contentment.

Ee konjal konjalalla

Ee monjum monjalla

Virunnu vannavar poikotte

Veettinakathavan vannotte

Badarul muneerin munnile pennoru-

Husnul Jamalay varumallo

(line 13-18)

In the song *Ee chiriyum chiriyalla*, the Oppana is presented with significant alteration from the previous one, chiefly in the costume of the bride and the Oppana performers, as the movie is picturising an educated modern girl, representative of the modern Mappila generation, different from the olden days. The bride is dressed in a trendy salwar suit with a net shawl on her head, and her companions, the dancers, wore sarees and churidars. There appears to be no visible distinction in clothing that proclaims their Mappila identity. The changing dynamic of Mappila attire is represented through the performers. Unlike the previous Oppana, one of the

performers has a bindi on her forehead indicating her religion (*malayalam old songs* 0:00-2:57). Through this religious inclusion, the art form transpires to be a shared cultural expression, highlighting the harmony and interconnectedness between different communities. This signifies the respect provided to diverse traditions and an openness to celebrate the cultural heritage of Mappilas together, reflecting the current scenario where this art form is not only performed by the members of the community, but by any talented performer.

Though the song is a typical Oppana song which praises and teases the bride and picturising the blisses associated with the wedding day, the choreography of the song has increasingly taken on the style of a group dance rather than traditional Oppana, with the bridesmaids performing rehearsed dance steps moving around the bride who is seated in the middle (*malayalam old songs* 0:00-2:57).

The Oppana song, *Thankavarna pattudutha*, from the movie *Yatheem* (1977), penned by P. Bhaskaran, music composed by G. Devarajan, and sung by L R Eeswari again celebrates the joyful anticipation surrounding a bride on her wedding. The song opens with a description of the bride clad in golden-hued silk attire as the beautiful partner of the auspicious groom, reflecting the significance of their matrimonial union. "*Thankavarna pattudutha rangukaari* / *Pennivaloru* /*Mangalapoo marante pankukaariyallo*" (line 1-3)

The lines "*Innaente kanninakathoru kinavin vettam*" (the glow of dreams in my eyes) (line 14-15), and "*Innente mukhathoru puchirithottam*" (a garden of smiles blooming on my countenance) (line 16) underscore the excitement and emotions of

the bride, brimming with dreams about a new life, and the smile symbolises the joy experienced by the bride and her associates on the day of the wedding.

The meticulous bridal preparations are enumerated in the song, where jasmine scented hair oil is applied onto her hair and kohl is lined on her beautiful blue eyes, highlighting the richness of the traditional practices associated with wedding rituals. Moreover, she is clad in golden bridal jewellery for her entrance into the nuptial chamber. It is a custom to decorate the bride for her first night, which is announced in the song where the bridesmaids tease her, proclaiming tonight is the auspicious night; the first night, your wedding night, when your groom tickles you.

The Oppana choreographed in the movie utilises substantial dance steps which only trained professionals could effortlessly perform, unlike the simple traditional Oppana. The performers are displayed performing various sophisticated feats, sitting and rolling around. The bride who shies away when approached by the dancers is escorted to the centre and seated, displaying the coyness demanded from a new bride, especially when the dancers taunt her. The costumes of the bride and the dancers are similar as they are seen donned in a traditional jumper, with a headscarf, but the conventional dhoti is replaced with pleated printed skirts, emphasising the change in trend. However, for the bride to stand out from the dancers, she is styled in clothes that are shining and elaborate with needlecraft (*Thankavarna Pattudutha* 0:00- 3:50)

There is another celebrated *Kalyanapattu* from the movie *Pathinalamravu* (1979) which sings the delicate emotions and the jubilant atmosphere surrounding

the wedding, composed by K. Raghavan and penned by the lyricist Poovachal Khadar, and sung by the popular Mappila song singers Vilayil Faseela and Ernholi Musa- *Manavatti karam kond mukham marach*.

> *Manavatti karam kond mukham marach*
>
> *Mayilanchi kavilath padarnn veenu*
>
> *Padarum choppily naanamunarnn*
>
> *Pala pala swapnam minni maranj*
>
> (line 1-4)

The song commences with the classic picturisation of a shy bride covering her face with her hands adorned with mehndi. The blush on her face is deliberated as the tanning by henna that spreads across her cheeks, evoked by her coyness and numerous dreams, hopes, and aspirations, associated with marriage, flickering in her mind.

The mention of "*Tharivalapolum kalikal paranju*" (bangles pronouncing playful sounds) and "*Kilukile aramani chirikkunnallo*" (the waist chain making tinkling laughs) (line 4-5) personify the adornments of the bride, which engage in laughing and making fun of the bride along with the bridesmaids, symbolising the joy and excitement of the wedding. Further, the lines like "*Arimapoo manam vannu nirayanalloo*" and "*Arikath kalichiri ozhukanallo*" (line 10-11) provide a sensory description of the floral fragrance that fills the pavilion and the laughter and joy that flows like a stream, bringing the joyous ambiance of the wedding.

Unlike the visuals in the majority of the *kalyanapattu* discussed so far, this one departs from choreographed dance forms and structured movements, presented

as Oppana. Instead, the bride sits serenely at the middle of her bridesmaids, while the camera pans over her, focusing intently on her festive wedding attire and ornate jewellery in close-up shots. The scene then zooms in on her face, capturing her expression, as the hands of the bridesmaids clap rhythmically in front of her to the repeated beat of '*thanathantha thaanathantha thanthinnom*' (*Manavatti karamkond* 0:00- 3:47).

Mulvey argues that the close-up shots of isolated female body parts produce an erotic effect. Instead of displaying the woman as a whole character, these camera shots objectify her by focusing on specific parts, reducing her presence to visual pleasure rather than narrative depth. The erotic fragmentation of a body into close-ups flattens the image, removing the illusion of natural depth, making the woman seem more like a cut-out or icon rather than a real person in a three-dimensional world (12). In the Oppana, close-ups of the bride's face, hands, jewellery, or body movements function to produce an aestheticized eroticism.

Fig. 11. Screenshot from *Manavatti karam kond* displaying the close-up shot of the bride's face, partially covered with her dupatta.

Proceeding to the next movie, *Aarambam* (1982), directed by Joshi, which is distinguished by the popular Oppana song *Chelotha puthumaaranorungi vanne*, penned by Poovachal Khader, music by A. T. Ummer, and vocalised by Yesudas and S. Janaki. The song, aligning with the traditional tune, again celebrates the matrimonial union of two souls. The song begins with the description of the arrival of the groom, all dolled up for the occasion, which makes the bride blush with coyness. "*Chelotha puthumaaranorungi vanne / Naanathaal puthiyonnin kavil chuvanne*" (line 1-2)

In Oppana songs, the bride, who is the centre of the song, the day, and the performance, is always praised for her beauty and tenderness. Therefore, the song praises the distinctiveness of the bride, comparing her to the white moon flower blossoming in the sky, adorned with the veil of dew and a rare ruby that descended to the earth for the first time, emphasising the delicate beauty and elegance of the bride.

The line "*Manikya kiliyinnu kuliraninje*" (15), from the song, emphasises the goosebumps experienced by the bride fantasising about her fiancé, who is revealed in the song as Basheer, signifying her nervous excitement, anticipation, and the emotional impact of the occasion. Various metaphors highlight the radiance and joy of the blissful wedding and the anticipation and hope for the future. The bride, Rasiya, lights up as the wedding unfolds, aligning exactly with her wishes. "*Monjathi Rasiyante manam thelinje / Vambathi kothichapol mangalyam vanne*" (line 22-23)

The song concludes in a final blessing, invoking divine grace and security, adding a sacred element to the song and ceremony. The bride is blessed that all the doors of paradise will be opened for her by the creator, signifying that her future will be filled with prosperity and good fortune.

Ellaa rahmathum ninakku vendee

Ennum padachavan arulum mole

Ellaa subarkkavum ninakku vendee

Ennum padachavan thurakkum mole

(line 24-27)

The song presents an enthralling visual portrayal of wedding celebrations, enriched by the vibrant hues and dynamic performances of not only Oppana but also Daffmuttu, a traditional Mappila art form, by trained dancers. The performance features two groups- one male, and one female, both groups aligned vertically, in two rows, male performers on the front and the female performers in the back close to the bride, the former performing Daffmuttu and the latter Oppana. Certain Malayalam movies have so far highlighted the Oppana dance performed by presumed bridesmaids, and this song introduces the male Daff performance into this realm, adding a new dimension to the artistic representation. The song begins with rhythmic clapping by the male performers and introductory dance steps by the female dancers, setting a lively and energetic tone. The bride is seated across from the groom at a distance with the dancers in between, and with the actor singing and affectionately gesturing towards the groom in accordance with the opening lyrics (*Chelotha Puthumaaran* 0:00-5:40)

Similar to the Oppana performances presented in the movies, Daff is choreographed with intricate dance movements, with a touch of folk dance enhancing the festive and joyous atmosphere. The inclusion of the daff instrument creates an engaging musical backdrop that elevates the celebratory mood. In this performance, only certain dancers, particularly those in the front and back rows, own and play the daff, while others dance along to the rhythm. This approach differs from the authentic Daff performances, where every dancer typically holds and plays the instrument, synchronising their movements with the beat. Whereas, in this song, the instrument Daff performs the function of a decorative piece. Daff is particularly performed to a set of songs or *Baiths* appropriate to the art form; however, in the song it serves only as an entertaining and amusing factor that is performed according to the Oppana song that praises the bride, groom and their matrimonial union, providing a visual treat different from the previous Oppana choreographies. It dismisses the claim that no emotion other than devotion should be encouraged during Daff performance.

Fig. 12. Screenshot from *Chelotha puthumaran*, picturing male dancers holding Daff in the front and female dancers in the back close to the bride.

Though a male art form is introduced to the big screen through this movie, the element of eroticism in the presentation of male dancers is absent. Typically, in dance sequences featuring male actors, the camera often focuses on their agility, dominance, and charisma rather than accentuation on erotic elements like lingering close-ups on body parts. The male body is presented for admiration but not for passive erotic consumption (Mulvey 12)

Additionally, the bride's attire marks a significant deviation from traditional Mappila bridal wear. Instead of the conventional outfit, she is dressed in a red saree, typically preferred colour for the wedding outfit in most Indian cultures, with a silk dupatta draped over her head, reflecting her religious inclination, imitating the contemporary trends in Mappila bridal fashion at that time. The bride's jewellery is also modernised, featuring ornaments such as the *netti chutti*, worn on the forehead, which adds a distinctive touch to her ensemble. However, the female dancers maintain a comparatively traditional look through the selection of their outfits, though it is slightly updated with modern styling. They are clad in monochromatic attire, either red or yellow costumes, adorned with white or shimmery silver headscarves, adding to the overall festive atmosphere. Their hair braided and styled to the front on both sides adds to the charm of the dancers.

The groom, also a representative of the modern Mappila men, wore a white shirt and pants designed according to the contemporary trend, but not elaborate in comparison to the bride's costume. The costume of the male performers consists of semi-sheer kurtas worn over cotton vests, paired with dhotis and caps. The male

dancers wore either white or blue, contributing to the song's vibrant visual appeal (*Chelotha Puthumaaran* 0:00-5:40)

The Oppana song *Kannipalunke ponnin kinave*, from the movie *Angadi* (1980), featuring lyrics by Bichu Thirumala, musical scores by Syam and vocals by P. Susheela, portrays the shyness, excitement and the beauty of the cultural and ceremonial aspects of the matrimonial occasion in a playful tone with subtle teasing directed at the bashful bride.

Kaathil thulunkiyum kunji alukkathum

Kayyil kadakanum thodayum kombanum

Minniyum maattiyum nettikkuriyumitanganamarude

Oppana kelkuvan

Ponnil kulichu nee bannathalle

Pinne enthinee kalla naanam

(line 10- 15)

The song sumptuously describes the bride as resplendent, luxuriously decked in various traditionally designed ornaments like diverse earrings, bangles, chokers, and other ornaments worn on the head named *maatti* and *nettikuri*, highlighting her complete adornment for the wedding, reflecting the significance of golden jewellery in Mappila weddings. The bride is enquired about her false coyness and hesitance, when she has bathed in gold, emphasising her grandeur signified by her adornments, and is ready to listen to the Oppana sung by women to celebrate the wedding. The song specifically reveals the act 'listen to Oppana', instead of the modern rendition

'watch' Oppana, though the movie features Oppana specifically as a spectacle rather than an auditory experience, emphasises the authentic way Oppana was once enjoyed by Mappilas.

The physical beauty of the bride is also elaborated upon, focusing on her expressive eyes lined with kohl and blushing cheeks, hallmarks of a shy bride. The youth of the bride is also emphasised by revealing her age, on the threshold of seventeen, hinting at the precise age when a woman was considered marriageable by the standards of that temporal society.

Tharivalakal thammilidanjum

Thalirmizhiyithal chimmiyadanjum

Cheruviral nakha munakal nunanjum

Manavara pookumbol

Kilivaathiladakkumbol manavaalananakkumbol nin-

Monjum nenjum meyyum maaran

Thaalolikkille angane naanam theerille

(line 38-50)

The latter sessions of the song discern the romantic manoeuvres that are about to unfold after the wedding. The subtle collision of her bangles, the fluttering of her weary eyes, her gestures like grazing her fingertips, while entering the nuptial chamber, and the later closing of the door, and the groom approaching her symbolising their intimacy, and thus the teasing of the bride concludes, hinting that her hesitation and coyness will gradually fade away to give way for love and comfort.

The dancers huddled around the bride on their knees, rhythmically clapping their hands according to the background music, clad in colourful printed skirts and tops, with a scarf around their heads. The camera pans to the various ornaments of the bashful bride, who is donned in a red vest and dhoti with golden embroidery and a shimmery colourful printed scarf, when the dancers presumably sing about various decorative jewellery on her ears, neck, and hands. The visuals confirm Oppana becoming increasingly public, set in an outdoor, decorated space embellished with colourful paper wall decorations. Onlookers, including men, are seen enjoying the event, with some even joining in the revelry with light dance movements (*Kanni Palunke* 0:00-4:52)

The movie *Mylanchi* (1982), directed by M. Krishnan Nair, has produced a set of various Mappila songs with musical score by A.T. Ummer. The movie begins with a *mylanchipattu* (*mylanchi* song), *Malarvaaka poomaaran*, written by the Mappila poet Bappu Velliparamba, when rolling the opening title sequence rolls, setting the tone of the movie. The song sung by Lila Rasak, analogous to a typical *mylanchi* song, complements the various '*mylanchi'* stains on the bride, accentuating the celebratory glamour of the *mylanchiravu* (mehndi night) associated with wedding ceremonies.

> *Malarvaka poomaran penninte kaikalil pularkkaalamaniyicha mylanchi*
> *Pularkkaalamaniyicha mylanchi*
> *Manavatti penninte poonkavilil raathriyil manavalan pooshiya Mylanchi*
> (line 3-5)

The above lyrics express the metaphorical *mylanchi* that has been adorned on the hands of the bride on the dawn, suggesting the beginning of a new phase, and the *mylanchi* daubed on the flowery cheeks of the *Manavatti pennu* (bride) on the nuptial night by her beloved groom, the red hue of *mylanchi* paralleling the natural blush that arises during the moments of intimacy. Similarly, the verse *Muthaya beevithan chundath puthiyappla mutham koduthappo mylanchi* (the *mylanchi*, when the groom kisses the lips of the bride) (line 15) suggests the moments of affection that alter the hues on her face. Here, the lyrics metaphorically utilise henna to draw symbolic comparisons to various intimate aspects of the wedding, presenting *mylanchi* not only as a traditional embellishment or a physical adornment during the wedding but as a tangible mark of the union between the bride and groom.

The lyrics *Kalyanapenninte kaiviral pathilum kalithozhimaar itta mylanji* (the henna adorned on the ten fingers of the bride by her playmates) (line 8) articulate about the literal henna designed on the hands of the bride by her friends, a genuine feat at the weddings in Malabar, showcasing the fun and communal aspects of wedding preparations and celebrations.

Justifying the lyrics, the song presented later in the movie, visually presents a bridesmaid singing the song while designing henna on the palms of the bride, which is a celebratory ritual conducted as a part of weddings. This aesthetic ritual, common among Mappilas, applies henna on both hands and feet of the bride in order to enhance her attractiveness on her wedding day. The bride, styled in red saree with complementing gold jewellery, is seated in the middle and displays her palm to adorn it with pasted henna, while Oppana performers perform around her, clapping

their hands, moving around the bride. The Oppana dancers are styled in the traditional Mappila costume with colourful jumper, white dhoti with dyed hem, and a scarf fastened to their heads (*Malarvaka Poomaaran* 0:00- 2:47).

There is another Oppana song from this movie with lyrics by P. Bhaskaran and voiced by Laila Rasak *Alankara chamayathal*, that vividly picturises the beauty and adornment of the bride, and her excitement and longing for her groom, capturing the romantic aspirations that come with the matrimony.

Alankara chamayathal oli nirache

Alankritha Puthumaari mathi mathiche

Azhakerum maarane aval ninache

Ara keran avalinn kothi kothiche

(line 1-4)

The above line describing the adorned bride radiating her bridal glow, who revels in the festivities of her wedding fantasising with excitement and admiration, her handsome partner, yearning to enter the nuptial chamber in the anticipation of uniting with her lover, utilises the Mappila poetic devices *kambi* and *kazhuth*, as the first sound /a/ is repeated throughout the stanza. The second sound also falls into the same category of sounds. And the whole song is composed utilising the poetic device *valkambi,* where the last sound 'che' is repeated throughout the stanzas.

The shyness of the bride, and the celebration and joy of the wedding are explicitly conveyed in the song with phrases like '*naanm kadiche'*, *aval rasiche, chirimazha pozhiche,* emphasising the happiness and shared joy of the occasion.

Aarambaputhupennay metha viriche

Aashicha maarane pinnaval thedaan kothiche

Aanantha lahariyilaval aadikaliche

Aval rasiche manam kuliche

Pennu pottipotti chiriche

(line 20-24)

The lines portray the nuptials, as the new bride, she spread the mat, stepping into the conventionally designated new role. The desire of the bride to seek the groom she longed for, partying in the opium of happiness, and her laughter, signifying the ecstasy of the wedding, are beautifully rhymed in the song.

The song displays a lovely bride clad in a white saree and gold ornaments with a countenance that proclaims delight and reticence, seated in the centre of the Oppana performers. The camera vividly captures the emotions on her face in a close-up typical of a traditional bride when the dancers tease her (*Alamkaara Chamayathaal* 0:00-2:37).

Astonishingly, both the above songs are choreographed closely resembling the art form, which is nowadays widely accepted as Oppana. The influence of Oppana performed at youth festivals and other cultural events, consigned as a traditional art form, is explicit here. There are restricted scurrying dance steps or enticing bodily movements, and with a manoeuvring that focuses on filling the performance with clapping of hands, identical to Oppana, though they switch places and pace around the bride. More than a cinematic Oppana, both these performances

are a lot like the art form Oppana performed on the stages of the youth festivals, which is accepted as the traditional art form performed by Mappila women. The latter song stands out due to its presentation, where all the performers are uniformly costumed in traditional Oppana attire. This consistency in costume performs an authentic and visually cohesive look, reminiscent of how Oppana is presented in more formal settings, evoking the performances typically observed during youth festivals and other cultural programs, where young girls showcase this art form with synchronised movements and costumes (*Alamkara Chamayathal* 0:00-2.37)

Fig. 13. Screenshot from *Alankara chamayathal* showcasing the dancers in uniform attire specified for Oppana performance

Another Oppana song from this movie, intriguingly integrated in the movie, picturises the *kathukuthu* (ear piercing) ceremony of the baby girl, celebrating a childhood milestone. The song *Kokkara kokkara koyi kunje*, featuring lyrics by P. Bahaskaran and delivered in the beautiful voice of the veteran Mappila song singers Vilayil Faseela and V. M. Kutty, is penned in the style of a children's song, utilising a playful and compassionate tone, with personified animal imageries.

Kokkara kokkara koyi kunje

Chakkara maavile thatha penne

Ocha vekkalle ocha vekkalle

Kochilam beevik kaathukuth-Innu

kochilam beevik kaathukuth

(line 1-5)

The song sung by the mother while swinging her baby in the cradle hushes the clucking chick and the parrot on the mango tree, as today is the ceremonious ear piercing of the baby, possibly informing of the gravity of the sacred event. The line brings in the subtle image of a hamlet with various sounds from nature exemplified in the onomatopoeic '*kokkara kokkara*', the sound of a hen, and the parrot on the mango tree, which is a mundane sight. Intriguingly, instead of the proper Malayalam word *kozhi*, the lyrics employ *koyi*, *ya* sound instead of *zha*, a retroflex approximant which is a marker of regional identity, as the people of Malabar often simplify the pronunciation of such words by replacing the *zha* sound with *ya* sound, which is easier to articulate. Despite being widely acknowledged as a non-standard pronunciation in formal Malayalam, it is generally accepted and celebrated as a unique feature of Malabar's cultural identity.

Resuming the juvenile tone, the song utilises the whimsical imagery of dragon flies and friends, and the breeze from the green forest, toddling towards the event. The inescapable association of such ceremonies, especially in relation to girl child, with lavish ornaments is also expressed in the song, provided as the golden

shower tree in the courtyard is adorned with various jewelleries like *ponnalukk* in its ears, *manithali* in the neck, and also adorned with pearls and stones like red coral.

Muttathe konnak kaathilellaam

Pathara maattoli ponnaluk

Maarath thaali mani thaali

Pinne, muthum pavizhavum muthaakkum

(line 12-15)

Symbolising the tradition of distributing sweets during celebrations, an observable practice among Mappilas, rock candy is mentioned as a sweet treat served and tasted with the lips, portraying the togetherness, an essence of their cultural life. Also complementing the emotional values and family bonding during such celebrations, a kiss to the elders and loved ones from the baby is highlighted in the lyrics.

Nottinunakkaan kalkandam

Vaarichuttum vilambum chundu kond

Muthappakkoru muthavum- santhosha

Koottaathakkoru mutham kodu

(line 16-19)

The whole song has interludes of melodiously vocalising the *zikr Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah, la ilaha Illallah* repeated for emphasis, signifying gratitude and religious devotion. Additionally, among Mappilas, the infants are

rocked in the cradles by their mothers and caretakers by integrating these *zikrs* in their lullabies to create a spiritually nurturing environment, combining faith with care.

The song picturises a festive household with a gathering of various people cuddled around and Oppana performers pirouetting around the cradle of the baby, performing a choreographed routine of Oppana mixed with assorted dance steps. The joy and festivity of the ceremony are visually presented through the Oppana performance and the pleasant countenance of the bystanders. Various intimate characters, apparently the father of the baby and as described in the lyrics, her *muthappa* (paternal uncle), fondle the baby with affection (*Kokkara* 0:00-4:29)

The Mappila community celebrated matrimonial unions, vocalising various Mappila songs, and this tradition became Oppana. Songs pregnant with a wide variety of themes and temperaments were vocalised during these rejoicings. Performing songs regarding the nuptial night, the beauty of the bride, and the qualities of the groom, the grandeur of the celebration was also a part of wedding revelry. They appointed distinguished *Pattusangangal* (singing troops) to vocalise songs during the celebratory ritual. However, due to the growing popularity of technological innovations, the community started relying on novel gadgets to diffuse songs, which was appealing and provided much ease, and was readily available in comparison to the singing troops. The use of loudspeakers became common, and recorded songs gradually replaced live performances. Recorded songs tendered a polished performance, with orchestration and loudspeakers supporting the song to reach larger crowds. Moreover, when close-knit communities became more

urbanised, the role of localised singers, assembled and trained at a local spot of their convenience, after the day's work, became less central or rather obsolete, as time passed. Individual families initiated organising weddings based on personal preferences rather than community customs, amplifying reliance on modern technology. Thereby, the tradition of community-oriented singing and rejoicing was gradually sidelined. By technological mediation and changes in the social structure, Oppana gradually diminished or disappeared from the communal circle.

However, the adaptability, visual vibrancy, and celebratory temper of Oppana complement the broader objectives of the entertainment industry, where cultural art forms are profusely repackaged to resonate with modern sensibilities to generate market value. While this approach assisted in preserving and popularising Oppana on a larger scale, it also raises questions about authenticity and the equilibrium between tradition and commodification. In the context of its portrayal within cinema, this representation signifies a calculated effort to adapt and present Oppana as a marketable cultural performance. This shift underscores the commercialisation of Oppana, where its traditional roots are reimagined to instil it within the cinematic narrative and attract public interest. One way this reimagination has been attained was through the eroticised depiction of Oppana on screen, catering to the dominant male gaze. The visual appropriation converges on the costumes, accessories, and rhythmic dance movements flaunted by the performers, and the subtle engaging coyness of the bashful bride, decorated and displayed as an exoticized object, demonstrates Mappila culture as colourful and quaint.

The cinematic representation, rendered Mappila song and Oppana popular among the whole of the Malayali population, even members from other communities started taking an interest in the art forms. The contributions of writers like P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar, Bichu Thirumala, musicians R. Raghavan, D. Devarajan, Syam, and celebrated singers Yesudas, P. Leela, L.R. Eeswari exemplify the prominence and popularity earned by this genre. These art forms ceased to be a product of the community alone. Mappila art forms are no longer confined to the community from which they originated; it has traversed beyond their traditional, communal boundaries to become a more widely accessible and performable genre. Today, individuals from diverse communal and religious backgrounds perform and even compete in Mappilapattu, Oppana, and other art forms, particularly through platforms such as reality shows, which is a broader platform that capitalises on the popularity of Mappila songs and the allied artistic expression.

The next chapter analyses the representation of Mappilapattu and Oppana in television by scrutinising selected visuals from celebrated Mappilapattu and Oppana talent search reality shows.

Chapter IV

Televised Traditions: An Exploratory Study of the Representation of Mappilappattu and Oppana in Talent Search Reality Shows

Yet another promising popular platform where Mappila cultural expressions triumphed in constructing a niche for itself is television. Unlike the cinematic medium, discussed in the previous chapter, where new Mappila songs were composed for each film that released, in television the focus extremely shifts from production of new songs to perfect rendition of already existing songs, both traditional Mappila songs and modern ones which have been composed for various broadcasting media like radio, gramophone, cassettes, cinema etc. through various talent search singing reality shows and a hybrid show of singing and dancing, highlighting the Mappila cultural expression-Oppana. This chapter delineates how the established potential of Mappila art forms to pull the crowd has been tactically exploited by the television producers, adapting a successful global television format of reality shows. However, within the limits of this adapted global format, the cultural producers acquire cultural agency and discover resources to further work successfully, promoting the vibrancy of the Mappila culture.

Raymond Williams in the book *Television* states that the power of television, an innovative broadcasting technology which developed generally in the late 1930s and early 1940s, "as a medium of news and entertainment was then so great that it altered all preceding media of news and entertainment" (11). Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu, where he deliberates about the journalistic horizons unbolted by television, such as "permanent access to public visibility, broad circulation, and

mass diffusion", he addresses it as "an access that was completely unthinkable for any cultural producer until television came into the picture" (47). This marvellous scientific invention not only redefined news and entertainment but also dwindled the prominence of previous modes of entertainment with its exhibition of a wide variety of shows and programmes to choose from, to keep the populace entertained at home. Thus, television was nurtured with investment, and it was sponsored as a novel profitable stage of a domestic consumer economy by characterising it among the "machines for the home." Television, "in its character and uses both served and exploited the needs of a new kind of large-scale and complex but atomised society" (Williams 12), and by the end of the twentieth century, it had become a permanent and taken-for-granted ingredient of cultural life.

The growth of television in India could be traced back to its humble beginnings in the late 1950s as an experiment in education. All India Radio broadcasted three-quarters of an hour of syllabus-oriented science programmes two days a week, targeting middle and high school students in state-run schools in Delhi. After the two succeeding decades of sluggish progress, television prospered, acceleratingly in the 1980s when Doordarshan became a national broadcaster and began to transmit national programmes. Further, with the advent of the cable and satellite revolution in the 1990s, television rapidly expanded through the households of India, thus by the turn of the millennium, numerous households possessed terrestrial television with access to satellite and cable.

The increased number of personal television sets in the towns and cities and the emergence of the new urban middle class who enjoyed the luxuries of

technology demanded more entertainment instead of educational content, and soon the educational ethos of Indian television was neutralised. To cater to the intensified insistence on entertainment programmes and to fill the empty schedules, apart from the reliance on Hindi and regional films, and songs reservoirs, by means of the new markets opened up by the phenomena of globalisation, foreign programmes like American soaps and films of Charlie Chaplin were purchased and imported. And significantly, popular European and international televisual formats were adopted, Indianized, produced and broadcast. The adaptation of international televisual formats, exemplified in the reworking of reality TV formats, critical to this particular study, could be better comprehended through the lens of Globalisation.

However, globalisation from the perspective of cultural studies is typically presented, providing close consideration to how local cultural differences are both altered and preserved within the broader global system. Thereby, cultural studies can remain attuned to the complexities and contradictions of how globalisation affects cultures at the local level, rather than accepting one-sided views of global integration. “A cultural studies approach to globalisation needs to resist the various rhetorics through which the concept is disseminated in order to remain sensitive to how local differences are both metamorphosed and maintained through the contemporary world system” (During 92).

Globalisation and Glocalisation

Anthony Giddens conceptualises the far-reaching phenomena of globalisation as a “stretching process” in the sense that “the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth’s

surface as a whole," thus defining globalisation as "the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (64). Consequently, local socio-political and cultural avenues are likely to be modified by factors such as global finance and consumer spheres, which function far from home, practically influencing the existence of everyone in one way or another.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse identifies globalisation as a "multidimensional process, which, like all significant social processes, unfolds in multiple realms of existence simultaneously" thus enabling it as an "open-ended synthesis of several disciplinary approaches," where, questions of capitalism, inequality, power, development, ecology, gender, culture, identity, population, media etc. are disputed over, accentuating on the plurality of the dimensions of the term (45). Further, globalisation is usually perceived as a corollary to modernisation. "Modernity is inherently globalising" (Giddens 63).

Nonetheless, it is pretty much obvious that the past eons as well have facilitated large-scale interactions and sustained cultural transactions between nations and social groups, exemplified in the longstanding trade interaction between Arabia and Malabar. However, these pre-modern cultural transactions and interactions were expedited in a clearly restricted manner by the facts of geography. But this process accelerated in the previous centuries due to the technological innovations and information transfer, augmenting the progression of globalisation, by eliminating the hurdles of previous temporal and spatial constraints. "In the

modern era, the level of time-space distanciation is much higher than in any previous period" (Giddens 64).

This elevated degree of neighbourliness, possible through globalisation, has made it much easier for cultural values, culinary practises, fashion predilections, martial arts, music, cinema, televisual formats, ideas, mentality, behaviour, philosophy and what not, to navigate from one continent to another in a swift and fluid manner by the integration of markets, transportation and communication systems, even reaching out to the farthest corners of the globe.

Notably, this tendency is generally perceived as either a homogenising force or an assertion of heterogeneity. "The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (Appadurai 295). According to the former viewpoint, the homogenising dynamism of globalisation erodes national or sub-national cultures with its weeping influence, even obliterating localities, ethnicities and their histories. In contrast, the latter, heterogeneity, can be translated as fundamentally the opposing obstructions that incessantly check the flows that contribute to the manufacturing of cultural look-alikes. Likewise, universalism has been persistently counterposed to particularism. Globalising trends, is deemed as in conflict with local assertions of identity and culture, such as; the global versus the local, the global versus the ethnic, the international versus the national, and the universal versus the particular, in which the second part of each binary is perceived either as being encompassed by the first, or it is resistant and preserves the existing system in its present state.

Roland Robertson argues that:

> the debate about global homogenization versus heterogenization should be transcended. It is not a question of either homogenization or heterogenization, but rather of the ways in which both of these two tendencies have become features of life across much of the late-twentieth-century world. In this perspective the problem becomes that of spelling out the ways in which homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies are mutually implicative. (27)

He attempts to combine homogeneity with heterogeneity, and universalism with particularism and proposes the concept of glocalisation, which could be deciphered as "a global outlook adapted to local conditions" (28). He states that, from an "analytic and interpretative standpoint, the concept of globalisation has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or in more abstract vein, the universal and the particular" (30). Thus, the proliferation of local assertions in various sectors of life could be perceived as a product of the irrefutable encouragement or stimulus received through the presentation of a global system.

In the analysis of the globalisation of television, the procedure of glocalisation unfolds, regardless of the long-enduring debate concerning the relative supremacy of the universalising versus particularising stimuluses accompanying globalisation, when focused on how the discords and tensions that accompany the processes of globalisation and localisation come into existence in material cultural practice. And significantly, the analysis of these materialisations divulges that it is

closely related to specific power relations and the market-oriented motivations of show producers, who tactically appeal to supposed or recognised local or contextual cultural identities in order to accomplish popular and commercial success. However, through these market-driven endeavours, there opens up avenues for the expression of ethnic or national identities and cultures with an appeal to the current fad, in the long run preserving the cultural or national heritage.

Globalisation of television, according to Joseph Straubhaar, operates at two levels; there is a "strong globalization of media operations toward the advertising-based commercial market paradigm. That is accompanied by a systematic shift in the forms or genres of programs that are produced, so globalized content models or patterns tend to spread" (681). He argues that all viewers of television are somehow touched by globalisation as there are audiences who primarily watch globalised television channels and programmes, however, such audiences mostly belong to upper-middle and upper-class elites, since access to new channels is often limited by economic capital and interest in them is limited by cultural capital. On the other hand, a vast majority of local audiences are consumers of globalisation at the level of program flow, genre, or broadcast model. National and local productions derive from formats or genres that have spread worldwide, remote from their places of origin, and also, templates of such programmes stretch globally as private, commercial, entertainment-oriented stations and networks establish coverage in various nations (Straubhaar 683).

Building on Robertson's idea of glocalisation, Straubhaar states these globalised contents and patterns get "adapted to local cultures and circumstances",

and this process "in turn is driven and bounded by audience desire for cultural proximity and relevance" (681). Local cultures synthesise with the imported elements of a foreign culture brought in by globalisation, mediated by technology, electronic media, migration of genres and models, and entrepreneurial undertaking of global or regional production companies and networks, and those cultures hybridise, merging local elements and imported ones to create new forms of culture. Thus, conceptualising globalisation as both spatial, with outward geographic spread of ideas and forms, and temporal, as it brings changes in the locale over time. Moreover, there is a conscious hybridisation in process when a television station deliberately duplicates a foreign genre from circulated videotapes and mixes it with local cultural specifics, to cater to the immediate audience, in the sense of cultural proximity.

Commercial television networks demand that the cultural products telecasted through the media triumph in extracting a large, profitable audience, and this colossal demand for commercial success or market precedent the emergence and standardisation or perfection of certain successful formulas. Straubhaar considers both the production companies and the genre formulas as social structures, accentuating Giddens, and argues that the structures both limit and permit the agency of those who act within them. More specifically, "commercial television networks essentially require cultural producers to work within the boundaries of certain successful genres or formulas. However, within those structural boundaries, producers find not only constraints but also resources" (Straubhaar 689).

Within the containments of an escalating global economic constraints and shaped or influenced by flourishing lucrative global patterns, regional and national cultures still tend to effectively champion their own cultural content over time, and they utilise these globally successful formulas to fashion cultural products which define and redefine their cultural nuances, and what materialises out of this process, is often intensely localised or hybridised adaptation of what is regarded recent or modern in global patterns, thus yielding hybridisation as essentially the dominant pattern of cultural interaction. Evidently, it manifests as the temporal reflection of the local, national, and regional absorption and adaptation of global patterns of modern culture. “As new patterns borne by technological and economic forces enter cultures, they interact with what is already there, producing a new pattern best characterised at this moment as hybrid” (Straubhaar 689).

The subtle interaction of the global and local, as cultural producers utilises globally admired television forms and genres to express and emphasise their culture, involves “the reconstruction, in a sense the production, of ‘home,’ ‘community’ and ‘locality’” (Robertson 30), and it obliterates the metanarrative that the waves of globalisation rapidly erode the sense of home. “Cultural producers use forms and genres that have spread globally to express ideas of what home is like. There is a subtle interplay between the global and local in television form and content” (Straubhaar 690). For Robertson, it is glocalisation, whereas Straubhaar conceptualises it as an aspect of the historical, temporal process of hybridisation.

Reality Television

Reality television, as Ruth A. Deller identifies in her preface to *Reality Television; The Television Phenomenon That Changed the World* is "arguably the defining television format of the twenty-first century. It fills television schedules around the globe, as well as thriving on streaming and video sharing platforms which host new programmes and provide access to vast archives of content" (xi). Jon Dovey describes reality television as "the perfect televisual form for the contemporary cultural moment" and "a crucial component of the fabric of popular culture" (78). However, it is cumbersome to define reality TV as it merges different previous genres and formats in order to create a new one, and Annette Hill broadly classifies factual entertainment or reality TV as "a category commonly used within the television industry for popular factual television, and the category indicates the marriage of factual programming, such as news or documentary, with fictional programming, such as gameshows or soap opera", and in the most generous sense "almost any entertainment programme about real people comes under the umbrella of popular factual television" (14). The programmes usually identified as belonging to this genre normally tend to focus on the personal, as common people and their experiences are highly constructed, and the formatted representations of which are broadcast with a fusion of factual coverage and entertainment tactics such as light humour, elevated emotion, and surprises. In the early stages, the term 'reality television', which circulated in different academic studies during the 1990s, focused on "crime, consumer affairs and disaster formats" (Deller 3). However, later on the makeover, talk show and docusoap formats of the 1990s and the social experiments

which acquired popularity in the turn of the millennium expanded the genre reality TV further, "as did the early 00s'resurgence in talent shows heralded by the *Popstars* and *Pop Idol* franchises – to the point where reality has moved away from being a single genre, and, instead becomes more of what Nick Couldry (2009) terms a 'meta-genre' (p. 47) encompassing several subgenres" (Deller 3).

The *Idol* franchise, with *Pop Idol* launched on the British network ITV1 in 2001, generally recognised as pioneer in talent search reality shows, brewed the formula for a profitable running popular entertainment, inspired by the successful international format *Popstars*, a combination of reality gameshow and variety show that inaugurated in New Zealand, where contestants auditioned for a place in a pop band. Annette Hill observes that in the US, "*Popstars* was so successful that it led to the creation of *Pop Idol*… which went on to do battle in the Saturday night ratings war. In 2003, *Pop Idol* attracted a forty-five per cent market share (11 million viewers)" (33). The American version of *Pop Idol*, *American Idol,* aired on the Fox network, debuted in 2002, and went on to become one of the top-rated shows in the history of American television with its continued success. The *Idol* franchise enjoys the recognition as the world's widely watched television franchise and many regions adapted the successful format, and the Indian version, *Indian Idol,* aired on Sony Entertainment Television since 2004, with a celebrity panel of judges, hunted talents in the four major cities of India, and since then music contests have been popular in the nation.

The underlying narrative of the *Idol* franchise or its structure across all the nations characterises the competition between previously anonymous ordinary

talents, who have been filtered and selected by judges and television producers through auditions held around the country, especially focusing on major cities. These contestants, a chosen few from the overwhelming aspirants, receive a chance to perform and compete in front of the camera, judges, with fellow contestants and a selected number of audience representatives present at the studio. A panel of well-known judges, expertise in the field of music and performance, mostly three in number, comment on the live concert of the contestants and assign scores according to their performance, based on various criteria, and the show season culminates in an extravagant, enthralling final episode in which the contestants showcase their best performance and the winner of the season or the national idol is crowned by the special guests and the judges. Further, each show ensures that at least one host steers the show, charmingly introduces and welcomes the Judges, greets the audience, and announces the singers and the rounds that they are about to perform. The results of each episode and the contestants who get eliminated after each round, the title winner of the season, and other vital proclamations are also revealed by the host or anchor. The whole show is recorded, edited, and broadcast episodically into the living room of the masses at a fixed time.

The same successful format has been adapted by numerous Malayalam television networks and reality TV, exemplifying the "21st-century transnational capitalism" (Darling-Wolf 22). It offers a positive forum for the investigation of the process of globalisation and localisation, due to the simultaneous reliance of this particular genre on both the universal, cross-national formats and the customised localisation of these formats to match specific regional and socio-cultural contexts

by virtue of the localisation of the media contents which encourages programmes that upholds indigenous music and art forms. Mark Andrejevic notes that reality TV "fits well with the dictates of global media production insofar as it combines a local cast and local viewer participation with a customisable transnational format. What is exported is not the content itself but a recipe for creating a local version of an internationally successful TV show" (12). The process of adopting such universally produced and owned formula to the domain of local contexts, to accommodate local cultural nuances that propel distinctive imaginings of a shared national/communal identity, opens up a strategic cultural space in which the national/local are actively negotiated and contested in relationship to the global.

In essence, glocalisation wields its influence on popular culture sites like television by fashioning hybrid forms that fuse global with local particularities, thereby resisting global capitalist and cultural dominance. In this association, glocalisation transmutes popular culture into a negotiation of global and local dynamics, spawning unique cultural artifacts that serve as a reflection of both global universality and local specificity. Popular culture operates as a space of opposition to cultural imperialism, where local communities emphasise their cultural identity by reinterpreting global forms. By reworking global cultural forms through local lenses, popular culture produces cultural expressions that generate the feeling of authenticity and reliance. The reality TV, popularised across various regions are textbook example of the redrafting of global patterns through the perspective of regional cultures.

With the rise of these regionally adapted television reality shows, melodies of Mappilapattu underwent a transformative rebirth through the realm of this mass media by the successful adaptation of the global format of competitive reality TV to articulate and preserve the indigenous cultural expressions of the Mappila community. It facilitates an equilibrium between adopting global influences, through its structures, and preservation of communal distinctiveness through the adoption of the content, though the content is packaged into a fascinating commodity with the vibrancy of visual and acoustic spectacle.

The Transition from Folk Art to Popular Art

In its primary context, Mappilapattu was intensely entrenched in the social and cultural life of the Mappila Muslim community of Kerala, as the presentations of these songs were primarily community-oriented, serving religious, social, and cultural functions. Performances were participatory, with the audience often joining in through singing, clapping, and reiterating those performances, fostering a sense of communal unity. Songs were handed down from generation to generation orally, conserving the religious and local historical narratives, linguistic subtleties, and dialects specific to the community of Mappilas. The spotlight was on the cultural and emotional harmony attained through the collective engagement with the performance rather than the technical flawlessness of the vocalisation of the songs or the competitive display of individual talent.

> The rapport between performers and the audience was intimate and ingrained in shared cultural experiences. It dealt, by means of spectacle, song, comedy, with a whole range of familiar experiences, framed by common references

> and attitudes. These attitudes were, to a large extent, shared between audience and artist, and the rapport was high. (Hall & Whannel 56)

Unlike antiquated community-based performances, these television shows are intended for mass entertainment, with a primary focus on competition, spectacle, and viewer engagement. The individual performances delivered before a group of judges and audiences by the selected contestants are evaluated based on various criteria, predominantly focusing on the quality of pitch, tonal accuracy, pronunciation of sounds, performance, costumes, stage presence, etc. Within this transformed ambience, these Mappila cultural expressions become "in essence, an art of the performer, rather than the art of a community. The community had become an 'audience': the art had been individualized" (Hall & Whannel 56). The effective transformation of Mappila art forms, from a communal art to the art of a performer, and the transition of the community as an audience was accomplished gradually, with the timely interactions of various amendments.

As mentioned elsewhere, the tremendous transformations undergone by the society sterilised the communal production of art and entertainment and the collective participation of the Mappilas in the creation process. The modernisation of the Mappila community, shedding its old collective communal ethos, has been successfully accomplished way before the turn of the millennium. Mappila art forms are not immune to technological innovations, that is, the new media forms that reshaped society; therefore, their effect was heavily felt in the ways their aesthetic forms were remodified. Hall and Whannel argue that:

> The media are not the end products of a simple technological revolution. They come at the end of a complex historical and social process, they are active agents in a new phase in the life-history of industrial society. Inside these forms and languages, the society is articulating new social experiences for the first time. In fact, the emergence of new art forms is closely linked with social change. (45)

Arguably, the materialisation of new artistic expressions is not arbitrary, it is intimately tied to instants of social change. For instance, V.M. Kutty states that till 1955, Mappila songs were propagated through the singing troupes that performed at marriage ceremonies, addressed as *Kalyanapattukar* or *Vattapattu* singers, who clapped their hands and vocalised the songs without the accompaniment of any musical instruments. Their selection of songs included *Kalyanapattukal*, historic songs, devotional songs, *Padapattu,* etc., chosen from the Arab-Malayalam compilation called *Sabeena* (*Mappilapattinte Gathimaattom* 35). These were traditional songs, popular and passed down in their communal circle. However, by the mid-century, this culturally embedded practice of vocalising traditional songs by local singing troupes was replaced by sound recording and dissemination technologies to blast music during weddings. Aminatha, an 82-year-old Mappila woman, well equipped with Mappilapattu and Vattapattu, pronounced that the loudspeaker with orchestrated Mappila song appealed more to the Mappilas and every family utilised a loudspeaker during marriages to diffuse songs (Sunil 718). The transformation of Mappila society and their communal ceremonies, due to the infiltration of technologies, is evident from the above verdict. The communal nature

of the celebratory art form was being diluted, as society started depending on technologies. In this altered scenario, when the community became extensively reliant on machinery, the Mappila art forms as well became solely produced for dissemination through various techs.

Additionally, during this period of social transition aided by technology, a novel and refined formation of a collective singers' performance troupe began to take shape. The introduction of various musical instruments into the musical culture of Mappilas aided in the furbishing of these new emergent troupes consisting of an assemblage of various specialised instrumentalists and singers. V. M. Kutty recollects about a singing troupe developed by himself with musical instruments like *tabala* and harmonium, consisting of male and female singers whom he categorises as Muslims and non-Muslims specifically. He admits that various *Ishals* of Mappila songs (written in Arabi-Malayalam) were transcribed into Malayalam, and were taught to these young singers to be performed on stages. He acknowledges that when this Mappila art form, which was earlier confined to the interiors of Muslim homes during marriages, entered the public space with the retinue of musical instruments, it was enthusiastically welcomed with applause by the appreciators of this aesthetic expression (*Mappilapattinte Gathimaattom* 35-36). Over time, many similar troupes began to emerge, and also the instruments like *tabala* and harmonium were renovated, along with the addition of several other musical organs, including assorted wind instruments and percussion instruments. It is noted that, in order to vitalise these stage shows and Mappilapattu concerts, singers like Idava Basheer imported innovative musical instruments even from Malaysia, and it invigorated the

audience (Umar Tharamel, "Performanceinte Sadhyathakal" 53). Until the introduction of these instruments, the voice of the folk performer bore the full weight of the performance, demonstrating the artistry of the singer and the poetic nuances of the lyrics, and enthusing the audience.

Evidently, unlike the earlier singing troupes who went by the handles like *Kalyanapattukar*, *Oppanapattukar*, *Vattapattukar,* etc., and vocally performed at weddings, these newly emerged troupes were oriented towards public stage performances featuring a wide and varied audience. Further, in order to reach the extensive audience, they utilised various sound equipment like microphones and amplification systems. The above anecdote divulges the transition of Mappila art forms- the transition from the private to public sphere; from a closed community to an open public, not concerning the spectatorship, but also regarding the performative aspect of the art form. Evidently, the entertainment attribute integral to the art, discarding all other virtues, began to be actively highlighted. For entertainment, these songs began to be learned by heart, practiced, and vocalised in front of a massive audience. The cultural expression became the art of a trained performer. Kutty specifically enumerates and names the non-Muslim and Muslim singers of the troupe, and it underlines the transaction of this creative art from the hands of Mappilas to the general public, with a focus on the talent of the performer. It traversed its traditional communal context and gradually became detached from its original meanings, and came to be consumed primarily as entertainment. This renovation attenuated its religious and cultural significance, shrinking it to a performative spectacle for broader audiences.

An interesting observation regarding these stage shows has been made by Umar Tharamel. He notes that, in the 1970s, when various musical instruments were incorporated into the performance of Mappila songs, Mappilappattu stage shows and concerts were proliferating all over Kerala. The monetary influx from the Gulf countries significantly influenced the economic and cultural advancements, which in turn assisted in the nurturing of musical culture. The experimental musical troupe assembled under the supervision of V.M. Kutty earned widespread acclaim and was a resounding success. Consequently, Mappilapattu established its supremacy in the public sphere of Kerala, along with the contemporary popular culture. During this epoch, the classical literary works composed in the melodious *Ishals*- exceptional compositions of Arabi-Malayalam literature -were performed throughout the state, acknowledging its fundamental characteristics. The public appearance of the Mappila songs, conducted by the structured orchestra, was radically different from the previous period when these songs were recited as *Seerah* (devotional reading of texts), without the accompaniment of any musical instruments, and it generated a humongous congregation of performers, including men and women. The widespread popularity of these performances firmly established Mappilapattu culture within the mainstream social renaissance of Kerala ("Performanceinte Sadyathakal" 52).

Hall and Whannel delineate that the music hall of English society appeared when the traditional communal culture was disappearing, but modern mass culture had not yet fully shaped. With the example of the music hall, they demonstrate how folk arts developed into popular entertainment. The music hall wasn't a prolonged tradition, but rather a fleeting surge of inventiveness that ensued just before the

transition of the society into a new era of cultural production, governed by more industrialised, commercial media.

> The music hall, it will be argued, was a 'sport', a transitional form, peculiar to late Victorian and Edwardian culture, and appeared at one of those freak moments when, under very special conditions, the community yields up a communal art and style for a brief period just when it is on the brink of major change. (60)

The emergence of the music hall, according to the authors, "marks a very special stage in the development of popular entertainment. This stage can be identified with the emergence of the individual performer and the importance of his personal style". Similarly, in the case of Mappila artistic expressions, the stage shows and musical concerts as demarcated above, functioned as a transitional moment in the progression of Mappila art forms, which similar to the English music hall, appeared when the traditional Mappila communal culture was vanishing but had not yet been fully incorporated by modern mass culture. The emergence of a distinct performer and the significance of his personal style to further the show could also be traced in these stage shows.

Just like the music hall which maintained many elements in common with earlier folk culture, the stage shows and Mappilapattu concerts, with the immediacy of the performer and the audience, was a better reflection of the life and culture of the people, as it was framed by common attitudes and references which to a large extent was shared between audience and artist. Nevertheless, it was, in essence, an art of the performer, rather than the art of a community. The community had been

replaced as the audience, and the art had been significantly individualised. Rather than sentimentalising it as the late expression of the 'folk' culture, considering the observations of Hall and Whannel, it is approximate to the truth to declare that these stage shows were a transitional form in a transitional society between earlier 'folk' and later 'popular' art.

Further, the emergence of new media does not signal a decisive break in the cultural development of 'popular' art. The media did change. But within the altered forms, the same distinctive qualities that distinguished the art form could be easily discovered. In the case of the Mappila art form, the distinctive qualities that set apart these songs are readily observable in the representations in the altered media forms, as exemplified in the previous chapter.

Moreover, the interaction between artist/performer and audience, in both the music hall and in the Mappilapattu stage shows and concerts, was really predominant, though not as much as participatory, when these art forms were expressions of the folk community. In the new media like cinema, television, and radio, "a great deal depends upon the impact and immediacy of the performance". However, in these modern media, the relationship between artist and audience, already formalised in these previous scenarios (music halls, and in the case of Mappila cultural expressions - the stage shows), to some extent, has become even more distant. Nevertheless, the element of continuity could be traced there (Hall & Whannel 61).

The glamorous potential of the stage shows to pull the crowd was strategically utilised by television, incorporating the elements of competition

through the format of singing reality TV. "Popular art [the conventional folk art] could survive the change from the more traditional to the new media, and that it is in the new media especially, which are more widely available to audiences than the traditional forms, that we should expect to find popular art today" and it is "through the popular artist and his art that some part of the values, attitudes and experiences of the common audience survives into and through the era of bourgeois individualism" (67). Through this popular platform of television programmes, the various nuances of Mappila cultural expressions are carried forward into the modern scene, familiarising the traditional art forms among the communally detached current audience.

Further, prior to television, it is noteworthy to mention that radio stations and gramophone companies like HMV and Columbia contributed significantly to the distribution of Mappila songs, considerably popularising the genre. Many artists like V.M. Kutty vocalised Mappila songs for these platforms. By the 1970s, assisted by the Gulf migration, audio tapes circulated the melodies of Mappila songs among the public of Kerala. Audio cassettes produced by recording companies Tharangini, Venus Records, etc., popularised Mappila songs among the population of Kerala. And by the 1990s, television revolutionised the way people assessed entertainment. By the time Mappilapattu reality shows aired through television networks, Mappila songs were already popular among various audiences by consumption through various audio-visual formats like CD/DVD.

Mass Produced Visual Mappila Songs

Against this backdrop, Mappilapattu singing television reality shows emerged, monetising on the wide reception of this genre. Nevertheless, these televised programmes played a significant role in reviving the melodies of traditional Mappilapattu and presenting it to a wide range of enthusiasts, particularly at a point of time when lately composed songs, marketed as Mappilapattu, under the banner, visual album songs, have been producing songs modelling on and even duplicating the melodies of Bollywood songs that are thoroughly market oriented, discarding the nuances of the authentic genre. Amidst this, there was a collective nostalgia and yearning for the good old Mappila songs, popularised before the turn of the century. In an interview conducted with Faisal Elettil, a Mappilapattu scholar and renowned reality show Judge in *Patturumal* (Kairali TV), and *Pathinalam Ravu* (MediaOne), he acknowledges that the visual album Mappila songs, provided with mass appeal was gaining wide acceptance throughout Kerala, especially among the younger generations and there were criticisms that Mappila songs tremendously shifted from being an acoustic experience to being a visual experience (the songs were disseminated in audio-visual format with the songs serving just as a melodious background for the depiction of romance, desire, longing etc. between the young male and female actors). As established elsewhere, till the widespread usage of television, Mappilapattu survived predominantly as an aural expression, thriving without the assistance of visual representation. Its popularity and cultural reminiscence rested solely on the poetic competence, melodic sumptuousness, and emotive performance of the song itself. And it was further enhanced with

orchestration. The absence of a visual supplement also entailed that the auditors engrossed with Mappilapattu through their imagination and memory, forming mental representations and emotional landscapes solely fashioned by sonic experience. However, with the surfacing of television, this dynamic started to shift. Visual media recontextualised Mappilapattu, trapping it within new aesthetic, narrative, and ideological structures. Within these altered aesthetic structures, the lyrical power, poetic excellence, rhythmic cadence, and cultural resonance upheld by the individual songs began to seriously deteriorate. Faisal Elettil points out that there were wider concerns among the Mappilapattu enthusiasts that the standard and quality upheld by Mappilapattu was extensively declining, through its mass production.

The decline of the standard of new Mappilapattu compositions, mentioned by Elettil, unlike the earlier songs, though composed for the mechanical media, could be further attributed to the production of mass art. Hall and Whannel delineate the divergence of popular art and mass art.

> It should not be thought, however, that what we are offered as the typical product of the mass media today is popular art. A very sharp distinction has to be drawn at this point between popular art and the 'art' of the mass media. It is true that the modern mass media have replaced many of the earlier institutions such as the music hall. But the distinction which we want to make is based not on the institutions but on the quality of the work done within them. (67)

He states that mass art is often a corruption of popular art. Mass art "often destroys all trace of individuality and idiosyncrasy which makes a work compelling and living, and assumes a sort of de-personalized quality, a no-style. The personal element then becomes detached (Hall & Whannel 68). Popular art is essentially rooted in the expression of the artist's personal style, vision, and creative signature, whereas mass art, on the other hand, is fashioned for mass consumption, typically created to appeal to broad audiences, and lacks the artist's unique expression. The personalisation within this mass art is market-driven, and it deflates the uniqueness, becomes generic and homogenised, and it lacks a distinctive personality that gives art emotional depth and character.

Further, mass art becomes a kind of stereotyping- a reliance upon formulae, particularly without offering anything creative or worthwhile within the conventions.

> For the popular artist, stylization is necessary, and the conventions provide an agreed base from which true creative invention springs. In mass art, the formula is everything-an escape from, rather than a means to, originality. The popular artist may use the conventions to select, emphasize and stress (or alter the emphasis and stress) so as to delight the audience with a kind of creative surprise. Mass art uses the stereotypes and formulae to simplify the experience, to mobilize stock feelings and to 'get them going'. (Hall & Whannel 69)

The inevitable tendency to reproduce a popular art or format, when it grossed profit and earned the attention of a wider audience, encouraged the youth artists to

produce Mappila songs with the established and proven recipe. Earlier compositions utilised the recognisable styles and conventions of Mappilapattu to create new, engaging products. Whereas the new age Mappila songs were composed relying entirely on formula, deliberately trying not to break new ground but to stick to the formula that has been proven to work, at the cost of exhibiting innovation and individuality in art.

It was this debasement that materialised from the thorough commodification and stereotyping of Mappila popular art, which Faisal Elettil mentioned, urged in the production of Mappilapattu reality shows, efficaciously adapting a successful global format. Under these circumstances, the legacy of Mappila songs was revived through television reality shows, making it once again popular among younger generations, who might otherwise lose touch with their heritage (Faisal Elettil). Already standardised Mappila songs produced for radio, gramophone, cassettes, cinema, theatre, etc., both traditional melodies with structured music and orchestration, and novel compositions- conscious carriers of the distinctiveness and idiosyncrasies of Mappila expressions, were recapped through reality TV programmes.

Eranholi Moosa, one of the most influential Mappilapattu singers, when he appeared as a guest in *Patturumal* aired on Kairali TV, acknowledges that Kairali TV bestowed a new life to Mappilapattu, through *Patturumal* (*Patturumal – Patturumal 24-11-12 Part 4* 2:03-2:20). As the first ever proper televised program on Mappila cultural expression, *Patturumal* rekindled the interest in Mappila songs, by bringing these songs into the living rooms of the audience.

Evidently, a foreign global format was adapted to enhance, preserve, and popularise the ethnic cultural expressions. Prior to reality shows, there have been various modes of Mappila song contests and competitions, but they weren't as triumphant as reality shows, due to the lack of a proper professional style. However, through Kairali TV's *Patturumal*, properly stylised and systematic, incorporating the globally successful elements of talent search reality shows, Mappila song talent search contests became popular. Soon, various other television channels like Asianet, MediaOne, Jeevan TV, Flowers, etc., followed the trend of Kairali TV in airing televised programmes exclusively dedicated to Mappila songs. Mappilapattu performances were commodified, with cultural elements packaged for higher TRP (Television Rating Points) and advertising revenue, meanwhile diffusing and once again popularising the engaging melodies of Mappila songs among the audience.

Mappilapattu Talent Search Singing Reality Shows

By successfully adapting global competitive singing reality TV formats, Mappilapattu reality shows have carved a niche for themselves while reflecting and commodifying the cultural heritage of the Mappila community. The marketing is executed by implementing various tactics, not limited to the utilisation of Mappila art forms, but like the incorporation of diverse community markers. The whole format of the show is carefully crafted with indicators that reinforce the identity of the show, which is tied to the Mappila community, whose genesis and evolution, as discussed earlier, is indebted to the Arab trading diaspora. Therefore, a tinge of Arab cultural elements is apparent in various aspects of the programme, like the

background music, calligraphy of the title card, the design of the sets, and even the titles of the programmes themselves.

The television programmes typically modify the titles of TV shows to cater to local tastes. The original format, *Pop Idol,* became *American Idol* and *Canadian Idol,* etc., following its transatlantic journey, thus overtly projecting the notion of a unified, coherent national identity (Livio 171). Though not a part of the official *Idol* franchise, Mappilapattu reality shows broadcast via Malayalam television channels were developed based on the format of *Idol* shows. And since these shows project a cultural or communal identity rather than a national one, the titles of these shows are mostly adopted, drawing on key cultural and linguistic markers associated with Mappila identity. *Patturumal; Ishal Marhaba*, the pioneer show conceived by Kairali TV, which ran for twelve seasons, has employed the term *Patturumal* (silken handkerchief) in their title to highlight the connection of the show to the particular community. It is again underlined by the subtitle *Ishal Marhaba*. The juxtaposition of the words *Ishal* (the tonal or melodic peculiarity of Mappila songs) and Marhaba (an Arabic word meaning ‘welcome’ or ‘greeting’) signals the community’s historical connections with Arabs, and also their linguistics, and it suggests a celebration of Mappila music and culture. Similarly, titles of the reality show *Pathinalam Ravu* (the 14th night), aired by MediaOne, *Mylanchi* aired by Asianet, *Kasavuthattam* of Amritha TV, and *Mappilapattu* of Jaihind function as explicit linguistic indicators tied to the Mappila community. This strategic selection of show titles enhances its authenticity and fortifies the cultural branding of the shows.

Though the title has been reimagined, the basic structure of reality TV espoused by the global format *Pop Idol* has been adapted; commencing with an audition for filtering previously anonymous contestants from various districts of Kerala, specifically for their Mappilapattu singing talent, and at the conclusion of which, a group of finalists are selected. The selected candidates then episodically perform before a qualified panel of judges, performing their versions of generally well-received Mappila songs and often bringing to limelight forgotten pieces of traditional Mappilapattu. They are provided with scores according to their performance, depending on various criteria. The elimination round, after a set of rounds, disqualifies the contestants who secured the least score, and the rest of participants compete again to win the title of the season.

Judges, who primarily evaluate the performances, provide critical comments and assign scores for each performance, play a central role in all shows that follow the format of *Idol* shows, though the panel of judges might vary from season to season. In Mappilapattu reality shows, the judges are mostly talented and trained singers and musicians, excellent particularly in this genre. By the introduction of these personages, tagged as Mappilapattu singers, in these shows, they secure social legitimacy by becoming reality TV judges. Mappilapattu, traditionally perceived as a folk tradition, was marginalised within mainstream cultural discourse. However, by positioning these artists as judges, these artists and the art form they represent acquire institutional recognition and superior status within the dominant media structure, posing as cultural authorities. Most Mappilapattu reality shows have ventured to incorporate a special judge who has extensive knowledge and

recognised expertise in the field. Faisal Elettil, T.K. Hamza, V.M. Kutty, Mappilapattu experts, have been employed with a specific function, that is to enlighten the audience regarding the particular song that is performed by the contestants. The context, theme, and authorship of songs, especially traditional ones, are delineated by these expert judges, who are seated alongside singers and musicians who primarily evaluate the singing performance delivered by the contestants. Though entertainment is the ultimate motive of these reality shows, allotted screen space is provided for imparting education regarding the Mappila community and their cultural expressions.

Further, the performances are staged in extravagant studio sets, premeditated with designs that enhance the visual appeal with colourful shimmering lighting, acoustic effects, and dramatic camera work. However, the sets are integrated with cultural signifiers. The background soundtracks, the whole design of the sets proclaims a Muslim/Arabic touch, accentuating the Arab-Mappila close connections. The calligraphy of the title card, displayed magnanimously on the screen of most of the Mappilapattu reality shows, is designed to resemble the Arabic script, though written in Malayalam. In the Arabic script, dots and other diacritics serve various phonetic and linguistic functions, and it is a distinguishable feature of Arabic and Arabi-Malayalam script. These diacritic indicators are added to Malayalam letters to accentuate the Mappila correlation of the show, where Mappila songs were primarily written in Arabi-Malayalam. All these aforementioned layouts and patterns that enhance the spectacle and serve as cultural markers function as a background for the delivery of Mappila songs melodiously vocalised by the contestants.

Fig. 14. *Patturumal* title card

Fig. 15. *Kasavuthattam* title card

Proceeding to the content, that is, the songs performed by the contestants, various rounds centred on the distinctive classification of Mappila songs are assigned to the contestants. The division might be based on the institution, like cinema, Mappila songs, theatre songs, traditional songs, or thematic, like devotional, romantic, and so on, or based on performance style, like duet round. Notably, the traditional round brings to the attention of the audience Mappila songs that have been composed by the established Mappilapattu writers of the past era, who were the representatives of the folk culture, before the modernisation. Numerous songs by these veteran poets have been systematically stylised and popularised through various recording media. But only the song and the singers have been celebrated by the audience, with seldom knowledge about the writer or the context of the song. In this regard, television reality shows like *Patturumal* and *Pathinalam Ravu* have taken special care to briefly introduce the song to the spectators.

For instance, *Ishal Mikavu* round in *Pathinalam Ravu* centres on traditional Mappila songs. The contestant Rinu Razaq in *Ishal Mikavu* Round vocalises a traditional Mappila song of an anonymous author, which has been passed down orally from generation to generation. After the performance, Faisal Elettil, in the

segment *Ishal qissa*, is asked to explain the details of the song by the show host. This representative traditional Mappila song, he explicates, composed in Arabi-Malayalam, is the vivid description of the Hoor al-Ayn (companions with beautiful, wide eyes). The Quran exegesis illustrates them as individuals of remarkable beauty and purity, symbolising the rewards and delights awaiting the faithful in the hereafter. Elettil clarifies that the authorship of this song has been tried to attribute to Vaidyar, but there is a lack of substantial evidence to support the claim. The authorship remains elusive, as this song, along with numerous other Mappila songs, has been preserved through time by oral transmission, without crediting its author, obliterating his presence when the art transpired to be a shared experience of the community. However, this traditional Mappila song, once orally transmitted across generations, was later stylised, musically arranged, and recorded in the vocalisation of Markos for circulation on cassette titled *Kanivu*- a shift marking its transition from lived tradition to commodified cultural artifact. It was this new, stylised adaptation of the song that the contestant referred to and practiced for her performance on the show (*Rinu Razaq in Ishal Mikavu Round* 00:12-10:12). Nevertheless, through the performance and the latter *Ishal qissa*, the audience, only familiar with the modern rendition of the song by Markos, becomes acquainted with the factual origin and communally preserved transmission of these traditional Mappila songs. Similarly, the context, authorship, *Ishals,* and peculiarities of numerous Mappila songs, cherished by the people through their widespread renown through cassettes and other recording platforms, are elucidated by the specially experienced judges present in the program.

In *Patturumal* of Kairali TV, the traditional round, titled *Qalbile Pattu,* a portmanteau of the Arabic term *Qalb* (heart) and Malayalam, *Pattu* (song)- the contestant Ziya Fathima performs the song *Ularide lam lam*, from *Badr Padapattu* written by Moyinkutty Vaidyar. A few minutes into the engaging performance, at the lower third of the screen, an info bar displaying the basic information about the song appears, and it is followed by a brief description of the historical elements and context that is the content of the song. After the performance, judges Firoz Babu, Ambili, and Abootty comment on the performance, correct the errors, and point out the instances where the singer needs improvement. Their commentary only highlights the performative aspects, serving as an instance where the Mappila art form succumbs to becoming an entertainment commodity. However, after their comments, the spotlight shifts onto T.K. Hamza, who specifically demarcates the composition of the song and the *Ishal*. He pronounces that this particular composition by Vaidyar was based on the *Ishal* of a song by an anonymous author, called *Mi'raj Pattu*, which is an ancient Mappila song, which recounts the historic tale of the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey and ascension to the heavens, an extremely significant event in Islamic tradition. This particular song, with the author unknown, might have passed down through generations of Mappilas, teaching them the Islamic history of the Prophet's ascent to heaven, where he met other prophets, a significant part of their belief system, which has been lost somewhere along the path. However, the song, its content, and the tune that inspired Vaidyar to compose an *Ishal* in *Badr Padapattu,* etc., are once again presented in front of the Mappila audience (and a wider spectrum of viewers as well) who have lost touch with the roots of their community. TK Hamza also clarifies the subject

matter of the song performed by the contestant. *(Patturumal -Patturumal 24-11-12 Part 3* 00:00 -12-33)

Another contest, O U Basheer, as well performs a song from *Badr Padapattu*, *Ahadathile*, which is the beginning lines of the epic poem, which delineates a heartfelt plea to Allah, who is the sustainer of every living being on earth according to Islamic belief, to help the poet in excellently completing the composition (*Patturumaal - Patturumaal 24-11-12 Part* 01:25- 05: 06). Similarly, Aneesh performs in *Qalbile pattu* round yet another song from *Badr Padapattu*, *Hakkana Konamaral*, a song which have been popular among the people of Kerala through the voice of Yesudas. Though the song is popular, the Islamic history rhymed in the song is not so popular. Through the info card *Pattarivu*, the content of the song, which presents an important historical anecdote of the migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah, is revealed. The hostile circumstances that led to the migration of the Prophet and his family and friends left behind all their possessions. All the assets left behind by the migrants were plundered by the enemies. The battle of Badr was a revenge for this infamous act, and the author, Vaidyar, carefully integrates these details into his composition. It is made clear to the participant and the whole audience through the lecture of T.K. Hamza (*Patturumaal - Patturumaal 18-11-12 Part 1* 6:07- 20:12)

Likewise, the song *Purapettabujahil,* composed in the *Ishal Oshakal*, which recounts the exodus of Abujahil to confront the prophet and his companions who departed from Makkah to Madinah, and the song *Thudare madhalavum* are performed by the contestants Rasheed and Arya, respectively. T.K. Hamza clarifies

that the song performed by Arya is in fact the continuation of the previously performed song *Purapettabujahil*, both taken from the *Badr Padapattu* of Vaidyar, which further delineates the commotion of the arrival of the enemy squad. (*Patturumaal - Patturumaal music dance fusion 16-11-12 Part 1* 18:00-22:23; *Patturumaal - Patturumaal music dance fusion 16-11-12 Part 2* 0:22- 17:18)

Badr Padapattu by Vaidyar is an epic masterpiece that narrates the Islamic battle of Badr in its entirety, with a consistent and intelligible structure encompassing a logical beginning, middle, and end. Envisioned to be orated as an uninterrupted whole, its full emotional and narrative impact materialises only through comprehensive performance. Vaidyar divided the work into distinct *Ishals* (melodic modes), each promoting the layered sequencing of the story. However, in contemporary media circulation, predominantly through recordings, these *Ishals* have often been isolated from their original succession, with each piece individually set to music and imparted as an individual song, contributing to the fragmentation of the coherent work. Consequently, the audience primarily encounters these segments in isolation, with little attentiveness to the composition's broader historical arc. The disjuncture between fragment and whole, emblematic of the way popular culture reconfigures traditional forms, disfigures the overarching narrative. Yet, it is curated through the expertise of the special judges of reality TV, and the whole narrative is made apparent, presenting the audience with an opportunity to recognise the totality that was once fundamental to the song's evocative power.

Nevertheless, there arises a powerful historical shift in the function and perception of *Padapattu*. The composition of the Mappilapattu genre, *Padapattu,*

heightened at a time when Mappilas were resisting the oppressive systems present before them in the form of feudal landlords and foreign authorities. At that historical moment, these songs, including the *Badr Padapattu*, were pregnant with emotive force, which mobilised the unarmed, lowly Mappilas against the brutal forces equipped with power and arms. They galvanised Mappila resistance through their romanticisation of martyrdom, narratives of exhortations to fight endangering forces, or their celebration of rebellion in the face of foreign threat. Unfortunately, the political rigour of these songs is traded for enhancing the entertainment appeal. When melodiously vocalised by the young contestants, smiling and tilting their heads, the potential for resistance carried by these songs discreetly slips away. It is staged as a vibrant artifact of tradition, not as an active political form. Its subversive edge is polished and toned down, and it is entirely stripped of its historical and ideological context. The history of the protests, nor the context of the Vaidyar composition, is highlighted when these songs are performed on the stages of reality shows. The radical art is repackaged for mass consumption and serves depoliticization through its strategic commodification.

Moving on, numerous Mappila songs have been composed for cinema (discussed in the previous chapter), which have been immensely popular throughout Kerala. A plethora of popular songs composed for cinema are modified or stylised renditions of traditional Mappilapattu *Ishals*, instigated by veteran Mappila poets. Reality shows provide a platform for discussion about the original *Ishals* and compositions that have been utilised by music composers like M.S. Baburaj and K. Ragavan. For instance, in *Patturumal*, the round *Oruvattam koodi* (once again) is

dedicated to the vocalisation of cinematic Mappila songs. In this round, the contestant Syam sings the super hit cinematic Mappila song *Peruthu monjulla oruthi*, lyrics by P.T. Abdurahiman and music by K. Raghavan, and T.K. Hamza delineates that the original Mappila *Ishal* of the song *Manakkum thamara* has been introduced to cinema, providing it with structured pitch and beats. (*Patturumaal - Patturumaal Ishal Marhaba 25-11-12 Part 3*, 0:19-09-12). Moreover, during performances where the contestants sing a traditional Mappilapattu *Ishal*, the judges share their erudition regarding its adaptation into movies. When Aneesh performed *Hakkana Konamaral*, the judge Abootty mentions that this *Ishal* has been incorporated in the movie *Mayavi*, by M.S. Baburaj, through the song *Kannaram pothi pothi* written by P. Bhaskaran. (*Patturumaal - Patturumaal 18-11-12 Part 1* 06:07- 20:12) Interestingly, reality TV shows become platforms for cultural reclamation by clarifying the melodic structure and rhythmic pattern of the song that has been repurposed in cinema. This generates a sort of reverse flow, in essence, from popular media back to traditional knowledge.

This televisual revival also offers a platform for creative reinterpretations. The stage often functions as a site where tradition meets innovation-where old compositions are rendered with new vocal techniques, instrumentation, and styles, thus ensuring their relevance in the contemporary media landscape. In *Pathinalam Ravu*, the contestant Badhusha sings a traditional Mappila song, a fast number, which the anchor of the show acknowledges that the swift beats made her want to dance to the song. In the *Ishal qissa* segment, Faisal Elettil reveals that he has listened to this song previously sung by many, but slow, gentle, and relaxed, unlike

the vocalisation of the contestant, which was high-energy, with a danceable twist, by significantly modifying the rhythm, instrumentation, and vibe of the song. The contestant admits that this song has been specifically configured with music and instrumentation exclusively for the performance. The particular song vocalised by Badhusha was written by C. Seythalikutti Master from Malappuram, who earned fame through the composition of this single song called '*Kulal'*, explicitly written for women to be sung during weddings and other ceremonial occasions. Elettil announces that through the reworked song performed by Badhusha in *Pathinalam Ravu*, this version will earn popularity and other young singers would follow this style (*Badhusha in Ishal Thanima Round* 4:06-11:27). These televised programmes provide a platform for artists to perform and reinterpret traditional Mappila songs, thereby introducing them to newer generations and wider audiences.

Further, singing reality TV programmes, integrating drama and theatrical elements into Mappilapattu performances, enriching their appeal and accessibility, further contributes to the commodification of this traditional art form. Theatrical components such as expressive storytelling, elaborate Mappila costumes of the bygone era, and dynamic stagecraft transform traditional Mappilapattu into captivating spectacles. This amplified entertainment value attracts broader audiences, increasing demand and marketability of the television show. It is exemplified in the performance of the contestant Amani in *Patturumal*.

Fig. 16. Screenshot of Amani's performance in *Patturumal Salkarapattu* round.

Amani performs in the *Salkarapattu* round, appearing in a conventional Mappila costume, adorned in a white jumper, *kachi* with a dyed hem, and an outdated head scarf of the past. The costume is perfectly executed that even her various gold ornaments do justice to the popular image of a traditional Mappila woman. Not only her costume, but also her make-up with grey hair strands, her mannerism, and expressions well suit the performance she is delivering. She opens the act with dialogues and enquires about the arrival of the *Puthyappla* (new groom) for whom she has prepared a bunch of savouries, which is presented on the stage. Amidst the elaborate mise-en-scène, she performs the Mappilapattu '*Punnara Puyyaple*' (*Salkarapattil Ithuvare nammal kaanatha Amani* 0:05- 5:05)

The particular song has been performed by the participant Theertha Suresh in the reality show *Pathinalam Ravu*, but without the theatrical elements, costume, or make-up, in the comedy round, the segment which features Mappila songs that highlight comedy and satire. This parody song, written by K.C. Aboobakkar, satirises the flamboyant esteem exhibited towards the groom by the family of the

bride in the Mappila community. The reverence displayed towards the groom never fades, even after decades of marriage. The groom is pampered by the traditional *Ammayi* in the song, providing him everything from food, drinks and even cigarettes to smoke (*Pathinalam Ravu Season 5* | *Theertha* 0:33- 10:13). In the performance by Amani, in *Salkaram* round, this particular song is preferred for the way it presents the reception of the groom and the feast prepared by the lyrical speaker. The groom is welcomed and honoured with a grand reception, mirroring the community's hospitality traditions with a grand feast exhibiting various dishes.

Parody Mappila songs like this, add a playful twist to the Mappilapattu tradition, often using the same popular tunes or *Ishals*, with Mappila expressions and vocabulary, but with customised lyrics to entertain the audience, or comment on social issues. Employing wit and wordplay, such songs critique societal norms in a way that is both amusing and thought-provoking. The faculty of such songs to amuse people while preserving the flavour of traditional music renders them as a unique form of entertainment, which reality shows tactically exploit. These songs, performed with exaggerated expressions and comedic timing, elevate the humorous ambience of the whole television episode. In the comic round, when Theertha performs, while singing the lyrics *cigaretteitha valicholi* (smoke cigarette), she promptly eyes at Vidhu Prathap, the playback singer, a special guest in the show, which is later inquired about by the guest. Along with the commentaries from other judges like Shan Rahman and Rahna, they build up on the comic timing of the contestant, enriching the overall comedic and joyful ambience, entertaining the television audience (*Pathinalam Ravu Season 5* | *Theertha* 0:33- 10:13).

Similarly, in *Kasavuthattam* of Amritha TV, the contestant Ashraf performs another parody Mappila song in the nostalgia round with himself enacting as a postman in uniform delivering a letter to an illiterate Mappila woman, and vocalises the song *Qatharil ninnum kathonn vannu*, a song which satirises the literary backwardness of the community, through the amusing presentation of a Mappila lady Pathumma who is awestruck as she receives a letter from Qatar, and doesn't know how to read. The singer introduces a young background dancer as the eponymous Pathumma, who delivers a dance number according to the beat with occasional dramatic enacting of the lyrics showcasing her helplessness as she is unable to read the letter, and she is not supposed to lend it to someone else to read it to her in fear of defamation, as her long-distance relationship will be out (*Athigambeera Prakadanavumayi Ashraf* 0:00-4:08). Obviously, the humour within the song which critiques the illiteracy of women at an historical juncture, and the theatrical rendition of the song provide innovative formulae of entertainment created at the expense of Mappila songs.

Moreover, Various Mappila art forms have also been brought onto the screen as a background performance to the vocalisation of Mappila songs. For instance, *Kasavuthattam* of Amritha TV ventured to incorporate a segment titled Mappila *Kala* (Mappila arts) round. The contest Hashim's vocalisation of the song is escorted by a group of Edarikode Kolkkali performers. The performance commences with the rhythmic beating of the Kolkkali to the slow crescendo of percussion, synchronising the tone for the verses that follow. The contestant dressed as one of the Kolkkali performers delivers the song. The camera promises equilibrium in showcasing both

the vocalisation of the Mappila song by the contestant and the background Kolkkali performances. The contestant finishes the vocalisation of the song and makes space for the climactic segment of the Kolkkali performance. The concluding crescendo propels the performance to an intensified emotional and physical pitch, with rapid instrumentation and enhanced movement channelling a dramatic fervour. The accelerated finale is demonstrated by a feverish swell of the music and energy, transporting the performance to an expressive zenith (*Edarikode kolkali--amrita tv kasavuthattam* 1:00- 9:20).

Fig. 18. Screenshot of *Kasavuthattam* of Amrutha TV, displaying Kolkali.

Kolkkali, as a communal art form, is repositioned from its traditional communal context to provide a visually charming scenery to solo Mappilapattu performances. This recontextualization not only dislodges the form from its cultural integrity but also relegates it to a commodified spectacle. In the performance of Hashim, Kolkkali becomes a decorative element levelled into a rhythmic accessory

that amplifies the performance of the singer rather than defending its own narrative or aesthetic supremacy.

When a significant cultural art is blindly displaced from its authentic habitat, mistakes might happen if not carefully executed. Such a blunder is pointed out by the expert judge V.M. Kutty during the judgment session. The tune, *Ishal*, the performance of the Kolkali players, and the vocalisation of the song are executed excellently, however, the content of the song, vocalised by Hashim, was a melancholic one, which sings the heartbreaking episodes of the Karbala war, where the grandson of the Prophet was arrowed to death. This selected song should be voiced carrying the weight of sorrow in a lamenting style evoking mourning for the demised, not as a jubilant one, a celebratory note which is usually and rightly voiced during Kolkkali performance (*Edarikode kolkali--amrita tv kasavuthattam* 1:00-9:20). This art form is performed traditionally in a festive and blissful ambience embedded in a celebratory, rhythmic ethos that reflects collective joy and social harmony and the song should also perfectly complement the play. This ignorance fits right into the broader critique of commodification and decontextualization in popular representations of Mappila art forms. The incongruous pairing of song and performance exposes a fundamental disruption from the form's cultural context and indicates a greater issue of commodification, where aesthetic preferences are informed less by cultural integrity but more by visual spectacle.

The occupation of providing a visual spectacle to a solo Mappila song performance has been perfectly executed by other art forms like Oppana and Arabanamuttu. For instance, in the performance by the contestant Jimcy in

Kasavuthattam in the wedding song round, she is accompanied by a group of gracious Oppana performers who deliver a well-synchronised and meticulously choreographed Oppana performance mixed with graceful dance steps. To elevate the dramatic touch, the contestant murmurs in the ears of the beautifully adorned bride and smoothens her head scarf. Occasionally, other characters, presumably the relatives of the bride, visit the stage to adorn her with a golden bangle, which is a custom amongst the Mappilas, where the relatives of the bride gift her gold jewellery. The visitors also design henna on the bride's hand. Occasionally, the camera pans to the beautified faces of the Oppana performers dancing according to the beats (*Asaputhidum kalliyanam* 0:00-4:11). The vibrant Oppana performance, along with the theatrical elements, elevates the authenticity of the wedding song round. However, the performance didn't do justice to the authentic Oppana performed by the Mappilas during weddings, where there is seldom spectacle and choreographed dance, but abundant Mappila melodies and collective participations, as the mediated experiences demand stylised entertainment and costume aesthetics, thereby stripping them of the socio-cultural context. It exhibits a general arrangement of cultural simplification, where the richness associated with traditional ritual is subordinated to the mandates of visual appeal and entertainment format, irrevocably eroding the authenticity of representation. In various other episodes, Mappila art forms like Arabanamuttu, Daffmuttu, etc, have been employed as a background for the solo Mappila song performances.

Fascinatingly, this trend gets reversed in the Oppana reality show, *Mailanji Monju,* broadcast by the Flowers TV. Here, Oppana becomes the highlight of the

show, where the singers are relegated to the background. Similar to talent search singing reality shows, there have been numerous television programmes where the limelight falls on dancing talent. The Oppana reality show, maintaining the Mappila signature, has been produced by combining the elements of talent search dance shows and singing shows, as vivacious dance rounds assess the talent of the performers who dance to the vocalisation of songs by three contestants singing at a corner of the stage, whose singing talents are also evaluated, resembling the Oppana performed in youth festivals and other cultural fests. In this particular reality show, the various dance forms are choreographed, maintaining little resemblance to Oppana, with a plethora of variations. The analysis of the various categorisations of Oppana in *Mylanchi Monju*, such as traditional Oppana, cinematic Oppana, Arabic Oppana, other language Oppana and comedy Oppana, reveals how this indigenous art form is provided with various countenances, mixing it up with various dance traditions.

The show inaugurates with the traditional Oppana round by team Jannat. In the traditional Oppana round, the female dancers perform a gracefully choreographed number, which is widely performed in youth festivals and other cultural events and generally agreed upon as the authentic, unadulterated art form, but in factuality, this redefined art has no resemblance to the Oppana which arose among the Mappilas, but in the selection of songs. This Oppana is still fortunately performed to traditional Mappila songs or songs composed in traditional style.

Fig. 19. Screenshot of traditional Oppana performed in *Mailanji Monju.*

However, in the show, the song sung by the contestants has been provided with appropriate, delicate background score to elevate the auditory appeal of the song. The brightly bejewelled bride, with colourful costume and embellishments, is escorted by the other Oppana performers and seated in the middle in a decorated seat, and they start performing according to the melodious Oppana song vocalised by three singers, who are also donned in the traditional Oppana costumes. The performers clap their hands, swaying and moving around, in the traditional Mappila costume with imitation gold jewellery and artificial make-up. The performance is judged according to the integrity and gracefulness of the performance delivered by both the dancers and singers (*Mailanji Monju | Oppana Reality Show | #Ep – 01* 5:50- 14:15)

The group of boys in traditional round performs the art form Vattapattu or Aan Oppana (Oppana of men). Here as well, the visual art widely differs from the

traditional art crafted by the Mappila community. Similar to Oppana, this 'traditional' Vattapattu is widely accepted and agreed upon as the authentic Oppana performance by men. Distinctively, in traditional Vattapattu, in its authentic sense, the male singers vocalise various Mappila songs during the wedding rituals at the groom's residence. The groom is conveyed to the bride's residence by melodiously vocalising the various Mappila songs appropriate to the function. But, by the restrictions imposed by time and space, in the choreographed Vattapattu, the groom is placed at the centre and the *Vattapattukar* sing and clap, sitting on both sides of the groom. Though greatly redefined, with the boys performing a choreographed number with calculated steps, performed in unison, standing and sitting on both sides of the groom, with a few members of the team vocalising the song from the margin of the stage, this art has been assigned fewer bodily movements in its performance in comparison to the Oppana of females (*Mailanji Monju* | *Oppana Reality Show* | #Ep - 02 16:00-30:17).

Fig. 20. Screenshot of traditional Oppana of boys performed in *Mailanji Monju.*

Apart from this, the show producers have ventured to branch Oppana into various forms. In contrast to traditional Oppana, the round cinematic Oppana allows performers and choreographers greater liberty to adopt a cinematic style of dancing and movement, without the restrictions of costume, and is performed to songs from Malayalam movies. As delineated in the previous chapter, a colossal number of Oppana songs have been composed, and performances have been choreographed for depiction through various cinemas. The Oppana songs appeared in Malayalam movies, are selectively sung on the stages by a group of three singers, and the rest of the competing team exhibits a choreographed Oppana with cinematic dance steps without much clapping. For instance, the team *Ishal* performs a choreographed Oppana to the song *Arikathu njammal vannotte* from the movie *College Girl* (1974). However, according to Judge Habeeb Mambad, the choreography resembles the 'traditional' Oppana at various places in the style of clapping and movements. He specifies that, unlike the performance in the traditional Oppana round, in the cinematic Oppana step sequences should be much more filmy in their presentation in accordance with the song selected (*Mailanji Monju | Oppana Reality Show | #Ep - 02* 2:00-8:06).

In Arabic Oppana, the dancers are supposed to perform a synchronised dance routine to an Arabic song with a bride/groom at the centre, distinguished with her alternate costume, also dancing along with the performers. In all the rounds except the traditional Oppana round, the supposed bride or groom also dances along with the associate dancers. The Arabic Oppana performed by female dancers is choreographed, resembling the Middle Eastern dance forms like Raqs sharqi (belly

dance), featuring prominent abdominal movements. The costumes of the Arabic Oppana of both male and female contestants are stylised, resembling the Arabic way of dressing. For example, in the Arabic Oppana by team Mohabbath (male), the participants performing a dance number similar to dance forms of the Middle East, wore a grey thobe and black and white keffiyeh (headscarf) with agal- a black cord that holds the headscarf in place. The thobe of the groom, distinct from other dancers, is orange in colour with a golden vest over it, and a white headscarf with an embellished, thick agal to fasten it in place. Through this distinction, the special status of the groom in the performance is highlighted (*Mailanji Monju | Oppana Reality Show | #Ep – 04* 27:40-33:00).

Fig. 21. Screenshot of Arabic Oppana by boys in *Mailanji Monju*.

In the round, other language Oppana, this art form is amalgamated with other language songs, especially Bollywood songs, and dance forms like Garba (Gujrati), Bhangra (Punjabi), and Rajasthani folk. The bride/groom and their associates dance to the song, which is vocalised by the singers. The team Ishani in this particular

round performs a dance number choreographed in Punjabi Bhangra style to the song *Wedding Da Season Hai*, a single presented by Gulshan Kumar and the music legend, T-Series, composed in a Punjabi style (*Mailanji Monju | Oppana Reality Show | #Ep – 17* 17:16- 47-30). Team Thasrif dances to the song *Tharki Chokro* from the movie *PK* (2014), which is primarily a Rajasthani folk dance style. Justifying the song selection, the contestants present a dance sequence showcasing traditional Rajasthani rhythms, beats, and energetic movements, with occasional clapping here and there incorporated into the design. The colourful Rajasthani clothes and vibrant dance steps performed by the contestants leave one wondering where the real Oppana mentioned in the round's title is unfolding (*Mailanji Monju | Oppana Reality Show | #Ep - 18* 35:14- 39:00).

Fig. 22. Screenshot of other language Oppana by boys in *Mailanji Monju*

Comic Oppana is a humorous or parodic version of the traditional Oppana, with comic elements integrated into the choreography. Satirical lyrics, exaggerated expressions and movements, mocked mannerisms, slapstick or mimed humour, etc.,

are employed by the choreographers to entertain the audience. Parodic Mappila songs are vocalised throughout the performance.

Obviously, in this television reality show, Oppana is spectacularised, fusing various forms and introducing innovative experiments with the art to hook the audience's attention. A whole programme with an hour-long slot is primarily provided for a singular Mappila art form -Oppana. But little effort has been made to represent the original art, performed by the community, where the male and female singers sit around the groom or bride and competitively vocalise various traditional songs. Little effort has been made to introduce traditional Oppana *Ishals* and songs that have been in circulation within the community for generations, through the wedding halls of the Mappilas. Little effort has been taken to introduce the authentic history of the form. Here, what they sell as Oppana is a dance form where there are a selected number of dancers-female or male- and a bride or groom respectively, placed at centre of the performance, and the art is entirely redefined for visual aesthetics, with elaborate costumes, make up, jewellery, lights and captivating energetic dance moves. If the producers and creators of the show have taken a little effort to delve into the history of the art form they might have encountered the fact that Oppana as a communal art was performed at various occasions, like ear piercing, tonsure ceremony of children and the occasion of the fortieth day custom of bathing the mother who delivered an infant, with distinct purposes. During the tonsure ritual and the ear-piercing ceremony, it is performed to distract the baby and alleviate its pain. During weddings, it acknowledges and helps with the coyness of the new bride, along with enhancing the communal rejoicing in the matrimonial

union of the two people. This knowledge might have helped them to conceive this art not merely as a practised dance form performed by trained artists with a representative bride or groom at the centre. Within these mediated performances, Oppana is no longer a living tradition but a stylised commodity, a choreography, stripped of its ritual rhythm and affective resonance, tailored to fit the competitive and glamorous disposition of reality shows. The consequence is an 'authenticity failure'- an instance where cultural forms are misrepresented or flattened to befit the demands of the entertainment economy, divulging the market's appetite for 'culture' without its context.

The shift from community-based performances to mass-mediated reality shows embodies a complex procedure of cultural adaptation. While reality shows have helped preserve and popularise Mappilapattu and other Mappila performing arts, especially Oppana, they also pose challenges related to authenticity, commodification, and cultural dilution. The vital question remains whether it is probable to strike a balance between preserving the traditional roots of Mappila arts and adapting them to modern media formats without compromising their core identity. Obviously, it has aided in the revival of forgotten songs and the introduction of those traditional Mappila songs into the contemporary popular culture. However, it inserts glamorous, competitive, and commodified dimensions to a traditional art form, often prioritising entertainment value over authenticity, which results in the packaging of culture for mass consumption. This repackaging of the art form for mass consumption is characterised in the simplistic utilisation of cultural symbols, costumes, and performance styles, curated to appeal to mass audiences,

often at the cost of authenticity, and it is well exemplified in the Oppana reality show. In *Mylanchi Monju*, selective elements of the art Oppana are highlighted and utilised according to television aesthetics to produce various choreographed numbers which, in essence, erode the authentic nuances of the art, and commodification becomes too overwhelming, as the art gets merely appropriated for profit.

This chapter's exploration of the representation of Mappilapattu and Oppana in television brings the analytical core of the thesis to a close. The following concluding chapter revisits the principal questions raised at the outset, weaves together the insights developed across the previous chapters to reaffirm the central argument and further reflects on the implications of the study conducted.

Conclusion

This thesis embarked to examine the dynamics of the representation of pre-existing folk arts in the terrain of popular culture, with the instance of the portrayal of Mappila art forms, Mappilapattu, and Oppana, in the mass-mediated, widely consumed, ubiquitous, and easily accessible forms of popular culture, that is, cinematography and television. Mappila artistic expressions, inherently formed alongside the existential orientation, patterns of everyday life, customs, and traditions of the Mappila community, were strategically and decisively integrated into the aforementioned platforms of popular cultural expressions, at critical a juncture when the encroachment of the modern elements of industrialisation, and mediatisation initiated the perpetual defining and redefining of the ordinary, mundane modes of existence of Mappilas. The analysis of these folk cultural representatives in the aforenamed traditional media forms interrogated how these mediated representations intersect with questions of popular culture, especially regarding the equilibrium of authenticity and commodification, when these art forms, situated within their community practices and observances, are reinterpreted within commercial entertainment platforms.

Guided by this central concern, the research proceeded with an epigrammatic understanding of the genesis and advancement of the community in the Malabar region, owing to various factors which, in turn, informed the folk-art forms that are the primary concern of this particular undertaking. The common origin point of the folk community could be attributed to the Arab-Malabar maritime trade transactions and the religious and cultural exchange that was facilitated through this intercultural

interaction. This religious-cultural negotiation framed the earlier Mappila literature, exemplified in the genre of *Malapattu*- devotional songs, which are hagiographic texts that eulogise the Islamic figures, especially Sufi Saints, celebrating their lives, miracles, and the piety of these revered figures who held substantial influence in determining the moral and spiritual worldviews of the community. These songs, thus devised, were not merely artistic endeavours but also tools of education. These texts were integrated into the informal curriculum of Mappilas to guide the community, spousing humanitarian views to in still ethical values, religious devotion, and anchor the communal identity. Therefore, the ancestries of Mappila artistic endeavours lie at the intersection of religious devoutness, community formation, and pedagogical intent.

Further, historically and across various regions, the aesthetic expressions championed by vernacular or subaltern classes are marginalised and classified as folk. This process is seldom neutral. The analysis of Mappila cultural articulations reveals that the classification of these expressions as folk is closely linked to power dynamics. As established, the majority of the Mappila population, oppressed converts from the lower strata of the social hierarchy, were socially excluded and economically destitute. Despite this, the entire community participated in the commercial richness of coastal trade networks due to their affiliation with the Arabs, who dominated maritime commerce. However, encounters with foreign powers driven by motivations other than trade initiated the disruption of coastal commerce, leading to economic decline and further landlessness as inland migrations occurred in search of better economic opportunities. The cultural artifacts of specific

communities are strategically excluded from the official ‘high culture’ by barriers of wealth, social class, and formal education, which marginalise them as folk expressions. The Mappila literary and cultural expressions, emerging from a marginalised community within the hegemonic social structures of Kerala, economically disadvantaged and educationally backward, were not part of high culture but were regarded as folk and excluded from academic and pedagogic engagement.

The status of these artistic expressions as folk or vernacular was once again consciously conferred during the British colonial administration, as the literature produced by the community then was impregnated with anti-colonial sentiments, resisting domination, and voicing their oppression, and these works further urged the socially and politically marginalised Mappila population to fight against these systemic oppressive forces. Through the politically charged *Padapattu* and their shared performances, the Mappilas challenged injustice, built solidarity, preserved their communal identity, and asserted their dignity in the face of oppression. The conscious cataloguing of these Mappila art and literature as ‘folk’ performed not only the depoliticization of its subversive content but also strategically consigned the community’s cultural output to the purview of entertainment, dissociating it from mainstream literary and cultural narratives. The cataloguing as entertainment based on the functional attribute of the communal art abstained it from critical engagements. This framing further reflects and reinforces the aforementioned hierarchy, where the culture of economically and socially marginalised communities

is deemed inferior or 'low culture', unsophisticated, and unworthy of serious academic attention, as it lacks the legitimacy of classical or elite traditions.

Therefore, for a prolonged period, the Mappila song tradition, which evolved along with the community in various forms and measures, and the specific linguistic construct that assisted in the composition of these songs, the Mappila vernacular, have been relegated to a secondary or peripheral status. However, for the Mappilas, these expressions are integral, woven into the fabric of their day-to-day existence, religious and social practices, and communal identity, exemplified in numerous instances. The *Mala* songs were performed at households during various circumstances as a spiritual observance. The *Padapattu* with anti-feudal and anti-colonial undertones vehemently vocalised their resentment against oppression, and challenged the dominant colonial narratives, further charging the unarmed Mappilas to fight the brutal forces of the imperialist oppressors. For the effortless dissemination of Quranic and other stories within the community, they devised *Kissapattu*. The community even enveloped the personal exchanges between people in songs and addressed that category of songs as *Kathupattu.* The wonders of their excursions, irrespective of the distance, were wholeheartedly recounted in *Sarkeettpattu*, preserving their experiences. Celebrating the joy and grandeur of Mappila wedding celebrations, *Kalyanapattu* were composed. These examples affirm that rather than functioning merely as artistic expressions, these songs were a constituent of their living traditions, deeply embedded in their lived experiences, which is a primary characteristic of folk articulations.

Evidently, Mappilas composed songs on a wide range of premises, emotions, and occasions, but the process doesn't culminate with the composition, as the community espoused the custom of vocalisation of these Mappila songs in various gatherings, a reflection of the community's strong oral tradition. These songs were sung, shared, and performed on diverse occasions of communal assemblies, shaping a living part of the communal life and expression. Significant occasions where members of the community, particularly of a locality, aggregated were the wedding celebrations, and other community-specific ceremonies like the circumcision of boys, the ear-piercing ceremony of the girl child, and other practices surrounding childbirth. These ceremonious gatherings transformed the venue into a key occasion for the performance of Mappila songs. They gathered around, clapping and singing around the child, bride, or groom.

In addition, locally established singers, separate bands of women and men, were appointed, especially by the wedding parties of the bride and groom, respectively, to vocalise Mappila songs during the wedding night, and even the nuptial date was decided following the availability of the singers. In the initial stages, as observed, the repertoire of songs performed by these singers on this occasion was not limited to those that thematically associated with various aspects of grand matrimonial union; rather, it encompassed a diverse collection of subjects, exhibiting the broader socio-cultural landscape of the community. However, over time, there appears to have been a shift towards thematic consolidation, with a rising prominence resting on songs that are thematically relevant to the wedding context. It is identifiable that this particular shift was not restricted to thematic but also

stylistic, as Oppana, one of the *Ishals*, usually performed at weddings, began to be frequently preferred for its fast-paced rhythm, as it energised and engaged audiences, and played a significant role in shaping the performance dynamic. As singers began to gravitate towards this captivating rhythm of the *Ishal*-Oppana, they began to be addressed as Oppana *pattukar* (Oppana singers), and thereby a distinctive mode of performance emerged. It was through this gradual codification of occasion-specific performance, musical choice, and audience expectation that Oppana as a distinctive Mappila art form took shape as a performative practice rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of Mappila weddings.

Before the rise of modern technology and mass media, Mappila songs and the collective joy derived from performing these songs at social gatherings served as popular modes of entertainment within the community, which was considerably marked by active and widespread communal engagement with high levels of participation and a strong emphasis on collective cultural expression. Categorising these expressions solely as entertainment based on the attribute of communal experience and absolving these artefacts from critical inquiry is reductive. To delegate these articulations as merely amusement and diversion, identifying features of folk art, is to overlook the political, historical, and affective charge embedded in the individual compositions. These forms are not mere cultural ornaments but fundamental modes of expression, resistance, and continuity.

Further, the increased access to education and reformations within the community encouraged them to forsake the ancestral indigenous practices, many of which were outdated and rooted in superstition, characterised by incompatibility

with modern sensibilities. Further, the economic impediment faced by the Mappila community was lifted by the employment-driven migration of individuals to Gulf nations, bringing prosperity to the various sectors of living associated with the community. This contributed to a holistic reshaping of the outlook of the Mappilas. In addition, the phenomenon of globalisation, facilitating global interactions, and significantly the globalisation of various technologies, redefined Mappila customs. The earlier modes of entertainment, centring communal activities and interactions of the folks, were replaced by the broadcast modes of entertainment. Technological progress diminished the requirement of vocalisation of Mappila songs for such collective gatherings by providing entertainment through the dissemination of pre-recorded songs through various loudspeakers. Consequently, songs began to be written for various recording media. Traditional marriage functions, once featuring live performances of Mappila songs by community singers as an integral part of the celebration, with the advent of modern sound technologies, especially loudspeakers and recorded media, replaced the need for live singers. This transition reflects the broader changes in their cultural practices and preferences, where the communal and participatory nature of previous folk art forms gave way to more passive modes of consumption, influenced by technological advancement. These changing social dynamics led to the decline of the communal performance of traditional art forms.

Therefore, the transformation of Mappila arts, from lived communal practices to mediated cultural products, must be comprehended within the broader context of social change. At this juncture, when society was undergoing radical changes, new forms of media ventured to deliver novel formats of entertainment,

replacing the previous ones. In this altered scenario, within these new forms, the vestiges of the old folk culture started to reappear, but as standardised and sanitised spectacles, reimagining the relationship between the performer and the audience. The communal ties of the individual performer were severed at the cost of the popularisation of the genre, as the public participation in the staging of these art forms mounted. The dynamics of the community as the primary consumers of the folk-art form were redefined as the aggregate of assorted audiences became the consumers of mass media. With all these changes considered, it is noteworthy that the broadcast initiatives by adopting previous communal cultural expression would not have been probable without one fundamental shift within, that is, the transition from Arabi-Malayalam to Malayalam script. The scriptural and linguistic transformation laid the foundation for enhanced accessibility and dissemination of Mappila aesthetic expressions.

A paradigm shift in the language employment of Mappila songs is perceivable as the prominence of Arabi-Malayalam dwindled as a result of religious reforms and formal secular schooling, which promoted literacy in standard Malayalam. The emerging Mappila poets, particularly around the mid-twentieth century, began to compose songs in a much-diluted Mappila language. The scripting in Arabi-Malayalam was overthrown, and the songs began to be written in proper Malayalam script. Though with an abundance of community distinct vocabulary, the songs were primarily written in a language that is accessible to the whole state rather than a particular community. While Arabi-Malayalam was a unique form of scripting that is intimately tied to the religious and cultural distinctiveness of the Mappila

community, its limited accessibility in the wider realm confined the circulation of songs within the community. However, with the linguistic standardisation and the simultaneous intervention of audio media, these songs entered the realm of wider public consumption. This transference not only augmented the popularity of Mappila songs among non-Mappila audiences but also revived a new wave of non-Mappila poets and lyricists to compose in the genre. The shift in scripting was mirrored in print culture as well. Emerging Mappila songs began to be printed in Malayalam script, and also the Mappila songs that had been published in Arabi-Malayalam began to reappear in proper Malayalam, rendering them accessible to a broader, non-Mappila readership.

The scriptural transition directly contributed to the popularisation and commercial circulation of Mappila songs beyond their original community contexts. The transition to Malayalam script further facilitated their live stage performance. The Mappila song stage shows materialised during a time when the community was gradually drifting away from its older ways of life, and the communal artefacts were adapting to a more media-centred cultural space. As songs became scripted in a familiar format, singers, particularly non-Mappila performers, could effortlessly access, learn, and reproduce them on the live stage. As previously stated, Mappila songs were energetically performed live in community congregations, especially during weddings and other social functions, vitalising the audience. However, this particular tradition gradually faded, as these performances by the local singers were replaced by the use of innovative technologies that played pre-recorded songs. Despite these modifications, the reputation of Mappila songs to energise the

audience continued to be compelling. Exploiting the performative appeal of Mappila songs, with the support of orchestras and musical instruments, live performances began to surface on public stages, demonstrating a new phase in the trajectory of Mappila songs.

Parallel to the stage shows, the popular culture medium, cinema, began to tap into the growing popularity of Mappila art forms. Capitalising on the widespread acclaim of Mappila songs, these forms were adapted, commodified, or reimagined across various films. The representation of this Mappila aesthetic expression in films was the key point that chiefly united the community as an audience with the particular medium, and the producers of the film at a point in time ordered the composition of a Mappila *Ishal* in their film to guarantee the theatrical success of the movies. These popular melodies further circulated beyond the cinematic medium as independent music, representative songs of the respective films, carrying the tag of musicians and singers who worked on it, increasing its popularity enabling wider reach and repeated listening, through physical formats like cassettes and CDs in the earlier days and through digital formats like YouTube in the contemporary scenario. The commercial viability of the genre is evident in the release of numerous categorisations of Mappila songs through various films.

The analysis of the diverse categories of Mappila songs in cinema revealed recurring patterns of lyrical and visual appropriation. In films, the Mappila song genre operates as a cultural leitmotif, reinforcing character identity, particularly when a Mappila character appears on screen. This recurrent fellowship between the genre and the character within the plot highlights a dual role, on the one hand, the

song genre functions as a popular entertainment providing auditory pleasure, and on the other hand, it deploys community representation.

To craft Mappila songs suitable for the cinematic medium, the idiosyncrasies of Mappila melodies were blended with the ingredients of Hindustani classical notes, integrating orchestration and structured musical arrangements that befit the magnanimous industry. Despite these musical adjustments, the lyrical vocabulary retained its Mappila credentials. Even when composed in standard Malayalam, accessible to the wider cinema audience, the lyricists continued to employ terminologies and jargon particular to the community, including Arabic loanwords and expressions familiar in the Mappila linguistic culture. Often, the sounds in the wordings are carefully crafted, imitating the Mappila pronunciation of the words, to maintain a sense of authenticity. This scrutinised attention to detail certified that the commercialised songs remained recognisably Mappila, in their tone and texture.

However, the form, which articulated complex levels of cultural, religious, and political significance, voiced social grievances; these songs articulated collective pain, hope, and defiance. When represented on screen, it becomes tamed to fit the popular culture discourse. The potent subversive undertones of the genre that once challenged hegemonic power structures and reflected community agency have been increasingly aestheticized and stripped of their political resonance, exposing modes of incorporation by popular culture.

Furthermore, in the place of proper cinematic dance numbers, stylised Oppana by background dancers featuring coordinated clapping, expressive and energetic body movements donning body-con attire was concocted to suit the visual

aesthetics of films. Within the cinematic representation, the art form began to be widely reputed as a female dance form, predominantly performed with a female figure, typically the bride, occupying the focal point of the group dance. One way the commodification aspects of the medium worked upon the Mappila art form, Oppana, is by codifying the performance as an object of visual pleasure, with the passive, coy bride fuelling the heterosexual male fantasy and the fetishised presence of the female dancers enhancing the erotic object. Through this reimagination, the art form, stripped of its communal and cultural context, was served to entice the male gaze, drawing attention to the sensuality of the movements of the dancers and their contoured clothing, over the traditionally valued performative functions and cultural significance upheld by the art. The cinema selectively appropriated the female version of Oppana, and there is an observable cinematic absence of the representation of the male contribution to the art form, which was once predominant in communal wedding ceremonies. Male Oppana singers were once integral to the ritualistic performance of the art form at the residence of the groom, as the singers performed during the ceremony of *mothalam* or *mukhathalam*, where the customary barber shaved the groom as part of the wedding rites, and the singers continued to sing till the ceremony was over. Later, when the groom is escorted to the bride's accommodation, the singers accompany them all the way, vocalising appropriate songs. Such a male presence in the art form, when appropriated on the screen, was strategically dropped, as in the dominant cinematic discourse, the male figure could not be the object of the gaze. Thus, the filmic adaptation of the cultural expressions reflects a gendered politics of visibility, where the male body escapes objectification, and the female body is aestheticized and commodified for consumption.

When it comes to popular cultural representation of Mappila art forms, particularly Mappilapattu and Oppana, in television, it is most notably accomplished through the adaptation of the globally recognised '*Idol'* show format, which provides a competitive platform for discovering budding singing talents. While on the superficial level, these singing reality shows appear to be mere talent showcases, their localised adaptations, suitable for the ambience of the regional audiences, transform them into cultural stages, especially in the case of Mappila aesthetic expressions. The incorporation of Mappila songs into talent search reality TV formats exemplifies the process of glocalisation, where a profitable global media template is systematically adapted to reflect local cultural specificities, rendering the content delivered through the media appealing to the local audiences through cultural familiarity, and it secures commercial viability.

When Mappilapattu was incorporated into this format through the televised stage, it transformed itself into a site of cultural negotiation, where the traditional form was recontextualised for mass consumption, tailoring to fit televisual aesthetics and audience expectations. But at large, it becomes another platform for the survival and popularisation of Mappila expressions when the community is no longer functioning in the usual traditional way, carrying out the task of performing these songs in their circles. With the decline of traditional modes of performing, television became an important platform of entertainment through which these cultural forms could survive and circulate by adapting to new contexts, presented through globalisation.

The television show producers were well aware of the potential of Mappila songs to attract and energise the crowd through the success of Mappilapattu stage shows, which had a convincing and enduring market among audiences. It is further evidenced in the commercial success of recording formats like the gramophone, cassette tapes, and later, audio-visual formats like CDs, which recorded Mappila aesthetic expressions. However, as with any commodity in the modern media that gains market value, the popularity of Mappila songs resulted in the widespread imitation and formulaic reproduction of the genre. This production of mass art, driven by commercial triumph, often sacrificed the artistic individuality possessed by the compositions in favour of replicating established formulas. Especially in the context of new-age audio-visual renderings, this occasioned a decline in the eminence and innovation of newly produced songs under the label of Mappila songs, which relied excessively on clichés and repetitive structures. It was primarily as a response to this saturation and dilution that television channel producers ventured to revive older, authentic, and once-popular melodies of Mappilapattu.

With the advent of televised representations that adapted a format which primarily focuses on music competitions, Mappilapattu appeared in a novel form, one which is extensively fashioned by the logics of media productions and ratings, gradually shifting the attention from community-based expressions to stylised performances intended for competition and spectatorship. In the mediated context, the genre was repackaged to harmonise with performance aesthetics, and therefore, songs were picked by the contestants for their potential to showcase their vocal virtuosity, stage presence, and emotional impact. This commercialised

transformation also introduced new styles of instrumentation, orchestration, and performance patterns that conform to mainstream anticipations of spectacle and competition. Traditionally, Mappilapattu was evaluated by the community based on the harmony of internal poetic features like *kambi* and *kazhuth*, focusing on the lyrical craft. However, new evaluative criteria that were insignificant and remained unassessed in the communal contexts, like the costumes of the singer, choreography, and the tonal accuracy of the stage performance, assumed a significant role in the mediated presentation reallocating the emphasis from poetic depth to performative spectacle further distancing the cultural expressions from their communal roots.

Nevertheless, operating within this dynamically altered ambience, the cultural producers working within these structures stumble on occasions that privilege them to voice themselves, facilitating the exposure of the forms, melodies, and artists that once enriched their communal artefacts. It offers cultural producers a degree of agency to negotiate their cultural representation in mainstream culture, providing legitimacy to the art and artists associated with Mappila cultural expressions, sidelined by the canonical circles. In most shows, judges, well-versed in the tradition, enact a decisive role by providing vital information about the songs, their compositions, authorship, and historical significance, thereby partially restoring their cultural depth, which has been obliterated by the mass circulation of the songs through recording media, detached from its context and communal alliance.

With each new channel programme and season of Mappilapattu reality television, innovations were introduced, often diluting the cultural specificity of the

form. Capitalising on the popularity of Mappila forms and their reception by the audience through reality TV, the Oppana reality show aired on Flowers TV, exploited the art form Oppana by fusing the art form with a range of unrelated music and dance styles, conceiving Oppana as a dance form performed by dancers by placing a distinctive decked bride at the centre, to any song vocalised in the background by singers. While marketed in the name of innovation, this fusion raises concerns about the erosion of traditional knowledge regarding cultural expression and the blatant commodification of cultural practices. The authenticity of the art form is questioned when it is replaced as a spectacle tailored for mass appeal and reshaped to fit the demands of popular media.

In the initial stages, reality shows like *Patturumal* aired on Kairali TV were conceived with the primary intention of reviving the rich and forgotten legacy of Mappila songs at a time when the aesthetic and lyrical standards of the new compositions were visibly declining under the pressures of mass production and commercialisation. The format of reality shows, through the vocalisation of Mappila melodies and the elaborate lectures on the songs provided by distinct expert judges, which enhanced the field of knowledge regarding the art form, was envisioned as a corrective to the erosion of quality seen in mainstream reproductions, and to educate regarding the tradition of Mappila art forms. However, an enquiry of more recent reality shows reveals a shift: the very format that once aspired to preserve the tradition has now become a conduit for mass art itself. For instance, in the shows centred particularly on Oppana, the structure often sidelines the traditional art, as the performance is thoroughly commercialised, prioritising visual appeal, spectacle, and

entertainment value over cultural authenticity, and minimal effort is taken to preserve or represent the form in its traditional, community-rooted aesthetics.

The scrutiny of popular culture representations of Mappila songs and Oppana, in cinema and television, demonstrated that while these popular culture sites commodify Mappila art forms congruent with their modes of aesthetics, renovating them into consumable spectacles, it also paradoxically turns out as the very site where these forms are sustained and made visible in contemporary contexts. However, the process of commodification in the new forms of entertainment provided by mass media is not neutral. It often occasions a complete disentanglement of the art form from its socio-religious and historical roots, restyling it to fit the aesthetic expectations and ideological comforts of dominant publics. Cultural forms entrenched in communal life are recontextualised, aestheticized, and often depoliticised within market-driven popular media landscapes. In this sense of outright commodification, these representations transform into a form of cultural containment through spectacle and market logic, disciplining the subversive potential latent in folk art, which stood in battle against the structures of high culture, registering their deviance from those forms. At the same time, this thesis argues that commodification does not entirely erase the cultural agency embedded in Mappila arts. Despite their deliberate repackaging intended for mass consumption, these forms still retain vestiges of visual and performative traces of their origin, which continue to resonate with the communal memory, identity, and history of the people. Popular culture may revise and rework

the modes of production and circulation, but it does not entirely sever the ties between form and community.

The technological assimilation into the lives of people and mediated exchanges accelerated through these innovations redefined communal interfaces, modernising the community's way of life, and modifying the conditions for cultural transmission. As communal production and participation deteriorated, popular culture one offered through mass media stepped in, offering a form of persistence, but one extensively shaped by commercial imperatives. Popular culture offers the indigenous folk expressions visibility that might otherwise be evaded in an increasingly globalised world.

This study contributes to the discourse on cultural studies by offering a nuanced understanding of the realm of popular culture by critically examining how indigenous folk-art forms are reshaped and represented within mass media, particularly in cinema and television, with the examples of marginalised Mappila expressions. It locates how the decline of communal and participatory forms of artistic expression is entwined with broader changes within the community, where transforming social structures and media economies have amended modes of cultural production and reception. Popular culture materialises in this context not merely as a site of representation but as a contested terrain-one that simultaneously enables incorporation into dominant structures and unlocks space for expressions of cultural agency and resistance. By analysing the sonic and visual renderings of Mappila songs and Oppana, this research highlights how tradition is negotiated within the frameworks of modern media, divulging the enduring tensions between

appropriation and assertion, erasure and reinvention, within the politics of representation.

While this study offers a critical reading of Mappila art forms- Mappila songs and Oppana, within the framework of popular culture, it is limited in scope by its primary attention on representations in cinema and television. As such, it does not fully address parallel occurrences in digital and social media platforms, where these art forms are also being rearticulated in novel and exciting ways. Additionally, the analysis is largely text- and image-based, and does not incorporate extensive ethnographic fieldwork or audience reception studies, which could have enriched the understanding of how these cultural texts are experienced, interpreted, and contested by various segments of the community. Furthermore, the study does not engage with performance theory, which could have offered valuable tools to analyse the embodied, affective, and spatial dimensions of Mappila art practices, especially in their transition from lived communal contexts to mediated spectacles. These limitations point toward potential areas for further investigation, which are outlined in the following chapter on recommendations for future research.

A Responsible Approach to the Representation of Folk Art in Popular Culture

In the contemporary world, it is nearly impossible to escape the influence of mass media and digital platforms, which shape and circulate popular culture. While these platforms can bring visibility to diverse folk art forms, they also often risk over-commodifying them, reducing rich traditions to repetitive, formulaic content that prioritizes spectacle over authenticity. This not only undermines the creative potential of art but can also dilute the cultural significance of indigenous practices.

Therefore, moving forward, this research suggests, creators and producers of popular art should approach the integration of indigenous and traditional art forms with greater care. It is vital to engage in thorough research to understand the cultural and historical contexts of these art forms and collaborate with practitioners or communities who have inherited this knowledge. By doing so, artists and media platforms can create works that fuse traditional and modern elements in a respectful, innovative, and culturally informed way. This approach can enrich both popular culture and the traditions it draws from, ensuring sustainability, authenticity, and creativity.

Recommendations

While this research has explored the representation of two major Mappila art forms, Mappilapattu and Oppana, in popular culture, analysing cinema and television, it opens up new directions in the analysis of the representation of folk-art forms in popular culture. The study titled, "From Panegyrics to TV Soaps: A Critical Study of the Representation of Mappilapattu and Oppana in Popular Culture - Cinema and Television" is a selective analysis rather than exhaustive, as it foregrounds specific aspects concerning the representation of pre-existing folk aesthetic expressions in the domain of popular culture, and it invites a strain of analytical approaches to the study of popular culture.

As this study primarily focused on the representation of folk-art forms in mass media to establish popular culture as a domain that functions simultaneously as a site of structural incorporation and resistance, or as an expression of agency, with the instance of select Mappila art forms, an important theoretical question remains underexplored. It has been argued that mass culture, through its replication strategies, formulaic structures, and overt commodification, dulls the ability of critical thought possessed by the consumers of the products of the culture industry, promoting conformity, as these traditional cultural expressions are reframed within the aesthetic and commercial logics of cinema and television, with such portrayals reducing these art forms to mere visual or performative spectacle. However, this particular narrative is not without complexity. Theorists like Stuart Hall have claimed that audiences are not merely passive consumers; they can decode, resist, and reinterpret cultural messages. Similarly, popular media is not a monolith; rather,

it holds contradictions and breaches through which subversive or alternative meanings can surface. Future research in this area could discover how audiences, particularly within the community, negotiate these on-screen portrayals: whether they simply internalise, co-opt, contest, or creatively repurpose the representations they encounter. This direction retains the potential to highlight the dynamic and contested landscape of popular culture.

Another promising yet underexplored possibility for future research is the representation and circulation of Mappila art forms in the new digital media spaces, particularly on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (Reels). While this study focused on popular culture with the instance of cinema and television, the contemporary terrain of popular culture is extensively shaped by user-generated content, algorithmic visibility, and virality. These platforms reframe traditional art forms within new modes of performance, audience interaction, and cultural consumption. Mappilapattu and Oppana, for instance, are now being tailored into short-form videos and remix culture, regenerating interest and often altering their cultural meaning. Future studies in this respect could scrutinise how these art forms are being negotiated within online ecologies and how digital circulation impacts their cultural meanings. This focus would not only expand the scope of research into the modern landscape of popular culture but also extend insights into how traditional elements are being actively restyled in the age of social media.

A further area suitable for investigation is the appropriation of Mappila sensibilities within the stylistic expressions of contemporary rap. Artists like Dabzee are featuring Mappila linguistic textures, cultural and regional references, and

rhythmic patterns in rap songs, producing a hybrid form that bridges tradition with modernity. This gestures towards a shift in how Mappila identity is being performed and perceived, with active engagement with youth culture and global musical idioms. Future research in this direction could critically observe these fusions, not just as musical innovations, but as cultural statements that negotiate communal identity, resistance, and belonging in complex ways. Probing how Mappila motifs voyage through genres like rap, representative of contemporary popular culture, can open new avenues for understanding cultural continuity, transformation, and the role of music as a realm of political and affective expression in the evolving scenario.

Further, the temporal shifts in the representation of these aforementioned Mappila art forms, Oppana and Mappilapattu, in Malayalam cinema also merit further scholarly attention. This study limited its focus to portrayals of these artistic expressions up to the 1990s, a period during which these art forms featured prominently in a range of Malayalam films, often entrenched in narratives implicating Muslim cultural life. However, what followed after the turn of the millennium remains largely uncharted. A longitudinal analysis could uncover how socio-political changes and evolving cinematic conventions or shifts in communal representation may have altered the way these art forms are visualised. Future studies could explore the factors contributing to the decline in the visibility of these Mappila art forms in the proceeding century, whether due to changes in audience demographics, market pressures, or broader transformations in cultural priorities within the film industry.

Beyond these two art forms, Mappilapattu and Oppana, there remains a significant gap in the study of other Mappila art forms in popular culture, such as Kolkkali, Daffmuttu, Arabanamuttu, and other lesser-known performance traditions delineated in the second chapter. These forms, while deeply embedded in community practices and religious life, receive scant attention in mainstream media and academic discourse alike. Their marginalisation is a reflection of commercial priorities within the media forms, shaping hierarchies in popular narratives.

While this investigation has been dedicated to the study of the representational aspects of Mappilapattu and Oppana in popular culture, particularly in cinema and television, it leaves open the prospect for extended exploration into their performative dimensions. These art forms are intensely ingrained in embodied cultural practice, suggesting rich potential for an in-depth analysis through the framework of performance theory. Such a perspective would permit future studies to deliberate how these traditions operate as situated performances, shaped by context, space, and audience. Future research endeavours could address this gap by inspecting how Mappilapattu and Oppana operate as performance practices, both within community spaces, such as weddings, ceremonial celebrations, or social gatherings, and in popular media platforms, where these forms are recontextualised. Drawing insights from performance studies, such an investigation could explicate how meaning is produced through embodiment, repetition, presence, and audience interaction, and how these elements shift across different performance contexts.

Another interesting area that encourages further research is the media history of Mappilapattu and Oppana. This study does not offer an exhaustive account of

their circulation and transformation across various audio and visual media platforms such as radio, theatre, gramophone records, audio cassettes, CDs, and DVDs. Each of these formats has played a significant role in mediating, archiving, and popularising these art forms at various significant historical junctures. A focused inquiry into these media could reveal how technological shifts have influenced the aesthetic presentation and reception of Mappilapattu and Oppana over time. Such an approach focusing on the media history would complement and augment the existing scholarship by tracing the material and technological trajectories of these performance traditions beyond the screen.

While this study has delineated to some extent the connection between Hindustani music and Mappilapattu in the context of cinema, a significant gap remains in meticulously examining the profound influence of Hindustani musical traditions on the evolution of Mappila songs. This is particularly relevant in the case of composers such as M.S. Baburaj and Chand Pasha, whose works exhibit the synthesis of Hindustani melodies and Mappila lyrical traditions. There is an urgency to undertake a focused, musicological study that traces these liaisons in detail, beyond cinematic representation, to appreciate how Hindustani styles moulded the sonic aesthetics of Mappilapattu. Attending to this gap could offer fundamental insights into the hybrid characteristic of regional music and the broader flows of cultural exchange in Kerala's musical trajectory.

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