

CHAPTER 1

NATTIKA – THE HISTORIC DIMENSIONS OF A PLACE

In considering the history of Nattika¹ –the land and its people- we have to make certain choices discrete. The remains of the past that we shall be exploring for the benefit of understanding the fact of martyrdom to be dealt with in our thesis, moves along various latitudes of time. There is still a notion of a chronological span of time, which in fact fosters a feeling of identity amongst the people of a province. Thus the martyrdom is located within a span of the British occupation, the National movement and early or underground communism. This is the chronicle that ordains the fact of martyrdom. But in this study we will have to be looking into discrepancies to this chronicle, as well so that the narrative that reordains the martyr as a victim of a sacrifice, is properly understood.

In the following section we proceed to identify the major factors that constitute the identity of the political entity called Nattika *firka*². We have considered the place this

¹ The word Nattika is a conjugation of two nouns-agriculture and riches. *Natta* has its roots in the act of *natal* or the act by which a plant, usually paddy, is planted in its fields/gardens. *Ka* is an abbreviation of the word *uruppika* or money. Nattika therefore means a land prospering through farming (Aaromalunny, 2000).

²Glossary

Taluk The most important revenue division within a district. There were ten in all in the Malabar district of Madras province in British India. The *tahsildar* formed the highest revenue authority in a Taluk.. The Deputy tahsildar had responsibility of only a sub division of the Taluk.. No pecuniary limits were set on the extent of their jurisdiction.

Firka A *firka* was a revenue division within a Taluk of British Malabar. It was of little significance in administrative terms but still retained certain powers through a revenue inspector in terms of collecting the taxes. The *firka* was merely a revenue unit and the revenue inspector who was in charge of the registration of lands in the *firka* and the due assessment and collection of taxes had no other powers than revenue.

Amsam A combine of two or three villages or *desams* The main bulwark of the British revenue system. The *adhikari* was the highest revenue authority in an *amsam*. They also exercised magisterial powers. The *adhikaris* had both civil and criminal jurisdiction in suits for money not exceeding Rs.20 in amount.

Nattika firka (before 1956) Nattika *firka* was a conglomeration of fourteen villages. These were the villages or *amsams* of Engandiyur, Vatanappilly, Thalikkulam, Nattika, Valappadu, Edathiruthy, Chenthrappinny, Kaipamangalam, Perinjanom, Koolimuttam, Pappinivattom, Padinjare Vemballur, Panangadu and Aala. It covered an area of 13733.06 Hectares.

region (i.e. Nattika *firka*) occupies in the historiography of Kerala, which has the status of a separate State and (sub) Nationality within the Indian Republic³. We have proceeded with the intent of extricating the place out of or locating it within a field of controversies regarding the history of Kerala. This for the reason that the historic port of Muziris- the place called Crangannore or Kodungalore today- argued by many historians to be the capital of the two succession of *Chera* kings who ruled Kerala is deemed to be a part of the *firka*. This is owing to the geographical peculiarities that demarcate the entire region as a homogeneous whole from the surrounding landscape, as we have described at a greater length below.

Proceeding from the historic background we concentrate our attention on a single village in the *firka* and the social system of this village as it stood at the time of the beginning of the National and Social movements (early twentieth century), which aspect is part of our inquires later in this chapter. The choice of the village proceeds from the fact that being the home village of the martyr, the fact of martyrdom/sacrifice assumes an ethnic significance due to the caste and kinship structure in the village, which topic we have dealt with in the second chapter. The history of the village is mainly derived from the legends about its origin and naming that were collected from various accounts during field work.

The concentration of our attention on such a limited region follows from the distinctive nature of the history of South India, where through the ages and the different dynasties of rule, the essential nature of the society that has remained, far from static and homogenous, given the continuous population movements and rapid changes in the political order.

Bailey has made the distinction of the two important social formations within which this flux was happening in South India- one, as the wet core and two, it's plane and

Nattika firka (today) The villages that originally constituted the *firka* was already split between the two *firkas* of Nattika and Kodungalore, in the Taluks of Chavakkadu and Kodungallur respectively.

From our point of study, it is the mnemonic function that the *firka* serves is more important and hence our reference to the *firka* is; the way it existed prior to 1956.

forest fringes. If, the immediately pre-colonial scenario, according to Bailey was one of men from the plains and forest fringes pushing into the ‘wet’ core territories, receiving new traditions and religious symbols from the valley culture and leaving their own marks on the societies of the rice belt, the ancient history of the region rendered in songs called the *pazhamtamilpattu* offers not a remarkably different social formation. The only significant difference that may be noted, is the relative decline of Buddhism and Jainism towards the colonial times. The trading communities who actively encouraged these religions, nonetheless continued to prosper, even under the Nayaka rule preceding the colonial occupation. According to Bailey, small warrior kingdoms have always remained a distinctive mark of these social formations. In the region that now forms the State of Kerala, there were three powerful kingdoms-Travancore, Cochin and Kozhikkode, even with the power as such lying scattered generally amongst the caste groupings of the arms-bearing Nairs with Christians , *Moplahs* or Tiyyas being exceptionally powerful in certain locales. According to Unni and Mencher (1975:126), even though the high ranking Nairs were primarily the rulers, occasionally a low-ranking Nair or a rich Tiyyar gained control over a small kingdom. “Each of these aristocratic lineages tended to set itself up as a separate sub-caste, acknowledging ritual superior but no peers. In the course of time following the vicissitudes of political fortunes, such lineages could rise or fall in the hierarchy” (Gough, 1952:1-13). The Christians were mostly landed gentry, even though they wielded much less political power compared to the Nair or Ezhava counterparts. Susan Visvanathan (1993:3) has pointed out their hierarchical positioning in the social structure alongside the Nairs and the full autonomy they enjoyed with regard to the management of their estate and dependents⁴.The *moplahs* or the ‘Malayali Arabs’ as

³ Regarding the geographical peculiarities of the State within the Union of India as a whole that has fostered the feeling of a distinct National identity within the Union, please see Nossiter.T.J.1998,pp.38-54.

⁴ Duncan.B.Forrester(1980) says, when the West re-discovered Malabar, Christians were regarded as a caste and had a recognized place in the caste hierarchy(ibid:99). In most parts of Kerala, they ranked after the Brahmins, roughly equal to Nairs, although some Syrians claimed that Brahmin blood in their ancestry made them indubitably superior to the Nairs.They follow caste endogamy like any other Hindu caste.In addition, the touch of a Syrian was also believed to neutralize any pollution caused by the contact of a lower caste.They were divided into two endogamous groups- the Southerners and the Northerners, that notwithstanding different congregations and different churches still practised

Logan (1995:191) addresses them, were reputed traders, since the time of their inception, that is two hundred years after the Prophet and were chiefly *Sunnis* who regarded as their priest the Ponnani Tangal (ibid:199). The Nambuthiri Brahmins comprised the priestly class that also exercised enormous political powers, being the derivative source for the hegemony that ruled the society(Gurukkal and Varier, 1995). The workers of the land, the Pulayas, Parayas and Vettuvas enjoyed little of any Rights with reference to land or participation in governance. Their possession was freely exchanged amongst the land owners especially during marriages or other ceremonies in the form of gifts⁵.They invariably formed the substratum of the caste and social hierarchy in the pre-colonial times(Iyer,1909:68-128).

Of the three kingdoms above mentioned, Travancore was the last to be ceded to the British, in 1809. Kozhikkode came under the direct British rule after the Battle of Seringappatanam, where they routed the Tippu Sultan of Mysore who had repeatedly raided the Zamorin's (chieftain of Kozhikkode) kingdom from 1766 to 1792 (Panikkar,1989:2). Cochin was also annexed along with the State of Travancore by the British . Prior to this there were many fratricidal wars between the Cochin ruler and the Zamorin of Kozhikkode with both alternatively taking the sides of the Portugese and the Dutch, the two other major trading-colonizing forces in the region. The net result of these wars, were the concessions granted to these forces for the building of independent fortresses by the native rulers for the assistance in terms of naval and armed forces to the rulers of Cochin and Kozhikkode in these wars⁶.

commensalism. The portuguese influence succeeded in creating the first division among them since the division into Northernists and Southernists that stretch back to the legend of the arrival of the Thomas of Cana, a trader in 352 AD. The portuguese influence showed itself in the division into Orthodox Syrians and Romo-Syrians, the latter that accepted the submission to Church of Rome. Thenceforth, the arrival of the Anglican Church's 'Mission of Help' sparked the next division, that paved the way for the Church of South India in 1836 and in 1842 the Marthoma Chuchr. These are some of the main divisions amongst the Christians that have risen ever since and continue to do so even today(ibid:99-101).

⁵ Sathish, one of the respondents detailed how the Pulaya families in the village of Edathiruthy adopted the names of their original owners and retained it even after being given away in dowry to the Nair landlords of Edathiruthy. For more details refer Chapter 4, on the system for naming the house holds followed in the village.

⁶ For a detailed documentation of the consolidation of the British power in Kerala and the wars and agreements with other foreign powers and the native rulers during the same period, see

Nattika Against the Historical Background of Kerala

Although in this day, known as the *firka* Nattika has a past that precedes the formation of the revenue division, by which designation, it has become popular. This goes back to the earliest days of the Kerala history, to the period of the *Chera* kings. There are relics of even earlier inhabitation in Kerala in the form of tombstones belonging to the neolithic and sometimes even the paleoloithic times⁷. The original inhabitants of Kerala, were faced with several cycles of migrations that either they were assimilated into the mainstream culture that followed or were totally displaced by the migrating populations. Anyway it is too difficult to say a final word on this given that even today there live in the forests of the Wyanadu district certain tribes of whom little is known by way of census figures or any archival materials.

William Logan the district governor of British Malabar who is credited with writing the first modern version of Kerala history, 1886 writes that Kerala was known to western traders at least since the time of Moses. During the time of King Solomon, cinnamon and cassia, two very important objects used in Jewish temple services were obtained through trade. Logan assumes that this trade existed between Israel and Malabar bringing to Israel once in three years articles such as gold, silver, ivory and peacocks. There are Jewish settlements in Kerala even today that traditionally trace their migrations to the sixth century B.C. There were other trade routes existing with

Rajendran.N(1979), *Establishment of British Power in Malabar(1644-1799)* and Panikkar.K.M(1960), *History of Kerala*.

⁷The *kudakkallu* and *toppikallu* as these tombstones are called in Malayalam and found scattered at various places have been thus interpreted by historian and archaeologists(ref. Logan). Wall paintings in the form of etchings on the side of rocks have also been discovered from the *Edakkal* caves in Wynad district and *Marayur* in Idukki district. They and other stone age instruments that have been found through excavations or by accident, signify the presence of a civilization that was gradually transforming from a hunting gathering stage to that of a more settled living economically geared by cattle-rearing and agriculture. Yet, there was no homogeneity in the spread of this transformation which in anthropological terms is marked by the use of iron, in place of stone. There must have been as it still exists to this day, in the hills of Wynad, tribes that used iron for making implements for cultivation on the one hand and the ones that used it for making instruments of war and hunting. According to Rajan Gurkkal and Raghava Varier (1995), the *Urali* tribesmen who specialize in the manufacture of iron sell them to both the *Paniyas*, *Kurumas* and the *Kurichyas* as work-tools and arrow tips, respectively. The spread of the use of iron and the rule of the first *Chera* kings have been weaned by these two historians from the songs that have survived from this age and we have dealt with these topics in greater detail below.

the East contemporaneously with that of the Jewish, especially Greek indirectly through Egyptians and Phoenicians for references to articles of trade characteristically Malabar, find mention in the Greek writer Ktesias (4th century BC). It is not our intention here to delve deeper into the trails or sources of ancient Kerala history. Nonetheless clear reference to Kerala can be found in the edicts of King Asoka of the Maghadha empire in the middle of the 3rd century BC, that in the regions adjascent to the dominion of the King, such as *Chola, Pandya, Satyaputra and Keralaputra* –all rulers of south India - the practices of King Asoka's dominion have been brought into practice in “caring for the sick, both of men and of cattle”. This can lead one to conclude that these regions adopted Buddhism that was the hallmark of Asoka's kingdom, but Logan tells us that it was Jainism and not Buddhism that spread over the Malabar coast at this time. Logan concludes that the Jains have left behind their remains in the style of architecture to be found in the temples even to this day that is a lot different from the rest of the Hindu temples found elsewhere in the subcontinent, but Nepal (Logan, 1995:185).

Logan's historiography was made from an administrative point of view, with the historic circumstances so contriving it. Lord Connally the District Collector of Malabar prior to Logan, was murdered in his bungalow allegedly by *moplah* rioters who were seeking justice from an unfair settlement of land revenue concluded by H.S.Graeme in 1823, in which the *moplahs* as a community felt they were at the receiving end⁸. This incident alerted the colonial regime to the exigency of reorganizing the settlement of land revenues and the means for their distribution and collection (Nair, 1987:24). This meant a clear identification of the different castes and communities and the manner in which their relationship with the land was defined. William Logan as the successor to Lord Connally was given the task, thus of writing a comprehensive (from a colonialist centralized administrative point of view- Gurukkal and Varier, 1995:16) a manual of the district Malabar.

⁸ For a detailed survey of the land settlements instituted by the British in Malabar, see Panikkar(1989) pages 1-48.

'A History of Travancore' in English by K.P.Sankunni Menon, had already appeared in the year 1878. This was a hagiography of the rulers of Travancore from the fourteenth century onwards, more than a methodological approach to the writing of Travancore history. Nonetheless it pointed to the seminal pangs of a nationalist awareness, being written in English and given the attempts at its glorification of the past (*ibid*:15).

A more detailed and scholarly attempt at writing the history of Kerala, came in 1924, from the efforts of K.P.Padmanabha Menon, who served as a lawyer and a civil servant in the States of Cochin and Travancore. His four volume work on the history of Kerala is based on the letters written by a Dutch priest named Visscher between 1717 and 1723 from Cochin where he was a chaplain in the church.

Padmanabha Menon traces the earliest citations on Kerala in literature to two sources, the accounts of travelers, and citations in puranic texts. According to the former, the coast known as Kerala today, was called Malabar in its historic times. It was addressed in a variety of ways by different people, for example, Melibar by Al Bairuni (AD 970-1039), Manibar by Al Idrisi (AD1153), Melibar by Marco Polo (AD 1271-1294), and Malibar by Ibn Batuta (AD 1342-47) (*Menon,1924:2*). The name Kerala itself is drawn from Sanskrit, where citations are made in different texts since historic times, such as Katyayana (first half of the 4th century BC), Patanjali (BC 150), as well as the epics, Mahabharatha and Ramayana and the puranas of Vayu, Matsya and Markandeya which by their very nature betray any effort to localize it in any span of historic time(*ibid:28*).

It is very difficult to conclude from the extant sources of archaeology or literature the exact transformations of the religions and regimes that have gone through this land. Brahmanical Hinduism must have made its entry only in the 8th century AD is one of the conclusions that Logan arrives at. This also marked the exit of Jainism which in its movement to the neighbouring Tamil Nadu made flourishing contributions to Tamil literature. This was also the time according to Logan when Malayalam as a distinct tongue began to emerge from Tamil. It would be centuries later (in the seventeenth

century) when a lower caste Hindu a *sudra* by the name Thunjattu Ezhuthachan derive a script for it from the *Grantha* – the Sanskrit alphabet of the Tamils-and render the Sanskrit epics in Malayalam⁹.

Caste as a religious institution was introduced into Malabar along with Hinduism only about the eighth century AD, simultaneously with the rise of the *Nambuthiris* to power and influence, according to Logan(Logan,1995:187). Jainism was the religion widespread in Kerala prior to that, in the opinion of Logan. Jainism like Brahmanical Hinduism also came from the North of the Indian subcontinent itself. The Jains had organized the community into corporate guilds before they left the country and moved into parts of Canara and Tamil Nadu. The two main guilds thus were the Nairs and the Iluvars, respectively the protectors and the planters of the land. Yet another guild according to Logan was the Vellalar or the agriculturists. He arrives at these conclusions mainly through an analysis of the expressions denoting the ownership of land. The earlier expression of land right was *nir-atti-peru* or “water-contact-birthright”, that later came to be replaced by the Sanskrit expression of *janmam* following the immigration of the Brahmins. That the Nambuthiris were not original inhabitants of Kerala is borne out by both the *keralamahatmyam* and *keralolpatti*¹⁰ –

⁹ The ethnographic details as such given above by Logan, even though they may be true to a large extent, fails to acknowledge the socio-linguistics that sharply portrays the distinctiveness of Malayalam as a language. According to P.K.Balakrishnan, a writer and a social critic,of Malayalam literature and Kerala society, and a historian in his own right, the origins of this language has to be located in the hierarchical caste formation that restricted every caste group to its own distinct use of expressions in addressing themselves to the others- higher or lower in the hierarchy. One thing for certain that Balakrishnan says, quoting the author of ‘A Dissertation on the Malayalam Language’, Mr.F.W.Ellis, the pioneering writer on the Malayalam language, who wrote in the year 1816 AD, that, the higher caste of Kerala, the Nmabuthiris may have never promoted the use of the language, in whatever form it existed at the point of their settlement in Kerala. From among the numerous dialects that prevailed in Kerala, at that point, one of the tongues emerged and with adequate backing from the written Sanskrit and the spoken Prakrit, derived its life source to evolve into the new language form that Malayalam has become today.

¹⁰ These two texts bear the references to the *Parasurama* legend regarding the origin of Kerala. The legend has it that Kerala was raised from below the sea by the lord Parasurama one of the ten incarnations of the God Vishnu, and gifted to the Brahmins to make their habitations as expiation for the sin of having killed the kshatriyas,or the warriors that killed his father. The *keralamahatmyam* was written in Sanskrit and is antecedent to *Keralolpatti* which was written in Malayalam and is ascribed to the sixteenth century.Both rely for the stem of their narrative on an ancient Sanskrit text called the *Brahmandapurana* .

the two texts subscribed by the Nambuthiris themselves as describing the origin of Kerala¹¹. Thus Sanskrit also as a language made its entry into Kerala very late and replaced many of the expressions with an originally Dravidian root. Such is the example of birth right that we discussed above.

The recovery of ancient sepulchres or burial tombs (*kuta-kkallu*) have revealed a lot of information on the pre-historic settlers of the land. One of the earliest excavations of these sites was done by Mr.J.Babington for the Bombay Literary Society in the year 1819. An interesting fact that has come down to us through these findings is that they buried their dead sometimes supplied in their tombs with weapons, cooking pots, oil receptacles, lamps, ornaments, water jars etc.(Logan,1995:179).Even today some of these practices are extant. Whereas some of the lower castes including the Ezhavas bury their dead when it is not the Brahmanical custom to do so, many keep the charred bones of their dead after burning them in an urn, buried in a part of their compound. Logan attests to this observation when he says, “the native tradition still extant, that so long as the bones remained “undestroyed and undefiled” the deceased enjoyed heaven.....Modern ideas have changed simply by making priestly intercessions necessary for the welfare of the deceased” (ibid:183).

These crematory rites are some of the founding rites of the Malayali Hindu that we have for the benefit of our understanding. Ever since the advent of Brahmanism the care of the dead is left to *Rudran* (one form of *Siva*). The dead are burnt and their

There is a contention that the two texts were written by the *Nambuthiris* in the eighteenth century AD, to ascertain their hegemony as the ruling classes of Kerala, prior to the coming of the British. But, historians Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier have unearthed a copy of the text that dates back to no less than 1527AD.In either case, they argue that the *parasurama* stories told in the texts existed in an oral form much before their textual forms. These are even now sung in the temples of Kerala during the festivals in the traditional forms of singing called, the *thottampattu* .These songs essentially praise singular lineages of *naduvazhis* or local chieftains who were the chief patrons of the temple.They may be basically divided into three portions-one, the founding of Kerala by the lord *Parasurama* and the settlement of Brahmins, two, the rule of the *Perumals* and three, the praise for the local chieftain or *naduvazhi* who was deputed to rule by the *Perumals*.These songs do not make any calendrical reference to time and only hold a general frame of ancience in which historical and divine figures blend together at random (Gurukkal & Varier: 1995 :12)

¹¹ The migration of the Brahmins that came and settled in Kerala and later formed the caste of the Nambuthiris are thought to be settlers from the region between the Krishna and Godavari rivers of the State called Andhra Pradesh.K.P.Padmanabah Menon has endorsed this opinion in his History of

charred remains flown downstream the Ganges in the North or the branches of Kaveri in the South and even into the sea in parts of Kerala. Logan concludes from his study of these founding rites that the “foundational religious idea of the Malayali Hindu, then, consisted probably of a belief in the evil propensities of deceased persons”(ibid:183). Logan even suggests that in the religion of the original inhabitants of Kerala images of the divinities played no part, because all the Malayali words for idols are of Sanskrit origin. Still, ancient phallic worship and snake worship are signs of a continuum that have caught up with all reforms in religion that have ensued since the coming of the Brahmins to Kerala. The true nature of this transformation in systems of worship is a still unraveling process given the variety of systems of worship extant to this day that actually date back to the most prehistoric past.

The most important proof for the influence of Jainism, that in Kerala during the time of Asoka is one of his Girnar edicts that say that in the land of *keralaputra*, in caring for the sick of both men and of cattle, the system of Devanampriya Priyadarshin (King Asoka) has been brought into practice. But the Jain influence left little impact on the religious lives of the people. Their monumental contribution remains in the style of temple architecture and also the voluminous literary production known as the classical Sanghom age of Tamil literature. Needless to mention that Malayalam was far from a distinct language in those times. The poet Ilamkoadikal who authored the Sanghom classic *Chilappathikaaram* was a Jain *muni* or ascetic himself and also the son of the Chera king Cheralaathan and brother to the king Chenkuttavan (Nair,1975:13)¹². Sanghom also stands for a group of litterateurs of Tamil who enriched the language through their contributions. There were three phases of the Sanghom known as the *Aadimasanghom*, *Madhyamasanghom* and *Andhisanghom* (the first –440 years, the second-370 years and the third -180 years respectively). All the three Sanghoms

Kerala, Vol.III. The opinion as such was initially made by the author of ‘Travancore State Manual’, Nagam ayya, in the Census Reports of Travancore for the year 1891 (Balakrishnan:1997:318).

¹²In this Preface to Chilappathikaaram in translation, the interpreter, cites ample evidence from the text of the poem to prove that the author of Chilappathikaaram must have been a Saivite. But the fact that he was addressed as the *adikal* a name usually given to Jain ascetics, can prove otherwise. In either case there is ample historic evidence to prove that at many places in the south India, Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism co-existed peacefully. (Nair:1975).

enjoyed the unilateral patronage of different generations of the *Pandya, Cera and Cola* kings of South India (ibid:15-16).

The final Brahmin migration from the North into Malabar came about the year AD 700. The text called *Keralolpatti* that was also written around the same time gives details of how the last *Parumal* retired for Mecca leaving the land behind for petty chieftains and how following this the Zamorin became the most famous of the Malayali rajas. Logan holds that the Brahmins introduced the caste as a social institution into Kerala which was made easier by the guild like organizations of the various occupations among the earlier inhabitants. They were mainly the Nairs, the Iluvvar (an ancient usage for Ezhavas, especially the way it is found in Logan's 'Manual') and the Vellalars. According to the *Keralolpatti* the Nairs were , the people of "the eye," "the hand," and "the order" and it was their duty "to prevent the rights from being curtailed or suffered to fall into disuse" (Logan,1995:597). The Tiyars or the islanders it is said came from the south (Ceylon), bringing with them the southern tree, that is, the coconut (*Tengayi*) and they were appointed planters of the body politic. To the Nairs also belonged the duty of supervision symbolized by their description as "the eye" (*kan*) and they were designated the (supervisors) *kanakkar* besides their duty of protection.

Following the migration and settlement of the Nambuthiris in Kerala, by 8th century AD, the temple became the fundamental unit of political and economic organization. Nambuthiris who settled in communal congregies called *gramam* or Nambuthiri villages, organized such villages around temples. These observations have been borne out by the historians like Elamkulom Kunjanpillai (1972) and Rajan Gurukkal (1977). P.K.Balakrishnan (1997), also gives noteworthy contributions on the role of temple in the life of medieval Kerala. The most important thing according to him is that none of the Kerala temples were built with the grant of the rulers or the kings. They were constructed under the singular enterprise of the Nambuthiris. The terrain or landscape of the region called the State of Kerala today, must have been wilderness of such an order that it took extra-ordinary or super human effort to make any piece of land habitable and suitable for cultivation. The founding of the temple initiated this

process, of founding a new settlement for the people and the possibilities of cultivating a new piece of land, according to Balakrishnan (ibid: 379).

Logan, however while writing his book in the 1880s, observes that , the fundamental and most influential unit of organization in Kerala was the Dravidian *tara*¹³. In Kerala, Nair inhabitants of a *tara* formed a small Republic, represented by their *karanavar* or elders. The British when they introduced land reforms in Malabar, substituted *tara*, by an *amsam* or a revenue unit comprising of two or three villages, each independently called *desams*. The *tara* enjoyed organizational suzerainty in that congeries of *taras* or village Republics formed the *nad* or county and the *kuttam* or assembly was a representative body of immense power which could even supercede the decisions taken by the raja or his ministers. One of East India Company's representatives at Calicut, thus wrote to the Company authorities when asked to explain the reasons for certain civil commotions, "These Nairs being heads of the Calicut people, resemble the parliament and do not obey the king's dictates in all things, but chastises his ministers when they do unwarrantable acts" (ibid:89).

The Tippu Sultan of Mysore following his conquest of Malabar did not affect any changes on the *tara* organization, but the East India Company changed *tara* into subordinate district establishments and thoroughly revised them and their traditional privileges. Later when the *amsam* system was instituted by Special Commissioner H.S.Graeme in 1822-23, it instated as head of the *amsam* or *adhikari*, the most influential of *desavalis* under the ancient system. As Logan pertinently points out, Mr.Graeme made the big mistake of thinking that the *desam* and *tara* were synonymous and so in his scheme of *amsam* establishments, the real civil organization by the *karanavar* or elders of the people was ignored, and in its place authority of various kinds was conferred on some only of the men who had been the local representatives of the ruling chieftains of Malabar (ibid:614).

¹³ meaning foundation, mound, ground, village, quarter; similar to Tamil and Malayalam, Telugu *teruvu* Canarese and Tulu *teravu*.

Logan's representation of the *tara* as a native example of parliamentary or democratic organization, in England or even as the village Republics of ancient Greece has attracted a lot of criticism. One of the most important of which is by P.K.Balakrishnan, who in the process of disputing Logan throws light on the nature of justice that prevailed in such civil groups that made them distinct from their English counterparts. Not merely their English counterparts, these civil administration units differed fundamentally from even their counterparts in the neighbouring States of Tamil Nadu, Mysore or even elsewhere in India. Logan's misjudgment proceeds from a misunderstanding of the role of Nairs in the social system, according to P.K.Balakrishnan. This fact has been pointed out by anthropologists K Raman Unni and Joan P Mencher too. Their works show us that Logan failed to notice the fact that the Nairs were not agriculturists like their Tamil counterparts the *Vellalars* or the Mysorean counterparts, the *Okkaliggas* and *Lingayats*. These castes not merely owned their land; they also cultivated them and were competent agriculturists, as well. The Nairs' responsibility on the land extended over the land till the act of supervision. They neither owned them nor cultivated them. The land was cultivated through Tiyyas share croppers on a still lesser lease than obtained from the *Nambuthiris* or by *Adiyas* or *Pulayas* under the direct supervision of a senior member of the Nair family. They were mainly warrior-captains and local war-lords. In the opinion of Raman Unni and Joan Mencher (1975:125), this scenario changed drastically, in the 18th century, in Travancore, when Raja Marthandavarma in his unification bid of the State broke the power of the local warlords. The Maharajah of Cochin followed soon under the guidance of Travancore. In Malabar, the aggression of Tippu Sultan, of Mysore re-defined the land relationships and introduced a new system of land taxation (Unni&Mencher, 1975:125).

P.K.Balakrishnan (1997) in a similar strain brings to our notice the nature of the justice dealt with in such institutions as the *taras*. For this, he first uses the analogy of the civil organization in the villages of Tamil Nadu during the medieval period. The Tamil villages were either the village of the Brahmins or the villages of the Nattars-other higher castes. The Brahmin villages comprised of only Brahmins (called

agrahaaram), and in the rest of the villages the *Nattars* made the decisions. Their discretion, yet was limited to providing irrigation for farming and make any repairs when necessary. In Kerala, in the meanwhile, the *taras* or the civil institutions that Logan was writing about, had no discretion on deciding on the management of land. These institutions thereby became exclusively instruments for carrying out the prevailing canons of justice according to the caste system. These canons were either generally followed according to the *manusmriti* –the text containing the rules of the society according to Hindu religion- or as they were interpreted by the Nambuthiris. This justice discriminated between the various castes with the intensity of punishment increasing down the caste hierarchy. P.K.Balakrishnan says, the *taras* in this regard dealt with the act of proving the crime and executing the punishment, (1997:145-159).

Another interesting point of dispute in Logan's manual is the advent of Hinduism to Kerala. K.P.Padmanabha Menon (1924) disputes his claims regarding the advent of Hinduism with the migration of Brahmins into Kerala in the 8th century AD. Logan's evidences as we saw above are mainly two. One is the deeds presented to the Jews and Syrian Christians respectively in AD 700 and AD 825. In the Jewish deed, one does not find attestation by the Brahmins, whereas in the Syrian Christian deed, one finds it. This led Logan to conclude that the Brahmins must have migrated into Kerala in the intervening period. But, Padmanabha Menon says, such deeds do not mention the witnesses of every community in the country at the time when such a deed is drafted. The Jewish deed makes omissions of the Syrian Christians and the Tiyyas who were settled in Kerala from much earlier dates. Thus, this evidence cannot be considered conclusive enough(Menon, 1924:45-50).

The second evidence shown by Logan is the practice amongst Hindus of treating the dead. He pinpoints the adoption of crematory practices, as proof of the advance of Brahmins into Kerala. The number of urns and sepulchres found in Kerala, that were used to bury the dead in the past point out the veracity of this argument. But, Logan, says, Padmanabha Menon (*ibid.*), was unaware of the fact that, the Hindu society in its early period, practised the act of burying their dead. He also cites verses from the Yajur Veda, to prove the fact that the act of burying the dead was practiced in Vedic

times. Therefore, the phenomenon of cremating the dead cannot be attributed to the influence of Brahmins(ibid:52).

Citing R.C.Dutt (Ancient History of India), among other sources, Menon argues the presence of Hinduism in South India prior to the date alleged by Logan. One of the important citations is the expedition of King Vijaya, son of Subahu, ruler of Sala (present day Bengal), in the kingdom of Magadha. Vijaya and his followers were set adrift in the ocean, for their misconduct, and they reached Ceylon, the island south of the peninsula, and colonised it. This is believed to have taken place in 543 BC. King Vijaya, still had to cross over into the peninsula to the kingdom of the *Pandyas* to procure a wife, and thence the introduction of Aryanism or Vedic Brahmanism may be counted in that region (ibid:64-5).

Pliny, writing on the reports of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to Chandragupta's court in 317-312 BC, following the Greek invasion of the sub-continent, enlightens us to the nation of 'Pandae', for its peculiarity of the rule of women. Matriarchy is an institution, characteristically renowned of the Nair community in Malabar and little otherwise known in India at that time (ibid:66).

Cape Comorin, or the lands end of India, was for a long time, a sacred place for the Hindus. Even in the first century AD, this must have been so as evidenced by the Tamil poems, Chilappathikaaram and Manimekhalai. The edicts of Asoka talk about Buddhist missions to Kerala, among other places including Ceylon. The existence of the worship of Siva, is another proof to substantiate the presence of Brahmanism prior to the 8th century AD. The deity/goddess worshipped at Cape Comorin, is Siva's consort, Parvathy, even though in this place, she is worshipped as Kumari (the virgin Goddess)(ibid:8-10).

Padmanabha Menon, thus, serves a number of proofs and effectively challenges Logan's formulation that Hinduism came to South India, with the advent of Aryans. Regarding the rule of the *Chera* dynasties also, he maintains a studied skepticism in the absence of supporting archaeological evidence. Still on the strength of literary evidence, it is held to be true by consensus of many a historian of Kerala

(SreedharaMenon, Elamkulom Kunjanpillai etc.). Their view is seriously challenged by P.K.Balakrishnan, who maintains that the rule of the *Chera* dynasty with their capital as Kodungalore in Kerala is only of a legendary kind with little factual historicity to ascertain it.

Controversies in the Historiography of Kerala

The historiography of Kerala is fraught with many problems, the foremost of which is lack of archaeological evidence. Excavations based on references to the reign of *Chera* kings from their capital in Kodungalore, yielded little results to the effect of the dimension supposed by many historians. Such lack of evidence is especially conspicuous when contrasted with the copper plates found in excavations from Tamil Nadu, where the names of the rulers or kings were unambiguously contained. The plates that have been found in Kerala, do not contain references to kings of any dynasty, with the singular exception of the Jewish deed of 14th century that mentions the name of a king Bhaskararavi.

P.K.Balakrishnan, writer and social critic of Malayalam, argues, that, the descriptions given in the Roman texts of Pliny (Natural History) and Ptolemy (Ptolemy's Geography) do not exactly concur with the suppositions of the existence of a *Chera* dynasty or the port of Muziris –the Crangannore (Kodungalore) of present day- as its capital. This view of Kerala's past maintains that the coast was a tract of wilderness with a few tribal clans as its main inhabitants in the times of the early Christian era, the time when the Roman trade is believed to have flourished with the coast(1997:24-36).

The *Chera* kings who are found referred to in Tamil classics, must have ruled from Tamil Nadu, according to the archaeological evidences so far procured. This is notwithstanding, a legendary or traditional view of Kerala's past that strongly holds that the *Chera* kings ruled from their capital in Kodungalore in two dynasties, between the 4th and 13th centuries AD. From the number of plates obtained from Tamil Nadu, especially from the regions ranging from Coimbatore to Salem , the

references to the name of Kerala are frequent. There are extant place names in Tamil Nadu, even today called ‘Veerakeralam’. This fact allows a historic exposition that the *Cheras* ruled from Tamil Nadu and that their kingdom extended beyond a good section of Kerala till at least Salem in Tamil Nadu. But, continuing to maintain that, no centralized rule ever existed in Kerala before the colonial times, P.K.Balakrishnan says, there are evidences from plates elsewhere to show that, such place names have been used as synonyms for the *Chera* dynasty and do not indicate that the *Chera* dynasty held sway over the region that is now called Kerala(ibid:37-41).

P.K.Balakrishnan in his turn may be seen as working on the pioneering theory of EMS Nambuthirppadu (1987) which says that, the *Chera* empire was an artificial super imposition on the material conditions of Kerala. Even though the State may have derived its name from the name of these rulers, their rule says EMS, did not succeed in making the cultural tradition of the Sangham period, a part of the cultural make-up of the people of Kerala, as it did succeed in making it the starting point of a “glorious” culture of the people of Tamil Nadu. This continues EMS, in his strain of Historical-Materialist interpretation of ‘The National Question in Kerala’, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* may be also seen in the extant practice of matriarchy which every society that moves forward from the tribal form of production to the agrarian form of production is expected to get over with, according to the material forces of history. The peculiar nature of the land and its topography that is criss-crossed by numerous water channels, together with the abundant supply of rains, that ensure the lack of a need for any irrigation belies the theory of ‘Asiatic Mode of Production’, that may be usefully applied in understanding the process of empire formation elsewhere in India but may not be used in the case of Kerala(ibid:xxvi-xxvii). EMS holds the same to be true for the second empire that is believed to have ruled over a unified Kerala, by the name *Perumals*, about whom references have been already made in the discussion of Logan’s Manual. The question of a unified Nationality that is often forged with the assumption of the rule of *Perumals* over a unified Kerala, that came to an accidental end, is also challenged by EMS saying that,

the empire of the *Perumals*, if at all existed, was at best over a territory stretching from Calicut in North to Quilon in the South.

Elamkulom Kunjan Pillai (1972), another historian, who holds the rule of the *Perumals* over a unified Kerala, as a historical fact, serves literary evidences to prove it. The lack of archaeological evidence, notwithstanding, the historian postulates the theory of a hundred years war between the *Cheras* and the *Cholas*. As a consequence, the following important developments followed in the social history of the region. The unified State disintegrated, the enormous loss of life amongst the Nair men resulted in the evolution of matriarchy in place of patriarchy, the Nambuthiris instituted the practice of *sambandham* or their license to sleep with Nair women and all the other castes that refused to submit to the licentiousness of the Nambuthiri men, they castigated as the polluting castes and wrested claims over the assets of the Hindu temple and initiated the process of the *janmi* system in Kerala.

P.K.Balakrishnan disputes the arguments of Elamkulom Kunjan Pillai that seeks to establish the ‘myth’ of a dynasty of *Perumals*. The rulers of the *chera* dynasty that the latter cites as the names of the rulers of this dynasty were mostly taken from Tamil inscription about them from the plates of the rulers of the *chola* and *pandya* kings of Tamil Nadu. This leads P.K.Balakrishnan to contest KunjanPillai’s arguments (1972) that they were rulers over ali of Kerala and the inherent hypothesis of Kerala Nationalism. P.K.Balakrishnan in his turn holds that the so-called *chera* kings found in the inscriptions of the Tamil Kings of the *Pandya* and the *Chola* dynasties were actually dependents of these Kings and ruled over a smaller piece of land between the Cape Comorin and Kollam in the South of the present day Kerala, and were a dynasty that was culturally a homogenous part of the *Chola* and *Pandya* rulers (Balakrishnan.P.K.1983: 57-77).

In thus disputing the claims of Elamkulom Kunjan Pillai and the official historiography of the Kerala State Gazette that has followed the efforts of another historian A.Sreedhara Menon ,P.K.Balakrishnan seeks to establish his hypothesis of the existence of a tribal form of society in Kerala, that was not organized into the

dimensions of an empire until integrated into the administration of the British empire over the rest of the land. He describes a plausible picture of the land that comprised the State called Kerala thus, "A land 38,864 square kilometers in area, two-third of which is covered by the forest and in the rest one-third the settlements of the people held sway by the rulers numbering no less than thirty; a hundred or so petty chieftains having nominal, if any commitments to these rulers- criss-crossed by 41 rivers with little of any artificial ways of transportation linking them " (ibid:104). This claims Balakrishnan is the picture of the State emerging at the end of the 16th century, when the foreign powers were about to make many deals with the local rulers, that would alter the course of events towards the founding of protectorates and colonies under the British, Portuguese, Dutch and the French.

The historians Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier have seriously contented the arguments of P.K.Balakrishnan and the conclusions on the Kerala society that they lead him into. They argue that, the lack of sufficient archaeological evidence notwithstanding, the literary evidences are proliferate and profound in order to recreate the images from Kerala's past. The period literature glorified as the Sanghom literature in Tamil is one of the original sources for a historiography of Kerala as well. But in order to make historic sense of these works, their origins in oral form has to be taken into account much before their transformation into textual forms. The specific form of Tamil in which these literary works found expression is called *pazhamtamil* or the old Tamil that was essentially in an oral form of Tamil. The Sanghom period may be approximated best as the period when the Tamil Sanghoms of Jain or Buddhist ascetics gave a textual shape to these songs extant in their oral forms. The period of the literal expression of these songs and the period of the narrative in these songs do not exactly correspond according to recent studies on this topic. Therefore, it is more appropriate to call them *pazhamtamilpattukal* or songs of the old Tamil, according to Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier(1995:34-36).

Their work on the history of Kerala gives an innovative picture of a people that had the most rudimentary forms of social organization in the iron age, and only recently emergent from the (upper and lower) Paleolothic ages. This reading of history is

made possible by an astute methodology that ascribes a unique authenticity to the ‘songs of the old Tamil’ derived from their ability as historians to communicate with a time that is indeterminably lost to our civilization. But, in their exceptional work, they seek a way out of the debacle posed for the historiography of Kerala in terms of the authenticity of documents, facts and inscriptions that usually form the matter for positivist historiography. In this effort they derive from oral traditions, the plausibility of not historical facts; but the endurance of a structure of social relationships that can be conceived as spread over an expanse of a region called the *chera* country.

The language called *pazhamtamil* spread all over the South of India, during the time of the Iron age. A written form of this tradition is believed to have emerged in the form of the Tamil brahmi script in the Krishna district of Andhra and thence spread to centres of trade like Madurai and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu until finally making its foray across the Western Ghats into Kerala. The script as it stands today owes its survival to the inscriptions on the Budhhist stupas found in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh and to the inscriptions found in the caves dotting the ancient trade routes connecting Madurai and Tirunelvely in Tamil Nadu (Gurukkal and Varier, 1995:94). The general assumption behind this fact is that the written language spread along the important channels of commerce, and hence its late entry beyond the range of the Western Ghats.

The oral tradition on the other hand was not routed through the channels of commerce, says Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier. The songs of this tradition valorize heroism and generosity that point to an economy that thrived on intense fighting and warfare aimed at taking possession of most importantly cattle, among other assets. The songs especially valorize the heroic death of many a chieftain of the *cheras*, the *cholas* and the *pandyas*. It has also instances of suicide, resembling social facts analysed by Mauss amongst the Maori of New Zealand (Mauss, 1979:48-49). The Maori who killed his totem animal by mistake would pine away to death, full of grief and guilt. The *pazhamtamil* heroes did a similar thing called *vadakkirikkal*(pining away to death holding one’s sword in hand and facing the North) ,if they suffered shame or defeat in war. One such hero celebrated in the *Purananooru* , ‘Purappun Naniya’ Perum cheral

aathan, died in this manner for receiving a wound on his back. A wound on the back is a sign of cowardice for such a wound is caused only when one turns one's back on the battle-field. The said king is told as died from shame inflicted by such a wound . Such heroes were later immortalized and worshipped with memorial stones with etchings of their name and deeds and adornments of peacock feathers and flowers. These localized cults fostered the worship of the gods *kottavai* and *murugan* who iconized at a larger level, the importance attached to martial arts and warriorship in the transition from the Stone to the Iron Age , a period stretching from 500 BC to 300AD (ibid: 95).

Sacrifice was one of the main forms of worship. The Kings especially gained their pride through conducting sacrifices. They were at the same time expiatory rites as well as propitiatory rites for the revered deity. The function of distributing the exploits of the war was also executed through a similar religious rite called *Undattu*. By this, the dependents of the Kings were ensured a judicious distribution of the earnings of the tribe, as rewards or gifts for their respective positions in the lineage of the tribe (ibid: 96). The ceremony of the *undattu* strengthened and at the same time limited the lineage ties. When the means of distribution was thus limited it was that the priestly class of Brahmins emerged as a new and parallel hub of relations of distribution. This process was initiated by the gifts of land made by the chera kings to the Brahmins, as mentioned in the songs. The Brahmins being a priestly class must have had to necessarily enlist the services of other classes-artisans,traders and slaves- for their sustenance. Thus, it must have been this new relations of ownership, that was to be decisive in the later times of South Indian history evolved (ibid:98).

It was following the migration of the Brahmins that the system of distributing the resources of the State stepped beyond the tribal lineages or kinship and included the Brahmins for their legitimization of the rule of a specific King. The settlement of the Brahmins bring the stage of the State formation to the level of an ideology , which ideology henceforth guarantee the King to his legitimate rule over the people. The Brahmins are referred to as *anthanar* in these songs and they performed the ritual – religious acts for the King. Anyway, as evinced by these songs, it is difficult to imagine the Brahmin migration and settlement as a linear progression in the course of

events. Rather, the extension of lineage and kinship ties and the ideological hold of the Brahmins can be seen to be unfolding simultaneously. According to Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier it nonetheless signified the beginnings of settled living and the beginnings of agriculture amongst the tribes of ancient South India and the culmination of the Iron age , the beginnings of a settled agrarian means of production and division of labour(ibid:100-103).

The Brahmin settlement opens its historiographical clues through the various references found in the temple inscriptions. These inscriptions that date from the 9th century AD onwards, were all written in the *vattezhuthu* script –the script in vogue all over South India, going by the temple inscriptions and the royal grants in the form of copper plates. In Kerala, these settlements were spread over thirty two *gramams*(villages).They were spread throughout the length and breadth of Kerala except the significant absence of a portion of Northern Malabar between the districts of Malappuram and Kasargode of today. The settlements generally grew up around the most fertile regions and initiated the historic act of irrigation over a land unknown to have had any kind of regular paddy cultivation of a kind that existed in the Cauvery basin of Tamil Nadu contemporaneously (ibid: 105-107).

The Brahmins introduced landmark innovations into the social process of production. They introduced a rigorous division of labour and organized an economy with the temple as its epicentre and as its axis assigning functions specific to the various caste groups, along with the rewards and punishments due to them as a part of the system of production. Not to be mentioned that apart from the Brahmin settlements or *gramams* there were also other settlements that were of mainly two kinds-one, the land and dependents of a naduvazhi or a local chieftain called *cherikkal*, two, settlements called *ooru*, that was a congregation of *uralar* or a body of landholders. The *uralar* cultivated the land through a settlement called *kaaranma* that prescribed for the different classes involved in the production process, limited fractions of the produce.The *kaaranma* as a system did not yet exhaust all the relations of production or distribution. Even below the *kaaralar* were the labour groups, settled in collectives (*kudy*) that finds mention in many title deeds. They included mainly the Ezhava castes

and artisans like Vannan(washer-man), Thachan(carpenter) etc. The last link in the production process was brought up by the *aaladiyar* who were the serfs that tilled the land. The last two classes mentioned were paid in kind and had no claim over the produce of the land (ibid: 114-119).

If the Brahmin *gramams* formed the top of the administrative rung, the *kudy* or the associations of a number of families belonging to a specific caste and doing a single occupation formed the lowest rung. In most cases, they were dependents of the landlords and were subject to trade with the change in the possession of the land. Thus a copper plate dating from 849AD talks about *Vannarkudy* (of the caste called *Vannar*), *Ezhakudy* (of the caste called *Ezhavas*) and *Vellalakudy* (of the caste called *Vellalars*). The *kudy* provided for its own seat of power called the *kudypathi*. A *kudyapthy* by virtue of his rank was known to have his own land and a set of dependents in his turn, whose families together formed *aalkudy*. The *aalkudy* generally formed of families from the castes of *Pulayas* or *Cherumar*. The *aalkudy* is considered by these historians as the base of the social formation in ancient Kerala (ibid: 160-164).

The *Uralan* formed a variation of the rank called *pathy*. If *pathy* served the role of a leader of an occupational group who had to be consulted in all matters relating to the management of land, the *uralar* has claim to his own land and was liable to its management through a congregation of similar owners called the *ooru*. The *uralan* and the *pathy* formed two fundamental hinges upon which the economic system turned in medieval Kerala according to Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier. From the available resources, it is yet not possible to conclude who exactly were the *uralans*. While some of the plates refer to them as Brahmins, such reference is conspicuous by its absence in certain others. No non-Brahmins at the same time have been found mentioned as the *uralars*. *Ooru* had its powers in administering justice according to the norms of *muzhikkulam* agreement which specified punishments according to the various crimes and castes. It had powers of jurisdiction over both Brahmins and non-Brahmins and the two historians conclude that it would be safest to hold that *uralar* meant basically a land-owning class of people irrespective of caste gradations (ibid: 163).

A rung further above the *Ooru* in terms of administrative powers was the *Nadu*. The *Nadu* consisted of several *Ooru* and had at its zenith its chieftain called the *naduvazhi* (literally the ruler of the *nadu*). The *Naduvazhi* had an army at his disposal of varying strengths called *arunoottuvar* (six hundreds), *munnoottuvar* (three hundreds), *ezhennottuvar* (seven hundreds), *anjoottuvar* (five hundreds), *aayiravar* (thousands) etc. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier list the names of the following *Nadus* from their survey of the historical and archaeological evidences- *Venad*, *Nantuzhanadu*, *Kezhemalanadu*, *Vembolinadu*, *Nedumpurayurnadu*, *Valluvanadu*, *Eranadu*, *Ramavalanadu*, *Kurambranadu*, *Purakizhanadu*, *Kolathunadu* (*ibid*:166-168).

The kings of Medieval Kerala called the *Perumals* formed the next administrative rung in terms of the exercise of power. Though their existence was seriously challenged by P.K.Balakrishnan in the work discussed above, the two historians whom we are currently discussing, reassert the rule of the *Perumals* over a unified Kerala, that comprised of the *Nadus* mentioned above. Their argument is based on the plates that have been recovered from various sites across the State. One of the serious contentions against the theory of a *Perumal* rule over Kerala is the contrasting nature of the plates that were found in the neighbouring States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The plates found in Tamil Nadu mention royal grants of land to the Brahmin villages or Brahmin regulatory bodies called *Brahmadeyam*. The social scenario in Kerala was but different argue the two historians. The Brahmins though settled in Brahmin villages called *gramams*, they never had any administrative importance and thus they find little mention in such plates. The plates of Tamil Nadu are initiated with a full blown praise of the King and his dynasty that makes the specific grant of land. Still the name of the year mentioned in the plates refer to the year in the rule of the different *perumal* kings, according to them. Even though we are in the dark about the details of their rule or the patterns of their inheritance, as a form of power and authority that ruled at the helm of the relations of landownership, their existence in medieval Keraia is undeniable. This is what Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier (1995:179-186) conclude from their analysis of the copper plates and other inscriptions obtained from Kerala belonging to this period (800-1125AD).

The absence of praise in the copper plates and other inscriptions of any of the *Perumal* kings lead them to concentrate on the role of the temple as the champion of the ideology, hegemonizing and normalizing the social relations of production and ownership. The temple as the symbolic seat of fertility in holding the deity within its *garbhagriha* holding within it the deity of the land (devan) who approximates the crown was at the heart of the cult in the temples. All the praise and hagiography that was due to the real crown, the *Perumals* were held in the obeisance to the temple and its presiding deity (*ibid*:187-195).

Following the rule of the *Perumals* the centralized system of administration also was scattered and many local centres of administration began to spring up. One of the significant developments of the close of the *Perumal* rule was the eclipse of a centralized code of punishment as embodied in the *moozhikkulam* agreement discussed above. In the absence of a general convention for deciding on the crime and the punishment due to the guilty localized and carnal ways of dealing with these questions came up. Such practices as dipping the finger of the accused in a boiling pot of oil to see if he/she is guilty were a product of this age. If the accused was guilty his/her finger would burn and if not guilty it would not be affected by fire. Such practices varied across the land and different regions held different forms of punishment (*Shucheendram kaimukku* or the hand-dip of Shucheendram, in erstwhile Travancore State is the example discussed above); not varying much in terms of the gross and arbitrary way in which justice was dealt with. There was no say for a judiciary or any naduvazhi in such examination of truth. This period was demonstrated by P.K.Balakrishnan as the proof for the rudimentary level of the society of medieval Kerala in terms of its administrative and jurisdictional growth. He laid this amongst other facts (discussed above) as the foundation for his argument that the society of medieval Kerala was largely a tribal society. From the historical analysis of Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier we have seen that this mistaken view has arisen from a lack of appreciation of history that lay hidden in the form of the *pazhamthamilpattu* or the song tradition in ancient Tamil. Still, instances like the residual role assigned to the administrative bodies of the Nairs called *tara* in being mere instruments for executing

the punishment and not having any powers of arbitrating justice, according to P.K.Balakrishnan¹⁴ help us to conceptualize about what may be termed as a ‘dark’ side of the history and society of Kerala that was conspicuous by its presence till the early decades of the last century in the form of practices like untouchability. It is in the Social movements that formed against these practices that the fact of our study martyrdom/sacrifice is located, as we shall see at a greater length in chapter 4.

The Village of Edathiruthy Against a Background of Kerala History

With this brief historical sketch as our backdrop we venture into the history of the village Edathiruthy, that was an *amsam* in the revenue division of Nattika *firka* till the end of October 31st, 1956 and ever since a village in the Crangannore (Kodungallure) Taluk of Trichur district in the State of Kerala.

The name of the village is derived from a legend¹⁵ that is taken from its recent past, that is as late as the Mysorean conquest of Malabar, 1792. Prior to this what may have been the name of the village is difficult to guess, even though there are relics that may help us to conclude on this matter. With the raid of Tippu Sultan the king of Mysore many Hindus especially the higher caste landlord Nambuthiris left their home villages in Malabar and moved into various places of Cochin and Travancore. The Nambuthiris of *uthroli* and *kadalayi mana* (household), who traditionally were the landlords of Edathiruthy had to leave at the time of war for fear of plunder, loot and forced conversion into Islam. It is said following this a period of anarchy prevailed in the village. Two bandits by the name Ikkachan and Kunjali reigned supreme over the land in the interim, when the British intervened and with the help of the *mooppil* (chieftain)Nairs in the village called *Blahayil*, arrested them and send them to the

¹⁴ See P.K.Balakrishnan (1997) pp.145-160, under the head *tharakkottangalude civil bharanam* where he discusses the nature of the justice dealt within the jurisdiction of the *tara* or the elementary unit of administration- revenuec as well as judicial- in medieval Kerala.

¹⁵ Told to us by Kollarayil Kochappu, an ageing respondent, an early Congress man from the village, a child hood friend of Sardar Gopalakrishnan and later during the time of the Communists' underground activities(1948-52), a member of the 'Home Guard' – a group of Congress volunteers that collaborated with the police for the capture of the Communists in hiding.

gallows. The guardian deity of the village Siva who was worshipped at the temple of the uthroli *mana* was subsequently brought to the family temple of the *Blahayil* Nairs dedicated to the deity, Ayyappa, son of Siva according to theogony and seated to his left. Thus the village is believed to have earned the name of Edathiruthy that literally means *edathu iruthy* or ‘seated to the left’. Here it means that Siva was seated to the left of his son and lord Ayyappa, whereupon the *Blahayil Mooppil* Nairs also became the janmis of the land belonging to the exiled Nambuthiris of the *uthroli* and the *kadalayi mana*.

The remains of one of these two house-holds (*mana*) surfaced while digging the land for cultivation in the recent past. Certain protagonists of the Rightist politics (the VHP) are seeking to give the remains of the *kadalayi mana* an air of divinity. This they have done by building a shed around couple of pillars of a gate *dwarapalaka* that was unearthed at the spot and lighting lamps every day. Their contention is that there must have been a temple there, and therefore it must be worshipped. They are working on the assumption that every *mana* had a temple attached to it, and therefore all parts of its remains are sacred. There is a gaping absence of mythology at this place when contrasted with the remains of the *uthroli mana*. These lay buried under the plot called *uthroli nilam* and no digging or farming takes place here and is deemed waste land. Close to the *uthroli nilam* there is a small one-room space of a temple built for a deity called the *panickaru mooppan* where a woman from a family in the neighbourhood lights a lamp every evening. The local belief holds that the *panickaru mooppan* is the spirit of the last descendant of the *uthroli mana*. Before the exodus of the Nambuthiris, upon the attack of Tippu, he was sacrificed as the last scion of the *mana* to guard and protect the dependents of the *mana*. This made his spirit the guardian deity of the entire village. The contrast is more than striking to the sensitive mind. If, on the one hand, new traditions are being invented and asserted at the site of the remains of the *kadalayi mana* that short of a mythology serves the calculative and accumulative rationale of a profit-maximizing politics, on the other hand, at the site of the *uthroli nilam* not only is the land left untouched, but also a memory of a sacrifice preserved ardently and profitlessly with little fanfare or glare. The two trends point to distinct

patterns of thought in the culture of the village, all unraveling within the intensity of a space separated by a distance of no more than a kilometre. We shall learn more of these patterns when we take up the death of Sardar Gopalakrishnan itself, which in its collective representation, shows similar kind of contradictions. The archetypal place held by the *panickarumooppan* and his sacrifice in the village psyche is also significant from the point of view of the thesis.

Coming back to the legends behind the naming of the village, it is also said that¹⁶ prior to the cutting of the Connolly canal, Edathiruthy formed a raised platform of land amidst fields that lie underwater for a good part of the year. The topography thus resembled an isthmus or a *thuruthu* amidst the rest of the land criss-crossed by channels and lakes that were later connected to form the Connolly canal. Thus it also formed a vital link between the mainland of the Cochin State and the rest of *manappuram*. It is even believed that during this time the village belonged to the peruvanom *gramam*, and was a part of the Cochin State and was called Sooranellur which name is forgotten today. In either case, the name of the village has to do with a function of linking –the princely States of Cochin and Calicut (Malabar under the British dispensation) or two hegemonic systems of landownership, that of the Namuthiri and Nair, which specific role assigned to it in meaning assumes added significance, when we discuss that fact of martyrdom or sacrifice as it exists in this village as marking its passage from a state of colonial subjection to that of sovereign rule as part of the Indian Republic.

A *gramam* as Logan tells us is an organization exclusive to the Nambuthris, like the other castes who had their own respective organizations for instance the *tara* or *nadu* of the Nairs and the *cheri* of the Tiyyas. In 1886 when Logan wrote his book, he records the names of ten principal Nambuthiri *gramams* that were still extant(Logan, 1995:120). Peruvanom was one of them. Lying to the northeast, about eight kilometers

¹⁶ Communicated to us by Kollarayil Ravi, a veteran Communist, part of which was through a letter that was written to us, which is added in the appendix under the head, 'Ethnography of manappuram', and the rest in the course of dialogues during the field trip (April 1999- January 2000 and December 2000- August 2001).

of Edathiruthy today, there is reason to believe that when the *uthroli* and *kadalayi* mana existed they formed a part of the peruvanom *gramam*. By its geographical peculiarities this reasoning can be seen to hold some water. The Edathiruthy village prior to the cutting of the Connolly canal in the 1830s, remained the natural link for the rest of Nattika with the neighbouring State of Cochin. The cutting of the canal made it (Nattika *firka*) surrounded by water from all sides. There is therefore reason to believe that before the eighteenth century or to be exact in 1792, before the raids of Tippu Sultan, the village was non-existent, or rather it formed a part of a larger conglomerate called peruvanom *gramam*. After the fleeing of the Nambuthiri landlords, and the arrest of the two bandits who held sway in the anarchy that followed Tippu's defeat by the British, the Blahayil *mooppil* wrested the janmam for most of the land from the new dispensation and even founded the village after its current name¹⁷.

In order to get these tales linked in a chronicle we need to familiarize with the topography of the Nattika *firka* and of the Edathiruthy village. The *firka* is usually referred to as either the *firka* or *manapuram* (coastal land) in popular parlance. According to the description given by P.Karunakara Menon's appendix to Logan's Malabar Manual (1995,cccxcvii), "the scenery in comparison with that of the two neighbouring Taluks of Ernad and Walluvanad is, flat and uninteresting, especially along the coast, while inland, low hills clothed sometimes with scrub jungle, but generally with grass and flat rice-fields interspersed with groves of coconut, arecanut, jack and various other trees surrounding the dwelling houses of the inhabitants, constitute the principal varieties of the landscape." The *firka* or the *manappuram*¹⁸ formed not merely the southern tip of *Ponnani* Taluk but also of British Malabar, with the Taluk of Cochin procured by the British from the Dutch in 1814 bringing up the rear at a distance of about fifty kilometere south of the southern most tip of the rest of the land mass of the district. This tip, a village called Aala formed the southern tip of Nattika *firka* and also of the Taluk *Ponnani*. The *firka* itself comprised of fourteen

¹⁷ This version of the village's past was also provided by Kollarayil Kochappu.

villages distributed within five *amsams* to the east and north bordered by the Connolly canal constructed in the 1850s, linking the numerous existing waterways to make traffic for the boats possible from *Ponnani* in the north to *Cochin* in the South, on the behest of the then Collector of Malabar, H.V.Connolly. To the South of Aala, or Nattika *firka* was the Taluk of Kodungalore then belonging to the State of Cochin and to its West was the Arabian sea. Ever since the formation of the State of Kerala these borders have been redrawn, but the *firka* and *manppuram* still retain their value in popular parlance when referring to Nattika and more importantly when referring to Sardar Gopalakrishnan as the first Communist martyr of the Indian Republic. Thus in terms of revenue division the villages of the erstwhile Nattika *firka* today lie split between the Taluks of Kodungalore in the South and Chavakkadu in the North, both within the administrative jurisdiction of the district of Trichur. The martyrdom of Sardar in itself has become a landmark in time referring to the birth of a new sentiment that binds together these villages in a unity even after its administrative utility was completely exhausted. One good illustration of this point is the Nattika *Firka* Rural Development Bank that operates even today and credits as its founders the Communist comrades who led the Communist party along with Sardar Gopalakrishnan in its dog years of underground activism. The Nattika *firka* in the name of the Bank serves today a mnemonic function even though its regional make-up does not pertain to what it used to be prior to the days of the formation of the State of Kerala. Through this function of mnemonic invocation an identity is perpetuated that demarcates the region as witness to a specific historic event –that of the martyrdom– that marked its passage from colonial rule to Sovereignty and Independence.

The local literati¹⁸, in its efforts to link this land with the larger picture of a Kerala State takes it back to the historic times when Kodungalore was the flourishing port of

¹⁸ See the appendix for a social history of the *manappuram* written by a resident of the Edathiruthy village; a close associate of Gopalakrishnan; a reputed theater artist and a veteran Communist.

¹⁹ A novel was written on the martyrdom that we study in our thesis. The preface to this novel, was written by a former Chief Minister of Kerala, C Achutha Menon. He writes about the *manappuram* thus, (in translation from malayalam), “From the Kodungalore ferry in the South to the Chettuvai ferry in the North, between the western (Arabian) sea and the connolly canal; filled with white sands lie the land called in local parlance *manappuram* and in the revenue terms Nattika *firka*” (Gopalan:1985).

Kerala mentioned in many an ancient text as the Muziris wherfrom the *Chera* kings are believed to have reigned. It is remarkable that with the sea inlets or backwaters of Kodungalore in the South and Chettuva in the North and with the Connolly canal towards the East the strip of land easily forms a homogenous expanse of coastal geography. Kodungalore, though did not form a part of the Malabar province was geographically ensconced by surrounding waters along with Nattika *firka* to form a separate land mass called in the local coinage, *manappuram*, meaning the “ land covered with sand”. This serves as a paradigm in relating to the history of Kerala when the *Chera* kings made the first ever unified rule over the land of Kerala. The *Chera* rule was interrupted according to legends when the last *Chera* ruler converted to Islam and left on a pilgrimage for Mecca leaving the land to be ruled by the different *naduvazhis* of Kerala.

The ancient history of this land is thus deemed as lying scattered in the various songs of old Tamil (*pazhamtamilpattu*)(the context and the possible nature of the origin of these poems were discussed above),or in the literature of the Sangham period. The Sangham period reigned in its supreme when its classics like the *pathittupatthu*, *akanaanooru*, *puranaanooru* and *chilappathikaaram* were written. *Chilappathikaram* narrates the story of the goddess Kannaki when she was only a subject under the rule of the *Chera* kings, but unleashed the rage of her widowhood on the kings when her innocent husband was unjustifiably executed by them. It was her fury that destroyed a whole empire and her cross-over to the Western Ghats to live the life of an ascetic formed the story of this classic. Kannaki is a very popular deity in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala of today. *Chilappathiakram* written by Ilamko adikal, and *pathittupathu*,*akanaanooru*,*purananooru*²⁰ etc., written by several other poets give numerous citations of various places, the names of which resound names of certain places belonging to the *manappuram* of today. Such and other evidences that were gained from excavations in and around Kodungalore have led certain historians to

²⁰ These poems written in Tamil are eulogies of the *Chera* kings. In the *pathittupathu* ten poets praise ten *chera* kings.

wonder if the place called Vanchi mentioned in these ancient texts as the capital of the *Chera* kings, is the Thiruvanchikkulom near the present day Kodungalore²¹.

The *manappuram* is surrounded from all sides by water /water bodies. To the west is the Arabian sea. In the North is the estuary-an inlet of the sea cutting into the land-of Chettuva, and in the South similarly, the estuary of Kottappuram. In the east was an intricate system of waterways, consisting of numerous small streams and rivulets that drained into the sea at different points, which during the time of H.V.Connolly, who became the District Magistrate of Malabar, in 1848, were connected together to create a larger water way called the Connolly Canal, that also made water transport possible between the northern and the southern reaches of the district... With the construction of the Canal, it formed a natural boundary separating Nattika from the contiguous areas of Cochin, in the east. This natural demarcation of its boundaries forged a feeling of local identity, that is of great importance in determining the way in which the theater of politics –of the martyrdom- that we shall examine in detail later ,is commemorated annually.

Kodungalore is also the scene of the spectacular festival of *Bharani* that comes in the Malayalam calendar month of *minam* or march every year. It is a festival that is one of its kind in the whole State. All castes irrespective of lower or higher are allowed to enter the temple on the day of the festival to abuse and desecrate the goddess Bhagavathi , the consort of Siva ,the reigning deity of the temple. The pilgrims come from long distances singing abusive songs about the goddess and attired in the color of red, swinging the sacrificial sword and cocks that are sacrificed for the goddess. Everything is done ritualistically. The first person to desecrate the shrine shall be a chief of the fisherman caste. The cocks are then slaughtered and sacrificed. Both men and women dance in frenzied states of possession who after paying vows to the goddess advances to a Nair who serves gifts to the devotees in the form of either arrack or toddy and not the usual holy water or flowers. Sarah Caldwell has identified in this annual pilgrimage the epitome of the *sakta* cult, as a conduit for the

²¹ *Keralacharithram* (Menon:1967).

psychological ambivalence the Kerala society has experienced with respect to its powerful institution of matriliney that had to struggle in different ways to grapple with the changing social history of the land(Caldwell, 1999:277-78).

This festival is often cited also as an extant practice pointing out the common heritage of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the past. The goddess *Bhagavathi* is identified with the goddess *Kannaki* of the legends of Tamil Nadu. *Kannaki* the heroine of the Tamil *Sangham* classic, *Chilappathikaram*, born in the *Chola* country (present Tamil Nadu) dishonoured and made a widow left Madura and reached the *Sahya* hills in the *Chera* country (present Kerala) where under a tree, she gave up her ghost. The mountaineers who saw her there took her for some deity and reported the matter to *Chera Chenkuttavan*, the then reigning monarch of Kerala. With the firm belief that she was an *avatar* (incarnation) of *Kali*- a mother Goddess- *Chenkuttavan*, decided to consecrate her image in the royal temple at Kodungallure (Pillai , (in) Pillai (ed.) 1955).

At a distance of about thirty kilometers north of Kodungallure, in the erstwhile Taluk of *Ponnani* (the same Taluk as Nattika *firka*)is the temple of *thirunavaya* on the banks of the river *nila* or *bharathappuzha*, there occurred the most famous of all festivals of Kerala the *mahamaghom* or the *mamankom*, every twelve years. It was a festival with a ritual of unparalleled consequence for all of Kerala that has since the coming of the British gradually waned out and disappeared. As Logan reports on the origins of this festival, it was an ancient custom for the Zamorin (ajah of Calicut who ruled over Malabar when Tippu attacked) to reign but twelve years and no longer. If he died before his term he was saved from the ceremony of cutting his own throat on a public scaffold erected for that purpose. Thereafter his body was burned with all pomp and ceremony and a new Zamorin was elected by the Grandees. This custom was eventually laid aside and in its place a new ceremony instituted. At the end of twelve years of rule, the Zamorin pitched his tent in a spacious plain on the empty river deck of the *nila* at *thirunavayi* and a great feast is celebrated for ten or twelve days, at the end of which feats any four of the guests that have a mind to gain the Zamorin's crown, fought through thirty or forty thousand of the Zamorin's guards and made bids

on his life. He that succeeded, succeeded to the throne of the Zamorin and he that perished- their corpses were customarily kicked by elephants as far as the brink of a well that was constructed beforehand into which they were tumbled and the well filled up with debris.

At each recurring festival all feudal ties were broken and the parties assembled in public conclave at *Tirunavayi* readjusted at such times all existing relations amongst themselves. Logan says, that down to the year 1743, when the *mahamaghom* was last held, the Zamorins were present at this festival as the suzerains of all Keralam, including Travancore, which as a Malayali State only attained to the first rank shortly after the date of the last *mahamaghom* festival. The practice itself must have begun with the *Perumals* before the start of the kollam era or the Malayali calendar believed to have been founded by Sankaracharyar (in 825AD), the Brahmin ascetic who traveled all over India and revived the philosophy of the Vedanta in dialogue with mainly the Buddhists and the Jains²².

When the last *Perumal* set out for Mecca and left the country without a ruler the duty of celebrating it devolved on the rajah of *Valluvanadu*. Thus it continued till the twelfth or thirteenth century AD when the power of the *Zamorins* through Muhammedan influence and arms and trade became supreme in all of Keralam .

²² There are contestations to the effect of deciding the exact origins of the Kollam era. According to P.Sundaram Pillai (1943), one of the pioneering archaeologists and historians of Kerala, it begins in the month of August in Travancore and in the month of September in Malabar. This in itself is a matter of great ambiguity in the way of historically locating the time and premises of its origin. Dr.Gundert- the German missionary who composed the first ever Malayalam lexicon- suggested that the year was begun to commemorate the foundation of a Siva temple about which no archaeological or textual evidence is available. Logan's judgement ordains the beginning of the Kollam era with the exile of the last of the *Perumals*. His conversion to Islam and abdication of throne to proceed on a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he died and was cremated in the Kollam year 0006(AD 831), is cited by Logan as its historical premise. This story is based on an oral tradition. There is a written record as well, of the events of *Perumal*'s abdication of his throne. This comes from the *Periyapurana* (a compendium of legends about the people and places of Kerala dating from the 12th century),which describes the ascension to heaven of a *Chera* prince, thus enduring the mythical disappearance of the *Perumal*. Another possible suggestion is that ,it is a modification of another older era, current in upper India, under the name of *Saptarshi* or *Sastramvatsara*. The possibility and number of suggestions is so many, that it is not a historical fact that may be easily concluded, the origins of which is still under debate.

On the *mahamaghom* the Zamorin wielded the sword of the last *Perumal* and defended himself from the *chavers*, the elect of four Nair households in *Valluvanadu*. They partake of their last meal on earth at the house of the temple representative of their chieftain, and then decked with garlands and smeared with ashes and may be joined by Nair or Moppilah or other arms-bearing caste men- for all who so wish may fall in with sword and target in support of the men who have elected to die. Thus armed they rush at the spearmen guarding the Zamorin who sat on a raised laterite platform by the bank of the river *Nila*, wielding the sword left by the *pallibaanaperumal* or the last *perumal* before the abdication of his throne. As Logan quoting a witness account from his wealth of archives, describes the scene thus, “ they (the *chavers*) wind and turn their bodies as if they had no bones; casting them forward, backward, high and low, even to the astonishment of the beholders. But notwithstanding the suppleness of their limbs notwithstanding their skill and dexterity in their weapons, the result is inevitable, and is prosaically recorded in the chronicle thus: “The number of *Chavers* who came and died early morning the next day after the elephant began to be adorned with gold trappings-being *Putumanna Kantur Menon* and followers- were 18” (Logan, 1995:167).

The presence of Kodungalore to the South and Thirunavayi to the North accords a historically and culturally distinguished character to *manappuram*. This is more of a nostalgic sentiment in the present day and hangs thickly in the air , now that the ancient glory of these places –Kodungalore as a port of trade and Thirunavayi as the site of Mahamaghom -is a thing of the past and Kodungalore’s position as *Chera* capital is a matter of contention²³.

²³ It has to be added that the event of *mahamaghom*, a ritual that resembles the North West American potlatches, at the temple of Tirunavaya on the banks of the river *Nila*, is a matter yet to be supported by archaeological evidences. The eye-witness account of Master Johnson given by Logan(1995) is the closest that we have come to so far in terms of ascertaining the existence of this festival. It is certainly mentioned in many a folk song of the Northern Kerala or elsewhere, and is also part of the popular culture, today, that even movies are made on it. Our intention is to point to the landmark monuments (such as the banks of *Nila*) that surround the *firkas* giving it the dramatic air, which is what the ritual of martyrdom commemorations is essentially about.

The tragic-nostalgic character of these temple rituals found a strong endorsement in *manappuram* in the death of Sardar Gopalakrishnan which fact we shall see in detail at a later stage. Within this schema of *difference* or ideological stratagem of forming a distinctive identity for the *manappuram* the village of Edathiruthy plays an anchor role through its claim as the home village of the martyr, Sardar Gopalakrishnan.

Earliest written records on Edathiruthy are found in William Logan's Malabar Manual. The appendix to the Manual holds descriptive accounts to all the Taluks of the Malabar district. Here under the title of *Ponnani* Taluk the village Edathiruthy is mentioned as an important Syrian Christian settlement with a church as well. To put it succinctly it is for the presence of the Syrian Christian community and its church that the village first attracts historic attention²⁴. This community of Syrian Christians even though very small when compared to the majority population of Hindus, were nonetheless influential land owners in the village, as we proceed to see.

There were no Nambuthiri landlords in the village from the British period onwards. The British had made fundamental alterations in the system of landownership and administration when they took control over Malabar following their defeat of Tippu Sultan. In the village of Edathiruthy prior to the beginning of the British rule we find extreme chaos reigning within. The erstwhile landlords of the *kadalayi* and *uthroli* mana (Nambuthiri household) that formed a part of the Peruvanam gramam who

²⁴ The Syrian Christians of Kerala form an ancient community of Christians that pre-date the arrival of the colonial forces, 1498. The Christians of Kerala believe, they were converts from the Hindu upper-caste Nambuthiris who were baptized by no less than one of Jesus Christ's twelve apostles (St. Thomas) himself. Being a very ancient community of Christians, they have had a chequered history marked by the different colonial occupations of the land by Christians of the Roman Catholic Church. The cultural milieu from which evolved the life style and the social organization of these Christians have been studied by Susan Visvanathan (1993). It offers a brilliant example of the fusion of the symbolic worlds of religions of very divergent contexts in terms of their origin, which in a common shared living space gave shape to sociologically and historically unique phenomena/facts. This is true as well with the Moslems of Kerala, called the *moplahs*, distinct from the rest of the Muslims in the sub-continent by virtue of the Arab descent that they claim. The story of the *Perumal* who converted to Islam and went to Mecca is one of the founding myths of the Kerala Muslims. It is even argued that the beginning of the Malayalam calendar marks his distribution of the kingdom amongst his vassals and tributaries before setting on the journey to Mecca, in the year 825AD (Logan, 1995:196). Leela Dube's work on the Muslim community of Laccadives also point to the dearness with which they preserve the memory of the fact of their conversion from Hinduism (Dube, 1960). For an extensive coverage of the different religions of a foreign origin, that settled down and prospered in Kerala, one can refer to either Iyer(1909, 1912) or Thurston (1909).

owned all the land in the village had fled the village for fear of a raid by Tippu. These Nambuthiris managed their land through their dependents, the senior-most of which were presumably the Blahayil mooppil Nairs. There were also Ezhava ,Pulaya, Paraya and Vettuva dependents for these landlords. Though there was a significant Syrian Christian presence from earlier days, it is difficult to say their *locus standi* vis-avis the Nambuthiris in the village. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that their status resembled that of the Nairs in being lease-cultivators of the land from the Nambuthiris²⁵. In the scenario following the exodus of the Nambuthiris they must have wrested total rights to ownership, either through negotiations and power-sharing with the Nairs or through direct collaboration with the occupying dispensation of the British or both. The power-sharing arrangement with the Nairs in the village that they had arrived at is discussed in the light of an incident that took place in the village, in the 1940s further down.

Cultivation of paddy formed the main source of the income of the people. But with the exile of the Nambuthiri landlords, there followed an uncertainty in the state of things to follow. The Moppillas was the only community that felt strengthened due to such pandemonium. According to legends²⁶, the circumstances allowed for the growth by plunder of two bandits called Ichakkan and Kunjalippillai. The Blahayil Mooppil Nairs also were at a loss about what to do in the state of uncertainty over the whole land of the Zamorin. It is to this scenario, that the British make an entry. Upon this the

²⁵ The Land Survey Records of 1905 (the first and till date the last of its kind for all of Malabar), show the names of many a Christian landlord. Families like *Chalisseril*, *Thadikkaran* etc. are seen to have owned large plots of land in the village. This document along with the testimony of some landless workers for the Christian landlords, help us reach this conclusion. Besides, the community and its church find its mention also in the Manual prepared by the District Collector of Malabar, William Logan (1886).

²⁶ This legend comes from the same source mentioned earlier in connection with the naming of the village, the ageing respondent Kollarayil Kochappu, by name. Such instances have been reported from elsewhere in Southern Malabar too. Panikkar(1989) record the deeds of Unni Mutha Muthappan, Chemban Pokker and Athan Gurukkal who held the reins of revenue and administration following the retreat of Tippu Sultan. In the year 1800, the last of the two mentioned above, were *darogas*(police chiefs) of Ernad and Cheranadu taluks (ibid:57).Panikkar links them with a series of opposition that the British Government faced in Malabar from independent warlords eventually transforming into organized peasants. William Logan , has recorded these 'outrages' in Malabar Manual(1995:554-559). K.Madhavan Nair(1987) a prominent Congressman from the district of Malabar also has recorded these uprisings, that culminated in the moplah revolt of 1921.

Blahayil Nairs seize the opportunity to capture the two bandits and send them to the gallows with the help of the British. After this is done, the land that belonged to the Nambuthirir illams passes under the Blahayil ownership and a cycle of revenue and administrative reforms are initiated by the British.

When the *amsam* system was instated, the *adhikari* that took office in the village of Edathiruthy was the Blahayil Mooppil Nair with whom it remained as a hereditary office. Even though the Nair was the *adhikari* of the Edathiruthy *amsam* that consisted of the *desams* or villages of *etamuttam*, *kazhimbram*, *perumpatappa*, *chentrappinny* and *edathiruthy*, he had his estate mainly in edathiruthy *desam* only whereof he was also the naduvazhi. With new system, the powers of the *naduvazhi* became far more absolute than earlier and he earned many jurisdictional rights superceding the extinct body of arbitrators – the *kuttam*.

Thus the abolition of the guild system was one of the effective results of the administrative reforms introduced by the British which did not stop at that. It also replaced a collegiate authority for purpose of arbitration with a single office, that of *adhikari*. This had its repercussions in Edathiruthy village as elsewhere. The Blahayil Nair family became autocratic in deciding the destiny of their labourers, the *cherumar* later known as *Harijans* when the National Movement began with its promises of freedom and equality. We shall explore these aspects in further detail when we discuss the implications of the National and Social movements for the village.

We have already seen the story or legend according to which the control of the Blahayil Nairs were legitimized in the village. Now, we shall see a social practice²⁷ by which they continued to ascertain such hegemony as ordained them as the landlords of most of the land in the village. About the Nambuthiris mention has been already made- how their *illams* or households lie in ruins today. About the Nairs also mention was made in regard to the way in which they won their authority to virtually rule over the village from the British. They perpetuated this right through various hegemonic practices and beliefs one of which, we have discussed as the way in which the village

²⁷ The source of this information also is the same as above; Kollarayil Kochappu.

received its name. Another was the ceremony of *koithoottu*. This was a festival celebrated annually after the harvest to show the generosity of the landlords. After the crops were gathered from the fields belonging to the landlord family the harvest of the field for the *koithoottu* was begun. The harvested grains were collected in bundles and heaped together in the middle of the field by the *parias* and the *pulayas* who formed the majority of the landless peasant laborers for the Blahayil lands. Thereafter the head of the family and the proprietor of the lands ,as a sign of his uncontested title to the land, lay hands on one ,just a single one of the bundles which he would take home with him. The rest of the harvest was all to be distributed in charity to all that were gathered for the occasion. The state of poverty and acute need for grains in the village being what it was the number of villagers, that gathered for these occasions was very large. The mere bulk of the gathering gave the occasion the color of a festival. The reputation of the festival also traveled to the nearby places, so that a section of the deprived from the nearby villages also joined the *koithoottu* festival. Literally the word means, "to harvest to feed". The act on the part of the Blahayil landlords may be analyzed as an act of hegemony thus asserting the hierarchy of caste positions in the village. Herein we find an interesting elucidation of Gramsci's ideas and how hegemony only goes to serve sustainability of the power and influence of the ruling class. The hegemonic act, often displayed the generative power of the ritual (Turner, 1986:93); but, perpetuated faith in the moral character of social relations and bound hierarchy with conviction (Taussig, 1986: 288). As we proceed to examine in chapter 5, the martyrdom commemoration of Sardar Gopalakrishnan, by the Communists in its ritualistic dimensions challenged this hegemony which was a hallmark of landlordism in the village, and subsequently with the efforts of the Communist Government in the year 1963, brought down the institution as a whole, by means of the Land Reforms Act. The Syrian Christians in the village were also powerful landlords, but in the ritual hierarchy of the village as a whole they did not find a place, owing to the totalizing hegemony of the Nairs. But with respect to the management of their own land and their dependents, they enjoyed near to absolute freedom. The concentration of the Syrian Christians was more intense towards the market bordering the Connolly canal

skirting the village in the East, with the reason that they were mainly traders apart from being landlords. An ancient Syrian Christian church mentioned in Logan's Manual stands overlooking the canal, in the streets around which they formed their main habitat.

The Ezhavas though in large numbers present, were mainly the middle cultivators, who leased the land from the Nairs and paid an annual tithe or *pattam* after the harvest. They were also allowed to own their own plots, but depending on their ritual position within the caste. Such landowners were mainly called *thandars* and enjoyed *defacto* jurisdictional powers amongst the disputes within the Ezhava community even under the rule of the British. The Land Survey records of the village dating 1905, show the names of many an Ezhava landholder. The landholding was also linked to the foundation of an ancestry or a *taravadu* rooted in the land and called a *kudiyiruppu*. These plots in later times with the rise in economic status of the family in most cases were transformed into a temple, with significant place to patriarchal ancestor cults, called *muthappan*, nonetheless having as the presiding deity the *bhagavathy*, an incarnation of the popular mother Goddess *Kali* all over India known by various names such as *Devi,Durga,Mohini* etc.(Preston,1980:14, Caldwell, 1999)²⁸.

²⁸ The cult of the mother goddess known as the *sakta* cult, is a significant theme for discussion later. But, it is essential to know the mythological background of the cult, the implications of which for the martyrdom rites are discussed in chapter 5.

The *sakta* cult originates from the mythology of Sati. Sati was the daughter of the king Daksha and married to lord Siva. King Daksha was not keeping good relations with his son-in-law. So, when Daksha conducted a big *yagna*, he invited all gods and goddesses, except lord Shiva. But Sati insisted on participating in the *yagna*, even though not invited. Thus Sati, leaving behind her husband, came to her father's home. Seeing that, her father had made sacrifices to all gods and goddesses except lord Siva, she jumped into the *havankundu*(fire place of the *yagna*) and died. Upon getting the news of Sati's death, the Gans(disciples) of Siva, destroyed Daksha's *yagna* and lord Siva finally came and killed Daksha and with a very heavy heart took away the body of his consort Sati. Siva then wandered the world, carrying the dead body on his shoulder. At this all gods and goddesses, took fright and approached lord Vishnu. To put a stop to the sufferings of lord Siva, lord Vishnu, cut the dead body of Sati into pieces. The different pieces of Sati's body, fell to the earth at 51 places spread from Kamakhya in the East to the Hinglaj(Baluchistan) in the West and from Guheswari(Nepal) in the North to Indrakshi(Srilanka) in the South. And wherever it fell, it became a sacred place for the *saktas* known as *saktipitha*. The spot where the *yoni*(genital organ) of the mother goddess fell, came to be regarded as Kamakhya. Sati is also known by other names- Kali, Tara, Khodshi, Bhubneswari, Chhinmasta, Dhumabati, Bagalamukhi, Kamala, Matangi, Bhairbi.(Jha, 1991:75-89)

The Vettuvas, the Pulayas and the Parayas, being the chief agriculturists and the cultivators of the land, lived closest to the fields. They had no right to ownership of land. They were dependents of the Blahayil Nairs or the Syrian Christian landlords mainly. Some of them also lived in the plots of the Ezhava lessee labouring under their supervision. The rewards for their labour were always at the subsistence level, and their social position at the lowest level of the caste hierarchy did not allow them to have any place of worship or partake of any portion of the social surplus.

Artisans, craftsmen, washermen, barbers and other castes were also a part of the village economy, and played an equally important part in defining the socio-economic character of the village as any other. They had a fairly large share of the leisure and surplus of the village economy than the *pulayas* or the *vettuvas*. They were not directly related to the land for their sustenance and sought their sustenance in the services that they offered to the members of different castes.

Notwithstanding the unchallenged scrutiny of the Syrian Christian landlords over their dependents, the ritual hegemony that the Nair landlords exercised over the village was of such a kind that the Communist movement identified it as its primary antagonist²⁹. The *Valluvancaudu tara* or the habitat of all the labourers for the Balhayil Nairs bore the brunt of the police persecution against the Communists³⁰. All the *Harijans* in the *tara* were branded Communists and repeatedly harassed by the police, on different occasions. The police notoriously colluded with the landlords in these days for “uprooting communism and the Communists”.

The legend of Ichakkan and Kunjalippillai need to be taken as a final victory over Moslem landlords in the village. The events that led to the spread of this legend may

²⁹ Communicated to us through Sathish a young (25-27 years of age) activist of the CPI(M), whose family hailed from the same *tara*.

³⁰ Regulation XI of 1816 had placed the village police under the heads of villages adding on the coercive powers of the State to the traditional authority of the *adhikari*. There were complaints late into the nineteenth century that the *adhikaris* were a law unto themselves and rarely, if ever, reported offences to magistrates, preferring instead to exercise their own authority. Moreover, by the mid 1880s, it became one of the cardinal principles of police recruitment that lower castes were to be chosen only where other recruits were unobtainable. In Malabar, Nairs came to comprise two-thirds of the constabulary by 1920 (Menon:1994:16).

be read like this. The British inherited in Malabar a land revenue system that was left by the Tippu Sultan. The Mysoreans made their revenue settlement with the *kanakkars* and not the *janmis* for the reason that many of the *janmis* had fled owing to the terror inspired by the ferocious administrators of Hyder Ali and Tippu. The ones that remained never trusted in these officers and desisted from entering into any contracts with them. During the time of the Mysorean Land Settlement the *janmis* got only what were given to them as charity. The revenue was settled between the *kaanakkars* and the government. When the British made their revenue settlements, they recognized the *janmis* as the sole proprietors of the land and thought of the *kaanakkars* as lessees of the land having no proprietary rights over the land and liable to evacuation at the end of every *kaanam* tenure(usually twelve years).

The flight of the *janmis* from Malabar had opened opportunities for the *moplahs* to secure full *janmam* over the lands. But what they did in fact was to advance small sums of money and acquire large *kaanam* rights. When the British came out with their first settlement in the year 1793, these *kaanakkars* who were customarily thought of as the co-proprietors of the land, were made into mere lessees. This change of status affected the land settlement adversely and a state of anarchy followed in terms of collection of taxes and the distribution of the produce. Thus from 1792 till 1802 the district was in a rebellions and organized robberies and in this the *moplahs* took a conspicuous part (Logan, 1995:185,552).

In the context of the story that speaks about the arrest of Ichchakkan and Kunjali this chain of events can be seen to hold water. The near to total absence of powerful *moplah* landlords as opposed to the Nair or Syrian Christians in the Edathiruthy village may be seen as a result of their conviction and subsequent hanging after which a new settlement was arrived at between the Blahayil Nairs and the British making the former the *adhikaris* of the village for the coming generations. The land settlement thus served the diplomatic function of ensuring the PaxBrittannia in the village.

This was the scene of the society in the village when the National and Social movements started a transformative phase that took the entire structure of social

relationships along with it and sought to reshape it in idealistic images that arose out of a new desire called the Nation State.

The National and Social Movements and its Implications for the *firka* of Nattika

The essential background to our study begins with the beginnings of the National movement in Kerala. At the point of departure for our study a unified State of Kerala was a non-entity. It lay distributed in the centrally administered district of Malabar, of the Madras State, and the princely States of Travancore and Cochin governed indirectly by the British through a Resident. In terms of an ingenious political organization, it formed a motley. The National movement but sought to change this and initiated the processes of organization at various levels, amongst various sections and along different lines. One of the earliest stirrings came in the town of Calicut, which was also the moufassil or district headquarters of district Malabar, following the founding of the Indian National Congress in the year 1885. A District Congress Committee was organized in 1910 and a unit of the Home Rule League was founded in 1915 (Kutty, 1985:23).

The catalyst was the beginning of the Non Co-operation and the *khilafat* movements in 1921. Elsewhere in Malabar, they were peasant movements of great drive and such force that it resulted in the *moplah* riots. There were clashes between the army and the rebels in *Malappuram*, *Manjeri*, *Pandikkadu*, *Nilambur*, *Parappanangadi* and other places. The landless peasantry of these taluks that mainly came from the Muslim community spearheaded the movement. The District Collector of Malabar, E.F.Thomas was in command of the army. The riots had effectively stopped the running of the British writs in the Taluks of *Ernad*, *Valluvanad*, *Ponnani* and *Kozhikode* Taluks for a period of almost a year. A Martial law declaration was in effect in these Taluks, till the rebellion was finally crushed by February, 1922(Nair, 1987:9)³¹. The revolt had very little impact in the Nattika *firka*, the southernmost tip

³¹ K.Madhavan Nair, who wrote the book *Malabar kalaapam* or the malabar revolt, was a prominent Congress leader who actively participated in the khilafat and non co-operation movements.Immediately

of Malabar in the *Ponnani* Taluk. In Nattika it was restricted to a few arrests that the police made of a few *khilafat* leaders, who were identified by one of the respondents³² as Koorikkuzhy Ahmed, Abdul Qadir Master, '*Khilafat*'³³ Nambuthiri and Moideen kutty Sahib, in the years 1921-22. Still the events further north and the consequences of the movements and Gandhiji's sudden stopping of the non co-operation following incidents of violence in Malabar and more so in the north Indian village of Chowri-Chowra left its impressions on the future course of political transformations in the village³⁴.

The Nagpur Conference of the Congress in December 1920 had resolved to divide all of India along linguistic lines and organize the Party on these lines. This resolution united Travancore, Cochin and Malabar together to form a singular unit of Kerala. This demanded of the Party workers the added responsibility of establishing Congress committees in the various *amsams* (the revenue division below *firka* and comprising of three villages or *desains*). Soon the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee was founded (1920-21). It practically substituted the Malabar District committee that was formed under the Madras Presidency committee. This coincided with the founding of the daily *mathrubhumi*, in 1923, that also served as the important mouthpiece for

after the revolt of 1921, he began writing a book on it, mainly based on his experiences, but could not complete it. Parts of it was serialized in *Mathrubhumi*. The book was eventually published posthumously by his wife(Panikkar, 1989:ix-x).

³² The respondent here was Mohammed Yumus, who was also son of Abdul Qadir Master who was arrested during the Khilafat; Non Co-operation movements. He was a strong activist of the CPI and was a member of the *manappuram* committee of the Party, when the incident involving Gopalakrishnan's death happened.

³³ Khilafat was the epithet by which the revolt of 1921 was popularly referred to in Kerala (Panikkar, 1989:x).

³⁴ According to Oommen(1985), the *moplah* rebellion had lesser impact in Southern Malabar compared to Central-North Malabar where it was intense, because the *moplah* peasantry of South Malabar was constituted mainly of *verumpattomdars*(second level lease cultivators who owed their debts to the *kaanomdar* and not to the *janmi*) and their demand centred around the prevention of eviction and payment of compensation for improvements made in the land(ibid:38).In the four taluks of Malabar-Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and Kozhikkode, where the revolt was strong, there was a large concentration of *moplah* peasants who were agrestic serfs. This according to Panikkar(1989) was due to conversion from the Hindu lower castes, mainly Cheruman, Pulaya, Vettuva and Mukkuvan castes(ibid:51-52).Land-owning *moplahs* were few in comparison to the Hindus.In 1903, of the 103 principal *janmis* called by Thomas Warden, a District official for consultation, only 8 were *moplahs*, 1 ezhava and the rest Hindu upper castes. Besides, in 1921 60% of the *moplah* population of the District concentrated in the taluks of Ernad, Valluvanad and Ponnani(ibid:53).

Nationalist publications in Malabar. The founding editor of the daily and the founding secretary of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee were both K.P.Kesava Menon, a barrister at the Madras high court who terminated his practice to return to Kozhikkode and take up the Nationalist cause in his home soil. Another Nationalist daily that began publication from Kozhikkode in the year 1924 was *Al-Ameen*, under the auspices of the Nationalist leaders Abdur Rehman and Moidu Maulavi (Kutty,1985:25).

The radical restructuring of the relations of ownership of land voiced by the *moplah* riots resurfaced in a milder form in the agitation of the Malabar *Kudiyan Sangham* in the 1920s. The structure of feudalism was not uniform throughout Malabar. It varied from village to village. Our analyses of the Edathiruthy village shows that the authority of Nair landlords and the relations over land were guided by what has been termed as *taravadu* complex, a phenomenon, we shall analyze more closely in subsequent pages. The lull that followed the *Khilafat* and the Non Co-Operation Movements was the period, when the middle-land owning peasantry called the *kaanamdars* intensified their struggle for greater rights over land. The *kaanamdars* constituted only a link in the feudal structure, and they never worked their lands. They were supervisors of land, who occupied the land on a mortgage (*kaanam*) further leased out the land to the *verumpattakkar* for working the land. They collected periodical tithes or levies from the *verumpaattakar* who in their turn worked the land either themselves or by employing the landless serfs. The majority of *kaanamdars* were from the caste of Nairs, who had taken up English education, as opposed to the Nambuthiri *janmis* who considered it anathema (Radhakrishnan , 1989:76).

The activities enjoyed much less popularity than the *Khilafat* or the Non Co-operation movements and was mainly carried out through legislative advocacy by introducing resolutions and legislation in the Madras Legislative Council and through meetings with the Government officials at higher executive levels appraising them of the need for land reforms. The Malabar *Kudiyan Sangham* (Malabar Tenants' Union) was also founded in 1922 at Pattambi that co-ordinated these activities and also published a newspaper, *Kudiyan* (Tenant).The main grievance of the *kanakkar* was the arbitrary

rights of eviction that the *janmi* who had leased out the land to them for cultivation held over his lands).The Malabar Tenancy Act that finally took effect in 1930, still left out the question of rights to ownership of land for the *verumpattakkars* that constituted the majority of the peasantry in Malabar, while it made the *kanamdaars* veritable owners of the leased lands making him/her immune to evictions and arbitrary levies imposed by the *jenmi*³⁵. The leadership of the agitation came from the educated middle- class, who made effective use of the newspapers- both English and Malayalam- for voicing their demands, and making representations before judicial and executive bodies for the concession of their demands. This ensured that the movement was localized in and around the premises of the Calicut town, which left the rural areas including Nattika *firka* largely untouched.

Following the *Khilafat* movement Congress resorted to various propaganda measures to popularize itself, amongst the masses. The *Kudiyen* agitation was something that found mobilization only amongst the educated sections of the middle landowners whose activities were mainly concentrated around Kozhikkode. In the meanwhile, the Congress leaders made frequent visits to the various Taluks, followed by processions with garlanded photographs of the Nationalist leaders. They organized events like hoisting the National flags, and the singing of the *prabhatabheri* a Nationalist rhyme. Vidwan P. Kelu Nair wrote plays and skits that popularized the Congress in the various stage performances all over the District. A couple of them were *padukappattabhishekam* and *pakkanarcharitham*(Kutty,1985:45). References to the staging of such dance -dramas find mention in the novel written inspired by Sardar Gopalakrishnan, called *Innaley* by E.V.Gopalan.

The 1930s changed all of that. The Guruvayur *satyagraha* and the salt *satyagraha* were two significant events that initiated a series of political changes in the region. The former was an agitation to make temple entry possible for the lower castes and the

³⁵ Though not of immense political significance, the *Kudiyen* agitation, according to EMS Nambuthirippadu, gave the Malabar peasants ‘the first elements of class consciousness- the consciousness that they should unite as a class and fight their enemy, the *janmi*’ (Radhakrishnan,1985: 89)

latter was part of the Civil Disobedience movement begun by Congress led by Gandhi. Gandhi had by then grown into a singular representative of the peasantry and enjoyed unequalled popularity in their minds as the *mahatma* (Chandra.B. 1987:77-80). The Salt *Satyagraha*, though actively organized elsewhere in Malabar, the riot areas of the 1921 uprising were left out(Gopalankutty,1985:57), the Congress leadership fearing the possibility of another break out. Still, the above-mentioned novel carries references to the events associated with the Salt *Satyagraha* in Nattika *firka* also, notwithstanding the fact that the *firka* formed a part of the *Ponnani* Taluk, one of the worst affected during the Riot days of 1921. This was clear evidence of the politically hyper sensitive nature of the region.

In 1931, the Kerala Provincial Congress started the Guruvayur *satyagraha* (1931-34)under the leadership of K.Kelappan with the blessings of Gandhi. The *satyagraha* was to open the temple gates for Hindus of all castes. The driving force behind this and the Vaikom *satyagraha* (1924-25) was mainly the abolition of untouchability. It mobilized a newly educated section of people to look deeper into some of the social evils that were practiced in Kerala and work towards a culture of hospitality and brotherhood amongst the communities and castes. These movements laid the ground for the spread of Communist ideology within the leadership and ranks of the Congress to a substantial extent. Gandhi's campaigns against untouchability had found a familiar and receptive ground in Kerala as evidenced by these *satyagras*.

It was upon Gandhi's insistence, in 1932 that the fast undertaken by the *satyagrahis* to open the temple at Guruvayur for the larger public was broken³⁶. The temple was Malabar's most famous temple, owned by the biggest landowner in the district and yet denied entry to more than four fifths of the Hindu population. The *satyagraha* brought to light some of the intense prejudices that beset the umbrella organization of the Congress. Many of the moderate old guard resigned from the Congress executive when the decision to picket the temple was taken. After the *satyagraha* was over, many of the remaining higher caste Congressmen faded from view, some under social

³⁶ For a more detailed reference on the Guruvayur *satyagraha* see, Menon,1994:106-118.

pressures from family and community, others because of the realization that it was one thing to seek to replace the British with an Indian ruling class, quite another to undermine the sacerdotal foundations of caste and property. On the other hand, many also from the higher castes, became disenchanted with Gandhian methods and Gandhian ideology (Nossiter,1988:47).

These movements left its impact in the form of a new row of leadership comprising of people like P.Krishnapillai, A.K.Gopalan, K.P.Gopalan, Keraleeyan, K.P.R.Gopalan that emerged facing the violence and brutality of the police unleashed in the wake of the political movements of 1930-32 (Nambuthirippadu, 1987:262). It was this new crop of leadership that later grew into the socialist faction of the Congress. The hanging of Bhagat Singh; an icon of the Indian rebellious youth, in 1931, had swung the political climate in the favour of strengthening the radical ranks within the Congress and its further expansion. The meeting between the Bengal radicals, and the convicts of the Lahore Conspiracy case send to South Indian prisons, with the local volunteers of the Congress send to prison following the ten-month long Civil Disobedience, 1931, also helped the exchange of the unrest forming within the Congress all over the country and the need for a political alternative(ibid:264).Such were the beginnings of the socialist party that was the basis for the Left movement in South India.

The Congress Socialist party that held its first conference in 1934 at Kozhikkode became an umbrella organization that sheltered the Communist leanings within the National movement. In 1935 they also began the publication of the party organ *prabhatham* from Shoranur, in Palghat. It was following this that the activities of the Socialists to organize the Communist party in Kerala strengthened. By the end of 1934, the Congress Socialists held five of Kerala's eight places on the All India Congress Committee. According to Nossiter (1988:48), within a year, CSP activists had established committees in most villages outside the Muslim area with reading rooms where the illiterate were taught to read, and areas where Socialist dramas and Socialist football matches were staged. This was also the time when any serious political beginnings towards a Nationalist cause was made in Nattika.

Between the years 1934 and '39, when the Congress Socialist party was first formed and subsequently transformed into the Communist party in the year 1940(Oommen, 1985:83), Kerala witnessed one of the most active periods of political organizations. Separate class outfits of the peasants and the workers (Cochin Labour Union, Labour Brotherhood, North Malabar Labour Union etc., along with approximately eighty local trade unions (Krishnan,1975)); organizations of the teachers, students, women (*Akhila Kerala Mahila Sangham*-1943), and the youth were all formed under the blanket leadership of the Communists during this period. These organizations and outfits were encouraged to work in tandem and in co-operation between themselves which then forged a feeling of unified existence at a mass level like never before.

The Communists started functioning as a distinct group in Nattika in the year 1938-39, even though any public appearance of the party was yet unknown³⁷. The organizers were known outside as the Congress leadership. The ideology of communism was still only taking its roots through the circulation of literature that was banned by the State which included mainly the classical texts of Communism by Marx and Engels and writings of the soviet leadership, mainly Lenin and Stalin. A Malayalam translation of the Communist Manifesto had already appeared in 1912, by the renowned Nationalist *swadesabhimani* Ramakrishna Pillai, from the princely State of Travancore. The circulation of this literature and this ideology came from Kozhikkode and spread through teachers who maintained routine links with the district head quarters at Kozhikkode for official reasons³⁸. Kozhikkode served the function of a centre of co-ordination and distribution of literature. Study classes were organized at frequent intervals that served to add further to the cadre of the party. Here the schools served a

³⁷ According to Sathish a young respondent and a member of the CPI(M) from the village of Chuloor, next to Edathiruthy, it was a man named Deamodaran Pottakkattu, who single-handedly took out the procession of the Communists in the village. Inspired by the Communist literature that he read, he gave full-blown representation to his ideological leanings not merely through these demonstrations, but also through speeches at the village junctions and also through a number of short stories and plays. An organized effort of the comrades were to follow, this heroism, in the process of emerging from the shadow of the Congress.

³⁸ There was a Training centre in Kozhikkode where the had to frequent for taking lessons in teaching organized by the Government and also for refresher courses in different subjects.

significant role. They were the places such classes were held³⁹. P. T. Bhaskaranicker who later went on to play an important role in the Communist party and the democratic movement of *Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad* was initiated into the movement from Perinjanom in Nattika. He was not a native of Nattika, but had come there to teach in the school at Perinjanom, yet grew to be an intrinsic part of the Communist movement in Nattika and very dear to the people of Perinjanom. He also participated in the Calcutta congress of the party that adopted the thesis for armed rebellion.

A very clear opportunity for the Communists to take public action came in the year of 1941, when a terrible rainstorm destroyed the Nattika coast. The fields were flooded, houses felled and trees uprooted rendering the peasants jobless and unable to raise any livelihood from their lands. The Communists were quick to react to their misery especially in the absence of any responsible action from the authorities of the State. Nattika saw the staging of hunger demonstrations under the Communist leadership following this. Hunger demonstrations were undertaken elsewhere too. One such demonstration was led by A K Gopalan from Kasargode to the province capital Madras that had won phenomenal appeal. In Nattika this demonstration was looked by the police with suspicion, because of which they charged cases on 14 of its volunteers. The Court later let them free of any charges. One of the 14 was T K Raman, the Secretary of the *Ponnani* Taluk Committee of the CPI who was assaulted by the police badly in public when he was arrested (Muhammed, 2000:57-58). Notwithstanding the reverses the party continued to help the people every way it could by supplying drugs, clothing and food.

The storm also makes its entry as a facsimile to the strike of the toddy tappers in the village of Anthicaud neighboring Nattika⁴⁰. Toddy tapping ,was an occupation

³⁹ Information provided by T.K.Sankaranarayanan a former activist and now a resident of the village Perinjanom, in the Kodungallur *firka* . He has been also arrested once along with T.K.Raman, when the latter was the CPI Taluk Committee Secretary, late 1940s and early 1950.

⁴⁰ The saga of the struggles of the toddy tappers spear headed by the Toddy Tappers' Union was narrated to us by the veteran Communist activist and early organizer of the toddy tappers, Comrade Sankaran, who is no more. He died of old age in the year 2001. Even months before his death when we met him he was a regular visitor at the Anthicaud Toddy Tappers' Union Office, an organization and a

traditionally handled by the Hindus of the Ezhava caste, which also formed a majority in terms of population. In the village of Anthicaud the situation worsened toward the beginning of the '40s, with the increase in cunning of the landlords and the shrewdness of the toddy contractors. The landlords began reclaiming lands on lease from holders after a year or two of the leases. This made the economic situation of the land-less peasants very unstable and unpredictable. On the other hand, the contractors, were not willing to undertake the sale of the tappers' toddy in full scale. The tappers who produced from their need for material resources a greater amount of toddy, found that the contractor was not willing to take all of his toddy. Beyond that, the contractors also set the inspectors on him to stop him from selling to another person the excess that he tapped from the tree.

These matters were worsened by the storm. The immediate result of the storm was devastation of the plantations. As it happens with natural disasters, the poor were the worst affected. The peasants were answerable for the failure of the crops. The tithe or 'patta' for the year had to be inevitably remitted with the landlord. No exceptions were allowed. The affected trees yielded little toddy. The number of such trees was also huge. A situation arose for the tappers from which the only solace to be found was the gods. But, before long, they founded the Toddy Tappers' Union and on the very day of its founding they entered on a strike⁴¹. The strike went on for years together, at the end of which substantial relief was earned through negotiations with the revenue inspector and the landlords.

movement that he had strived hard along with a lot of others to begin. As the narrative speaks for itself, there was little of any sign of a discrepancy with regard to his speech or memory; notwithstanding his old age.

⁴¹ The Toddy Tappers' Union in the Nattika *sirka* was exceptionally strong that, in some ways it overshadowed the activities of the Karshaka Sanghom, that spearheaded the peasants' movements elsewhere in Malabar. According to Oommen(1985:35-53), the Sanghom enjoys the singular and enviable distinction of being the first and the most powerful of the peasant organizations in the history of Kerala.

The Toddy Tappers' Union played a significant role in organizing the activities of the peasants in Nattika through public demonstrations and strikes. In 1947 along with the coming of the Independence came the ban on production and sale of alcohol in the Madras State. Included in this, was the ban on the sale of toddy. Malabar remaining a district in the Madras State was allowed no exemption. The umpteen number of toddy tappers in the villages after villages were jobless, as a result. The poverty of the years following the war was acute. Social unrest mounted to a never before high in the region. A meeting of the Congress Party convened in the village of Valappadu, neighboring Edathiruthy was witness to an uncommon incident .The toddy workers of the region amassed in a procession and came to the Convention hall to present a memorandum to the top rung leader of the Congress, who had come to attend the meeting. They did not find a responsible ear in the Convention. Instead they were treated by the Police who took them as miscreants disrupting the meeting ,beat them and arrested them.

The intentions of the processionists were very modest and reasonable. The tappers who were driven to the limits of poverty and penury of existence were demanding a concession to be made to them in the government policy of banning the tapping and sale of toddy. The one and only demand that they raised before the leadership of the Congress that was meanwhile in power in the Presidency was to relax the rules against tapping so that they could at least make a living out of the jaggery tapped from the tree in place of the toddy. The situation was impossible once the law against any tapping of the tree had comprehensively taken place. The difference it made to the tappers in terms of their work related only to the raw materials that they used in the act of tapping. Once the inflorescence of the coconut tree was cut open to flow its running sap, then collected and used as toddy the tree would produce no fruits. But coconut was not a rare commodity anywhere in Malabar at that time. The Government having already made a choice on the prevailing ethical grounds in favour of coconuts against toddy, the preference of the tappers was restricted to a single thing. And, this was the jaggery the tree produced. Depending on the raw materials produced in tapping, they could produce either toddy or jaggery from the tree tapped. If they covered the cut

inflorescence with a special kind of mud or a particular kind of leaf ,it produced toddy in its secretions collected over cycles of 24 hours. Instead, if they covered the cut portion with calcium carbonate commonly used to make a chewing mix with tobacco or to furnish the walls of houses, it produced jaggery in place of toddy. It was reacting against these modest demands that the Congress leaders wanted to get the Toddy Tappers Union activists arrested in 1948,not even a year later than the Independence. It only goes to show how certain insensitive rules and laws of the colonial regime that continued into the free country led to the growth of fresh unrest in the country even after the leaving of the British.

The year 1942 was significant for yet another reason, for the Communists. It was the year the World War II took a decisive turn with the Soviet entry into the war on the side of Britain and the rest of the allied forces. The Communists were pushed to the defensive a` la the British role in India and prepared to defend its war interests. This was the year when the rest of the National movement decided to launch its leonine aggression against the British as assailed in the slogan “quit India”. The Communists were left isolated in the whole National movement and alienated from the people. Nattika was still an exception or one of the few exceptions. In Nattika the year 1942 opened with the rainstorm mentioned earlier. Coupled with their rescue and relief efforts the ‘anti-Jap’ ('jap' for japanese) demonstrations popularized the Communists and endeared them to the landless peasants –mostly *Harijans*. One of the verses (in translation) from the slogans in these demonstrations read like this⁴²,

“Let us be prepared for the fight,

The Japanese are already at our gates,

Fight to protect our home and hearth,

Fight to save the chastity of our women”.

⁴² This stanza of a poem; a popular slogan of the Communist rallies in 1942-45, and its context was given to us by Mohammed Younus, whom we already introduced in connection with the Khilafat and the Non Co-Operation movement in the *firka*.

Once the war was over, there was a thaw in the relationships of the Communists and the Congress. The CPI decided to contest the elections to the central and provincial legislatures with the party leadership under P.C.Joshi weighing for parliamentary ways of class struggle. A Telugu comrade was elected to the Madras provincial legislature by the name Venkateswaralu. He was the first elected representative for the CPI in any representative body in India. In Nattika the Communists hosted a welcome for this comrade, on 28th April 1948 , and also observed the ‘Telengana day’, in appreciation of the efforts of the peasants of Telengana that rose against landlordism in a major uprising. On 6th April the Beedi Workers Union of Nattika along with the *Kisan Sangham*, the *Harijan Sangham* and the Communist Party of India had brought out a notice titled *avakaasaprakhyapana* notice or a Declaration of Rights. For the Communist movement in Nattika, this declaration and the observation of the Telengana Day the nature of its conflicts that ensued following the adoption of the Calcutta thesis by the CPI, in the same year, according to Abhimanyu, a veteran Communist and a dairy farmer from the village of Kattoor. Following these incidents the police started random arrests of the Communists in Nattika ,invariably taken to the jail in Chavakkadu (taluq headquarter of *ponnani*); remanded in judicial custody and in the majority of the cases set free by the judiciary and if sentenced, send to the jails at Cannanore or Salem⁴³.

The Communist Party of India and the Nattika *Firka*- Forms of Cultural Symbiosis

Representations of a continuous political formation of a distinctive nationhood since the earliest times are evidenced in literary and other artistic expressions⁴⁴of Kerala. But, the National movement that emerged with a concrete and distinctively modern

⁴³ Source is the same as above, Mohammed Younus.

⁴⁴Literature dating from the Sangham period or the period of classical Tamil literature contain these descriptions as evidenced by the historiography of Kerala, examined in the first section of this chapter. There are serious contentions amongst the historians about ways of reading it. Nonetheless such works are taken as conclusive texts on the integrity of a shared and imagined past, crucial to the formation of a keralite identity(Gurukkal and Varier, 1995).

idea of nationhood, had created a language of its own, that mediated roles and exchanged discourses in a chaotic variance. This chaos was later interpreted in terms of a linearity of events culminating in the gaining of Independence, the declaration of the Republic and the formation of the Indian Union. Its telos of Independence and Sovereignty as the Nationalist historiography would have us believe, was not always a consistent factor by its presence. The lurking lie or betrayal within any teleological theory of progress was an affirmative or binding element of the movement⁴⁵.

The history of the Communist Party of India also presents itself to us in such a light. Famed for its strategies of sabotage and upset of power systems, the CPI had its beginnings at Tashkent in Russia in the year 1920 and at a far remove from the arena of Nationalist politics unfolding within the sub continent. The account of this event related by one of the founding members of the Party, Rafiq Ahmed, gives us challenging insights into the origins of the CPI.

According to him, the thrust behind the formation of the Party was a tradition called the *hijrat* that existed in Islam, and received strong ideological thrust during the time of the *Khilafat* movement. By this tradition they who were persecuted under a political regime, escaped from the country in order to escape further repression. There is an underlying assumption that such escape from repression by a particular State implies rebellion against the very State. Such militant tradition of self-sacrifice can also be seen in Sikhism. Both Sikhism and Islam have prescribed for martyrdom as the one way of unifying the diversifying pulls of the State, civil society and religion, in the context of their modernization (Uberoi , 1996). The tradition of the *hijrat* nonetheless is exclusive to Islam, and the point at which Rafiq Ahmed is talking about, the thrust of the National movement was at its pinnacle, what with the massacres at the Jalian Walla Bagh in 1919, on the one hand and the repression of the *Khilafat* movement, on the other.

⁴⁵Shahid Amin's critique of Indian Nationalism by examining in its historic details, the "anti-police 'riot' of 4 February, 1922 in Chauri-Chauraan event which all Indians,when commemorating the nation, are obliged to remember – only in order to forget – as an 'error' ",is a very good example of the explication of this lie(Amin,1996:1).

In a personal account narrated to Mussafar Ahmed (1962) another pioneering Communist, Rafiq Ahmed talks about how he along with some of his friends from elsewhere, fleeing the political persecution from the British Regime in a similar way, crossed the borders of the Empire at the Frontier Province in the North West and entered Afghanistan, where they were received and welcomed by the then General of Jalalabad, Nadir Khan, with the king Amanullah of Afghanistan having already promised to give refuge to such people. The rebellion that fomented in the minds of them who along with Rafiq Ahmed set out on the *hijrat* did not allow them to stay in Kabul, or settle down in Afghanistan. In Kabul, upon meeting more exiles and learning that revolution had taken place in Russia, there formed among them a strong opinion to go to Russia. Thus a group of more than hundred and fifty volunteers who were dissatisfied with the nature of diplomacy being carried on by the king of Afghanistan with the British regime, to send back such exiles and the state of affairs prevailing in Turkey after the fall of the Caliphate decided to set out on the journey to Russia. After passing through the hardy terrains of Turkmenistan, they finally arrived at Tashkent where they were received and hosted by the Red Guards, in the month of September, 1920 and in company of other Indian exiles who had reached Tashkent from other parts of the world, formed the Communist Party of India. Thereafter they received training in Marxism-Leninism from the military school in Tashkent and later from the Eastern University, Moscow founded with the explicit aim of training the 'eastern' people in Marxism-Leninism.

This very first band of Indian Communists then returned to India, to establish contacts with the Communists and began organizing the Party in India. But their intentions were thwarted by the British regime when they were interrupted on their return journey at Peshawar and sent to prison after what came to be called the Peshawar Conspiracy Case. The Communists in India would face similar infamous trials as in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case or the Meerut Conspiracy case on charges of sedition against the regime, until they were finally legalized to function in public in 1942, during the time of the Quit India movement.

Till then, they marked their presence within the National movement as a subversive group that was avowedly at variance with the proclaimed aims and objects of the National movement. The first time they had an opportunity to organize their activities in public was in 1942, when it disavowed the Nationalist agitation of “Quit India”. This coming to light as a bearer of the mark of betrayal, it carried with it into the period after Independence. So much so that, for every new initiate into the ideology of the CPI, this past assumes the form of a critical birth mark, thus constituting a sense of defensive identity vis-à-vis the questions of Nationalism.

The politics that spawned this identity we have identified as the politics of the underground that the Communists followed in the early stages of their organization⁴⁶. One such work that helps us identify the nature of this politics is ‘Specters of Marx’ by Jacques Derrida. The work is a deconstruction of the text, The Communist Manifesto, in the context of late twentieth century, when the major State formations of the Communists have already collapsed, in the Eastern Europe. The author is involved in a polemic with Francis Fukuyama⁴⁷ who declared the demise of World Communism and the global triumph of free market economies, with the historic

⁴⁶ The Communist Party of India was founded in the 1920s. Its Kerala Committee awaited for long its constitution. This was eventually founded in the 1930s on the initiative of certain Congressmen of a leadership stature. P.Krishnapillai, EMS Namboodirippadu, K.Damodaran are some of them. They co-ordinated the early activities of the Communists from within the Congress party. In 1936 just preceding the formation of its Kerala Committee, EMS was at the same time, Secretary of The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee with the added responsibility of giving the organization a final shape as well as a member of the committee that led from the underground the communist ranks dispersed within the Congress, mainly as a faction called the Congress Socialist Party. K.Damodaran and N.C.Shkchar were two other comrades who were members of the underground committee of the Communists and formed the leadership of the Congress simultaneously. P.Krishnapillai similarly held the charges of the State secretary of the Congress Socialist Party and a member of the KPCC executive committee (Nambuthirippadu:1987). According to Nossiter T.J., (1988:46), the honour of establishing the first communist organization in Kerala goes to the six-member Trivandrum-based Communist League of 1931. A printed pamphlet entitled *The Communist Party* circulated in Trivandrum citing N.P.Kurikkal as Organizing Secretary of the Indian Communist Party (Kerala Provincial Organization) is the first record of any self-styled communist organization to appear in Kerala. So far as is known it was unconnected with the party Nationally. 1937 was the year when the earliest party fraction was actually formed. As ideological precedents to the formation of the organization, a short factual biography of Marx was published in 1912 and a sympathetic obituary of Lenin in 1924. For all other purposes, according to Nossiter, (ibid.:47) Congress Socialism was the broad church of the Left and few of those who attended the inaugural meeting of the Kerala CPI in 1939 would have claimed any great theoretical knowledge of Marxism but the ninety leaders enjoyed a more valuable asset, the practical experience of the popular causes of Kerala.

⁴⁷ Fukuyama made his controversial claims in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*(1993).

developments of Eastern Europe. He says, that, even though Communism be dead, the specters of Marx continue to live and it is only very usual for Communism to be addressed as spectral in its presence. The very ‘Communist Manifesto’ opens with the name assigned to Communism by the Austrian dictator Metternich at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which said, “a specter is haunting Europe, the specter of Communism”. This name given to Communism in early eighteenth century Europe, returns in Marx’s critique of Capitalism , as well, in ‘the Capital’. According to Derrida, it is the specter lurking behind the commodities in a market, that enable them to enter into an autonomous sphere of existence and form relations between themselves, a phenomenon, Marx calls, ‘commodity fetishism’. The commodities in their alienation from the labour that produces them assume phantasmic power over their producers, and reflect back the relations amidst themselves back on to the social relations of production. Thus the creative power of labour becomes yet another commodity for purchase in the market, totally alienated from the labourer, who is naturally gifted with his labour power (Derrida,1994:125-176). The question, the author then raises is why the specter of Communism is still haunting the World, in the forms of mourning or epitaphs written for its demise as witnessed in the work by Fukuyama. The reason Derrida aptly points, is the relevance of a New International of Communists is not an antiquated proposition. Its main engagement as it was at the time of Marx would remain the same, a dialogical engagement with the specter, the invisible one, that sees all from within its secret apparition, yet itself remaining unseen. The specter, though remaining invisible to the spectator’s eye, yet returns in its apparitions, in the most unpredictable of ways. Here the author uses, the simile of the Ghost in Hamlet, who returns to his kingdom, and that reminds Hamlet, “there is something rotten in the kingdom of Denmark”. It is the same critical question that Hamlet raises “to be or not to be” that we find written into the epistemology of many a Communist party, in many a place in the World. The question of the CPI and the methods of their functioning from the underground is no exception.

Through organizing in the underground, they were giving certain well defined ethnic characteristics to their ideology, one instance of which forms our present study.

The phase of the history of the CPI, that we take to be our leading light is when it proclaimed a total peasant uprising against the Indian State for its overthrow in 1948. The revolt of the peasants of Telengana formed the ideological beacon light for the Communists in this regard. This phase was one of serious peasant political stirrings in parts of West Bengal, Telengana, Malabar and the princely States of Travancore- Cochin.

The Communist movement in Nattika can be read as an expression that reads in two distinct ways. It may be either seen as part of the landless peasant's rebellion against the landlord or as the movement of the lower castes for greater privileges in the social order. The Communist party had raised its slogans and prepared its agenda mainly on the former ground. But the identification it had gained with the lower castes and the specific idiom in which the politics of Communism was shaped lead us to conclude it was the latter ground that prevailed in the growth of Communism. In fact, both the aspects help us to understand as a totality the nature of the social fact that we have set out to study. They respectively nurture narratives of death as martyrdom and sacrifice, the structural dynamics of which we have discussed in detail at a later stage.

The example of the village Edathiruthy that we showed in the last chapter as illustrative of Nattika *firka*'s social dynamics may be adopted here as well.

In plotting the growth of Communism here we come to the origins of the National movement in the village. Such beginnings are to be plotted in the repeated settlements of land that began following the British occupation. We already saw that the institution of *adhikari* was instituted by the reforms of H.S.Graeme in 1822-23, replacing the local institutions of the *tara* and *oorukkoottams* - the seats of imposition and execution of punishment for all violation of justice that prevailed according to the norms of the caste system. The concentration of such powers in the hands of a singular land lord, further secured and strengthened the position of the land owning family and its hereditary chief. This brought into prevalence what Menon has characterized as the the Nair *taravadu*- form of authority over land and the dominance of land relations according to their hegemony, that blatantly followed the practice of caste system

(Menon,1994:10-21). It still paved for a lot of ambiguity in their role because the Nairs were not one of the twice-born like the *brahmins*, *kshatriyas* or the *vaisyas*. Being *sudras* they were polluting castes and were obliged to the benevolence of the Nambuthiris for their very existence elsewhere in Kerala(Iyer,1912:1). But, the exile or extirpation of the Nambuthiri households, in many parts of Malabar, as in the village of Edathiruithy gave rise to the peculiar situation of the Nairs inheriting the status of landlordship. Further they wished to manufacture the consent of the lower caste tenants and peasants and to claim for themselves the top position in the hierarchy ritually that was half assigned to them by the British government in the form of the position of the *adhikari*. This need to manufacture consent provided subsequently the space for the resettlement of the status of the tenants who were obliged to the *taravadu* for the lease of land for cultivation.

The village social system of Edathiruithy may be considered as one of the archetypal examples of the *taravadu*-temple complex of hegemony described by Menon (1994:10-21). The head of the dominant Nair *taravadu*, was also the head of the Edathiruithy *desam*. He also enjoyed the rights of a seat of honour at the temple and the superintendence of its affairs. In the last chapter, we also saw how the story of the institution of the temple and the derivation of the name of the village also served as instruments of hegemony to ascertain this position of privilege. Some of the ritual practices also involved the ceremony of *koithoottu* (page 61, above), by which the share of the tillers was distributed as charity⁴⁸, a mention of which has been already made. Apart from the land owned by the Blahayil Nair *taravadu*, the elder of the family was also the trustee of the lands owned by the Thiruvanchikkulam *Devaswom*⁴⁹ of Kodungalore, in the *desam* of Edathiruithy. The only other presence of landlords in

⁴⁸ Question may be raised if it was charity or a way of sharing or distributing the produce.In Kerala, given that it was the system of *kaaranma* (see p.45) that guided the settlement of the produce of the land, the tillers of the land were always paid in kind and had no rightful share of the produce of the land.Therefore, the ceremony can be looked upon as a practice of charity only and not distribution.

⁴⁹ Literally the word *Devaswom* means the land of the reigning deity. It essentially meant a guild of the upper caste Nambuthiris or Nairs, that was set up around every big temple, and owned the proprietorship of the lands under its management as well as the management of the revenue accruing to the temple and the distribution of income to the service castes in the temple.

the village was restricted to the Syrian Christians who were also merchants, but played a significantly lesser role in the politics of domination in the village.

The peasant-landlord relations in the village amongst the Syrian Christian landlords and their dependents had a distinctive attribute altogether. As Susan Visvanathan (1993:3) observes, the Syrian Christians enjoyed a position of privilege in the formation of the social hierarchy that was at level with the Nairs. A strict division of privileges with respect to the adjudication of matters relating to their dependent peasantry prevailed amongst the Nair and Syrian Christian landlords in terms of adjudicating disputes over land under their control. Notwithstanding the fact that, the Nair landlord was also the *adhikari* of the *amsam* he maintained a prudent line of non-interference in the matters of disputes arising between the Syrian Christian landlords and their dependents.

This is best illustrated in the narration of a dispute that took place in the early forties(the exact year could not be recalled by the respondent) between a Syrian Christian landlord's daughter and one of his dependents.

This incident had created a massive stir among the people and is still remembered by many as one of the significant events in the history of the place. Pengan a *Harijan* by birth was a dependent with a Christian family in his neighborhood. Pengan lived in a small house in a compound that belonged to an Ezhava family and therefore, it cannot be fully said that he was a dependent of the Chalissery family .It would be more correct to say that, he was an employee of the Chalisseri Anthony's family. Anthony had married thrice and was living with his third wife and their three children, the other two wives having already passed away and their children dispersed in various places.

The incident that took place is reported thus⁵⁰. Pengan was sent to the market in the nearby town called Irinjalakuda by the youngest daughter of Anthony to buy oranges. The purchase ordered for was a sizeable amount and therefore, Pengan had to carry a big load on his shoulders in what is called a *kaavu*(a pole of wood with rope slings

⁵⁰ Reported by Pengan, the Harijan peasant involved in the incident himself.

hanging from it from both ends with baskets tied to them at their ends). Pengan felt thirsty and hungry on the way. So, he spent some money from the balance which he had on him, from whatever Kochumaria the daughter of Anthony gave and helped himself to some food and tea from a hotel on the way. Upon his return, while eating his supper from Anthony's house Kochumaria entered the scene and asked him for the return of the balance. He gave back two rupees less than the actual balance. Kochumaria asked him about this, he asked for a some time to give it back. Kochumaria apparently did not like this answer and slapped him on his cheek. Pengan was not indifferent either and he flung the dish of porridge on Kochumaria's face. Pengan returned home swearing not to work for Anthony again. These incidents were happening at a time, when Anthony had promised Pengan a plot of land next to his own house and Pengan was thinking of moving with his wife to settle down on Anthony's property.

The next day, Pengan went to a different place to work along with his uncle. In the morning about nine o' clock, Kochumaria came to Pengan's house, where she saw Pengan's wife Kurumbakutty, sweeping the front yard of their house. She called her near and began a conversation over the events of the previous day at her house. In a fit of rage which took Kurumbakutty completely by surprise ,Kochumaria reached for the former's wedding chain , snatched and broke it. The owner of the property, by the name Raman master saw this and immediately intervened to get the chain back from her and keep it in his safety. Kochumaria returned to her house after this. The issue became a major one in no time and the premises of Pengan's house became filled with people.

The *Harijan* Sangh met that very evening. But, before it could come to any plan of action, the President of the Sangh resigned. The President of the *Harijan* Sangh, Raman Master , an Ezhava school teacher and also a fellow-traveler of the Communists had allegedly come under the influence of powerful Christian families in the village⁵¹. The SNDP⁵² (the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham)

⁵¹ Here we find the antagonisms emerging within the Ezhava community along the lines of the political loyalty to be followed in the times of change initiated by the National movement and accelerated by the

intervened and gave enormous support to the demands of the *Harijan* Sangh to obtain redress from the family of Chalisseril Anthony . Thus, in their concerted action, it was decided that, Kochumaria would tie the chain back on Kurumbakutty's neck herself, in

Communist movement. This division would heighten in course of time summing in the passing of the resolution "in the annual meeting of the Malabar SNDP, held at Melur, Chowghat in April, 25, 1948, it was resolved to urge for a complete ban on the Communist Party" (Ministry of Home Affairs: 1949:51).There is not enough ground to substantiate that Raman master resigned coming under the influence of the Christian landlords, which alone gives credence to the idea that his resignation was keeping in foresight the eventual collaboration of the *Harijan* Sangh with the SNDP over this issue. That gives us reason to speculate that it was his Communist leanings that stopped him from collaborating with the SNDP. Any way, there is too little information available on this topic, as to conclude what exactly caused the resignation of Raman Master from the presidency of the *Harijan* Sangh

⁵² A voluntary social support organization formed for the benefit of the Ezhavas in the princely state of Travancore, in the year 1903, went a long way in determining the course of the history of Kerala in the following few decades and continues to be an influential actor in the state's political as well as social scenario.The foundation of the Yogam is almost unilaterally credited to the activities of a Doctor, K.C.Palpu, from Thiruvananthapuram who had to withstand casteist discrimination early in life, to effectively continue his studies for medicine in Madras and for a job later in Mysore.The kind of discrimination he was faced with in personal life, being denied opportunities to education and job in his home state, turned him into a crusader for the procurement of the same rights for his likes.This zest took him to consultations with Swami Vivekananda, the early twentieth century social reformer from Bengal, who founded the Ramakrishna Mission. He advised Dr.Palpu to initiate organization around a spiritual figure for all the social reforms he contemplated in his mind. Dr.Palpu's search took him to a man called Narayana Guru(see footnote 93), who had made an installation of the god Siva at a place called Aruvippuram in the Travancore state, built a temple there and was attracting a lot of devotees.After parleys with Narayana Guru, Dr.Palpu, went ahead with the legal formalities of founding the organization for the betterment of the lot of the Ezhavas.Thus, it was that the SNDP Yogam was registered as a joint stock company in the year 1903 with the licence of the British regime.The Yogam had membership from different places, though head-quartered at Aruvippuram where Narayana Guru had found his first habit.Kumaran Aasan a budding poet (later celebrated as the radical one of the trio of the three modern poets of Malayalam literature along with Vailathol and Ulloor) in those days was appointed as its first general secretary(Sanoo,1986:168).The Yogam had its larger following and still continue to have in the Southern parts of Kerala, with waning influence towards the Northern regions.This had its reasons too. The adoption of modern education amongst the Ezhavas of Malabar had started bearing fruits because the British Government provided the educated ones with opportunities of employment as we see in the case of the number of schools that were set up by the newly educated members of the Ezhava community.Towards the Northern Malabar, there were traditionally powerful Ezhava families like those of Murkothu Ramunny and C.Krishnan, who rose in wealth and power and eventually spread their influence through encouraging schooling and arousing amongst the Ezhavas the need to rise as a community in social ranking.The social milieu and hence the nature of upper-caste discrimination or/and oppression in the Malabar was different from Travancore. Therefore the path of reforms amongst these Ezhavas, usually addressed as Tiyyas also took a distinctive turn.We have discussed these in sections in chapter1 (see the following section on biography, in which we have discussed the clan of Gopalakrishnan, who was a Tiyya himself, against the backdrop of social reforms in Malabar)and chapter2(where in the analysis of the worship practices of the martyr's (Gopalakrishnan) clan, we have dealt with the transformation in patterns of worship initiated by the reform movements).To get a broader picture of the reforms and its impacts in the district of Malabar as a whole see Menon (1994:63-71), where the author talks about the 'growth of a Tiyya elite' and Oommen(1985:64-67).

the front-yard of the church and pay fine of one chilli (half a paise) each to the temple, the church and to the *Harijan* Sangh. She had to do this along with a confession for her doings. In the final turn of events, this was exactly carried out.

The certainty of repair of justice was avidly ensured by the sequence of events in this incident. The breach of peace made by the Christian landlord's daughter did not reach the *adhikari* who was the statutory arbitrator of all civil and criminal disputes within the village. Here we have reason to believe that it was because the act involved a landlord and a tiller of the land, that the aggrieved felt they would get no justice from the *adhikari*. Besides the National and social movements had made its reflections in the village that alternative ways of justice can be possible. This was an incident that presaged the authoritarian measures that would follow on the part of the landlords and the resistance measures organized by the *Harijans* under the Communist leadership in the years 1948-50.

The valuable insight that we gain from this incident is the extent to which power was shared by the Syrian Christian landlords in the village along with the Blahayil Nairs. There is even reason to assume that the *adhikari* did not intervene to effect the course of law in this incident because it involved a Christian landlord and his dependant.

When the National movement began, it pulled activists from three main sections- the middle peasants or the tenant cultivators who held the same land on lease over long time, and earned titles to small plots of land by themselves towards the time of the land settlement of 1905, the Nair families that lived close to the landowning Mooppil Nairs, but shared none of their privileges in the social scale of production and were also tenants at times like the majority of the Ezhava middle peasants or tenant cultivators and the Syrian Christians from amongst whom the name of Chevvukkaran Francis, stands out. He made his presence felt in the village of Edathiruthy, as a progressive minded person sympathetic to the demands of the peasants, for the re-distribution of land, a demand also raised by the CPI, by volunteering to announce over a mega-phone, the controversial decision arrived at by the *Harijan* Sangh and the

S.N.D.P, to make the Christian landlord's daughter, tie the wedding chain back on Kurumbakutty's neck.

The presence of the Syrian Christians in the Social reform movements in Travancore was far more conspicuous compared to Malabar. When the Kudiyattam agitation was making progress in Malabar, it was The Abstention Movement that was mobilizing Travancore⁵³. The Syrian Christians were one of the major parties to the presentation of the Travancore Memorial or 'Malayali Memorial' of 1891, one of the earliest statements of Nationalism as well as communalism in the State, to which the Hindus; prominently Nairs and Ezhavas (in that order) were also party. The 'Memorial' as it is, expressed grievances in the newly educated from these communities being denied job opportunities with the Travancore State⁵⁴ with most of these jobs going to the non-Keralite Brahmins (virtually Tamil Brahmins), whom the 'Memorial' dubbed as 'foreigners' (Kusuman, 1976:2). The 'Memorial' as such helped to remedy the situation. However, the benefits were shared mainly by the Nairs and the Syrian Christians owing to their higher caste status. This left the Ezhavas aggrieved who were denied job opportunities because of their lower caste status and there was a subsequent denial of civic rights. This was notwithstanding their educational qualifications thanks to the spread of missionary schools that were prepared to accept students from all communities irrespective of their caste positions. K.K.Kusuman alleges that , "The Travancore Memorialists viz., the Nayars, Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims made a joint venture to cast off the influence of the Tamil-Telugu Brahmins in the civil service of the State, by touching the feelings of regionalism of these communities" (1975:2). These alleged "foreigners" were in fact invited to settle in Travancore during the time of Marthanda Varma (1729-1758) and the Dewanship of Raja Kesava Das (1788-99). The Travancore Memorial even though endorsed by the Nayars, Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims led in eventual course to sectarian thinking in terms of

⁵³ The princely state of Cochin was also swaying with the trends in the neighbouring state of Travancore generally. Here, the Cochin Ezhava Sabha, submitted a petition to the maharajah seeking intervention to take decisions furthering the Ezhava representation in the Government services in the year 1916. A Pulaya Mahasabha was also founded in Cochin in the year 1931-32(Oommen,1985:73).

⁵⁴ It had the third largest population amongst all the princely States in British India, Nossiter.T.J., (1988:45).

advancing the position of each and every community separately in terms of the procurement of Government jobs. For example, the Travancore Memorial was itself followed by an Ezhava Memorial in 1896, that expressed similar grievances as the Travancore Memorial but exclusively from the view point of the members of the Ezhava caste. Every caste and community began taking specific interest in the education and employment of members from their own community in the Government jobs. The Ezhavas were late to realize that the attainment of political rights as in Government jobs had to be subsequent to the attainment of civic rights as entailed in the right of access to public places or the right to walk on public roads. Thus was begun the reform movement led by the spiritual leader Sree Narayana Guru, at the end of the 19th century. Many of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam units set up by the Guru debated about the ways and means by which the Ezhavas can absolve themselves of the age-old discriminations thrust on them. Some of them contemplated conversion (the likes of C.V.Kunjuraman who was in favour of Christianity and Dr. K.P.Thayyil in favour of Islam, Murkothu Kumaran wanted the Ezhavas to form an independent community within the Hindu religion but outside the caste organization, K.Ayyappan was for abandoning all religions and living according to Rationalism and some others converted to Sikhism like K.C.Kuttan (K.C.Jai Singh), E.Raghavan (Harnam Singh), Kannatu Kesavan (Udaya Singh), S.Raghavan (Kripal Singh) and K.Krishnan (Ranjit Singh) being some of the pioneers. The Travancore Memorial as such sowed the seeds for the future differentiation of different castes into different communities and make organized demands to the State in order to apportion the public goods made available through the State.

The Travancore Memorial, in fact had even more obscure an origin. According to K.K.Kusuman, "Though feudalistic in content and anti-British in effect, the 1809 revolt of Velu Thampi of Travancore and that of Paliyath Achan of Cochin in the same year may be considered the first organised attempt aiming at the political independence of these native states. This was also the first political upheaval of Kerala. The anti-British sentiments of Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan, the Prime Ministers of Travancore and Cochin respectively resulted in open confrontation with

the British. However, apart from the fiasco in the political front, it brought irreparable damage to the social life of the country. The fervent appeal of Velu Thampi, through the historic proclamation at Kundara in 1809, to the Hindu orthodoxy, generated a popular anti-Christian feeling, which, to this day has influenced the politics of the State. Communalism or sectarianism that is rampant in the politics of Kerala had its remote origin in the above proclamation. However, at a time when Nationalism was non-existent the only course open for whetting anti-British feeling was to appeal to the religious sentiments of the majority of the people, viz., the Hindus. This was the strongest- also the weakest-point of the proclamation. But it sowed the seeds of political consciousness in the minds of the people, which was to develop and manifest itself by the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The sectarian appeal and the consequent enthusiasm of 1809 made a spectacular impact on all major political movements of the later period; the Travancore Memorial (Malayali Memorial) of 1891 was no exception" (1976:1).

If this scenario prevailed in Travancore, Malabar offered an entirely different political landscape. Land and not jobs was the major bone of contention. The Social movement therefore was mainly aimed at the obtaining of titles to the land for tenants who were totally at the mercy of the Nambuthiri or Nair landlords after the settlement by the British Collector Graeme in 1823. The *moplah* tenants were the first to rise against the Land Settlement sanctioned by the British and they were also the most aggrieved because they had attained to almost unquestioned dominion over their lands when Tippu Sultan took possession of Malabar in 1792. The Syrian Christians who were traditionally landlords and traders in Malabar were not affected by the resettlement of the Land revenue system by the British, following their defeat of Tippu in the Battle of Seringapatnam, and subsequent possession of Malabar. In the village of Edathiruthy their status of land-ownership was deep seated with a strong community formation symbolized by the presence of an ancient Church; so much so that, the village finds it's mention in the Malabar Manual of William Logan for the presence of this church and the community sprawling around it. This deep seated security provided presumably by the long-established traditions of their settlement explains perhaps why

there were very few leaders from this community during the Social and National movements in the village. Still, Francis from the family of Chevvukkaran is an exception. His name was taken with a distinctive respect in the narratives of the different respondents although any attempts to have a dialogue with him were hampered because he was recovering from a dislocated jaw and was advised not to speak by his doctors. He was especially regarded with awe for the progressive stance he took in the dispute between a Syrian Christian landlord's daughter and a *Harijan* peasant (Pengan, the details of which we already discussed above), and was always referred to as a staunch supporter of the Communists.

In proceeding further with tracing the growth of the National movement in the *firka* (with the village of Edathiruthy in focus), we follow the biographies of some of the prominent leaders of the movement in the *firka*. In the course of the field work, this opened up a Dostoevskyian canvas of characters, rather than a group of historic individuals. This fact may be attributed to the aesthetic genre of the novel inherent to the fact of Sardar's martyrdom. We have discussed this genre along with the rest of the aesthetic genres contained in the fact of Sardar's martyrdom at a greater length in chapter 4. Still it is essential to note here some of the essential characteristics of this genre. The most important of this certainly is the completeness of an idea against the incompleteness of the idea of the individual through which such idea finds representation (Bakhtin, 1975:33-48). Even though part of the National movement, with the ideology of Nationalism as its prominent backdrop, the engagement of these different lives with its spirit vary. In this seminal variation, there is a distinctive ideological dissonance that gives to each of their separate lives a distinctive colour that mark them as characters from a polyphonic novel. A genre inaugurated by Dostoevsky, the polyphonic novel according to his critic Bakhtin, tries to represent the truth through the multivoicedness of its characters(ibid:3-37). Bakhtin addresses the style of discourse in a novel as 'the dialogic imagination'(Bakhtin, 1981). It is a similar phenomenon that we encounter when we take up the task of etching the biography of this leadership. The two significant differences from the novel the biographies maintain are 1) its unwritten form and 2)the position of the author; in our case being

the spirit of the martyr . We credit the spirit of the martyr with the authorial position because, according to Bakhtin, whose appreciation of Dostoevsky, that we have formed the basis for our study, holds that the creator of the work of art cannot express himself directly. Thus according to him, the author is dead in the analyses of Bakhtin. The author hence necessarily depends on the voices of others to express himself. The author must split oneself, separate oneself, give oneself a double voice and make himself polyphonic(Palmieri, 1998:45-56).But for the authorial position assigned to the martyr in the formation of these narratives; the narrative would anchor around an aggregate answer to the question ‘what he is?’. Such a question will give way only to a monologic answer, confining it to the classificatory norms of society and robbing the biographical narratives of all possibility of addressing or at least raising the question ‘who he is?’⁵⁵.But, given the indigenous theory of martyrdom/ sacrifice that holds the death of Sardar to be true, every other life associated with this event was also narrated with the intent of highlighting the ideological persona that made him/her into a character. A character resembling one of Dostoevsky’s heroes holding fast to a truth or set of truths, reflecting on oneself in a thicket of several of such truths; a polyphony of truths. To this highly intense backdrop of hyper-sensitivity to the realm of idea remains the silent image of the martyr as the unifying realm of all these ideas yet unleashing all the diversifying pulls on the same in the guise of the author, a dead one, who cannot express oneself directly, but has to depend on the polyphony of voices for self-expression.

‘Sociological Imagination’ was yet another of the sources of the narratives on the biographies of the Communist leadership in the *firka*. Following Carl Wright Mills (1959), we assume the presence of a sociologist, in all respondents; irrespective of the cultural, professional, class and various other backgrounds. According to Mills, the Sociological Imagination, is an essential ingredient of a modern consciousness that does not take another person’s existence as given or for granted. Without an essential appreciation of the individual’s position within a welter of daily experiences and

⁵⁵ This vital distinction in the nature of biographical narratives was pointed out by Hannah Arendt in the biographical preface that she wrote to the collection of essays by Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*(1992).

social roles, the inner life and the external career of the individual do not meet. And it is in this meeting point that the individual becomes conscious of others' and his/her own psychologies, that help him/ her focus private uneasiness on explicit troubles and thus transform an indifference to the public into involvement with public issues In the words of Mills, "That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society" (*ibid*:7). Thus we see that, in 'sociological imagination' when the stress is on biography and history, in 'dialogic imagination', it is on hero and ideology. Both these concepts mix in our field survey. Coupled with the concept of 'dialogic imagination', 'sociological imagination' has given us ample methodological space in plotting and locating the breadth of discourses that were covered in the course of collecting biographies of the Communist leadership, that emerged in the process of a radical kind of socio-political and economic transformation that engulfed the *firka* in its recorded as well as retold past.

Only three of the biographies given below were the product of direct interviews with the people involved in the movement, those of Mohammad Yunus, P.K.Gopalakrishnan and Kochupennu. The rest are built around details collected from different respondents and literature published on them in the souvenirs released to mark the martyrdom of Sardar.

We begin with the biography of Sardar himself for the reason that it is his martyrdom that is often cited as a preface to move on to the description of various other lives involved in the National and Social movements.

Born in 1915 to Ezhava parents Chathunni and Godamma was the seventh in line of a family of seven brothers and two sisters. He lost both his parents early in life and was guided into adulthood under the legal guardian ship of his elder brother, Raman. Gopalakrishnan's father was a document writer for legal notices and land

settlements⁵⁶. But, more importantly, he was a well-respected middleman – a *thandar*⁵⁷ - in settling the disputes that came up in the village. In fact, his reputation was so far-reaching that, people from other villages used to come searching for him to solicit his services in settling disputes. Some of the noted clients that, he had adjudicated for, included the landlord Blahayil Nair, another landlord from the

⁵⁶ These elementary details of his life were given to us by Gopalakrishnan's elder brother Kumbalaparambil Unniappan master, who incidentally is also the only one still left alive of all Gopalakrishnan's brothers and sisters.

⁵⁷The *thandan* formed an important feudal dignitary office, that controlled the affairs of all Ezhava families settled in a region identified as a conclave called the *kudy*.In Malabar, at the time with which we are concerned, the institution or the office had become redundant, because the ritual ordaining of an ordinary Ezhava into a *thandan* of a *kudy* was done by royal decree issued from the Zamorin's court. Since the beginning of the colonial administration, such decrees ceased to be and hence the rightful powers and duties. Yet, the fact that Chathunni, was addressed as *thandar* amongst the Ezhavas in the village of Edathiruthy gives reason to believe that the office must have carried on hereditarily notwithstanding its periodical renewal from the Court of the Zamorin or that a separate court decree for appointing the *thandar* was not in practice in Malabar.In contrast may be observed the role and status of the same office, in the neighbouring state of Cochin, that retained princely rule, even under the British suzerainty and hence continued many of the old practices of the Court.

L.K.Anantha Krishna Iyer writes about the thandars amongst the Izhavas of the State of Cochin thus, "In the southern parts of the State, only one man is appointed by the ruler of the State, for specified localities, and he is called the *Thandan* (head man of the caste in his village), whose privileges consist in wearing a gold knife and style (an implement used in writing), walking before a Nair with a cloth on his head, riding on a palanquin or a horse, carrying a silk umbrella, and gaving a brass lamp borne before him, for each of which he pays separately a tax to the Government. Any person, using these privileges unauthorized, lays himself open to a penalty.His local deputies, who are *Ponambans* or *Vettukkarans* are appointed by him and besides them, there are elected men, two,four or six for each village or a number of villages,known as *Kaikkars* or managers, and their business is to make preliminary inquiries about social disputes and convene meetings before the *Thandan* for the arbitration ands settlement of all such disputes.These are but relics of the ancient village communities. On occasions, such as a public durbar, a State procession etc.,intimation is given to the head-man, who sends for the necessary caste-men to put up festoons and to sweep the roads.In Travancore and North Malabar, the head-men of the caste are known by the names , *Panikkans* and *Tharakkaranavans* (the senior men or head-men of the villages), whose social functions and status are substantially the same as those detailed above.Thus, in Cochin State the name *Thandan* is given to the head-man of the caste, while in the adjoining Taluks of Palghat and Valluvanad it is referred to a sub-caste, the members of which observe the custom of polyandry"(Iyer, 1909:VolI: 306).

P.K.Balakrishnan, writing about the institution of the *Thandar* prevalent amongst the Izhavas writes about it to show the rigidity of the hierarchy that was followed in pre-modern Kerala in the name of the caste system. The numerous privileges that the *Thandar* earned as part of the princely decree or the *theettoram*, were restricted to his position within the Izhava community and not outside it.The *Thandars* had the privilege to decide on every question relating to the Izhava community.Rites of puberty, marriage and cremation – all followed the ritual sanctification of the *Thandar* in the Izhava community.They also carried the right to excommunicate members of the community that disobeyed them. In short, theirs was a role that ensured the canons of caste hierarchy was rigidly followed even at its lower rungs. (Balakrishnan:1997:385-393).

According to Menon, (1994: 18) where a Nair *taravadu* was more powerful, the headman of the Tiyyas caste assembly (thandan) acted as the intermediary between his community and the ultimate appellate authority of the Nair.

neighboring village called Adiparambil Raman⁵⁸. The latter name is associated with a lot of ‘progressive’ developments in Nattika, the foremost of which was the renovation of the road that cuts though the heart of Manappuram, allegedly built by Tippu Sultan of Mysore for his war campaigns. This feat was begun, when he was a member (elected on a Congress party platform) of the local administrative body called the District Board, in elections to which the franchise was very restricted those days and were subject to property qualifications.

At many places in the neighbouring State of Cochin, the title of *thandar* was sanctioned through *theettooram*; a princely decree giving titles and possessions to the State’s subjects. But in Malabar, examples of such decrees have not been found even though the title of *thandar* has been consistently followed into the periods of British rule and Independence. Apart from this Chathunni had title to a certain amount of land that was distributed among his children four of whom had not attained to legal or statutory adulthood at the time of his death⁵⁹. Both Chathunni and Godamma belonged to the same neighbourhood, but to different kinsgroups or clans -*kumbalaparambil* and *ponathil-* of the village Edathiruthy.

Gopalakrishnan studied at the government school in Kattur, the neighbouring village. In the school, education in those days was limited to the third forum, which meant an equivalent of the seventh class of today. The nearest place for a high school was Chowghat which was over twenty kilometers away and not a comprehensive deal for most students from the families of Edathiruthy. Both Unniappan (Sardar’s elder brother by two years) and Gopalakrishnan, who studied together at the Kattur school, entered the profession of teaching after finishing their third forum. The government in pursuit of its policy , in the year 1934, encouraged opening of private schools by giving an allowance of Rs.80 to anyone interested in setting up a school with monthly allowances in salary for the teachers. This resulted in the mushrooming of schools in all the villages of the *firkā* Nattika. Unniappan and Gopalakrishnan later passed their

⁵⁸ Communicated to us through Kumbalaparambil Unniappan master.

⁵⁹ The details of property ownership were gathered from the Land Survey Records of 1905 and the Re-survey records of 1931.

matriculation when the government issued an order saying that school teachers with a minimum teaching experience of ten years may appear for the exam independent of whether they have studied till the tenth or not⁶⁰.

The dominant question of the National movement as Gopalakrishnan saw it upon becoming a teacher was that of the practice of untouchability. In the year 1930-31, when he joined as a teacher at the Sree Rama Vilasam school in Chenthrappinny village of the *firka*, a lot of groundwork had been already done by several Social reformers against the practice of the caste system. Prominent among which was the movement led by the Ezhava community leader Sree Narayana Guru⁶¹.

Gopalakrishnan saw the Guru as a promising reformer. He fully identified with the teachings and sayings of the Guru also, and happily received the ideas of the Guru calling for the spread of education and the need for organizing the scattered community of the Ezhava divided at various levels –like the divisions of the *thandan*, *panicker*, *pinamban*, *choan*, *kuruppan*⁶². The idea of equality amongst these subdivisions cutting across the relative gradations in social and economic ranking was an appealing idea to the mind of Gopalakrishnan⁶³.

Such disparities he often found it difficult to tolerate amongst the members of his own clan. Although he inherited ancestral property, he never used it to set up his own

⁶⁰ The source on the information of Gopalakrishnan's schooling and the Government's policy on the beginning of new schools was Kumbalaparambil Unniappan master. Unniappan master's wife, Panchali was the manager of a school at Kazhimbrom, a village neighbouring Edathiruthy, whereas Unniappan Master himself taught at the Government school in Perinjanom, another village in the neighbourhood, till the time of his due retirement from the teaching services of the state of Kerala.

⁶¹ There have been several works on the life, thought and reforms initiated by the Guru. For the benefit of our thesis, we have relied on Guru's biography by Moorkothu Kumaran published way back in Malayalam in the 1940s (see footnote, 93). The copy that we read from had its pages missing that we are yet to conclude on its year of publication. The biography by M.K. Sanu, called Narayana Guru (1986), is another comprehensive work on the theme (see footnote, 48).

⁶² Please refer to the foot-note above, given to the term *thandar* (p.89).

⁶³ This is understood from the fact that he began his social activism from the school in his neighbourhood called Perumbatappa, where he was the organizer of a lot of activities including a reading club, a sports club with a volleyball ground and late night classes for adult education. Such activities were organized under the banner of the Sree Narayana Guru Smarak Samajam (Gopalakrishnan, 2001), that shows his adherence to the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. The Samajam was a volunteer force largely confined to the *firka* of Nattika and presumably was at dissonance with the SNDP (the pan-Kerala organization of the Ezhavas founded by Sree Narayana Guru in 1903).

home, he certainly built a house in the piece of land and gifted it to Kumbalaparambil Raman master who was his own kin⁶⁴; was a teacher in the school in the village (*balabhodhini*- the name of the school) and was the president of the *Harijan* Sangh (which earned him the derogatory surname, *vettuva* Raman) also for period of time and resigned from the presidentship when a controversial issue regarding a dispute between the Syrian Christian landlords and their *Harijan* dependents broke out in the village (the Pengan case discussed above). The SNDP intervened in the dispute and took over the hegemonic leadership of the conflict.

Raman master belonged to a phratry (*Angitteyil*) different from Gopalakrishnan's own(*Aleykkodan*).But, in the family of Gopalakrishnan the eight sisters and brothers having lost their parents early in their lives were almost on their own from very early stages of their life. Looking at their individual lives it may be understood that a spirit of onerous individualism had spawned amongst the descendants of this particular phratry of this migratory clan that made many of them avid explorers of a peculiar kind. Gopalakrishnan's brothers and sisters, who lost their parents early in life were all small scale inherited property owners when they attained maturity.All of them had received school education also that qualified them as potential teachers.Four of the brothers including Gopalakrishnan himself, became school teachers, with two of them- Raman master and Unniappan master- starting their own schools.The eldest brother Kumaran became a contractor for the sale of toddy for some time and turned to other occupations later.The next in line was a girl Laxmi, who was married to a family in a village in the neighbourhood, who also ran a school, at Kaipamangalom, also a part of the *firka*. The next eldest Unni, served the auxiliary unit of the British army engaged in cutting roads and the like at different places in India, along with several similar recruits from Edathiruthy itself. The next eldest, Gopalan was an ayurvedic physician and continued in the same profession for all his life. The four younger brothers- Raman, Unniappan, Goapalkrishnan, Sreedharan- were all school teachers including Gopalakrishnan, who had a stint with The Air Force as well. The youngest of all,

⁶⁴ Unniappan Master's wife, Gopalakrishnan's sister-in-law, Panchali provided this valuable information to us.

Sreedharan, also served in the auxiliary services of the Indian Army. The other sister, Parvathy was married into a similar family, to a background of teaching and landowning-farming. Thus they diversified into different ways in terms of earning their livelihood. The explorations of Gopalakrishnan stands at the helm of these efforts because it indulged in a licentious variance with all the existing hegemonic ideas and moral practices of the time which made a tragic nemesis of sorts inevitable.

Though unmarried and having no family of his own, he spent a lot of time with his kindred. Regarding their uncle, Gopalakrishnan's nephews and nieces, have a lot of heart-rending stories to recall. He was certainly, their most favourite. Panchali, Gopalakrishnan's sister-in-law, recalls that all the kids used to crowd around him whenever he showed up at their house. When she served him food, they would not even let him eat, she continued. She would intervene, saying that, she would distribute some plates to all of them, so that he could eat peacefully. But, Gopalakrishnan always forbade Panchali from doing so, allowing the children to do as they wished. According to her, the intensity of human relationships that crossed many sanctions of the routine, used to manifest itself in his interactions with people. Every day and every person was far more important than any existing sanction of social life. The father figure, that Gopalakrishnan, was expected to be for these kids, he was not. He was just one of them. Not owing to lack of intellect or lack of personality, but by sheer choice. He and a lot of others, had made their goals, a choice far superior to what anyone in the village had even aspired to that far. It was a new idea of Freedom, for which a lot of people had come forward to sacrifice everything. They had no desire of winning it for personal profit. Therefore, they cared little for their lives. They had to be more than content with their lot if their coming generations would taste the fruits of their romance with Communism.

He remained a bachelor to his death, but, had contemplated marriage, is what his sister-in-law, recalls. Panchali's version is that he fore-saw a showdown in his life, and he was not sure if he would survive it. Therefore, he preferred not to get married and waited for the inevitable to happen.

If, this was the perspective given by his sister-in-law, a peasant woman had a totally different picture to give. *Aayiram ekadasikku oru dwadusi* a proverbial imagery. This was how Chakkikkutty, a *Harijan* woman, eighty years old and widow of Kunjayyappan, began her story of Sardar. *Ekadasi* is a religious vow kept by Hindus of mostly upper castes in awe or devotion to preferred deities for the fulfillment of particular wishes (like marriage, birth of a child etc.). It essentially meant foregoing two meals of the day, assuming that every day there were at least a number of three meals. In Chakkikkutty's rendition of the proverb, there is an inherent sarcasm of the value of these rituals. The *Harijans* lived in an *ekadasi* as a matter of routine and not as a matter of devotion to the sacred. The proverb thus meant that once in thousand days came a day of two meals for the *Harijans*, indicating the abject poverty they faced in those days when the Social movement for the betterment of their lot was in the offing; the 1930s and 40s.

Chakkikkutty and her family were dependents of Sardar's brother, Kumbalaparambil Unniappan Master. As noted earlier, Sardar himself was till the time of his death a member of Unniappan master's family, and spent all the time he could avail when he was free from his responsibilities as a political activist and a school teacher playing with his nephews and nieces, in Unniappan master's house. In the narrative of Chakkikkutty, there was no indication of the pain or suffering with which Sardar's memories were usually evoked. She narrated in a carnivalesque ribaldry, how he stripped himself of his *mundu* (the dhoti usually worn by men and women alike in Kerala covering the lower halves of the body, coming till the ankles of the feet) and gave it to Chakkikkutty when she jocularly mentioned to him, "Why should you go around wearing a torn dhoti?". Returning from his bath in the pond nearby, Sardar failed to notice the tear in his dhoti and when Chakkikkutty pointed it out to him he had no compunctions in stripping himself naked. In rendering the incident with a characteristic humour Chakkikkutty laid bare the reflections of a personality that is serio-comic as Bakhtin would put it; in contradistinction to the epic or the tragic hero that the propaganda machinery of the different Party ideologies seek to institutionalize in the minds of the population of the *firka*.

He stayed away from the caste based organization of the Ezhavas called the SNDP in Nattika , but , continued with the reforms inspired by the Narayana Guru(1856-1932). He was part of a different organization called Sree Narayan Guru Smaraka Samjam as part of which he organized activities around the Perumbatappa school in his neighbourhood, where he organized classes for adult education and also started a library.

Gopalakrishnan stayed with the family of Unniappan Master his immediately elder brother and was dearest to them as cited above from the words of Unniappan Master's wife Panchali. In later times when a dispute arose between him and his elder brother Raman Master (the fifth eldest in Gopalakrishnan's family) under whose guardianship he grew into adulthood, in the school run by whom he also worked as a teacher, it became difficult for Gopalakrishnan to continue in the village of Edathiruthy-his home village. A lot of reasons are attributed to this dispute between the brothers. The novel written on his life gives it to his initial leanings towards Gandhism and sympathy for *satyagraha* that in toto meant a renunciation of the British patronage. According to a news paper article, that appeared on his 48th Martyrdom day(Vasudevan, 1998), the dispute arose over an invitation letter for the wedding of one of Raman Master's relatives. Gopalakrishnan, the article says, told his brother that it was not proper of his relative to discriminate between the school manager and the teachers by giving him(Raman master) alone the card in a separate envelope and the for the rest of the teachers in bulk. Raman Master who was also the manager of the school in which Gopalakrishnan also taught, stood by his relative's decision and tried to justify his act. Gopalakrishnan held that his brother was trying to justify him because he was a relative, upon which he asked Gopalakrishnan to stop coming for classes from the next day onwards⁶⁵. For a short term afterwards, he taught at a girls' school in the village of

⁶⁵ In this regard, a piece of information that we gained in the course of the field-work may as well be shared. This relates to a land dispute, a Harijan peasant from the Edathiruthy village was involved with Raman Master. This man, Arakkaparambil Korappan was settled in a piece of land, which was sold off by its title-owners to Raman master, without the knowledge of Korappan. When Raman master, the new owner of the land, asked Korappan to vacate, he took the issue to court staking the claim that he had a right to retain his settlement wherfrom he cannot be evacuated without his consent. The court studied about the case through a special commission and gave the verdict in favour of Korappan, but asked him

Kazhimbrom where his sister-in-law, was the manager. This dispute anyway ended with Gopalakrishnan leaving Edathiruthy and finding recruitment from Bombay in the British India Air Force.

Livelihood or political opinion; hard to say, separated the lives of Gopalakrishnan and Unniappan who grew up very fond of one another in the absence of their parents. When Unniappan got married and moved into a separate house hold from their ancestral home Gopalakrishnan had moved in with them. Unniappan Master himself wrote to Gopalakrishnan when he went to join the Air Force during the World War II and discovering that he was not at peace with his stay at the Kohima front facing the Indian National Army (INA) of Subhash Chandra Bose aided by the Japanese, that he could return home anytime he wished and in the relative days of scarcity and strict rationing spawned by the War, he was most welcome to share whatever grains they could muster; notwithstanding a family of four children of his own (that subsequently grew into eight), himself and his wife to be adequately fed enough at least to join the school and attend to the studies⁶⁶. Unniappan master was a tenant of the Blahayil landlords and received often reprieves in terms of paying rent on time learning that all his kids were attending school and the eldest two daughters were graduating from the college at Trichur⁶⁷.

to make good the price of the plot of land in seven instalments of sixty one rupee and seventy five paise. Korappan who narrated the entire incident to us, emphasized the landmark character of the trial over the possession of land which he being a Harijan managed to win, at a time when Harijans were grossly treated as the bottomline of the society having no Rights to anything. It was in the same context that he remembered Gopalakrishnan also. He mentioned how morally Gopalakrishnan supported his cause even though the opposite party to the case was Gopalakrishnan's elder brother. Adding a tragic -heroic air to the event, the ageing Korappan said, he learnt about Gopalakrishnan's death, while returning from the court that very day, on which he got the favourable verdict. This happened at the Chetuvu ferry from the conversation of a couple of policemen that he overheard.

⁶⁶ This welcome message send by Unniappan mater to Gopalakrishnan in the Air Force was informed to us by Panchali.

⁶⁷ The cross-community partisanship often took such acute patterns that was often ill-defined according to the communitarian demands raised by the reformist movements heralded by the reformist movement began by the spiritual leader of Ezhavas Sree Narayan Guru. This communitarianism was the guiding principle behind the caste-based organization of Social movements like the SNDP, the NSS (Nair Service Society) or the Nambuthiri Yogakshema Sabha. This principle apparently stood in the way of cross-caste interactions, that transgressed the principles of caste hierarchy. Menon (1994) refers to the institution of the toddy shop that provided an arcadia of sorts where a heteroglossia was existent that soon was to be hijacked by the modernization trends amongst the different communities asserting the needs to ascertain the gains that would accrue from the filling of the Government jobs by distinct

Upon his return he was a “full blown Congressman” as Unniappan recalls even today. This political maturity soon entered the phase of transformation that had by then become the norm with most Congressmen in Malabar- the conversion to Communism. This transformation was effected mainly through the group of teachers that formed the receptive ground for the National movement in Nattika.

The spread of schools in Nattika in the 1920s and 30s had a lot to do with the beginning of Nationalism. This in its turn had its moorings in the number of newly educated youth from the middle land owning class, the *kaanamdaars* mostly belonging to the caste of Ezhavas and Nairs. With the material boost that they obtained with the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930,(there was a re-survey of the land following the Act)giving them freedom from stringent rules of lease helped them in venturing into more differentiated forms of occupation. In further leasing the land to the *verumpattakkar*, while cultivating plots to which they had title they were at the same time peasants, landlords and teachers. This motley paradigm of services that they derived from the land and gave back to it made them a most unique expression of a class that played a vital role in the politics of the period. In serving a multiple role with regard to the relations of land ownership, they identified with a multiplicity of political formations. But the transformations into a radicalization of these roles finally led to their banishment from active and public life, and also made their identity as Communists fast⁶⁸.

Menon has argued the origins of the National and Social movements in Malabar were expressions of a need for community (outside and beyond the Hindu caste system)

community members. The procurement of government jobs led to the formation of a distinctive communitarian ethics amongst the different communities that militated against this heteroglossia. The new reforming zeal saw toddy “only as the marker of lowness and exploitation”, according to Menon (ibid:69).

⁶⁸ The family of Gopalakrishnan, is a prototypical example of this phenomenon, of which many more examples can be given from the village of Edathiruthy itself. This is notwithstanding the umpteen such examples common in the fourteen villages of the Nattika *firka*. The diversification in terms of earning a livelihood apart from being educated and land-owning is the characteristic that is highlighted in our understanding the course of their lives(see page93). It was in this milieu that the ideologies of Nationalism,Socialism and Communism was slowly making its progress.

distinctively expressed in the case of the Tiyyas and the Nairs. "While at a broader level, anti-imperialism and the sense of belonging to a nation could be the basis of an aspiration to community, at the local level, the question of difference was predominant" (1994:40-62). Thus identification with the Congress activity helped to build a sense of community amongst the Nairs. The Tiyyas had earlier responded with the construction of local shrines and organizing a community of equals -Tiyya equals-around them.

These social developments were a turning point in the evolution of the political universe of Gopalakrishnan. In the germane ideology of Communism, he saw the possibility for transgressing the phenomenal ways in which politics was localizing their attention on specific caste groups and organizing them along communitarian lines. This understanding of Communism had its sub text in the only challenge posed to such communalism,i.e. Gandhism and its open challenge to eradicate the practice of untouchability, both of with which Gopalakrishnan found immediate identification⁶⁹.

Joining the school at Perinjanom was but a turning point in the life of Gopalakrishnan. It was while teaching at this school that he became acquainted with P.T.Bhaskarapanicker and made friends with him. Panicker was not a native of the Nattika *firka* and his home village was in the Ottappalam Taluk further north in Malabar. He was a Congress man and also a staunch supporter of the Socialist wing within the Congress, so much so that even students at the school affectionately named him *kuttybose* or the Little Bose⁷⁰.

The growth of Socialism and later Communism in the *firka* was mainly the fruit of the efforts of these early leadership that found their release at Perinjanom in the evenings where P.T.Bhaskarapanicker ,already a graduate in Physics, also engaged them in

⁶⁹ This turn-around in terms of political vision in the life of Gopalakrishnan is one of the original contributions that the novelist who fictionalized Gopalakrishnan's life makes. The novelist, E.V.Gopalan who was also a part of the same landowner-schoolteacher-congressman-socialist-communist milieu that formed the bedrock of National and Social movements in the *firka* is very convincing in pointing out this transformation in the life of Gopalakrishnan.

⁷⁰ Based on information provided by two veteran Communists from the village of Perinjanom, the late Kalarikkal Narayanan and T.K.Sankaranarayanan.

lessons for preparing for passing the matriculation exams or the equivalent of the tenth.

The year 1942 is a remarkable year in the history of the Indian National movement in that it was in the month of August that year when Gandhi called upon the British to Quit India and began a no-holds barred fight against imperialism for the first time in the history of the Congress party. But the year of 1942, was also the year, when the entire coast of Nattika was in a state of a severe devastation following a storm that hit the coast ⁷¹. The Nationalistic agenda that entered the phase of ‘leonine aggression’ was rejected by the Communists and following the Stalinist line, they were supporting the Imperialist war.

But, in Nattika this was not the time for ideological evaluation or introspection .It was a time for concrete action outstepping all class/caste divides. This was where the ethnic grounding of Communism was laid in Nattika, and its ideological variance or dissonance with Gandhism and its clarion call for Quit India went largely unnoticed. Under the banner of the Communists a rescue brigade was formed that could salvage the losses of the people due to the storm. The poor had lost all means to a livelihood; and in their efforts for the building of an ideal society, the Communists were offered a clean slate. The storm thus stands as one single event in the history of the *firka* that can be profitably claimed as having paved the way for winning the faith of the poor for the Communists in Nattika. It is not that this is pointed out by the people of the villages of the *firka* when one talks to them. But, it is more that, the Communists and the solidarity with which they organized the rescue activities have got etched in their minds as an integral aspect of the local psyche. Comrade Sankaran’s reminiscences of the storm ravaged Nattika and efforts of the toddy tappers to fight the natural calamity coupled with the adversity of Government policy, may be recounted at this point. The organization of these workers into the Toddy Tappers’ Union, became as much of

⁷¹ The storm could have been in 1941 or 1942. The more convincing date seems to be 1942,because that way the natural calamity coincides with a lot of other social and political developments too. In local memory it seems etched proverbially as *pathinariley kodumkattu* which means the storm of the year 16 (the malayalam year 1116 or 1941AD).But, here the imageries along with the dates are proverbial.A

basic necessity as lighting the lamp at the installation spot of their patron deity for most of these families according to Sankaran. That was the nature of association that arose out of the developments following the storm in most villages in the *firka*⁷².

Though all the political parties shared sympathies with the disaster-struck Nattika population, the Communists had to bear the brunt of any vandalism perpetrated from the destitution that followed the storm.

There were a couple of incidents when boats ferrying grains and other provisions over the Connelly canal were stopped around Nattika were looted. The loot was later distributed amongst the storm-ravaged land less and home less. The Novel *Innaley* a fictionalized biography of Gopalakrishnan, accounts that Gopi the character that represents Gopalakrishnan in the novel was charged by the police for the alleged crime of complicity in the loot of grain ferries across the Connelly canal. According to the Novel, these incidents paved the way for Gopalakrishnan's leaving his home village for Coimbatore where he joined the Armed Forces of British India. Terrible nostalgia drew him back from the armed forces to his own village. These details do not match with the events told by his brother and sister-in-law, and hence lack authenticity. Not to mention, that the novelist does not make any claims to the authenticity of the events narrated in his novel, either.

His stint with the Air Force according to his brother, had opened new vistas of a Nationalistic imagination, that he came back or returned from the armed forces as "full blown Congress man". But, this was yet another transformative phase in the life of Gopalakrishnan, as the events later turned out to show⁷³.

Although he entered the social life of Nattika as a Congressman and was an organizer in the strain of Sree Narayana idealism even prior to that, he kept clear of the SNDP

more realistic picture seems to be the one given by the Novelist E.V.Gopalan in the fictionalized biography of Gopalakrishnan, which puts it in the year 1942.

⁷² See also pages 71-73.

⁷³ P.Krishnapillai whose name became synonymous with the word 'comrade' *sakhavu* and considered the single most important organizer of the party in Kerala vouches that the revolutionaries of Kerala came to be through a metamorphosis of stages that include the Civil Disobedience movement, Socialist party and the Communist party (Krishnan:1975).

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham the Social reform movement founded by Sree Narayana Guru. As a school teacher he was also an active participant in the Malabar Teacher's Federation activities and was almost singularly responsible for the setting up of a library in his home village that stands to this day. It bears the name originally given to it when founded, the Sree Narayana library. Still, it is as a Communist that he is instantly identified. This is due to the dynamic leadership that he gave to many a programme of the Communists especially during the dog days of communism when the organization went underground.

In 1948, the Madras Government cancelled his Teaching Certificate, and he was drawn into total activism⁷⁴. Sardar Gopalakrishnan is remembered singularly for the heroism with which he organized the activities of the Communists from the underground. In Nattika the police hunt intensified for the Communists in January 1949, even though the Calcutta thesis was adopted in 1948 February 28th itself. He rose to a heroic stature of leadership that was not existent before, and went well with the synonym of Sardar he had earned for himself. His encounters with the Inspector of Police Govindan Nambiar became stuff of folklore. So much so that, many even consider his death to have been caused by this enmity. Such imputations in the case of Sardar's death are but many and varied, a detailed study of which follows in a later chapter.

The alternative political vision of the Calcutta thesis⁷⁵ marked a radical departure in the political universe that Gopalakrishnan situated himself. At the local level, this saw

⁷⁴ Gopalakrishnan, P.K. (2001), *Sardar Gopalakrishnan*, Chirasmara, Edathiruthy:Sardar Smaraka Pathana Kendram.

⁷⁵ The World Federation of Democratic Youth and The International Union of Students convened in Calcutta, from 24 to 27 February 1948, for a conference known as South East Asian Youth Conference, for the purpose of devising a revolutionary strategy for the Asian countries that were emerging from the yoke of colonialism. It was agreed that the Communist parties in South and South East Asian countries must organize violent insurrections and civil wars to overthrow the bourgeois democratic leadership of their respective countries. The CPI Congress met in Calcutta on the following day and adopted a 'political thesis' saying that although Independence was won, "the freedom struggle has been betrayed and the National leadership has struck a treacherous deal behind the back of the starving people, betraying every slogan of the democratic revolution". B.T.Ranadive, the General Secretary of the CPI, took upon himself, the responsibility of engineering the 'final revolution' in India on the lines of the "October 1917 revolution in Russia.

the strengthening of the Party units in terms of its self-control through confessions of commitment to the dogmas of the ideology of Communism that reckoned in the Indian State a bourgeois State that had to be overthrown for the establishment of a proletarian State in its place.

The ordering or functioning of these units as recollected today by veteran Communists from the period, express lot of sympathy towards the grueling act of critical self-examination that was bound on the activists. Gopalakrishnan with the Dostoevkian⁷⁶ essence of self-hood that drove him was a passive victim to such invocations of the dogmatic ideology of the Calcutta thesis, to throw himself open to the most uncompromising critical self-evaluation. The cathartic anguish with which he discussed in such meetings are recalled by one of the sympathizers of the Communists, Panikkettal Chandru. He remembered an instance where Gopalakrishnan sat alone at the back yard of his house after the meeting and cried aloud all by himself. This dimension of grief and guilt that he harboured in his mind towards the possibilities of the Communist ideology in transgressing the given norms of dividing people into rich/poor, high caste/low caste showed the kind of raging fervor with which he organized the activities of the Communists in the underground following the adoption of the Calcutta thesis.

This must have formed the other radical political turn-around in the life of Gopalakrishnan. This phase began his orientation towards the possibilities of working class and peasant movements as opposed to the Social reform programmes along the

On 26th March, the Government of Bengal Presidency declared the CPI an unlawful association throughout the province, raided its office in Calcutta and made a number of arrests. In Tellichery, the police allegedly seized a number of guns, cartridges and knives which the Communists had hidden in a cache. On 26th February 1949, the Communists attacked the Dum Dum airport in Calcutta, the adjoining engineering works of Messrs. Jessop & Co., and a Government gun and shell factory. On 9th March, the Communist dominated trade unions sought to paralyse communication by a strike of the railway, port and telegraph works.

In the Telengana region of Hyderabad State, about 2000 villages passed under Communist control and they undertook land reforms, held courts and passed judgments. The writ of the Government had ceased to run in these parts. On 29th September, the Central Government released a White paper entitled 'Communist Violence in India'. In the wake of this publication, the Madras Government imposed its ban on the CPI, and other Communist sponsored organizations. On 2nd January 1950, the government of Travancore-Cochin resorted to the same step (Gupta, 1988).

⁷⁶ A hero as a representative of a social malady, trying to fulfil his life as an ideology.

lines of Gandhian non-violence and the clarion call for fight against the practice of untouchability.

The political vision of the Calcutta thesis was heralded into Nattika with the publication of a notice. The notice was titled 'the Declaration of Rights'. The *Harijan* Sangh, the *Kisan* Sangham and the Communist Party endorsed the statements in the notice. The contents of the notice asserted the rights of the peasants against the oppression of the landlords and the complicity of the police in the landlords' actions. On the day this notice was brought out, April 6th, a rally was also planned to announce the demands raised in the notice. It started from the Edathiruthy village and proceeded southward toward the neighboring village of Chenthappinny where it was scheduled to end in a public meeting and then disperse. A batch of policemen from the Malabar Special Police stationed at Valappad a village neighboring Edathiruthy set out in pursuit of the procession. The procession wound its way through bushes and thickets, while the police came in a van, that could not go beyond where the motorable road extended.

The MSP cops were unfamiliar with the locality. They were easily duped by the whistles that the activists blew. The whistles were similar to the police whistles and their esprit de corps' made them follow its direction because of which they lost the trail of the procession and ended in frustration and embarrassment⁷⁷. The Communists enjoyed playing many tricks with the police, even though they were their main

⁷⁷ This procession was narrated in its graphic details by K.K. Abhimanyu a young volunteer of the Communists at the time when these incidents were taking place. He was present in the rally mentioned above as well. Abhimanyu, a veteran activist of the CPI from the village of Ponjanam neighbouring the village of Kattur. Both Kattur and Ponjanam were part of the Cochin state, before the formation of a unified Kerala, and in the days of the Communist hunt by the police, we go into lengths in this thesis, these villages offered safety to the Communists in their bid to escape capture by the police, i.e. the by then notorious band of MSP or the Malabar Special Police(see foot-note31).

Abhimanyu when we meet him is a respected member of the CPI from his village and was in the lead of organizing the dairy farmers by forming co-operative societies for the procurement and sale of milk, in their bid to outdo the sales of monopoly milk-suppliers in the market. In the first leg of our field-work, we met him a couple of times and had long conversations with him, with a very active and comprehensive description by him of the events always setting the trend of our dialogues. When we returned to the field work in January 2001, we learnt to our dismay and grief that this veteran comrade had committed suicide allegedly from insolvency. To mourn the loss of such an active, experienced and fresh mind was all that we could do, in return to assuage the pain and emotions on the loss of one of our key informants.

persecutors when captured. What lay behind this amusement is very interesting to explore. A.K.Gopalan,⁷⁸ in his autobiography(1973), reminisces about one of the rallies that he was in leadership- a rally that started from Cannanore in Northern Malabar and ended in Madras the capital or headquarters of the Provincial administration. It was meant to convey grievances to the administrators about the situation of poverty and unemployment that troubled the people and to spread the ideas of Socialism. It covered a distance of nearly five hundred kilometers and crossed many villages enroute. There was a battalion of police that followed the rally throughout its course that joined it at various places at various times. On one day the rallyists decided to play a prank on the police. At the shout of a whistle, while cruising in the jungle bordering Kerala and Tamilnadu, the rallyists would disperse in all directions with the police panicking behind them and at the call of a second whistle they would re-group and continue as if nothing happened. The author recalls the event as it finally transpired, with a lot of delight, how, "one broke his umbrella; another fell down; a third's trousers slipped down"(Gopalan, 1973:82).There was apparently no fun in merely dodging the policemen. Wherever there was an opportunity to fool them, it was best utilized. On another occasion, this time underground and hiding from the police ,he recalls, "Nevertheless, there was a joy and happiness and self-satisfaction in this. One's life was led amidst the people. I was participating as far as possible in the freedom struggle. *I could annoy and browbeat officials. That was reason enough for happiness and self-satisfaction*"(ibid:140 italics added).These reflections point to a vital source of imagination that the independence movement spawned in its resistance to the colonial State. It manifested in the form of a game. A Game, often with grave consequences and grave assumptions. It held no space for individual selves, subjects or egos, but had its distinct set of rules and characters paraphrasing the National movement. The game was fatalistic and the end of the game was already known to the players. The police were always the losers. The stakes in the game were high-for the freedom-fighters, it was their own lives. The premeditated

⁷⁸ A Communist leader from Malabar during the same period and who in later times represented the unified Kerala State in the Parliament.

finish to the game served to intensify the pace of the game. It helped form and transform events with or without the design of the players. This vitality rose to its height towards the actual gaining of Independence on August 15, 1947. But, the game was not to be finished. The game points to an abstract realm of the civilization and has no pertinence to the actual happenings or events of history. It continued with different/same set of players and transpired still more events in its course. But, its fatalism was not changed. It continued to generate more heroes and martyrs in its roll. These games of rivalry possibly intensified with the ban on the Communist parties. A whole new terrain was opened for a new game of hide and seek wherein apart from the policemen and the Communists, the people were both willingly and unwillingly drafted as players and consequently terrorized for their roles by the police.

The next round of arrests in Nattika by the police came with the celebration of the Telengana Day, on the 25th of April. The main charges against the accused were shouting slogans against the Congress government, and swearing the resolve to end landlordism. Seven comrades were arrested following the Telengana day celebrations. The arrests alerted the Communists about the gravity of the situation that was arising before them. So, they moved into a State of underground intended mainly at taking cover from the police, day or night⁷⁹.

The shift of the arena did not mean that the pace of the struggle was slackened in any way. Two significant strikes happened following this in which Sardar played a prominent part. Both these strikes happened in the village of Edathiruthy, which was also home to Sardar. These strikes were, the beedi-workers' strike and the oil mill workers' strike. Even before, any of these strikes began, a singular transformation had happened that made the political situation very volatile in the whole of Nattika *firkā*. This was the transfer of the erstwhile Sub-Inspector of Police, and the posting of a

⁷⁹ The information on these arrests and the details of the strikes, processions by the Communists leading to the January 26th 'Rally for Citizens' Rights were given by K.K. Abhimanyu. Later, he published most of what emerged in our discussions in an essay titled *Sardariney Orkkumbol* (Remembering Sardar) in the souvenir of the CPI Mandalam Committee on the fiftieth anniversary of Sardar's martyrdom, in the year 2000.

new officer, Mr.Govindan Nambiar in his place. This transfer was done presumably, with the intention of beginning a purge of the *firka* to rid it of Communism.

On January 23rd 1949,began the still notorious raids in Nattika under the initiative of the new Sub-Inspector Nambiar. It was the day of the festival in the Catholic Church at Edathiruthy. Across Edathiruthy river was the village of Kattoor, which was a part of the princely State of Cochin. Kattoor offered immunity to the Communists from the police because the CPI was not yet banned there. The Communists availed themselves to full measure of the sanctuary that Kattoor offered them from the police of Malabar.

But even this immunity was breached, on occasions. On the 23rd of January there was a camp of the Communists in Kattoor in one of the sympathizers' houses. The police surrounded this house in the night at 3AM. To the dismay of the Comrades, the police from Irinjalakuda in Cochin State under the Sub-Inspector Mr.Chokkalingam had teamed up with Mr.Nambiar for the raid of the Communists. It was in Chokkalingam's discretion to make the arrests because Kattoor fell inside Cochin territory. After the arrests, the Communists were made to cross the river that separated the villages of Kattoor and Edathiruthy and upon that, they were handed over to Mr.Nambiar who thence took them to the Police Station at Valappad. The charges against the accused this time were conspiring to upset the regime of the Nehru Government. It is another fact that the police failed to frame a charge sheet and hence the Magistrate let the prisoners free after remand custody of fifteen days.

In the month of March 1949, there occurred the strike of the beedi workers. The strike was against the arbitrary ways of the factory owner, in withholding the wages of the workers and reducing the number of their workdays. The workers in reaction decided on a sit-in strike. This meant that, they would take their respective places in the factory on a working day; but, instead of working, they would strike and shout slogans demanding their rightful wages. Sardar was in the leadership here again. A situation of emergency followed. In the end, the owner framed the striking workers in a police case saying they looted his factory. This was followed by a manhunt in the night by the police under Mr.Nambiar. Several people were arrested. Those who escaped the

arrest joined in a flash demonstration the very next day. Sardar was in the lead here too. This provoked further arrests. Not all that were booked were arrested. Those who escaped the arrest procured their bails directly from the Magistrate, thus continuing their evasion.

The workers in the oil mill at Edathiruthy entered the strike in the month of May. The mill had around twenty workers all of whom were Communists. Their main grievance was to fix the number of working hours a day at eight hours. The labor laws that enforced this conditionality were glossed over by the owner of the mill. The workers gave a notice to the management saying the labour laws should be implemented for them. Following the memorandum, a meeting followed in Edathiruthy Bazaar, where Sardar spoke explaining the object of the workers' strike. A group of policemen no more than five in number moved towards the meeting. The listeners slowly receded seeing the police approach. The Head Constable who led them wanted to arrest Sardar once they reached near him. Sardar not only denied them his arrest but asked them to move aside and asked the people to come nearer to him. Then he gave a forceful speech lasting for about half an hour. The police were outwitted and speechless. Once he was finished the meeting dispersed and Sardar and his friends escaped to Kattoor. The strike had its expected outcome. The District Labor Officer intervened and fixed the working hours at eight hours a day.

On September 25th 1949 the elections to the Madras District Board the governing body for the district of Malabar, with limited discretionary powers; nonetheless powerful in deciding matters relating to education and health. The Communists had fielded their candidate. But, it could not do much by way of campaigning. Demonstrations and meetings were banned for the Communists. Mr.K.Sekharan Nair was the Communist party candidate for the constituency of Nattika *firka*. Nonetheless, a few comrades of the Communist party managed to surreptitiously raise the voice of the Communists in a Congress meeting in Edathiruthy. The goons of the Congress chased this comrade down the streets of Edathiruthy bazaar for interrupting the election meeting of the Congress. In fact, through a megaphone he had managed to shout to every one gathered for the meeting that the Communists would reply to all

Congress' allegations and mudslinging the next day. This was the act that provoked the reaction of the Congress leadership to set their goons on him. His comrades were infuriated and the next day a procession followed defying the ban, led by Sardar. No arrests or police interceptions happened to that rally.

On the day of the election, the polling agents for the Communist Party came to the polling station at Valappadu, with a lot of precaution. The agents had to vanish the minute the polling was finished or get arrested. The agents therefore, came out of the polling station before the polling was over and along with Sardar who waited for them at the beach, walked to a sympathizer's home a few miles away. There, after a meal of porridge and boiled tapioca they dispersed. That evening, immediately following the elections, the Government banned the Party.

The Communists had to go completely underground following the ban. They could not be seen anywhere in daylight. If they were reported to be seen somewhere or hiding at a certain place, the police immediately raided the place and arrested them. Therefore, their movements had to be finely calculated. The danger of being caught increased with the police finding useful informants from the Congress party. The informants told the police the whereabouts of the Communist leaders in hiding.

The Communist Party was restricted in its functions. It met in units of five each. Every unit was called a cell. The cells continued to operate the propaganda of the Communists for revolution and change. Taking much risk on their lives, certain comrades managed to stick the Party posters even in the police station at Valappadu.

The finale of the clashes with the police came on the 26th of January 1950. The day was to mark the coming of the Republic of India, the enactment of the Constitution and the swearing in of the President as the head of the sovereign democratic Republic.

The Manifesto of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India on the New Constitution (1950) read,

“Workers! Peasants! Students! Women! Members of the oppressed middle classes! Demonstrate against this exploiter's constitution, this Constitution of National

enslavement on January 26th.....The Communist party calls upon the entire working class of India, upon all working class organizations, to demonstrate the unity of the working class on the AntiConstitution Day, despite the efforts of the Socialist disruptors (*ibid*:7).

Thus, the Central Committee of the CPI had decided to expose what they interpreted as the hypocrisy that concealed the bourgeois regime that led the government on the first Republic Day. It was a National level decision, even though the news reached fast its various local units at the Taluk and village levels, including the Nattika *firka*. The movement was rather weakened in northern Malabar due to widespread arrests by the police. Nattika *firka* was one place where the repercussions were yet to be felt, but for the terrifying presence of a villainous inspector of police. The cells of the Party in Nattika met and decided to register a strong protest against the Congress government on the first Republic Day. The decision was also arrived at that in the demonstration on the Republic Day Sardar should lead the demonstration with the Communist flag. A collision with the police was expected. But, it was still decided that the rally should proceed no matter what comes in the way till it reached its destination where it would disperse after a public meeting. It was next to impossible to hold a peaceful demonstration. The Comrades knew this fact. But, still, the resolution was fast and there was no going back on it.

Two significant developments took place that were to have an everlasting impact on the history of the place between the arrival of the local leadership's decision to hold a rally on the Republic Day for Citizen's Rights (*pauravakaasajatha*). It was the arrest of three of the front ranking leadership of the local committee of the CPI. P.T.Bhaskaranicker, about whom we read later in detail was holed out by the police from his hide-out in Perinjanom at the house of Kalarikkal Narayanan. He was brutally assaulted and dragged through the red mud of the Tippu sultan road before being hurled into the police carriage waiting. The descriptions were often graphic. His shirt was all torn and his fair skin had turned red all over with blood leaking from the wounds of the scratch from the dragging. It was a shocking incident that many believe strengthened the Communists' resolve to stage the proposed rally.

If, P.T.B's (as P.T.Bhaskarapanicker was endearingly called) arrest came about a week before the 26th, three or four days before the proposed rally , two other leaders T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair (about whom more details follow) were also arrested by the police from the festival premises of the *thaippoyam* dedicated to lord Subramanyan. It was the most inopportune of places for a Communist to be seen at that point in the *firka* from where the two leaders were arrested. No one expected something as gross as such an arrest for a Communist⁸⁰. This apparently spread ambiguity in the minds of many an activist regarding the local leadership's resolve to stage the proposed rally on the 26th. Yet, a residue of the leadership that remained met on the 24th of January at Sankaran's (a communist activist, a *Harijan* landless peasant) house in Kaipamangalom village that included Tharayil Velayudhan, Kalarikkal Narayanan, K.S.Kunjitti and Sardar Gopalakrishnan. They resolved to hold the proposed rally even though a fraction of the leadership that arrived at the decision now lay behind the bars, two of them with a dubious distinction, tantamount to a betrayal of the revolution. In the future, their courting arrest, would serve towards binding in the people's minds the belief that Sardar was cast away or abandoned by the top-leadership into donning the role of a sacrificial victim.

On the 26th of January, the Comrades met at the village called Perinjanom in a sympathizer's house. There were about fifty of them of which around twenty were school children from the Upper Primary school at Perinjanom infuriated over the arrest of P..T.Bhaskarapanicker, their teacher, apart from being an active and front ranking leader of the Communists who had participated in the Calcutta Congress that adopted the Ranadive thesis. The police manhandled him before the people of Perinjanom with the intent of demeaning him.

⁸⁰ This fact was highlighted by Mohammed Younus, Kalarikkal Narayanan and also K.K.Abhimanyu.What is note-worthy is that the coloration of a betrayal that this incident later assumed in the collective representations of Gopalakrishnan's death (see chapters).Such narratives imply that, the arrest of the two leaders set Gopalakrishnan as a victim to be sacrificed on the 26th of January at the hands of the police.Neither of these two leaders are alive today, for us to make a clarification.Besides, it is beyond the ambit of our potentials to judge the action of these two leaders in any way.Yet, it is an incident that it is impossible to gloss over in understanding the dialectics at work in studying the totality of the phenomenon of martyrdom/sacrifice.

In the afternoon about 4 o' clock, the demonstration began. They marched in two lines with Sardar leading from the front with the Communist flag in his hands and Mohammad Younus (details follow) bringing up the rear. The people came out in large numbers to watch them . A *jatha* by the Communists was the last thing anyone expected on that day.

On the way towards Sree Narayananapuram, their destination, the marchers neared the police outpost at Mathilakom. The police cops from the MSP, were already marching towards them, led by Mr.Nambiar. Upon reaching the procession the Inspector shouted to them that they were all arrested and the procession was dispersed. Neither the police nor the Communists cared for a reply. In not less than a second, a clash followed. The police successfully dispersed the demonstration. But, Sardar stayed put. Finally, seeing that no one remained but him of the entire procession, he turned back to run. But, the police pounced on him and vent all their anger on him. He was taken to custody and a few hours later, he died .His corpse was buried at the shore in Valappad, by the police.

This is a summary of the events through which the life of the martyr conveys to us the ideas that he stood for. His decision to fight till the last, that earned him the honour of a martyr, was posthumously given to him. It was at a public meeting of the CPI, at Kozhikkode towards the end of 1951,when his watch and pen were handed over to Jyoti Basu, senior leader of the CPI, that the Party immortalized his memory. Till then, his death was a repressed truth. No one dared to talk about it and no one encouraged it, either. This element of repression stands to this day, as we learn from our field work experiences. There is a distinctive air of holiness as much as there is secrecy to it. Yet, his martyrdom is ritually commemorated every year, coinciding with the Republic Day of India. This in fact, is the entry point to a different universe of politics, so distinct and so different from the Republic that we live in; yet, so much within it. It is the most excellent illustration of local genius at work, that valorizes a martyrdom that challenged the Indian Republic, yet, signifies the same political entity thus. We have tried to reach out to the intimacy of this experience that is unique to the political fabric of India as a Democracy, a blemish on its regard for Human Rights, yet an indelible

stamp of its vibrancy. We go into the dialectic of this fact, in the following chapters. Before that, we have to present the biographical sketches of the larger than life role played by the few leaders who were alongside Sardar in the days of his activism and whose names live on in popular tales as honored as the martyr himself, if not more. Mostly they were the members of the *manappuram* or the Nattika *firka* committee of the Communist Party of India⁸¹.

The *manappuram* committee or the nattika *firka* committee of the CPI largely evolved out of the nucleus of school teachers that met late night at the Perinjanom school where the teachers who were preparing for the matriculation exams met on the initiative of P.T.Bhaskarapanicker. Not all of them were school teachers though and they had representatives of different organizations like the Beedi Workers Union, Karshaka Sanghom; and also of the *Harijan* Sangham, they worked in close association with the Communists. As aptly pointed out by Nossiter T.J.(1988), the early literacy of the lower castes and backward communities has been an important factor in the development of the society and , through the medium of newspapers and magazines, of the high degree of politicization. The study class was only one of the meeting places where the ‘radically minded school master’ discussed the pamphlets of

⁸¹ Of this leadership, the lives of P.K.Gopalakrishnan, T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair assume special significance. The idea of holding a rally for the assertion of Citizens’ Rights was a contribution of P.K.Gopalakrishnan. He was also one of the accused in the case of fomenting rebellion against the Indian State, for organizing the rally on the 26th of January 1950, even though he was physically not present in the rally. The outcome of the rally was little anticipated by P.K.Gopalakrishnan when he inaugurated the rally, and left to Trichur assuming fresh responsibilities of the Left-oriented Progressive Writer’s Association, to the nearby town of Trichur. This left Sardar Gopalakrishnan in the leadership of the rally. Gopalakrishnan gave to his namesake, his pen as a mark of his remembrance which incident was later retold in the form of a short story by D.M.Pottekattu, a litterateur of repute in Malayalam of whom we have discussed in detail later.

T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair earned disrepute following Gopalakrishnan’s death as betrayers of the rally. Even this despise or rebuke has a necessary element of sacredness inherent to martyrdom within it. Such sacredness evokes a religiosity of the martyr as a Palestinian fidayee. “But, a fidayee has to win, die or betray”-Jean Genet wrote these words, when he was fighting for the PLO, in Israel, in the seventies when he had sworn to fight with resistance groups that crystallized his hatred towards the civilization of the West (Genet,1993). They-T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair courted arrest two days before the scheduled rally and became objects of ambiguous ridicule. The ambiguity was an aura around the posthumous persona of Gopalakrishnan that combined various ideological streams, the Communists followed in the years following the Indian Independence. The allegiance of both T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair to the CPI as opposed to the CPI(M) have been thus in local ideology interpreted as betrayal of the Revolution; but well within its own ideological precincts that in the light of the aura presented by the martyrdom allows for dissent and difference in its totalizing presence.

the Socialists and disseminated its ideas which spread through the village in oral communications from public meetings, through Socialist ‘street theatre’ to gossip round the village well and in the tea shop(ibid:58). The *manappuram* committee or the Communist leadership as it was called in the *firka* those days comprised of eleven members. It was to be eventually disbanded following the death of Sardar Gopalakrishnan with all its members receding to the underground at various places in Malabar and Travancore-Cochin in the wake of the police arson that vengefully ravaged Nattika. They resurfaced in the year 1952, and fought the District Board elections (P.T.Bhaskarapanicker) as well as the Madras Legislature elections(P.K.Gopalakrishnan) winning both the seats for the *firka*. In 1957, again, the first Legislative Assembly elections to Kerala, also they won, upon which the daily *Mathrubhumi* praised the average Communist activist in the following words. “Deep-rooted in the soil of Kerala and tended by the constant care and attention of its activists is the Communist Party of Kerala. In every remote village, there are Communist activists who are closest to the most down-trodden of the people and have identified themselves with these sections. It might be that he goes about like a vagabond. But in his village, he keeps daily contact with all individuals. And he takes the message of the Party to every heart. He has an objective which keeps him inspired. And to achieve that objective he devotes his self-sacrificing endeavour. The better morrow might perhaps be a mirage, but to him it is the complete truth. And the means to achieve his aim he finds in the Communist Party. The Party is his body and soul”(Nair, 1965:65).

The Nattika *firka* committee of the Communist Party that saw through these epochal transformations in the history of the Party as well as the State of Kerala, comprised of the following names, T.K.Raman, Mohammed Younus, Ramakrishnan Vaidyar, P.A.Prabhakaran, Sardar Gopalakrishnan, P.K.Gopalakrishnan, Salem Krishnan, P.S.Sankaranarayanan, K.S.Nair and P.T.Bhaskarapanicker. We follow here short biographies of a few members of the Committee that we have gathered (at best) in the process of our ethnography to make clear the ethnic particularities of this movement in the *firka* of Nattika.

T.K.Raman, is a respected leader of the people of Nattika *firka*, despite many pitfalls, in his leadership. Regarding the martyrdom of Gopalakrishnan, if there is any name more vulnerable to rebuke than that of T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair, then that is only that of Govindan Nambiar, the Inspector of Police who allegedly beat Gopalakrishnan to death. In the entire *firka* a single soul lenient to the role played by T.K.Raman in ‘setting up’ Gopalakrishnan as a victim for sacrifice would be hard to find. No one would be even willing to speculate that while getting arrested these two leaders had little of any intention of sending Gopalakrishnan to the grave. This characterization notwithstanding, it is the leadership that T.K.Raman continued to give the Communist movement in the *firka* for decades, even after the death of Gopalakrishnan and his release from the jail that has earned for him the kind of respect that he enjoys amongst the people today. Born on 12th June 1912, at Talikkulam, Nattika into an Ezhava family⁸², he started his life as a grocery shop owner to feed his family. But, he soon left the trade and joined the National movement as a Congressman. A man called Kongattil Raman Menon, is cited to have been influential in initiating T.K.Raman into politics⁸³. Within the Congress, eventually, he became a Congress Socialist and a Communist. In the 1930s rose to the leadership of the Communists in Nattika and was the Secretary of the *manappuram* committee and the *Ponnani* Taluk committee of the CPI when they were formed. Led a hunger march to the revenue inspector’s office in the *firka* (every *firka* had a revenue inspector as its statutory-administrative head who scrutinized the collection of the land leases and taxes by the *adhikaris* in every *amsam* - the local revenue unit), in 1940-41, when World War II ravaged the domestic economy, of which the poor bore the brunt. He was later arrested for this and was brutally beaten and assaulted by the police in the public during the arrest. Later released, ‘T.K.’(as he was endearingly called), complained to the Collector Mr.D.Williams which resulted in a suspension from service of three policemen who carried out the assault. He was also in the leadership of the Communists in the *firka* when the rescue work following the storm of 1942 was at its height. A veteran

⁸² Information taken from Muhammed (2000) a short essay on T.K.Raman, that appeared in *Sardar Smaranika*, 2000.

⁸³ Ibid.

Communist, a school teacher and also a gifted volley ball player, E.S.Kunjikkalavan master, from his neighbourhood credits him with the leadership of the group of Communist volunteers who raided a boat ferrying rice and sugar across the Connolly canal and distributed it amongst the storm-struck poor⁸⁴. T.K. was arrested once more. This time, it was two days before the *pauravakasajatha* on the first Republic day, along with K.S.Nair another front ranking leader of the CPI in Nattika. He was later released without any charges when the ban on the Communists was lifted. When the State of Kerala was formed, he became the secretary of the CPI Trichur District Committee. He stood resolutely for development activities in the *firka* like the tarring of the Tipu Sultan road that later became a National high way, the founding of the Nattika *firka* rural bank that volunteered the distribution of statutory ration of essential goods, in the late fifties, the founding of a high school in his home village Talikkulam and a polytechnical school at Valappadu, the neighbouring village.

Mohammed Younus was born to a family with a political background, represented by his Father Abdul Qadir master, who as an activist of the Congress had participated in the Non Co-operation movement of 1921, and was sent to jail. He got married, when he returned from the prison, and Mohammed Younus was born in 1927 as the second of a subsequently eight children family⁸⁵.

His Father died early, when Younus was only eleven years old, i.e. in 1939. Younus quit his studies ever since, though he continued to satiate his personal angst to learn from other sources. To make a living, he used to sell snacks that his mother would make at home, in the various shops and hotels nearby. He also learnt the craft of rolling beedis to augment the efforts of his mother at home to support themselves. It was during this phase of rigour and strife in his own life, that he was first attracted to Communism. The book that captured his political imagination, he still retains in his memory, was collectively authored by K.Damodaran, C.Unniraja & E.M.S., and was

⁸⁴ Kunjikkalavan Master.E.S, *Volleyballum Communist prasthanavum* (Ibid).

⁸⁵ Mohammed Younus leads a life retired from all kinds of active politics, although people now know him as sympathetic to the Congress party. He gave us all the details that follow in the narrative himself, over a three hour long interview.

titled, "What Malayalis Should Do For The Unity And Freedom Of The Nation?" What appealed to Younus, most, was the clear perspective in which it laid out what ideally should be the approach to the minorities, at a National level.

He was the Secretary of the Beedi Workers' Union in Nattika and was instrumental in bringing out the *avakaasaprakhyapana notice* (Declaration of Rights) mentioned earlier. He narrated to me an incident to show how the Communist movement in those days was a movement against casteism as much as it was against other forms of injustices. He cited an incident on one of the Chathayam Day celebrations, to mark the birth anniversary of the Social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. The Guru was born into the Ezhava caste, one of the lower castes and had waged a singular life long crusade against the evils of the caste system while preaching modern norms of social organization and education. On the occasion of the celebrations, the Communists, including Younus had taken the lead in organizing the people. But, a group of people, who had gathered there under the instance of a local Ezhava landlord, wanted to wrest the proceedings for themselves and not let the Communists steal the opportunity to hold remembrances of the Guru in their disfavor. Whenever the Communists were about to begin their speech, these vandals would intercept, by beating loud on their drums. Younus and friends shifted their venue from one junction to another one nearby. But, the vandals, who were apparently paid for creating nuisance, did not relent. They followed Younus and friends to wherever they went. Upon this, Younus got very angry, and threatened the drum beaters, with a long knife used to cut jack fruit , that he would splice through the outer of their drums, if they did not stop. The miscreants retreated immediately afterwards.

Younus was arrested along with another leader of the Communists, P.K.Gopalakrishnan while campaigning for the CPI's candidate during the 1949 District Board elections. They were soon bailed out by the Party counsels and advised to organize the party from the underground once the Party was summarily banned from public activities following the District Board elections.

He participated in the *pauravakaasajatha* held on the first Republic day as the vice-captain of the volunteers in the rally and witnessed the arrest and the brutal assault of the volunteer captain Sardar Gopalakrishnan by the police, who subsequently succumbed to the injuries without receiving any medical attention. He escaped police arrest, fled Nattika and took refuge in a mosque along with some friends at Cochin from where he was arrested by the police a fortnight later to be released later along with the lifting of the ban on the CPI. He has not been in active politics ever since and has in the public cult receded into private life with sympathies for the Congress party.

P.A.Prabhakaran came from the family of Nairs in the village of Edathiruthy, Nattika⁸⁶. Traditionally a higher land-owning caste vis-à-vis the Ezhavas and following an avuncular system of matriilineal descent and polyandry, Prabhakaran's family was dependent on the *Blahayil* family of Nairs from the same village for their *kaanam*. He entered no profitable occupation until reaching late middle age and was mostly dependent on the communal sharing of his matrilineal household for his essentials. The Nairs were the main landlords of the village, but the family of Prabhakaran was still not one of the chief beneficiaries. Being a leader of the Communists, on the other hand, his house was subject to repeated police raids time and again by the police, on charges of hiding the Communists that they had to finally leave their house and property behind and take refuge elsewhere. Such an instance is singular in the history of the village where a whole family had to leave their ancestral property behind and flee the village to escape the man-hunt by the police.

Sardar's death following the first Republic Day had made it even more difficult for Prabhakaran to continue in Edathiruthy and he had therefore gone undercover. The scene of those who remained at Edathiruthy was the worst. Chathan a landless peasant worker , a *Harijan* and a Communist activist was caught by the police and paraded through the streets after brutal assault and taken to each and every one of the houses

⁸⁶ P.A.Prabhakaran or 'Prabhakarji' as he is fondly addressed had a whole-hearted admirer in Ravi, another veteran Communist from the village of Edathiruthy, whom we have discussed at greater length at a later stage. The details that follow here were mainly given by him added to the short references many others made in the course of their remembrances. *Chirasmarana* a souvenir published by Sardar Smarak Pathana Kendram (2001) also carried some essential details on him (pp.10-11).

where the Communists hid themselves for the police to file separate cases against all of them and harass them physically. One of the most frightening acts by the police was to call the different members of a family outside their home and ask them to beat each other. Father would beat his son or vice versa and this added to the delight of the marauding camp of policemen that spread terror in the streets of Edathiruthy. Others who were caught were taken to the street corners and made to announce in the public that they denounced communism and severed all allegiances to it. Such cumbersome and prosaic ideological manipulations by the police were to manifest its effects years later. Questions of political loyalty were ransacked by the police in the most vicious way after the startling representation of it that they faced in the form of Sardar. In trying to invert the image of the Communist in the local imagery they were fostering an identity that would be irrepressible in the years to come.

Prabhakaran meanwhile had to adapt to the ways of the poor. The most outstanding of his attributes as Ravi recalls was this. It was not difficult to escape the notice of the villagers-mostly *Harijans*-who offered the Communist leaders their houses to remain out of the public gaze and plot strategies for a rebellious overhaul of the social relations; not merely the economic relations but the entire vista of social relationships, how adaptable were the Communists to their ways of living. Prabhakaran evoke most endearing remarks about him. The hospitality of the *Harijan* households would demand them to treat their leaders—mostly higher caste Ezhavas and Nairs—to at least a respectable meal a day. This would comprise a spicy dish apart from their morsel of porridge which was the usual fare. It was not in the habit of most leaders to be content with merely the latter, which fact obviously reflected back on their diffidence to leave their own caste or class upbringing, despite their adherence to the ideology they claimed to practice. But it was remarkable that Prabhakaran adjusted to their diet absolutely to make them content enough with their host. This was indeed a rare attribute as people recall about Prabhakaran thus highlighting a virtue of his leadership.

Implied in such observations that some of my respondents made, is the demand of the times being a complete overhaul of human interactions rather than the implementation of any specific agenda for social revolution – be it the Calcutta Thesis or the Guruvayur *Satyagraha*, 1936. Also implicit to such remarks on virtues of leadership, were the absence or dearth of leaders like Prabhakaran, in the contemporary Communist leadership in the *firka*.

Prabhakaran was arrested by the police while changing shelter in the underground, later released. He had no home to come back to in his village. The police had ransacked his house. Consequently, his family had sold their belongings and moved into the neighbouring village of Kattoor which was immune from police raids owing to its location within the Cochin State where they bought property and settled down in different plots. Prabhakaran himself went to Malappuram where he continued his activities with the Communist Party and was the office secretary of the Malappuram District Committee of the Party for a long time. He married and settled with his family there itself. He never returned to his home village not even in his death, which happened in a hospital not far from Edathiruthy.

K Sekharan Nair was born in the village of Edathiruthy and began his political activities in the Congress. In 1946, he joined the CPI and soon became a member of the *manappuram* committee and later of the *Ponnani* Taluk committee⁸⁷.

He earned infamy in Nattika by courting arrest two days prior to the *pauravakaasajatha*. He was arrested along with T.K.Raman in surfacing from the underground on the 24th of January evening, notwithstanding the severe censure that they faced from the police. Their arrest fosters the feeling in Nattika that Sardar was a victim offered in sacrifice to the police. Even though hated and rebuked in intimate circles of the Communists, for this incident, he had a leadership stature that evoked a fatherly kind of devotion as confessed to us by Ravi.

⁸⁷ Information taken from, *Viplavakariyaaya Sakhavu K.S.* by Raghavan.C.K, Sardar Smaranika, 2000, CPI Mandalom Committee, Edamuttom. The daughter of K.S.Nair continues to live in their ancestral house-hold in the village of Edathiruthy along with her family, who was also instrumental in providing with some information.

Following the legalization of the CPI in 1952, he became active in developmental politics taking the lead in advocating for the setting up of the polytechnic college at Valappadu and the Nattika *firka* rural bank. In 1964 following the split of the CPI, he joined the Marxist faction and was elected to the Kerala Legislature in the 1967 elections. But in the year 1969 he left the CPI(M) to join the CPI and remained there till his death. The martyr column or pillar erected to the memory of Sardar Gopalakrishnan in Edathiruthy, home to both Sardar and K S Nair, stands on the land belonging to K S Nair, and upon his death was registered in the name of the party by his daughter. He was widely known as the chief ideologue of the party in Edathiruthy and in his memory a library is coming up in Edathiruthy right next to where the martyr pillar to Sardar stands.

P T Bhaskarapanicker belonged to a village in Central Malabar. He came to the village of Perinjanom to join the Perinjanom upper primary school as a teacher. He was more qualified than any of the teachers serving in the neighboring schools. Having completed his Graduation in Sciences, he was a good source of inspiration for the rest of the teacher community to take up higher studies while maintaining their jobs in the schools. Panicker himself took initiative in this regard by starting tuition classes for the teachers who were enthused by the presence of Panicker to their good. Apart from Sardar, P.T.Bhaskarapanicker was the only other member of the *manappuram* committee who had experiences of travelling in the Northern parts of India. He is also reported to have participated in the Calcutta Congress of the CPI in 1948 that adopted the Ranadive Thesis⁸⁸.

A lot of the school teachers thus started meeting at Perinjanom high school with P.T. who took classes for their matriculation exams. Qualifying the exam also meant an increase in the pay. Therefore, the opportunity that P.T. offered was all too welcome for the teachers. The formation of a teacher community in Nattika that later became the breeding ground for the Communist ideology had its seeds in these classes. The

⁸⁸ Ayyappanmaster,T.R (2001), *P.T.Bhaskarapanicker: Oranusmaranam, Chirasmaraana, Edathiruthy: Sardar Smaraka Pathana Kendram.*

teachers once turned into avowed Communists took great interest in organizing study classes on Communism, Socialism and a lot of other topics. As mentioned earlier Sardar took initiative to start a library at Perumbapadappa, Edathiruthy where he also started classes for adult education.

P.T.Bhaskarapanicker rose to high esteem and endearment amongst the villagers of Nattika.Perinjanom school where he taught became a hub of the activity of the Communists in Nattika.It was his arrest and brutal assault in public that led to the rally on the 26th.Again,he provided inspiration to the novelist E V Gopalan to write a novel about the death of Sardar.This matter should be reckoned also with the fact that P.T.B. as he is endearingly called amongst the people was not a native of Nattika.A combination of these factors make his presence in the political plot of the dog days of Communism especially reminiscent to the people.

He had made known his Socialist leanings from the days he joined the Perinajom school itself. Later he became a front ranking leader of the Communists and lost his job when the party was banned.He did not go back to his village, but resolved to stay on in Nattika. He changed shelter many times before finally taken in by the police from Perinjanom two days before the *pauravakaasjatha* planned for the first Republic Day.

Upon release from the jail, he stood for the election to the Malabar District Board held in 1952 for the CPI, which he won from Nattika and went on to become the president of the District Board. As an elected representative he used his position mainly for the setting up and spreading of schools in Malabar. Both Victor. M. Fic (1970) and T.J.Nossiter (1988) two pioneering theoreticians on the mass bases and the ideological strategies of the CPI in Kerala have mentioned his contributions as the President of the Malabar District Board, 1954 in the welfarist policies of a democratic administration that won the recognition of even the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the form of award for role-model for “efficiency and model administration”. Victor.M.Fic describes, this brush with democratic politics, as “a kindergarten in which the Communist cadre learnt the ABC of responsible government and effective

administration" (Fic, 1970: 43-44). Such recognition at the National level according to Nossiter was instrumental in coaxing the adoption of the parliamentary means of class struggle by the CPI in the light of the forthcoming first Assembly elections to the Kerala State legislature at the Palaghat Congress of the CPI in 1956, which virtually meant the Communists' total emergence from the underground and a shelving for the time being if not a total denunciation of the armed struggle against the bourgeois regime of the Congress Government adopted in the Calcutta Thesis of 1948.

P.T.B. continued his efforts as an enlightened administrator and policy reformer even as private secretary to the education minister of Kerala, Joseph Mundassery when the first ministry was first formed in 1956. Even outside government he continued his activities by participating in the people's science movement of Kerala the *Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad* and striving for the popularization of scientific learning and progress through the publication of a new magazine called *saastrakeralam*.

Till his last he maintained his links with Nattika where he began his political activities and was instrumental in inspiring the novelist E V Gopalan, a colleague of his while teaching at Perinjanom UP school into immortalizing Sardar Gopalakrishnan by writing a novel in his memory.

P.K.Gopalakrishnan, had just completed his barrister course from the Law College in Madras when he came back to his village, Mathilakom in the year 1948⁸⁹. He was arrested successively three times within the year 1950, thenceforth. There was a police case following an incident at Mathilakom on the 26th January 1950 in which he was the prime accused even without his participation in it. It was an holistic suppression and character assassination of the Communists and everyone and everything related to

⁸⁹ P.K.Gopalakrishnan today leads a life of retirement from politics in his home village Mathilakom in the erstwhile Nattika *firka*, today a part of Kodungallur *firka*. His last office of responsibility before retirement was the post of the Deputy Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly. He has also written a history of Kerala, titled *Keralathinte Saamskarika Charithram*, published by the Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, first published in 1976. This is an exhaustive and detailed volume on the history of Kerala, interpreted from the historical materialist view point of Marxism. The qualitative attribute, that the author claims for his work is that, it emphasizes the importance of the cultural forces in determining the course of history as opposed to the conventional view of Marxists that credits the economic forces overwhelmingly.

them, by the police and hardly a Communist revolt like what happened in Telengana in 1948 itself.

Gopalakrishnan was later relieved from the pain of false accusations, when the Government summarily withdrew the charges leveled against him and 39 others who were implicated in that case which was framed on charges of attacking the police outpost at Mathilakom. This was to come only in 1953 whereas the case itself was registered in 1950. By then, Gopalakrishnan was an elected member of the Madras State Legislature from the constituency of Nattika *firka* and A.K.Gopalan a front ranking leader of the Communist party had won his acquittal from the Madras High Court for charges of fomenting threat to the security of State. This refinement of charge was absent in the case against Gopalakrishnan and others which made a Constitutional argument difficult and practically impossible. In the case of A.K.Gopalan it was different. The blatantly constitutional nature of his case made the argumentation easy and the judgement of the Madras High Court was endorsed by the judiciary all over India. Thenceforth, the Government also relaxed its restrictions on the Communists and made it easier for them to be part of the civil society, till the Naxalite uprisings came in the late sixties. Being a law graduate the announcement of the Republic Day on the 26th of January inspired Gopalakrishnan very much. In fact, he claims that the idea to hold a rally to highlight the discrepancy within the idea of the Republic, when the Communists were denied the Basic Freedoms was an idea that formed in his mind. The entire Nattika Taluk committee endorsed the decision. At the time the rally was planned, it was meant strictly to be a peaceful demonstration and the maximum adversity anticipated was a *lathi* charge and arrest by the Police. Subsequently, it so turned out that, it became a conflict between the Communists and the Police.

There were three cases in all that were charged against P.K Gopalakrishnan during the period 1948-50. None of these cases was genuine. They were all fabricated and made to implicate Gopalakrishnan for the reason of being a Communist .He described how the first of these cases was framed with a laugh on his face. The charge was trying to persuade the wife of a renegade Communist to pour acid into her husband's eyes. The manner in which these cases were framed had a necessary element of ridicule ingrained within. The purport of this ridicule was to diminish the character of the Communists. They were aimed at dispelling the aura that surrounded the Communists in their milieu. On a larger scale this ridicule represented the face of authority in a Nattika where the traditional grasp of power were fast slipping away from the grip of the landlords. At least in the case of Nattika, the Mathilakom incident or the *pauravakaasajatha* is of remarkable importance, because, it marked the most powerful and the most brutal expression of the modern State in the history of the place. The fact that, it came on the very day of the inauguration of the Indian Republic, made it much more significant than it may have otherwise deserved. P K Gopalakrishnan although did not participate in the *pauravakaasjatha* inaugurated the procession and assuming his responsibility as the Secretary of the Progressive Writers' Association under the aegis of the CPI, Trichur chapter left Nattika. It is believed that Sardar left him his pen on the fatal day⁹⁰.

He did not restrict his field of activity to Nattika either. The impact of the Communist movement in Nattika was felt in the neighbouring taluk of Kottappuram belonging to the Cochin State was felt in the form of a *satyagraha*. This *satyagraha* was for getting the rights to walk on a path that bordered /skirted the compound wall of the 'paliyam' family that belonged to the Nair caste and was traditionally powerful being the Dewans of the Cochin State for generations.

⁹⁰ Any written matter surviving from Sardar was unobtainable. Any such matter, if at all existed, were immediately destroyed following his death, wherever it was kept. This was done out of sheer fear of the police who could frame charges for keeping libelous literature or out of sheer fondness for the communists, that, should such material come into the hands of the police, they may lead to the capture, arrest and ultimate foil on their plans.

This *satyagraha* happened in 1948 and was under the leadership of the Communists and had unstinted support from people of all communities and castes⁹¹. One of the memorable aspects that P.K. Gopalakrishnan recalled was the large turnout of Namboothiri women for the ‘*satyagraha*’ and an inter-caste marriage that followed its success between a Namboothiri woman and an Ezhava male who met during the *satyagraha* for the first time.

In the elections to the Madras legislature, in 1952 he was the CPI candidate who defeated the opposite candidate from the Congress, one of Nattika’s most powerful landlords, Adiparambil Raman. When the CPI split in 1964, P K Gopalakrishnan remained with the CPI and now leads a life retired from active politics. He has published several books in Malayalam, one of which is a version of Kerala’s cultural history approached from a dialectical perspective.

There are a lot of other people with whom the days of underground for the CPI is instantly identified. First and foremost among them is a *Harijan* by the name V K Chatahan – *ValluvankaduAinikkadu Koran Chathan*⁹². There were about thirty *Harijan* families on the *valluvankadu thara*. The Communists once the Party went underground found shelter with the *Harijan* families. This turned the police severely against them. The *Harijans*, one and all were identified with the Communists irrespective of the fact whether they were actually Communists or not. However, VK Chatahan was an avowed Communist. He was one of the main organizers of the party when it went underground. He even lost his father to police beatings during one of the wanton raids by the police at his house⁹³. He took initiative to move the Communists from one shelter to the next when it was learned that there was any jeopardy in continuing in the same shelter. He was himself finally taken in by the police following the *pauravakaasajatha* and brutally assaulted in public by the police made to walk down

⁹¹ T.K.Oommen(1985) records the satyagraha as one of the most significant of all social movements in the Cochin state(ibid:73).

⁹² Valluvankadu stands for the *thara* or the raised land set amidst fields where all the workers in the fields of the *Blaayil* family of Edathiruthy settled. Ainikkadu stands for the landlord family in the north where they were originally the dependents before migrating to the south .

the roads disclosing one after the next all the houses that were sympathizers of the Communists. It is still wondered how it was that he survived such beatings by the police⁹⁴. Nonetheless, he went on to become an activist of the CPI, and in 1963 became an elected member of the Edathiruthy Panchayat.

Kochupennu, also from the *Valuvankaduthara* is another important organizer of the Communists from the village of Edathiruthy⁹⁵. She is now seventy four years old and has been an active social worker in the Edathiruthy village of Nattika *firka*. Her social activism began with the fight to get the rights to wear blouses while working on the fields of the local landlord, the Blahayil Nair. She was part of an organized effort to establish these rights for all the *Harijan* employees of this landlord. The first political battle of Kochupennu was a success. She could scare away the landowner's henchman who threatened her along with friends of stripping them in the field. They showed him the block of wood that they used to break cluttered mud in the field and threatened him instead that if he ever attempted anything like abusing them, it might even cost him his life. Kochupennu and friends suffered no further humiliation or threats for working in the fields wearing a blouse, to shield their skin from the scorching sun. No Human Rights existed for the *Harijans* in the thirties and the forties. There was much hope, with the coming of the Independence that, the situation

⁹³ These information were provided by Sathish, a young activist of the CPI(M) and a member of the Sardar Smarak Pathana Kendram in the village of Edathiruthy. The brutality that the police showed on V.K.Chathan particularly was cited by many others too, as the worst of such cases.

⁹⁴ Another activist of the *Harijansangh* Velayudhan, who became a sympathizer of the communists remembered how on a couple of occasions, the police actively confronted him. Once, they crossed him at a venue of public meeting, where he was going to speak, and made him speak to the crowd by force, that, communism was meant for the destruction of the country. Another time, he was taken by force to the temple and made to swear to the deity that he was not a communist. Both the times, he complied without any resistance. Not merely that, his house was searched several times by the police, for 'underground' communist leaders and he was beaten up in front of his family by the police only out of frustration that they could not find anyone. Through repeated raids like these, in different houses in Nattika, belonging mainly to those of the *Harijans* and Ezhavas, the Inspector, Mr.Nambiar, established a de facto autocracy, with few people to challenge his usurped power.

⁹⁵ Kochupennu, the elderly peasant woman from Edathiruthy had tears filled in her eyes most of the time when she was talking about the struggles of her time. May be one reason, why her son N.C.Ravi, a retired school teacher from the Government school at Perinjanom often intervened on her behalf to complete her reminiscences. Ravi master is also an activist of the CPI(M) and was particularly enthusiastic about the project of writing a history of the village from the sub-altern view-point of the peasants. He introduced us to another veteran Communist Ravi, saying that his namesake and neighbour would be able to guide us in completing such a project.

was going to change and the *Harijans* would be dignified free Citizens. But, they were mislaid hopes (*vyamoham*); merely a chimera , they quickly realized. This was also one of the reasons, why there was a big support for the Communists from the *Harijans*, in the period immediately following Independence.

They had no right to wear a shirt or a blouse, or grow a moustache, cut or trim their hair, or even wear clean clothes. The *HarijanSangh* that was one of the earliest organizations of the *Harijans* was an offshoot of this society where atrocities far from the imagination of any contemporary mind, took place against the *Harijans*. -The *Harijan Sangh* sowed the real seeds of communism in Nattika. The Communists too recognized in the *Harijans* the true agency of the revolution. They were very quick to respond to the demands voiced by the *Harijans* for their Basic Rights.

Kochupennu wanted to participate in the *pauravakaasajatha* that claimed the life of SardarGopalakrishnan , but was refused to do so by the *manappuram* committee leadership, including Sardar, for reasons of security and danger to their lives. Upon the removal of the ban, when the elections to the District Board came in the year 1952, Kochupennu was one of the candidates of the Communists. She did not win the elections and following many scandals in her life for the mid-wife's job that she often did, as a traditionally trained hand, gradually withdrew from public life and continues to this day to earn her living from weaving mats from dried pineapple leaves.

D M Pottekkattu was the earliest crusader of the Communists in Nattika⁹⁶. Born in Chulur village bordering Edathiruthy in Nattika, he was a playwright of reputation. His dramas are published by the Sahitya Akademy of Kerala and are widely read throughout the State. He has written short stories too one of which (*pena paranja katha*) is about Sardar Gopalakrishnan and the legacy he leaves behind. The legacy is symbolized through his pen that he left with his comrade and friend P K Gopalakrishnan before he started out in the procession that took his life. He single

⁹⁶ Most of the details about D.M.Pottekkattu, who is no more come to us through Ravi and Sathish who is an admirer of his writings as much as the lonely crusade of Communism he carried out when people of the village were only beginning to wake up to the ideas of Communism, in the late twenties and early thirties of the last century.

handedly took the charge of volunteering the Communist ideology in Nattika, when communism was yet to take its roots in Nattika. He used to come in procession all by himself with the red flag of the Communists and give speeches at public spots. Such was the zeal that he is known to have shown towards communism and is often identified as the beginnings of the Communist ideology in Nattika. He went on to fulfil his reputation as a dramatist, and even inaugurated the controversial play written by Thoppil Bhasi *ningalennay Communistaacki* ("you made me a Communist") at Chavara village in Kollam District. The play has a most significant place in the cultural history of Kerala in the last fifty years. Later he directed three full length feature films in Malayalam and in Nattika is widely respected for initiating Ramu Karyat, (also from Nattika *manappuram*) into film making. The latter went on to make *chemmeen* ("prawn") that was the first ever film in Malayalam to win the Indian President's award for the best picture. Such invocations of achievements in theatre and cinema is an intrinsic aspect of the history of communism in Nattika and we shall see why it is more so when we look into the details of Sardar's martyrdom.

Such were the lives of the earliest crusaders of communism in the Nattika *firka*. We have discussed their lives briefly in order to leave trails marking our way into the density of a social fact that stands loomingly large before us in the form of Sardar's martyrdom. Before we venture into the thicket of this ideology, there are a few more developments in the history of the Communist movement in Kerala that we need to be aware of.

The Communist party though founded in 1939 did not appear in the public till the year 1940. And when it appeared nor did it choose to sever links with the National movement under the leadership of the Congress from which the Communists originally emerged. This they did by choosing the date of January 26th, on which date in 1930, the Congress adopted its resolution for the achievement of total independence from the British regime as its goal. In Malabar, on the same date in the year 1940, the Communists decided to go public for the first time in the history of their activism, by writing bills and flaunting posters on the walls of Government establishments, streets, roads and other public places, hailing the revolution and assailing imperialism and

colonialism⁹⁷. Following one year in 1941 they went public in Travancore-Cochin; again on the same date .This emergence from within the shadow of the Congress was happening when the CPI as such was legally banned by the British regime. As a magical coincidence on the same date , in 1950 after the gaining of Independence there is again a re-emergence of the CPI from under legal banishment in the *firka* of Nattika. Such minute historic details we find reflected in the mimetic narrative of the history of the Communist movement when we look into the magical, mythical and theatrical characteristics that define Gopalakrishnan's martyrdom/sacrifice.

The day of 26th January 1950 retained this fatalistic significance for the Communists through the publication of an article by the Cominform (Krishnan, 1975).The Party was seriously rethinking its plans for an overthrow of the Indian State by force in the months preceding the formation of the Republic. To resolve the crisis, the CPI sought the counsel of Stalin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union through a delegation of Comrades Ajay Ghosh and S A Dange who sought a change in the underground strategy and look for other ways and Comrades Basavapunnayya and Rajeswar Rao who stood for a Chinese path for the Indian revolution .This revision of strategies had begun to spread amongst the ranks even before the actual divulging of the same in an official manner. This came on the day of the 26th January 1950 in an article published by the Cominform that in revising the earlier strategy of armed rebellion virtually welcomed the new born Indian Republic into the world of sovereign Nations. The Charter of Slavery that the CPI had called the Indian Constitution , it wasn't any longer. But the day of the 26th January 1950 the ideological milieu of Indian Communism was shrouded in severe ambiguities about the nature of the Indian

⁹⁷ Kalarikkal Narayanan, a grocery-shop runner from the village of Perinjanom in the Kodungallur *firka* ,who passed away in 2001, after the first leg of the field-work was finished was an active member of the CPI during the times of underground.He performed the crucial task of couriering messages to and from the Party leadership with the rest of the Party comrades in hiding.A very important job indeed given that, none of the comrades knew where the others were.This was an information shared by the Party Secretary and the courier alone.He had this to say about the night of january 25th 1940, when the Communists for the first time went public with their slogans and ideas.The volunteers painted the walls with scribblings of Communist slogans written with coal tar, after covering the finger tips with a piece of cloth and dipping it in the can of tar.As he recalled they all wore a uniform on that night.The event anyway passed peacefully, without any immediate consequences.

State that declared itself a Republic. It is this ambiguity that is best captured in the concrete idol of a martyr, -of Sardar Gopalakrishnan in Nattika *firka*- that fact alone served to make his martyrdom to be observed as a ritual in the future.

These ambiguities continued late into the fifties, that is, even as Ranadive was ousted from the Polit Bureau and his thesis was replaced by the new strategy adopted by the new PB headed by the new secretary Rajeswar Rao which sought the Chinese path of guerilla warfare and a leadership role for the peasantry and liberation army as distinct from the former strategy that placed the proletariat and the trade unions in the forefront of the assault against the State. Thus not till the Palghat Congress of the party in April 1956 was the Independence of the Indian State recognized by the party. Yet, in 1952 February when the first general elections were held, the party published its manifesto and contested the elections, while continuing to maintain that peaceful or parliamentary measures alone would not serve its cause. This implied an unfulfilled return to the parliamentary ways of waging the struggle as the party had already done by contesting the 1946 elections to the central and provincial legislatures. It had an electoral alliance for the 1952 parliamentary elections with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party founded by Acharya Kripalani who had left the Congress. In Kerala the KMPP was led by K.Kelappan (famed as Kerala Gandhi) who along with A K Gopalan of the CPI were elected from *Ponnani* and Kannur with a good majority. A K Gopalan was the first leader of the opposition in the Indian parliament, when the party that he represented did not yet accept the formal Independence of the Indian State. Such was the nature of this ambiguity.

Victor. M. Fic (1970) has charted the path followed by the CPI in coming to terms with the system of Parliamentary Democracy (the gist of their ideological ambiguity), and the adoption of a strategy for a 'peaceful transition to Communism'. According to Fic, it took a series of policy measures from 1948-56, when the strategy was finally conceptualized in Kruschev's address at the XXth Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of Soviet Union). It had its beginning, in September 1947, when the Founding

Conference of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform)⁹⁸, urged ‘local’ Communist Parties to wage wars of National liberation. The Soviet delegate, A.A.Zhdanov, by propounding this thesis, in the Cominform attained fame (it is interesting at the same time important to note that, it was the same Cominform which on the 26th of January, 1950, on the First Republic Day, published an article congratulating the National bourgeoisie for its declaration of the Sovereignty of the Nation, i.e., when the Communist Party of India was still banned and pursuing a policy of armed struggle for liberation from the National bourgeoisie).

The Second Congress of the CPI, held at Calcutta in 1948, accepted the Zhdanov thesis, that branded leaders like Nehru and Sukarno (Indonesian Nationalist), as “traitors and running dogs of Imperialism”. Working in tandem with China, an Asia Bureau of the Cominform was set up in Peking to guide the National liberation movements from the National bourgeoisie, in countries such as India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam through the waging of civil wars. The endorsement of the Cominform meant, upon liberation from the National bourgeoisie, these countries could begin the peaceful transition to Communism, under the Sino-Soviet tutelage, with the world balance of power, tilted in their favour, through the operationalization of different trade treaties and other economic pacts (Fic. 1970:1-20).

The total abandonment of this thesis, came about only with Kruschev’s XXth CPSU Congress speech, which also attained historic relevance, through the beginnings of “de-stalinization” and “revisionism”. Any way, by then, serious measures were already undertaken in many of the newly independent countries, towards the achievement of a Socialist revolution by the native Communist parties. The Calcutta Thesis, 1948 and the Communist insurrections following it, was the Indian example of this.

⁹⁸ The ‘Cominform’ was successor to the ‘Comintern’ – a supra-national federation of national communist parties active from 1919 to ’39. After World War II, Stalin replaced the defunct ‘Comintern’ by ‘Cominform’. The Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression pact of 1939, led to the waning of the influence of the ‘Comintern’ in many parts of the World. ‘Comintern’ was originally founded following the Bolshevik revolution, under the vanguard of Lenin, ostensibly to defeat the ‘centrist socialism’ of the Second International and promote world revolution, by forging alliance between the Communists and liberal, socialist sections of the nationalist bourgeoisie (Motyl, 1998).

Following the adoption of the Calcutta thesis, there were violent eruptions by the Communist volunteers at many places in Kerala, mainly North Malabar, in which many became martyrs. They were related developments beginning with an attempt for a seizure of rice kept by a local *jenmi* at Korom in April 10, 1948. There was a confrontation with the police in the days following the seizure in which a total of five persons lost their lives. A similar incident followed at Thillankeri in Kannur district on April 12, 1948. In the confrontation with the police –the Malabar Special Police deployed to quell Communist violence –16 people lost their lives. Similar paddy lifting cases continued at Kamballoor near Nileswaram, Kodakkad, Vyakkara etc., with no casualties of life. Munayankunnu incident was yet another, where the Communist insurgents held a camp and were fired at by the police and six people lost their lives. At Onchiyam near Badagara on 1st May 1948, 7 Communists were killed in police firing for resisting the arrest of two fellow comrades. Moyarath Sankaran who had been in the National movement since 1920, was arrested on 11th May 1948, brutally tortured in the police lock-up, succumbing to his injuries on 13th May 1948. At Padikkunnu, in May 1950, two remanded under-trial prisoners were taken on bail by the police and along with another Communist arrested elsewhere were shot dead in a mock encounter. Elsewhere in Kerala two major incidents were reported. One at Edappilly (in the erstwhile State of Cochin) in March 1950 where the police station was attacked to release a Communist leader N.K.Madhavan resulting in the death of two police constables. The other was at Sooranadu (in the State of Travancore), in December 1949 where the local leadership attacked a police party and killed a sub-inspector and three constables as part of an ongoing tussle with the local *jenmi* over fishing rights to a pond(Balakrishnan, 1998:215).

Southern Malabar in this canvas of Communist uprising stands isolated, except for the protest demonstration against the authoritarian State called the Citizen's Rights Rally (*Pauravakasajatha*) on the First Republic Day of India, January 26th 1950 that ended in a clash with the police, death of one person and the arrest of three others. The corpse of Sardar Gopalakrishnan who died in the confrontation was not even returned by the police and was abandoned at the beach. The arrested were detained and tortured in the following few days. A confession was demanded of them attempting to attack the

policemen which they refused. After few days of detention the police let them go free without filing any cases against them.

Following the death of Gopalakrishnan, absolute stillness surrounded the *firka*, especially his home village Edathiruthy, where reportedly, the police atrocities took several months more to ebb. In the meanwhile, the Communist leadership of the State started reviewing their policy, and in 1952, EMS Nambuthirippadu, in an important work entitled, ‘The Nationalist Question in Kerala’ stated that it was not the programme of Socialist revolution, but catering to the Nationalist and democratic aspirations of the people which proved the most portent force in the post-colonial countries after the World War II. The Communist Party thenceforth revived the movement for *Aikyakeralam* or a unified Kerala, the seeds for which were laid in the 1920 Nagpur session of the Congress, to organize their regional committees on the basis of regional languages. Their campaign now projected the ancient legend of *Mahabali*, the mythical King⁹⁹, under whom all of Kerala was a united, happy and prosperous kingdom. This campaign spread far and wide in Kerala.

The campaign also reached Nattika *firka*, where it collected significant overtones with the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan, supplementing its meaning in the form of a sub-text. The incident of his martyrdom was on its way in forming itself into a legend in the *firka*. The legend of *Mahabali* as it is; is considered an act of supreme sacrifice according to tradition. This turn of events resulted in the rise of Gopalakrishnan’s martyrdom as an indisputable social fact the morphological characteristics of the representation of which we shall proceed to examine in the next chapter.

⁹⁹ According to the *Vamanapurana*, *Bali* was the lord of *asuras* (the heathen, who inhabited the underworld) who defeated the *devas* (the gods, who inhabited the heavens) in combat and held sway over the three worlds of heaven (*devalokam*), hell (*pathalam*) and the earth (*bhoomi*). Lord Vishnu upon the request of the *devas* to redeem their lost kingdom took incarnation as the *vamana* (the midget) and begged of *Bali* the charity for three feet of land. *Bali* offered the *vamana* to measure it with his own feet. Upon this the *vamana* grew monstrously big and in his two steps measured all of the three worlds over which *Bali* held sway and asked *Bali* where to place the third step. *Bali* obligingly offered the *vamana* his own head and the *vamana* placed his feet on top of *Bali*’s head and pushed him into the underworld along with all the rest of the *asuras* who became dwellers of the underworld for eternity thenceforth. In Kerala *Bali* is celebrated as the *Mahabali* as an icon of the most generous, munificent and egalitarian ruler of its mythical past who returns from the underworld on the day of the festival *Onam* that is celebrated since time immemorial and celebrated today as the National festival of the entire community of Malayalis.