

**MĀPPILA NĒRCCAS IN MALABAR:
DYNAMICS OF MODIFICATION AND EVOLUTION
A COMPARATIVE STUDY AMIDST MODERNIST
AND REFORMIST DISPUTES**

*Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN FOLKLORE STUDIES

By

IRSHAD T.

Under the guidance of
Dr. Jisha C.K.



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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled ‘**MĀPPILA NĒRCCAS IN MALABAR: DYNAMICS OF MODIFICATION AND EVOLUTION A COMPARATIVE STUDY AMIDST MODERNIST AND REFORMIST DISPUTES**’ submitted by **Irshad T.**, is the result of an authentic work carried out under my guidance. I also certify that neither a part of the work nor the whole of it has been submitted for a degree here or elsewhere. The thesis is hereby submitted to the University of Calicut for examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Folklore Studies in the Faculty of Humanities.

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Both the adjudicators have not recommended any modifications or suggestions and therefore the original thesis is resubmitted as such. The soft copy is attached is the same as that of resubmitted copy.

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DECLARATION

I, Irshad T., do hereby declare that this Ph.D. thesis entitled ‘**MĀPPILA NĒRCCAS IN MALABAR: DYNAMICS OF MODIFICATION AND EVOLUTION A COMPARATIVE STUDY AMIDST MODERNIST AND REFORMIST DISPUTES**’ is the summary of the research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Jisha C. K., in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Folklore Studies. I also declare that neither a part of the work nor the whole of it has been published anywhere except quotations and references which have been duly acknowledged at appropriate places. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated content.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores *Mappila Nercha*, the vow-based ritual performed at Sufi saint and martyr maqams in Kerala's Malabar region, as a dynamic folk tradition central to Mappila identity, inter-community engagement, and cultural continuity. This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach, deploying participant observation and informal interviews with ritual custodians, community elders, and devotees. Field sites include *Badr Nercha*, *Appavanibha Nercha*, *Pattambi Nercha*, *Kondotty Nercha*, *B.P Angadi Nercha* and *Malappuram Nercha*, each reflecting diverse regional styles rooted in Sufi devotion, martyr commemoration, or heroic Islamic legends.

The research distinguishes between two evolutionary trajectories influencing *Nerchas*: (1) natural, organic, and community-led evolution, which sustains ritual integrity and social cohesion, and (2) external interventions stemming from globalization, commercialization, or reformist religious critiques leading to applied folklore, characterized by ritual shallowness and cultural fragmentation. The analysis reveals that naturally adaptive change fortifies *Nercha's* symbolic and communal relevance, whereas imposed modifications weaken ritual authority and provoke identity anxieties.

Findings confirm three major *Nercha* typologies: Sufi-centered, martyr-based, and heroic-legend forms, each adapting structurally to local socio-cultural and ecological contexts. The study's core insight is that *Nercha's* resilience hinges on community belief system. When rituals are guided by internal belief and local tradition, they reinforce identity, inter-folk communication, and cultural stability. But the externally influenced changes, risk eroding these foundational dimensions.

This thesis contributes significantly to the field of folklore and ritual studies by illustrating how *Mappila Nerchas*, as living traditions, respond to modern pressures while maintaining their core social and spiritual significance. By examining the balance between organic evolution (community stewardship) and

external intervention (globalisation, commercialization, religious reform, etc), the study highlights essential mechanisms for preserving ritual integrity and inter-folk communication.

Keywords

Mappila, Nercha, Folklore, Malabar, Folklorism, Public Folklore, Applied Folklore, Custom, Ritual

സംഗ്രഹം

കേരളത്തിലെ മലബാർ മേഖലയിലെ മുസ്ലിംകൾക്കിടയിൽ. സുഫികളുടെയും, വിശുദ്ധന്മാരുടെയും രക്തസാക്ഷി മഖാമുകളിൽ നടത്തുന്ന പ്രതിജ്ഞാധിഷ്ഠിത ആചാരമായ മാപ്പിള നേർച്ചയെ, മാപ്പിള സ്വത്വം, സമൂഹങ്ങൾ തമ്മിലുള്ള ഇടപെടൽ, സാംസ്കാരിക തുടർച്ച എന്നിവയ്ക്ക് കേന്ദ്രബിന്ദുവായ ഒരു ചലനാത്മക നാടോടി പാരമ്പര്യമായി ഈ പഠനം പര്യവേക്ഷണം ചെയ്യുന്നു. ഈ പഠനം ഒരു ഗുണപരമായ നരവംശശാസ്ത്ര സമീപനം സ്വീകരിക്കുന്നു. ആചാര നടത്തിപ്പുകാർ , സമുദായ നേതാക്കന്മാർ , ഭക്തർ എന്നിവരുമായുള്ള അനുപചാരിക അഭിമുഖങ്ങളും പങ്കാളി നിരീക്ഷണവും വഴി ദത്ത ശേഖരണം നടത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നു.. ബദർ നേർച്ച, അപ്പവാണിഭ നേർച്ച, പട്ടാമ്പി നേർച്ച, കൊണ്ടോട്ടി നേർച്ച, ബി.പി. അങ്ങാടി നേർച്ച, മലപ്പുറം നേർച്ച എന്നിവ പ്രധാന ഫീൽഡ് സൈറ്റുകളിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നു, ഇവയിൽ ഓരോന്നും സുഫി ഭക്തി, രക്തസാക്ഷി അനുസ്മരണം അല്ലെങ്കിൽ വീര ഇസ്ലാമിക ഇതിഹാസങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയിൽ വേരുന്നിയ വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന പ്രാദേശിക ശൈലികളെ പ്രതിഫലിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

നേർച്ചകളെ സ്വാധീനിക്കുന്ന രണ്ട് പരിണാമ പാതകളെ ഗവേഷണം വേർതിരിക്കുന്നു: (1) ആചാരപരമായ സമഗ്രതയും സാമൂഹിക ഐക്യവും നിലനിർത്തുന്ന പ്രകൃതിദത്ത, ജൈവ, സമൂഹം നയിക്കുന്ന പരിണാമം, (2) ആചാരപരമായ ആഴം കുറഞ്ഞതും സാംസ്കാരിക വിഘടനവും സ്വഭാവമുള്ള പ്രായോഗിക ഫോക്ലോറിസത്തിലേക്ക് നയിക്കുന്ന, ആഗോളവൽക്കരണം, വാണിജ്യവൽക്കരണം അല്ലെങ്കിൽ പരിഷ്കരണവാദ മത വിമർശനങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന് ഉടലെടുക്കുന്ന ബാഹ്യ ഇടപെടലുകൾ. ജൈവ മാറ്റം നേർച്ചയുടെ പ്രതീകാത്മകവും സാമുദായികവുമായ പ്രസക്തിയെ ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നുവെന്നും അതേസമയം അടിച്ചേൽപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ട പരിഷ്കാരങ്ങൾ ആചാരപരമായ അധികാരത്തെ ദുർബലപ്പെടുത്തുകയും സ്വത്വ ഉത്കണ്ഠയും സ്വത്ത് പ്രതിസന്ധിയും ഉണർത്തുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നുവെന്ന് വിശകലനം വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു.

സുഫി കേന്ദ്രീകൃതവും രക്തസാക്ഷിത്വവും വീരവാദപരവുമായ ഇതിഹാസ രൂപങ്ങൾ, ഓരോന്നും പ്രാദേശിക സാമൂഹിക-സാംസ്കാരിക, പാരിസ്ഥിതിക സന്ദർഭങ്ങളുമായി ഘടനാപരമായി പൊരുത്തപ്പെടുന്നു എന്ന വസ്തുത കണ്ടെത്തലുകൾ സ്ഥിരീകരിക്കുന്നു. നേർച്ചയുടെ പ്രതിരോധശേഷി സമൂഹ വിശ്വാസ വ്യവസ്ഥയെ ആശ്രയിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു എന്നതാണ് പഠനത്തിന്റെ കാതലായ ഉൾക്കാഴ്ച. ആന്തരിക വിശ്വാസവും പ്രാദേശിക

പാരമ്പര്യവും ആചാരങ്ങളെ നയിക്കുമ്പോൾ, അവ സ്വത്വം, വ്യത്യസ്ത സമുദായങ്ങളുടെ ഇടപെടൽ , സാംസ്കാരിക സ്ഥിരത എന്നിവയെ ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. എന്നാൽ ബാഹ്യമായി സ്വാധീനിക്കപ്പെട്ട മാറ്റങ്ങൾ, ഈ അടിസ്ഥാന മാനങ്ങളെ ഇല്ലാതാക്കുന്നു.

മാപ്പിള നേർച്ചകൾ, ജീവിക്കുന്ന പാരമ്പര്യങ്ങൾ എന്ന നിലയിൽ, അവയുടെ കാതലായ സാമൂഹികവും ആത്മീയവുമായ പ്രാധാന്യം നിലനിർത്തിക്കൊണ്ട് ആധുനിക സമ്മർദ്ദങ്ങളോട് എങ്ങനെ പ്രതികരിക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് ചിത്രീകരിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് ഈ പ്രബന്ധം നാടോടി, ആചാര പഠന മേഖലയ്ക്ക് ഗണ്യമായ സംഭാവന നൽകുന്നു. ജൈവ പരിണാമത്തിനും (സമുദായ അറിഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ടുള്ള) ബാഹ്യ ഇടപെടലിനും (ആഗോളവൽക്കരണം, വാണിജ്യവൽക്കരണം, മത പരിഷ്കരണം മുതലായവ) ഇടയിലുള്ള സത്തുലിതാവസ്ഥ പരിശോധിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെ, ആചാരപരമായ സമഗ്രതയും നാടോടി ആശയവിനിമയവും സംരക്ഷിക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള അവശ്യ സംവിധാനങ്ങളെ പഠനം എടുത്തുകാണിക്കുന്നു.

സൂചകപദങ്ങൾ: മാപ്പിള, നേർച്ച, ഫോക് ലോർ, മലബാർ, ഫോക് ലോർ, പൊതു ഫോക് ലോർ, പ്രായോഗിക ഫോക് ലോർ, ആചാരങ്ങൾ, അനുഷ്ഠാനങ്ങൾ

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LINGUISTIC NOTATIONS

Vowels

a അ, *ā* അ, *i* ഇ, *ī* ഇ, *u* ഉ, *ū* ഉ, *r* ഋ, *e* ഏ, *ē* ഐ, *ai* ഞ, *o* ഒ, *ō* ഓ, *au* ഔ, *aṃ* അം, *aḥ* അഃ

Consonants

ka ക, *kha* ഖ, *ga* ഗ, *gha* ണ, *ṅa* ങ

ca ച, *cha* ഛ, *ja* ജ, *jha* ഝ, *ṅa* ഞ

ṭa ണ, *ṭha* ണ, *ḍa* ഡ, *ḍha* ഢ, *ṇa* ണ

ta ത, *tha* ഡ, *da* ഢ, *dha* ണ, *na* ന

pa പ, *pha* ഫ, *ba* ബ, *bha* ഭ, *ma* മ

ya യ, *ra* ര, *la* ല, *va* വ, *śa* ശ, *ṣa* ഷ, *sa* സ, *ha* ഹ, *ḷa* ള, *za* ഴ, *ra* റ, *kṣa* ക്ഷ, *tra* ത്ര, *jña* ജ്ഞ

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Folklore plays a vital role in preserving the identity of communities. For the *Māppila*, *Nērc̣ca* is more than a ritual; it's a living tradition and powerful folklore that connects generations, reinforces their sense of belonging, and showcases the harmonious blend of religious and cultural practices in Kerala. The cultural identity of a society is often reflected in its rituals, which embody its values, beliefs, and traditions. Among the Malabar *Māppilas* of Kerala, the *Nērc̣ca* stands out as a significant ritual that encapsulates this cultural essence.

Nērc̣ca is a ritualistic offering or vow observed by the *Māppila* community in Kerala. It is rooted in the Malayalam word "Ner," meaning truth or agreement. *Nērc̣ca* ceremonies are held at the *Makhāms*¹ of revered Sufi saints and martyrs. These events blend religious devotion with local cultural practices, creating a unique expression of faith and community.

Beyond its religious aspects, *Nērc̣ca* serves as a platform for community unity, cultural expression, interfolk communication, and historical remembrance. People from various community backgrounds participate and involve themselves in ritual authority in *Nērc̣ca* festivals, fostering communal harmony. The festivals feature traditional ritual, custom, ceremonies, prayers, music, dance forms like *Kōlkali* and *Duffmu*□□*u*, and the distribution of *Chīra*□□², reflecting the communities and region's rich cultural tapestry. It is a place with history, belief, identity, power, religious devotion, social integration, and folkloric action.

Every society has different folklore, each with its unique identity and cultural

¹ A large place, usually built of stone under the ground, where the body of an important person is buried.

² In some interpretations of Islamic ritual, particularly in Sufi traditions, foods and treats are sometimes distributed at maqam after prayer or during other religious gatherings. These foods are often seen as blessings and are shared to foster a sense of community and spirituality (Tomb).

expressions. At the heart of the identity of these groups is their folklore, a powerful medium that reinforces their sense of belonging and connects them to their heritage. Folklore not only reaffirms the identity of individual societies but also serves as the uniting force between various groups in a society.

Folklore is expressed through various media, such as folk tales, oral traditions, architectural sculptures, customs, and rituals, which are all rooted together within the culture of these people. Amongst these forms of expression, rituals and customs are unique because of their unswerving connection with the day-to-day life of the people. Even though every society has its own special customs and practices that make it different, the nature of folklore is its ability to foster harmony. Different communities within a society like to participate in each other's rituals and ceremonies, thus contributing to a culture of coexistence and respect. These interactions are made possible by the dynamic nature of folklore, which adapts elements from the local culture, geography, and situational facts. Consequently, communities develop customs that are similar to the larger cultural context of the region, thus easing integration and coexistence.

Shared customs and traditions not only bring different communities together but also passed on to others. Traditions serve as channels through which communities can celebrate their differences and shared identities. Therefore, through the exploration of folklore, one gains access to the lives, beliefs, and worldviews of such peoples and gains deeper insights into their social and cultural relationships. The *Nērcca* performed by the *Māppilas* is a tradition that is not only ceremonially significant but ultimately important in social design.

Customs or rituals that some groups and individuals take for granted may be among the most important things in life for some groups. For those who value them highly, their abolition is seen as an invasion of their basic rights. For example, the rights of some lower castes in the *Māppila Nērcca*, and the recognition and rewards they receive only during the *Nērcca*, are completely lost when the *Nērcca* is abolished. With this, a layer of mutual sharing that previously connected lower castes to the *Māppilas* is lost. The *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* is a case in point. When the

custodians, who had been observing the *Nērcca* for centuries, attempted to eliminate it, the *Rāwter* groups, who had long been participating in it, compelled the *Makhām* to reopen and perform the *Nērcca* themselves. The relinquishment of such *Nērccas* or rituals not only denies rights to some communities but also destabilizes their belief systems, which are strongly intertwined with such rituals. This also brings into focus an element of loss and disruption inherent in the diminution of such *Nērccas*.

It must be emphasized that in the past, the term "*Māppila*" referred to more than Muslims; instead, it referred to Christian and Jewish communities as well, such as the *Nasrāṁi Māppilas* and *Jūda Māppilas*. The common usage of the term beyond religious affiliations is a testament to its original role as a social identifier that referred to cultural intermingling and residence. Yet, over time, the term has come to be predominantly identified with Muslims in northern Kerala, more specifically in the Malabar region. Migrants, converts, and their generation of Arabic and Persian-speaking origins made up the ethno-religious community that is currently known as the *Māppilas*. Despite the existence of diverse designations in other places, such as *Labbas*, *Pattāni*, *Rāwters*, *Tulukkan*, and *Māppilas* became a distinct blend of Islamic ideology and Malayalam cultural practice.

Culturally, Islam came to Kerala primarily through maritime trade with Arabia. Malabar was the main location where Islamic institutions were established in India, where the first *Masjids*, intermarriages, and conversions in the coastal area occurred. The initial Muslim immigrants and the local converts created a hybrid culture marked by syncretism and regionalization. Thus, the emergent *Māppila* culture was not a Middle Eastern Islam imitation but a vibrant vernacular tradition with its own rituals, music, and performing activities of which the *Nērcca* is one of the most important.

The *Māppila Nērcca* tradition, based on centuries of local traditions, is a distinctive combination of ritual and custom. The structure of all *Nērccas* is not uniform, adapting to the geographical, historical and environmental characteristics of each region and being locally diverse. The forms of rituals, performances and

symbolic offerings such as the *Cīra*□³ are not universal models, but are influenced by local agricultural resources and environmental conditions. Such adaptation makes the *Nērcas* highly involved in the living traditions of its practitioners and at the same time subject to processes of change and competition.

This research explores the *Māppila* folklore, with emphasis on the *Nērcas*. These *Nērcas* have, over time, been crucial interfaces between the *Māppila* community and other communities in society, and it has promoted intercommunal relations and coexistence. The *Nērcas* serves a number of crucial functions: it confirms a sense of common *Māppila* identity, maintains cultural heritage, allows communication among different groups, and is a site of communal solidarity. In addition, these rituals are localized archives, which maintain language, tradition, and ritual forms intact and establish a site of collective cultural negotiation. Finally, *Nērcas* are powerful in the maintenance of local economies through ritual markets, symbolic offerings, and associated trade processes.

The *Nērcas* cannot be regarded as an immovable piece of history; instead, it is a living and constantly developing edifice. There is a critical dichotomy in its evolution, identified through this research. Organic development is the result of inner cultural negotiations, i.e., development over time, reinterpretations of theology, and environmental adaptations. These internal processes are responsible for keeping the ritual culturally alive and relevant. External pressures, originating from commoditization, religious orthodoxy, change in beliefs, political authority, or institutional control, tend to impose extraneous developments that can disrupt the ritual's internal logic, sense of communal ownership, and emotional association.

The implications of such transformations are wide-ranging. Firstly, they result in collective identity destruction and cultural discontinuity. Secondly, they undermine the potential of inter-folk communication, a central aspect of the *Nērcas* that initially bridged rituals across religious and caste divisions. Thirdly, externally transformed *Nērcas* result in cultural homogenization, thereby undermining the

³ Food donating from holly places

diversity and local specificity that initially characterized the tradition. Fourthly, the changes result in theological and psychological disquiet among practitioners, particularly when central beliefs or ritual processes are disrupted. Lastly, they offer the potential for commodification and market-based reinterpretations of rituals, thereby undermining the cultural autonomy of the community and transforming the *Nērcca* into a spectacle that loses its original participatory significance.

This study places the *Nērccas* within an interdisciplinary framework of folklore studies, exploring their evolutionary changes under internal dynamics and external forces and their contributions to the preservation of cultural identity. The significant finding of this study is that in the *Māppila* context, the *Nērcca* is not merely a religious ritual but a complex folkloric act governed by systems of belief, communal involvement, and environmental settings. Such people without the underlying system of belief are typically considered outsiders to the *Nērcca* practicing society, thus highlighting ritualism as being dependent on communal ideological systems. Unlike formalized religious rituals, *Nērccas* are highly region-sensitive and are presently threatened by external forces.

The process of folklorisation is, therefore, an evolving process in these *Nērccas*. Some of these elements are entering into public folklore, while others are becoming applied folklore; some remain specific to the community, while others evolve organically within their original contexts. This situation raises some essential questions: This study examines how *Nērccas* evolve through both natural cultural processes and external interventions, tracing patterns of ritual change across regions. It explores how these transformations affect the social, religious, and economic life of the *Māppila* community, and whether alternative forms can sustain the communal functions of *Nērccas* today. Finally, it questions whether these rituals can be safeguarded from distortion or must adapt to new cultural realities

Methodologically, the research draws upon folkloric qualitative research. Ethnographic field research, oral history, participant observation of ritual, and the theoretical paradigms of performance and systems of belief. The research aims to analyse the changing nature of *Nērccas* by placing emphasis on the mechanisms by

which forms of ritual are modified or shattered. To this end, it theorizes the *Nērcca* not merely as a religious institution but rather a performative social form with implications for cultural identity, intercommunity relations, and the maintenance of regional folklore.

In short, this research demonstrates that *Nērccas* are not merely leftovers of a past age but also living tools of cultural identity, negotiation, and transformation. The paths of their evolution offer us great insight into how community rituals absorb, resist, or succumb to internal and external pressures, thus shaping and redefining the limits of cultural belonging and collective memory in present-day Malabar.

Literature Review

The *Māppila* community, which is primarily settled in the Malabar region of India, is a community with a rich cultural and historical past that has been analysed in several studies, such as *Two Years in Malabar* by Lance-Corporal Vincent Jos. Ryder in 1907. This study provides a comprehensive account of the *Moplah* caste, or the *Māppilas*, their superstitions and beliefs, and the historic background of the ‘Great *Māppila* Feast’ of the "*Nurcca*." It also analyses the *Māppila* rebellions between 1840 and 1900, providing valuable insights into this significant community in South Malabar.

The author aims to share knowledge acquired through firsthand experience and encounters with the *Māppila* community while living in Malappuram for the period 1904 to 1906. This is made evident as the author aims to present the complexity of *Māppila* tradition and emphasize the importance of the *Nurcca* festival, which has been inadequately documented in the past. The author also aims to fill a considerable gap in the literature concerning the *Māppilas*, a unique ethnic minority in India's Malabar region. The period of this lengthy exposure gave the writer a better comprehension of their traditions, social structure, and religious beliefs, which differentiate them from surrounding communities.

The *Māppilas* are described to be a historically rich people, who came to settle on the Malabar coast from the Arabs, nine centuries ago. They were primarily engaged in the spice trade, which led to their cultural integration and the circulation of their religion among the indigenous people. The author points out the fact that the *Māppilas* adhere strictly to the tenets of Islam, which shape their social practices and community interactions. It is the essence of their identity, as it determines their tradition and their interactions with other societies in the region.

The main theme of this study is the *Nurcha* festival, which the author contends is the first time in the history of this event that it is being documented in writing. The festival is described as a significant cultural event that symbolizes *Māppilas'* traditions and group identities. The author is particularly interested in providing both military and civilian readers with extensive information about this festival and its place in the *Māppila* people's social calendar.

Nurcha, or "*Naarcha*" or *Nērc̣ca*, is an important religious and cultural role observed by the *Māppila* community of Malabar, especially in the Malappuram region. The study states that the *Nurcha* is an offering or thanksgiving offered to the *Masjids*, martyrs, and an established tradition in the local culture and customs of the *Māppilas*. It is associated with the observance of *Nērc̣cas* performed by a person who wants to regain good health or good luck in his occupation. This act of worship normally consists of the offering of a gift to a charitable institution or the poor of the village instead of offering thanks for Favors.

The article notes that *Malappuram Nērc̣ca* is not just a religious practice, but is a reflection of their nature and their place in the larger social order. It is a poignant reminder of their historic persecution and the need for communal identity. The author notes that the *Nērc̣ca* is now a pivotal aspect of the *Māppilas'* cultural heritage, a reflection of their strength and faith. The historical genesis of

Malappuram Nērcca is rooted in *Malappuram Pada*⁴ history and martyrs. This book describes the various historical reasons and causes for the origin of Malappuram.

In addition, the study also mentions the personality of the *Māppilas*, noting their tendency to be pleased as well as their ability to be loyal and emotionally committed, particularly in situations of risk. The author believes that there are numerous stereotypes regarding them because of poor understanding and observation, and that a response based on respect for their culture can promote good interaction.

Ryder's methodology is historical in that he places the modern social relations in the long historical context of the region. He explores how the past affects current relationships, predominantly the mutual hatred and rivalry that have been built up over the years. This is significant in understanding the complexity of inter-caste relationships, as well as the cultural identity of the *Moplahs*.

The *Nērccas*, or festivals, of the *Māppila* community in Kerala offer a nuanced study of the intricate interrelations between religious practice and cultural identity. In their study published in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Stephen F Dale and M. Gangadhara Menon (1978), "*Nērccas*": *Saint-Martyr Worship among the Muslims of Kerala*, highlight the significance of the festivals as a strong marker of *Māppila* identity, accomplished by the integration of Islamic principles and local traditions. This integration leads to a unique cultural phenomenon that is a product of the intermeshed influence of religious systems of beliefs and the socio-historical context of the location. The festivals are said to serve not only as religious activities but also as cultural activities, thus fostering communal identity while preserving the historic narratives inherent in the community.

⁴ In 1763, a local landlord named *PāraNambi* had a dispute with one of his officers named Ali Marakkar. The dispute escalated to a major battle between the landlord's men and the Mappilas and the lower caste Hindus amongst the tenants. 44 *Māppilas* and a lower caste Hindu of the *Ta□□ān* (goldsmith) caste lost their lives in the battle.

One of the key contributions of this study lies in its analysis of the role of “Nerccas,” also known as “Nērccas,” in commemorating historical figures and events crucial to the *Māppila* community. Festivals like the *Pūkkōūr Nērcca* commemorate the *Māppila* rebellion against British colonial rule, thus serving as a cultural mechanism for preserving collective memory. Similarly, other *Nērccas*, such as the *Koōōi*, *Malappuram*, and *Pūkkōūr Nērcca*, highlight the diverse aspects of *Māppila* life and history. The *Koōōi Nērcca*, for instance, celebrates a Sufi landlord from the late eighteenth century and is marked by elaborate ceremonies and strong community participation, reaffirming the spiritual authority of traditional religious leaders (*Ulama*). The *Malappuram Nērcca*, rooted in a region historically marked by conflicts between *Māppilas* and the landlord class, reflects the complexities of *Māppila* identity shaped by socio-economic tensions. On the other hand, the *Pūkkōūr Nērcca* focuses on commemorating the martyrs of the 1921-22 *Māppila* rebellion, emphasizing the role of these *Nērcca* in connecting the community to its historical struggles and collective identity.

The research also points to the dynamism of *Nērccas* and their capacity to adjust to changing social conditions. For example, the extent of the *Kūāyi Nērcca*, which is relatively small, shows the shift in the focus of community rituals, such as the worship of an unknown saint. This shows the way in which *Māppila* observances can absorb changes while maintaining the essence of their religious and cultural meaning. Besides, the festivals offer an important arena for social interaction, especially in rural settings, where *Nērccas* tend to be the year's most publicized events. Women, who otherwise have limited public roles, take an active part in these affairs, which are arenas for religious practice, recreation, and economic exchange through local bazaars.

Although culturally important, the *Nērccas* are controversial among members of society. The research highlights the varying viewpoints presented by urban, educated *Māppilas*, who tend to see these festivals as contrary to the teachings of Islam and campaign for their elimination, against rural *Sunnis*, who eagerly support and engage in their continuation. This division highlights the

widespread negotiations of identity within society, characterised by the existence and sometimes confrontation between traditional practice and reformist modern ideology. The persistence of *Nērcas*, in the face of these challenges, is a reflection of their profound role in the construction of *Māppila* identity.

Dale and Menon also mention the interfaith acceptance and tolerance that is commonly observed in these celebrations. Participating in the preparation and distribution of food, a religious merit deed in Islam, often cuts across religious lines, with Hindus joining Muslims. Such interactions underscore the communal nature of *Nērcas* and their wider cultural role in Kerala's multicultural society.

This study offers useful knowledge about the religious and cultural traditions of the *Māppila* group and the way they are involved in the constitution of identity. In their analysis of the historical, social, and religious dimensions of *Nērcas*, Dale and Menon offer a rich analysis of how these festivals function as constituent modes of belief and cultural survival. Their findings are a significant addition to the debate about tradition and modernity within minority groups, and offer a rich context for an understanding of the cultural identity of the *Māppilas* within the larger context of Kerala's historical and social context.

The book, *Sufism in Kerala* by Dr. V. Kuññāli, published by the 'Publication Division of the University of Calicut', explores the extent to which Sufism has influenced the lives of the *Māppila* community of Kerala, with reference to the martyrs (*Śuhadākkal*) and the Sunni tradition. The work is a detailed analysis of the way in which *Māppilas*, steeped in Sunni teachings, have combined Sufi practices with the Quran, Hadith, and Shariah teachings to develop a distinctive mixture of religion and cultural heritage.

Martyrs, especially those who died in the context of Jihad, are seen as heroes of rebellion against colonial forces, a theme that is strongly emphasized in the text. Their memory that remains is recalled through cultural rituals such as *Nērcas*, which is a mutual feast that commemorates their sacrifices and reiterates a sense of communal identity. The idea of *Nērcas*, as interpreted in Sufism in Kerala, involves offerings or *Nērcas* performed both for religious and personal purposes,

demonstrating the *Māppilas'* strong religious belief and devotion to ensuring communal harmony.

The book cites major *Nērcas*, such as the *Pūkkōṅṅūr* and *Malappuram Nērcas*, in commemoration of the past, namely the martyrdom of 44 *Māppilas* in 1734 A.D. These are presented as central to forging solidarity in the form of processions, prayers, and offerings such as rice cakes (*Appam*), which are centered on charity, solidarity, and remembrance. Dr. *Kuññāli* also explains how *Nērcā* is a personal practice during times of hardship, combining personal devotion with collective practices, which are at the very core of the *Māppila* mode of life.

'Sufism in Kerala' examines the ancient significance of Sufi practices, such as *Dikr* and worship of saints (*Auliya*⁵), in *Māppila* religion. The saints are said to have miraculous powers (*Karamah*) and are worshiped on the basis of their piety and intercessions. The idea of *Wilayat*, in which the saints' spiritual power is accorded prominence, is elaborated upon, and important works such as *Mawlid-Mālas* and *Nērcappāṅṅukal* are identified as valuable texts that chronicle the lives and miracles of the saints and thereby establish their influence on the religious and cultural identity of the *Māppila* people.

The book also examines notable figures such as *ṅeikh Zainuddīn Makhdum* and the *Makhdum* family, who were famous for their scholarship and spiritual guidance. Their writings and literary works are revealed to have contributed immensely to the *Māppilas'* incorporation of Sufi rituals into their Sunni faith and thereby consolidating their religious and cultural identity.

In short, the investigation of Sufism in Kerala provides a close examination of the unique merger of Sufism, martyrdom, and cultural heritage, e.g., *Nērcā*, in the *Māppila* community, which reflects their vibrant religious heritage and community solidarity. The study is a valuable reference to use in understanding the interconnections between religion, culture, and history that are crucial in building the *Māppila* identity.

⁵ The Arabic plural of "Wali," meaning "friends," "protectors," or "saints".

The study, *The Saiyids of Hadramawt* by R. B. Serjeant, published in 1957 by the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), contains useful information about the position of aristocratic families, the Sayyids and the Sharifs in particular, in the context of Hadramawt. This is the background history explaining the cultural traditions associated with burial places in the Muslim world. Graves in the majority of Muslim societies are often sites of remembrance and veneration. The research cites the use of the terms 'Saiyid' and 'Sharif,' which carry the meaning of noble descent and honour in the Islamic faith. Such names are often reserved for those who are descendants of the Prophet *Muhammad*, and their tombs are often highly venerated. The veneration of such people can lead to the institution of commemorative rituals around their tombs, which can encompass site visits, prayer offerings, and the commemoration of memorial events.

The article further argues that the study of such noble names and the resultant historic consequences is still a relevant area of study. This implies that the practices of burial grounds, especially those of public personalities, are more likely to be influenced by the social and historical accounts of such noble families. The heritage of such families can dictate how their tombs are perceived and remembered by society.

The scholarly study *Celebrating With Beef: Omanur Nercha Shows South Malabar's Religious Syncretism* by Muhammed Haneefa A. P. discusses the religious and cultural importance of the *Ōmānūr Nērc̄ca* festival of Sunni *Māppila* in South Malabar, Kerala. It provides a historical overview, mentioning the festival's origins on the seventh day of the Islamic month *Dhu al-Hijjah* to commemorate the martyrs of *Ōmānūr*, who fought against feudalism. The festival symbolizes the spirit of oneness, resistance, and social cohesion, going beyond religious differences.

One of the distinguishing aspects of the *Ōmānūr Nērc̄ca* is the provision of beef and coconut rice, symbolizing hospitality and unity among the celebrants irrespective of religion. The tradition is reflective of local traditions and represents significant cooperation between Hindu and Muslim people. The festival is contributed to by a wide cross-section of members of society, a cooperative

mentality that characterizes the event. In spite of recent communal violence in India, the *Nērcca* is still a place of coming together and celebration, a testament to continued mutual respect among groups.

The study also discusses how the festival brings people together in harmony with the sharing of food, bringing people of different religions together in generosity and mutual interaction. A 2005 Discussion permitting one member of a family to bring food on behalf of the family has minimized communal eating but maintained inclusivity, enhancing the accessibility of the festival. The ranking system in giving highlights the value of timely involvement and accountability, enhancing communal bonds. Preparing and presenting food is a religious obligation where the participants feel their actions bring them heavenly rewards, introducing a divine aspect to the festival and promoting participation across religious lines.

The *Nērcca* also commemorates *Kunjali* and his companions, martyred in 1716 in the cause of converts' rights. Observed annually, the festival honours resistance against oppression and shared identity. It has, over time, recorded shifting Hindu-Muslim relations while retaining its unifying nature. Sharing of food, particularly beef, represents brotherhood and hospitality, bridging differences, and active Hindu participation represents the event's position as a shared cultural heritage.

As historical significance, the *Ōmānūr Nērcca* maintains continuity in promoting cohesion through syncretic traditions, adaptation in practice, and cultivation of shared values. As a living embodiment of collective memory and social cohesion, it emphasizes the staying power of religious and cultural syncretism in South Malabar.

The study "*Keralattile Muslim Pradeshikolsavangalude Carithram, Samskaram, Anyamata Swadheenam*," presented by Sherin P.K. to Mahatma Gandhi University, offers a critical analysis of the cultural, interfaith, and historical dimensions of Muslim regional festivals in Kerala. It begins with imagining festivals as socio-cultural phenomena umbilically linked with regional identity, then concentrates on the unique Islamic adaptations within the Kerala context. The

analysis unfolds the ways in which regional celebrations like *Urs*, *Nērc̄ca*, and *Candanakkuṁam* are rooted in Islamic tradition but at the same time reflect local cultural influences. Through an examination of these festivals, the research unfolds the interactive dynamics between religious faith and local customs, projecting the malleability of religious practice in a particular regional context.

One of the chief contributions of this work is its extensive documentation of individual *Urs* celebrations, including the *Taṁṁal Upappa Makhām Urs*, *Pulingōm Makhām Urs*, *Karikode Makhām Urs*, *Koṁṁōṁṁi Nērc̄ca*, *Pūkkōṁṁūr Nērc̄ca*, *Mailur Pazhayapalli Kodikuttu Nērc̄ca*, *Erumeli Candanakkuṁam*, and *Perumattam Candanakkuṁam*. These instances show how Islamic rituals have intermingled with local practices to produce a distinct socio-religious texture. Secondly, the work highlights the function of such festivals in promoting interreligious exchange, as in festivals like the *Pulingōm Makhām Urs*, where Muslim as well as Hindu rituals are conducted. This cross-religious participation is a testament to the open and homogeneous character of these celebrations, which reflects Kerala's cultural diversity.

This appears to be a shortcoming of the present research. The *Māppilas* are said to believe in the *Nērc̄ca*. This practice is one among many that are part of the indigenous culture and considered un-Islamic. The basis for this claim, however, is anything but material. My study is presented such that it reflects how those *Māppilas* who are engaged in the practice of *Nērc̄ca* perceive it as a ritual.

Shakkeela A. Rahiman's study, '*Customs and Practices of Muslims of Malabar with Special Reference to Festivals*', submitted to the University of Calicut in July 2007, is a pioneering work in understanding the cultural and religious practices of Malabar Muslims. The study explores the festivals and practices of Malabar Muslims and their historical and sociocultural significance. Rahiman's multidisciplinary approach, rooted in history, sociology, and anthropology, explores the function of festivals as a means of cultural expression and social bonding.

The thesis focuses on the central role of the dargah in ensuring collective harmony and protecting traditional practices. It also analyses the role of reform

movements in adding to the religious outlook of the Muslims within the region, and how the movements contributed to the redefinition of practices and changing attitudes towards the festivals in a modern context. Building on the initial work by Rahiman, the present study suggests conducting a more detailed analysis of the *Nērcca* festivals, with reference to their historical development, social significance, and transformation. Through a study of the initial Sufi saint impact as well as the long history of cultural heritage of the festivals under question, the present study suggests extending Rahiman's research, i.e., by ascertaining how the traditions have been reinterpreted in respect of reformist movements during the modern era. This thesis aims to bridge the historical and contemporary perception of *Nērcca* festivals with a study of them in the broader religious and cultural framework of Malabar Muslims. All past studies on this topic have applied a historical narrative approach in examining the *Māppilas* and their *Nērccas* and the reasons why the *Nērccas* were established. Few studies have been carried out that explain the role of the *Māppila Nērcca* and the social responsibilities that come with it, the importance of the *Nērcca* in maintaining the *Māppila* presence amongst the rest of the communities, the present status of such *Nērccas*, and the implications of such trends towards the life of the *Māppila* community. This is a shortcoming that the current study endeavours to address.

Origin and Early History of the Muslims of Keralam 700 AD - 1600 AD by J.B.P. More is an academic treatise on the foundation and expansion of Kerala's Muslim community between the 8th and 17th centuries. The book addresses the cultural, social, and economic contribution of Kerala's Muslim community, describing their involvement in Kerala's sea trade, their relationship with indigenous powers, and the resultant effect of colonial politics. Historical records, oral traditions, and archaeological evidence are employed by J.B.P. More to construct an exhaustive image of the integration of the community within Kerala's unique socio-political framework.

L. R. S. Lakshmi's book *The Malabar Muslims: A Different Perspective* is a scholarly analysis of the *Māppila* community living in Kerala, with emphasis placed

on their development during the colonial period. It studies the social, economic, religious, theological, political, and educational features of the community from within, highlighting the central roles played by women in *Māppila* society. The emphasis placed on matrilineal joint family systems and women leaders is an invaluable contribution to the understanding of the special social arrangement of the *Māppilas*. Lakshmi demystifies the oversimplification of the community by dispelling the inter- and intra-regional variations and the entrenched social stratifications. Moreover, the comparison between the current status of the *Māppila* community and that of Muslims elsewhere in India adds Vigor to the study.

Roland E. Miller's book, *An Overview of the History and Culture of Mappila Muslims in Kerala*, is established as a valuable addition to Kerala's *Māppila* Muslim community's scholarship. It presents a thorough examination of the historical evolution, cultural customs, and social organization of the *Māppila* Muslim community, which is the state's largest Muslim community. The book discusses the community's history and process of migration, customs, and religious observances, and their interaction with the wider social context of Kerala.

C. N. Ahmed Maulavi's book, *Keraliya Muslim Navothanam*, is a study of the social, cultural, and political aspects of the Muslim community in Kerala. It is a detailed study of the numerous strides that have been made by this community and their efforts in making social and economic strides. The book also studies the challenges faced by the Muslim community in Kerala and the steps taken by them to overcome these challenges. The author begins the discussion by researching the historic contributions of the Muslim community towards the cultural, scientific, and educational aspects of Kerala. Moreover, the book researches some of the aspects of modern Muslim society in Kerala, such as education, political participation, social norms, and cultural practices.

The work is robust in the context that it is a critical analysis of the educational history of Muslims of Kerala. It is an in-depth critique of the different educational institutions established by the Muslim community in the region and their contribution towards the intellectual and educational growth of society. Moreover,

the author provides an elaborate explanation of the contribution of the Muslim community towards the intellectual and cultural growth of society. This includes their contribution towards the intellectual and educational growth in their community as well as in general.

The book *Pracheena Keralavum Muslim Aavirbhavavum* by Dr. C. K. Kareem is a significant contribution to scholarly work on the historical record of the Muslim community in Kerala. The book touches on the emergence of the Muslim community in ancient Kerala, for instance, their relationship with Arabian and Persian cultures, trade relations, and the early social organization of Muslims. The book also provides a detailed analysis of different aspects of Muslim social life, for example, matrimonial practices. The research is community history-focused, providing an in-depth analysis of the historical beginnings and socio-cultural transformations that the Muslim community in Kerala went through. In support of evidence of research, the author uses a vast collection of primary and secondary sources.

The academic article entitled *Religious Syncretism among Indian Muslims and Its Manifestation in Dargah Practices: Case Studies of Three Dargahs in Kerala. Religions of South Asia*, written by R. H. Samseer and R. K. Bushra Beegom, examines religious syncretism among Indian Muslims with specific reference to its articulation in dargah practices in Kerala. It refers to the advent of this syncretic articulation of Islam against the backdrop of the growing dominance of essentialist and puritanical religious thoughts that possess the ability to destabilize the cohesive integration of Muslims with the dominant religious and cultural milieu. The historical narrative provided in the article traces the social and economic intercourse among Hindus and Muslims and how these inputs have helped to lead towards the articulation of a syncretic identity in society.

The most remarkable aspect of this study is the syncretism of religious practice between Belief and Sufism, which has resulted in Sufi shrines being cultural centers for Islam and Hinduism believers alike. This syncretism can be most prominently observed in the *Dargahs*, where rituals and practices are generally a

syncretic mix of Islamic and local cultural features. The article also places the Moplah Rebellion in this syncretic context, suggesting that the past has shaped the religious practice in Kerala today.

The study of the *Dargahs* in Kerala is one that seeks to enhance knowledge about the syncretic identification present among Muslims in the area. Through the analysis of certain case studies of three *Dargahs*, the article attempts to show the role of these locations as the loci of communal harmony and cultural exchange. The findings are that, in spite of the problems presented by puritanical narratives, the syncretic practices present at the *Dargahs* persist, showing a strong element of Muslim identity in Kerala.

All the important studies mentioned here have documented the *Nērcas* using a historical narrative methodology. More attention has been paid to topics such as how the *Nērcas* were formed and what historical events are related to them. Some studies have also described the vow as a Muslim fest. It is rare to study the vow as folklore. However, the vow as a folklore acts as a pillar of the social identity and cultural essence of a community, and the study is conducted here to understand how a folk is related to its folklore. An attempt is made here to discuss the sense of identity and social background of the community that performs that folklore through folklore. This study proceeds in a way that the *Nērcas* is seen as the folklore of a community, and to what extent the vow plays a role in forming the sense of identity, social consciousness, and cultural personality of the community that performs it. It explains the evolution of the vow and how various changes affect that community and that focal point.

Research Problem

This study investigates the evolutionary nature of *Nērcas* in the Malabar region, focusing on their folkloric characteristics, their transformation into forms of common folklorism under various external interventions, and the ethnographic perspectives of the *Māppila* community regarding these practices. Traditionally, these ritual commemorations have served as crucial spaces for identity construction, cultural integration, inter-community interaction, and the reinforcement of social

cohesion through folklore. However, *Nērcas* are now evolving under the combined influences of globalization, modernization, urbanization, changing communal structures, and shifting belief systems. While natural evolution is an inherent cultural process, the consequences of external interventions and the emergence of common folklorism produce distinct impacts that differ from organic changes.

This study also discusses how the community's lived experiences and narratives reveal their views on these changes and adaptations. Contemporary transformations in social and cultural dynamics have significantly altered the nature of *Nērcas*, diminishing their integrative and communicative functions. This research critically examines how these transformations, shaped by common folklorism, external interventions, and local perspectives, have negatively affected cultural integration, inter-folk communication, and contributed to identity anxiety within the *Māppila* community, while exploring how folklore may be reinterpreted to restore its role in fostering social connection.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the key socio-political and economic factors that contribute to the evolution or modification of *Māppila Nērcas* in Malabar.
- To examine the role of inter-folk communication facilitated by *Nērcas* and to analyse how its transformation has influenced relationships between different communities.
- To document the perspectives of community members, religious scholars, and cultural historians regarding the transformations in the practice and meaning of *Nērcas*.
- To understand the life and cultural worldview of the *Māppila* community, with special focus on the role of *Nērcas* as a cultural expression.
- To analyse the historical evolution of *Nērcas* and their contribution to shaping and sustaining *Māppila* identity within the broader Malabar region.
- To investigate the traditional functions of *Nērcas* in fostering social cohesion, promoting inter-community interaction, and reinforcing a collective sense of *Māppila* identity.

- To explore the impact of globalisation and modernist/reformist movements on the structure, performance, and significance of *Nērcas*.
- To examine the processes and stages through which the evolution of *Nērcas* takes place, identifying both internal cultural dynamics and external factors that drive changes and adaptation.
- To understand *Nērcas* in terms of its conceptual framework, typology, unique structures, and associated legends, from both the *Māppila* belief perspective and within a broader folkloristic context.

Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that within the *Māppila* community, the evolution of *Nērcas* is an inherent and organic process that ensures the continuity, relevance, and resilience of ritual practices in alignment with the community's cultural ethos and social structures. In contrast, modification results predominantly from external interventions such as globalization, commercialization, reformist discourses, and socio-political forces, which disrupt the natural functioning of these rituals. It is further hypothesized that while natural evolution sustains cultural identity and social cohesion, forced modifications adversely affect the integrity of folklore, weaken communal bonds, and create identity anxieties within the folk group.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its in-depth exploration of *Nērcas* as living cultural rituals that have shaped and continue to shape *Māppila* identity in Malabar. By tracing their historical evolution, we gain insight into how *Nērcas* have reinforced communal identity, fostered social cohesion, and enabled engagement between different folk groups. The investigation into their conceptual divisions, structures, legends, and ritual customs also reveals how globalization and modern influences have led to adaptations, modifications, or decline in traditional practices.

The importance of this topic is that it can make a comprehensive study of a very important ritual that is being practiced by a culturally diverse community, and

examine the positive effects that such a ritual has on the mentality, life, and identity of the practitioners, as well as other concerned communities. This research provides valuable information about the relations between the *Māppilas* and other communities, how the *Māppilas* became a dominant group, and how they live harmoniously with other groups.

This research highlights the socio-political and economic drivers behind these changes while examining how shifts in *Nērcas*-led inter-communal communication have influenced relationships between communities. By documenting perspectives from community members, religious scholars, and cultural historians, and comparing *Nērcas* with similar rituals elsewhere, the study elucidates how folklore adapts to social change. Ultimately, this work deepens our understanding of the belief systems, ritual life, and broader life and culture of the *Māppila* community.

Scope of the Study

While numerous studies have been undertaken on several facets of the *Māppilas* illustration, their history, language, literature, Gulf migration, struggles, arts, and ritual traditions, there is a notable lack of study that probes the identity of the *Māppilas* and the connection between the folklore of the *Māppilas*, like *Nērcas* and the social life of their community. This study attempts to fill that vacuum, at least in part, by investigating the worldview and outlook of the *Māppila* community.

This study is conducted at a time when even the *Sunni* sects of the *Māppilas*, traditionally rooted in local customs, do not give much emphasis to *Nērcas* in their contemporary writings and thoughts. Therefore, this study comes at a time when the need to communicate the importance of these *Nērcas* is evident. Also, this research is presented at a pivotal moment in time, when there are numerous communities, the *Māppila* community among them, facing a serious threat to their sense of identity. Research into the *Māppila* sense of identity and community is particularly pertinent and needed in such a context.

Theoretical Background

History of Folklore Evolution Concepts

For decades, folklore studies were largely led by the categorization of folklore into separate genres like folk tales, folk songs, proverbs, and rituals. Such a genre-oriented approach constructed the academic perception of folklore for decades. Nevertheless, as newer definitions of folklore gained strength, inconsistency was created within the discipline. At first, folklore studies placed greater emphasis on textual analysis, focusing on the nature, components, and elements of folklore forms. With time, this viewpoint developed. Researchers saw that the same folklore text could have varying characteristics based on the context in which it was experienced or performed. This fact made researchers move away from text-based studies to situational-based studies, based on the fluid interaction between folklore and context.

Richard Bauman and Dan-Ben-Amos considerably aided this situational contextualization, helping to inform how folklore changes and adjusts within different situational contexts. Lauri Honko describes that folklore is not a fixed phenomenon but an evolving process influenced by the interaction of two different communities. The first one is the traditional community, who make and enact the folklore, while the second one is the scientific community, which is an external force analyzing, recording, and affecting it. Honko portrays folklore as experiencing a normal, dynamic process that can be segregated into various phases. Honko, in the 1990s, came up with the theory that folklore lives two lives: primary life and secondary life. He also went on to explain that the evolution of this process consists of 22 phases, of which 12 are in primary life and 10 in secondary life. This model of explanation draws attention to the interaction between the traditional sector and the scientific world in shaping and perpetuating the folklore process through time (Lauri Honko).

Folklore is influenced by two basic communities: the community that creates and sustains it, and an outside community that interferes with its development. Developments within the creating community can have a significant impact on the folklore, and external interferences can also propel its evolution. In studying the

process of folklore, it is necessary to separate these two communities and assess the influence each community has on the folklore. Outside interventions tend to change folklore into applied folklore, making it a commercial commodity or, in other instances, leading to its decline. These modifications can degrade the original function that folklore used to hold in the originating community, causing a possible negative impact on that community's cultural identity and unity. One of the defining features of folklore is its perpetual evolution.

This dynamic causes modifications and developments over time. Another means of evolution exists when folklore is transferred to new settings, diverging from its initial context. Folklore that appears in these new settings is also technically called folklorism, stressing its shift and adjustment to secondary or tertiary sites. Folklorism is a natural development of folklore brought about with the approval and consent of the source community. Applied folklore is used for alterations in folklore caused by internal or external actions. Both of these processes are different and must be examined independently to comprehend their individual contributions to the folklore process (Raghavan Payyanad). This separation indicates the dual mechanisms by which folklore develops either organically within society or through deliberate changes imposed from external sources. Both methods demonstrate significant dynamics in the investigation and alteration of folklore throughout time (Regina Bendix). Folklore develops in a given context and when the same folklore shows up in dramatically different contexts, it then gets labelled as folklorism. This idea points to how folklore can get modified and recontextualized but still hold onto its fundamental essence.

American folklorists Dan Ben-Amos and Richard Bauman stressed the need for researching folklore in its proper context, with an eye toward the performance and cultural significance. By contrast, European folklorist Hans Moser focused on folklore that had lost its specific setting. Moser was one of the first scholars to study folklore knowingly transplanted into a new setting, applying the term folklorismus in 1692 to this process. Eventually, the term folklorism came to replace folklorismus in everyday usage. Moser also classified folklore into three different categories, further describing how it gets developed and adopted in various circumstances:

Display of traditional elements: *Cultural and religious elements that are intrinsic to the traditional practices of a community are showcased or performed outside that community.*

Adoption of folk motifs: *Folk motifs or practices originating from a community are embraced, celebrated, or adapted by external communities.*

Creation of new elements: *Cultural Elements that appear to belong to a community but are outside its traditional practices are either discovered or intentionally created for a specific purpose, often tailored to suit external needs. These categories reflect the various ways folklore can transcend its original context, whether through preservation, adaptation, or reinvention, shedding light on its dynamic and multifaceted nature (Regina Bendix).*

It was during this time that folklorists were reluctant to incorporate folklore found beyond its initial context as part of the field of study. The main focus at the time was to keep and interpret the original shape of folklore. There was the emergence of discussions on the place of folklore in new settings. It was commonly assumed that the function of folklore in its native setting was genuine, and whatever function it served in a new setting was either inauthentic or unreal.

Here, Richard M. Dorson coined the term ‘fakelore’ to refer to folklore that emerged in a new setting and for purposes other than those it originally had. Fakelore, according to Dorson, was the commercialization of folklore where elements of folklore are taken out of their society and reused for wider, mostly commercial, audiences. The word fakelore emphasizes the transformation of folklore from a tool of communication for the masses or working-class societies to being at the service of the elite or consumerist societies. Such changes usually go a long way, with the folklore now undertaking functions far removed from its initial purpose (Richard M. Dorson).

Hermann Bausinger has provided numerous suggestions for making folklore an academic discipline. "*Folklorism is a folk culture lived at second, the widespread fact that folklore in the widest sense, not confined to oral tradition, occurs in context to which it originally did not belong*" (Raghavan Payynad). He recommends that the study of folklore should be established as a serious theoretical study. The key points

are that “*yesterday's practical folklore is known as folklorism and that folklore and folklore often intermingle. It is also suggested that the distinction made between folklorism and authentic culture tends to restrict or chain the latter*”. Bausinger emphasized that culture is ever changing, and in the course of changing from one state of being to another, a cultural vacuum can be found to exist. Hermann Bausinger called for a scholarly approach to the study of folklore and made a case for it being accepted as a serious scholarly discipline. Some of his most important concepts included the following:

1. Folklore today is, in fact, the applied folklore of the past.
2. Folklore and culture are also deeply intertwined, and their relationship testifies to the ever-changing nature of human experience.
3. The divide between folklore and "real" culture generally serves as a limiting frame, constraining our understanding of both.

As Ulrike Baudmann sees it, there are two main avenues through which the vacuum can be filled: by means of reincarnation, when cultural phenomena are reborn in new guises, and folklore, when the old is recontextualized and fitted into new molds. This observation by Ulrike Baumann is a good means of grasping precisely what folklore is (Regina Bendix).

Folklore or its elements can evolve into non-folklore by the mechanism of folklorism, whereby elements of tradition are adapted or recontextualized into new folklore forms. Nevertheless, those non-folklore forms can be folklorised, a process by which they evolve back into folklore, following a cycle of cultural development. These processes-folklorism and folklorisation-underscore the ongoing evolution, adaptation, and rejuvenation of folklore (Vilmos Voigt). Fig. 1 shows the cyclical flow diagram of the Folklore concept.

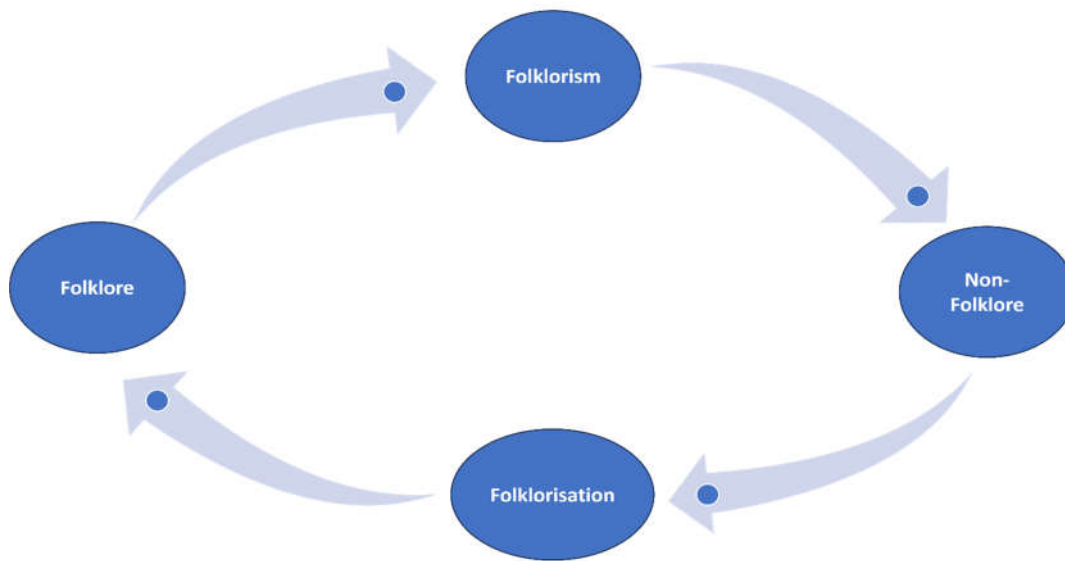


Figure 1: Folklore process concept of Vilmos Voigt

The Yugoslavian folklorist DhunJa Rightman Augustin describes the evolution of folklore as occurring in three distinct stages:

Folklore with innate characteristics: *Folklore in its original, traditional form, embodying the cultural and intrinsic qualities of the community.*

Folklorism: *The adaptation or recontextualization of folklore, transforming it into new forms or using it for purposes beyond its original context.*

Integration into other cultural activities and modern arts: *Folklore becomes incorporated into broader cultural expressions, including contemporary artistic and cultural practices.*

This framework, outlined by Rightman in 1978, emphasizes the dynamic nature of folklore as it evolves and interacts with other cultural domains (DhunJa Rightman Augustin).

The community converts folklore into folklorism. Outside forces beyond the community that change folklore or that intervene consciously cannot be recognized as part of folklorism. Applied folklore is recognized as intentional interventions that drive folklore into realms beyond its native domain (Raghavan Payyanad).

Conscious interventions eradicate folklore or transform it into some other form of applied folklore that cannot serve its original purpose. It will become a method that is detrimental to that community. One may name a new form of folklorism only so long as the memory of the original form continues. When the memory of the original form ceases to be relevant or vanishes altogether, the folklorism becomes part of folklore itself, being a part of the folklore of the community. Applied folklore is the adaptation of folklore in a way that suits the requirements of the industrial age or other external agendas, frequently by maintaining and utilizing the memory of the original folklore. This can have a profound impact on the social structure (Raghavan Payyanad).

But the impact is much more serious when a folklore genre vanishes completely as a result of deliberate actions. Removing folklore by external means without substituting anything to serve its original function for future generations is very detrimental to society. Fig. 2 shows a cyclical diagram of external and internal interventions in folklore.

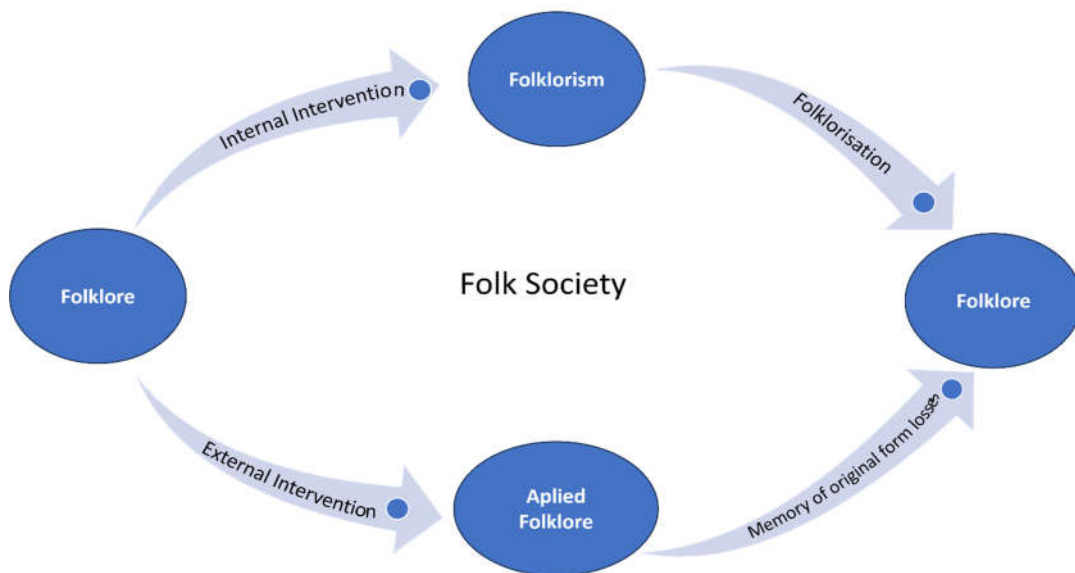


Figure 2: External and internal intervention in Folklore

Public folklore is the process of identification, documentation, interpretation, and dissemination of traditional cultural expressions and practices to the general public. It underscores collaborative endeavours among folklorists, community

members, cultural institutions, and the public to ensure the continued validity and relevance of folklore in the modern world (M.D. Muthukumara Swami).

Public folklore is a discipline that centres on the interactive involvement of communities with their culture, and it advocates for collaborative research methods that empower communities to represent their culture in their own voices. It entails practices such as community self-documentation, folklife festivals, and government programs for funding, which create space for community members to participate actively in representing their culture. Public folklorists perform several roles, such as scholars and administrators, brokering "cultural conversations" that negotiate cultural representations between folklorists, community members, and audience members. In this model, social issues and power relations are critically engaged within heritage programs as a way of addressing power inequalities and promoting authentic cultural expression (Robert, Baron).

Public folklore is a descriptive term for the active role of folklorists in working with cultural traditions in public places, with an emphasis on the interrelationship between theory and practice in representing and interpreting popular tradition. Public folklore includes the active participation of folklorists in documenting, representing, and interpreting cultural traditions in public places using multiple methods and genres in fostering community knowledge and appreciation of folklore.

Folklorism is the adaptation and inclusion of aspects of traditional folklore in new art or cultural productions. It differs from folklore, which is original folk art and cultural traditions handed down from one generation to another and is representative of the attitudes, customs, and practices of a community. Although folklore rests within a people's actual practices and stories, folklorism is quite commonly a reinterpretation or stylization of these for modern-day use, as within literature, music, or visual arts. The dynamic between folklore and folklorism is anything but simple since numerous works are merely combinations of both traditional folklore materials and the personal style of the individual artist. This fusion underscores the

continued viability of folklore within contemporary culture and its function to maintain and foster the national consciousness of a people.

Cultural Evolution Concepts

This is a theory of understanding the patterns and processes of change in culture over time. This theory examines how cultures respond, evolve, and change due to different internal and external influences. Cultural evolution theories are a mix of a few theories.

Fundamental concepts of the theory of cultural evolution:

1. Culture-based

Cultures have to change in response to new environmental, social, and economic situations. Theory on cultural evolution analyzes how beliefs, habits, practices, technologies, social organization, and values change as a reaction to challenges, opportunities, and contacts with other cultures.

2. Innovation and diffusion

Cultural transformation usually happens through the interaction of new technologies, ideas, or practices. They can diffuse from other cultures. The transfer may lead to the transformation and integration of new cultural forces.

3. Social change

The evolution of culture has a close association with social change. Social structure changes, power shifts, institutions, and population structure affect norms, values, and mores. Social movement, political revolution, and economic alterations are significant factors in cultural change.

4. Globalization and contact

Globalization has had a significant impact on cultural transformation, and interconnectedness, migration, and information exchange have contributed

significantly to cultural development. Cultural exchanges result in hybridization, foreign elements' reception, and the production of global forms of culture.

5. Cultural resistance and stability

Cultural transformation tends to be resisted as well as stability. Components most core to social unity or those that represent core values tend to fight change and continue over time. Equilibrium between innovation and continuity is a significant area of concern for theories of cultural transformation.

a. Applications of Cultural Transformation Theory

Cultural transformation theory is a broad paradigm used across anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies and folklore studies. It assists in the study of cultural globalization, acculturation, assimilation, revivalism, and the effects of technological progress on traditions. Analysing these processes allows scholars to develop knowledge on cultural diversity, identity formation, social inequality, and cultural, social, economic, and environmental factor interaction.

b. Contributors to Cultural Evolution Theory

Cultural evolution theory is an interdisciplinary discipline informed by the work of a diverse range of researchers and disciplines. This theory is an active and interdisciplinary theory that keeps changing as new knowledge is developed. It is a broad perspective for understanding the dynamics of cultural adaptation, innovation, and stability, and it gives important insights into the intricate dynamics between individuals, societies, and their cultures.

Some of the most important figures include:

Lewis Henry Morgan: American anthropologist, Morgan outlined a theory of cultural evolution in ancient society (1877) that delineated stages from savagery to primitiveness and ultimately to civilization. Émile Durkheim (a French sociologist), Franz Boas (a well-known anthropologist), Richard Dawkins, Dan Sperber, etc., are some other contributors.

Relevant Theories Applied in this Research

In this research, only selected theoretical concepts have been employed, specifically those most compatible with understanding how *Nērcas* evolve and how they are modified under the influence of external forces. To analyze situations where certain *Nērcas* deviate from their original nature due to external intervention and transform into forms incapable of fulfilling their initial functions, the framework proposed by Raghavan Payyanad has been utilized. Payyanad conceptualizes folklore as involving two distinct communities: the internal community, which carries and practices the folklore, and the external community, which exists outside it. The research draws on the distinction between Folklorism, referring to changes initiated internally by the community, and Applied folklore, which refers to alterations arising from external influences. These processes, as Payyanad suggests, can have potentially detrimental effects on both the folklore itself and the community practicing it.

Additionally, to understand instances where certain *Nērcas*, folklore undergoes a dynamic process starting from Folklore, which is transformed through Folklorism into Non-Folklore; this non-folkloric content is then re-integrated into cultural expression through Folklorisation, ultimately returning again to the sphere of Folklore, forming a continuous cycle as articulated by Vilmos Voigt and Regina Bendix. Furthermore, when *Nērcas* evolve into forms that become part of public display and performance, the concept of “Public folklore” as defined by M. D. Muthumaraswamy offers a particularly consistent interpretive framework. Through this selective and context-specific application of theoretical models, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolution and transformation of *Nērcas* within both internal and external socio-cultural dynamics.

Methodology

Folklore provides the best framework for a complete and honest appraisal of this topic based on the *Māppila* folklore, belief, and ritual. This study employs a folklore approach in the majority, using tools such as oral histories and participant observation, complemented with some secondary data.

The study is carried out as qualitative research on folklore. This type of methodology makes it possible to closely study the folklore, rituals, beliefs, worldviews, and social organization of the *Māppila* society. Direct observation, personal involvement, participant observation, and long-term fieldwork are the basic components of the study design. Long-term presence in the *Māppila* communities makes it possible to observe daily life, rituals, *Nērcas*, and their related beliefs, while rapport with the members of the *Māppila* community and other neighbouring groups, established through informal talk, makes it possible to gather stories and personal testimony about *Nērcas* and related phenomena. When interpreting data collected from a large number of participants, it is possible to determine the most reliable methods of data collection, like making the most frequent responses or taking their general statements into account.

Data collection methods include informal interviewing, participant observation, narrative analysis, and historical contextualization. In-depth interviewing of the major informants, like the elders, religious leaders, youths, *Nērcas* committees, participants in *Nērcas*, and inheritors of the ceremony, facilitates open-ended discussions in which the participants can freely discuss their experiences and perceptions. Repeating the study of the narratives and oral histories provided by the members of the community helps in analysing the data. The study of historical events and how they shaped present social dynamics provides detailed knowledge of present inter-folk relations and identity of the community.

The data collected through participant observation, informal interviews, and narratives are subjected to systematic analysis using thematic analysis. The data is categorized into meaningful categories and themes, and the *Nērcas* found through data collection are divided into categories and analyzed for their structure and characteristics. Analyzing the fundamental beliefs of the *Māppilas* can help to understand whether the changes in the *Nērcas* are related to *Māppila* beliefs. It also includes describing social norms and cultural practices. It analyzes the contexts in which *Nērcas* merged, including its form and modern manifestations. Themes are constructed to determine the nature of a community's cultural identity within a

broader social and historical context. The most commonly reported and frequently available information from various sources is used to validate the data, and the findings are compared to information obtained from direct observation, personal interviews, and historical records in different situations and time contexts to ensure that the findings are reliable and valid. Ethics are of extreme importance in this study. Informed consent is obtained from the participants, and they are made aware of the research purpose and their rights in their entirety. Confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing the participant's identity and by safe storage of data to protect sensitive information. Cultural sensitivity is exercised by maintaining the values and practices of the *Māppila* community with due regard to the researcher's point of view and potential biases.

This approach is a qualitative model for investigating the *Māppila* society using research techniques such as direct observation, personal involvement, and interpretation of history. It is closer to the folklore approach in the scientific paradigm. This study aims to give a vivid description of the social and cultural interaction of the *Māppilas* through a variety of data collection and analysis techniques, strongly embedded within the society. In addition, it is meant to enrich the greater debate on ethnographic research in the Malabar region.

The analysis employs a reflective method characteristic of the writing, questioning, criticizing, and interacting with the information presented by the authors. It provides a subtle comprehension and interpretation of the subject. The descriptive and comparative methods are used to interpret data. Using interviews, newspaper articles, and direct experience as primary data, and research theses, dissertations, *Nērcappatukal*, *Mālappā□□ukal*, history books, critical books, notices, and graffiti etc. as secondary data, the analysis uses a reflective method that involves questioning, criticizing, and interacting with the information presented by the authors, using folklore concepts and other concepts. This helps to further understand and interpret the subject.

Also, the above studies have employed folkloric methodology. The myths and beliefs of the *Nērcca* have been documented to be observed as a festival.

Instead, it does not encompass an ethnographic study of the beliefs and spiritual ties of the *Nērcca* observing community. This study employs a different methodology and approach by conceiving the *Nērcca* to be an artifact of folklore, encompassing its customs, rituals, evolution, and transformation as a folkloric tradition, and the social and communal transformations it effects.

Chapter Scheme

This research is divided into core and non-core parts. Non-core part includes introduction, significance of the study, literature review, methodology, study objectives, etc. The core part includes 3 chapters. The first chapter, ‘Chapter 1- *Māppila* Life and Culture,’ presents a detailed description of the *Māppilas* and *Māppila* folklore. The second chapter in the core section, named ‘Chapter 2- Exploring the Legends, Rituals, and Belief Systems of *Nērccas* in Malabar,’ gives a detailed explanation of the origin and evolution of *Nērccas* in Malabar, delving into their legends, customs, and practices. The final chapter in the core section, named ‘Chapter 3- *Nērcca* Structure and Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis Through Folklore and Belief Perspectives,’ is the analysis part of this thesis. It discusses comparative analysis of selected *Nērccas* and observes these *Nērccas* from the folkloric point of view, examining the structural changes in *Nērccas*, the transformation that each *Nērcca* undergoes, as well as their corresponding practices and characteristic features. The final part is titled ‘Key Findings and Concluding Reflections,’ and it gives the findings, discussion, and conclusion of the work done in this thesis.

Geographical Area of the Study

Before the emergence of independent India, the Malabar district was a part of the Madras Presidency of British India. The area that this district comprised was made into the northern districts of Kerala after the formation of the state. This area came to be known as the Malabar region. The *Māppilas*, a stable Muslim community in this area, have a rich and vibrant culture. *Nērccas* related to this community in this geographical area is studied in this thesis.

Limitation of the Study

The limitation of this research resides in its geographical scope and in choosing *Nērc̄ca* for analysis. Within the territorial limit of the area of study, there are around a hundred different *Nērc̄ca* and rituals. Nevertheless, for this research study, only important *Nērc̄cas* with unique features have been picked based on certain criteria. While other *Nērc̄cas* are occasionally mentioned to provide context or examples, the analysis focuses exclusively on six selected *Nērc̄cas*.

This selective method is a limitation since it restricts the scope of the study within an area where each small village can possess its own individual *Nērc̄ca*, big or small. The decision to restrict the study to six *Nērc̄cas* was made to make the study feasible within a time-based framework. Each *Nērc̄ca* contains a large number of rituals, coupled with its history and legends, and it is difficult to cover a large span to any extent. Furthermore, the existence of primary data or sources for the majority of *Nērc̄ca* no longer practiced poses an additional limitation. For most rituals, there are limited secondary sources that lead one to have to depend on oral histories as primary sources. In spite of such limitations, the six selected *Nērc̄cas* are especially significant and have been selected due to their distinct features, which are well laid out in the analysis chapter. These categorizations and distinctions seek to offer sensible insights into the varied nature of *Māppila Nērc̄ca*.

CHAPTER 1

***MĀPPILA* COMMUNITY: LIFE AND CULTURE**

1.1 Introduction

The *Māppila* community of Malabar occupies a unique position in Kerala's cultural and historical landscape, embodying a deep interweaving of religious belief, indigenous traditions, linguistic expressions, and folk aesthetics. This chapter seeks to examine the foundational aspects of *Māppila* identity by delving into their cultural practices, social organization, religious customs, and lived experiences as shaped over centuries. Even though primarily Muslim in faith, they are not a homogenous group of immigrants, but a historically hybrid community formed through centuries of interaction between Arab traders and local populations. The community's name *Māppila* itself traces its roots to terms denoting foreign son-in-law or children born from intermarriages, as reflected in diverse etymological interpretations that include “*Mātāvinre Pillai*” (Mother's child) and “*Mahā Pillai*,” indicating high status.

Their cultural history is inseparable from the historical trajectory of the Malabar region, which served as the gateway to maritime trade and cultural exchanges with Arabia and Persia. As early as the 7th century, Malabar became a significant hub of Islamic diffusion in India, and the descendants of those early interactions eventually evolved into the *Māppila* community. Yet, this community is not defined solely by religion. They developed distinct naming practices, food cultures, architectural forms, rituals, and folklore that set them apart from other Muslim communities in India. Their cultural identity is deeply grounded in the Malayalam language while integrating Arabic and Persian linguistic, musical, and religious traditions. *Māppila* names such as *Mammu*, *Mayamu*□□y, and *Kuññammad* bear the phonetic and semantic marks of Arabic influence while being creatively localized.

This chapter also explores the social structure of *Māppila* families, which historically blended to the elements of matrilineal inheritance influenced by *Nāir* customs with Islamic patriarchal norms. *Māppila* homes, *Masjids*, and rituals reveal a distinct architectural and aesthetic grammar, shaped by regional climatic conditions, Arab religious norms, and local artistic creativity. Cultural elements such as the usage of *Niskārattinna*¹, *Haudh*², and the design of domes and minarets bears witness to this hybrid heritage.

Religious and cultural life among them is marked by the performance of rituals such as *Rātīb*, *Qutubiyat*, and *Khatam Dua*, along with the recitation of devotional songs like *Māppilappā□□u*, *Mālapā□□u*, and *Rifāi Māla*. These practices, more than spiritual engagements; are folkloric traditions that carry collective memory, regional belief systems, and community aesthetics. In particular, songs like the *Muhyuddīn Māla* and *Badr Māla* commemorate saints and historical figures, reinforcing communal bonds and shared historical consciousness. The prominence of female-oriented songs like *Naḥḥsat Māla* reveals the gendered dimension of *Māppila* ritual culture and its role in women's spiritual lives.

Furthermore, this chapter underscores the participatory character of *Māppila* folklore. Traditions like *Māppilappā□□u*, *Oppana*, *Kōlkali*, and *Paricamu□□u* are not confined to ritual settings alone; they are communal performances that bridge the sacred and the secular spaces. These expressive forms serve not only as entertainment but also as vessels of education, social critique, and identity formation. Even martial traditions like *Māppila Kalari* are situated within the broader folk cultural matrix of the community, signifying both self-defense and symbolic assertion.

¹ In old Muslim houses in Kerala, especially in the "sitout" or front porch areas, Muslims often designate a space for prayer. This is typically done by creating a dedicated area within the sitout, sometimes with a small platform or designated mat, where individuals can perform their daily prayers.

² In a *Masjid*, a pool for ablution, also known as a wazukhana or ablution area, is a standard and essential facility for Muslims to perform wudu (ablution) before prayer. The wudu area provides a place for Muslims to wash their hands, face, and other parts of their body, as required by Islamic ritual before prayer.

Māppila culture is also marked by its cuisine, dress practices, and community roles. Signature foods such as *Talaśśēri Biryāni*, *Mu□□a Māla*, *Iracci Pattiri*, and *Unnakkāya* are not mere culinary products; they are symbolic expressions of community cohesion, hospitality, and ritual significance. These food traditions, often centered around life-cycle events and religious festivals, function as cultural scripts that affirm communal belongings.

Another important aspect of this chapter is the role of interfaith and intercultural interaction in shaping *Māppila* identity. The historical relationship between *Māppilas* and other communities in Malabar is reflected in shared rituals, the veneration of saints, and participation in local festivals. Examples like the *Māppila Teyyam* and the legends of figures like *Kōyi Mammad* and *Kalantan Mukri* reveal how local folklore integrates *Māppila* characters into the wider ritual landscape of Kerala. These narratives demonstrate the permeability of cultural boundaries and underscore the syncretic ethos of Malabar's folk traditions.

Overall, this chapter establishes that the *Māppila* community is not simply a religious group, but a richly layered folk community whose traditions span across linguistic, ritualistic, artistic, and social domains. By examining their folklore, rituals, oral traditions, and socio-cultural frameworks, this chapter lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the evolutionary dynamics of the *Māppila* identity. It argues that their culture, though rooted in Islam, has grown through localized adaptation, intercultural exchange, and the creative preservation of tradition. In doing so, it sets the stage for subsequent chapters that explore how *Māppila* rituals, especially the *Nērecca*, function as a tie of faith, folklore, and cultural resilience.

1.2 *Māppila* Etymology

There are numerous perspectives regarding the etymological origins of the term *Māppila*. The word *Māppilai* is employed to denote the husbands of daughters wed in Tamil Nadu. Likewise, there is a view that foreign men who wed native women in Malabar are referred to as the *Māppilas* of this place (K.V. Abdurahman). Husbands in Malabar Muslim family are even referred to as “*Putu Māppilas*” and

“*Putiāpla*”. Likewise, the historical fact that Malabar was formerly a part of the Madras Presidency also gives some force to this contention.

Another opinion suggests that ‘*Mahā Pillai*’ developed into *Māppila Pillai*. *Pillai* was a title given to individuals of high social status. *Mahā Pillai* was a very prestigious title, which was afterwards reduced to *Māppila* (Rolland E. Miller). If the name was being utilized as a badge of honour, then several writers of the 15th century, who were supporters of *Māppila*, should have utilized that name in their writings. But no such authors utilized the name *Māppila* with pride in their writings, as observed in the work of *Zainuddīn Makhdūm*, ‘*Tuḡfat Al-mujāhidīn*’. Thus, the above assertion doesn’t have much supporting literature.

Another assumption is that, the term *Māppila* would have been applied to those who contracted matrimony with local women or their children. The first reference to the term *Māppila* occurs in the travels of Barbosa, who visited Kerala in 1508 and used the term ‘*Moors Mapulars*’. But, none of the earlier historians like *Ibn Battuta* (A.D. 1349), *Abdur Razaq Samarkhandi*, and *ḡeikh Zainuddīn Mahbari* (1598) used the term *Māppila* (T. Muhammed).

The prefix ‘Ma’ represents mother. A child is born when a mother from Malabar experiences Mut’a³ marriages or normal marriages with a father from Arabia or Persia. When the father goes back to his homeland, the child is raised by the mother. This situation is the origin of the term *Mātāvinre Pillai* (mother’s child), which subsequently became shortened to *Māppila*. This is the original source of the term *Māppila* (A. P. Ibrahim Kunju).

Mostly immigrant religions, i.e., Christian, Muslim, and Jewish, were referred to as *Māppila*. By designating the name *Māppila* in this manner, all the immigrants would have been referred to as *Māppila*. The place of Christ’s birth, the town of *Nazrēt*, is identified with *Nazrānīs*. The name *Jōnaka* is a transliteration of the Tamil word *Sōnaka* for Arabia (J. B. P. More). The Romans and Persians originated from *Ionia* (Greek), and were indicated as *Yavanaka* in Sanskrit. It is

³ A temporary marriage contract for a particular period.

further argued that the people of these two groups imposed this name upon all foreigners (Divan Bahadur and Gopalan Nayar).

Immigrants who were Persian-speaking or Arabic-speaking and came to Malabar from other countries or Persia for reasons like trade, propagation of religion, or other reasons, and later went back to their homelands were not counted as *Māppila*. Although, the term *Māppila* was used only for the descendants of temporary and permanent marriages, who had made this place their homeland and spoke Malayalam (Hussain).

The writer of *Pār ḡiba Yācis* asserts that the term *Māppila* is a distorted form of the Arabic term *Māfla*. He further asserts that when the Arabs initially came to the area, they employed the Arabic term *Māfla* to denote farmers. *Māfla* then became *Māppila* (C. K. Kareem and C. N. Ahammed Moulavi).

1.3 Malabar

After the fifth century of *Hijra*, an Arab geographer named ḡariful Idrisi utilized the word Malabar in his writings. Attaching the prefix 'bār' to *Mala*, signifying 'land,' is how the word *Mala*, representing 'mountain,' came to signify 'land of mountains' (T. Muhammed).

1.4 Major Legends about *Māppilas*

There are many legends regarding the *Māppilas*, both among themselves and others. Their legends include the history, beliefs, families, dynasties, festivals, *Nērcas*, customs, and ceremonies of the *Māppilas*. One of the most common legends regarding their descent is their origin in Kerala. It is due to the conversion of King *Cēramān Perumāl* to Islam and the emergence of the *Māppilas* in Kerala. One night, when *Cēramān Perumāl* was gazing at the sky, the moon was divided into two halves, and after some time it reunited. He saw it and was astonished. He wanted to know the reason for it. He consulted the scholars of the king and the scholars of the country. But none of them could provide him with a satisfactory answer. After some days, he was informed by some scholars who came from Arabia, or he was given a clue by some traders from Arabia, that, a Prophet named

Muhammad had emerged in Arabia. He believed in and preached a God, *Allah*. He demonstrated a *Mu'jizah*⁴ to persuade those who were present around him to believe in that God. The King described them about the miracle which was witnessed by him and expressed his wish to see the prophet. He wanted to take him along with them when they were going back to Arabia. The Arabs promised him that he would make his wish come true. The empire was divided into different kings, and *Cēramān Perumāl* left with them. After meeting the Prophet, he accepted Islam. While going back home, he became ill. Before his death, he left a letter with the Arabic merchants and religious heads who had brought him from Arabia. In the letter, he instructed them to present the letter to his royal relatives and other individuals related to him in Malabar. In the letter, he requested the provision of all the facilities required by the bearers of the letter. He then died and was buried there. His friends from Arabia went to Malabar in Kerala, where they presented this letter. As instructed by *Perumāl*, the relatives provided all the support available to people from Arabia. For their prayer, the first *Masjid* was built in *Kodu□□allūr*, and later many other *Masjids* were built in all the corners of Kerala. A community called *Māppila* was created in this manner. This is the most familiar and widely recounted legend concerning the origin of the *Māppila* community in Kerala⁵.

Certain historical accounts support this legend, linking it to the Zamorin and specific rituals associated with the transfer of royal authority of *Cēramān Perumāl*. When Zamorin came to royal power, he would swear an oath that "*They would only rule the kingdom until their uncle's return*". This practice contributed to the reinforcement of this legend (T. Muhammed). It was also the practice to receive *Pansuvāri* from a *Māppila* woman. On the enthronement of the Zamorin, as he marched from *Panniyankara* to Kozhikode *Kō□□appuram* carrying the flag, it was an old custom for a *Māppila* woman to offer betel leaves near the *Kallayi* bridge. Further, it has been observed that this offering was made by a man dressed as a

⁴ An act of a miraculous nature presented by Prophets in challenge of the deniers of their prophecy to prove their truthfulness

⁵ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

Māppila woman. This practice continued for a long time before it finally died out (William Logan). It is believed that this practice may indicate the conversion of his ancestor, *Cēramān Perumāl*, to Islam. The Zamorin gave great assistance to the *Māppilas*, showing great respect for this community (Divan Bahadur and Gopalan Nayar).

1.4.1 Legends Associated with the Muslim Dynasty

***Arakkal* Dynasty**

There is a legend about the emergence of the *Arakkal* dynasty. While bathing in the river, the *Cirakkal* princess slipped and fell, and was swept away. Hearing her cries, a *Māppila* who was passing on the road came running, and saved her by giving his clothes. She married the *Māppila*, who had given his clothes to save her from shame, on the grounds that she had bought a dress from a *Māppila's* hand. The princess who married the *Māppila* was punished with exile from the dynasty. Thus, the princess was given a good amount for her maintenance and facilities by the *Cirakkal* King. Then, *Māppila* named *Mammad*, who saved the princess, established the *Arakkal* dynasty, ruled the country, and annexed areas like Lakshadweep⁶

There is a mention of the *Arakkal* family and *Cēramān Perumāl* in an epic. *Mālik Dinār* was a friend of *Cēramān Perumāl*, who was accompanying him from Arabia. After building the *Kodu□□allūr Masjid*, he instructed his younger brother, *Muhammad Habib Madaniya*, to give the letter written by *Cēramān Perumāl* at his deathbed to his relatives. So, he proceeded to *Perumāl's* sister, *Sridevi*, in *Dharmapa□□a□am* and told her of *Perumāl's* death and informed her to become a Muslim as per the desire of *Cēramān Perumāl*. Then, *Sridevi* and her son *Mahābali* became Muslims. He adopted the name *Muhammadali* and founded a new dynasty called the *Arakkal* dynasty. As he had a monopoly on foreign trade and sea trade, he was also known as *Āzirāja* or 'King of the Sea'. This legend was explained referring

⁶ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

to the names *Munshi Fazil* and *Abubakkar*, who learned the documents kept in the *Arakkal* Palace (T. Muhammed).

1.4.2 Legends Associated with Prophet *Ādam*

The *Pantalāyani* of the Malabar region is claimed to be where the footprints of Prophet Adam are said to have been imprinted. The place is designated as *Pārappally*, close to Kollam. There is a rock on the seaside that has an impression that closely resembles the footprint of a human being. As per the *Māppila* tradition, Prophet Adam imprinted his foot at *Pārappally* for the first time and subsequently stepped his second foot on ‘Adam’s Peak’ in Sri Lanka. There is now a pilgrimage site designated as *Pārappally Makhām* in a village close to Kollam in Malabar⁷ (P. P. Ummer Koya).

1.4.3 Legend Associated with Family Clan

Marakkār

A popular legend is connected with family clans and lineages. A renowned businessman, *□eikh Marakkār*, who came to Kozhikode with the motive of propagating religion and conducting business, requested the permission of the Zamorin to settle in Kozhikode permanently. The Zamorin requested *Marakkār* to marry a lady from his family belonging to the *Nambūtiri* clan and gave them a house and land on the riverside for their residence, and were named as the *Thōppil family*. This legend is connected with the *Thōppil Taravā□*. Members of this family held a superior position in the Zamorin's palace. In the Zamorin's coronation ceremony, a custom was conducted in which members of the *Thōppil* family were ritually welcomed with betel leaves. This fact has been quoted from the article *Perumayu□e Taravā□*, published in *Mathrubhumi* on 23 August 1998 (K. K. Muhammed Abdul Sathar).

Kōyas

Another legend is that of the *Kōyas* in Calicut, who are said to have originated from Arabia. When *Śābandar Kōya*, the Zamorin port officer and subsequent steward of *Māmāgam*, was residing in Malabar, his name was renamed from '*Khōja*' to '*Kōya*'. Although the *Kōyas* subsequently divided into various families, Kuttichira in Calicut was their hub. They lived in '*Irumānam Vīu*'. In the *Kōya* family, the matrilineal system was the prevalent practice⁸

Vetṭatt

There is another legend on '*Veṭṭatt*'. There was a kingdom known as '*Veṭṭatt*', which was the royal residence of the *Veṭṭatt* King of *Putiyaādi*. A *Māppila* came to the royal palace to sell goods. But the king was not there. When the *Māppila* arrived, two young ladies from the royal family requested him to show the products. Then one of the girls bought silk from *Māppila*'s hand. Finally, the king came to know this news. A woman from his family bought the silk from a *Māppila*. She was forced to become a *Māppila* and marry the *Māppila*. A place was found in Tanur, a palace-like house was built, and it was given to her family. Later, this family came to be known as '*Naha*'. *Veṭṭatt* King instructed the *Caampally Gurus* to convert the *Kalari Acāryās* to the *Māppila* community and to protect their girl and her *Naha* family⁹

According to a legend, the king of Kerala, who had embraced Islam, used to come to his kingdom on Fridays and was delighted to find the *Masjids* filled with big crowds on Fridays¹⁰.

⁸ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

⁹ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

1.4.4 Legends Connected to Other Communities

There is a belief in the festival and fair organized in connection with the *Ōrkā□iri Śiva Bhagavati* temple. While Goddess *Bhagavati* was going through the *Ōrkā□iri* region, she spotted a beautiful pond and took a bath there. It was a pond owned by the *Māppila* family. A young woman named *Kāyakko□i Pāthumma* in the *Māppila* family spotted a lovely woman stepping out from the pond, wet from the water, with no clothes to change. She presented the *Bhagavati* with a *Māppila* outfit. It was a *kāci* and a blouse. A *Bhagavati* temple was constructed here, and following this belief, even today, in the *Ōrkā□iri Śiva Bhagavati* temple, the festival is started with offering *kāci* by the eldest lady of the *Kāyakko□i Māppila* family. This *kāci* is given to honor the *Bhagavati* (Manoj Kumar T.).

1.5 Indirect Class Stratification among the Māppila Community

1.5.1 *Ossāns*

An indirect classism exists among the *Māppila* community. It's not a direct casteism. There was discrimination existed among the *Māppilas*, particularly in the case of occupational ranks in certain situations. Mainly, barbers in the *Māppila* community known as '*Ossān*' were facing classism among the *Māppila* society. Other *Māppila* do not engage in marriage and family with *Ossān*. The *Ossāns*, who are barbers who shave and cut hair, have faced extreme and general discrimination throughout history. The *Māppilas* also do not enter into marriage alliances with *Ossāns*, although this is not articulated as direct caste discrimination like untouchability (N.P. Hafiz Muhammed).

1.5.2 *Puislām*

A type of classism discrimination exists among the *Māppilas* against the *Puislāmis*. Those who were new converts to the *Māppilas* religion were known as *Puislāms*¹¹. The majority of the *Māppilas*, including the tribals and the affluent, did not marry *Puislāmis*. It can be said that this discrimination did not exist among them

¹¹ Puyislam: Those who were new converts to the *Māppila* religion

at the time of the emergence of the *Māppilas*. If discrimination had existed among them at that time, the *Māppilas* would not have become such a dominant population here since the *Māppilas* inherited their entire genetic makeup from the indigenous people to whom they belonged.

There are three ethnic groups in Lakshadweep: the *Mēlācēri*, the *Mālūmi*, and the *Kōyās*. Among them, the *Kōyās* are at the highest caste level. They did not intermarry with the *Mēlācēri* and did not participate in communal rituals. The *Mēlācēri* toiled in the coconut plantations of the *Kōyās*, and they were not permitted to wear even a shirt at that time (E. C. Haskarali).

1.5.3 *Taññals*

The predominant role was played by *Taññals* in the *Māppila* community. They particularly believe that they have blood relations with the Prophet or with the companions, who existed during the time of the Prophet. They are assigned a predominant role in the *Māppila* community; because of this, they do not marry often outside their family. Their marriages will be with members of their family. Another set of Brahmin sects was known by the name *Taññal*, i.e., *Maññannūr Madhusūdanan Taññal* (K. K. Muhammed Abdul Sathar).

1.6 Worship of *Māppilas*

The *Māppilas* have different forms of worship practices. They hold them very close to their lives. The *Salāh*, the five daily prayers, is the most sacred. Then comes fasting during the Arabic month of *Ramadān*. Another one is *Zakāt*, and another is Hajj. However, the *Māppilas* hold a belief that any small act that contributes to the advancement of society, people, living beings, trees, and nature is a type of worship. Every act that injures any of them is immoral.

1.6.1 *Salāh*

Salāh or Prayer, which is called *Niskāram*, is performed towards the *Qibla* in Makkah, which the *Māppilas* hold as the primary place of worship. *Salāh* is done by standing and sitting, moving certain hands and feet. There are certain times for this

in the day, from sunrise to sunset. Five times a day are given. The purpose of *Salāh* is to have a clean body and mind at all times. Before performing *Salāh*, one must undergo *Wudu* (ablution) (Saithalavi Moulavi).

1.6.2 Nōmb (Fastingin Ramadan)

Ramadān is a period of worship from dawn to sunset. Those who desire to eat can eat during the night meal before the *Subhi Adhān*, which is just before sunrise. Fasting during *Ramadān* is done by abstaining from food, beverages, and evil thoughts during the day. Eating is permitted only after *Maghrib*, which is after sunset. This is a fasting practice that requires mental and physical discipline. The practice is done throughout the Arabic month of *Ramadān*. Fasting is only obligatory for those individuals who are in good health condition. Travelers are exempted from practicing fasting (K. P. Zakariya).

1.6.3 Zakāt

Zakāt is the giving away of a part of one's wealth to needy members of society annually. Two and a half percent of his wealth must be given away compulsorily. That is why they feel that the *Māppilās'* acts of worship are socially responsible. *Zakāt* is a means to transfer wealth from the haves to have-nots, without gathering it (P. A. Swadiq Faizy Tanur).

1.6.4 Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah)

Hajj is the journey of pilgrims to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. It is preceded by various ceremonies and is done in the Arabic month of Dhu al-Hijjah. It has various rituals in Makkah and Madinah. *Ka'ba* circumambulation, stoning of Satan, historic mountain climbing, etc, are various rituals. Nowadays, performing the Hajj is obligatory only for those who can afford it because it is so costly for people from other countries to go there. (Prof. K.A. Rahman)

1.7 Celebrations

Māppilās have two important celebrations: *Ceriyaperunnāl* or Eid al-Fitr, and the Festival of Sacrifice, *Bakrīd*, also called Eid al-Adha.

1.7.1 Eid al-Fitr

Following the end of the last fast for the month of *Ramadān*, Eid al-Fitr is celebrated with various activities on the next day. This celebration is observed on the first day of the Arabic month of *Shawwāl*. Just before sunrise on this particular day, it is a custom for dishes, based on local eating habits, to be given out to poor segments of society (with the aim of preparing a sumptuous meal in their homes on the Eid day). This custom of charity is referred to as *Zakāt* al-Fitr. For this reason, this celebration is referred to as Eid al-Fitr. On Eid day, people are advised to dress in new clothes, make use of spices, and indulge in nice food. On Eid day, people go to visit family, friends, and relatives. In addition, women tend to adorn their hands with henna, and there are numerous other celebratory customs that are performed within homes. Also, special prayer is offered in the *Masjids* on Eid day (Abu Tariq Zubair Muhammed).

1.7.2 Eid al-Adha

The day of sacrifice is the peak of the Hajj rituals. The people who perform the Hajj pilgrimage, and also those who participate in its observance, perform the sacrificial ceremony of a goat or a cow. The sacrificial ceremony is referred to as *Udhhiyat*. Following the ceremony, all Muslim believers of the world, irrespective of participation in Hajj, celebrate Eid. Since it is the festival performed following the Bali ceremony, the *Māppilās* celebrate it as *Baliperunnāl*; in addition, due to its connection with *Ulhiyat*, it is celebrated worldwide as Eid al-Adha. The term ‘*Bali*’ has grown to be referred to as *Valya* Eid. The remaining ceremonies and customs accompanying this festival are similar to those of Eid-ul-Fitr, except for variations in the month practiced and the foundation of the story.

The *Māppilās* also observe a variety of other festivals, having created a number of local festivals. They celebrate life events such as marriage, ear piercing, *Sunnah* weddings, and other family festivals. The death or birth days of ancestors offer more celebrations. Some notable examples of such festive occasions include

the birthday of the Prophet, *Muharram*, and *Bara'at*¹² (Abu Tariq Zubair Muhammed).

1.8 Māppila Traditions

There are a variety of traditions observed in *Māppila*. Among them, major traditions are followed by the worship of holy men and *Nērcas* in *Māppila* rituals. It has been postulated that the principle of offering to holy men is derived from a religious concept, and this *Nērcas* appears to be closely associated with the local culture and rituals practiced in South India (K. K. Muhammed Abdul Sathar). The *Nērcas* practiced by the *Māppilas* extend beyond historical and mythological scholars alone; they encompass legends from recent history, as well as saints and scholars who passed away in the current century. *Madavur C. M. Valiyullāhi Nērcas* is an example of *Nērcas* based on a recently expired scholar. When a person belonging to the current generation passes away, he or she may subsequently be regarded as a holy man or woman, owing to the immense respect of the locals, and become a target for *Nērcas*.

In Malabar, the practice of making *Nērcas* is not just based on the commemoration day of saints, but also may be to pay homage to people who participated in the struggle for the independence of the nation. The *Māppilas* revere those who lost their lives for their nation as sacred souls. Paying homage and showing respect to such holy beings is a common practice in many Islamic communities. Owing to the social interaction of the *Māppilas* in Malabar, cultural integration regarding *Nērcas* is spreading immediately. All *Nērcas* have come into existence to pay homage to the saints and to those who have performed acts of bravery among the *Māppilas*. *Nērcas* in the *Māppila* community may be limited to a few families, regional, or encompassing the entire nation. These are created by blending numerous local ingredients.

¹² This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

Some of the *Nērcas* in Malabar have a considerable blend of customs observed in local rituals or festivals like *Peṅṅivaravu*, *Muṅṅum Viliyum*, *Candanakkuṅṅam*, *Kutturātib*, and *Ezunnallatt* (on elephant or horse). *Nērcas* have certain similarities with some of the local customs, for instance, fireworks and circumambulation. This is a reflection of the fact that man is a social being. But *Nērcas* are extremely costly and are a public festival of the *Māppilas* (M. Gangadharan).

1.8.1 Māppila's Traditional Folk Dress

The *Māppila* dress varies depending on the socio-economic status of the wearer, age, purpose of function, and profession. Women from the *Māppila* community dressed in a *Penkuppāyam* with a lower dress. It is only seen in Kerala. Besides this dress, simple *Māppila* women wore *Kindān*, *Sūp*, or *Kācci*. The *Taṅṅam* was originally used as a protection for her head. *Makkana* was also regarded at times as being old. *Māppila* women from coastal areas wear *Jiljāba* when they go outside. It can be seen in Thalassery, Kannur, and Kozhikode areas, where there is high contact with Arabs (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

The *Māppila* women wear a *Kāccittuṅṅi* and a *Penkuppāyam*, which are hand-stitched or machine-stitched. The head is covered with a light shade of *vellattaṅṅam* or *varṅṅattaṅṅam*. In addition to the above, leather threshing, creepers, leather sandals, and slippers were worn as footwear. *Māppila* women in Malabar wore *Kācci*, *Kindān*, *Kārakai*, *Karupp*, *Surul*, etc. as clothing. Women wore clothes depending on their age, when they went to weddings and other special events. Young women wore the best *kasavukarattuṅṅi* and *kasavukupāyam*, or *Cempaṅṅu*, also called *Mathāv* and *Curul*. There was a wide-sided *Taṅṅam* with designed carvings on the four corners and the middle. Older women wear *Kācci*, a rounded white shirt, a light *Kasavu bordered Taṅṅam*. Instead of *Taṅṅam*, women also used to go out wearing a thin white cloth cover called *Pokaṅṅam* (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

The newlywed's clothing is decorated. The newlywed is dressed in a heavy silk cloth known as a *Matāv*, embroidered in red and yellow gold and adorned with

tiny rounds having a gold design. On the blouse is a matching *Penkuppāyam* with *Kasavu* design, and on the head is a *Kasavuta* with embroidered gold. *Māppila* women offer *Salāh* wearing a *Makkana* to cover the head and a loose white *Niskārakuppāyam* that goes down to their feet to cover the rest of the body, but not their faces.

In the countryside, *Kallimu*, *Kaili*, *Kaibanian*, turban, and a broad belt, a *Rā* belt, were used by *Māppila* men. A turban *Tu*, and a hat were worn by them, and white *urkeys*, and different types of caps. Popane shirts and *Sūrittu* were used by rich and middle-class men. Shoes made of leather or sandals were used for the feet. Removable buttons are used on the chest and arms of the full sleeve shirt, and rod gold buttons on the entire sleeve, named the German brand 'Crimson's button'. The shirt has front and right-side pockets. A *Bayarāmpuri Urumāl* on the head, a long white Arabic gown-like dress, and a '*sauderi* and *coat*' vest coat were worn by some of the local chiefs of the *Māppila*. There will be a pocket watch with a gold chain named *Kedimacha* in the coat's upper pocket. The *Bulūd* velvet stockings and shiny boots will be used. It was also a symbol of status. The *Qādhis* had a special dress that was pleasing to the soul and looked Arabic. Mullahs and *Ustāds* used a round-necked, long-sleeved shirt, a white cloth, a turban, and *Kudametiadi*, *Pattametiadi*, or *Mu* on the legs. Men's attire is said to be influenced by Yemen (P. P. Mammed *Kōya* Parappil).

Regardless of age, *Gañciprāk Baniyan* and *Urumāl*, or handkerchiefs, were used. On holidays and weddings, *Māppilas* dressed up in good quality attire. In the first celebration of the newlywed couple, costly attire referred to as *Jāmatt* was delivered to the bride's house. *Māppila* women particularly loved adorning themselves with henna and applying *Suruma* in their eyes. Married women applied hair oil known as *Pūve* and *Sāi*. They even used perfumes. Wealthy families utilized Arabian *Atars*.

A *Ca* of thin cotton cloth in black, white, or some other color was used by the newborn children. In weddings, *Māppila* typically wears white on special occasions. The head is covered, perhaps with a hat and a scarf. The

Kozhikode *Puthiyāpila* uses front-open and knee-length *Aṅkarka*. Nowadays, *Aṅkarkas* and caps are not worn at weddings; instead, grooms typically wear coats and suits or *kurta* and *pyjama* or common dresses. The *Māppilas* have a religious belief that some parts of the body must be covered. *Māppila* women wear any type of bright clothes according to their choice. Most of it is stitched with coloured thread. They wear a turban and a loose white wrap, which covers their heads. Rich women may wear any light-coloured silk dress. Women of high castes cover their faces when they go out. However, this is not practiced among ordinary *Māppilas*. Except for the face, a woman must cover all parts of her body. *Abu Huraira* narrated: “*Allah's Messenger (PBUH) forbade two types of dresses: (A) To sit in an Ihtiba' posture in one garment, nothing of which covers his private parts. (B) to cover one side of his body with one garment and leave the other side bare. The Prophet (PBUH) also forbade the Mulamasa and Munabadha (Imam Muhammed Al-Bukhari).*

In day-to-day life, this notion is generally neglected, and a comfortable dress is worn. The salwar evolved into the churidar, which is available in different models for women's wear. *Sāri, Leheṅka, Cōli, Sarāra, etc.* are now worn by *Māppila* women. There are some types of wraps that can be wrapped over a shawl, which is the fashion these days. Earlier, the purdah was worn by older women, but now it is a fashion trend worn even by young girls. As the tie with the Gulf became stronger, the purdahs are of different shapes and are now stitched in different shapes. Now, it is not easy to identify a person's group by looking at their attire. Earlier, people followed many ways to distinguish themselves from other groups, like shaving their heads, wearing a hat, and sporting a beard. *Māppila* faith does not allow dragging clothes on the ground, so clothes should never be below the Ankle. *Abdullah bin `Umar* narrated: “*Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, 'Whoever drags his clothes (on the ground) out of pride and arrogance, Allah will not look at him on the Day of Resurrection'” (Imam Muhammed Al- Bukhari).*

Men wear a white turban with a coloured border. A white turban without borders is also worn. While other groups wear it on the right side, the *Māppilas* wear

it on the left side. A string tied around the waist keeps it on. One or two 'Ēles' are tied to it. These Ēles can be of gold, silver, or other metals. Verses of the Quran or other mantras are inscribed on them. But now this is used rarely. Some wear a long, thin cotton shirt covered by a short jacket up to the waist. But it is common in South Malabar. In the towns, low-cut jackets and shirts with European styles were in fashion. Jeans and T-shirts are becoming fashionable. A small white cap or a white and black cap was worn. Some of the unique caps that are prevalent these days are the *Māppila* cap, the Turkish cap, and the *Fez* cap. There is a unique, fashionable cap called the *Tala□karattoppi* at the *Tala□kara* village near Kasargod. The cap is draped by simple old men or *Mollas*, while a round turban is wrapped around it.

Scholars these days have different types of turbans. Scholars from each set of *Māppilas* can be identified by observing their unique turban and dress. Scholars these days are the only ones who are identifiable by dress. The hair of the *Māppilas* is well-groomed. Many, particularly old and middle-aged men, have beards. However, these are obsolete these days.

Māppila these days prefer the favourite dress of the *Malayāli* to be a shirt and jeans. This is dressed according to the *Māppilas'* choice. Only royal family women or the *Nambūtiri* family women had the right or privilege to dress in Kerala¹³. But even then, the *Māppila* women wore dresses that covered the body. The *Māppilas* played a crucial role in the construction of the dress culture of Kerala. The practice of wearing the upper garment in the lower caste was admired by the system of *Māppilas* wearing so, which also contributed to the construction of the dress culture (J. B. P. More).

¹³ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

1.8.2 Traditional Jewelry

Jewelry has been an integral part of human history, evolving across different cultures. Various communities have their own unique jewelry styles and traditions. For instance, some African tribes are recognized for body piercings and sizable jewelry pieces. Jewelry can be crafted from materials such as stone, clay, wood, pearls, gold, and silver. In the *Māppila* community, gold ornaments hold a significant place among their traditional ornaments. Typically, *Māppila* men do not wear many ornaments, except rings, which generally feature single stones. *Māppila* women, however, enjoy a wide array of jewelry, including anklets, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and more. They often wear multiple earrings, similar to other groups like the *Mukkuvas* and *Tiyyas*. The upper ear is commonly pierced to accommodate *Ci□□* earrings, and one might see around 10 or 12 *Ci□□s* worn at once. Nose rings are not typically part of their tradition (Charles Alexander Innes).

Gold is valued not only for its beauty but also as an important investment. Traditionally, a specific piece of ear ornament known as *Ci□□* or *Māyittumāl* was seen as a form of spiritual support for a woman after life. This highlights gold's cultural and economic significance in the community. Women adorn themselves with jewelry during various occasions, such as weddings, receptions, traditional ceremonies like *Kātukutt* and *Mēkātukutt*, and pregnancy celebrations. A long-standing tradition involves the bride's father presenting gold jewelry during her wedding. In the past, this would be decided on the wedding day, and it was vital for the groom's family to know what the bride would receive, as insufficient gold could impact whether the wedding proceeded. Today, the practice continues, with the amount of gold given based on a family's financial situation. Wealthier families provide more, while those with lesser means give less. If the father has passed away, this responsibility often falls to uncles or other close relatives.

Māppila jewelry includes distinctive pieces like *Pavi Māla*, *Cakkara Māla*, *Ēlass*, *Mullapū Māla*, *Añjupattak*, *Kārakāllam*, *Kalam Māla*, *Edakkallam*, *Karutta Kallam*, *Koralāram*, *Pramāni*, *Mūnnu Patapōn*, *Pawanum Kōva*, *Alōchana Māla*, *Padi Māla*, *Makkatte Kallu Māla*, *Vendakka Māla*, *Mani Māla*, *Mullamottu Māla*,

Ilakkattāli, *Cavidi* and *Tanurukku* are for the neck. Hand jewelry includes items such as *Kottuvala*, *Cettuvala*, *Ōlavala*, *ilaunna Kandivala*, *Pirivala*, *Oi Vala*, *Bulūda Tarivala*, *Katakan Vala*, *Nāgapatam*, and *Māava*¹⁴.

Historically, *Māppila* women wore small earrings with 10 to 16 holes, including various styles of *Alikat* (Circles) earrings, the *Chethalikath*, and the *Ūlialikath*. Ear cuffs, *Jimuki*, *Ponnaraññānam*, *Ponnēlass*, *Seri*, *Ūātha* on the waist, and *Pādasara* on the feet. On the forehead, *Nettippattam* with *Mudicakam*. Fingers with large finger rings. They also wore ear cuffs and other traditional ornaments (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

Māppila men generally do not wear gold but may wear silver rings with stones. For special occasions such as weddings, both men and women may wear rings given by close family members. Young boys once wore a gold piece called *Kūchīm Manīm* on their waists, although this has become rare. Girls traditionally wore a gold item called *Aramudi* around their waists. Brides adorn their foreheads with jewelry pieces called *Netikuri* or *Netipam*. Their ears have ornaments known as *Piracci*, along with additional ear jewelry such as *Manikātila*, *Minni*, *Pañca*, *Kummat*, and *Kadukkan*. They wear various bracelets and accessories on their hands, and rings on their fingers, some with gemstones, others without. A bride also uses a golden hairpin and wears special attire. On her feet, she adds *Vīrāganattala* or *Ponpādsara*, and her footwear features a decorative *Kasavu* border with a hint of gold.

Over time, the unique jewelry style has become less common. Changes due to globalization and different cultural influences mean that now everyone wears all kinds of jewelry, with many brands no longer offering distinct designs. Wedding guests often pair their outfits with pearl necklaces and terracotta accessories. While it wasn't traditionally done, some women now choose to pierce their noses, but

¹⁴ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

others prefer not to. There is also a trend toward wearing jewelry that is light in weight, or made from diamond, platinum, antique, or uncut materials¹⁵.

1.8.3 Māppila Culinary Tradition

The *Māppilas* have a special cuisine associated with them. The special food of the *Māppilas* is an important part of the *Māppila* culture. Food is prepared for all occasions in the life of the *Māppilas*, like festivals, receptions, weddings, *Nērcas*, etc. The *Māppilas* have a special food for all special occasions. The three major cities of the Malabar region, Kozhikode, Thalassery, and Kannur, are known as centres of cuisine.

Likewise, one of the city's main markets in Malabar is *Mi□□ai Teruvu*. The Kozhikode special is *Halwa*. Because of its culinary identity, a few places get their place on Kerala's cultural map. 7 Indian restaurants under the listing of the World's Legendary Restaurants of The Times of India. Among them was the *Biryā□i* of Paragon Hotel, Kozhikode included. (Times of India). The Thalassery *Biryā□i* brand has a reputation for its taste. Outlook magazine has chosen Thalassery as one of India's top ten food destinations.

Kozhikode is also known for its *Biryā□i*. In Kozhikode, *Dum Biryā□i* is also highly well-liked. The specialties of the *Māppilas* of North Malabar include *Mu□□a Māla*, *Mu□□asurka*, *Mu□□amariccat*, *Iracci Pattiri*, *Alīsa*, *Ilayata*, *Vāzhakāyappam*, *Kōzhiyata*, *Pōla*, *Tarippōla*, *Ki□□attappam*, *Madhurakkari*, *Kilsa*, *Unnakāya*, *Ca□□ipattiri*, *Kir Pattiri*, and *Ka□□uvecca Pattiri*. *Māppila* cuisine was introduced to the South Malabar regions by those who left North Malabar for the restaurant industry. This was established by the increased chances of group living and Gulf culture (K. E. N. Kunjahammed).

There are certain special dishes in the month of *Ramadān*. Depending on the place, there are other dishes like *Iraccikaññi*, *Tarikkaññi*, and *Jīra Kaññi*. These are made only in the month of *Ramadān*. It is presumed that they had certain taste

¹⁵ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

groups based on the food they used to eat, and then divided them into different groups. Every religion has certain strict rules regarding what to eat and how to eat it. There are certain rules that have to be followed in the *Māppila* diet. For *Māppilas*, there are certain foods that are forbidden and certain foods that are permitted. There is a chapter of the Quran which explains what kind of food should be eaten and how it should be prepared, cooked, eaten, and served. According to this, a *Māppila* system has been formed. The title of the fifth chapter of the Quran is *Al-Ma'idah*. Due to this, the *Māppilas* have formed a food culture. The *Māppilas* do not eat blood, dog meat, pork, dead bodies, animals killed without slaughtering, animals slaughtered without praising God, animals killed after bleeding, the remains of wild animals bitten and eaten by, animals beaten to death, etc. In contrast to the indigenous people, the food culture of *Māppilas* is said to be a mixture of Arab and Persian foods (*Surah Al-Ma'idah 5.1*).

It is evident that the rich food culture is more dominated by the coastal regions, which are comparatively more integrated with Arab culture. In contrast to the coastal region's *Māppilas*, the *Māppilas* of the Palakkad and Malappuram districts do not observe much variety and significance in food. Fewer programs and ceremonies are there that accord significance to food as in the coastal regions. Their food consists mainly of inland agricultural items.

The *Māppilas* have a special dish called *Pattiri*. Rice is washed, ground, and boiled in boiling water to make *Pattiri*. Flour is made from it and baked on a stone. There are various types of *Pattiris*. *Pattiri* is also called *Pathal* in North Malabar. There are various types of *Pattiris*, such as *Ka□□acha Pattiri*, *Iracci Pattiri*, *Mu□□a Pattiri*, *Ko□□an Pattiri*, *Gōtamba Pattiri*, *Moola Pattiri*, *Tire Pattal*, *Kuññi Pattiri*, *Veesi Pattiri*, *Ott Pattiri*, and *Nice Pattiri*¹⁶. There is a special dish of *Māppila* in the form of meat and *Pattiri* (K. E. N. Kunjahammed). Though *Neychōr* (Ghee Rice) and *Biryā□i* are also known to be *Māppila* dishes, non-communities have recently become used to them too. The other communities are not used to the

¹⁶ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

Māppila dish called *Tēāchōr*. *Tēāchōr* is a rice dish made by draining the water and adding common local rice, coconut, fenugreek, salt, and shallots.

During *Ramadān*, no food or drinks are taken during the daytime. *Attāzam* is the traditional time to start the fast, and *Iftar* is the traditional time to end it. During *Ramadān*, special dishes are made by the *Māppilas*. The *Māppilas* believe some things about the food supply for the coming year. There is a *Māppila* belief that on the eve of the 15th of the Arabic month of *Shāllān*, God decides everyone's food (*Rizq*) for the coming year. On that day, which is called *Barāt Rāv*, special foods like sweets and other stews are made; the idea is that if you eat well on the night of *Barāt*, you won't be short of food for the coming year. After the day of *Barāt*, preparation for *Ramadān* starts. The major responsibilities are grinding rice for breakfast and grinding spices for curries, for cooking in *Ramadān*.

In Malappuram district, bottle gourd curry is a part of every *Ramadān* dinner. Fish pickles, made in large batches in Lakshadweep, were a part of the coastal *Māppila's* diet. There are special fasting-break foods and dinner foods. Festivals and fasts are a part of the life of Kerala *Māppila*. Such ceremonies are complete with a variety of foods. In Kozhikode, there is a *kōl* sent by the bride's mother to the new groom's house during the *Ramadān* month; these are sweets made specially.

Children give sweets to friends when they join a *Madrasa*¹⁷ as students. Usually, food offered by the *Māppilas* as part of their ritual is called *Cīraī*. Sweets, meat, rice, etc., are offered during *Mawlid* on the Prophet's birthday. Food is distributed on the 17th day of *Ramadān* from the *Masjids*. Other rituals include a wheat kheer called *Kāwa*, served to reciters during *Mawlid* festivals held in the houses of the *Māppilas*. *Pālvāzakka*, a dish made from rice, and sweet curry from chickpeas are also used. These are all special foods cooked and consumed as part of the ceremonies, like the milk pudding, baked with balls. There may be variations to these regionally (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

¹⁷ A religious school

In North Malabar, *Kirda* sweets are a tradition to offer to pregnant women. When the wife is pregnant, the family of husband also sends a special dessert called *Kirda*. Wheat flour is beaten, then cut into discs and deep-fried with nuts, sugar, and coconut. Place slices of a hard-boiled chicken egg on top of the flour mixture. Then it is cut off at the edges, egg and sugar-coated, and fried in ghee to prepare *Kirda*. There is a house in Kozhikode called *Kirtakākam* that is related to this delicacy, where fifty or one hundred *Kirda* are sent from the groom's house to the bride's house (Kozhikote Muslimkalude Charithram). This dessert is also offered prior to rice on the first day after groom's arrival at the bride's home. The same food is prepared in different manners in different regions of Malabar, depending on the geography of the region, such as jeera *Kaññi* in Malabar, *Auñadha Kaññi* in Palakkad, and Kasargod *Kaññi*. There is a method of making Kasargod *Kaññi*, and it is consumed by hand. *Pattiriyum Pōtumkālum* is one of the Wayanad *Māppila* foods. Buffalo legs are carved and roasted on wood in an oven for hours. When all the inner marrow of the bone is roasted, it becomes a tasty food. The marrow between the bones is what decides its taste. Wayanad foods like *Turamāñña* and *Vaduka* have much in common with tribal foods. Meat, fish, eggs, sugar, and ghee are the chief ingredients of most *Māppila* foods. *Kaññi*, a Keralite dish, has also been experimented with in *Māppila*.

The cooking in *Māppila* is different from Kerala food. *Sāmbār*, *Aviyal*, *Ōlañña*, *Kālan*, and *Puliśśēri* are not prepared by the *Māppilas* for their festivities because they don't wish to lose their own culinary style. In the areas of *Ēranād* and *Valluvanād* of the current Malappuram district, where the *Māppilas* lived, they used to make *Tēññācōr* and dal, and not *neyccōr* and *Biryāñni*. A 'Tālip' is made by adding some leaves to the *Kaññi* water, adding salt, and adding leaves or vegetables. The coastal *Māppilas* were far ahead of the interior *Māppilas* in terms of the variety of food at that time. The *Māppilas* observe an important ceremony called '*Palla Kāñal*'. In this ceremony, the relatives of the pregnant woman go to her house to meet her and to express their love.

A meal called *Bajār* is served to guests who come to the house. *Kāyavaruttatu*, laddu, jilebi, halwa, *Pūvanpazham*, and others are served along with *Bajār* (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil). Some *Māppilas* use the word '*paip*' for hunger. *Ēranād* and *Valluvanād* districts show the most visible changes in the food culture of *Māppilas* due to Gulf influence. Arabian foods such as *Alfahām*, *Majbūs*, *Kuzimanti*, *□awāya*, and *Kabsa* have dominated the food culture of Malabar *Māppilas* completely. The way *Māppilas* consume food during their celebrations makes them different from other communities. Arabian tradition influenced them to eat together. The consumption of food on individual plates for each member was not found in *Māppila* celebrations. Compared to local tradition, the *Māppilas* have a family way of eating called '*Masara*'. The term *Masara* is a circle formed by the people sitting on the tables; the etiquette of consuming *Masara* should be followed. One should not stop eating and rise from the seat in the middle of eating because the *Masara* will be broken. *Masarapalaka* were special types of planks used to sit on the floor and eat (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

Eight big *Masarapalas* are arranged in a circle to create *Masara* for men. *Neyccōr* is arranged in a circular *Dhala□ki*, a copper plate of a big size with small legs in the middle of the *Masara*. A mu□□on curry and a side dish are also arranged. Small baskets of curry, like the curry served to men, are also placed below the *Dhala□k*. Except for this, curry is served in *Masara* in two or three *Kāsās* (Large copper vessels). The *Masara* board is arranged in a circle. There are thirteen or fourteen women in a *Masara*. Women who went to a wedding washed their hands while dining. They do the same after dining. The bride also dines in this *Masara* without an individual plate. The curry is served from this *Dhala□k* facing towards their seat. A *Masarapala* system has been in existence for almost three decades (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

But they do not follow these practices nowadays. The practice of consuming food from each bowl began. The *Māppilas* of Kozhikode, until recently, used *Masara* for functions and weddings. Having lunch by sitting during the *Māppila* rituals earlier has nowadays been replaced by a buffet system

1.9 Main Occupations

The *Māppilas* played a crucial role as helpers for Arab traders along the coast. In these coastal areas, many people worked as fishermen, constructed huts, made ropes, wove straw mats, and dried fish for trade. Inland farmers harvested pepper, ginger, cinnamon, and sandalwood, selling them to local middlemen, who then sold the goods to Arab traders. The *Māppilas* were vital in connecting these farmers with the Arab merchants, functioning as key intermediaries in trade. Furthermore, they engaged in small businesses and remained devoted to their work even after becoming *Māppilas*. By the end of the 11th century, they dominated port-based trade and small commerce activities. As the population grew, they began expanding into agriculture and further trade roles, buying and selling farm goods. Many *Māppilas* built thriving businesses, establishing trade as a significant profession. When the Portuguese arrived, some *Māppilas* started moving away from trade, but it still played a crucial part in their lives. Their expertise in trading was respected and considered an honourable profession.

Barbosa, a traveler of that period, noted most *Māppilas* in coastal districts were involved in fishing, especially near *Ēzhimala*, where fishing boats were numerous. *Māppila* women in these coastal areas contributed significantly by working jobs like coir making. In agricultural regions, they participated in farming. Up to the 13th century, Muslims in *Pazaya* served important roles as middlemen in trade and small businesses (Mansel Longworth Dames).

1.9.1 *Māppila Khalāsis*

In Malabar, close to Kozhikode and Beypur, live the *Māppila Khalāsis*. Ship-related heavy lifting services were done at the initial stage. They were first seen in the coastal areas of Malabar for this purpose. They are people who can lift heavy objects without formal education or knowledge of engineering principles such as lifting and placing heavy objects with knowledge or experience over generations, lifting heavy objects from the sea bed, some ship-related work, lifting the ship's engine, and lifting heavy loads that cannot be lifted even by machines such as huge cranes. The *Māppila Khalāsi* is renowned for its ability to do such things. The

Māppila Khalāsis shifted to other regions all over the world to do this work in this way.

During the 1972 cyclone at Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, the Binge Gader crane, which was built to create a barrier at the location of creating a harbour, toppled into the sea. An oil business owned the crane. Harbor demanded to take away the crane. Despite the Indian Navy's best efforts, this project was unsuccessful because of the inability to do so. Many groups tried, but all were unsuccessful, and the crane company was penalized severely. In one instance, this task was undertaken by *Māppila Khalāsi* and was completed effectively (C. M. Musthafa Haji).

1.10 *Māppila* Family System

The *Māppila* community predominantly follows a patrilineal family system. In some parts of North Malabar, such as Thalassery, and within groups near Kozhikode, staying in the wife house is still common. Similar to the *Nambūtiris* from *Nāir* clans, *Māppilas* often stay at their wives' homes during the day but return to their homes at night. This lifestyle shows clear local influences on *Māppila* customs, especially in coastal communities. Contact with Arab traders resulted in marriages with locals, with many Arabs living in these areas before returning home, often leaving their wives behind. As the Arabs were not permanent residents, this likely influenced the family system. The widespread practice among coastal *Māppilas* strongly indicates a connection to their Arab heritage. The presence of similar marriage practices in Lakshadweep supports this view. If these customs had originated from *Nāir* families, they would have influenced the inland regions of the *Māppila* community as well. The *Māppilas* have retained a unique and assertive identity shaped by their history and cultural interactions.

1.10.1 Nicknames

Māppilas use many terms to refer to their relatives.

- **Mother:** *Umma, Ummacci, Ummi*
- **Father:** *Bāppa, Uppa, Bāba*

- **Father's father:** *Valiyuppa, Bāppichi*
- **Father's mother:** *Valiyumma, Immamma*
- **Mother's father:** *Valiyuppa, Ippappa*
- **Mother's mother:** *Valiyumma, Immamma*
- **Younger Brother:** *Anthrōn, Aniyān, Anjan*
- **Elder brother:** *Jē□□an, Karnōr, Ikkāka*
- **Father's elder brother:** *Mūttāppa* (Mother's elder sister's husband is also called the same)
- **Father's younger brother:** *Elāppa* (Mother's younger sister's husband is also called the same)
- **Mother's younger sister:** *Elāma* (Father's younger brother's wife is also called the same)
- **Mother's elder sister:** *Mūttamma* (Mother's elder sister and father's great-grandmother's wife)
- **Father's sister:** *Ammāyi* (Maternal Uncle's wife is also called also called the same)
- **Husband of father's sister:** *Ammāyi Kākka*
- **Brother's wife:** *Nāthūn*
- **Sister's husband:** *Aliyan*
- **Husband's younger brother:** *Elēccan*
- **Wife's sister-in-law:** *Ilayacci, Elēcci*

Generally, older men are called *Kāka*, and older women are called *Tātta*.

1.10.2 Ulpam (Surname)

Among Muslims, ancestral names (family names) are generally absent in their culture. Like Arab countries, they usually use the father's name or tribe. The Arabs didn't follow a strong family naming tradition or a defined ancestral heritage. The ancestral names of the *Māppilas* have roots in local culture, like the *Nāir* family lineage, which signifies their development in this region. Historical records from the Malabar region up to the eighteenth century show no *Māppila* ancestral names. *Nāir* influences, such as matrilineality, are present in *Māppila* ancestral naming conventions. Many *Māppila* family names appear alongside *Nāir* and *Nambiār* names, showing that *Māppilas* couldn't adhere to ancient ancestral naming practices.

Māppilas descended from various castes and communities, and the pride and economic strength of present-day *Māppilas* reflect this rich heritage. Wealthier *Māppilas* gained recognition as prominent families, while less successful ones were marginalized. They raised their status by marrying into established families, enhancing their family prestige. The term "*Taravā*" for the *Māppila* family systems arose in the 19th century or later, marking a significant shift in their identity (K. K. Muhammed Abdul Sathar).

1.10.3 Māppila Names Tradition

Māppila names show the influence of Arabian and Persian cultures. They integrate Arabic or Persian names into their language. The name *Muhammad* is adapted in many ways by *Māppilas*, with variations like *Mammad*, *Mayammad*, and *Mammu*. Sometimes, the Malayalam word 'Kuññi' is added to names, creating *Mayamuññy* or *Mammuññy*. Adding 'Kuññ' results in names like *Kuññammad* and *Mammuññi*.

Jabir Bin 'Abdullah reported that a child was born to a person amongst us, and he gave him the name of *Muhammad*. Thereupon, his people said: "We will not allow you to give the name of *Muhammad* (to your child) after the name of Allah's Messenger (PBUH). He set forth with his son carrying him on his back and came to Allah's Apostle (PBUH), and said: Allah's Messenger a son has been born to me and

I have given him the name after the name of Allah's Messenger(PBUH), whereupon Allah's Messenger(PBUH)said: Give him my name but do not give him my kunya, for I am Qādhim in the sense that I distribute (the spoils of war) and the dues of Zakāt amongst you.” (Imam Muslim Ibn Al Hajjaj Al Naysaburi).

Two key considerations that guide the *Māppila* naming tradition are: avoiding names of gods from other communities and ensuring names lack negative meanings locally. They choose names from other languages and nature. *Māppila* adds Arabic words of local names like "*Dāsan*," as seen in 'Abdullah' or 'Abdur Rahman' (meaning servant of God).

1.10.4 Titles in *Māppila* Community

Māppila surnames are often shortened. Men who complete *Hajj* earn titles like *Hāji* or *Hājiyār*, while women are known as *Hajjumma*, though these are less common now. Nicknames, called *Ōmanappēr*, exist within families or among neighbors, like *Ku□□imōn*, *Kuññimōl*, *Kuññimōn*, *Ceriyāva*, *Ceriyōn*, etc. This naming pattern is also derived from regional tradition. In other Islamic contexts, personal names are often formed by adding titles such as *Abu* (father of), *Ummi* (mother of), or *Ibn* (son of). For example, the name *Abu Ahmed* means 'father of Ahmed'.

Māppilas also borrow names from Islamic history and prophets from Muslim scriptures, as names are also there in Christian and Jewish scripture, like *Isa* (Jesus) and *Nuh* (Noah), and *Yusaf* (Joseph).

1.11 *Māppila* Traditions' Influence on Place Names

In the Malabar region, many place names reflect the *Māppila* tradition. These names are tied to the rich culture of the *Māppilas*. For instance, *Musliyār A□□ādi* is named after the *Musliyār*, who is a *Madrassa* teacher or *Masjids* leader in the community. Another place, "*Hajiyārpati*," derives from the *Māppila* pilgrimage to Makkah called *Hajiyār*. Place names like *Puttanpalli* and *Pārappally* also have *Māppila* roots, often starting with 'Masjid'.

1.12 Māppila in other Community Ritual

The *Teyyam* community calls *Māppilas*, *Mādāyi Nagarē*, due to their presence at the historic *Mādāyi Masjids*. During the *Māppila Teyyam* performance, the *Māppilas* perform rituals similar to their worship. The *Teyyam* is called *Odapirappē* at these gatherings and receives blessings. The *Teyyam* blesses *Māppilas* for well-being in prayers, fasting, and daily rituals, highlighting the deep spiritual integration in *Māppila* life (R. C. Karipath).

The *Mampuram Taṅṅal* was influential in connecting communities through festivals. Devotees traveled to *Kaliyāṅṅa Kāvu*¹⁸, offering prayers and donations at *Muṅṅiyārapally*, a center founded by *Mampuram Taṅṅal*. They prayed for solutions to their problems, which illustrates the strong spiritual sharing practices in *Māppila* culture.

1.13 Māppila Rituals Performance

Every community has its special rituals that are like art forms. These rituals often feature music, group unity, unique facial expressions, and specific body movements, making them rich in artistic qualities. In the *Māppila* community, many rituals are seen as art. Faith connects art and rituals, and these traditions often come from local customs. They are influenced by the community's social surroundings and can differ from place to place. A ritual practiced in one location might not be found in another and may seem unfamiliar or unusual to outsiders. Over time, rituals evolve due to changing circumstances, needs, and beliefs. Therefore, it's important to consider the context in which a ritual was developed to truly understand it and the community it belongs to. *Māppilas*, being native to the region, have many religious customs and rituals, such as *Kutturātīb*, *Mawlid*, *Rātīb*, *Salāt*, *Qutubiyat*, *Khatam*, and *Wa'z*.

¹⁸ In the context of Kerala, India, "kavu" refers to a sacred grove. It's a protected area of natural vegetation, often associated with local deities or ancestral spirits, and plays a significant role in the cultural, religious, and ecological landscape of the state. Kavus are also known as *Sarpa Kavus* (Sacred Grove of the Serpent), particularly in Kerala.

1.13.1 Rātīb

Rātīb songs praise Islamic holy spirits and describe their qualities. These are performed with specific melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and gestures. Each Sufi group has unique *Rātīb*s, which include names of God, verses from the Quran, praises, and prayers given by the Sufi master. Disciples repeat these in a particular rhythm and mood. The word "*Rātīb*" means doing something repeatedly, and the belief is that such repetition brings spiritual rewards. The holy spirits praised can differ among various *Rātīb*s. A "*Murīd*" is the person who gives permission to perform a *Rātīb*, and it can only be conducted with their approval.

***Rifāi Rātīb* (Kutturātīb)**

Rifāi Rātīb or *Kutturātīb* is a specific type of *Rātīb* carried out in honour of □*eikh Rifāi*, □*eikh Abdul Abbas Ahmedul Kabeer Al Rifāi*, who founded the *Rifāi Tarīqa* (Irshad Thottumarathil). This ritual involves the use of weapons, setting it apart from regular *Rātīb*s. The name *Kutturātīb* combines the Malayalam word "*Kuttuka*," meaning to pierce, and the Arabic word "*Rātīb*," meaning repeating. The ritual begins with prayers, including the *Fātiha*, the first chapter of the Quran, and prayers honoring Prophet *Muhammad* and the Sufis. Hymns about the Prophet are chanted, and an instrument called the *Arabana* is played, creating a spiritually powerful atmosphere that elevates both performers and viewers. During the ceremony, performers use weapons to make self-inflicted wounds, believing that their *Guru*'s prayers will heal them through divine power. The main aim of *Kutturātīb* is to fulfill particular needs, such as removing diseases or bad omens, by invoking divine powers. It is typically performed at night in a house or *Masjid*, focusing on purifying the body and mind before praying to God. The *Arabana* or *Arawana* sets the rhythm for the ceremony, becoming even more sacred in the presence of devoted followers. Ritual forms like *Ancalmu*□□*u*, *Kōrimu*□□*u*, *Vārimu*□□*u*, or *Kalimu*□□*u* are also part of the performance. Hymns are recited uniquely, involving creative movements of the body, adding an artistic touch to the ceremony. In some areas, only the *Kalimu*□□*u* is performed. As hymns are chanted and the *Arabana* is played, performers enter a spiritual state called *Hādhir*, feeling

the Holy Spirit's presence. Weapons like *Katāram*, *Dappūs*, *Kathir*, and swords evoke strong emotions such as fear, worship, and respect. *Kutturātīb* is practiced in most of the regions in Malabar, while in South Kerala, it is not practiced except in *Bīma Masjid*. *Collu Rātīb* is a version of *Kutturātīb* without weapons.

Muhyiddīn Rātīb

Muhyiddīn Rātīb is a set of prayers practiced by *□eikh Muhyiddīn Abdul Qādir Gīlani*, a respected religious teacher. These prayers can be held in *Masjids* and homes. During this ritual, people continuously recite praises, known as *Dikrs*, in addition to other prayers like *Salāts* and *Tahlīls*¹⁹. These prayers mention the different qualities of Allah and are done in a musical manner. The notable aspect of *Muhyiddīn Rātīb* is the repetitive and lengthy recitations of these praises.

Rātīb al-Haddad

Rātīb al-Haddad is a collection of spiritual thanksgiving, or *Dikrs*, compiled by *Sayyid Abdullah ibn Alawi al-Haddad*, a prominent Islamic scholar from *Hadharamaut* in Yemen. In Malabar, devotees typically recite *Rātīb al-Haddad* following the evening *Isha* prayer.

Śāduli Rātīb

The *Śāduli Rātīb* holds popularity among followers of the *Śāduliyya Tarīqah*, a spiritual path established by *Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili*. This *Rātīb* features rhythmic verses and coordinated movements.

Jalāliya Rātīb

Jalāliya Rātīb was organized by '*Qutbuz zaman Sayyid Muhammed Mappilai Labbai Alim Valiyullahi*'. This *Rātīb* contains prayers and Quranic verses associated with the *Qadiriyyah Tarīqat*, aiming to attain spiritual purity and accomplishments.

¹⁹ A sect of Holly changings

1.13.2 *Salāt*

For *Māppila* believers, performing *Salāt* is important as it involves honoring Prophet *Muhammad*, which is seen as a virtuous act. There are various forms of *Salāt*, each intended to express love for the Prophet and seek God's blessings. Popular types of *Salāt* include *Salāt Tibb*, *Salātun Nāriya*, among others. In some gatherings, a combination of different *Salāts* is recited. A simple and well-known form among the *Māppilas* is

“*Sallallāhualā Muhammad,*

Sallallāhu Alaihiwa Sallam.”

Salāt Nāriyah

Salātu Nariyah is a prayer believed to help people achieve their goals quickly and overcome obstacles. This prayer is well-known in the Arab world, and reciting it 4444 times is said to bring desired results. It's often referred to as the "fire prayer" for its powerful effect.

1.13.3 *Mawlid*

Mawlid is a set of songs that praise the Prophet and are recited by groups in places like homes or *Masjids*. A leader guides the singing, and a musical instrument named the *Duff* was often used to keep the rhythm in earlier times. These songs are mostly sung during Prophet's Day, which celebrates the Prophet's birthday in the month of *Rabi-ul-Awwal*.

In Malabar, *Mawlid* came from Arabic folk culture and is also recited during *Māppilas'* house warming parties and special occasions. These recitations are part of small ceremonies lasting for hours, but typically don't use the *Duff*-like rhythmic instruments anymore in Kerala or Malabar. *Mawlid* ceremonies are held at homes to help improve the atmosphere, ward off illnesses, and change bad habits. People often make promises, or *Nērccas*, for specific reasons before performing *Mawlid*. These gatherings feature prose poetry about the Prophet *Muhammad* (PBUH) and usually occur on his birthday. They may also honour local saints.

Every year, the twelfth day of *Rabi' al-Awwal* marks the Prophet *Muhammad's* birth. On this day, people celebrate the *Mawlid* festival with joy. They recite Quranic verses, share stories of the Prophet's miracles, and share food. Most *Mawlid* songs consist of verses and prose, featuring Quranic words, names of prophets, prayers, and praises for holy men. They are put together in ten to twelve lines of verse with some prose, which can be sung. Common *Mawlids* in Kerala include *Manqūs Mawlid*, *Badr Mawlid*, and *Sharrafal Anām Mawlid*.

Manqūs Mawlid

Manqūs Mawlid is a well-known *Mawlid*. This *Mawlid*, which is commonly recited in our country, was composed by the great *Makhdūm* of *Ponnāni* over five hundred years ago. It is said that it was named *Manqūs* (meaning abbreviated) because it was shortened from the *Subhāna Mawlid*, which is about a thousand years old and was composed by the great *Imām Ghazzāli*. At one time, a strong Cholera epidemic spread in *Ponnāni* and its surroundings. Due to the continuous deaths, even the cremation of the dead was difficult. Seeing the scene of one death after another, all the locals were terrified, and their leader, *Zainuddīn Makhdūm*, approached them. He advised them to recite this *Mawlid*, which they had composed, from house to house and to have a meal. They heeded the advice of *Makhdūm*, and within a few days, the disease miraculously disappeared, and the life of the people returned to normal. Since then, *Manqūs Mawlid* has been the main remedy in all areas where infectious diseases have struck Kerala (U. M. Abdul Hasan Ponnani).

Badr Mawlid

Badr Mawlid celebrates Prophet *Muhammad's* victory in the Battle of *Badr*. This event happens on the 17th of *Ramadān*, tribute of the day of the battle. People gather in *Masjids* or homes to recite the *Mawlid* and share a meal. Hymns are sung to honor the soldiers of *Badr*, and Quranic verses are recited.

□ *arrafal Anām Mawlid*

□ *arrafal Anām Mawlid* celebrates love for the Prophet. It shares stories of the Prophet's conception, the blessings at his birth, and the miracles of that time.

There are also *Mawlid*s for local holy figures, called *Siddhās*. For example, the *Madavūr C. M Mawlid* is named after *Abū Bakr Maulvi*.

1.13.4 *Qutubiyat*

Qutubiyat is a monthly event in many *Masjids* and homes in the Malabar region. During this ceremony, "*Yā Gaus Yā Muhyiddīn*" is recited a thousand times with *Fātiha* and *Dikr*. This poem honors *Ghausul A'zam Muhyiddīn* □*eikh*. Each *Fātiha* pays tribute to the Prophet, Muslims, the Companions, angels, and *Jinn*²⁰.

The ceremony includes hymns and scriptures recited in a specific order. People stand and sing certain verses at specific parts. At a certain point, the lamps are turned off, completing the ceremony in darkness.

1.13.5 *Khatam Dua*

The *Khatam Dua* ceremony is also held here, as part of a tradition. *Khatam* involves reading the entire Quran out loud from start to finish. This is done when someone passes away, whether it's in their home, at their grave, or nearby. During the ceremony, you can smell sandalwood and camphor filling the houses and the hall where everyone gathers for the recitation.

1.13.6 *Wa'z* (Preaching)

Wa'z is a type of speech given to large audiences, focusing on stories from the hadiths, the lives of the Prophets, Islamic history, and various ideas. It sometimes discusses past conflicts that occurred during the spread of Islam. A *Wa'z* speech is like telling a story, where the speaker changes the loudness of their voice to keep listeners interested, combining both prose and verse. This speech style has a ritualistic aspect, and *Wa'z*, in particular, can create a sense of spiritual awe in those who listen.

In Kerala, skilled *Wa'z* speakers can draw large crowds, and their clothing often resembles that of priests. The flow and rhythm of the speech are crucial, as

²⁰ Supernatural Being in Islamic Belief

speakers vary their voice tones, making them louder or softer, longer or shorter, at specific times. This unique style is what makes Wa'z particularly popular with audiences. Traditionally, these speeches were most common during *Ramadān*, but now they can occur at any time to suit listeners' needs. Online Wa'z have also become quite common, making Wa'z accessible to even more people²¹.

1.14 Māppila Folk Arts

Māppila arts include literary, ceremonial, martial, household, material culture, and performance forms.

1.14.1 Māppilappāṭṭu

Māppilappāṭṭu is a key folk art of the *Māppilas*, representing their life and traditions. These songs are passed down orally and are an important part of their culture. They started as Arabic *Baits*, then became *Arabi-Malayalam Safīnappāṭṭu*, *Mālapāṭṭu*, evolving into *Māppila* songs.

Māppilappāṭṭu songs are embraced by the whole community and passed down through generations. They include songs for birth, naming ceremonies, marriages, and other life events. Like other indigenous groups, *Māppilas* use songs to express beliefs and traditions.

1.14.2 Mālapāṭṭu

Mālapāṭṭu is a collection of poems that honor scholars, great men, and brave individuals. These poems are mainly written by one or more poets. The first known example is *Mohyuddeen Māla* from 1607, the earliest *Māppilappāṭṭu* (V. P. Muhammdali). It is a devotional song by *Qādhi Muhammad* from Kozhikode, dedicated to *Muhyiddīn eikh*. In the Prophet's time, such songs existed in Arabia, and many poets wrote about his life. *Mālapāṭṭu* songs were sung to help with diseases, worries, daily problems, and financial troubles. They were recited to bring relief and hope.

²¹ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

Muhyiddīn Māla

MuhyiddīnMāla praises Saint *Muhyiddīn* □*eikh* from 1077 AD, a famous traditional song among *Māppilas*.

Two lines out of the *Mālapattu's* 300+ lines:

“*Kōyīntemullōdkūkennuconnāre*

Kūsāthekūkipparppichvittōvar”

Badr Māla

The *Badr Māla* honors the men who fought in the Battle of *Badr*, a significant conflict for *Māppilas*. It praises the bravery and virtues of the *Badr* martyrs.

Two lines from the *BadrMāl*:

“*Mannilpiranthuhayāttaayinikkunnāl*

Mannārbadarīnkalkāvalilēkallah”

Nafīsāt Māla

Nafīsāt Māla is a beloved song among *Māppila* women, named after a holy woman from the Prophet's lineage (*Nafīsāt Bīvi*), four generations down the line. This song is very important in their culture. Historically, pregnant *Māppila* women would sing *Nafīsāt Māla* to hope for an easier childbirth. When labor pains started, it was a tradition for another woman to sing *Nafīsāt Māla*. The belief was strong that by the time they finished the song, they could expect the baby to be born and hear its first cry. Because the song is named after a woman, it became an essential part of dealing with various women's issues. *Māppila* women often sang it in the evening during their pregnancy.

“*Shemithorusheerikkpettunombalampidithe*

Sheshikettrandunālvarebejārlnilathe

Samayaminthabeebi peril Nērcayekupathe

Saadiyammozhimudiyum mun aval pethe”

Rifāi Māla

The *Rifāi Māla* is a special type of *Māla* honoring a different *Guru*. In the *Tarīqa* group, each *□eikh* would have a *Māla* that followers made and sang. The *Rifāi Māla* is specifically dedicated to *Ahmed Rifāi*, who founded the *Rifāi Tarīqa*. The *Māppilas* use each *Māla* for specific purposes.

These songs, like the ones used in *Nērcas*, speak about holy figures and brave men who fought against groups like the British, the Portuguese, and local enemies. Examples include *Mālappuram Māla*, *Maññakulam Māla*, and *Mampuram Māla*.

1.14.3 *Padappāṭṭu*

The *Māppilas* have songs that tell stories of their struggles, battles, and holy wars. These songs describe their fights and boost their courage and excitement. Important battle songs include *Mālappuram Padappā□□u*, *Badr Padappā□□u*, and *Cērūr Padappā□□u*. These songs were crucial in motivating the *Māppilas* during their battles against invaders, giving them strength and determination in tough times.

“*Adipettkottippidittāro*

Adi tāliyummāleyaruthāro

Pidipettusinnimkadithāro

Picha Ca□□ayamkeerappedutāro”

1.14.4 *Qissappāṭṭu*

Qissa is an Arabic word that means story or narration, like *Qissappā□□u* recounts Muslim history, tales of prophets, and important historical events. Examples include *Ibrahim Qissappā□□u*, *Yusuf Qissappā□□u*, and *Sulaiman Qissa*.

1.14.5 *Kessupāṭṭu*

Kessupā□□u are love songs celebrating relationships, often between husband and wife, highlighting their affection. *Kessupā□□u* includes separation, love, affair, and family relations, also²².

²² Data taken from archival copy of *Malappāṭṭu*, *Kessupāṭṭu*, *Qissappāṭṭu*, *Nechappāṭṭu* etc. Copy included in Appendix.

1.14.6 *Kattupāṭṭu*

Kattupāṭṭu includes songs of love and sorrow, written as letters exchanged between partners, especially between husband and wife.

1.14.7 *Kalyānappāṭṭu*

There are many wedding songs like *Kaimuṭṭippāṭṭu*, *Mailānchipāṭṭu*, *Veṭṭilapāṭṭu*, *Oppanapāṭṭu*, *Pandalvarṭanakal*, *Appapāṭṭu*, *Ammayipāṭṭu*, *Vaineelampāṭṭu*, etc. *Māppila* weddings, known for their multi-day celebrations, include songs during events like *Mailānchi*, *Pudukkam Varavu*, and the groom's arrival. *Ābharanapāṭṭu* is another type of *Māppila* song.

Women's *Kaimuṭṭippāṭṭu*

In the past, women had a unique art form called *Kaimuṭṭippāṭṭu*, also known as *Kalikkārathikālude Kali*. This was a special type of wedding song. Typically, a group of eight to ten older women would form a circle, clap hands, and lean forward as they sang. They used a small metal instrument called a *Kiṭṭini* to add rhythm. The bride will be present during *Kaimuṭṭippāṭṭu*, and also for the henna ceremony. Sometimes, however, the bride would sit in the center on a chair while others sang around her. The performance included a lead singer and a chorus group. Many songs told stories of famous weddings, like those of the Prophet's daughter *Fātimah* and the Prophet's wives *Khadīja* and *Ayisha*. There was often friendly competition between the bride's choir and the groom's choir. A *Kolāmbi*²³ was placed in the circle's center, adding to the performance's energy. This type of singing was also called *Kolāmbipāṭṭu* by the *Māppilas*.

Finding talented singers was important, so wedding dates were chosen based on their availability. In parts of Malabar, singers sang loudly outside the room where the newlyweds sat. While men's *Kaimuṭṭippāṭṭu* was known as *Oppana*, women's *Kaimuṭṭippāṭṭu* was different. Over time, the women's version changed, eventually becoming known as *Oppana* and moving beyond just weddings.

²³ Spittoon

Men's Performance later evolved and was known as *Va□□apā□□u*. Initially, *Kaimu□□ippā□□u* songs combined Arabic and Malayalam languages, but later became more localized.

Men's *Kaimu□□ippā□□u*

Kaimu□□ipā□□u stands as the most developed art form in *Māppila* folklore, having undergone significant changes from its original style. Originally known as *Oppana*, it was a performance by men at weddings. The male singers formed a group called the *Kaimu□□ipā□□u Sangham*. There was no restriction on the number of such groups that could participate. During the wedding, two groups would position themselves on opposite sides of the hall to sing. One group would sing a line, and the other would repeat or respond to it. *Oppana* performance could last for several hours, and if the singers were in high spirits, they might perform continuously for an entire day and night. As the performance reached its high point, the singers would stand up and clap loudly, marking the moment when the groom was led to the *Ma□iyara*²⁴, a special room, amidst singing. Each group had a leader known as the *Mūppan*, who was responsible for both starting and concluding the song. Like other forms of folklore, the exact origins of *Kaimu□□ipā□□u* are unknown. The songs were typically performed in wedding houses and during *Māppila* celebrations, focusing on themes such as the marriage of the Prophet, Spittoon the stories of his companions, the marriage of the Prophet's daughter, as well as more contemporary marriage and reception scenarios.

“Tasrifummu-Bāarakadārawaye Nabi Ummatimārḳ

Tānamānitham ĀnamaayeemeleyanabiUmmatimārḳ”

Many actions caused some *Māppilas* to dislike *Kaimu□□ipā□□u*. This led them to split into two groups. Some groups stopped singing *Kaimu□□ipā□□u*, and because of this, they couldn't join weddings that featured it. Another group decided to keep singing *Kaimu□□ipā□□u* at weddings anyway. As disagreements over *Kaimu□□ipā□□u* grew among the *Māppilas*, more people chose not to attend

²⁴ Decorated room for newly wedded couples.

weddings where it was sung. Over time, *Kaimu* changed a lot, losing its special style. Its new version is now sung at youth festivals called *Va*. However, the original *Kaimu* is no longer performed in its traditional way.

1.14.8 *Oppana*

Oppana is a lively performance by young *Māppila* women. They surround the bride, leaning on her, and sing *Oppana* songs. Originally, the men's version of *Kaimu* was also known as *Oppana*. The performance involves one person starting a line and others repeating parts of it. Everyone claps in rhythm, moving hands up, down, and sideways, creating a blissful setting. *Oppana* includes a slower section called *Cāyal*, gradually speeding up with faster clapping (*Murukam*). Traditionally, *Māppila* women wore folk costumes during *Oppana*, with groups of eight to ten. It's seen as a modified version of women's *Kaimu*. The themes from *Oppana* and women's *Kaimu* were often similar. Today, *Oppana* has broad appeal, though it has lost some original style, and is now enjoyed by different communities at weddings, art fairs, and public events.

1.14.9 *Kōlkali*

Kōlkali is a traditional art form from the *Māppila* community, consisting of martial arts and music. Over time, it has lost its original context and is mostly performed at youth festivals today. Both ordinary *Māppilas* and working *Māppilas* enjoy martial arts and entertainment. Traditionally, it was performed at weddings and celebrations with accompanying music. Though its exact origins are unclear, the songs tell tales of heroes from *Māppila* folklore and Arabi-Malayalam poems. It's similar to a local dance called *Kōlā*. Typically, participants use sticks made of *Cilamb*, but preferences can vary. The *Guru*, or leader, plays a significant role in the performance, and physical training is essential. The style can differ based on the region and the *Guru*'s personal techniques.

1.14.10 Kalaripayattu

In *Kalaripaya*, the *Māppila Kalari* style is unique compared to others. It is a vital martial art for the *Māppila* community. The origin of *Kalaripaya* has various tales, and according to the *Māppila* version, it started in *Khurasān*, a region in Iran known for training warriors. These warriors practiced a martial art similar to *Kalaripaya*. Due to ancient trade links, people from *Khurasān* likely introduced these practices to the *Māppilas* in Malabar long ago (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

The *Māppilas* have tailored some elements of *Kalari* while preserving cultural traditions. The local community has had a major impact on the *Kalari* style. They set up many training spaces along the west coast. Different techniques were taught, namely *Nālpātīra Kalari*, *Pantīra Kalari*, *Patineiradi Kalari*, and *Muppatīradi Kalari*. *Nedum Kalari* is about fighting solo against a big enemy group. *Aṅga Kalari* is for dueling, *Ceru Kalari* for healing, and *Toṅu Kalari* is for teaching *Marma* points. *Kuru Kalari* includes exercises for secret warfare.

Each *Kalari* had *Māppila* practitioners, many of whom gained fame for their skills. New *Māppila Kalari* styles emerged, such as *Meittāri*, *Ankattāri*, *Keṅutāri*, *Veṅutāri*, *Muccān Vadi*, *Kuruvadi*, and *Puliyankappayat*. A significant performance in *Kalari* is *Kōtāri Aṅgam*, mastered by *Māmu Gurukkal*. *Māmu Gurukkal* is also the lead teacher at the *Shāfi Dawakhāna Kalari* medical center, specializing in accident recovery.

Today, there are only a few *Māppila Kalari Saṅgham* (teams) left. In small *Kalari* and *Thodu Kalari*, the focus is mainly on therapy, while other groups have moved. The *Curakodi Saṅgha* in *Celavūris* is one of the few remaining *Māppila Kalari Saṅghams*.

1.14.11 Arabanamuttu

The *Arabana* is a drum made from goat skin, and it's a significant part of Arab culture. This is why it's known as '*Arabana*'. The name reflects its Arab roots. There are two main styles of playing *Arabana*: *Kalimu* and *Rātīb Muṅṅu*. To play, musicians produce sounds called *Ñōṅṅu*, *Taṅṅu*, *Viral*, *Tallu*, *Tarippu*, *Ullu*,

Maripuram, and *Thiriññakam*. Before a performance begins, there is a respectful greeting to the Prophet. The songs performed cover various themes such as *Baits*, religious topics, legends, love stories, and conflicts. During a performance, the musicians are divided into two groups that face each other. A *Ustād*, or leader, starts singing in Arabi-Malayalam, and the other players join in. As they sing together, the music gradually becomes faster and more intense. Performers also add unique sounds by tapping their wrists, noses, shoulders, and other parts of their bodies, or by chanting "Allah" in a special tone. The *Arabana* is essential for special ceremonies like *Kutu Rātīb*, where songs are sung in time with the *Arabana*'s rhythm.

1.14.12 Cīnimuṭṭum Viliyum

Cīnimuṭṭum Viliyum is also known as *Muṭṭum Viliyum*, is an ancient art form using an instrument called the *Māppila ṭahnai* for music. It is a large double-reed oboe-like instrument, which is a popular north Indian instrument. It uses *Orraccenṭa* and *Muras* for rhythm and is popular in events like *Nērccas* due to its melodious nature. A special performance, *Peṭṭivaravu*, was integral to *Nērccas*, exemplified by *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca*. Instruments like *Orraccenṭa* and the smaller *Muras*²⁵ were once commonplace in Malabar. The *Chīni*²⁶, or *Māppila ṭahnai* player, is essential, performing well-known Hindustani and Carnatic *Rāgas*. *Chīnimuṭṭu* is also known as 'Pallikaṭṭu' and 'Alōnmār'.

1.14.13 Paricamuṭṭu

Paricamuṭṭu is very close to *Paricakali*, but has a few small differences. It is tied to *Kalari* training and represents the traditional art of the *Māppila* community. In performances, songs are performed in Arabi-Malayalam, and a *Guru* with twelve artists participates. The *Guru* stands in a circle, guiding and motivating the participants. It starts with movements by *Cavidikkeṭṭu* and *Mukkaṭṭi*, with terms like *Amartiyum* and *Terut* from the *Murukkam* language. Dance steps move

²⁵ A percussion instrument like *Cenṭa*

²⁶ A wind musical instrument like a clarinet

inside and outside, following a four-beat rhythm. The songs are similar to hymns with *Viruta*. Originally, this was a big attraction at *Māppila* weddings, serving as significant entertainment.

1.14.14 *Duff*

The '*Duff*' is a simpler form of the *Arabana* and has been well-known in Central Asia and Europe for ages. It is played with Arabic songs or verses, involving body movements like kneeling and intricate footwork. The *Duff* is lighter than the *Arabana*, and the *Māppila* community uses it in celebrations. Legend says that people played the *Duff* to welcome the Prophet to Madinah. It was common in *Sunnah* weddings and ceremonies like *Nikāh*. Variations include *Orra mu□□u*, *Moonu mu□□*, *Anj mu□□u*, *Ezhu mu□□u*, etc. Before Islam reached Kerala, the *Duff* was already a popular instrument in Arabia, praising prophets and saints and telling miraculous stories about heavenly spirits. A known verse includes:

“Yā Nabi SalāmAlaikum,

YārasulSalāmAlaikum,

YāhabibSalāmAlaikum,

SalawātullahAlaikum.” (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil).

The *Duff* was first used to show respect and give greetings to the Prophet *Muhammad*. People performed physical movements like sitting, reclining, bending, and moving to the left, right, forward, and backward. Originally, people sang Arab *Baits*. Over time, they also began to sing hymns and religious music alongside the *Bait*.

1.14.15 *Dufli*

The *Dufli* is like a mini-*Duff*, used in special ceremonies in certain Malabar areas. It was common in places like Ervadi and parts of Malappuram and played similarly to the *Duff*.

1.14.16 *Taññappāṭṭu*

In *Taññappāṭṭu*, a *Uppāpa* or old man goes door to door, singing and knocking. He is sometimes called a *Fakīr* or *Fakīran*, wearing old clothes and carrying a *Duff* or *Arabana*, with a green collection box resembling a *Masjid*. His visits aim to collect donations for specific *Masjids*. His look is different from usual *Māppila* attire, following the North Indian Sufi style, with many pearl necklaces and rings in copper and silver. His messy look and long beard suggest he has been on many travels. He visits *Masjids* like *Nāgūr* and *Ullāl* to gather *Nērccas*.

1.15 *Māppila Malayalam*

The *Māppila* language grew from social interactions within the community. It includes proverbs, idioms, songs, stories, and customs. This language combines Arabic words with cultural terms and ensures close communication in the community. Compared to others, it allows better social interaction within the *Māppilas*. Many Arabic words are included, along with borrowed words from Malayalam. Arabi-Malayalam was the first written form, combining Arabic, Persian, Malayalam, Tamil, and Kannada, often understood better by *Māppilas* than pure Malayalam. Strong Arab influence led to many words mixing into Malayalam (Jameel Ahammed). Words like *Barkat*, *Bējār*, *Khudrat*, and *Halāq* are commonly used. *Māppila* sentences often contain Arabic expressions and cultural references, with some words uniquely understood only within the *Māppila* community, using terms like '*Masjid*' and '*Mollākka*' along with specific *Māppila* words.

1.16 *Māppila Architecture*

Māppila architecture is special for its unique style of building homes, *Masjids*, and other structures. It stands out from other architectural traditions. In Malabar, houses often look similar to local designs on the outside, but inside, they might have prayer rooms, especially in wealthier homes. Nowadays, one can mostly see *Māppila* culture in *Masjids* and *Makhāms*. *Māppila* houses are different because they don't have places like *Tulsi Tara* or *Pūja rooms*. In older homes, the prayer room was usually in the *Ummara Veranta*, though not all modern houses have one.

When constructing *Masjids*, there is a slight orientation towards the west. The *Imām*²⁷, the prayer leader, faces west inside the *Masjid*. There is also a large area for *Wudu* (ablution), and some *Masjids* have a shared *Wudu* area for this purpose, known as a *Masjid* pool. On Fridays and special occasions, there is a platform called a "*Mimbar*" facing east for delivering sermons. *Masjids* feature large domes and tall minarets, which are noticeable from far. The design of these elements shows Indo-Saracenic influence with features like *Takiyāvu* and *Srāmbia*. Smaller prayer spaces like *Srāmbia* do not have large minarets or domes (C. T. Basheer).

1.17 Calligraphy

In *Māppila* culture, you won't find many statues or images. This is because Islamic history doesn't emphasize images. Monotheism, the worship of one God, is a core belief in Islam. When Islam began, it was suggested to avoid icons or statues to prevent them from becoming idols (Charles Alexander Innes). However, *Māppilas* showcase their creativity through decorations found in the interiors of *Masjids* and other architectural elements.

“Abu Huraira (RA) narrates: The one who is addicted to wine is like one who worships idols” (Muhammed ibn Yaseed ibn Majah).

Calligraphy is an area where *Māppilas* are deeply interested. This passion might be influenced by the special handwriting style used in the Quran, which makes it distinct from other writings. Today, these traditional ideas are evolving, with people exploring new ways to appreciate and incorporate *Māppila* art and architecture.

1.18 Traditional Practices from Birth to Funeral Rites

There remains a tradition among the *Māppilas* of *kūttikkonduvaral* (fetching) the pregnant wife to her home in the seventh month of pregnancy. For this tradition, a group will go to the husband's house. The bride's parents would be taking many sweets when they go for this. Those include *Māppila* traditional sweets and bread of

²⁷ Preachers in the *Masjid* who led the prayer.

various types, such as *Kiṭṭattappam*, *Caṭṭi Pattiri*, *Muṭṭa Mariccat*, *Pancārappāta*, *Halwa*, *Muṭṭamāla*, *Kirdān* etc. The family of the wife does it traditionally, and they offer it to the family and neighbours. Several relatives visit the pregnant woman with sweets, which are distributed to the relatives also. Malabar refers to this as the *Pallakānal* ceremony. It was taken from matriarchal traditions. The bride would be given sweets, new garments, and a visit from the groom's mother and other relatives. This ancient ceremony is referred to as *Pallakānal*.

When a baby is born, the baby is first held in the hands of the father, the grandfather, or the guy who is nearest to the newborn baby does this. And for baby boys, *Adhān*²⁸ and *Iqāmat*²⁹ are recited, whereas for girls, *Adhān* is recited. When a child is born for the first time, the elders will give *Zamzam*³⁰ water to the infant. This responsibility is also carried out by the father or other elderly family men. The hair of the baby will be shaved on any odd day after the seventh day after birth. This is usually done on or before day twenty-one. The *Māppila* carry out this activity as a grand event; the wealthy family children wear a waist chain and garlands of gold or silver. Name-calling and hair removal formerly occurred on the same day, but this has changed. Black cords were usually wrapped around children's waists by ordinary *Māppilas*. The rich families' tradition of sacrificing *Aqīqat*³¹ goats, calves, etc., coincides with naming and shaving the children and redistributing them among the communities. It is part of the *Māppila* ritual. The dead cow or goat skin ought to be sold, and its money donated to the poor from within the same local area.

²⁸ The Islamic call to prayer, recited by a muezzin to announce the time for one of the five daily obligatory prayers. It is a melodious call, traditionally delivered from a *Masjid's* minaret or doorway. The adhan serves as a reminder for Muslims to leave worldly affairs and attend to their prayers.

²⁹ The second call to prayer in Islam, recited immediately before the start of the congregational prayer (*salah*). It serves as a signal to those already in the *Masjid* that the prayer is about to begin and that they should prepare to line up for the *salah*.

³⁰ Holy Water

³¹ *Aqiqah* is an Islamic tradition where an animal (usually a sheep or goat) is sacrificed to celebrate the birth of a child. It's a Sunnah (recommended but not obligatory) practice, typically performed on the seventh day after birth, but it can be done later if needed. The meat from the sacrifice is then shared with family, friends, and those in need.

Clothes, dishes, money, sweets, and other objects were given to the woman who is serving the mother and infant during the time of the children's hair removal. Along the same line, money or gold, depending on the child's hair weight, is also offered to the barber who cuts off the child's hair. The bride's home is where the baby was born. In the morning and evening, the mother and infant are both bathed in lukewarm water.

The newly postpartum women are bathed in ayurvedic oils and medications. After being bathed, the kid is kept on the left side of the mother and recites the verse of *Āyatul Kursi* from the Holy Quran. When the *Māppilas* cradle the child, they play their own traditional lullaby. The song narrates stories of sons and heroes while singing. While sleeping, a small iron rod is kept beside the bed, believing that this will protect the kid from the evil eye. For forty days following the delivery, a woman avoids contributing to religious rituals. The *Nālpasukuli*³² is a special bath taken by the women on the 40th day of delivery, after which they return to their normal lives. Dress and cash were provided to the lactating mother by the guests on that occasion. If that is not sufficient, they may reward the lactating mother with money also. After that occasion, new clothes and other items were given to the women who offered the nursing service. The resources nowadays are not the same. Annually, the ladies who carried out the nursing service visited those houses and were rewarded in terms of gifts or commodities.

The mother and child are brought to their father's house after *Nālpasukuli*. If the child is a boy, *Sunnat Kalyānam* (circumcision) is performed at a young age. Circumcision boy, known as *Puyāpla* or *Puthiyāppila*. In affluent families, it is a reason for great jubilation. Two weeks after the *Sunnat Kalyānam*, it is traditional to take the *Puyāpla* to the *Masjid* on a Friday for *Jumua*³³. According to *Sunnah*, friends and neighbours come to visit the *Puyāpla* with numerous gifts, and healthy foods such as eggs and fruits. They may also provide large amounts of money.

³² A postpartum custom practiced by mother on the 40th day of delivery.

³³ Jumu'ah (also spelled Juma or Jummah) refers to Friday, a sacred day in Islam, known as the "Day of Assembly" or "Day of Congregation". It's when Muslims gather for communal prayer, known as the jumua prayer.

Sunnat Kalyāṅam is being celebrated among *Māppilas* nowadays also. But in different parts of Kasargod, it is celebrated like a big festival.

If the girls are slightly older, the *Kātukutt Kalyāṅam* is complete, and invitations are being printed. There are other local traditions also for the wedding feasting, first feasting, and fasting feasting. If a girl is getting married, the girls' parents will visit her husband's house, or *Aduppkānal*³⁴. Besides, there are a number of ceremonies. Marriage is another important ceremony.

1.18.1 Marriage

Māppilas are likely to adhere to the patrilineality system. Some follow the matrilineality. This system may have been derived from Arab customs, which one can observe in the Muslims living in Kayalpattinam and the coastal regions of Yemen (K. E. N. Kunjahammed).

When a *Māppila* girl reaches marriage age, her family and father search for a suitable groom, approach the groom's parents, and express their desire. Similarly, the boy's family, who followed patrilineal, also found him a suitable bride. If both the bride's family and the groom's family are well acquainted with each other, and the socio-economic levels of both families are known, a suitable date is presented to the bride's parents. The male sections, i.e., the groom's father's elder brothers and elder brothers of the groom, go to the bride's house and, after consulting the bride's father, father's elder brothers, and elder family relatives, decide to get engaged on a specific day. After that bride's family visits the groom's house on the day of the engagement. The bride's father and other men of the bride's family visit the groom's house, and the bride's and groom's fathers and elder males fix the wedding date after consulting their fathers' brothers and other men.

Earlier, it was also a practice to decide the dowry to be given to the girl who was about to get married based on the wealth of her parents. It is given in the form of gold and the bride's land. There was a practice of not completing the marriage if

³⁴ A custom practiced by family of newly wedded bride.

the dowry was not provided. But this practice was later abandoned. The prayer of the religious scholar seals the ceremony in case the marriage is arranged. In early times, there were special gifts and sweets provided to the bride's family later. Meat, *Pattiri* rice, and meat are provided by the wealthy *Māppila* (K. E. N. Kunjahammed). Nowadays, becoming engaged is a ceremonial ritual. Earlier, there was a ritual in which the *Musliyār*³⁵ would go to the bride's house after the engagement and request her consent to get married. This practice is hardly followed these days.

A wedding will be conducted only with the bride's permission. Five, seven, or nine people, including the groom, the groom's sisters, and other female relatives, go to the bride's home and gift her with dresses, chocolates, sweets, etc. *Māppilas* from wealthy families will either leave a necklace of gold or a gold ornament to adorn the bride. *Valayidal* is the name of this ceremony, which is done even today. But today, the *Valayidal* ceremony is done first, and is named as *Mi□□ai Kodukkal*. Now, this also depends on the state of the economy, food offered to the bride's family.

Early time *Māppila* weddings were commonly held on Mondays, Thursdays, and Sundays, and on Fridays along the coastal areas. The bride's and groom's parents have previously invited neighbours, relatives, and members of other groups to the weddings. The principal dishes were large bowls of Beef curry or Chicken curry and rice. These were used to eat with seven to nine people.

In rich families, *Māppila* weddings are a reason to celebrate. The groom and his group leave for the bride's house at noon on the wedding day. Carts and canoes were used, whether the bride's house was close by or reachable on foot, or whether the people came from far. There will be flambeau or paraffin lamps if traveling at night. The groom will be dressed in white attire on the big day (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil). The *Nikāh* is a significant *Māppila* wedding ceremony. The *Nikāh* ceremony will be performed from either the bride's house or the *Masjid*. The *Nikāh*

³⁵ A religious figure respected by the *Māppilas*

of the poor family was done only at the *Masjid*. In front of the guests, the groom hands over the *Mahr* to the bride's father. During the *Nikāh* ceremony, the father will present his hands to the groom. Father or close relative of the bride and two witnesses are obligatory for *Nikāh*. According to the bride's demand, the *Mahr* may be remitted in different forms, such as gold, silver, or cash. The groom is then given complete authority over the bride by her father. In the presence of the *Imām* or *Qādhī* of the *Masjid*, the marriage is registered; this practice started after the Kazis Act, 1880. The groom was otherwise referred to as *Putiyāpla* following *Nikāh*.

The most distinctive feature of *Māppila* weddings was the wedding song. The bride is seated on a platform, and elderly women go around clapping and singing wedding hymns. The bride's family accorded the groom's father's family the highest respect. Wedding songs are sung once all the participants have been given a betel leaf and have accepted it. Nowadays, it is not practiced³⁶. The bride was known as "*Vīar*" and the groom as "*Māppila*".

The bride wears the wedding attire brought by the bride's father's sisters, nieces, and other women. Wedding attire worn by the bride includes *Pāurumāl*, *Kāccittu*, *Cappakupāyam*, etc. The bride is then decorated with jewelry and wears six *Aliqats* in the left ear and seven in the right ear. *Anantakot* and *Kuduma*, *Pandirand Mani*, *Kompan* and *Nīla Kompan*, and *Kātil* were among the traditional attire. Women belonging to the *Māppila* community would adorn their necks with necklaces such as the *Ati Māla*, *Kada Māla*, *Nandukara Māla*, *Mūnnām Tālimāla*, *Chavti Māla*, *Rushikovu Māla*, *Chett Māla*, and *Muattāli Māla*. Bangles such as the *Anikundamvala* and *Pirivala* were worn on the hands. On the foot, *chalappattam* was utilized. The *Arapa* nowadays was replaced by *Thālipūt*, *Komp*, and *Tāli*. Subsequently, the bride is placed on a pedestal as wedding hymns are being recited. Traditional wedding songs were also written and passed on from generation to generation. Earlier, *Māppila* sang their wedding songs in Arabi-Malayalam.

³⁶ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

The groom used to reside at the bride's house in various regions of northern Kerala, Kozhikode, Kuttichira, and parts of Kannur. The bride's brother visits the groom's house after dusk and takes the groom to the bride's house. The groom is known as *Putiyāpla* in this area. *Putiyāpla* is offered bread and items similar to *Māppila* food at the bride's house. The bride's house will then offer rice and meat. The bride is then taken into the *Ma□iyara* by the family women. Next, the groom enters the *Ma□iyara*. The bride also brings cow's milk in a *Piññā□am*. The bride gets the rest of the cow's milk after the groom has drunk some of it. *Putiyāpla* will give silver or gold coins in the *Piññā□am*. The bride's mother is given the right to this coin. Outside *Ma□iyara*, elderly women play wedding songs. Here, it was necessary that the marriage box be held by the groom. It includes materials like *Kasavucarad*, *Suruma*, *Attar*, *Kācittu□i*, *Pā□□urumāl*, and white cloth, among others (P. P. Mammed Koya Parappil). Even today, new additions are being made to these traditions.

1.18.2 Patient Care and Visitation

Māppilas consider the visitation of the sick and offering them comfort as a noble practice, and they also attempt to render financial assistance to those who are economically disadvantaged. Old patients are given careful attention by their kin. The daily lives of the ill are preserved with care. In the event of the deterioration of a patient's health, *ZamZam* (Holy water) with a little honey is applied to the lips, a practice known as *Sakarātum Vellam*. At this juncture, older kin pray the words "*Lāilāha Illallā Muhammad Rasūlallā*"³⁷ orally, which the patient is persuaded to repeat. The visitation of the sick and the offering of comfort are considered virtuous behaviour by the *Māppilas*. Traits such as the visitation of the sick, financial assistance when required, sharing of resources, and acknowledgment of caregivers are indicative of *Māppila* culture.

1.18.3 Funeral Rites

When a person is on the deathbed, the family members rub the patient's feet to console him. After passing away, the deceased's eyes and mouth are both sealed,

³⁷ Holly Verses for Chanting

and the chin and head are tied together with a piece of cloth. The body is then put in the centre of the house on a mat. The body is directed to the east and west. The news is then reported to the locals, relatives, and relations. There is a tradition in some areas of Malabar of tying a microphone and announcing over the area. The deceased body is placed for bathing once loved ones and well-wishers come. After soaking in warm water, the body is wrapped in a particular cloth. Henna, frankincense, perfume, and other substances are applied. Men are given three pieces of clothing, while ladies are given two pieces of clothing and a *Niskāra Kuppāyam*³⁸. Collective prayer is led by the *Imām*. The dead person's body is carried to the *Masjid* on a wooden cot. In the *Masjid*, a *Rak'at*³⁹ *Salāh* is recited in front of the deceased person's body. Sons or close family members should take the lead in this. The *Masjid's Khatīb* will take the lead if they are unable to or are not there. The dead body is taken to the *Masjid* crematory after the prayer. They say "*Lā ilāha illallāh*" to the mourners before the body, and the ones at the back respond accordingly. Directing the deceased body towards the north and south directions, the dead body is lowered slowly into the grave. The *Mīzān*⁴⁰ stone and flowers are put on the foot and head after covering the grave with the stone. After the burial, family members wash their feet, proceed to the house of the deceased, and recite the verses of the Holy Quran. Three consecutive days were devoted to this. It is a custom to perform *Kannūk* three days after death. On the third day after death, the eye of the deceased individual is lost. That is the reason for the ceremony. On this day, individuals provide their relatives and friends with rice and meat. There are others who perform it more days. It's up to the financial capability of the family how many guests are invited. Food is served, and a blessing is performed on the anniversary of death.

³⁸ During the prayer (Namaz), Muslim women are generally expected to wear modest clothing that covers their entire body except for their face and hands. This dress code, known as hijab, is considered a form of modesty and protection, and it's often observed in *Masjids* and during prayer time

³⁹ A single unit of prayer within the Muslim salah(prayer)

⁴⁰ A stone specially designed for placing on the grave

If the husband is deceased, women used to spend four months and four days observing *Eiddat*⁴¹. It is forbidden to leave the house, speak with other males, or be visible during certain times. Every day is devoted to prayer and Quranic recitation. It is not appropriate to overhear their chats outside. Following the *Eiddat* ceremonies, *Māppila* women are permitted to remarry.

1.19 Mahallu System

Mahallu is the local spiritual and intellectual centre of the *Māppilas*. A *Masjid* is its focal point at all times. The *Mahallu* directions will be followed for all of the *Māppilas'* festivals and rituals. A *Mahallu* leader would be the *Qādhi*. According to *Qādhi's* directions, festivals like Eid and religious practices like the *Ramdān* fast are started and conducted in the *Mahallu*. At the death of a *Māppila*, his cremation and follow-up ceremonies are conducted in the *Mahallu*. The *Nikāh* ceremony of a *Māppila* is conducted and legitimized as well in the *Mahallu*. In some particular cases, *Mahallus* serve as institutions for the settlement of disputes by mediation. Here, *Jumua* is an extremely important tradition of *Māppila*. Every Friday all *Māppila* under the *Mahallu* will gather in *Mahallu Central Masjid* for *Jumua*.

1.20 Kurikkalyāṅam

A good example of interdependence and social support in the life of *Māppila* is *Kurikkalyāṅam*. Individuals with limited resources who have a financial crisis can prepare an invitation letter for *Kurikkalyāṅam* on a particular day at their house, or one of the shops around the crossroads. Many people are invited for *Kurikkalyāṅam*. Guests are offered tea and snacks. Attendees will be part of the *Kuri* of the donor who contributed what he could. The money may be used to assist the individual who arranged the *Kurikkalyāṅam* with their financial struggles. The amount of money contributed by each individual will be noted by *Kurikkalyāṅam's* scribe. The giver of the money should be reimbursed by the payee with an amount

⁴¹ Eiddatin Muslim law is a mandatory waiting period observed by a Muslim woman after her marriage dissolves, either through her husband's death or divorce. It ensures certainty of paternity and allows the woman to mourn her husband's death or divorce.

equal to or more than what was given to him in case the giver ever performs such a *Kurikkalyā*□*am*.

Although *Kurikkalyā*□*am* is no longer practiced, *Māppilas* still give money according to this model of *Kurikkalyā*□*am* while marrying the daughters of a person or during a housewarming, who is economically struggling.

There are authors who are especially tasked with sending out cards such as this, in order to invite weddings in coastal areas like Tanur. These authors are tasked with sending out wedding invitations, receiving wedding invitations, and recording the amount received by those who attend the wedding. For this, they receive payment. In coastal areas, it is still prevalent. Presently, a letter costs approximately 7 rupees on average. This needs lots of hard work to be done. Just like that, in this place, some people have turned the invitation to weddings into a profession.

Ossāns Kurikkalyā□*am* is different from this one. *Ossāns* get the chance to have *Kurikkalyā*□*am* each year. A letter with the information about the annual *Kurikkalyā*□*am* time and venue will be sent to everyone. They have to provide tea and snacks to the guests. There will be arrangements to receive the money and record the amounts given by the guests. Individuals may give the amount they can give according to their financial status. The *Ossāns* do not have to pay back any more *Kurikkalyā*□*am* money that they received through *Kuri*. That is the way that *Ossān's Kurikkalyā*□*am* is different from other *Kurikkalyā*□*am*. Nobody paid the *Ossāns* when they shaved and trimmed the beards and hairs of ordinary people or cleared their nails. They were fed by the people when they came to homes, which was the only type of wage. Maybe that is why a *Kurikkalyā*□*am* became their rightful claim (N. P. Hafis Muhammed).

1.21 The *Māppila* Community within the Arts and Traditions of other Cultures

As *Māppilas* adopted rituals from local traditions, there are instances where local traditions were influenced by the *Māppila* community. The rituals and arts of Malabar Hindu communities have engaged the *Māppila* community most among all the other communities. The Malabar *Māppilas* had a very friendly relationship with

the lives of other people here, as compared to other regions of Kerala. It determines the day-to-day life of temples and Sacred Groves, fixing the festival dates, providing God ornamentation, and providing the equipment required to prepare offerings in temples, and selecting the temple priests, etc. Malabar has plenty of such examples. All the elements of local rural life reflect the influence of *Māppila* culture. It shows the friendship that exists between these groups and the *Māppilas*. The *Māppila* community was provided a place by its legends and rituals. This is the clearest evidence that they respected and believed in the *Māppilas* as brothers. Malabar's *Māppila Teyyam* employs terms like "*O□apirannōnē, Kū□epirappē*" to call passionately to their brothers.

1.21.1 *Māppila Teyyams*

Kōyi Mammad Teyyam: This has a legend. The wind and rain have destroyed *Mauvvenikōlōt*. The Sacred Grove and staircase must be rebuilt. There was a man named "*Mammad*" who travelled to *Ko□malakkā□* to chop wood. According to local legend, *Mammad* went to a place where *Phalacāmu□□i* lived, where nobody dared go near, and when he was cutting down a tree, the tree fell and killed *Mammad*. The villagers were saddened, and the *Perumka□iyārs* found a solution. From that day, they concluded that *Mammad* is God, because he has been devoted to God. The *Teyyam* will perform like *Māppila* rituals, take *Wudu*, and provide an *Adhān*. *Teyyam* will pray with a sword and shield on May 28 every year. The *Teyyam* is bound by the *Mavila* community.

Kalantan Mukri Teyyam: This blessed and divine *Teyyam* is worshipped by a large number of devotees. That is *Kalantan Mukri Teyyam*. Regardless of caste or religion, *Kalantan Mukri* was a *Mukri*⁴² who drowned in the river while preparing for a festival in the temple in the area. The entire country mourned. *Perumka□iyār* visited to offer healing. It is predicted that *Kalantan Mukri* must become a *Teyyam* because God loves him. That is *Kalantan Mukri Teyyam*.

⁴² A caretaker of the Masjid

Āli Teyyam or Ālicāmu□□i Teyyam: It is performed in *Kumpalanā□u* at *Ariko□□ikāvu*, on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of the *Mīnam*⁴³. *Āli Māppila* was attracted to *Na□□ēli*, *Nāir's* daughter, in anticipation of meeting her. *Nāir* prayed to *Bhagwati* to save his daughter. Then *Āli Māppila* was stabbed by *Bhagwati*. Then, unpleasant events occurred in *Ariko□□ikāvu*. So, *Bhagwati* told her to ask for forgiveness in prayer. Having forgiven, *Āli* turned into God and celebrated as *Teyyam*.

Bappiriyān Teyyam: It is a type of *Teyyam* comprising multiple *Kāvu Teyyams*, as different from other *Māppila Teyyams*. *Bappiriyān Teyyam* myths are connected to Goddess *Āryanpūnkunni*. *Bappiriyān* is worshiped by all the goddess's devotees. According to another myth, *Gan□abomma*, a sea merchant *Māppila*, who fought enemies on the seas and passed away heroically, became "*Babibiri*". *Babibiri* is connected with several *Kāvus* in *Tulunādu*.

Pa□a Māla Nāir Teyyam: The courageous and noble *Nāir* soldier, *Pa□amāla Nāir*, was punished for something he did not commit. He was assassinated as per the order of the king. He converted to *Māppila* before his death. Then he became a *Teyyam*.

Neityāramma Teyyam: On *Mēdam*⁴⁴ 16th and 17th of every year, *Neityāramma Teyyam* is also performed along with the *Teyyams* held in the *Kakāt* temple. In southern Kerala, *Māppila* ladies are also known as *Neityār* as a term of respect. The *Neityār Teyyam* was *Ayishumma*, a *Māppila* lady.

Yōggyār Akambādi Teyyam: The '*Yōggyār*' was a soldier in *Kōkka□i Kōvilakam* at Neeleswaram. He killed *Ayishumma*, the servant of *Kōvilakam*, because she ate a part of the wheat while preparing it. Hereafter, because of that, at the end of *Yōggyār Akambādi Teyyam*, he loosens his hair, wears a *Ta□□a* on his head, and starts dancing in the *Ummacci* style.

These myths and tales are well-known. *Vaidyatti Muttacci*, *Kallai Mammu Teyyam*, etc. are some more *Teyyams* (R. C. Karipath).

⁴³ Malayalam month

⁴⁴ Malayalam month

1.22 Beliefs and Restrictions

Monotheism is a basic belief for all *Māppilas*. The belief in reincarnation is one of the most important beliefs. The belief that our current life is temporary, that we will be given a second birth after death, that God will judge everything that we have done in this life, and that the individuals who have done good deeds will attain paradise and the bad deeds will attain hell, respectively. They thus believe that to attain paradise, they should live like this. There are thus some intellectual etiquettes that they should abide by for attaining heaven and escaping hell. They are categorized as *Fardh*, *Halāl*, *Sunnah*, *Karāhat*, *Harām*, etc.

Harām are the actions and conduct which ought to be avoided by a *Māppila*. *Harām* is a word that refers to the forbidden in Arabic. They are believed to suffer in their subsequent birth if they perform such forbidden acts.

Halāl means acceptable things. *Halāl* is an Arabic word for "permissible." Such a person will have a *Harām* and *Halāl* life at all times. All the sins leading to societal and environmental catastrophes will be *Harām*. For example, stealing, extortion, forgery, cheating, and other such crimes; in a rational manner, even eating food earned unethically is prohibited. But all the allowed social and natural goodness is *Halāl*. The philosophy of *Sunnah* believes that some activities within the permissibility limits have virtues to them. *Sunnah* means following the deeds and teachings of the Prophet. It is presumed that eliminating even a thorn in the passage comes under *Sunnah*.

There is also *Karāhat*. There is no special punishment for engaging in the activities of *Karāhat*. But it is better to avoid it. If anyone has done a lot of *Karāhat*, they may end up in hell. The *Māppilas* have quite a few other beliefs, big or small. The *Māppilas* believe with extreme passion that this world too will have a doomsday. There are quite a few other small beliefs. They believe that *Jinn*⁴⁵ do exist. They also believe that angels do, too.

⁴⁵ A supernatural being in Islamic belief

intercultural contact, religious transformation, and regional adaptation. This chapter has examined the diverse strands of *Māppila* identity, ranging from their etymological roots to the unique cultural practices that have come to define their everyday life. From their distinctive naming systems, folk rituals, and religious observances, to their architecture, cuisine, attire, and artistic expressions, the *Māppilas* exhibit a cultural hybridity that blends Islamic traditions with local Kerala sensibilities.

The evolution of the term "Māppila" itself underscores the deep historical ties between indigenous communities and Arab-Persian settlers, where intermarriage and matrilineal practices played a foundational role in community formation. The linguistic, sartorial, and ritualistic elements of *Māppila* life reflect a dynamic assimilation of foreign and local traditions. Moreover, the chapter highlights the remarkable influence of Sufi traditions and the role of *Taqqāls*, demonstrating how spiritual authority shaped community cohesion and ritual life.

Significantly, the cultural institutions of the *Māppilas*, such as the various forms of *Rāṭīb*, *Mawlid*, *Māla*, and local festivals, reveal a highly participatory and contextually grounded religious life. These practices not only fulfilled spiritual needs but also served as mechanisms for social bonding and cultural preservation. Their adaptation into folk arts like *Māppilappāṭṭu*, *Duffmuṭṭu*, and *Paricamuṭṭukali* illustrates the community's creative engagement with performance traditions, turning belief into aesthetic expression.

Equally notable are the gendered and caste-based nuances within the community, such as the distinctive customs followed by women, occupational hierarchies, and subtle intra-community divisions. While the *Māppilas* have historically been viewed as an integrated part of Malabar's cultural matrix, the chapter also points to the existence of social stratifications and resistance to intermarriage with certain groups, such as the *Puislāms* and *Ossāns*, revealing the layered nature of identity within the community.

The chapter also shows how the *Māppilas* contributed to Kerala's socio-economic and cultural spheres, particularly through trade, culinary innovations,

architectural practices, and linguistic developments like Arabi-Malayalam. Their influence extends beyond religious practices to interactions with regional communities, as seen in shared rituals and cultural festivals. This reciprocal relationship not only affirms the integrative role of the *Māppilas* in the pluralistic society of Kerala but also highlights their openness to cultural borrowing and intercommunal solidarity.

The *Māppila* community of Malabar presents a compelling example of cultural synthesis, where religion, folklore, and social practice unite to form a distinctive identity and establish that the *Māppila* identity is not static but constantly negotiated through history, belief, geography, and cultural expression. It provides a foundational understanding that is essential for deeper analysis in the chapters that follow, particularly concerning how rituals such as *Nērcas* serve as instruments of social function, cultural continuity, and evolving identity within the *Māppila* world.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLORING THE LEGENDS, RITUALS, AND BELIEF SYSTEMS OF *NĒRCCAS* IN MALABAR

2.1 Introduction

The ritual landscape of the *Māppila* community in Malabar is richly textured with honouring practices that reflect both devotional intent and regional cultural adaptation. Among these, the traditions known variously as *Nērcca*, *Urs*, and *Candanakkuṁam* stand out as highly localized expressions of religious memory, spiritual reverence, and folk belief. This chapter undertakes a regional ethnographic and folkloric examination of such rituals across the districts of Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, and Trissur; collectively constituting the Malabar cultural zone. By exploring the vernacular names, ritual structures, legends, and associated community beliefs, the chapter aims to document the diversity and transformation of these practices as they exist on the ground.

These ritual tributes are typically held in memory of Sufi saints (*Auliya*), martyrs (*Šahīd*), or local spiritual leaders, whose *Makhāms*, *Jāram*¹, and *Dargahs* have become pilgrimage sites and cultural hubs. However, the terminology used to describe these commemorative events varies significantly by region, even when the ritual structure and objectives are closely aligned. In some localities, the observance is referred to as *Nērcca*, while in others it is known as *Urs*, a term borrowed from Arabic-Persian-Sufi usage denoting the spiritual union (or death anniversary) of a saint with the divine. Elsewhere, *Candanakkuṁam*, literally meaning “sandalwood pot,” is used to describe processions that symbolically carry offerings in a highly visual and performative manner. These nomenclatural differences are not merely linguistic; they reflect layered cultural histories, regional identities, and localized modes of religious engagement.

¹ Particular grave, comparatively smaller than Maqam

The chapter situates these rituals within the larger framework of folk religiosity, exploring how belief systems and oral narratives sustain and recontextualize them over time. Particular emphasis is placed on the legends associated with each *Nērcā* or *Urs*, including origin stories, miracles attributed to saints, and the moral or spiritual lessons embedded within community memory. These legends are not fixed texts but are dynamically transmitted through oral traditions, performances, songs (*Māla*, *Qasīda*, *Nērcappā*□□*u*, etc.), and public storytelling. In doing so, they function as folkloric mechanisms that both preserve and reinterpret the sacred in response to contemporary realities.

This chapter also analyses the belief systems of participating devotees, exploring how ritual observance is informed by concepts of *Fardh*, *Sunnah*, *Barkat* (blessing), and spiritual intercessions. The devotees' understanding of the *Nērcā* as an act of faith is shaped by generations of cultural transmission, often tied to personal *Nērcas*, healing narratives, and community well-being. The convergence of sacred geography, local identity, and ritual repetition can transform these *Nērcas*.

2.2 Nellikkunn Taññal Uppāpa Makhām Urs

Kasargod is well known for its numerous *Nērcas*, and one of its most famous events is the Kasargod *Nellikkunn Ta*□□*al Uppāpa Makhām Urs*. *Ta*□□*al Uppāpa* was a respected holy man, known as an *Auliya*, who had many followers in Kerala. The *Urs* takes place every two years from January 22 to February 2 at his tomb, located in *Muhyiddīn Masjid* in *Nellikkunnu*, Kasargod. *Ta*□□*al Uppāpa* was seen as a source of help and comfort for the people in the *Nellikkunnu* area. Locals often went to him for advice on their troubles, as he was known for visiting the sick, offering prayers to Allah for healing, and giving small treatments. Many believe that his instructions led to cures for their chronic illnesses. Whenever people faced difficulties, they turned to *Ta*□□*al Uppāpa* for solutions, and it's said that their problems were resolved. A well-known story among the locals involves the fishermen from the area. In this tale, the fishermen were unable to catch fish for several days, and their families were struggling without food. They approached

Ta□□al Uppāpa for help. He went to the shoreline, lifted his hands in prayer to Allah, and assured the fishermen, "Go to the sea tomorrow, and from then on, there will be no shortage of fish, and your families will not go hungry." (Sherin P.K.). Following his prayer, the fishermen reported an end to their fish shortages, and they never faced hunger again.

Cooked and raw fish are the primary offerings in *Makhām*. People also provide items such as pepper, oil, silk, and eggs as offerings. '*Nellikunn Ta□□al Uppāpa Makhām Urs*' is to honour and remember *Ta□□al Uppāpa*. The *Nērcas* will start with hoisting the flag close to the *Nellikunn Makhām*, where their *Ta□□al Uppāpais* are buried. There will be a gathering for the *Mawlid* and a Prayer meeting during the subsequent days. On the final day of the *Nērcas*, *Cīra□i* will be distributed. The *Nērcas* shall be wound up with the all-community assembly following the food donation.

2.2 Rāmantali Śuhada Nērcas

Rāmantali Makhām is the shrine where the 17 great martyrs who struggled against the Portuguese and martyred themselves in the path of *Allah* are resting. It is documented in the authentic historical book *Tuhfatul Mujāhidīn*, written in the Arabic language. The Portuguese were referred to as the *Para□gis*. *Zainuddīn Makhdūm*, an author who lived in Kerala during this time and witnessed Portuguese violence personally, prepared a book "Tuhfatul Mujāhidīn" about this in Arabic. In this book, *Rāmantali* is referred to as *Ēzimāla*. All these areas were known by the generic name of *Ēzimāla* at that time.

The legend behind this *Rāmantali Śuhada Makhām* is, Portuguese, under the leadership of *Vasco da Gama*, who arrived at Kappad in 1499, attacked *Māppila* centres all over Malabar. The *Māppilas* used to clash with the invading forces, whoever it was. It was the objective of the Portuguese to act against their domination and seize the monopoly of the trade in spices like black pepper from the Arab merchants. The Portuguese considered the *Māppilas* to be arch-enemies who were ever raising a crisis for their dominion. Disputes between them were common. During that time, vessels with a few pilgrims who were arriving from the holy

Makkah following the Hajj to the *Ēzimāla* were attacked by the Portuguese off the coast of *Ēzimāla*. Approximately 400 pilgrims were massacred, and jewels were robbed. They displayed their children and pleaded for mercy, but nobody was spared. Having plundered their belongings, the Portuguese set the vessel, including children, on fire.

The Portuguese constructed a fort at *Rāmāntali*, a coastal location at the northern tip of *Ēzimāla*, a strategic location and a cozy residence. Portuguese began to harass *Māppila* families in the vicinity. When the Portuguese harassment was intolerable, the *Māppilas* made up their minds to face the Portuguese. They cared more for their faith than for their bodies or their families. Before embarking on the war, the elderly men, women, and children were shifted to nearby towns. Surrendering all to *Allah*, the above-mentioned *Māppilas* fought the Portuguese. 17 *Māppilas*, headed by *Pōkkar Mūppar'*, fought to save a *Māppila* girl who had been abducted by the Portuguese (*Śuhada Māla, Nērcappā□□u*)². After killing a lot of men, the 17 warriors, who were dwindling in number and arms, became martyrs. The Portuguese hacked up the *Māppila* warriors' corpses and tossed them into the well in front of the *Masjid*. After a few days, the kinfolk who resided in other places visited and tried to search for the victims' corpses. While on the lookout, the *Tiyya* youth, who was in the distance cutting coconuts, told the relatives that he saw light fires emerging from far while he was climbing the coconut tree and that he had no idea what the light was. The area shown by *Tiyya* was where the remains of *Śuhada's* bodies had been disposed of. It was an unbelievable scene to witness in the well that the bodies were intact and had not felt old. The *Māppilas* were martyred before the *Portuguese*, who were equipped with weapons. Thus, their graves were built in front of the *Rāmāntali Jumua Masjid*. *Sayd Muthukkōya Ta□□al* started the *Urs* as seen today in 1963. The *Urs* is held in the month of February. The names of ten historical figures are only known today. The remaining 7 martyrs are unknown. Most of the residents of *Rāmāntali* today are the descendants of the *Śuhadas*. The families of *Rāmāntali* remain as the first family, the second family, and the third

² Nērcappāttu, and notice of *Nērcā* is enclosed in the Appendix

family. Among them, the *Kuttiyan Pīdika* family of *Pōkkar Mūppar* is referred to as the first family. The place where *Jumua Masjid* stands was the seacoast. The Portuguese constructed the fort on the land which is known by the name *Ko□□aparam*. The war equipment and the remains were preserved and exhibited in their *Makhām*, where the souls of the 17 martyrs are resting. The majority of the *Rāmantali* residents today are descendants of the *Rāmantali Śuhadas*. Food donation and prayer ceremony, and Mawlid are the main rituals in *Rāmantali Śuhada Nērcā*.

2.4 Puli□□ōm Makhām Urs

A tourist got lost and was stranded in *Puli□□ōm*, which was a forest region. He was tired and could not get out of the forest, and was frightened when he witnessed a beam of light. When he approached the source of light, he understood that it was a tomb. He heard an insubstantial sound from it: "*Go back home without fear*". The traveller who embarked on the journey with the bravery of that experience arrived at home safely and told the natives about the condition that compelled him to flee danger. Upon hearing this, the natives went to the spot where they noticed the grave, suspected that the grave was of an *Auliya*, and thought of constructing a *Masjid* in the vicinity. After that, many pilgrims came there, and it turned into a pilgrimage site. It is where *Puli□□ōm Urs* is celebrated today. *Urs* is celebrated in January. There will be activities for 5 days.

It is assumed that other *Auliyas* are also buried in the *Puli□□ōm* grave. Thus, it is an *Urs* celebrated in the memory of these *Auliyas* and known as *Puli□□ōm Makhām Urs*. A lot of devotees visit *Puli□□ōm* to pray at the *Makhām* and make offerings. Also, there is another legend associated with this *Masjid* in *Puli□□ōm*. *Puli□□ōm* was a Hindu-dominated region. A Muslim family migrated there from a southern country beyond the sea. All the chiefs and officials of the *Puli□□ōm* region are members of the *Kamballūr* fort. Nearly all of them were farm labourers and other workers on their land. In contrast to the ordinary native families, they treated the workers and guests kindly. A Muslim family who migrated from the south was provided with all assistance in the *Kamballūr* Fort. Again, more Muslim families began to migrate to *Puli□□ōm* hearing the good opinion about the place.

The elders of *Kamballūr* Fort gave all sorts of help to those who arrived. The population of *Māppilas* in the *Puli□□ōm* area increased. Hence, the *Māppilas* felt the necessity of a *Masjid*. Realizing this, the *Kāranavar* of *Kamballūr* Fort granted land and gave the required help to construct a *Masjid*. Soon, a *Masjid* was constructed there (Muhammed Ahammed B.).

The *Urs* in this *Masjid* is inaugurated by the flag hoisting ceremony, and this is performed by the chief of the heirs of the *Masjid*. This is followed by the recitation of the Quran and prayers. *Cakkara Kaññi* is the main *Cīra□i* of the *Urs* at the *Masjid*. On the eve of *Urs*, the *Puli□□ōm Masjid* office bearers and locals arrive at the house in *Kamballūr* Fort with a pot full of sugar. By leaving the pot at the door, members of the *Kamballūr* family and other members are politely requested to attend the *Urs*. There are members of the *Kamballūr* family who arrive at the *Masjid* on the day of the hoisting of the flag to join in the *Nērcas*. Then every member of the family is addressed by name and invited to the seat that has been set for them. Then there is a tea party. Then the locals will present meat and fruits to the members of the family. Once the people had presented their prayers, the priest of the *Masjid* would present a *Kizi* (a few coins in a red cloth) to the members of the family. Once received, the Elder will give some of the money to the running expenses of the *Urs*.

The *Puli□□ōm Urs* is one of the most visible manifestations of mutual friendship and unity between the Hindu community and the *Māppila* community. There is a ceremony conducted by both communities in relation to the *Urs*; *Nañj*³ and *Nayat*⁴. *Māppilas* done the *Nañjital* and *Nāyā□□* are managed by the Hindu Society. *Māppilas* kill the animal brought by the Hindus after hunting, reciting *Bismi*. Both groups then share it. It is done on the night of *Urs* day. Later in the morning, *Nañj□al* is performed in the *Kariankot* river that flows beside the *Puli□□ōm Masjid*. In a few minutes, everyone will be back. The next morning, they will come and take the dead fish away. Now, *Nañj* and *Nāyā□□* don't exist; both are

³ A type poison making from traditional Plant

⁴ Hunting

not allowed by law. Prayers and all other things are performed in this *Nērcca*, like in normal *Nērcas*.

2.5 Kāṅṅilpīdika Nērcca

Kāṅṅilpīdika Masjid is situated in *Veṅṅalam*, near Kozhikode. Every year, they hold a special event called the *Tiruvātira* on the *Nērcca* day during the month of *Dhanu*, following the Malayalam calendar. This event features many traditional practices by both the *Māppilas* and Hindu communities. A tale from this village tells of a *Māppila* young man who fell in love with a Hindu girl from *Kāṅṅilpīdika*. They decided to get married, even though their families were against it. However, the young man was well-loved in society because he often helped others. So, his family and the locals eventually accepted the marriage. When he died, he was laid to rest at the *Kāṅṅilpīdika* graveyard, which then became a site for pilgrimages. This *Nērcca* begins with the raising of a flag. When the *Nērcca* occurs, an elder woman from that Hindu family, who married the *Māppila* man, performs a custom at his grave. Following this, there is a prayer gathering that welcomes people from various religious backgrounds.

The major events on the second day are *Varavuka*⁵. On this day, many families from both the Hindu and *Māppila* communities gather. The *Masjid*'s committee members warmly welcome everyone and guide them to a designated area near the grave. The *Nērcca* ends with a communal meal where different groups from the community take part. This meal is shared by everyone sitting together under a tent at the *Masjid*. Some people enjoy the meal there, while others take it home. Afterward, the *Ustād* of the *Masjid* leads a final prayer to conclude the ceremony. Nearby is the *Hamsakulaṅṅara Bhagavathy* Temple. When the temple bell rings, the singing, known as *kīrtan*, is paused, a tradition that continues today. The land for this temple was originally donated by a *Māppila* family, reflecting a gesture of love and harmony. Initially, the *Nērcca* did not include rituals like visits and rice

⁵ Ritual procession

offerings. But as participation from various communities increased, these activities were introduced to ensure the participation of everyone in the celebrations.

2.6 Tāttūr Nērcca

The *Tāttūr Nērcca* near *Māvūr* in Kozhikode district is different from any other *Nērcas*. While other *Nērcas* are often associated with legends, great men, or warriors, the reasons for the origin of *Tāttūr Nērcca* are unknown. There is a legend about the martyrs of *Tāttūr Masjid*, but no definite history reveals that the martyrs came to be because of this. Unlike other *Nērcas* full of history, *Tāttūr Nērcca* lacks a consistent history. The *Nērcca* is in connection with a dispute that involves a *Masjid*, where the fighters who lost their lives defending it are celebrated as heroes. Some of their names are posted in front of the *Masjid*. This *Nērcca* takes four days, from the 22nd to the 25th of the *Muharram* Arabic month. Individuals from several places come to pray and recite the Quran for this occasion. Food is distributed for four days; many eat it there or take some home. Some even dehydrate the food in order to preserve it for up to the next *Nērcca*. Interestingly, the primary offering here is a rope and a bucket. Individuals suffering from sickness or challenges provide a rope and bucket made of areca palm leaves, which are said to assist with asthma and other ailments. Food, rice, and animals such as chicken, goat, and buffalo are among the offerings given. Offerings that remain after use are utilized in cooking food for the *Nērcca*. Camp ropes are given out freely to those who need them. Only workers connected to the administration can utilize resources or wealth, and only for particular ends. The *Nērcca* formally commences on the 22nd of *Muharram* after 8:00 a.m. with a flag-hoisting ceremony headed by major committee members. This is preceded by uninterrupted Quran recitation up to the Asr prayer on the fourth day. The event ends with a prayer following the Asr prayer on this final day.

During the four evenings of *Nērcca*, all boxes of offerings are opened, the money goes toward *Nērcca*'s expenses, and is handled by the committee. On days of feasting, at noon, the rice and cooked meat are served to the people, and at night, food is distributed to those who consume it at home. On different days, the food is

organized with assistance from local families of locations such as *Māvūr*, *Pāzhūr*, *Cheruvādi*, and *Tāttūr*. There have been modifications in these practices over time.

On the fourth day, cultural performances are conducted, and visitors come with musical instruments. Local visitors from *Konnār*, *Pāzhūr*, and *Māvūr* join the celebrations, including fireworks. The activists and community leaders receive guests, and even elephants are employed to welcome *Peṅṅivaravu*⁶.

2.7 Cērūr Śuhada Nērcca

Cērūr Pada, the struggle between the *Māppila* fighters and the British army, is the background of *Cērūr Nērcca*. The *Cērūr Nērcca* came into existence as a memorial for the *Māppilas*, headed by *Mampuram Sayyid Alawi Taṅṅal*, who struggled courageously and were killed in a battle against the British. *Cērūr* was a struggle against the British colonial strategy of undermining the *Māppila*-Hindu alliance.

It was a time when *Kīzāls* and *Māppilas* were conducting some struggles and small protests against British rule and the British natives. In October 1843, on 26 *Ramdān* (1257 Hijri), the battle took place under the leadership of *Mamburam Sayd Alawi Taṅṅal* at *Cērūr*. *Mamburam Taṅṅal* was respected by his sister religions. An example of this was the friendship between the local chieftain *Kappāt Panikkar* and the *Taṅṅal*. *Panikkar* used to respect and love him very much. Knowing this, the British spread many falsehoods with the malicious intention of destroying friendships and dividing them. The quarrel over the conversion of a few people to Islam eventually led to an open war between the British and the *Māppilas*. The encounter took place with 60 soldiers of the 5th Madras Regiment. Four soldiers were killed in the battle, and seven of the *Māppilas* became martyrs (*Chandrika Daily*).

Pattarkkadavan Hussain, Poovatan Mohiuddin, Poothanakkapuram Mohiuddin, Pantaruti Ismail, his son Musakuṅṅi, Kunnancheri Ali Hassan, and

⁶ This part of the study includes data collected through informal interviews; details of the informant list are provided in the bibliography.

Cholakan Bukhari were the martyrs. The *Masjid* and the nearby well are memorials of the struggle. The battle occurred on the 26th of *Ramdān*, but they were buried on the 28th, and their dead bodies were brought to Tirurangadi, where the soldiers prepared to cremate them. When the *Māppilas* came to know about this and opposed it, the British left the place. Later, *Māppilas* buried the grave in the Tirurangadi area with devotion. Based on this, *Cērūr Padappā* was written. The British banned the singing of this *Padappā* and visiting the graves of *Māppilas*. A *Nērcca* is conducted every year in the name of these holy souls.

2.8 Mutṭiccira Śuhada Nērcca

Muṭṭiccira Nērcca is another *Nērcca*, which history claims to be a *Nērcca* to fight against the British. This is according to the *Munniyūr Muṭṭiccira* riot. This occurred on 14th November 1841 (Muhammed Haneefa A. P). *Muṭṭiccira*, where there was brotherhood and unity among *Māppilas* and Hindu communities, the British army's tactic to destroy the unity resulted in the riot and killing of 11 *Māppilas*. There was a disagreement concerning the position of the *Masjid*. At the same time, at the order of the British, someone unknown person chewed a betel nut and spat it on a white cloth, which was left out to dry in the course of the *Jumu'a* prayer on Friday. This resulted in major issues. *Mampuram Taṭṭal* intervened and appeased the issue, but the issue was purposefully designed by the British for the *Māppilas*. The British army began to torture the *Māppilas*. A British soldier shot at the *Māppilas* in the *Masjid*. Then the battle turned fierce, and the *Māppilas* who recognized this, fought with arms, and 11 *Māppilas* were martyred. Several were seriously hurt. 11 *Māppilas*, including *Kuññālanku* brothers *Marakkāru* and *Muhammad*, were martyred during this war. Soldiers carried the bodies of these martyrs to Tirurangadi and were ready to burn them. As per the history books, a band of *Māppilas* united with arms, and scared of this, the soldiers retreated towards Kozhikode through Tirurangadi. Subsequently, the martyrs' dead bodies were buried

in the graveyard of their *Jumua'at Palli*⁷, *Muḥḥiccira Palli*. But in the name of these sacred souls, *Nērcas* are also prepared here on *Shawwāl* 6th of every year.

2.9 Ōmānūr Śuhada Nērcca

The *Ōmānūr* martyrs are three martyrs who laid down their lives in defence of Islam and religious freedom for *Allah's* sake. *Kuññāli*, *Abū Bakr*, and *Moidīn* were killed on the 7th *Dulhajj*⁸, 1128 *Hijiri*, at *Ōmānūr* near *Koḥḥōḥi*. The event began with a few anti-*Māppilas* attempting to desecrate the *Masjid* as a result of a controversy regarding the conversion of a Hindu woman named '*Ammāluamma*'. There followed an attempt to attack *Māppilas*; three thousand soldiers came unannounced. *Māppilas* too had to fight and resist. *Māppilas* were able to kill a lot of individuals from the opposing side. Three *Māppilas* who were martyred during the war were abducted and buried in the *Pazhayaḥḥāi Jumua Masjid's* old location. *Ōmānūr Śuhada Nērcca* is commemorated in most parts of Malappuram and Kozhikode districts with *Ōmānūr Śuhada's* annual *Nērcas*, during *Dulhajj*. The major activity of the *Nērcca* is the distribution of food. All community members collaborate to do this. In certain areas, it's the responsibility of the lower caste community to collect and conduct the *Nērcca*. During those *Nērcca* days, they will visit house by house to announce the *Nērcca* and gather *Nērcca* donations (Muhammed Haneefa A. P.).

2.10 Pūkkōḥḥūr Nērcca

As part of the Malabar rebellion of 1921, several clashes took place between the *Māppilas* of Malabar and the British. The Battle of *Pūkkōḥḥūr*, which happened on 26th August 1921, is known as the encounter between the *Māppilas* and the British in *Pūkkōḥḥūr*. The famous *Pūkkōḥḥūr Nērcca* is to commemorate the martyred *Māppilas* in this encounter. This *Nērcca* originated from a program held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the *Pūkkōḥḥūr* battle connected with the Malabar rebellion in 1972. So, this *Nērcca* is unique. The *Nērcca* started 50 years

⁷ Masjid

⁸ Arabic month

after the occurrence of the battle. Because during the immediately following years to the war, the British approached this place and prohibited people from going near the graves and entering them. After independence, the *Māppilas* enclosed it with a fence and safeguarded it. Later, even after independence, nobody visited it, because it was not a practice that was followed. After the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the war, this *Nērcca* was started as part of an opinion that *Pūkkō□□ūr* should remember its martyrs. The *Nērcca* was organized in the month of April that year, and since then, *Pūkkō□□ūr Nērcca* is organized annually on the 5th and 6th of April every year.

Most of the *Māppilas* of *Pūkkō□□ūr* were composed of the labourers of the *Janmi*⁹ *Nilambūr Tirumulpād* between 1921-22. Among those *Māppilas*, who suffered the atrocities of *Janmi*, as well as the British army, *Vadakkēvī□□il Muhammad* was the first person to respond to the British's anti-*Māppila* behaviour at *Pūkkō□□ūr*. This event infuriated the *Tirumulpād. Muhammad* was laid off from his job by *Tirumulpād*. A false charge was brought against *Muhammad*, and the police were ordered to arrest him. This action created more feelings of anger among the *Māppilas* against the British. Some other problems also occurred there. The *Māppila*'s, under the leadership of *Karā□□ē Moidīn Haji*, offered to stop *Muhammad*'s arrest at any expense. Meanwhile, there was a conflict between the British and the *Māppilas* at Tirurangadi. *Māppilas* confronted the British with weapons they acquired. Enthusiastic *Māppilas* stormed the Mañjēri Police Station and looted the weapons, and they marched towards *Nilambūr Kōvilakam*, singing *Padappat*. Under the leadership of Captain *Milankar*, soldiers attacked the *Māppilas* at *Pūkkō□□ūr*. Several *Māppilas* and British perished in the confrontation. The *Māppilas* who were killed in the fighting were buried by the British themselves on the side of the road. The British did not even permit them to conduct their post-mortem rituals. They even prohibited entering that area. After independence, they gave back that place to the local residents. Then they fenced this land. Later, it became a pilgrimage centre (Sherin P. K.).

⁹ Land lord

When *Nērcca* began in 1972, *Nērcca* in *Pūkkō□□ūr* was conducted by a committee chosen by local people. It was celebrated as a big event. The ritual starts with a morning prayer on the *Nērcca* day. The initial *Varavu* in the evening of the festival was in commemoration of *Perinchēri Kuññaramu□□i*, who passed away during the encounter. The first among the second day arrivals is to commemorate *Kuthi□□al Muhammad*. All arrivals will have a band *Mēla*, *Kōlkali*, and *Duffmu□□u*. *Badr Mawlid* and *Badr Māla* are read at night during festive days. Both are conducted as offerings. *Badr Māla* and *Malappuram Padapā□□u* provided the *Māppilas* who took part in the *Pūkkō□□ūr* rebellion with the strength to combat the British. That is why *Māppilas* chant this as an offering during the festival.

2.11 Pullāra Śuhada Nērcca

It can be derived that *Pullānur* was the original name of *Pullāra Dēsom*. The Early *Māppilas* of *Pullāra Dēsom* used to attend the big *Jumua Masjid* in *Malappuram* on Fridays to offer *Jumua* prayers. As they needed to travel some kilometres from *Pullāra*, it was a general practice for *Māppilas* of *Pullāra* to reach late for *Jumua* prayers. Because of this, circumstances arose in which the *Māppilas* of *Pullāra* were unable to do *Jumua* prayers as required. While they went for *Jumua*, the *Malappuram* people always sneered at the *Pullāra Māppilas*. On a particular day when the *Malappuram Māppilas* sneered at the *Pullāra Māppilas* for arriving late for *Jumua*, the *Pullāra* individuals decided to construct a *Masjid* in *Pullāra* on the same day. On their return, they thought of constructing a *Masjid* and carried the material they found, such as bamboo, ariconut, and thatch, and constructed a thatched *Masjid* within the same day. It was gradually enlarged. That is how a *Masjid* was established in *Pullāra Dēsom*. Yet, the *Malappuram Masjid* was destroyed during the *Malappuram* battle due to the conflicts between the *Nā□uvāzi Pāranambi* and the *Māppilas* of *Malappuram*. This resulted in a permanent dispute between *Pāranambi* and the *Māppilas*. Large numbers of *Māppilas* were killed, and *Pāranambi's* army was damaged greatly.

Pāranambi's army, thereafter, awaited an opportunity to annihilate the *Māppilas*. It was at this time that a person who was on the other side of the *Māppilas*

in the conflicts pertaining to the building of the *Pullāra Masjid* took shelter in the land of *Pullañjēry* and betrayed about recently built *Pullāra Masjid* to *Pāranambi*. Taking this as a chance, *Pāranambi* instructed his army to demolish the *Pullāra Masjid*. Knowing this, the *Māppilas* started protecting the *Masjid*. On 22nd *Ramdān* of the *Hijri* year, when the *Māppilas* returned home for *Attāzam*¹⁰, the army of the enemy came to raid the *Masjid* and prepared to go inside the *Masjid*, close the door, and burn it. This being known, the *Māppila* named '*Kōlanto□i Pōkker Mūppar*' courageously entered the *Masjid* through the water outlet hole, put out the lamps, and slew the enemies. Having defeated a number of enemies, he ascended to the roof of the *Masjid* and cried the *Adhān* loudly, to inform the world outside about the danger. On hearing this, one of the enemies spotted *Kōlanto□i Pōkker Mūppar*, slaughtered him to death, and abandoned him in a well near the *Masjid*. The *Māppilas* who came there, understanding the danger, went inside the *Masjid*, and a massive confrontation ensued there. There was an armed confrontation in the *Masjid* with the leaders of the area's prominent family, *Kuttiyamu*, *Sūfi*, *Kōyamu□□i*, *Moidīnku□□i*, etc. *Pullāra Śuhada Nērcca* is conducted in memory of the 12 martyred *Māppilas* (Ayyub Saqafi Pallippuram). The remains of 11 individuals were buried together in one location, while the remains of the *Kōlanto□i Pōkker Mūppar*, whose body was not found then, were buried in another corner of the *Masjid*.

There is a tale behind this. When all the remains were discovered, they could not locate the remains of the *Kōlanto□i Pōkker Mūppar*, who was in the well. Therefore, the locals did not hear about the martyrdom of one individual. After a few days, the *Qādhi Payyanād Marakkār Musliyār* saw a dream and uttered: "I am lying dead in a well, I must be taken out and buried." Based on this dream, *Kōlanto□i Pōkker Mūppar*'s corpse was taken out of the well and buried in another location. *Pullāra Śuhada Nērcca* is a *Nērcca* constructed in honour of these martyrs. This *Nērcca* is unique from other *Nērccas* for the reason that it is celebrated even in different areas in the same manner, but the other *Nērccas* are celebrated only near

¹⁰ Dinner in *Ramdān* fasting. It is considered as the start of fasting.

that *Makhām. Pullāra Śuhada Nērcce*□□i has been placed in many nearby areas also.

2.12 *Kuññimarakkār Nērcca*

Another well-known *Nērcca* of the *Ponnāni* region is *Kuññimarakkār Nērcca*. *Manaparampil Kuññimarakkār* was a brave man who combated the Portuguese anti-Muslim tendencies and misgovernment. His mother imparted spiritual and physical knowledge to him when he was a kid, whose dad passed away when he was little. The mom instructed her son to get a job of his own when he was grown, and *Kuññimarakkār* selected the fish trade. Once while dealing in *Ponnāni*, he met the well-known scholar *Zainuddīn Makhdūm*, who transformed the life of *Kuññimarakkār*. *Kuññimarakkār* learnt several physical and spiritual aspects from *Zainuddīn Makhdūm*, and subsequently, he became a spiritual leader. He used his spirituality for the well-being of the locals. Once, a man ran into the wedding hall of *Kuññimarakkār* and announced that a beautiful young woman had been kidnapped by the Portuguese. No one dared to confront the Portuguese. With the permission of his mother and *Zainuddīn Makhdūm*, *Kuññimarakkār* took up the mission. *Kuññimarakkār* went with the boatmen to rescue the girl. He went into the Portuguese boat and, killing one by one, rescued the girl and handed her over to the boatmen. After telling the young woman to take herself to a safe place, the *Kuññimarakkār* rushed to the nearby ship of the Portuguese. But he could not save his own life in the fight. The corpses of the *Kuññimarakkār* were chopped into seven pieces and left on the banks of Kozhikode, Veliyamkod, Beypur, Vadakara, Tanur, Vypin, and Manat. Locals buried the parts of the corpse that dropped in these seven locations. Thus, in these locations, *Nērcas* are constructed in the name of the *Kuññimarakkār*. The participants who come to take part in the *Nērcas* also provide *Kōttupalli Śahīd Māla* as an offering. It wards off diseases and other diseases. Individuals in areas such as *Ponnāni* and *Veliyamcode* would visit the residence of *Kuññimarakkār* before marriage and ask for the blessings of his mother. There is a story behind this. Before proceeding to rescue the young lady at his marriage venue, *Kuññimarakkār* informed his mother: ‘Although I couldn’t bring you a new girl as a

bride, new girls will always arrive in this house. Bless them and keep them joyful". The people of the region believed it to be particularly fortunate to conduct offerings on *Nērcca* day.

2.13 Manattala Nērcca

The *Nērcca* is held in *Manattala* in remembrance of *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar*, the brave, heroic, and religious person. *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar's* father, a devoted servant of the Zamorin by the name *Ambalam Vī□□il Kuññusaku□□i*, lived in the Zamorin *Kōvilakam*. Zamorin and *Kuññusaku□□i* fought, and Zamorin displaced *Kunjusa* from every duty and imprisoned him. It was during this period that *Kuññusaku□□i* became the father of a boy. The messenger also told Zamorin that the royal pundits who examined the birthmarks on the child foresaw that the child would be of royal birth. It was foretold that he would be a man who would gain permanent respect in the hearts of the people by doing alms and would be the owner of many wealth. Zamorin told him about this news and delighted *Kuññusaku□□i*. He was set free from prison with a lot of gifts. The father gave his son the name *Hydrōsku□□i*, and young *Hydrōsku□□i* learned how to handle weapons, read, and write. For some years, he taught children in *Kalari*. *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar* did what his father did and became a soldier in the army of Zamorin. At one time, the Zamorin instructed *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar* to cut a banana stem by concealing an iron rod within it, to check his potential. Realizing the test, he severed the tail of the banana. He was successful in the test and was appointed as the commander of the Zamorin's army. He was responsible for overseeing many temples under the Zamorin. He was the one who ordered temple properties to be exempted from taxation. When *Tipu Sultan* and his faction fought against the Zamorin forces, *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar* was the leader of the Zamorin team (Chettuvayi Abobacker).

With his military leadership, Tipu and his group suffered major losses. Various antecedents were made to the *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar* for luring him. A mediator informed him beforehand that the daughter of Tipu Sultan was to be offered in marriage to the *Mūppar*. But, *Hydrōsku□□i Mūppar* remained committed on behalf of the Zamorin. Failing strategy, Tipu Sultan planned to assassinate

Hydrōsku □ □ *Mūppar* via treachery. There are different beliefs about his death. Tipu Sultan is said to have influenced one of the Zamorin soldiers, and that soldier remained in hiding during the war and murdered *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar* from the back. Another incident was the battle between the *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar* and the enemies at *Pazaya* □ □ *ā* □ *i*, Chavakkad. One of the enemies attacked *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar*, and when the *Mūppar* went to attack him, he fled to the *Pazaya* □ □ *ā* □ *i* streets, and Tipu's army who reached *Pazaya* □ □ *ā* □ *i* streets after him, surrounded the *Mūppar*. Understanding the betrayal, *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar* sought assistance from each *Pazaya* □ □ *ā* □ *i* house. No one was ready to assist him, and the doors were shut in front of the *Mūppar*. The *Mūppar* cursed the *Pazaya* □ □ *ā* □ *i* people. Legend tells that, because of this curse, the doors of the houses in *Pazaya* □ □ *ā* □ *i* remain closed even before dusk. Finally, *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar* died in a clash between the *Mūppar* and Tipu Sultan's army.

Thus, the *Manattala Nērcca* is performed in memory of *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar*. The flag is hoisted at the *Manattala Masjid*, where *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar* rests. The *Varavus* beginning from areas such as *Puttenka* □ *appuram*, *Siddīque Masjid*, and *Vanchikkadavu*, followed by musical bands, turbaned elephants, and various traditional art forms, will meet at *Manattala Masjid* and raise the flag. Eggs and milk are the main offerings here, during and outside the ritual. Eggs and milk were *Hydrōsku* □ □ *i*'s favourite food when he was young, and even till his death. Worshipers try to ensure the health of children by offering *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar*'s favourite foods.

When he was attempted to be killed in *Edappulli*, his finger was cut off. His men buried this finger there, which is the *Edappulli Jāram*. The fireworks, which are a part of the rituals, are extremely popular. Chavakkad and neighbouring people do fireworks as offerings daily. Large crowds visit to witness the fireworks display. *Hydrōsku* □ □ *Mūppar* is a martyr who struggled for the Hindu Zamorin. The Zamorin descendants continue to conduct fireworks as part of the *Manattala Nērcca*. *Tābūt Kāzca Varavu* is a very important and attractive custom in *Manattala Nērcca*.

2.14 Teruvatt Palli Nērcā

Teruvatt Palli is a well-known Muslim pilgrim centre in Palakkad district. An *Auliya* called *Sayd Muhammad*, who migrated from Arabia to Madras, was laid to rest here. He migrated to the place where the *Masjid* stands near *Kuzalmantam* from Palakkad. He requested the king of the land, *Elayād Tampurān*, to grant him a spot to construct a *Masjid*, but he paid no heed to it as there was a drought at that time. Realizing the distress of the ruler, *Auliya* plunged into prayer. It rained heavily that night, and the drought in the country came to an end. Seeing that this individual was not an ordinary individual, the *Tampurān* granted him land. There he built a *Masjid* and settled there. Seeing his peculiarity, the people of the region and nearby villages began approaching him to describe their different problems and obtain solutions. He would take a handful of mud from the place where he resided and offer it to those who visited him. This is *Pūma□□u*. It is thought that this would yield good crops. *Pūma□□u* is offered to the visitors who come here, even if it is not the time of *Nērcas*, and it happens even today. Farmers who have thrown mud on the land receive a satisfactory harvest. It is the assumption that a part of the harvested products will be taken to the temple in gratitude for this. The *Nērcā* is performed during the white moon in *Makara*,¹¹ which is also the harvesting time.

On the eve of the *Nērcā*, pilgrims will begin camping here with *Nērcā* resources, farm machinery, cattle, horses, etc. The *Nērcā* sources are provided there. They will display their cows and machinery at the *Makhām* and bring them back home. This is the faith that, irrespective of caste, devotees will visit the *Makhām* to receive blessings for any new start, marriage, or buying new things. This *Nērcā* is filled with the traditions of the local people of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

On the day of *Nērcā*, after morning flag-raising and prayer, the site where the *Auliya* was buried is opened to visitors, where numerous offerings are made. Everything beneficial in human life is donated here. But primarily, agricultural products are brought. Tamils predominantly visit here. There will be a flood of

¹¹ Month In Malayalam Calendar

Kerala-Tamil devotees. The two processions will begin from the site where the *Auliya* was buried. They will go to other locations, attend receptions and pick up offerings, and come back to *Auliya's* tomb. There will be an *Āna Ezunnallattu* with forehead bands, *Varavu*, *Kōlkali*, band *Mēlam*, and other decorated bullock carts of various neighboring locations before the *Palakkad* people arrive. There will also be decorated horses in the procession of Tamil groups, *Duffmu□□u*, *Mawlid* recital groups, *Arabanamu□□u*, and Tamil *Pulavar* song singing groups. On the *Nērcas'* days, much food will be offered as gifts by the Kerala-Tamils at the *Makhām*. The *Nērcas* will be concluded with prayers after the meal. On *Nērcas* day, one can observe the people of Kerala and the Tamils' variety of customs and arts.

2.15 Koṅṭōṭṭi Nērcā

Hazrat Muhammad Shah Valiya Tha□□al of Mumbai came to *Ko□□ō□□i* in Kerala in the mid-1700s. He was born in *Kalyān*, Old Bombay Province. His ancestors are said to be Yemeni and are also said to be from the Prophet *Muhammad's* family (Umer Maduvayi). He possessed deep knowledge of the Parsi and Arabic languages, as well as Islamic affairs. He was a polyglot linguist, sage, and Sufi. He showed numerous wonderful achievements in life and proved his skill in treating patients. This alone was enough to make him popular and worshiped among the people in the middle of the 17th century. While he was meditating on the *Ana□□al* hill near Areekode, the local people who observed him reported to the then *Ko□□ō□□i Qādhi, Abdul Azīz Musliyār. Qādhi Abdul Azīz* and other scholars were visited by *Muhammad Shah*, and after discussions and debates with him, the scholars realized his erudition and invited him to *Ko□□ō□□i*. So, he came to *Ko□□ō□□i* and settled near the *Pazaya□□ā□□i Masjid* and later moved to where the *Taqiya*¹² was subsequently constructed. He started spiritual healing and Sufi preaching. He taught spiritual lessons combining the two styles: *Qadiri Tarīqa* and *Chisti Tarīqa* in the footsteps of his □eikhs. His arrival in *Ko□□ō□□i* marked a new era in the history of *Ko□□ō□□i*. Many believers in *Ko□□ō□□i* and its neighborhood regarded his dwelling, *Taqiya*, as an asylum for their various ailments.

¹² It is the spiritual centre of Muhammedsha Tha□□al.

Day by day, *Muhammad* Shah began to realize his popularity in neighboring areas, and many people began coming to *Koṭṭōṭṭi* for treatment and other things. Some people were willing to accept his discipleship. They began living in the area of *Taqiya*. So, he was attracted by numerous disciples within and outside Kerala. He became a comfort and shelter for people of all castes in and around *Koṭṭōṭṭi*.

A special cure for the thorn in the throat initiated by *Muhammad Shah Valiya Taṭṭal* is continued even in his *Taqiya. Koṭṭōṭṭi Qubba*¹³ is extremely popular for this cure. *Tipu Sultan*, one day, happened to see him and was impressed by his learning and character, and appointed him as *Ināmdār*, who was assigned to collect taxes from *Chāliyār* to *Ānakayam*. The 550 acres of land on which his *Taqiya* stands were exempt from tax (Umer Maduvayi).

2.15.1 The Legend behind the Nērcca

Nērcas are one of the different ways of commemorating the Holy Spirit. It is done differently in different regions of the world. It is being celebrated everywhere. *Taṭṭal* became devoted and a leader in *Koṭṭōṭṭi* and other regions of Kerala. His house, *Taqiya* at *Koṭṭōṭṭi*, became a home for poor people. Every year, *Muhammad Shah Taṭṭal* used to hold a Quran recitation ceremony near *Taqiya* in memory of his *ṭeikhs*, after hoisting the flag every year. This flag hoisting site was later known as *Kodimarattiṭṭal*. The *Mullas*¹⁴ and *Murīds*¹⁵ (his disciples) of *Taqiya* recite 40 *Khatham*¹⁶ of the Holy Quran. This was the *Nērcca* of those times. More and more rituals were added to it in later generations. Musical performances and different art programs were a part of it. This made the *Nērcca* more attractive. Their successors also helped and supported the practice. This is how the *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca* acquired the flavour of a secular and agricultural festival.

¹³ Place of Muhammed shah taṭṭal buried.

¹⁴ Religious Scholars

¹⁵ Disciples of Muhammedsha Thaṭṭal

¹⁶ Completing Quran recitation in one time.

Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca was also a large-scale trading market for farmers and others to buy their whole set of supplies for a year at a lower cost. Most of the daily essentials were available in this market. Many of the rituals that exist now have come into existence in different situations in the course of time, and this ritual has taken a different shape. *Peṭṭivaravukal*, *Tōkkeṭṭukkal*, and *Candankkuṭṭam*; different communities have unique roles in each custom. Thus, the *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca* became a unique secular ritual in history. After *Hazrat Muhammad Shah Taṭṭal* expired, his descendants became the *Stānīya*¹⁷ of *Koṭṭōṭṭi*.

2.15.2 Ritual and Customs Associated with the Nērcca

The beginning of the *Nērcca* is marked by a flag hoisting ceremony, which takes place exactly one month before the celebration of *Nērcca*. This flag is offered by some families in *Kurupatt*, near *Koṭṭōṭṭi*. They visit the *Taqiya* with the flags after offering prayers at the *Qubba*. Then, *Taṭṭal* and his followers visit the *Qubba* to offer prayers, before returning to the *Taqiya*, from where they altogether march to the flagpole with a procession. Another prayer is performed near the flagpole. *Taṭṭal* marks his palms with a liquid sandalwood solution by immersing his hands in it, which is then imprinted onto two flags; one bearing 11 palm prints and another bearing 35 palm prints. 11 represents the addition of the numbers ‘5 and 6’, representing the *Islām*¹⁸ and *Īmān*¹⁹, which are the basis of Islam's principles. 35 represents the number of *Sheiks* in their *Tarīqa*. After imprinting, the two flags are tied to the flagpole. Then, the invitation letter to the *Nērcca* is signed first, and copies are dispatched to the authorities, *Murīds*, and leaders of the concerned communities. White flags to hoist in nearby places like *Kaṅṅirapparamb*,

¹⁷ Ruler and spiritual leader of the *Taṭṭal*'s family.

¹⁸ The declaration of faith (Shahada), prayer (Salah), almsgiving (Zakat), fasting during Ramadan (Sawm), and pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). These 5 pillars serve as a framework for Muslim life, guiding their actions and shaping their understanding of faith.

¹⁹ Iman is considered the foundation of belief in Islam, and it is believed to be essential for a complete and genuine faith. It is often defined as the belief in the six articles of faith, known as arkān al-īmān. These include belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and divine decree.

Mēla □ □ *ādi*, etc, are handed over to the people who are assigned to do so. Then, all of them leave the place. *Nagāra* (drum) is played when they march back to the *Qubba*. The next day, early morning, everyone found the flags flying on the flagpole.

Murīds, followers, and devotees from far-flung areas come together to consult the ruling *Stānīya*, who is chosen from among their kin, in order to convey the approximate date of the harvest. If the flag is raised on the 10th of a specific Arabic month, the *Nērcca* is then begun on the 13th of the following Arabic month.

One day in between the flag hoisting ceremony and the commencement of *Nērcca*, the *Vellikko* □ *i*,²⁰ which was kept in the *Qubba*, was taken back by the *Swāmima* □ *ham* family, belonging to the *Ta* □ □ *ān* community. They polish it and bring it back to the *Qubba* as part of *Ta* □ □ *ān* *Pe* □ □ *ivaravu* at the end of the *Nērcca*. There is a legend associated with this practice. Some years ago, there was a serious outbreak of *Talammata* □ □ (cholera) that struck the family. When traditional treatments failed, *Ta* □ □ *al* administered what was considered a divine medicine meant to cure the disease. In gratitude for this act, the family promised to offer a silver flag to the *Taqiya* every year during the *Nērcas*. They started the annual practice of bringing a silver flag every year.

(a) *Tōkke* □ *ukkal*

The *Tōkke* □ *ukkals* takes place on the 13th day of the Arabic month, i.e., a month after the flag raising ceremony. This event marks the commencement of the *Nērcca*. It takes place at night. With the defeat of *Tipu*, many local kings and vassals who had fled to *Tirukocci* and *Travankore* in protest against the reforms introduced by *Tipu Sultan* came back to join the British rule. They launched attacks at many places in Malabar. They also reached *Ko* □ □ *ō* □ □ *i*. *Pāranambi*, who was the vassal king of Zamorin, was also the leader of this. Knowing this, they retaliated with available weapons and eventually won the strike. 11 cannons were there among the items left behind by *Pāranambi*'s soldiers. 5 were returned and 6 were kept in

²⁰ Silver coated flag

Taqiya. These cannons are loaded with gun powder and fired into the sky every year during the opening ceremony of the *Nērcca* to mark the victory of the *Ko□□ō□□i Ta□□al* against *Pāranambi*. This gunshot will be heard in all the nearby areas. After hearing this, the people of the area knows that the *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* has started. These cannons are believed to have divine power. Most of the jobs, like washing and caring for the cannons, are done by the *Amāran*²¹ community. After the washing, water will be poured through the barrel, which was collected by the believers to drink and apply to the body. The oil to be applied to the cannon is the main offering for the *Nērcca*. The oil left after polishing the cannon is believed to have healing powers. Applying this oil on the body is considered good for curing diseases and solving many problems.

The gun is displayed on the 13th day of an Arabic month in *Taqiya*. Distribution of *Cīra□i* will be done after special prayers. A counter is set apart for receiving oil to be applied to the guns. There are prayers before guns are taken to the *Nērccapādam* (carnival ground) to be shot for the firing ceremony. Men who are trained specially bring the cannons from *Taqiya* to the ground where the firing ceremony is done. *Māppilas* carry the cannons up to the flagpole, and lower castes bring them from there. Turkish-hatted *Māppilas* put gunpowder in the cannons, and the two groups shot together. Shooting was done after *Maghrib Adhān*.

(b) *Peṭṭivaravu* and *Etirēlkkal* (Box Arrival and Reception)

He people who admired *Ta□□al's* miraculous acts, such as curing various ailments during their lifetime, their relatives, and those who regarded him as heroic legends, all came from different places to receive blessings by offering him products, grains, vegetables, etc., grown in their lands. He also served as an *Ināmdār* (tax collector for the *Tippu*), which led landlords and agricultural workers to seek his favor. This practice contributed to the initiation of the *Pe□□ivaravu* ritual. Even after *Muhammed Shah Valiya Ta□□al's* death, they followed the practice of coming with grains and sweets safely in a wooden box to his successors. This is the

²¹ A lower caste community

‘*Pe□□ivaravu*’, which means ‘coming with the box’. Later, when the form of *Nērcas* changed, colorful pearl umbrellas, art exhibitions, and musical bands were all part of the *Pe□□ivaravu*. This continued until the *Nērcca* lasted.

Every *Pe□□ivaravu* has its own time to come. It should reach the agreed ground at the specified time. After this, the representative of each *Pe□□ivaravu* arrives at the *Taqiya* and announces the arrival; this practice is called *Varavariyikkal* (announcement of arrival). After offering prayers in the *Qubba*, carrying a colourful umbrella called *Satyakuda*, his representative disciples and bodyguards ride out on horseback to receive them, which is called ‘*Etirēlkkal*’. *Mu□□um Viliyum* will be performed along with them. After receiving them, the *Ta□□al* or his representatives, and the retinue return to the *Qubba* with the box. Then, the box will be handed over to the *Qubba*, and the procession members offer prayers and perform musical recitals. They return after visiting the *Putiya Maliyekkal* (*Ta□□al* homestead), offering prayers, and greeting each other. A lot of *Pe□□ivaravus*, large and small, used to be there in the past. There was no particular day or time for the *Kīzāla*²² community to arrive. There were no time limits for them to enter the *Qubba* and *Taqiya*, and therefore, they did not have to wait for the *Etirēlkkal* ceremony.

Pe□□ivaravukal

It is a procession of *Ta□□al*’s *Murīds* and friends from areas such as *Kiziśśēri*, *Morayūr*, *Ozukūr*, *Kōppilānmār*, *Ettuthurakkār*, *Vellattarakkār*, etc. He received numerous disciples from these areas when he sat for *Ih’tikafu* (enlightenment) on *Ana□□al* hill. In this procession, there will be lots of gifts for the *Ta□□al* because these followers had numerous farms.

Vellā□□arakkār: It’s the largest *Pe□□ivaravu* in *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca*, which takes place on the second day of the *Nērcca*.

E□□utharakkār: *E□□uthara* is the name for the eight villages near the *Velluvambrum* of the former *Ēranād taluk*. Since they were nearest to *Ko□□ō□□i*,

²² Lower caste community

they were very close to the *Ta□□al* and thus they had a position in the first row of *Manattala* ceremony.

Kōppilānmār: The *Kōpilāns* are an important family in *Ko□□ō□□i*. They were the ones who oversaw the matters pertaining to the agriculture of *Ta□□al*.

Kiziśśērikkār: It is a procession with lots of *Appams*. There were two processions for *Mēlē Kiziśśēri* and *Thāzē Kiziśśēri*.

Local Processions: There are numerous local processions from *Kaṅṅiraparamba*, *Nediyirup*, *Mēla□□ādi*, *Myladi*, *MusliyārA□□ādi*, and numerous *Kīzāla* communities. There is also a *Ta□□ān Pe□□ivaravu* of the *Swāmima□ham Taravā□* as part of the closing ceremony.

(c) *Candanameṭṭukkal*

The *Ta□□ān Pe□□ivaravu*, arrival of the *Swāmima□ham* family is the final procession arriving at 9 am on the 17th of an Arabic month. Returning from the courtyard of the *Qubba*, the chief ceremony of *Candanameṭṭukkal* starts, which is the end of the *Nērcā*. This practice is very devotional and diversified. *Candanameṭṭukkal* is a ceremony in which the *Stānīyan* (chief) and his representative carry quality special sandalwood paste on their heads barefoot from the tribal house and bring it to the *Qubba*, along with the *Cīra□i* to be distributed in the *Qubba*. After performing a prayer in *Taqiya*, the *Valiya Ta□□al* departs from *Puttan Purakkal's* house and arrives at the *Valiya Maliyēkal*, *Ta□□al's* family house, from where sandalwood and *Marīda*²³ are brought to the flagpole. After placing sandalwood and *Marīda* on the floor of the flagpole, *Murīds* sprinkle rosewater while reciting *Holy Quran* verses. *Ta□□al*, his family members, *Murīds*, and *Pa□□akkār* (bodyguards) walk towards the *Qubba* carrying sandalwood and *Marīda* on their heads, reciting *Bait* and *Mawlid* and *Mad'h* songs (songs praising the ancestors), in a respectful atmosphere. Neither he nor his representative should wear footwear during this custom. People carry colorful umbrellas and welcome

²³ *Chīra□i* (Sweets for distributing like prasadam)

them. Sandalwood paste and *Marīda* are taken to *Qubba* by its designated representative. At that instant, the *Nagāra Koṭṭal* begins. *Taṭṭal*, his family members, and the representative enter the *Qubba* after taking *Wudu*. The *Silsila* recitation will begin at the grave of *Hazrat Muhammad Shah Taṭṭal*.

(d) *Silsila* recitation

It is purely based on the Persian Sufi tradition. On entering the *Qubba*, *Taṭṭal* and family members, and the *Murīds* pray at the grave of *Muhammad Shah* with sandalwood paste and *Marīda*. This is followed by the renowned *Silsila*. A person nominated by them reads it out and then prays for the well-being of mankind. This was the start of the closing ceremonies of the *Nērcca*. Then the *Murīds* are blessed by sprinkling rose water. Then, a newly purchased *Voli* (decorative blanket) is laid on the grave, which is anointed with sandalwood paste. The rest of the sandalwood paste is divided into two portions, one given to the *Murīds* and *Rizwa* (grave area). The latter is reserved for the flag-hoisting ceremony. Then they will distribute *Marīda* in the main hall. Then, three gunshots from the cannon will mark the end of *Nērcca*. Then, *Taṭṭal* and his family will return to *Taqiya*. In the evening, *Cakkaraccōr*²⁴ will be distributed in *Taqiya*.

2.16 Malappuram *Nērcca*

This *Nērcca* was formed in memory of the forty-four courageous warriors of the *Valiya Palli* in Malappuram, who battled bravely against the forces of *Pāranambi*, Zamorin's vassal ruler, to protect their family, children, property, religion, self-respect, and worship in the year 1732 (Lance-Corporal Vincent Jos Ryder).

2.16.1 The Legend behind the *Nērcca*

Pāranambi was the vassal king of the Zamorin's domains in *Ēranād*. Throughout his reign, the Zamorin king acknowledged and admired his talent. As a result, *Pāranambi* had become an esteemed personality of the Zamorin. Due to this

²⁴ Boiled rice with jaggery

favoritism, he was crowned the vassal king of the region. So, his descendants had the privilege of continuing this position. In 1625 AD, the Guruvayur vassal king rallied his army to attack *Pāranambi*, the Malappuram king. Some historical reports also reveal that, it is not the Guruvayur vassal king, but *Pūntrakkōan*, the Kottakkal ruler was the ruler who tried to attack *Pāranambi*. The cause of the war is still unknown. Soon after that, the two armies clashed in battle. Finally, *Pāranambi* and his soldiers were on the brink of defeat by the end of the war. At the moment when he was going to be seized by Guruvayur's vassal king and locked in a tunnel, certain brave *Māppila* soldiers of *Malappuram* unconstrained him and then carried him to the fort in Malappuram safely. Delighted to be freed from peril, *Pāranambi* encouraged a culture of peace and love with the *Māppila* communities. This led to a more peaceful, calm, and comfortable life for the *Māppilas* who lived in Malappuram. During this context, his faith and trust in the *Māppilas* increased through various events, circumstances, and incidents. he became strongly committed to helping them. A new *Pāranambi* came to power over time. It was at that moment that the Malappuram *Māppilas* revealed their wish to build a *Masjid* for their religious purposes. *Pāranambi* himself made it possible by giving them the required land, money, and assistance. It is said that this *Masjid* was built in the early 1700s, precisely in 1731, as per some historical accounts (Hussain Randathaani).

A beautiful *Masjid* was built at a location known as *Pūlakammu*. At that time, there were only few *Masjids* for *Māppilas* to worship, and later, this one became especially famous across the region. Numerous visitors from different place came to see the *Masjid* and *Māppilas* led them to the *Masjid*. In 1729, a highly educated and talented martial arts master named *Kōyāli Marakkār* and his friends came to Malappuram to see the *Masjid* and *Pāranambi* came to know about him. The king invited *Kōyāli Marakkār* and his friends to the fort. *Pāranambi* was so impressed when he met *Kōyāli Marakkār* and offered him to stay in his fort as a friend. With time, the king, impressed by *Kōyāli Marakkār's* abilities, made him the chief of the army and gave him the right to take weapons along with other rewards.

He was absolutely honest and fair in the things assigned to him. Until then, among the areas of Malappuram, none of the local families related to *Pāranambi* or any other major farmers paid taxes to the treasury. Rather, there was a strong focus on tax collection from the lower castes, *Māppilas*, and the poor alone. Conversely, *Kōyāli Marakar*, who was zealously collecting taxes everyone, soon set to work filling the treasury of *Pāranambi*. This, however, created resentment among *Pāranambi*'s family members and few locals. Also, some of the officials of *Pāranambi*'s fort, got frustrated by *Kōyāli Marakar*'s higher position. They were all looking out for an opportunity. Then a story was brought forward by a relative of *Pāranambi* from the *Ponmala* region that *Kōyāli Marakar* had sold a member of his family into bondage since he refused to pay the tax. Another version reports that he sexually attacked a young female relative of *Pāranambi*. On hearing this, *Pāranambi* faced many obstacles and extreme criticism (Lance-Corporal Vincent Jos Ryder). His enemies went around spreading rumours that even the *Pāranambi* family could not uphold pride in this nation. This aggravated *Pāranambi*'s rage. In rage and under pressure from his kin and from within the fort, he conspired to kill *Kōyāli Marakkār* and called him to the fort. Understanding the betrayal, the *Marakkār* armed himself and went to fort. But the army deceitfully brought *Kōyāli Marakkār* to kill him. He conveyed his need to meet the *Pāranambi* to let him know the truth. But, showing agreement to his need, they tried to kill him. Having seen the deceit, he decided to escape this time. In between the clash, *Pāranambi* was knocked down by the sword of *Marakkār*. Though the *Marakkār* had managed to harm some soldiers inside the fort and flee, word spread soon all over the country that the *Kōyāli Marakkārs* had tried to kill *Pāranambi*.

This led to intense riots all over the country, and the army began a large-scale revolt against the *Māppilas*. Large numbers of people were killed during the mayhem. Due to this, the *Māppilas* were left in a delicate position. At this time, the *Māppilas* cried to *Pāranambi* in desperation, but their pleas went unheard. Those who were jealous and bitter about the *Marakkārs*' position, as respected military officers, took advantage of this moment. This became a serious riot, compelling the *Māppilas* and their relatives to take shelter in the great *Masjid* of Malappuram. The

Māppilas were willing to give their lives to save their children and family under the threat of dying at any time. Families dispersed in different directions, while others stayed back in the *Masjid* to guard it. Historically, 44 people were responsible for the safety of the *Masjid*, with a *Māppila* called *Pōkker Mūppan* as their leader. He came to be referred to as *Pōkker Śahīd*. There were slight attacks at first, but as time went on, *Pāranambi's* army mounted their attacks. *Pāranambi's* army encircled the inhabitants of the *Masjid* by polluting its source of drinking water. In retaliation, the *Māppila* forces were attacked from the *Masjid*, and by the third day, 11 people had been killed, including *Pōkker Mūppan*. *Pāranambi's* army burnt the thatched roof of the *Masjid* and destroyed it. The army left the *Masjid* only after all the *Māppilas* had been martyred.

The rest of the people ventured outside to fight and died all together. An estimated 44 dead bodies were found on the compound of the *Masjid*. According to reports, most of *Pāranambi's* men were also killed in this revolt. Historical records show that immediately following the rebellion, the *Māppilas* escaped the area, and soon after, those from surrounding areas came to bury the dead warriors collectively in the large courtyard of the *Masjid* in *Pūlakammu*. It is reported that these people came to participate in the war after hearing about the war, but when they arrived, they found the war had concluded and saw the dead bodies. This took place in the month of Muharram, 1732. Subsequent to this, the condition was pacified. But after that, the family of *Pāranambi* and the area were stricken with a contagious disease and became the source of continuous catastrophes. *Pāranambi* looked for an antidote and discovered that it had resulted from the levelling of the *Māppila Masjid* and the deaths of the *Māppilas*. The remedy was to build a new *Māppila Masjid* and establish appropriate living conditions for the *Māppilas*. As a result, five years later, in 1737, the *Masjid* was rebuilt with *Pāranambi's* supervision. A beautiful *Masjid* constructed of teak and wood was subsequently built. This *Masjid* remains the biggest *Masjid* in Malappuram. Even today, this *Masjid* remains in Malappuram. The mortal bodies of the 44 brave soldiers who died during the battle against *Pāranambi* are also buried in proximity to this *Masjid*. To honour these brave soldiers, a *Nērcā* by the name *Malappuram Nērcā* was founded subsequently.

2.16.2 Ritual and Customs Associated with the Nērcā

Nērcas took place along with the oath-taking of warriors. It was conducted in *Muharram* month. Later, because of the disparity between the Arabic lunar calendar and the Gregorian calendar, it was shifted to the initial weeks of March. The people of Malappuram used to say the proverb, "*Mārcil Nērcā Tīrcā*". The architecture of the older houses in *Valiyaāi*, Malappuram, enabled them to serve as shops during *Nērcā*. *Peivaravu* was a major part of this *Nērcā*. Earlier, these *Peivaravus* came as *Ziyārat*²⁵ guests. Their visit comprised prayers, *Dikr*, Quran recitation, and the distribution of *Cīra* sweets. Visit usually comes from places such as *Payyanā*, *Mañjēri*, *Pullāra*, *Podiyād*, *Eutara*, *Kōūr*, *Vadakēma*, *Kunnummal*, *Muparamba*, *Cemmankadav*, and *Ponmala*. *Malappuram Nērcā* starts on saturday night in the third week of March. The first *Peivaravu* is the *Petti* of the *Nāukalli* family from *Kōūr*. This is followed by bright bamboo lanterns, colourful paraffin lamps, umbrellas, and performances of *Kōlkali*. *Māppila* art forms like *Kōlkali* are also followed by this arrival. When the bearers of the *Pei* arrive at a specified location, it is left there, and the *Nērcā* committee greets them and welcomes them. Then they march to *Makhām*. Then others, such as *Vadakēma*, *Kunnummal*, *Mailappuram*, and *Pūkkōūr*, come one after another. Many small and big groups continue to arrive till *Nērcā* is over.

On the second Sunday afternoon, the *Poyā Peivaravu (Mēlmuri)* is the most important one to arrive and attracts a lot of attention. Committee members go to a specific location to welcome them and wait for them to arrive. This joyful welcome is called *Etirēlkkal*. This *Pei* is greeted by the accompaniment of musical instruments, and a great number of people on both sides gather to see this event. Following *Etirēlkkal*, the *Peivaravus* move fast, and their walk to *Makhām* is such that it appears as if they are heading into battle. A flag is then raised, followed by each team's arrival. Raising flags is a competition among teams. A few days before this, every team happily brings their flagpole to the *Masjid* courtyard

²⁵ Prayer at grave of the Auliya

and installs it. This is also celebrated by every team. The event ends with the arrival of *Ta□□ānpe□□i*. Malappuram locals used to say that the last person to arrive at any event was the one with *Ta□□ānpe□□i*. The *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* ceremony ends in the same way with the arrival of *Ta□□ānpe□□i*. This *Petti* is headed by a *Ta□□ān* family. There is a legend about a *Ta□□ān* who died when he was guarding the *Masjid*, a good friend of *Pōkker Mūppan*. As a tribute, the *Ta□□ānpe□□i* is conducted by this family and their descendants (Yogyan Hamza Master).

In contrast to other *Māppilas' Pe□□ivaravu*, the *Ta□□ānpe□□i Varavu* includes many games like *Cendako□□u*, *Pariccamu□□ukali*, *Cavi□□ukali*, among other local arts and decorations. After arriving at *Makhām*, the box is shown, prayers are said, and the *Nērcca* is formally brought to a close²⁶.

2.17 Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca

The *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* is an offering made to perpetuate the memory of *Pa□□āmbi Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al*, who was a scholarly man and a Sufi saint.

2.17.1 The Legend behind the Nērcca

During *Tipu's* campaign, a fort called '*Ramagiri Kota*' was built as a strategic centre in *O□□allur Panchayat*, near *Pa□□āmbi*. *Ramagiri* fort was the camp of *Tipu's* military troops during the campaign. When *Tipu* died, the troops deployed at the fort were orphaned. They belonged to the *Rāwther* community. After *Tipu's* death, the functioning of the fort became difficult day-to-day, and the soldiers, with no other skills, had great difficulty obtaining food and other essentials. They suffered disabilities, and their lives were further complicated by epidemics of infectious diseases like *cholera* and *smallpox*. *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al* came to provide assistance and solace during this troubled time. They devoted

²⁶ Some data in this section are taken from the song by *Malappuram Padappattu*, informal interviews with community members, old participants, etc. A full list of informants is provided in the bibliography, and additional sources and photographs are included in the appendix.

themselves to the care of the sick, giving them sustenance and instructing them in the art of weaving. Consequently, the *Rāwters* regained hope and meaning in their lives.

The people of *Pa□□āmbi* and the area around it were attracted to his wonderful personality, exceptional talents, and healing powers. Allopathic medicine was not much popular at that time. He was a renowned Sufi scholar and a revered intellectual. He was loved and respected as a *Guru* by all religions. Out of love for him, the *Rāwthers* would offer him gifts during harvest times.

During his lifetime, many followers came to him for advice on various matters. This was more so with the *Rāwters* community. Even after his death, this practice continued as a mark of respect. Every year, on the day he was believed to have died, the *Rāwters* used visit the house where he dwelt, bearing a variety of *Appams*, *sweets*, and *crops* from their land. They would pray and lament at the place where his body was brought for burial. One of the usual practices is going to the shrine, praying, and leaving thereafter. It has been maintained as a practice for years now.

When *Rāwter's* groups are faced with hardship or difficulties, they take various forms of food stuffs or cash offerings to the *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al Makhām*, or drop their offerings into a box. Every year, large groups of *Rāwters* visit the *Makhām* in this way. This is how *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* started. Not only the *Rāwters* join in; ordinary believers and local people also join his *Ā□□u*²⁷ *Nērcca* on this day. Devotees from many parts of the country visit the *Makhām* every day all through the year with offerings and prayers.

During the year, apart from these nobles, people from other places who were recognized for their valuable contributions made prayers and offerings at his mausoleum. Later, the *Pa□□āmbi* community took over the *Pe□□ivaravu* commonly known as *Appappe□□i*, with the prayer ceremonies traditionally

²⁷ A one-year commemoration ritual, there are practices related to remembering and honoring the deceased, including the performance of prayers, reciting the Quran, and donating charity. Some Muslims may also observe the annual death anniversary.

performed by *Rāwters* during the daytime. Later, families and descendants who enjoyed the unprecedented miracle *siddhi* in *Ālūr valiya Pūkkūññikkōya Ta□□al* in their lifetimes started the *Appapetti*. Similarly, various families adapted various rights and ceremonies of the *Nērcca*, which became more powerful and developed as a popular festival. *Appappe□□i* from places like *Orrappālam* also started attending the *Nērcca* from then onwards. It eventually developed into a popular festival as common people in *Pa□□āmbi* got involved. Large festivals were observed, and the *Nērcca* subsequently grew. The *Appappe□□i* came in a festive mood, preceded by percussion instruments, musical groups, and *Āna Ezunnallattu*. The *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* turned out to be one of the most elephant-attended festivals in Kerala today, with more elephants than the *Trissur Pūram*. The *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkūññikkōya Ta□□al Ā□□u Nērcca* subsequently developed a formal pattern with rituals and ceremonies under the control of local committees. It has grown to be a major festival in *Pa□□āmbi*, drawing lakhs of participants from the surrounding areas. It is believed to have thrived during the reign of '*Ālūr Ta□□al*'s' grandson named '*K. P. Ta□□al*.' People belonging to different castes and religions participate in this festival and are at the forefront of implementing it. This highlights the secular nature of this *Nērcca*.

One of the informants about *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca*, named '*Nārāya□aswāmi*,' was also the president of the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* committee for the year 2023 and has also been part of earlier committee positions for the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca*. This is considered to be solid proof of involvement by people from different castes in the *Nērcca*. With time, some conflicts regarding the *Nērcca* arose due to emerging trends among the *Māppilas*. This somewhat detracted from the shine of this *Nērcca*. This new group strenuously objected to some features of local culture in the rituals and traditions among the *Māppilas*. Certain well-respected people belonging to the *Ālūr Valya Pūkkūññikkōya Ta□□al* families also raised objections and dissuaded certain aspects of this *Nērcca*, leading to certain minor changes in its ritual procedures. *Pa□□āmbi*, *Ma□□ārkkād*, *Rā□□ā□□iri*, and *Karimpuzha* have descendants who are associated with these families. Earlier, descendants of these families, having married into and settled in different places, would come to their

ancestral homes in *Pa□□āmbi* two days ahead of the beginning of this *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* to attend. These families are also the successors to the offerings or provisions exhibited in *Makhām* related to the *Nērcca*, which are identified throughout the year. In the past, it was a custom to announce the date of *Nērcca* at the *Masjid* on Friday following the *Jumua* and to form a committee for it.

In the early days, the popular *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* calendars used to show that the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* would take place on the first Sunday of February. Eventually, due to changes in the fasting period of the *Māppilas* and various other *Māppila* celebrations, a *Nērcca* committee adjusted the date according to the season. Since there is no designated location or formal arrangement for conducting the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca*, the event takes place in the heart of *Pa□□āmbi* city, necessitating special permission from the state. Being recognized as a gazetted *Nērcca*, it receives full support from the administration. At first, the rituals and decisions for the *Nērcca* were managed by the *Ālūr Ta□□al*'s families, who had the power to determine the process. The committee functioned with their advice, and all the rituals were centred around them. As time passed, as most '*Ālūr Ta□□al*' families slowly retreated from the *Nērcca*'s rituals, the committee still decides and announces the *Nērcca*'s date from their ancestral house. At present, the *Masjid* also plays no role in determining the *Nērcca*'s date.

However, because of custom, the appointment of the *Nērcca* committee and decision about its date continue to remain within the shoulders of *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al* family members, ie, the '*Ālūr Ta□□al* descendants.' They involve themselves in nothing other than giving out the news regarding the decision to committee members. The successors of *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al* have little connection with the present *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca*. In keeping with their tradition, the *Ālūr Ta□□al* descendants' representative opens the *Makhām* for prayers for *Rāwters*, only on the day of the reception of the *Pe□□ivaravu*, as indicated by the committee in charge of the *Nērccas*. They no longer participate in the reception of *Appappe□□i* or other festivities as they used to during the earlier days.

2.17.2 Ritual and Customs Associated with the Nērcā

On the anniversary of *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkuññikkōya Ta□□al*, the family of *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkuññikkōya Ta□□al* is now conducting a major prayer assembly and *Mawlid Sa□gam* that consists of all members of the family, as well as invited and uninvited believers and Islamic scholars. It is held at the residence of a family member, and there will be a food donation served to the visitors. Rice and other things are accepted as *Nērcas* for this meeting. This is the only ceremony performed directly by their descendants nowadays. It takes place not on the very day of *Pa□□āmbi Nērcā* but on the actual death anniversary day of the *Ta□□al* in the Arabic month that falls before it. Until 1991, prayer meetings and *Nērcas* were held inside the *Makhām* itself, their descendants spearheading those activities. Only after that did the family start to become estranged from each other. The legend of the believers about the *Nērcā* is that “*Pa□□āmbi Nērcā* will go on unceasingly”. They believe that, whether others agree or not, the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcā* is inevitable. For example, the citizens of *Pa□□āmbi* insist that “even during 1992, the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcā*, which was attended by lakhs of people, took place despite the declaration of Section 144”. It is surprising to them that it happened.

The *Karimānkuzi* family, belonging to the *Māppila* community, has the honour of carrying or hosting the *Nērcā* flag. As per tradition, when the *Karimānkuzi* family was suffering from smallpox at a time when many misfortunes and disasters befell them, *Ālūr Vaaliya Pūkkuññikkōya Ta□□al* came as a physician and cured them. This story is usually told. After this event, the *Karimānkuzi* family and *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkuññikkōya Ta□□al* became close. In appreciation of such association, the *Ālūr Ta□□al* family gave the *Karimānkuzi* family the privilege to hoist the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcā* flag. The *Rāwters* announce their arrival through the *Varavu* at 4 PM. When they arrive at a specified place, representatives of the central committee of the *Nērcā* proceed to receive them. This celebration is a colourful procession with about 100 elephants, folk music bands, art forms, and coloured umbrellas, each group vying to show the most spectacular entrance. Later, they march through the town of *Pa□□āmbi*, ending the procession in the evening with

100 elephant escorts. The next day, *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkūññikkōya Ta□□al's* descendants, the heirs of the *Makhām*, and designated people of their family, open the *Makhām*, on which the *Rāwter* come back with the *Appappe□□i* and their gifts. They conduct their prayers and offerings there. The *Nērcca* gets completed once the *Makhām* is opened and their prayers and offerings are made within. At first, the *Rāwters* alone participated in the morning ceremony, but later on, others in *Pa□□āmbi* also joined the morning ceremony with 100 *Appappe□□is*. On *Nērcca* day, a flag hoisting ceremony is conducted in the morning, followed by the *Rāwters'* prayers and offerings, which bring the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* to an end²⁸ (Narayana Swami *Pa□□āmbi*).

2.18 Appavāñibha Nērcca

Abdul Wafa □amsuddīn Muhammad Kālikūti, also known as *□eikh Māmukkōya*, was the son of an Arab merchant named '*A□eikh Alāuddin Himmassi*', who traveled to Kozhikode from Arabia for trade. The *Appavāñibha Nērcca* is a well-known *Nērcca* held at the *Iṭiyaññara Mosque* in Kozhikode as a part of *□eikh Māmukkōya's* death anniversary.

2.18.1 The Legend behind the Nērcca

During his lifetime, *□eikh Māmukkōya* was credited with many miraculous deeds. He was revered as a significant *□eikh* who journeyed to Persia and various other locations, gaining insights into numerous material and spiritual matters, and performing many incredible acts. The local populations, particularly the *Māppila* community in Malabar and especially in Kozhikode, held him in high regard. He was deeply loved and respected by both the *Māppila* community and others, who believed that he possessed many miraculous powers. Numerous legends and oral narratives regarding his miraculous acts are shared among the people of Kozhikode.

²⁸ Some data in this section unless otherwise cited from published books or journals are drawn from unpublished sources and fieldwork, informal interviews with community members, *Nērcca* Committee, and participant observation. A full list of informants is provided in the bibliography, and additional sources and photographs are included in the appendix.

In earlier times, the period of *Idiya* brought immense joy to the residents of Kozhikode and Malabar. Initially, this festival spanned ten days. According to a legend, *Peikk Māmukkōya Tal* would visit the graves of esteemed individuals whenever he was alive. In line with this legend, the gates of all the tombs he frequently visited are kept open continuously throughout the days of this *Appavāṇibha Nērcca*, allowing devotees to visit. It is commonly believed that *Peikk* was born in the year 930 *Hijri* and passed away on Saturday, 15 *Rajab*, 980 *Hijri*.

2.18.2 Ritual and Customs Associated with the Nērcca

This *Nērcca* has unique practices that set it apart from other *Nērcas* in Malabar today. A typical ritual found in most *Nērcas* across Malabar includes the *Peivaravus*, art performances, and the *Candanakkuam*, etc. In contrast, the *Appavāṇibha Nērcca* does not incorporate such rituals, but features its own distinct characteristics. However, during the ten days of *Nērcca*, the activities in the *Masjid* where his remains are interred, featured only recitations of the Quran, *Mawlid*, and the distribution of food, unlike other festivals in Malabar. There exists a tradition of bringing *Appam* for various personal intentions as offerings during this *Nērcca*. *Appams* were crafted in the shape of the body part affected by illness, with the belief that presenting them here as offerings would lead to healing.

2.19 B. P. Anṅāṭi Nērcca

B. P. *Anṅāṭi Nērcca* is an important festival in Malabar. Also known as ‘*Beṭatu Putiya Anṅāṭi Nērcca*’. This *Nērcca* has been maintained over the years, with its unique rituals and traditions intact. This *Nērcca* is kept in honor of *Yāhūm Abdul Qāder Auliya*, also known as *Abdul Badirin Falil*, on the 22nd day of the Arab month of *Safar*²⁹. Later, it shifted to being observed within the first week of January (V. K. Haneefa Musliyar). The *Nērcca* is conducted in two ways. One is a basic form in which there is only food distribution, *Mawlid* recitations, and prayer ceremonies. The second one is with a range of rituals where there are multiple processions, celebrations, and hoisting of flags, known as the *Kodikuttu Nērcca*. In

²⁹ Arabic Month

both cases, *Mawlid* recitations, collective prayers, and distributions of food are generally held. The *Nērcas* are made on the 22nd and 23rd of *Safar*, with *Mawlid* recitals and food distributions on these days.

2.19.1 The Legend Behind the Nērcā

Two families claim their rights over the resting ground of *Yāhūm Ta□□al*. This *Nērcā* is held in two ways, which are different from one another, depending on these two families' claims of where his remains were buried. The *Ā□□u Nērcā* and *Food donation* will be held on *Safar* 22 at *Be□□attu Putiya□□ādi* and also at *Va□akkē A□□ādi*, which is said to be where his body was shifted and buried. Both events are organized by people from two families. Various individuals donate sacks of rice, cereals, and other products for different purposes of this *Nērcā*, which are then brought in pots during the function. This food is cooked for distribution during *Nērcā*. Early on, the menu used to have *Neycōr* (Ghee Rice) and beef curry, but later on, it changed to all *Neycōr* alone. On the *Ā□□u* day of *Yāhūm Ta□□al*, certain houses in the neighborhood also observe *Mawlid* recitals in his memory.

The most prominent *Nērcā* of the *Yāhūm Ta□□al* is the *Putiya□□ādi Valiya Nērcā*. This observance is considered as a big *Nērcā*. *Be□□attu Putiya□□ādi Valiya Nērcā* is a *Māppila Nērcā* observed by all communities around and in *Be□□attu Putiya□□ādi*. A big three-day *Nērcā* is usually performed annually in the first week of January. Visitors from across places tend to visit this place for this purpose. *Be□□attu Putiya□□ādi Valiya Nērcā* is observed as a *Māppila Mahōtsava*. Vendors, hawkers, and circus artists of all types reached there weeks ago in advance of this event. Mostly, all the castes of families who are settled around *Be□□attu Putiya□□ādi*, along with the migrants, spouses, and other relatives, go back to *Be□□attu Putiya□□ādi* at this *Nērcā*. Most of those who have migrated overseas for employment also return during this time.

2.19.2 Ritual and Customs Associated with the Nērcā

After the *Nērcā* date is set and the gun shot has been discharged, a team called *Mu□□um Vilikkār* goes around the province to proclaim the *Nērcā*, raise the

required funds and resources, and collect materials such as the ariconut tree and bamboo to build a tent for the *Nērcca*. The *Mu□□um Vilikkār* employs one *Cen□a* and a *Kuzal* as their musical instruments, and once they prepare the material, they will come back to *Yāhūm Ta□□al Auliya's Jāram* on Sunday before the hoisting of the flag. In the preceding days of the *Nērcca*, they were visible in those places. It is the responsibility of the *Mu□□um Vilikkār* to receive the *Pe□□ivaravu* to *Jāram*. The *Pe□□ivaravu* will arrive at a short distance from the *Jāram*, where it will wait before being received. The *Nērcca* committee, accompanied by the *Mu□□um Vilikkār*, will then proceed to welcome the *Pe□□ivaravu*. Following this, they will escort it to the *Jāram*. During this time, arrangements are made for the *Mu□□um Vilikkār* to be hosted in various homes, where they are specially entertained. The flag of the grand *Nērcca* is raised on Sunday during the *Nērcca* festival. A flag changing ceremony, which is traditionally performed by the *Parśśēri Ambā□□u family* (a Hindu family), will be held on the previous Sunday at the flag post in *Jāram Maitān*³⁰.

The B. P. *A□□ādi Valiya Nērcca* is inaugurated by the coming of the *Kaññikarude Pe□□ivaravu*. On the first day of the festival, Sunday, at 10 am, fishermen and people from the market area will assemble at the B. P. *A□□ādi* market. During the three days, they will carry rice, coconuts, and other ingredients required to cook the *Kaññi*³¹ to be used as offerings at the site, which will be transported to the *Jāram Maitān*. Some will take these on their heads as offerings. The *Pe□□ivaravu* will arrive at the *Jāram Maitān*, with many *Nērcca* flags and instruments following it. The cooking of the *Kaññi* will soon start. This *Kaññi*, which is cooked in a large vessel placed in the paddy field beside the *Jāram*, will be served along with coconuts in a small container. Hundreds of rice sacks will be used for this *Kaññi* distribution, which goes on during the *Nērcca* days. Individuals from different parts of the region will donate rice for the *Kaññi*, and numerous people will travel from every corner of the country to savor it. In the afternoon, the *Tirūrkkāru□e Varavu* will arrive, also accompanied by musical instruments. At

³⁰ Ground for gathering

³¹ Rice gruel

three o'clock, the *Tirūrkkāru* *Varavu* will pass through the existing court complex of *Tirur*, with Elephants and various *Māppila* art performances such as *Cen*, *Kōlkali*, *Duffmu*, *Arabana*, and *Cā* *imu*. This advent also occurs at noon on the first day of the *Nērcca*. Upon the arrival of this *Varavu*, the general public will assemble at B. P. *A* *ādi*. When the *Tirūrkkāru* *Varavu* comes, they go to the *Nālakat* family at *Puzikunnam* to take away the flag, from there to the *Jāram Maitān*. Prayers are said before the flag is raised on the flagpole. At this time, donations from some people will be distributed among the crowd. After the flag is hoisted, umbrellas will be opened in the sky, and fireworks will begin. Following the hoisting of the flag, *Pe* *ivaravus* will keep arriving at *Jāram* from different places until the mornings of Sunday to Tuesday. The *Cāppakkāru* *Varavu* of *Wāgā* will arrive at *North Bazaar* at four in the morning on Wednesday. With elephants and music, the *Nērcca* bearers will then go to the northern market and later escort the *Cāppakkāru* *Varavu* to the *Jāram Maitān*. This marks the end of the three-day-long *Nērcca*, which involves placing the elephants in front of the *Jāram* and lighting firecrackers.

The flag is removed on the Sunday following the *Nērcca*. The flag lowering of the *Nērcca* is done in the presence of the *Nērcca* committee and the *Mu* *um* *Vilikkār*. After lowering the flag, it is carried to the *Jāram*, and after offering prayers, it is taken to the *Nālakat Taravā*.

People who carry a heavy offering to the *Jāram* in a square box covered in straw or banana leaves call it *Mū* *a*. *Mū* *a* generally carries rice and other farm products. *Mū* *as* were carried on a large bullock cart during the past; however, these days, they are hand-carried. This change is a reflection of the way farming has evolved. More than half of the visitors to *Yāhūm Ta* *al Auliya*'s *Jāram* in *Putiya* *ādi* do not belong to the *Māppila* community. Additionally, travellers in various vehicles, including buses and auto-rickshaws, passing through this area are also observed making offerings at this *Jāram*.

2.20 Badr Śuhada Nērcca

This *Nērcca* is also known as *Badrī□□alu□e Nērcca*. It is a *Nērcca* globally observed in remembrance of the martyrs and courageous soldiers who fought in the Battle of *Badr*.

2.20.1 The Legend behind the Nērcca

The Battle of *Badr* is the first battle that occurred in AD 622 in the year 2 *Hijri* during the propagation of Islam as per Islamic history. The Battle of *Badr*, the most significant battle in Islamic history, in which Prophet *Muhammad* himself took part, is unmatched among the believers of Islam. *Badr* and *Nērcca* are named in honour of the martyrs and courageous soldiers who fought this war. *Badr* is a city 150 kilometres from Madinah towards Makkah. Born in Makkah, Prophet *Muhammad* was spreading the word of Islam when the *Mušriks*³² of Makkah, or the people of Makkah, disagreed with him and tortured him emotionally and physically to a great extent, along with the various restrictions placed upon him by which he fell into extreme distress. In a condition where hardly any individuals joined him in his belief, he had to leave his own nation and house and run away to other areas. When he walked some places with Islamic preaching, he encountered some 70 individuals of Madinah headed by *Sahadu ibn Muhād*, and they invited him to Madinah. He got the invitation accepted. He came back to Madinah with the '*Muhājirs*' who accompanied him from Makkah. The people who accepted the Prophet in Madinah are referred to as *Ansār*.

Whoever believed in him joined him and Islam, like the *Ansār* and the *Muhājirs* who departed from Makkah with him. He earned some followers with him while propagating Islam in Madinah. Madinah was a very diplomatic city in the olden days. Because if the people of Makkah wanted to travel to Sham³³ and Yemen for business, they could do it through Madinah. Thus, the growing acceptability of Prophet *Muhammad* in Madinah instilled fear in the polytheists who drove the

³² Mecca people who did not become followers of prophet Muhammed.

³³ Greater Syria

Prophet out of Makkah. Since they understood that this would hurt them later, the *Muśriks* of Makkah were creating some issues in Madinah just to cut down on the Prophet's acceptance in Madinah. They attempted to place the blame for this on the head of the Prophet and his believers. There was a merchant who had brought much trouble to the Prophet in Makkah, named *Abu Sufyān*, one of the *Qurays*³⁴ tribe chief, and who travelled far and wide to Syria and Yemen. He was a major businessman and leader who headed the movements against the Prophet. In this circumstance, Prophet came to know that *Abu Sufyān*, who had exiled him from Makkah was traveling via Madinah after a business transaction, and thus, Prophet and his men organized an army for him as a chance to take revenge upon him. However, that was not the only reason. There are some diplomatic and divine commands believed to have been present in this attack plan.

But when *Abu Sufyān* came to know that the Prophet and his unit were going to attack him, he dispatched messengers to Makkah. From Makkah, a huge army of nearly a thousand soldiers, 600 camels, and 100 horsemen marched to confront the Prophet and his companions. The tiny unit of the Prophet's warriors, who stood before *Abu Sufyān* to fight, had to battle an army that was three times as large as theirs. The Prophet's army, with only 313 members, was compelled to fight. They did not retreat, but geared up for war. There were 313 individuals on the side of the Prophet, comprising those who came from Makkah and those who came to join the Prophet from Madinah. Some claim to say 60 camels and three horses were, some argue about two horses. The Prophet's men geared up to battle against his three-fold enemy. On the 16th of *Ramadān*, the Prophet and his team camped at *Badr*, 150 kilometres away from Madinah, and constructed a star-shaped hall where they could have a supply of water by harnessing all the water sources there. This was an excellent war plan. This instilled a fear into the enemy army with high manpower, gang power, horse power, and camels. It was raining that same night, and the ponds were filled with water so that the Prophet's men could use the water as they preferred. The opposing party, who were incensed by this, stated that they would go

³⁴ Clan of prophet Muhammed

there to fetch water, and the Prophet's army fought off those who went there. What followed was that a band of 313 followers of the Prophet was observed constructing a victory chariot. The enemy troops retreated, and this battle on 17 *Ramadān* was announced to be a victory for the side of the Prophet.

This is also the battle that provided a magnificent historical beginning to the expansion of this religion. Once the war had been won, the Prophet and his followers became widely accepted in Madinah. Numerous tribes joined Islam. In this war, the Makkah *Musriks* were badly defeated, and all their chiefs who possessed the most military power were killed. *Abu Jahl*, *Aswad*, and *Šaibat* lost a huge army. All the polytheists in Makkah were thrown into a state of panic. History tells that those individuals, including *Abu Sufyān*, who commanded this war, subsequently accepted the Prophet's Religion. Muslims believe that 'angels' came from God to assist the Prophet's army in this war, and they gave all assistance to the Prophet's side to win this war. Approximately 70 enemies were martyred in this battle. Fourteen of the Prophet's army also died as martyrs in this. Some of the enemies were taken captive. The *Badr Nērcca* is in remembrance of the martyrs of this war, or the 313 valiant warriors who met death in this war, irrespective of the enemy army's strength. *Badr Nērcas* are followed in various parts of the world.

2.20.2 Ritual and Customs Associated with the Nērcca

In Malabar and throughout Kerala, this *Badr Nērcca* happens on the 17th of *Ramadān* and is nearly similar in Malabar³⁵, with varying *Badr Mawlid* and food donation.

2.21 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the rich diversity and deep-rooted cultural significance of *Nērcas* across the Malabar region by closely examining select examples from Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, and Trissur. Through a detailed folkloric and ethnographic lens, it has highlighted how each

³⁵ The *Badr Mawlid* and *Badr Padappattu* literature are also used as additional references for gathering data in this section.

Nērcca, despite regional variations in form, name, and structure, contributes meaningfully to the collective religious and cultural identity of the *Māppila* community.

The study of *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca* revealed its strong association with Sufi traditions and musical spirituality, particularly linked to the revered figure of *Muhammed Shah Auliya*, around whose *Makhām* the ritual is centered. The use of *Duffmuṭṭu*, *Arabanamuṭṭu*, *Māppilapāṭṭu*, and musical processions illustrates the devotional and aesthetic dimensions of this event. In contrast, *Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca*, though held by a *Māppila* community, reflects elements of syncretism and intercommunal influence, especially in its performative grandeur and festival-like atmosphere, resembling elements of nearby festivals such as Trissur *Pūram*. Its visual and performative rituals underscore how *Nērcas* adapt to local cultural landscapes.

The *Malappuram Nērcca* was examined for its strong martyr-based legend, where historical figures and warrior saints are remembered through commemorative rites. This *Nērcca* serves not only as a spiritual practice but also as a tool of historical memory and communal resistance. Similarly, the *Appavāṇibha Nērcca* holds local mythic significance through its oral legends and unique ritual structure, where specific offerings and prayers reinforce the spiritual efficacy of the ritual. The B. P. *Aṭṭāṭṭi Nērcca*, with its deeply rooted *Makhām* worship and associated myths, further illustrates how saints and sacred spaces are at the heart of local religious consciousness.

A common and vital ritual observed across many of these *Nērcas* is *Peṭṭivaravu*, a grand procession often involving decorated pots (sometimes referred to as *Candanakkuṭṭam*), drums, music, and community participation. This procession is not only a visual spectacle but a symbolic act representing the submission of *Nērcas*, a communal offering, and a rebuilding of sacred memory. The *Peṭṭivaravu* also functions as an aesthetic and performative element that draws collective attention and participation, reinforcing communal solidarity.

The legends behind each *Nērcca*, passed down through oral narratives and songs, serve as the backbone of belief. These stories give meaning to the rituals and guide the actions of devotees. They also reflect the socio-historical conditions that gave rise to each *Nērcca*, including migration histories, local saintly interventions, spiritual miracles, or martyrdoms. Through these stories, each *Nērcca* becomes more than a religious event; it becomes a living cultural archive, continuously updated and reinterpreted by the community.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that *Nērcas*, despite differences in name, such as *Urs*, *Candanakkuṁam*, or *Nērcca*, are united in their function as community rituals rooted in faith, folklore, and cultural expression. Their regional adaptations, ritual variety, and performative richness reflect the broader folkloric vitality of Malabar's *Māppila* communities. At the same time, the presence of shared elements such as *Makhām* veneration, *Peṁṁivaravu*, collective food sharing (food donation), and storytelling points to a common religious imagination and cultural continuity that sustains these practices across generations.

This detailed comparative study of specific *Nērcas* and their constituent legends and rituals provide a critical foundation for understanding the dynamic nature of these folk traditions. It sets the stage for analyzing the broader patterns of ritual evolution, folklorisation, and external influence that will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

***NĒRCCA* STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS THROUGH FOLKLORE AND BELIEF PERSPECTIVES**

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of selected *Nērccas*, focusing on their rituals, customs, structures, and regional variations. It explores how geographical, historical, and cultural differences have influenced the evolution of each *Nērcca*, resulting in distinct patterns of change. The chapter also examines how external interventions, like religious, political, or commercial, have led to significant modifications in traditional *Nērccas*, often weakening their original functions and cultural integrity. By analysing these shifts, the chapter highlights how some *Nērccas* have transformed into public folklore events, while others remain confined to ritual only or community-specific ritual, revealing the complex dynamics of continuity and change in *Māppila* ritual traditions.

3.2 Understanding *Nērcca* through *Māppila* Community Faith

The word “*Nadr*”, which means to resolve to do a holy deed, to resolve to do something in the name of God, is the principle of the *Nērcca* made by the *Māppilas* of Malabar. There are many principles related to the *Nērcca* within the *Māppila* faith (Abdul Azees Saqafi Vellayur). A *Nērcca* within the *Māppila* faith is to resolve to do a holy deed. However, *Māppila Nērcca* are local forms that incorporate extensive rituals of this principle and concept. The same concept is expressed in a festive form. This happens when a whole community makes a vow in the name of an *Auliya* or a *Śahīd*.

In the *Māppila* community, the term *Nērcca* has two connotations. One of them is a quite individualistic *Nērcca*, i.e., offerings. But the other is celebrating the memorial days of the holy spirits and saints with the people in general, called *Ā□□u*

Nērc̄ca. Though both share the same meaning, they are very different in their execution. Principles of both are the same.

The first *Nērc̄ca* is constructed in the mind of the believer out of an individual situation of the individual. The *Māppilas* term such a ‘*Nērc̄ca Nēruka*’, i.e., to offer money, things, or *Dikrs*¹, holy verses to holy souls, holy places, shrines, or people to gain realization of a desire (*Murād Hāsil*) or to guard them against evils, this is believed to be *Nērc̄ca*. If anybody thought of *Nērc̄ca Nēral*, it will be a fardh (compulsory). In the Dravidian language, ‘*Nērc̄ca*’ signifies promise, agreement, truth, etc. (M. Gangadharan). It may be difficult for others to comprehend if a person has made a *Nērc̄ca*, as it is purely confined to the mind of that individual. *Nērc̄ca* is an undertaking given based on a contract. Sometimes it may be a contract made for a definite purpose. This can again be performed in two ways. This contract is done as an expression of gratitude after the matter is over. Or the contract is done prior to the matter being settled. Numerous people make a series of *Nērc̄cas* based on a contract.

These *Nērc̄cas* are made while preparing for a specific goal, a journey, or to prevent accidents in life altogether. Sometimes it may be a single person or one group. *Nērc̄cas* are made in different ways. *Nērc̄cappe*□□*is*² can be found at holy places and roadsides all over Malabar. *Nērc̄cappe*□□*is* are mostly green in colour. Another way *Nērc̄ca* giving is direct giving to *Makhām* or holy places. *Badar Śuhada Nērc̄cappe*□□*i*, *Mu*□□*iccira Śuhada Nērc̄capetti*, *Ōmānūr Śuhada Nērc̄cappe*□□*i*, *Pallivaka Nērc̄cappe*□□*i* are the examples of *Nērc̄cappe*□□*is* seen in Malabar.

These *Nērc̄cas* very rarely become big *Nērc̄cas*. When a group of people undertakes to make an offering to prevent or save themselves from a disaster that has fallen upon a whole land, this *Nērc̄ca* often turns into a big *Nērc̄ca*. This

¹ Holy Verses

² Offering boxes, also known as donation boxes, are commonly used in both *Masjids* and temples to facilitate donations.

offering is made on the instructions of some saint or other. Thus, when this *Nērc̄ca* is made, it becomes the need of not only an individual but also a group. One such *Nērc̄ca* is the *Paṅṅarkulam Kāli*³ *Nērc̄ca*. When cattle started dying in large numbers in a village called *Paṅṅarkulam* near *Mañjēri, Mampuram Tal* suggested that a *Kāli Nērc̄ca* should be held every year as a solution, and on that basis, *Kāli Nērc̄ca* is held there every year. This is a pledge taken by a group as a whole to prevent a disaster that has befallen on a society.

The second type is *Āṅṅu Nērc̄ca*. It is done in various ways, ranging from festive *Nērc̄cas* with various rituals and customs to *Nērc̄cas* with minimal rituals. These differ based on local and other differences. These festive *Āṅṅu Nērc̄cas* are also referred to as *Koṅṅikuttu Nērc̄cas*, *Candanakkuṅṅam Nērc̄cas*, *Nērc̄cas*, and *Urs*, all are interchangeable terms. The scale of the *Nērc̄cas* may be different. It may not be within the confines of an individual or a group. Sometimes it is a part of the region of more than one group of people. It may be to commemorate any saints on their memorial days or on special days associated with them, pray to them, offer holy words, *Dikrs*, and *Mawlıds*. Here, too, the concept is the same as dedication. Offerings are being made in these *Nērc̄cas*. Although both are *Nērc̄cas* to holy spirits or holy places, one is something that is solely in the mind of the individual, and the other is a ritual that is being done by the people as a whole and by the community at large and involves various rituals. So, it is of a very elaborate festive type. And it includes many ceremonies. But for the *Māppila* community that is performing this *Nērc̄ca*, both forms of *Nērc̄cas* are conceptually the same. The *Nērc̄cas* of the community are done by bringing gifts, offering *Dikrs*, verses of the Quran, and prayers with great celebration at the places associated with some kind of physical remains of a holy spirit. The same act is done individually without any celebration, which is called the offering *Nērc̄ca*. Conceptually, the *Māppila* community ritually makes donations to the holy spirit, offering money, objects, prayers, or sanctified verses. The principles of *Nērc̄ca* are taken from *Māppila* holy texts and *Hadees*. *Māppila* considers the *Nērc̄ca* celebration to be a ritual. *Whatever*

³ Cattles

charities you give or vow you make are surely known to Allah. And the wrongdoers will have no helpers (Al Baqara 270 - Holy Quran). Fig.3 shows the hierarchical flowchart of divisions of *Nērc̣ca*.

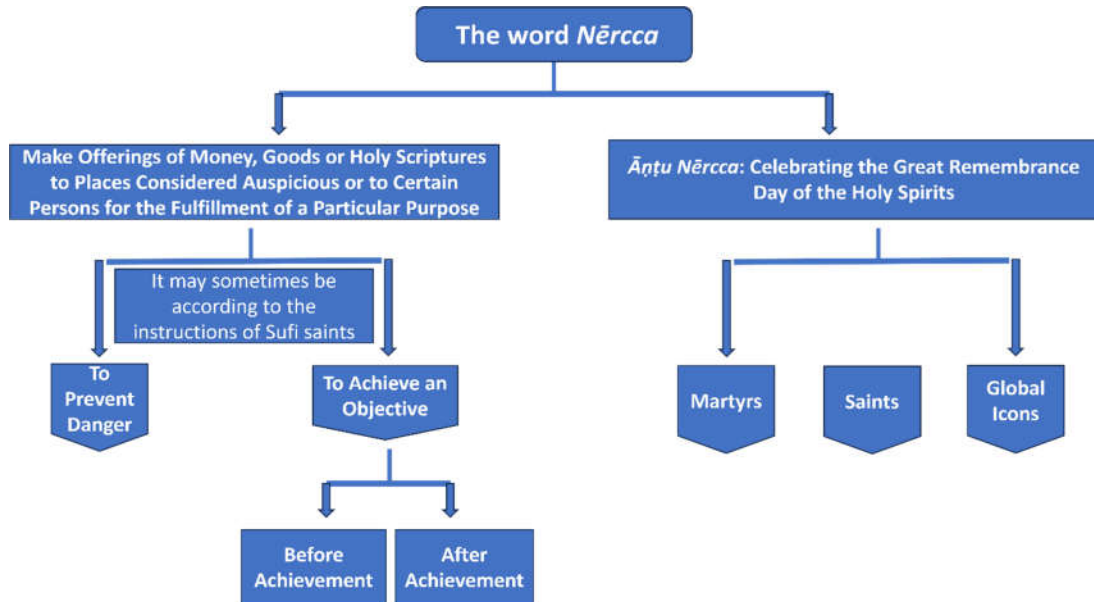


Figure 3: Divisions of *Nērc̣ca* concept in *Māppila* community

The word '*Nērc̣ca*' is not only used by the *Māppilas*; most communities in Kerala use the word '*Nērc̣ca*' to refer to offerings made with a specific purpose. "*Paṅacōṅē Nērc̣cakkārē*" is a riddle in Malabar chant when danger strikes.

3.3 Classification of *Māppila Nērc̣ca*

Nērc̣cas can be divided according to many different criteria, including the variety of rituals, the circumstances under which the *Nērc̣ca* was established, and the content of the *Nērc̣ca*. When so classified, *Nērc̣cas* conducted in the same location must fall within different categories. When broken down in this manner, we can examine and see if the same kind of *Nērc̣cas* is similar in their development and if they all encounter new circumstances, crises, new societies, new groups, new social conditions, and new technologies in the same manner. In this case, the split is made according to the context within which the *Nērc̣cas* were started. When grouped in this manner, the *Nērc̣cas* of Malabar can be classified into three groups. Nearly all

Nērccas are martyrs, Sufis, and Global icons of Islam. The foundation of all *Nērcca* is the remembrance of heroic legends. All the *Nērccas* researched in the study are connected with the remembrance of heroic legends. Fig. 4 shows the division of *Āṅṅu Nērccas*.

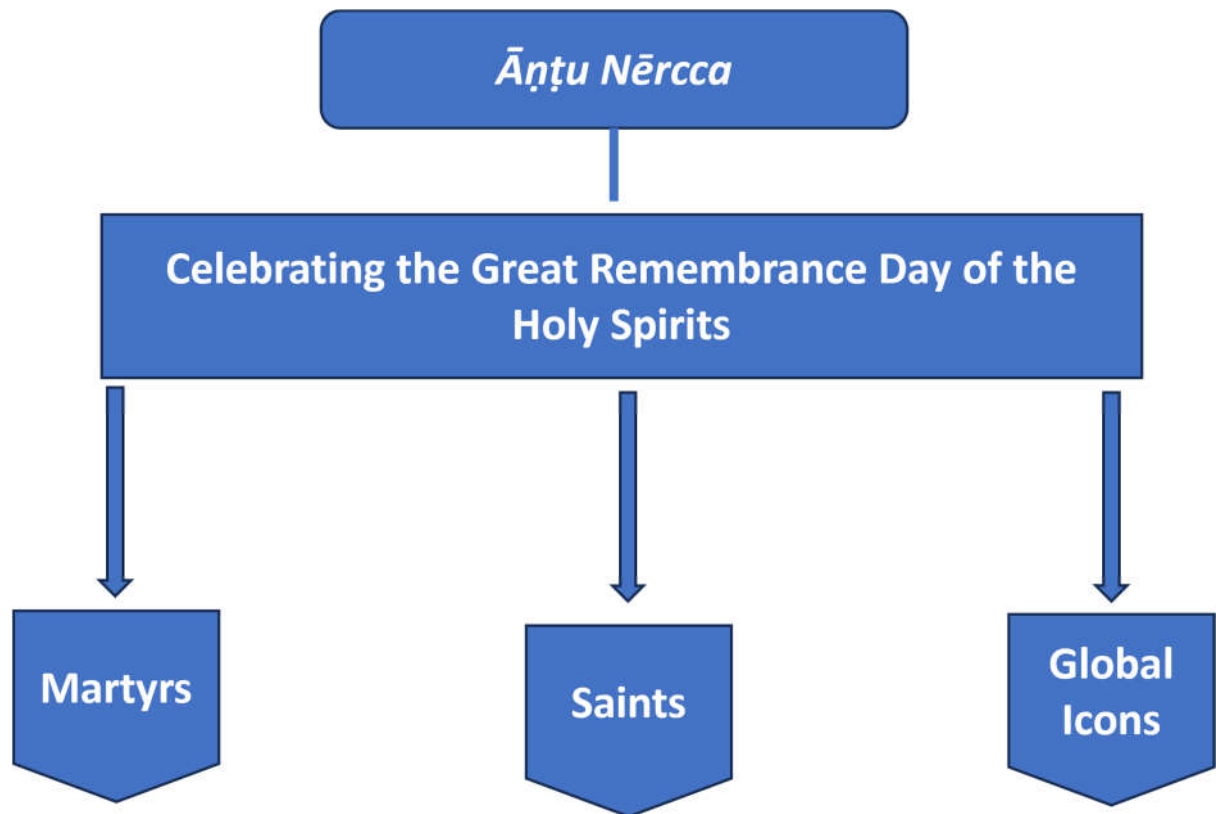


Figure 4: Three types of *Āṅṅu Nērccas*

3.3.1 *Śuhada Nērcca* (Commemoration of Martyrs)

The first type of *Nērccas* in Malabar is the *Śuhada Nērcca* (*Nērccas* of Martyrs), the most significant variant of the *Nērccas*. Some of the natives of *Māppilas* refer to it as the *Saitākkamāruṅṅe Nērcca*. Examples for *Śuhada Nērccas* are *Malappuram Nērcca*, *Pookkottur Nērcca* etc.

The *Māppilas* respect the courageous men who fought unceasingly against the landlords, rulers, and the British in Malabar and died courageously as martyrs. Those who fought to safeguard their places of worship were also 'Martyrs' to the *Māppilas*. The *Māppilas* venerated the martyrs and thought of them as very close to

Allah. “Think not of those as dead who are killed in the way of Allah. Rather, they are alive, with their Lord, and they have provision” (Holy Quran 3:169). The martyrs were referred to as *Śahīds*. They were regarded as holy men and were considered very close to God. Hence, the *Māppilas* used to pray before God for their requirements in front of the martyrs or their absence. The *Māppilas* had a belief that if their request was presented to God through one of Allah’s beloveds, then it would be settled very soon. *Tawassul and Istigāza* are two types of strategies for requesting Allah for a quick response (Najeeb Moulavi). Prayer and dedication, along with this belief, have moulded the *Nērccas*. The final intention of the *Nērccas* prepared by the *Māppilas* on the Martyrs' Day is to satisfy these sacred souls and to solve their problems and wishes. The most significant *Nērccas* in Malabar are the *Nērccas* of the martyrs. This reflects the patriotism and freedom spirit in the *Māppilas* religion. The *Māppilas* viewed the struggle for the nation as a worship. This is the most significant belief of the *Māppilas'* religion. They consider that if one dies during the struggle for the country, he or she also possesses the virtue of a martyr. For this reason, they are holy souls in the context of the *Māppilas'* religion. Abu Hurairah reported:

“The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, “Whom do you reckon to be a martyr amongst you?” The Companions replied: “The one who is killed in Allah's way.” He said, “In that case, the martyrs among my people would be few.” The Companions asked: “O Messenger of Allah! Then, who are the martyrs?” He replied, “He who is killed in the way of Allah is a martyr; he who dies naturally in the Cause of Allah is a martyr; he who dies of plague is a martyr; and he who dies of a belly disease is a martyr; and he who is drowned is a martyr.”” (Imam An-Nawawi).

3.3.2 Auliyākkannmāruṭe Nērcca (Nērccas of Sufi Saints)

The *Māppilas* in Malabar regarded those among them who excelled in their Sufis who manifested different miracles, or those who were descendants of the Prophet, as *Auliya* or *Ta□□al*. The *Nērccas* that they make on their memorial days are another significant type of *Nērccas*. They are referred to as *Auliyākkannmāru□e*

Nērcca. These *Nērccas* may be made with or without their knowledge. In this type of *Nērccas*, there may be *Auliya* who become saints only upon death, without revealing any extraordinary features while alive. These *Nērccas* are restricted to the region. Sometimes, over the years, this would percolate outwards and would be joined by persons from neighbouring villages.

In such *Nērccas*, the *Auliya* are persons who moved into Malabar from Arabia or Persia or some other place at some given point of time and lived amidst the *Māppilas*. Or else, they must have been great persons who were born and brought up in Malabar itself and who had knowledge, godly powers, and invisibilities. They were the ones who attracted the focus of the *Māppilas* and other people of Malabar, and became cult objects. In an era where practices such as allopathy had not yet evolved, they were curers of some illnesses, spiritual curers based on Sufi practice, and spiritual guides who solved many problems. These saints were a point of confidence among the *Māppila* people. Later, they were remembered and their memorial days were celebrated as *Nērccas*. They are referred to as the *Nērccas* of saints. Most of the very elaborate *Nērccas* that are still followed in Malabar are the *Nērccas* of saints. The *Nērccas* of saints are still followed with great devotion by individuals. Some treatments are also offered in these types of *Nērccas*. Examples for *Auliya Nērccas* are *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca*, *B. P. A□□ā□□i Nērcca*, etc.

3.3.3 Global Sufi Martyr Figures in Islam Become *Nērcca*

The third type of *Nērccas* is the tribute to universal Islamic historical figures. This is quite dissimilar to the tribute to indigenous Muslim Sufis and entirely different from *Auliyākkannmāru□e Nērcca*. This is a tribute to warriors or Sufis who waged or preached for the propagation of Islam, the religion of the *Māppilas*. They need not be residing among the *Māppilas*. The foundation for this tribute will also be mere stories or legends regarding them. These *Nērccas* will not be formal *Nērccas*, such as the martyr *Nērccas* and the saint *Nērccas* in Malabar. These *Nērccas* will consist of mere nominal ceremonies, prayers, and food offerings. Furthermore, it is not restricted to a specific region. Whereas other *Nērccas* are conducted at a *Masjid* or tomb, it will be conducted simultaneously in nearly all

Māppila Masjids and in all areas where this religion is present. The rituals will differ based on each country and culture. For this, *Nērccappes* are appointed in each *Masjid* and area. These *Nērccas* are normally conducted by the *Māppila Masjids* directly. Examples of such *Nērccas* include the *Badr Nērcca*, the *Rifāi Nērcca*, *Muhyiddīn eikh Nērcca*, and the *Ajmer Urs*. The Malabar region widely exhibits only the *Badr Nērcca*.

3.4 Nērcca: Integration of Belief and Regional Cultural Practices

The texture of the *Nērcca* exhibited is not practiced by Muslims on an international scale. But the intention of the *Nērcca*, which is to glorify the great ones, glorify the saints, show respect for their relics, pray at their tombs, give alms for them, and glorify them, all comes under worship in Islam. When it is worship, it is a ritual. It is a common shared belief that *Nērcca* is a ritual or worship; with this belief in mind, there are numerous types of worship in this notion among Muslims in most parts of the world. If this notion and the factors of the culture of the place in which it comes about are put together, then a type of observance and ritual is made. The *Wali song* of Sumatra in Indonesia all have this practice (Hafiz et al.).

In Senegal, a part of West Africa, the *Magal of Touba* is a major event commemorating *eikh Ahmadou Bamba*, a prominent Sufi leader. This festival attracts millions of pilgrims who engage in prayers, recitations, and communal meals. It emphasizes themes of peace, tolerance, and spiritual devotion. In countries like Kenya and Tanzania, which are parts of East Africa, Sufi festivals often include the celebration of the *Mawlid* (the Prophet's birthday) alongside the remembrance of local saints. These events may feature traditional dances, storytelling, and the sharing of food, fostering a sense of community and cultural identity. In South Africa, the commemoration of Sufi saints often takes place during *Mawlid* celebrations, where communities gather for prayers and discussions about the teachings of the saints. These events highlight the integration of Sufi practices within the broader Islamic community (Seferbekov et al.).

They all take it as worship. It is based on this principle that the *Māppilas* make *Nērc̄cas* here. With many of the locally developed rituals coming along, the texture of the *Nērc̄ca* that we have today has emerged. Hence, the ritual and practice of the *Nērc̄cas* are not distinct from one another. Because they are all a part of the ritual, the believers look at the *Nērc̄ca* as a ritual and a virtue in every sense. Even if there are no seemingly untraditional elements, everything that is a part of the ceremonies of the *Nērc̄ca* is looked upon as a ritual.

In contrast to *Nērc̄ca*, the *Māppilas* have no other ritual or practice in which other groups can participate, either in whole or in part, in any other ritual or in the customs that are included in the ritual. Most of the people interviewed believe that *Nērc̄ca* is a ritual. In *Nērc̄cas*, folklore is shaped through some process. A *Nērc̄ca* is usually a combination of custom and ritual. Only when custom and ritual unite do festive *Nērc̄cas* emerge.

*“A ritual is a formal behaviour, according to established and repetitive patterns, expressive of community values, meanings, and beliefs. The primordial use of ritual would imply that the ritual involved some reference to sacred, supernatural, or magical realms. In fact, Durkheim believed that the opposition between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' is characteristic of ritual, which involves crossing the regular line between the two. For Durkheim, the sacred is a reflection of the community in which people live. Ritual thus has the role of bringing the individual closer to the social whole. Continuing this theme, the ritual can also be viewed as a reaction to threats to the community. Ritual activity increases in the face of social change or at other times of social instability. Within cultural studies, these concepts of ritual have been applied, more or less accurately or metaphorically, to examine how secular collectivises (and particularly subcultures or ethnic groups) define and articulate their identity, and resist pressure from outside in contemporary capitalism (hence, for instance, the title of Hall and Jefferson's collection, *Resistance through Rituals*.” (Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick).*

The *Māppilas* have varying opinions on customs and rituals. The majority of *Māppilas* embrace custom in the role of ritual, but numerous *Māppilas* resist custom

in ritual. The opinion of the *Māppilas* regarding customs and rituals is based on their religion and it differs. The *Māppilas* look at rituals entirely differently from the theories provided in common customs and rituals. Customs and rituals occupy some special place in the faith of the *Māppilas*.

Māppilas' rituals are always connected with faith. *Māppilas* explain, Rituals are all acts which a people or an individual do in a certain manner, in the hope of a certain merit. It is purely based on faith and the hope of reward from Allah. *Māppila* faith says all rituals are worship (M. K. Ismayil Musliyār).

Māppila customs live as customs only in extremely limited areas. Customs are things which people, or a society in general, generally do and repeat in a specific manner. They are the practices developed based on regional traditions. *Māppilas* do not hold the belief that it possesses any special virtue. Custom is autonomous, and the character of custom is contingent on what it is paired with. If the custom practice is paired with a good deed, it is good, and if it is paired with an evil deed, it is evil. *Māppilas* consider all good deeds to be blessings. All bad deeds are considered to be immoral. Fig. 5 shows the dual outcomes of customs in the *Māppila* community.

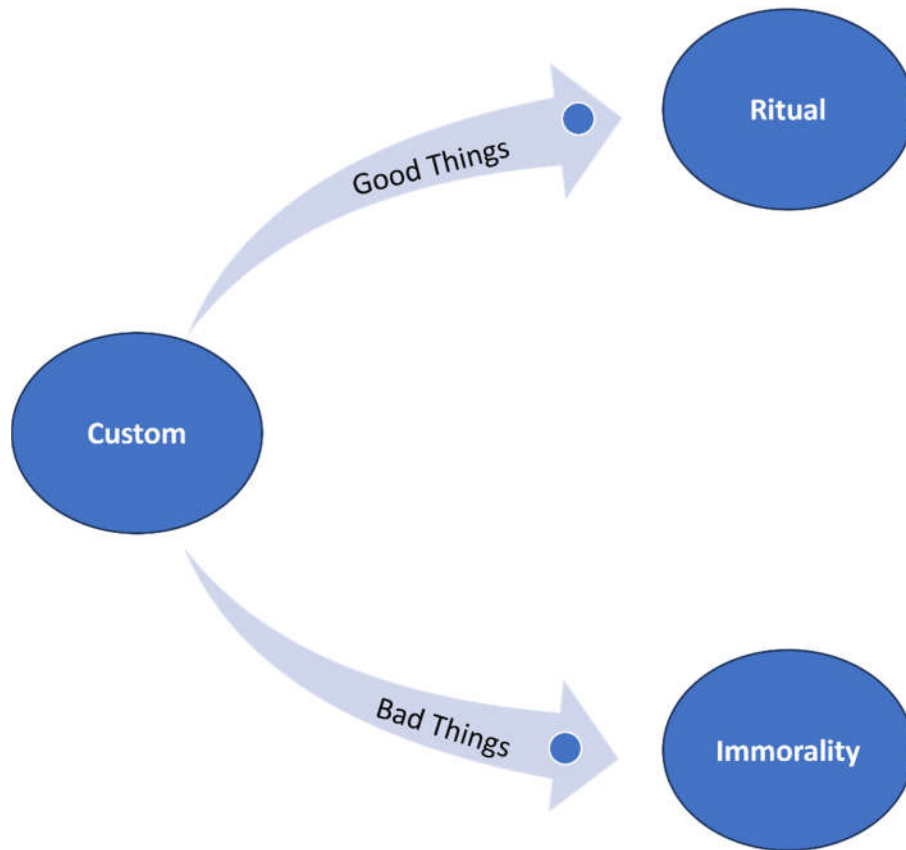


Figure 5: Dual outcomes of customs in the *Māppila* community

In accordance with the *Māppila* belief, there are jurisprudence standards for distinguishing good and evil deeds based on the belief itself. An omnipresent sharia encompasses all human affairs into five judgements in *Māppila* belief. *Fard*, *Sunnah*, *Halāl*, *Harām*, and *Karāhat*. The *Māppilas* judge all the things they perform in their lives as being judged by these five judgments. Among these, *Fard* and *Sunnah* are such things which have been made pure, or according to the beliefs of the *Māppilas*, *Fard* acts and *Sunnah* acts have a reward following their performance. *Karāhat* and *Harām* acts are prohibited and punitive. *Halāl* acts are such acts for which there is no special reward but are lawful. Even if it is allowed, if it is utilized for evil, it comes under the category of *Harām* or *Karāhat*. The *Halāl* judgment relies on what it is combined with (Kozhannur Ali Moulavi).

The custom of the *Māppila* religion can fall under the umbrella of *Halāl*, or the traditions can be regarded as *Halāl*. When it is accompanied by good deeds, it becomes *Sunnah*, and when it becomes *Sunnah*, it becomes a practice and worship. The *Māppilas* also have the belief that when accompanied by forbidden acts, it becomes *Harām*. Fig. 6 refers to the relation between human actions based on the beliefs in *Māppila* jurisprudence.

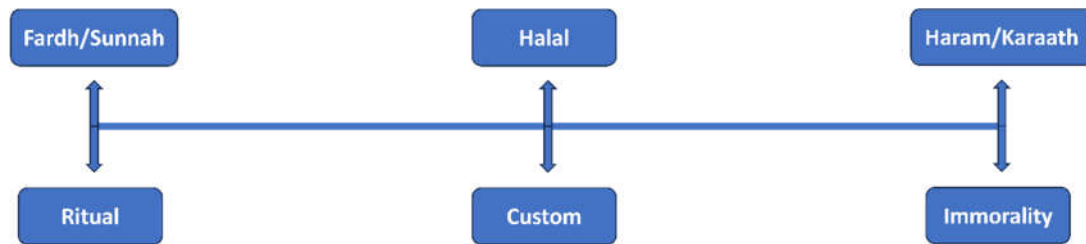


Figure 6: The relation between human actions based on the beliefs in *Māppila* jurisprudence

The *Māppilas* view all the activities in their lives from two aspects. All the activities that the *Māppilas* perform in their lives fall under two categories, good and evil. They are taught precisely what is good and what is evil, as per their beliefs. They have a number of systems for this. According to the Quran, *Hadith*, *Ijma'*, *Qiyās*, and religious teachings in *Madrasas*, the *Māppilas* have the means to know if every action they perform in life is good or bad. It is believed that every action performed in their life will either lead to good or it will lead to bad. They think that if they perform good things in life, then they will receive heaven, and if there is evil in life, then they will receive hell. This will be decided by the five judgments to weigh and identify good and evil, according to the *Māppila* jurisprudence. There are no idle deeds in the life of the *Māppilas*. For instance, if one clears a small obstacle (thorn or stone) from a path while on the way, it is not an idle act for the *Māppilas*. They take it as a virtuous deed that is blessed by God. From this perspective, everything that is done by the *Māppilas* as a ritual is good, and rituals are permissible acts. When an act is combined with rituals that have been made to be virtuous, then it becomes worship. The custom of the *Māppilas* does not stand alone; it has existence only if it combines with any act. If it is paired with any good act,

then it becomes a ritual; if it is paired with an unholy act, then it becomes immoral. For instance, a procession of people is marching. If it is an act which goes on at fixed intervals, it is a custom. But if the party marches on the birthday of a saint to pray over his grave or to hoist a flag there to declare the arrival of a *Nērcca*, then that becomes a ritual. But if that band of people marches to loot a place annually, that too becomes an unclean action. It is said that when the same custom is performed for something else with ill motives and for ill acts, it gets contaminated and is punished by God.

As mentioned before, the *Māppilas* take all rituals as things that provide them with virtue. If some custom followed in an area is added to a ritual, then it merges with the ritual. Then there is no separate thing called custom, and only ritual exists. This is why the custom in the *Māppila* religion is stated to be limited. As there is less religious faith in the virtue of custom and they are believed to be just local cultural elements, the observance of custom is not viewed by the *Māppilas* as a religious act. Fig. 7 shows the detailed chart of human affairs in *Māppila* belief.

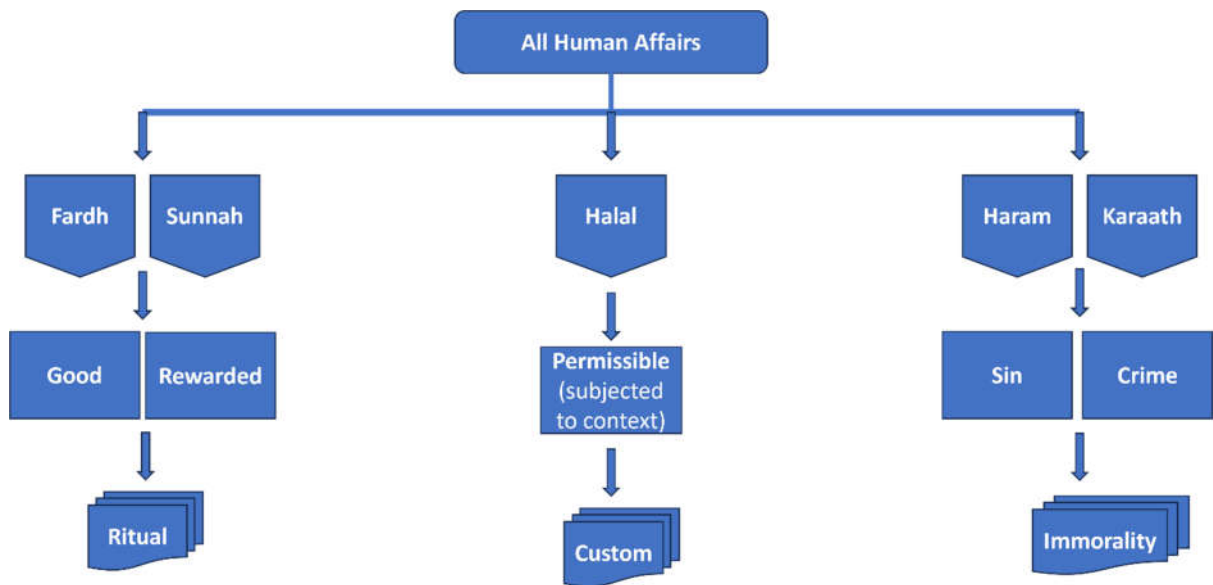


Figure 7: A detailed chart of human affairs in *Māppila* belief

In the *Māppila* society, *Sunnis* are the supporters of customs and regional traditions. But a few of them have also begun opposing customs. This has tended to

make them give up customs in most *Nērccas*. In all *Nērccas*, customs are developed over time. Such folklorism happens over a period of time.

Māppilas tend to regard local details that are not part of the *Māppila* precepts and that occur in other groups' rituals as traditions. But the *Māppila* reformists accept and believe only in the precepts. They do not accept tradition. They regard all else as irreligious. They practice only what is laid down in the precepts. They do not treat the *Nērccas* that arrived as a component of regional variants of religion as rituals. They regard them as unorthodox and irreligious. This is why this community is referred to as *Māppila* reformist (Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella). From their perspective, most of the rituals that the *Māppilas* referred to as rituals, including *Nērccas*, were not rituals. But even the *Māppilas* who viewed all of these as rituals, when customs were blended with rituals, many different opinions came from within the *Māppila* community itself. Among them, there are views that custom should not be appended to rituals, and the performer must do them only in their complete ritual version. Also, the rituals must not be appended and carried to the extent of celebration, custom, etc. Such persons among the *Māppila* community and reformist groups, having different opinions, were brought about by the influence of globalization, modernization, education, and religious reform movements, etc., as explained below. This influence has taken different forms in every *Nērcca*. Some customs have been totally taken away from what is thought to be rituals. Some *Nērccas* still maintained only those aspects that the community performing them thinks are rituals. The *Malappuram Nērcca* is one such *Nērcca*. Most of those things which were deemed custom in the *Malappuram Nērcca*, including the processions, festivities, flagpoles raising the flags of every caste, band *Mēla*, works of art performances, some ceremonies performed when the procession reached, and the beliefs that relate to it, were taken out of this *Nērcca*, and only its prayer aspects, *Mawlid* recitals, and food donation, which are wholly believed to be rituals among the *Māppila* community are performed.

Another aspect of this modification is what happened in the *Paññāmbi Nērcca*. In this *Nērcca*, all the rituals were taken away, but only the customs still

exist. Here, the prayers conducted at the tomb of the great *Aloor valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al*, the pilgrimage and ceremonies at his tomb, the *Hadiya*⁴ bestowed on his descendants, the involvement of their descendants, and the distribution of food were all taken away from this *Nērcca*. With this, what was eliminated from this *Nērcca* were its ritual ceremonial aspects, but the aspects that were thought to be the customs that were incorporated in the *Nērcca* over time did not change. The coming of the *Rāwters* into the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca*, the coming of other castes, the elephant procession, fireworks, the *Pa□□āmbi* circumambulation, and the art performances, which are considered customs, did not change. The descendants of *Aloor valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Ta□□al* have certain roles in the *Nērcca*. There were some descendants among them who ended up turning to *Māppila* reformists. So, their perception of the *Nērccas* changed from being a mode of worship. The rituals involving it were not promoted at all. Additionally, in the early times, they were the inheritors of the money and wealth that were donated as offerings at the grave, not just at the time of *Nērcca* but the whole year through. The *Nērcca* and the grave were a source of earning for the economically backward family back then. Thus, they initiated performing the *Nērcca*. Subsequently, after all of them became prosperous economically, the necessity for income from the *Nērcca* and the graveyard was no longer required by them. This was also due to one of the reasons why they were no longer interested in the *Nērccas*. That is why these families do not permit the rituals included in the *Nērcca* to be conducted or do not take the initiative to conduct them. What is occurring here is the phenomenon of the authorities being divorced from the *Nērcca*. When the persons authorized to conduct the ritual refrained from it, the ritual was not be continued there, but only the customs persisted. All the aspects that the community holded as custom, like the *Pe□□ivaravu*, the *Āna Ezunnallattuu*, the circumambulation, etc., and all those that subsequently entered the *Nērccas* persisted. Because it was not a ritual and the responsible people did not want to perform it; anybody could perform it. One specialty of the *Pa□□āmbi Nērcca* is that though it is a *Māppila* community *Nērcca*, the *Rāwters* group, which is a different community, has been given some rights in it. Thus, when the ones who are supposed to conduct the ritual in the

⁴ When gifting to a holy person, focus on items that promote spiritual growth, reflection, and devotion

Māppila community refrain from conducting the ritual, the *Rāwters* and other *Māppilas* get their rights to conduct it. Thus, even if there is no ritual, the rest of the customs will be conducted by the *Rāwters* and individuals who are not in that community, and they are content with it. But in fact, the ritual has vanished and is nothing but a custom, and it has turned into a ‘Public folklore’ and a *Nā□□ulsavam*. If the elements of the ritual are lost from the *Nērccas* and its custom continues, it becomes a public folklore. But when the elements of custom vanish from it and only ritual is left, it is a ritual that exists only in the *Māppila* community. As aspects of custom shared among other communities fade out of *Nērccas*, it turns out to be a ritual specific to the *Māppila* community. Other communities only engage in a *Nērcca* that is both a ritual and a custom.

3.5 Functions of the *Nērcca*

Nērcca has a lot of functions to play in the society. Here are some important functions of *Nērccas*.

- Building a Sense of Identity
- Protecting Culture
- Cultural Integration
- Cultivating Culture
- Inter-folk Communication
- Protecting the Rights of Groups
- Protecting Authority
- Open Market
- Entertainment/Education

3.5.1 Building a Sense of Identity

The primary aim of any group's folklore would be to provide a sense of identity. This specific aim is no less relevant in the context of *Māppila* folklore. Passing on information from generation to generation through oral traditions, customs, rituals, and beliefs helps in establishing the identity of a group. *Nērccas* are

a mix of these beliefs, customs, and rituals. In every *Nērcca*, a code of morals and values relevant to that group is formed, which is an important aspect in providing a sense of identity. Rituals play a crucial role in creating a sense of identity by connecting individuals to their heritage, fostering community bonds, expressing shared values, and adapting to societal changes. Through these processes, rituals help individuals navigate their identities within the context of their cultural and social environments (Gregory J. and Ashworth).

3.5.2 Protecting Culture

Similar to all folklores, *Nērccas* play an important role in preserving the culture and values of a people. *Nērccas* symbolize the *Māppila* culture. *Nērccas* are the most prominent indicator of *Māppila* culture in Malabar, because of the *Māppila* symbols and other traditional factors seen in that *Nērcca*. Ritual gatherings are instrumental in protecting culture and fostering a sense of belonging among individuals. They create emotional connections, facilitate cultural transmission, and reinforce social structures, all of which contribute to a strong and cohesive community identity (Aca Mehmet).

3.5.3 Cultural Integration & Cultivating Culture

Nērccas are an example of ritualistic practice where the expression of cultural integration is strongly evident. In the *Nērccas* of specific localities, one can discern the unique cultural traits specific to the region in the *Nērccas*. The mixture of various customs, rituals, and traditions prevalent in different communities is strongly seen in the form of *Nērccas*. This illustrates the fact that the progress of society is eased through such processes of integration. Only those customs that have developed according to the social, cultural, and environmental contexts of a particular region have the ability to flourish in a given society. While analysing the southern end of Malabar, one can note that all *Nērccas* and *Pūrams* have similarities to a high degree. The similarities are noted in both Trissur *Pūram* and the *Paññāmbi Nērcca*. Clearly, the regional cultural matrix is composed of *Pūram* and *Nērccas*. The inclusion of certain aspects of particular elements of the culture of another community in the *Māppila* rituals is a form of cultural integration. The

occurrence of the presence of elephants is a major example of the process of such integration. Elephants are a vital element in most *Pūrams*, including South Malabar's Trissur *Pūram*, which is believed to be a reason for including elephants in *Nērccas* of that region. Besides, in some *Nērccas* like the *Paññāmbi Nērcca*, the processional activity of every participating group generally has a competitive element, whereby the size of the procession, the visibility of each group, and the number of elephants form the focal points of comparison. This competitive spirit also partially follows the rivalry witnessed between the *Pāramēkkāvu* and the *Tiruvambādi* group during the Trissur *Pūram*. Several *Nērccas* and the Trissur *Pūram* developed and existed simultaneously. In South Malabar, it is common to find elephants, *Nettipattam*, and pearls prominently included in the *Nērccas*. On the other hand, the inclusion of elephants, *Nettipaññam*, and *Muttukkuda* is extremely rare in the *Nērccas* of Central Malabar. In this area, the *Peññivaravus* are rich in agricultural yields and *Māppila* artistic performances, which are of paramount importance. *Kōlkali* and *Kutturātīb* are common in the *Peññivaravus*, showing a stark contrast compared to the *Nērccas* in South Malabar.

- **Mimetic Learning:** Rituals often involve mimetic processes, where individuals learn behaviours and norms by observing and imitating others. This form of learning is particularly effective in integrating cultural practices, as it allows participants to internalize the values.
- **Symbolic Representation:** Rituals symbolize the values and beliefs of a community, making them a powerful tool for cultural integration. They express collective identities and reinforce the social order, helping individuals feel a sense of belonging and connection to the larger group (Zirfas, Jorg and Christoph Wulf).

By doing these *Nērccas* annually, the *Māppilas* also consecrate their culture. They continue to remind society that their culture is superior. Not only that, they also perform an act of eliminating what is extraneous within their rituals and incorporating it only for the sake of the society's acceptance.

3.5.4 Inter-Folk Communication

The *Nērccas* are a meeting place for many groups, and therefore, they provide a space for *Māppila* groups to exchange ideas with other groups. There is no any space other than these *Nērccas* where effective sharing of rituals occurs. Among *Māppila* rituals, the *Nērccas* are also the most important place for exchanging ideas. This is a function that deserves the most attention in the new era, because it gives other groups the opportunity to intervene in the spaces of *Māppila* groups, interact with *Māppilas*, and participate in their rituals. The role of *Nērccas* is very important in making the culture of the *Māppila* community feel that it is not different from other groups.

“Ritual festivals often embody cultural practices that are essential for community identity. They allow for the expression of shared values and traditions, which can further solidify inter-community bonds and promote unity ritual festivals serve as vital spaces for inter-community relations by fostering engagement, showcasing cultural practices, and providing opportunities for collective participation. these communal activities are essential for building and maintaining social connections within and between communities” (Deagan and Kathleen).

3.5.5 Protecting the Rights of Groups

In *Nērccas*, there are also rights for other groups. In many cases, other groups have more faith and devotion than the *Māppila* group. For instance, half of the believers who actively take part in B. P. *Aāi Nērcca* and *Makhām* are not *Māppila* community members. Other communities have some rights in the *Māppila Nērcca*. In B. P. *Aādi, Ambāu* family, which is a Hindu family rise flag post. In *Koōi Nērcca*, *Tōkkeukkal* ceremony is separated into two communities, *Kīzāla* and *Māppila*. In Malappuram, a *Taān* family comes as the last *Peivaravu*, named *Taānpe*. This will differ in various *Nērccas*. This will be consisting of lower classes and other groups in the community. These groups also have the right to do various ceremonies related to the *Nērcca* rituals. Occasionally, it will be to hoist a flag, occasionally to install a flagpole, and so forth. Other groups will also have other types of rights. The *Nērccas* also provide protection for these rights.

3.5.6 Protecting Authority

Another role is the safeguarding of authority. There can be a set of people who have the authority to conduct a ritual pertaining to the *Nērc̄ca*. Those set of people are identified only when the *Nērc̄ca* is occurred. It can be the descendants of the saint who lies at the tomb, his relatives during his life, his disciples, some sort of family, or a ritual committee that is constituted annually. Whoever it is, their authority is seen during the *Nērc̄ca*, and it is their duty to safeguard it, so if it is to be feasible, the *Nērc̄ca* has to be conducted. For instance, during the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*, the *Taṅṅal* family can ride horseback in a royal procession with their soldiers, disciples, and retinue. At this point, a lot of people wait for their orders; such powers are only given during the *Nērc̄ca*. When the *Nērc̄ca* is over, these powers cease, so it is a responsibility of the *Nērc̄ca* to safeguard the authority.

3.5.7 Open Market

The *Nērc̄ca* places are largely places where huge markets are possible. The *Nērc̄cas* are an excellent opportunity for the farmers and others to sell their products and for the individuals who are required to purchase it. In early times, the *Nērc̄ca* fields were a marketplace for the farmers. As all the *Nērc̄cas* were conducted alongside the harvest periods, the *Nērc̄cas* were the best opportunity for the farmers to sell their harvest products. The *Nērc̄cas* were also an opportunity for the individuals who buy the products to purchase the required items throughout the year. Likewise, the *Nērc̄cas* were also an opportunity for the women to purchase jewelry. In early times, the primary things in the *Nērc̄ca* market were bottle bangles and necklaces. That is where they would go out.

3.5.8 Entertainment/Education

Nērc̄cas became an important source of entertainment in *Māppila* society. Since entertainment opportunities were usually limited in this society, *Nērc̄cas* became an important part of *Māppila's* leisure activities. Different entertainments like *Peṅṅivaravu*, dances, artistic performances, *Muttukkuda*, *Varṅṅakkuda*, and fireworks provided great opportunities for entertainment in *Māppila* society. Later,

with the evolution of different entertainments like carnival rides, amusement rides, and circuses, the amusement scene diversified.

Nērccas also became an important place for educating value systems, morality, culture, *Māppila* dialect, history, legacy, etc.

3.6 Structural Analysis of Studied *Nērccas*

All the *Nērccas* in this study have been subject to cultural evolution and folklorism. When one examines each of the *Nērccas* shown in the study, it is possible to observe that folklorism was occurring within the *Nērcca*. The formation of the *Nērcca* itself varied despite belonging to the same group; each of the elements of the *Nērcca* was composed by adopting the traits of the region where the *Nērcca* took place and of other communities existing there. But still, there are similar elements in all *Nērccas* which are performed in different styles. Rituals, celebrations, various categories of items involved in celebrations, forms of art, *Chiranis*, and *Peṅṅivaravu* were all developed. All *Nērcca* have *Peṅṅivaravu*, but *Peṅṅivaravu* style differs. Table 1 shows the comparative analysis of different *Nērccas* in terms of ceremonies associated with them. Table 2 gives a comprehensive overview of the similarities in ceremonies in different *Nērccas*.

Table 1: Comparative study of different *Nērccas*

Names of <i>Nērcca</i>	Types	Cultural Context	Peṭṭivaravu	Cīraṭi/ Offerings	Arts Performance	Special Treatment in <i>Makhām</i>	Special Characteristics
<i>Koṇṭōṭṭi Nērcca</i>	Sufi Commemoration	North Indian Sufi Tradition	Artistic Character's Importance to Arts Performance	North Indian Dish <i>Marīda/ Aval</i> , Rice	<i>Māppila</i> Ṣahnai, <i>Kutturāṭib</i> , Duffmuṭṭu, <i>Arabana</i> , <i>Chavittukali</i>	For Thorn in Throat	<i>Silsila</i> Recitation, using Horse for <i>Peṭṭivaravu</i> , different Customs like <i>Chaṅṅalatta</i>
Malappuram <i>Nērcca</i>	Martyr Commemoration	<i>Vēla</i> like Rural Temple Festivals	Revolting Character	Rice/ Meat	<i>Māppilappāṭṭu</i> , <i>Kutturāṭib</i> , Duffmuṭṭu, Band <i>Mēla</i>	Asthma, Shortness of Breath	Using Grass in Graveyard to give for Domestic Animals, Pushing and Shoving in <i>Peṭṭivaravu</i>
B. P. Anṅāṭi <i>Nērcca</i>	Sufi Commemoration	Pūram Like Trissur	Festival mode	Ladyfinger Banana & Uncooked Rice	Muṭṭum <i>Viliyum</i> , Band <i>Mēlam</i> , Duffmuṭṭuu	Stomach Pain	Elephant and Fireworks, in Infront of the <i>Makhām</i>
<i>Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca</i>	Sufi Commemoration	Pūram Trissur	Festival Mode in a Competitive Manner	Sweets/ vegetables	Band <i>Mēlas</i> , Cenṭa <i>Mēla</i> , <i>Pandi Mēlam</i>	Psychological problems and other diseases	Hundreds of elephants and fireworks belong to every group
<i>Appavāṅibha Nērcca</i>	Sufi Commemoration	Limited Ritual, Not Regional Customs	No <i>Peṭṭivaravu</i>	<i>Appam</i> / <i>Pāyasam</i>	<i>Mawlid</i> Recitation	All body part diseases	Food Distribution and Prayer only, food is related to regional taste
<i>Badr Śuhada Nērcca</i>	Martyr in the Global Islamic Concept	Limited Ritual, Not Regional Customs	No <i>Peṭṭivaravu</i>	Rice/ Meat (Beef or Chicken)	<i>Mawlid</i> Recitation	All Diseases	Prayer and Food Distribution Only

Table 2: Similarities between *Nērc̣cas*

Similarities between the six <i>Nērc̣cas</i>						
Names of <i>Nērc̣ca</i>	<i>Cīraṅi</i>	Prayer	<i>Koṅiyērram</i>	Treatment	<i>Peṅivaravu</i>	Performance /Arts
<i>Koṅṅōṅi Nērc̣ca</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Malappuram Nērc̣ca</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>B. P. Aṅṅādi Nērc̣ca</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̣ca</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Appavāṅibha Nērc̣ca</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes / <i>Mawlid</i>
<i>Badr Śuhada Nērc̣ca</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes / <i>Mawlid</i>

3.7 Analyzing the Structural Variations of *Nērccas*: A Comparative Approach

Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca was established by acknowledging several cultural traits. Unlike other Malabar *Nērccas*, the *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* was established as a *Nērcca* that blended Malabar local culture, Persian culture, and North Indian Sufi culture. We can perceive *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* as a North Indian, Persian, Malabar blend. Several artistic performances and other rituals are unique.

"Oliwali Daya Olimaan Laku Haqqum Alaiya

*Huli Jameehul Muslimeen Huli Sadiqul Muslimeen"*¹

This prayer is a symbolic representation of inclusion of all religions and genders in *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca*. It has a culture that welcomes, preserves, and supports heterogeneous communities. The *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* is, in general, a harmonious practice with very artistic features. The *Ko□□ō□□i* region was a territory that caught the interest of many poets and artists during the initial days. Thus, the *Ko□□ō□□i* region is a land that has a great space for creative works and lovers of art. It can be assumed that a *Nērcca* that was established in this *Ko□□ō□□i* area was established in a manner where there was an emphasis given to the arts and pleasure in the culture of that particular *Ko□□ō□□i* area. As the *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* is also Sufi in nature, Sufi aspects can be viewed in abundance within it. The most important aspect is that *Nērcca* began with the commemoration of the great Sufi *Khawja Muhinudheen Ci□ti*. *Ko□□ō□□i Nērcca* is replete with Sufi-style features. Its rituals are mostly serene, tranquil, and musical. Songs, ghazals, and the tune of the *□ahnai* appear in all the rituals. It is not like that of a large *Pūram* or festival. It does not feature fireworks, *Āna Ezunnallattu*, and foreheads in large *Pūrams*. But most of the ceremonies, such as *Cha□□alatta* and *Silsila* recitation, can be viewed in it. Also, it shows the Sufi-style of how the sandalwood container is used upon the head, or how it is used upon the devotees, and how the devotees bow amongst themselves.

¹ It is a prayer for well-being, performed by Muslims and, at the same time, by their brother communities.

But when considering the *Malappuram Nērc̄ca*, the *Peṅṅivaravu* of the *Nērc̄ca*, rituals and practices, all distinct in their form because the *Malappuram Nērc̄ca* is a martyrs' *Nērc̄ca*. The artistic and pleasing aspects are very few. When we compare this *Nērc̄ca* with other *Nērc̄cas*, things are slightly different. A serious nature is observed in the *Nērc̄ca* ceremonies. Since the *Nērc̄ca* is occurred with the memories of *Malappuram Paṅṅa*², its culture is abundant with the nature of a war. *Malappuram Nērc̄ca* has its own regional reasons for that. Malappuram is like the *vēlas*³ of the *Nērc̄ca* villages (Stephen Frederic Dale and M. Gangadharan).

The B. P. *Aṅṅāṅi Nērc̄ca* is quite distinct from other *Nērc̄cas* in Malabar, with the *Āna Ezunnallattu* and *Peṅṅivaravu* and some such ceremonies. The B. P. *Aṅṅāṅi Nērc̄ca* is a festive *Nērc̄ca*. It is more akin to the *Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̄ca*. The *Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̄ca* is similar to the Trissur *Pūram*. B. P. *Aṅṅāṅi Nērc̄ca* is conducted in a similar way to *Pūram* in all the ceremonies. As examples, it will have elephants faced towards the *Makhām* and fireworks are conducted like *Pūram*. Though the *Māppila* song melody and shehanai rhythm can be heard, it is mostly like *Pūram*. In B. P. *Aṅṅāṅi Nērc̄ca*, *Āna Ezunnallattu* and *Muttukkuda* are observed as a major part which makes it is closer to *Pūrams*. At the same time, it reflects the distinctive cultural characteristics of the coastal region.

Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̄ca is most similar to Trissur *Pūram* having 100 or more elephants (Stephen Frederic Dale and M.Gangadharan). *Appappeṅṅi*, the arrival of various types of *Āna Ezunnallattu*, fireworks, and the competition to make each kind of arrival grandiose makes this *Nērc̄ca* close to Trissur *Pūram*. *Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̄ca* is a competitive form of *Nērc̄ca* like the *Paramekkavu Thiruvambadi* competitions of Trissur *Pūram*. Each group has competitions with elephants, fireworks, and other art competitions, making their arrivals grandiose.

Appavāṅibha Nērc̄ca is similar to the culture of Kozhikode. This has only ritual-based ceremonies, and do not have *Peṅṅivaravu-like* ceremonies. Its ritual

² Riot

³ A festival occurred in temples and *Kāvus* in rural areas

elements and its culture are also related to the region, it has only prayers as ritual, and the *Appams* and *Pāyasam* are given as the offering and *Cīraṅṅis*. So, the comparison of this *Nērc̣ca* can only be done by observing the special type of regional *Cīraṅṅis*. It is predominantly linked to the distinctive sweet-making tradition of Kozhikode.

Badr Nērc̣ca shares a whole theme that exhibits a common style; they differ from offerings and *Cīraṅṅis*, which are characteristic of the region. The different forms of *Cīraṅṅis* and offerings make sense to regional variants. “Regional traditions had a profound impact on the development of ritual customs in the early Muslim world, particularly through the lens of legal schools and practices. The analysis of local rituals provides insights into how these customs were shaped by the unique cultural and social contexts of each region” (Haider and Najam Iftikha).

3.7.1 Structural Comparison of Peṅṅivaravu Practices

Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca

In the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca*, all rituals here are more or less artistic and nice to look at, and the background music is of *ṅṅahnai*. There is no firing in this *Nērc̣ca*. Even during ceremonies like *Etirēlkkal*⁴, we can view some rituals such as *Chaṅṅalatta*. This is the practice of running to and fro with a lit lamp towards those who arrive at the *Peṅṅivaravu* and towards those who are accompanying them. All these are highly enjoyable ceremonies. In the same way, the *Taṅṅal* visits to greet people carrying a *Muttukkuda* on the back of a nicely ornamented horse. But nobody other than *Taṅṅal* usually carries a pearl umbrella here. There will be ornamental stupas of bamboo and coloured paper and garments to support. The *Peṅṅivaravus* accommodate different kinds of performances like *Kutturātīb* with *Rātībs*, band instruments to *Māppila* song tunes, *Kōlkali* to the couplets of *Māppila* songs, and *Caviṅṅukali* and *Vaṅṅakali* of the *Kīzāla* communities. *Māppila ṅṅahnai* melody can usually be heard loudly during this *Peṅṅivaravu*. In

⁴ A customary practice of receiving *Peṅṅivaravu*, conducted under the authority of the *Nērc̣ca* ritual.

general, the *Peṅṅivaravus* may be considered as an intersection point of diverse art forms.

Malappuram Nērc̣ca

Malappuram Nērc̣ca is entirely different from other *Nērc̣cas*. In *Peṅṅivaravu*, of various classes of people arriving either in a competitive mode or in the mode of going for a war. The processions and the rituals of the *Malappuram Nērc̣ca* look like a war. Having crossed the processions of all the *Tuktārs*, notably the *Eṅṅuturakkārs*, the processions march in a war-like way.

As the origin of the *Malappuram Nērc̣ca* is a war and martyrs are involved in it, a tough nature can be observed in the rituals and practices of that *Nērc̣ca*. The box arrivals are in a warlike fashion. The flagpoles are also installed in a competitive fashion. It is also reported that there is a resemblance to the works in the Malappuram rural areas.

B. P. Aṅṅāṅi Nērc̣ca

But *Peṅṅivaravu* of the B. P. *Aṅṅāṅi Nērc̣ca* is a bit like *Pūrams* and festivals. Being a coastal region, when the *Peṅṅivaravu* arrives, there is an arrival of fishing workers known as *Cappakkāruṅṅe Varavu*. These *Peṅṅivaravu* arrive with a grand *Āna Ezunnallattu* and fireworks known as *Kambam Kattikkal*. There are a lot of fireworks in a way similar to *Pūram*. While there are forms of art like *Kōlkali*, *Arabana*, the significance of the festival and the significance of the arrivals are more than the forms of art.

Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̣ca

Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̣ca and the *Peṅṅivaravu* of *Paṅṅāmbi Nērc̣ca* are similar to Trissur *Pūram*, with the inclusion of all types of people and the use of elephants and fireworks as much as possible. Musical instruments such as the ‘Nasik Doll’ feature prominently in the *Peṅṅivaravus*. Emphasis is laid on the pomp of the *Peṅṅivaravu*, the number of elephants, and the majesty of the fireworks more than on art forms or music.

The practice of *Peṅṅivaravu* is not observed in *Appavāṅibha Nērcca* and *Badr Nērcca*.

3.7.2 Structural Comparison of Art Performance

Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca

Another aspect is the significance of the arts in this *Nērcca*. “*Dikrum Hadisum Fannum*” is *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca*’s ideological word (K.T. Rahman *Taṅṅal*). *Dikr* refers to the praise of Allah. *Hadith* refers to the life of the Prophet. *Fann* refers to 'arts'. This is the culture of *Koṅṅōṅṅi Qubba* and *Koṅṅōṅṅi Taṅṅal*. The passion for art can be viewed throughout the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca*. There is some type of art form in all the ceremonies related to *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca*. Sometimes *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca* is selected to introduce any art form. Some art groups in *Koṅṅōṅṅi* area, select *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca* for their introduction. In *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca*, there used to be a practice wherein new art forms and artists would arrive with the *Peṅṅivaravu* and perform this art form before the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Taṅṅal* in the *Qubba* and give *Dakshina*⁵, and *Taṅṅal* would bless them and praise them for artistic talents (Abujan Performer). This shows the significance of arts in the *Qubba*. All the rituals of *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca* will consist of the melody of *ṅahnai* and the rhythm of *Cenṅa. Muṅṅum Viliyum*, the Kerala style version the *ṅahnai* which is a north Indian instrument is a significant component of the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērcca*. Singer sang various kinds of songs in front of the tomb, which is another specialty.

Malappuaram Nērcca

Art forms such as *Kutturātīb*, *Arabanamuṅṅu*, *Māppilapāṅṅu* and *Kōlkali* are significant part of *Malappuram Nērcca*. But these are performed mainly during the time of *Peṅṅivaravu*. These performances are not part of the Sufi tradition; rather, they are regarded as typical *Māppila* performances, distinct from established

⁵ Gift

traditions such as the Sufi *ahnai*. No such songs or art forms can be observed in *Malappuram Nērcca* as an accompaniment to other ceremonies.

B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca*

Such art forms can be observed in B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca* also. *Arabnamu*, *Māppilapāṭu*, and *Band Mēlas* are observed this *Nērcca*, but such art forms can be observed as an accompaniment to *Peṭṭivaravus* of the *Nērcca*.

Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca

The usage of *Band Mēlas* and shrill musical instruments such as *Nasik Dhol* is observed during the *Peṭṭivaravu* of *Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca*. Other festivals are likely to be the result of an analogous tradition like *Pūrams* and festivals. No accompaniment of instruments or music takes place in the other ceremonies of the *Nērcca*. Such music or instruments are not rendered around the *Makhāms*.

Badr Nērcca and Appavāñibha Nērcca

In these *Nērccas*, no other art forms are widely used; only *Mawlid* recitation is performed, rendered in various tunes and styles. These *Nērccas* include different forms of *Mawlid*, each with its own distinctive recitation style and thematic content. Sometimes, the *Mawlid* highlights the life and virtues of the Sufi saint who is believed to be interred in the respective grave.

3.7.3 Comparative analysis of Treatments in *Makhāms*

Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca

Today, more individuals visit the *Nērcca* and mausoleum, carry their *Nērccas* and ask solutions to their myriad life problems, at the Sufis' or saints' mausoleums. Today, most of the believers visit the *Makhāms* of such Sufi orders rather than martyrs' *Makhāms*. A unique treatment for a thorn embedded in the throat is also present in *Koṭṭōṭṭi*. After consuming a slice of banana which is provided from there, the issue will be resolved. Believers also go to the *Koṭṭōṭṭi*

Qubba for this treatment and the resolution of many other issues. In *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērcca*, the cannon oil was believed to be a remedy for various diseases.

Malappuram Nērcca

In *Malappuram Nērcca* time, believers attempt to join the crowd *Peṭṭivaravu*, for Asthma curing, since they believe that overcrowding the *Peṭṭivaravu* will heal Asthma (Yogyam Hamza Master). In the Malappuram region, grass collected from graveyards is believed to have medicinal properties and is used in folk practice to treat cattle ailments and to facilitate smooth calving. Yet, the number of followers visiting the tombs of the martyrs related to the *Malappuram Nērcca* to convey such challenges is relatively low. More followers visit for pilgrim-related purposes.

B. P. Aññāṭi Nērcca

Believers go to the grave of B. P. *Aññāṭi Yahoom Taṭṭal Auliya* daily to eliminate some particular diseases like stomach issues. *Yahoom Taṭṭal's* favourite food is *Ladyfinger Banana*, which is very famous for curing stomach diseases. Over a hundred people come there daily for one reason or another. Over half of them are from beyond the *Māppila* community.

Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca

Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Taṭṭal is widely respected in the *Māppila* community for providing both exorcism and treatment for various physical diseases. He performed spiritual healing rituals to expel evil spirits and cure mental disturbances believed to be caused by supernatural forces. Alongside exorcism, he offered remedies and guidance for many bodily ailments using traditional methods rooted in local belief. His practice combined religious faith, folk medicine, and communal trust. This dual role as a spiritual healer and folk doctor strengthened his status among devotees. His treatments reflect the deep interconnection between faith and health in *Māppila* culture.

Appavāñibha Nērcca and Badr Nērcca

Individuals go to the tomb of *Q̄eikh Māmukkōya Taq̄q̄al* in *Idiyaq̄q̄ara Masjid*, Kozhikode, daily for various problems. They will make different shapes of *Appam* for different illnesses. That is why this *Nērc̄ca* is known as *Appavāṇibha Nērc̄ca*. In *Badr Nērc̄ca*, there is no special treatment observed. But believers offer *Nērc̄ca* for any mental or physical purposes.

There are several reports related to the belief about the healing power of tombs, such as:

“Who visit these tombs share personal testimonies of healing and spiritual upliftment. These accounts contribute to the ongoing belief in the efficacy of the rituals performed at the graves of the Just. The faith in these practices is often bolstered by anecdotal evidence from those who have experienced positive outcomes after their visits.

In summary, the belief in healing at the tombs of the Just in Islam is a complex interplay of spiritual significance, ritual practices, community involvement, cultural traditions, and personal experiences. These elements together create a strong conviction among many Muslims regarding the potential for healing and spiritual benefits derived from visiting these sacred sites” (Foqara M.).

“On the tomb of Mehmed b. Pir Ali, also known as Īmam Birgivi, highlighted the various rituals and beliefs that attract people from all social classes to his grave. This indicates that tombs are seen as places of healing and spiritual connection” (Parladır and Halil Saim).

3.7.4 Structural Comparison of *C̄iraṇi*

During times of past hunger and famine, the scarcity of food was critical, and hence, food donation was an aspect that significantly influenced the origin of the *Nērc̄ca*. Individuals attended the *Nērc̄ca* to obtain food. Nowadays, as the demand for such food and domestic hunger waned, and food is readily available at all times,

fewer individuals attend the *Nērc̄ca* with the intention of eating. The Islamic concept also promotes food distribution.

Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca

The items of worship and offerings at the *Nērc̄ca* are connected to the local agricultural culture or the food culture. Rice flakes and rice are the major items of offerings in all the *Nērc̄cas* that are presented in Malabar. What is unique to *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca* is that the *Marīda* offering in this *Nērc̄ca* is a North Indian food item. It is also a very significant one in the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*. The cooking, bringing, and distribution of *Marīda* are all significant rituals of this *Nērc̄ca*. It is said that such North Indian Sufi practices are observed only in the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*. One thing that makes this strong is the anecdote of the *Cīraṅṅi* named *Marīda*. *Marīda* was a particular dish in the Palace of Mughal emperors. The cooking method was known only to the palace cooks. When Emperor *Akbar* accepted the Sufi saint '*Nizamudhin Auliya*'s discipleship, he used to serve *Marīda* as a special dish to his *Guru*, *Nizamudhin Auliya*, who favoured '*Marīda*' quite a lot and requested him about the cooking technique of this item. He had no choice but to disclose it in front of the *Guru*. Therefore, when the great brothers of the *Nizamudhin Aulia* lineage arrived in *Koṅṅōṅṅi*, this *Marīda* was offered to the believers and devotees there, as part of the *Nērc̄ca*. *Marīda* prepared with wheat flour, rice flour, and sugar is the principal item of *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*, which needs a lengthy cooking procedure (Salam Tharammal). *Cakkaraccōr* (sweet rice) and *Kañṅi* (rice gruel) are also among the *Cīraṅṅis* distributed during the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*. This is also an influence of regional food practice.

Malappuaram Nērc̄ca

In *Malappuram Nērc̄ca*, there is no report of distinct *Cīraṅṅi* items. A rice type named *Tēṅṅācōr* was the key *Cīraṅṅi*. They included rice flakes, *Appams*, coconut, etc., as offerings in this *Nērc̄ca*.

Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca

The Paṭṭāmbi *Nērc̣ca* is also known for distributing offerings such as rice flakes, jaggery, and *Appam* to devotees. These are deeply valued in the belief system of the participants. Many devotees believe that consuming these offerings helps cure various physical ailments and protects them from misfortune. This practice reflects the traditional view that ritual food carries blessings and healing power. The distribution of *Cīraṅgi* thus strengthens the link between ritual performance and community health. It also illustrates how folk belief and religious practice merge in the *Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca*. The material of these *Cīraṅgi* is also regional materials.

B. P. Anṅāṭi Nērc̣ca

A major offering and *Cīraṅgi* scene within B. P. *Anṅāṭi Nērc̣ca* is the Ladyfinger Banana. It is stated that *Yahoom Taṅṅal Auliya* used to provide Ladyfinger Banana to the patients who visited for stomach ache treatment. Further, it is stated that he also liked Ladyfinger Banana a lot during his lifetime, and hence Ladyfinger Banana is taken there as a *Nērc̣ca*. All these bananas are cut into pieces and shared with the devotees visiting there. The principal trade of all the big shops in front of the *Makhām* of this saintly soul is selling the Ladyfinger Banana. Likewise, the rice obtained here is distributed to the poor people of the region through special ration cards and is distributed at regular intervals. Rice is distributed to some 600 families through this donation.

Appavāṅibha Nērc̣ca and Badr Nērc̣ca

The principal offering and *Cīraṅgi* of the *Nērc̣ca* conducted in Kozhikode, the land of scrumptious food like *Appams*, is part of the local culture. In Kozhikode *Appavaanibha Nērc̣ca*, the offering consists of various types of *Appams*, one of the principal dishes of Kozhikode, and *Pāyasam* is also distributed there. It can be seen from this that *Cīraṅgi* has been developed according to the food culture of this location. In *badr Nērc̣ca* mostly the *Cīraṅgi* will be cooked meat like beef chicken or mutton.

3.7.5 Structural Comparison of *Nērc̄ca* Schedule

The anniversaries and memorial days of the □*eikhs* or martyrs after whom the *Māppila Nērc̄ca* is named are reckoned in the Arabic month. Yet generally, all *Nērc̄cas* are held in association with festivals within or around the Malabar area and the harvest festival. Nearly all the *Nērc̄cas* in Malabar are held between January and April. Even though the □*eikhs*' or martyrs' anniversaries cause many of them to differ, little prayers are conducted on such days, and the grander and more elaborate *Nērc̄cas* are typically conducted on the most convenient dates between January and April. This has something to do with the region's harvest and climate. Additionally, *Nērc̄cas* are usually a product of merchants, and thus money is available only in Malabar at the harvest time of agricultural crops.

Koṇṭōṭṭi Nērc̄ca

The date of this *Nērc̄ca* is also selected from the realization that the anniversary of □*eikh Muhammad Shah Valiya Ta□□al*, on whom the *Ko□□ō□□i Nērc̄ca* is centred, is *Rabi-ul-Awwal 14*, but the date of the *Nērc̄ca* is fixed by the information given by his devotees and others regarding the time of harvesting in their localities. It need not fall in *Rabi-ul-Awwal*. It is most likely to be connected with the Malabar harvest season between January and April.

Malappuram Nērc̄ca

Even though the *Malappuram Nērc̄ca* is conducted during the month of *Muharram*. This *Nērc̄ca* is also conducted in the same way. *Nērc̄ca* will be conducted in March, as “*Mārccil Nērc̄ca Tīrca*” is a proverb of the Malappuram region.

Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̄ca

The same is the case with *Pa□□āmbi Nērc̄ca* also. The reason for *Nērc̄ca* is indeed conducted during the Arabic month. But it is celebrated on the first Sunday of February. One can see that the *Nērc̄ca* was prepared in accordance with the needs,

climate, and conditions of that region. It is carried out in accordance with the farming tradition of that region and the harvest season.

B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērc̄ca*

Similar to other *Nērc̄cas*, this *Nērc̄ca* is celebrated in memory of *Yāhūm Abdul Qāder Auliya* on the 22nd day of the Arab month of *Safar*. But the usual practice was to observe this *Nērc̄ca* within the first week of January. The decision on the date was taken in the last week of December.

Appavāñibha Nērc̄ca* and *Badr Nērc̄ca

Unlike the previously said *Nērc̄cas*, *Nērc̄cas* with greater ritual content are conducted according to the Arabic lunar calendar itself. For instance, *Badr Nērc̄ca* and *Appavāñibha Nērc̄ca* are observed purely for their ritual significance and are not linked to market activities or the harvesting season.

3.7.6 Comparative Analysis in *Koṭiyērram*

Apart from the *Badr Śuhada Nērc̄ca*, all the Malabar *Nērc̄cas* entail flag-waving. Even in Malabar *Nērc̄cas* in which only rituals are done, flag hoisting occurs. This is a demonstration of how the *Māppila* community regards flag-waving as a ritual instead of a custom of *Nērc̄cas*. This is the reason why flag waving is practiced even in *Nērc̄cas* such as the *Mampuram Nērc̄ca*, which do not have elements of such celebrations and rituals. Even in the *Malappuram Nērc̄ca*, which is still practiced and does not have elements of rituals, flag-waving is performed. Flag waving in various *Nērc̄cas* has various practices. The *Kuruppatt family* offers the flags for *Koṭiyērram Nērc̄ca*. In the B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērc̄ca*, it is done by the *Ambāñu* family, a different community. In *Pañāmbi Nērc̄ca*, the flag is hoisted by the *Karimānkuzi* family. The Prophet's grandson was martyred on the battlefield of Karbala, and upon hearing the news, the Islamic community organized a mourning procession to his sacrificial mausoleum, and the coming of the boxes is a re-enactment of this. It is reported that the flag was hoisted as an indication of the mourning procession of *Imām Hussain* (Balakrishnan Vallikkunnu).

3.8 Contextual Factors Influencing the Modification of *Nērc̄ca*

Folklore can develop in two ways. One is natural evolution, which occurs in all folklore, and the second is the modification that happens to folklore based on the factors influencing it. Natural evolution is the evolution that happens with the knowledge of the community that bears that folklore, but another form of evolution is the evolution that happens because of the intervention of an external group or something else (Raghavan Payyanad). The modification is not a natural evolution; this influences the existence of that folklore and the organic function of that folklore. Two primary groups are held responsible for the evolution and modification of the *Nērc̄ca*. One is the performing community, and another is the external community to the *Nērc̄ca*. Globalization, modernization, change in belief, reformative ideas, etc., all these will influence both these communities, and it will influence the *Nērc̄ca* in various ways. For instance, the food that is offered in relation to the *Nērc̄ca* ceremony was previously a system of placing a leaf pot into it and adding porridge within it. That has been changed, and now different foods and biryani are offered as *Cīrani* in disposable containers.

There was a time when the arrival of the *Nērc̄ca* was announced by the *Murīds* in the villages and around the areas with *Nagāra*, and firing. Likewise, there was a time when they wrote letters and sent them, but nowadays they officially announce the *Nērc̄cas* via social media and other systems, posters, and reels. Such a type of evolution is happening with the knowledge of the *Nērc̄ca* practitioners' community or internal community. What we are getting from this is that the application of technologies is now a component of the globalisation of social media and how the community of *Nērc̄ca* organizers applies them. When these same technologies like globalization, modernism, etc. were employed by a society external to the *Nērc̄ca* practitioners' society, it regards the *Nērc̄ca* as a secondary byproduct and makes it into a consumable good, or when that external influence attempts to turn the *Nērc̄ca* into what it was meant to be, that alteration can cause degradation to the organic functions of the *Nērc̄ca*.

The natural evolution of folklore is technically called folklorism, emphasizing its adaptation and migration to secondary or tertiary contexts. Folklorism is a natural development of folklore that takes place with the acceptance and consent of the original community. Applied folklore, on the other hand, is a technical name that describes the modifications of folklore caused by conscious, external intervention that appears in these new contexts. These two processes are different and must be examined independently in order to grasp their individual effects on the folklore process (Raghavan Payyanad).

A *Nērc̄ca* is the folk practice and lore of a folk group who have the common belief that a *Nērc̄ca* is a ritual; commonly, the *Nērc̄ca* practitioners' community. Thus, whoever does not have that belief is beyond that folk group; commonly, the external community. Furthermore, the external community is those who think that a *Nērc̄ca* is not a ritual, that it is not worship and that it is entirely immoral, and who have no specific belief in the *Nērc̄ca*. Their interference leads to modification of the *Nērc̄ca*, or censure of this external force can alter the *Nērc̄ca* and the group that takes it. These modifications are not done with the understanding or interest of the group conducting the *Nērc̄ca*, and that is the reason they injure that group.

Owing to the impact of various factors, some differences, disagreements, and criticisms are created in the *Nērc̄cas*. This is because of the contrasts of the *Māppilas'* beliefs in the rituals and customs of the *Nērc̄ca* and the beliefs that are newly created. Criticisms such as these have been created among the *Māppilas*, from within the *Māppilas* themselves. This has affected and impacted each *Nērc̄ca* differently.

Koṅṭōṭṭi Nērc̄ca

There exists a *Taṅṅal* family in the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*. The *Koṅṅōṅṅi Taṅṅal* family is the one that heads the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca*, its official, and its centre of power. When the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Stānīyan*, *Mustaq Shah Valiya Taṅṅal*, died in 2011, it was necessary to elect a new *Stānīyan*. Only if there is an official, the *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̄ca* and all its rituals and practices can be performed. There has

been more than one individual who has shown interest in becoming the *Stānīyan*, and behind them, there have been followers who are referred to as *Murīds*. If the leader passes away, the following leader should be selected by the followers, and there are no common claims or disagreements. But unlike the norm, in 2011, a disagreement came up, and the leader could not be selected. This is also due to a shift in the beliefs of the followers and others. When the faith of the people in a leader with devotion and fear started to decline, and the leaders and the *Murīds* had numerous other material aspirations, they reached a state of aspiration for leadership. Because of this, the leader could not be selected, and the *Nērc̄ca* was violated. Later, conflicts were settled after fourteen years and the *Nērc̄ca* restarted in 2025.

Malappuram Nērc̄ca

The composition of the ceremonies in Malappuram is described as being war-like. Due to this, there used to be conflicts between various groups during the *Nērc̄ca*. This event resulted in murder, and there were times when the *Nērc̄ca* had to be discontinued. A murder took place in relation to the *Peṅṅivaravu* of the *Eṅṅutarakkār* in the *Nērc̄ca* (Madhyamam). Usually, there existed this proverb in Malappuram following fights, that many used to challenge one another to meet at the *Nērc̄capādam*. These issues do not stem from the basis of earlier animosity. When a *Nērc̄ca* is performed, a rivalrous tendency is created. It eventually creates large issues, and the composition of the ceremonies is bound to create issues. All this is built out of the urge to get the largest flagpole and to place the flag in the best possible position. This then grows into a competitive attitude and further into issues, which is what occurred in the *Malappuram Nērc̄ca*. The Malappuram *Nērc̄ca* came to a close, with the *Ulama's* interests being overlooked in the context of the murder. The second resolution presented at the 19th annual conference of the *Samasta*, conducted on March 23, 24, and 25 in 1951, in Vadakara, was regarding the irregularities that occurred in the *Nērc̄ca*. "*It has been resolved and recommended to end all the deviations occurring in the Nērc̄cas being performed in the name of great personalities and which are unlawful in the sight of the Ulama of the Ahlu-Sunnah*

wal Jama'at and to adopt only the Sunnah forms in the capitals." That was the subject matter of the resolution (Dr. K.M. Bahauddin Hudawi).

In the case of *Kūttai Nērc̄ca*, though it was a very expansive *Nērc̄ca* amongst the neighboring *Kūttai* residents, it belonged to a *Ta□□al* family and had its own power and authority to do its *Nērc̄ca* and its functions. Thus, small and big changes that happened to the *Ta□□al* family influenced the *Kūttai Nērc̄ca*. Subsequently, the *Nērc̄ca* itself appears to have vanished. The same thing happened to the *Ko□□ō□□i Nērc̄ca*. A dispute over power among the *Ko□□ō□□i Ta□□al* caused *Nērc̄ca* itself to come to an end. But this does not happen with all *Nērc̄cas*. The *Malappuram Nērc̄ca* is different. Even though this *Nērc̄ca* didn't possess any special authority, it was a *Nērc̄ca* subject to the group's authority overall, but this *Nērc̄ca* also stopped. One of the primary reasons why this occurred was the competitive spirit of this *Nērc̄ca*, and thus, physical assaults and even homicides occurred in association with this *Nērc̄ca*. When this occurred, there was even the risk of frequent issues with the *Nērc̄ca*. When *Māppila* scholars were not interested in conducting this *Nērc̄ca*, the *Nērc̄ca* was discontinued. But overall, the *Nērc̄cas* conducted by public groups remain without anything special happening to them, and the *Nērc̄cas* conducted by certain individual authorities can be easily made to undergo such interventions. Thus, if the authority of the *Nērc̄cas* is not kept in one group or family, by any of its significant customs and rituals, neither does it remain static nor decrease even if the family ceases to it.

Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̄ca

The *Pa□□āmbi Nērc̄ca* is an *Nērc̄ca* pertaining to the *Makhām* where *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkuññikkōya*'s physical body is buried. But in the generation that followed his demise, members of the families who were to be in power did not take an interest in it. This is because they joined the reformist ideologies and their view regarding these *Nērc̄cas* changed. Additionally, economic success is also a significant cause for this. Previously, the income of the *Nērc̄ca* belonged to the *Ālūr valiya Pūkkuññikkōya Ta□□al* families, who were involved in the *Nērc̄ca*; hence, their

families were interested in carrying out the *Nērc̄ca*. Subsequently, once everyone became economically successful, the revenue from this *Makhām* was no longer required. That is why the *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkuññikkōya* family distanced themselves from it, and the public of the local folk took over and conducted it as public folklore. None of the ritual elements exist anymore. With the withdrawal of the *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkuññikkōya* family from it, the ritual elements vanished from it.

B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērc̄ca*

Certain families who were prominent players in B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērc̄ca* afterwards kept away from it. They attempted to revamp it in their own ways. But nothing changed because of the resistance by the community. There have been no further developments in B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērc̄ca*. All the rituals are conducted by the heirs. The *Ambāṭu* family, who are the heirs of small flag lowering, still conducts it. In the early times, when the *Nērc̄ca* used to be done, the four-member family used to be given the power of the tomb for six days on the days when this *Nērc̄ca* used to be done. B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērc̄ca* used to be done on these six days earlier. But now it is not done by the family, but a local *Nērc̄ca* committee has been established. The date of the *Nērc̄ca* is set in the *Masjid*, and all concerned people are notified. The day of the *Nērc̄ca* is determined by the *Nērc̄ca* committee, and they conduct the *Nērc̄ca*. During the days of *Nērc̄ca*, there is a special counter arranged in front of the *Makhām*, and even after arranging the counter, the amount collected from the counter is utilized by the *Nērc̄ca* committee towards *Nērc̄ca*, whereas the amount collected from the *Makhām* is now utilized as the revenue of the *Makhām*. Now, the control of the revenue gained from the *Makhām* is with the *Waqf* Board. The revenue gained from the counter, especially prepared by the committee during the *Nērc̄ca*, money received from the locals, industrialists, traders, and other collections, are the revenue that is utilized in preparing the *Nērc̄ca* today. Earlier, there was no system of bifurcating the income obtained from the *Nērc̄ca* and the income obtained from the *Makhām*.

Appav̄nibha Nērc̄ca and Badr Nērc̄ca

The *Appav̄nibha Nērc̄ca* and the *Badr Śuhada Nērc̄ca* are not *Nērc̄cas* upon which controversy or disagreement has been much present. This is primarily because there is no room for controversy or disagreement in them. The only thing that the *Māppilas* consider to be purely ritualistic is what can be seen in these *Nērc̄cas* in the early days, and that is what has persisted in these *Nērc̄cas* in subsequent times. There have been no special ceremonies or customs added to these *Nērc̄cas* since there is no criticism of these *Nērc̄cas* among the *Māppilas*. But though there is criticism among the *Māppilas*, there is no disagreement among the *Māppilas*, and hence no major changes have taken place in these *Nērc̄cas*.

The respective communities have a local feeling towards *Nērc̄cas*. Because they are more devoted to local *Nērc̄cas*, and when the same *Nērc̄ca* is conducted in the nearby regions, there is less participation in it. A very good example of this is the *Ōmānūr Nērc̄ca*, a *Śuhada Nērc̄ca* in the *Ko□□ō□□i* region. This *Nērc̄ca* has extended to nearby regions. This local *Nērc̄ca* has also extended to parts of Tamil Nadu. The general view is that the individuals who migrated from *Ko□□ō□□i* to the *Gūdallūr* region took this *Nērc̄ca* along with them. In other words, this *Nērc̄ca* is conducted in certain regions of *Gūdallūr*, and it has been observed that the locals there also have faith in this *Nērc̄ca*.

3.9 Influential Factors Contributing to the Folklorism of *Nērc̄cas*

Nērc̄cas are also a channel of knowledge, as is all folklore in general. *Nērc̄cas*, being a valuable folklore among the *Māppilas*, also has this role to play. *Nērc̄cas* are also a channel of passing on and learning about communal knowledge and worldview. Even though *Nērc̄cas* have all these functions to carry out, nowadays these *Nērc̄cas* have become such that they are not able to carry out all these functions. Instead of the natural development that happens with all folklore, there have been intentional interventions in *Nērc̄cas*.

In religious ceremonies that believers and followers join in and perform with utmost devotion and respect, differences of opinion, criticisms, and conflicts ensue

primarily because of new ideas springing forth in the minds of believers. It is enabled through the chance of comprehending new ideas, the chance of being aware of new perspectives and experiences, and alterations that happen among people's beliefs. There are certain other considerations that pave the way for this. The prime reasons for this are:

- Globalization
- Modernization
- Economic stability
- Economic prosperity
- Religious reform movements
- Gulf migration
- Change in belief system
- Education

3.9.1 Globalisation

As part of globalization, a lot of changes are occurring in folklore. Cultural exchange is significant in this. With cultural exchange, the cultures and rituals of a community blend with cultures elsewhere in the world. The rituals of the community transcend the borders of that community and move beyond it. Global ritual forms blend with local forms, which leads to the creation of hybrid forms of rituals. Generalization is another feature. This attempts to generalize unique and distinct local customs and derive a common folkloric form from them. This kills the individual style of the community folklore and its singular and distinct form. This kills the meaning of folklore itself. Meaningless folklore cannot function and perishes or gets transformed into another form. It emerges from the confines of tradition.

The society's folklore that was part of tradition is removed from its traditional context and assumes a new shape as applied folklore and public folklore. Globalization provided an opportunity to research new world culture, economy, market, etc. *Nērc̣ca* was adopted by the sellers as the name and festival of trade, and after globalisation, the importance of *Nērc̣ca* declined.

Globalization commodifies ritual forms and traditions. Globalization's strength is the strategy of making a society's practices a commodity for sale on the global market. Once it is a commodity for sale on the global market, it becomes unnecessary to the needs of the society to which it belongs and loses its meaning and purpose.

“Globalization negatively impacts folklore by simplifying and commercializing cultural expressions- a process known as folklorisation, which strips them of their original depth and meaning, turning them into mere products for consumption. This trend promotes cultural homogenization, overshadowing diverse local traditions with dominant global norms and reducing the richness of folklore. As folklore is adapted for market demands, it often becomes disconnected from its roots, fragmenting its original context and weakening its role in expressing community identity. Furthermore, the emphasis on globalized cultural products poses educational challenges, as younger generations grow more distant from their own traditions, threatening the transmission and preservation of authentic folklore for the future.” (Kashima and Yoshihisa)

New media have introduced and showcased folklore worldwide. This has resulted in folklore being produced out of their native context and being shown in a new context for the very first time. This has resulted in certain folklores being showcased in different venues and festivals. Films, songs, and documentaries on folklore are all included in these. For example, *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca* theme is included in the Malayalam movie named “*Patinālām Rāvu*” produced in the year 1979.

3.9.2 Modernization

Modernization is also a by-product of globalization. With the emergence of modernization, the tradition, ritual, and practice of the society that follows folklore become outdated, and they have to leave them and adopt modern culture. This will influence all segments of society, such as dressing, food culture, and way of life. This will make the new generation disregard the rituals in order to reject the old practice. Some members of the new generation in authoritarian families have not come to take responsibility and continue the *Nērccas*.

3.9.3 Economic Stability & Economic Prosperity

With economic security, society and people will start experiencing changes in their lifestyle, education, and culture. Their fields of interest will start changing. This will divert them from conventional ways of thinking. It will result in the utilization of modern facilities and advanced technologies. Also, *Māppila* groups who were empowered to conduct *Nērccas* were once motivated to do so as they earned money through *Nērccas*. But when all those in power were at the top economically, they did not require the earnings from *Nērccas* any longer. This is also a reason.

The economic burden that the authority has some across, like the responsibility to provide food, the conduct of *Nērcca*, etc., would be a burden for the *Nērcca* committee; it resulted in the discontinuance of the *Nērcca*.

3.9.4 Religious Reform Movements

Another significant cause is the religious reform movements. There are various sub-sects among the *Māppilas* in Malabar itself. They are divided into two branches based on their ideology, *Sunnis* and *Salafis*. Numerous movements have appeared from the *Salafis* and numerous *Tarīqats* that have emerged from the *Sunnis*. *Sunnis* are the supporters of local traditions. But the *Salafis* are a group who do not believe in the *Nērccas* and locally created rituals that are part of local culture, and do not view them as rituals. They formed reformist movements like the *Aikya*

Saḡham, created in the 1920s. These accept only the fundamental concepts of religion. They do not accept popular or local religion. These could be referred to as *Māppila* reformists (Abdurahman Mangad).

This group ideologically and persistently opposes the *Māppila* traditions which have developed among the *Māppilas*, like *Nērc̄cas*, *Malapāḡu*, *Mawlıds*, and *Rāt̄bs*, by means of lectures, writings, publications, public discourses, and debates (Dr. P.T. Noufal). Over a period of time, through this activity, individuals close to this *Salafi* movement have appeared even among the *Māppilas*. They have made efforts to point out aspects of the other local groups' customs and rituals in the *Nērc̄cas* and proclaim this to be heretical. In the course of such ongoing opposition, reformist reasoning has been able to bring about small movements. This campaign has brought about significant modifications in the practices of the *Māppilas'* *Nērc̄ca* practice over time, and most *Nērc̄cas* have excised many aspects that were adopted from the local culture. In their tongue, they have introduced purity and have purified it. They have produced a sort of purification argument. Though the religious reformist arguments have been very much opposed to *Nērc̄cas*, they could not prevail in eradicating *Nērc̄cas* entirely. Most of the *Nērc̄cas* have survived, but within them, many of those items that originated from local customs, or culture that appear to be temple festival-connected have been excised. Nearly all *Nērc̄cas* have survived, with only those items that are guaranteed to be wholly ritualistic for the group using them. While this went on, rituals like the *Peḡivaravu*, offerings that had been brought into it, faded with time. Some *Nērc̄cas* did not change. Aside from the changes that took place with time, nothing else was done to some *Nērc̄cas*.

3.9.5 Gulf migration

Gulf migration is also a factor that has impacted the *Nērc̄cas* and culture of the *Māppilas*. The *Māppilas* who migrated to Makkah and Madinah in Saudi Arabia, the place where Islam was born, for employment observed that such rituals were not observed in the culture of the destination place where their religion was born, and were attracted to the culture. So, they resisted such traditional rituals in their place.

3.9.6 Change in Belief

The transformation in the beliefs of the *Māppilas* has adversely impacted their folklore and promises. From a society that once trusted and obeyed the *Ulama* blindly and believed in rituals and traditions blindly, when the believers accommodated logic and science in their religion to some degree, the strong passion for such rituals and practices faded to some degree. This influenced numerous folk tales as well as promises. Local conflicts and violence against *Makhāms* are all instances of this. Beyond natural evolution and folklore, several forms of folktales have cropped up in the *Nērccas* of the *Māppilas* for the reasons stated above.

3.9.7 Education

Education also contributes to this significantly. As societies acquire modern education, their area of operation and outlook transform. Thus, they shift away from their conventional occupations and relocate to their new occupations and locales, which separates them from their local knowledge and beliefs regarding practices and customs.

3.10 The Evolutionary Process of *Nērccas*: A Folkloristic Analysis

We have understood the general factors that help in the evolution or modification of *Nērccas*. But these factors cannot directly enter folklore and interfere in the case of *Nērcca*. They can only influence the customs, rituals, or beliefs associated with that folklore or folk. Folklore evolves and changes because of the phenomena that are formed as a result of this influence. Such influences and phenomena are discussed here. When it comes to *Nērccas*, evolution and modification happen in a few steps. A *Nērcca* is mostly a combination of ritual and custom. Only when custom and ritual unite, festive *Nērccas* happen. *Māppilas* have varied opinions about customs and rituals. The majority of the *Māppilas* embrace custom, but a small number of them are against it. The opinions of the *Māppilas* about customs and rituals are based on their belief.

Some opinions against the custom of the *Nērc̄cas* started to increase among the *Māppilas*. This is a section of the *Māppilas* who still believe that the *Nērc̄ca* is a ritual. Their demand was that the ritual parts of the *Nērc̄ca* should remain unchanged and that the custom that had developed over time should be abolished. Voices against the custom were constantly raised from the *Māppilas* themselves, and there are many circumstances behind the formation of such opinions. With this, customs began to disappear from many of the *Nērc̄cas*. This changed the structure of the *Nērc̄ca* itself, and it has been stated earlier that the *Nērc̄ca* is a combination of ritual and custom. Since it is a mixed form of both, if any of the ritual or custom disappears or if any change occurs in it, it will cause a great change in the structure and nature of the existing *Nērc̄ca*. This structural difference becomes applied folklore, public folklore, or fakelore in the field of folklore studies. Because the *Nērc̄ca* is a folklore, the natural evolution that occurs in the *Nērc̄ca* is folklorism, and the changes that occur due to the intervention of external forces are called applied folklore or public folklore. Such a change also occurs here. When customs disappear from some *Nērc̄cas*, it becomes a ritual that only that community participates in. When the ritual does not exist in some *Nērc̄cas*, and only the customs are maintained, and an outside community takes and uses elements of the *Nērc̄ca* for their needs, it becomes public folklore or applied folklore.

All such discrepancies affect the customs. For example, the custom of the *Ko□□ō□□i Nērc̄ca*, though not held during certain years due to disputes between authorities, the ritual practices continued to be observed even in those years. That means that all the physical problems affect the conduct of the customs. Rituals are upheld by firm foundational principles, which ensure their continuation; customs, lacking such structured underpinnings, are inherently more susceptible to change or disappearance.

3.10.1 *Appavāṇibha Nērc̄ca and Badr Nērc̄ca*

Some *Nērc̄cas* still continue without significant changes in the custom and ritual within them. No other changes have occurred except for the natural evolution

over time. Some of such *Nērccas* are the B. P. *A□□ā□i Nērcca*, the Kozhikode *Appavāṇibha Nērcca*, and *Badr Nērcca*. The *Appavāṇibha Nērcca* and *Badr Nērcca* were *Nērccas* that the *Māppilas* believed was not very customary in the early days, but were just a ritual. For the *Māppilas*, the *Badr's Nērccas* have included only those *Nērccas* which they have treated as rituals from the very start. Hence, there has not been any great alteration in the *Nērcca* with time. Fig. 8 represents the folklorism pathway seen in the *Badr Nērcca* and *Appavāṇibha Nērcca*, which are ritual only *Nērccas*.

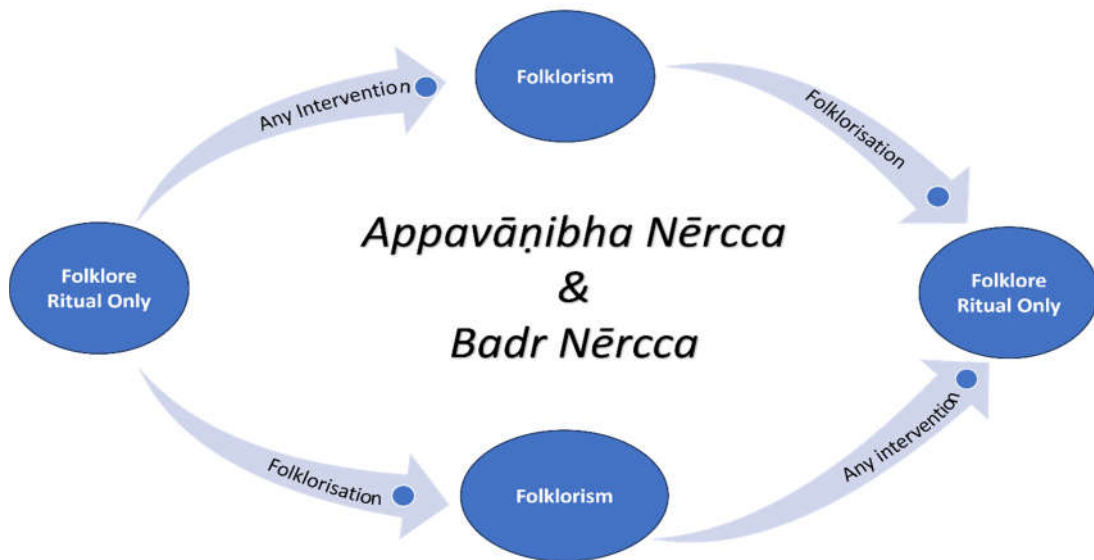


Figure 8: Folklorism in ritual only *Nērccas*: like *Appavāṇibha Nērcca* and *Badr Nērcca*

3.10.2 B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca*

B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca* is a ritual that is a blend of several customs. Every custom, such as the arrival of the *Peṅṅivaravu*, *Kadīna* and *Kambam Kathikkal*⁶, and the *Āna Ezunnallattu* are still being done in B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca* as it was done before. Some families who were privileged to conduct it in the early days withdrew from it afterwards. But as there were no rituals or customs revolving solely around them, the locals developed a popular committee, and the *Nērccas* are still conducted as before. All its rituals are still conducted without deviating from their original form. Fig. 9 shows the cyclical flow of folklorism in B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca*.

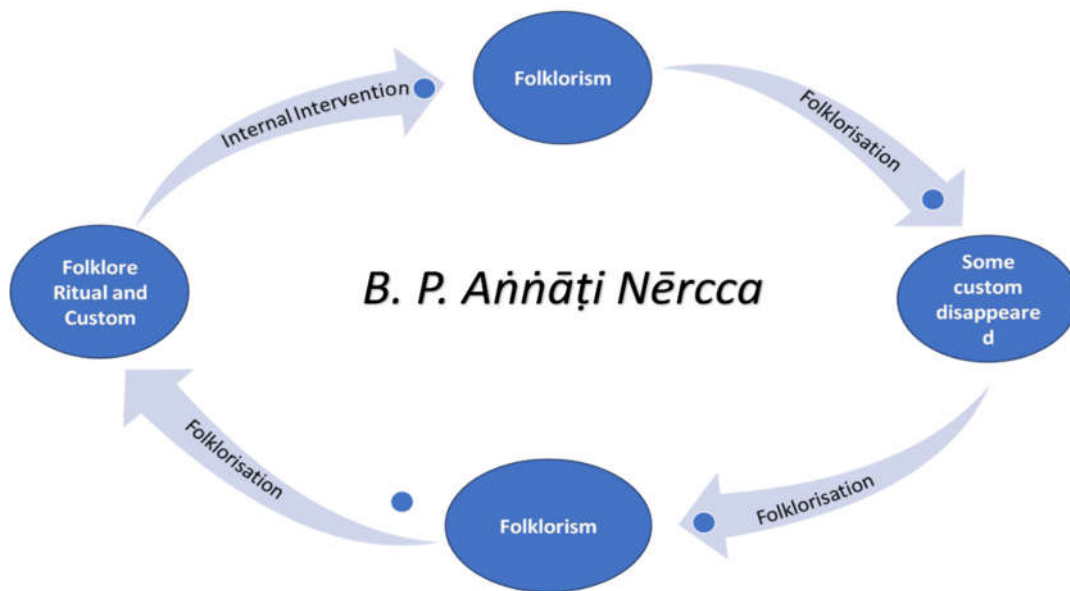


Figure 9: Folklorism in B. P. *Aññāṭi Nērcca*

3.10.3 *Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca*

In the case of *Paṭṭāmbi Nērcca*, the changes happened was contradictory to all other *Nērccas*. The rituals vanished, and only the customs persisted. The heirs of the *Ālūr Valiya Pūkkunñikkōya Tañnal* retarded from the rituals associated with the *Nērcca*, and this led to the eradication of rituals. But other communities within

⁶ Firing crackers used in temple festivals

Paṭṭāmbi have taken on and continued the *Paṭṭāmbi Valiya Nērc̣ca*'s customs as such. This custom only practice made it public folklore. Thus, the *Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca* has been maintained there by which this discrepancy was not noticed. In contrary, if they are transformed as simply rituals and no custom, the original *Nērc̣ca* would have vanished for the public.

With the passage of time, the original *Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca*'s memories will get erased from the minds of the people, and the current *Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca* will become folklore. Fig. 10 shows the cyclical flow of Folklore in *Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca*.

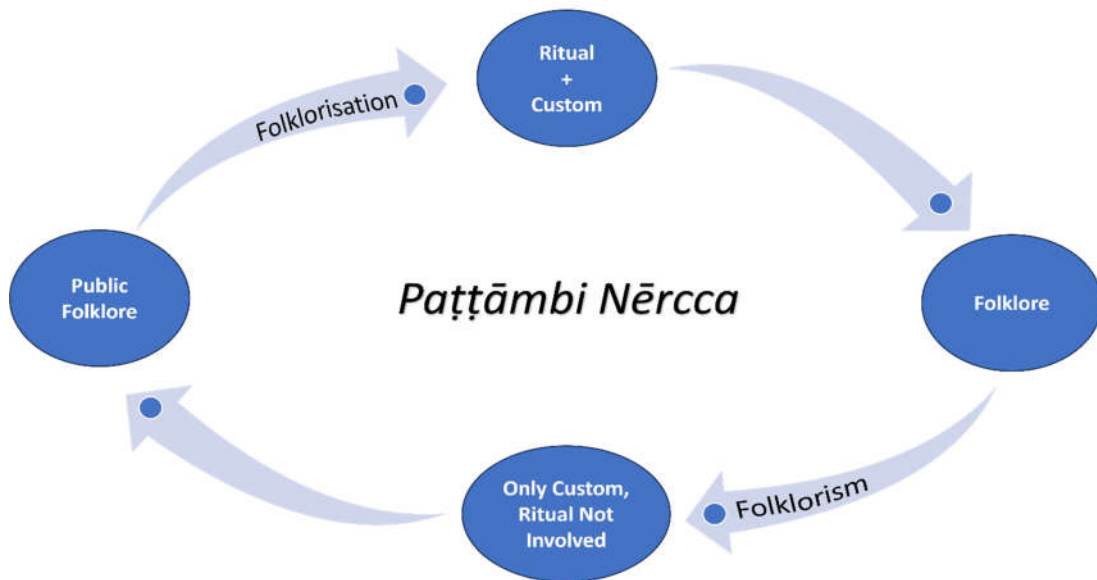


Figure 10: The steps of Public Folklorism in *Paṭṭāmbi Nērc̣ca*

3.10.4 *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērc̣ca*

Something completely different happened in the case of *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērc̣ca*. The *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērc̣ca*, which was associated with elaborated rituals and customs, has completely disappeared for a few years, and has been reduced to a very small ritual prayer audience. In the years immediately following the grand *Nērc̣ca* stopped, a fake *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērc̣ca* has emerged, exploiting the memories of *Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērc̣ca* and presenting it as mere commercial festivals devoid of rituals and customs under the name of '*Koṭṭōṭṭi Nērc̣ca*', recreating similar customs in

a new form at the same place where the *Nērc̣ca* was made. It is a clear ‘Applied folkloirsm’. In later years, they started *Peṅṅivaravu* like in *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca*. Some new *Peṅṅivaravu* and some new customs were also introduced in this applied folklore. Finally, after 14 years, in 2025, the actual *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca* restarted with all its ritual and customs. That time, the applied folklore merged with folklore. The *Peṅṅivaravu* and some small customs created by them became part of *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca* folklore. Fig. 11 shows a cyclical flow chart of the Folklorism process in *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca*.

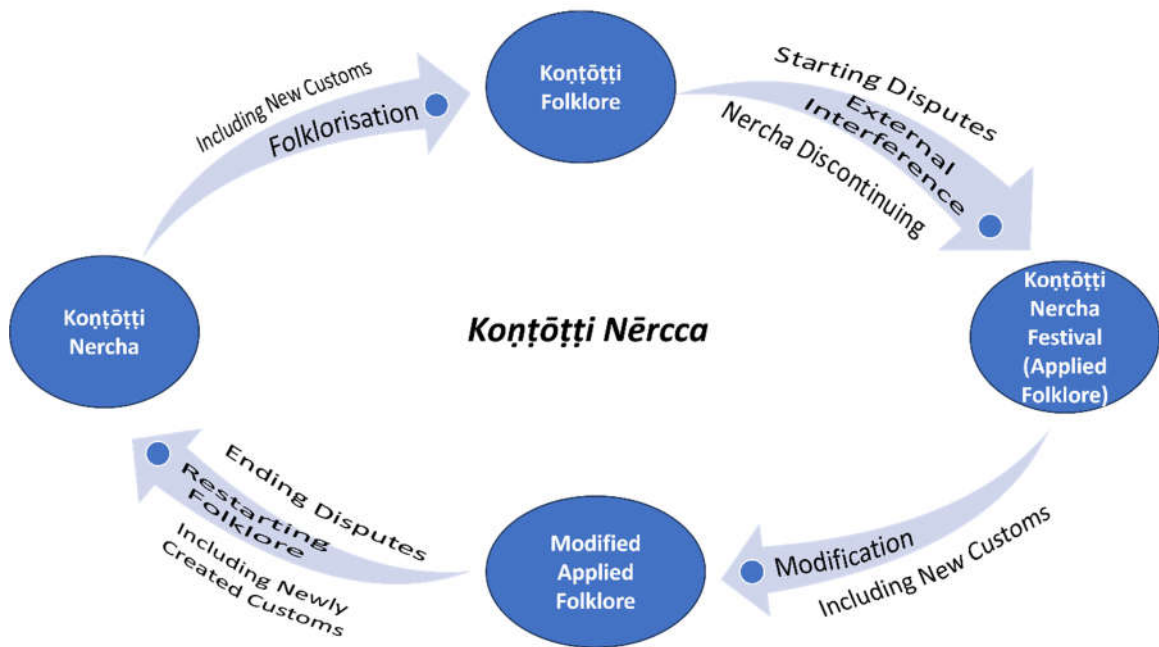


Figure 11: The process of Applied Folklorism in *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca*

The huge public participation in such festivals is evidence that the importance of *Koṅṅōṅṅi Nērc̣ca* has not diminished in the minds of the *Māppila* community and other communities.

3.10.5 Malappuram Nērc̣ca

The *Malappuram Nērc̣ca* is changing, with the custom disappearing and it becoming a mere ritual practice of the community. In *Nērc̣ca* that are purely ritualistic, the influence of other groups is very minimal. Fig. 11 shows a cyclical flow chart of the modification steps in *Malappuram Nērc̣ca*.

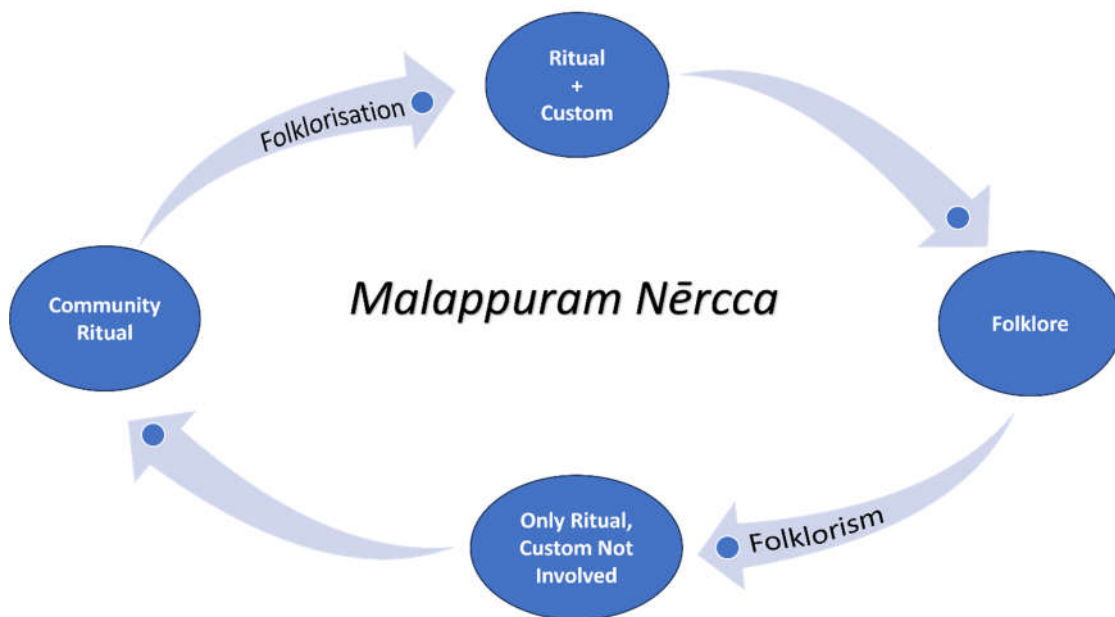


Figure 12: Modification steps in *Malappuram Nērc̣ca*

3.11 Impact of External Interventions on *Nērc̣ca* Practices

In each group and society, *Nērc̣cas* have a lot of functions to fulfil. The *Nērc̣ca* is the creation of that group to fulfil these functions. *Nērc̣cas* are purely folklore of that group, so *Nērc̣cas* will change over time and change in a manner that is required by that group and society. Those *Nērc̣cas* that lose their purpose will vanish or transform into something else, barring natural evolution. Apart from natural evolutions, *Nērc̣cas* may also change or vanish through conscious efforts by external groups. Being a product of a society, all resistance, criticisms, and alterations from within and from the outside of the society will impact the *Nērc̣ca*,

and the *Nērc̄ca* will be required to encounter all of them. These groups can only look at folk and folklore from their own perspective, and if folklore is not seen from the perspective of the people who practice it and make changes, it will be endanger the *Nērc̄cas*.

The erosion of traditional knowledge and practices due to external market forces can threaten the cultural identity of indigenous groups. As rituals and the knowledge associated with them diminish, the community's connection to their heritage and identity may weaken, leading to a loss of cultural continuity.

Thus, external interventions can negatively impact indigenous group rituals by disrupting traditional knowledge systems, increasing resource exploitation, and threatening cultural identity (Kodirekkala and Koteswara Rao).

3.12 Significant Consequences of External Intervention on the Traditional Roles of Māppila *Nērc̄ca*

3.12.1 Disintegration of Collective Identity

External interventions, especially those that reform, commercialize, or politicize the *Nērc̄ca*, have the potential to weaken the symbolic and emotional connections that form the basis of *Māppila's* collective identity. When traditional rituals are remodelled or replaced, the common sense of belonging and historical continuity that *Nērc̄ca* formerly provided may become disconnected, resulting in identity crises among the people.

3.12.2 Loss of inter-folk Communication

Nērc̄cas have previously facilitated intercultural conversations between *Māppilas* and adjacent populations via mutual ritual, offerings, and performances. Outside interference might curtail such inter-folk space by incorporating disqualifying traditions or ideological repression, ultimately fracturing communal solidarity and intercultural cohabitation.

3.12.3 Interference in Cultural Continuity

Nērccas serve as channels for passing on cultural memory, customary knowledge, and ritual practices from one generation to another. When *Nērccas* are stifled or changed in their essential character by external forces, this continuity of culture is broken, resulting in generational disconnection and the erosion of intangible cultural heritage over time.

3.12.4 Cultural Homogenization and Loss of Local Variants

State, religious, or commercial standardization tends to dilute local customs, performances, and ritual forms, thus creating cultural homogenization. The rich local diversities of *Māppila Nērcca* traditions are reduced to a single, commonly sanitized or ideological version without their pluralistic connotations.

3.12.5 Belief, Anxiety, and Psychological Dislocation

To individuals and groups who are deeply invested in the symbol and spirituality of *Nērcca*, abrupt interruption or ban on rituals can induce cognitive and affective discomfort. This happens when customary beliefs become delegitimized or made unachievable, leaving followers in a condition of religious and existential uncertainty.

3.12.6 Commodification and Loss of Community Ownership

When *Nērccas* are transformed to serve tourism, commercial interests, or political spectacle, they become vulnerable to becoming commodified events. This transfers ownership from local communities to outsiders and results in the loss of authenticity, agency, and participatory meaning in the ritual process.

3.12.7 Decline of Ritual Economy and Local Sustainability

Nērccas have traditionally sustained local economies in terms of supporting artisans, food producers, performers, and small-scale vendors. Exogenous changes lowering or changing ritual activities halt this embedded ritual economy, jeopardizing local livelihoods, market stability, and the circularity of community-based economic practice.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comparative exploration of *Nērccas*, examining their ritual practices, structural features, and customs across different regions of Malabar. The analysis has shown that while these *Nērccas* share a common cultural and religious foundation, they differ significantly in their external form and internal function due to regional, historical, and socio-cultural factors. Each *Nērcca* has evolved uniquely, some preserving their traditional ritual core, while others have transformed into broader public folklore or applied folklore events or lost their original structure under the influence of modernization, urbanization, and external interferences. This chapter broadly analyses the pathways of transformation in each *Nērccas* and gives the changes in the folkloristic perspectives.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Major Findings of the Study

- Contextual factors and influential factors, such as socio-political and economic elements, play a significant role in shaping the evolution and modification of *Nērcas*.
- *Nērcas* as a Medium for Inter-Folk Communication.
- *Nērcas* forms the cultural base of *Māppila* society.
- The structure and the nature of *Nērcas* are shaped by regional and social needs.
- *Nērcas* exist predominantly in three forms: Sufi-oriented, martyr-based, and those based on global Islamic heroic legends.
- Rituals and customs are significant parameters that determine the nature of *Nērcas*.
- Two factors are responsible for the evolution of *Nērcas*: natural evolution with knowledge of the *Nērcas* community and the interference of external forces.
- The *Nērcas* community believes that *Nērcas* is a ritual, while external communities do not share this belief.
- External interference by groups in the functioning of *Nērcas* imposes a burden on their organic roles, resulting in various negative consequences.
- Irrational alterations driven by external factors cause cultural fragmentation within the society, whereas evolutionary change occurs naturally without threatening the community as a whole.

Conclusion

This research, titled "***Māppila Nērcas in Malabar: Dynamics of Modification and Evolution - A Comparative Study Amidst Modernist and Reformist Disputes,***" has meticulously examined the complex interplay between folklore, ritual, social identity, and cultural evolution within the *Māppila* community. The central concern was how *Nērcas* and traditionally enriched and spiritually meaningful rituals, have changed either through natural, intentional developments or because of external influences, and the various effects these changes have had on community identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. This research, which performs a comprehensive historical and cultural interpretation of the cultural background of the *Māppila* community, describes the evolutionary and gradual changes of the *Nērcas* in the Malabar region based on their mythological and cultural aspects. The *Nērcas*, the proponents of folklore, have been evolving over time in a multitude of different forms through natural evolution and the actions of external forces. This study has made a thorough examination of the ways in which the causes of these changes influence society.

The research problem was formulated to investigate the change in *Māppila Nērcas*, specifically examining the natural development brought about by indigenous socio-cultural change and the changes induced by extraneous interventions. The aims accordingly matched this issue by trying to know the culture and life of the *Māppila* people, record religious scholars' and individuals' views, analyse the historical development and organization of *Nērcas*, investigate their traditional roles, research the effects of globalization and recent controversies, and finally determine the main socio-political and economic determinants causing their fall or change.

This comparative perspective brought out that though all *Nērcas* had a common ritualistic core, regional adaptations gave rise to differences in structural and performative characteristics. Schedules, art forms, musical practices, and even the offerings themselves in *Peṅṅivaravu* differed markedly, conditioned by history and environment. These variations were indicative of an organic cultural evolution

in which *Nērccas* naturally evolved to fit local needs and circumstances without compromising their basic community-formation functions. And yet, the study also saw another concurrent trend: the externally driven alteration of *Nērccas*. Subject to globalization, commercialization, and changing socio-political contexts, some *Nērccas* encountered changes that shifted their fundamental character. Some rituals became reduced to tourism spectacles or politicized shows, diverging from their traditional integrative and spiritual functions. Such divergence has serious consequences. Natural evolution preserved cultural consistency and communal identity, while external alterations tended to cause fragmentation, identity insecurity, and an erosion of communication between folk.

The findings revealed that *Nērccas* can be categorized into three broad types: Sufi-based, martyr-commemoration-based, and global-icon influenced. Each type showed different patterns of evolution and varying degrees of susceptibility to external influences. Importantly, the study reinforced that ritual and custom are the cornerstones of *Māppila* cultural life. Any significant change in these dimensions resonates deeply within the community, affecting collective memory, social relations, and identity formation.

One of the most important findings was the role of *Nērccas* in promoting inter-community interaction. Traditionally, these rituals were arenas where various communities among all religions mingled, celebrated, and strengthened common cultural bonds. The erosion of this role under external pressure is a cause for serious concern, indicating a larger trend of communal disconnection and identity crisis among young generations.

The effect of ritual transformation was examined in the context of *Māppila* belief systems based on the five jurisprudence standards like *Fardh*, *Sunnah*, *Halāl*, *Harām*, and *Karāhat*. These moral systems not only controlled religious life, but also cultural practices, such as *Nērccas*. Therefore, changes in rituals and customs indicated fundamental changes in the moral and social fabric of the community.

The study also highlighted regional differences in the development of *Nērccas*. For instance, seashore *Nērccas* incorporated coastal cultural aspects, while

interior *Nērcas* exhibited agrarian culture. These regional characteristics influenced not only the form but the community's participation in the rituals, showing that any intervention or modification must take note of localities to prevent alienation.

Importantly, the study concluded that natural evolution, though inevitable, did not adversely affect the communal identity or cultural functions of *Nērcas*. Instead, it often revitalized rituals, making them more relevant to contemporary realities without sacrificing their integrative role. In contrast, externally driven modifications, motivated by political, economic, or commercial interests, often stripped *Nērcas* of their deeper meanings, reducing them to superficial displays. This loss of cultural content is a serious threat to the social unity and cultural continuity of the *Māppila* community.

Thus, the study firmly promotes a community-based method to the preservation and development of *Nērcas*. Folklore should be identified, not as a thing of the past, but as a living and dynamic system requiring stimulation from within society. Preservation efforts for *Nērcas* have to be based on cultural education, revitalization of universalized ritual forms, opposition to commodification, and proactive engagement by scholars, artists, and community leaders.

This thesis reiterates that *Nērcas* are not just religious festivals but crucial cultural structures that contain the shared consciousness of the *Māppila* community. Their preservation, recreation, and reinterpretation are necessary to ensure the sustenance of social cohesion, cultural identity, and community resilience in a world that is increasingly fractured and globalized. This study also describes the evolution and modification of *Nērcas* in folkloristic perspective. Some *Nērcas* have folklorism, and some of them have transformed into applied folklore or public folklore.

By learning about the evolutionary trajectories of *Nērcas*, identifying natural development and harmful external alteration, this study not only contributes to folklore studies but also provides practical knowledge for cultural preservation practices in an increasingly changing socio-cultural environment. Finally, defending

Nērcas is not so much a matter of defending ritual as of preserving the living heart of a people, that the strands of tradition, memory, and identity may remain to form a strong and varied cultural fabric for future times.

Folklore is a timeless necessity of a culture. In order to maintain its authenticity and internal balance, it is necessary to determine the original and ancient elements of folklore in our time and uphold them in a way that is consistent with the existing modes of expression of society. Society should form the basis of its identity by understanding folklore as the basis for the preservation of spirituality, the unity of the community mind, and artistic tradition.

The future lies in a scientific rethinking of the subject of folklore. The sciences should develop the necessary methods to preserve folklore, which is necessary for the cohesion and survival of society, and protect it. According to this research, society should preserve its cultural identity and mutual communication through natural renewal with the knowledge of folklore.

Scope for Further Research

- Sociological impact of *Nērcas*: by examining how its festivals foster inter-communal interaction and reinforce communal cohesion.
- The role of different communities in *Nērcas* can be studied.
- The psychological status of participants in *Nērcas* can be studied through psychological methodology.

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APPENDICES

List of Appendix

Appendix A

Photographs of *Nērcca* ritual, *Makhāms*, arts performances, and other *Nērcca*-related ceremonies

Appendix B

Various daily reports and notices about *Nērccas* and their history

Appendix C

It includes various types of published and unpublished Arabi-Malayalam *Nērcappāṭṭukal*, *Mālapāṭṭukal*, etc. Some data for *Nērcca* taken from these.

Appendix A



Kutturāṭṭ Performance



Tattānpeṭṭi Varavu with *Cīrani* to *Koṅṭṭōṭi Nēcca Candanameṭṭukkal*



A devotee bowing to the cannon barrel (left) and volunteers cleaning the cannon barrel (right) at *Koṅṭṭōṭi Nēcca*



Muṭṭum Viliyum



Devotees presenting the oil to polish the cannon oil at *Konṭṭōṭi Nērc̣ca*



Inside view of *Makhām*



Nēccappetti



Masjid related to *Appavāñibha Nēcca*: *Itiyañhara Mosque*



Duffmuṭṭu Performance



Traditional *Māppila Kōlkkali* performance



Arabanamuttu Performance



Marīda distribution related to Koṇṭōṭṭi Nērcca



Tattānpeṭṭivaravu in Koṇṭōṭṭi Nērcca: Bringing Vellikkoṭi and Cīraṇi and entering the Qubba



Malappuram Valiya Jumua Masjid

Appendix B



Madhyamam Daily, 06/11/2000



Madhyamam Daily, 31/03/2002

Chandrika Daily, 27/09/2017



Chandrika Daily, 29/03/2025

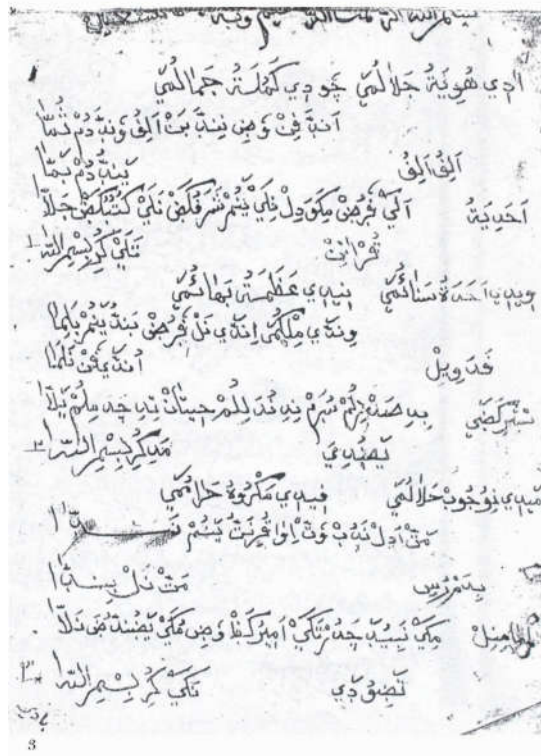
Notice of the Rāmantali Śuhada Nērcā



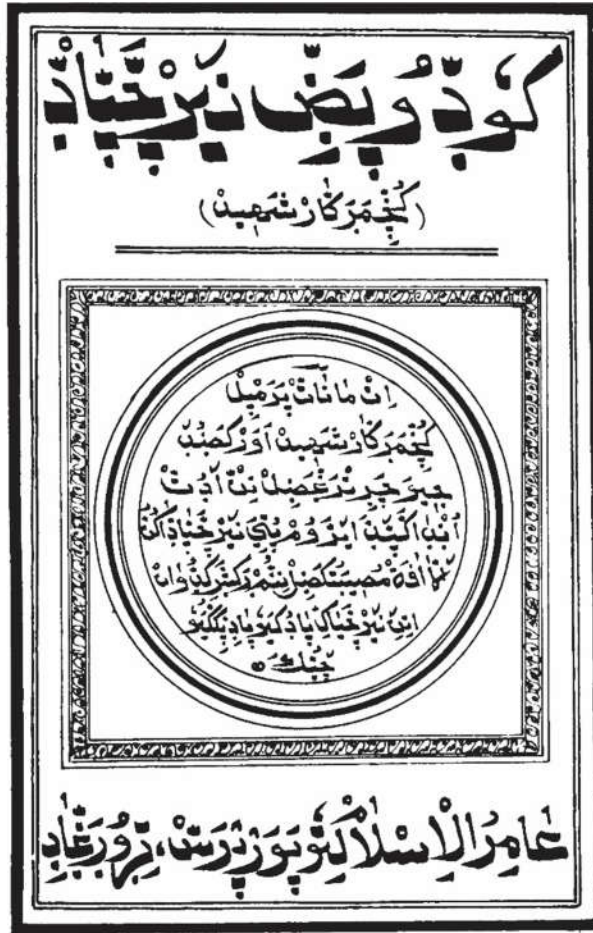
Digital poster of the *Koṭṭōṭi Nēcca* Digital poster of the *Appavāṇibha Nēcca*



Teruvatt Palli Māla, Vāzappulli Mammūṭṭi, Vadakkēkkāṭ



Koṅṭōṭṭi Muhammad Ṣah Taññal Qissappāṭṭu



Kōṭṭupalli Nērcappāṭṭu, K.T. Muhammed Tirūrañṇādi



Rifā i Māla



Nafīsat Māla