

**BECOMING 'HINDU' AND 'MUSLIM'
IDENTITY AND CONFLICT IN MALABAR
1900 - 1936**

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Most are born into a religion; some acquire a religious identity; an unfortunate few have religion thrust upon them. While the first of these statements is an objective fact the latter two raise questions both of subjective perceptions and of temporality. Is the perception of subscribing to a religion a matter of individual preference alone? Further, does individual belief necessarily involve an identification with unknown others who are members of the same religion i.e. does individual belief create a sense of religious community? Lastly, are collective religious identities acquired for all time or are they asserted within particular historical contexts alone? Most historical studies of the emergence and supposed consolidation of antagonistic religious identities, the phenomenon of 'communalism', tend to stop at the moment of epiphany: the realisation by individuals of being 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'.¹ There is a teleology implicit in most studies, a sense at the end of inevitability, the achievement of that which was to be achieved. One sometimes encounters too an essentialism; that lurking under the veneer of secular citizenship is the loosely chained beast of a primordial, eternal religious identity.² Both these tendencies are reflected in historical studies which concentrate on riots because the 'communal' identity is ostensibly full blown in such circumstances. The communal riot becomes the equivalent of the baptismal font; once dipped one becomes a permanent member of the faith.³ However, every individual is the sum of different identities - religious, ethnic, regional -

¹ S.B.Freitag, Collective action and community: public arenas and the emergence of communalism in north India (Berkeley, 1989); S.Bose, 'The roots of communal violence in rural Bengal: a study of Kishoreganj riots, 1930', Modern Asian Studies, 16, 3 (1982); D.Chakrabarty, 'Communal riots and labour: Bengali jute mill hands in the 1890s', Past and Present, 91 (1981); C.Joshi, 'Bonds of community, ties of religion: Kanpur textile workers in the early 20th century', Indian Economic and Social History Review, 22, 3 (1985); G.Pandey, 'Rallying around the cow: sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri region, c. 1888-1917', in R.Guha ed. Subaltern studies (Delhi, 1983); A.Yang, 'Sacred symbol and sacred space in rural India: community mobilisation in the "anti cow killing" riot of 1893', Comparative Studies in Society and History, 22, 4 (1980).

² L.Dumont, 'Nationalism and communalism', in Religion, politics and history in India (The Hague, 1976). Pandey stresses that such essentialism is characteristic of colonial discourse on India, and remarks on continuities in nationalist prose. However, he does not sufficiently distinguish between the discourse of communalism and the reality of the emergence of communal identities. Very often one feels that communalism is nothing but the false consciousness of the colonial bureaucrat. G.Pandey, The construction of communalism in colonial north India (Delhi, 1990).

³ In Freitag's work, it is participation in a realm of popular culture characterised by religious processions that engenders 'communal' identities over a historical period. See Freitag, Collective action and community.

each of which is contextual and constantly shifting. It would be perhaps more useful to study identity as a multivalent and transient category, in as much as it is asserted within specific contexts, rather than as something which is created for all time.

In the case of Malabar, the Mappila rebellion of 1921, which culminated in the attempt to set up an Islamic state in a few areas, has dominated the historiography. Both teleology and essentialism have been rampant: the emergence of a beleaguered Mappila Muslim identity has been assiduously traced to as long back as 1498.⁴ This essay argues for the contingency of identity and is an exploration of what did not happen rather than what did i.e. the processional conflicts of 1936 in Cannanore did not culminate in bloodshed or even the emergence of militant 'communal' identities. A rhetoric of religious antagonism emerged, 'communal' passions were whipped up and just as suddenly the situation went back to normal. Both in 1915 and 1936, there were affrays on the issue of religious processions and the playing of music in front of places of worship. What, in 1915, had been a question of conflict between two communities jostling for control of local commerce, two decades later assumed the nature of a clash between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', which involved both political parties and a greater intervention by the state. Three major themes run through the paper. First, communalism is seen as a logical outcome of the working of nationalism rather than its antithesis. If in the north 'politicised religious community emerged as an equivalent, and viable alternative to nationalism', in Malabar it was nationalism that embodied religious community.⁵ Nationalism as an ideology was not able to find a satisfactory solution for the problem of caste inequality. The assumption of a united body of Indians did not square with the reality that some were less equal than the others. It was this fact that led the Congress in Malabar to adopt a limited programme of attempting to build unity within Hinduism alone. Secondly, in the context of conflicts, the state emerged as the arbiter of what had earlier been settled at the level of the locality by leaders of the community. Religion became as much a question of law and order as of private belief. Parallel to this was the breakdown of community methods of arbitration.

⁴ The following is a sample of the extensive literature on the Mappila outbreaks: S.F.Dale, Islamic society on the south Asian frontier:the Mappilas of Malabar, 1498-1922 (Oxford, 1980); K.N.Panikkar, Against lord and state:religion and peasant uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921 (Delhi, 1989); R.Hardgrave, 'The Mappila rebellion, 1921, peasant uprising in Malabar', Modern Asian Studies, II, 1 (1977); C.Wood, 'Peasant revolt:an interpretation of Moplah violence in the 19th and 20th centuries', in C.Dewey et al ed. The imperial impact:studies in the economic history of Africa and India (London, 1978).

⁵ See Freitag, Collective action and community, pp.192-96.

1 Religion and Identity at the beginning of the twentieth century

The landowning matrilineal households (tharavadus) of the Nayers in Malabar enjoyed more extensive powers of ownership and control than their counterparts elsewhere in the Madras Presidency. Apart from extensive holdings, they controlled forests, wastelands and even non-navigable rivers. What underwrote their authority was their virtual monopoly over wet lands in a region deficient in the production of foodgrains.⁶ Rural settlement tended to be centred on a tharavadu encompassing the lands and labourers it commanded. Around each major tharavadu there were families of service castes - oil pressers, washermen, blacksmiths, potters who held hereditary rights and privileges in the produce as well as the family and local shrine. Very often, they cultivated lands held from shrines or tharavadus which were just sufficient for subsistence. Within a village, Mappila Muslims too shared a right in the services of artisans and other lower castes. The occupations of these service groups reflected a secular, community obligation rather than their position within a religious framework of responsibilities towards Nayar *yajamanans* alone. This is significant, as existing work tends to see village relations focused on the *jajman* of the dominant caste either as part of a Hindu religious complex in which the *jajman* is the chief sacrificer, or one in which he replicates the royal style within the village microcosm.⁷

Not only did Mappilas form a part of the patron-client network, as tenants and agricultural labourers they were also subject to the jurisdiction of the tharavadu. Tharavadus had the authority to settle civil disputes as well as arbitrate in conflicts between the constituents of the community around them. They could impose traditional punishments like stopping of the services of the washerpeople, preventing individuals from participating in community ceremonies, or imposing the ultimate sanction of excommunication. Prominent Nayar families, particularly in the interior of Kottayam, decided disputes among Mappila tenants well. As a measure of patronage, they donated rice to local mosques just as they did to shrines. Miller records an interesting incident from 1937 when a group of Mappilas decided to become Ahmadliyyas. The *yajamanan* refused to accept gifts from the members of the sect; this necessarily involved the concomitant denial of patronage to the heretic body. Moreover, they were refused access to the common Muslim burial ground.⁸ As yet, in the early decades of

⁶ See Dilip M. Menon, Caste, nationalism and communism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948 (Cambridge, 1994), ch.1 for a detailed study of agrarian relations in the region.

⁷ See A.M. Hocart, Caste: a comparative study (London, 1950), p.68, and more recently G. Raheja, The poison in the gift: ritual, prestation and the dominant caste in a north India village (Chicago, 1988).

⁸ E.J. Miller, 'An analysis of the Hindu caste system in its interactions with the total social structure in north Kerala' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1950), pp.158-59.

the century, the secular authority of a tharavadu over a locality was not seen as detrimental to the influence exercised by the mosques and Mappila *ulemas*. Religious differences seemed to count for little. Of the four branches of the Muthur tharavadu in Tellicherry, all the members of one had converted to Islam. The head of the branch was, however, a Hindu.⁹ Rural community was not based so much on premises of equality or tolerance but on the fact of everyone being equally dependent on the tharavadus. Labourers, Mappilas as well as Hindus, had the benevolent paternalistic arbitration of Nayar landlords thrust on them.

Religious practices in the region were characterised by their diversity. A mixture of ancestors, spirits, ghosts, nature deities, defied humans and Brahminical deities rubbed shoulders within a flexible pantheon. Modes of worship ranged from rituals involving the use of toddy and meat to those which enjoined vegetarianism and a 'pure' lifestyle. In 1918, K.M.Panikkar remarked of the religious practices of the region that any resemblance to a body of religion even as amorphous as Hinduism was remote.¹⁰ There were few temples in the region, and those that were there had a limited circle of devotees drawn from the upper castes. At some of the temples even the higher ranks of Nayars were not permitted proximity to the inner sanctum. Shrines (*kavus*), were the popular sites of devotion and they drew upon a congregation of lower and upper castes who formed a community within a region defined by the sphere of overlordship of the dominant family or families in the region. While at one level, it was a community of worship, at another level, it also corresponded with a secular community of work involving the tharavadu, its nearby branches, tenants and labourers. Thus, apart from the religious domain, the adherents of a shrine reflected a pattern of shared irrigation networks, shared labour and so on. At shrine festivals, various castes were involved at different stages of the rituals. For example, at the annual festival at Pishari shrine in Kurumbranad, each caste performed the role traditionally associated with it: the blacksmith repaired the sword; the umbrella maker supplied umbrellas; the fisherpeople brought salt from the coast; and the Tlyyas brought coconuts and toddy.¹¹ These festivals were marked by the providing of services by the lower castes and the giving of grain by the tharavadus as donation to the shrine which was then redistributed to the devotees during the rituals.

The community of worship around the shrine was also a community of subsistence centred on the tharavadu.¹² Festival processions tended to demarcate both the secular

⁹ Hamid Ali, Custom and law in Anglo-Muslim jurisprudence (Calcutta, 1938), p.50.

¹⁰ K.M.Panikkar, 'Religion and magic among the Nayars', Man, 62 (1918), p.104.

¹¹ F.Fawcett, The Nayars of Malabar (Madras, 1901), pp.255-64.

¹² For a more detailed discussion on popular religious practices in Malabar see Dilip Menon, 'The moral community of the *teyyattam*: popular culture in late colonial Malabar', in (continued...)

authority of the tharavadus as well as the religious affiliation to a particular shrine. Since most of these processions moved through a traditionally recognised sacred terrain, there was little scope for conflict. The boundaries between different divinities was miscible: shrines of Nayar ancestors could be thrown open to the public if the deceased ancestor was believed to possess special powers; tribal deities came to be worshipped at shrines belonging to Nayar households. Such democracy of worship engendered a sense of community around the shrines regardless of caste or religion. Of course, it must be stressed that this was a 'presumed community' which was summoned up on the occasions of religious festivals. In Mattanur, Nayars took offerings to the annual *nercha* (festival) at the local mosque once a year.¹³ Thurston records a striking instance of the melange of beliefs shared by castes and communities. In the houses of a large number of Tiyyas in Malabar, regular offerings were made to a person called Kunnath Nayar and his Mappila friend Kunhi Rayan. The former was believed to have complete control over all the snakes in the land. Near Mannarghat, Mappila devotees collected donations for a snake mosque.¹⁴

In the interior the Mappilas were mainly workers on the land, ranging from tenants cultivating coconut for export to those who scratched out a living cultivating hill rice and a few vegetables on their homesteads. Individuals like S.Mammi Supl who owned over half the wetland in the Kolanta *desam* were rare on the ground.¹⁵ They tended to be concentrated in villages bordering the rivers, as a considerable number were engaged in trade along the river. While Mappilas tended to be a minority in the interior, they were clustered along the coast, particularly in the port towns of Tellicherry, Cannanore and Badagara where they constituted nearly half the population.¹⁶ Mappila merchants more or less dominated the export trade in coconut and pepper as well as the coastal trade. Their control over the latter was to be of considerable significance in the wake of the Depression and the plummeting of international demand which destroyed many of the traders in export commodities on the coast. Mappila traders from the coast were the vital nexus between landlords and cultivators in the interior and the external market creating a symbiotic link. Merchants and their agents visited

¹²(...continued)

¹² Studies in History, IX, 2 (1993) and 'Intimations of equality: shrines and politics in Malabar, 1900-1924', in P.G.Robb ed., Dalit movements and the meanings of labour in India (Delhi, 1993).

¹³ Miller, 'An analysis of the Hindu caste system', p.164.

¹⁴ E.Thurston, Omens and superstitions of southern India (London, 1912), p.128-9.

¹⁵ Settlement register of Kolanta desam, Irikkur amsam (Calicut, 1904).

¹⁶ In 1921, the percentage of Mappilas in the population was 42 in Cannanore, 38 in Tellicherry and 50 in Badagara. Census of India 1921, XIII, Madras, Table IV and V.

the hamlets lying near important market towns regularly and purchased paddy, coconut and pepper directly from the cultivators. Apart from the big merchants and traders, there were those who were associated with the business as stevedores and labourers on the ports who in their spare time made coir ropes and mats for the market. Two groups of merchants and importers dominated the trade in rice, one of which consisted of Cutchi Memons and Mappilas who had agents in every port in Burma.¹⁷ Malabar had been deficient in the production of foodgrains since the 19th century, a problem exacerbated by the mad rush to convert wet lands to the cultivation of cash crops. Therefore, the Mappila importers of grain were the guarantors of food. Their hand was strengthened by the laissez faire policy of the Government of Madras which refused to control or regulate the trade in grain until the massive shortages following the second world war forced a decision to start rationing.¹⁸

In north Malabar, the Mappilas were not a beleaguered community like their brethren to the south. It has been argued that a combination of being the agrarian proletariat and a religious minority had engendered a sense of opposition among the Mappilas of south Malabar. Resentment had come to have an ideological focus on the shrines of martyrs who had died in outbreaks against Hindu landowners. There was sense of being 'Muslim' as against the Hindus.¹⁹ In north Malabar, the Mappilas in the interior were numerically a minority and were incorporated within common traditions of worship. On the coast, they were prosperous merchants who were guided more by the pragmatism that commerce engendered rather than an oppositional identity. Many of the prominent Mappila merchants had over generations maintained close links with the pepper growing Nayar landowners in the interior. Such affiliations continued into the era of administration through elected bodies like the Taluk Boards and Municipal Councils where the lords of commerce and land worked in a corrupt and unbreakable alliance. A clique consisting of the pepper barons - the Kalliattu and Koodali tharavadus - and the Mappila merchant and exporter, Kunhi Moyan Haji, controlled the Chirakkal taluk Board till its dissolution in 1930.²⁰

Was there a clear sense of religious identity in this period? Participation at religious festivals for most devotees meant an incorporation as members of particular castes. They were identified by the produce they brought or the services they performed at various stages in the ritual. Thus, while they could have emerged from these occasions with a sense of reassertion

¹⁷ *Development Dept. G.O. 356 dated 25 February 1945* (Kerala Secretariat) [henceforth KS].

¹⁸ See David Arnold, 'Looting, grain riots and government policy in south India, 1918', *Past and Present*, 84 (1979), pp.136-38.

¹⁹ See Dale, *Islamic society on the south Asian frontier* in particular.

²⁰ *Local Self Govt. Dept. G.O. 1745 (L&M) dated 17 April 1928* (KS).

of the fact of their being Nayar, Cheruma, Pulaya and so on, it is unlikely that they came away feeling 'Hindu' in any meaningful sense. Indeed, later reform movements tended to see shrine festivals as entrenching caste, and particularly lower caste, identities. Nambudiris and the upper echelons of the Nayars may have had some notion of all Indian Hinduism, particularly in their affinity towards a map of pilgrimage places. In the main, any notion of being a Hindu was a transient one asserted within particular contexts and not something that bound landlord and labourer, or upper caste and lower caste. Mappilas in the Interior worshipped at local mosques, shrines to Muslim holy men as well as a variety of shrines devoted to snakes, tribal deities and local divinities loosely within a 'Hindu' pantheon. Attitudes with regard to the other religious communities were characterised by obliviousness rather than knowledge. Mappilas were seen as part of the community of subsistence, their work contributed to rural community, and they participated in shrine festivals (without, of course, any ritual incorporation). There may have been little sense of 'us' and 'them', except at the level of popular prejudices regarding differing lifestyles and patterns of speech.²¹ In fact, it may be possible to argue that there was a greater awareness of mutual differences among the constituents within a putative 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' bloc i.e. between Sunnis and Ahmadiyyas or between Nayar and Pulaya. Pandey has argued that in an earlier period, the sense of the individual community had been 'fuzzier'.²² This needs to be qualified. Belonging to a numerical minority living within the cultural milieu, however ill defined, of the majority, 'fuzziness' could have arisen as much from self effacement, as from imperfect cognition.

1.2 Emergence of urban rivalries

The first two decades of the twentieth century were a period of economic boom. Malabar pepper and copra ruled the European markets, displacing exports from the plantations of south east Asia.²³ The two prime beneficiaries were the *kuzhikanakkars* (improving tenants) growing coconut, a large majority of whom were lower caste Tiyyas and Mappila merchants involved in export. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a lower caste Tiyya elite had emerged on the strength of the profits from cash crop cultivation, education, association with the colonial administration, and more dubiously, for some, the control of toddy distribution

²¹ This is not to argue however, that these prejudices are wholly innocuous. They could contribute towards the creation of what Dutta has recently termed a subversive body of 'commonsense' about other communities. See P.K.Dutta, "Dying Hindus": production of Hindu communal commonsense in early 20th century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXVIII, 25 (1993), 1305-19.

²² Pandey, *The construction of communalism*, p.159.

²³ For example, in 1905-06, a bumper pepper crop in Malabar coupled with a poor one in the Straits Settlements and Java saw exports to Germany and Italy rise by over a 100 per cent. *Review of the sea borne trade of the Madras Presidency, 1905-06*, p.16.

networks. The Gazetteer observed that Tiyyas were to be found in all walks of life as 'pleaders, merchants and landlords'. As Tiyyas began to move into urban areas, three areas of conflict emerged. The first related to the acquisition of land in the towns of Tellicherry and Cannanore which led to a struggle between these two prospering groups for urban space. As a consequence of the Malabar Compensation for Tenants' Improvements Act of 1900, many Tiyya tenants had secured *de facto* security of occupancy. Landlords found it difficult to evict since rates of compensation had been inflated by the boom in the prices of coconut. Many landlords began to resort to overleases, putting the costs of eviction on the overlessees who in most cases tended to be Tiyya professionals or lower caste emigrants investing in land. A case in point was C.Krishnan, Tiyya editor and social reformer, who supplemented his income by collecting rent on lands which his father had acquired on overleases.²⁴ At the same time, prosperous Mappilas too were acquiring land on overleases, very often near existing temples and shrines. In 1927, the raja of Kadathunad complained to the Tenancy Commission that Mappilas had been acquiring land near Hindu religious spots and should be prevented from doing so.²⁵ Nayar tharavadus with lands on the coast preferred to let Tiyyas and Mappilas battle it out for leases on their lands. Very often, there was an edge of an inchoate Hindu camaraderie. M.Anandan, a Tiyya pleader at Tellicherry, was given a lease by a Nayar landlord to convert wet lands to garden to prevent the encroachment of Mappilas.²⁶

The second sphere of conflict lay in the field of commerce. Building on the profits of cash crop cultivation, Tiyya entrepreneurs had begun to set up weaving factories, brick and tile industries and saw mills.²⁷ In 1909, C.Krishnan founded the Calicut Bank which financed a wide range of activities; from loans to professionals and merchants to money for the setting up of tea shops and stalls. By 1915, observers had begun to remark on the growing spirit of commercial jealousy between the Tiyya and Mappilas, as the latter found their monopoly over urban commerce and moneylending gradually being undercut by a nascent Tiyya elite. With increasing employment opportunities in the towns, there was a migration of lower castes from the villages to work in the factories being set up in the towns. As yet, it was not a sharp break signalling a movement from peasant to worker. Most people tended to cling on to their homesteads, cultivating a few cash crops and returning during the agricultural rush season of

²⁴ K.Achuthan, C.Krishnan (Kottayam, 1971), pp.72-73.

²⁵ Oral evidence of A.K.Sankara Varma *valiya Raja*, Malabar Tenancy Committee Report, 1927 [henceforth MTCR, 1927], vol.II, p.318.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.377. Oral evidence of M.Anandan, Member of the Bar, Tellicherry.

²⁷ S.Aaron, Jeevitha smaranakal [Memoirs] (Cannanore, 1974), pp. 45-48; Papers on Industrial Conference, September, 1908, Ootacamund, p. 59; Report on the Working of the Dept. of Industry, Madras Presidency [henceforth RDIMP], 1926-27, pp.21, 34.

the harvest. Till the onset of the Depression, there was a shortage of labour on the land exacerbated by migration northwards into Coorg and abroad to Ceylon, Malaya and Burma.²⁸ Moreover, these new factories were sickly and seasonal. For example, a heavy monsoon could prevent logs from being floated down river as well as stall the production of bricks. Nevertheless, there was an influx of men from the villages, who had no sense of rootedness or belonging. Lastly, there was no neighbourhood around the factories where workers lived; and the factories themselves were small and scattered. If the Tiyya elite sought to consolidate their position in the towns they did not have to look far for a constituency.

There was yet another sphere where there was an emerging conflict between Tiyyas and Mappilas. Just as Tiyyas had begun to encroach on the commercial monopoly of the Mappilas, the latter began to dismantle the Tiyya monopoly in the toddy trade. The profession of liquor extraction and distribution was coming under attack from temperance campaigners, a rhetoric as yet in the wings. Far more important in its consequences was the shift in the policy of the Madras Government towards extracting more revenue from excise as they realised that land taxes could not be raised indefinitely. The ramshackle toddy industry which had been the monopoly of a few Tiyya families like the Muirkkoth, now began to be brought under the excise bureaucracy. As taxes on trees and the production of toddy rose steadily - by 50 per cent for toddy and by 172 per cent for the vend fees on arrack between 1917 and 1927 - so did illicit tapping and distillation.²⁹ As Nayar landlords were made responsible for policing excise infringements, one of the consequences was a growing strain within rural community. This added to the latent conflict between Nayars and Tiyyas and observers had begun to speak of the 'communal rivalry' between the two groups.³⁰ Faced with the difficulty of carrying on their profession, Tiyyas began to drift away from the toddy trade. Mappila financiers began moving in and displacing the Tiyya liquor barons.

The aspirations for mobility of the emergent Tiyya elite and the rootlessness of the migrant workers cohered in an ideology provided by the caste reform movement among the Ezhavas of Travancore led by Sri Narayana Guru. He attempted to draw a direct connection between work, religious practices and status. As toddy tappers they were seen as pursuing a demeaning profession; by offering blood sacrifices and toddy at shrines, they were the votaries of a lower form of worship. By eschewing their connection with liquor and by adopting 'purer'

²⁸ Census of India, 1911, XII, Madras, part I, Report, p.27; Census of India, 1921, XIII, Madras, part I, Report, p.49.

²⁹ Report on the administration of the Abkari Revenue Dept., Madras Presidency [henceforth RARMP], 1907-08, 1; RARMP, 1914-15, 1; RARMP, 1918, 17.

³⁰ Written evidence of K.V.Krishnan Nair, High Court *vakil*, Tellicherry, MTCR, 1927-28, vol.II, p.396.

forms of worship, the Tiyyas could aspire to a recognition of their true status.³¹ This new ideology coupled with the breaking away from rural structures of production and hierarchy and the fortuitous pressures on the toddy trade led to a massive questioning of status as well as of the role of Tiyyas in rural religion. Tiyyas began to refuse to supply toddy to shrine festivals, seeing in such rituals an attempt to incorporate them as subordinates.³² Moreover, resentments began to spill over in what had been ritual performances. In Mavila shrine, the annual mock fight between groups of Tiyyas and Nayars became a free for all with the Nayars retreating with bloody noses.³³ Rural shrines came to be perceived solely as reproducing inequality both in their exclusion of untouchables as well as the allocation of particular functions to castes within rituals. With the movements of lower castes, as workers, to the towns, shrines in Tellicherry and Cannanore gained a new following. An inchoate lower class culture emerged parallel to the growth of a temple culture among lower class elites.

In 1906, Kottieth Ramunni, a lawyer and K.Chantan, a retired Deputy Collector founded the Sri Gnanodaya Yogam for the upliftment of the Tiyyas of Malabar. The society proposed to build temples for the Tiyyas and in 1908, Sri Narayana Guru laid the foundations of the Jagannatha temple at Tellicherry. By 1916, two more temples were founded: the Srikanteswara at Calicut and the Sundareswara at Cannanore. The setting up of Tiyya temples was seen both as a focus of community as well as a strategy towards equality. These temples were meant to be for of and by the Tiyyas alone where they would worship as a separate therefore equal community. In 1920, a resolution was adopted at the annual conference that the 'Tiyya community should cease to worship or have anything to do with the temples maintained for or by the so called higher castes'.³⁴ It is significant that the Tiyya elite saw themselves as standing outside Hinduism, a religion tainted in their eyes with inequality and subordination. The new temples were represented as the foci of community in the towns, demarcating their spheres of influence through processions. Temple processions from Jagannatha as much as smaller local shrines attempted to parallel festival processions in the countryside which reflected the religious influence of the shrines as well as the secular authority of the tharavadus. In the urban areas there was bound to be greater dispute over boundaries and areas of control. Moreover, the new Tiyya temples were not only competing with the shrines in the villages for a congregation, increasingly they found themselves losing followers to shrines in the towns which afforded a sense of belonging to the migrant workers. A lower class culture

³¹ See M.S.A.Rao, Social movements and social transformation: a study of two backward classes movements (Delhi, 1979).

³² Mithavadi, May 1921.

³³ C.H.Kunhappa, Smaranakal matram [Memoirs] (Calicut, 1981), pp.5-6, 26.

³⁴ Mithavadi, August 1913.

of devotion sprang up around these rejuvenated urban shrines which, by their proximity to areas of work and residence, acted as centres of loyalty. The Tiyya temples, by both standing outside Hinduism as well as refusing to admit untouchables lost a prospective constituency.

As the incubus of inequality threatened the unity of the Hindu fold, Nayar intellectuals attempted to defuse the crisis by pointing out that the 'main enemy' of the Tiyyas was the Mappilas rather than the higher castes. A Nayar reformer writing in the *Mithavadi* in 1913 stressed that if the Tiyyas began reading the Puranas, going on pilgrimages and worshipping Vishnu and Ganapati, their animosity towards the Nayars would cease.³⁵ The solution offered for caste conflict lay in an imitation of upper caste practices. Condescending and trivial as this might have seemed, this was precisely the strategy that upper caste reformers would take up later in the course of nationalism. There was another stand of insidious continuity. Tiyya reformers had defined shrine worship in rural areas solely in terms of the reproduction of caste subordination, occluding the fact that these were sites where not only people of different castes, but of different religions as well participated. The move towards temples, ostensibly projected as standing outside Hinduism, paradoxically moved political activity towards Hinduism. The complexity of the shrine culture was exchanged for the simplicities of temple entry and Hindu equality.

Even as the Tiyyas were moving towards some cohesion within their putative community while standing outside Hinduism, and the Nayars were attempting to define a Hinduism which could appeal to the subordinate castes, there were Islamizing tendencies among the Mappilas of Cannanore and Tellicherry. Following the First world war, and the British 'betrayal' of the Caliphate, there had been efforts within the Mappila religious establishment to redefine their sense of identity in a more religious format. In 1914 and 1915, public meetings were held in Chirakkal *taluk* and elsewhere in north Malabar drawing crowds of upto 3000 people. Nearly all the meetings were presided over by *kazis* of the localities and they called upon all Mappilas to give up the matrilineal system of inheritance. At some of the meetings, the roused priests declared that, 'if anyone were to say that he does not want that his self acquired property should on his death devolve according to Mohammedan law, he would turn a *kafir*'. When the district authorities asked for an enquiry to be made by *tahsildars* into the matter, it was found that a majority of the Mappila families were in favour of legislation against matrilineal inheritance.³⁶ Subsequently, a petition to the Governor of Madras purportedly from the 'Moplah residents of Cannanore' stated that the 'Marumakkathayam Law

³⁵ *Mithavadi*, September 1913.

³⁶ Reports of P.A. Ammoo Sahib, *tahsildar* of Chirakkal, 29 January 1915 and Dy. *tahsildar*, Quilandy, 1 February 1915. The latter found on interviewing 37 of the 48 Mappila families in Quilandy that there was only one dissenter. *DR Public 497/Pub.15 dated 9 March 1915* (Kozhikode Regional Archives) [henceforth KRA].

of inheritance is opposed to the spirit and teachings of Islam. But we have been forced to follow it owing to long usage'.³⁷ Thus, not only was the horizon darkening with the clouds of conflict between the Tiyyas and Mappilas, there was the possibility that this could take on overtones of religion.

1.3 Tiyyas, Mappilas and the riot of 1915

On the 27th of February 1915, a procession of Tiyyas beating drums and accompanied by several other percussionists marched towards a temple in Tellicherry. Seven Tiyya volunteers in uniform carrying sticks escorted the procession. Traditionally, the offering of lamps to the temple had not been associated with either an ostentatious display of noisy devotion or an armed entourage. The route charted was provocative; it passed in front of the major mosques in Tellicherry, making sure that even the new Pilakod mosque was not missed out. Moreover, *niskaram* (prayer) was going on when the Tiyyas went by with music and drumming. The Inspector of the Police was not being alarmist when he observed that the Tiyyas seemed to want to establish a precedent in the matter of music before mosques.³⁸ A few days later, in Calicut (south Malabar), a riot between Mappilas and Tiyyas resulted in the burning down of Palliyarakkal shrine. The shrine, three miles away from Calicut was managed by four Nayar families, but the religious ceremonies were performed by a Tiyya priest. Worship was performed thrice a week, including Fridays. Palliyarakkal was located close to a footpath leading to Konthanary mosque situated to the east. The day previous to the incident, when a *puja* was being performed at night, a procession of Mappilas taking offerings to the Konthanary mosque had not ceased playing music in front of the shrine.³⁹ In south Malabar, an existing tradition of militancy meant that processional conflicts could very easily turn violent.

In June 1915, the government of the district proposed the setting up of a conciliatory board calling upon the notables of both communities. This was in keeping with the general policy of the imperial government of maintaining control over society through relying on those whom they perceived as 'natural leaders'.⁴⁰ Malabar was a neglected outpost of the Madras Presidency, where the institutions of administration of the state had not as yet managed to reach down into town or village society; it was a 'limited raj' dependent on elites. Therefore, the authorities perforce had to reckon with individuals who claimed to represent a wide constituency. In north Malabar, it was a case of a weak state negotiating with an elite

³⁷ *Ibid.* .

³⁸ Petition from Imdadul Islam Association, Tellicherry, 28 February 1915 and Report of Inspector of Police, 22 March 1915. *DR Magisterial D 298/M.15 dated 13 June 1915* (KRA).

³⁹ *DR Magisterial 544/M.15 dated 26 March 1915* (KRA).

⁴⁰ See Freitag, Collective action and community, p.57.

without a base. Kottieth Ramunni, the President of the Sri Gnanodaya Yogam, was aware that he represented the Tiyyas only nominally and the Hindu community not at all. He noted with caution that, 'a conciliatory board presupposes the existence of a fractious spirit between the two great communities...' He feared that the creation of the board could precipitate the very problem it was trying to solve. Ramunni offered an alternative explanation: a spirit of 'mere commercial jealousy' between Mappila merchants and Hindus poaching into the formers' preserves. He felt that one way to defuse the situation would be to throw open the Chamber of Commerce to merchants of all classes and communities.⁴¹

The Tiyya leaders consciously defined themselves as not Hindus. They wished to stand apart as a separate community of equals outside of the Hindu religion which they perceived as entrenching caste inequality. In the countryside, Tiyyas were attempting to detach themselves from religious networks which entrenched their social inferiority within Hinduism. It has been observed for Ceylon that the emergence of localised struggles for symbolic space can be attributed to the heightening of 'revitalisation movements' within religion.⁴² In Malabar, the peculiar context was of a caste movement which sought to make a critique of Hinduism by standing outside of it and redefining the terms of worship. Among the Mappilas, even though there had been attempts at Islamicisation, their elites were too involved in symbiotic relations of profit with the landowning Hindu families to want to instigate any 'communal' disturbance. The pragmatism of Mappila elites coupled with the isolationism of the Tiyya elite defused conflict. Moreover, in a period of economic boom, when exports of Malabar copra and pepper were funding the setting up of factories, the scope for urban lower class conflict was limited. There was nevertheless a struggle between Mappilas and Tiyyas for demarcating areas of urban influence. It had not as yet assumed the proportions of a battle over sacred space and was more an attempt to create sharply defined sacred spaces out of secular territory: the streets and bylanes became the equivalent of the *kavuvattam* in the villages. To use Roberts' phrase, the construction of new shrines and *srambis* was an attempt to create 'iconic markers of the battle for minds'.⁴³ Roberts has further argued that the British imposition of their cultural premises regarding silence in front of places of worship was the source of conflict. Moreover, this worked to the disadvantage of Hindus as against Muslims,

⁴¹ Kottieth Ramunni to A.D.M., Malabar, June 1915. *DR Magisterial D.298/M.15 dated 13 June 1915* (KRA).

⁴² M. Roberts, 'Noise as cultural struggle: tom tom beating, the British and communal disturbances in Sri Lanka, 1880-1930s', in V. Das ed. *Mirrors of violence: communities, riots and survivors in south Asia* (Delhi, 1990), p.254.

⁴³ Roberts, 'Noise as cultural struggle', p.267.

since the playing of music was integral to Hindu processions.⁴⁴ However, as we have seen in this instance, the playing of music was an 'invented tradition'. In 1915, for the first time, the Tiyyas took a procession with music to a shrine festival; a secular act of assertion of territorial muscle.

At the beginning of the century, processions involving religious antagonism had been few and far between because of the location of temples and shrines far away from public thoroughfares. The state's attitude to the problem of religious processions in the nineteenth century had been one of pragmatism and of leaving well enough alone. In 1874, the Madras government had directed Magistrates to interdict processionaries from playing music while passing any place of worship not belonging to their own sect. Five years later an appeal to the Madras High Court had asserted the right of Hindus to go in procession in 'a lawful manner so as not to disturb the respondents or other persons assembled for the performance of religious worship'.⁴⁵ William Logan, the enlightened Collector of Malabar, had observed that it was difficult to legislate upon, or lay down strict rules in, such matters. He said that it would be difficult to notify hours of worship in Hindu temples in Malabar as 'there was hardly any occurrence in a family which is not deemed worthy of being associated with temple worship'. He went on to say that the construction of a timetable for Mohammedan worship would be easier but 'was to be deprecated as fraught with mischievous results'. Logan's proposal expressed succinctly the attitude of the state towards religious processions: 'Leave the thing to the good sense of the processionaries is my view. If they display bad sense, then stop all their processions till they recover their good senses'.⁴⁶ Over the next two decades, there were to be shifts both in political stances and the attitude of the Government.

1.4 The growth of a Hindu politics

Mass political activity in Malabar was inaugurated with the Khilafat movement which gained a wide following with the linking of the exigent question of tenancy reform. However, there always remained the danger that political activity could not be maintained within channels which could be controlled by leaders. For one, there was a militant Mappila identity in south Malabar as we have seen. Moreover, Congress and Khilafat activities though linked together rhetorically, actually depended on separate volunteer structures which existed side by side. In 1921, following a series of contretemps, culminating in an insensitively handled police raid on Mambram mosque, the Mappila rebellion broke out. Though an inchoate leadership initially managed to maintain some control over a groundswell, agitation soon broke its bounds. All

⁴⁴ Roberts, 'Noise as cultural struggle', pp.259-60

⁴⁵ G.O. 861 (Judicial) dated 9 May 1874 (KRA).

⁴⁶ R.Dis. Magisterial R7/M82 (KRA).

Musaliar and Variyamkunnath Kunhamad Haji attempted to set up an Islamic state in Ernad and Walluvanad.⁴⁷ Stories of fanaticism, violence and conversions badly frightened the Hindu population as much as the Congress leadership. From then on an increasingly Hindu style of politics began to develop in Malabar; an introspective navel gazing which was concerned more with the question of differences and inequality within Hinduism. This paralleled the movement in north India, where a more militant Arya Samaj sought through the *shuddhi* movement to reclaim converts back to Hinduism.⁴⁸

The Nagpur Congress session in 1920 had finally recognised that something was rotten with the state of Hinduism and had defined untouchability as a 'reproach to Hinduism'.⁴⁹ This provided a programme for Congressmen still shell shocked by the upsurge of the Mappilas and looking for a contained politically reformist programme which would not engender conflict. The Tiyyas had thrown down the gauntlet by setting up temples in which they worshipped separately as a community of equals. However, they continued to deny entry to Pulayas, Cherumas, Nayadis and other untouchable castes in their temples. The Congress found both a problem and its solution here. *Hinduism could be purged of inequality if untouchables could be allowed into temples.* The Utopia of caste equality lay within the temple. This was both a limited as well as myopic programme. It did not envisage garnering the support of other religious groups, and it completely ignored the fact that there was a thriving culture of shrines in the interior patronised by lower and upper castes as well as Mappilas. Moreover, urban migrants had revived the culture of shrines in their attempts to recover community in the alien environment of the towns. Caste inequality came to be seen as the metaphor for the ills of society and the Congress programme seemed to imply that Hinduism needed to be a unified force before nationalism could work.

The first attempt at temple entry was made at Vaikkam in Travancore regarding the rights of Ezhavas and lower castes to use the roads around the temple. Once the main leaders, all Nayars, were arrested, a Syrian Christian, George Joseph attempted to take over command. Gandhi rebuked him and specified that the *satyagraha* was a 'Hindu' affair. The movement was circumscribed on account of this limited definition and temple entry conceived as a programme

⁴⁷ See Dale, Islamic society on the south Asian frontier, ch. 5; Conrad Wood, 'The first moplal rebellion against British rule in Malabar', Modern Asian Studies, 10, 4 (1970), pp. 543-56.

⁴⁸ See Gail Minault, The Khilafat movement: religious symbolism and political mobilisation in India (New York, 1982), pp. 193-201.

⁴⁹ E.Zelliott, 'The Congress and the untouchables, 1915-50', in R.Sisson and S.Wolpert eds. Congress and Indian nationalism: the pre-independence phase (Berkeley, 1988), p.185.

for mass involvement became an issue which was relegated to the Legislative Council. The motion to allow access to lower castes was defeated by one vote.⁵⁰

Civil disobedience in Malabar was characterised by the participation mainly of upper castes, particularly Nairs, and it culminated in the *satyagraha* at Guruvayur temple ostensibly to gain entry for lower castes.⁵¹ When the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee took the decision to embark on a campaign of civil disobedience, there was great consternation among a significant minority within the Congress camp. The veteran leader, K.Madhavan Nayar, resigned from the Congress fearing another conflagration on the line of the Mappila rebellion. He was persuaded in the 'national interest' to tone down his stance. However, even in the full swing of the salt *satyagraha* the erstwhile 'rebel' areas remained quiescent, even indifferent. Only one Mappila was with with Kelappan's march on foot from Calicut to Payyanur where the salt *satyagraha* was to be inaugurated. There were comic situations like when the procession on foot from Payyanur heading for the *satyagraha* at Guruvayur, stopped short of the 'rebel' area. Marchers took a train from Feroke to Tirur because of a rumour that the Mappilas would prevent them from moving into Ernad!⁵²

The majority of the participants in salt making in Payyanur were Nayars and Nambudiris most of whom came from the dominant families in the region. Policing of the *satyagrahis* was characterised by uncharacteristic restraint by constables who had no desire to alienate the village elites.⁵³ The route traced by the procession through Malabar took in a good many prominent tharavadus where the *satyagrahis* would rest for the night. Obviously, this precluded the possibility of including lower castes or Muslims because of the strict rules of pollution. Very often, the working of nationalism seemed to be a continuation of elite authority through other means. Landlords who were Congress sympathisers would send word for the closure of local markets; expropriate the foreign cloth of hapless merchants and stage a bonfire in the marketplace; and in the case of liquor picketing would follow up peaceful persuasion during the day with more muscular dissuasion at night.⁵⁴ Occasionally, and serendipitously, other groups were drawn into civil disobedience activity; a group of traditional

⁵⁰ R.Jeffrey, 'Travancore: status, class and the growth of radical politics, 1860-1940: the temple entry movement', in R.Jeffrey ed. Peoples, princes and paramount power: society and politics in the princely states (Delhi, 1978), pp. 153-57.

⁵¹ See Menon, Caste, nationalism and communism, ch.4.

⁵² AICC Files G 107/1930 (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library) [henceforth NMML]; E.Moithu Maulavi, Maulaviyude kathā [The Maulavi's story] (Kottayam, 1981), pp.155-57.

⁵³ M.Sankaran, Ente jivithā kathā [My life story] (Calicut, 1965), p.297; Mathrubhumi, 3 May 1930.

⁵⁴ Mathrubhumi, 7 May, 14 May 1930; Diaries of A.C.Kannan Nair [in Malayalam] 24 March 1931 (NMML).

salt making Tiyyas at Kuniyan found themselves being first arrested as law breakers and then feted as nationalists. The countryside maintained a pragmatic distance; one Congressman remarked that the people preferred cheap foreign cloth and a lot of toddy even after months of fervent agitation.⁵⁵ Occasionally, pressing local concerns found their way into ostensibly nationalist activity. On the coast, where Tiyyas had been displaced from the toddy shop trade by Mappilas, over 40 per cent of the liquor picketers were Tiyyas.⁵⁶ In the interior, where Tiyyas managed to retain control over shops, partly because the profits were not lucrative, most of the picketers were Mappilas.

Predominant among the identities to surface after months of civil disobedience was a sense of Nayarhood; almost half of the participants arrested had been Nayars.⁵⁷ Recruitment for agitation had followed the genealogical map of tharavadus in many cases; A.K.Gopalan began recruiting from within his family.⁵⁸ A growing sense of self awareness and mission among the Nayars is evidenced in the resolutions adopted by the All Kerala Nayar Samajam in May 1932. 'All those who have been resident in Kerala for over a generation, speak Malayalam and observe Onam and Thiruvathira [festivals] should be allowed to become Nayars'. The President of the Samajam, Ramavarama Thampan, waxed eloquent in his address to the conference, saying that the word 'Nayar' was the epitome of humanity itself.⁵⁹ While the Nayars and through their association, the Congress, started to assume Hindu stances, the Tiyyas continued to see themselves as outside Hinduism. However, their earlier stance as a community of equals standing apart from society was coming to be seen as politically isolationist. In 1930, the authorities of Srikanteswara temple had begun to admit Pulayas and Cherumas, a move which threatened to take the wind out of the sails of the Congress temple entry movement. While the Nayar dominated Congress was not too keen on making overtures to the Tiyyas, avowedly Hindu organisations like Malaviya's Hindu Mahasabha attempted to woo them. Cynicism among the Tiyyas regarding the good intentions of upper caste reformers continued. When Malaviya addressed a mammoth meeting of Tiyyas, beginning with the cry '*Ramachandra ki ja!*', the crowd lustily replied, '*Ravana ki ja!*'.⁶⁰

In May 1931, in a move to purge Hinduism of inequality and revitalise the religion, the Congress met at Badagara and passed a resolution for temple entry as the main plank of the

⁵⁵ A.K.Gopalan, In the cause of the people (Delhi, 1973), pp.20, 25.

⁵⁶ Movement in Kerala. *AICC Files G 107/1930* (NMML).

⁵⁷ Mathrubhumi, 18 December 1930.

⁵⁸ Gopalan, In the cause of the people, p.17.

⁵⁹ Mathrubhumi, 11 May 1932.

⁶⁰ Mathrubhumi, 1 June 1930.

Congress political programme.⁶¹ K.Kelappan, the leader of the Malabar Congress, encapsulated the political programme of the second phase of civil disobedience in the following words: 'A twentieth century version of Hinduism is an immediate necessity'.⁶² It was with the Guruvayur *satyagraha* that it became evident how far the Congress in Malabar had retreated into a Hindu, and more specifically, an upper caste politics. In October 1931, when the first batch of volunteers set out for Guruvayur under T.Subramaniam Thirumumpu, there were only a handful of untouchables in the procession, who nevertheless received wide publicity. Once the *satyagraha* commenced in November, the mode of protest, from the very beginning, precluded the participation of lower castes. The *satyagrahis*, mainly Nayars, bathed in the temple tank, applied sandalwood paste on their foreheads, and only then attempted to break the cordon around the temple. In their demeanour they were as much Hindu devotees as political activists. Every evening, prayer meetings and readings from the Hindu scriptures were organised outside the temple. A new, proselytising Hinduism which was to be accessible to all was taking shape outside the temple. By the next month the mood had changed. A.K.Gopalan attempted to enter the temple forcibly and was beaten up by retainers. Krishna Pillai entered the temple through the eastern gate, taboo for castes other than Brahmins, and rang the temple bells.⁶³ Ringing bells was a privilege granted only to the Brahmins. The element of conflict between the Nayars and Brahmins, be they the Namboodiris or the Tamil *pattars*, began to dominate the protest at Guruvayur. Nayar volunteers began breaking the cordon, entering through the eastern gate and demanding to be fed inside the temple alongside the Brahmins. A strong streak of Nayar-Brahmin rivalry began to colour political rhetoric in a struggle ostensibly about the opening up of the temple for untouchables. Kelappan had to issue press notices clarifying to the public that the movement was not directed against any caste, the *pattars* in particular, but was against Hindu caste orthodoxy.⁶⁴ The Tiyyas resolutely stood aloof from the shenanigans of the Nayars and at their public meetings continued to call for 'self respect' and 'blacklisting' all Hindu temples.⁶⁵ At Guruvayur, lower castes began bathing in the temple tank and this constituted the limited gains of the *satyagraha* at this juncture.

It was in September 1932 that the prospect of the widening of the struggle first emerged. The Communal Award of the Government of India envisaged separate constituencies

⁶¹ Mathrubhumi, 12 May 1931.

⁶² Mathrubhumi, 16 June 1931.

⁶³ V.Bharateeyan, Adimakal engane udamakalayi [How the slaves became masters] (Trivandrum, 1980), p.25.

⁶⁴ Mathrubhumi, 1 January 1932, 2 June 1932.

⁶⁵ Mathrubhumi, 4 and 6 November 1931.

for untouchables, a move that Gandhi stated he would oppose with his life. He proposed to launch a fast to bring the government and Ambedkar to heel, against the advice of Patel and other close associates that this could spark off 'imitative fasts'.⁶⁶ Kelappan's independent decision at this juncture to go on a fast unto death for the opening up of Guruvayur to untouchables seemed to confirm the Congress Command's fears. Gandhi began to put pressure on Kelappan to give up his fast as he believed that it did not arise from any inner inspiration but was merely imitative of Gandhi's own strategy.⁶⁷ Kelappan refused to countenance backing down from his original intention but was eventually forced to give up his fast on the 2nd of October 1932 after eleven days and without having achieved his objective. The issue of Guruvayur, like that of Vaikkam retreated to the debating chambers of the Legislative Councils.

What is significant is that two years of political mobilisation in Malabar had culminated in a politics which though not overtly antagonistic to other religious communities, was at best, oblivious of them. Religion in the villages had been an amorphous category in which there had been very little sense of being 'Hindu'. By espousing temple entry as a political programme, nationalism had managed to create a sense of Hindu identity atleast among the upper castes, while projecting Hindu community as an aspiration for Malabar society. Inequality within society came to be defined through the lens of caste alone, limiting nationalist activity to a rallying of liberal Hindus. However, by seeing the resolution for caste inequality in temple entry, the ground was prepared for the emergence of a religious Hindu identity which could assume antagonistic overtones.

1.5 Communal disputes: the festival season of 1936

If the 'twenties had been characterised by a boom, the next decade saw a changed economic context with the onset of the Depression. In the political realm, as we have seen, the era of mass nationalism had been severely limited in its scope and characterised by a retreat into Hindu politics. The Depression hit cash crop cultivators, particularly the Tiyya tenants, severely; the slump in the prices of coconut as well as the dumping of Ceylon coconuts on the Kerala market had a great impact. Coupled with this was the collapse of small industries which had come up following the boom of the 'twenties, which had led to the building of houses on a large scale. Tile factories, brick kilns, sawmills, and weaving mills collapsed in large numbers.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ J.M.Brown, Gandhi and civil disobedience: the Mahatma in Indian politics, 1928-34 (Cambridge, 1977), pp.313-15.

⁶⁷ Mathrubhumi, 27 September 1932.

⁶⁸ Report of the Department of Industries of the Madras Presidency [henceforth RDIMP], 1926-7, 1927-8, 1931-2, 1935-6.

There was both the decline of internal demand as well as tough competition in the south east Asian market. The floating population in the towns increased as those who could not be absorbed on the land moved to the towns in search of employment. The slump in industry meant that there was very little steady employment available and a large footloose population emerged which had no prospect of employment either in the town or countryside. The Mappila merchants were not hit as hard since they controlled the coastal trade in rice and were adaptable with regard to exports; they channelled Malabar coconut oil to Bombay and Karachi rather than Europe. Profits were invested in the lucrative toddy trade gradually displacing the Tiyyas from their erstwhile monopoly of the business. By 1935, auctions of toddy shops had become a thing of the past as Mappila cartels dominated proceedings.⁶⁹

On the political front, the Government of India Act of 1935 opened up the prospects of electoral participation and drove a wedge between generations among the Tiyyas. A younger generation, tired both of the loyalist as well as exclusivist stand among the older Tiyya elite, moved towards an alliance with political parties which would represent them. The Congress itself was in danger of splitting with the emergence of the socialists who moved out of the exclusive confines of a Hindu politics and tried to garner support in the countryside and the factories in the towns.⁷⁰ An older generation of Congressmen with no heart left for battle, formed a Rightist bloc and retired to the pastures of Harijan upliftment. Younger right wing Congressmen, particularly in Cannanore, made use of the rift within the Tiyya community as well as the latter's growing resentment towards the Mappilas. In the Badagara Panchayat Board, the police had to be called in to maintain order between Tiyya and Mappila members who were literally at each other's throats. Between 1932 and 1934, there was a growth of Muslim organisations in the Madras Presidency, the Islamic League and the Madras Presidency Muslim League. In 1934, Abdul Sattar Sait was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly on the Muslim League ticket from Malabar.⁷¹

On 6 April 1934, a Communal Pact, seeking to define places of worship, was signed between the old generation of the Tiyya elite and prominent Mappilas of north Malabar. There were two main provisions, one of definition the other of procedure. The explanation of what constituted a temple was vague; only that it should be situated on private land and be the object of prayer for Hindus. Much stricter criteria were applied to Mappila places of worship: only those from which the muezzin called the faithful to pray would qualify as mosques.⁷²

⁶⁹ RARMP, 1936, p.15.

⁷⁰ K.Gopalankutty, 'The task of transforming the Congress: Malabar, 1934-40', Studies in History, 5, 2 n.s.(1989), pp.177-94.

⁷¹ See R.E.Miller, The Mappila Muslims of Kerala: a study in Islamic trends (Madras, 1976).

⁷² Mathrubhumi, 7 April 1934.

At one sweep, this disqualified all the wayside shrines which had come up over the last three decades in the urban areas. Such a pact with a potentially controversial clause was sufficient at a time when there was not much conflict between the communities; atleast not the kind of conflict settled on the streets. It did not augur well for the future. The clause regarding procedure stated that if either community were taking a procession and there happened to be a place of worship within sight (defined as a distance of 200 feet), then music was to be stopped for 25 feet on either side.

From January 1936, the northern suburbs of Cannanore were tense in anticipation of the festival season to begin on the 27th. The police stopped a procession of Nairs from passing in front of Pudappara *srambi* with music. There was no opposition or disturbance. However, local Congressmen intervened and began to foment trouble. On the 29th, while a procession of Tiyyas was proceeding towards a shrine in Alavil, a few men broke away and passed drumming in front of the mosque at the dead of night. Two days later, a group of Nayars and Tiyyas marched from Alavil, deliberately stopped in front of the Pudappara mosque and drummed for a while. This crowd of 'Hindus' were organised by four people, two of whom were local Congressmen. Reflecting the changed nature of the confrontation, the District Magistrate observed that the 'entry of the Nairs has complicated the straight Tiyya-Mappila issue'.⁷³

The building of *srambis* proceeded apace. At Kakkad, some Mappilas acquired land belonging to a Tiyya, and built a mosque in his compound adjoining the Kottali temple. Fairly soon, the priests at the mosque started complaining about the music coming from the temple. On the 28th of February 1936, a Tiyya procession, in advance of the festival at Cherumba shrine in March, passed in front of the Kappad *srambi* playing music. According to the Police Inspector K.V.Muhammad, a Mappila himself, the crowd shouted abuse at the *srambi*, calling it a 'latrine' among other things. A petition from local Mappilas stated that the Tiyya 'fanatics' had looted some shops as well.⁷⁴ The police were alarmed both by these attempts to break the fragile peace negotiated by the Pact of 1934, as well as the attitude of confrontation which was 'spreading like wildfire'. The extent to which the Tiyya processionists were willing to go to provoke Mappila ire can be seen in a petition from the Mappilas of Tekkumpad, an island on the Baliapatam river. For the festival at Azhicode that year, Tiyya crowds deliberately charted a route which would take them past the mosque in Tekkumpad.⁷⁵

⁷³ D.M. Malabar to Home Secretary, Madras, 8 February 1936. *Home (C) Dept. G.O.399 dated 1 May 1936 (KS)*.

⁷⁴ Report of K.V.Muhammad, Inspector, 2 March 1936 and Petition of Moplals of Edakkad to D.M., Calicut, 29 February 1936. *Home (C) Dept. G.O. 393 dated 1 May 1936 (KS)*.

⁷⁵ *DR Revenue 2776/36 dated 16 March 1936 (KRA)*.

In an atmosphere of growing tension, the police authorities, in an unprecedented move, decided to impose strict conditions on processionists to the Cherumba shrine festival scheduled to begin on the 27th of February. The Joint Magistrate and the Deputy Commissioner of Police decreed that those who desired to carry *kalasams* (pots) in procession should get licences from the police. No sticks were to be carried by the devotees and music should be stopped within 25 yards of the mosque. The arbitrary distance of 25 feet fixed in the Communal Pact was replaced by an equally arbitrary figure of 75 feet; the latter however, had greater authority proceeding as it did from the state. There were objections by the temple authorities at interference by the State in local religion, and when the police refused to back down on licences for bearing pots of offerings, it was decided to cancel the festival.⁷⁶

The annual festival at Karuvalli shrine was to commence on 4 March 1936. On the 1st, P. Madhavan, a young Congress lawyer addressed a meeting of worshippers in the shrine. The previous month Madhavan had written an article in the *Mathrubhumi* condemning the Tiyya leadership which had refused to change with the times and had continued to espouse a detached attitude. He felt that it was time the Tiyyas took an aggressive stance and he advised the gathering at Karuvalli shrine to stop all ceremonies at the shrine if they were required to stop music before mosques. Madhavan was making a political leap here; the temple authorities had objected only to the need for licences to carry pots. They had not objected to the stopping of music before mosques. Meanwhile, Mappila groups had begun petitioning local authorities out of fear that Tiyyas were planning to play music and beat drums in front of the local *thana* mosque. There had been no problems earlier. Since the structure was regarded as a mosque under the terms of the Pact of 1934, processions had ceased music while passing in front of it. In February 1936, two Tiyya processions had observed silence. However, the context had changed with the cancellation of the festival at Cherumba. On 4th March, a group of 500 Tiyyas prepared to march past the mosque knowing full well that it was Bakr Id and there would be a huge crowd of Mappilas in front of the mosque. They were emboldened by the fact that over 2000 supporters had come from the outskirts of Cannanore - Edakkad, Azhicode, Alavil - expecting trouble. The procession arrived at the mosque at 10 p.m., five hours later than the time given to the police and expressed its intention to play music. Halting 40 yards away from the mosque, they continued the beating of drums. Nothing untoward happened, but it was clear to the authorities that a younger generation of Tiyyas was bent on disregarding the 1934 Pact.⁷⁷ A day later, the procession from the shrine manager's house on the occasion of the festival at Kararinakom had to pass a *srambi* where no Friday prayers were held nor did

⁷⁶ *Mathrubhumi*, 3 March 1936; *Hindu*, 29 February 1936 and 3 March 1936.

⁷⁷ True copy of S.I.'s Report, 5 March 1936. *DR Revenue 5691/36 dated 12 May 1936* (KRA).

the muezzin call. It was in the middle of a predominantly Hindu area, and the managers of the shrine gave a guarded undertaking that the procession would not indulge in any more drumbeating than what was the custom.⁷⁸

On the 6th of March a meeting attended by over 3000 people was held in Cannanore. Protests were lodged by self styled leaders of the 'Hindu' community at the taking away of the rights of citizens to use public roads and play music in processions. One of the speakers denounced such interference with the social and religious customs of Hindus and called upon all Hindus to 'awake' and launch a lawful agitation. Potheri Madhavan, the young Tiyya lawyer and Congressman, criticised the police for infringing on the 'ancient customs' of the Hindus while the 'rights of Hindus' were being 'destroyed' by the setting up of thousands of *srambis* along the roads.⁷⁹ By now a younger generation of Tiyyas had no reservations about regarding themselves as Hindus. Even as the confident assertions of 'Hindu' community grew, there were rumblings of discontent among those who did not wish to be coopted into this putative community. At a meeting of *avarnas* (lower castes) in Calicut, a speaker from the Peruvannan (washerpeople and ritual performers) caste stated that his community suffered both from the oppression of the Tiyyas as of the upper castes.⁸⁰ While a younger generation of Tiyyas rushed to become 'Hindus' and join hands with their Nayar brethren, there were other castes which saw such brotherhood as spurious. Moreover, not being caught up in debating about processions and community, they were more conscious of the continuity of caste inequality which such calls to 'Hindu' community tended to mask. A meeting of the Muslim Jamaat at Cannanore to protest against recent violations of the 1934 Pact reaffirmed its faith in the Pact. Resolutions were passed praising the efforts of the authorities and dismissing allegations of partiality.⁸¹ This again was a familiar theme. While the minority swore by the state and its legal framework, the majority calmly flouted regulations, while at the same time claiming that rules were meant to placate the minority.

On March 9th, a mammoth meeting was held at the historic Muzhapilangad temple where a crowd of 10,000 'Hindus' repudiated the Communal Pact. The President of the meeting took particular exception to the fact that the Superintendent of Police had written to the manager of the Azhicode temple that those refusing to abide by the Pact were 'ruffians and trouble makers'. This was seen as an attack on the 'manhood' of 'Hindus' and the speaker alleged that the 'Hindu blood coursing through our veins has dried up'. Even while calling upon

⁷⁸ Petition submitted by Kuniyankandi Kunhraman et al. *Uralars of Karuvalli kavu*, 5 March 1936. DR revenue 3584/36 dated 16 March 1936 (KRA).

⁷⁹ Mathrubhumi, 7 March 1936.

⁸⁰ Mathrubhumi, 7 March 1936.

⁸¹ Mathrubhumi, 10 March 1936.

a monolithic block of Hindus, there was an underlying awareness of difference. 'Even though the Hindus may be divided into several communities, it is a fundamental truth that we must be united over this issue'. Significantly, the speaker stressed that 'we must forget the differences between *savarna* and *avarna* and oppose our common enemy'.⁸² The perception of differences within Hinduism outweighed the perception of unity. The collector of Malabar organised an emergency meeting bringing together notables from Muslim and Hindu communities, and pleaded for respect of the rights of individuals. A dispute arose over definitions. T.Narayanan Nambiar agrees to stop music in front of mosques where prayers were said, but not before shrines. The Mappila representative stressed that there was no distinction between mosques and shrines so far as they were concerned.⁸³

The most significant meeting was held a week later in Cannanore which brought together a galaxy of forces. On the podium were A.Achuthan, a Tiyya; Govardhan Das Khemji, a Gujarati cloth merchant; T.Sankaran Nair and the Raja of Chirakkal. The Raja's speech was inflammatory and attempted to consolidate a perception of Hinduhood. He began by asserting that a great calamity had befallen the Hindus who were being prevented from playing music as a part of religious ceremony. He went on to fulminate

If we are to yield to this, we shall have to lock up our shrines and temples and throw their keys into the Arabian Sea...do the Mappilas think that they can destroy temples etc. as Tipu and others did?...If we Hindus do not want (our) temples and (our) customary practices, let us have (*sic*) full shave for our heads which are now only half shaven and become Thangals (Mappila priests) or something else tomorrow...We should always be prepared for a fight...Even now over 2000 persons have assembled here. All these people should be prepared to die...If we fail in this agitation we shall close our temples, throw away our Gods and religion and surrender ourselves to the Mappilas.⁸⁴

In the face of such intemperate language, the Collector's response was phlegmatic. He was of the belief that the Raja had been put up to speak in this fashion and the government should cut his *malikhana* if he continued to pose a problem; 'if his pocket is threatened, he will return to his books'.⁸⁵ In the event, this prognostication proved correct, and the Raja retired from the fray to his library. There was a strong response to the Raja's speech from the Mappilas of Calicut. Soon after prayers on Friday, the Pookoya *thangal*, who had remained out of the

⁸² Mathrubhumi, 11 March 1936.

⁸³ Mathrubhumi, 14 March 1936.

⁸⁴ Excerpts from Raja of Chirakkal's speech reported in Chandrika, 23 March 1936 and Mathrubhumi, 25 March 1936. Home Dept. G.O.374 (Confdl.) dated 30 April 1936 (KS).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, D.M., Malabar to Chief Secretary Govt. [Confdl.].

public eye since 1921 asserted that the *nercha* in Konthanary mosque at Valayanad would be celebrated on 14/15 April. The *nercha* had been last held in 1926. Anticipating objections from Hindus, leaflets were to be distributed calling upon all Mappilas to assemble in support. The authorities observed with some alarm that this was an instance 'of the Cannanore contagion having spread to Calicut'.⁸⁶

However, the fever broke and the situation returned to normal. The elite provocateurs retreated from the streets to their libraries and debating chambers. Meanwhile, the socialists had managed to tap the groundswell of resentment amongst the indigent and unemployed in the towns through forays into organising trade unions and unemployment marches. In December 1934, a sub committee had been set up within the Congress organisation to 'organise industrial workers on the basis of day to day economic struggles' and to fight for radical measures like equal pay for equal work; a 40 hour week; the recognition of unions; and the right to strike.⁸⁷ By 1937, the socialists had managed to lay the foundations of an organised movement in the beedi making factories and weaving mills of Calicut and Cannanore. Moreover, they had managed to draw a section of the liberal Muslims into the fold of the Congress even as the Right wing continued to nurture its prejudice against Mappila participation. In 1938, the socialists finally came to dominate the Congress committee in alliance with the liberal Mappilas.⁸⁸

1.7 Conclusion

One of the noticeable features of this period was the growth of a lower class culture - of migrants, casual labourers and vagrants - centred on urban shrines. Freitag argues for Benares that a democratic realm of worship appeared in which they were not incorporated within a hierarchy and which elicited little upper caste or orthodox opposition.⁸⁹ In Malabar, the lower classes laid claim to public spaces which allowed an affiliation, albeit temporary, with the ambitions of a lower caste elite eager to assert its position in the towns. However, perceptions were fragmented. Within the Tiyya elite, there was a conflict over generations, only the younger ones calling themselves 'Hindus'. To the migrant workers, it was quite immaterial whether they were Hindus or not; they participated in a religious culture which did not differentiate between castes, and that was sufficient. While the various participants in processions may not have

⁸⁶ *DR Revenue 3799/36 dated 21 May 1936 (KRA).*

⁸⁷ Proceedings of KPCC meeting, 29 December 1934, *All India Congress Committee Files* [henceforth AICC] P-15/1934-36 (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library) [henceforth NMML].

⁸⁸ *AICC Files P-12, part I/1939 and P-38/1939-40 (NMML).*

⁸⁹ See Freitag in S.B.Freitag ed. *Culture and power in Benares: community, performance and environment, 1800-1980* (Delhi, 1989), p.121.

seen themselves as Hindus, could they have become 'Hindus' through participation, as Freitag claims for north India? She maintains that popular culture activities provide the best evidence for tracing the ultimate development of communalism.⁹⁰ However, it is not very clear that participation in processions, itself a liminal activity, can engender permanent identities. In the case of the Tiyyas, it is not all clear that the processional conflicts of the 'thirties precipitated a move towards Hinduism. In fact, the resounding failure of cultural and religious reform to bring about even a semblance of equality, precipitated a period of confusion. Some Ezhava and Tiyya leaders and their followers converted to other religions; C.Krishnan became a Buddhist and others converted to Christianity, Islam and even Sikhism.⁹¹ The more militant moved towards an engagement with wider politics; with electoral participation and the newly emerging ideologies of socialism and communism.

The intervention of the state as arbiter in religious festivals increased in the 'thirties. The Collector arrogated to himself the power to place restrictions on what could be carried during religious processions; religion became a matter of law and order. This was not surprising since the period of mass nationalism had necessitated a greater intervention by the state in maintaining local order, as numbers of elites defected from their role as collaborators. Moreover, police action in towns during civil disobedience had been characterised by the use of violence and the capacity of crowds for disorder had increased proportionately. As Veena Das perceptively points out, from the point of view of the administrator, it was not so much popular celebrations which were a matter for concern, but the 'quality of time' brought into being. It was an occasion of breaking the bounds of everyday behaviour which could very easily turn against authority. The boundaries of the ritual calendar came to be marked as occasions on which law and order problems were anticipated.⁹² The attitude towards processions had changed drastically since the liberal attitude of Logan at the end of the nineteenth century. A directive from the government of India stated in unequivocal terms that, 'If a meeting which is otherwise a public meeting is held in a mosque it cannot cease to be a public meeting because it is held in a mosque'. Moreover, if the issuing authority needed to define 'public meeting' more extensively, it was up to them to insert in the order, 'such *ad hoc* definition of "public meeting" as would meet the object in view.⁹³

⁹⁰ Freitag, Collective action and community, pp.35, 91.

⁹¹ See C.K.Pullapilly, 'The Ishavas of Kerala and their historic struggle for acceptance in the Hindu society', Journal of Asian and African Studies, 11 (1976), pp.24-26.

⁹² Veena Das, 'Introduction' in Das, Mirrors of violence, pp.18-20.

⁹³ D.3091-1/31 dated 28 December 1931, Dy. Secy., GOI, Foreign and Pol. Deptt. *Disposal 18/32 dated 25 February 1932* (Office of the Special District Superintendent of Police, Malappuram).

While processional conflict can be read as rivalry between prospering and declining groups at one level, it is significant that there were distinct differences between 1915 and 1936. In 1915, in a period of economic boom, both Tiyya elites and Mappila merchants had been prospering and conflict arose out of the clash of two self confident communities. In 1936, in the context of the Depression, the Tiyyas were declining, the Mappilas continued to prosper and yet there were conflicts. Unlike north India, where Freitag draws a contrast between the 'optimistic, expansive rhetoric' of the Hindus and the 'defensive posture' of the Muslims, the picture in Malabar was of 'Muslim' prosperity and 'Hindu' decline.⁹⁴ Instead of looking solely for proximate economic causes, if we look at the changed social and intellectual climate of 1936, there are many clues to the changed nature of discord. The discontent of a younger generation of Tiyyas with an isolationist, non-Hindu stance; the need for a declining right wing within the Congress to find allies on the streets; the growth of a feeling of Hinduhood engendered by nationalism; the decline of a shrine culture in the villages as the tharavadus found themselves out of pocket and unable to sustain worship; and finally the presence of an unemployed underclass seeking community in worship at urban shrines. And, at the end of it all - a vibrant socialist alternative that sought to tackle both the problem of inequality as well as of wider political participation through a secular idiom.⁹⁵

Crucial in the transformation of conflict had been the intervention of disgruntled sections within the Congress who sought to gain a following in their struggle with the socialists. Religion became a counter in the game of intra party politics. Aligning with the Congress became indicative of aligning with a wider 'Hindu' identity. This was the natural outcome of a nationalist politics which had come up against the problem of caste inequality in its attempts to create unity and had seen the solution in a 'Hindu' politics of equality. Communalism, in the form that it emerged, was an offshoot of nationalism. This is instructive when one looks at the dilemma currently faced by the Bharatiya Janata Party as it tries to cement unity. Faced with the issue of caste inequality (exacerbated by the Report of the Mandal Commission), it too suggests that being Hindus together should help solve the problem. In that sense at least it carries forward the inheritance of nationalism.

⁹⁴ Freitag, Collective action and community, p.218.

⁹⁵ See also Menon, Caste, nationalism and communism, ch. 6.

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