

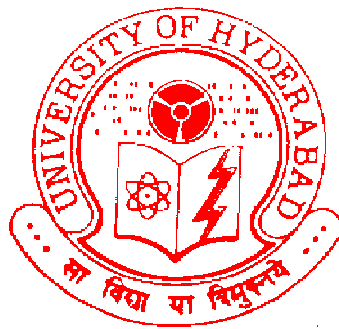
Technologies and Theologies: Islam and Media Infrastructures in Malabar

*A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad for the award of
the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

By

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2018**

DECLARATION

I, Nuaiman K. A., registration no. 12SNPC01, hereby declare that this doctoral thesis entitled “Technologies and Theologies; Islam and Media Infrastructures in Malabar” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Prof. P. Thirumal is bonafide research work and is free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University of institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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- A. Published in the following publications: *Communication and Journalism Research*, Vol. 3, Issue 2 (2014): ISSN: 2348-5663
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Head of Department

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To Ummayyumma, my great grandmother and for her struggles

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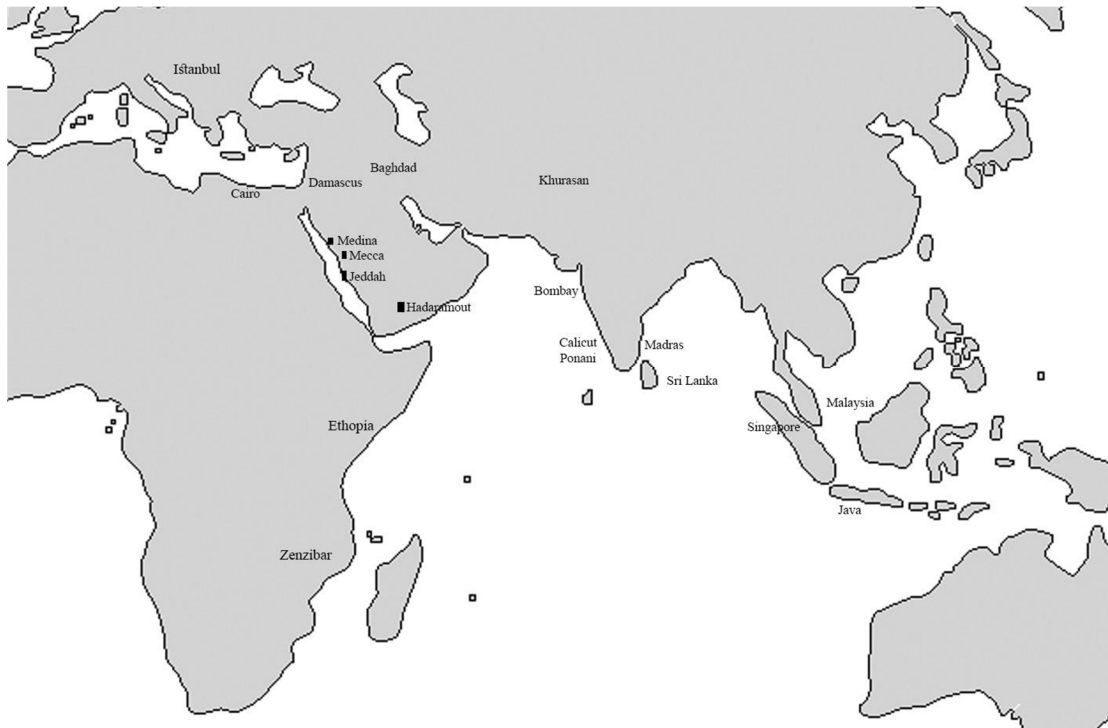
Nuaiman K. A.

A Note on Translation and Transliteration

In translating Arabic, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil and Arabic Malayalam words, I have followed simple transliteration method using popular spellings in order to facilitate an easy reading and comprehension. For the same reason, I have followed Common Era and avoided the Hijri era whenever I refer to a year. All quotes from the Qur'an are from Abdel Haleem's translation (Abdel Haleem, 2004)

Maps

Map-I



Malabar in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean world

Map-II



Malabar Coast of the Indian Subcontinent

Map-III



Major places mentioned in the thesis from Malabar

Chapter- I

Introduction: The Field

In their editorial note on Muslim media, a first of its kind, in the special volume of the *Journal of Media, Culture and Society*, Philip Schlesinger and Hamid Mowlana (1993) justify their attempt to bring out such a volume by arguing that the changing patterns of communication behaviour amongst Muslim communities is at the centre of the recent changes in the world order. Following this Mowlana (1993) proposes an Islamic community paradigm, as against an information society paradigm, to make sense of communication practices from an Islamic perspective. He deploys a series of Islamic terms to delineate and make a case for this such as *tawhid*, *ummah*, etc. and argues that four elements are fundamental to understanding the Islamic community paradigm; (1) the world view of *tawhid* [which he translates as the unity of God, human beings and the universe], (2) sociology of knowledge in Islam, (3) integration of personality through Sharia [Islamic jurisprudence] and (4) meaning of society and state in Islam or what he calls *ummah*. He also points to sociology of knowledge in Islam as one of the key components of the Islamic community paradigm that will not only help one to make sense of contemporary communication practices from an Islamic perspective but through which the determining characteristics of Muslim communication practices could be understood. But later in the article he argues that the information revolution that underlies the information society paradigm should not be portrayed as a distinct phenomenon in human history nor should it be treated as a distinct one from the Islamic community paradigm.

While constituting a separate working group for studying Islam and media, the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) also expressed similar concerns: “to study the universal principles of communication in

Islam and the West.”¹ But while delineating the objective of the working group in detail, they stated: “to look at the communication phenomenon with a view to contribute towards mutual understanding and peace with justice, to engage in research and organizational development efforts geared toward strengthening the global societal structures and to contribute to the advancement of research and evaluation in the media and communication related fields from an Islamic point of view.” And the major issues that the group is concerned with, according to their website, includes “Islam, communication and sustainable development; coverage of the American war against Iraq; Islam, communication, and Muslim countries; and Islam, communication, and the spread of terrorism”.

It is ironic that the initial attempts of both Mowlana and the IAMCR to argue for a distinctive character of Islamic community paradigm as opposed to information society paradigm and to study the universal principles of communication in Islam and the West respectively comes to a standstill as their projects unfold and the focus then becomes one that highlights either the similarities between Islamic and non-Islamic communication practices or the instrumentalist role of media in Muslim societies. Such an irony is of course inevitable when one does not pay enough attention to the details that structures the modalities of knowledge production and dissemination in a given society that direct the course of information/communication technologies or when one tends to ignore the differences between the modalities of knowledge production and circulation in different societies. This avoidance looks to be a systematic one in both the major initiatives to study the intercession of Islam and

¹ It is interesting to note that by then IAMCR already had a working group formed to study the interaction between religion and media called ‘religion, communication & culture.’ Does it then suggest that interaction between Islam and media cannot be studied in the general framework of religion and media? Much of what is discussed here is taken from <https://iamcr.org/s-wg/working-group/RCC>, and <https://iamcr.org/s-wg/working-group/islam-and-media> accessed on 21 April 2016.

media from the institutional vantage point of media studies, especially when one realizes that much of the sociology of knowledge in Islam can be understood and actualized in its concrete form as a historical expression of a particular kind of modality, its pedagogic practice and the way it produces and transmits knowledge. The following incident that happened during the initial phase of my fieldwork in Kozhikode, Northern Kerala, helped me to recognize the centrality of these elements in Islamic knowledge practice.

I met Dr. Sheikh Usama al-Sayyid al-Azhari, one of the 50 most influential Muslim personalities in the world according to The Royal Islamic Strategies Studies Centre, Jordan, and who teaches at the Faculty of Usul al-Din and Da'wa [religious foundation and propagation] in the renowned Al-Azhar University, Cairo, in the office of Sheikh Aboobacker Ahmad. The latter is also known as Kanthapuram A. P. Aboobacker Musaliyar, a learned and highly influential Muslim scholar from Malabar. Sheikh Usama travelled all the way from Cairo to Kozhikode to visit scholars in Malabar, to stay with them and read *hadiths* [prophetic traditions] with them in order to obtain *ijaza*, the consent attesting that he has read the prophetic tradition with a master and received permission from them to read it for himself and to transmit it to others with proper *isnad*.² Sheikh Usama also specifically wanted to visit Abu Muhammad Al Qadiri al Vailathuri al Malaibari, also known as Vailathur Bava Musaliyar, who has written an extensive commentary on *Jam` al-Jawami` fi Usul al-Fiqh* [a compendium of the principles of law written by Taju Din 'Abdul Wahhab Ibn 'Ali As-Subki (d.1370) in 1359 at Nairab near Damascus] and to take

² *Isnad* is a technical term in Islamic tradition for scholarly genealogy and is considered as a proof attesting to the historical authenticity and chain of transmission of a particular text or tradition in Islam.

ijaza from him to read and transmit *Jam`al-Jawami`* and its commentaries.³

What was so surprising about this visit to me was the fact that Taju Din 'Abdul Wahhab Ibn 'Ali As-Subki, the author of *Jam`al-Jawami`*, also belonged to the same place in Alexandria where Sheikh Usama was born and brought up in. But he travelled all the way from Alexandria to Kozhikode via Cairo to visit a Malabari scholar to get his *ijaza* to read a book written by a 14th century scholar from his (Sheikh Usama's) region. What was equally remarkable was the fact that all the *hadiths* he had read with the scholars in Malabar were already available in thousands of books and was easily accessible to any scholar from Al-Azhar for centuries now. When I had the opportunity to talk to Sheikh Usama, I posed this question: why did he travel all the way from Cairo to Kozhikode to read a book or *hadith* with a Malabari scholar when they were readily available in the libraries in Cairo or on hundreds of online platforms? Foregrounding the link with knowledge, the physical presence of a scholar, and imbibing of knowledge from him orally through companionship in Islam, he said: "knowledge is considered to be the lost property of a Muslim. It is passed unto us from the Prophet through his heirs, honest scholars. Knowledge is transmitted to us and among us through a tradition of inheritance. So, knowledge in Islam becomes true and authentic knowledge only when it is received as an inheritance through an unbroken chain starting from the Prophet. Reading a book and gaining knowledge from it independently is not epistemologically valued in Islamic knowledge practices. So it's always appreciated when knowledge is gleaned from scholars who have studied it from another honest scholar and this chain finally

³ *Jam`al-Jawami* is perhaps the most famous of Imam Subki's many works. It remains up to this day the standard work on Shafi`ite law and is used as a textbook for the study of law at the Islamic University of Cairo. Abu Muhammad Al Qadiri al Vailathuri al Malaibari's commentary on this 14th century text (*Al Alwa al Sawathiu fi Tarqeebi Jam' al Jawami*) is widely used in traditional Muslim centres of learning in Malabar.

goes back to the Prophet.”

Sheikh Usama’s later book titled *Buldaniyyath* (2013), a compilation of forty *hadiths* from forty different countries and forty different scholars has a *hadith* he heard from Abu Muhammad Al Qadiri in Malabar, who had heard it from his master Sayed Muhammad bin Qahhar, who heard it from his master Shihabudheen Ahmad Shaliyathi, who heard it from his master Muhammad Muhyudheen Hasan with the chain finally reaching up to Anas bin Malik, who heard the Prophet telling Ubbay ibn Ka’ab (d. 649) (considered the greatest reciter of the Qur’an after the Prophet), the following: “Indeed Allah has commanded me to recite the Qur'an to you. Ubbay asked, ‘Allah mentioned my name to you?’ ‘Yes’, the Prophet replied. ‘And I have been mentioned by the Lord of The Worlds?’ Ubbay asked again. ‘Yes.’ Prophet replied. Hearing upon this Ubbay’s eyes was filled with tears” (pp. 182-185). By the time this particular *hadith* reached Abu Muhammad Al Qadiri of Malabar in 1960 and then Sheikh Usama of Alexandria in 2012, it had travelled across continents, oceans, countries, races and centuries and of course several times back and forth from Medina where the Prophet said this to his companion in the 7th century.

On 6 March 632, while delivering his farewell sermon in the Uranah Valley of Mount Arafat, Prophet Muhammad said to his companions who had gathered there in the thousands to offer their final rites of Islamic pilgrimage called Haj, the following:

“O People, lend me your attentive ear, for I know not whether I shall ever be amongst you again after this year. Therefore, listen carefully to what I am saying. All those who are present to listen to me today shall take my words to those who are absent and those to others again. It may be that the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness,

O God, that I have conveyed your message to your people.”⁴ Upon completing his Final Sermon thus, near the summit of Arafat, the last revelation from God came down: “...Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessings upon you, and chosen as your religion Islam: total devotion to God...” (Quran 5:3).

This farewell sermon, known as Khutbatu l-Wada, is considered as the culminating point of Muhammad’s prophetic mission. Among the many other things the Prophet reminds his companions of and lay out in the form of a blue print for the generations of Muslims to come include the importance of propagating his messages. Thus the Prophet’s advice to those who were present to convey his message to those who were absent also marked a new beginning in Islamic history: rise of institutions of teaching and learning. Since then, Muslim scholars, preachers, rulers and leaders alike have started to build infrastructures and employ the skills required for transmitting the Prophet’s message to the Muslim public and beyond.

The Prophet’s last sermon, both through its form and content, lays out a model for the transmission of his messages for later generations as well. Since the Qur’an, the Holy book of Islam itself means ‘to recite,’ and introduces the Prophet as an excellent model for those who put their hope in God (33: 21), Muslims consider each word and deed of the Prophet as exemplary. The request made by the Prophet to his companions at the historic sermon ‘to lend their attentive ears’ for the transmission of his messages was taken to be an order related to the senses; particularly listening. Though the importance of the faculty of listening in Islam has already been established through various means and mechanisms much before the Prophet’s farewell sermon, particularly through the very title of the Holy text (Qur’an, which

⁴ This is taken from various *hadiths* narrated in Imam Bukhari’s (d. 870) *Swahih al Bukhari*, considered as the most authentic source in Islam after the Qur’an. Particularly the *hadiths* no. 1623-1626 in the chapter titled “The Sermons during the Mina days.”

means recite) and the form it adopts for its revelation, first to the Prophet and then to his companions,⁵ the Prophet once again reiterates its centrality in Islamic pedagogic practices in the farewell sermon. This privileging of the faculty of listening, over other sensorial practices, which according to Islamic pedagogy is key to understanding, believing and embodying a thing into practice has not only fashioned both the form and content of institutions of learning in Islam but has also shaped their future destinies. Thus, listening in Islam was not a technique outside the faith, but is considered as a constituent element of faith and revelation-based social practices.

In the phenomenology of perception the difference between seeing and hearing also marks a fundamental difference in orientation of being in the world (Chidester, 1992). They also present human beings' radically different relationships with the world and outside by embodying different ranges of religious discourses. The two dominant perceptual theories called intromission and extramission, engaging with vision and hearing, delineate this difference in detail; while sight is always associated with space, immediacy and continuity, hearing is explained in terms of time and discontinuity. Thus, it is assumed that in hearing, the presence, connection and the continuous bond between the subject and the object of perception disappears (Eifring, 2013).

But in Islam listening is considered to be a medium through which continuity between the subject and object of perception is announced, anchored, produced and maintained. As clearly illustrated in the farewell sermon as well as in the model the Prophet established for the practical transmission of his messages, Islam brought in listening as a central and defining characteristic in its epistemology by developing a

⁵ Commenting on the form it adopted, Qur'an in its verses says the following: "Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, 'This is nothing but blatant sorcery' (6: 7). I take up this point for further discussion in the third chapter.

mechanism in which voice and listening is mediated through the presence of human bodies. When the Prophet says to his companions in Arafat to listen to him, to lend their ears, and to take his words to those who are absent and to them to take his words to others again until it reaches the last ones, what is being established and maintained is a continuity of a chain of committed Muslim messengers. This guarantees the faithful recording and transmission of a tradition through human voice and its listening (Ware, 2014). The Prophet's selection of human voice for *azan*, the call to congregational prayer, as opposed to for example, a Church bell in Christianity or the sound of the horn in Judaism, also illustrates this point.

Writing in the 11th century, a Muslim scholar from Iran, Dhia' ul-Din Abd al-Malik ibn Yusuf al-Juwayni (d.1085), also known as Imam al-Haramayn, the leading Master of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, counts the physical presence of the master and his verbal instruction among the central requisites of knowledge in Islam. George Makdisi (1981) in his analysis of the emergence of educational institutions in Islam and the West also demonstrates that the major difference between institutions of learning in the West and that of Islam is the absence of the Master and his loud reading for/to students in the former. Comparing what al Juwaini has said on Islamic education with what Bernard of Chartres (d. 1130), a French scholar and administrator has said about the pre requisite of learning in the West, Makdisi points out that the silent investigation replaced the presence of the articulating Master in the West. Thus, the physical presence of a Master in Islamic knowledge transmission foregrounds its bond with orality and hearing. This proposes that knowledge does not reside in documents, but in “authentic human beings and their personal connection with one another” often articulated through their voice (Graham, 1993: p. 507).⁶ It is

⁶ See Michael Cook's (1997) study on opposition against writing tradition in early Islam.

in this historical background Ziauddin Sardar (1993), argues that the idea of communication in Islam is intrinsically related to the concept of *ilm* [knowledge], where the distinction between ones' pursuit of knowledge and its distribution and transmission ceases to exist.

How are these theologically inspired and historically developed pedagogic forms and practices associated with it integrated into and impacting the entry/exit of information and communication technology among Muslim communities? Or what ambitions does communication technology embody in Muslim societies? These questions have rarely figured as a topic of discussion in communication studies. As the two key moments in the effort to institutionalize Islam-media studies concretely exemplify why/how and when media/communication is studied vis-à-vis Islam, it also sheds lights onto the larger institutional concerns that shape modes of inquiries to study Islam-media interactions.

For example, a cursory look at the academic scholarship on Islam and media suggests that the questions and concerns of these studies have largely been confined to: (1), whether the new information and communication order bring (Muslim) communities closer together or atomize their already precarious relationships (Mowlana, 1993), (2), how does the introduction of new communication technology play an important agentive role in shaping religious discourses in Muslim communities (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996), (3), is religious authority waxing or waning, diversifying or centralizing in the information age? (Hjarvard, 2016; Graf & Petersen, 2009) and (4), how religious elites have overcome autonomous media infrastructures, their institutional apparatuses and the independent consumers they have produced by entrenching their religious authority in new ways (Mandaville, 2001).

Speaking specifically in the context of digital media, the new information technology according to these scholars meant not only a new method for transmitting texts, but also a new idiom for selecting and presenting religious texts to cater to new kinds of Muslim readers and viewers and argue that the non-institutionalized nature of dissemination of religious knowledge and the inherent potential of cyber transmission has necessitated a reconsideration and reconfiguration of existing Muslim networks. However, Burnt (2009) contests this argument and asks whether a Muslim's engagement with the new media reflect the continuum of Muslim understandings located in the non-digital world. But for him, Islam's encounter with cyber environments appears new only in terms of how the media is applied and much of the content still has a basis in classical Islamic traditions and hence only helps in reinforcing existing religious authorities. Ziauddin Sardar (1993) also presents a similar view when he notes that information technology has changed the very manifestations of Islam and that the distributive and decentralized networks offer a different potential for Muslim societies and culture. The attempt then, to study Islam-media intersection has largely been limited either to figuring out a new Muslim consumer vis-à-vis religious authority or to tracing out continuity in religious communication vis-à-vis change in media technologies.⁷

Thus Islam and media intercession has always been posed, either as a problem to be explained and solved as we have seen in the above mentioned studies or as a mere question of representation.⁸ These works while they focus on the impact of media technology in a given community by highlighting its epistemic value do it at

⁷ The thesis use the terms media, technology or media technology in an expansive sense and interchangeably by converging both the meaning and usage of media technology and communication technology on the realisation that the distinction between them is challenging in its everyday use.

⁸ Edwards Said's *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts determine how We See the Rest of the World* (2006) is an example.

the expense of obscuring the questions on the ontological value of communication technology and the sensibilities it embodies in a society. The remarkable absence of discussions on the form and significance of communication/technologies in the scholarship on Muslim media demonstrates this problem aptly where technologies are understood as disembodied entities. The fact is that technologies do not enter a community in vacuum. But a community adopts/adapts information and communication technology as part of the larger infrastructural designing of their community and in relation to their social assemblage in which their religious orientations play a constituent role. As a result, existing impact narratives on media technology are unable to engage with the constituent nature of technologies in Islam and its religious practices. This study then argues that in order to understand the conditions of possibilities that religious media affords in a community, one need to develop a narrative that will account for what can be broadly termed as the religious work of media.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis is an attempt to understand the history and ethnography of the use of media technology among Muslims. Taking cues from an on-going discussion among the AP faction of Sunni⁹ Mappilas¹⁰ in Malabar on why Sunni Mappilas, despite

⁹ Sunni and Shia are the two major doctrinal divisions in Islam. Though there are many differences between these two groups, the major one is explained in terms of their stand on who was Prophet Muhammad's legitimate successor. As the etymology of the word Sunni describes, a Sunni is a Muslim who stresses on the importance of the Sunnah [Prophetic tradition] along with the Qur'an as the core basis of Islamic Sharia [Islamic jurisprudence] and regards all the first four Caliphs as the legitimate successors of the Prophet Muhammad. They are also known as the followers of the *sunnah* and the community (*ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamā'ah*). The Shias also known as *Shi'atu 'Ali* [the party of 'Ali] holds the belief that Prophet Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor (Caliph/Imam) and do not consider the first three Caliphs as the legitimate successors of the Prophet. Thus Shias consider Ali ibn Abi talib as the first imam in Shi'ism. For detailed description on this see John Esposito and Ibrahim Khalin (2009). AP faction is a major Sunni Muslim group in Kerala named after their spiritual leader A. P. Aboobacker Musaliyar. The section on "Who is a Mappila?" in this chapter will explain these doctrinal/organizational divisions as they are articulated among Mappilas today.

being the largest Muslim community in the region with one of the highest literacy rate among any Muslim community in the world, do not have a successful newspaper, the current thesis addresses a key question: what are the contours in and through which information and communication technology enter/exit a Muslim community? This question also raises several related concerns as well: Why are certain forms of technology more popular among certain religious communities? What are the important practices or institutions responsible for introducing and popularizing information and communication technology amongst them? What are the strategies in and through which Islamic religious discourses and its preferred mode of transmission merge with the aesthetics of technologies? How do they format/redesign media technology in order to domesticate their use in the community? How does the interpretative dynamism of Islamic law help one to circumscribe or expand the use and impact of technology? And finally, how does addressing these questions help one to understand media technology in the conceptual terms of Orthodox Sunni Muslim ethics?

As a focus, I study these questions within a specific Muslim context in the Malabar Coast of South India, the Mappilas. By presenting these questions, the study discerns the role of communication technology in the social history of Muslim communities in the region, serve as a case study for on-going research on Mappila Muslims, create a new archive that provides a space and accounts for discourses that stem from and flourishes in the interiors of Mappila Muslim existence and through that aims at advancing our knowledge about Mappila Muslim community. This focus, while helping me to study the Mappila Muslim community in detail, will also help to gain some insights into how Islam and its universal claims are realized in a specific

¹⁰ Muslims from Malabar, the northern part of Kerala, are generally called as Mappilas. The subsequent sections in this chapter will explain these terms and its historical evolution in detail.

regional ethnic context. Thus, this research on information and communication technology in a religious community proposes to study communication technology as part of the larger infrastructure in that community and to study the community through their communication technology infrastructures.

1.2 The Study Region: Malabar

The term Malabar is used today to designate the geographical area covering the six districts of northern Kerala in Southern India: Kasargode, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Palakkad. But being a historical region, Malabar's geographical boundaries varied from time to time, owing to the changes in the socio-cultural, economic, political and religious life both within and outside the region, particularly in the Indian Ocean coast. The word Malabar had been used once as an all-encompassing term to denote the entire Indian coast along the Arabian Sea starting from the western coast of Konkan to the tip of the subcontinent in Kanyakumari, covering a geographical area that is today spread across five states (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Kerala and Tamilnadu) flanked by the Arabian Sea on the west and the Western Ghats on the east. In documents from medieval history, the term has been used to describe the place between Kollam,¹¹ to Mangalore¹² and later from Muziris (Kodungalloor)¹³ to Mangalore. The earlier terms used to designate this region clearly shows the fluidity of the region in terms of its geographical spread. The word *bilad al-filfil* [the land of pepper] used by the Moroccan traveller Ibn Battutah in the 1340s

¹¹ Kollam is an ancient port city in Southern Kerala.

¹² Mangalore, now officially known as Mangaluru is also an old port city located in the Southern part of Karnataka and in between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats.

¹³ Muziris/Kodungalloor, believed to be an integral part of *Mahodayapuram*, the capital city of the later Chera dynasty is a city located in the south-western border of present day Thrissur district, immediately north of Kochi in Kerala.

not only opens out the time and space of the region in history, but also points to the economic significance and nature of trade in ancient and medieval Malabar.¹⁴

The etymology of the word Malabar, attributed to several languages belonging to different religions, cultures and continents reflects the region's historical connectivity with the wider world outside, particularly the Arab Islamic regions. Derived from the Dravidian word *mala* (hill) meaning land, and *bar* meaning country or coast in Arabic and Persian respectively, the Malabar Coast is believed to have been one of the most cosmopolitan zones in the Indian Ocean region. According to S. M. H. Nainar (2014), the earliest usage of the term goes back to the 10th century but the first recorded usage of the term Malabar dates only from the mid-12th century by Arab Muslim geographer Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani as-Sabtiin (d.1165) in *Kitab Rujar*. Divided into several independent kingdoms (Venad, Cochin, Calicut, Arakkal and others) and ruled by local kings, Malabar became a definitive region on British India's political landscape only in 1799 after the third Anglo-Mysore war. By then Malabar had been geographically reduced to denote the area between Palakkad and Kannur to form an administrative district called Malabar district under the Madras presidency in British India. After the Indian independence in 1947, Madras Presidency was reorganised into Madras State of which Malabar district was a part of until 1956. When the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 was implemented aiming to form states along linguistic lines Malabar district along with Kasargode Taluk, which till then was part of South Canara district of Karnataka, was

¹⁴ *Rihla*, meaning journey, is a travelogue written by Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battutah, a 14th century Moroccan traveller, who in his 30 years of travelling had covered the entire Islamic world and beyond. The full title of the travelogue is *Tuhfat al-anzar fi gharaib al-amsar wa ajaib al-asfar* [A gift to those who contemplate the wonders of cities and the marvels of traveling]. Ibn Battutah is believed to have visited Malabar on three different occasions in the 1340s. Though this thesis has used various versions/translations of Ibn Battutah's travelogue, originally written in Arabic in 1358 under the title *Tuhfat al-nuẓẓār fi gharaib al-amsār wa-'ajā'ib al-asfār*, the primary source for the discussions in this thesis is H. A. R. Gibbs's (1929) English translation and Mahdi Husain's (1953) translation and commentary on *Rihla*.

merged with the State of Travancore-Cochin to form the state of Kerala.

Though the fieldwork for this thesis was primarily conducted in Kozhikode, Malappuram, Wayanad and Kannur districts of today's Malabar, the thesis will constantly refer to the historic region called Malabar in its expansive definition while invoking the term Malabar and will cover the wider cultural geographical entity/idea/frame of Islam.

1.3 Who is a Mappila?

Though there are disputes among historians and Muslim scholars alike as to when Islam reached the Malabar Coast, what is certain is that Islam was introduced first in Malabar within the Indian subcontinent. Given that the long maritime relationship between the Mediterranean regions and the Malabar Coast flourished through spice trade, which according to some records go back to 1000 BC, historians assume that Muslims reached here around the time Islam began in Mecca and Medina. While documents such as the *Qissat Shakarawati Farmad*, [Story of Chakravarti Cheraman Perumal], together with the legends and traditions prevalent among the Muslim community in the region, proposes that Islam reached the region during the time of the Prophet itself,¹⁵ archival evidences such as inscriptions on Islamic tombstones in Malabar and the Tharisapalli copper plates of 849 suggest that Malabar witnessed substantial Muslim presence and settlements within two centuries after the time of the Prophet.¹⁶ *Rihla*, the travelogue of Ibn Battutah who visited Malabar three times in the

¹⁵ The *Qissat Shakarawati Farmati* is an anonymous, undated Arabic manuscript concerning the introduction of Islam in Malabar. In this account, whose authenticity is disputed among historians, Mappila Muslims claim descent from a Hindu king of Malabar. He is said to have personally witnessed the miracle of Prophet Muhammad splitting the full moon into two. For a detailed discussion of this document, see Friedmann (1975), Wink (1997) and Kugle & Margariti (2017). An older copy of this document is archived in the British Library.

¹⁶ For an English translation of the grant in the Tharisapalli copper plate, see Rao (1988) and Narayanan (1972).

1340s, also shows that the Muslims had become a strong community by the early 14th century with considerable numbers and infrastructure such as mosques and centres of learning across the region.

As the Tharisapalli copper plates of 849, in which 11 Muslim names are written in Arabic as signatories who had witnessed to a grant given to the Syrian Christian community by the local king of Venad (Kollam/Travancore), Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal, shows Muslims from the early phase of their settlement in the region enjoyed patronage and privileges from the local kings. This is especially evident in the case of the Zamorins, the local kings of Calicut [now Kozhikode], who considered Muslims as his trusted associates in trade. They played a significant role in the thriving spice trade in the Malabar Coast which brought in both fortune and fame for the region. It has also been noted that the Zamorin had ordered the *Mukkuvas*, the fishermen community, to convert to Islam in order to strengthen his naval force (Aslam E S, 2016). Commenting on this relationship, Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom (d.1619) in his *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, considered as one of the first historical writings from Malabar, said the following: “Muslims enjoyed great respect and regard from the Hindu rulers. The main reason for this is that the construction and development of the country is taking place through the Muslim” (p. 16).

But the Portuguese arrival in the Malabar Coast in 1498 and the trade alliances they made with the Zamorins under the new geo-political and economic conditions in the Indian Ocean regions not only destabilized the socio-political structure of Malabar but also made the life of the Muslims in the region difficult. The subsequent arrival of the British only made things worse. The colonial administrations’ decision to enforce the Mappila Outrages Acts of 1854 and to form a special Police force aimed to curb the Muslim resistance against the British explicate the precarious Muslim situation in

the region. The colonial records termed the Muslim acts of resistance as a religiously inspired act of violence and Muslims as ‘mad,’ ‘fanatic’ and communal. Among the numerous battles between the Muslims and the British in the region, the 1921 rebellion is considered as “the culmination of sporadic Mappila acts of resistance” (Shafeeq K, 2014: p. 19). Given the intricacies that layered the 1921 Malabar rebellion, particularly its association with the Khilafat movement demanding to protect the authority of the Ottoman Empire as the Caliphate of Islam, Malabar rebellion is said to be responsible for bringing the nationalist political question as well as the Islamist movements into the forefront of social life in Malabar. Though the Muslims from the Travancore and Cochin regions were already familiar with the Wahhabite¹⁷ inspired Islamist movements in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the course of the Khilafat movement in Malabar gave new impetus to these Islamist movements. Familiarity with north Indian Muslim institutions, scholars, and movements such as Ahl-i Hadith (a movement often compared to Saudi-based Wahhabism) through the nationalist movement is also said to be responsible for this Islamist connection (Punathil, 2013). As the question of the authority of the Ottoman Empire as Caliphate of Islam was closely tied to the emerging religious/political power in the Arab Muslim regions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Khilafat movement had far reaching impact on Muslim life in Malabar. These concerns, along with several others, informed by the Islamic Sharia was expressed in the Muslim approach towards the rebellion itself when a large section of traditional religious scholars opposed the

¹⁷ Wahhabism is an Islamic movement named after its founder Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab (d.1792). While its followers describe it as a reform movement established to restore the principles of *tawhid* [pure monotheistic worship in Islam], the movement is criticised by other Muslims as a deviant sectarian movement propagating *bid’a* [illegitimate inventions in Islam]. Al Wahhab started his movement from Najd, a central region in today’s Saudi Arabia, by denouncing many of the widespread Sunni practices such as veneration of saints and visiting their tombs and explained them as being idolatrous. The agreement al Wahhab made with the local tribal leader Muhammad bin Saud for political obedience in return for protection and propagation of the Wahhabi movement gave birth to modern Saudi Arabia. The movement is also said to have inspired many of the modern radical Islamic movements.

rebellion, particularly the violent form it took, citing religious reasons. But most of the studies on Malabar rebellion consider it as an outstanding articulation of Muslim identity in 20th century Kerala and a point of departure for the future Mappila self-making process. They do not attempt to explore such religiously inspired contestations within Muslim communities; rather the attempts were largely confined to whether it was a religious or peasant movement without analysing the subtleties of being religious during the Malabar rebellion. But these concerns were very significant and were further crystallized with the formation of three organizations in Malabar just after the rebellion: the Kerala Muslim Aikhya Sangam in 1922, the Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema in 1924 and the Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyath ul-Ulema in 1926. The first two were inspired by the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia and Egypt and the last one by the traditionalist ideologies of Ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamā'ah. The Malabar rebellion is still studied by many scholars for varied reasons; economic (Panikkar, 1989), political (Dale, 1980), and cultural (Ansari, 2016; Hussain, 2005). But it has been least studied for its far reaching impact on the religious life of the Muslim community in the region. Such questions, as it appears in the public discussions in Malabar, are reserved only for theologians to indulge in and discuss with each other under the assumption that it does not have any social relevance.

Muslims in Malabar are generally known as Mappilas. But the term has also been used to refer to the Jews and Syrian Christians (with west Asian connections), in Travancore and Cochin. The etymology of the term is not well-known since various origins have been attributed to it. One widely held belief is that the term Mappila derived from two Malayalam words *maha* and *pillai* meaning big and child

respectively.¹⁸ One of the first recorded usages of the term Mappila appeared in the writings of Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese writer who was also an employee at a factory in Cannanore [now Kannur]. Written in the early 1510s and known as *Livro de Duarte Barbosa* or *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, it provides detailed accounts of the people, communities and rituals in Malabar. On visiting Kozhikode, Barbosa saw “a great quantity of Moors” (p. 146) and among them two groups Moors Mapuler [Mappila/native Muslims] and Paradesy, “the other foreign Moors” who included “Arab, Persian, Guzarates, Khorasanys and Decanys” (p. 146). “Mapuler”, according to Barbosa, go “bare like nairs”, wear “small round caps on their heads and their beards fully grown” possess many mosques “in which they unite in council.” Commenting on their numbers, he observes, “If the king of Portugal had not discovered India, this country would have had a Moorish King.”

But what we see later in both academic and popular writings is the erasure of such distinctions. Instead the term Mappila started to appear in these studies as an encompassing term for all Muslims (Saidalavi, 2017) suggesting that there existed a homogenous Muslim community in the region (Lakshmi, 2012). But this contradicts casual empirical observations of Muslim life in the region. “Numerously factionalized and fighting each other” at every possible level on questions ranging from attributes of the God and his messenger to moon sighting, this ‘organizational factionalism,’” according to Mahmood Kooria (2013), is what makes “Keralite Islam specific in a broader context” that can tell us what “the actual cultural and intellectual spheres of

¹⁸ Other popular and not so popular stories of the origin of the term include the Arabic word *Muflih* (prosperous or victorious) and *Maflih* (agriculturalist). Historians also opine that the word could also have originated from two Dravidian words *ma* (mother) and *pilla* (child) indicating either the long history of Arab Muslim marriages with local Hindu woman in which the children never appear to have been claimed by their foreign fathers or to the long history of Muslim migration from the region to various South-east Asian and west Asian countries as a result of which the father was/is an absent figure in Muslim homes. The term is now also used for bridegroom and/or husband in both Muslim and Syrian Christian communities.

the community are like.” In order to delineate the extent of this “factionalism” Kooria observes, “the very mention of the ‘unity of the community’ itself will generate new factions and fractions” and their reach in the interiors of Muslim life is immense. But ironically, even when arguing this, Kooria’s concern is to “think aloud whether a ‘change’ is possible in ‘Keralite Islam,’ beyond the factionalist concerns” so that one can offer “something productive and creative” for the upliftment of the Muslim community. Thus he indicates that one does not need to study them for their value to understand what “the actual cultural and intellectual spheres of the community are like” as he suggests in the beginning, but only to reject and “productively and creatively” go beyond them.

When the social organization/distinctions among Mappila Muslims are studied, they are studied either as a continuation of the Hindu caste system (Mathur, 2011) or as a separate phenomenon defined in terms of “Islamic juristic concepts of purity, knowledge, piety and morality” (Saidalavi, 2017: p. 19). The latter approach, though it claims to attempt to re-evaluate the former, appears different only in terms of how one explains or rationalizes social divisions or discriminatory practices around them without paying attention to the practices as such. If the textual analysis of Islamic jurisprudence is the base for one’s analysis to study social distinctions among Mappila Muslims as Saidalavi (2017) argues, the question would also be whether such texts allow one to conceptualize these social divisions as part of discriminatory practices at all.¹⁹ Apart from avoiding such perennial questions, this frame work will also not allow one to see the social organisation of Mappila Muslim community as it is defined, shaped and actualised in Malabar through their members’ theological convictions. These convictions, at a very fundamental level, are the result of one’s

¹⁹ Saidalavi claims in the beginning of his study that he combines textual analysis and ethnographic accounts. But he neither provides the names of any texts he used nor does the study seem to have incorporated any textual analysis.

alliance to a particular school of law, *aqeeda* [doctrines] and *thwareeqa* [Sufi brotherhood] or one's rejection of such adherences and the resultant argument for *ijthihad* [an Islamic legal term for independent reasoning] in Islam. As we will see in the following sections and chapters, these distinctions are strongly anchored and taken forward through the activities of various Muslim organisations from the 1920s onwards.

A majority of the Muslims in the region, like any other in the Indian Ocean region, follow the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam (Shafi Madhab).²⁰ Popularised first by the Arab Muslim trading communities who visited the Malabar Coast and later by the Hadrami scholars,²¹ the belief and everyday religious practices of Mappila Muslims are characterised by the Shafi'i School of law. Minor exceptions in this regard are the presence of a small Shia community and the Hanafi School of law. The popularity of the Shafi'i School of law in the region is exemplified in *Fath-ul-Mueen*, one of the pioneering legal texts of the Shafi'i School written by Zainudheen Makhdoom Saghir (d.1619) in Malabar. But it was with the formation of the Kerala Muslim Aikhya Sangam and Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema in the early 1920s (mentioned earlier) – two Wahhabite organisations – that the role of schools of law in Islam was questioned for the first time. These Wahhabite organizations argued for *ijthihad* [independent reasoning] against madhab-based *taqleed* [an Islamic terminology denoting the conformity of later generation Muslims to the teachings of a scholar belonging to the first centuries after the Prophet, in this case Imam Shafi]. The

²⁰ Madhab, meaning the way to act, is a school of thought within Islamic jurisprudence. It emerged in the first two centuries after the Prophet, aiming to consolidate and regulate scholarly interpretations of Islamic scriptures and exclude dogmatic theologians and their illegitimate methods in order to maintain an internal cohesion. There are four madhabs in Sunni Islam and they are Shafi'i, Hanafi, Hanbali and Maliki and are named after their founders. For a detailed discussion on madhabs, its significance in Sunni Islam and relation to *ijthihad* and *taqleed*, see Abdal Hakim Murad (1995).

²¹ These are scholars from Hadhramawt of Yemen who are believed to have been responsible for Islamization processes in various Indian Ocean regions, especially along its eastern frontiers. See Engsang Ho (2006) and Abdul Jaleel (2018).

formation of the Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyath ul-Ulema by traditional Sunni scholars in 1926 made these distinctions more concrete and visible as they strongly argued for a madhab-based interpretation of the Islamic scriptures. Henceforth the theological debates that structured the everyday religious practices of Muslims were largely centred on the question of *ijthihad* vs. *taqleed*. The formation of Wahhabi-inspired Kerala Nadwathul Mujahideen, as late as 1952 and Jamaat-e-Islami, founded by Moulana Abul-a-la Maududi in 1948, brought about more politically-oriented Islamic ideologies but by questioning the concept of *taqleed*. Dakshina Kerala Jam-e-yyathul-Ulema, another traditionalist Sunni organisation was formed in 1955 but confined their activities to Travancore and Cochin. Though Tablighi Jamaat's²² presence in Malabar compares to other religious organizations in the northern part of the region, they have a substantial presence in southern Kerala.

The splits in Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyath ul-Ulema in 1966 and 1989 resulted in the formation of Samasthana Kerala Jam'eyyath ul-Ulema and Samastha AP - EK factions (named after its leaders A. P. Aboobacker Musaliyar and E. K. Aboobacker Musaliyar and also known as AP Sunnis and EK Sunnis) respectively. The ideological rifts in Kerala Nadwathul Mujahideen better known as Mujahids, ended up in the formation of seven new groups. The Qur'an Sunnath Society's interventions in the theological debates of 1980s are considered as the most radical one by many since they argued for a Qur'an-based interpretation of Islam, rejecting both Prophetic traditions and early scholars. Apart from these, the presence of numerous Sufi *tariqats* [Sufi orders] belonging to various traditional Sunni sects, and the various theological debates within and outside Islamic media made the religious sphere of the Muslims in the region quite vibrant and shaped it. Ironically, the attempt to free Muslims from

²² Tablighi Jamaat is an Islamic movement established by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in 1927 with a substantial presence in South Asia.

‘all these age-old debates’ resulted in the Mappilas leaning towards (the theological conventions of) one of these organizations.²³ Though the formation of Muslim political parties such as the Muslim League (1947), the Muslim Democratic Party (MDP) (1984), the Islamic Seva Sangh (ISS), the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), and the Indian National League (INL) in the early 1990s, and the Social Democratic Party of India and the Welfare Party (SDPI) in the 2010s did not affect doctrinal and juristic debates among the Muslims in the region, Muslim League has always been accused of being a sympathizer of Wahhabite ideology by the Samastha AP faction.²⁴ Since the SDPI and the Welfare party are the two direct political outshoots of the Popular Front of India²⁵ and Jamaat-e-Islami respectively, their theological orientations are explicit. Understanding these diverse theological strands and its organisational forms while writing a contemporary history of Mappila Muslim community in Malabar is important since these issues are embedded in the organisation of their everyday life. Evident from the matrimonial advertisements in newspapers and the matrimonial sites run by many of these organisations, they function as endogamous communities. Common spaces for interaction among people belonging to these organizations are often limited and Salaams, the Islamic manner of greeting are sent and received between Muslims in the region based on their organisational affiliations.

To summarize the above descriptions, it is proposed that the contemporary

²³ The National Democratic Front or Popular Front of India is a good example of this. Though in the early phase of their formation they claimed that they would maintain a ‘neutral’ stand in their theological orientations, they soon seemed to follow Wahhabite teachings in their mosques and rituals.

²⁴ Recently the EK Samastha faction also raised this criticism, despite them being one of Muslim League’s strong vote banks in the region.

²⁵ PFI is a successor of National Development Front (NDF), a Muslim organization that started in Kerala in the early 1990s as a reactionary movement in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition and the right-wing Hindutva upsurge.

theological orientation among the Muslims/organizations in the region can be mapped along the lines of their approach vis-à-vis *ijthihad* and *taqleed*. Though all the above-mentioned organisations come under the rubric of Sunni Islam in the broader categorisation of Islam into Sunni and Shia, in Malabar, only those sects and organisations that adhere to *taqleed* are identified as Sunni Muslims. Non-Sunnis in the region include Mujahids/Wahhabites/Salafis, Jamaat-e-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat. But it has also been observed that the theological differences between Salafis and Jamaat-e-Islami are remarkably minimal in the region. Early scholars of both these organizations also admit to this.²⁶ While Sunnis and non-Sunnis introduce themselves as traditionalists and reformers respectively, Sunnis identify others, especially Salafis as Mubthadi'a/bid'a [illegitimate inventions in religion].

In order to bring out these nuances that structure the Mappila Muslim every day, this thesis will focus on a particular section of Mappila Muslims in Malabar: the Sunnis. But while referring to the post 1989 situation it largely means the AP Sunnis. Thus, when I use the term, Mappila or Mappila Muslims in the following chapters, it is not to suggest that it encompasses all the diverse groups within the Muslim community in the region.

1.4 Methodology, Methods and Sources

Like most recent studies on media practices, my initial plan was to study media habits of the Mappila Muslim community and to analyse the nature, the subjectivities it envisions and the publicness it constitutes among them. Thus the attempt of the research in its earlier phase was to focus on the contemporaneous present of the Mappila Muslim community as it is articulated in and through their engagements with

²⁶ Autobiographies of Jamaat-e-Islami leaders such as Sheikh Muhammad Karakkunnu and T. K. Abdulla are examples of this.

different media technology particularly what is now generally perceived as new media. But as is evident from the research questions I have already delineated above and from the discussions in the coming pages of this dissertation, this thesis is now an attempt to develop an internal history of media in a Muslim community. The thesis attempts to do this by analysing how theologically inspired and historically developed pedagogic practices in Islam are integrated into and impact the entry/exit of information and communication technology among Muslim communities. Thus, this study proposes to engage with and foster dialogues amongst different disciplines, times and spaces as it is demonstrated in the contexts of the Mappilas of Malabar.

This shift in focus, from the contemporaneous present to history, developed over the course of the research, is on the realisation that the details of the continuities and discontinuities in a community cannot be grasped with its nuances without an awareness of how they had developed and set in place historically, thus shaping the contemporary. This demands that the contemporary be understood on a much broader temporal and social scale, and hence has to be worked back from the present. The challenge then was to develop a narrative on media technology and its function in a Muslim society, which would account for their connected-fluid and sometimes surprising histories and ethnographies. This is important while studying ‘everyday technologies’ (Arnold, 2013) such as the one I engage with in this dissertation - lithography, loudspeaker and cassettes.

This then demands different forms of engagements at the methodological level. Hence the attempt of this dissertation is, as media archaeologists suggest, to closely examine old media technologies when they were really new (Zielinski, 2008; Parikka, 2012). They propose this method of writing the social history of media

technology in a given society, assuming that questions such as what constitutes media, what are the meanings and significances attached to them, what are their technical functions and what are the other cultural tasks they ascribe to, are particularly crucial and intense at the moments when these technologies were first introduced in a given society. So the study proposes to follow an ethnographic *longue durée* approach in which multi-sited ethnography is conducted on a much broader temporal and social scale that incorporates both archival and textual materials. To achieve this goal, several research methods are employed in this study. They include: participant observation, in-depth unstructured interviews, case studies, life histories, textual analysis and archival research.

Apart from observing the religiously significant rituals, prayer meetings, reading sessions and other congregational activities, the dissertation also use many other important sources of information to access an otherwise unavailable archive. They include fatwas [religious decrees], interviews with Ulema, *wa'iz* [preachers], participants of *wa'z majlises* [preaching sessions] and Muslim media entrepreneurs. In addition to this, written materials such as classical Islamic books in Arabic [*kithab*], contemporary and historical materials such as magazines and souvenirs published by Muslim organisations and institutions, newspaper reports, petitions, posters and flyers etc. published in Arabic, Malayalam and Arabic-Malayalam are also used. Archival resources used for this study includes the catalogues of old books in various libraries and reports on publications issued and registered in several Provinces of British India. Manuscripts and the oldest surviving copies of lithographic and typographic versions of *kithabs* examined for this thesis were collected from different libraries attached to the local mosques or Arabic-Sharia colleges in Malabar. A distinctive feature of the resulting presentation would be the juxtaposition of local level ethnography detailing

the contemporaneous present with the historical evolution of modes and methods of Islamic scholarship as it is revealed in Islamic knowledge practices or what Messick would call Sharia ethnography (Messick, 2008). Thus the thesis in order to build up its arguments makes use of materials from theology, archives and ethnography.

Since any form of fieldwork, particularly ethnography, is a highly charged personal and emotional enterprise (Coffey, 1999), it is impossible to detach the self from the field especially when one does fieldwork 'at home.' Thus, my own upbringing and experience as a Mappila Muslim who grew up in Malabar has been a crucial factor at different stages of this research - conceptualising the research problem, finalising on where to map the field, who would be the interlocutors and what would be the archives. While on the one hand this provided me with greater purchase in my field particularly in the form of providing relatively easy access to people and resources, it also opened up opportunities for reflecting upon my own training, memories and experiences from times before the 'actual fieldwork,' thus extending the temporal realm of my fieldwork. This peculiar location of the researcher that often straddles between participant observer and observing participant during the fieldwork is implicated in analysing certain events. For example, my request to attend a meeting of online media volunteers organised by a Sunni institution turned out to be an invitation for me to give a lecture on Muslim social media activism. There were also many instances during the fieldwork where the experiences of my interlocutors not only sparked my own memory of a similar experience in the past but also helped me to make new connections between them and as a result allowed me to read the experience differently as well. My experience with a Mappila migrant labourer in Malaysia, narrated in the fifth chapter, is an example of this. I have tried to demonstrate this reflexivity, though often demanded only from

‘native ethnographers’, throughout this thesis especially by bringing in my own “personal experiences as data in the analysis” (Callins & Gillinat, 2010: p. 17). Reflexivity, thus appears in this thesis not just as a static mentioning about the self of the researcher in the introductory chapter, but more in the form of a process or what Kohn (2010) calls ‘processual form of reflexivity,’ in which the ethnographic self constitutes one of the important resources for this research work.

1.5 Islam: A Blind Spot in Media Historiography?

As it is evident from the research questions already stated above, one of the major issues that this thesis is trying to engage with is the debates regarding media historiography. While the studies published in the *Journal of Media history*, a journal dedicated to media history, demonstrates that history of media technologies has been predominantly written either from the perspective of the nation state or its various colonial precedents and post-colonial antecedents, the publication history of the journal suggests that print and the various cultural expressions it enabled to flourish in Western liberal democracies, particularly journalism, through newspapers and periodicals, demarcates the launch pad for writing media histories. By focusing their objective of inquiry primarily on establishing a connection between print, journalism and nation state these studies tend to narrow down the scope for an expansive understanding of meaning and significance of media technology in a given society, their multiple origins and histories. In doing so, these studies also set in place a model to understand the life of later media technologies from the logic of modern nation states and their secular apparatuses.

Thus, this metaphorical domination of print, journalism and nation state in media historiography on an already existing multitude of genres, modes of production

of texts and its circulation effectively erased other important genres and the socio-cultural practices that developed around them, including mechanisms of their reproduction, circulation and geographical coverage.²⁷ This erasure was a constituent one for the newly emerged polities and for their socio-spatio-temporal imaginations as many of these genres, technologies and their regions were important avenues for many communities and cultures to express and constitute their self and their imaginative potentials that linked human beings across divides of distance in both time and space, which significantly challenged many of the foundational logics of modern nation states. While the dominant approach to writing media history has always been a collaborative project with various post-colonial nation building activities aiming to reproduce a mythical civilizational past, geography and demography, critical scholarship on media historiography offers a powerful criticism of this dominant strand and argue for an exploratory approach that takes on board previously ignored technologies, regions and genres. As a corrective measure, many of the recent media histories have been written from the perspective of fragments emphasizing regional specificities. While the former approach privileged continuities in media histories, the latter approach often highlighted the discontinuities at various levels suggesting that there exist a disconnect between these two.

To write the history of media technologies of a region like Malabar and of a religion like Islam is equal to attempting to recapture a cultural space that extend beyond the scope of a nation state, its regional fragments and their temporal logics often articulated through a geographically bounded civilizational past. Such an attempt will surely demand employing unorthodox methods, sources and forms of engagements in order to get access to hitherto obscure and neglected material that

²⁷ I take up this issue for detailed analysis in chapter 3 while discussing the introduction of print among Muslim communities.

would account for the varieties of genres, languages, ideas, individuals, geographies, technologies and their multiple origins and connections over a much broader spatial/temporal canvas. For example, the trans-local Muslim networks of *hadiths* [prophetic traditions] or *fiqhi* [Islamic jurisprudence] literary tradition in Malabar, as we have seen in the story of Dr. Sheikh Usama al-Sayyid al-Azhari, span across a large geographic and temporal scale: from the Swahili Coast in East Africa to Java in Southeast Asia and from 632 AD Mecca to 1359 AD Damascus to 2012 AD Alexandria and beyond. Employing an interpretative frame to write the history and ethnography of media technologies of such a historical space and time, this thesis seeks to explore not only the mundane but also the unexpected aspects of media technology in a community. The thesis seeks to achieve this goal firstly by bringing Islamic discursive traditions and its material practices together, then by bringing them into the centre of media studies and lastly by making them speak back to each other. As a result, the focus of the thesis while studying the above mentioned research questions in the specific Muslim context of Malabar frequently shifts its scale of analysis from Malabar to Ottoman to Western Europe to the Arabian Gulf, back and forth or what Ronit Ricci would call, “Arabic cosmopolis” of South Asia (2011: p. 4): and from Islamic discursive tradition to normative liberal assumptions: Islamic genealogies to national histories.

Since the history of media in any Muslim society is also the history of the expansion of its various social institutions, particularly Muslim centres of teaching and learning, this dissertation also proposes *da'wa*²⁸ as a key term that will not only

²⁸ *Da'wa* is an Arabic word which literally means ‘to invite.’ It is one of the key terms in Muslim theology and has been extensively used in the Qur’an where it means summon one’s peers to act in conformity with God’s will. So Qur’an says “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best” (Qur’an 16: 125). According to the Brill’s Encyclopedia of Islam, the term has also been used in Islamic literature to designate the duty of any

encompass a vast array of communicative practices and media forms introduced and developed in various Muslim societies and the world views they espouse in the orthodox Sunni Muslim ethics, but will also help one to make sense of Muslim communication practices, its forms and importantly connections between them.²⁹

1.6 Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, with four main chapters along with an introduction and a concluding chapter. The thesis tries to understand social milieu in and through which information and communication technology enter/exit a Muslim community. The first chapter provides the background information to the Mappila Muslim society while tracing the origin and evolution of two terms, Malabar and Mappila. The chapter also details the theological differences between various Mappila Muslim groups in the region as they are played out in the socio-political and historical structures of the region and argues that the need to study these differences is important in understanding the everyday Mappila Muslim life. Additionally, the chapter introduces the research questions, methods and sources followed in the study and briefly discuss the methodological departures the present study proposes for writing media histories. It also identifies *da'wa* as a key term in Muslim media practices and argues that a vast array of communication practices and media forms

Muslim to “actively encourage fellow Muslims in the pursuance of greater piety in all aspects of their lives”.

²⁹ Following Shaikh Usama, Talal Asad (2015) argues that Qur'an's call to be a community that 'urge what is good and oppose what is reprehensible' (Amr bi al-Maruf wa'l-Nahy an al-Munkar) constitutes the central element of *da'wa*. This has given birth to a variety of communication practices in Islamic tradition which include but is not limited to advice (*nasiha*), warning (*tadhir*), speak (*qala li-*), exhort (*wa'za*), etc. By connecting these practices with the foundational elements of ethical formation of an individual in Islam, he further argues that ethical formation of an individual in Islam is not a matter for the individual alone, but it takes place through interactions among people and things in several locations including the media. Michael Cook (2000) in his historical survey of 'amr bi-l-ma ruf' also points out that the practices that developed around this Qur'anic call are foundational in Islamic community making processes.

introduced and developed in various Muslim societies and the world views they espouse in orthodox Sunni Muslim ethic has been the result of the elaboration of the meaning and significance of *da'wa*.

The second chapter, 'Islam, Media and Malabar: Conceptual Trajectories', is dedicated to surveying various approaches and debates on studying religion-media intercession in general and that of Islam in particular in the existing literature in order to set out the points of departure for the present study. Theoretical approaches the chapter discusses ranges from propositions that see Islam and media as antithetical to each other to Islam as media. The chapter then turns to two dominant approaches in anthropologies of Islam to see if they can assist in understanding Muslim-media practices with its complexities: anthropologists' call to focus on what they call Islam as a discursive tradition and Islam as an everyday practice. While the former position argues that it is the meta language of Islam as a discursive tradition that regulates all fields of Muslim life including their media behaviour, the latter position goes against the autonomy of religion and argues that it is the meta language of everyday in which technology, its form, materiality and aesthetics organize human experience including that of the meaning of being religious today. The chapter argues that both these approaches in and alone are inadequate to comprehend Muslim media practices. As a response, it suggests bringing these two approaches into conversation by paying attention to the medial dimension of the discursive tradition and the discursive dimensions of media technologies: study materialities of the discursive tradition and the discursivity that materialities of media technologies afford in relation to each other.

Since this study proposes to engage with and foster dialogues between Islam

and media in the context of Malabar, the chapter also discusses different approaches employed in studying Islam in Malabar in the existing literature. The chapter identifies two important tropes in the historical and sociological writings on Mappila Muslims namely, confirmatory and confrontational. While the former approach explains Mappila Muslims in terms of their success in the adoption of the local non-Muslim cultures and traditions, the latter approach explains it in terms of their failures to do so. The chapter argues that the construction of Mappila Muslims either as rebellious or as conformist is in a way an extension of the argument that there are two versions of Islam: textual and lived assuming that these two are necessarily contradictory. In doing so, they reduce Mappila Muslim history problematically either as the history of success/failure or of confirmation/confrontation that conceals alternative approaches to the field. As a response the chapter argues for drawing upon an archive that provides space and accounts for discourses that stem from and flourishes in the interiors of Mappila Muslim existence.

The third chapter, 'Lithography as the Muslim Way of Printing', is an attempt to trace the history of Muslim negotiations with the printed word/world and the technologies of communication that print aspired to replace in Muslim societies. The chapter briefly outlines the history of Islamic textuality and textual cultures among Mappilas from the early phase of Islam's introduction in the region. The chapter then looks at the specific form of printing technology Mappila Muslims adopted to produce, reproduce, and disseminate their texts and traditions: lithography. The religious milieu in and through which lithographic technology enters the Muslim community is significant. Reading the archival materials collected from various sources against the dominant media history requires enquiring into Muslim print culture on the one hand and Islamic textuality and textual cultures on the other, while

the chapter attempts to historicize the specificities of Mappila Muslim engagement with printing technologies. The chapter argues that the Muslim preference for lithographic printing as opposed to typographic printing clearly demonstrates that printing in the early phase of its introduction in the region was clearly a technology that differentiated along community lines. This argument problematizes the dominant perception of printing as a phenomenon with a universal history and appeal across communities and regions. The chapter also argues that many of the misconceptions about Muslim-print encounters emerge from ignoring the pre-print modalities of Muslim textual production and the inability to see media technologies as part of the larger social assemblage of a community.

The fourth chapter, 'Wa'z and Making of Media Infrastructures', aims to do two things. (1), to discuss two interrelated questions: how are we to account for the abundance of information and communication technology among the Mappila Muslims of today? What are the important practices or institutions responsible for introducing and popularizing information and communication technology amongst them? (2), trace the genealogy of how electronically amplified sound became one of the most noticeable features of contemporary Islam in Malabar. The chapter discusses these questions by analysing the popularity of a sound technology introduced in the 1950s: loudspeaker. It then suggests that the use and popularity of information and communication technology in Muslim societies is deeply embedded in their approach to the Islamic tradition of knowledge transmission in which oral transmission plays a significant role. The chapter identifies *wa'z*, as a predominant form of knowledge transmission among Mappila Muslim community in the region and argues that *wa'z* embodies aural qualities Islam espouses by skilfully employing the phonic and poetic qualities of spoken words. Aimed to evoke a particular mental state among their

audience and to inculcate *thaqva* [God fearing], through the creative deployment of acoustic techniques, the chapter argues that *wa'z* provides the discursive space for sound technologies to flourish among Mappila Muslim community. Thus in the loudspeaker, as an emblematic sonic media technology of Mappila Muslim community, the authority of Islamic religious discourses and its preferred mode of transmission merge with the aesthetics of technology; the convergence of the metaphysical and the empirical, divine and the human.

By projecting *wa'z* as one of the institutions most responsible for Islamization and establishing its close link with the setting up of religious infrastructure in the region, the fifth chapter, 'Cassettes and sound reproduction: Muslim soundscape in Malabar' demonstrates how sound amplification technologies were important for Mappila Muslim communities in their efforts to make spatial claims in post-Independent India. The chapter then presents two key debates on the use of the loudspeaker within Mappila Muslim community in the initial phase of its introduction (1960s) and at the peak of its popularity (2010s) in order to argue how technologies and their use in Mappila Muslim community embody various intra community theological differences and inter community socio-political aspirations. The debates among Ulema on the status of the loudspeaker and sound amplification reiterate the fact that media infrastructures were welcomed in the religious community not as an inevitable consequence, popularity or easy accessibility of a given technology. But such questions are taken as a matter of theological importance with ethical consequences. Thus, the tensions between mediation in a religious setting as a divinely inspired act and technology as a human experience are negotiated through the legal frameworks available in the Islamic Sharia literature.

The chapter follows the disputes between Hindus and Muslims on the use of loudspeaker and argues that both the colonial and post-colonial approach towards Muslim religious sound/technologies not only reflects the structural character of communal politics in the Indian subcontinent, but also throws up some important questions about the constitutional right to practice religion in India today. It then discusses how criticism against sound-based knowledge practices have been central to the Wahhabite-inspired Muslim reformist projects in the region in order to demonstrate how the idea of communication and its media infrastructure in a Muslim community is deeply shaped by their approach to knowledge. This obsession with acoustic technologies within and outside the Muslim community either by opposing it or arguing for it not only demonstrates how constituent sound and various forms of its manifestation are to Muslim societies, but also explains why they tend to define their community and its concerns along acoustic lines.

The last part of the chapter, explains how sound reproduction technologies like cassettes developed from and contributed to existing knowledge transmission practices such as *wa'z* that flourished in and around various acoustic technologies. By bringing in examples from the ways in which Mappila Muslim community engaged with sound reproduction technologies, particularly the social institutions and material practices that minimised the difference between source and copy in reproduction and the practices that drastically changed the nature of cassette technology as a private medium into a public medium, I have argued that communities develop mechanisms rooted in their tradition to domesticate technologies to fit into their specific contexts. This is followed by the conclusion in the last chapter where I summarise the chapters, findings of the thesis, the challenges it poses and issues ahead.

Chapter-2

Islam, Media and Malabar: Conceptual Trajectories

As I set out to study the mediations among the Mappila Muslims of Kerala, I had suggested in my initial PhD proposal that I will analyse the media habits of the Mappila Muslim community based on newspapers, print magazines and other new media outlets published by Muslim organizations and individuals from Kerala and the various cultures associated with it.¹ The formative reference points that assisted me in framing such a proposal and in delineating my field were the works of Jurgen Habermas² and Benedict Anderson.³ However on a closer contextual scrutiny based on some of the preliminary ethnographic data, the analytical framework these scholars offered seemed vague and elusive. Here, my entire project on the media habits of the Mappila Muslim community began to take a complete turnabout. One incident which made me realize the narrowness of my analysis, based on newspapers, print magazines, websites and other digital media platforms run by Muslim organizations and individuals primarily targeting Mappila Muslim readers, was a *wa'z* (*wu'az, pl.*)⁴

¹ My initial motivation to take up this project was based on some quantitative criteria such as the high literacy rate (93.7 - 95%) among the Muslim community in the region which is higher than the national average for muslims and higher than certain other religious groups like the Jains (86%)., (Premi, 2011) and *Islamika Vinjana Kosham* [Islamic Encyclopedia] (2012).

² The Habermasian (1989) idea of the public sphere and Fraser's (1990) critique on Habermas and her subsequent conceptualization of the counter public have been very central and influential in the Media/Journalism Studies disciplines in the last three decades. For studies from the Indian context exploring the entanglements between the media and the public sphere see, Saeed (2013), Rajagopal (2009), and Ninan (2007). For studies on the Muslim context see, Meyer & Moor (2006), Eickelman & Anderson (1999).

³ Imagined communities, a term Anderson (1991) explored in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* is another defining concept in studies on media. See for example, Mandaville's (2001) work on Muslim media and community formation.

⁴ *Wa'z* is a form of pious exhortation popular among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar. For a detailed discussion on *wa'z*, see the fourth chapter in this dissertation on *wa'z* and the making of media infrastructures.

by a *Musaliyar*.⁵ I attended service at a local mosque in my village during the month of Ramadan.⁶ In his late night *wa'z* on the 12th day of that Ramadan in 2013 at the Puthanpalli Jumu'a Masjid [the new mosque] in East Kellur, Wayanad, Hamza Musaliyar⁷ warned the believers gathered inside the mosque:

Look at the way people, particularly the young generation, spend their time today. We all have 24 hours a day. But how do you spend it? Have you ever thought of that? You start making a list of how you spend your time; then you will realize this. How much time do you utilize for sleeping, eating, talking to people, watching television, reading newspaper and importantly on your phone? My brothers, if you don't use your time wisely you will regret on the Day of Judgment. But we think that we are wise. However what does it mean to be wise in Islam? It simply means to constantly remember the One who created all of us; who granted us these 24 hours from his eternity. If that's the meaning of being wise in Islam, how many of us are wise? For us, who is a wise man? A man with multiple degrees from universities, a scientist, a doctor, an engineer...? For us these are intelligent people. We consider those who read newspapers, magazines and books and gather information from them as very brilliant people. But is that true? They are intelligent only in a limited sense; in the life here on earth which is much shorter than the afterlife. Will the information you gather from newspaper and television save you from the fires of hell? No, it will not help you! Rather it will make your way to hell

⁵ A *Musaliyar* is a respected and knowledgeable person among the Mappila Muslim community. The word is believed to have been derived from *Muslih*, the Arabic word for reformer, conjoined with “*yaar*”, a Malayalam colloquial expression for the respected.

⁶ Ramadan is the month of fasting according to the Hijri/Islamic/Arabic calendar.

⁷ Hamza Musaliyar has been a popular *wa'iz*, and has been giving *wa'z* in the last seven decades. He hails from Malappuram district of Kerala. In the 1960s and '70s his *wa'z* sessions attracted thousands of people from Malappuram, Kannur, Kozhikode, and Wayanad districts of Malabar.

easier. So don't lose your time and reward in the afterlife by spending most of your time on reading newspaper, watching television, discussing politics and spending your time on mobile phones. We think that having the latest mobile will enhance our status. But have you ever thought of what would be our status in the afterlife? My dear brothers, we shouldn't be losers in that life. That's our ultimate target. The Almighty gifted us with this month to prepare ourselves to be the ultimate winners. Ramadan is the month when the Holy Qur'an was revealed and hence all Muslims are obligated to recite the Qur'an as much as they can. It's also the month when each and every good deed of the believer will be rewarded abundantly by the Almighty. So I request you, particularly my young sons and daughters, to avoid ending up as failures in the afterlife. What appears in the newspaper should not bother you at all. There are bigger things for us to bother about and take care of. We have better things to read, watch and listen to.

While this was not the first incident where I had heard such observations, this particular speaker's invocation and call for the rejection of newspaper reading and TV watching was a shock to me. It was shocking precisely because in my proposed study on ethnography of media among Mappila Muslims, I tended to rely on the analysis of newspaper and other popular magazines as I mistook them to be the legitimate representations of the mediations among my interlocutors. In this mistaken conception, I had been aided by Anderson (1991), whose observation on newspapers as the substitute of morning rituals of pre-modern and pre-nation states, had profoundly contributed to the study of the newspaper⁸ as a valid representation of

⁸ An extension of this argument also includes television. To know how the idea of imagined communities has been used in television studies, see, Abu Lughod (2005) and Rajagopal (2001) in the Egyptian and Indian contexts respectively.

everyday mediation among the informants of various ethnographers (Abu Lughod, 2005; Fahmy, 2011). If newspaper reading is so central to the modern subject formation, how will a media ethnographer account for incidents such as the one I encountered in the field? To what extent are the contemporary social theories helpful in making sense of the intricate connections between religion and media? Hence the questions present themselves: how do we study religion and media? What is media for a Muslim and how are we to understand the intricate relationship a Muslim has with information and communication technology?

2.1 Religion and Media Intercession as a Problem

In an article by Biersdorfer (2002) published in the *New York Times* titled “Religion Finds Technology” the author begins by explaining the scene inside a church in the Kensington section of Brooklyn in the US on an early Sunday morning as follows:

“Live full-color images from cameras placed around the room started to appear on the wall-mounted projection screens, and the crowd began to quiet down in anticipation. The room was full of sleek video and audio gear and illuminated by theatrical lighting equipment”.

After an elaborate description of the objects and scenes in the interior of the church, Biersdorfer warns his readers that one should not mistake this scene for a stage production, a sport event or a studio floor set up for television show recording. “It is a church on a Sunday morning preparing for their weekly service,” he reminds his readers. He is awed by the presence of the latest communication technology, primarily developed to facilitate better communication between human beings, in a chapel built for mediating between God and his followers.

In the last few years of my research on religion and media, I had also encountered awe and surprise from others alerting me to the fact that I may have been mistaken in bringing together religion and media technology in my research. In my conversations with them I could sense the origin of these anxieties. It was based on two convictions. One, they truly believed that religion and media belonged to two different realms. If the former is a matter of the afterlife, the latter is considered as a matter pertaining to the here and now. The second conviction had direct bearing on my person. As a journalist I used to write for both mainstream and alternative media organizations (in Malayalam and English) about developmental issues such as the agrarian crisis, the Adivasi land question and the Civil Society movements in South India for many years, before I took a long break. Recently I started writing again for the Malayalam press, but this time dealing with a completely different set of issues and concerns than what I once used to. The issues I engaged with in my recent writings were mostly about religion, above all Islam and its interactions with the media. And that constituted the second source of their worry. Many of my readers seriously believed (of course they were all well-wishers too) that by choosing religion, particularly Islam as a subject to study and to write about instead of development I was destroying a successful future in journalism.

This tendency to see religion and media as two antagonistic realms and the anxieties it generates are not new at all. It is not a misconception particular to those outside the scholarly circles also. These anxieties have been part and parcel of a larger symptom in the very way questions on religion and media were posed and answered in the academic disciplines as well. Such questions and answers not only consider religion and media as two autonomous entities belonging to two antagonistic realms

acting independently, but often give media a higher epistemic value over religion.⁹ It is this higher epistemic value attributed to media technology that causes Biersdorfer of the *New York Times* or the friend of mine in Kozhikode to get surprised whenever they see religion alongside media or vice versa.

As indicated above, this worry has been a prevalent one in many academic studies on media and religion in the last several years. Francis Robinson (1993) in his study on technology and religious change in South Asia exemplifies this tendency in a different way by asking why “print did not begin to become established in the Islamic world until the nineteenth century, four hundred years after it began to be established in the Christendom” (pp. 229-233). According to him this ‘late arrival’ of printing technology in the Islamic world owes to the way knowledge and its authority have been maintained in the Muslim world. Here he presents religion and technology not only as two opposite ways of understanding things, but also technology as the legitimate way of understanding and correcting religion. Subsequently, Robinson would argue that the large-scale resistance from Muslim religious authorities towards adopting printing technologies was basically to prevent their followers from knowing their religion legitimately. By arguing so what he is indicating towards is the “inherent tension in religion, particularly in Islam to interact with technologies” (pp. 229-251).¹⁰

⁹ Daniel Lerner (1958), one of the key proponents of the modernisation theory argue that media plays a crucial role in the modernisation process. His pioneering work *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing Middle East* (1958) notes, “As people are more exposed to media, the greater is their capability to imagine themselves as strange persons in strange situations, places and time than did people in any previous historical epoch” (p. 52). A more recent edited volume on media in South Asian religious societies proceeds on the very assumption that the relationship between media and religious societies has always been a unilateral one where communication technologies shape religious traditions and systems, not the other way round. See Babb & Wadley (1995).

¹⁰ I will examine this argument in detail in the next chapter while discussing the introduction of print technologies among Muslim communities.

The “unpredicted return of religion”¹¹ and the massive expansion of media technology have been considered as two important developments in the recent past. Some scholars argue that these two phenomena are two unrelated events. They might have happened simultaneously by coincidence and should be studied independently. Others argue that these are two well-connected events demanding attention in relation to each other. What are the implications of these two seemingly different approaches toward religion-media entanglements? What hopes has this attempt to establish or demolish the relationship between religious and technological media set in place? When they are studied in relation to each other how are the questions being asked and answered? When they are studied independently how are they being posed? How different or similar are these approaches? From where do these approaches enter the broader philosophical traditions? And finally, what kind of conceptual assumptions about religion and media are persistent in these traditions? Considering how these approaches have been elucidated in various academic studies in the past might serve to answer some of the questions raised above.

2.2 Religion in the Information Age

Manuel Castells (1996), known for his conceptual formulation on network societies (originally proposed by social theorist George Simmel)¹² basically argues that the

¹¹ The narrative of modernity proposes a transition to a rational, modern order where religion does not have any significant role. However, the post-colonial experience points towards a different direction. The post-colonial condition in many parts of the world is chiefly characterized by the relevance of religion in public life. Religion in such communities and cultures, instead of withering away has survived and emerged as a standpoint proposing an alternative epistemology and ontological explanation for everyday life. This phenomenon has been by and large termed in popular as well as academic studies as return of religion or as a re-turn of religion. See Raschke (2012), particularly the chapter titled ‘Postmodernism and the return of the “religious”’ (pp. 52-69).

¹² The intellectual origin of the idea of network society goes back to the German Sociologist George Simmel (d.1918), who analyzed the effect of modernization and industrial capitalism on complex patterns of affiliation, organization, production and experience. His book *Conflict and the web of*

“social structure and activities of “New society” in the information age are organized, shaped and sustained not by vertical hierarchical systems, organizations or schemas such as religion but by electronically processed information and communication technologies” (pp. 3-4). Though there have been social networks/connections throughout human history, according to Castells, the restructuring of industrial economies in the wake of globalization, the rights-based civil movements of the 1970s and ’80s, and the revolution in information and communication technology in the last three decades distinguish all the previous structures of networking/connections from the one we experience today. The important technological characteristic of the present time, for Castells (2000), is the historically specified communication system organized around the electronic integration of all the previous modes of communication systems available to human beings, from the typographic to multisensorial information technologies. The mode of connection that binds this ‘comprehensive medium’ together and its consumers as a ‘truly network society’ is a set of ‘inter connected nodes’ that are ‘*value free and neutral*’ (emphasis mine), which includes and excludes relevant nodes based on decentred performance standards and shared decision making (p. 16).

But interestingly, Castells excludes religion from this ‘interconnected nodes’ claiming that religious communes refuse to ‘bend to the network’ (p.19) and he is very categorical on this when it comes to the question of Islam. He not only places the historically encoded information such as that of religion and its moral world outside the realm of integrated communication system and the network society it envisions,

Group-affiliations (1955) is considered as a pioneering work on this. See Chayko’s (2015) review of this book titled “The first web theorist? George Simmel and the legacy of ‘The web of group-affiliations’”.

but also argues that the latter makes all the symbolic power of traditional communicators external to the 'comprehensive medium' irrelevant. The only possible way for this historically transmitted transcended information to secure an earthly coexistence with information societies and sustain their relevance is to 'recode themselves in the new system' by 'losing their super human status' (pp. 10-20). He also hopes that societies will become truly secularized and enchanted when all the superhuman wonders can be seen online (Castells, 1996: p. 406).

For Castells (1997) the contemporary religiosity or what he calls the 'conspicuous consumption of religion' one sees today is a temporary paradox in the secularization process. Global informationalism and the spatial-temporal sensibilities that the secularization process invokes will finally lead the societies to the mechanical reproduction of belief; superhuman wonders online. He describes these processes as a move from the "inducement of virtual reality to the construction of real virtuality" or what he calls "the belief in making" (pp. 370-75).

The role of religion in the information age, Castells believes is reactionary in nature. He makes this argument explicit when he opines that "religion is contemporary culture's main discontent and the mere sign of resistance to the new logic of informationalization and globalization" (pp. 19-20). The contemporary Muslim religiosity, which he calls "fundamentalism" in these descriptions, is either a "reaction against unreachable modernization or the evil consequences of globalization and the collapse of the post-nationalist project" (p. 26). It is this antagonistic approach towards religion and technology that allows Castells to argue that when the world enlarges via information, it will force religious authorities to control it and as a

defensive strategy, religion will have to go public. Islamic fundamentalism for Castells is precisely part of such a public articulation of Muslim religiosity.

Interestingly enough, in his later work on identity in the information age Castells (1997) makes a different turn from his earlier postulations. Like Olivier Roy (2005) here he counts 'Muslim fundamentalism' among the many nodes that constitute the new network society, which according to him is the product of the information age.¹³ But he does it with a precautionary note that 'Muslim fundamentalism' can also be the result of deficiency of information that enables and structures the conditions of possibilities for global jihadi networks to form, organize and sustain (pp. 12-22). Thus while it is the excess of information available to one through various technologies that makes network society possible, in the case of Islam it is the deficiency of information, according to Castells that acts as the organizing principle for network society.

For our analytical purposes what is noteworthy here is the way religion/religiosity in general and its Islamic version in particular finds an entry and exit in Castells' studies. On the one hand religiosity for him is an aberration in/from contemporary life. It reminds one of modernity's unfinished projects and promises. Once modernity has a comprehensive hold over the world religion/religiosity will disappear. So religiosity for Castells is something to be ignored as it is just a matter of time before it will disappear. On the other hand, Castells takes religion/religiosity very seriously in his analysis and sometimes even describes it as reminiscent of modernity itself. In doing so he presents the growth and popularity of global *jihadi* organizations as evidence for the historical importance of network society and its

¹³ Manuel Castells here specifically mentions *Al Qaeda*.

resilience in today's world order. He further argues that these organizations contribute in their turn to the rise of what he terms "the network state" and thereby alter the existing international order (pp. 108-44). But even when he counts religion as one of the nodes among the modes of network society, in whatever limited fashion, he dismisses public articulations of religion except its 'fundamentalist' versions expressed through the means and actions of *jihadi* organizations. Other forms of religious expressions are, for him, reactionary trends against deteriorating patterns of socio-economic exclusion triggered by globalization (p. 42).

It is evident from Castells' approach reproduced in the above discussion that he sees religion and the media as antagonistic to each other and their coming together as an undesirable act.¹⁴ Such an understanding, part of long standing hegemonic arguments in social theory, according to Eickelman & Piscatori (1996) is a result of "oversimplified dichotomization of tradition and modernity" using which most of the social theorizations of contemporary religiosity have been carried out. For Eickelman & Piscatori this over simplification comes from a specific conceptualization of modernity which "lay in sharp contrast between two artificial constructs of modernity and tradition and the consequent misunderstanding of the entrenched social functions of tradition" (pp. 23-24). Such "oversimplified conceptualizations" are set in place in the long traditions of hope that theories on modernization and disenchantment are expected to prove disappearance of religion from public. It is obvious that such a

¹⁴ It could be said that such a reading of Castells skips the critical attention he deserves. However, the ambiguities present throughout his tirade in fact argue the opposite; being religious in Castells' formulation does not mean abstention from modern media technology. But such a reading of Castells I would argue is only possible at the expense of his overall understanding of religion vis-à-vis technology and the role he assigns to both in relation to the other. This becomes clear when one looks at the way he presents feminism and environmentalism as transformative movements made possible along with technological revolution, but positions 'fundamentalism' as a reactionary movement. The role of new communication systems and the information society it envisions in this regard is to radically transform spatial and temporal understandings sustained by a socially, culturally and historically encoded information system such as religion. Information society then sets forth a disembodied view of information and communication technology.

notion will insist one to place religion/religiosity and information/media in antagonistic terms. For them the conjuncture of these domains is an undesirable act.

Now let us consider Eickelman and Anderson (1999) (henceforth E&A) who seem to argue that the relationship between the religious and the technological is a systematic one more than a reactionary one as Castells and others have suggested. E&A begin their studies by critiquing scholars who study religion-media intersection with their over simplified understanding of modernity and tradition. When scholars like Castells see religion as a social system that refuse to “bend to the network” as a problem to be ignored, E&A see contemporary Muslim religiosity triggered by various media technology as just the opposite; religion is something which flourishes along with globalization and its information and communication technologies. According to them “the easy accessibility and proliferation of electronic media facilitate the constitution of a new Muslim public and enable them to challenge both the state and religious authorities, build civil society and engage in transnational relations” (1999: pp. 7-10). The new Muslim public sphere, according to them, is constituted by the new media technologies both as an alternative concept to the civil society in the Muslim context or as an entry point for Muslim religiosity to go public. By arguing so, they suggest that all forms of contemporary Muslim religiosity are distinctively a modern phenomenon.

Though E&A and Castells seem to differ in their understanding of Muslim religiosity vis-à-vis information and communication technology, at closer analysis they look more similar than at first. The paradoxes in Castells’ claims take on a new form in E&A, who begin their analyses claiming to offer a critique of scholars working with an oversimplified dichotomization of the religious and the

technological. It is this curious similarity of thought that underpin the intellectual projects in Castells and E&A who come from different disciplinary and ideological backgrounds and begin their inquiries with two different hypotheses, but at the end render similar kind of explanations when it comes to the question of Muslim religiosity vis-à-vis communication technology that I want to emphasis here.

A closer analysis of E&A's arguments on what they call the new Muslim public in the Islamic world will bring out how Castells' propositions are mirrored in their work – that religion and technology belong to different realms and contemporary religiosity is a reaction to globalization and the resultant binaries he (Castells) draws on. In E&A's formulations, religion and technology do not belong to different realms but the latter facilitates the former. To elucidate this claim and to bring out the Castells in E&A, I offer here a detailed analysis of the latter's propositions.

Three things are fundamental to E&A's conceptual understanding of the new Islamic public sphere. They are the new media, the new public and reintellectualisation. Let us take each of these three elements separately. Imagining new media¹⁵ as more than a technology and thus necessarily different from all other communication technologies in the past, E&A argue:

“Minor and emergent channels of communication that have proliferated are not mass in the sense as conventional print and broadcasting. They are composed and consumed within more specialized, often voluntarily entered fields where producers and consumers, senders and receivers, are far less distinguishable than broadcasters or the press and their audience. Instead they

¹⁵ By new media they generally mean means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the Internet.

merge in a kind of transnational community that moves the centre of discussion and its impetus off shore or overseas because their technology is mobile or was first available there” (1999: p. 8).

New Media, which is very central to the Islamic public sphere that they envision, “reconfigure audiences as communities”, “radically reduce the social and cultural distance between producer and consumers” and “occupy an interesting space between the super literacy of traditional religious specialists and mass sub literacy or illiteracy” (pp. 9-11). They see new media as the “natural home” of emerging bourgeois middle class Muslims in the Islamic world. These Muslims draw on numerous media domains made possible by new media technologies to produce creolized discourses¹⁶ on Islamic texts and practices that are not authorized anymore or importantly, do not require to be authorized by traditional religious authorities anywhere but are instead produced by new people in intermediate discourses. These new people, “who have emerged and have benefited from the huge increase in modern mass education” (p. 10) “widen the circle of those affected by new media constitute a market for new mixes of ideas” (p.11). Thus Madrasas, the traditional Islamic centres of teaching and learning, trained and strengthened a small number of elites and their networks and empowered this small group of elite to interpret religious traditions and circulate the authoritative techniques to others (Eickelman, 1992). In contrast, the “more widely open and spread” modern mass education opened up and

¹⁶ By creolized discourses I mean those discourses that emerge from the new players and sites outside the traditional knowledge circles of Islam. They include Muslim media commentators, tele-evangelists and popular preachers. They make use of new media technology extensively in order to make their arguments on issues of religious importance. Their arguments not only contradict and challenge the traditional interpretations of religious texts and practices but are fundamentally based on the assumption that rulings on Islamic affairs does not require a mufti or judge qualified to do *ijtihad*, critical independent research. The controversial Bombay-based tele-evangelist Zakir Naik and the Cairo-based Amor Khaled and their religious rulings are good examples of this. This dynamics between popular arguments and traditional authority or what Nathan J. Brown (2016) calls multiplication of religious spheres in the Islamic world according to E&A is a product of new media environment.

brought in new avenues for a wide range of “intellectual techniques and authorities” (p. 650). This transformation in the domain of knowledge practices, according to Eickelman finally lead to what he calls “the erosion of exclusivities” that previously defined and sustained communities of discourse.¹⁷

According to E&A the link between the new media and the new people in the Muslim world is “reintellectualisation” of Islam. By “reintellectualisation” of Islamic tradition, they mean “presenting Islamic doctrine and discourse accessible in vernacular terms, even if this contributes to basic reconfigurations of doctrine and practice” (1999: p. 12). Social theorists had earlier used the category of reintellectualisation to denote ‘folk/local Islam’. But this term has also been widely criticized for deflecting attention from the presence of the global in the local throughout the Muslim world and presenting them as necessarily contradictory (Lukens-Bull, 1999; Gibb, 1998). But E&A claim that their conceptualization of reintellectualisation of Islamic tradition in the new media context strongly differs from its previous theorizations.¹⁸ For them, with the arrival of new media and its subsequent creation of new people, “Islamic discourse not only moves to the vernacular and become accessible to significantly wider publics, it also becomes framed in styles of reasoning and forms of argument that draws on wider, less exclusive or erudite bodies of knowledge, including those of applied science and engineering” (1999: pp. 12-13).

What does the entanglement between new people, new media and reintellectualisation of Islamic knowledge traditions do? According to Eickelman

¹⁷ Eickelman’s understanding of the function of media in the Islamic world is shaped by his earlier studies on Islamic educational institutes in Morocco. For more details see Eickelman (1985).

¹⁸ Here also we see the textual/lived or global/local Islam binary operating in the background, but differently. This will be discussed in detail in the last part of this chapter.

(1999) at a very fundamental level this conjuncture does five things: (1) empower protest groups within Islam, such as minorities including women; (2) increase fragmentation of religious authority; (3) subsequent democratization of Islamic knowledge tradition; (4) brings into the picture new players to claim religious authority; and (5) inaugurates new ways in which Islam can be approached, studied and commented upon and finally transform religious and political beliefs into a conscious system. Thus media technologies,

“Set aside the long tradition of authoritative discourses by religious scholars, so that chemists, medical doctors, journalists and even garage mechanics can interpret “Islamic” principles as equals with scholars who have graduated from the schools of Ulema.....New public spheres in which religious norms, practices and values play a significant and sustained role that is not necessarily coterminous with civil society but that can offer powerful support for it”. (pp. 14-15, 38)

Such blurring of lines between religion and civil society should remind one, E&A say, of the impossibility of sharply demarcating between the public and the private, and indicate the more important continuities between these spheres. As a result, the private transcends its traditionally assigned space and enters into the realm of political intervention. Though this political intervention catalysed by the fragmentation of traditional religious authority may lead to political instabilities in the Muslim world in the short run, they are definite that it will finally contribute to and will materialize the formation of a civil society throughout the Middle East and in the Muslim world (Eickelman, 1999: pp. 29-38; Anderson, 1999: pp. 41-53).

As opposed to what E&A had claimed in the beginning that they work against the oversimplified dichotomization of tradition and modernity and for a realization of blurred lines between these two, we see in contrast that this binary plays a significant role in their theorization of the conjuncture between the new media, the new public and the reintellectualisation of Islamic knowledge tradition. Take for example the detailed explanation they provide for reintellectualisation of Islamic knowledge tradition which for them play a crucial role in the development of new Islamic public sphere. Reintellectualisation here demands specific understanding of tradition, authority, temporality, mode of argument and reasoning. Curiously, the acceptance of such specific understanding of tradition and its temporality, as E&A did will not yield any critique on the “over simplified dichotomization” they level at scholars like Castells and others but will only add new layers to their own oversimplifications. In their analysis, E&A do recognize the new interpreters of Islam or what they call the new public as a legitimate public as long as the “reintellectualisation of Islam is anchored less in the long standing conventions of Islamic interpretation than in the modern demands and experiences of Muslims; a shift from a law based to an experience based way of reasoning” (1999: p. 13). Such a theoretical position by default assumes that tradition can only be accessed, legitimized and incorporated through competing interpretations. As a result of this, the Muslim public, and so is Muslim politics, an arena where Muslims argue not over what the correct interpretations of tradition is but what is the appropriate interpretation of tradition for the present day context and what it means to be a Muslim in this context. This contemporary interpretation is only possible by liberating Islam from the traditional

Ulema's mediation. E&A among others assume that it was the liberalization of media that made liberalization of Islamic discourses possible.¹⁹

Though E&A argue that religiosity flourishes along with the expansion and popularity of media technology, they do not legitimate all forms of religion in their analysis but only specific forms of religiosity. So their analysis is predetermined by their conviction of what forms of religiosity should flourish. If it was 'fundamentalism' that found minor recognition in Castells' information network society, it is the "reintellectualised Islam" that finds a place in E&A's emerging Muslim public. Other forms and formats that contemporary Muslim religiosity takes on are the symptoms of the present age's anomalies according to both of them. What does it mean? It simply means that religion cannot enter any debate as it stands. It requires religion to meet certain kinds of conditions and to remake itself accordingly. The task of information and communication technology among religious communities today is to rework religion in order to mould it into a presentable form. In short, it suggests that religion is a problem to be explained along the lines of modernity and its institutional and technological forms. Both Castells and E&A argue this in two seemingly different ways; while Castells' proposition suggests that contemporary religiosity is a phenomenon to be ignored, E&A proposes that religiosity afforded by media technologies is the key to modernity. While the former position explains this problem as a symptom of incomplete modernity, the latter argues that it is a problem, but can be overcome by using tradition positively. What E&A propose is to attempt to "get people to adopt as part of their tradition what really is not part of their tradition" (Agrama, 2012: p. 13).

¹⁹ Following scholars who see parallels between the religious resurgence and the proliferation of media technology in the last few decades some make the argument that there is a strong connection between liberalization of media that made liberalization of Islamic discourses possible. This has been the dominant trend in many of the studies on Muslim media. See for example, Hackett & Soares (2015).

2.3 Mediation and Question of Religious Authority

Most of the studies on media-religion entanglements in the last decades have revolved around the question: is religious authority waxing or waning, diversifying or centralizing in the information age? For example, look at the way Hjarvard (2016), one of the key proponents of mediatization of religion theory, puts forth this question:

“The visibility of religion is in part a reflection of a general mediatization of religion through which religious belief, agency and symbols are becoming influenced by the workings of various media. The presence of religion in the media is not just a mirror of religious reality outside the media. It is also an outcome of a complex set of processes in which the importance of religion and particular religious beliefs and actions are contested as well as reasserted, both in and by the media, at the same time as religion undergoes transformation through the very process of being mediated through various media” (pp. 8-17).

We have already seen, while discussing Eickelman’s work, where such concerns emerge from, where it will lead to and what conclusions it aspires to draw up. But what I want to discuss here is the limitations of such questions and the possible enquiries and interpretations it forecloses. The question whether religious authority is waxing or waning takes off by accepting certain premises on the role of religion and religious authority in the contemporary world. The question is accompanied by a set of sub questions: do religious authorities or their followers succeed or fail in transmitting religious messages? Are they able to sustain their strategic authority and control over the communication resources? But the futility of such questions gives rise to two related paradoxes. When one set of scholars argue that religious authority fragments with its encounter with media technologies and give

birth to new classes of interpreters who appropriate religious systems of signification independently (Eickelman, 1999), others argue that religious elites have overcome these so-called autonomous media infrastructures, their institutional apparatuses and the independent consumer they have produced by entrenching their religious authority in new ways (Mandaville, 2001). Muslim religious authorities, according to the latter line of argument, see new media technologies not as a threat to their traditional role but as providing an opportunistic avenue to reach out to more people and places and exert their authority, which would have been impossible otherwise.

In their studies on the Qatar-based Muslim scholar, Yusuf al-Qaradawi,²⁰ Bettina Graf and Petersen (2009) traces Qaradawi's career as a religious scholar in the last six decades. Among the range of factors that might have shaped Qaradawi's long and controversial career, they cite channels of communication open to him as a major one. Gudrun Kramer (2009) is more explicit when she calls him a Media Mufti whose career and sphere of influence were shaped by satellite television and the internet. Kramer's use of the term Media Mufti seems parallel to Graf's and Petersen's use of the term Global Mufti while describing Qaradawi.

Elaborating on this, Ehab Galal (2009) while writing about the popularity of *Sharia and Life*, a program broadcast on Al Jazeera channel,²¹ introduces Qaradawi as part of a new phenomenon that he calls the Islamic media. His initial doubt "how come that a channel like Al Jazeera, presenting itself as a secular, critical,

²⁰ Yusuf al-Qaradawi is an acclaimed Islamic theologian trained in Cairo's Al-Azhar University and a leading figure of the Muslim Brotherhood. He is now based in Doha, Qatar and is the Chairman of the International Union of Muslim Scholars. He is listed among the most influential Muslim personalities in the world. See Esposito & Khalin (2009).

²¹ *Al-Sharia wa-al Hayah* [Sharia and Life] was one of Al Jazeera's popular programmes hosted by Qaradawi where he answered questions asked by viewers on issues pertaining to living as a Muslim in contemporary societies.

independent channel focusing on news coverage chooses to produce a program of this kind” is later sorted out when he argues that Qaradawi differs from many other traditional Muslim religious scholars because of his use of the new Islamic TV. Qaradawi’s very appearance on TV, according to Galal, contributes to his popularity among ordinary Muslims and non-Muslims, enhances his authority as a Muslim scholar and augments acceptance of his Islamic scholarship in the Muslim world and outside. Qaradawi achieved this stature by utilizing transnational broadcast media in conjunction with other new media and his visualization of Islam along a modern framework. As a result, Qaradawi could construct a Muslim public discursively.

This argument may remind us of similar stories in other religious contexts. The popularity of ArtScroll, an English language Judaica publishing house is one example. Stolow Jeremy (2010) argues that the new conditions of mediated communication transform, not dissipate, religious authority. While arguing so, Stolow adds a new dimension to what Galal explains in the Islamic context. As opposed to Galal, religious authority strengthened and extended through mediated communication is not a discursive one for Stolow. But it is the product of traditional religious authority’s ability to act according to the evolution of logic of commodity exchange where Artscroll could establish hegemony in Jewish liturgical publishing industry by “orchestrating a desire for authenticity and shaping the means of its attainment” (Stolow, 2010: p. 86).

When E&A argue that religious authority wanes when it engages with information and communication technologies, Galal and Stolow among others forcefully assert the exact opposite. The tendency to either prove or disprove if religious authority is diversifying or centralizing in the information age has led the

two sets of scholarships to paradoxical claims. This paradox, I contend, is the result of the limitation of the initial question with which both of them start their inquiries; whether religious authority is waning or waxing. This question, in many senses, is least fruitful in understanding the religion-media interface. The unproductivity of this question has far-reaching effects as it completely ignores the media as a realm where important projects of the cultivation of the self takes place (Hoover, 2016). This instrumentalist approach towards media according to Stolow (2005) ignores substantial concerns about how the use of media infrastructures in religious contexts is inherently unstable and constitutes ambiguous conditions of possibility for religiously signifying practices.

What is seen in the above discussion is the reverberation of the classical question Benjamin (1977) once asked about the aura of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. For Benjamin, aura, or what he also calls originality and authenticity of a work of art is lost when it is mechanically reproduced. But, he considers this loss as a good thing as it has the potential to create avenues for a historical shift in perception and mode of being in the world with a possibility to emancipate a work of art from its traditionally retained relations of power. For him, this politicization of art fills the void left behind by the loss of aura/originality of the art. This politicization then enables the spectator to watch the work of art in their particular situation and thereby to generate new relations of power. So what mechanical reproduction, for Benjamin, is supposed to do is to continually politicize aura/authority/originality and traditions and institutions associated with these in order to make them irrelevant.

But in its everyday dimension of mediation between religion and media, the question is not simply of whether aura/authority is lost or gained in mechanical

reproduction. To be more precise, the question here is not at all about authority. Benjamin (as cited in Stollow, 2005) himself acknowledges this fact when he says that mechanical reproduction does not destroy the aura of artwork much and the traditional relations of power and value in which this auratic relationship was once encased. What he instead proposes is that mechanical reproductions enable the audience to see the work of art in a new situation. If that is the case, the question becomes one of how the character of aura/originality/authority changes through mechanical mediations of art, and is not about its destruction. In order to explore and explain such transformations of authority, one needs to ask a different set of analytical questions. Asking such analytical questions is not easy because it demands a complete turnabout. For this one needs to work with a different understanding of religion, its authority and role in society as opposed to what we have seen in the preceding discussions. This will be an all the more difficult task if one is dealing with a religion like Islam which works with a different notion of authority in the religious context.²² It is on this flawed understanding of religious authority and its transformation that many of the questions on religion-media interface are anchored and thus reveal their limitations.

The conversations both Castells and E&A initiated in their attempts to understand contemporary religiosity facilitated by media technologies are not two different projects. Their conversations began from two different starting points; Castells by proposing that media and religion belong to two antagonistic realms and E&A by arguing that religiosity and media are well connected. But the paradox is that both of them curiously and importantly meet at a single point that assumes and

²² For a more fruitful and detailed discussion on what authority means in Islam and what constitutes authority in Islam, see Agrama (2010).

assigns the new information and communication technology the task of disembodying religion from public life. The role of media in these two scholarly narratives is a definite one; to evict religion from public and to relocate it within bourgeois domesticity. If at all it has to be in public it should take a recognizable form and structure, recognizable to modern sense and sensibilities. Such a perception is formulated on the assumption that the mere expansion of media infrastructure among Muslim communities will eventually challenge the normative frameworks through which religious authority operates and sustains in a society and weaken its markers of affiliation and identity.

Where do such assumptions arrive from? They derive from a particular European philosophical convention that recognizes only those traditions and claims that are organized using forms and epistemological structures from the modern-secular public sphere. This philosophical tradition assumes that modernity and its sensibilities are natural, whereas tradition and its sensibilities are a construct. By doing so, what is achieved is to “presuppose and naturalize modern sensibilities, temporalities and mode of reason” (Hirschkind, 2011: p. 93). While Castells naturalizes modern sensibilities through a “simplified dichotomization” of tradition and modernity, E&A do the same in the name of critiquing of ‘oversimplified dichotomization’ of tradition and modernity. But both of them do it at the expense of ignoring distinctive styles of arguments by which Muslims reference the past, its temporalities and modes of reasoning. By doing so, they exclude a vast array of objects, practices and discourses which would have helped them to narrate an altogether different story of the religion-media interface. What they want religion to do is to act within the background of European modernity and its rational world that

repositions the status of religion and reconfigures the way people imagine their religious belonging.

2.4 Media, Religion and its Materialities

Commenting on the limits of contemporary religious studies de Vries (2001) asks scholars of religious studies to move from studying and reflecting on the meaning of religion to the significance of religious mediation and mediatization without and outside of which religion will not be able to be expressed in the first place. According to him, though religious traditions across history have relied on various kinds of communication technology the current interface of religion with information and communication technology marks a qualitative shift, “from a peripheral to an intrinsic bond between the mediatic and the religious” (pp. 3-42). Elaborating on Derrida’s (1998) proposition that the relationship between religion and media is irreducible today where religion is considered as a practice of mediation indebted to and inseparable from media technology, de Vries argues that manifestation of one’s religion in the contemporary world is only possible through media technologies. Derrida (2001) explains this intrinsic relationship between media and religion through the story of television and the visual culture it affords. For Derrida, Television is a pre-eminent Christian apparatus of representational power in today’s world. In the time of powerful visual culture that television and other technological apparatuses have made possible, Derrida says that there is no need to believe in anything anymore as one can see everything. What qualifies these new ways of seeing is the fact that it is always organized by a technical means that presupposes an appeal to faith (2001: p.63). de Vries uses this position and explains further in order to argue that without and outside the mediation and mediatization, religion would not be able to manifest in

the first place to such an extent that virtual interchangeability of religion and media is possible within contemporary societies (2001: pp. 23-29). His favourite example for this formulation is the comparison between the notion of special effect in digital settings and miracles in the religious context and argues that the former cannot be understood without the conceptual resources of the latter (p. 28).

de Vries's attempt to equate religion and media is an elaboration of his earlier studies on religion where he argued that methodological studies on religion must begin from the particular as opposed to the universal.²³ His suggestion in this regard is to study words, sounds, smells, sensations, gestures, power, affects and effects of religion/religious practices rather than its texts or the transcendental claims they make. What he basically means by this is to look at the materiality of religion. Religion for him then becomes a set of practices and objects. Klassen (2008) explains the meaning of seeing religion as a set of practices from its media dimension as follows:

“In the case of religion and media, the concept of practice has facilitated a shift from focusing purely on the message of a text, image or sound to considering the medium in its many dimensions; how it works and who controls it, to what range of human senses a particular medium appeals, what people do with both messages and the media that transmit them, and how ritual, theologies and religious dispositions are constituted and transformed by different kind of media” (p.138).

Stolow (2005) opines that the most fruitful studies on media and religion are those which proceed not from the instrumentalist approach of religion and media, but

²³ See de Vries's (2008) long introduction to *Religion; Beyond a Concept*.

from the idea of religion as media (p. 125). Engelke (2010) reiterates this point when he says that it is those scholars combining material culture studies and media studies approaches in their inquiries that have produced the most profound anthropological discussions of mediation.

Analytically, how useful would be this equating strategy to study the entanglement between religion and media ? How different is this equating strategy from segregating religion and media into two opposing realms? What would such an argument want to achieve and at what expense? One striking shortcoming of this approach is that it does not differentiate between religion and media before it builds up a connection between them. Instead it assumes that one can replace religion with media. This in effect helps the proponents of this approach from not employing a definition for religion and media in their theoretical claims and the further questions it may provoke. In what respect is the mediatic religious or vice versa? How is one to differentiate between different forms and expressions of the religious and the mediatic? Ignoring such questions only leads one to oversimplify the complex ways in which media and religion are related. Instead it allows religion to animate the discussion about media and get absorbed without a remainder and vice versa.

Hirschkind (2011) offers a powerful criticism of this approach by asking whether religious communities cannot worship their preferred deities without “mediation or mediatization” (p. 91). He also accuses the proponent of this equating strategy for merging distinct sets of mediations – theological and sociological – and for reducing different models of mediations within them into a single phenomenon (p. 92). Hirschkind argues that equating religion and media is only possible through the adoption of a Protestant theological sensibility where public display of religion is

considered as the mediation of an internal, private religious essence which finally ends up in reducing religion to media. Following Asad (1993), Hirschkind argues two things here: (1) faith is not a split subject which can be divided into private/interior and public/exterior; (2) the practices within and through which religion is articulated publically are not exterior to the belief but actually constitute the belief as a dimension of life specific to each and every religious tradition. Thereby, he proposes that for a believer, mediation is not a phenomenon outside his religious domain but is a practice that constitutes his religious self.

Hirschkind's proposal also departs from the way religious adherents' use of media has been generally studied as an expression of religious identity.²⁴ Such identitarian views are predominant in the studies carried out in the contexts of minority religious groups' interactions with various media avenues made possible by the developments in information and communication technology. Hirschkind and others argue that such identitarian views about religion and media reduces Islamic rituals to the status of cultural customs (Hirschkind, 2006; Mahmood, 2005). Such a view radically transforms the role such practices have played historically in the realization of a pious Muslim self. It also deprives religious practices of their very ability to contribute to the formation of ethical dispositions that constitute the fundamental meaning of these practices. In that sense, one uses media not to express the self, but to shape the self.

2.5 Sunni Orthodoxy, Ethics and Media Technology

²⁴ Seeing media use as an expression of one's identity is the predominant mode of studying media in the Muslim context. Look at the two recent studies for example, Kabir (2012) and Mellore & Rinnawi (2016). In a recently concluded international conference on Muslim media at Agha Khan University (Nov 3-4, 2016), 'Media in Muslim context; inventing and reinventing identities' was one of the major themes for discussion.

One of the major inadequacies of contemporary Social theories, according to Mahmood (2003) is their assumption that ethics and politics belong to two different ontological realms. Her ethnographic exploration of the mosque movement in Egypt, which she calls the piety movement, takes a completely new approach to the way religious practices including the practices involving the media interface have been studied. The two contrastive approaches I had laid out in the previous section that view religious media practices as mediatic and constitutive present a more encompassing question: why are religious rituals and bodily form and practices absent from political analyses? To put it differently, why are specific conceptions of rituals and the forms that they take not themselves seen to have political implications? This question takes Mahmood to the roots of post Enlightenment thought, where she argues that the legacy of Humanist Ethics, particularly in its Kantian formulation, was not able to pay enough attention to the morphology of moral actions and to their precise shape and form and hence missed the crucial part played by them in the creation of the self, community and authority (p. 838). This relative lack of attention from the normative liberal conception of politics towards ethics and moral conduct has led to their absence in contemporary political analyses.

It is obvious that in shaping the field of ethics and moral conduct, the Kantian legacy dominated the post Enlightenment liberal thought. Mahmood now asks: what was the Kantian legacy? What did it replace? (p. 842) For Kant, the only necessary condition for the making of ethical-moral self was an exercise of the faculty of reason shorn of the specific contexts of social virtues, habit, character formulation and so on. Kant argues specifically against the Aristotelian tradition. For Aristotle, morality is both realized through and manifest in behavioural forms. In contrast, Kant argued that an amoral act could only be moral to the extent that it was not a result of habituated

virtue but a product of the critical faculty of reason, which in turn was understood to be universally valid. This means that one acts morally in spite of one's inclinations, habits and dispositions, not because of them (p. 860). The Kantian legacy was so consequential to the post Enlightenment thought that even Pierre Bourdieu (1984), whose work focuses on practices of dress, physical bearing and styles of comportment, considers these practices interesting. For Bourdieu, it is interesting only in so far as a rational evaluation reveals them to be the signs and symbols of a much deeper and more fundamental reality of social structures and cultural logics.

Mahmood positions herself precisely where Bourdieu failed to pay attention; a position where she considers how different concepts of subject formation require different kinds of bodily capacities and demeanours within specific discursive (rather than cultural or class) contexts. Her approach – what she calls an analytical approach – is drawn from a “positive ethics” which has its origin in Ancient Greek philosophy and some of its crucial concerns have been reformulated by Michel Foucault (1984). Positive ethics looks to the particularity of form that ethics takes not as contingent but as a necessary aspect of understanding its substantive content. In this formulation, ethics is founded upon particular forms of discursive practice, instantiated through sets of procedures, techniques and exercises through which highly specific ethical moral subjects come to be formed. She draws upon the term *habitus* – but not as Bourdieu famously did.²⁵ In other words, she does not look to *habitus* to understand how the structural and class positions of individual subjects come to be embodied as dispositions – largely through unconscious processes. Instead, she draws upon a longer and richer history of the term, “one that addresses the centrality of gestural

²⁵ There is a difference in the approach between Bourdieu and Mahmood. Mahmood later clarifies why she does not look into class structure because her approach demands something else which she delineates as analytical approach and suggests as being more productive in the analysis of the piety movement.

practices in certain traditions of moral cultivation” (2005: p. 136). Mahmood (2003, 2005) delineates her understanding of the terms as follows: Aristotelian in origin and adopted within Christianity and Islam. *Habitus* in this formulation is concerned with ethical formation and presuppose a specific pedagogical process by which moral character is cultivated. It is true that Aristotelian ideas on ethics have significantly influenced early Muslim scholars.²⁶ But the fundamental difference between the two also needs to be emphasized which Mahmood and Hirschkind fail to notice. As opposed to the Aristotelian ethical thought, the Islamic idea of virtue-ethics is law based.

Both Hirschkind (2006) and Mahmood (2005) in their theorization of Islamic practices take us to a radically different approach to the Muslim use of media technology. They place theological instructions and religious cultivation of behaviour at the centre of the debate and argue that the medial character of any specific religious tradition and the forms it adapts and adopts are the result of a specific disciplining in the respective religious tradition, or what Asad (1986) has famously called the discursive tradition. It means then that the use of media technology in an Islamic community is deeply embedded in Muslim ethical thinking.

Hirschkind (2006) makes this argument more forcefully when he says that Muslims in Cairo listen to cassette recorded sermons not with their ears, but with their hearts (p. 79). Hearing with hearts, he explains is only possible through the sensorial capacities listeners cultivate through their religious disciplining of mind or what he calls ethical listening (p. 79, 98). This practice of ethical listening highlights the role of affective, kinaesthetic and gestural modalities of bodily experience within the

²⁶ See Hossein Nasr & Aminrazawi (1999) and Hossein Nasr & Leaman (1996) for a detailed discussion on the Greek sources in Arabic and Islamic philosophy.

process of listening and reflects the cultural practices that organize and give form to sensory experience (p. 93). In ethical listening, sensorium is an object of pedagogy and ethical attunement which help to fashion and sustain the sensory conditions for a modern Islamic ethics (p. 84). Listening here is not a cognitive action, but works at the level of the affective, and the relationship between the sermon and the listener is constitutive in nature.²⁷ But the Islamic counter public constituted through ethical listening practices for Hirschkind is also shaped by the structures of techniques of modern publicity and the dialogues they mediate (p. 30). Thus, in some senses, the conceptual difference between Habermasian public sphere and Hirschkind's Islamic counter public is very minimal. They differ only in the latter's conceptual promise to blur the boundaries between state and society, public and private, which is very central to the former as a normative space and way of doing modern secular democratic politics. Though the conceptual framework Hirschkind suggests through his ethnographic exploration of sermon-listening in Cairo is useful to make sense of the rituals in Muslim contexts which involve engagements with information and communication technologies in various forms and practices, it is not sufficient.

It is insufficient because religious rituals for Hirschkind do not make sense in and of themselves. They become an important element of his analysis as long as they are mapped onto a national civic arena and have been put to novel use in the Muslim's engagements with the existing conditions of possibilities shaped by modern political institutions and its pedagogical techniques (2005: pp. 30-32). This is evident from the way he approaches *da'wa* practice in Egypt. He presents *da'wa* as a

²⁷ Jean Luck Nancy's (2007) use of the term *écouter* to delineate how the mode of listening attaches a subject to an object is also a useful framework to understand what Hirschkind calls ethical listening. According to Nancy "when one is listening one is on the lookout for a subject, something (itself) that identifies *itself* by resonating from self to self, in itself and for itself, hence outside of itself, at once the same as the other than itself, one is the echo of the other, and this echo is like the very sound of its sense" where both sound and self share the same form, structure or movement' (p.9)

discursive arena for the expression of the demands engendered by political modernization among illiterate Muslims and cassette sermons as a paradigmatic rhetorical form which enhances the dialogical structures of social discourses within the mosque premises, and thereby expanding the role of mosques as an essential site of public discussion.²⁸ Why do people in Cairo embody an ethical self? Or why do they listen to cassette recorded sermons by Islamic scholars? “It is to hear what is going on in Egypt. An alternative to the televised and press media promoted by the state,” One of Hirschkind’s interlocutors says (p. 36). Thus cassettes for Hirschkind are another addition to the list of things which E&A has for the formation of the new public in the Muslim world.²⁹ So very often ethical listening to cassette recorded sermons, in Hirschkind’s analyses is presented as a mechanism adopted by reformist Muslims to recruit ordinary Muslims into the structures of national political life/modern citizenship.³⁰

For the interlocutors in my ethnographic field, sermons are not a discursive arena for expressing their demands engendered by modern political institutions. The

²⁸ In a sense this looks as an elaboration of the concept of the Habermasian teashops being extended to mosque premises.

²⁹ For Eickelman and Anderson (1999) the advent of modern mass education, literacy, and the wide availability of written texts, telephone, fax machines, internet etc. plays a significant role in constituting the Muslim public sphere in the Islamic world.

³⁰ This is why Hirschkind avoids the long history of the notion of *da’wa* from the late medieval period to until early twentieth century in his analysis. Instead he argues that *da’wa* received little systematic elaboration during this period until the Islamic opposition movements in Cairo, particularly the Muslim brotherhood, earlier in the 20th century “rediscovered” it. The huge literature produced in the above-mentioned period on *da’wa* and its practitioners disapproves of Hirschkind’s claim. Since the concept of *da’wa* has been one of the central notions in Islamic theology, it has received careful attention from Muslim scholars and they have redefined and rediscovered it throughout Muslim history. For example, writings by Sayyid Abd Allah ibn Alawi al-Haddad (d. 1719). What Hirschkind does not do then is to distinguish between the notion of *da’wa* in the Islamic opposition movement and outside. For example, the *da’wa* practices outside the ‘Islamic opposition movement’ that is quite strong and popular in Cairo. If he has such a distinction in mind his avoidance of sermon practices outside the ‘Islamic opposition movement’ is not only a systematic one, but also perpetuates an Islamic version of the assumption that ethics and politics belong to two different ontological realms. Paradoxically it is this assumption that he claims to resist. I will come back to this point in the fifth chapter while discussing *wa’z* and its relation to *da’wa*.

sermon is not a form to develop the dialogical structures or social discourses within Islamic contexts either. For them it is a disciplinary realm to nurture rule-based virtues such as love towards Prophet Muhammad (*Mahabba*) or fear of God (*thaqva*). Instead of acting as a mediatic vehicle between one's national citizenship and one's Islamic self, or as a rhetorical form to express one's internal religiosity, sermon or any ritual for that matter, such as reading the Qur'an or listening to *nasheeda*,³¹ in an important sense forges their religiosity. Thus the aim of ethics in Islam is to produce subjects who not only obey the law, but also experience pleasure in obeying the law. In doing so, they strive to acquire a perfection that is embodied in its entirety in the bodily dispositions of the Prophet. They write, read, print, record, or listen not to know what is happening around them, but to be a responsible ethical beings in relation to their Creator and His messenger. But scholarly accounts of religious media in Muslim societies have tended to ignore this Muslim attitude towards virtue and ethics in understanding their media behaviour. So when Hamza Musaliyar asks his audience not to lose their time and reward in the afterlife by wasting their time on reading newspaper, watching television and spending time on mobile phones (as we have seen in the beginning of this chapter) or Sheikh Aboobacker calls Facebook a 'fasadbook'³² (as we will see in the fourth chapter) what is reflected in their articulation is an ethical concern referring to the moral disorder potentially unleashed through media technologies.³³ Elaborating Mahmood's (2003) critique on contemporary social theorization, I argue that the omission of this internal critique of

³¹ The basic meaning of *Nasheed* or *nasheeda* is song. However in Muslim societies it specifically means songs that has Islamic content such as praising the Prophet, his companions or saints.

³² *Fasad* is an Islamic term for moral corruption and disorder.

³³ Following Andre Wink (1986) who used the term *fitna* to describe a political strategy for sowing dissension in pre-colonial political formations Veena Das (2010) also argues that the terms *fitna* and *fasad* which she translates as terms referring to disorder, disaffection between communities, chaos and refusal to submit to the will of Allah, are key terms to understand the everyday moral and spiritual striving of a Muslim in contemporary India.

media technology in Muslim communities from the scholarly analysis is partially due to the assumption that ethics and technology belong to two different ontological realms.

2.6 Discourses on Media and Religion: Delineating the Fault Lines

As we have seen from the above discussions, the two dominant approaches to studying the Islam-media entanglements derive from two different theoretical positions in Islamic studies vis-à-vis media: anthropologists' call to focus on Islam as an everyday practice and Islam as a discursive tradition. Seeing the Islam-media entanglement from the everyday dimension, the first set of theories, what I call the medialization theories, argue broadly that it is the meta language of everyday in which technology, its form, materiality and aesthetics organize human experience including that of the meaning of being religious today and its ambivalences and inconsistencies, which cannot be explained using the framework of a single tradition (Schilke, 2010).³⁴ The other set of theories, which I call religionization theories, attempt to understand this entanglement from the vantage point of Islam as meta language to go against the autonomy of everyday and its technological infrastructures and argue that it is the discursive tradition that regulates all fields of Muslim life including their media behaviour (Asad, 2015; Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind 2006). That is to say that while the former position in its attempt to look for heterogeneity and inconsistencies of human beings privileges the deliberative aspect of technology, the latter position highlights the disciplinary power of tradition in its attempt to account for social structures and the coherence it sustains.

³⁴ It can be argued that clubbing various seemingly opposite perspectives outlined so far into a single category called medial theories/form based theories can only be done at the expense of crude generalization. But look at the way the question of media has been raised in such debates and discussions. The role media technology have been assigned in all these varieties of perspectives is an instrumental one. So their inquiries are by and large confined to two questions: what media do to people or what people do with media.

The fundamental difference between these two approaches becomes evident when bringing these differences into focus in relation to media technology: the former position emphasizes how media technologies act as a priori to human experience and the latter focuses on how authoritative discourses in religion are so pertinent to human beings' interactions with various media technologies. To bring the media theories in conversation with contemporary religiosity vis-à-vis media, it is suggested that deployment of particular media technologies are the necessary conditions that make particular forms/expressions of religiosity possible. According to this 'epistemic history of media' (Larkin, 2009: p. 118) religion is not only a second order reality but changes according to the changes in media technology. This call of technology (Heidegger, 1982) to religion and its followers to take specific forms presumes that machines have the capacity to make one think in particular ways and shape the ways in which discourses of living beings are carried out (Agamben, 2009). McLuhan (1964) puts this formulation more brilliantly and straightforwardly while saying medium is the message. Bringing this theoretical paradigm to study the Muslim community in Yemen, Messick (1993) argues that the way *Fiqhi* texts³⁵ were written, read, archived and circulated had a huge impact on the way authorities had been formed and maintained in Yemen which he calls the calligraphic state.³⁶

Now look at the second proposal. In order to bring the religious theories/content based theories in dialogue with contemporary religiosity vis-à-vis media, it is assumed that the meta language of religion shapes the course of media infrastructure in any given religious community. Asad (1986) in his *The Idea of*

³⁵ *Fiqh* is the knowledge corpus about Islamic jurisprudence. This knowledge is gathered through a systematic interpretation of the Qura'n and Sunnah, the sayings, actions, or habits of the Islamic prophet by Ulemas. *Fiqh* deals with the day-to-day affairs of a believer.

³⁶ Messick in his studies compares how different forms of schooling have produced different styles of writing and reading and because of that different interpretations of religion. See Messick (1997) and Makdisi (1981).

Anthropology of Islam explains this as follows:

“No coherent anthropology of Islam can be founded on the notion of a determinate social blueprint, or on the idea of an integrated social totality in which social structure and religious ideology interacts. If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Quran and Hadis. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artefacts, customs and morals. It is a tradition. A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of any given practices” (p. 14).

Bringing this theoretical paradigm to study the Muslim community in Cairo, Hirschkind (2006) argues that it is through the deployment of the disciplining power of ethical speech which is sustained through Islamic pedagogical techniques such as the *khutuba*³⁷ and the affective and sensory hierarchies they cultivate that the necessary discursive arena for the production, circulation and consumption of cassette sermons is constituted (pp. 105-109).

In short, the discursive arena constituted by Muslim-media entanglement is often identified either as a deliberative space created and sustained through the creative deployment of information and communication technology wherein the aesthetics of technology takes over the religious meanings and authority or as a disciplinary power of tradition wherein religious disciplining and sensibility not only forecloses the contestations over meaning but also reproduces that religious disciplining and sensibility. This way of framing the inquiries, Hirschkind argues,

³⁷ *Khutuba* is a form of pious exhortation. A detailed discussion is provided in the fourth chapter.

exemplifies the tendency within liberal thought to view the individual as necessarily in conflict with the community (p.106) and basically draws its conceptual fault line from the religious and mechanical binary. This binary is worked out as part of what Bruno Latour (1993) has called “the process of purifications” by which borders between the human and non-human are continuously posited while being simultaneously overcome. Such fault lines basically explain the affinity between religion and media in terms of the crisis in modernity. Habermas himself made it clear when he said that the contemporary popular/mass media's ability to mould affects and desires represent an immense threat to democratic practices of political deliberation as popular media practices undermine the rational-critical character of public debate necessary to deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1989).

But to what extent is either of these approaches in and alone sufficient to make Muslim-media engagements intelligible? Can Islam be explained in terms of its discursive knowledge alone? How do various forms of media technologies and discourses, from calligraphy to internet, supplement different ideological contents within Islam as opposed to the breakdown of Islam's institutional forms and authorities? How are we to understand the potential implosions media interactions can initiate within religious communities as opposed to the solidarity and comradeship media is supposed to nurture? How is the discursive tradition argument going to account for the ways in which discursive knowledge in Islam has been conceived, produced, stored and circulated among Muslim communities? How will discursive tradition explain the embodied approach to knowledge which is prevalent among traditional Muslim communities across the world? Or can one actually distinguish the embodied knowledge from the discursive one and vice versa?

This dissertation argues that such questions cannot be explained

comprehensively if one concentrates on the deliberative aspect of technology or the disciplinary aspect of tradition alone. Both the medial and religious theory approach to study Muslim engagements with media technology in and alone are inadequate, apart from their historically flawed approach, to fully comprehend the media related activities among Muslim communities and cultures and its impact on patterns of their religious, socio-cultural and political life. They are historically flawed, because while the deliberative approach suggests ruptures in discursive tradition when tradition is mapped onto mechanical reproduction, the disciplinary approach suggests continuity in discursive tradition across time and space irrespective of the medial forms it takes. That is to say that while the former position privileges the form religion takes across time and space, the latter privileges its content assuming that these two realms can easily be segregated. Such a positioning of the religion-media entanglement conveniently ignores the complex relationships between the texts and practices within Islamic discursive tradition. Apart from that this approach also avoids the ruptures in continuity and continuities in ruptures.

The question then to ask is how one is to overcome such fault lines. As a response, this dissertation suggests bringing these two traditions in conversation by paying attention to the medial dimension of the discursive tradition and the discursive dimension of media technology. To put it differently, this study looks at the materialities of the discursive tradition and the discursivity that different material forms of media technology afford. For this, the study proposes to see both content and form not as two different entities acting independently but in relation to each other³⁸

³⁸ I borrow this idea from Hayden White (1990) where he argues that form already possesses a content prior to any given actualization of it in speech or writing.

and as part of a larger assemblage.³⁹ Such an approach, I believe, will assist one to see the religious work of media and the medial work of religion in tandem with each other in producing the everyday Muslim subjectivities. Emphasizing on such connections and fluidity between religion and media will also work as a corrective measure to the essentialised understanding of religion and media and their roles in society. So, this study is also about how specific technologies have been reworked and transformed in and through religious practices as much as it is about how religious practices have been reshaped and transformed in and through media technologies. The most logical scholarly interpretive stand point in this regard the study proposes is to neither prove nor disprove the affinity between religion and media, but to think through their connections; what are the conditions of possibilities that specific forms of religion affords vis-à-vis media technologies in making the contemporary Muslim ethical self possible? My central argument thus is that religious discourses as such do not acquire any power, authority and efficacy, but depend on the way how their constituent elements are organized. In the same way, media gains power, authority and efficacy in religious contexts only when it conforms to the “liturgical conditions” of what constitutes religious discourses.

2.7 Mappila/Malabar: Beyond the Logic of Conformation and Confrontation

This study proposes to engage with and foster dialogues between the two main disciplinary audiences - media and Islamic studies; and it aims to demonstrate this in the context of Malabar. The history of Mappila Muslims in Malabar and their sociology have been by and large written through two tropes: confirmation and confrontation. As a consequence, scholars of Mappila Muslims have been framing

³⁹ I employ the term assemblage as it has been proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; as a framework to understand complex social relationship by stressing on fluidity, exchangeability and multiple functionalities. For more see, *A Thousand Plateaus* (2002).

their discussions either in terms of Mappila Muslims' adaptation of the local non-Muslim cultures and traditions, predominantly the Hindu community, or their confrontation with local communities and foreign invaders. Some studies combine certain elements from both these tropes and argue that Mappila Muslim political struggles in the colonial period were actually an outburst of their dissent with both the foreign, predominantly Christian, invaders and the local, predominantly Hindu, perpetrator (Ansari, 2005; Miller, 1992; Panikkar, 1989). When one set of scholars were busy with unearthing the long traditions of syncretism among Mappilas, the focus of others were on the long battles Mappilas fought against Hindu landlords and Christian invaders. The prominence that *Muhyadheen Mala*⁴⁰ and *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*⁴¹ have received within Mappila Muslim scholarship and the subsequent erasure of many other texts will attest to this point. While *Muhyadheen Mala* helped historians and literary critics to tell the story of Mappila Muslim syncretism, *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* has been widely used to narrate a longer history of Mappila Muslim confrontations. It is my contention that privileging these two texts over many others to tell the history of Mappila Muslims forms closures in Mappila/Malabar historiography in significant ways and ignores texts and practices most crucial to understanding the fundamental characteristics of Islamic traditions in the region. The absence of *Fathul Mu'een* (1583), a sixteenth century legal text, authored by Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdoom Saghir (d. 1619) which played a critical role in the everyday

⁴⁰ *Muhyadheen Mala* is a 16th century devotional poem in Arabi-Malayalam written by Qasi Muhammad (d.1617) praising the virtues of Sheikh Abdul Khadir A. Gilani, a 11th century Sufi scholar and the figurehead of the Qadiri Sufi order. This is also considered as the oldest surviving literary piece to be found in Arabi-Malayalam.

⁴¹ *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin fi ba'd Akhbar al-Burtughaliyin* or popularly known as *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* written by Zainudheen Makhdoom Zaghir is basically a call to wage war against the Portuguese invasion of the Malabar coast of South India. The book is also considered as one of the early historical writings on Malabar written by a native scholar. Written in Arabic in 1583, the book provides the details of the events unfolding during the Portuguese colonization of the Malabar Coast. *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* is generally categorized as anti-colonial literature.

self-making processes of Mappila Muslims in the last four centuries, from any of the historical and sociological analyses of Mappila Muslim life clearly illustrates this fact.⁴²

The tendency to see Mappila Muslim history in either of these ways is not limited to academics or non-Mappila Muslim historians. The attempts to approach Mappila Muslim history from within the community were also not very different. The growth and popularity of Muslim political and religious movements in the region in the last few decades also relied and capitalized on such binary narratives.⁴³ Historical developments such as the 1947 partition of undivided India into Pakistan and India, and the various postcolonial experiences such as the rise of the Hindu nationalist movement, the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, and the post Mandal minority political formations might have played their own roles in necessitating, facilitating and privileging such ways of framing Mappila Muslim histories, cultures and societies within and without the Mappila Muslim community. The historical narratives thus written produced two contrasting images of Mappila Muslims; rebellious and conformist. From time to time nationalist, Marxist and Islamicist historians and political activists alike have taken part in these image-building exercises to suit their socio-political aspirations. Interestingly, this has also cultivated a new desire for Mappila Muslim history across different socio-cultural, religious and

⁴² The only exception in this regard is the recently submitted PhD dissertation by Mahmood Kooria (2017) at the Leiden University where he looks at the development of Islamic legal discourses in the Indian Ocean region. Muhammad Swalih's on-going PhD research at the Department of Social Anthropology in Freie University, Berlin also looks at *Fathul Mu'een* as a defining text of the Mappila self. The third and fourth chapter in this dissertation looks at *Fathul Mu'een* in detail to study the forms of its circulation and popularization.

⁴³ A cursory look at various books, pamphlets, seminars, and campaigns published and conducted by Muslim organizations and the formation of various socio-cultural and political organizations among Mappila Muslims in the last few decades will attest to this.

political groups.⁴⁴ The formation of organizations to study Mappila Muslim history, a series of public conferences organized by political parties on Mappila Muslim history, the use of Mappila Muslim historical figures in election campaigns by both Muslim and non-Muslim political parties etc., highlight this point.

The construction of Mappila Muslims either as rebellious or as conformist is in a way an extension of the argument that there are two versions of Islam: textual and lived. According to the proponents of this binary Islam, while the textual version privileges the importance of living as a Muslim according to the foundational texts of Islam and stops him/her from any form of negotiations with non-Islamic societies and cultures fearing the potential alterations it could bring about, lived Islam not only privileges such negotiations and alterations but argues that such things are possible within the framework of Islam. The questions such as to whether Islam is compatible with modernity and its various institutional forms such as secularism and democracy are often answered using such frameworks and people take sides accordingly. The implications of such a binary approach in studying Islam vis-à-vis Malabar is far reaching. For example, consider this opening paragraph from *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends*, a book which is considered to be one of the pioneering works on Mappila Muslim community. Miller (1992) notes:

“While every effort has been made to provide a frame of reference for understanding the whole life of the Mappilas, it is obvious that not every area in this vast and virgin field can be ploughed in the first attempt. Attention is

⁴⁴ Muslims being the largest minority community in the present day Kerala state is a crucial factor in regional politics. In order to gather popular Muslim support it has been a common practice among political parties or their cultural groups to organize seminars on Mappila Muslim history and anchor the political demands of the community through their historical experiences. The most recent one is a series of Mappila Muslim history seminars organized by the Communist Party of India (Marxists) in various parts of Malabar during the run-up to the 15th Legislative Assembly election in 2016.

therefore focused on the change that Mappila experience produced in Mappila Islam” (p. xviii).

Having said that, Miller proposes and distinguishes between two different ideas; Islam in Kerala and the Mappila community, or what he refers to as the focus of his study and calls the Mappila Islam. Miller’s proposition is that there exist two Islams - Islam in Kerala, a framework within which Islam is considered as foreign, and Mappila Islam, which propose that Muslims from Kerala are by definition exotic and heterodox. This actually follows and contributes to the two tropes of Mappila Muslim historiography we have discussed above: integration and confrontation. What are the limits of such attempts in approaching Mappila history?

The tendency to see Islamic practices as textual and lived binaries is a predominant one in many academic studies from the last few decades. Goldziher (2009), who is considered as the founder of Islamic studies in Europe, is one of the early scholars who brought this binary into academic studies. He argued that Islam is the only religion that is originally pure, rational and abstract, where superstitious beliefs and rituals are not frowned upon by rationalism, but by later orthodox doctrines. By saying so, he brings in two kinds of Islam into his analysis: rational-textual religion and orthodox-lived religion. The latter for him has come into existence through the syncretism of Muslim societies with other cultures and communities. While Goldziher appreciates rational Islam which has its base in the textual corpus of Islam, he disassociates from syncretic Islam, labelling it as the heathen ingredients in Islam. Following this, later Islamic studies identified certain scriptural intellectual traditions in Islam as ‘proper’ orthodox Islam while everything else has been conveniently labelled as ‘popular Islam’ and left for ethnographers and

anthropologists to study, who in turn, ignored for a long time, the ways in which popular Islam is embedded in their respective scriptural tradition and vice versa.⁴⁵

Remarkably, like Orientalists, Muslim modernists, who claim that they are in the process of rediscovering Islam and Muslims from the Orientalist representations of Islam also epitomize this tendency in their theorizations of Islam and Muslim communities. Rooted in the old civilizational models of diffusion and reception, such attempts not only reproduced the binary (Islam) but also gave a new dimension to it.⁴⁶ When this model was applied to Islam, Rudolph Ware (2014) notes that it also carried the implicit idea that the centre's claims on normative authority are spatially and structurally immutable and it is difficult for the "periphery" to provide any meaningful insights on the "centre". The result of this line of interpretation has been that most of the studies on Muslim community has very often been framed by the opposition of proper and popular Islam while these categories in and of themselves have remained strikingly unquestioned.⁴⁷

What does such an approach do to Mappila studies and what does it aim to achieve? For this I take the works of scholars who have been working on Mappila Muslim community in Malabar as a reference point and juxtapose them in order to see how the confirmation-confrontation binary unfolds in their studies. The two scholars

⁴⁵ A very good example of this tendency in Kerala is the way *Muhyadheen Mala* has been studied as a Muslim version of Hindu folk culture where scholars tried to establish parallels between Sufism in Islam and Bhakthi movement in Hindu religion and argue that *Muhyadheen Mala* derives its formal and aesthetic structure from Hindu devotional genres. See Arafath (2015). Such arguments systematically ignore the larger networks and contexts which such texts are part of in the Muslim world, and the scriptural corpus that the followers of these "syncretic rituals" have laid out from the discursive traditions of their own religion.

⁴⁶ While traditional Muslims are appreciated for their syncretic character by the secular liberals, they were often depreciated by the Muslim modernists for the same reason. The majority of Muslims in such Muslim modernist narratives are depicted as heirs of Hindu tradition and thus treated as infidels.

⁴⁷ There is a lot of literature/scholarship that has tried to overcome this divide, though sometimes reintroducing the same dichotomies. Consider for example, Metcalf (1995).

considered here are M. T. Ansari and Julten Abdelhalim. I do this in order to argue that though both Ansari and Abdelhalim may initially appear to be taking up two seemingly opposite projects – of confrontation and assimilation respectively – paradoxically they ‘make the existence of each other possible.’⁴⁸ In that sense, I propose that there is more proximity than distance in the confirmation and confrontation models. What makes such a paradox possible is the question I take up here and by doing so I delineate my proposal from the confrontation-confirmation models and the subsequent binaries it reproduces.

Ansari (2016) situates his work on the Mappila Muslim community as an attempt to expose the general perception about Islam studies that tends to see Islam and Muslims as a “remainder in its refusal to “conform” to national and international secular-modern norms.” He argues that such perceptions not only erode Muslims’ world-view, but also gradually erase their life-worlds. In order to bring this erased Mappila Muslim life back into the narratives, to investigate the question of Islam in the region and to scrutinize secular modernity from the religio-political perspective of Islam, Ansari constitutes an alternative archive or other resources of history comprising popular, administrative, academic, and literary discourses which represents the Muslim as a recurring remainder that unsettles nationalist imaginations/calculations.

Thus Ansari (2016) sums up his project as follows:

“Islam has continued to haunt the nation that is given to valorise unity over diversity. Haunting implies a habitation and Islam’s critical charge in

⁴⁸ I take this phrase from Agrama’s work where he uses a lithograph by M. C. Escher, a Dutch artist to demonstrate how secularism and religion constitute each other mutually. For details see Agrama (2012).

contemporary India is that of being the “spectral truth” of the nation. Muslims are the source of a deep seated anxiety for secular nationalism and the targets of resurgent Hindutva in that they expose the fault-lines of a demographically, geographically and culturally unified nation. It is my contention that an uncritical insistence on unity has led to a formation in which “minor” subjects embody an excess of identity in contrast to the Hindu citizen whose identity coincides with the national. In this perspective, difference is perceived by the national imaginary as “foreign”, as something that has to be excised or exorcised. In this context my endeavour is to engage with, not the fissures, but the interstices of the nation” (p. xiv).

Ansari remains sceptical of and problematizes working with the secular modern framework and the subject formation it envisions and makes possible. The phrases he uses throughout the discussion such as ‘threatened minority,’ ‘a nation increasingly being mirrored in a Hindu idiom,’ ‘the unfinished nature of Islam,’ ‘the sense of crisis evoked by Islam,’ ‘Islam as the other in the process of national translation,’ ‘dissonance looming before the Muslim self,’ etc. exemplify his scepticism towards secular modernity. Bringing this critical framework into his discussion of the Mappila Muslim community in history and the present, he argues that it is the determination to conform to certain specific standards and visions that has produced a particular figure of the Mappila, which he calls “fanatic” in the popular, administrative, academic, and literary discourses. Thus, Ansari’s project at a very fundamental level aims at rectifying secular-modernists’ view and through that to refigure the fanatic (2005). Drawing on the life of Muhammad Ali’s autobiography,

Ansari (2002) points out to the “dissonance looming before the Muslim self”⁴⁹ in India and argues that the problematic of Islam in India is that any attempt by a Muslim to become one with the national image will demand him to ignore the important aspect of his identity, his Muslimness. The genre of autobiography, through which he tries to tell the problematic stories of Indian state formation, according to him, does not lend itself to a minority life.

Julien Abdelhalim (2012, 2016)⁵⁰ however asks seemingly opposite set of questions in her studies: How do Indian Muslims accommodate their Islamic identity and present a remarkably mature political community? Why do Indian Muslims cast strong confidence in the democratic system of governance? Why does deprivation and discrimination not diminish their faith in democracy and various institutional forms? What are the means by which Indian Muslims accommodate Islam with the reality of being citizens in a secular democratic state? What prompted her to ask such questions is the lack of studies on Muslim communities in India that do not exhibit the positive images (of Muslims) that reflect how common people deal with the public sphere (Abdelhalim, 2012: p.11). She cites examples for such positive images throughout her analyses: “Muslim women taking their children to Hindu ceremonies at school, Muslims celebrating national holidays in an entirely Muslim manner, youth getting socialized to the idea of being ‘Indian Muslims’ and ‘Muslim Indians’ simultaneously without a preference for one identity over the other, holding mass demonstrations and

⁴⁹ Ansari elucidates this dissonance through the publication history of the autobiography such as the fragmentary nature of the final text, the long delay in its first publication, the significant change of the title, from “Islam; Kingdom of God” to “My life; A Fragment” and its relatively obscure status thereafter.

⁵⁰ The discussion offered here is primarily based on the PhD dissertation of Abdelhalim titled “Spaces for Jihad: Indian Muslims and Conception of Citizenship,” submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Heidelberg in 2012 Though Abdelhalim’s work is now published in book form (Abdelhalim (2016), *Indian Muslims and Citizenship: Spaces for Jihad in Everyday life*, Routledge, New York) I could not access it except the introductory chapters available online.

public rallies that carry purely Islamic causes but utterly respect Indian legal regulations” (p. 354). By presenting these examples she argues that it is these manifestations of composite nationalism⁵¹ that form the basis of Muslim citizenship in Indian society. Thus she continues:

“The Indian case presented us with first, a postcolonial order of an application of a liberal conception of citizenship, coupled with an invention of minority status and adjustments guided by a uniquely secular constitution. Second, these adjustments led to the invention of concepts such as composite nationalism. By this, the Indian case sets a historically fascinating precedent in global history; the majority of Indian religious leaders (‘ulama) acted as motivators for choosing the secular democratic option versus the promised Islamic regime. Reconciling faith with citizenship was a major innovation of the Indian Muslim ‘ulama’. The classical fascination with darul Islam versus darul harb was replaced by multiple variants such as darul watan. The love of the watan, hence, was asserted as an integral part of faith” (pp. 349-350)⁵².

Abdelhalim summarises the answers to her initial research questions in the Fatehpuri Mosque’s Shahi imam’s words, who says that accommodating the public sphere is not a difficult task for Muslims as the Indian public spaces are open to

⁵¹ Like Ansari, Abdelhalim also endorses the debates on nationalism happening in the wake of the two-nation theory. But she traces the history of Mappila Muslims’ firm belief in secularism and their active engagement in the democratic processes to the idea of composite nationalism proposed by Moulana Madani. This is interesting to read in juxtaposition to Ansari’s argument that it is from Malabar in the 1920s in the wake of the 1921 rebellion that the argument for the two nation theory was envisioned.

⁵² Darul Islam and darul harb are two important legal terms in Islamic Sharia devised to denote legal rulings for areas Muslim live in and they mean abode of Islam (regions where Islamic law prevails) and abode of war (non-Islamic lands) respectively. But what makes a land darul Islam or darul harb is a matter of contestation among Muslim legal scholars. For example, Sheikh Zainudheen Maqdoom in his *Thufathul Mujahideen* describes Zamorin’s kingdom, ruled by a Hindu king as Darul Islam. For a detailed discussion on these terms, see Calasso & Lancioni (2017). Darul watan is a term Abdelhalim coined to describe the case of Indian Muslim and means that abode of nation

propagate Islamic ideas freely and the constitution is not biased towards any religion including Islam (p. 351). She claims that her ethnographic research among Indian Muslims also proved that their decision to reconcile with the Indian polity and its various institutions such as democracy and secularism cannot be seen as a desperate person's last refuge in constitutional rights, but as something that emerged out of their Islamic sensibilities.

Both Ansari and Abdelhalim emphasize the importance of drawing on an archive as an important task if one wants to productively engage with the issue of Islam in India. So, both of them work with certain sets of texts to understand the Muslim life world in Malabar. While Ansari uses texts such as William Logan's Administrative Report (1887) to N. S. Madhavan's short story "Higuita" (1990), the macro texts with which Abdelhalim works seems to be the Indian constitution. What do these texts represent? Where do they belong to? What do they include and exclude? Or is there any difference in the archives which Ansari and Abdelhalim work with to formulate their seemingly opposite arguments?

It is true that scholars, administrators and literary figures are criticized in Ansari's analyses for not perceiving the many complex ways in which Muslims lived their life in Malabar and for focusing only on a few select aspects or for misrepresenting them. It was because of the lack of a broader picture of the community, Ansari argues, that Mappilas were represented as fanatics at first in colonial records which then permeated other popular writings. He adds that this 'insane fanaticism' attributed to Mappilas and considered as cultivated through their blind faith in religion was a later construct of the British in order to find internal evidence for Mappila Muslim uprisings, so that they could easily undermine the

political reasons (p. 83, 152). But by critiquing such a construct, Ansari's attempt is also to find an overarching reason for Mappila uprisings elsewhere, and not just in their "blind faith." That is why while reading "Higuita", a short story by N S Madhavan, Ansari had to say that in "Higuita," the Muslim is projected as a villain despite internal evidences suggesting that Jabbar, the Muslim protagonist in the story, may have a life and logic of his own within the narrative and the nation (p. 281). Jabbar is a Muslim for Ansari and (according to him) for N. S. Madhavan as well. Ansari indicates that Madhavan's construction of this character owes to Jabbar's past in Malabar and through this argument he traces the genealogy of Jabbar's characterization to the figure of the fanatic constructed by the British in the wake of the Malabar rebellions. Curiously enough, Ansari, who considers Jabbar as a Muslim (and importantly only as a Muslim) from Malabar looks for Jabbar's life and logic everywhere else but not in his faith. Or is it to say that faith cannot be internal evidence? Thus, while William Logan's attempt was to discover the internal evidence for the rebellion within the Mappila Muslims' faith, Ansari's attempt was to prove that the internal evidence or life and logic of a Muslim lies not in his faith, but within someone else's narratives (in this case Madhavan's story) and the nation.

Ansari looks at a series of texts, particularly literary renderings to understand the Muslim life world.⁵³ But his focus is on their narratives about Muslim life; what is written about the Mappila Muslims and their practices. The textual life of a Mappila Muslim is not part of his framework: i.e. texts written for Mappila Muslims to practice and follow in their daily life.⁵⁴ For Abdelhalim also the focus is on the

⁵³ Here Ansari specifically looks at the writings of Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) and P. C. Kuttikrishnan (1915-1979).

⁵⁴ The absence of texts and practices written for Muslims is a striking one in Ansari's study where he looks at various literary renderings to see how a Mappilas' life has been portrayed there, but he has

promises that the written constitution has to offer to Muslims in contemporary India. Thus, Islamic prescriptions are resisted by Abdelhalim and put aside by Ansari for their assumed lack of value in understanding the life world of Mappila Muslims. Hence they end up engaging with two different aspects of the nation and its narrations.

The only difference between the above two engagements is that, for one, liberal ideas and practices are the lens through which to examine Mappila Muslim life whereas for the other liberal ideas are the object to be examined. While Abdelhalim argues that it is citizenship that provides Muslims in Kerala a space for jihad, Ansari seems to argue that it is jihad that denies them equal citizenship or denial of equal citizenship that takes them to jihad.⁵⁵ That is to say that while Ansari talks about the perils of citizenship, Abdelhalim elaborates on the promises it can offer to an Indian Muslim. So Abdelhalim argues that the rise of Muslims as citizens has made Mappila Muslims in Kerala more receptive to liberal institutions and they use their capacities of modernization to endorse Islam of a particular variety that she phrases as jihad. These narratives bring out the broader terrains from which both Ansari and Abdelhalim speak. Both of them, in an important sense speak from the larger nation

hardly included any literature produced by Mappila Muslims or produced for them. This also raises the larger question of what gets framed as authentic literature in his studies.

⁵⁵ The Islamic Supreme Council of America describes jihad as the most misunderstood concept from Islam today. Often understood as a religious duty imposed on all Muslims to spread Islam by waging war and translated as holy war, the Arabic word jihad literally means struggling or striving. The Arabic word for war is al-harb. The word jihad is a technical term in Islam, and jurists and scholars debate and polemicize over its meanings in response to varying circumstances (Asad, 2007). Thus its meaning is interpreted based on the Qur'an and Prophetic teachings ranging from the struggle taking place in one's soul and mind to working to inform people about the faith. The root word for jihad and *ijtihad* [intellectual strife in researching Islamic sciences] is the same; *jahada* meaning strive for excellence. But over time, the concept of jihad has been appropriated by political and religious groups to suit their purposes. Scholars say this is misuse of the term. Jihad for Abdelhalim (2016) in the Indian Muslim context is part of their broader spiritual aspect for what Allah has ordained. Hence she argues that it is through democratic framework and jihad that Indian Muslims' goal of lived citizenship (which refers to the practice of citizenship and attempts to challenge exclusionary processes in everyday life) is undertaken through constitutional weapons (p. xii).

statist narrative; the former by asking what a modern secular nation state is doing with its Muslim subjects and the latter by asking what this state has offered to them.

I argue that though both Ansari and Abdelhalim seemed to have embarked on different projects – of confrontation and confirmation respectively – they not only curiously meet at several points but also build up unusual proximities in their arguments and ‘draw each other into existence’. I contend that what allow both of them to draw each other into existence are the respective archives where they look for the Mappila Muslim life world. This proximity is more evident in what they exclude from their respective archives while looking for the internal life and logic of Mappila Muslim: the textual life of Mappila Muslims. The internal logic of faith made possible through the embodiment of these texts and traditions is a problem for both of them as it is evident from the way they compose their archives and the subsequent narrative they build up. That is why a textual, embodied life of a Mappila Muslim, or what was written for/available for Muslim practices in the region, is completely absent in their narratives. This erasure looks to be more systematic in Ansari’s work, particularly when he claims that his attempt is to constitute other resources for Mappila Muslim history, other than liberal-secular-nationalist and Marxian historiography.

Coming back to the earlier discussion of the two tropes in Mappila Muslim historiography, one can easily assume that both the confrontation and confirmation arguments demonstrate their proximity in missing religion, as it has been understood and practiced by the Mappila Muslim community, from their respective analyses. It is because of this that Ansari had to “refigure the fanatic” that people from Logan to Madhavan had already figured out or Abdelhalim had to rediscover a positive Mappila from the “negative images dispersed everywhere.” In that sense the

difference between the ideas of the critical subject/minor subject Ansari proposes (p. 16) and the citizen minority that Abdelhalim proposes (p. 37) to understand the Muslim life in India is very minimal. Why this paradox?

I argue that this paradox is the result of the way they posit their questions of Islam: through the discourses of nationalism or secularism. Because to talk about Islam in terms of modernity, nationalism, democracy, secularism etc. can automatically silence a lot of other discourse that stem from and flourish in the interiors of Muslim existence. As I had mentioned earlier, it is these inclusive-exclusive tropes that enabled the everyday politics in India vis-à-vis the Muslim community to take the form and articulations that is seen today.

In line with Tschacher's (2009, 2010) argument on the approaches to the study of Tamil Islamic literature⁵⁶ and extending it to the Mappila Muslim historiography, it is my contention that both the confrontation and confirmation approach in studying Muslim history and sociology in Malabar reduce Mappila Muslim history problematically either as the history of success/failure or of confirmation/confrontation 'which obscure alternative approaches to the field' (2010: p. 53). This is problematic because such approaches systematically conceal archives which Mappila Muslims consider close which include but are not limited to texts and practices, rather texts for practices, in the everyday Muslim context.

⁵⁶ Analysing the discussion about Muslim origin in Tamilnadu and how it has impacted the historiographies of Islamic Tamil Literature, Torsten identifies two major strategies; inclusion and exclusion. These strategies are anchored in various historical writings by the creative employment of binaries such as trade versus conquest, assimilation versus convert, Tamil converts versus descendants of foreigners. While the inclusivist narratives have greatly contributed to the emergence of a field of consensus, the exclusivist narratives project Islam as a religion that finds it difficult to reconcile with Tamil culture. Torsten argues that the respective defensive strategies employed in both the positions clearly inhabit the same discursive space and hence reveal the problematic nature of the assumed binaries of Muslim religiosity. This in effect contributes to obscure alternative approaches to the field.

The question then is what will happen to the different jihads that both Abdelhalim and Ansari propose if we are to bring Mappila Muslim life worlds into non-jihadi rhetoric? To put it differently, how are we to tell the story of the Muslim community from the region without subscribing to the confrontation-confirmation binary? Or with what exactly did they confront or confirm? Existing literature on the Mappila Muslim community cannot help supply the materials necessary to address these questions. For that to be possible, one needs to shift attention from the confrontation-confirmation binary and focus more on describing Mappila Muslim texts, traditions and life on their own terms and times. This will require suppressing researchers' personal distaste for particular traditions (Asad, 1993) or taste for particular categories if we are to understand them. But this is also not asking to take a middle path. Presenting such a "balanced" view will be equally diminishing.

From where can we recover the Mappila Muslim who lives his/her life beyond the rhetoric of confirmation or confrontation? To address this question, one needs to draw on an archive, an archive that provides space and accounts for discourses that stem from and flourishes in the interiors of Mappila Muslim existence. The materials accessed and examined in this dissertation are an attempt towards that end.

Chapter-3

Lithography as the Muslim Way of Printing

On March 11, 2016, I was travelling from my hometown in Wayanad to Kozhikode, the principal city of present day Malabar, in a public transport vehicle. This usually takes two to two and a half hours if the traffic blockades in Thamarassery Ghats do not interrupt the trip. But this time the journey took almost four hours. This was surprising because the Ghats area was free from any traffic blocks unlike other times. What had caused the blockade was a series of protests from Manathavady to Kozhikode. The Muslims had come out to the streets in huge numbers after their Friday congregational prayer in almost all the Muslim majority areas which disrupted my trip. Shouting slogans against *Mathrubhumi*, a leading regional newspaper, and burning its copies in bulk, the crowd gathered on the streets demanded cessation of the reading of this newspaper. The protests were part of a series of reactions to an offensive comment about Prophet Muhammad published, first in the Thrissur city editions of the newspaper on 8 March 2016, and republished in the Kozhikode city edition on the next day. The protest continued for several days and still continues in different forms and on different platforms.¹ Placards, posters and banners were put out throughout the state, particularly in the Muslim majority areas, calling to boycott *Mathrubhumi* products. Social media platforms were widely used to spread the message. An online campaign with [#i_hate_mathrubhumi](#), [#boycott_mathrubhumi](#) hash tags appealed to people to

¹ Publication of derogatory comments on the Prophet has become a reference point for many to talk about the anti-Muslim sentiments that *Mathrubhumi* newspaper generates through their reportage. Since then, there have been a number of informal calls by various Muslim organizations to unsubscribe from *Mathrubhumi* and their other print products. Newspapers and magazines run by Muslim organizations published several articles and comments exposing the newspapers that take anti-Muslim stands. M. V. Shreyamskumar (the Joint Managing Director of the Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing company, the state president of Janata Dal (Secular) and a long-term legislative member from Kalpetta legislative constituency) losing in the 2016 assembly election from Kalpetta is considered by many as the direct consequence of the Muslim protest against *Mathrubhumi*. Since two of *Mathrubhumi*'s major shareholders are also the top leaders of Janata Dal (Secular) and since the party activities receive substantial coverage in the paper *Mathrubhumi* is considered as JD (S)'s informal mouthpiece. For the first time in Kerala's recent political history JD (S) lost all the seats they had contested to in the legislative assembly election. In their election review report of 2016 the party admitted that anti-*Mathrubhumi* sentiments from the Muslim quarters of the constituencies contributed heavily to their poor performance in the election.

unfollow/unlike the social media pages of the newspaper and their radio and TV channels. Within few hours, the Facebook page of the newspaper lost around 30,000 likes. Following this the Muslim households in the state started unsubscribing to the newspaper. *Mathrubhumi*'s distribution was disrupted in many places as the local newspaper agents either disagreed to supply a newspaper which insulted the Prophet Muhammad or had lost substantial numbers of their subscribers which heavily cut down on their revenue.²

The protests did not stop there. The call to boycott companies who advertised in *Mathrubhumi* publications took the protest to the next level. It led to significant revenue loss to the newspaper in terms of advertisements as many of the big business ventures in the region who regularly advertised in *Mathrubhumi* stopped doing so. Two of *Mathrubhumi*'s foreign offices in the Gulf countries stopped operations fearing the growing anger among Malayali Muslims in those countries. A senior circulation executive of the newspaper told me on condition of anonymity that the newspaper lost one fourth of its total subscribers and revenue in just a few days. As a corrective measure, *Mathrubhumi* published an apology note on 10 March 2017 in all its editions regretting publishing derogatory remarks about the Prophet. In another statement along with the apology, the *Mathrubhumi* management said that the newspaper had only reproduced a report from a social media page and this happened due to the negligence of a trainee journalist. They promised to take action against the employees responsible for this and requested the state government to take immediate criminal actions against those who first wrote and published the comments on social media. The newspaper wrote long letters to Muslim community leaders and scholars apologizing for their mistakes and seeking their continued cooperation with the newspaper. The letter also reminded the

² For a detailed account of the protests against *Mathrubhumi* by Muslim organizations see the reports published in the following online portals retrieved from: <http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/mathrubhumi-apologises-after-outrage-massive-protests-over-insult-prophet-muhammad-40062>, <https://scroll.in/article/804918/despite-apology-keralas-mathrubhumi-newspaper-faces-online-boycott-drive-from-radical-muslim-groups>, <https://cafedissensusblog.com/2016/03/14/tolerant-protest-of-kerala-muslims-against-blasphemy/>, and <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/muslim-organisations-force-kerala-newspaper-to-apologise-for-offensive-comment-on-prophet-muhammad/> on 8 August 2016.

community leaders of the historical role the newspaper had played in cultivating nationalist consciousness, integrity and strengthening interfaith relationship among citizens before and after India's independence from the British. But many of the Muslim organizations saw their protest against the paper as part of a long history: the Muslim community in the region started their first full-fledged newspaper in the 1920s as a mark of protest against the way in which Mappilas and their leaders were portrayed in *Mathrubhumi*.³ They said in their responses to *Mathrubhumi* that historical facts did not allow them to believe what happened was an isolated incident.⁴

While the Muslim protest against *Mathrubhumi* and the boycott of the newspaper continued, some rebutted the protest pointing out to the 'general Muslim apathy' towards reading in general and the printed word in particular. Responding to *Mathrubhumi* management's apology note published in the online edition, a reader with user name Kumar, wrote in the comments column of the newspaper:

This protest is not new. Muslims have always been disinterested in reading newspapers. Initially they protested against writing in Malayalam. Later their scholars

³ Muhammad Abdurahiman Sahib (d.1945) from Malabar was the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee President and a leading figure in the freedom movement in the 1920s and '30s. He started *Al-Ameen* newspaper in 1924 from Kozhikode aiming to spread nationalist sentiments among Mappila Muslims. Since there was already a newspaper run by Sahib's own co-workers and leaders in the party, with the objective of spreading nationalist agenda in the region, what caused Sahib to start his own newspaper? Sahib's real intention for starting the newspaper is said to be the plight of the Mappila Muslims in the wake of the Malabar rebellion and its aftermath which *Mathrubhumi* was not ready to publish for various reasons. Instead their reportage on the rebellion and its aftermath largely supported the British narratives. The major reason for this is said to be their role in the Malabar rebellion, which exposed the cruelties committed by the feudal class in the region. Apart from the socio-cultural and political reasons, the Malabar rebellion was also considered by many as an outburst against the upper caste Hindu landlords, to which most of *Mathrubhumi*'s founders belonged to. Thus *Mathrubhumi*'s attitude towards the Mappila Muslim issue was obvious. For a detailed description of the nexus between *Mathrubhumi*'s reportage on Mappila Muslim community, the Malabar rebellion and the emergence of *Al-Ameen* newspaper see Pottakkad, et al (1978), Keraleeyan (1959) and Rasheed (1994).

⁴ For example, Aboobacker Musaliyar, General Secretary of the All India Sunni Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema in his response to the newspaper listed out a series of incidents where *Mathrubhumi* had portrayed the Muslim community unjustly. He also mentioned his own personal experiences of how the newspaper had tried to tarnish his persona without any factual evidence. This personal letter he wrote to the editor was later published in various newspapers, social media platforms and was widely circulated, after *Mathrubhumi* published a distorted version of it. See the article in the link for more details. Retrieved from, <http://www.islamonline.in/news/news/node/167> on 12 August 2016.

issued a fatwa⁵ forbidding the community members from learning English language. They opposed printing, using blackboards in classrooms and even translating their own Qur'an into Malayalam. They truly believed that their sacred texts cannot be printed or written on black boards.⁶

Referring to the on-going protest against *Mathrubhumi*, the commenter continued:

The only difference such Muslim disinterest towards reading and writing now has from the past is that earlier it was done out of their ignorance. But now it takes a more explicit political turn. They are carried out with political motivations and are orchestrated by economically rich and politically influential Muslim individual organizations.

Mathrubhumi's decision to publish this response in their readers' comment column could be read as a deliberate and well-thought out act as they claim that the readers' comments are moderated for its factual accuracy and decency in language by their editorial team. They also request readers not to make any comments, which may invoke communal hatred or provoke religious sentiments. Even then, what might have provoked the newspaper to publish such a comment at a crucial juncture when the newspaper had been losing its readership/subscribers from among Muslim settlements? Apart from propagating a long-held belief about Muslim backwardness vis-à-vis literacy the potential of the comment lies in its cunningness to sophisticatedly refute the Muslim protests against the newspaper.

The above comment in *Mathrubhumi* is the revelation of a broader symptom of the way Muslim media practices have been understood and written about for a long time now. The accusation that the Muslim community in the region, as everywhere else, opposed

⁵ Fatwa is a technical term for expert legal opinion issued by a learned man in accordance with Islamic norms and regulations.

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/mathrubhumi-malayalam-news-1.918305> on 3 March 2016.

reading and writing or its different manifestations is a central thread in many of the narratives exploring Muslim “backwardness”. We see such narratives taking on new roles and forms in different times and spaces as in the above example. We also see such accounts and questions reverberating with the invention of every new technology from print to cinematography to internet; does Islamic theology grant permission for Muslims to use X, or do they also come under the forbidden category? If they use it, will it change their religiosity and religious authority? Do Muslim countries allow access to media and freedom of expression? The questions continue.

These questions very often assume that the mere entry of communication technology into Muslim societies in and of itself will transform the community.⁷ Bryan S. Turner (2012), for example, demonstrates the importance of new media technologies in the lives of young Muslims by saying that media technologies are the important means through which Muslims now build consensus on religious issues and make their life compatible with contemporary social and cultural predicaments. The biggest impact of this consensus produced and maintained through the global communication system, according to him, is the creation of numerous centres of interpretations of Islam as opposed to the earlier hierarchical holding of religious knowledge by a few. The creative accommodation of media technology has brought about a paradigm shift towards democratization of knowledge and religious life styles. It is assumed that the increase in the number of centres of interpretation of religious belief and practices produce considerable instability in the way the system of formal religious authority function as there has been an inflation of sources of authority. This diversification some scholars believe will enable “any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad” or local teacher or mullah to claim to speak for Islam and issue a fatwa to guide a local community (Eickelman, 1999;

⁷ A very public example of this is when in a recent lecture delivered at a conference organised in New Delhi on 1 March 2018, in honour of King Abdullah II of Jordan, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, while presenting his vision for the development of Muslim youth in India said the following; “change among Muslims is only possible when Muslim youth will hold Quran in one hand and computer in other.”

Robinson, 1993; Turner & Vopli, 2007). Very often being asked such questions is reserved only for specific religious communities and we do not pose them vis-à-vis all religious/language communities. Or if at all asked it does not carry the same baggage as it carries in the Muslim contexts.⁸

For example, we do not ask why Gothic or Chinese scripts/scribes were reluctant to adopt print technology.⁹ These scripts took centuries to get adopted into printing technology as the types required for their scripts and other printing materials were not readily available. Same was the case with many Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, Italy and Spain and they continued to use many of their books in manuscript forms for many centuries even after the invention of typographic printing technology. In such communities, manuscript tradition was stronger until the 19th century (Mckitterick, 2003). But the late arrival of print into these communities was justified at various levels citing both historical and technical reasons. One such important justification was the complex nature of the scripts that did not lend itself easily into movable types (Fischer, 2001). But in the case of Islam and Arabic such historical justifications were not only denied, but Islam was always portrayed as the sole reason responsible for the late arrival of print technology among Muslim communities.

The norm in the case of Muslim communities and Arabic language, as it appears in existing literature, always appear to be suggesting that Muslims should take up any new technology without any deliberation.¹⁰ The denial of negotiation with technology for Muslim

⁸ During the discussion at the IAMCR - Islam and media working group meeting in Hyderabad where I presented a paper on Muslim women's magazines in Kerala, the members of the work group raised the question why such questions were always asked to Muslim communities and cultures.

⁹ Though the Chinese were familiar with printing technology much before Gutenberg's invention in Europe, they had not explored its potential for mass textual production until the 15th century. The reason for this is said to be the open-ended nature of Chinese logographic system.

¹⁰ In a recently published book Laresson (2011) while observing that the use of latest information and communication technology mirror changes and developments within a society and their changing relationship to the West, also directly links Muslim backwardness and oppression to their attitude towards technology. His suggestion to the Muslim community then is to adapt new technologies, which according to him Ulema does not allow. So he says, "Contemporary Muslim Ulema have a tendency to accept earlier technologies even when they

communities in popular and scholarly literature ignores many historical and contextual elements, which shaped Muslim communication practices. The most important one among them is the erasure of the history of pre-print Muslim communication technologies and the cultures that developed around them in existing literature.

This chapter attempts to trace the history of communication technologies that print aspired to replace in Muslim communities, their negotiations with the printed word/world and how it has been carried forward in print and later technologies. The attempt in this chapter is also to ask the following questions: was Muslim community late in adopting printing technology? How are we to arrive at a conclusion that one community is late in adopting a particular technology more than other communities? When and why did Muslims adopt it? And when they adopted it, what did it do to them and their religion/religiosity? Unlike in the above discussions these questions will be posed to and studied in a particular Muslim context here – the Mappila Muslim community in South India.

By doing so the attempt here is to look for an internal explanation for the Muslim community's engagement with print technologies. In order to achieve this, this dissertation tries to understand the Muslim print experience in Malabar as a continuum of a long history of Muslim communication practices prevalent among them in the region. For this, I examine the specific forms Muslim communication practices have taken in the region in order to argue that the very forms that a community use and prefer for their communication practices is an essential part of their discursive tradition. That is to say that Muslim community in Malabar, as elsewhere, has developed a historically grounded approach towards print and the tendency among them has always been to prefer a medium that will support the very practice of their

are resistant to new ones, does not however mean that Muslims are free to use older technologies with no restriction" (p. 197). He along with Hoffman (2013) also makes similar observations in his new book on the Muslims' use of communication technologies. To know how such perceptions are embedded in popular understanding of Muslim-media engagements see the news report retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/big-data-to-cameras-how-technology-is-empowering-muslim-women/story-Rmu0IuX9zpliQaxekYU2hN.html> on 14 December 2017.

religion. To be more specific, their use of media/technologies has always been indistinguishable from their religious practice. The functioning of such technologies in a given society cannot be fully explained unless we pay specific attention to the religious contexts into which these technologies are introduced and popularized. But the approach modelled on the Central European or Christendom experiences which views print in evolutionary terms, as moving from oral to written/manuscript to print to radio signals, will not be beneficial in the Mappila Muslim ethnographic context.

3.1 Islam and Print: Early Encounters

The popular, protracted as well as scholarly myth about Muslim encounters with communication technologies was formulated from the history of Muslim-print technology interactions. Scholars subsequently elaborated and explicated this story as an analytical framework to understand the Muslim encounters with any new media world. Thomas F. Carter (1943) who in a chapter of his book titled *Islam as barrier to printing* summarizes this story as follows:

“For several hundred years before block printing came into Europe, all East Asia was printing, from Nara to Turfan - Japanese, Chinese, and Uigur Turks - and through most of this territory printing was carried on in a large scale. But between the Far East that printed, and Europe where printing was unknown, lay the Moslem world that refused to put its literature in printed form. This barrier between the Far East, where all Buddhist and Confucian literature was being spread abroad in printed form, and Europe where ancient manuscripts were being so laboriously copied by hand in the Christian monasteries, proved in the end to be not impenetrable, but for a time the isolation of Europe from the lands of the Far East was complete. It is strange that such a literary people as the Arabs – and such a religious people – refused to use this

vehicle for the spreading abroad of religious thought. Paper they found in Central Asia – and with almost incredible quickness it displaced all other writing materials from Samarkand to Spain. But not so with printing” (pp. 214-15).

Carter underlies the fact that the Islamic world did not adopt printing not because they were not aware of its existence. In 1493 itself Jewish refugees from Europe had established printing presses in the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, one of the largest and a major Muslim empire in history. Despite all of these developments, “why did the Islamic world trail so far behind the Christian world in adopting print?” Robinson (1993: p. 233) asks. The reasons for this Muslim prejudice towards print and the subsequent late arrival of this technology in the Islamic world, according to scholars, were many: the brush made up of hog’s bristles used for cleaning the block (Carter, 1943), inherent Muslim conservatism (Hitti, 1970), the fear of cheap and easily available Qur’an falling into the hands of infidels (Lane, 1890), politically motivated hostility (Bayly, 1996), opposition from the influential *khatibs* [scribe class], the fear about *bid’a* [illegitimate religious innovation], having to associate with *kufir* [the infidel], receiving the product from a non-Muslim civilization, fundamental scepticism towards the written word/world and the fear generated from the attack on the very heart of conservative Islamic knowledge traditions and its transmission system, and the democratization of knowledge (Robinson, 1993).

When every Muslim starts reading printed Qur’an, it was assumed that it would “turn Islam upside down, Islamic empire ripped off, institutions of religious authority flattened” (Ayers, 2004: p. 6). The immediate reference points for such calculations were the socio-cultural, religious and political developments that Christendom witnessed ever since Gutenberg’s print technology was introduced for mass production and circulation of the Latin Bible and its various vernacular translations. Thus the Protestant reformation was considered as the direct product of the availability of the printed book (Pettegree, 2015). A host of other

developments such as European colonial expansion, transformation in family structures, political orders, and the development of modern science etc. are also attributed to the arrival of printing. The assumption then was, as it is today, that Print will do the same things for Muslim communities across the world as it did for a large section of Europe/the West. Thus, the question what did print technology do to Muslim communities proposed that technologies would have a universal history or universal impact across regions and religions.

This conception about print and its impact on the Islamic world was not merely a later analytical understanding. In the early years of the introduction of print technology even the printers and publishers believed that print would have the same kind of impact on every community and they strategized their commercial operations accordingly. For example, look at the history of the first Qur'an printed in Arabic.¹¹ When Alessandro Paganini, an innovative publisher and printer based in Venice, decided to print the Qur'an for the first time in 1537/38, what he had in mind was the commercial success of the Bible printing enterprise after the Gutenberg experiment in Christendom. The Protestant Reformation, believed to be made possible by the wide spread availability of Bible prints, added further impetus to expanding the Bible market. Paganini truly believed that printed Qur'an would be a huge commercial success in the Islamic world. So he conceived his printed Qur'an as an export product for the Arab-Turkish markets, particularly the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul. Keeping this huge market in mind, he prepared the printed edition of the Qur'an, which was destined exclusively for Muslim populations who did not yet own a printing press (Nuovo, 1990). But the end result was a disaster. Paganini could not attract the Muslim audience to his "poor man's Qur'an," also known as the Venetian Qur'an and it remained unsold forever. It appears from the above experience that both the questions and the answers on Muslim print largely

¹¹ Much of what is being discussed in this and the coming paragraphs draw on Nuovo (1990).

derived its theoretical as well as pragmatic concerns from the (Protestant) Christian historical experience with this technology.

There of course were two religious decrees that banned Muslims from printing using the movable types (Proudfoot, 1997; Gencer, 2009). The first one was the 1492/1508 fatwa of the then Shaykh al-Islam, the apex religious authority of the Ottoman Empire, which gave permission to non-Muslim communities to use print technology, but not to the Muslims of the Empire. This decree was in response to the Christian and Jewish refugees' request for permission to print in Istanbul. Shaykh Al-Azhar also issued a similar decree in Egypt (1760-1849) declaring that printing religious books and the Qur'an in particular could not be allowed. But the decrees allowed Muslims to import printed religious books from outside the Empire, particularly from Christian Europe (Aqeel, 2009). This provision in the decree complicates the usual narratives on Muslim printing as it permits Muslims to associate with the printed word but instructs to dissociate with printing technology at the same time. The question this religious decree raises is perennial: what was the actual Muslim discontent with print? The later development in the Muslim world such as the establishment of printing presses under government sponsorship in Istanbul and in Cairo in 1728 and 1821 respectively and the waiving of all restrictions on printing religious works by 1803 further complicates this story. Such complex details were never brought to the forefront but kept in the margins. The rejection of Paganini's Qur'an which was till recently explained solely in terms of Muslim conservatism also contributed heavily to shaping the hegemonic Muslim print (hi)story. However recent scholarship on Paganini's Qur'an, particularly after recovering the only surviving copy from the library of the Franciscan Friars of San Michele in Isola, Venice not only put these existing narratives on Muslim encounters with print into crisis, but also proves that many of the then Muslim anxieties about printing technology were true and historically substantiated.

Paganini's first printed version of the Qur'an was full of errors. Paganini was considered a pioneering innovator in the publishing industry.¹² But his calculations failed miserably both technically and economically in the Muslim context. Angela Nuovo, who in the late 1980s located the only surviving copy of this "poor man's Qur'an," notes that the grand technical investment made in setting up an Arabic printing press in the 16th century could not accomplish any textual perfection which a normal Muslim reader would naturally expect in their reading material. An Islamic studies scholar from Europe who examined this copy reported the following:

"We have seen that a single imprecision could cost the scribe his head, yet here we have a volume with scarcely a single page printed correctly. There is not a word without errors. The distinction between the similar forms of the Arabic language is completely ignored. The compositor does not recognize the letters of the alphabet" (Elsheikh, as cited in Magno, 2013: p. 122)

Apart from such errors caused by technical problems in printing using Arabic types, it is said that Paganini's Qur'an was a badly produced and aesthetically dissatisfying one (Ayers, 2004: p. 58). Thus, the first printed Qur'an itself demonstrates many of the practical limitations of printing technology in its initial phase in the Islamic contexts. In order to understand the depth of the chaos such a badly printed Qur'an might have generated in the 16th century, one need to look at the long history of writing, paper, ink, calligraphy, book production and the textual cultures it gave birth to in the Islamic world in detail.

¹² Paganini introduced many exciting ideas in book publishing and marketing such as the publication of editorial series, which shared thematic characteristics and presentation. The books printed in his printing press in Venice had triumphed in Germany and Britain and penetrated the Balkans, but failed miserably in the Islamic world (Magno, 2013).

3.2 Mass Production in the Muslim World before Print

In her fascinating study on the early history of the Arabic media, Beatrice Grundler (2011, 2012, 2016) argues that when the modern book codex was introduced in the Arab world, it did not have any novelty value, as the Arabs were already familiar with the book format since at least the 8th century. Though books in the Arab/Islamic world preceded paper, the introduction of inexpensive rag paper from China via Central Asia in 8th century Baghdad, spearheaded a profusion of Arabic writing and publishing. The result was the omnipresence of books in the Arabian Peninsula. The bio-bibliographical entries (*Tabaqath*) compiled in the late 10th century list out authors from the second half of the 8th century, some of them filling several pages. Qur'anic studies, Prophetic tradition (*hadith*), philology, local poetic traditions, translation of foreign materials and other mundane documenting activities not only created a vast array of writings, but also helped to create and develop complex attitudes towards writing and book production. Konrad Hirschler (2012) in his studies on medieval Arabic writing culture introduces the societies within the Islamic world as the most bookish societies. He goes on to say that their fascination with manuscript production even led medieval scholars to fear the over production of manuscript-books.¹³ Qur'an, which introduces itself as *kitab*, meaning the book, was converted into a written document in the book format, and helped to expand scribal art cultures in the early stages of Islam. Within such a historical context where books in various forms were painstakingly copied and decorated and the art of book production was highly sophisticated, the expectations of the reading Muslim public were naturally very high. The question then is whether print technology, in its beginning was capable of meeting these expectations.

¹³ In order to demonstrate the developments in reading and writing cultures in medieval Islamic societies Hirschler (2006, 2016) provides in his studies detailed material evidences such as the *sama* [reading certificates] and catalogues of private/public book collections of medieval Muslim scholars in Syria.

The first printed version of the Qur'an (1537/38) proves that print technology could not meet these highly sophisticated aesthetic Muslim expectations about book production. But it was not just problems with technology in the early phases of its introduction. The situation had not changed even after 250 years. In 1760 Carsten Niebuhr, an early 18th century traveller to the Arabian peninsula encountered the same issue in Yemen where he saw printed books from the European presses in Muslim circles. But their approach towards these books was indifferent, he noted. "They were held in low esteem. Arabians value chiefly a species of elegance, which consists in their manner of joining the letters, the want of which makes them dislike the style in which Arabic books are printed in Europe" (Niebuhr, as cited in Messick, 2013: pp. 300-301).

3.3 Book Historiography: An Overview

Book history as a discipline promises that it will not tolerate any simplistic understanding of the relationship between society and culture (Hall, 1996). But print historians were least interested in exploring the complicated historical details of the pre-print book cultures among Muslim communities, which shaped the Muslim relationship with print technology and the new materials it produced. Rather they chose to pose the questions and cultivate their answers on Muslim attitude to print in general and to that of book history in particular by situating themselves in the 15th century central European experience of print. The question what did print do to Islam thus stressed, on the one hand, the universal characteristic of print technology, and on the other hand, privileged the idea that print is a neutral or transparent medium which marks a complete break from the technologies in the past (Messick, 1993). But the fact that many of the admirable aspects of pre-print cultures, both minute and magnificent, persisted well into print cultures insists that we also delve upon other details: the history and ethnography of any technology will be incomplete unless we bring into the narrative the history and ethnography of what it tried to replace. But unfortunately most of the histories of

technologies have been written privileging the promises a given technology offers and aspires to replace.¹⁴

If the explanations given in the literature for the late arrival of print were largely internal to Islam, as we have just seen, the reason for adopting the same technology, according to these studies lies elsewhere. Speaking of the South Asian Muslim context, Robinson (1996) argues that Muslims saw print as a powerful weapon in their battle against the joint threat of the British rule, the Christian proselytizing mission and the presence of a Hindu majority population. According to him Muslims viewed print as a mechanism to compensate for the loss of political power and as a response to external threats. So he says: “If Islam could no longer be supported by the swords of Muslim princes, it could now be supported by the enhanced religious understanding of Muslims themselves” (Robinson, 1996: p. 72). He also argued that it was not peculiar to India, but historically emancipation of Muslim media was a direct consequence of political movements outside the Islamic world. There was a symbiotic relationship between the growth of pan Islamic consciousness and the growth of the press. Elaborating on this, Robinson says: “When Russia and the Ottoman Empire went to war in the late 1870’s the press boomed. When the British invaded Egypt in 1882, it boomed again. When the Ottoman Empire entered its terminal stages from 1911 onward, the press boomed as never before” (1993: p. 281).

The split in reasoning that emerge in the above scholarly narratives as to why Muslims oppose and later adopt print is an interesting one. According to them, Muslims opposed print for theological reasons or to defend true religion. But Muslims welcomed it for political reasons or in support of popular religion. Talal Asad’s compelling observation in his classic essay titled “Towards an Anthropology of Islam,” will help us to understand this irony. Asad

¹⁴ Ong’s (1982) concept of secondary orality which sees print essentially as a “deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print” (p. 133) is an important study. His work looks at print as an extension of orality, not as a break from it. Stuart Blackburn’s (2003) study on the intersection of print and folklore demonstrate this idea in a specifically South Indian context.

(1986) observes that in Western Anthropology there is a curious split in the theories on Islam. While 'true' religion is described in quite Weberian terms as an acquired state of ethical consciousness, 'false' religion is discussed in strikingly Marxist terms such as escapism, false consciousness and opium for the people.

The book histories of South Asia have been written from various perspectives. It includes analytical bibliography, cultural history, material, economic and legal aspects of book production, and distribution methods and professional practices book production gave birth to. The contextual unity of the books produced in a particular region, community or a period is also explored through their reading practices, literary cultures and library collections (Stark, 2009; Joshi, 2002, 2006; Gupta & Chakravorty, 2004; Pinto, 2007; More, 2004; Venkitachalapathy, 2012). Though these studies aspire to cover as many areas as possible in their 'interdisciplinary run riot', as the book historian Darnton (1982) has famously said, the studies from the South Asian contexts were more or less confined to the contents and genres of published works (Jha, 2008). It is this focus on either of these two elements of printed works or in a few cases both, which enabled scholars to often causatively link Muslim engagement with the printed word and the emergence of the reform movement. As a result, it is not at all surprising that the attempt of any standard literature on print history will be to study the relationship between the diffusion of knowledge and the process of intellectual formation, modernization and cultural renaissance. Arguing that print-based discursive spaces have been at the core of many political movements in the last two centuries, Habermas (1989) and Anderson (1991) among many others have put media and its consumption at the centre of political and attitudinal change in the modern world. Marshal McLuhan (1962), for example, argues that Gutenberg's press accelerated a revolution in human consciousness. So the image of a printer or a publisher, as it is portrayed in the literature, is that of an intellectual path breaker. Such portrayal is more explicit in the way newspaper histories have been written in

India. In Nadiq Krishnamurthy's (1966) writings what can be seen is the transposition of the personae of Indian freedom fighters and reformers fighting for their cause onto the field of Indian journalism. It is almost as if newspapers became the warriors in freedom/reform movements.

As the anecdote cited in the beginning of the chapter clearly indicates, the way histories of press in Kerala were written was also not very different from these predominant tendencies (Raghavan, 1985; Jayaraj, 2013; Kesavan, 1985). Historians of Mappila Muslim print also argued that it was with the emergent print culture that modern identities become possible for religious communities in Kerala (Arunima, 2006) and Mappilas were the first community in the region to be modernised through various print initiatives (Salahudheen, 2015). Following Benedict Anderson's proposal for establishing connections among novels and newspapers and the formation of nation states, this mode of inquiry places heavy emphasis on regional literature that an emergent 'print capitalism' gave birth to at a very particular moment in history. What we see in such conceptualizations of the history of nationalist imagination is a privileging of two things: print and the new cultural artefacts, particularly novel and newspapers. Modernity for these historians arrived in the form of the new literary styles in Malayalam prose writing introduced by the emergent print culture, such as journalistic writings and interfaith dialogues (Arunima, 2006). According to this historiography, the new genres such as novels and journalistic writings allowed popular religious histories to be retold in new styles, to reach out to a wider social group and finally to create a modern self. This notion of literature tends to narrow down the scope for our understanding of writing cultures and the various genres it produced both spatially and temporally, or what Messick (2013) has called "the metaphorical domination of journalism and novel over the already existing multitude of narrative productions". By privileging only specific genres and their particular mode of reproduction this 'textual overtures of modernity'

and their historiographies effectively erased existing genres and their textual productions which constituted important avenues for many communities and cultures to express and constitute their self and their imaginative potentials in the newly formed polities.

Thus the historiography portrayed the establishment of printing presses as a dramatic event in and through which the new reading public started to distinguish between old manuscript-centred textual tradition and the newly printed book-centred literary cultures. This shift was explained as a dramatic event because, according to historiography, all these happened in a very short span of time without leaving any space for negotiations (Schulze, 1997). The only choice available to a community of readers then was to jump from poetry to prose, storytelling to novel reading, manuscript to print and thus from tradition to modernity.¹⁵

To know how this formula has worked out in the Mappila Muslim context, one only needs to look at the many forms and practices they used for their textual productions. As Bayley (1996) has pointed out there existed a sophisticated communication order in any given community and communities of knowledge in the pre-print era which played a critical role in paving the way for the later orders to be in place. Malabar witnessed a multitude of literary practices both scholarly and popular.¹⁶ There was a vast array of genres and texts that Islamic jurisprudence gave birth to and fascinating ways in which these were reproduced and circulated. But these genres and the practices associated with them have been denied a place in the new societal imagination Anderson and others have envisioned. This denial appears methodical when one considers how such genres and their circulation at a very fundamental

¹⁵ Schulze (1997) explains this shift in the Islamic context as the emergence of an Islamic public sphere which created a “social discourse in which the new reading public came to distinguish between what was regarded as “tradition” (manuscript without a use value in the market) and what was considered as “modern” (printed books) (p. 29).

¹⁶ Unlike many other scholars, Bayley (1996) opposes the idea that Print in itself created an information revolution or is the only such revolution, but emphasizes on the need to look at it as a continuum of the already existing information orders.

level had shaped Mappila Muslims' everyday life. Instead historians privileged only certain kinds of genres and their mode of production that they believed would naturally take communities to certain kinds of social imaginations that would bring into existence a modern nation state and the self.

Along with the primacy novels and journalistic writings have gained in the narratives about newly imagined communities, print also has a central analytical position over other forms of reproducing techniques. Print has been projected as an undifferentiated enterprise/process placed in opposition to oral culture on the one hand and manuscript/scrabal culture on the other. This hegemony of genres such as novel and journalism and the mass producing technology such as print in the new imaginative trope of the modern nation state completely ignored the highly rich regional and religious ways of reading and writing.¹⁷ Instead it has been argued that print fixed languages, genres, communities and their literary cultures. Such arguments have foreclosed any analytical possibilities to look into these diverse and plural regional/religious textual-literary cultures. The new citizen and the self, imagined and materialized in the newly formed nation state, thus is an upshot of particular literary practices produced through particular techniques of reproducibility. Other ways and forms of knowing or imagining the society were not considered as knowing/imagining at all.

However, popular as well as scholarly histories portrayed the Mappila Muslim print history as a struggle between modern educated reformist Muslims' continuous attempt to establish printing presses and the traditionally trained orthodox Muslim scholars' and their followers' resistance to it (More, 2004; Abu Majida, 1998; Mangad, 2009; Ahmad, 2009). It portrayed the orthodox Muslims' and their Ulemas backward looking approach as being responsible for the poor circulation of printed materials. A popular Mappila Muslim historian,

¹⁷ For example, *fiqh* literature flourished in the Malabar Coast and the distinctive ways in which these literature were written and circulated, were never systematically analysed to understand the dynamics of community formations in the region. The last part of this chapter provides a detailed discussion on this topic.

Abu Majida (1998) accuses traditional Muslim Ulemas in Kerala of owing a huge debt to the reformist Muslims incurred from their failed printing initiatives Sayed Sana'ulla Makthi Thangal (d.1912), who is considered by many as the pioneer of the Muslim printing in the region, started several periodicals within a period of 12 years, but failed miserably in pursuing them beyond a few issues. His project to launch a weekly magazine, ambitiously called *Nithyajeevan* [eternity], in 1902 had to be dropped in the middle as the journal could not mobilize even 100 subscriptions in spite of widespread campaigns throughout Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. His later book which was symbolically titled *Manaklesham* [heartsick], was a heartfelt response to the Muslim rejection of his call to partake of the prospects it would open up for the community such as writing, translation and publishing. (Puthuponnai, 2014).

What we see here is a mixture of seemingly opposite responses. On the one hand stories of the modern self is anchored through the stories of print and the genres it gave birth to. Following this logic one set of scholars argue that Mappila Muslims did publish novels and newspapers and acquired a place in the new community imaginations (Arunima, 2006). But others argue that Mappila Muslims' response to print was indifferent owing to their inherent reluctance to read and write (Abu Majida, 1998; Ahmad, 2009). But are these two positions entirely opposite to each other? I argue that it is the latter argument, which seems to suspend the former argument that makes the first argument possible.

3.4 Mappila Muslim Printing: A Brief History

Archival evidence suggests that Mappila Muslims in Malabar, as elsewhere, had extensively used printing technologies, published widely and their literary activities were on the increase in the early decades of printing and publishing. The Catalogue of Malayalam books in the British Museum for 1772 to 1961 (Gaur, 1971) reproduce long lists of books printed and

published by Mappila Muslims in Kerala.¹⁸ “The Reports on Publications Issued and Registered in the Several Provinces of British India 1876-1898” kept in the Kozhikode regional archive is another resource that documents the history of Mappila Muslim publications. Though these reports on publications issued and registered in several provinces of British India do not provide comprehensive details of the Muslim publication history in the region, this document prepared on the basis of the books preserved under the virtue of the Indian Copyright Deposit Act (1867) definitely provides a better picture of the history of Malayalam printing with details such as the number of publications each community/religion published yearly and their general characteristics. If that is the case, from where does the story of Muslim apathy towards print emerge from?

This chapter argues that the myths about Muslim engagements with printing technology (subsequently all narrations about Muslim-media interactions with later information technology) emerge precisely from the failure to understand the meaning and significance of print in the Islamic context. I propose that asking questions such as why were Muslims late in accepting print or what did it do to their religion/religious authority etc. are insufficient to grasp the importance of print in Malayali Muslim context. Because such questions assume that technologies as well as communities are undifferentiated entities. This stops us from asking further questions. Instead of asking such rhetorical questions, we should look at what they did accept from among the technological choices available to them, its precedence in their specific community histories and the factors that might have motivated them to accept/reject certain technology over others. Only such an inquiry can enable us to

¹⁸ Arabi-Malayalam book collections in various libraries suggest that Mappila Muslims had also printed and published from various cities outside present day Kerala. For example, the book titled *Majma, ahkam al-nikah*, authored by Muhammad Kalikoothi was published from Bombay in 1883. The Yale University Library Catalogue introduces this book as following; ‘A metrical compendium of the Muhammadan law relating to women, accompanied by a paraphrase in arvi, i.e., Malayalam in the Arabic character’. Thibunabiyy, (Prophetic medicine) by Ahamad Koya which is considered by many as the first book printed in Arabic Malayalam is also printed from Bombay in 1840. But such books published by Mappila Muslims outside the region are yet to be studied. Bombay Government Gazettes, which documented the details of the books published in the cities, are a useful source in this regard.

identify the discursive pattern through which communities historically negotiated with technology. Such attempts are also important for several other reasons. The question of why they did not accept print is loaded with related hypothetical questions and conclusions, but what they did accept is an empirically grounded fact.

The challenge then is to identify the differentiations within technologies and the specific regional/religious aspirations it embodies in the production and reception of the texts and traditions of a given community. For that one needs to look in detail at the forms of media prevalent in a community and its specificities. Unfortunately, the print history of India was largely explored either in terms of the socio-cultural and political changes it brought into a community ascribing full agency to an undifferentiated technology, leaving the agency of the community and their textual cultures unattended to or in terms of the contents presented in the books. This emphasis on the normative promise of a technology or content do not allow scholars to focus on the form of the technology or to draw their analytical conclusions based on its characteristics in relation to other similar technological forms available in a given time. This is evident from the way we use terms such as book and text interchangeably. Book being a form and text being the content within it, this interchangeable use of the terms hides the significance of the form. Thus media forms carried little significance in most of the studies. The present chapter is an attempt to make sense of the technological forms Mappila Muslims use to print, and the philosophy of knowledge it represents and aspires to reproduce. This chapter also looks at print as an object and analyses whether the forms it adopted in the Muslim context was incidental. To elucidate this line of inquiry the study proposes to examine the forms of print adopted by Mappila Muslims in Malabar and to locate it within the larger background of their textual cultures that preceded the advent of print. By doing so I ask how the socio-cultural and other specificities of a community is reflected in their choices of a particular form of technology. These, I propose, will in effect help us not only to understand

how texts were produced but also how its different forms emerged and conveyed meanings in the Muslim life world.

To get a broad picture of the scenario, this dissertation looks at the history of printing in the region from 1869 (the year in which the first Muslim printing press was established in Malabar) to the 1920s. Examining the Catalogue of Malayalam Books in the British Museum provides publication details for the period. Among the 311 books in the British Museum collection, put together under the virtue of the copyright deposit and donations from individuals, missionary societies and university departments between 1876 and 1912, 32 are Islamic books. I call them Islamic books because of their explicit Islamic religious content. Brief descriptions for each book provided in the catalogue about their content suggest that most of these books are either a translation or an interpretation/commentary of an earlier Islamic classical text rendered into Arabic or Arabic-Malayalam. Evident from the names on the jacket/catalogue, all these books were authored/published by a Muslim and printed in a Muslim-owned printing press. These 32 books were published from the three major Muslim settlements in the region: Tellicherry (Thalassery) in Kannur, Ponnani and Tirurangadi in Malappuram.

The first two (Muslim) books in the catalogue, according to the chronological order of publication, are the *Kachodappattu*, a metrical compendium of Muslim faith whose author is unknown, and the translation of Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Fakhr al-Din's *Kasd ul Sabil*, a compendium of Muslim faith and practice. Both these books were published in Thalassery in 1879. It is interesting to note that in a catalogue of Malayalam books published from 1772, the first Muslim book appears only a century after the cataloguing was started; a decade after the first Muslim printing press was established in Thalassery in 1869. This was three years after the Indian Press and Deposit Act (1876), which allowed the India office Library and the

British Museum the right to requisition a copy of every book printed in British India in any language, was implemented.

It is impossible to believe that the first Muslim printing press in Thalassery had not published any book in the first 10 years of its operation or that there were not any printed Muslim books till then. The catalogue itself lists out the names of about 18 Muslim printing presses functioning in Malabar between the year 1879 and 1912. But, according to the catalogue, all of them together had published only 32 books during a span of more than three decades. This throws up some important questions about the applicability of the European idea of the book in the Mappila Muslim context. Many scholars have already noted that the British legal superstructure was largely incapable of monitoring Muslim printing and publication operations. The low rate of book registration under the Copyright and Deposit Act, according to Proudfoot (1994) has to do with the Muslim understanding of the book. Padwick (1961) observes that one cannot make sense of Muslim publications from these period using categories such as copyright, authoritative/original edition or printer, author and publisher as there were no such distinction among them. The “Reports on Publications issued and registered in the Madras Provinces of British India (1876-1898)” provides hints to understanding how this might have worked out in Malabar. The report notes that the literary activities of the Mappila were on the increase and most of the Mappila Muslims’ books and pamphlets printed during this period were lithographed version of already existing popular texts in manuscript forms. So it was obvious that Muslim books could have slipped through the British legal structures that were primarily meant to monitor originally authored books and their authoritative editions.

The most explicit and striking information that this catalogue provides is about the specific form adopted for printing by Muslims during this period. This can be broadly considered as the initial phase of Muslim printing in the region: lithography as opposed to the

then popular typographic printing methods. The descriptions given in the catalogue for each Malayalam book in the British Museum clearly show that early printing by religious communities in Malabar could be easily categorized along the lines of the specific forms of printing technologies that they had used. While Muslim print is clearly marked by the lithographic form, non-Muslim printing escapes such easy categorization. When they are described at all in the catalogues or bibliographies, they are marked by their typographic form. This categorization, visible in the catalogues, is more explicit in the initial decades of the advent of print.¹⁹ The “Reports on the Publications issued and registered in several Provinces of British India 1874-1898” also notes that literary activities in the form of publications were not only present among Mappila Muslims during this period but most of their publications were lithographed books and pamphlets. All books either published by Muslims or printed at a Muslim printing press were produced using lithographic printing presses. The same books published by non-Muslims were printed using different technologies. For example, *Alif Laila Va Laila* (The Thousand and One Nights or the Arabian Nights), the popular Arabic story collection was published by one Kannambra Ramanunni Elaya Nair in 1891 at Vidya Vilasam Press in Kozhikode. But, the Mappila Malayalam version of the same stories was published by Kuriyadath Kunhi Moosa in 1898 using lithography at Mazzharul Uloom Press in Thalassery. We also see that in *The Malayalam first Reader* in Laccadive textbooks series published by MacMillan from Madras in 1899, the Arabic characters were printed separately using lithography while the Malayalam texts were printed using typography. The only non-Muslim lithographic press mentioned in the catalogue is the Basel Mission Press in Tellicherry. Basel Missionaries established this lithographic press in Thalassery in order to expand their missionary activities in the Malabar region. The details of

¹⁹ The categorization of printed materials along the lines of typography and lithography in the library/catalogues becomes all the more important because it took many centuries for the libraries and catalogues in Europe to differentiate between print and manuscript (McKitterick, 2003). This intermingling of print and manuscript in libraries and catalogues can be seen as a reflection of the continued relationship between manuscripts and print which questions the basic assumption that with print the world of the manuscript book came to an end.

the books they published reveal that most of their publications were actually meant for the Mappila Muslim readers. Though the number of Muslim books mentioned in the catalogue does not match with the number of printing presses functioning in Malabar during this time period, what is certain is that all the Muslim-owned printing presses in the region were lithographic.

Another two factors that the catalogue reveals are that the Muslim printing presses can be identified by their Islamic names and their technological form can be determined since it is mentioned in the title of the printing presses. These two characteristics take on importance because such details are not readily available for books published in non-Muslim contexts. To see how a typical Muslim printing press is named in the said period, look at these examples: Manba'ul-Hidayah litho Press, Manba'ul-Ajaib Press, Mazhar al-ulum Press, Muhikk ul-Ghara'ib Press, Nur al Hidayat litho Press, Ali Hajji, Amir ul Islam litho power press, Mafatih al Huda litho Press, Al Murshid litho press and Mathba'thul Islamiyya litho press. This nomenclature tells us about the special status given to the lithographic type as opposed to the movable typographic type in Mappila Muslim contexts. While print, without any additional descriptions, was used as a synonym for typography, lithography was never that. Does this mean then that lithography had been a minor phenomenon within print or was it differently treated?

The above data explains how printing in its early phase in the region was clearly differentiated as opposed to being perceived as a singular phenomenon. Though such differences have been widely recognized, explored and used today in mechanical engineering and related sciences to improve the technical qualities of printing (Bakshi, 2006) it has seldom been used in the Humanities and Social Sciences to understand and reflect upon the historical circumstances which shaped the arrival and popularity of printing technologies and its

implications for specific communities.²⁰ Whenever such details are provided they are mentioned in passing describing the technical characteristics of a given printing press, but do not draw any analytical conclusions from it.²¹ The exceptions in this regard are Proudfoot's studies on early Malay Muslim printing (1993, 1995) and Messick's study on printing in Yemen (1993).²² It is surprising that book historians hardly paid any attention to such details despite the fact that archival evidences strongly suggest that clearly demarcated distinctions did exist in the early phase of printing technology. Even then, print both as an idea and as a practice has been widely analysed either as a homogenized transition from orality to print which produced cracks in the relationship between literary cultures and oral traditions or as a bridge between the two without paying much attention to the differences within print.²³

²⁰ None of the book history books in India has lithography as an entry in their indexes. One of the pioneering works on Indian book history is curiously titled *Moveable Type* (2006), which explains all types of printing, but in the name of typographic moveable printing without mentioning that other forms of printing existed in India. None of the chapters in the book even recognize that there existed other forms of printing which was very prevalent in the Muslim quarters of the then India. The book does discuss about books printed at the Muslim-owned lithographic presses, without acknowledging its difference from other forms of printing and its analytical value in the Muslim context.

²¹ Ulrike Stark (2007) mentions in her article on the arrival of the Book in Hindi and Urdu that it was the introduction of lithography in India in the 1820s that opened up the realm of print to Indian agency. She also briefly discusses the impact of lithography on regional language printing in India. But she stops there without exploring further the affinity between lithography and the Indian agency she talks about or its status in the Muslim context. This is very crucial when we know that the first Indians to own lithographic presses were all Muslims; Muslim Fai'z Ali in 1830 at Kolkatta, Nawaab of Avadh, and Munshi Wajid Ali Khan in 1833 (Shaw, 1994, 1998). We may also assume that someone like Francis Robinson (1993) whose works claims to map technology and religious changes in Islam in the context of India and Print may draw on these distinctions. He notices that such distinctions existed by saying that he is "not talking of Gutenberg movable type, but of lithography. Movable type for Islamic cursive scripts was not widely used in South Asia until the twentieth century, and to this very day has not succeeded completely in displacing lithography"(pp. 239-240). However this does not inform his analytical framework. Pinney (2003) also discusses lithography, but briefly, to appreciate its relevance for photo printing. All these indicate that the analytical value of lithography was recognized by book historians either for its technical specificities or for its commercial importance as it was considered as a cheap, portable technique which enabled mass production. What is equally surprising is that Sheldon Pollock in his studies on Indian intellectual and literary history does not recognize the socio-cultural value of this technology in printing Indian languages, particularly Sanskrit.

²² There have been many studies on the relevance of lithography in printing Persian texts. While Marzolph's (2001) work discusses the role of lithography in printing illustrations in Persian texts, Nile Green (2010) discusses lithography only to trace the circulation of the industrial commodities as a gauge of Iran's integration into an industrializing global economy. Scheglova (1999) in his essay acknowledges that lithographic printing in Muslim contexts as opposed to non-Muslim contexts took a different turn, but without going into the details of its specific Muslim characteristics, and his discussion is limited to Persian manuscripts lithographed in Indian presses.

²³ Blackburn's (2003) work on Tamil print is a good example of this where he takes printed folklore as an example to demonstrate the intersection of print and orality. He reads literary practices as being set in motion by

If lithographic usage was well-defined and popular among Mappila Muslims as these records show, what were its analytical values for writing a history of Muslim negotiations with technology in general and that of print in particular in the region? How are we to understand the ontological manifestations embedded in lithography? What are the insights it can provide for writing a history of the Muslim community in the region? As I have already stated in the beginning, how are we to see it as a continuum of Muslim communication practices from the past? What is the implicit theory of knowledge that such an internal coherence provides for Mappila Muslims? What are their discursive values for Islamic traditions? To answer these questions one needs to look at books and its forms as history as opposed to histories in the books. The discussion that follows will pay attention to understanding lithography's self-presentation as a way of reading, thinking, learning and therefore of historical truth-making with regard to the orders of knowledge in Islam.

Book in history as well as in the present is considered as an emblematical figure of civilizational growth and prosperity. As an important cultural product, books are not lifeless entities meant to present facts and figures but they themselves embody and express the aesthetics and the values of their time and space. Their very physical form and appearance in and of itself has been exploited to improve the quality of the interaction between texts and their targeted recipients (Pearson, 2008). So the meaning of a book cannot be separated from its verbal content, visual imagery, font type, cover design, look and layout and vice versa. Books have their verbal content supplemented by various kinds of visual imagery. Thus, the form a book adopts in its presentation of the content has an effect on the way the book is going to be approached, touched and consumed. Therefore the form of a book makes it difficult for its reader to read the text objectively (Pearson, 2008). Hence the book and its formal characteristics are not meant to provide the contents alone, rather these mediate the

the advent of colonial printing in Tamilnadu in opposition to orality. It is precisely because of this categorization that he does not differentiate between typographic and lithographic printing and the conceptual differences between them.

meaning of the content as much as the content shapes its form. While a great deal of information is indeed communicable, valuable and measurable without much opinion on the receivers' part as to how it is delivered, it remains that for the nature of that knowledge to be understood in its entirety there must be some understanding of the platform through which it is delivered and of the interpretative limitations as well as the potentialities that the medium offers to the text. Thus, we may have to assume that the preference for lithographic printing in the Mappila Muslim context is more of an epistemologically motivated one than any economic, ideological or politically inspired one. So a shift from manuscript to print or changes within print itself is more than a change in the medium. But the emphasis usually placed on printing in the West as well as on non-Western literature has not always been helpful to comprehend the nature of these changes. Indeed, many commonly held assumptions about print have been largely dictated by those for whom the process of printing was not only the most important form of reproducing their texts but was the first form of mass reproduction of the texts. The trajectories of print and its impact has been received and disseminated from their standpoint, rather than those of people who were affected by, what was for several generations, only one aspect of the reproduction of texts and traditions.

Before we go into any further discussion on understanding lithography as a way of epistemology – a way of conceiving, composing, constituting and disseminating knowledge in the Muslim community and as a discursive statement, let us delineate the differences between typography and lithography in detail.

3.5 Typography and Lithography: Differences in Technology and Authorial Presence

Though they share the basic features of mass reproduction, both typography and lithography are two different modes of printing involving completely different sets of technical procedures and formalities. But they also differ in their very approaches towards language and printing with far reaching implications at every stage of their conceptualization and

production of printed materials.²⁴ The time gap between the inventions of these two technologies will also explain their differences in some detail. Invented in 1440, typography was widely used for mass production of texts such as the Bible, dictionaries and grammar books. But it was with the invention of lithography in 1796 that non-textual forms such as maps, diagrams etc. found a place in printed materials (Proudfoot, 1997). So it can be assumed that both the technologies, at least in their initial stages were used for two different purposes. Importantly the latter was used to accomplish many of the tasks the former technology could not undertake.

Another way to locate the difference between typography and lithography is to look at the ways in which the inventors of these technologies conceptualized their mechanics. Guttenberg, who invented typography, being a goldsmith and Senefelder, who invented lithography, being an actor and playwright, their respective professions not only contributed to their inventions but also their later use. Technical skills required for a goldsmith and a playwright are clearly reflected in typographic and lithographic technologies respectively. For example, Senefelder's initial thought while tinkering with lithographic technology was to see if it could be used to print music.²⁵ Giving a very detailed account of the invention of this new medium and a course on its application in his *The Classic 1819 Treatise*, Senefelder (2005) says:

“A page of wretchedly printed music from a prayer-book, which I accidentally met with at a shop at Ingolstadt, suggested to me the idea that my new method of printing would be particularly applicable to music printing; I, therefore, resolved on my return to Munich, to go directly to Mr Falter, a publisher of music, to offer him my invention.

²⁴ For example, in lithography a flat surface is used as opposed to the raised surface in typography.

²⁵ The techniques for printing music varied from time to time and they included woodblocks, movable type and engraving. All these techniques were not only expensive and time consuming but also produced messier results. Printing music typographically required multiple separate impressions for staff lines, words and notes.

I learned that Mr Gleissner, a musician of the Elector's band, was just about to publish some pieces of sacred music. This was most welcome news to me. Without further delay, I called on Mr Gleissner, to whom I communicated my new invention, offering him, at the same time, my services for the publication of his music. The specimens of music printing which I showed him, obtained his and his wife's highest approbation; he admired the neatness and beauty of the impressions, and the great expedition of the printing; and, feeling himself flattered by my confidence, and the preference I gave him, he immediately proposed to undertake the publication of his music on our joint account" (p.13).

Situating these differences in the Islamic context, Messick (1997) delineates and distinguishes typography from lithography at different levels. He argued that while lithography retained the oral qualities of manuscript texts, typographically printed text eradicated or further distanced such traces. At the level of composition of letters for printing, when the individual letters in a word are joined naturally in an unbroken script in the latter, the words in the former were joined mechanically. This difference in the way letters are placed in words made reading lithographically produced texts more comfortable in certain times and places. These two demarcations were crucial for Arabic letters. In typography, types for letters are independently arranged. Linguists note that this is a unique characteristic of European languages and their alphabetic system (Morison, 1972). In Arabic the very nature of the script does not allow letters to be arranged independently. So an easy transition from manuscript to typography was impossible. The standard universal type form employed in typographic printing blocs was also a barrier for the Arabic script to be converted into letter blocs as the calligraphic art, which was the predominant form of visual art in the Islamic

world, was so diverse and their specificities from region to region had already given birth to distinct local ways of writing Arabic.²⁶

Another major theme Messick (1997) brings into his analysis is the issue of impersonality and regularity in typography. Since lithography is a technique based directly on a handwritten copy traces of personal characteristics of one's handwriting is maintained during its reproduction; typography is a process of transforming handwriting into movable type characters, thus making the text impersonal. This process of mechanical impersonalisation in typography, according to Messick, causes typography to embody a new stylistic and technical order and thereby a new world of textual authority. Hence at the very basic technical level itself lithography and typography differs where the former attempts to maintain the styles in manuscript production while the latter tries to abandon it completely. Therefore lithographed books were often considered as printed manuscripts "which allowed the age of script to continue under the guise of print" (Khalid, 1994). This is why Messick argues that the attempt to see writing as a form of deliberate and self-conscious orality which preserves a feeling for the book as a kind of utterance might be elaborated to understand the lithographic modality as a mediated textual culture between orality and print.

The concept of fixity/certainty has been a major theme of debate in print history as the classical European historiography on print culture believed that the real strength of 'the textual overtures of modernity' lay in its ability to fix the text and its meaning or what Elizabeth L. Eisenstein (1980, p.113) famously calls the preservative power of print. It is this assumption that print fixes texts and its meanings in a homogenized manner that guides readers to imagine collectively that acts as the core basis for Anderson's idea of imagined communities (1991). As already indicated, this idea of fixity has been questioned by many

²⁶ As opposed to the Mashriqi-Ammiyya, (Eastern dialect) there developed different varieties of spoken and written Arabic such as the Maghrebi Darija (Western Arabic). I will discuss its implication in the section on Muslim preference for lithography .

scholars who argue that print afforded not just one culture rather many cultures (Johns, 1998; Sabrina et al, 2007). The lengthy errata lists attached to typographically printed books as an annexure, particularly in the early phases of printing to alert readers to the mistakes in the printed book and their corrected versions, clearly demonstrate the ambiguities of printing, as opposed to the certainty it hoped to bring in. For scholars like Messick these lengthy errata lists in typographically produced books while contributing to the unreliability of the printed word, also points out to the potential perfectibility, finality and closure of the printed word. But lithography reminded its reader of the imperfect qualities of human script and the living presence of a particular calligrapher thus shaking the idea that print is comfortable only with the finality (Ong, 1982). This invocation of pre-print manuscript cultures and the persona it embodies in lithography according to Messick also invokes the pre-egalitarian hierarchies of scholars and their textual cultures, which does not qualify lithography to be an appropriate medium for an emergent “imagined community” of homogenous and interchangeable citizens.

The relationship between printer, publisher, text and readers also changes based on the medium used for printing (Mckitterick, 2003). While the printer in lithography was always identified with individuals because of the presence of persona at various stages of lithographic printing processes, particularly the role of scribe, the printer in typography is often identified as machines. In Muslim lithographic printing, the scribe and the author get almost the same treatment, whereas in typography, the role of the composer is completely insignificant. In lithography, both authors’ and scribes’ names are prominently mentioned on the very first page of the text itself.²⁷ Another major difference is the way authors or their publishers physically visualize their texts in its final printed form. While lithography gives the publishers a sense of the final appearance of the printed book before it is actually printed, typography

²⁷ In some books I have seen in Malabar, the authors name is not provided. But the scribes’ names are printed prominently. This indicates that in certain cases the scribes gained more prominence than the actual author(s) of the books. For example, in *Mawahib Al Waliyyul Akhbar Ala Jami Manakhibhi shaikhi Ali Akbar*, a mawlid, [panegyric poetry] printed at Bayaniyya Litho Power Press, Parappanangadi, in 1971, the author is unknown, but the scribe, P. Muhammad Kutty’s name is printed on the last page.

does not offer such a possibility. Apart from all these, lithography also offered another possibility to its consumers. While typography was more like a territorially and linguistically bound technology, lithography through the very nature of its technology could overcome such limitations. As a result a lithographic printing press in one region could potentially print in any language belonging to varied ethnicities and geographies.²⁸

In order to situate the arguments developed so far in the Mappila Muslims' historical-ethnographic context, the attempt in the next two sections is the following: to understand Mappila Muslim lithographic print in *longue durée*. For that, I will lay out how the idea of the book originated, developed and was practiced among the Mappila Muslim community and how lithography as a technology meant for mass reproduction embodied such historical experiences.

3.6 Book in Malabar Before Print

The history of media in general and that of book in particular has always been written by identifying them with printing. As already indicated, this bond between print and media had been further strengthened through a historiography that privileged the experience of the people for whom printing was the first and the most important method of textual reproduction. But how are we to write it through the eyes of communities for whom printing was only one aspect of reproduction for several generations? The history of Mappila Muslim community provides an exciting case in point to write such a story.

It is believed that Islam was popularized through the activities of Malik b. Dinar (d.748) in the Malabar Coast. According to historical sources he is the first copyist known to sell the premier Muslim book, the Qur'an. Malik b. Dinar took it up as a profession for his living (Grundler, 2007). Considered as one of the six Basaran scholars who were without

²⁸ It was this possibility offered by lithography that enabled the Mappila community to print and publish their texts from various cities outside present day Kerala.

equals from Kufa, Malik b. Dinar was a scholar interested in Qur'anic readings (Pellat, 2012)²⁹. Though there is not much historical evidence of his activities in Malabar, it can be assumed that he continued his scribal practices here as well for two substantial reasons. (1) After the introduction of Islam in 8th century Malabar the growing Muslim population, demonstrated through the construction of mosques throughout the Malabar Coast, created a huge demand for copies of the Qur'an. As a professional scribe this demand for Qur'an might have provided Malik b. Dinar with ample opportunities to make a living in a new land. (2) Apart from the demand aspect, as a propagator of Islam in the region it would have been mandatory for Malik b. Dinar to make Qur'an available to everyone. Additionally writing Qur'an was considered as the noblest profession which would bring *baraka*, the blessings from God into one's life here and hereafter. Therefore it can be assumed that the first propagator of Islam in the region was also its first publisher. Malik b. Dinar's *da'wa* activities would have set the background and foundation for later developments in the field. The growth of Islamic scholarly and writerly culture in the region in the following decades supports this assumption. The development of a unique Arabic script for writing Arabic in the region, later known as *Ponnani lipi* demonstrates how strong the Muslim scribal culture in the region was.³⁰ Since Qur'an is the first Muslim book and around which Muslim scribal culture and book production practices have flourished in Malabar, like other Islamic societies, Muslim conceptualization and approach to book/*kitab* has been shaped by their view and approach to this sacred text, the arts that flourished from it and their function within the domain of piety.

We do not have much material evidence to understand the introduction and development of Islam in the region except a few epigraphs. There is also not much known

²⁹ Kufa and Basara were two major centres of Islamic learning in the classical period and two rival centres of early Islamic legal controversy and language debate. See Van Gelder (1996) for more details.

³⁰ Ponnani lipi/script is a distinct way of writing Arabic developed in the Malabar region. This was primarily used to write Malayalam in Arabic characters. In addition to the 28 letters in Arabic, Ponnani script uses many special characters to denote Malayalam phonemes which are not available in Arabic. For an elaborate discussion on this, see Cheerangote (2012).

evidences about the forms of communication Muslim scholars and their followers used in the early stages of their community-building efforts in Malabar.³¹ Since recitation of Qur'an, the foundational book of Islam, is an everyday obligation for Muslims, it is evident that Muslims in the region as elsewhere were aware of the idea of *kitab*/book.³² The solid Muslim presence in the region by the 10th century itself can be taken as strong evidence for the fact that the idea of *kitab*/book was also strong among them. Whether they knew it in the book codex format as we see it today or not is uncertain. Since no physical specimens of such books survive from before the 16th century, it is also not known what exactly was their form and structure. But what is known for certain is that Malik b. Dinar, as a professional copyist, knew it in the book codex format. The literary sources in Arabic written by Muslim scholars, both native and foreign who either visited the region or propagated Islam in Malabar from early 14th century onwards provide strong evidences for the flourishing book-centred teaching and learning cultures among Muslims as early as the 11th century. Two of the early examples in this regard are the *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad*, an anonymous Arabic manuscript and Ibn Battutah's *Rihla*.

On visiting the mosques in Malabar, Ibn Battutah, the author of *Rihla*, notes that he met several students studying various religious subjects at various mosques in the region, which he lists out in the travelogue. Two examples he has given in his travelogue show how systematic was the mosque-centred educational activities in Malabar: stipends for students generated through revenue from assets belonging to the mosques and extensive superstructures of the mosques meant to provide infrastructural facilities for students to stay and study. In Mangalore, he notes, all Muslims knew Qur'an by heart because the town had

³¹ The reason for this lack of material evidence for Mappila Muslim history has always been alluded to as the colonial approach towards the Muslim subjects in the region. Muslims believe that many of the historical traces of their early life had been either confiscated by the Portuguese, Dutch and later British colonialists or had been destroyed.

³² Reciting Qur'an is a mandatory activity for all Muslims, as it is obligatory in all the *salat* [ritual of worship], one of the five basic pillars of Islam.

23 schools for boys and 13 for girls. The list of Muslim religious specialists who acted as judges, preachers and Imams whom Ibn Battutah met in Malabar and mentions in *Rihla* shows the extent of the thriving scholarly culture in the region.³³ The fact that most of these scholars were foreigners trained in the then important centres of Islamic learning in Mecca, Medina, Yemen and Baghdad once again affirms that Malabar acted as a knowledge hub in the 13th century itself. Apart from their training in religious education, their names and familial genealogy (*nasaba*) reveal that most of them belonged to scholarly families whose members had produced innumerable books on various subjects and disciplines. These scholarly exchanges were not unidirectional. We also see local scholars from Malabar traveling to foreign countries, spending long periods of time with reputed scholars and mastering religious subjects.³⁴ These scholarly exchanges are obvious from the legal queries Malabari scholars had sent to the then renowned scholars and religious education centres in the Arab/Islamic world and the questions Malabari scholars in turn received from various Muslim societies across the Indian Ocean and beyond.³⁵

The Makhdoom family's arrival to the Malabar Coast from Ma'bar of Coromandel, Tamilnadu, in the early 15th century, had further strengthened these scholarly networks. Evident from the exceptionally popular books written by Makhdoomi scholars in various disciplines of Islamic knowledge tradition, Makhdoomi scholars' career in the Malabari mosques on various capacities had established a renewed Mappila Muslim orientation towards books. They assigned books a central role in their teaching and learning activities. Many

³³ Ibn Battutah lists out the following names of Imams, preachers or Qazis in *Rihla*: Muhammad al-Naqawri, Nur al Din Ali, Dadar al Din al Ma'bari, Husayn, Said (from Maqdashu and studied in Mecca and Medina), Al-Sarsai (from Baghdad), Fakhr al Din Uthman, Shihab al- Din al- Kazaruni (from Persia), Fakhr al-Din and another judge and preacher from Oman.

³⁴ Yaqt ibn-Abdullah al Rumi al Hamawi (d.1229), a 12th century Arabic biographer of Greek origin notes in his *Kitab mujamal Buldan* [Dictionary of Countries] that he had personally seen Ibn Asakir's (d.1175) *Tarikh Dimashiq* [History of the City of Damascus] where he had written of a Malabari *Hadith* scholar who spent a long time in Damascus.

³⁵ Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d.1566/67) a renowned legal expert in the Shafi School of law was approached by someone from Malabar seeking his legal opinion on the status of a *talaq* [divorce], which was pronounced with incorrect Arabic words. Al-Haytami included this question and his legal opinion in his famous collection of fatwas called, *Al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyyah*, mentioning that the question was directed to him from Malabar.

historians identify this late medieval period in Islamic societies as an age in which the notion of religious authority had been largely explicated through writing texts, its dissemination and through the development of pedagogical practices emphasizing book-based learning (Bang, 2011: pp. 91-92). Among Mappilas the ‘textualization of religious authority’³⁶ happened through three related developments: (1) Makhdoomi scholars’ initiative in writing and disseminating books, (2) the production of a systematic curriculum for religious education in the Ponnani Mosque, the then higher centre for religious education, with a list of books and authors categorized according to disciplines and finally, (3) the development of book collections in both public and private libraries.

As already noted most of the scholars Ibn Battutah met in the Malabar Coast were members of established scholarly traditions either through their familial genealogy or institutional affiliations. But unfortunately their writings are not available to us, except for a few anonymous Arabic manuscripts or passing references in secondary literature. In such a situation, *Hidayat al-Adhkiya’ ila tariq al-Awliyya*, (henceforth, *Adhkiya*) a late 15th century Sufi text authored by Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdoom Kabir (d.1522) has to be considered as the oldest surviving book written by a Mappila Muslim scholar in Malabar. Since then a series of other books were written and circulated not only within Malabar but throughout the Indian Ocean regions from the East African coast to the archipelago of South-East Asia. Among them *Fata al-mu’in* [The Victory of the Helper] composed in 1574/5 by Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdoom Saghir (d.1619) demands special mention. *Fata al-mu’een* was an attempt to interpret Islamic religious law (Sharia) in the context of the Malabar Coast addressing their socio-religious-economic and political needs.³⁷

³⁶ ‘Textualization of religious authority’ is used in the sense that authority no longer rested solely in a person/s, but rather in particular person’s ability to write or access texts. Here charisma came to be embedded in texts and their interpretation rather than ‘routinized’ in the sense Weber describes.

³⁷ Panakkal (2016) in a paper presented at the International Conference on Ocean of Law in Leiden University analysed this 16th century legal text, to illuminate how Zainudheen Makhdoom Saghir took a moderate stand in his legal formulations to befit the particular socio-cultural and geographic contexts of his immediate audience in Malabar.

A bibliographical analysis of *Fata al-mu'een* and *Ajeebathul Ajwiba*, a collection of fatwas by the same author, reveal that a huge collection of books by scholars from across the world belonging to different schools of law had reached the Malabari scholars long before both these two texts were composed.³⁸ The practice of acquiring old texts has a specific connotation in Islam and they were copied several times and circulated even to faraway places. The way *Fiqh* literature has developed historically among the Islamic scholarly communities will explain this. Since most of *Fiqh* literature is either a commentary/super-commentary/abridgment or a poetical rendering of an already existing book, the very process of writing books in Islam demands acquiring already written books. This demand for old books in Muslim scholarly circle operates not at the level of intellectual exercise alone. But it is also a material demand. The actual process of writing commentaries was always carried out in the blank spaces of books from the past. This peculiar practice has even given birth to a genre in *Fiqh* literature called *Ta'leeq*, meaning writing in the margins. These commentaries on an older book in the form of page-by-page notes/comments/footnotes are then published not as an independent/separate new book but as part and parcel of an already existing book. Thus the resulting text is a creative blend of both the old and the new writings (See the figure no.I & II in the Annexure). A cursory analysis of old Arabic manuscripts will show that their pages are designed in such a way that the blank spaces occupy a major portion in the books than the contents. At the level of language, the *Fiqh* literature employs scholarly Arabic language, which demands further explanations. These two elements, language and design, of Islamic books clearly demonstrate that books in the past were actually written and designed keeping future commentators in mind. Thus writing a book or commentary in Islam, apart

³⁸ Studying bibliographical entries in a book can not only reveal key works and scholars that the author of a particular book deals with, but also his scholarly connections, imaginations and the scholarly network that the author is part of or envisions to be part of. Thus it constitutes an important source of social history. In a bibliographical analysis of *Fata al-mu'een* and *Ajeebathul Ajwiba* presented at "Kochi 1514", an international conference on Cross-cultural networks between Central Europe, South Asia and beyond in the early Modern period, Nuaiman (2014) explored Malabari Muslim scholars' global connections in the 16th century. For more details on the implications of bibliographical analysis for writing social history see, Tanselle (2009).

from being a scholarly activity, has also been a way of relating to the past and the future of Islam.

Fata al-mu'een also belongs to this long tradition of *Fiqh* literature starting from Imam Al-Shafi'i's (d.820) *Kitab al Umm*, which is considered as the authoritative guide and foundational text in the Shafi school of Law (Ponmala, 1996). This foundational text itself was written down by the students of Al-Shafi'i from their notes of his teaching sessions. Thus this book was not a written text at first, but orally transmitted.³⁹ *Fata al-mu'een* itself was an extensive commentary/*Hashiya* on Makhdoom's own *Fiqh* compendium titled *Qurrat al-'ayn* composed in 1567.⁴⁰ This textual relationship Makhdoom builds up can be tracked from the full title of *Fata al-mu'een: Fata al-mu'een bi sharahi Qurrat al-'ayn*.

The books written in the Malabar Coast in the 15th and the 16th centuries were widely available across the Indian Ocean region and invited many commentaries and super commentaries from later scholars from different regions and languages as stated above.⁴¹ What we see then is the traveling of texts through time and space; both horizontal and vertical or what Ho calls "travelling texts" in Islam (2006: p. 116). The comradeship thus formed through Muslim textual traditions and genres are vertical as well as horizontal. This in a way challenges Anderson's idea of horizontal comradeship formed through newspaper and novel reading, which according to him acted as the very base for the modern social imagination and

³⁹ This idea of writing down the master's teaching sessions into a book form is a long-standing tradition in Islam. This is also important in the following discussions (In the modern idea of reading, the reading always comes after a book is published. But in the Islamic contexts it is a common practice that reading/reciting of a book comes before it is written. So one might have recited a book or learned/memorized it by heart through its sound form well before it was actually written. Lambek (1990) demonstrates this as the Islamic way of approaching the text as a form of copying/reproducing the text orally. Also see Makdisi (1981).

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion on *Hashiya* and its role in the development of *Shafi fiqh* literature, see, el Shamsy's. (2013)

⁴¹ Kooria's (2016) PhD research on the expansion of Shafi School of Law in the Indian Ocean regions traces the circulation of *Fata al-mu'een* and its commentaries in Swahili, Arabic, Malay, Tamil and Malayalam languages. His recent work on *Fata al-mu'een* that specifically looks at the life of the text in Zanzibar-Tanzania shows that many East African scholars were familiar with this Malabari text. Kooria (2017) also explains that Umar bin Ahmad bin Sumayt, the famous chronicler from the Swahili Coast, learned this text from his father who had studied the text in Mecca with Sayyid Bakrī, who in turn has written a famous commentary on *Fata al-mu'een* called *I'anat al-ṭalibeen*.

subject formation. This was not a characteristic peculiar to Muslim books written in Arabic alone. *Muhyadheen Mala* (1607), the first known and surviving book written in Arabic Malayalam, states explicitly in the text that it is a poetic rendering of another book titled *Bahjathul Asrar va Maadinul Anwar* written by Sheik Abdul Hasan Ash Shettanaufi (d.1313) two centuries ago. Such experiences in the Malabar coast questions the proposition that writing commentaries was made possible for the very first time in the Indian subcontinent only when increasing numbers of classical works were becoming available to the Ulema through print, and that it was through the wholehearted embracing of printing technology that religious scholars could effectively disseminate their ideas among their audience (Zaman, 1999, 2007).

Apart from such writerly cultures, several decrees in *Fata al-mu'een* also provide details about the nature of book circulation among Mappila Muslims. The fatwas by Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom Saghir instructing readers to correct the mistakes they found in a book kept in the public library collections established through religious endowments indicate three things: there existed various ways of book circulation system, the flexibility of the content in Muslim books as opposed to the fixation of the content in many other contexts, and libraries were not a closed space reserved only for scholars but open to the general public.⁴² At the same time the fatwa forbids readers from making any alterations in the content if the book with errors (s)he found or borrowed was from a private collection, invoking the question of ownership. But, if the text in question is the Qur'an, the fatwa continues, it is obligatory for any reader to correct the mistakes whether it was privately or publicly owned.

Another argument in the fatwa deserves special attention. *Fata al-mu'een* forbids the readers from correcting the mistakes found in Qur'an if the reader's handwriting does not

⁴²This practice of making books available in public forums was facilitated by the idea of *waqf*, an Islamic act of endowment, under Islamic law, which typically involves donating an asset for religious or charitable purposes with no intention of reclaiming the assets. A *hadith* attributed to the Prophet establishes the history and meaning of *waqf* in Islam as follows: Umar b. Khatab, the second Khalif once asked the Prophet what was the most pious way to make use of a piece of land he acquired in Khaibar. The prophet asked him to devote it to the welfare of human beings, in a way that it could not be sold or made the subject of gift or inheritance.

match the elegance of the calligraphy of the Qur'an. Hence, it is clear that scholars paid great attention to the aesthetical and material qualities of book production. This thriving book production culture in Malabar was assisted by two other related practices related to the traditional educational system: invention of Ponnani ink and the introduction of the book binding art/*jild*. Over the course of time these two practices were developed into full-fledged professions in many traditional teaching and learning circles.

To compare this Muslim book experience with that of the Christian community in the region who had introduced printing technology in the early 19th century Malabar as part of their missionary activities, let us look at Claudius Buchanan, an Anglican priest who visited Kerala in 1806. When Buchanan (as cited in Arunima, 2006) showed the Christian priests in Mavelikkara a copy of the printed Syriac New Testament they were not only astonished to see it, but were also “suspicious of whether he was a Christian at all and what his motivations are” (p. 64). Further conversation between Buchanan and the priests in Mavelikkara attest to the scarcity of Christian religious literature including the Scriptures. This absence finally forced the Christian community to agree with Buchanan's request to introduce printing technology, to translate the Bible into Malayalam and to establish schools in each parish for Christian instruction. Buchanan's visit to Kerala was in 1806, nearly five centuries after Ibn Battutah's visit to Malabar where he was astonished to see not the scarcity of Islamic religious literature, but its abundance in systematically organized popular religious centres and the networking of scholars and scholarship in the Malabar Coast within the wider Muslim community.⁴³ This means that, at least in its early stages of introduction in the region, as opposed to other communities, print did not have many things to offer to the Mappila Muslim community or the Muslims did not perceive a lacuna that could have been sorted out through technological means.

⁴³ The Mappila Muslim approach towards the book has also been demonstrated, as Kooria (2017) observes, in the celebrations and feasts organized in the coastal areas in the earlier times to celebrate the arrival of the first copy of a manuscript from a distant place.

3.7 The Qur'an: The Muslim Book through the Ages

The Muslim attitude towards book both as a form and content, its production, circulation and consumption was historically set in place through the Muslim approach to the foundational book, *Al kitab*, the Qur'an. As Qur'an itself points out, the Muslim sacred book is "not a book inscribed on a parchment" (6: 7), but was originally an oral text meant to be rehearsed and recited first by the Prophet and then by his companions. In his study on the Muslim understanding of the scripture, Graham (1987) by tracing the uses of the word 'Qur'an' in Qur'an, *hadith* and early Muslim literature, argues that as opposed to the general assumption that the word Qur'an is a proper noun referring to the collected and written corpus of God's revelation to the Prophet, Qur'an is a verbal noun derived from the Arabic root Q-R, the basic meaning of which is to 'recite, read aloud'. He further explains that the use of Qur'an both as an action – reciting – and as a unit of text meant to be recited underscores the centrality of the recited character of the book whose authoritative character is realized and achieved in its fullness and perfection only when it is recited aloud correctly. Thus, Qur'an for its followers is a text to be heard and recited, not read. The decision to compile the Qur'an, which was till then scattered among the Prophets companions in the form of a single-copy book in AD 632 confirms this point. Qur'an was compiled for the first time in Islamic history when a large number of Hafiz [those who memorized the complete Qur'an and professional reciters] were killed in the Yamama battle that happened in AD 632. Writing in that context was an attempt to aid an already existing oral tradition, not to replace it. Thus writing acted as a complementary medium to orality.

Arabic philologists argue that the privileging of the oral medium over writing is a pre-Qur'anic phenomenon in Arabic literature where poetry, the then major form of Arabic literature, used human memory as its medium (Grundler, 2011). The argument that the exalted position of the Book of Scripture in Islamic faith is connected to and derived from the attitude towards the holy writ in other Middle Eastern Semitic religions also place the root of Muslim

approach to the book within pre-Islamic civilizations (Graham, 1987). Though these arguments are partially true, what is certain is that Islam gave this tradition an altogether different dimension. The distinction Islam made between its attitude towards writing and orality with that of previous Semitic holy writs as well as pre-Islamic oral traditions is explicit from the theological positions Islam took towards writing and orality. While describing the distinctiveness of Qur'an from other Abrahamic religious texts, the Qur'an introduces itself as a text of recitation in a written form (Qur'an 56: 77-80) But writing here comes secondary to recitation and its theological potential is explained when within the Qur'an it is claimed that its acceptance among non-believers was facilitated because of the particular form through which the text had been revealed. "Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, 'This is nothing but blatant sorcery'" (6: 7) The positioning of the Qur'an is further articulated and complicated when Qur'an claims that the Prophet who received the messages from the God, was an *ummi*, meaning unlettered (person) (Qur'an 7: 157, 3: 20, 62: 2). The attempt of Islam to distinguish its approach to the book form from other Semitic religions is also laid out through various Prophetic traditions. In one such instance, the Prophet told his companions: 'Acquire knowledge before it disappears'. Hearing this they anxiously asked him how that was possible as long as the book, Qur'an, was in their hands. The Prophet's answer to them is revealing: 'disappearance of knowledge (in Islam) means disappearance of learned men'. In Islam, the Prophet was the first person who learned and embodied its first book. When someone, who had not met the Prophet during his life time, asked Ayesha, the Prophet's wife and companion, about his character, she replied that his character was like that of the Qur'an, indeed he was a walking Qur'an.⁴⁴ What these prophetic traditions indicate is that Islam's foundational approach to knowledge is a bodily one. That is to say that Islam equates body and the book or what Ware (2014) calls bodily assimilation of the book.

⁴⁴ As reported in Swaheeh Muslim. Hadith no. 746.

Elaborating on this, one can argue that books as such do not exist, or has no life in Islam. The book, as is knowledge, attains its authority only when it is embodied. If that is the case, to what extent is it possible to go back to the foundational texts of Islam for one to study and write an anthropology of Islam, as Talal Asad has suggested (1986: p. 14) without paying attention to the ways in which Muslims have embodied their books and lived it? The idea of going back to the foundational texts is not possible simply because Muslims do not do that.

The Muslim habitus of reading a book is first and foremost shaped through the memorization of Qur'an. Once a written text is memorized it makes the text irrelevant or pushes it into the secondary realm. Memorization here acts as the primary window to personally possess the word of God into one's body, which breaks the separation between the physical form of the text and its user (Ware, 2014). In this mnemonic possession of texts which makes the text internal to their bodies, reading is more like a ritualistic practice than a cognitive exercise where the reader's competence to comprehend the text, as we understand it today, is not an important concern. It is an entirely different way of writing as well as knowing the text, where memorization provides the reader with the opportunity to continuously engage with the text (Lambek, 1996). Baker (1993) in his ethnographic study on the reading practices among the Muslims in Indonesia argues that comprehension as a category to understand their reading practices has no use. What reading is in the Muslim context is an activity of apprehending what there is to know. So it is reciting from memory or reading without comprehension that brings Islamic texts into the social context and add layers to its meanings. That is to say that it is through the recitation of the book as part of a ritual, often held as a community activity, that a book gets authenticated in Islam. Thus, reading in Islam is more about apprehension of a given book than its comprehension.

Three experiences that I encountered during my fieldwork made me take note of this unique Muslim approach towards books. In a prayer session I attended in a local mosque in

Kodiyathoor in Kozhikode district the Imam, quoting a Prophetic tradition said that the *Surath al Ikhlas*, one of the smallest chapters in the Qur'an constitutes one third of the whole text. He then asked the people gathered there to recite the *Surath al Ikhlas* three times before they offered supplications so that they would get the benefit of reading the entire Qur'an. Contrary to our contemporary understanding of the reading of a book where one part cannot replace the other or we get irritated if a page is missing while reading a book, a small part of the Qur'an can not only replace the other portions, but can also represent the value of the whole. Whether parts constitute the whole or the whole decides the value and agency of the part is an important question here that problematizes the part-whole relationship.

The second incident took place at the “*Dowlathul Qur'an*,” a Qur'an reading session held at Jamia Markaz, in Kozhikode. In “*Dowlathul Qur'an*” sessions people come in huge numbers and read the Qur'an together once in every three months. Everyone gathered there gets a copy of the Qur'an containing only a part (*Juzu*).⁴⁵ Different parts are given to different people sitting in the *Majlis* [gathering] who may or may not know each other. But the idea of “*Dowlathul Qur'an*” is to complete reading the whole Qur'an several hundred times in a single *Majlis* by thousands of people. Though no one person recites the whole Qur'an but each recites only one thirtieth of the Book, it is believed that everyone gets the benefit of reciting the whole Qur'an. This is also practiced among Sunni Muslims in the region as a death rite for their beloved ones. In the former case, if it is the living ones who get the benefits of reading the whole Qur'an, in the latter case it is the departed souls who get the benefit of the reading. Reading here, as opposed to the modern idea of an individual cognitive activity where benefit is measured along the line of one's cognitive capacity, becomes not only a community practice, but reading attains wholeness only when it is performed as a community. A silent individual reading a text and decoding its inherent meaning has no value here. Rather the emphasis is on performing the reading where you read aloud while performing your

⁴⁵ Like the 114 chapters, the Qur'an is also divided into 30 parts and each part is called *Juzu* in Arabic.

reading. It is this performatory dimension of reading that gives value to the written text as opposed to the written text authorizing the ways of reading a text.

The third incident was a “*Khatamul Bukhari*” session in the same institute. “*Khatamul Bukhari*” marks the celebratory culmination of the reading session of the second highest adorned text in Muslim tradition after Qur’an, the *Swaheeh al Bukhari*, at religious learning centres. This is a widely celebrated event in most of the higher centres of learning in the Islamic world. Apart from the students who have been reading the *Swaheeh al Bukhari* and their teachers, the session at Jamia Markaz is also attended by thousands of people including prominent scholars from India and abroad. It is at the completion of the reading of the book, that a teacher gives his students the *ijaza*, the necessary consent to read the book for themselves and to others and to do further research on it. In classical Islamic educational setting, learning progresses through reading the text aloud several times. I have seen the senior teachers at the institute giving *ijaza*, the consent for reading and referencing (*Mutha’la*) the books, to students visiting them. In such contexts students do not read the text with the scholar, but their reading of the book starts with *ijaza* from a senior scholar. There are also students who gather their *ijaza* from many scholars to read the same book. The purpose of such practices prevalent in Islamic scholarly communities is to make their reading practices more authentic and authoritative. In such contexts reading acquires an entirely different meaning where the very ontology of reading constitutes its epistemology. Like the memorized text in a scholar’s body, the form and its content are inseparable here. While the content of the Qur’an demands a specific mode of transmission and bodies for it to be authentically circulated, in return it is through these specific modalities and bodies that the meanings of the text is archived and circulated.

This peculiar experience of the Muslim approach towards the book questions the very meaning of orality and writing as we understand them today. The important one among them

is the challenge it poses to our perception about communication practices in evolutionary term: the human progress being a shift from orality to writing and the tendency to associate literacy with writing. But in the Islamic context this transition with its nuances cannot be understood in terms of progression from one to the other. With the arrival of writing in its different forms, orality does not end but takes on a different form and role in Islam where it is through orality that writing gains and sustains its very existence and authority. The way Islam has been written by itself has also helped to retain its oral qualities, not to abandon it. The way *hadiths* have been written is an example of this. *Hadiths* had been archived and circulated in the oral form in the early stages of Islam and remained so. But when they were transcribed, they were transcribed by retaining their fundamental oral characteristics. The names of people through whose memories the *hadith* had been handed down from the Prophet to the contemporary scholar are mentioned at the beginning of each *hadith*.⁴⁶ What we see in Islamic writings then is not writing as such, but an inscription associated with the spirit and voice where concrete writing has been consistently denigrated (Derrida, 1974). When Qur'an was written for the first time, vowels (*harakats* literally meaning movements) and diacritical marks were not marked and that made reading of the text impossible unless one already knew it. So only those who had memorized the Qur'an by heart orally could read the written form of the Qur'an. Thus to read a text one needed to recite it aloud several times. Therefore reading in Islamic contexts does not proceed from writing, but from memorization.

⁴⁶ For example, the first *hadith* in the *Swaheeh al Bukhari*, collection of *hadiths* compiled by Imam Bukhari (d. 870) which Muslims believe is the most authentic text in Islam after Qur'an is as follows: "Imaam Al-Bukhaaree reported that Al-Humaydee `Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr narrated to us saying: Sufyaan narrated to us, who said: Yahyaa ibn Sa`eed Al-Ansaree narrated to us: Muhammad Ibn Ibraaheem At-Taymee informed me: That he heard `Alqamah Ibn Waqaas Al-Laythee saying: I heard `Umar ibn Al-Khattaab whilst he was upon the pulpit saying: I heard Allaah's Messenger saying: Indeed actions are upon their intentions, and every person shall receive only that which he intended."

3.8 Drinking the Letters: Writing and Reading as an Act of Embodiment

The above-explained Muslim approach to textuality is widely practiced among traditional Mappila Muslims in Malabar at various avenues and rituals. One commonly held practice within the community is called *pinjyaanamezhuthu* or drinking letters. In this practice, Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions and supplications specially composed by pious Sufi saints and scholars are written on ceramic plates using Ponnani ink. These writings are supplemented with names of the Prophet, his companions and other Sufi saints, drawings and numbers. Very often scribes with some basic training in calligraphy are approached to write these letters prescribed by a pious/learned man on ceramic plates. These letters and images are then washed off using normal water, rose water, and honey or in some instances with *zam zam*, the holy water from Mecca. Believing that this water which contains the dissolved letters has special spiritual status and healing power, people drink it for various purposes. It is believed that the dissolved texts in the water unfold their spiritual power once it reaches the body and starts acting within it.⁴⁷

Ware's (2014) study on Islamic education in Senegal is a useful analogy to understand this popular ritual. The literal embodiment of texts onto one's body practiced in this ritual explains the underlying philosophy of Islamic textuality: inseparability of text and body where the objective is always to educate the whole of a human being, rather than the narrow transmission of discursive knowledge. Like the memorized text in a scholar's body, the drunk/consumed letters in a Muslim's body materializes the textual transmission to a concrete form. Embodiment in this context, according to Ware goes beyond its meaning in English language, as exemplar or practical application. The closer meaning of the term, according to him, would be "incarnation, instantiation and manifestation". Such practices for

⁴⁷ A similar practice is *kayyeezhuthu*, literally mean handwriting, usually held in connection with Eid in Sunni Madrasas. In *kayyeezhuthu*, the religious instructors in the Madrasas write certain prayers on the students' hand using honey, and the students lick it off.

him underlie the centrality of the body in Islam not just as a medium to transmit knowledge but as a mechanism that shapes, archives and actualizes religious knowledge.

Apart from this, *drinking letters* also raises some important questions about the form of the script itself. Here one writes letters on the plates only to wash them off and drink them. In a way the process involves complete erasure of the text. Erasing the text is generally understood as the erasure of knowledge. But in *drinking letters*, these erased letters dissolved into water attains power. That is, it is with the erasure that the text attains authority.

3. 9 Lithography in Longue Durée

The extent of Mappila Muslims' familiarity with book production at least two to three centuries before Gutenberg printed the first Bible in Europe in 1456 and the prevalent socio-cultural practices associated with books among them had been explained in the previous sections. Much before the first printing press reached the Malabar coast in the 1550s with the establishment of a printing press in Ambalakkad in Cochin by Jesuit missionaries, the first book in native Malayalam language was printed from Rome in 1772 or the first Malayalam book was printed in Travancore/Kerala at the CMS press, Kottayam in 1824,⁴⁸ Mappila Muslims had produced innumerable books written on paper sheets. These were bound by stacking the sheets, fixing one edge and gathering in thick or differently designed cover pages, and there developed a well-organized system for their circulation both within and outside the region.⁴⁹ The fatwas in *Fata al-mu'een* about the private-public book collections

⁴⁸ Though the first printing press in the region was established in 1550s, it was not used to print Malayalam, but to print Syriac and Tamil. The first book printed from Ambalakkad in 1578 was the Tamil translation of *Doctrina Christum*. The Malayalam script was printed for the first time in a Latin book printed in the Netherlands in 1678. The book *Hortus Malabaricus* documented the plants in Malabar. In order to give the local names of region-specific plants their Malayalam names was printed in Malayalam script. It is also believed that before the publication of the first Malayalam book in 1824, a Malayalam translation of the New Testament was printed from Bombay in 1811. For more details see, Chummar (1950) and Kesavan (1985).

⁴⁹ As opposed to the Hindu community's use of *ola*, a palm leaf used for writing, Muslim manuscripts were mostly written on paper.

clearly underlines these facts. Obviously there was no particular reason for Mappila Muslims to get excited when they saw the printed book for the first time. Because many of the things print offered then to other communities had already been achieved through manuscripts and related arts in Muslim societies. This demands us to situate the Muslim book production and their encounters with print technologies within the specific context of Islamic knowledge tradition rather than using the Protestant Reformation as an analytical framework. Then how are we to locate the prominence lithography gained in the Mappila Muslim printing cultures over typography? What are the epistemological ambitions it aspired to fulfil? What are the specific Mappila Muslim aesthetic values lithography embodied? What does this shift in focus from what Muslims wrote /published to how they wrote/published achieve?

Makhdoom Saghir's fatwa in *Fata al-mu'een* which explicitly forbid the readers from correcting the mistakes in the Qur'an, if the handwriting of the reader does not match the magnificence and sophistication of the calligraphy of the Qur'an points to the aesthetic investments Mappila Muslims made in their manuscript tradition. Their long experience with the book as a material had already contributed immensely to the development of strong aesthetic imaginations. However it was not merely an aesthetic investment, but a theological one as well. It was the search to develop a script worthy of God's word that laid the foundation for Arabic calligraphy. The theological base for these strivings was the Qur'an's own claim with regard to its form: "And we have arranged it in the best form" (25: 33).⁵⁰ Though this particular ayath [verse] specifically refers to the form of revelation, Qur'an in another chapter introduces itself as a text written "on honoured, exalted and pure pages, by the hands of noble and virtuous scribes" (80: 13-16). Later Qur'anic scholars in their *tafseers* [commentaries] on these verses also warn Muslims of the care to be taken in beautifying their ways of writing God's words.

⁵⁰ The word *Tarteel* which is used here to describe the form of the Qur'an indicates the putting together of parts to form a strong, integral and consistent whole. In another verse (73: 4) the word is used to specifically mean recitation of the Qur'an by its followers instructing them to recite the Qur'an slowly and distinctly.

It is a general belief among Muslims, supported by Prophetic traditions, that writing God's word will bring *barka* [blessings] to one's life. Hence the profession of a calligrapher was not only considered as a noble profession in Islam, it was also believed that the money one made from this profession was the most virtuous source of income. So it was a common practice among Muslim scholars to be trained in this art, and copy the Qur'an and other books for their livelihood. What primarily motivated scholars like Malik b. Dinar to work as a copyist was this reward from God that the profession could bring into the life hereafter. Thus this profession brought income, fame and blessings altogether. One of the stories that Muslim scholars in Malabar often cite in their *wa'z* [pious exhortation] to alert their followers to the importance of building a career related to the Qur'an and allied activities is that of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb, despite being the emperor of a large kingdom, worked as a copyist to meet his daily living expenses. It was this piety attached to writing God's word that offered calligraphy a flourishing future among Muslim societies across the world.

In many senses, Calligraphy was to Islamic learning what Painting was to European enlightenment. The aesthetic investment Muslim scholars, writers and their rulers made in this regard is underscored by what Pablo Picasso, the 20th century European painter had to say about the Arabic calligraphy of his time. He said that if he had known there was such a thing as Islamic calligraphy, he would never have started to paint. "I have strived to reach the highest levels of artistic mastery, but I found that Islamic calligraphy was there ages before I was" (Picasso, as cited in Frembgen, 2010: p. 136).⁵¹ If one can explain the history of Europe through its paintings, one can narrate Muslim history through the development of Arab calligraphy (Murad, 1999). The long and rich Muslim experience with letters in its most explicit physical form played a significant role in shaping complex and diverse styles in Arabic calligraphy and through that their attitude towards the poetics of book production.

⁵¹ Also see Gertrude Stein's *Picasso* (1938) where she discusses the influence of calligraphy on Picasso's paintings.

Roper (1985) notes that in Britain a relative latecomer to Arabic typography, printing in Arabic was aesthetically less satisfying with regards to clarity, legibility and its fidelity to the *Arabic naskhi* script until the mid-19th century. The reasons for the Muslim rejection of Paganino's Qur'an printed in Italy in 1537 was (the poor quality of its production, especially the aesthetically dissatisfying type designs) discussed earlier. The Arabic printing experience in Britain in the 1820s showed that the situation had not changed much in Europe even after three centuries. Therefore it was not surprising that a huge number of typographically printed Islamic books from Europe targeting Muslim readers in the Arab/Islamic worlds were unsold and piled up in book shops in the Muslim cities (Proudfoot, 1997). This happened despite the Ottoman government's formal initiatives to import Arabic books from Europe. The absolute absence of typographically printed books in the local Mappila Muslim libraries established at the crest of the printing revolution in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Malabar is also clearly indicative of the aesthetic choice Muslims made between typography and lithography.

The Muslim choice for lithography was also motivated by technical reasons. Given the particular characteristics of the script, typographic printing presses were unable to print Arabic letters. Written in the cursive script with four different forms and numerous diacritical marks, as opposed to only two forms (upper and lower cases) in European languages, typographic printing in Arabic language posed formidable challenges for publishers as they had to purchase a minimum of 625 characters as opposed to less than half those for European languages. Even then the result was dissatisfactory. This situation was further worsened in the case of printing in regional Arabic scripts like the one in Malabar. Accommodating local Ponnani Arabic script into the existing Arabic typographic setting was almost impossible. The situation was much more difficult if one had to print in Arabic-Malayalam as it accommodated sounds and vocabularies from several languages including Arabic, Persian,

Tamil and Urdu, but written with an adapted Arabic script.⁵² This required not just more number of types, but also multiple impressions in some cases. A comparable example in this case is the story of printing Music. In the initial stages, staves and notes in music were not printed, but were added by hand. When they were printed for the first time, they were printed either through double impression or notes were written over the printed staves. The diacritical marks in Arabic are reminiscent of the staves and notes in Music. Scholars also note that compared to printing in other languages, Arabic typographic printing caused a huge financial burden as it required more number of types (Bentahila, 1988).

Another major reason for the Muslim disinterest in typography was that it disrupted the human presence that manuscript traditions tried to retain. Human presence in Islamic knowledge tradition is considered to be of enormous value and it has been retained in the Muslim educational system through several means: face-to-face learning sessions, oral instruction, long stay with a teacher, and *ijaza* and *sanad* [authentication]. The manuscript culture in Muslim societies could accommodate many such elements of human linkages. The way the books had been written and pages organized reminded the reader of this human linkage and its presence. The way books had been conceptualized, written, produced and circulated among Muslim scholars aimed at perpetuating the presence of a master. It has already been discussed how writing commentaries, super commentaries or abridgment of (on) an old text had become a major convention in Islamic scholarly tradition. But the typographic print either took out this human presence completely or minimized its impact on texts. This is particularly visible in the way commentaries and super commentaries from previous texts had been printed in typography. While commentaries were published in manuscripts and lithography as part of an original book and thereby making the book with the commentary an original one in turn, such ways of producing books were technically impossible in typography.

⁵² In Arabic Malayalam many of the sounds not available in Arabic language were accommodated in Arabic scripts by adding additional diacritical marks.

What we see then is the failure of typography to meet the Muslim aesthetic expectations cultivated through their centuries-old relationship with books on the one hand and typographic technical constraints to accommodate Arabic scripts on the other. In such a situation, it was the obvious conclusion to come to that typographic printing press was not meant for Muslim writings and they continued with manuscript traditions until lithography was invented in 1796. This Muslim attitude towards typography and their continued relationship with manuscript tradition is also underlined by the fact that many of the typographically printed religious books were republished and circulated in manuscript forms. In addition the typographically produced texts were also later painstakingly copied and lithographed many number of times. In Kerala when the first Arabic typographic printing press called Coronation Memorial Press (CMP) was established in Edava, in the erstwhile Travancore in 1936, under the patronage of the Travancore princely state, they had to use both typography and lithography in order to complete the Arabic book printing projects. This use of mixed medium clubbing both typography and lithography in a much-celebrated Arabic typographic printing press points towards the failure of typography in fulfilling Muslim printing demands. It is reported that CMP had received orders for Arabic book printing from places as far as Punjab in present-day Pakistan. This brings to the fore the rarity of typographic printing presses even in Muslim-majority regions in Northern India. It is a curious coincidence that the first printing press established by Christian Missionaries in North Kerala (at Illikkunnu Bungalow near Thalassery, which was also the residence of Hermann Gundert), a region with a substantial Mappila Muslim population in 1845 was a lithographic printing press. And the first Arabic typographic printing press in the region was established in (Travancore) Thiruvananthapuram where the Muslim population was comparatively less. It is curious also because of the fact that almost all the printing initiatives of Christian missionaries in India were typographic. In this context, it is obvious that in a community where orality was privileged over other forms of communication, lithography, a printing technology initially

invented to reproduce sound was welcomed wholeheartedly. Like the manuscript culture has preserved the feeling for a book as a mode of utterance (Ong, 1982), lithography retained the oral qualities of written texts and thus the feeling for the Muslim book.

3.10 The Case of *Fata al-mu'een*

The printing history of *Fata al-mu'een*, the 16th century *Fiqh* compendium written by Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom in Ponnani is an interesting case in point to delineate the history of Muslim print in the region. I select *Fata al-mu'een* here for several reasons. *Fata al-mu'een* is not just one of the oldest books from the region, but is also one of the most popular. By the 18th century itself it was circulated as far as Tanzania in the West and Indonesia in the East (Kooria, 2016). Given its popularity and the commentaries it invited, it is hard to pin down a religious or non-religious text from Kerala comparable to *Fata al-mu'een*. As a text which covers subjects as minute as trimming one's hair or nail to the more complex issues of jihad, *Fata al-mu'een* documents and explains the Muslim everyday life in its complete sense of the term. Thus it becomes a text which no Mappila Muslim can evade in the normal course of their daily life. This close connection between Mappila Muslim life worlds and *Fata al-mu'een*, makes the history of its dissemination all the more important as much can be learned about what people believe knowledge is from the way knowledge is passed on from one generation to the other (Ware, 2014).

Various copies of *Fata al-mu'een* from three important library collections in Malabar are examined here. They are (1) the library attached to the local mosque in Ponnani where this text was written and its author had worked as a religious expert in the 16th century. (2) Dar al-Ifta al-Azhariyya Library in Chaliyam established by Ahmad Koya Shaliyathi, who acted as the chief Mufti for the last Nizams in the Princely State of Hyderabad. (3) Jamia Markaz Khutubkhana, Kozhikode, one of the largest Muslim libraries attached to a traditional Islamic seminary in Malabar. All these libraries together have 20 different copies of *Fata al-mu'een*

including three commentaries. Among these 20 different copies, eight copies are in manuscript form, nine copies are lithographed and three copies are typographically printed. While the dates of their publication ranges from a manuscript from 1858 to a lithographic edition of 2002, the places of their publication include Cyprus, Lebanon, Egypt and various places in Malabar.

Among the eight manuscripts, the oldest one is written in 1858. The first typographically printed edition belongs to the year 1894 and the first lithographed version to 1909/10. In between 1858 and 1894 three more manuscript versions were published. The other two manuscripts belong to the period between 1910 and 1927, the year in which the second oldest surviving lithographed edition was published at Mamba'ul Huda litho power Press in Thiroorangadi. The other two manuscripts are undated (due to missing title pages). But experts who are familiar with the Arabic writing style in the region and the details of its evolution opine that the last two were written before the 1920s.⁵³ The other seven lithographed versions were published between 1927 and 2002. They include three editions with extended super commentaries written by two different Malabari scholars namely Karinkappara Usthad and Nannambra Saithali Musaliyar and one Egyptian-Meccan scholar called Sayed Bakri, and hence belongs to the *Hashiya* literature. The two typographically printed editions were published in 2002 and 2004. The most popular version among all these editions in contemporary Malabari religious learning circles is the two *Hashiya* editions written by Karinkappara Usthad and Nannambra Saithali Musaliyar in the year 1964 and 1972 respectively. Almost all the religious education centres and scholars in Malabar now use these two editions published from lithographic presses or its latest technical versions.

The intriguing fact about this data is that the timing of the publications does not match the sequence of the technological advancement where manuscript is first followed by typography and then lithography. If this archive is read in the chronological order, the

⁵³ Personal conversation with Aboobacker Saqafi Agathi on 16 September 2016.

manuscripts are the oldest and then the 1894 typographic print edition. This typographic edition was published from Egypt. Interestingly the text, which was typographically printed in 1894, was again written down in 1910 and 1927 by two different scribes and lithographed. What make these two lithographed editions different from the typographic one, apart from the use of types, are the extensive comments added by the many readers/owners in the lithographed editions. Commentaries/notes by readers are almost absent in the typographic editions. The spatial arrangements of the content in the pages of both editions also differ substantially. While the lithographed editions were first written and then printed leaving significant parts of its pages blank in addition to the empty pages at the end, in typographic editions such spatial ordering for commentaries were not available. The blank space in the Islamic book, usually meant for later comments and additions, was an integral part of Muslim publishing culture which gave birth to a genre in Islamic writing traditions, called, *Tha'leeq*, meaning writing in the margin (See the figure no. III in the Annexure). Thus while lithography opened up scope for further negotiations, corrections and in some instances even made rewriting of a given text possible through the very form it adapted, typography in Islamic writerly cultures closed up such avenues.

Among the 20 different versions of *Fata al-mu'een* available in the archives, all the manuscripts and eight of the lithographed copies were produced in Malabar. The three typographic editions were published from Egypt (1894), Cyprus (2000) and Lebanon (2004). Despite typography being the most popular printing method in the region, the scarcity of typographically produced texts in the Malabar Muslim book collections established in the late 19th and early 20th century clearly shows that there existed a strong Muslim preference for lithography. The abundance of lithographically produced books in the libraries attached to the local mosques in the interiors of Malabar further supports this argument about the popularity of lithography. This is particularly evident in the case of the Dar al-Ifta al-Azhariyya, Chaliyam in Kozhikode, a library established in the course of the so-called print revolution in

the region, where manuscripts and lithographically produced books occupy more than 90 percentage of the total book collection.

Four Malayalam translations of *Fata al-mu'een* published in the last two decades are also found in the Markaz Khutubkhana apart from the 20 mentioned above. Among these four, the last one was published in 2008. Claiming that all the three previous translations could not do justice to *Fata al-mu'een*, this translation was published along with the original Arabic text on each page. The distortions in the previous translations, according to the publisher as well as its translators (as opposed to the three previous translations, the last one is done by a team of six scholars), primarily came from their heavy reliance on Malayalam language (Tharuvana, 2012). The publishers of the last 'translation' did not even claim that it was a translation; rather they use the word *aashaya* (idea) *samgraham* (abridgement), to introduce their 'translation'. This raises concerns as to the difficulties in using translation as a category to understand Muslim textual traditions (Tschacher, 2014); especially in the context of the growing emphasis on literary translations as a means to understand Islamic pluralism, cosmopolitanism and global networking. When one set of scholars use such translation projects as a method to demonstrate the historical interconnectedness between literary translation and religious conversion in South India (Ricci, 2011) others argue that the slow process of translation of religious texts including the Qur'an in the South Indian Muslim societies is an indication of their conservatism and apathy towards the popularization of religious knowledge (Karashery, 2016).

The printing history of *Fata al-mu'een*, one of the first and the most popular book written in Malabar, outlined so far complements the general characteristic/history of Muslim publication that can be drawn from the details provided in the Catalogue of Malayalam Books in the British Museum: Mappila Muslims' preference for lithography. Apparent from the two different ways in which lithographic and typographic texts are written, composed, pages designed, comments included/excluded, and more importantly how the closure/opening of a

given text is embedded, this preference for a particular form of printing, I argue, reflects the constitutive elements of Islamic knowledge traditions.

3.11 Themes and Subjects of Early Muslim Printing

Though this dissertation does not attempt to discuss the content and meaning of the Muslim printed texts, a random look at the contents/themes is revealing. The issues most of the books in the Catalogue of Malayalam Books in the British Museum discuss are “five pillars of Islam” – *shahadatain* [declaration of faith], *salat* [praying five times a day], *fasting*, *zakat* [alms giving] and *hajj* [pilgrimage to Mecca]. The other issues books discuss include *Mahabba* [love towards the Prophet and Sufi saints], Muslim death rites, *Thwibbunnabi* [Prophetic medicine], Muslim behaviour and *Thwahara* [purity]. What bound all these major themes together is the fact that they were all meant to be performed, not just read, comprehended and reflected upon. Even the texts written for ‘reading’, particularly the devotional panegyric poems, which cover a major share of the published works, are actually meant for ritualistic reading.

Another factor that unites these themes together is the language used to write them. Mostly written in Arabic, a language not very familiar to the immediate audience of these publications in the region, these texts were not “comprehensible” to a majority of them.⁵⁴ Though Arabic Malayalam helped to bridge this gap, the tradition of writing and publishing in Arabic continued. How are we to explain this? One explanation given in the existing literature addresses this question from the perspective of religious authority where writing in Arabic prepared Ulema to assert their religious authority and cultural authenticity effectively, apart from demonstrating their mastery over Islam’s sacred language (Zaman, 2007). This line of argument largely follows from another where the Mappila Muslim scholars’ claim regarding

⁵⁴ The question asked to Ibnu Hajar from Malabar, in the 15th century and cited in his collection of fatwas on the legal status of divorce uttered in incorrect Arabic, mentioned in a previous footnote (35), illustrates how Arabic was not comprehensible to the general Muslim public.

their Arab lineage from the time of Prophet Muhammad was contested. It was argued that such claims of lineage from the Prophet were meant to advance their religious authority (Prange, 2008). A different side of this claim is that Arabic texts written and published in Malabar are less authentic sources of Islamic tradition in the region than the Arabic Malayalam texts (Shameer, as cited in Saldanha, 2014). Here both the arguments refute each other by invoking the question of religious authority, but without explaining what/who in Islam constitutes religious authority.

For whom were these texts written and published? Was it for an imagined Muslim community living in some abstract land as some historians claim? The publication and circulation pattern of these texts, for example the multiple editions of *Fata al-mu'een* in the region, show that they were widely circulated among the Mappila Muslims of the region. This question on language cannot be explained if we do not take the performatory aspects of Islamic textuality and the various forms of its manifestations seriously. The argument for retaining the Arabic original of *Fata al-mu'een* while 'translating' it into Malayalam, in order to avoid any distortions, explains this. The very idea of writing Muslim texts from the right to the left using Arabic scripts, whether it is an Arabic or Arabi-Malayalam text itself is a defining factor of the Muslim textual cultures.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly outlined the history of Islamic textuality and textual cultures among Mappila Muslims in the Malabar region of South India. The chapter has also looked at the specific form of techniques and technologies Mappila Muslims used to produce, reproduce and disseminate their texts and traditions. The religious milieu in and through which technologies enters and exits a specific Muslim community has been significant for the analysis in the chapter. Reading the archival materials collected from various sources against

the dominant media history, the chapter attempts to historicize the specificities of Mappila Muslim engagement with printing technologies. As demonstrated by the data provided in the chapter Mappila Muslim preference for lithography over typographic printing shows how printing in its early phase in the region was differentiated along community lines. This is in opposition to the dominant perception of printing as a singular phenomenon with a universal history across communities and regions. The chapter also argues that many of the misconceptions about Muslim-print entanglements, as we have seen in the comment by Kumar cited in the beginning of the chapter, emerge from ignoring the pre-print modalities of Muslim textual production on the one hand and the specificities inherent in the adoption of a technology into a particular religious-regional community on the other.

Chapter- 4

Wa’z and the Making of Media Infrastructures

Journalism during the anti-colonial struggles against the British rule, the various state sponsored nation-building programmes in the early decades of post Independent India, and the development related activities that flourished under non-governmental organizations in the last two decades are said to be the three institutions/events that were responsible for popularizing the different media technologies among various socio-cultural-religious communities in India (Krishnamurthy, 1966; Melkote, 2015; Sreekumar, 2011).¹ But, the Mappila Muslim community of Malabar stood apart from these prevalent trends in many respects. In the previous chapter I had delineated how print technology or the cultures we usually associate with print did not create excitement amongst the Mappila Muslims as it did among many other socio-cultural-religious communities in the region. In the last chapter it was also argued that “Muslim apathy” towards print cannot be fully explained unless we understand what print meant to a Mappila Muslim in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. That being the case how to account for the abundance of information and communication technology among the Mappila Muslims of today? What are the important practices or institutions responsible for introducing and popularizing information and communication technology amongst them?

Scholars who have studied media activities in the Muslim world have proposed that it was the political and neoliberal economic reforms in the last three

¹ As I had shown in the previous chapter, most of the early print initiatives in Malabar/Kerala were religious community initiatives. Print in the initial decades of its introduction was used solely for missionary activities, particularly by the various Christian communities. It was only in the early years of the 20th century that print had begun to be widely used for other purposes. The anti-colonial/independent struggles gave a new impetus to print with a wider reach among the population than before. For more details see Krishnamurthy (1966).

decades and the subsequent creation of a pluralized media landscape that helped Muslims to develop the discursive competences, skills, institutions and other infrastructures essential to articulate their religion in public, intervene in public debates and to restructure the public sphere (Schulz, 2011; Meyer & Moors, 2005). It is true that the new media landscape has intensified the Muslim ways of going public. But what such studies systematically ignore from their analytical gaze is the historical evolution of Muslim media engagements in the pre-economic reforms period. Apart from such a causal approach towards Muslim media vis-à-vis economic liberalism, these studies also conceal the multifaceted characteristics of Muslim media engagements in the post economic reform period in the Arab/Muslim world, particularly in West Africa and South/South-East Asia. For example, how can such an approach account for the commonly held belief – and the practices it gives birth to – among Muslim communities that it is these new media institutions and infrastructures in the neoliberal world order that pose a severe moral predicament to their community or what Pandian and Ali (2010) calls in the South Asian context, the ‘moral difficulties of our time’.²

While on the one hand the liberal economic policies and the new developments in technological realms accelerate Muslim media engagements, Muslims believe that their current engagements with technologies are part of a

² In her study on the moral and spiritual striving in the everyday Muslim life in the same volume Pandian and Ali edited, Veena Das (2010) while proposing moral perfectionism as an important dimension of Muslim everyday life, delineates these moral difficulties of a Muslim in contemporary India as follows: how do (Muslims) relate, in this time and in this place, to those who are in their vicinity and with regard to whom they might never be in some kind of “ideal” position of having clear-cut guidelines in terms of rules and regulations from their own religious tradition? Or, even worse, how do they cultivate morality as a dimension of everyday life, when certain forms of knowing somehow contradict their feelings that there are forms of being together that they can come to experience as part of their ordinary mode of life, that they wish to acknowledge but for which they should not be required to give justifications (p. 233).

response to the moral challenges that the post liberal media economy has set in place.³ This double strand in Muslim media engagement is evident from the very fact that the sheer volume of media content produced and circulated by Muslim scholars and their institutions in various forms and formats in the last three decades have mostly revolved around questions such as the one Pandian and Ali (2010) had asked: “how do we conceive the moral crisis of the contemporaneity, what does it mean to live as a Muslim today, will the neglected moral insights and potentials of the past shed light on the trials of the present”, etc. Thus the argument that Muslim engagement with media technology flourished in the time of economic and political liberalism is not only incomplete but also misleading in several senses.

One major institution or practice that will help us to understand this double strand in Muslim media landscape is mediated pious exhortations. While they demonstrate the manifold ways in which religion and media are connected in the new media landscape by providing religious communities with the essential institutions and infrastructure for mediation, they also shed light onto the moral crisis of the contemporaneity that provide the discursive conditions for the mediated pious exhortations to take place. Thus this chapter proposes *wa’z* (*pl. mawa’iz*), as pious exhortations are commonly known among Mappila Muslims, as the most significant platform for introducing and popularizing information and communication technology among Mappila Muslims. *Mawa’iz* have been considered by Muslim religious

3 Liberal economic policies here refer to the wide range of economic policies various government agencies in India and abroad implemented in the 1980s and '90s in order to usher in a business atmosphere conducive to the free movement of goods and services by expanding the role of private and foreign investments. The specific policies under this initiative include reduction in import tariffs, deregulation of markets, reduction of taxes, and greater foreign investment etc. These policies have drastically changed the nature and functioning of existing media landscapes. For a detailed discussion of these policies and its impact on media in the Indian context, see Singhal & Rogers (2000) and Mathew (1998).

scholars as the medium most responsible for the Islamization in the region.⁴ But this is a least studied one. The relevance of *mawa'iz* in Mappila Muslim contexts has been reiterated by many of the traditional Ulema I had interviewed from the region. When I asked Hamza Musaliyar Kunnappalli, a prominent *wa'iz* [pl. *wu'az*, the one who performs *wa'z*] and a popular religious scholar during the early 1960s, what *mwa'iz* contributed to the Mappila Muslim community, he replied:

Good that you asked this question. Whatever little Islamiyath [Islamness] we see among our brothers and sisters here today completely owes to mawa'iz. At a time when there were no madrasas, Arabic or Dawa colleges, wa'z was the only option available to people to study their religion. There were deeni madaris [religious schools], but only a few people could attend these as it required staying for a long period with a religious scholar. But those who attended daras [traditional Islamic centres of higher learning] used to teach about Islam to other people through Othupallis.⁵ However for the general Muslim public, wa'z was like daras. It was from these wa'z majlises that our forefathers acquired their Islamiyath. People learned the basics of Islam such as how to perform an ablution, and offer the five-time prayer in keeping with the higher lessons in thasawuf [the Islamic science of spirituality] from these mawa'iz. It will not be an exaggeration if I say that wa'z conferred Islam to Kerala and Islam was also sustained through it. Although we have more facilities for religious learning today, a large number of Muslims still rely on

⁴ Sheikh Aboobacker Ahmed, also known as Kanthapuram A. P. Aboobacker Musaliyar, reiterated this point during our conversations in order to convince me of the importance of *mwa'iz* in Mappila Muslims' religious life. I use the term Islamization here to denote the various forms of *da'wa* activities, which includes but is not limited to the propagation of Islam and provides religious education and training to Muslims.

⁵ *Othupalli* is a Malabari term used to refer to a single-teacher school established adjacent to mosques in earlier times to provide elementary Islamic religious education.

mawa'iz for acquiring religious knowledge and wa'z makes them Muthaqqi [god-fearing Muslims].

4.1 Sermon in Islam

Hamza Musaliyar's answer to my question not only reflects on the centrality of *wa'z* in the Mappila Muslim life world, but also sheds light on the development of *wa'z* as an institutional structure for presenting Islam to a wider Muslim public in the region. This is not a character particular to Malabari Islam. Historically, different forms of *mawa'iz* have played seminal roles in cultivating the pious Muslim self throughout the Islamic world. In all the three Abrahamic religions, eloquent public-speaking skill was considered as one of the great attributes of the Prophets. So in Qur'an one can see Prophet Mosa, who is an important historical figure for all the three Abrahamic religions, seeking help from God when asked to go and meet the Pharaoh, the Egyptian emperor, and to call him to Islam as follows: "Lord, lift up my heart and ease my task for me. Untie my tongue, so that they may understand my words" (20: 25-28). We see this transformative power of eloquent public-speaking skill playing a significant role in Prophet Muhammad's prophetic missions as well. Most of his messages for his companions and later generations of Muslims were delivered in the form of both small and large scale sermons held in the holy premises of Mecca and Medina. Of them the farewell sermon the Prophet delivered in the valley of Mount Arafat in Mecca on 6 March, A.D. 632 deserve special attention.

The last sermon by Prophet Muhammad at Mount Arafat is considered as the culminating point of his prophetic career. But the role of sermons in Islam does not end there. Rather it marks the starting point for sermons to take on new roles in Muslim societies. The Prophet asked those who had gathered there to convey his

message to those who were absent.⁶ Since then Muslim scholars, preachers, rulers and leaders alike have started employing the skills and infrastructure required for eloquent speech in their Islamic missions creatively, and sermons have played an important role in Islamic missionary activities across the world (Arnold, 1913). The development of *Ilmul Balagha* [the science of eloquence in the Arabic language], which deals with how to convey proper meanings of Arabic words in an effective manner according to various situation, as a sub-field within the discipline of Arabic linguistics is an indication of the centrality of *wa'z* in the Arab-speaking societies. *Ilmul Balagha* has produced extensive literature including training manuals, handbooks and biographies of successful preachers, which are widely used by Muslim institutions to train Muslim scholars and preachers. To understand the popularity of such literature in the Islamic world, one needs only to look at the annual catalogues of leading Muslim publishing houses in Cairo and Beirut, two major publishing centres in the Arab Islamic world that carries long list of books on *Ilmul Balagha*.

The primary objective of *mawa'iz* has always been the transmission of religious knowledge. But various aspects of this symbolically rich religious practice have been widely appropriated by several socio-cultural-political players for different purposes throughout Islamic history. The recent example of this is the sermon delivered by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on 4 July 2014 in the militant-held northern Iraqi city of Mosul. It was in his Friday sermon that Baghdadi declared the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate (IS) and himself as the Caliph of Muslims all around the world.⁷ His use of the liturgical space (inside a mosque premise), time (on a Friday sermon

⁶ Al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 1623, 1626, 6361.

⁷ Al Arabiya, a Saudi based Arabic channel provides the full version of al Baghdadi's sermon here, retrieved from <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/webtv/reports/2014/07/07/ISIS-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdidi-first-Friday-sermon-as-so-called-Caliph-.html> on 26 February 2017.

during Ramadan) and infrastructure available to a Muslim to declare in public his hitherto elusive project of Islamic State itself shows how *mawa'iz* and its associated worlds are deeply intertwined with the question of religious authority, whose origin can ultimately be traced back to God and his Prophets according to Muslim belief. Thus, pious and persuasive exhortation in Islam is considered as an event, where revelation of Qur'an by God to the Prophet through Gabriel in the 7th century Mecca and Medina, is renewed, affirmed and extended to contemporary Muslim societies.

Since this is not a historical study of Sermon practices, this chapter will not deliberate on the historical development of Sermon either as a genre or as an institution. As indicated above, *Ilmul Balagha* as a major sub-division in Arabic linguistic studies has a long tradition of engaging with Sermons, mostly analysing the rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions of oratory (Scholz, 2008). The focus of historical studies on Sermons has been either to chronicle and analyse important preachers and sermons, or to read them in tandem with the political changes in the Arab-Islamic world (Jones, 2012). An interesting turn in Sermon Studies in the recent past is marked by the prominence it garnered as an emerging area of academic inquiry in the disciplines of Islamic Studies and Political Science. These recent studies approach Sermons from a security perspective, owing to the security concerns that some of the sermons by radical Muslim organizations and leaders have generated (Ranstorp, 2010). Islamic Studies as a modern discipline in Western academia has a much longer history of engaging with Muslim sermons but is mostly limited to studying its content and role in interpreting Islam (Pederson, 1948, 1953). However it was the arrival of Anthropology and its focus on sensorial attunement that have brought sermons into the centre of contemporary academic debates on Muslim life worlds as these studies have started unpacking the multifaceted ways in which Sermon practices and the

shaping of Muslim community are connected (Antoun, 1989; Gaffney, 1994; Hirschkind, 2006).

Nevertheless Sounaye (2013) points out two major shortcomings of the existing literature on Sermon: disciplinary bias and geographical bias. As I have already mentioned, most of the existing literature on Sermon comes from three disciplines: Islamic Studies, History and Anthropology. Geographically the existing studies cover mostly Arab-speaking regions, and among them a majority of the studies are based on fieldwork conducted in Egypt or Jordan. These biases and the subsequent generalizations they drew up in understanding sermon practices have been the foremost challenge new scholars have to tackle in Sermon Studies. For example South and South-East Asia where 45% of the Muslim population live today are hardly mentioned in the existing literature on Sermon.⁸ So there definitely exists a bias against non-Arabic sermon practices. The reasons for this avoidance are many. But even when they are studied in the Arab Muslim contexts, they are mostly studied either for their content or for their linguistic dimension. They are hardly studied for their infrastructural organization.

Though there are disputes among historians and Ulema alike over the period of Islam's arrival in the Malabar Coast, there are strong evidences to suggest that by late 11th century Islam as a religion had been a major presence in the region with a substantial number of mosques and well networked scholarly communities. Since the mosques and Ulema are integral parts of Muslim community's religious life, their numbers and the nature of their geographical distribution across the region in the early 12th century as recorded in Ibn Battutah's travel accounts is a clear indication of the

⁸ The only exception in this regard is the recent studies emerging from fieldwork done in South Asia. See, Stille (2014), Sunarwoto (2012) and Haqqani, (2011).

strong presence of a Muslim community in Malabar. Ibn Battutah also notes that religious educational activities in Malabari Mosque premises in the 11th and 12th centuries were attended by a large number of students and scholars. The very existence of a large number of mosques in the 11th and 12th centuries itself is evidence that there existed substantial numbers of Muslims in the region performing the mandatory communal rituals in Islam which include the obligatory Friday sermon (*khutuba*).

Makhdoom Ahmad Ibnu Zainudheen (as cited in Elad, 2015) observes that from the early 14th century onwards Muslim scholars had made systematic attempts to organize religious education in Malabar such as *daras* and *wa'z*. The descriptions of religious rituals and services obligatory for both Muslim individuals and the community provided in the two earliest jurisprudential texts written in Malabar (*Qurrat al-'ayn* (AD 1567) and its later *hashiya* titled *Fathu l-mu'een* (1574)) also introduce various forms of sermons as part of *da'wa* practices or everyday ritual observances. Thus the prevalence of *mawa'iz* among Muslim communities and its strong impact on community formation delineates this practice as a rich source for writing the social history of any Muslim community. Though the attempt of the present chapter is to study the use of media infrastructure in Muslim sermon practices – how technologies are introduced, circulated and popularized during sermon practices – it also aims to introduce and explore the possibilities of using sermon practices and infrastructures as a source for writing the Social history of Mappila Muslims of Malabar.

4.2 Types of Sermons

Sermons have been widely considered and used by Muslim scholars and rulers as a significant domain for disseminating Islamic knowledge. It has also been an important avenue for them to interact and mediate with the wider Muslim public. As a result sermons became a vibrant phenomenon and took on different styles and forms keeping in tune with the changes in the socio-cultural, regional and religious spheres. The dynamic character of this theologically rich genre has made pious exhortations a historically grounded institution. A cursory look at the development of this genre, its expansion and diversification in the Muslim world along the lines of Islam's travel from Mecca and Medina, to West Africa or South-East Asia, as provided in various literature on Sermon practices will explain this (Jones, 2012; Larkin, 2008; Sunarwoto, 2015; Abdulkader, 1999).

Different scholars have also used different analytical frameworks to identify and categorize sermons. Depending upon the needs, historical and religious contexts, discursive strategies and occasions in which they are practiced, a variety of terms are used to label them. For example, Gaffney (1994) identifies two types of sermons in Egypt: moderate and radical. While the moderate sermons, according to Gaffney, supports the modernization projects of the government and creates an atmosphere conducive for the state-sponsored developmental activities to take place by interpreting Islamic texts and traditions according to the demands of the situation, the radical sermons argues that such context-based interpretations are not possible. Taking into account the way in which preachers and scholars employ language in these sermons Gaffney also calls them metaphoric and metonymic sermons respectively. These categorizations by Gaffney were largely based on the Weberian

understandings of religious authority, specifically Muslim religious authority. This categorization by Gaffney parallels the other binaries he brings into his analysis on Egyptian Muslim community such as *minbar* and *mihrab*, official and private mosques and preacher and imam.⁹

Invoking the spatial and temporal dimension of Islamic sermon practices, Jones (2012) in her studies categorizes sermons both horizontally and vertically based on the time and space in which sermons are delivered. So she uses categories such as pre-modern or medieval sermons to designate and differentiate between sermons belonging to different times. Andalusian and non-Andalusian are the other two categories she brings into her analysis in order to categorize sermons based on their geographical origin.

4.3 The Sermon in Malabar

To study Sermons in the Malabari Muslim context, I will not invoke any of the above-discussed models, but will look at how such historical and universal typologies have been appropriated by Mappila Muslims in Malabar. To do that, the chapter looks at various linguistic expressions used by Mappila Muslims to designate sermon practices in different languages close to Malabari Muslim history and the present. The languages considered here are Malayalam, Arabic, Tamil and Arabi-Malayalam.¹⁰ By looking at these expressions/words/usages, the attempt is also to identify and reflect

⁹ *Mihrab* is the place in a mosque where a religious scholar/imam leads the prayer with the congregation facing the *ka'ba*, believed to be the first mosque on earth; whereas *minbar* is a kind of pulpit facing the public where a religious scholar/preacher/imam addresses the community. While in the former case the conversation is supposed to be between God and the community, in the latter the conversation is among the community. Gaffney takes these two ceremonial places as metaphors to talk about the normative religious authority and its actualization in everyday Muslim life.

¹⁰ Whether Arabi-Malayalam can be considered as a different language or not is a longstanding debate; however for the purposes of this thesis I will be taking it as a separate category.

upon how the question of language and these nomenclatures are intertwined with larger theological debates within Islam in general and that of Malabar in particular.

Khutuba is a term frequently used for sermons in the Arab-Muslim world. Literally meaning public speech in Arabic and widely used to designate varieties of speeches, this term has been used in particular to designate three types of public speeches in the Malabar context. They are *Jumua' Khutuba* [Friday sermons], *Khutubat-al-Eid* [sermon on the day of Eid], and *Khutubat-al-nikah* [wedding sermon], the sermon given before actualizing the marriage contract between the bridegroom and the bride's guardian. Though the names are different, there are many elements that bind all these three *khutubas* together. Usually these *khutubas* are performed within a liturgical space and are required to meet certain conditions i.e. *khutubas* must be performed in Arabic language, heard by a minimum number of people and should be delivered at specific times and occasions. At the level of content and format, *khutubas* should follow particular patterns and incorporate specific contents in the nature of advice to the audience. Another element that connects them together is the space in which they are usually performed: inside mosque premises. But wedding sermons are occasionally performed outside the mosque premise though it is not encouraged.

Whether these *khutubas* are public speeches (or not) like others has been a long-term debate among Malabari Muslims. Evident from the many books published, cassettes produced, debates organized and legal battles fought between Sunnis and Salafis in various courts, this has also acted as a defining factor that decided one's

theological position among the varieties of Schools of thought within Islam.¹¹ Whether one is a traditional Sunni or Salafi is often decided and publicly performed on the basis of the position one takes on this debate. The traditional Sunnis argue that the above three sermons are not like other public speeches, but are forms of rituals in Islam. Being rituals, they do not emphasise on the need to understand the meaning of a *khutuba*. So for Sunnis, these *khutubas* cannot be performed in any regional language but only in Arabic. As a result, Sunnis generally read out the Friday *khutuba* from various written documents such as *Nabathi Khutuba*, a collection of sermons compiled by Abduraheem bin Muhammad bin Nubatha Ibnu Nabathi, a 10th century scholar from Aleppo, Syria. But for non-Sunnis these *khutubas* must be performed in a familiar language and its content should be of contemporary relevance. So mosques in Malabar are divided based on the language in which these *khutubas* are performed. That is to say that while Sunnis consider *khutuba* as a ritual and invest in its significance by elaborately decorating the *minbar* from where *khutubas* are performed, Salafis invest in its content and meaning in order to make it both contemporary and comprehensive to their audience. Salafis also argue that one of their major contributions to Islamic reformism in the region was to change the language of *khutuba* from Arabic to local Malayalam.

Another commonly used term for sermon in Malabar is *wa'z*. According to Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*, the word *wa'z* in Arabic means preaching, counselling, warning, commanding or instilling fear about God. The Qur'an also uses this word to refer to the above meanings in different contexts (5: 57, 10: 58, 11: 121). The Muslim holy text additionally attributes *wa'z* as one of the important prophetic

¹¹ To know how central this debate on *khutuba* is for Muslims in the region, see Hassan Musaliyar (2015),

missions and refers to itself and the other religious texts of Abrahamic traditions as *wa'z*. But *wa'z* in Malabar is performed in Malayalam. Though the *wa'iz* will quote from the Qur'an, Hadith or other religious texts extensively, they will be supplemented with Malayalam explanations and commentaries. Yet this term is not used to designate other sermons in Malabar except those organized by Sunni Muslim organizations and institutions. Non-Sunni Muslims distance themselves from *wa'z* and other practices associated with it by stigmatizing it as backward or as a primitive ritual. What such criticism really means in the Malabari Muslim context will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Wa'z by Sunni Muslims is usually organized at night. Beeran M., an 83 year old Muslim from Koolivayal, Wayanad, told me that in his younger days *wa'z* used to start after *Isha* [the night prayer] and would continue until the early morning, before the call for *Subhi* [the morning prayer]. This had been the practice till the state government introduced the new Provisions of the Environment (protection) Act (1986) which included provisions to control noise pollution aimed at regulating the use of loudspeakers in public places after 11 pm. After the strict enforcement of the new law the timing of *wa'z* was shifted to 7 pm -11 pm. Interestingly, the introduction of this law has also opened up new battle grounds for religious organizations belonging to Sunni-Salafi traditions since these organizations have started lodging complaints against the opposing group for mis/using loudspeakers beyond the legally allowed time limit.¹²

Vailathara Kunhumammad Musaliyar, a prominent *wa'iz*, proffers certain theological justification for this late night organization of *wa'z*. "Several verses in the

¹² The fourth chapter will discuss how this battle for and against loudspeakers is constitutive of the theological differences between Malabari Muslims in detail.

Qur'an and Hadith talk about the excellence of performing *ibada* [worshipping Allah] in the night time. Actually the aim of *wa'z* is to make the believers better worshippers. *Wa'z* in itself is an *ibadath* that prepares believers to do better *ibadath* and *ibadath* in better ways. In the Qur'an, Allah says that the hours of the night are more effective for harmony of heart and tongue and more suitable for words," he explains. But Muhsin Elad, a graduate from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, and an ardent follower of *wa'z majlises* in Malabar adds another practical layer to it. According to him in the old days, *mawa'iz* were delivered without the support of any sound amplifying equipment and it was very difficult for the *wa'iz*'s voice to reach out to the audience who were in the hundreds. One possible solution for this was to organize it at late nights when there was not much noise.

Another popular term used to designate Islamic sermon in Malabar is *uruthi*. Though *uruthi* is considered as the most indigenized term for pious exhortation among Malabari Muslims, this word is not derived from Malayalam, Arabic Malayalam or Arabic. The word closest to *uruthi* in Arabic according to Lane's *Arabic English Lexicon* is *ureethu* which means 'I intend to.' A closer term is Urdu which is the name of a language, a language that is intimately associated with Muslim life and politics in India, except in Malabar. Then from where did the word *uruthi* enter Malabar Muslim lexicon? I assume that it came from the neighbouring Tamil language.¹³ The word *uruthi* in Tamil according to the *Tamil Lexicon of Madras*

¹³ Belonging to the same Dravidian language family both Malayalam and Tamil not only shares many similarities but it is believed that Malayalam derived from Tamil, one of the oldest surviving classical languages in the world. So it is not surprising that Tamil words are extensively used in the longest surviving Arabic Malayalam texts. In a manuscript I found in the possession of one of the oldest Muslim families in Wayanad, during my fieldwork, believed to be a dictionary prepared to understand Moinkutty Vaidyar's (d.1892) *Mappillapattu*, (he is one of the most renowned *Mappilapattu* poet), one can see the rich use of Tamil words. Since then there have been systematic attempts by Malayali Muslim historians to ignore this Tamil connection. For example, in their introduction to *Mahathaya Mappila Sahithya Paramparyam* [The Great Mappila Literature Tradition], considered by many as a foundational text on Arabic Malayalam, Ahmad & Abdulkareem (1978) contest the argument that Arabic Malayalam is derived from Arabic Tamil or what is called Arwi arguing that Islam came to

University also means moral or religious advice. In Winslow's *Tamil-English Dictionary* of 1862, 'moral instruction, good advice tending to salvation' is given as its fourth meaning. But it is not really clear where this meaning comes from, given the fact that the basic meaning of *uruthi* in Tamil is 'strength'.

The popularity of the word *uruthi* for sermon among Mappila Muslims, gives us a substantial clue/glimpse to an interesting side of Malabari Islamic history; Mappila Muslims' connection with the neighbouring state of Tamilnadu. Malabari Muslim history has been written largely proposing that Islamization in the region owes much to the Indian Ocean regions; that Islam came directly from the Persian Gulf without any mediators in between (Ahmad & Abdulkareem, 1978). By establishing such a close connection between Malabar and the Arabian Peninsula, these prescriptive writings aim to privilege Mappila Islam as more authentic and as a closer version to the Islam of the Prophet in 7th century Mecca and Medina than their neighbouring counterparts in the subcontinent. But the fact remains that Malabari Islam owes much to Tamil Muslim traditions as much as to the Arabian Peninsula. This is exemplified in various styles of prose-poetry writings popular in the region and the extensive use of Tamil words in it such as *Mappilappattu* and *Malappattu*. The Makhdoomi scholars of Ponnani, whom Mappila Muslims consider as the scholars responsible for the specific characteristics of Islam in Malabar today, actually came from Ma'bar of the Coromandel Coast. This is apparent from the names they had chosen while writing scholarly religious texts in the 15th and 16th centuries, where they had retained their Ma'bar connection.

Malabar first and it was the Malayali Muslims who paid serious attention to language and literature. It might also be interesting to read the cover page of their book on Mappila literature in the context of this claim; Mappila Muslims standing in the Malabar Coast expecting the arrival of a ship through the Arabian Sea.

But *uruthi* is not just another name for sermon in Malabar. Rather it is considered as a particular form of *wa'z* developed from the peculiar socio-cultural-linguistic context of Malabar with specific aesthetic characteristics. *Uruthi* evokes a particular mental state among the audience by skilfully employing sound cadences during its deliverance. One of the major allegations of Salafis against *uruthi* is that it is just a play with sound without any substantial content. Some of their criticism alleges that *uruthi* contributes majorly to the sound pollution in the region. Though people use *wa'z* and *uruthi* interchangeably to designate Islamic sermons there exist a clear distinction between the two. While *uruthi* by default contains all the general characteristics of a typical *wa'z*, the latter can be performed without the aesthetic qualities attributed to the former. Similar to *wa'z*, *uruthi* is also particular to Sunni Muslim tradition. Though *qissa* [storytelling], a very popular genre of Islamic sermon in the Arab world, is not found in Malabar its elements are creatively incorporated in *uruthi* and *kadhprasangam*, a kind of performance combining speaking and singing to present a historical story.¹⁴

Salafis also organize sermons but using different names. The most commonly used terms for the sermons they organize include *Islahi Prabhaashanam* [reform/revival lecture] and *Adarsha Prabhaashanam* [ideological lecture]. While these sermons imitate the lectures organized by non-religious, cultural, literary or social institutions in their styles, formats, language, time and place, Sunni sermons completely differ from them in all possible ways. This has started to change slowly and both Salafi and Sunni organizations now borrow styles from each other owing to

¹⁴ Though *Kadhprasangam* is widely considered as a performing art that originated from Kerala and is often associated with temple festivals, devotional performance genres among Mappila Muslims had adopted this style to present historical stories very early. For example see, *Manqoos Mawlud* written by Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom Kabir (d. 1619).

the changes in the activities/vision of their organizations and the new priorities these have set in place. But the tendency to call Sunni sermons as *wa'z* or *uruthi* and that of Salafis as *prabhaashanam* has not changed much. Thus the *ramadan prabhaashanam*, *Qur'an prabhaashanam*, or *nabidina* [birth of the Prophet] *prabhaashanam* organized by Sunnis will still be called as *wa'z* while the *matha prabhaashana parambara* (religious lecture series) organized in the form of a traditional *wa'z* by Jamat-e-Islami will never be introduced as *wa'z*.

The tendency to categorize sermons based on their form and liturgical condition had changed since 1922, with the formation of the first Muslim organization called *Muslim Aikya Samgham*. Subsequently it is done on the basis of who organizes and performs *wa'z*, irrespective of the styles.¹⁵ Other new forms/versions of sermons include *mukhaamukham* [face-to-face], *aashaya samvaadam* [ideological debate] and *sneha samvaadam* [heart-to-heart discussion, table talk] etc. These new genres mostly developed and were popularized in the wake of growing intra-community theological debates or inter-community faith debates for strengthening communal harmony between religious communities. The trend to organize religious sermons in the format of a typical academic seminar in academic spaces is also very common now. One such sermon recently organized by the Majma' Da'wa College at Calicut University titled their program as "Intellectual debate."

¹⁵ Haithami (2015) highlights another classification (among the Sunnis) where posters prepared for publicity of sermons by traditionally-trained Sunni scholars or Musaliyars are often referred to as *wa'z*, while the same by scholars who graduated from the new Islamic/Arabic/Shariat colleges are referred to as *prabhaashanam*.

But this categorization is not a clearly demarcated one as genres borrow from each other and the liturgical conditions¹⁶ in which they are performed bind them together in multiple ways. As Jones (2012) has noted sermons are rarely performed as an isolated event (p. 12). They are organized as part and parcel of many other religious rituals such as fasting, the Prophet's birthday celebration, veneration of a local Sufi saint or other sacralising events such as *dhikr-dua-swalath majlises* where believers gather together to chant certain prescribed prayers followed by mass supplications. In such contexts, the overall emotional mood of the sermon is set and governed by the religious ritual of which the sermon is a part of. But such indispensable association between sermon and other religious rituals exist only among traditional Sunni Muslims. When a *wa'z* is performed as part of a larger religious ritual/festival in Sunni Muslim settings, sometimes it is even impossible to differentiate between sermon, supplication, chanting and a particular ritual or the move one makes between them.

Since sermons are performed and listened to as any other religious rituals, such as the namaz, fasting or Hajj, it enable *wa'z* to transcend many of the demarcations laid out so far. But the overemphasis on the content of the sermon in many of the existing studies on sermons ignores its ritualistic aspects. It is such an emphasis on the meaning of sermons that enables Hirschkind (2006) to argue that *da'wa*, of which sermon is a central part of, had not undergone any serious development/change in form from the late medieval period until the Islamic opposition movements in Cairo rediscovered it in the 1920s (p. 31). But the aforementioned time period actually witnessed a huge expansion of *da'wa* related

¹⁶ Following Jones (2012), I also use this term in the way Bourdieu had defined it as the set of prescriptions that govern a ritual's form and is indispensable for it to be considered valid, effective and authoritative.

activities, both at the conceptual and practical levels, in the form of writing books, performing sermons, organizing debates and issuing fatwas.¹⁷ This avoidance appears to be methodical in Hirschkind's studies on Sermon practices in Cairo since he persistently avoids sermons outside his 'revivalist' framework.¹⁸ As a result, when he posits 'revivalist' sermons in Cairo as a critical response to the marginalization of Islamic doctrines, and practices within the projects of social and political reform being promoted by the Egyptian nationalist thinkers, the positioning becomes possible for him at the expense of marginalizing the extremely rich and thriving sermon practices among 'non-revivalist' Muslim communities in Cairo and other parts of Egypt. More importantly such analysis stems from a particular understanding of what revival means in Islam and does not take into consideration the vast Islamic scholarship produced on this question including those by scholars from Hirschkind's own ethnographic field, the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. It is my contention that bringing such 'non-revivalist' sermon practices and the scholarship on *da'wa* that provide theological justifications for 'non-revivalist' sermon practices to flourish will question many of Hirschkind's assumptions with regard to Islam and its knowledge practices.

Hirschkind's scepticism of popular, non-revivalist sermon practices also stem from the larger theoretical positions he takes vis-à-vis Islamic traditions. Islam as a

¹⁷ Jones's work (2012) on sermon practices documents Muslim scholars' attempt to elaborate the meaning and significance of *da'wa* with respect to sermon practices in the Islamic world in the late medieval period.

¹⁸ Hirschkind (2006: p. 2) considers cassette sermons in Egypt as a key element in the technological scaffolding of what is called the Islamic revival (*Al Sahwa al Islamiyya*) (p. 55). This Islamic revival, according to him, is a centrifugal counter movement to the centripetal consolidation of religious authority and knowledge by the Egyptian state from the 1950s onward. But Agrama (2010) presents an entirely different ethnographic description on how religious authority works in Cairo in his seminal work on fatwa. The following essays also deal with the issue of such avoidance and its implications for studying Muslim societies: Fadil & Fernando (2015), Deeb (2015), and Schielke (2010).

discursive tradition originally proposed by Asad (1986) is one among them. Asad (1986, 1993) claims that the discursive tradition is ‘not about the programmatic discourses of ‘modernist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ Muslim movements,’ but is about the ‘established practices of unlettered Muslims’ which ‘instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history’ (1986: p. 14). But what constitutes these established practices or how are we to arrive at the correct form and purpose of a given practice is unclear from his description of Islamic discursive tradition. The challenge Muslims face in their day-to-day Islamic social life is not that they do not have a discursive tradition. But what is the correct form and practice of the discursive tradition is the question that they raise. Answering this question would demand taking certain theological positions with regard to Islamic traditions and its knowledge practices. When Hirschkind takes such a theological position vis-à-vis sermon practices in Cairo by privileging the revivalist sermon practices over others, he seems to privilege programmatic discourses of ‘modernist’ over the ‘established practices of unlettered Muslims.’ One can see this ambiguity throughout Hirschkind’s analyses.

The sermons I consider for analysis in this chapter are part of the ‘non-revivalist’ trends in Islam. Both ‘revivalists’ and their scholars in Malabar alike not only try to keep themselves away from it, but also warn their fellow Muslims about the dangers of being part of it; because they believe that such sermons are not capable of addressing contemporary issues, hence do not belong to “our time”. Going one step further, Muhammad Labnash, one of my ‘reformist’ leaning interlocutors from Kozhikode told me that these Sunni sermons were actually part of a conspiracy to

weaken one's firm belief in Islam and hence a threat to Islam.¹⁹ Still they are organized frequently in Malabar and are attended by thousands of Muslims. The popularity of such sermon practices cannot be compared with any other religious rituals in the region both in terms of the number of events organized every day and the number of people who turn up to listen to them.

4.4 The *wa'z*

Malabar hosts countless sermons. Some of them are annual events organized in connection with the *Maulid* celebrations of the Prophet and other Sufi saints, and are organized according to the lunar calendar. Others are organized occasionally by *mahallu* [parish] communities or Muslim organizations. Though these sermons are organized randomly, Ramadan [the month of fasting], and *Rabiul Awwal* [the month the Prophet was born] are the two most popular seasons for organizing them. Sometimes series of sermons are also organized at *Mahallu* levels when the foundation stone is laid for a new masjid/madrassa or when a new one is opened. Most of them are small and local events, but attract audiences from neighbouring places. The large sermon sessions are also frequent and attract believers from all over the region.

The sermon I have chosen for this study is an annual ten-day long Sermon series held in Cheruvadi, a small town in the eastern part of Kozhikode district. The term I prefer to use to designate this sermon is *wa'z* (henceforth Cheruvadi *wa'z*) for several reasons.²⁰ Though it is described as *Varshika Qur'an prabhaashana parambhara* [Annual lecture series based on Qur'an] in formal posters, flyers and

¹⁹ I will elaborate on what this criticism against *wa'z* means in the Malabari Muslim context in the next chapter.

²⁰ Usually attendees of *wa'z* refer to and identify with a *wa'z* by the name of the place where it is held, if not by the name of the *wa'iz*.

billboards prepared to publicize the event, both the organizers and the participants refer to it as *wa'z*. The *wa'iz* himself, constantly and consistently refer to it as *wa'z*. Among the typologies we have already outlined to describe sermons in Malabar, *wa'z* is the closest term that captures the various characteristics of the Cheruvadi *wa'z*. Above all, a traditional Sunni Muslim sect organizes this particular event and the *wa'iz* is a traditionally trained Ulema. Usually such features belong solely to a *wa'z* and henceforth the term *wa'z* will be used throughout the discussion. “Why don’t you publicize it as a *wa'z*?” I asked K. P. Abdul Rahiman, the programme convener of the event. “Everyone who attends our programme knows that it is a *wa'z*. Posters are prepared for those who generally don’t attend them. In order to attract them, we thought *prabhaashanam* would be the better word. That’s all”. He explained.

Cheruvadi *wa'z* is one among the countless *wa'z* organized in Malabar. But what makes it an illustrative case for hundreds of sermons organized every week? One major reason is the size of the event. Begun in 2007 and strategically located in Cheruvadi, primarily targeting Sunni Muslims from Kozhikode, Malappuram and Wayanad districts of Kerala, this event is said to draw ten to fifteen thousand believers each session. During those ten days, the event is attended by one lakh people and is heard/watched online by another fifty thousand people. The publicity materials of the *wa'z* project it as the largest of its kind in Malabar region both in terms of the length of the event and the size of the crowd that turns up to participate in it. Since this is an annual event conducted by the same person on a particular topic, it allowed the researcher to visit the field during three consecutive years and to follow the *wa'z* and the *wa'iz* closely and in depth. Each year the *wa'iz* selects one *sura* [a chapter from the Qur’an] and delivers his *wa'z* for ten days based on the topics that particular chapter in the Qur’an discusses. So he organizes each day into thematic

sessions which lasts for two to three hours. Though the Cheruvadi *wa'z* is modelled on the old style *wa'z majlises*, it also makes use of all the available modern techniques and technologies from the very conceptualization of the event to its organization and dissemination. Apart from that, this event serves as a catalyst in the region for organizing other *wa'z majlises*. As a result many recent *wa'z majlises* in the region follow the model that the Cheruvadi *wa'z* has set in place. In Cheruvadi itself, two different religious institutions have started organizing similar kinds of *wa'z majlises* after the Cheruvadi *wa'z*'s popularity. Thus it marks on the one hand the continuing characteristic of Malabari *wa'z majlises* and on the other hand the changing nature of its organization that allows one to understand the different layers of complexities involved in a *wa'z* practice as it is performed today. The Cheruvadi *wa'z* is organized as part of a longstanding Sunni tradition. The pamphlets prepared for the *wa'z* place it as part of an existing Sunni Muslim tradition in Cheruvadi and claims that their *wa'z* aims at reinforcing those traditions. Nevertheless, one should not mistake it to be representative of all kinds of sermons performed in the region. Each sermon session organized by different organizations or parish communities will have their own specific aims. But I take the Cheruvadi *wa'z* as an illustrative/reference point to understand how a *wa'z* is organized, performed and mediated and to get a sense of how *wa'z majlises* were performed/organized in the past. Thus the Cheruvadi *wa'z* will also appear in the following discussion as a case in point to refer to the past.

But there are other practical as well as personal reasons for selecting this specific *wa'z*. Given the nature of Muslim organizational factionalism and how deeply its elements are interwoven into the everyday dynamics of the region, it is very difficult for a Mappila Muslim researcher from Malabar to do fieldwork among

his/her community in the interiors of Malabar unless he/she develops a close affinity with the organization or locates a friend/relative who can negotiate with the organization and its leaders on his/her behalf. My familiarity with Samastha Kerala Sunni Yuvajana Samgham, the youth wing of Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathuk Ulema which is an apex body of Sunni Muslim scholars in the state, helped me to overcome this practical challenge.

4.5 People and Place of Wa'z

A 25-minute drive from Kozhikode, Cheruvadi connects major towns of three districts: Kozhikode, Wayanad and Malappuram. A business centre on the banks of the Chaliyar and the Iruvazhinji rivers, that flows through Kozhikode and Malappuram districts, Cheruvadi was once known for its *azcha chantha* [weekly market] and its timber, rice and cattle businesses. U. C. Mammad, a prominent Muslim figure in Cheruvadi and the founding manager of the first high school in the village told me that the very name Cheruvadi exemplifies the rich historical tradition of this place: “The belief is that the name Cheruvadi originated from two words – *Cheriy*a and *Vadi* meaning small and stick respectively. Small sticks are used for *Kolkali*, a folk art form popular among Muslims here. This town was once famous for *Kolkali* performance and training.”

According to the 2011 census data, Muslims constitutes approximately 70% of the total population in Kodyathur village to which Cheruvadi belongs to. The Hindu community constitutes 22% of the population and the rest are Christians. According to the data available in the various local mosques in Cheruvadi, the Muslim population in the Mahhalu is approximately 7000. Though there are no concrete data available for their occupational patterns, a random analysis reveals that most of the

Muslims are involved in small-scale business in Kerala or in the Gulf countries. Substantive number of young people is involved in illegal sand mining and the supply of other construction materials such as bricks and quarry stone, thanks to the proximity of the Chaliyar and Iruvazhinji Rivers.

Cheruvadi is like any other small town in current Kerala in terms of its appearance in that the difference between a village and a small town in Kerala is very minimal. But its Muslim composition is very unique. Unlike many other villages in the interiors of Malabar, Cheruvadi is home to all sects and factions belonging to the diverse schools of thoughts within Islamic tradition. These include two major factions among traditional Sunnis, six groups among Salafi-inspired Mujahid organizations, Jamath-e-Islami and Tabligh Jamath. Most of these sects have their own mosques and religious learning centres in and around this small town. Another remarkable factor is the presence of the Ahmadia Muslim community, popularly known as *Qadianis*, and Qur'an Sunnath Society whom the other sects do not consider as Muslims. Cheruvadi and nearby areas are one of their strong holds in Malabar with their own mosques and religious training institutions.

Cheruvadi has a long, rich and controversial history of theological debates among these Muslim sects, which has placed this small town at the centre of Muslim religious debates in Kerala and outside at various points in time. The 1988 *Mubahala* with Ahmadiyas was the most controversial one among them, which made this small town famous outside the country as well.²¹ *Mubahala* refers to the ancient ceremony

²¹ An undated documentary directed by Prof. A J Malabari and produced by Jama'ath Ahmadiya, Kerala about *Mubahala*, uploaded on YouTube in 2010, shows the wide news coverage that this event received in Malayalam, Arabic, English and Urdu newspapers. The documentary also claims that the *Mubahala* helped this small village to acquire great fame in the Muslim world. To watch the documentary follow this link, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AI6O28m-jZo>.

in which two opposing sects formally calls God's curse down upon whichever of the two opposing parties is wrong on a theological issue. This is modelled upon an incident that happened during the Prophet's time in Medina where the question as to the true identity of the Messiah was raised by both the Christian and the Muslim communities.²² Following this tradition the fourth Caliph of Ahmadiya community, Mirza Thahir Ahmad issued a *Mubahala* challenge from their headquarters in London to Muslim organizations on the question of the status of Prophethood in Islam. The Anjuman Ishaqat Islam, an umbrella organization of all Muslim sects except that of the Sunni AP faction accepted the challenge. They met in Kodianthur on 28 May, 1989 and in a ceremonial manner called God's curse down upon the party whose belief was wrong according to Islamic principles.

The debates between Qur'an Sunnath Society and Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema (1980s), and that between the Jamath-e-Islami and Samastha Kerala Sunni Yuvajana Samgham (1996) were the other well-known events in the past. The recent one in this series happened during my fieldwork between Sunnis (both AP and EK faction) and Jamath-e-Islami. The question for debate this time was the unusual length of the grave of a Sunni scholar known as Ezhimala Usthad buried in the community cemetery some twenty years ago. When one group affiliated to Jamath-e-Islami argued that the extraordinary length of the grave was the result of a later addition by the local *Mahallu* committee, the Sunnis argued that it was not an unusual phenomenon in Islam that the graves of saintly people grow on its own. The purpose of citing these long histories of theological debates by various sects among Muslims in Cheruvadi is for two important reasons. (1) *Wa'z* in Cheruvadi, like in any other

²² Qur'an says: "If anyone disputes this with you now that you have been given this knowledge, say, 'Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, and let us pray earnestly and invoke God's rejection on those of us who are lying (3: 61).

place and time, is not an isolated event, but rather encased in and performed as a continuation of older debates with specific roots in local Muslim life worlds as well as outside it. (2) It was through these events that Muslims in these areas were introduced to many of the new communication technologies for the first time. For example, I was told by many people in Cheruvadi and nearby places that they had seen video cameras and videography for the first time at the *Mubahala* in Kodyathur. Some of them had even told me that they attended the entire episode of the *Mubahala* to see how videography works.

4.6 The *wa'iz*

A *wa'z* has many elements: the *wa'iz*, the listener, the organizer, the space and the infrastructure. But the most important one among all these is the *wa'iz*. The *wa'iz* in Cheruvadi is Shafi Saqafi Mundambra (henceforth Shafi Saqafi). Shafi Saqafi, as he is known among his listeners, is a popular *wa'iz* and a religious scholar who studied Islamic theology at a traditional seminary called *daras* in Muthuvalloor, Malappuram. He spent ten long years studying different branches of Islamic knowledge tradition such as the Qur'an, Hadith, *thaswawwuf* [Islamic mysticism], and *usool* [principles and methods of Islamic knowledge] with a single master before moving to Jamia Markaz, an institute for higher learning affiliated to Jamia al-Azhar, Cairo and Zaituna University, Tunisia. His two-year stay in Jamia Markaz with experts in different disciplines prepared him to be an *alim* who gives fatwas in the Shafi School of law. The Saqafi in his name is the name of the degree awarded to him upon completion of his higher studies at Jamia Markaz. Since he passed out from Jamia Markaz in 1998, he has been working as a *Mudaris* [religious teacher] at Majma' Dawathil Islamia, an Islamic seminary providing both secular and religious education, in Arecode,

Malappuram. Shafi Saqafi considers *Mudaris* as his basic profession. Being a *wa'iz* for him is an extension of the tasks he does as a *Mudaris* in disseminating Islamic knowledge to the wider Muslim public.

Wa'iz [preacher] - *alim* [scholar] divide has been one of the central nodes of controversy throughout Islamic history particularly when it comes to the question of religious authority (Berkey, 2000). While the former is deputed to instruct the common people, the latter is assigned to teach students engaged in intensive studies in the various branches of Islamic scholarship. Pedagogically, the *wa'iz* as opposed to the *daras* in Malabar has also been conceptualized along these lines. That popular preachers have not received Islamic knowledge through authentic routes and that their sermons mostly rely on suspect or weak *hadiths*²³ and other untrustworthy resources are the two central allegations scholars make against popular preaching to condemn them. Thus in scholarly circles, popular preachers are often described and opposed as *mubthadae* [illegitimate inventors in religion].²⁴ But some others note that it is the popularity and hold popular preachers have among the masses through their visibility that provokes scholars to go up against them. They argue that it was when popular preachers started to map their sermons on contemporary political situations and make use of this discursive space to test their grip on power equations that Muslim scholars started warning against the dangers of popular sermons (Berkey, 2000). Such debates are prevalent in Malabar as well. The Ulema's condemnation of the popular preacher, Dr. Zakir Naik and his sermons demonstrates this. A medical doctor by training with

²³ *Hadiths* are categorized into various types such as *Sahih* [authentic], *Hasan* [acceptable], *Dai'f* [weak], or *mawdoo* [fabricated] based on their reliability and acceptability. A *hadith* is considered as weak either due to discontinuity in the chain of narrators or because of the bad character of any of the narrators in the chain such as due to fabrication of lies.

²⁴ Berkey (2010) reproduces debates between scholars like Ibn al Jawzi and Jalal al Din al Suyuti Ibn al Hajj, and preachers like Al-Abbadi and al Shirazi. She also points out to the degree of power preachers exert over their audience due to their visibility and following among the common people.

no expertise in Arabic language or training in classical Islamic literature, Zakir Naik for them is an illegitimate authority in religion who interprets Islam's foundational texts without any of the intellectual and linguistic training that it demands.²⁵

But a *wa'iz* like Shafi Saqafi, like many other popular preachers in the region transcends this divide in many ways. He has received his education in Islamic theory, knowledge and tradition through *ijaza* [attesting that he studied Islam with a scholar for an extended period of time and received permission from him to transmit it to others]. Shafi Saqafi spent ten long years with various *Asaatheeds* (masters) and gained knowledge from them. Receiving Islamic knowledge from a Sheikh orally and directly is considered as authentic and holds higher epistemic value. According to Islamic pedagogy, such a system provides advantages not available in a modern educational institute where reading and writing without the assistance of a scholar and attaining self-sufficiency are considered as important aspects of knowledge transmission.

This may seem unusual in modern academic cultures. But Islam considers that knowledge consists in habitus and acquisition through imitation and repetition (Ibn Khaldhu, as cited in Cheddadi, 1994). So the *sanad* [authentication] attests that one received knowledge from a righteous living person who in turn received it through an authentic unbroken chain extending back to the Prophet. In traditional setting an Usthad is entitled to transmit a text, prayer or even a small piece of knowledge only if

²⁵ The traditional Sunni Ulema's criticism against Dr. Naik is based on their theological positions and predates the controversy involving him that claims that a terrorist involved in a recent attack in Dhaka was his follower and was inspired by his speeches. This has given new impetus to their criticism. See the following reports available in <https://sunninews.wordpress.com/2008/11/13/sunni-muslims-demand-ban-of-zakir-naik%E2%80%99s-talk/>, <https://scroll.in/article/811508/muslim-clerics-in-india-unite-against-superstar-televangelist-zakir-naik> retrieved on 3 October 2017.

he has received it from another scholar. Shafi Saqafi showed me the *sanad* in which the *ijaza* to transmit knowledge as well as the details of the scholarly chain extending back to the Prophet were written. The centrality of such practices in Islamic knowledge traditions prevalent even today among traditional Muslim communities questions Eickelman's argument that cassette sermons set aside Islam's traditional knowledge practices and enable "even garage mechanics to interpret Islamic ideas on par with graduates from the schools of Ulema" (1999: pp. 29-40).

These peculiar ways in and through which knowledge have been transmitted in the Islamic world for 14 centuries have had repercussions in the way *wa'z* is organized and popularized today. "Why do you prefer oral transmission of your knowledge over transmission through writing? Don't you think that writing your knowledge in a book format is easier, cheaper and less time consuming? Why don't you just record your sermon in a studio and circulate it on CD or DVD formats instead of delivering it several hundred times?" Shafi Saqafi's answer was quick, "It may be cheap and easy, but seeing your audience physically while transmitting knowledge is important. For me it is like conducting a class in the *daras* where students stay with me while learning their lessons. The major difference is the size of the audience and the length of their stay with me. The number of people listening to lessons in a *wa'z* is very high but the time you spent delivering it is small, whereas in a *daras* you stay with a small number of students for an extended period of time."

He then explained how he started performing *wa'z*. After graduating from Jamia Markaz where he specialized in *Tafsir* [the Qur'anic exegesis], he wanted to perform *wa'z* more systematically. One day while performing his Hajj in Mecca he expressed this wish to his Sheikh and requested him to give him the *ijaza* [the consent

for performing *wa'z*]. But his Sheikh, Aboobacker Ahmad, himself a popular *wa'iz*, asked him to wait until they meet in Arafah where the Prophet delivered his farewell sermon, known as *khutubathul wida*. “When we finally met at the Mount Arafah, the exact place from where the Prophet delivered his final *wa'z*, the Sheikh called me. Holding my hands in his hands, he gave me the *ijaza* to perform *wa'z*”. I have heard Shafi Saqafi repeat this story during one of his *mawa'iz* where his Sheikh was also present.

Prophet Muhammad in his farewell sermon not only pronounced the culmination of his prophetic career but also the prophetic mission in Islam itself. Then the question was who would guide the community after the era of the Prophet. Shafi Saqafi cited a Hadith to me in which the Prophet is attributed as saying that “scholars are heirs of the prophets”. By citing these two stories, Shafi Saqafi positions himself in a genealogy of authority that descends from God through the Prophet Muhammad and adds layers that makes his *wa'z* more authentic and authoritative. The role of a *wa'iz*, according to him, is to act as a liaison between God and the community, for whom he translates the authoritative discourses into concrete moral and corporeal forms.

4.7 *Wa'z* and the Media

Apart from the *wa'iz* and his listeners, the most visible aspect of any *wa'z* today is its media infrastructure. As Grimes (2002: p. 219) has pointed out in his studies on mediated rituals, the very presence of media technology in any event and that of ritual in particular does two things: announces the importance of the event and heightens its significance. But the enhancement media infrastructure provides to a *wa'z majlis* is not unidirectional. While media infrastructure provides wide publicity to a *wa'z*, in

return the *wa'z* also acts as a platform to introduce and familiarize the audience with new media technologies available in their time. The story of Echo, a sound rental service company based in Venniyur in Malappuram, is illustrative. Sitting in his office attached to a computer training centre in Chelari, K. V. Hassan, who is himself a religious scholar and the Managing Director of Echo told me:

Echo is basically a sound service provider that was started in Malappuram in 1996. But we provide service across the state. When we decided to launch such a company, I along with my friends sat down for several days to finalize its name. Many names were suggested. But we finally agreed upon Echo. The name actually came to us from the popularity that the audio signal processing called echo²⁶ had among the wa'z-following communities in Kerala.²⁷ Situated in Malappuram, a predominantly Muslim area, public events organized by Muslim community organizations and their institutions were our primary target. Now we provide sound infrastructure for major events organized by Muslim institutions across the state.

Hassan is an entrepreneur who tried his hand at many businesses but failed in most of them. “What motivated you to start a sound rental service company?” I asked

²⁶ Echo is an audio signal technology that stimulates and reflects the original sound signal adding one or several signals onto it so that it reaches the listener with a delay. Apart from the technological curiosity echo generates, its experience of audibility enables repetition, a central idea in both Arabic language and Islamic education system. The long discussion about repetition is a central theme in many of the *Thafseers* [commentaries] since Qur'an extensively uses repetition as a method for effective teaching. Al-Suyooti (d.1505) in his *Al-Itqaan fi Uloom al-Qur'an* observes that repetition in Islamic contexts is used not merely for emphasis or confirmation, but as a form of eloquence and is a reflection of good style.

²⁷ Hassan also told me another remarkable story: Among the Sunnis the sound system with echo was nicknamed as “*khuna khuna mike*”. It all started, it is assumed, when a Sunni went to a sound rental service provider to book their service. He wanted to order the sound system with the echo facility. But the person forgot the word ‘echo.’ Instead said that he wanted to book the mike set which repeats “*khuna khuna*” when one utters the word *shaikhuna* (Sheikh/*shaikhuna*, meaning leader/our beloved leader, is an honorific title Muslims generally use while introducing their community leaders and scholars).

him. “There were already many small scale sound rental services in Malappuram. But very often they could not meet the high demand for sound amplifying systems in this area. During peak seasons such as *Rabiul Awwal* these small companies would hire equipment from other companies in southern Kerala in order to meet the high demand. Apart from that the popularity and number of *wa’z* events being held were on the rise. Being a *wa’iz* and part of a major Muslim organization here, I have personally experienced this gap in demand and supply in the sound rental service sector. So there was a niche in the market. Just concentrating on *wa’z* programs itself could provide a better business opportunity.” He elaborates how he ventured into sound business:

The idea struck me when I was giving a wa’z in a local masjid in Kundoor in 1994. Coincidentally, the sound operator in Kundoor Masjid was the first employee of Echo. In the mid-1990s the demand for echo audio signal processing system among Muslims was huge. The sound equipment market then was dominated by Indian companies and among them Ahuja. We were the first to import the latest technology from England, Italy and Japan. There was already one in Ernakulam. But for people in Malabar it was difficult to hire equipment from such faraway places as it was expensive. In the initial years of operations, we imported power amplifiers from Montarbo, an Italian company. As I said organizers of big wa’z majlises and annual convocation ceremonies of religious educational institutes were our primary clients. There were instances where some wu’az insisted upon the organizers hiring sound system from our company alone because of its quality. There were also instances where wu’az would suggest to us new technologies introduced recently in other countries and markets. As the popularity of Echo increased

we had to import newer equipment in order to maintain our standing in the market. In return, these newer equipment gave us newer clients.

As Hassan has rightly pointed out, the early years of the '90s were crucial for the Muslim community in the region for several reasons. The popularity and high demand for sound equipment, from amplifier to tape recorder to cassettes, in this period Hassan alludes to, owes to the unparalleled increase in the number of Muslim public meetings including *wa'z majlises* organized during the time. The immediate motive for this was the split in two major Muslim organizations in the state, the Muslim League and the Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema. While the split in the Indian Union Muslim League, a major Muslim political organization in the state, in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition and the emergence of Abdul Nasar Ma'dani, a popular *wa'iz*, into a charismatic Muslim leader naturally demanded increase in the number of public meetings held by Muslim political parties, the split in Samastha provided opportunities for *wa'z majlises* to prosper as Ulema belonging to opposite groups started to galvanize their support among Muslim community via organizing different religious rituals. Thus, the popularity of media infrastructures and the factionalism that developed based on various theological and political differences among Mappila Muslims are connected in many ways (I will explore this connection in the next chapter).

Echo's story reveals several other things as well. Important among them is the fact that it underscores how deeply technologies and their introduction and usage in a community are connected to religion. It also proves that the argument 'religious authority today is solely dependent on its medial base,' is incorrect. Rather it tells us how media technologies and their industries are dependent on religious authorities as

well. Such partial stories of both technology and religion emerge when scholars study the media-religion intercession by focusing solely on and privileging only one, the one with high epistemic value.

Apart from sound amplifying equipment, printed materials are also widely used in *wa'z*. But their usage in *wa'z* is minimal and is mostly limited to pre-publicizing *wa'z* events through posters and invitation letters. Though printing comes first in the chronological order of technologies than sound amplifiers, their use in *wa'z* started much later. The old posters available to us today also attest to it that printing technology had begun to be widely used in *wa'z* only with the arrival of sound amplifiers.

One of the oldest *wa'z* posters I could trace during my fieldwork is a 1959 poster prepared by Kozhichena palli repair committee [Kozhichena Masjid Repairing Committee] based in Kozhichena, Malappuram (See the figure no. IV and V in the Annexure). The poster was printed at ALP Press in Tirurangadi, a major printing hub for Mappila Muslims even today. The poster announces a *wa'z* series, starting from 23-3-1959 and going on till 2-4-1959 in Kozhichena. The poster provides the names of the three *wu'az*, who were to preach in an 11-day long *wa'z* series. Other details provided in the poster include the name of the place, the designation of the *wu'az*, and their academic qualifications with regard to religious studies and the name of the institute/organization they were affiliated to then. The poster also makes a request on behalf of *deenul Islam* [religion of Islam] asking believers to come in large groups, participate in the *wa'z* and to extend their wholehearted cooperation. Though the first sentence in the poster reads that the *wa'z* would start on 15 March 1959 and would be conducted according to the below provided schedule, the schedule as such only

includes details of the programme from 23 March onwards. This mismatch between the dates in the introductory sentence and the schedule could be a proofing mistake, a very common and difficult to correct mistake in typographic printing. I have already discussed in the previous chapter how long erratum lists aiming to correct the errors of a published work had become an integral part of early typographically printed texts.

Apart from this basic information for listeners/readers, the poster provides a very detailed view of what the atmosphere of a *wa'z* might have been like in the 1940s and '50s. One notable characteristic is the absence of a title or subject for the *wa'z* which is very common nowadays. Recalling his earlier *mawa'iz*, Kunnappalli Hamaza Musaliyar told me that the subject wise categorization of *wa'z* was a recent innovation. "When I started delivering *wa'z* in the late 1950s, it was just *wa'z*. Neither were we given particular subjects by the organizers, nor were our *mawa'iz* confined to one particular topic. In those days a single *wa'z* would cover almost all possible topics, from the basic tenets of Islam and its fundamental practices to more specialized areas such as *thaswawvuf* [Islamic mysticism]." According to him, categorizing and identifying a *wa'z* with a particular title or topic started with the reproduction of *wa'z* through cassettes, as it required titles and labels for marketing.²⁸ The other two visible omissions in the poster are the details of the venue and the time of the *wa'z* which any of the present day *wa'z* posters will consider as a serious mistake. Should we then understand that such information was obvious to any potential listener of a *wa'z* in the 1950s?

²⁸ How the entry of cassette reshaped the domain of *wa'z* is the major theme of discussion in the next chapter.

Another fascinating detail the poster reveals is about the close connection between *wa'z* and the making of religious institutions in Malabar. *Wa'z* is organized to mobilize resources including finances to construct or repair mosques or other religious institutions such as *deeni madaris*. The *wa'z* in Kozhichena was organized by a mosque repairing committee. Though such connections still survive in many of the *wa'z majlises*, it was more intensive in the first decades of India's independence from British rule and particularly after the formation of Kerala state in 1956. The Mappila Outrageous Act that the British introduced first in 1854 and amended several times later in the wake of the long Malabar rebellions (1836-1922), had a provision to ban Muslims from repairing and constructing new places of worship. This provision was incorporated into the Act on the recommendation of the then Malabar District Collector who reported that the mosques and the sermons delivered there were widely used to mobilize Mappila Muslims against the British government. The law was not revoked by the Madras government, of which Malabar district was a part of, even after Indian Independence. It was only in 1957 when the first elected government came to power in the newly formed state of Kerala that the law was finally abolished. As a result many of the existing mosques were renovated and new ones were constructed in the late 1950s.

Hamza Musaliyar Kunnappalli himself remembers hundreds of such *mawa'iz* he participated in in the late 1950s and early '60s both as a listener and as a *wa'iz*:

The first wa'z I gave in my life was in Kunnappalli near Perinthalmanna in 1958. I was a muthallim [a religious student] in Kunnappalli Mahallu²⁹ Masjid. When the Mahallu committee decided to renovate the pond used to

²⁹ The word Mahallu in Arabic means a living place set aside for a particular group of people. In Muslim societies this territorial entity acts like a Parish in Christian societies.

perform ablution in the masjid premise, they organized a seven-day long wa'z majlis. The then Imam of the mosque who was also my teacher suggested my name as the wa'iz. The construction and renovation of mosques and other religious institutions were largely dependent on crowd funding then. Wa'z was the most important occasion where people would gather in huge numbers. Spiritually moved by the wa'z they would donate their assets for religious purposes. Apart from that the wa'iz will intermittently remind his audience throughout his wa'z of the importance and benefits of making donations and offering endowments for religious needs. Sometimes the wa'iz will collect them personally. I myself have done it several times.

My acquaintance with Hamza Musaliyar also involves one such incident. The local masjid in my village in Kellur, Wayanad was first renovated in 1963 and reconstructed in 1972 using the resources mobilized through his wa'z. To perform these mwa'iz, he stayed in the village for several days. Since then he had been a regular visitor to Kellur. He agreed to talk to me despite being acutely ill on the request of my father who had assisted him during his wa'z sessions.

4.8 Gathering around Loudspeaker

The most interesting detail in the Kozhichena poster is not about the wa'z as such. But it is a small piece of information printed in the bottom line of the poster about the use of sound amplifying equipment. With an N.B. mark³⁰ it informs the readers/potential audience of the wa'z that loudspeaker(s) will be used in the wa'z to make listening easier. One of the striking features of any wa'z today is the omnipresence of communication technology at every stage of the event; before, during and afterwards.

³⁰ N.B. is the abbreviation for the Latin phrase *Note Bene*, meaning note well.

A random walk through the Muslim majority areas of Kozhikode, particularly through the neighbourhood of its mosques will reveal how fascinatingly technology has been deployed for *wa'z*. Electronically amplified sound from loudspeakers is one of the most noticeable features of Islam in the region. Loudspeaker brought Islamic sound, once confined to the mosque and Muslim households, onto the streets. The following section is from my field diary.

It is a Friday afternoon. I offer my *jumua* [the Friday congregational prayer] at Masjidul Hamili, a popular mosque on the crowded Mavoor road of Kozhikode. Though this four-storied mosque is one of the biggest in the city, it cannot accommodate all those gathered there for the prayer. The uniformed mosque security personnel standing near the place where believers perform their ritual ablution are distributing bundles of newspapers for the overflowing crowd to use as their *muswalla* [the prayer mat]. Taking newspaper sheets from the security guards they find their own places on the sides of the public road or on the corridors of nearby shops.

After the prayer, people are in a hurry to exit the mosque. By then both sides of the public road and the parking areas outside the mosque compound are occupied by street vendors selling wares from fruits to CDs. Next to them a highly decorated four-wheeler, with illumination and colourful billboards, is parked. An impressive *nasheeda* [an Islamic musical genre] sounding from the fully covered vehicle catches the attention of the rushing crowd and stops them for a while. A group of young men in their white jubba and dothi, which in Malabar is generally considered as the traditional garb of *muthallims* [Muslim religious students], standing in the background of the sound blaring

vehicle, runs to them and distributes pamphlets. The *muthallims* running hither and thither make sure they do not miss anyone. I am also handed one. It is a stunning multi-coloured flyer designed with Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art forms such as minarets. Printed on both the sides, the flyer is an invitation to a *wa'z* program to be organized in Pulikkal near Ramanattukara, a small town 30 km away from Kozhikode.

One side of the flyer, like the billboards on the vehicle, provides particulars of the *wa'z majlis*, such as where and when it will happen and who will perform. But the flyer also gives some additional information such as the details of the bus route from major towns to Pulikkal and contact numbers of the organizers. On the opposite side is a long invitation. The flyer addresses the reader as 'brothers and sisters in Islam'. It then describes the contemporary (the flyer also uses the word *aadhunikam*, literally meaning modern) situation in which Muslims are entrenched in and the ethical challenges this pose. It reminds the reader of the necessity of facing these challenges as a Muslim and not to take it as an excuse for not practicing religion. "There are many Muslims now who think that Islam is a religion of exceptions and excuses allowing one to live according to their convenience. They do it out of their ignorance. Ignorance is the biggest sin in this religion. But what you see all around today is just ignorance and its manifestations. So let us learn what Islam has to say about our life in this world." The flyer then concludes by inviting all the believers to attend the three-day *wa'z* series by Muhammad Farooq Naemi, a popular *wa'iz* from Southern Kerala on the topic "The truths that the new generation should know."

As the crowd from the mosque slowly disappear into the busy routines of their life, the *muthallims* also got ready to leave the place. Collecting the few flyers left over on the public road they all get into the vehicle. When the vehicle starts moving, the *nasheeda* which is still playing is stopped. The loudspeakers tied on top of the jeep now starts booming out a pre-recorded announcement, “Dear believers, the rising star in the podium, and the one who fascinated lakhs of people by fuelling their hearts with love towards our beloved Prophet, the blessed orator of Ahlussunna, Farooq Naemi is addressing tens of thousands of believers in Pulikkal.....” The announcement is interspersed with *nasheeda* and recordings of Naemi’s own previous *wa’z*. Now, like the crowd from the mosque that vanished into the busy Mavoor Street, the announcement vehicle also slowly disappear and merge into the traffic.

The scene I just explained above is not a surprising one for people frequenting Masjidul Hamili and nearby areas on the Mavoor Road. For those who travel to Kozhikode, Mavoor road is a connecting place as it is very close to the two main bus stations in the city. They experience such events almost every day, most often after each daytime congregational prayer. Hundreds of posters of *wa’z* pasted on both sides of Mavoor road, on lamp posts, on the walls of bus shelters, abandoned buildings, and the pillars of the over bridge tell of the frequency of such events. Big events also make use of other mechanisms for publicity such as inflatable arches, electronic billboards and signs, newspaper/television advertisements, special supplements with major newspapers, booklets and more. The advertisements of sound recording studios offering special packages to record announcements for/of *wa’z* that appear in magazines owned by Muslim organizations indicate how extensively such

technologies are used well before the actual *wa'z* takes place. Thus thinking about a *wa'z* without its medial base has become impossible now.

The flyer the *muthallims* distributed on Mavoor road also hints at the larger discursive conditions in which a mediated *wa'z* takes place today - the perils of contemporaneity and the ethical challenges it poses for Muslims. The topic of Farooq Naemi's *wa'z* encapsulates this, "The truths that the new generation should know." According to the flyer, the topic specifically addresses the younger generation who are immersed in the ignorance unleashed by *aadhunikatha* [modernity]. It is evident from Farooq Naemi's other *mwa'iz* available on CD/DVD formats or his YouTube channel that he considers contemporary media institutions as the sole source of this ignorance. Thus, it is also impossible to think about a *wa'z* without the conditions of possibilities that the contemporary media reproduce, which according to the *wa'z* is nothing but ignorance.

4.9 Loudspeaker as an Everyday Technology

The affinity between Islam and media, which we tend to take for granted now, began in complicated ways. The history of the use of loudspeaker in *wa'z* is an example of this. Among the numerous technologies used in a *wa'z*, from the simplest to the highly sophisticated, loudspeaker is the most visible one. But its inclusion in *wa'z* was not all that simple. The loudspeaker was the most basic and foundational media technology in *wa'z* which not only paved the way for later technologies to enter the domain but they were also modelled upon the precedence and usance of loudspeakers. Therefore I suggest that to map the affinity between media and *wa'z* with all its intricacies, one should begin by looking at the most simple and tangible media infrastructure - the loudspeaker.

Studying loudspeaker also has other implications. The loudspeaker is one of the most neglected information technologies in Media Studies. This is an acute negligence in the Indian context where technologies like loudspeaker play a significant role in defining and prioritizing social questions.³¹ The rapid changes in communication technologies and their exponential expansion have laid out new definitions for what constitutes media, offering new avenues for academics and policy makers to chart out. At the same time this preoccupation of the discipline with newer technologies comes at the expense of systematically pushing out old technologies into the margins of scholarly analyses. Thus the transformations in communication technologies have not only redefined what constitutes media today but have also changed the way we perceive media technologies of older times. How many of us today give attention to the loudspeaker as a communication medium in the way we consider other communication technologies? A recent state-wide demonstration by Light and Sound Welfare Association, an organization of labourers working in the sound rental service in Kerala is a remarkable one in this regard. In the protest march, their main demand to the state government was to declare the loudspeaker as a medium and to enlist it in the category of essential service.

The hostility towards loudspeaker in Media Studies is apparent from the way the History of Media has been written in India which often does not even make a passing reference to technologies like loudspeakers. This avoidance raises several concerns. Important among them are the resultant conceptualization of new technologies as isolated inventions which hardly considers historical specificities and

³¹ In their instruction to political parties on the use of loudspeaker in election campaigns, the Chief Election Commission of India recognizes loudspeaker as an important means for election propaganda and for imparting information to the public. Many governmental and non-governmental agencies also use loudspeaker extensively in their socio-cultural-health awareness campaigns assuming that this will help them to reach out to people more effectively.

the evolution of a given technology from the technologies in the past. On the consumption side, such an approach tends to ignore Social histories of media technologies. Engagements with specific media forms not only produce consumers for an existing technology, but also play a significant role in preparing them to be consumers of technologies that would emerge in the future. In order to understand the social dimensions of media technologies, one need to begin with studying smaller technologies and the communities it would have constituted. In this sense, smaller and humbler 'everyday technologies' (Arnold, 2013) like loudspeaker as opposed to large-scale technologies, help us to understand the more dynamic, mundane and habitual use of information and communication technologies in everyday life.

Media, like any another technology are part of larger social assemblages. They belong to the contemporary as much as they do to the past and future of societies. They are not mere apparatuses produced and consumed to transmit or receive information. Sometimes they are least used for transmitting or receiving messages from one source to the other. They embody several other socio-cultural-religious and economic ambitions of its users. So they are fluid with multiple meanings and functions. The challenge then is to develop a narrative on media technologies, which will account for their connected-fluid and sometimes surprising histories and ethnographies that will enable a researcher to understand the social/cultural/religious/technological work of media technologies. How do we do that? Media archaeologists suggest closely examining old media technologies when they were really new (Zielinski, 2008; Parikka, 2012). They propose this method of writing the Social history of media technologies, assuming that questions such as what constitutes media, what are the meanings attached to them, what are their technical functions and what are the other cultural tasks they are ascribed to, were

particularly crucial and intense at the moments when these technologies were first introduced in a given society.

Loudspeaker still makes listening easier. Echo technology still stimulates and reflects the original sound signal. But these foundational characteristics alone no longer fascinate people. It then demands certain kinds of reinventions. So both the technology and its consumers have to reinvent themselves in order to incite excitements and get excited. To capture these reinventions in detail we need to understand the histories of the excitements these technologies generated when they were new: how did the emotional bond between a particular technology and its consumer start, grow, decline or take new forms? This is important because in many instances these emotional bonds play critical roles in shaping future technologies that the community may use by reviving and recirculating materials and techniques of communication that had been, lost, neglected or obscured in the past (Parikka & Hertz, 2010). That is to ask how inherent is the association between a loudspeaker produced in the 1920s and the latest version of an iPhone. A more fruitful approach to study media technologies from this perspective is to think through their connections rather than the disparities between them.

4.10 Listening as Seeing

Several experiences I had encountered during fieldwork convinced me of the significance of loudspeaker in Mappila Muslim society. The following one stands out among them. This happened during a meeting organized by the Kerala Malabar Islamic Class Room (KMIC) and Sunni Global Voice (SGV), two major online platforms of Sunni Muslims from the region. Their activities include live broadcasting of *wa'z* and other religiously significant convergences, organizing religious rituals

such as Qur'an recitation, performing *Mawlid*, Mala [ballads] and *Ratheeb* and above all conducting online lectures and classes using Beylux Messenger, a popular Internet voice and video chat program. Though online programs are open to all, they specifically target Malayali Muslim expatriates working in various Gulf countries. A majority of the key volunteers of these two online platforms work in various service sectors in the Gulf countries especially in Saudi Arabia and UAE. As part of expanding their activities, to recruit more volunteers and to standardize their programmes they convened a meeting of online Sunni activists which they called Online Sunni Samghamam [online Sunni get-together] on 23 June 2013. But there was another immediate reason as well. "Many of our recent online interventions generated heavy criticism from different circles, particularly from our mother organizations in Kerala. Some of them actually created lots of chaotic situations throwing our own leaders and scholars into crisis. So there has been a demand to reorganize our activities systematically," Naseer P. K, a key volunteer of KMIC told me.

The meeting was held in the seminar hall of Jamia Markaz, Kozhikode where I was also invited to speak. By the time I reached the campus the auditorium was full and they had closed the spot registration facility to attend the meeting. Sheikh Aboobacker Ahamed, the Chancellor of Jamia Markaz inaugurated the Samghamam. In his inaugural speech, which was also live broadcasted, he alerted the audience of the significance of technology in today's life in general and in *da'wa* activities in particular. Of more interest to this thesis was that he demonstrated this through his experience with loudspeakers:

Nowadays everybody talks about Facebook. But I heard that it's also called *fasadbook*.³² When we were young it was the loudspeaker. To see what this equipment looked like was a thrill for people in my generation. So we would go for *wa'z* conducted in faraway places if there was a loudspeaker being used. In those days, organizers would also publicize well in advance if they planned to use a loudspeaker thinking that it would bring in more people. That was true also. I don't remember exactly when a loudspeaker was used for the first time here. But I remember walking along with my classmates in Daras to listen to a *wa'z* organized in Chathamangalam. The distance between Chathamangalam and Mangad where I was studying then is roughly 30 km. I have seen people struggling to find a place near the loudspeaker. They wanted to know what the microphone operator did, how he fixed things, how did the loudspeaker relay sound, etc. Will people in your generation or the next generation believe that all these things happened? But it all happened. Now you talk about Facebook. You spend so much time on it. You organize online classes. These are all good. But don't waste your time on that. Don't get excited with all these technologies around you. Use technologies that are appropriate for Islam. Don't think that all these technologies will help you with everything. They cannot help us beyond a point. Don't think that Islam survives because of your Facebook. Technologies will come and go. My dear students spend your time appropriately. Do things which are appropriate. And use things which are appropriate. Remember on the Day of Final Judgement, Allah will question you about each and every single action you did, every single word you spoke and everything you used.

³² *Fasad* is an Islamic term for moral corruption and disorder.

Apart from helping one to understand the many complex layers involved in Muslim-media intercession, Sheikh Aboobacker's long speech at the event convincingly demonstrates how to place Malayali Muslims' encounters with communication technology in a historical perspective. While organizers of the *wa'z* imagined that loudspeakers would bring more listeners to *wa'z* as we have seen in Sheikh Aboobacker's speech or would make listening easier as we have seen in the 1959 Kozhichena poster, how the loudspeaker excited the audience the most was with its newness; a new technology people could see and touch, while listening to that which the particular technology was designed for is undermined. Many Sunni Muslim leaders also pointed out that the sixth anniversary of Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema held at Thiroorangadi, Malappuram in 1962 was an important event in introducing many of the new sound amplifying technologies to the Muslim community in the region. They recalled that many groups visited the venue to see the extensive use of sound technologies in the conference. The loudspeaker here played the role of a crowd mobilizing object.

Such experience demands a critical scrutiny of dominant narratives of media technologies that privilege the transmission model of communication where the role of technology is that of a transmitter of information from one source to another. How fruitful is it to study technologies by basing our analyses solely on their projected functionalities? Will the same technologies have the same histories and functions everywhere? What are the forms technologies take in different socio-political-religious contexts? Some of the recent anthropological and historical studies on information and communication technologies envision to explore such "surprising histories" of media; radio as furniture in Indonesia (Mrazek, 2002), loudspeaker as a visual entity in urban Nigeria (Larkin, 2014), batteries as a conceptual frame for ideas

of power and freedom in Zambia (Spitulnik, 1998) and books as photo background in studios (Pearson, 2008). What these studies in effect suggest is that the overemphasis on the programmatic utilities of media may distract researchers from exploring its unintended but powerful everyday consequences in different social contexts.

It is not just technologies, but their introduction and popularization into/within a community also emerge as part of a larger social design. Khan (2011) notes that though sound technologies were available in South Asia from the 1920s onwards, the Muslim community here started to use it widely in the 1950s only. The debates on the appropriateness of using loudspeaker to perform religious rituals also began in the same period. Though such questions and debates were very marginal in the initial stages of its introduction and limited to the Malayali pilgrims returning from hajj,³³ the debate intensified as the use of loudspeaker increased.³⁴

4. 11 An Acoustic Community and its Sound Marks in Kerala

What was the larger social design that necessitated the use of sound technologies in Malabar in the 1950s? We have already discussed that the 1950s witnessed a growing number of new mosques across the region. The controversial provisions in the Mappila Outrageous Act, which restricted any form of construction and restoration of mosques in the region was revoked by the government in the newly formed Kerala state in 1957. The boom in mosque construction in the '50s was the direct consequence of this revocation. Until 1947, Mappila Muslims were allowed to conduct religious education inside government school premises. This was said to be

³³ Khan explains that it was during this period that the Saudi Arabian government had begun to use loudspeakers to announce *azan* and broadcast the instructions of the Imam to the millions of pilgrims gathered there to perform hajj (2011: p. 573).

³⁴ The next chapter will explore these debates in detail.

an attempt by the British government to attract the Muslim community to modern education (Muhammad, 2015). The government schools where Islamic religious education was allowed during the British rule are still known as Mappila Schools. But after the Independence in 1947, the Madras government (of which Malabar was a part of) ended this facility. This posed a big challenge to Muslim organizations and required them to establish their own madrasas across the region (Abdul Khadir Musaliyar, 2015). The Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidhyabhyaasa Board [Board of Islamic Education in Kerala] formed under Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema's initiative took up this responsibility. Collaborating with local Muslim communities and organizations, they started constructing buildings for madrasas in every village where there was a substantial Muslim population. In order to understand the size of this project one only need to look at the number of madrasas now functioning in Kerala under the two Sunni Muslim educational boards belonging to the two different factions of Sunnis. What had started out with 10 madrasas in 1952 has now grown into a mass movement with 23000 madrasas. Biographies of early leaders of this Islamic Education Board tell us in detail of the challenges they faced and how financial resources mobilized through *wa'z majlises* conducted across the region had helped them to establish madrasas wherever necessary (Abdulla Musaliyar, 2013). This once again underlines the intricate ways in which *wa'z* and infrastructure building among Mappilas are connected.

There were other reasons as well. The formation of the new state of Kerala required redrawing of existing administrative and territorial boundaries. Apart from this, the new land reform policies of the government intending to end the feudal agrarian system and granting tenants the ownership of the land they had been cultivating created new households (Raj & Tharakan, 1981; Radhakrishnan, 1981).

Though the number of Muslims who benefitted from the land reform act was minimal compared to other communities it contributed in repositioning the social standing of the community in the newly formed state.³⁵ This along with new employment and educational opportunities created through government policies and programmes made peoples' movement between rural and urban areas more frequent. Such administrative moves in effect necessitated and facilitated the redrawing of the existing social landscape of Kerala in many ways. These changes in the socio-political and economic spheres of the region and its impact on Muslim community can be traced from the changing patterns of Mosque construction and their geographical location in Malabar. If most of the mosques constructed in the early part of the 18th century were on the river banks, agricultural lands and interior places, the new mosques were mostly built in the village/city centres, establishing the change in the occupational and spatial profile of the Mappila Muslim community (Arafath, 2013: p. 91)

The attempt to demarcate new Muslim community spaces in the newly formed state was carried out by redefining the boundaries of existing *mahallu* and forming new ones. Such spatial reordering of the social and the social reordering of spaces demanded the construction of new socio-cultural-religious infrastructures. Thus new mosques were constructed in the newly evolving Muslim settlements or Muslims started moving to spaces near the newly constructed mosques. As the Kozhichena poster of 1959 clearly suggests this new infrastructure building process and *wa'z* were very closely related.

³⁵ Some studies even proposes that the introduction of land reform in Kerala made the Muslim living conditions, like that of the Dalits in the region, worse and the landless among the Mappila Muslims have actually increased. See, Herring (1980), Kunhaman (2002) and Abdussalam (2010) for further details.

The bond between *wa'z* and the mosque did not end in just mobilizing resources, particularly in the form of donations and endowments. Rather it was the beginning of a long-term relationship. Very often these *wu'az* in the Muslim locality later acted as the mosques' spiritual guides and they were consulted before any important decisions were taken with regard to the functioning of the mosques. They also played a key role in demarcating new spatial boundaries for newly formed *mahallu* in many places. Kunnappalli Hamza Musaliyar who came to my village for the first time in the late 1950s to perform *wa'z* was called again in 1968 to finalize the border of our newly formed *mahallu*, *puthanpalli* [the new mosque]. These re-drawings were not an easy process, but instigated disputes within the community. This is true even today when *mahallu* with a large number of Muslim households decide to divide and form new ones. Objections from the mother *mahallu* on where the boundary should be drawn, and which households are to be included or excluded is a common phenomenon.

The spatial reordering of the Mappila community accompanied by new infrastructures such as the mosque, madrasa and cemetery required the establishment of a new communication order as well. The loudspeaker for *azan* [the call to prayer] was first introduced in many mosques as part of this larger infrastructural design. In effect, formation of a new *mahallu* also meant the establishment of new sound techniques as well. As Lee (1999) has observed in the case of Singapore, while the new mosques served the purpose of being a physical landmark to the presence of a strong Muslim community in a particular locale, the amplified call to prayer was considered as its soundmark.³⁶

³⁶ A term used by Schafer (1994).

While socio-religious communities in the newly formed state had been trying to define their social spaces and identify themselves using various strategies developed along the lines of political, cultural, geographical or linguistic orientations, local Muslim communities' attempts to identify with a concrete space were largely dictated along acoustic lines. As Schafer (1994) has suggested, these local Muslim communities who could be demarcated along acoustic lines, were modelled on Plato's 'ideal republic' or Weimer's 'city' which limit the size of its inhabitants to 5040 people and 600-700 houses respectively on the basis of the capacity of a single orator or watchman to reach out conveniently using his sound. What we see here then, is the coming together of two communities producing and reproducing each other; an abstract acoustic community and concrete spatial community.

In the Islamic world the boundary of a local community was often determined based on the "area over which the *Muezzin*'s voice can be heard as he calls for the prayer" (Schafer, 1994: p. 215) from minaret or loudspeaker.³⁷ Thus, *azan* from the mosque acted as a sensorial sign available to every member of the local Muslim community, announcing their territorial claim (Mestyan, 2017) also. It has been a common practice among people of Malabar to apply to join a particular *mahallu* in their neighbourhood claiming that they hear the *azan* from that particular mosque more clearly than the one they are currently affiliated to. Such claims are prevalent in *mahallu* which offer sophisticated infrastructure for prayer and religious learning for children. In order to avail of those facilities the people make their claim along

³⁷ Towering minarets, a characteristic feature of Mosque architecture in the Muslim world has always been designed to serve the acoustic functions of the mosques. In older times the *muezzin* usually sounded *azan* from the minaret to reach out to the maximum distance possible. The introduction of the loudspeaker replaced the acoustic functions of the minaret. But even today, when loudspeakers fail or power supply is shut down, the *muezzin* will climb on the minaret to sound *azan*. The older acoustic function of the minaret is still retained in some mosques by strategically placing the loudspeakers on top of the minarets.

acoustic lines. During my fieldwork I came across members of the local mosque administration in Athavanad, Malappuram deliberating on such an application in which an existing member of their mosque wanted to move to a newly constructed mosque claiming that he could hear the *azan* from that mosque more clearly. But such pragmatic claims are also rooted in certain theological convictions. In a Hadith attributed to the Prophet he reminds the Muslims of the significance of attending the mosque from where one can hear *azan* as follows:

“All the alive and lifeless things of the places around up to which the voice of *azan* reaches will pray forgiveness for the *Muezzin* and bear witness. The person who will attend the *salat* by hearing the *azan* will get times greater virtues of that *salat*. The *Muezzin* will also earn equal virtues and all his (small) sins between two *azans* will be pardoned”.³⁸

Overzealous use of sound amplification in *wa’z majlises* is a manifestation of the desire of the communicator to display the transmission of the message while transmitting the message (Larkin, 2014: p. 990).³⁹ The spatial coverage of media infrastructures of a *wa’z* often goes beyond the limits of its actual audience. Great efforts are made to ensure that sound reaches all the neighbouring areas. Those who oppose *wa’z* often use this extravagant use of technology as a reason to criticize *wa’z*. Though their criticism stems from their ideological discontent with *wa’z*, the opponents point out the *israf* [Islamic notion of extravagance] on sound infrastructures in particular to show that *wa’z* is a *bid’a*. But Sunni Muslims and their

³⁸ As reported in Mishkat, as Hadeeth no. 667.

³⁹ The Mappila Muslim community manifests this desire to display their media infrastructures in many different ways. When the madrasa in my village had installed new sound amplifying equipment in 1995, the committee wanted to “inaugurate” the equipment. According to them the suitable manner of inaugurating such equipment in a religious setting was by organizing a *wa’z* by a prominent *wa’iz* and a prayer congregation led by a pious scholar using the new sound system. Thus the new amplifier in the madrasa was inaugurated with a three-day long *wa’z*.

organizations still use it. This excessive use of media infrastructure while it enhances the importance of the event for its potential/intended audiences also aims at projecting the importance of the event to others. In that sense, media infrastructure in a *wa'z* is installed for its audience as well as for its opponents though they do not listen to it. This tendency to use excessive media infrastructure is more common if the *wa'z* is organized in non-rural/urban areas inhabited by members of differing Muslim sects.

Aiming to insert Islamic/traditional Sunni sounds into the space, these loudspeakers are strategically located when a *wa'z* is organized. In Cheruvadi, people who come to listen to *wa'z* usually sit in the stadium and the loudspeakers are placed in the interior of the stadium directed towards the audience. They are placed on both sides of the stage from where Shafi Saqafi delivers his *wa'z*. Additionally they are placed not just on the exterior of the stadium but also throughout Cheruvadi. This raises the question: for whom are all these infrastructures being brought in? Does it address those who come to listen to the *wa'z* and are gathered in the stadium alone? Or is it also intended to address those who are not in the stadium and those who did not want to listen to the *wa'z*? The infrastructure the organizers have set in place tell us that they have a larger audience in mind. This is very important for a place like Cheruvadi where Muslims from a variety of theological orientations including those who are ardent critics of *wa'z* stay. “Why would you set up infrastructure which you actually don’t need?” I asked this question to Abdul Hameed, the convener of the *wa'z*. “We don’t want anyone who passes through here and nearby areas to miss the *wa'z*. We want to reach out to the maximum number of people possible,” he replied. This excessive use of media infrastructure is a characteristic feature of any traditional Muslim congregation creating its soundscapes.

Hameed's answer explains another hidden intention of using media infrastructure for *wa'z*; push the boundaries of *wa'z majlis* beyond its territorial scope, so that even those who intentionally/unintentionally avoid it will have to listen to it. It is true that the sounds/noise would trouble them and this is evident from the many cases filed against "noise pollution" produced by traditional practices like *wa'z*.⁴⁰ Similar to *azan*, loudspeakers in *wa'z* are also part of the everyday experience of everyone in the region as it invades their space by inserting traditional Sunni sounds in their lives whether they want to hear it or not. It is through this sound dimension of a Muslim congregation, Stille (2016) notes, that the community is most effectively self-represented in the region. This aural experience reconfigures the space acoustically through the deployment of media forms and creates an Islamic soundscape (Hirschkind, 2006) which requires people living in the Islamic soundscape to develop particular skills to negotiate sound either through attention or inattention to *wa'z* (Larkin, 2014).

4.12 Sound and its Discursive Conditions

Where do we locate the popularity of electronically magnified and multiplied sound and the new conditions it creates in the Islamic discursive tradition? What forms of religious subjectivity does this Islamic soundscape reflect? What is the discursive condition from which new actors, practices, institutional spaces and perceptions emerge in and around new acoustic technologies? What does it mean to live as a Muslim in the shadow of these acoustic technologies?

⁴⁰ In one such incident, T. K. Ibrahim from Kattayad, Wayanad, registered a complaint at the Police station against the excessive use of loudspeaker by the masjid during the month of Ramadan. See the news report in Chandrika daily titled Uchabhaashini upayogathinethire paraathi [A complaint against the use of loudspeaker]. Published in the Wayanad edition. dated on 2003, August 12.

<http://masjidsoundsystem.com> an online platform dedicated to “all those who have been blessed by Allah with amazing voices” and wish to set up a sound system in their respective local Muslim congregational spaces, introduce the story of a Muslim sound engineer as follows:

“One day a little kid recited *Suratul Muzzammil* to his parents. They had never heard anything like that from a boy of this age. It was simply amazing and cannot be described in words. They knew immediately that their son was blessed by Allah with an amazing voice and the ability to recite Qur’an in his own unique style. The kid’s father immediately started on a quest to record his recitations. This triggered his interest in sound engineering. Everything good always comes from Allah and Allah alone! He eventually started installing sound systems in masjids. Bad public address system in masjid is a universal problem and there was no readily available information on the subject. They immediately knew that their prayers have been answered and Allah gave them something unique to work with” (retrieved on 11 November 2016)

Hence the schematic narratives about the media habits of Muslim communities always portray them as distinct, opposite and mutually exclusive from their earlier communication cultures (Eickelman, 1999) or what Meyer (1998) has termed in the Ghanaian Pentecostalist discourse as a: “complete break with the past” (p. 316). But as we have already discussed, the centrality of sonic environment and the popularity of acoustic technologies in Muslim communities can be directly linked to the constituent characteristic of Islamic knowledge tradition and the role of sound in it. New communication technology in Muslim societies are always introduced and maintained as a continuum of traditional communication technology and their

aesthetic qualities. Both the producer and listener of sensuously mediated sound and their mechanical reproductions believe that the sonic environment has moral effects on them.

While describing the day of the Last Judgement, Qur'an says the following: "the Trumpet will be sounded, and everyone in the heavens and earth will fall down senseless except those God spares. It will be sounded once again and they will be on their feet, looking on" (39: 68). For the ultimate destruction and for the final recreation of the universe, Allah chose sound over everything else. According to www.masjidsoundsystem.com, this is an extreme feature of Allah's amazing creation.

4.13 Conclusion

The discussion so far suggests that the use and popularity of information and communication technology in Muslim societies is deeply embedded in their approach to the Islamic tradition of knowledge transmission. The centrality of oral transmission of knowledge in Islam is demonstrated through a variety of practices Muslims consider as foundational to their religion. Be it the revelation of Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad, the way the Prophet communicated with his companions or the way Prophetic traditions are reported, transmitted and codified, aural disciplining played a key role in shaping Muslim sensorial experience. This explains how electrically amplified sound becomes one of the most noticeable features of Islam in Malabar (See the figure no. VI in the Annexure). *Wa'z*, as the predominant form of knowledge transmission in the region, embodies these aural qualities Islam espouses by skilfully employing the phonic and poetic qualities of spoken words. Aimed to evoke a particular mental state among their audience, to inculcate *thaqva* [God fearing], the most desirable quality and the final goal of knowledge transmission in Islam, through

the creative deployment of acoustic techniques, *wa'z* provides the discursive space for sound technologies to flourish among the Mappila Muslim community.⁴¹ Thus in the loudspeaker, as an emblematic sonic media technology, the authority of Islamic religious discourses and its preferred mode of transmission merge with the aesthetics of technology and vice versa; the convergence of the metaphysical and the empirical, divine and the human.

⁴¹ *Thaqva* is considered as the pinnacle state to be achieved, which keeps one conscious of Allah's presence at heart, and persuades him/her to perform virtues and abandon evil.

Chapter- 5

Cassettes and Sound Reproduction: Mappila Soundscape in Malabar

In a survey report prepared for UNESCO on the use of broadcast media in combating illiteracy Maddison (1971) notes that broadcast media essentially contributes to literacy since traditional methods of personal instruction alone cannot eradicate illiteracy. Hence strategies using auditory media technologies, along with visual media, are considered as an effective way to combat illiteracy. Thus, the reason for the popularity of auditory media technologies in a community is generally attributed to their low literacy rate. The last chapter argued that such conclusions are premised on a flawed understanding of the religious-technology convergence. To delineate this argument I have presented the Malabari Muslim community's experience with auditory technologies as a case in point.

In a group with one of the highest literacy rate among Muslim communities across the world (93.7%),¹ the popularity of auditory media requires a different explanation. In the previous chapter I had discussed in detail how electronically amplified auditory practices become one of the noticeable features of Islam in Malabar and the ways in which such practices are embedded in the theory of knowledge Islam espouses. Since auditory media technologies support the centrality of oral transmission in Muslim societies, the authority of Islamic religious discourses and its preferred mode of transmission merge with the aesthetics of technology in equipment like the loudspeaker. The present chapter is an attempt to track down the

¹ Various reports prepared based on the 2001 and 2011 Census reports highlights this fact. See Premi (2011) and the following report available from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/kerala-s-muslims-record-highest-literacy/story-5mflTWUgEclm1rlvu7jXL.html> retrieved on 23 October 2017.

pathways through which sound technologies arrived in the Mappila Muslim community and took root in the culture. The chapter will also discuss briefly how sound technologies embodied and further articulated various intra-inter community differences and concerns in Malabar. In the last section, I will discuss how sound reproduction technology developed from and contributed to the existing practices that flourished in and around oral transmission of religious knowledge.

5.1 Loudspeaker in Public

The loudspeaker inside a mosque premise is generally used only for sounding the two minutes long *azan* five times a day, and can be heard within a 2 km perimeter.² They are also used for the Friday *khutuba* and *wa'z* performed inside the mosque. But these rituals are hardly ever broadcasted outside. Apart from this they are occasionally used for *Mawlid* recitations on the first 12 days of the month of *Rabiul Awwal*. If at all religious rituals performed inside the mosque are also broadcasted outside, it is done for a limited audience, mostly women, in the neighbouring households of the mosque. Thus the use of loudspeaker inside a mosque is very limited. This is evident from the low capacity amplifiers used inside the mosques with minimum value add-on facilities. But when religious practices/traditional rituals, particularly *wa'z*, once confined to the mosque or other liturgical spaces, started to be taken outside the mosque premises, the use of sound amplifying equipment not only intensified but also diversified.

² According to the Noise Pollution (Control and Regulation) Rules 2000, under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the permissible decibel levels for loudspeakers inside the Mosque is 50 dB during day and 40 dB at night near a silence zone and 55 dB during day and 45 dB at night for residential areas.

When did *wa'z* move outside the mosque? This question is important since it is with this move that the use of media infrastructure intensified among the Mappila Muslim community. To answer this question one needs to look at the evolution of mosques in Malabar Coast as a socio-cultural-religious space. The basic objective of any mosque in Islam is to provide space for congregational prayers five times a day, particularly for *Jumu'a* on Fridays. But they also serve other purposes such as functioning as centres of Islamic teaching and learning, providing space for logistical utility for traveling traders, as a space to deliberate on intra and inter communal issues. While describing the functions that a typical Malabari mosque served in the early and late medieval period both Ibn Battutah's 14th century travelogue on Malabar and Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom Saghir's 16th century call for Jihad against the Portuguese, titled *Tuhfat al-Mujahideen feen Ba-a-Si Akhbaril Burthukhaliyeen*, ["A Tribute to The Warriors with Information about Portuguese"] assign mosques with more or less similar extra-religious roles. The elaborate superstructures of traditional mosques in Malabar, according to these scholars, were designed to provide these facilities for different social groups within Islam.

Various records and reports of the British administration in Malabar prepared in the wake of the Malabar rebellions (1921) describe mosques as a space where sermons were held regularly. In some instances, the British even attacked mosques in several parts of Eranad, Malappuram assuming that it was inspired by the sermons delivered in these mosques that the Mappilas prepared to fight against them.³ From all these historical records and narratives it can be assumed that *mawa'iz* were held inside the mosque premises till 1950s. The only exceptions were a few public meetings held by Muslim organizations outside mosque premises. But these were

³ For a detailed discussion about this, see Randathani (2007).

mostly organizations with explicit affiliation to political parties. Records available to us including the previously mentioned posters (in the fourth chapter) then suggests that making arrangements for *wa'z* outside the mosque had become an organized practice only in the mid-1950s.⁴

Why was *wa'z* taken outside the mosques in the 1950s? One immediate reason could be the restructuring of the existing *mahallu* systems and the spatial reordering of the community in the 1950s. Construction of new mosques in the Muslim interiors of the region made *wa'z* a locally organized event. However the audience arrived not just from the immediate localities, but from faraway places as well. As the Kozhichena *wa'z* poster shows us, *wa'z* held in rural areas was attended by a huge Muslim population who lived beyond the immediate borders of the *mahallu*. While these local mosques provided the audience the *wa'z*, they in return gave the authorities the necessary resources in the form of donations and endowments to build religious infrastructures. Since the existing mosques had not been renovated for several decades because of various colonial laws, these mosques would not have been spacious enough to accommodate large audiences. Another factor was the presence of large number of women in the new *wa'z majlises*. Decline in the availability of socializing places once available to Muslim women in traditional settings was one reason for this huge turnout in the *wa'z majlises*. As Sunni Muslims in the region did not encourage women attending services at mosques, organizing *wa'z* outside the mosque became necessary in order to accommodate these growing number of women attendees.

⁴ In a poster prepared to announce the fourth anniversary of Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema conducted in Chaliyam in 1924, it is also mentioned that there would be a sermon session inside the Chaliyam Jumua Masjid on 16 October 1925, indicating that in the early decades of the 20th century sermons were confined to mosque premises.

5.2 Sound and Mappila Spatial Imaginations

The reasons for holding *wa'z* outside mosques were not just for practical purposes. Alongside changes in the Muslim settlement pattern, there had been an expansion of religious activities being held in public after the 1950s. Religious performances once confined to the domestic realm started taking on new roles in the newly formed Kerala polity. *Wa'z* was one among them. In order to understand this public character of Islam in the region in the 1950s, one has to place it in the broad context of community formations among other socio-cultural-religious groups in the state.

The early decades of the 20th century were a crucial period for many communities in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, particularly for the lower caste/class among them. Articulating community identities at various levels in order to negotiate with multiple power structures in the emerging Kerala state, there developed various socio-religious movements anchoring different trends for social emancipation in the material, cultural, political and spiritual realms (Mohan, 2015). These movements aimed at two things: (1) mark their community's presence in the region on a large-scale and (2) use the avenue thus created to bargain with the state to claim for rights and privileges (147). These movements had multiple layers to it. When Malayali identity was trying to define itself in relation to the neighbouring Tamil at one end and Kannada on another, both in terms of language and territory, communities within Kerala were trying to define themselves against each other. Various groups within each community and caste also followed the same pattern by differentiating themselves from each other. But such initiatives were minimal among Muslim communities in the early part of the 20th century because of the continuing rebellions in Malabar and the subsequent repressive laws the British implemented to

regulate their movements. As a result, when other hegemonic communities and castes organized themselves under various community movements or aligned with existing political organizations, labour or peasant movements, the Mappila Muslim community stood apart, except for a few marginal voices, in the first decades of the 20th century particularly during 1920-1947.⁵ In the case of the Mappila Muslim community, the desire for modern resources and the struggles to access/achieve them actually started to take on a concrete form very late. While the freedom movement provided other communities with the impetus to articulate their concerns along the lines of anti-colonial movements, for Mappila Muslims, at least in the region, such avenues were not readily available largely because of the stringent laws introduced in the wake of the continuing rebellions against the British.

It was only after gaining Independence from the British in 1947 that Muslims started to avail of the avenues and platforms that were already available to other communities in the region. This was particularly visible in the case of basic religious infrastructure. But the partition of India into India and Pakistan along religious lines and the following violence it perpetuated in North India complicated the scene.⁶

⁵ Khan Bahadur K. Muhammad, the first Muslim educational officer appointed in Colonial Malabar to attract Mappilas to modern education describes the developments in this period in his book *Mappilamar Engottu?* [Whither the Mappilas?], first published in 1954 and republished by Mathrubhumi Books in 2015.

⁶ It is a common argument that the partition did not affect the South Indian Muslim communities and the south Indian Muslim context has been presented as a case in point to 'correct the bias of scholarship on South Asian Islam,' taking the partition as a major reference point. See the theme note prepared by Jha (2007) for a seminar titled "Histories, cultures and politics: Islam and Muslims in South," organized by Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, in Hyderabad. While it is true that it did not affect the South Indian Muslims in the way it affected the Muslims in North India because of their proximity to the new border, it is not true that it did not make any impact on Muslim social life in South India. While Ansari (2016) argues that the very case for two nation theory had been concretized as an aftermath of Malabar rebellion (1921). Various cases pertaining to the tribulations of "Pakistani citizens" with Malayali origin also indicate towards the implication of partition for Mappila Muslim life. To follow those cases, see the reports available from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kozhikode/The-curious-case-of-Malabars-sidelined-Pakistani-citizens/articleshow/51937184.cms>, <http://www.firstpost.com/long-reads/the-promised-land-tribulations-of-keralas-pakistani-citizens-3713497.html> retrieved on 13 March 2018. *Paradeshi* (2007),

Marking their physical presence in the newly formed state was thus a critical move for Muslims. The making of religious infrastructures (erection of new mosques), formation of new political parties (Muslim League in 1947), revival of existing religious organizations (Samastha, Mujahid), organization of systematic religious education (formation of Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidhyabhyaasa Board in 1954), and public events (organization of *wa'z* outside the mosque) significantly contributed to this move.

Among other important elements, *wa'z* has also been a public display of numerical strength. Any *wa'z* is made up of a vast number of individuals, their coming together into a single space and their listening to an individual. It also involves public display of capacities that the community possess and their ambitions for the future. All these taken together give an entirely different meaning to an otherwise normal event organized inside the mosque. As Metcalf (1996) has indicated in her introduction to *A study on making Muslim space in North America and Europe*, inscribing old ritual practices in new forms upon the newly arrived spaces has always been part of a strategy to make territorial claims for Muslims. And it was such territorial claims by ethnic and religious minority groups that provided them with a launching pad to make larger socio-cultural-political claims in the new places that they had arrived. How did *wa'z* reconstitute an already existing space? When *mawa'iz* are organized outside the mosque, they could be organized anywhere; in the centre of a market, a paddy field, a sports stadium, a government-owned community hall, a wedding hall or any other place that anyone could potentially make claims on. The

is a Malayalam film by P. T. Kunju Muhammad which tells the plight of Malayali Muslims holding Pakistani passport but living in Kerala, forced by Indian authorities to leave the country to Pakistan. The movie is an example of the impact of partition finding expression in Malayali popular culture.

question then was who has the power to own them, make them places of space and what are the strategies involved in it (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

The language employed in any *wa'z* makes it evident that it is meant only for Muslims and is performed to cultivate and enhance their ethical sensibilities. Why should such an event be organized in a public space or require a public display? Werbner (1996, 2003) provides us with a useful analogy to understand this phenomenon while she talks about the journey of a Pakistan-based transnational Sufi figure to Britain. On migrating to Britain, the followers of Ghamkol Sherif in Pakistan also took along with them the rituals associated with the *Urs* [death anniversary] of their Sheikh and celebrated it twice a year there. Processions through the streets of Birmingham, Manchester and other important immigrant neighbourhoods were the main attraction of the festival. As they marched they chanted *zikh*⁷ in loud voices. Werbner argues that such explicit gestures embody several other implicit manoeuvres. She says:

“In chanting (*zikh*) they not only purify their hearts and souls, they also sacralise and “Islamicize” the very earth, the buildings, the streets, and the neighbourhoods through which they march....they sacralise an alien cityscape, the land of infidels and reconstitute them as moral space..... In sacralising spaces, Muslims root their identities as Muslims in a new locality and embody the moral right of their communities to be in this new environment”. (1996: p. 312)

⁷ *Zikh* literally means remembrance. Mainly associated with Sufism, *zikh* is a form of devotional act, often performed as a group in which Muslims repeatedly and rhythmically recite the names of God, his attributes, blessings of the Prophet or prayers for forgiveness.

How does *wa'z* reconstitute a place of “infidels” into a moral space? Look at how a football stadium is turned into a moral space when Shafi Saqafi performs his *wa'z* in Cheruvadi. The football stadium is owned by the Cheruvadi Panchayat [the local administrative body under the Government of Kerala]. The stadium is available to anyone on rent to organize public events. It has been used to organize a variety of events from sports events and cultural events to trade fairs. It has also been the venue for the annual Cheruvadi festival, a carnival of food, cultural programmes, circus and many more. But the *wa'z* brings a completely different spatial rhythm to this football stadium with its own laws and regulations.

During the time of *wa'z* the stadium is temporarily divided into two parts and separated by long curtains. The front of the stadium which opens to the main road and faces the stage is reserved for men and the back area is earmarked for women. “This is to make sure that there won’t be any chances for *ikhtilat* [mixing of men with women],” says Abdul Hameed Haji, the convener of the program. The volunteers deployed across Cheruvadi streamline the participants’ movement and direct both men and women to the pathways reserved for them. Thus the football stadium is transformed into a *wa'z majlis* now with its own visual and auditory order. Thousands of people, including those who might have been regular participants of other events held in the stadium, gather there to listen to *wa'z* and behave with completely different bodily dispositions. According to them, they now sit not in a football stadium, but on a sacred space: they cover their heads, speak softly and gently, walk slowly, do not fight for chairs or make any noise.

Shafi Saqafi would say to the audience later on in his *wa'z* that the place they were sitting on was a sanctified space. By quoting a Hadith in which the Prophet is

attributed as saying that spaces of scholarly deliverance are part of paradise, he would remind the audience that they were sitting in paradise, not on earth, the time they spent there did not belong to this world, it belonged to the afterlife, that it was a heavenly time. He would repeatedly remind the audience of this throughout his *wa'z* and would ask them to treat the space and the time of *wa'z* with due respect. By employing Islamicized topographies over an otherwise secular place what was being done was not just the moral conquering of a new place, but also experimenting with the embodiment of sanctity in new places (Liebelt, Shenar, & Werbner, 2016).

This is not to say that a *wa'z* is organized to achieve such earthly ambitions alone. A *wa'z* can be organized, performed, listened to and understood, as a majority of the Muslims do, independent of all these. At the same time it is also illogical to argue that it does not have any functional value outside its projected objectives in religion. *Wa'z* basically aims to cultivate a pious self in a human being. But this does not happen in vacuum. A pious self belongs to earth as much as it belongs to heaven; because for Muslims being pious in this world would make them pious in the afterlife. So the pious self has to be created and maintained in opposition to many other selves available to one in this life; secular, national, regional, linguistic and modern. That being the case, the *wa'z* being taken out of the mosque and the formation of the new state of Kerala happening at the same time cannot be seen as a coincidence. Holding the *wa'z* in public was also an act of presenting a community, their bodies, behaviours, and norms to a wider public. Thus it becomes an act of communicating with the Muslim public as much as exhibiting this communication to others.

Coming back to the discourses emerging from within the community, the 1950s and the 1960s were also the time that Nadwathul Mujahedeen and Jama'th-e-

Islami, two Salafite organizations, started to appeal to the community at mass level. Sunni Muslims considered these two organizations as *mubthadae*, [illegitimate inventors in Islam]. This illegitimate innovation in religion, according to traditional Sunni belief, comes from a specific approach to Islamic knowledge tradition, its interpretation and importantly through specific forms and modes of its circulation (Ware, 2014). Following the logic of Protestant reformation in Christendom, Islamic religious movements of this sort argued for new interpretations of scriptures over centuries' old tradition and its reproduction (Loimeier, 2005, 2016). While the Salafite organizations believes that it is through orality that those centuries' old traditions are reproduced and maintained among Sunni Muslims in the region, they think printing technology would reverse the order: prioritize the printed texts over tradition.⁸ Obviously criticism against *wa'z* was at the core of their criticism against Sunni Muslims. So for Sunni Muslims, popularization of *wa'z* and its public display also meant an assertion of a particular approach to Islamic knowledge tradition and its circulation which involves the traditionally-trained scholars, their companionship, habitus and its circulation among the audience through their physical presence, their speech and its written expression. (Karamustafa, 2015).

The introduction of the loudspeaker into Muslim community through *wa'z majlises* held in public places coincides with other developments outside the community. The 1950s and '60s were the time people in Kerala started to hear sounds which were unfamiliar to them till then. The boom in the construction field, establishment of new industrial ventures, introduction of new public and private transport systems etc. had brought into existence a completely new set of sounds which invaded the human soundscape. In such an atmosphere, *wa'z* outside the

⁸ The chapter on print in this dissertation discusses this issue in detail.

mosque had to compete with these new sets of sound and cultivate a new practice of hearing among its audience who were now taken outside the mosque. Amplified sound using loudspeakers in *wa'z* could serve both these purposes.

5.3 Sound, Power and Muslim Factionalism

Construction of new mosques by different or opposing sects and formation of new religious organizations further complicated this picture. The 1960s and '70s were also the time the Salafi-inspired Kerala Nadwathul Mujahedeen (KNM) and Jama'th-e-Islami established their grassroots base in the interiors of Malabar. They needed their own religious infrastructure. This resulted in the establishment/construction of at least three mosques belonging to three different sects, namely the Sunni, the Mujahid and the Jama'th-e-Islami in every typical Muslim settlement in Malabar. In semi urban or urban areas this number multiplied. The further divisions within KNM and the two splits in Samastha Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema only increased their number in every single Muslim settlement.⁹

The attempts of these newly formed organizations or sub sects to carve out their own socio-cultural-religious space within Muslim community and outside had made the Muslim religious sphere in Malabar vibrant on the one hand and chaotic on the other. Mosques and media infrastructures were the primary realms where these battles were fought out within the community. Thus, an *azan* from these new mosques

⁹ According to the Waqaf Act 1995, Mosques are required to register with the State Waqaf Board and requires special building permission from the local administrative authorities. Since many of these new mosques do not either get such permissions or do not apply for the same their exact numbers are not available. But their increase in number has been reported on several platforms and in articles pertaining to Kerala mosques. For example see the following quote from the online edition of *India Today*: "It is impossible to miss them on the 650-km drive from Trivandrum in southern Kerala to Kasargod in the north. Round every second bend, the minarets of a gleaming new mosque reach for the sky. In an unexpected way, Kerala's skyline is changing". To read the full report, follow this link, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/religion/story/19871015-mosques-sprout-all-over-in-kerala-in-a-variety-of-shapes-799403-1987-10-15> retrieved on 6 March 2018.

using loudspeakers were considered by Muslims not just as a call to prayer but also as a reflection of the larger theological and factional differences emerging in one's locality. Since *azan* has a significant role in regulating the everyday activities of not just Muslims, but also non-Muslims in the region, the use of loudspeakers for *azan* to reflect on and magnify the sectarian differences had far-reaching consequences. For example, some sects follow different time schedules for their *azan*. If the listener of an *azan* is not able to recognize its source (mosque), it can confuse him/her.¹⁰ This was a prevalent problem in the 1960s and '70s when these mosques and the sounds they were producing were very new. And it still continues to be a confusing one for many.¹¹ Thus the electronically amplified call to prayer in the new socio-religious settings of Malabar offered various religious sects and organizations a medium to reclaim and retain their space within the community.

Did the loudspeaker epitomize an already existing sectarianism within Islam, create new forms of it or did it magnify an already existing one? All three hold true. We have already seen how loudspeakers exemplified the already existing theological differences within Muslim communities. Thus the history of the loudspeaker in the Malabar Muslim context cannot be written without taking into account the history of factionalism within it. Interestingly enough, the loudspeaker made its initial appearance in Malabar by evoking a theological debate among the Muslim community in the region. A debate in the 1960s over the religious status of the

¹⁰ This is a crucial factor during Ramadan, the fasting month where different sects follow different timetables to begin and end fasting and these times are marked by the early morning and evening *azans*. Though the difference between them is a matter of a few minutes, scholars belonging to opposing sects argue that this will invalidate their fasting.

¹¹ When I went to Kodyathur-Cheruvadi, which has more than five mosques, for the first time in 2012, I was warned by many to be aware of the "wrong *azans*". Some people used the word *azan dirar* [the *azan* of dissent], referring to a Qur'anic use of the term Masjid Dirar. Masjid Dirar was a mosque built by *munafiqs* [hypocrites], during the Prophet's time next to the Masjid Quba in Mecca and the Qur'an warns Muslims from going there.

loudspeaker is said to be the reason for the first major split among the Sunnis in the region. The question that provoked this debate, and later the split, was posed to the Fatwa committee of Samastha comprising of leading religious scholars of the time. It was whether the Islamic Sharia permitted the use of loudspeaker to amplify the sound of an Imam leading congregational prayers such as *khutuba*. This question was raised because in the Shafi school of Islamic jurisprudence it is a pre-requisite that the Friday sermon of an Imam, in order to be considered as a valid ritual, must be heard by at least forty men assembled in a mosque. However while using loudspeakers to amplify an Imam's voice is one hearing the original voice of the Imam or not? Is the sound being produced from the loudspeaker a reproduction of an original voice or an extension of it? If it is not the original voice of the Imam, would it not affect the validity of the ritual itself, etc. were the primary concerns of the fatwa seeker. Following this, the Fatwa committee appointed an expert committee to look into the question. They submitted their final report after several rounds of consultations with numerous scholars, scientists, and technicians including sound engineers from India and abroad, and after having referred to a huge literature on similar cases in Islamic jurisprudence.¹² Based on this report a majority of the scholars in the Samastha opined that using loudspeaker in performing religious rituals was permissible. While one scholar observed that though permissible, it is '*khilaful owla*' [against the best of traditions], the President of Samastha, K. K. Sadaqathulla Musaliyar strongly opposed their opinions noting that since loudspeakers distorts human voice it cannot be used for performing mandatory religious rituals. Following this, the Ulema association was split into two and Samsthana Kerala Jam-e-Yathul Ulema was formed in 1967 under the chairmanship of Sadaqathulla Musaliyar. K. K. Najeeb Moulavi, the current

¹² *Fatwa* (1998), a collection of fatwas by Nellikkuth Ismail Musaliyar, a prominent Sunni Muslim scholar compiled in three volumes and *Uchabhashiniyum dhaarmika prashnangalum* [Loudspeaker and ethical concerns] (2013) by Najeeb Moulavi provides detailed descriptions of these discussions.

General Secretary of Samsthana Kerala Jam-e-Yyathul Ulema told me that more than 500 mosques in the region still do not use loudspeaker for Friday sermons and a few among them do not even amplify the *azan* using the public address system. Though RSS, a right-wing Hindutva organization, and *Janmabhoomi*, BJP's official newspaper, often highlight Samsthana's stand on using loudspeaker to oppose its use in mosques,¹³ Najeeb Moulavi made it clear that their own opposition against loudspeaker was strictly based on Sharia principles.

This debate among Ulema that started in the early years of the introduction of the loudspeaker reiterates the fact that media infrastructures were welcomed in the religious community not as a result of any inevitable consequences, popularity or easy accessibility of a given technology. But such questions were taken as a matter of theological importance and were sorted out after a series of tense and sustained discussions within the community. Thus, the tension between mediation in a religious setting as a divinely inspired act and technology as a human experience is negotiated through the legal frameworks available in the Islamic Sharia. The dynamics of the legal debates on the status of technology in Islam demand us to take structures of ethics and belief system prevalent in a religious community seriously and to see how they play out in the making and unmaking of media infrastructures in particular socio-cultural-religious settings. The new technological order thus produced in a community embodies their larger ethical concerns as well.

The attempt to erect a new mosque by one particular religious sect was always opposed by other sects at various levels and through various means. Opposing them through legal means by filing objections in revenue departments or police authorities

¹³ For example, a report published on 10 September 2015, in the Kozhikode edition of *Janmabhoomi*, (also available in the online edition <http://www.janmabhoomidaily.com/news320581>) highlights Samasthana's stand on the use of loudspeakers prominently.

is one among them. As a result, applications seeking permission for building mosques are rejected by the concerned authorities in most of the cases. In one such case filed by the EK Sunni faction against their opposing AP Sunni faction in the office of the District Magistrate, Wayanad, the complainant among many other things stated the following: “The application submitted by Al-Huda Islamic complex seeking permission to construct a building in Kellur which they plan to use as a mosque should not be granted. Once the mosque becomes fully functional, they will start using loudspeaker not just for *azan* but for other religious rituals as well. This may cause noise pollution in the neighbourhood, trouble families living in houses close to the proposed mosque, particularly elderly people.”

“Such complaints are common in Kerala,” Adv. C. K. Kareem who represented the Masjid Alliance Committee in similar cases at various government and judicial forums told me. The growing number of reports in Malayalam newspapers about the complaints, judgments and protests on “abuse” of loudspeaker in mosques attests to Kareem’s observation. This method of anchoring one’s dissent against another in the form of his/her dissent against sound produced through loudspeaker is not just an intra-communal phenomenon. The growing number of news reports in Malayalam newspapers indicates that the use of the loudspeaker in a mosque has become a point of contention in inter-communal relations as well. In a case filed against the use of loudspeaker in a local mosque, in Neelikkaatu, Malambuzha, a group of petitioners requested the district magistrate to order the removal of the loudspeaker from the mosque as the noise emanating from it disturbed their life and work. As follow up on the petition, the District Collector of Palakkad asked both the parties to appear before him. In the meeting the Mosque committee informed the collector that they were going to stop using the loudspeaker in a day or

two. “The reality was that the petitioners actually did not stay in the neighbourhood of our mosque. They stay in a locality where the sound from the mosque is not audible. I am not sure even the Muslims who live close to the mosque are able to hear the *azan* from the mosque because the amplifier we use here is of low volt. Many Hindu families, who stay nearer to the mosque than these petitioners, had no complaint against us. Then from where did it come? These petitioners belong to the RSS faction and their complaint is definitely a politically motivated one. They might have thought that raising dissent in the form of a case on sound pollution will make it a non-political issue. But we did not want to divide the people living in our village and make their life hard. So we decided to remove the loudspeaker from the mosque,” Muhammad Sabith, Joint Secretary of the local Muslim Jama’th told me.

In many instances, building permits to construct mosques were given in Kerala on the condition that call to prayer will not be broadcasted over loudspeakers. The earlier law, which allowed mosques to use loudspeakers without any prior permission, no longer exists in many Indian cities. As a follow up step towards the recent Bombay High Court direction to remove "illegal" amplifiers from mosques, the Maharashtra government had asked mosques to take permission from the concerned police station to install sound amplifying equipment.¹⁴ While in some instances it is alleged that the loudspeakers from mosques disrupt the peace and are used to instigate communal violence, in other instances it is argued that loudspeakers turn the areas it acoustically cover into a Muslim ghetto.¹⁵ An investigation conducted by *The Indian*

¹⁴ See, <http://expressindia.indianexpress.com/news/ie/daily/19991215/ina15052.html> retrieved on 18 December 2017.

¹⁵ The Supreme Court of India’s judgement in July and October 2005 had made it clear that religion is not a ground to violate noise rules. In November 2006 the Israeli parliament proposed to ban *azan* via loudspeakers as part of an attempt to improve the quality of life of people living near mosques and won the preliminary approval in March 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/17/world/middleeast/lod-israel-muslim-prayer.html> retrieved on 18 December 2017.

Express in 2014 into the 605 communal violence cases reported from Uttar Pradesh after the general election results were announced showed that in more than one third of the cases, loudspeakers in mosques and the construction of new mosques and graveyards were the cause of the violence.¹⁶ Showing the details of the noise level they had recorded from the sites of religious rituals as well as non-religious festivities of all communities in Mumbai (Ganpati processions, Ramzan and Eid, Christmas, New Year and outside temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras), Sumaira Abdulali, of Awaz Foundation, a Mumbai based NGO working on noise pollution awareness campaigns, says that though noise pollution is not a community-specific phenomenon, the Police authorities in India are selective in implementing noise rules and thereby promote communal tensions.¹⁷ Comparing the colonial government's attitude towards religious sounds in British India and Ceylon, Khan (2011: p. 578) demonstrates that such approaches towards religious sound and its regulation in India is a structural one reflecting the nature of communal politics in the Indian subcontinent.

As the case studies above indicate electronically magnified sound from the mosque was widely used as a metaphor both in the inter-community and intra-community sectarian fights to argue cases against each other. Such arguments were also widely used to mobilize people and to alert them to the potential dangers that a loudspeaker from a Muslim settlement could bring in through sound. Punwani (2014) observes that the 'maha arati,' a ritual the Shiv Sena had started performing on roads outside temples in 1992 as a grievance-redressal mechanism/counter against the use

¹⁶ See Galonnier (2013) and <http://www.rediff.com/news/column/jyoti-punwani-the-loudspeaker-politics-of-the-right-/20140807.htm>, retrieved on 18 December 2017.

¹⁷ See the following report of the interview with Sumaira Abdulali, http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/environment/anti-noise-crusader-for-curbs-on-loudspeaker-use-in-mosques_10071355.html retrieved on 18 December 2017.

of loudspeakers in mosques was the major rallying point for Shiv Sena rioters in the violence that broke out in Mumbai after the Babri Masjid was demolished. Use/abuse of loudspeaker during times of violence is still a common thread in many of the narratives on violence. It has also been reported that perpetrators of communal violence take particular enjoyment in destroying sound amplification equipment (Larkin, 2014).

The symbolic relevance that the loudspeaker gains as a medium within and outside Muslim societies not only indicates the central and divisive role sound amplifiers possess in the everyday context of Muslims' lives but also informs us how a small technology like the loudspeaker embodies the larger socio-political-religious questions, concerns and ambitions; how popular use of loudspeakers for religious purposes started producing new forms of sectarianism, magnifying the existing one and by that brought in new anxieties about the loss of unity within the community and outside (Khan, 2011). What we understand from the above cases is that the decline or growth of a faction or sect within the community in Malabar was largely measured along acoustic lines: whose sound is heard and listened to more, and at the expense of what. Schafer (1994) in a different context demonstrates this relationship between sound and power by connecting the decline of Christianity in European cities and the bombardment by traffic noise. Goethe's Humanism, for Schafer, disappeared when the watchman's voice no longer reached all the inhabitants of the city of Weimer. Ong (1982) calls this move from sound-based oral culture to sight-based literary culture in modern life as "a certain silencing of God" which is at the centre of modernity.

5.4 From Listening to Reading: Questions on Muslim Reform

From the sheer volume of literature and debates produced on *wa'z*, it is clear that

criticism against *wa'z* has been very central to the 'Kerala Muslim reformist project.' Reformists' dissociation with and distinction from traditional Muslim societies has always unfolded through criticism of *wa'z*. Being the ritual most responsible for popularising traditional Sunni texts and practices in the region, such criticisms are not at all surprising. These criticisms, mostly comes from Salafite organisations and their modernist sympathizers, who dub *wa'z* as a *bid'a* [an illegitimate innovation in Islam]. Stigmatisation of *wa'z* as a native, primitive, rural and backward ritual/culture also regularly occurs in their criticism. Some others use more ambiguous terms such as 'traditional', 'ancient', 'popular', and 'folkloric' to exoticize/denigrate it and to imply that *wa'z* is a vestige of the past, hence it does not belong to modern Muslim society in these progressive times. Thus, these criticisms against *wa'z* are not just a criticism against a religious ritual, but exemplifies their antagonism towards particular habitus in religion where listening is considered as constitutive of Islamic knowledge tradition. That is why criticism against *wa'z* has often been raised as a criticism against 'unwanted noises in Islam.' The following statement by V. P. Rajeena, a journalist working for publications run by Jama'at-e-Islami and a key worker of Muslim Mahila Andolan written as a Facebook post, aptly summarizes the Muslim reformists' concerns about the pedagogical practices that have developed based on sound, its amplification and reproduction. She says:

It is a pity to have to listen to the verbal garbage (attahaasam) these wu'az let out in front of a microphone. A philosophy of life which is immense and amazing is given an easy name called "religion." These idiots that create a pseudo enclosure and confine the ideas inside it, then add a tinge of unreasonable fear to fuse it within people's brain, who swallow these ideas without question, were aptly called the "donkeys who carry the book" by the

*Holy Quran. The howling (oriyidal) of these senseless morons sweep away the grand gifts given to humanity by God Almighty, the very thought of which makes me burn up inside. Confining one's brain entirely to letters and symbols and enslaving the body to mindless rituals, they create a huge amount of filth.*¹⁸

The criticism Rajeena raises against *wa'z* is largely concerned with the role sound plays in distorting the 'wonderful ideology' called Islam into the 'howling' of an animal. So she calls *wa'iz* like swallows and compares them to donkeys that carries books but do not understand them. This distortion and misunderstanding, according to her, stems from the way knowledge is circulated in a *wa'z majlis*, which is through the amplified sound of the *wa'iz*. Her accusation is that in *wa'z*, knowledge, which she calls 'howling,' pouring forth from the mouth of a *wa'iz* does not enter the listeners' brain, but their stomachs. That is to say that for her like other critics of *wa'z*, knowledge transmitted in a *wa'z* through amplified sound equipment is not intellectually appealing. The allegory she brings in to describe the method of knowledge transmission in *wa'z* is that of eating which she suggests does not require any intellectual capacities. What she sees in a *wa'z* is just bodily activities of the *wa'iz* and his listeners, who do not think and act. She also accuses listeners of *wa'z* for their intellectual laziness which according to her results from the very form *wa'z* adopts and the medium it uses. The larger question she asks then is a methodological one concerning what sensorium is used for knowledge transmission in Islam. She is certain that using technologies that privilege sound will only help Islamic knowledge to lose its identity. Then what will happen? Though she does not answer this question directly, the books the donkeys carry in her narrative allude to her preferred medium:

¹⁸Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/rejeena.nallalam?hc_ref=ARQtJkLwJTojVdZpSg1QyzznhZahTvkQ1Fm-eRpgg5rnYUal912uBwJvYedQRIOhSgM&fref=nf on 10 January 2017.

reading.

The growing literature in Anthropology suggests that central to the historical configuration of modernity was a vast reorganization of sensory experience and it is argued that in becoming modern, Western culture moved away from a culture of hearing to a culture of seeing (Sterne, 2003). As I have already argued in the previous chapter, sermon audition has been central to cultivating a pious Muslim self that allows one to hear and embody ethical instincts and moral dispositions in the Islamic belief system. Contradictory to the cognitive task of learning rules that the modern idea of reading proposes, listeners in Islamic contexts hone affective-volitional dispositions that both attune the heart to God's Word and incline the body towards moral conduct (Hirschkind, 2004, 2006). Thus, sermon practices in Islamic traditions which privileges ear over eye have always been a problematic space for both Modernist and Islamic reformers alike for reassessing the virtues and dangers of the ear (Hirschkind, 2004). Their attempts to establish the conditions of possibilities for Modernity in various Islamic societies to enable Muslims to re-educate and realign their traditional learning along the lines of modern sensibilities have always been anchored through their dissociation with practices such as sermons.

While arguing to regain the true identity of Islamic knowledge and make it relevant to 'our time' what Rajeena wants the Mappila Muslim community to do is to move away from the culture of hearing to the culture of reading which 'lends a space for critical engagements with the text.' *Wa'z* does not provide such spaces for critical reflection. In *wa'z majlises* a listener is submerged in the aura of sound. In such contexts the scholar does not speak to someone's intellect but to their emotions. That is why one sees "emotionally charged people crying, donating or endowing their

material assets to religious institutions in such *majlises*,” says Ja’far Machri, a Salafi media activist.

Many articles and public speeches against *wa’z* demonstrate this emotional mood a *wa’z* creates and its ‘exploitive’ character by citing the example of auctions conducted in *wa’z majlises* aiming to mobilise financial resources for religious purposes. In these auctions listeners buy objects such as hens, eggs, honey etc. from the *majlis* for a rate higher than the normal price believing that it will bring *baraka* [blessings].¹⁹ This according to the reformist critics demonstrate the irrationalities and superstitions that *wa’z* generates and sustains. But for its followers such donations and endowments are part of showing their respect for knowledge. “Since the fundamental difference between Sunnis and Salafis is demarcated based on their approaches to Islamic knowledge and the methods of its dissemination, this Salafi criticism of *wa’z* is quite understandable. Because *wa’z* privileges particular ways of practising knowledge,” says Shafi Saqafi. Such Salafite anxieties about *wa’z* were recently articulated by their followers when there emerged a news report that two traditional Sunni organizations were going to merge. Mocking this report, Ashraf Kavay, a Jama’th-e-Islami follower said on social media that Malayalis would definitely benefit from this merger as it would potentially reduce the sound pollution rate in Kerala.

5.5 Sound and Silence: The Idea of Civic Islam

A statement by a section of Muslim organizations in the state on September 2015 demanding all mosque authorities to control the use of loudspeaker implies the new

¹⁹ I have personally seen in many *wa’z majlises* an egg that cost Rs.5/- auctioned off for Rs. 4000/-, or a 100 ml honey bottle auctioned off for Rs. 10,000/-.

role Islamic soundscape plays in contemporary Kerala society.²⁰ Responding subtly to the criticism raised by both the right-wing Hindutva organizations on the one hand and the Salafite organizations on the other, the statement requested the local Muslim community to use loudspeakers ‘wisely’ stating that mosques should not be a nuisance to people engaged in their work. While Panakkad Sayed Hyder Ali Shihab Thangal, the President of Indian Union Muslim League and the leader of EK Sunni faction, saw this as a move to strengthen inter-community relationship by stating that believers should keep out of matters that create controversy and hostility among various communities, Salafite leaders such as Karakkunnu projected it as an intra-communal issue. Sheikh Mohammed Karakkunnu, Assistant Ameer of Jama’th-e-Islami, said it was the Muslim clerics (by which he specifically meant Sunni Ulema) in the mosques that compete in using loudspeakers that demanded such a move from Muslim organizations. Indicating the chaos the use of loudspeaker had generated within the community he said in a press statement that religion was meant to ease human life, not create panic and spread hostility. T. P. Abdulla Koya Madani, another Salafi leader and the President of the Kerala Nadwathul Mujahedeen also specifically mentioned the sound pollution from the loudspeakers installed in mosques as being a real problem in/for society.

The above mentioned joint statements by a section of Muslim organizations and the subsequent discussion it generated are striking for two reasons. (1) The absence of AP faction of Sunnis and their leaders, and (2) the justification Samsthana provided for joining the move. Since AP Sunnis have always been accused as the major contributors to noise pollution in the region, their absence is crucial here.

²⁰ To read the full version of this joint statement by Muslim organizations, see the report published in the following links, <http://twocircles.net/2015sep21/1442853012.html>, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kozhikode/Curb-use-of-speakers-in-mosques/articleshow/48894268.cms>, and <http://twocircles.net/2015sep21/1442853012.html> retrieved on 3 October 2015.

Responding to the press statement, some of their followers even expressed the concern that the move against loudspeaker basically targets their activities. Their dissent was expressed in the form of an editorial article published in *Siraj Daily*, AP Sunnis' official newspaper on 14 September 2015. Written by N. K. Abdul Samad from Erattupetta and titled Uchabhashini: Ochayedukkan Varatte [Loudspeaker: don't create noise] the article criticizes the move.

The article starts with a long anecdote in which Upendra Brahmachari, a national leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishat describes loudspeakers in mosques as an instrument, which is divisive, dangerous, disturbing and over all anti-Hindu and designed to mobilise Muslims in their Jihad against Hindus. He also explains in detail why 'Muslim loudspeakers' alone should be banned and not any of the other loudspeakers used in Hindu temples, wedding parties and musical events stating that Muslim loudspeakers disrupt people's health, work and sleep since they function both day and night. He also makes some theological observations on behalf of Islam by proposing that Islam does not mandate in any of its scriptures the use of new information and communication technology for their prayers and rituals. Brahmachari speculates whether Muslims and their God have some hearing problem.

The article then proceeds by asking some pertinent questions. They are, (1) data about the major forms of pollution in the state, (2) what is the contribution of noise pollution to it, and (3) within noise pollution what is the contribution of religious noise and specifically Muslim noise? "If we analyse this data available to anyone, one can easily understand that Muslim organizations' move is an apologetic one aiming to appease right-wing Hindutva allegations on Muslim noise. That is why Muslim political organizations who make extensive use of loudspeakers in their political campaigns throughout the year ask mosques alone to restrict the use of

loudspeakers without making it applicable to their own activities. Why are these Muslim organizations who have been asking Muslims to fight Indian fascism bravely in all possible ways now bowing down in front of right-wing Hindutva allegations on the question of loudspeakers in mosques? Their statement is self-contradictory in many places. The joint press statement suggests that it is because of the loudspeaker that non-Muslims misunderstand this religion and Islamophobia is on the rise. Are *Ahuja* mike and the loudspeakers installed in the minarets responsible for all the sufferings and challenges that this community face today? All these show that their problem is not loudspeaker or noise pollution as such. Their attempt is to divert attention from the real issues that this community faces,” the article continues.

Though the article argues that Muslim organizations and institutions should seriously think of reprioritizing their strategies in the time of right-wing Hindutva uprisings, the question it asks is why a section of Muslim organizations think that such a shift in strategy should start from reducing the use of loudspeakers in mosques. The EK Sunni faction also raised a similar set of questions after P. K. Firos, the State General Secretary of Muslim Youth League, the youth wing of the Indian Union Muslim League, wrote a Facebook post criticizing the use of loudspeaker for *Mawlid* recitation in mosques during the month of *Rabiul Awwal*.²¹ One of the questions asked of Firos was why when people like him use the loudspeaker extensively in their political campaigns he was getting agitated and disturbed upon hearing Muslim sounds in particular.

Samsthana’s presence in the joint statement is interesting because their reasons for the restricted use of loudspeaker differ from that of other signatories. While the others view this move either as a question of living in a pluralistic society

²¹See P. K. Firos’ original Facebook post on loudspeaker and the readers’ comments to it here: https://www.facebook.com/PkFiros/?hc_ref=ARQW6IZzu4Gpro8M_AGVuhTiVKuQG7U1-Ly4NcUkR9MbHo3qdYlUBcpu_ft1iPGO9U&fref=nf retrieved on 12 November 2015.

and hence as an issue of maintaining inter-community relationships or as an attempt to reduce inter-community tensions, Samsthana took the stand that they would support the initiative as it might help Muslims to observe their prayers in its most noble form and instil in their hearts *thaqwa* [God-fearing], the most rewarding moral conduct in Islam. They also used the opportunity to remind the opposing organizations of the debates in the early 1960s on the use of loudspeaker that led to the first split in Samsthana and said that they were happy to see more people and organizations coming forward to endorse/support their (original) stand.

What we see here is a framing of ‘good and bad Islam’ along acoustic lines.²² While ‘reformed’ and ‘transparent’ Islam responsible towards the civic ideals of a pluralistic society is defined by reduced/minimal use of the loudspeaker, the ‘traditional’, ‘backward-looking’ and ‘trouble making’ Islam is articulated through their high production and consumption of amplified sound. Though this binary did exist in the past, what is distinct about the new framing that emerges from these discussions on loudspeaker is the increase in the number of Muslim organizations moving from the latter position to the former. Bayat (2005) in a different context calls this transition as a shift from Islamism to post Islamism. In post Islamism, Muslim organizations and institutions are compelled both by their own internal contradictions and by societal pressure to reinvent themselves and this is expressed in secular exigencies. While post Islamism according to Bayat is conceptualized as a reinvention of religious tradition in response to external threats where internal contradictions within the community disappear, the case I just delineated demonstrates how intra-community differences are reflected in their ‘fights against common enemies.’ The

²² Mamdani (2004) argues that the ‘good’ Muslim/‘bad’ Muslim binary were a Western invention to refer to the political rather than cultural or religious identities of Muslims. The appropriation of this binary by Muslim organizations to explicate theological differences within the community, as it emerges from the discussion on loudspeaker, refers to the religious identity of a Muslim.

obsession with loudspeaker within and outside the community either by opposing it or arguing for it in a way demonstrates how constituent sound and various forms of its manifestation are to Muslim societies. It is because of this constituent role that sound play in Muslim lives that Muslims, in order to articulate their differences and concerns within and outside the community, tend to argue their cases along acoustic lines.

In the following part, I will discuss how sound reproduction technologies developed from and contributed to the existing knowledge transmission practices that flourished in and around acoustic technologies such as the loudspeaker and sound amplifier. This section will also demonstrate how *wa'z* has been used as a discursive arena to domesticate the use of cassette technology by presenting an otherwise private media as a public one.

5.6 Cassettes and Sound Reproduction

Sound reproduction is not a new phenomenon. It has been in practice for a long time now in many ancient practices such as the usage of animal horns for amplification of human voice. The idea of *muballigh*, the one who reproduces the Imams' sound and movements in large congregational prayers for those who cannot see or hear the Imam, is an old idea in Islam. But sound production in its modern meaning, usage and form differs from all the previous practices. One of the striking differences of sound reproduction using modern technologies is said to be its power to separate a sound from its source. Pierre Schaeffer (as cited in Kane, 2014) describes this mechanically reproduced sound as a sound that one can hear without seeing the source. According to him the popularity of recorded sound industry such as music owes to the desire that the absence of the visual generates through recorded sound by hiding the source.

Scholars like Sterne (2003) opposes this approach to recorded sound by saying that it lacks historical perspective and is hostile to sound reproduction. According to him the fear is that reproduction will modify an otherwise undamaged interpersonal communication on the assumption that sound-reproduction technologies are neutral conduits separate from the social relationship. He also questions the source-copy binary in these assumptions and argues that sound-reproduction technologies are not ontologically separate from their source. For him technological sound reproduction, for example cassette recording, is not a break from other ancient practices of sound reproduction such as amplification of human voice using animal horns or the role of *muballigh*, in Islamic prayer congregations, but is a continuation of an already existing practice. While Sterne's criticism allows us to see sound reproduction in its historical perspective and not as a neutral conduit distinct from social relationship, his emphasis is on continuity of technology. In order to draw such an analytical continuity he does not even recognize the differences in the way the very idea of reproduction is conceptualized and executed and the way reproduced sound is heard in the old and new practices. For him such differences are a deviation from continuity. The problem with Sterne's formulation is that it will allow one to recognize only certain forms of continuities, that too in particular domains. Thus, his attempt to draw continuities between various communication techniques is limited to sound technologies alone. For example, Sterne's formulation will not allow one to see print and sound in continuity. But if one wants to track continuity among different communication technologies belonging to different space, time and senses, then the challenge is to see how continuity works through differences. For that, one needs to recognize differences first and then see how differences are mediated at various levels using various mechanisms. Only such an attempt can help us to see technologies as an

integral part of socio-cultural relationships. Cassette recorded *wa'z* in Malabar allows us to do precisely that.

Cassette technology in the Islamic world has always been associated with the 1979 Iranian revolution (Sreberny & Mohammadi, 1994). Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's (the founder of Iran as an Islamic republic) argument for rule by Islamic jurists was translated into a popular opposition movement through his cassette recorded missives from Paris smuggled to Iran (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). Since then scholars have started describing these complex events which lead to the overthrow of US-supported Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and the subsequent creation of an Islamic republic in Iran under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as Iran's Shi'ite Cassette revolution (Hoffmann & Larsson, 2013) or as Khomeini's Cassette revolution (Al-Rasheed, as cited in E&A, 1999), etc. It is in this historical context that many of the scholars of contemporary Islam as well as security agencies tend to alert us about the role of cassette sermons in propagating radical Islam (Hirschkind, 2006: p. 4) and why large sections of population look at the popularity of new technology among Muslim youth with suspicion (Ilias, 2010). During the period of Iranian revolution, cassettes were a strong presence among other Muslim communities from Indonesia to Egypt through recorded sermons imported mainly from Saudi Arabia. The popularity of cassettes was so extensive that scholars like Eickelman (1996: p. 125) explained it as voiced Islam's takeover of printed Islam.

The reason for the popularity of cassettes in the Arab-Islamic world was always attributed to its material qualities; small, portable, reproducible, low cost, simple power requirement and easily exchangeable between people (Hirschkind, 2006). These material qualities according to Hirschkind made cassette the preferred

medium of the oppositional movements since its size enabled its users to evade the existing regulatory mechanisms of the government and thus to reach out to more people and to mobilize them against the government (Hirschkind, 2006). Manuel (2014) on the other hand argues from the Indian context that the popularization of cassettes in the early 1980s also had to do with developments at the local level. The introduction of cassettes was made easy according to him because of the relaxation in the state-imposed import restrictions on cassettes (Manuel, 2014: p. 390). Thus he attributes the reasons for the popularity of cassettes in a community to logic not internal to it. While both these perspectives are partially true, they do not explain sufficiently how the historical acquaintance of Muslim communities with hearing have reflected in making cassettes a popular medium in the Muslim world and how the larger acoustic infrastructures already prevalent in the Muslim world contributed to and developed from the political, economic and material contexts that Hirschkind and Manuel refer to. This is important in Hirschkind's own ethnographic context where the role of hearing as a religiously significant sensorium was a crucial factor in redefining Cairo's soundscape. A more fruitful approach then would be to see these developments not as split categories, but as a continuum.

5.7 Cassette *Wa'z* in Malabar

Closely similar to the developments in other Muslim societies, cassette technology reached the Malabar Coast in the late 1970s and early '80s (Ilias, 2010). Though cassette *wa'z*²³ reached the Malabari Muslim homes for the first time from Gulf countries in the late '70s, the Malayali Muslim experience of it was remarkably different from that of other Muslim societies in the world for various reasons. It was

²³ By cassette *wa'z* I mean *wa'z* recorded by individuals or organizations in compact cassettes using tape recorders.

through the Saudi Arabia-based Salafi preachers' sermons in Arabic imported from the Gulf countries that cassette technology was introduced in other South East Asian and West African Muslim societies. In Malabar it followed an opposite course. It was Mappila Muslim scholars' *wa'z* in Malayalam recorded at Malabar but taken to the Gulf countries by migrant labourers, copied there and then brought back home in large volumes that popularized the cassette recording technologies here. Another important difference is the fact that while the introduction of cassette technology in other Muslim societies was explicitly linked to the rise of Muslim oppositional movements in the form of Islamist politics or Salafism, cassette entered the Malabar Muslim households as part of traditional Sunni discourses.

Given that the Gulf-connection was strengthened by the wave of migration from Kerala to the Persian Gulf in the late '70s, Gulf was a crucial factor in the introduction of many other technologies in Kerala. Almost all the newest technologies were introduced and popularized in Malabar through Malayali Muslim migrants (henceforth NRK Muslims – non-resident Kerala Muslims) working in various Gulf countries. The radio, tape recorder, television sets and later computers and mobile phones considered as luxury items were sent in parcels or brought along with them by NRK Muslims. In some cases pilgrims returning from Hajj played a significant role in importing and popularizing many of these technologies among the Muslim community well before the economic liberalization policies started facilitating easy import of information and communication technology in India. Many people I interviewed told me that they had got their first electronic gadget when their relatives came back home from Hajj. The changes in import policies in accordance with the new economic liberalization policies in India from the late 1980s onwards accelerated

this move and subsequently changed these technologies from being a luxury to a more familiar one for people in the region (Manuel, 2001: p. 190).

My first encounter with a Sony tape recorder was in the early 1990s. A distant relative of mine, a labourer working in Sharjah, UAE, came to visit his in-laws in my village. During his visit he had brought along a two-in-one radio-cassette player recently bought from the Gulf. Since there was no electricity at his in-laws' house and the batteries available in the village then were not fit for the Sony tape recorder he left it at my home for a day. Though I do not remember the exact name of the cassettes he had left along with the Sony tape recorder, there were definitely a few *wa'z* and *Mappilappattu*²⁴ [Mappila songs] cassettes. While demonstrating its operation, he explained to us that it was a special tape recorder; that it did not require the cassette to be reinserted to switch on to the second track after finishing the first half-track. We all sat around it and listened to the *wa'z* and music. We were hearing such sounds for the first time. Embarrassed to hear a *wa'z* from a machine, my grandmother asked us, "Doesn't it remind you of what Allah has said about the book He is going to give us on the Day of the Final Judgement?" She was trying to draw an analogy between a small cassette in which a large volume of speech was recorded and the Muslim belief in the two angels called Raqib and Atid [also known as *Kiraman* and *Katibin*], noble recorders, sitting on one's shoulders and recording all one's actions, utterances and feelings. Muslims believe that this book which is the cumulative document of a person's actions will be brought in front of him/her on the final Day of Judgment and the book will start speaking on its own what the angels have recorded. "Many people doubt these days whether a small book kept on our shoulders can record such a long

²⁴ Mappila Song is a popular musical genre among Mappila Muslims of Malabar rendered to lyrics in the colloquial Mappila dialect of Malayalam mixed with Arabic.

list of actions one does in one's entire lifetime. If human beings can record long speeches in a small machine like this, why can't God record all your speeches and actions in a small book?" Her embarrassment of new sound recording technology suddenly turned into firm conviction. So did ours.

The first tape recorder my family owned was brought by my father when he returned from Hajj in 1996. Along with the tape recorder he had also brought a full version of Qur'an readings in 20 cassettes recited by the renowned Qari' Sheikh Abdul Basit bin Abdul Samad of Egypt. This is not just a personal story. But is part of the broad pattern of the introduction of information technology in most Mappila Muslim households in Malabar. While Ilias (2010) sees this Gulf connection as part of an old pattern of global dynamics in Kerala through its extensive ancient and medieval trade with the outside world, particularly with the Arab Islamic world, Osello and Osello (2007) argue that this is part of Mappila Muslim entrepreneurs' efforts to link the need for education, reform and future progress of Kerala Muslims with their pursuit of economic interests and attempts to produce a Mappila Muslim modernity.

5.8 Hearing Home: Sound and Migration

Kerala's Gulf connection has always been studied and understood in terms of what Malayali migrant labourers have brought back home, particularly in terms of economic remittance (Zacharia & Rajan, 2004, 2012). The discussions on the impact of Gulf migration on Kerala's socio-cultural landscape were mostly limited to Film Studies and Gender Studies where the attempt have been to see how the Kerala model of development and its economic base constituted through migrant labourer's remittance have shaped Malayalam cinema, its industrial and narrative context

(Roweena, 2002; Menon, 2008; Radhakrishnan, 2009). Cultural flow from Kerala to the Gulf had never been studied systematically. The only exception in this regard is a recent study on cultural or political organizations among Malayali migrants in the Gulf countries (Ilias, 2015). The emergence of cassette *wa'z* presents a unique case study not just to understand Gulf migration beyond its economic tropes but also to understand how migration has shaped the translocal Malayali cultural practices.

In the initial days of cassette *wa'z*, every stage of its production and distribution was fully handled by Gulf migrants.²⁵ It was recorded using home tape recorders owned by Gulf migrants or their relatives.²⁶ Its production and distribution was also limited to the informal networks of Mappila Muslim migrants in the Gulf. The pattern of community life among Malayali migrants in the Gulf made these processes easy as hundreds of Malayalis stayed together in a single compound or “camps” as they were/are popularly called. Recorded using multiple tape recorders collected from inmates of the camps or neighbourhoods, the amateur characteristics of its production were very visible and audible from the materiality of the cassettes themselves. The cassettes were duplicated as they (the migrants) listened to the *wa'z* and the comments and conversation between them is also recorded in the background of the newly ‘produced’ cassettes. Thus, in the new cassette *wa'z*, the quality of the original sound is not only degraded but new sounds are also added. Introduction of dual cassette decks/dual well cassette decks with two transports solved these issues to some extent as it enabled playing and recording in a single machine. Recording

²⁵ This part is written based on my interviews with first and second generation Gulf migrants in Kozhikode, Malappuram, Wayanad, and Kannur districts.

²⁶ Though a typical tape deck or tape machine is used to record and playback sound, cassette players from the very beginning of its introduction was known more as equipment to record sound on compact cassettes than as a machine to play sound. This is evident from the very name users preferred to call this machine; tape recorder, one of the many uses of tape deck.

multiple *mawa'iz* in the same cassette or using the same cassette for multiple recordings was common in such amateur productions. A *wa'z* cutting over to another unrelated *wa'z* was also common. Since the economic motives were minimal in the initial stages, cassettes were often recorded, produced and distributed free of cost. Exchanging cassette *wa'z* was considered as a pious activity as was listening to it. Most of the *wa'z* cassettes in my collection produced by Gulf migrants in the early 1990s were handed over/handled through several people. Many of them had written their names on it only to be struck off later by its new users/owners. In addition to the names of several owners, the cassettes are also marked with details such as the subject of the *wa'z* and the name of the *wa'iz* indicating that the same cassette was used for multiple recordings. This amateur character and informal distribution networks may resemble the underground cassette cultures prevalent in Pop Music industry in the late 1970s (Jones, 1990).

While cassettes were widely used in many Muslim and non-Muslim contexts to import new and unfamiliar sound recordings, Mappila Muslims used it to export familiar sounds that they missed, from their homes to their new work places in the Gulf countries. The idea of 'missing sound' among Malayali Muslims operated at many levels. While cassette *wa'z* articulated the public dimension of it, *kathupaattukal* or letter songs represented its private facet. The sound articulated in *wa'z* was important for these migrants because of the particular Islamic character it embodied and the piety it espoused in Malabari Muslim soundscape as opposed to the more Wahhabite-leaning Islamic soundscape in the Gulf countries. Islamic soundscape in the Gulf countries, at least in its public articulation, is limited to *azan* and the Friday congregational *khutuba*. The overarching presence of Islamic sound as we see it in Malabar is absent in Gulf countries.

Kathupaattukal or letter songs, a sub category in the broader *Mappilappattu* genre, flourished parallel to cassette *wa'z*. Closely connected to the lives of migrant labourers in the Gulf and their families in Malabar, the popularity of these songs marks their desire to stay connected with each other by hearing their voice. Though this genre of songs existed among Mappilas much before the large-scale Gulf migration, *Kathupaattukal* are basically considered as letters between a husband in the Gulf and his wife in Kerala but written in the form of song and recorded on audio cassettes.²⁷ The introduction of cassettes made *kathupaattukal* a popular musical sub-genre in *Mappilappattu* and a favourite among migrant families. Interestingly, this genre took its form from an actually existing practice: reading letters out aloud and recording it on an audio cassette in one's own voice and sending it to relatives in Kerala. Very often a tape recorder would be initially sent from the Gulf with a bunch of such 'cassette letters'. The replies to the "letter" would also be sent in the same format.

Two things happen here. (1) A letter that is supposed to be a medium bound to writing-reading is turned into a speaking-listening medium. (2) Cassette, a medium broadly considered as a public medium is privatized and made intimate. Thus, the history of cassettes in Mappila Muslim households tells us that the popularization of cassette technology in Malabar owe to the migrant labourers desire to hear (from) the homeland. Thus it was not a coincidence that it was Gulf migrants who initiated the production and distribution of *wa'z* cassettes using professional means.²⁸ This is also

²⁷ A letter written by one Mariyakkutty, a Mappila Muslim woman from Eranadu, Malappuram, to her husband Hassan Kutty who was imprisoned in Bellari jail in the wake of 1921 Malabar rebellion is believed to be the first letter song (Personal conversation with Abdurahiman U P, a researcher on letter song cultures among Mappilas).

²⁸ Alfa Cassettes, Chemmad, one of the first professional cassette producers and distributors in the region is an example. S A M Jameel, a popular Mappilappattu singer, told me in a personal conversation in 2010 March that he heard his recorded voice for the first time from a tape recorder

true in the case of loudspeakers. Mosque authorities requesting Gulf migrants from their villages to either present or donate sound amplifying equipment to the mosque is a common practice. In most such cases they bring the equipment with them from the Gulf countries or send it through some other means.

My own experience with a Malabar Muslim migrant labourer working in Malaysia demonstrates that such practices are also prevalent among other migrant communities. Ali, a 26 year old young man, from Kodinhi in Malappuram works in a restaurant run by a Pakistani in Miri, Malaysia. Since I was a regular visitor at this restaurant and there were very few Malayalis in the city, we became acquainted over a period of time. Ali came to Malaysia after failing to find a suitable job in Kerala that could help meet his financial commitments: half constructed house, debt, sisters' wedding, medical treatment for father. The list went on. He tried the usual job-hunting trajectory of the Mappila Muslim including the Gulf, but failed miserably. Later a distant relative working in Kuala Lumpur got him a visiting visa to Malaysia to try for a job and he finally found one with the Pakistani restaurant chain. When I called Ali one day to inform him that I was leaving for Kerala he asked me if I could carry a parcel to be handed over to his family. Since mine was a short trip and I did not have any luggage, I agreed to carry luggage weighing a maximum of 20 kg for Ali. The next evening Ali came to visit me with a big parcel and told me that it contained a sound amplifier for a mosque in his village. Knowing his struggles to make both ends meet, I asked why he was spending so much money on this.

playing in a grocery shop owned by Malayali migrant in UAE. But it is hard to confirm who started cassette production first given the popularity of various amateur practices that has existed in Malabar. Since the production and distribution of *wa'z* cassettes did not require any license from the government and were generally considered as copyleft materials, it is difficult to ascertain who started it first. Why these cassettes are considered as copyleft materials will be discussed in the later part of this chapter.

The Imam of our mosque has been asking me if I could donate a portable loudspeaker. They wanted a portable one so that a single system could be used in the mosque, madrasa and for other small events held outside. It is expensive, but cheaper than buying from India. After all it is for our akhira [the life here after]. And you know after coming here I hardly hear azans. I miss them badly. When I call my mother and if it is time for azan she will tell me how long it has been since I heard the azan from our mosque. Then she will put her phone on loudspeaker mode so that I can hear the azan from my home clearly. We will not speak until the azan finishes, but will only listen to it. When she learns that I am donating this loudspeaker to the mosque, she will be happy. As the Imam told me while making the request, Allah will definitely reward me for this endowment as long as it is used to call people to the righteous path.

Ali said firmly. I was pretty sure that it cost him two months of his salary.²⁹

But it appeared to me from what he said that such personal sufferings did not bother him while taking such a decision. Migration, a key component of modern life, developed and flourished following industrial revolution, colonialism and capitalism. It is always understood as a turbulent phenomenon where one experiences his/her personal and social life in perpetual disintegration. But people and communities develop distinct mechanisms to cope with these uncertainties, to renew their life and to integrate themselves into their community and place of origin. Among the many media and mechanisms available to one to integrate and connect back to the local Muslim community, Ali chose sound.

²⁹ Since Ali's employer had withheld his passport fearing that labourers may disappear upon finding a better job elsewhere, Ali was not able to send money back home using his passport; for which according to Malaysian law you require your passport. So Ali usually took my help to send money.

Ali's experience throws up questions on one's understanding of consumption of technology as being related to affluence, leisure or in tandem with growth and the status one achieves. Ali, like any other Mappila Muslim migrant, show that the history of technologies can also begin and flourish from the most painful moments in life, such as migration. The tendency of migrant labourers to mark their presence and connect with their homeland through different sound/sound reproduction technologies not only demonstrate the centrality of auditory traditions in their life, but also show how their life in a new place brings in new auditory practices and technologies to tradition back home. Since migration at a fundamental level is a movement of the body from a familiar place to an unfamiliar one, it requires several mechanisms to adapt to the new environment, including new ways of hearing. Sterne (2003) observes that the change in practices of hearing must be seen in relation to human being's other bodily practices of the time. He argues that the very shape and functioning of sound technologies is an extension and reflection of changing practices in a society and their relations to the nature and function of hearing.

5.9 From Production to Reproduction: New Listening Contexts

The introduction of simple and low cost cassette reproduction in audio recording industry constituted a quintessential new media platform (Manuel, 2014; Qureshi, 1995) and facilitated unprecedented changes in *wa'z*. The most visible one among them was the physical reordering of the *wa'z majlis* itself as it brought in a new physical object - recording stations - into the *majlis*. Located often in front of the stage from where the *wa'z* is performed the recording stations not only enhanced the importance of *wa'z majlis* but also literally symbolized the changes audio recording technology initiated in the Muslim soundscape in Malabar. Though these recording

stations had a humble beginning in the initial stages of its introduction with just the basic equipment, it expanded in prominence with the arrival of later technologies such as video recording, telecasting over closed circuit televisions, live online telecasting, broadcasting, etc. In some cases, the entire spatial organization of the *wa'z majlis* was designed according to the requirements of the recording, particularly when the *mawa'iz* were broadcast live on television channels or the Internet. The excitement that this technology generated among the *wa'z* listening community is very visible from a photograph of a *wa'z majlis* of the early '90s published in a local newspaper where hundreds of listeners came to listen to the *wa'z* with their tape recorders. Sitting in front of the *majlis* and holding up the tape recorders in their hands, listening appears to be a secondary activity (as opposed) to recording for this enthusiastic crowd (See the figure no. VII in the Annexure).

Along with recording instruments, audio recording technology brought together a web of other new players into the *wa'z majlis*; producers, technical operators and entrepreneurs. The idea that the same *wa'z* could be heard after a live delivery got over, that too multiple times, was a defining turn for both the *wa'iz* and his listeners. Hence the entry of cassettes into the domain of *wa'z* reconfigured Islamic soundscape in many ways. Major among them was the removal of *wa'z* from its original context. Taking *wa'z* beyond the scope of its traditional live articulation, cassettes put *wa'z*, *wa'iz* and listeners in motion. This movement made possible by cassette recordings played a significant role in extending the geography of existing Muslim soundscape into more areas and people. Since *wa'z* is considered as a one-time live address, its content and mode of presentation are structured accordingly. But the scope for reproducibility of *wa'z* in sound format has changed this understanding

and thus the ways in which a *wa'z* is presented and listened to in the live performances have also changed.

While *wa'iz* like Ibrahim Musaliyar argues that cassette technology has made *wa'z* more accessible and popular, Hamza Musaliyar opines that audio recording facility distract the audience from their careful listening, “The belief that a *wa'z* can also be heard later affected audiences’ already deteriorating listening capacity. The idea that you will never miss a *wa'z* as long as its recordings are available changed the way people hear a *wa'z*. They started losing their mental presence/concentration and *khushu* [humility].” In a recently organized *wa'z* by Cheroor Abdulla Musaliyar in Kooriyad, titled “The *wa'z* meant to revive the spirit of *wa'z*,” he insisted that listeners and organizers avoid recording his *wa'z*. While listing out the strategies he was going to adapt to ‘revive the spirit of *wa'z*’ Cheroor Abdulla Musaliyar on the very first day of his *wa'z* specifically mentioned that there would not be any recordings of his *wa'z* available in cassette, CD, or YouTube video formats.³⁰ When I asked him why he would do that since recordings could help his *wa'z* to reach out to more number of people, he replied, “That may be true. But it will affect the way my immediate audience listen to *wa'z*.”

Cassettes put *wa'z* in motion and initiated new forms and avenues for its circulation; it brought in *wa'z* from faraway places and took *wa'z* to faraway places. Thus the circulation of cassettes with its capacity to breed new forms of connectivity among fellow Mappilas living in distant places has contributed to the existing forms of connectivity between them. But one would also need to see such connectivity historically. To where do/did cassette recorded *wa'z* of a Sunni Muslim scholar

³⁰ I had to take special permission from Abdulla Musaliyar to record his *wa'z* and he granted the permission on the condition that I would use it only for academic purpose, and not for public circulation.

travel? Who listened to it? Did the new conditions of possibilities for hearing created by cassette recordings affect the rhetorical and moral authority of the *wa'iz*? An enquiry into these questions will reveal that circulation of cassettes, though it introduced new patterns of connectivity, followed an already existing pattern of circulation. Instead of breaking traditional networks cassettes strengthened it. Same is the case of live performance; who said (*wa'iz*), in what capacity (*wa'iz*'s scholarly reputation), at which platform (where and who organized it) were crucial factors that made a cassette *wa'z* popular.

Hafiz K. T.'s cassette selling experience while he was a student in the late 1990s at Jamia Islamia, Shanthapuram illustrates this point. Jamia Islamia is a religious seminary run by Jama'th-e-Islami. As part of their compulsory *da'wa* service, Hafiz along with his friends visited a village with a predominant Sunni population. *Da'wa* activities in such an institutional set up also mean selling their literature published in book or cassette formats. Though Hafiz and friends spent an entire day in the village visiting several households, no one bought books or cassettes from them. According to Hafiz, the reason was obvious:

They knew that we came from Jamia Islamia, Shanthapuram and the literature belonged to Jama'th-e-Islami. Returning to the college without selling even a single book/cassette would have been equally upsetting. So we decided to hide our institutional affiliation and play a trick. One of the cassettes in our collection was a 'prabhaashanam' by Jama'th-e-Islami leader who was also a Thangal [descendant of the Prophet's family]. Thangals are widely venerated among Sunni families who believe that their words and acts will bring baraka [blessings]. We know that it is a tradition Jama'th-e-Islami strongly opposes

arguing that it is against vahdaniyyath [Islam's basic concept of oneness of God]. But to sell the cassette we had to exploit that Sunni belief and introduce ourselves as students selling wa'z cassettes of a Thangal. We also knew that Jama'th-e-Islami opposes wa'z accusing it of propagating orthodoxy. They do not use the word wa'z to introduce sermons by their leaders, at least in Kerala. But the "wa'z by a Thangal" was the only cassette we could sell in that village.

Hafiz's experience tells that the cassette recorded wa'z travelled through a landscape and community already marked by a public representation of commonness through their theological orientations such as their school of belonging in the matters of Islamic law or the different factions within it, shared Sufi practices, ritual and educational cultures. In that sense cassette can also be considered as belonging to the genealogy of "travelling texts" (Ho, 2006: p. 100). The circulation of cassette was dependent on the public persona and religious authority of the wa'iz, while its consumption helped the wa'iz to further assert and authenticate his authority. Such empirical evidences also question the assumptions that increasingly pluralizing media landscape transform the content of religious communication and alter the notion of religious authority along with the changes in the sites and forms of the communication (Eickelman, 1999). The questions, which person possesses the authority to speak on behalf of Islam and whom would a particular Muslim community consider as a religious authority then are intimately tied to how knowledge is produced and transmitted where the habitus of a scholar is a key element.

5.10 Categories of Listeners

Apart from the audience seated in front of him, the *wa'iz* now had to address the audience beyond them as well. This produced two categories of listeners for the same event based on their physical absence or presence. The challenge before the *wa'iz* then was to address these two different categories of audience at the same time. Addressing an imagined audience for the *wa'iz* was challenging in many ways. How did *wu'az* succeed in making their *mawa'iz* speak to the audience who were absent?

Cassette recording sometimes demanded a shift in priority given to the present audience over the absent audience. It changed the subjects covered and the language employed in a *wa'z* substantially. Standardization of language in *wa'z* was one end result. Since the sensual appeal of a *wa'z* relied on the way words were pronounced, sentences were structured and importantly how sound was creatively deployed, this standardization of language had long-lasting implications. An analysis of the *wa'z* cassette industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s will explain this. Among the numerous *wu'az* only a few could succeed in the cassette industry. Others had to limit their *wa'z* to live performances. The five prominent figures in the *wa'z* cassette industry in the 1990s include M. M. Basheer Moulavi, Valithara Muhammad Kunhi Moulavi, Abdul Nasar Ma'adani, Abdul Samad Samadani, and Perodu Abdul Rahiman Saqafi (Haithami, 2015; Muhsin, 2015). Among these five, three are from the (formerly) Travancore region. The Malayalam dialect spoken there is considered to be the standardized form of Malayalam and their *mawa'iz* are always appreciated for its "*theli Malayalam*" [Malayalam with clarity].

A live *wa'z* performance had not just the *wa'z*; it was accompanied by many other rituals and practices before, during and after the *wa'z*. Though they were not directly related to the articulation of the *wa'z*, together they formed and contributed to

the overall liturgical atmosphere of the event. All these rituals and practices, except a few, were mediated acoustically. This include the *Mawlid* [the laudatory poetry praising the birth and life of the Prophet], supplication at the beginning and end of the *wa'z*, special announcements to make donations and endowments, instructions of the *wa'iz* to the audience to say *jawab* upon hearing the Prophet's or companions' name, etc. But cassettes avoid all these peripheral sounds from the larger recitational complex of the *wa'z* assuming that it is only relevant to the immediate audience present at the venue. Thus the mediation of *wa'z* through cassettes avoids many of its immediate contexts and characteristics though such omissions were not very easy and practical in the analogue sound editing.

Another major shift was the change in the way *wa'z* has been conceptualized. As I have already mentioned, in earlier times *wa'z* was meant to create virtues through general advice (*naseeha*) or what Qur'an describes as *amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar* [Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong] (3: 104). Thus, a normal *wa'z* in those days would cover almost all the basic tenets of Islam: five-time namaz, fasting, *zakat* [alms giving] and Hajj, and would invoke biographies, histories and stories suitable to instil fear of God in the listeners' mind. So it was very difficult to differentiate between two *mawa'iz* in terms of the content unless the *wa'iz*'s name was mentioned. As an extension of the Sunnis' belief in the case of the Friday *khutuba*, the content of the *wa'z* was not the primary concern in a live performance. The mere understanding that it was a *naseeha* [advice] was sufficient to make the listening a meaningful act. What attracted people to a *wa'z* was its overall liturgical setting. *Wa'z* in such an atmosphere acted as a background to attain ethical dispositions. So people would listen to a *wa'z* even if they did not understand its details; because for them going to a *wa'z majlis* and

spending time there was in itself an act of religious significance.

The entry of cassette production into *wa'z* practices changed such affective approaches to *wa'z* since cassettes were produced according to the subjects it covered. As a result of this the *wa'iz*, organizers and listeners all started to think of *wa'z* in terms of its subject. The organizers or the *wa'iz* would decide the subject for the *wa'z* as early as the time when invites were extended. It produced *wu'az* with specialization in particular subjects. Subjects for *mawa'iz* on such occasions were decided based on the general characteristics of the listeners: age, gender, regional compositions. Sometimes they were also decided based on the time of the event. For example, on *Rabiul Awwal*, the *wa'z* is likely to be on the Prophet's history.

It would be interesting at this point to see the changes cassette revolution has brought among Muslims against the background of the changes the same technology made possible in other communities, cultures, regions and genres. Manuel (2001, 2014) notes that the outcome of cassette technology in Indian vernacular music industry was invasive; challenging the hegemony of film music with the emergence of several hundred new producers, diverse micro music and the profusion of regional-folk-pop-hybrid genres. All these offered consumers an exceptional range of musical choices. He also points out that the cassettes replaced live performances. But in the case of *wa'z*, the reverse was the case. The standardization of *wa'z* initiated by the cassette recording technology actually limited the choices of its listeners and it set/cast aside many popular *wu'az* that followed the old patterns in their live performances. Thus cassette *wa'z* hardly represented the varieties of styles and persuasive techniques followed in the majority of *wa'z*. However, it increased the number of live performances for two reasons; (1) those who did not adapt to the 'cassette language' still continued with their live performances, (2) unlike music, the

idea of delivering *wa'z* inside a recording studio solely for cassette production was not welcomed in the community.

As a result, the cassette industry could only grow along with live performances, not separately from it. Consequently the live-record dichotomy that Manuel and others delineate took on a different route in *wa'z*. The explanation for this again lies in the manner in which knowledge has been traditionally transferred in Islam. Oral learning from the Sheikh by sitting next to him and seeing him has always been the privileged way of acquiring knowledge in Islam. The physical presence of the scholar was an important element in Islamic scholarly traditions as the knowledge transmitted in Islam is also considered as embodied knowledge.³¹ This required that the *wa'iz* address his audience in person in live performances. So cassette industry could only flourish within the liturgical conditions of *wa'z*. This observation also questions Manuel's (2001) suggestion that the popularity of audio recording industry separates religious characteristics from religious genres at the moment they enter the logic of the audio reproduction industry and turns it into a mere entertainment artefact.

Though cassettes did not affect the number of live performances, it did affect its length. Generally *wa'z* series were organized as 10 to 40 days long event where one to three scholars would speak. During this time the *wa'iz* that comes from a faraway place would stay at the local mosque itself. This was also largely due to the limited transport facilities available in remote/rural villages. During the extended stay of the *wa'iz* in the mosque his learning and experience were utilized for other religious purposes such as short term reading sessions of Islamic Sharia. By the time the *wa'iz* finishes the *wa'z* they will also have finished reading at least one small

³¹ Though scholars disagree whether "looking at the face of a scholar is a form of worship" is a Hadith or not, they unanimously agree that it is a worship for which God will give reward.

religious text. The most popular text to use in such reading sessions was the *Ashrath Kithab, or Pathukithab*.³² Attended by many people from the local community, these sessions act as a bridge between the traditional *daras* [learning centre] and the *wa'z*. The changes in infrastructural settings, particularly in transportation and communication, changed this paradigm. As the improvements in transportation facilities provided better mobility for the *wa'iz*, the cassette accelerated the movement of his *wa'z*; the long series were shortened and new *wu'az* were featured each day.

Before the circulation of cassettes, the *wa'iz* could deliver the same content in multiple places. But the flow of *wa'z* from one place to another made repetition impossible. Though it is a common practice to listen to the same *wa'z* several times, because of the trend set in place by the cassette recording technology, delivering different contents in every *wa'z* posed formidable intellectual challenge to the *wu'az*. It demanded that they look for new sources, new inquiries and thus produce new content. Though these changes helped the *wa'iz* to invest in the content and improve his *wa'z*, it made the distinction between scholar and preacher more visible. While the former had hold on Islam's vast knowledge traditions, the focus of the latter had been more on the aesthetic dimension of its deliverance. "The need to deliver new contents for *wa'z* often lead *wu'az* to propagate false or weak Hadith," says Shafi Saqafi. As a result, scholars started publically denouncing several popular *wu'az* that relied heavily on new technology to deliver their sermons.³³

³² *Pathukithab* is a compilation of ten different books authored by four scholars belonging to different times and regions covering various subjects pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence, hadith and *Thasawwuf*.

³³ A good example of this denouncement is the traditional Sunni Ulema's stand on popular Islamic televangelist Dr. Zakir Naik. Traditional Sunni scholars do not count him as a reliable scholar of Islam, but only as a television star. To see the details of their criticism follow these links, <https://scroll.in/article/811508/muslim-clerics-in-india-unite-against-superstar-televangelist-zakir-naik>, and <http://www.firstpost.com/india/sunni-sufi-demand-for-ban-on-zakir-naik-a-call-for-counter-extremism-or-sectarian-slugfest-2921422.html> retrieved on 13 November 2017.

Normatively *wa'z* can be conducted at any time and place. But the sociality as well as the religiosity it envisages demands its organization at a specific time and space. In Malabar it is generally organized inside the mosques, places close to a mosque or at public places in the vicinity. Though it happens throughout the year, the preferred time is always night. But cassettes changed this spatial and temporal pattern. It not only brought *wa'z* into the domestic space, but also made it a performance one could hear anytime. However did the cassette recordings take away from the larger liturgical atmosphere of the *wa'z majlis* as they substituted the embodied presence of the *wa'iz* as well as his socially rooted sound?

As Shafi Saqafi repeatedly reminds his listeners, the participation in a *wa'z majlis* requires particular dispositions from the listeners. Since the *wa'z majlis* is filled with *baraka*, listeners are always asked to behave as if they are in the presence of God. Any place where *wa'z* happens attains this special status through its connection with God because what they do in a *wa'z majlis* is to explain God's revelations. It is widely believed that the supplications participants make in the *wa'z majlises* would be duly answered. Sometimes people carry bottles of waters and place it in the *majlis* or request the *wa'iz* to blow on the water. They take it back home while leaving and drink from it believing that the water from the *wa'z majlis* has healing power. Some people bring honey instead of water. In other words it is this sacredness attributed to the *Majlis ul Ilm* [gathering for knowledge] that actually makes *wa'z* possible.

What happens to this sacredness when *wa'z* is circulated through cassettes and heard in domestic spaces? This question cannot be answered without taking into account the broader spatiality and temporality to which *wa'z* belongs to. One of the criticisms against *wa'z* by 'reformist Muslims' is that it does not belong to 'our time.' "From which age do these *wu'az* come and to whom do they speak?" P. Ruksana,

President of the Girls' Islamic Organization of Jama'th-e-Islami asked in a television debate. They accuse both the *wa'iz* and his listeners for their pre-modern sensibility. It is true that *wa'z* does not belong to "our time" as it does not index the contemporaneity of the events unfolding in a newspaper or television (Hirschkind, 2006: p. 118). If one looks at the content of a *wa'z*, its major concern is with the past and the future, not with the present. It speaks to its audience from the past, very often from 7th century Arabia, to prepare them for the future. But it is a future which does not belong to this world at all, but other worldly. The present that comes in between these two times is marked by moral decline. Thus present in a *wa'z* matters only as a time to be ignored and surpassed. "Don't get stuck with/in the present. It may tempt you. But just run away from it. This is not the life you need to be bothered with. There is a life in the future and that future belongs to only those who ignore the present and live like a fish in the sea. The fish lives and breathes in the sea. But it does not taste salty," Shafi Saqafi reminds his listeners. As the *wa'z* happens the present gets translated into the past and the future.

Spatially *wa'z* transforms the space where it happens into a *majlis ul ilm* which belongs to paradise. The notion of time and space in a *wa'z* is not about the ordinary, universal, linear time or space. It is always about the supernatural, the sacred and heaven. So the disposition any *wa'z* demands from its listener largely depends on these transcendental elements. Ordinary Muslims listen to a *wa'z* in order to cultivate an ethical self which will enable them to be closer to the transcendental. The question then is how listeners differentiate between a live performance and its cassette version in the context of *wa'z* or do they differentiate between them at all?

5.11 Cassette as a Public Medium: Provincializing Technologies

As opposed to the impact of cassette culture in the Music industry, cassette-recorded *wa'z* did not replace its live performances. Rather they complemented each other. Anyone who listens to a cassette *wa'z* also follows *wa'z* in its live performance and vice versa. So the distinction between live and recording for them is very minimal. Though cassette buyers do not believe that cassette *mawa'iz* are original live performances, they also do not think it is just a mechanically reproduced copy either. A cassette in this context is not a copy with or without the original.³⁴ But is a copy in original.

Wa'z itself developed various mechanisms in order to minimize the differences between a live performance (source) and its recorded version (copy) by placing the latter as part of larger liturgical settings in which *wa'z* takes place. They include social institutions that the material practices associated with cassette *wa'z* gave birth to, such as cassette libraries where the consumption of mass mediated *wa'z* took more organized forms. Cassette libraries are often attached to the local mosques, madrasa, or the regional offices of religious organizations. These cassette libraries not only enabled listeners to get new cassettes from the library, it also provided them with a platform to exchange cassettes outside the libraries' formal circulation network. Many of these libraries also provided listening facilities where people could gather in groups and listen to *wa'z*. This in effect created miniatures of live *wa'z majlises* inside the cassette libraries and a feel for live performances beyond their physical and spatial immediacy.

³⁴ Baudrillard's (1981) idea of simulacra and simulation will help us to understand this proposal better. Baudrillard, while claiming that contemporary society has replaced all realities and meanings with their significations and symbolism and human experience is just a simulation of reality, suggests that there exist two types of mediations: simulacra and simulation. Simulacra are the copies without original and simulation is the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time.

Organizing cassette *wa'z* of leading scholars in villages on special occasions is another practice. Instead of organizing a live *wa'z*, these events are meant to deliver cassette *wa'z* in the form of a live performance. Here, the *wa'z* by a particular scholar delivered in live performance is first recorded in cassette and the masjid in the village or the local unit of a Muslim organization procures a copy of it. They will organize an event to play the cassette for the public. These events are often organized in public places after prior announcements. Elaborate auditory technology such as loudspeakers and amplifiers are also used to make cassette *wa'z* audible to the people gathered there. Though small in size compared to live *wa'z* performances, many attend these events. Completing a circle, the *wa'z* recorded in cassettes here again takes the form of a live performance. "We used such practices in the early 1990s when cassettes were still a new technology. In some instances we even organized cassette *wa'z* of selected scholars in more than 5000 villages on the same day and time," says Aboobacker Saqafi, the Media Secretary of Samastha Kerala Sunni Yuvajana Samgham. Aboobacker attributes a practical reason for organizing such events to the frequent invitations their scholars get from different parts of the state to deliver *wa'z*. "It was practically impossible for them to go to every village. So we suggested the idea of organizing cassette *wa'z majlises*. From this experience we developed the idea of playing a single scholar's cassette *wa'z* in *majlises* held in almost all villages in the state simultaneously. The idea behind it was that on a particular day and time you hear the same sound across the state." This practice of playing cassette *wa'z* in the form of a live performance where the cassette acted as a *wa'iz* was important for several reasons. Apart from being used to reduce the gap between, live and record, source and copy, or production and reproduction, this practice prevalent in the early years of cassettes' popularity could be seen as an attempt of the Mappila Muslim

community to integrate the possibilities a new technology offered to an already existing practice. Thus it helped them to experience the new technology not as a 'complete break from the past' but as its continuation. They did this by developing practices which turned an otherwise private medium such as cassette into a public medium. Thus, cassette in the early phase of its introduction served as a public medium among Muslims. Mechanisms/practices such as these that developed from within specific communities, apart from making the movement from one technology to another smooth and less challenging, should also be seen as attempts to domesticate 'universal' technologies.

As the popularity of sound reproduction techniques increased among Mappila Muslims there emerged new practices of buying *wa'z* cassettes. In many instances *wa'z* cassettes are purchased not primarily for listening to a recorded live *wa'z* performance later, but for several other reasons of which listening is only one or marginal. They are largely procured at religiously significant occasions such as Ramadan or *Rabiul Awwal*, events, places such as mosques, religious institutions, or most often at live *wa'z* performances itself. Sometimes, the organizers of the *wa'z* or the *wa'iz* himself would sell the cassettes to mobilize money to organize other religious activities or to organize another *wa'z*. In the case of Shafi Saqafi, the money mobilized through the sales of his *wa'z* cassettes/CD/DVD (now they are mostly in CD/DVD formats) is used to meet the daily expenses of the Da'wa College he runs in Arecode, Malappuram. Thus the close connection between *wa'z* and the building of religious infrastructures in Malabar is maintained through cassette *wa'z* as well. The very act of buying a *wa'z* cassette in such instances, like the very act of participating in a *wa'z majlis*, was seen as one's commitment towards religious institutions and hence part of *baraka*.

This is not to say that listening to a cassette *wa'z* in a domestic space is not different from its live performance. A domestic space may not require Muslim men and women to maintain the kind of dispositions they are obliged to observe in a public space. So listening to a *wa'z* at a domestic space is definitely a different experience. But the point here is that they do not treat it as any other mechanical reproduction which does not demand the same treatment as the original. Since any *wa'z* can only happen in a larger liturgical setting, many of its characteristics are retained while listening to a *wa'z* on cassette as well. That is why listeners respond to the supplications coming from the cassettes by saying *Ameen*, or salute the Prophet or other saints upon hearing their names in the same way as they do in a live performance. Maimoona, a Muslim housewife from Vellamunda, Wayanad, always plays cassette *wa'z* while she works in her kitchen. "I like hearing *wa'z* alone. So I play it after my husband leaves for work and the kids go to school. Hearing it when you are alone will increase the feeling for *thaqwa* [God-fearing]. It also helps me to overcome my loneliness." Her collection includes only 15 cassettes. Most of them are very old. Since she does not have a CD player at home, she is not able to listen to the new *mawa'iz* which are produced only in digital formats. "How many times have you listened to the same old *wa'z*?" I asked her. "I don't remember" she laughed and said, "It doesn't matter how many times you listen to the same *wa'z* as long as it helps you to improve your *iman* [the faith in Allah and his messenger]. Don't we read the same Qur'an several times every day? Don't we repeat the same rituals five times every day? Do you get bored with these repetitions?" She asks. The question she asks then is what exactly the cassette mediates or what are the differences between the constituent elements of listening to a cassette *wa'z* and a live performance.

Maimoona does not miss any *wa'z* that happens in her locality, particularly if it is of her favourite *wa'iz*. She generally goes for *wa'z* with her husband. If he is out of station or does not want to go, she will join other women in her neighbourhood. If it is in a faraway place they arrange for a taxi and go. Cassettes in such contexts heighten her desire to attend the live performance. Like the announcement vehicle for Farooq Naemi's *wa'z* I described in the previous chapter, most of the pre-publicity events for a *wa'z* such as public announcements are interspersed with selected portions from *wu'az*'s earlier cassette recordings. In some *majlises*, the organizers play the cassette recordings well before the actual event starts. Thus the role of the cassette in the larger recitational complex of *wa'z* is much more than that of a mechanical reproduction. While the notions of reputation and credibility of the *wa'iz* plays a central role in popularizing the *wa'z* cassettes, the religious authority and public persona of the *wa'iz* is reasserted and authenticated through its consumption.

Hearing my continuous questions on cassettes Shafi Saqafi looked disturbed. "Why do you place so much emphasize on cassettes?" He asked and then continued, "It is not cassettes that matter in *wa'z*. It is the ability to act according to knowledge and *thaqwa*, one acquires from a *wa'z* that matters. *Wa'z* is a medium to know God and his messages for human being. So is a *wa'z* in a cassette or CD. My *mawa'iz* are recorded and sold in cassettes and CDs. In Cheruvadi I release them on the very next day. My audience who have already heard the *wa'z* on the previous day buy them. Generally cassettes are meant for repeated hearing of a *wa'z* they have already heard. In my *mawa'iz* if I have to mention a particular subject, issue or question which I have already discussed in detail in another *wa'z*, I would refer to the cassette or CD in which that particular *wa'z* is available; so that the audience who are interested in knowing the details may buy it. Reproducing a *wa'z* in such instances makes my job

easier. The audience also benefit from it. It saves our time and energy.” Shafi Saqafi said. What Shafi Saqafi is hinting at then is how creatively *wu’az* incorporate the possibilities cassette recording offer them into live performances by using it for cross-referencing their live performances. This on the one hand makes cassette recording an integral part of live performances but at the same time makes live performances an important avenue for introducing cassette recordings. Thus old and new technologies in *wa’z* are not seen as a threat but as mechanisms that complement each other. What is so unique about these negotiations is the role of traditional Ulema, who are always accused of being antagonistic towards technology or their use of technology is seen as an ‘Ulema’s surrender to the power of new media’ (Larsson, 2011) in initiating such mediations between technologies possible.

5.12 Unstable Commodities: Observations on Muslim Media Economy

Though *wa’z* cassette production started as an amateur initiative by NRK Muslims and was circulated through their informal networks in the Gulf and back home, some of them slowly converted it into a commercial venture. It has already been mentioned that the first enterprise that started *wa’z* cassette production using professional means was an NRK initiative. Apart from that religious organizations and their sister institutions also started producing cassettes of scholars under their fold using the existing resources available as part of their publishing ventures. Religious organizations had access to the *wa’z* and *wa’iz* as most of the events were organized by the local level organizations and institutions affiliated to them. Their networks were wider and closer to the potential buyers of cassette *wa’z* than that of the privately-owned cassette distribution companies. Evident from the individual care many *wu’az* have taken in producing and distributing their *wa’z* on cassettes, *wu’az*

themselves realized the significance of this mediation in promoting their theological positions and religious authority among the Muslim public. SYS Book Stall, one of the early cassette producers and distributors of wa'z in Malabar began their operation in 1990. Alavikkutty, the then Manager of the Book Stall explains:

In those days there were only a few companies in the cassette market and the demand for wa'z cassettes was slowly increasing. Other major players in the cassette market who largely produced Music and Cinema were not interested in wa'z. Generally people who listen to wa'z will also not be interested in visiting such shops. We started our initiative by producing wa'z cassettes of prominent Sunni Ulema. Though we didn't have any outlets other than the one in Kozhikode, most of our cassettes were sold in a few months' time and we had to come up with more copies. Apart from the individual buyers, the cassette libraries in madrasas or our organization's local level units were our major customers.

Alavikkutty's testimony gives a vague but broad picture of the wa'z cassette industry in its beginning and how it stood apart from other cassette industries such as Music including *Mappilappattu*. But does this mean that wa'z has taken an entrepreneurial turn or religion is no longer confined to the privacy of belief (Sounaye, 2013: p. 89) Some scholars argue that the Muslim urge to publicly articulate their religious belief is embedded in the thriving religious consumer culture (Schulz, 2007) and the concept of entrepreneurship is important in understanding the structural transformation Muslim societies undergo particularly in the case of religiously significant mediations (Sounaye, 2013). It is true that the growing presence of religion in public also involves presenting Islam or for that matter any religion today in a more tangible form that one can see, hear, smell and touch. This in

effect necessitates production and consumption of material goods including religious media. This of course involves money transaction and profit making. Depending on the product, its quantity and spatial coverage, there are local level to big multinational companies working in this “sacred economy.” The flourishing of Halal markets across the world is a good example of this. Thus religion now has been performed through its diverse material forms. That is why the consumption of “religious goods” is taken by many as an indicator to measure religiosity in its tangible forms. But does this mean religion is economized? Or should we see it as an example of degradation in religious values?

The changes in the market-driven economy in the last few decades have not only increased the demand for religious commodities, but have also affected them in multiple ways. This required these commodities to change according to certain market logics in their production, packaging, distribution and consumption. As a result religious commodities have also expanded (Starrett, 1995). But the consumption of such religious commodities has always been internal to Muslim faith and constituted their faith. Since faith is not a split subject it relied on publically accessible dimensions of religion as much as it is dependent on virtues internal to one (Hirschkind, 2011: p. 94). So the questions such as what or how to eat, dress, read, hear or do not, express one’s religiosity in Islam, but importantly constitute it. This is to say that a Muslim cannot have a belief without disposing the same in its material form or without its bodily disposition; the inseparability between *ilm* [knowledge] and *amal* [act]. But the ‘sacred economy’ argument often convincingly misses this aspect and focuses its analytical value on the production side of religious commodities than its consumption.

By extending their sound acoustically, *wa'z* cassettes prepare Mappila Muslims to live and engage in public as members of a community of devotees through a shared experience of hearing. But this is not a community that comes into existence through cassette *wa'z* alone. In order to understand this one should look at the larger institutional setting in which these cassettes are produced and circulated. We have already seen how *wa'z* cassettes had been used to build up and maintain a long term relationship between the religious institutions and the listener. Sometimes cassettes are sold for higher than their normal prices as in the auctions carried out in/during the *wa'z*. But they are also distributed free of cost. Not all *mawa'iz* are sold in cassette formats. But they are still recorded and circulated in informal circles.

Though the cassette market is a highly competitive one, *wu'az* do little to regulate its recording and distribution processes, rather they encourage its circulation outside the market circuit. They ask the audience to take the *wa'z* to those who were absent as the Prophet had said to his companions in Arafa in the farewell sermon: *uballighkum shahid val ghaaib* [“those who are present to listen to me today shall take my words to those who are absent and those to others again”].

It's true that there is a huge demand for wa'z cassettes and CDs and there are many production houses who now concentrate their business on such markets. But it is not a profitable market. Not because people don't listen to wa'z, but they listen to it too much. Wa'z always circulates outside the formal networks of business. They are often given and copied free of cost. Such religiously inspired circulations fail the market logic. The production companies alone cannot do anything in this regard as wu'az themselves encourage such forms of circulation,

says Muhammad Shabeer, Managing Director of Unity Studio, one of the biggest production houses who work closely with Muslim religious organizations. Instead of selling it like other cassettes what these production houses and sometimes *wu'az* also do is to get sponsors for *wa'z* cassettes and circulate it free of cost. They often find these sponsors from the *wa'z majlis* itself. Sometimes a single person will sponsor the entire production and circulation costs and sometimes a group of people. "Sponsors do it out of their religious commitments, expecting rewards from Allah for spreading religious knowledge. So who will buy cassettes when they are available free of cost?" Shabeer asks.

This 'trading with God' (Mittermaiter, 2013) in which *wa'z* cassettes are sponsored by a few individuals and is given free of cost brings together divergent players/intentions onto a single platform: divine, religious commitment, the afterlife, and modern regimes of business calculation. Thus the commodity status of the cassette often merges into its religious dimensions. Its religious character neither prevents the production companies from selling it nor does its commodity character stop Muslims from pirating it and circulating it beyond the business circles. Like the sanctified spatiality of *wa'z majlis* does not shut its door to other mundane activities, the cassettes also move in and out of their commodity status depending on the forms of sociality and religious patronage within which they are consumed. So their existence merely within the logic of market economy or religious authority is ambiguous and unstable. Instead they intersect and reshape one another.

5.13. Conclusion

In its attempt to develop an internal explanation for the appreciation or rejection certain forms of technologies enjoy in a specific community, the present chapter has

argued that technologies do not enter a community in vacuum in order to impact its consumers and their social relations. They do not enter and conquer a community as a result of popularity or easy accessibility of a given technology or as an effect of developments in Science and technology alone. Such narratives do not consider information and communication technology as part of the larger infrastructural designing of a community in which religion plays a significant role. By projecting *wa'z* as one of the institutions most responsible for Islamization and its close link with religious infrastructure building in the region, the chapter demonstrates that the new (sound) amplification technologies were very central to Mappila Muslim communities in their efforts to make spatial claims in post-Independent India.

While the debates on loudspeaker within the Muslim community in its early period of introduction and at its peak of popularity show that technologies in their designing and function embody various theological concerns - the disputes between Hindus and Muslims on the use of loudspeaker in mosques and other Muslim religious festivals throw up some important questions about the constitutional right to practice religion in India today. In order to understand various structures of these exchanges within and outside the communities, often anchored through as a debate on loudspeaker, one needs to take into consideration the ethical concerns of the community derived from their theological assumptions. At the same time mapping the social changes within these communities demands scholars take the evolution of technologies in a given community more seriously. By bringing in examples from the ways in which Mappila Muslim community engaged with sound reproduction technologies I have argued that communities develop mechanisms rooted in their tradition to provincialize technologies, otherwise seen as 'universal', to fit in with their specific contexts. s

Chapter- 6

Conclusion

The concluding chapter of any dissertation is meant for writing a perfect summary of the research project. Writing the last pages of this thesis, I cannot think of a better way of doing it than writing about a critical incident that happened to me during the course of the research.

On 31st December, 2016 while waiting for my late night train to Frankfurt at the Berlin Central Station, I was robbed by a group of gangsters. They took my bag and ran away. In a matter of seconds, they disappeared into the crowd outside on the street celebrating the New Year. Devastated by the shocking incident, I started sweating in the frosty winter cold. Unable to do anything else, I slowly went to the security counter stationed downstairs in the hope that they could offer some assistance. But the visit only exacerbated my anger and pain. The police officer told me that they were helpless in this case as the area where I lost my bag was not covered under their CCTV security camera. But he gave me a blank white paper and asked to list out the things I had lost. The report prepared based on this list, he said, would help me either to get back my things from the Central Lost Property Office in Berlin if at all it reached there or to claim the insurance, if I had one. But for the former to happen in this case, I would need to be extremely fortunate as it involved robbery, he alerted me.

As I started to write down the things I had lost, I realized that I had lost almost everything which I thought was precious to me – not just in the last few years but for several years to come, including my most prized possessions: laptop, external hard drive,

voice recorder, camera, pen drives, mobile phone and the two books that had been recently issued to me from the philological library of the Freie University, Berlin. But the irreplaceable loss was of the data, articles, books, photos and sound recordings I had collected during the course of my PhD research along with its back up saved onto the external hard drive. To complete the formality I submitted a petition along with this list and in return the officer gave me a Police report. I messaged a few friends in Berlin and back home seeking help. Many of them called me back at midnight itself to express their sympathy. Being research scholars in various stages of their writing, my colleagues in the department said they could imagine the trauma of losing the data and the problems it could cause to a researcher's future plans. Some of them said I could locate the laptop if I had set up the 'Find my Mac' option on my MacBook. But to my misfortune I had not activated it. So there was nothing else I could do except pay regular visits to the Berlin Central Lost Property Office, only to realize once again that it would never reach there. But I continued my visit.

One morning I received a call from Dr. Abdel Hakim Azhari, one of my key interlocutors from Malabar who had not only helped me to get access to many important Islamic texts and scholars from the region and beyond, but also with whom I had read many of these texts; this young scholar who had graduated from Jamia Al Azhar, Cairo. Hearing the news of the tragic incident I went through from a common friend, he told me the following, "Al hamdullilah! [All praise is due to God alone]. You should be happy by now and be thankful to your God for what happened." It is not difficult to make sense of the spirit in which a believer speaking to his co-believer uses such idioms and expressions, particularly when one is in a crisis. Such advices are always considered as an

integral part of the traditional duty of every Muslim; as an expression of responsibility, concern and care for a friend. But Azhari had more to offer than just showing compassion to a fellow Muslim. “In the past few years you have been probing the relationship between knowledge and technology in Islam and it seems to me that you haven’t found a definitive answer. But now you have one. As a researcher, there is a lot for you to be happy about in this incident than to be sad and complain.” Unconvinced by this baffling mode of consolation I remained silent. He understood. He then narrated two long stories to me. In the first story, Ibn Hajar al Haytami (d.1566), an Egyptian-Meccan scholar whose lengthy notes prepared to write a *Fiqh* compendium was stolen. But that did not stop al Haytami from finish writing the book from memory within a few months and the book (*Tuhfat al-muhtāj*) became one of the most popular and defining texts of the Shafi School of Law.

The second story, though I had already heard it several times before Azhari’s retelling, had a definite insight to offer this time. In this popular story, Abu Hamid b. Muhammad al-Ghazali (d.1111), one of Islam’s most prominent scholars who is also considered as a *Mujaddid* [renewer of the faith], was robbed by a gang of thieves on his way back home from Nishapur, Baghdad where he had spent several years studying with/at the most reputed scholars and centres of learning. Amongst the things the thieves snatched from al-Ghazali was a bundle of written papers. The Imam allowed the robbers to take all his valuables but pleaded with them to return the papers as they would not have any use for them. Surprised by this unusual request, the leader of the band of robbers asked him what those papers were. “They contain all the years of my attainment in Nishapur. When my teachers lecture, I used to prepare notes and later meticulously

rewrite them under various chapters and headings. They are the fruits of my labour. If you destroy them, I am also ruinously destroyed.” Hearing this, the gang leader said to al-Ghazali, “What kind of an *alim* [scholar] could be robbed of his knowledge if deprived of his books? Knowledge confined in a few papers, vulnerable to theft, is no knowledge at all.” It is believed that this casual but powerful remark by a thief shook al-Ghazali to the core and made him realize that to know truly one needed to embody knowledge and to make it a part of his very being. So al-Ghazali, like any other *alim*, started memorizing not only what he wrote down but also the works of scholars who came before him.

Comprehending what Azhari wanted to convince me of through the stories, I asked, “Why should we waste time in memorizing texts when we have plenty of technology at hand to help store and access texts; can't someone utilize that time for acquiring more knowledge?”

“Books in the Muslim world have always been the major target of attacks against them. Be it the crusaders in medieval Spain or the modern day Salafite Muslim insurgents and their Western counterparts in Timbuktu (Mali), Mosul (Iraq) or Damascus (Syria). But the difference between these two, from medieval to modern, is that the community could survive the former attacks but will not be able to do the same with the latter.”

“Why is that?”

“The reason is the massive shift in their approach to knowledge. In the former case knowledge could survive without books as there were human beings who memorized them, absorbed it literally into their bodies in its entirety. But in the latter case, knowledge is confined to books alone. The result is, as al-Ghazali said to the

robber, knowledge disappears along with the disappearance of the book/CD/laptop that contains knowledge. So the question is what is your approach to technology in relation to knowledge? These two cannot be discussed independently. It does not mean that Islam is against technology. No. Technology is useful. It is a *ni'ma* [blessing]. It is because of technology that we could speak to each other from two far off places. But technology can also be *niqma* [catastrophe]. The difference between these two is both thick and thin. What concerns a Muslim is when does it become a blessing or catastrophe? Losing a laptop wouldn't have created havoc to a classical Muslim scholar because his approach to a laptop would have been entirely different.” He then explained to me how he was trained to read Islamic books by his *Usthads* [masters]. Being a Hafiz [one who has completely memorized Qur'an] himself, Azhari was trained to apply this skill while reading other books as well.

“My *usthad*, Ponamala Abdul Qadir Musaliyar was very particular about this. He was able to cite directly from any classical Sharia texts, that too, many continuous pages. But our modern education systems consider this as an inferior method to acquire, store and disseminate knowledge. Instead it forces students to rely solely on these *alath e jadeed* [new medium]. That's why you feel broken-hearted when you lost a laptop. That shouldn't have been the case.”

Azhari's phone call was consoling because it was the only conversation I had with anyone after that traumatic incident that made me explore the possibilities of what had happened instead of staying with it as a problem. Thus it eased my stress. But the most fruitful outcome of the conversation was something else: his timely reminder of both the significant or insignificant role technology acquires in Muslim knowledge practices, his

creative linking of it to my research question and thus translating what was till then a personal pain into a historical experience. As he himself alerted during the conversation, it was easy to confuse what Azhari was trying to say with what is called Muslim apathy towards technology, a quite familiar approach in Muslim media histories. But what he sought to convey was something more; to think through the connection between knowledge practices in Islam and its medial forms; forms in and through which knowledge is acquired, archived and disseminated in Muslim societies and the productive tensions among them. This productive tension between Islam and technology is created, maintained and resolved by taking an embodied approach to both religion and its medial forms.

My initial proposal for this PhD project was to study contemporary media practices among Mappila Muslim community and to analyse the nature of publicness it constitutes amongst them. Thus the attempt of the research in its early phase was to focus on the contemporaneous present as it is articulated in and through Mappila Muslim community's engagements with different media platforms such as newspapers, print magazines and importantly new media outlets owned/published by Muslim organizations and individuals from Kerala and various practices associated with it. The formative reference points that assisted me to frame such a proposal, delineate the field and make my theoretical framework legible were the works of Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson whose observations on media in general and that of newspaper in particular have profoundly shaped the disciplinary concerns of Media Studies which often tend to take newspaper/television/radio as valid representations of everyday mediation among

the informants of various ethnographers.

As I have already pointed out in the first two chapters, this initial proposal took a complete turnaround during the early phase of my field work when I happened to attend a *wa'z majlis* where a Musaliyar warned his audience about losing one's time and reward in the 'hereafter' if one were to concentrate one's energies on reading newspapers and watching television during the time of Ramadan. It was a complete turnaround because in my proposed study I wanted to focus on newspapers and other popular media outlets as I mistook them to be legitimate representations of the mediations among my interlocutors. On closer reflection, the disjuncture between the framework offered by the above mentioned scholars and my field led to a disturbing theoretical vacuum in my ethnography.

But the challenge then was how to ethnographically locate the everyday mediations among Mappila Muslims. How do I make sense of their specific discursive practices to understand their media engagements? How does one understand their subjectivities in its everyday dimension? How could one make observations that would yield a conclusion without utilizing the theoretical frames that rely on radically different epistemological and ontological assumptions than those of my interlocutors? These questions led me to presuppose a fairly simple – though ignored by the previous scholarship – empirical fact: that the discursive practices of communication or mediations I observed among Mappila Muslims stretch far back in time and far beyond their territorial geographies. To put it differently, the textual corpus and traditions that define, regulate and set the standards of everyday mediations among my interlocutors far exceeds the narrow boundaries of lay-out and rather reductive nation-statist contents of

newspapers and television. Now, my challenge was how to identify the actual textual corpus, its genealogy and interpretive hierarchies in which all mediations occur and how all those textual knowledge travel on an everyday basis. In solving this, I came across an absolutely different kind of textual corpus and traditions that are most integral to the sense and sensibilities of Islamic practices and discourses, and the sense and sensibilities of my interlocutors. In other words, this corpus constituted a very powerful authority in the making of everyday mediation among Mappila Muslims. This conviction in the initial phase of my fieldwork has enabled me to privilege an ethnographic approach well supported by the interpretation of the textual genealogies that constitute classical Islamic sources which pervade, regulate and importantly sustain through certain specific forms of mediations and self-making processes among Mappila Muslims. This in a crucial sense is an attempt in *provincializing* Europe. This is also to suggest that to employ a theoretical frame that use different ontological and epistemological assumptions will not ultimately yield the intelligibility that I want to “restitute” to the forms of mediations among Mappila Muslims.

This shift in focus, from the contemporaneous present to history, developed over the course of the research is on the realization that my interlocutors rely largely upon the pre-modern technologies of the self for the formation and perfection of their subjectivities. Hence the question: how do past media speak to the present media? To reframe the question in my ethnographic context – how does the attentive ear the Prophet alluded to in his farewell sermon in AD 632 and the communication practices and forms of experiences it gave birth to in Islam travel through time and space in order to manifest in the Mappila Muslim engagements with media technology in the contemporaneous

present? What is it that bind, for example, cassette, loudspeaker and lithographic technologies in a Muslim community together and connect it back to the attentive ear that the Prophet had asked his companions to render in order to listen to his words carefully and to take it to the generations of Muslims to come, who according to the Prophet, might understand his words better? The challenge then was also to develop a narrative on media technologies belonging to different stages in history and their functions in a Muslim society, which would account for the histories of their connections and continuities.

Over view

This thesis was an attempt to make sense of the history and ethnography of media technology in a Muslim community. It began this inquiry by asking a fairly simple question: what are the milieu in and through which communication technology enter/exit a community? As opposed to most of the existing historical and sociological accounts of Muslim-media intercessions that seems to grapple with the above question by looking at technologies absent in Muslim communities (why Muslims did not adopt certain forms of technologies), the current thesis explores the question by looking at technologies present in them (what did Muslims easily adopt) and what is present in those technologies. The central focus of the project then was to attempt to explain why certain forms of technologies gained easy entry and popularity in the Muslim community and the various socio-cultural and historical processes, strategies and institutions through which the negotiations between them and these technologies began, flourished and finally made the technologies part of their everyday life. Thus this thesis is much about the past as it is about the present. The thesis also departs from existing studies on Muslim-media entanglements that mostly tend to see media technology as a mere site for disseminating

information/knowledge or representation of subjects by attempting to reconstruct the sociology of knowledge in Islam through the media technologies they use.

The dissertation began its analysis in the second chapter by surveying the theoretical trajectories of understanding Muslim-media intercessions in existing literature in order to set out the points of departure for the present study. The chapter argues that the most reasonable way to approach the question on Islam and media intercession is not to establish/reject an inherent relationship between these two or to equate them by arguing that the relationship between Islam and media is irreducible to the extent that virtual interchangeability of religion and media is possible within contemporary societies. It is also not to see media use as an expression of one's religious identity or as a mere platform for representation, but to think through their connection. The chapter proposed to methodologically achieve this goal by bringing two distinct approaches on anthropologies of Islam in conversation: anthropologists' call to focus on what they call Islam as a discursive tradition and Islam as an everyday practice. By bringing these together to make sense of media in Muslim contexts this study argued to pay attention to the materialities of the discursive tradition and the discursivity that materialities of media technologies afford in relation to each other. Since this study proposes to engage with and foster dialogues between Islam and media by bringing these two approaches into conversation in the context of Malabar, the chapter also argues for an archive that provides space and accounts for discourses that stem from and flourishes in the interiors of Mappila Muslim existence in Malabar.

In the three subsequent chapters, the dissertation reviews the beginning and flourishing of three technologies in Mappila Muslim society, namely lithography,

loudspeaker and cassette. The analysis in the third chapter is written based on archival research carried out at three different sites – the Catalogue of Malayalam books in the British Museum, Dar al ifta al-Azhariyya Library Chaliyam, Kozhikode and the printing history of *Fata al-mu'een*, a 16th century *Fiqh* compendium written by Sheikh Zainudheen Makhdoom in Malabar and explores the question why Muslim printing in its beginning was clearly marked by a preference for lithographic printing as opposed to typographic printing. Interrogating the dominant media historiography of print cultures which present printing as a singular, linear phenomenon with a universal history and appeal across communities and regions, the Muslim history of lithography demonstrates how (supposedly) technologies are differentiated along community lines. The chapter also argues that many of the misconception about Muslim engagements with printing and subsequently with any other media technology emerge from the attempt to systematically ignore from the analyses the pre-print modalities of Muslim textual production and the larger history of Islamic textuality and textual cultures. The textual cultures that developed around the Muslim approach towards their foundational *kitab* [Book], Qur'an, problematize the dominant understanding of communication practices/technologies in evolutionary terms: the human progress being a shift from orality to writing, thus from manuscript to typographic print. Concepts such as *ijaza* [consent] and *sanad* [chain of transmission], which are central to these textual cultures, suggest that the popularity of information and communication technology in Muslim societies is deeply embedded in their approach to the Islamic tradition of knowledge transmission in which oral transmission plays a significant role. The two different ways in which lithographic and typographic editions of *Fata al-mu'een* are written, composed, the pages designed,

commentaries and super commentaries included/excluded, and more importantly how the idea of closure/opening up of a given text is embedded further reflects on the constitutive character of Islamic knowledge traditions and the larger Muslim concerns that guide their negotiations with technology.

The fourth and fifth chapter, through an ethnographic exploration, attempt to trace the genealogies of how electronically amplified sound became one of the most noticeable features of contemporary Islam in Malabar and why Mappilas tend to define their community and its aspirations along acoustic lines. The fourth chapter attempts to do this by studying the technology introduced in the region through printed posters and popularized through *wa'z majlises* in the early 1950s: the loudspeaker. The chapter identifies *wa'z* as a predominant form of knowledge transmission among the Mappila Muslim community and as one of the institutions most responsible for Islamization in the region and argues that it embodies aural qualities Islam espouses by skilfully employing the phonic and poetic qualities of spoken words. Aimed to evoke a particular mental state among their audience and to inculcate *thaqva* [God fearing], through the creative deployment of acoustic techniques, the chapter argues that *wa'z* provides the discursive space for sound technologies to flourish among the Mappila Muslim community. It also shows how in loudspeaker, as an emblematic sonic media technology of Mappila Muslim community, the authority of Islamic religious discourses and its preferred mode of transmission merge with the aesthetics of technology; the convergence of the metaphysical and the empirical, divine and the human.

The fifth chapter, by establishing a close link between *wa'z* and religious infrastructure building in the region, explains the myriad ways in which sound

amplification technologies are/were crucial for Mappila Muslim community in their efforts to make spatial claims both inside and outside their community in post-Independent India. By doing so, it also demonstrates how these tiny everyday technologies embody various intra community theological differences on the one hand and inter community socio-political aspirations on the other and thus reflect the structural characters of communal politics in the Indian subcontinent. The two debates among Ulema and the community leaders on the status of loudspeaker and sound amplification in its early period of introduction (1960s) and at its peak of popularity (2010s) are discussed in the chapter at length in order to show two different trajectories of a secular technology in post-colonial Indian polity vis-à-vis Muslim community and through that attempts to capture the tensions and dynamics of transformations within secularism in India as well. It also explains how the tensions between mediation in a religious setting as a divinely inspired act and technology as a human experience are negotiated through the legal framework and its interpretative dynamism available in the Islamic Sharia literature. The final part of the chapter looks at how sound reproduction technologies like cassettes developed from and contributed to the existing knowledge transmission practices that flourished in and around various acoustic technologies and argues that communities develop various mechanisms rooted in their tradition to domesticate the use of media technology. The cassette culture in Mappila Muslim community thus developed many social institutions and material practices that drastically changed the very destiny of cassette technology from a private medium to a public medium.

In sum, the attempt in this dissertation has been to provide an Islamic genealogy of media technology as it is played out among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar, South

India. Bringing three distinctive source materials namely theological, archival and ethnographic together, interpreting them and allowing them to speak to each other, the study argues for increased communication between Media Studies, Islamic Studies and Anthropology in order to make Media Studies recognize information and communication technologies as part of a larger social assemblage and infrastructure building of a community in which religion plays a significant role. The study proposes that the entry/exit of technologies and their subsequent role in a given society cannot be understood comprehensively if we study technology in isolation, but only in relation to other infrastructures in the present as well as the past. The dissertation thus foregrounds the need to study media technology in a community as part of a long and continuous process of infrastructure building and in relational terms. It is this inter-subjective relationality of media technology with other infrastructures and human beings or what can be called networks of relationship between various infrastructures and its users that provide them the general conditions of possibility for existence, an avenue to present themselves and the potential to transform.

But this may require the Communication discipline to make a definite move from its current focus on epistemic/cognitive understanding of the work of media technology towards a more ontological/affective dimension and thus invest more in understanding media technology as a way of presentation and revelation of reality than its representation. The argument then is for an embodied understanding of the state of technology in a community rather than merely reproducing analytical frameworks offered by the impoverished notions of Cartesian methodology which tend to present technology devoid of their subjects: how self is actualized in technology. The speech act and its

listening articulated through various mechanisms in all the three technologies discussed in this dissertation disturbs this Cartesian logic of matter-content divide and demands us to understand technology as matter with its own substance, life and being.

The present work attempts to address these concerns by bringing religion, particularly its Islamic version, and the discursive terrains it offer to its followers into the centre of Media Studies. The study thus argues that the lack of systematic ways of studying religion in relation to its medial forms restricts our understanding of media technology and their work in the contemporaneous present and possible futures of the concerned community. Thus this study argues that religion in general and Islam in particular constitutes a major blind spot in Media Studies. The ways in which theological principles find their way into a community's media habits, and how the medial forms enter into theological traditions have been a significant concern for this study. It thus highlights the importance of studying discursive forms of Islam along with discursive traditions in Islam. But bringing religion into the forefront of Media Studies will have other far reaching implications as well since they potentially open up the non-secular, non-liberal world of media technologies and their work into our analyses and theorizations of media practices. Such an approach can also equip one to go beyond the limits of territorial geographies that national/regional media historiographies are based in. For that to happen, Media Studies should acknowledge the many origins of technologies, their multiple uses, negotiations and the processes of domestications in various communities and thus many worlds of technologies. Muslim conceptualization of technologies that straddle between the ideas that technology is both *Ni'ma* [blessing] and *Niqma* [catastrophe] provides an interpretative framework not just to capture these many

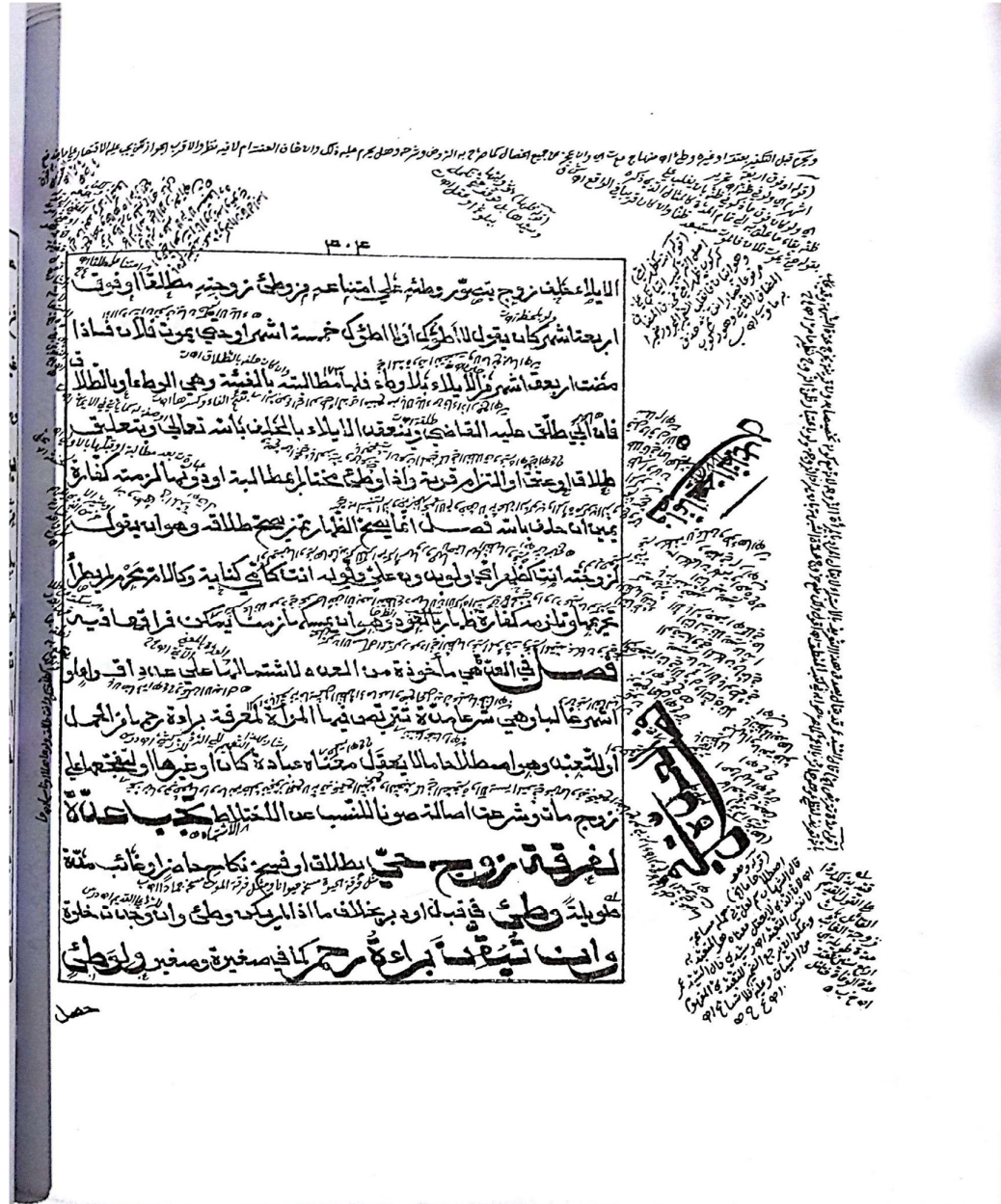
worlds of technologies but also to imagine technologies as being beyond the logic of anthropocentrism on the one hand and technological determinism on the other.

It is clear from the above discussions that many of the issues that the current project aspired to grapple with in the beginning cannot be solved here adequately and the insights and suggestions laid out in the dissertation require more in-depth ethnographic, historical and importantly philological research. But this requires more resources. One major problem that the current project constantly faced with was the shortage of archival materials, particularly for writing the chapters on loudspeaker and cassette. Archives in the region have a dearth of materials in the sound format. This also shows the lack of sound-based perceptions about communities and culture. This is particularly true for religious communities like Muslims. In the case of early Muslim print history and manuscript tradition which constitutes a major part of the third chapter, the problem was not the scarcity of archival materials, but their locations. Owing to the long history of colonialism, trade and travel networks in Malabar, a major part of the early primary resources on manuscript/print culture are now kept in various libraries, museums and archives in London, Amsterdam, Lisbon and Cairo. This leaves researchers from the region with only limited archival resources. Future research projects plan to address these constraints as well as to recover newer archival and ethnographic data from the region itself. This future plan also includes studying more classical Islamic texts in order to build up an in-depth understanding of how the question of technology is historically thought through as well as practiced in Muslim moral philosophy.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the discussions in this dissertation contribute new questions, concerns, suggestions and frameworks to the growing literature

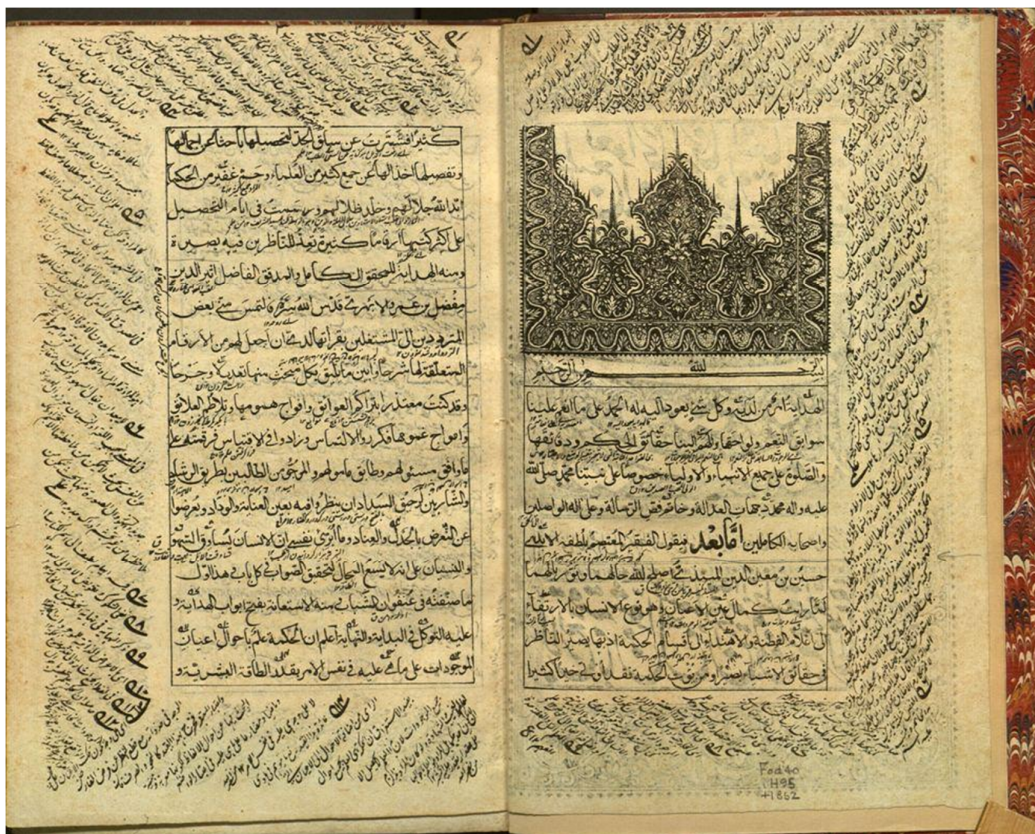
on Muslim media in the subcontinent and elsewhere and materials used for this study and their interpretations constitute an alternative archive on Mappila Muslim history as well as the history of media in the region.

Figure- I

A lithographed version of *Fata al-mu'een* with multiple commentaries by different authors.

[illegible]

Figure- III



A lithographed *Kithab* from Dar al-Ifta al-Azhariyya Library in Chaliyam with commentaries written in the margins

Figure - IV



A poster of Kozhichena *wa*'z (1959)

Figure- V



A wa'z poster in Arabic Malayalam informing audience that loudspeaker(s) will be used in the wa'z (1951)

Figure - VI



An Ahuja (India's leading sound amplifier producer) advertisement in Kozhikode's Muslim neighborhood.

Figure - VII



A crowd in a *wa'z majlis* in Kozhikode with their tape recorders in hand.

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